

segni 
e
comprensione

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“SEgni E COMPrensione”

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With this issue, we are launching a new section co-directed by Daniela De Leo and Giorgio Rizzo, dedicated to research works revolving around applied phenomenology and hermeneutics. This initiative is in collaboration with the Department of Philosophy and Applied Ethics at the University of Zambia and the International African Center of Applied Phenomenology at Saint Bonaventure University.

The aim of this section is to create an interdisciplinary and international platform for dialogue, focusing on exploring the challenges and applications of phenomenology and hermeneutics in both theoretical and practical contexts, with particular attention to African and global cultural and social dynamics.

*The Overcoming of the Particularist/Universalist
Thesis in African Philosophy*

The Place of Thinking

Odera Oruka, in his “Four Trends in Current African Philosophy”¹, classifies the works of African philosophers into “ethnophilosophy”, “philosophical sagacity”, “nationalist-ideological philosophy”, and “professional philosophy”. And as concerns the last group, he divides it, notwithstanding the lack of any uniformity, into two other subgroups, namely, “particularists” and “universalists”. If according to Kwasi Wiredu, universalists see African philosophy as «coterminous with philosophical investigations having a special relevance to Africa»², particularists agree with the conception that no philosophy is African philosophy unless it deals with a specifically African theme or topic. The appeal of the particularist position consists in the fact that philosophy should be intended as the criticism of the ideas we *live by*. For this reason, introducing topics such as logic and ontology, the theory of substance and the idea of immortality — that is, philosophical positions belonging to

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¹ H. Odera Oruka, “Four Trends in Current African Philosophy”, in A. Diemer (ed.), *Philosophy in the Present Situation of Africa*, Franz Steiner, Wiesbaden 1981, pp. 1-7.

² K. Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1996, p. 149.

another philosophical tradition — into African philosophy one will miss the point about the existential necessities of cultivating African philosophy. On the other end, however, the universalist agenda seems more inclusive than the particularist one and for this reason a serious study of African culture ought to be *critical* and *reconstructive* in order for the result to qualify as philosophy. Moreover, every contemporary African philosopher should try to exploit all the philosophical insights and resources that come from abroad. All philosophizing, at any rate, involves assertions, explanations and justifications that require an attitude common to all philosophers. Africans, according to this point of view, cannot pretend to *uniqueness* or *purity* in the matter of philosophy, since they have been influenced, for better or for ill, by other cultures³. It is apparent from the foregoing discussion that there are two basic schools of thought on the question of definition of African philosophy. The first maintains that African philosophy is the traditional philosophy that has been inherited by today's Africans through their oral traditions. And according to this view, the task of a contemporary African philosopher is to collect, interpret, and disseminate African proverbs, folktales, myths and so on. The second school of thought maintains that African philosophy ought to take cognizance of modern developments in knowledge and reflection. Those who advocate the second approach to African philosophy do not believe that in modern times philosophy can remain a communal body of thought. Hountondji, to make an example, has been particularly keen on emphasizing this aspect of the matter when he notes that many African philosophers were churchmen, trying to find a psychological and cultural basis for rooting the Christian message in the African's mind without betraying either. The consequence was that these authors were compelled to conceive of philosophy on the model of religion, as a permanent, stable system of beliefs, unaffected by evolution, impervious to time and history, ever identical to itself⁴. It seems as though the word "philosophy" automatically changes its meaning as soon as it ceases to be applied to Europe or to America and is applied to Africa. Applied to Africa, philosophy is supposed to designate no longer the specific discipline it evokes in its Western context but merely a collective worldview, an implicit, spontaneous, perhaps even unconscious system of beliefs to which all Africans are supposed to adhere. Because of the historical accident of colonialism, the main part of the philosophical training

³ Cfr. A. G. A. Bello, "Some Methodological Controversies in African Philosophy", in K. Wiredu (Ed.), *A Companion to African Philosophy*, Blackwell, Oxford (UK) 2004, p. 263.

⁴ Cfr. P. J. Hountondji, "African Philosophy: Myth and Reality", in T. Serequeberhan, *African Philosophy. The Essential Readings*, Paragon House, New York 1991, p. 115.

of contemporary African scholars derives from foreign sources, but philosophical truth has to be disentangled from cultural contingencies⁵. Kwame Appiah asserts that if African philosophy shares neither the problems nor the methods of Western philosophy, one is bound to wonder what the point is of calling the activity “philosophy” at all⁶. The ways the universalist thesis can be construed are different and can be summarized in the following:

- 1) Philosophy is the body of knowledge which philosophers have discovered or hope to discover;
- 2) Philosophy is a set of enduring problems or topics;
- 3) Philosophy is the method of inquiry which governs the practice of any activity which may legitimately called philosophizing;
- 4) Philosophy is something everyone can do.

Propositions (1) and (2) construe the universality of philosophy to consist in its *content*. Proposition (3) takes the universality of philosophy to consist in its *method*, meanwhile proposition (4) construes philosophy as a universal attitude among peoples⁷. Paulin Hountondji, to make an example, construes the universalist thesis along methodological lines, appealing to the essential unity of a single discipline even if admitting that there may be differences of philosophical content from one country to another. His main concern is to exclude from philosophy communal worldviews which are not critically examined⁸. However, critics of the universalist thesis sees it as an attempt to universalize a Western particularity, allowing the West to dictate both the rules and the agenda of the philosophical enterprise. Western *logocentrism*, according to this view, would be an alien paradigm for an African philosophy since it would force on an African context cultural and historical views that can be found only among Western philosophers. These critics claim the methodology as well as the content of African philosophy should be radically different from Western philosophy and they doubt that there is either a universal philosophy or a universal method to govern the activity of philosophizing. According Charles Anyanwu, for example, it is not

⁵ Cfr. K. Wiredu, “On Defining African Philosophy”, in T. Serequeberhan, *African Philosophy. The Essential Readings*, cit., p. 98.

⁶ Cfr. K. A. Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York 1992, pp. 92-3.

⁷ Cfr. J. M. Van Hook, “African Philosophy and the Universalist Thesis”, in *Metaphilosophy*, 28, 4, 1997, pp. 389-390.

⁸ Cfr. See P. J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Hutchinson, London 1983.

possible to accept the view that there is *one* Philosophy which is valid for all men.

As a matter of fact, philosophy is determined by what people have lived⁹. As well stated by Kwame Gyekye, the philosophical enterprise is not an *ivory tower* intellectual pursuit, unrelated to the practical problems and concerns of human society.

A celebrated allegory of the most well-known Platonic dialogue, *The Republic*, shows that the intellectual ascent, beginning in the world of the ordinary human being, toward the attainment of philosophical knowledge or understanding or appreciation or insight ought to be followed by a *return* to that world for the purpose not only of enlightening its inhabitants but also of helping to deal with concrete problems thereof, such as the problem of ruling a society¹⁰. If it is true that philosophy is concerned with the whole range of the human experience, providing conceptual interpretation and analysis of that experience in order to respond to the basic issues and problems generated by that experience, it is also true that much of the importance and thrust of the conceptual interpretation done by philosophy will depend on the kinds of ideas, issues and problems that attract the attention of philosophers belonging to a geographically and historically determined *context*.

We should avoid, in accepting the context-dependence of philosophy, the idea, favored by a strict rationalism, that this intellectual activity has to be guided by strong rational parameters without which it resolves into contradictions or, even worse, into a kind of verisimilar *fiction*.

Even without falling into an ethnological approach, we may agree with the idea that, as declared by Marc Augé, there are «le discours, les initiatives, les revendications les plus personnelles en montrant comment, par-delà leur prétention à l'originalité, ils sont dictés, directement ou indirectement, par une pensée pré-personnelle, un ensemble de norms et d'exigences qui sont toujours déjà là, antérieures au sujet qui s'affirme ici et maintenant»¹¹. In such case, philosophical analysis converges with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, that of the *linguistic relativity*.

⁹ Cfr. K. C. Anyanwu, "The Idea of Art in African Thought", in G. Floistad, *Contemporary Philosophy: A New Survey*, Martinus Nijhof, Dordrecht 1992, p. 237.

¹⁰ See K. Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity. Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, Oxford University Press, New York 1997, pp. 16-19.

¹¹ P. J. Hountondj, "Une pensée pré-personnelle. Note sur 'Ethnophilosophie et idéo-logique' de Marc Augé", in *L'homme*, 2008, 185-186, p. 359. Cfr. also M. Augé, *La construction du monde. Religion, représentation, idéologie*, Maspero, Paris 1974.

The Notion of Place

There is a theme common to any philosophical investigation: the question of being, of being as such, $\text{ov } \eta \text{ ov}$. Much of my argument can be put in the terms of the idea that the question of being is indeed permeated by a more *radical* question, namely the *question of place*. Questioning place means to investigate into the *topos* in which all human experience, practical or theoretical, has always come to pass. Yet what place is and how it ought to be understood in order to go beyond any narrow-minded debate on the particularism or universalism of philosophy is what is here in question. More generally, when it comes to place, the tendency is either to assume the notion, or to assume some specific reading of it, or else to view it as a secondary and derivative concept. Place has increasingly been seen as secondary to space—more in particular, to a particular notion of space as homogenous, measurable extension — and so “reduced” to the notion of position, simple location, or mere site. What is then the place of philosophy, if it has one? The place in which we cope with any philosophical issue, be it Italy or Zambia, the place in which philosophical questioning first arises, is the place in which we first *find ourselves*. And that place is not an abstract world of ideas, *eidos*, not a world of mere sense-data, not a world of theoretical objects. Being-in-a world, *In-der-Welt-sein* using the Heideggerian jargon, means finding ourselves already “in” a place, already given over to it and involved with things, with persons, with our lives, with particular affective and emotional atmospheres. I am aware of the fact that being in South Italy or in Zambia is not without consequences to my thinking attitude. Just to mention something that makes a difference, I experience, while being in Zambia, my second home, an inclination towards a way of thinking which favors existential issues or practical interests rather than theoretical or even worse “metaphysical” constructions. I feel also a stronger involvement of my body, my *Leib*, in doing philosophy in Zambia as if my thoughts were more responsive to the emotional and affective atmospheres surrounding me, more responsive to the *chair* of the world surrounding me. Questions of philosophy are questions in which the philosopher is herself already entangled, already bound up so that philosophy cannot be understood anymore as an abstract and impersonal undertaking, but drawing on the philosopher’s own existential situation. Philosophy, then, is not something to be applied *to* life, but much more it comes *out* of life and is lived as a *part* of life. The idea that there is a simple relation of “application” that holds between a prior theory and a practical situation is, therefore, to be disproved. Our existence is a matter of the way

our being is *already* given over to a *situatedness* in the world from which we cannot stand aside. And situatedness, as such, always opens out a set of possibilities (theoretical, practical, artistic) that can present themselves as questions (it is enough to remember the Kantian questions: “What can I know?”, “What should I do?”, “What can I hope?” each of which will take on a more specific form in each cultural, geographical and social context). In a Zambian context, to make an example, knowledges, actions and hopes can be expressed in *forms* that can be very different from the European relative ones, so different that we can dare to admit that they are incomparable with each other as unique and singular *language games*, to adopt Wittgenstein’s jargon. Common to every human being is also the possibility to question the way he/she should understand himself/herself as the sort of being who can stand in relation to the horizon of the world from which questions like those above may arise. The notion of situatedness (of the human being) can, in this way, solve the fruitless debate between universalists and particularists since it recalls at the same time the idea (Heideggerian) that our “being-there” is instantiated in a community, a geographical and cultural context, and the unquestionable (ontological-transcendental) *factum* that the “being-there” embodies our (universal) innermost nature. Situatedness, moreover, may be construed in temporal terms, since it is an opening into a future from out of a determined and pregiven past. And, in addition, it has also an essentially *topological* character inasmuch it is precisely a gathering, a “happening of belonging”, in which elements are brought together within a larger domain or region in way that also allows those elements to appear in their distinctive ways. Living for a long period of the year in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, I experience the gathering of the elements which surround me in a way very different from that lived by in my town, Lecce, Italy. First of all, the relations of *nearness* and *remoteness* are, in some way, restored in their ontological dignity: I can feel, experience, and live remoteness in a city (Lusaka) in which distances are felt as more noticeable in comparison with places of the European context in which distances are like deleted (fast trains, buses and airports everywhere). Now if we agree that the distinctive question of philosophy is the question of being and if we admit that this question as such is inseparable not only from the question of being as it arises in respect of any specific being but also from the question about our own being, then it is easy to mark the *topological* character of the philosophical undertaking since beings are very different from context to context. Everybody, not only professional thinkers, is given over to such questioning inasmuch everybody is given over to a certain situatedness, to a world, to a “there”. We are gathered

into a place so that questionability always presupposes *topos* and vice versa. Such situatedness may also become apparent to us through our moods and affectivity, through the way we “find ourselves” (what Heidegger calls in *Being and Time*, «Befindlichkeit»). One can encounter place in *boredom*, and in such a mood nothing in the world seems to matter; another one can find place in *anxiety* [*Angst*]. In my own experience, I found my place in Zambia in *wonder* (*Wunder* in German, *thauma* in Greek). At any rate, the idea of situatedness reconnects us with a sense of the urgency and genuineness of our own lives, bringing philosophy close to the personal, lived experience that gives it real motives and directions. The things which surround me varies according to the place in which I am, or I *dwell*. I *am* is I *dwell*. And this is not irrelevant to the philosophical questioning since, most of the time, we are *attuned to* things as if they were *ecstasies*. The form of a thing exerts an external effect, radiating into the environment, taking away the homogeneity of the surrounding space and filling it with tensions and suggestions of movement, and, most of all, creating (affective) *atmospheres*. Space, so, is “tinctured” through the presence of things, persons, or other affective constellations, that is, through their *ecstasies*. It is a sphere of presence. We are not able to think if not in such atmospherical (not geometrical) spaces: of joy, grief, and ecstasy. What the universalist and particularist thesis fail at is the disregard of the assumption that thinking is always *attuned to* an environment of things. Put in other words, thinking is a *pathic* experience before being a cognitive activity. And by “pathic” I do not mean pathetic or pathological, but rather the affective involvement that the perceiver feels unable to critically react to or mitigate the intrusiveness of. Philosophically, rehabilitating pathicity means valorizing the ability to let oneself go or to be a means of what happens to one rather than subjects of what we do¹². Therefore, a philosopher should be interested, first of all, in our ordinary (naïve) sensible experiences, taking into serious consideration the criterion of affectivity— of how “one feels” when experiencing the copresence of something surrounding her or him: the wind, the water, a particular smell and so on. What is felt is not a visual quality but a face of the world, a certain *atmosphere* expressing itself, like that one I experience when I walk early in the morning through Lusaka’s compounds, each one with its idiosyncrasies and *Lebenswelt*—Kamwala, Kabulonga, Chibolya. And the appropriate attitude is not that of interpreting or deciphering but that of feeling in an

¹² Cfr. T. Griffero, *Quasi-Things. The paradigm of Atmospheres*, SUNY, Albany 2017, p. VII.

immediate way, like in the moment when one feels the storm in the air or when one feels joy or sadness. Only starting from such experiences, thinking and poetizing, *Denken und Dichten*, are taken home to that well or source from which they arise. They, put in other words, become *heim-isch*, at home. Thinking, in short, is nourished by characters like night and day, nearness and farness, sound and silence, soil and water, experiences like my romantic journeys with my partner Abigail in a old colonial boat along the Zambesi river in Livingstone, situations, quasi-things, orientations of the felt-body perceivable by the soul only by prescinding from the scientist reductionism that made the world disenchanting and erased its «content of distance», tearing away its *mimbus*, the eros of distance¹³. Thinking, in my point of view, is this and not a mere collection of notions, informations. Thinking, in the last period of my life, is the “scent” of Africa, the cognitive but, most of all, the pathic experience of it. *My thinking, my Africa*.

I wish to avoid, however, a misunderstanding: if thinking needs, as a *conditio sine qua non*, a place or *topos* in which to grow, it doesn't mean that the condition of thinkability of an African philosophy has to be found in a mythological bond with an ancestral territory, that is to say, «dans le rapport du territoire e de la terre»¹⁴. As sharply noted by Eboussi Boulaga, the *logic of belongingness* is the logical tool used by the philosophy of the colonizers to monitor every land outside of Europe, making of philosophy a means of war and occupation. A tool inadvertently employed by every ethnological thought. The logic of belongingness adopted by Western culture disavows *de jure* every alterity or, better to say, every cultural claim not inscribed into the hegemonic project of modernity. If I assert that thinking retains a relationship with the “soil”, I take “soil” to mean something which «ne cesse d'opérer un mouvement de déterritorialisation sur place par lequel elle dépasse tout territoire: elle est déterritorialisante et déterritorialisée»¹⁵. What is then the *topos* of thinking? And how does it affect the specificity of a possible African philosophy? Every philosophical enterprise emerges from a place, having so a topological character, nothing, however, can come to light if not from a particular perspective or context, here the particular character of philosophy. *Logos* doesn't point to an *impersonal* or *anonymous* activity, since, as language, it unfolds in different orientations which are historical and social. Words *name* things and things differ in the way they are named by the

¹³ Cfr. Ivi, pp.24-35.

¹⁴ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Qu'est ce que la philosophie?*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1991, p. 82.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

different languages which are present on the earth. Language, *per se*, as a matter of fact, is not a neutral system of signs, free from any cultural or historical determinants and experience always is *voiced* and *embodied* each time in a specific language. Phenomenologically speaking, language has a relevant impact not only on thought but even in perception. The Tanzanian writer Euphrase Kezilahabi, emphasizing the importance of using African languages in literary works compared to the use of foreign languages writes: «Such foreign languages objectify [Africans'] views within [their] signifying systems and push [them] to orchestrate peculiarities of [their] own cultures».¹⁶ As a consequence of this state of affairs, African literature becomes «a literature of *odes to exotica* and vulgar anthropology and a phenomenology of prostitution»¹⁷. This is what Hountondji calls the theoretical «extraversion»¹⁸ of knowledge in Africa perpetuated by ethnophilosophy. To speak a language is more than using words to communicate with others. A language is the expression of beliefs, customs, collective attitudes which connote a particular social, political and cultural context. This is the reason I appreciate so much the fact that my great friend Father Angelo Palleri, a Franciscan Father, administrative director of the Saint Bonaventure University in Lusaka, speaks very good Nyanja, the local dialect. I admire him since mastering a language allows you to get in touch, in an immediate way, with the people surrounding you understanding much more than just the semantic value of the words. A language, after all, is what let beings manifest themselves. Thinking so is the *topos* in which the gathering together of things and persons is *thought*. And many are the paths which thinking can take to articulate that gathering. In Austin Mbozi's essay, *Problematizing Western Reparations for Colonial Injustices: Clearing the Way for African Ubuntu*, the focus is Western theories of material compensations and reparations for colonial injustices. The author highlights seven theoretical and practical problems associated with material compensations for Africa and he defends the African ethicists' emphasis on restoring the dignity of victims, supported by the equal sacrifice principle. Mbozi then, finds the equal "sacrifice/dignity" restoration alliance a plausible

¹⁶ E. Kezilahabi, "African Philosophy and the Problem, of Literary Interpretation", unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison 1985, p. 359.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸ Cfr. P. Eldridge, "Hountondji and Husserl. Subjectivity, Responsibility and Phenomenology in the Critique. Of Ethnophilosophy", in A. Olivier, M.J. Lamola, J. Sands (Eds.), *Phenomenology in an African Context. Contributions and Challenges*, Suny Press, Albany 2023, pp. 121-122.

solution. The co-authored essay of Julius Kapembwa and Matende Wedu focuses on the disposal of the dead which differs across cultures and times due to prevailing factors including traditional beliefs, normative worldviews, and resource availability. The paper seeks to explore the views of the Batswana regarding disposal of the dead through a case study of Ledumang Ward in Gaborone, Botswana. Frederick Njumferghai delves into a comparative analysis of the metaphysical concept of the human person in the Yoruba tradition versus Western philosophy. It explores the tripartite nature of human person in Yoruba culture, consisting of the body (*ara*), the soul (*emi*), and the significant element known as the inner head (*ori*). The Yoruba view emphasizes predetermined destiny through the *ori*, in contrast to the body-soul division commonly found in Western thought. John Mundua, in turn, focuses on that ontological conception which grounds an environmental ethics which is independent of any human ascription. According to such conceptual framework, he considers the African “cosmotheoandric” worldview as an ontology that implies intrinsic value of the environment. The main argument of his paper is that, from the African worldview, we can have an African extraction of environment ethics as a viable alternative for the care of the planet as the common home of humanity. Moses Muyuya’s essay, last but not least, is a case study, that is, an inquire on Amina Changwe’s situation through a counseling-client relationship by transference and counter-transference. After a clear examination of her case, the author moves onto mixed therapeutic measures which don’t exclude even pastoral counseling.

PROBLEMATIZING WESTERN REPARATIONS FOR
COLONIAL INJUSTICES: CLEARING THE WAY FOR AFRICAN
UBUNTU DIGNITY RESTORATION
DI AUSTIN MBOZI¹

Abstract

I problematize dominant Western theories of material compensations as not persuasive enough to compel colonial perpetrators of injustice to compensate Africa. I highlight seven theoretical and practical problems associated with material compensations for Africa. The first is the problem of identifying the actual African victims and second, the problem of using counter-factual calculations to determine the amount of compensation required. The third problem is that of burdening primary perpetrators of injustice to pay compensations while the fourth relates to using the collective guilty principle to identify burden bearers. The fifth problem is that of burdening secondary Western beneficiaries while the sixth is the problem of burdening Western knowledgeable beneficiaries. The last problem relates to burdening Western involuntary beneficiaries of injustices.

I instead defend the African ethicists' emphasis on restoring the lost dignity of victims, supported by the equal sacrifice principle. I find the equal sacrifice/dignity restoration alliance more plausible.

Keywords: Colonial injustices, Global justice, material reparations, dignity restoration, equal sacrifice principle

Introduction

Calls for compensations by groups that have suffered some sort of injustice perpetuated by other groups are heard world-wide. Compensation broadly speaking means that the 'victim's original situation must be restored' (Lotter 2005, 83). But because compensations are usually not made immediately after the injury or loss, compensation is usually intended to restore the status of the victim to the level where the victim would have been had the injury or loss not occurred.

Our focus is Africa's compensation for colonial injustices. So rather than focus on compensation broadly, we focus on reparations and restitution. Reparation is compensation made by the very person/s who caused the

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injustice. But with restitution, compensation may be made even where no human being is responsible for causing the suffering. Bernard Boxhill² distinguishes restitutions and reparations as follows: reparation can only occur after some loss or damage due to prior wrong-doing. But though restitution can only occur after some loss or damage, that loss or damage need not be due to a prior wrong doing. If A loses his wallet and B finds it and returns it to A, restitution has been made although no wrong was committed.

Many thinkers argue for Africa's compensation. Hennie Lotter³ proposes guidelines on how to identify former perpetrator and victim groups/nations as well as what sort of compensations might be needed under what historical circumstances. Ronald Badru⁴ argues that the pre-colonial African metaphysical beliefs in ancestors do establish good grounds for modern Africans to claim reparations on behalf of their ancestors. Thomas Pogge⁵ argues that compensation is needed because wealthy nations have created a 'global institutional order' that make it hard for poor nations to trade on equal terms with wealthy ones. Adeolu Oyekan⁶ defends the morality of reparations but argues that payment of such reparations must be suspended until African governance systems that may waste reparation funds are improved. Motsamai Molefe⁷ argues that the African concept of personhood has an inbuilt resource for rectifying historical injustices because it contains a 'theory of moral/dignity status' and 'an account of historical conditions.'

And when it comes to the question of what exactly should be restored in these compensations, African ethicists point to dignity rather than material restoration as the ultimate goal. Lotter⁸ says compensations has two aims.

² Cfr. B. Boxill, 2010, *Black Reparations* in: E. Zalta, ed. *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2006/entries/black-reparations/>, accessed July 16, 2020.

³ H. Lotter, 2005. "Compensating for Impoverishing Injustices of the Distant Past." *Politikon* 32 (1): 83-102, p.89.

⁴ Cfr. R. Badru, 2010, *Reparations for Africa: Providing Metaphysical and Epistemological Grounds of Justice to the Descendants of Dehumanized Generations*, in *Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology*, 2010, 7 (2), pp. 67-80.

⁵ Cfr. T. Pogge, *Politics as Usual: What lies Behind the Pro-poor Rhetoric*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2010.

⁶ Cfr. A. O. Oyekani, *Reparations, Slavery and Political Realism: The Challenge of contemporary African Leadership*, in *Philosophia Theoretica: The Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*, 2016, 5 (1) pp. 42-58.

⁷ Cfr. M. Molefe, *Personhood and (Rectification) Justice in African Thought* in *Politikon*, 2018.

⁸ H. Lotter, *Compensating for Impoverishing Injustices of the Distant Past*, in *Politikon*, 2005, 32 (1), pp. 83-102, p.84.

One is to restore the victim's material goods that were lost. The other is to restore the dignity of the victim to the level of the perpetrator and all other humans. Dignity is restored when the perpetrator apologizes since this 'symbolically restores the equality between the victim and perpetrator as citizens of equal dignity'. Oyekan⁹ also recognizes these two aims by referring to material goods as 'return of stolen property' and by referring to dignity restoration as being affirmed by an 'acknowledgement' or 'atonement' by perpetrators of the past wrongs. At the World Conference against Racism (WCAR) in Durban in August-September 2001, most African thinkers and diplomats rejected material reparations in preference for dignity restoration¹⁰.

What is not addressed in the literature is why African ethicists prefer dignity restoration to material reparations. In this essay I do three major things. In the first section I show that the material restoration/reparations concept, which is more emphasized in the West than in Africa, is both morally and practically problematic when applied to the African predicament because it provides unsatisfactory answers to the following questions: Which exact groups deserve material reparations given that African communities were affected differently? How do we calculate how much reparations Africa deserves? Who should bear the burden of reparations in Western societies given that the primary perpetrators are already dead, given that there are chains of perpetrators within Western bureaucratic societies, given that some Westerners neither perpetrated injustices or benefitted from them, given that naïve Westerners enjoy African wealth without knowing that it is from injustices, or given that some Westerners enjoy such wealth involuntarily? Why should Africans be compensated even when some of their ancestors were also involved in selling slaves and natural resources to Western imperialists? And even if these questions were to be answered, who should pay for Africa's problems arising not from past injustices but from natural calamities?

In the second section I show that many African thinkers emphasize dignity restoration as an alternative to material reparations. In the third section I defend the equal sacrifice principle as an ally of dignity restoration, tracing the equal sacrifice/dignity restoration alliance to the pre-colonial Buluba people's *koyija kibundi*, or collective cleansing of the world, as described by

⁹ Oyekan, *Reparations, Slavery and Political Realism*, op. cit., pp. 42-58, p.43.

¹⁰ Cfr. J. Ukabiala's article, 2001, *Historic Declaration at Anti-racism Conference*, <https://www.panafricanperceptive.com/reparations.html/>, accessed 2 March 2021.

Placide Temples¹¹. I then connect this thought to more recent modern African ideas of rectification justice as depicted by Motsamai Molefe¹².

Problematizing Western material reparations

In this section I show seven problems associated with material reparations.

(a) The problem of identifying actual victims

Which exact group deserve compensation in Africa? Lotter¹³ gives stages of general guidelines about how to connect that the effects of the injuries suffered by ancestors are still being suffered by descendants through poverty. The first stage is calculating using social science methods the current levels of poverty among the descendants. The second stage is to show that the ancestors to the current generation suffered certain injuries from an injustice. The third stage is providing evidence that the current levels of poverty are inherited from earlier generations.

Lotter's guidelines can actually work among groups like, for instance, African Americans, who are still clearly marginalized. The question is whether or not the African situation can pass all these guidelines. It is possible to apply the first guideline. Calculated data about Africa's current average poverty levels is in fact already available¹⁴. But it is hard to connect this poverty to imperialism. One problem is that it is hard to determine whether the current poverty is a result of colonialism or of the misrule of post-independence black African governments. In some cases such as Zambia, Africans actually lived worse off standards of life before colonialism, improved during colonialism and then after independence mismanaged the

¹¹ Cfr. P. Temples, 2nd ed. 1959. *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africaine. www.congoforum.be/up/docs/tempels%20Bantuphil..., accessed January 20 2018.

¹² Cfr. M. Molefe, *Personhood and (Rectification) Justice in African Thought* in *Politikon*, 2018.

¹³ H. Lotter, *Compensating for Impoverishing Injustices of the Distant Past*, in *Politikon*, 2005, 32 (1), pp. 83-102, p.89.

¹⁴ As at 2005, out the 15 World's poorest countries, only Tajikistan and Nepal were not from sub-Saharan Africa. The poorest sub-Saharan African countries were Malawi, Mali, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Niger, Uganda, Gambia, Rwanda, Guinea Bissau, Tanzania, Mozambique, Chad and Ghana. Source: Pogge (2010, 66). The situation has not changed much.

economies to lower standards of living¹⁵. Of course, in some cases like South Africa the apartheid system gave more economic power to whites than to blacks. So the link between colonialism and black poverty seems more clearly visible. The problem is that this links the poverty to white settlers than to colonial imperial powers. It seems more of an internal white-black affair, namely that South African white citizens and not imperial Britain are more directly responsible for the injustices on blacks.

One other problem associated with identifying victims arises when some victims have been made better off by the very injustice that they suffered. The argument given about African Americans can apply to some African countries. Booker Washington puts it thus:

we must acknowledge that, notwithstanding the cruelty and the moral wrong of slavery, the ten million Negro inhabiting this country, who themselves or whose ancestors went through the school of American slavery, are in a stronger and more hopeful condition, materially, intellectually, morally, and religiously, than is true of an equal number of black people in any portion of the globe¹⁶.

These views are echoed. In 1974 African American boxer Muhammad Ali saw unpleasant living conditions in poor areas of former Zaire (now the DRC) where he had gone to fight George Foreman. On returning to America he reportedly jokingly exclaimed that ‘thank God my granddaddy got on that boat’¹⁷, meaning that he would have been worse off had his grandparent not get onto the ship to become a slave in America. This argument, though potentially offensive to victims, is not entirely without merit: Slave traders injured African American but inadvertently left them economically better off in America where they are, on average, relatively wealthier than black Africans back in Africa. Mathias Risse¹⁸ argued the same for Africa and other Third World regions by suggesting that the global poor are economically better off than they would have been had the current Western-led global

¹⁵ Zambia inherited from colonial masters a per capita GDP of over \$500. But it had declined to \$250 by 1991. Zambia’s debt in 2020 stood around \$12 billion.

¹⁶ As cited by Oyekan. Oyekan is citing Washington’s (1967) book, *Up to Slavery*, Kessinger Publishing Co, Montana 2016.

¹⁷ Cfr. Debble Young’s article, 2018, *Thank God My Granddaddy*, <https://www.richardcyoung.com/politics/feature/thank-god-grandddaddy-got-boat/>, august 2024.

¹⁸ Cfr. Risse Mathias, *How Does the Global Order Harm the Poor?* in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 2005, 33), pp. 349-376.

order not been established¹⁹.

Oyekan²⁰ disagrees with Washington. He gives an analogy that suppose a man rapes a woman, and it is later somehow proven that had he not molested her in this way, she would have instead been ran over by a bus and killed. For Oyekan the rapist must still be punished. My response is that Oyekan's analogy is a misplaced one. It ignores that fact that Africans also engaged in the slave trade, *as elaborated later*. Those 'raped' Africans were 'raped' by fellow rival African tribes who sold off to be 'raped' further as slaves. Oyekan's other point is that although African Americans are indeed economically better, they are still psychologically unfulfilled and less happier than they would have been without the injustices. Fortunately, this thread of his argument simply reinforces my argument that it is not economic compensation needed but dignity restoration. Black people in general need some dignity respect in order to be psychologically healed and become emotionally happier.

The other problem associated with identifying victims regards former victims that have self-recovered from the injuries without being compensated by their former perpetrators. Lotter's²¹ suggested that self-recovered victims should be refunded for recovering themselves and receive apology:

If the victims have recovered in these ways by themselves, ...[they] can take pride in their ability to rise above their circumstancesHowever compensation acknowledging the harm... awarding money for costs incurred should still be on the agenda. So too should be compensation that restores the moral worth and human dignity of victims.

Unfortunately, this is not an independent argument for material reparations. It assumes that material reparations are due to victims by perpetrators but only guides perpetrators to refund self-recovered victims. The other arguments I have given against material reparations can sweep out this along. The only part that it fortunately does is to agree with me that dignity restoration is due.

¹⁹ Risse (2005, 23) gives detailed statistical data suggesting, among other indicators, that between 1960 and 2000 as the current global orders gained momentum real per-capita income in developing world grew at an average 2.3 %, that longevity (average) rose from 44 to 64, that the literacy rate rose from 54% in 1950 to 79% in 1999, and that infant mortality fell from 156 in 1960 in 1000 live births to 54.

²⁰ Oyekan, *Reparations, Slavery and Political Realism*, op. cit., pp. 42-58, p. 46.

²¹ H. Lotter, *Compensating for Impoverishing Injustices of the Distant Past*, in *Politikon*, 2005, 32 (1), pp. 83-102, p. 87.

(b) The problem of counterfactual calculations

How do we calculate how much material reparations Africa deserve? Jeremy Waldron²² has ably shown that answering this requires use of counter-factual calculations that can hardly be accurate because they would be based not on actual data but on imaginary data about ‘what would have happened if some event (which did occur) had not taken place.’ He says such calculation that try by imagination to ‘change the present so that it looks more like the present that would have obtained in the absence of the injustice ... have no normative authority’.

In any case Waldron wonders why counter-factual calculations should be calculated only in a manner that favors victims. Why not, he wonders, calculate the possibility, for example, that a greedy and despotic Maori chief of traditional New Zealand might still have sold off the communal ancestral lands if the Europeans had not appropriated it to themselves in 1865? We can ask the same for Africa. Given that many Africans were ruled by warring factions at the time of contact with Europeans ,it is questionable why such calculations should rule out the possibility that an African despot might have brutally killed and/or starved his people as well as selling off the lands of almost the entire African population had colonial conquest not occurred!

The isolated available information about the quality of life among colonial-era Africans learns towards a conclusion that even if we used the most charitable counter-factual calculations, there is a high likelihood that these calculations might lead us to this: if the injustices (the slave trade and colonialism) had not occurred the currently living Africans would have been surviving on a standard of living, on average, which is not very different from they currently do. Data on pre-colonial African standards of living is not available. But data obtained during colonial rule shows that it is actually colonial rule that improved African life expectancy which was extremely lower before Western contact²³. Before Western contacts Africans utilized the natural resources (minerals, wildlife and environment) of course. But it was comparatively only at a low scale²⁴. Lacking huge capital for natural resource

²² J. Waldron, *Superseding Historical Injustice*. *Ethics*, 1992, 103 (1), pp. 4-28, p.8.

²³ Holding Leander and James Robinson, 2012, *Colonialism and Economic Development in Africa*, www.rbec.org/papers/w18566/pdf., Accessed December 20 2015. Figure 3 presented by Holding and Robinson reveals that average life expectancy for Uganda and Zimbabwe rose during the colonial period from a mere 24 in 1942 to 32 in 1965.

²⁴ Rodney (1972) and Tembo (1990) give details showing African economic self-reliance and technological advancements at the advent of institutionalized commercial contacts with the

utilization and largely unaware of the international value of these resources, African rulers sold lands off to European dealers at very low prices. So the huge economic value of these resources, and the huge capital and technology to exploit them, were actually introduced by the same colonists. It is no wonder that some South African whites boast that black South Africans would have been worse off had whites not arrived²⁵.

Another way to estimate that Africans would not have enjoyed any high standard of living is to argue that they have since independence received but misused an estimated US 1 trillion²⁶. In South Africa the government is now led by black people themselves and it has introduced measures such as the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) to address black poverty. Zimbabwe has redistributed the land to blacks. Yet Africa, on average, remains the most economically poor continent on earth.

(c) The problems of identifying burden bearers

The problem of identifying burden bearers brings into focus five associated problems, namely; the problem of identifying the primary perpetrator, the problem of applying collective guilty, the problem of burdening secondary beneficiaries, the problem of burdening knowledgeable beneficiaries and the problem of burdening involuntary beneficiaries.

The problem of identifying primary perpetrators

The primary perpetrator principle of compensatory justice imposes the cost of compensation on the *actual* perpetrators of injustice. However, despite the seemingly obvious nature of this approach, there are hardships in applying it in actual practice. First, in many cases original perpetrators are already dead.

West. These advancements were on the upswing. Africans mined iron, copper and various other metals, as well as engaged in smelting. They were gold producers (especially the Akan of Ghana), they manufactured cloth and beads (especially in Benin), they engaged in metal casting and made bronze sculptures (especially the Yoruba in Oyo state, a part of the larger Ife state), they made military weapons (especially the Zulu and King Shaka), they domesticated animals (especially the Tutsi of Rwanda), they grew crops and fruits (especially the Shona of Zimbabwe and the Baganda banana growers of Uganda), they made canoes and engaged in building architecture (especially the Shona under the Rozwi rulers of Zimbabwe). However, Africa was still at feudal stage, slightly behind the then Western levels.

²⁵ T. Metz, *Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights in South Africa*, in *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 2011, 1 (2), pp. 532-559, p. 552.

²⁶ Cfr. D. Moyo, *Dead Aid*, Penguin Books, Johannesburg 2009.

And criminal responsibility (unlike benefits) cannot be inherited by descendants²⁷. Second, the perpetrators may be a 'chain of perpetrators', not be a single group but groups of individuals each having played a major or only a minor role in a chain of activities. In light of this Amdur²⁸ questions who exactly is the perpetrator when white immigrants grabbed Red Indian lands in America. Is it the politicians who made unjust land policies? Is it the voters who voted for these politicians? Is it the soldiers who shot the Red Indians? When applied to Africa, we cannot hold only John Cecil Rhodes and his pioneer column in Zimbabwe as the perpetrators of injustices in Southern Africa. We should include the entire white populations of South Africa and Britain who worked in these countries' civil service, or even the entire Europe whose leaders endorsed the sharing of African territories at the 1884-85 Berlin Conference in the first place!

Third, there is the problem of having perpetrators among the supposed victims. It seems not fair that Western whites should pay for reparations even when Africans were also involved in the slave trade and colonialism. Let me expand this third problem. This essay is primarily addressing normative philosophical questions. But on this point I have no choice but to give selected empirical details because, first, there is need to moderate the views (often one-sided in favor of Africans, sorry to say) of many African thinkers who are so focused on 'conceptual decolonization' that they ignore or easily dismiss any facts that appear to discredit Africans. Secondly, these facts are crucial in determining the strength or weakness of Africa's moral claims on dignity restoration and third I am implementing Henry Odera Orika's²⁹ and Pogge's³⁰ suggestions that philosophical arguments are 'useless' and 'have not been of much help, lately' because they have been largely abstract and not taking on board positive empirical science and historical facts. As Risse³¹ says, the global justice discussion requires more interaction with other disciplines than philosophers are often comfortable with³².

²⁷ R. Amdur, *Compensatory Justice: The Question of Costs*, *Political Theory*, 1979, 7 (2), pp. 229-244, p. 233.

²⁸ Ivi, p.230.

²⁹ H. Orika Odera, *The Philosophy of Foreign Aid: A Question of the Right to the Minimum*, PRAXIS International, 1988, (4), pp. 465-475, p.474.

³⁰ T. Pogge, *Politics as Usual: What lies Behind the Pro-poor Rhetoric*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010, p.8.

³¹ Cfr. M. Risse, *How Does the Global Order Harm the Poor?* in *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 2005, 33), pp. 349-376, footnote 3.

³² Pogge and Risse do give a lot empirically obtained economics statistics to put across their respective positions on global justice.

It is usually made to appear as if Europeans simply at all times chose to use military force to grab Africa's resources. The reality is that in *some* cases it is the dishonest African rulers who largely invited the use of this force. In his *How Europe Under-Developed Africa*³³ (1974), Walter Rodney, a Guyanese of African descent, has given a detailed account of the extent of Western exploitation in Africa. Yet he admits that there were more slaves kept within sub-Sahara Africa by their fellow black Africans and Arabs in East Africa and Sudan than by white Europeans. He says that the Afrikaners, (the whites of European descent who regard themselves as indigenous Africans), kept only a few. Rodney³⁴ admits that 'it would be a mistake to believe that it was an overwhelming military power that Europeans used to capture slaves... . Europeans found it impossible to conquer Africans during the early centuries of trade.' He goes on to elaborate how African kingdoms from Angola right up to West Africa were slave trading centers where African rulers kidnapped citizens of rival rulers and sold them to white slave traders³⁵ (Rodney 1974, 103-140) . If European slave traders had tried to forcibly capture slaves without going through African rulers, there would have been war between African armies and these European traders. African elites even fought each other over ownership of slave-raiding territories. In desperation they in some cases recruited European slave traders to help them fight local rivals. Then the able-bodied subjects of defeated rivals were sold as slaves³⁶. Even individual bands of Africans captured slaves for sell because they wanted to buy Western goods such as red scarlets³⁷. To make matters worse, efforts to stop the slave trade did not come from African elites but from the British government which outlawed it in 1804. Some of the African elites were actually ready to fight the British government for trying to end slavery. A European missionary in Barotseland (modern Western Zambia) Adolphe Jalla reported that king Lewanika and his headmen 'stockpiled' more slaves when he heard that Britain has outlawed slavery. The king and his ruling class later opposed the British resident representative Major Robert T. Coryndon when

³³ Cfr. Rodney Walter, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Tanzania Publishing House, Dar es Salaam 1974.

³⁴ Ivi, p.88.

³⁵ Ivi, pp. 103-140.

³⁶ Ivi, p. 157.

³⁷ Ivi, p.88.

he announced an end to slavery on October 25, 1897³⁸.

What Rodney blames Europeans for is that they ‘taught’ Africans to sell slaves rather than keep them for domestic use. Unfortunately, he does not substantiate this. A freed slave, Olaudah Equiano’s³⁹ own self-written story reveals that it is African traders who captured him and sold him to a wealthy African family which used him for domestic labor. What this shows is that Africans did sell slaves among themselves. What Europeans introduced was merely a lucrative international market for slaves and advanced weapons for slave capturing.

When Afrikaner South Afrikaners trekked northwards to escape British rule at the Cape, having learnt the cost of land wars in the Cape, they were eager to negotiate in getting land from Africans rather than grab it by force. But the Africans invited human life atrocities. The Zulu people led by king Dingane in 1837 agreed with Afrikaner Great Trekkers led by Piet Retief to sell off the lands around the Drakensberg Mountains. Dingane further asked the Afrikaners to grab back the around 700 cattle that his fellow African rival King Sekonyela had grabbed from his kingdom in their previous battle. The Afrikaners did all this. Yet Dingane still violated the agreement and instead went on to kill some ninety seven Afrikaner men and women as well as 185 of their children⁴⁰. This caused the Afrikaners to kill many Zulu in 1838.

In 1883, a German settler Franz Adolf Eduard Luderitz bought a large mass of land from local chiefs near Angra Pequera bay on which he intended to establish German settlements. In 1885, another settler Heinrich Ernest Goring signed an agreement with a local chief called Kamaherero whereby the German settlers should protect the chief against sporadic attacks by the Khoikhoi (Hottentot) tribal hunters. In 1890, Kamaherero’s son, Samuel, signed an agreement with German settlers to help him ascend to the throne. Yet the Herero and the Nama natives later killed over 120 German settlers in a revolt. This is why German soldiers, at some point led by General Lothar

³⁸ M. Mainga, *Bulozi Under the Luyana Kings: Political Evolution and State Formation in Pre-Colonial Zambia*, Bookworld Publishers, Lusaka 2010, p.189. This is not to say that no African rulers opposed the slave trade. Some actually tried to fight it in preference for trade goods and an introduction of Western technology. These include the king of the state of Kongo in early 16th century, Queen Nzinga of the Matamba state in Angola in 1648, a leader called Tomba of the Baga people in what is now the Republic of Guinea in about 1720 and king Agaja Trudo of Dahomey in about 1724 (Rodney, 1971,90-91). However, European slave traders eventually succeeded in sponsoring rival rulers within African states.

³⁹ Cfr. P. Edwards ed., *Equiano’s Travels: Interesting Narratives of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavas Vassa, The African*, Heinemann Educational Books, London 1967.

⁴⁰ F. W. De Klerk, *The Last Trek, A New Beginning*, Macmillan, London 1998, p.5.

Von Trotha, between 1904 and 1908 attacked the Herero and the Nama in what is today condemned as colonial German's genocide in Africa. The Germans may have overacted. But this still does not exonerate Africans from being part of the larger problem.

In Zimbabwe, it is King Lobengula who sold his territory to Rhode's agent, Charles Rudd, with the signing of the Rudd Concession of 1888. Rhodes only overthrew this king when the latter began sporadic attacks on the settlers. In Western Zambia, it is King Lewanika who sold his territory to Cecil Rhode's agent, Frank Elliot Lochner with the signing of the 1890 Lochner or Barotse Concession. This agreement facilitated the colonization of Zambia⁴¹.

In defense of material reparations, Oyekan's⁴² differs with my view. He gives an analogy that Germany cannot refuse to compensate Jewish holocaust sufferers on grounds that a few Jewish spies aided the Nazi. My response is that he presents a wrong analogy. The few Jewish spies that were secretly paid by the Nazi were working against the official policy of their own Jewish ruling elites. But in Africa, it was the Africa ruling elite's own official policy that sold off their slaves. Defenders of material reparations can also suggest that African despots that aided colonialism did not represent the African majority. But this argument would be self-defeating. First, African philosophers have argued that pre-colonial Africa was ruled a highly democratic by 'consensual democracy'⁴³, meaning that African rulers engaged in the slave trade with nearly total public support. Second, the same argument can be used to defend modern Western tax papers. They can refuse to pay reparations on grounds that their ancestors' governments were ruled by dictators who supported the slave trade without general public approval of their ancestors.

The problem of applying the collective guilty principle

I showed the problem of who to burden the cost of reparation when there is a 'chain of perpetrators'. One solution to this problem is to invoke the collective guilty principle. This holds that since several groups and

⁴¹ Cfr. V. M. Tembo, *A History of Central and Southern Africa*, ZPC Publications, Lusaka 1990.

⁴² Oyekan, *Reparations, Slavery and Political Realism*, op. cit., pp. 42-58, p. 46.

⁴³ Cfr. K. Wiredu, *Democracy and Consensus in African Traditional Politics: A Plea for a Non-Party Polity* in: E. Eze, ed. *Post-Colonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell, Cambridge 1997, pp. 303-331.

individuals played a role in causing the injustice, the entire nation was involved and so it must bear the cost. Paul W. Taylor⁴⁴ suggests that ‘the obligation to compensate for the past injustice does not fall upon any particular individual but upon the whole society’ because ‘the perpetrator of the original injustice was the whole society.’ He prefers ‘institutionalized compensation’ because women, for example, were segregated as a ‘collective target.’

There are two problems with this approach. Taylor, ironically, provokes the first problem when he says that ‘whole society’ does not include the members of the victim group. Why not, we may ask, if some members of the victim group participated in causing the injustice? The second problem about the collective guilty principle, raised by Amdur⁴⁵, is that there are always some innocent citizens among the accused group who did not participate in the chain of injustices. He says there is no way a whole society, including recent immigrants, those who were children at the time of injustice, those who tried to fight the injustice etc., could have been perpetrators. He warns of a danger of creating what Lotter⁴⁶ calls ‘a new generations victims’ who must pay for injuries which they did not cause. In sum, the collective guilty principle defeats itself by naively acquitting perpetrators among the supposed victims and it unfairly convicting innocents among the alleged perpetrator group.

The problem of burdening secondary perpetrators

The secondary perpetrator principle is invoked in the event that the primary perpetrators are already dead. Here the burden of reparations must be imposed on those that perpetuate the injustice. One notices three variants of this principle. The first variant burdens those that *worsen* the existing condition of victims. Perhaps the strongest description of this variant comes from Pogge⁴⁷. Pogge accuses developed nations of perpetuating the poverty of the global poor by creating a ‘global institutional order’ through their control of

⁴⁴ W. P. Taylor, *Reverse Discrimination and Compensatory Justice*, Analysis 1973, (33), pp. 177-182, p.181.

⁴⁵ R. Amdur, 1979, *Compensatory Justice: The Question of Costs*, *Political Theory*, 1979, 7 (2), pp. 229-244, p. 235.

⁴⁶ H. Lotter, *Compensating for Impoverishing Injustices of the Distant Past*, in *Politikon*, 2005, 32 (1), pp. 83-102, p. 93.

⁴⁷ Cfr. T. Pogge, *Politics as Usual: What lies Behind the Pro-poor Rhetoric*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2010.

global financial institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Scheming behind these institutions, leaders of developing nations make it hard for poor nations to negotiate fair terms of engagement with wealthy nations. To make matters worse, the little funds available to poor nations is wasted by corrupt regimes in the name of sovereignty. The 'international borrowing privilege', devised by wealthy nations, allows greedy and despotic rulers from poor nations to borrow huge funds from international financial institutions. These rulers also enjoy the 'international resource privilege' which allows them free use of these funds without international control. The result is that although these monies are borrowed on behalf of their citizens, these rulers misuse them for personal gain and for purchasing weapons. Under the internationally recognized 'national arms privileges', these arms are used to silence the voices and opposition of their people. And yet, according to international law the future generations of those nations must repay these debts, even if they did not benefit from them, while the wealthier nations recover these loans with interest. These poor nation rulers also receive bribes from nationals of wealthy nations so that they sell off natural resources to these nationals at giveaway prices. The WTO further allows affluent countries to subsidize their domestic producers. This makes their exports to poor countries cheaper, thereby destroying the local industry in these poor countries. Simultaneously, the WTO allows these affluent countries to increase tariffs on imports to protect their local markets, thereby making exports from poor countries unprofitable. Furthermore, the WTO allows developing countries to hold patent rights even on essentials such as advanced medicines and seeds. Poor countries have no capacity for innovation. So they are forced by import these essentials at high prices.

The second variant involves perpetrators that *maintain* the existing condition of the victims. An example can be Western nations who are rejecting African immigrants, even when they benefited from exploiting Africa. A version described by Robert Fullinwider suggests that when one major event or a series of events produces a negative effect, the failure to solve the problems associated with that event should no longer be blamed on the primary perpetrators of that major event but on those that failed to heal the injury when an opportunity to do so availed itself. In 1865 after the Civil War, he argues, the American lawmakers amended the laws to extend equal citizenship to black Americans. If the US government of the time had implemented these legal reforms black Americans would by now have been enjoying equal economic opportunities with whites. So the blame for the

current problems of the African Americans can no longer be blamed on the slave traders but on the then US government.

The third variant involves those that merely *ignore* the existing situation of victims. They go about their lives naively and not fighting for equality. Lotter⁴⁸ says such people ‘became complicit ... through acts of omission, by ignoring the plight of the vulnerable sufferers of injustice’.

Clearly, the first variant is worse than the second, and the second worse than the third. To the first variant we can respond that the current African leaders implicated by Pogge are not innocent. They are part of the problem by accepting bribes and failing to negotiate international deals that benefit their citizens. Wealthy nations are merely taking advantage of the corruption of African rulers. Western leaders are elected to promote the local interests of their voters. Their voters do pressurize them to work for national interests. It is up to African populations to remove dictators, replace them with capable leaders and pressurize these leaders to work for national interests as do their Western counterparts. We can respond to the second variant by also using it against African leaders. We can say that it is no longer the slave traders and colonialists to be blamed for current African poverty but the current African leaders for failing to utilize the US 1 trillion post-independence aid funds that have been disclosed by Moyo⁴⁹. The third variant is actually not so clearly a wrong. A mere refusal to speak out for those suffering is not really a cause’ of that suffering.

The problem of burdening knowledgeable beneficiaries

We have seen that identifying primary perpetrators, justifying collective guilt and identifying secondary perpetrators are all problematic. So an alternative is suggested that those who are currently enjoying the benefits of past injustices *knowingly* must bear the burden of reparations.

If I knowingly and voluntarily benefit from wrongs done to others, though I do not commit the wrongs myself, then perhaps it is true to say that I am less than innocent of these wrongs, and perhaps it is morally fitting that I bear some of the costs of compensation. But it is not like this with involuntary benefits (Fullinwider 1975,317).

⁴⁸ H. Lotter, *Compensating for Impoverishing Injustices of the Distant Past*, in *Politikon*, 2005, 32 (1), pp. 83-102, p.93.

⁴⁹ Cfr. D. Moyo, *Dead Aid*, Penguin Books, Johannesburg 2009.

This position is rejected by Amdur⁵⁰. Every beneficiary must pay, he suggests, because the idea behind compensation is to restore the competitive balance that would have existed had the injustice never occurred. The issue of which beneficiary knew or not is irrelevant. A further complication is how we are going to prove that the beneficiary knew that their benefits were from proceeds of crime anyway. And even if this is known it would mean that among citizens who equally benefitted, those who knew should pay while those who did not should not pay.

The problem of burdening involuntary beneficiaries

Fullinwider⁵¹ suggests that reparations should ideally be paid by beneficiaries who voluntarily enjoy the benefits of injustice, not those whose receiving these benefits is 'involuntarily and unavoidable.' He says involuntary beneficiaries become an 'a new generation of victims' when they are tasked to 'bear the burden of the remedy.'

I concur with Lotter⁵² that involuntary beneficiaries who know that they are enjoying the fruits of injustice have an obligation to protest and be audible in pressurizing their governments to aid the victims that suffered for what they are enjoying. Failure to do so amounts to perpetuating the injustice. However, I am uneasy with the reason Lotter gives as to why these beneficiaries must speak out. He says they must speak out for their own good because they cannot afford to live happily among fellow humans who are bitter for suffering the results of past injustice. If their governments eliminates such bitterness by aiding these victims the beneficiaries will now live comfortably in a new healed society with no bitter members.

It seems that Lotter is being unfair to this 'new generation of victims'. He has shifted the moral assessment parameters from deontological grounds to utilitarian ones. The 'new generation of victims' in Western societies are making a deontological argument that their negative rights have been violated by being forced to pay for the injustices they played no role in perpetuating. But Lotter's response is utilitarian, which is that they must bear the cost because it is for their own collective good. Lotter's argument surely implies that if X steals all the food which Y had stockpiled for the coming month, we

⁵⁰ R. Amdur, *Compensatory Justice: The Question of Costs*, *Political Theory*, 1979, 7 (2), pp. 229-244, p.231.

⁵¹ R. Fullinwider, *Preferential Hiring and Compensation*, *Social Theory and Practice*, 1975, (3), pp. 307-320, p.318.

⁵² Lotter, *Compensating for Impoverishing*, op. cit., pp. 83-102, p. 94, footnote 32.

as Y's neighbors must compensate Y because it is us who suffer the noise when his hungry children start stealing our food. This implies that modern Western citizens must compensate Africans because it is them who will suffer when more and more Africans keep illegally entering their countries and creating social discontent in host countries. This is a plausible argument for political realism on behalf of Western self-interest, but certainly not on behalf of victims.

Now, given these complications about Western material reparations, should we resign to the libertarian principle that suggests that nobody should compensate Africa's victims? No! The solution is to resort to the African dignity restoration. But before we do that, let us show how African thinkers object to material reparations.

A rejection of material reparations by African elites

Many African thinkers and diplomats object to material reparations and prefer dignity restoration. Odera Oruka⁵³ rejects material reparations because poor nations that were not injured by slavery and colonization would receive no support while wealthy nations that never enslaved or colonized any nation would not be obliged to support any poor nation:

But rectification cannot be a universal policy for all kinds of aid. First, it implies that any affluent nation which can prove to have been no party to past historical injustices has no obligation to offer aid.... Secondly, the principle implies that any country whose current state of poverty is not due to past injustices done to her by any other nation would, by this very fact, fail to have legitimate claim for receiving aid as rectification of past injustices.

Odera Oruka is more concerned with helping Africans retain their dignity than with punishing the perpetrators. At the World Conference against Racism (WCAR) in Durban in August-September 2001 Senegal's president Abdoulaye Wade also rejected as 'childish' calls for material reparations on grounds that even Africans were involved in the slave trade⁵⁴:

If one can claim reparations for slavery, the slaves of my ancestors or their descendants can also claim money from me because slavery has been practiced by all people of the world.

⁵³ O. H. Oruka, *The Philosophy of Foreign Aid: A Question of the Right to the Minimum*, PRAXIS International, 1988, (4), pp. 465-475, p.468.

⁵⁴ Cfr. Anton La Guardia's article (August 31, 2001) in *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world . news/1339092/Africa-rift-over-calls-for-slavery-reparations.html>. Accessed on 2 February 2021.

African elites opt for apology for dignity restoration. South African foreign minister Dhlamini Zuma said an apology and not money would better restore African dignity. The ‘apologize- and-be-forgiven policy’ of the South African government’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) at the end of apartheid in 1994 was guided by Ubuntu values⁵⁵. Clearly, whites who apologized for committing racist-related crimes assured blacks that from then on they would be respected as humans of equal dignity while blacks who forgive the whites assured whites that blacks were no longer bitter and would not revenge.

At the same WCAR forum Nigeria’s President Olusegun Obasanjo said reparations ‘may further hurt the dignity of Africans’, views that were echoed by the Republic of Congo, South Africa’s Bishop Desmond Tutu and one of Africa’s eminent persons at the time, Professor Ali Mazrui. Even Oyekan’s⁵⁶ ‘political realism’ that calls for suspension of material reparations has emphasis on dignity in mind. He says that Westerners are only likely to apologize when Africans govern themselves with dignity, adding that ‘A developed Africa would therefore have much more to offer the world and therefore exploit its relevance as a bargaining tool in the quest for slave reparations.’ Respect for equal dignity showed in the deal between Libya under President Muammar Al-Gadhafi and Italy Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi when they signed the Italy-Libya Friendship Treaty on August 30, 2008. Under this treaty Italy was to ‘pay’ US\$5 billion in ‘reparations’ to Libya for the injustices which Italy as a colonial ruler inflicted on Libya between 1911 and 1943. Yet, in reality this does not seem to be reparations but mutual national self-interests as trading partners of equal dignity. The move was not intended to restore Libya’s lost wealth ‘to the level it would have been had the injuries not occurred’. Libya permitted Italy to invest into its vast oil reserves (especially through the Italian oil giant company ENI). Furthermore, Libya was to help Italy in stopping African immigrants into Europe. Clearly, Italy was to benefit more, because the Libyan infrastructure to be built with this US\$5 billion was to be constructed by Italian companies. No wonder the enthusiastic Berlusconi boasted in the slogan about, ‘fewer immigrants, more gas and more oil’⁵⁷. Restoring the dignity of Africans is preferred not only because it is the most fair one to both Westerners and

⁵⁵ T. Metz, *Toward An African Moral Theory*, in *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 2007, 15 (3), pp. 322-341, p.325.

⁵⁶ Oyekan, *Reparations, Slavery and Political Realism*, op. cit., pp. 42-58, p.54.

⁵⁷ Cfr. C. De Cesali’s article (2012), *The Paradoxes of Colonial Reparations: Foreclosing Memory and the 2008 Italy-Libya Friendship Treaty*, *Memory Studies*, 5(3), pp. 316-326.

Africans but also because it 'serves as a symbolic acceptance of guilty, with the purpose of mitigating the ill-effects of a better-forgotten era'⁵⁸.

Compensation for 'taken away' dignity is justified and practical. I have used the phrase 'taking it away' in quotation marks because ontologically the human being is born with dignity which cannot actually physically be taken away. When the perpetrator takes away the victim's property and humiliates her, the victim not only loses her material possessions. She also loses her dignity in two senses. The first sense is epistemically. She loses her inherent dignity *in the eyes of the perpetrator*. Slave traders and racist colonists saw Africans as deserving 'a life whose standard was well below that of pets'⁵⁹. The second sense is dysfunctional loss. Lotter⁶⁰ laments such loss as leaving 'deep emotional scars' that impair the victims 'capabilities for effective functioning.' Here the victim loses dignity in terms of her inability to self-develop and pursue full personhood as a moral agent. She may feel psychologically depressed and inferior. This loss of self-confidence makes her stop aspiring to self-develop. Without such self-development a human being, lacking subsistence basic necessities of life, cannot behave rationally and self-consciously as a morally upright being. Odera Oruka⁶¹ says the victim cannot live 'a humanized life on earth. She is even bound to be corrupt, because like a drowning person she can 'cling to any person or object nearby, however irrational or useless that may be for survival'.

This is not to say that African thinkers do reject all material support or reparations. Their point is that such material support must be aimed at restoring the dignity of black peoples, not aimed at returning lost material goods. However, Africans do demand material reparations only for mass killings. This is because killings associated with colonial injustices are too grave to be restored with mere verbal apology. Approximately 80 000 Herero and the Nama Africans of Namibia were brutally killed by Germany soldiers

⁵⁸ Oyekan, *Reparations, Slavery and Political Realism*, op. cit., pp. 42-58, p. 49. There are of course also traces of the 'restoration of dignity' idea in Western literature (e.g. Amdur (1979, 241: Waldron (1992,7). The difference is that Western thinkers do not base them on Ubuntu values while Africa does.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰ H. Lotter, *Compensating for Impoverishing Injustices of the Distant Past*, in *Politikon*, 2005, 32 (1), pp. 83-102, p. 89.

⁶¹ O. H. Oruka, *The Philosophy of Foreign Aid: A Question of the Right to the Minimum*, PRAXIS International, 1988, (4), pp. 465-475, p. 468.

between 1904 and 1908⁶². Germany accepts dignity restoration and apologized for the atrocities. During the course of the year 2020 she proposed reparations of 10 million Euro. Some 11,500 Kikuyu in Kenya were brutally murdered by British troops in the late 1950s and nearly one million Algerians died in the war against French troops between 1954 and 1962. Payments for atrocities are grey matter between material restoration and dignity restoration. The physical individual human lives of victims lost cannot be replaced, but the lives of descendants can be improved. The dignity of individual dead victims cannot be restored, but the dignity of their descendants can. Former perpetrator governments that apologize for atrocities but not to wealth exploitation seem to be aware of this.

The equal sacrifice principle: an ally of African dignity restoration

On what moral basis then, do Africans base their emphasis on dignity restoration over material reparations? In this section I argue that the equal sacrifice principle justifies Africa's preference for dignity restoration and vice versa.

The equal sacrifice principle compels all able human beings to assist those in need regardless of who perpetrated or suffered from past injustices. It avoids 'punishing perpetrators' because it is more concerned with equalizing the dignity of all human beings. It has both Western and African roots. But as shown with African emphasis on dignity restoration the equal sacrifice principle is more emphasized in Africa. In Western thought Amdur supports it. Opposing material reparations, he says 'the problem is that it is extremely difficult-perhaps impossible - to apply these [material reparation] principles, in any rigorous way', to actual cases:

When it is not possible to assign the costs of compensation either to the perpetrators or to the beneficiaries of injustice, those costs should be distributed evenly among the entire community⁶³ (Amdur 1979, 234).

To strengthen his support for this forward-looking rather than backward-looking solution Amdur refers to the post-World War II West Germany reparations to Jewish victims. These reparations, he argues, were not based on Germany collective guilty but on the basis that some

⁶² Cfr. Article by Jason Burke and Philip Oltermann, August 12, 2020, *Namibia Rejects Germany Compensation Offer for Colonial Violence* in *The Guardian*.

⁶³ R. Amdur, *Compensatory Justice: The Question of Costs*, *Political Theory*, 1979, 7 (2), pp. 229-244, p.234.

compensation is ‘morally necessary’.

The equal sacrifice principle also does a better job with respect to natural disasters than do material reparations. Sometimes applying it may not be needed, but dignity restoration is still needed. Take a case where a natural calamity causes some suffering but another natural force heals the suffering. A rare case is Jan van Riebeeck’s 1652 ship wreck at the Cape. That natural misfortune led to Afrikaner settlement in wealthy South Africa. If such ‘natural restitution’ happens to an African country that was unjustly injured in the past, that country needs no international equal sacrifice support but the restoration of its dignity through apology by its former perpetrator is still due. Or take another case where a natural disaster causes suffering but the victims recover on their own from the effects of the disaster. Let us call itself restitution. Wealthy nations such as the USA do recover themselves all the time from tornadoes, for example. If an African country that was previously unjustly injured can afford to recover itself from natural disasters again there is no need for an international equal sacrifice to apply. But the country that perpetrated the injustice must still apologize and restore the victims’ dignity.

The equal sacrifice principle also caters for descendants of primary victims who have not recovered either materially or psychologically. Without referring to Africans as such, Lotter⁶⁴ advocates for compensation to ‘secondary victims’ of descendants whose ‘capabilities for effective functioning’ have been hampered because they inherited the psychological trauma and disabling living conditions from their ancestors who were the primary victims. Boxill⁶⁵ as he supports preferential hiring for American blacks, puts it more strongly:

In order to retain their sanity and equilibrium in impossibly unjust situations, people may have to resort to patterns of behavior and consequently may develop habits or cultural traits which are debilitating and unproductive in a more humane environment. [Their unjust injuries]... may be deeply ingrained and extremely difficult to eradicate.

Relying on material reparations cannot work in addressing ‘psychological trauma’. It is hard to tell whether or not it is such ‘psychological trauma’ that makes modern Africans failing to self-recover, to the extent of wasting the US\$ 1 trillion aid revealed by Moyo. In any case, there is nothing to show that pre-colonial Africans were any different from

⁶⁴ H. Lotter, *Compensating for Impoverishing Injustices of the Distant Past*, in *Politikon*, 2005, 32 (1), pp. 83-102, p. 89.

⁶⁵ B. Boxill, *The Morality of Preferential Hiring. Philosophical and Public Affairs*, 1978, 7 (3), pp. 246-268, pp. 254-255.

modern Africans in terms of social behavior or economic productive culture. If anything, facts point towards the conclusion that they have always been , even before colonialism, less productive than Westerners. In an attempt to explain why 90% of South African black farmers who have been re-allocated land still fail to be as commercially productive as white farmers, Metz attributes this failure to black farmers' lack of training in farming. He makes it clear from the onset that he does not subscribe to the racist notion that 'blacks cannot farm or are more generally not productive without guidance from whites.' Fair enough. What defeats the strength of his central point is his claim that the root cause of this lack of black training is because whites upon arrival in African did not share the 'science and technology, the profits resulting from mineral excavation and the allocation of political power' along Ubuntu values of sharing. The fact that Metz's acknowledges that the whites had science and technology when they arrived in Africa while blacks did not have means that the latter already were economically less productive before the former arrived. The reality is that blacks were already behind in commercial productivity before contact with whites. And this is confirmed by UN researches cited by Risse's⁶⁶ suggesting that the gap ratio between the pre-colonial Western nations and African nations was 3:1 in 1820.

And even if material compensations were to be made to Africans who are 'psychologically traumatized', the problem remains about what criterion will be used to calculate that blacks no longer suffer from colonial trauma. Is it when their productive level reaches the level of whites?

The equal sacrifice principle avoid all these question helping all humans in need by all those able to. Odera Oruka is one African thinker who championed the equal sacrifice principle after dismissing reparations as we saw above. Odera Oruka however, does not cite African values as guiding his equal sacrifice principle, most likely because at his time guiding African ethics with Ubuntu values had not gained momentum. But he cannot be said to have been influenced by Western moral thought either. In fact he complained that Western thought was guided by 'international justice', which is fairness between states; rather than 'global justice', which is fairness among global citizens⁶⁷. The fact that Western thought had not yet appreciated discourse on global justice should explain why he does not cite the Western

⁶⁶ M. Risse, *How Does the Global Order Harm the Poor?* In *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 2005, 33), pp. 349-376.

⁶⁷ O. H. Oruka, *The Philosophy of Foreign Aid: A Question of the Right to the Minimum*, PRAXIS International, 1988, (4), pp. 465-475.

thinker Peter Singer⁶⁸, who had defended a global justice theory that champions the equal sacrifice principle. Singer justifies this ‘capacity to assist’ principle by giving a popular hypothetical easy rescue case in which an infant is drowning in a shallow pond. You happen to be nearby and you can save the child with minimal effort and inconvenience of your part. According to Singer, it is immoral for you not to assist the child.

Now that Ubuntu has been developed, which of its values can support dignity restoration and global equal sacrifice? Two works stand out: Placide Tempels’ *Bantu Philosophy*⁶⁹ to represent the original pre-colonial thought on rectification justice and Motsamai Molefe’s⁷⁰ ‘Personhood and (Rectification) Justice in African Thought’ to represent how Tempels’ pre-colonial thought on rectification justice can be revived. Tempels describes the compensation theory of the pre-colonial Buluba people of DR Congo under Chapter VI subtitled ‘Restoration of life: Norms of Penalty, Compensation, Punishment, Forfeit and Ontological Purification.’ He says Baluba compensation is not based on Western materialistic counter-factual calculations, since ‘penalty, fine and damages belong to the European legal notions.’ Baluba compensation aims at ‘re-establishing the metaphysical order or harmony among the vital forces.’

These vital forces are interwoven and interdependent. Temples⁷¹ explains that ‘vital force’ is, roughly speaking, what is called ‘being’ in Western metaphysical thought. Every physical and non-physical entity is a force because it has ‘vital energy’, or ‘potent of life.’ Nothing exists independently of any other thing because ‘in everything there is another thing; [and] in every man a little man.’ And everything is a force because it has vitality or ‘a life-full energy’ in it.

The most senior vital force is obviously God, the ultimate nature of being who possess force in himself. Under God is a layer of ancestors. Under ancestors are the elders of the clan, each of whom can use the potent vital forces in him to actually inflict harm, with a mere curse of words, on his children or descendants. Below this layer there are non-human animals,

⁶⁸ P. Singer, *Famine, Affluence and Morality*, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1972, (1), pp. 229-245.

⁶⁹ Cfr. Tempels Placide, 2nd ed. 1959. *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: *Presence Africaine*. www.congoforum.be/up/docs/tempels%20Bantuphil... , accessed January 20 2018.

⁷⁰ Cfr. M. Molefe, *Personhood and (Rectification) Justice in African Thought* in *Politikon*, 2018.

⁷¹ Tempels Placide, 2nd ed. 1959. *Bantu Philosophy*. Paris: *Presence Africaine*. www.congoforum.be/up/docs/tempels%20Bantuphil... , accessed January 20 2018, pp. 21-22.

followed by plants. Further down there are inanimate objects, such as rocks.

A person with good deeds is a *muntu mukulumpe*, and earns full personhood. A person who injures others must pay compensation to the victim. A man whose property is stolen by another complains of his vital force being 'weakened.' Compensation then is aimed at restoring his 'strength.' The victim's vital force needs to be re-strengthened because there cannot be harmony in a community where some members are bitter for being victims. It is up to the victim to decide what compensation gives him back his 'strength'. So it was up to the perpetrator to negotiate with the victim's demands. Tempels complained about this approach because sometimes victims demanded too much, sometimes a man who borrowed 30 francs when he was in great need might repay ten times more to his 'deliverer' and all the judges would urge him to pay on saying 'remember he [the creditor] is your deliverer.' He shares what a village chief called Kapundwe shared with him in 1945. Kapundwe kept and cared for an ewe on behalf of his friend from a neighbouring village. Later the ewe got killed and Kapundwe's dog was seen eating its skin. The entire village agreed that it might not have been his dog that actually killed the ewe. However, Kupundwe was forced to pay three ewes and 100 francs in compensation because both the ewe and the dog were under his care and because *somebody* needed to please the *bisanso*, or sorrowful grief of the owner of the killed ewe.

However, a god itself or a spirit, which are the higher spirits, cannot be weakened. But they should not be angered in any way. What exactly justifies the equal sacrifice principle is the collective punishment, the *bipupo*⁷² which befalls a society when one of its members injures the higher spirits and does not make peace with them. The entire community is punished, or even wiped out with a calamity or epidemic, for example. To avoid or stop such collective punishment the entire village must conduct a *koyija kibundi*, which is the 'washing' or cleansing of the entire community through ceremonious rituals (60)⁷³. This is because 'the world of forces is held like a spider web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network 'Every injustice is an attempt upon the life (sc, upon the vital force) of the person injured and the malice in it proceeds from the great respect due to human life, the supreme gift of God⁷⁴. The supreme gift of god, human life, grants human dignity.

A look at very recent African literature reflects similar ideas.

⁷² Ivi, p.73.

⁷³ Ivi, p.60.

⁷⁴ Ivi, p.29.

According to Molefe the concept of personhood is folder or corpus for a theory of rectification justice because it has at three facets. The first is a ‘theory of moral status/dignity’:

This idea that human beings have capacity for virtue specifies the intrinsic features that render human beings as superlatively valuable as bearers of *dignity*. This talk of the human capacity for virtue captures the facet of human nature around which the entire political system of Afro-communitarianism revolves⁷⁵.

Second, it has an ‘account of historical conditions’. The notion of personhood is backward-looking. An individual attains full personhood not on the basis of the good deeds she is likely to do in future but on what she did in the past. The third is the idea of personhood that suggests that there must be enabling conditions for a human to achieve moral excellence. When the facet of dignity and historical conditions are combined they justify that those that deprive others of dignity make compensations because ‘it will be irrational for one to expect a human being to attain full personhood in an environment that is uncondusive for self-perfection’ , for example, without material goods⁷⁶.

Now, if personhood can only be attained in an [economically] conducive environment, and we have found in the first section that Western model material compensations fail to take off, then who should bear the burden of recreating the favourable environment for Africans descendants of victims of colonialism? The answer points back to Baluba ontology of global interwonvenness which made us all either enjoy or suffer from the sin of slavery and colonialism. This evil is too grave to be seen as an attack against any particular individual or group but to gods and other higher forces. Since, as we saw of Western material reparations, no one can compensate anyone for this injustice, we need a global cleansing of this sin. Those who can afford must make an equal sacrifice to this global *koyija kibundi* while the former perpetrator nations still have an obligation to restore the African dignity by offering apologetic gestures.

Conclusion

In this article I showed that material/financial reparations as emphasized in Western moral theory are problematic when it comes to compelling Western

⁷⁵ M. Molefe, *Personhood and (Rectification) Justice in African Thought* in *Politikon*, 2018, p.10.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

nations to compensate Africa for colonial injustices. Instead I defended the African emphasis on restoring lost human dignity as being more plausible, especially that it invokes the equal sacrifice principle that compels all able nations to assist the global needy without recourse to who caused or benefitted from historical injustices. It only obligates former perpetrators to demonstrate apologetic gestures to victims.

This is not to say that material reparations are theoretically not appealing everywhere. It is only to the colonial injustices against Africa that I showed that they can hardly apply, except for cases of atrocities that cost mass loss of African lives.

THE HUMAN PERSON IN AFRICAN VS. WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

FREDERICK NJUMFERGHAI*

Abstract

This article delves into a comparative analysis of the metaphysical concept of the human person in the Yoruba tradition versus Western philosophy. It explores the tripartite nature of the human person in Yoruba culture, consisting of the body (ara), the soul (emi), and the significant element known as the ori (inner head) that influences destiny. The Yoruba view emphasizes predetermined destiny through the ori, in contrast to the body-soul division commonly found in Western thought. Western philosophical perspectives on the human person, influenced by prominent thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant, vary from dualistic to monistic views. The document discusses how Western philosophy defines a person based on moral status, self-awareness, values, choices, and the ability to adopt life plans. It also highlights the complexity of the Yoruba view with its inclusion of physical, spiritual, and destiny-related elements, providing rich insights into human existence and the essence of personhood across different cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: Personhood, Destiny, Dualism, Ethics, Community

Fundamental Considerations

The metaphysical concept of the human person in the Yoruba tradition compared to Western philosophy presents a fascinating contrast between two distinct worldviews. In the Yoruba tradition, the concept of the human person is tripartite, consisting of the body (ara), the soul (emi), and a third element known as the ori (inner head). The ori is particularly significant as it is believed to determine a person's destiny¹. The creation of a person is seen as occurring in stages, with the body being molded by Orisanla, the god of creation; the soul and ori are provided by Olodumare, the supreme deity². This contrasts with the dualistic body-soul division commonly found in Western

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¹ Cfr. M. Akin Makinde, *An African Concept of Human Personality: The Yoruba Example*, in *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 1984, 7 (3), pp. 189–200.

² Cfr. Anthony, Immaculata Olu & Mike Boni, *The human person in Yoruba culture and philosophy*, in *Researchgate*, Nov. 2021, pp. 327-334.

thought.

Western philosophical concepts of the human person have evolved over time, with various philosophers offering different perspectives. Generally, the Western view has been influenced by the likes of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant, who have tended to see a person as either a combination of body and soul (dualism) or as one or the other (monism). A person in the Western philosophical tradition is often defined by their moral status, capacities for self-awareness, values, choices and the ability to adopt life plans. A person in Western philosophy is often defined by their moral status, capacities for self-awareness, values, choices, and the ability to adopt life-plans³.

The Yoruba view is more complex in that it includes not only the physical and spiritual elements but also the aspect of predetermined destiny through the ori. This adds a layer of depth to the understanding of human personality and its connection to the cosmos and fate, which is less emphasized in Western traditions.

Both perspectives offer rich insights into the nature of human existence and the essence of what it means to be a person, reflecting the diverse tapestry of human thought across cultures.

Certainly! The Yoruba and Western views on the human person offer distinct perspectives that reflect their unique cultural and philosophical backgrounds.

Yoruba View Of The Human Person

The Yoruba concept of the human person is holistic and deeply spiritual. It encompasses not just the physical and the spiritual, but also a third element that influences destiny⁴. This tripartite model includes:

- Ara (Body): Molded by Orisanla, the god of creation, the body is the physical vessel.
- Emi (Soul): The soul, which is believed to be given by Olodumare, the supreme deity.
- Ori (Inner Head): A critical spiritual component that determines the person's destiny⁵.

³ C. Taylor, *The concept of a person*, in: *Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge University Press;1985, pp. 97-114.

⁴ Cfr. M. Akin Makinde, *An African Concept of Human Personality: The Yoruba Example*, in *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 1984, 7 (3), pp. 189–200.

⁵ Cfr. *Ibidem*.

In the Yoruba tradition, Ori plays a central and multifaceted role in the spiritual and philosophical understanding of one's life and destiny. It is considered the most important part of the human soul, the bearer of an individual's destiny and personal god. Here are some key aspects of Ori in Yoruba belief:

1. **Spiritual Intuition and Destiny:** Ori is seen as the embodiment of spiritual intuition and the individual's destiny⁶. It is the reflective spark of human consciousness that guides decisions and actions, leading a person towards their life's purpose.
2. **Divine Essence:** As a metaphysical concept, Ori represents the divine essence within each person⁷. It is the inner wisdom that influences one's character and fate, and it's believed to be crucial for achieving *iwa-pele*, which is a harmonious and balanced character.
3. **Worship and Consultation:** The Yoruba people venerate Ori as a deity, consulting it during times of difficulty and decision-making⁸. It is believed that Ori has the power to bless and shape a person's existence, so showing respect and honor towards Ori is essential for spiritual alignment and well-being.
4. **Guidance in Life:** Ori acts as an inner compass, directing individuals towards fulfilling their destinies⁹. It is thought to accompany devotees on their life journeys, including metaphorical or spiritual sea voyages, symbolizing the journey through life.
5. **Artistic Representation:** In traditional Yoruba visual arts, Ori is often represented by a disproportionately large head in sculptures, symbolizing its importance and the belief that the head contains one's destiny¹⁰.

The concept of Ori is deeply interwoven with the Yoruba understanding of the cosmos and the individual's place within it. It is a unique aspect of Yoruba spirituality that highlights the interconnectedness of intuition, destiny, and the divine.

⁶ Cfr. <https://oldworldgods.com/yoruba/god-ori-in-yoruba-mythology/>

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Cfr. A. Babasehinde, *The concept of Ori in the traditional Yoruba visual representation of human figures*, in *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 2007, 16(2), pp. 212–220.

Western View Of The Human Person

Western philosophy, influenced by thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, and Kant, has traditionally focused on dualism (body and soul) or monism (either body or soul). The Western concept often emphasizes individual properties such as consciousness, rationality, and memory as the basis for defining personhood¹¹. The Western view tends to be more individualistic, with a focus on personal autonomy, moral status and the capacity for self-awareness and rational thought¹².

It often centers around the idea of the human being as the center of reality with all the other aspects of reality serving to fulfill the human person¹³.

Formation of The Human Person

In Yoruba thought, the creation of a person occurs in stages, with the body being formed first, followed by the soul and the ori¹⁴. The ori is particularly significant as it is seen as the individual's personal deity and the determinant of their fate¹⁵.

The formation of the human person in Yoruba culture is deeply rooted in their mythology and religious beliefs. According to Yoruba philosophy, a human person consists of a body, which is physical, and a soul, which is spiritual. The creation involves several deities: Orisanla, the god of creation, is responsible for moulding the body; Ogun, the god of iron, beatifies it; and Olodumare, the supreme deity, provides the soul¹⁶. The Yoruba view a person as part of the community, emphasizing the importance of being dependable and contributing to communal life¹⁷.

¹¹ Cfr. M. Molefe, 2019, *A Conceptual Mapping of Personhood*, In *An African Philosophy of Personhood, Morality, and Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-15561-2_2 . june 2024.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ D. Nderitu (2020), *The Meaning of Human Person in the African Context*, in Wariboko, N., Falola, T. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of African Social Ethics*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham., https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36490-8_6 .april 2024.

¹⁴ Cfr. M. Akin Makinde, *An African Concept of Human Personality: The Yoruba Example*, in *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 1984, 7 (3), pp. 189–200.

¹⁵ Cfr. *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Cfr. Anthony, Immaculata Olu & Mike Boni, *The human person in Yoruba culture and philosophy*, in *Researchgate*, Nov. 2021, pp. 327-334.

¹⁷ Cfr. *Ibidem*.

In contrast, Western philosophical culture often emphasizes the individual and their rational capabilities. The Cartesian philosophy of René Descartes, encapsulated in the phrase *cogito ergo sum* (i think, therefore i am), highlights the importance of thought and individual existence¹⁸. Western thought also has a dualistic view of the human person, typically dividing the person into body and soul, with a focus on individualism and personal development¹⁹.

These perspectives show a fundamental difference in the understanding of what constitutes a human person, with Yoruba culture focusing on communal integration and spiritual elements, while Western philosophy often prioritizes individual rationality and personal identity. Both views contribute to a rich tapestry of human understanding across different cultures.

Some Basic Points of Comparison

1. Community vs. Individuality: The Yoruba view emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals with their community and the cosmos, while the Western view often highlights individual autonomy and rights.

2. Destiny vs. Autonomy: In Yoruba belief, destiny plays a significant role in shaping a person's life through the *ori*, whereas in Western thought, the focus is more on individual choice and self-determination.

3. Holistic vs. Fragmented: Yoruba philosophy views the person as a whole, with all components working together harmoniously, while Western philosophy sometimes separates the person into distinct parts (e.g., mind vs. body).

Both perspectives provide valuable insights into the nature of personhood and the human condition, each offering a unique lens through which to understand ourselves and our place in the world. If you're interested in exploring specific philosophical texts or concepts within these traditions, I can assist with that as well.

Ethical Views

¹⁸ D. Nderitu , 2020,, *The Meaning of Human Person in the African Context*, in Wariboko, N., Falola, T. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of African Social Ethics*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36490-8_6 .april 2024..

¹⁹ Cfr. <https://philosophy.institute/philosophy-of-human-person/> april 2024.

The Yoruba and Western views on the human person have profound implications for ethical considerations, shaping how morality, behavior, and societal norms are perceived and practiced within their respective cultures.

1. Community-Centric Morality: The Yoruba perspective emphasizes communal values and the interconnectedness of individuals within society. Ethical behavior is seen as that which promotes harmony and balance within the community²⁰.

2. Destiny and Responsibility: The concept of Ori in Yoruba thought suggests that individuals have a predetermined destiny, yet they are also responsible for their actions. This duality influences ethical decisions, as one must align actions with their destined path while maintaining communal harmony²¹.

3. Character (Iwa): In Yoruba ethics, good character and moral integrity are paramount. The pursuit of *iwa-pele* (good character) is considered essential for personal and societal well-being²².

4. Individual Rights and Autonomy: Western ethics often prioritize individual rights, autonomy, and the capacity for rational decision-making. Ethical considerations revolve around the protection of these rights and the promotion of individual freedom²³.

5. Approach to Well-being: The Yoruba concept of àlàáfíà (peace and well-being) aligns closely with the biblical concept of shalom, suggesting that well-being is not measured by material possessions but by moral and ethical values²⁴. This contrasts with some Western approaches that may emphasize material success as a component of well-being.

6. Social vs. Individual Development: Yoruba ethics suggest that physical prosperity is enhanced by strong moral values, and development should focus on right living rather than increasing material possessions²⁵. In

²⁰ A. Wole, *Which Way to Shalom? A Theological Exploration of the Yoruba and Western Foundations for Ethics and Development*, in *Conspectus : The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* Vol. 37, No. 1, 2024, pp. 85-95.

²¹ Cfr. *Ibidem*.

²² J. B. Babalola, *The consequentialist foundations of traditional Yoruba Ethics: an Exposition*, in *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK) New Series*, Vol.5 No.2, December 2013, pp.103-121.

²³ Cfr. <https://www.modishproject.com/western-culture-a>

²⁴ Cfr. A. Wole, *Which Way to Shalom? A Theological Exploration of the Yoruba and Western Foundations for Ethics and Development*, in *Conspectus : The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* Vol. 37, No. 1, 2024, pp. 85-95.

²⁵ Cfr. *Ibidem*.

contrast, Western ethics may support the pursuit of personal success and material wealth as part of individual development.

7. Ethical Foundations: Yoruba proverbs and cultural practices provide a foundation for morality and well-being, emphasizing the importance of character and communal values²⁶. Western ethics, influenced by humanistic and philosophical traditions, often derive ethical foundations from reason and individual rights²⁷.

In summary, the Yoruba view tends to promote a more communal and destiny-oriented approach to ethics, while the Western perspective often emphasizes individualism and rational autonomy. These differing viewpoints influence how each culture approaches moral dilemmas, societal norms, and the concept of well-being. Understanding these differences can foster a more nuanced approach to global ethical discourse and intercultural understanding.

Yoruba Rituals And Ethical Values

Yoruba rituals play a significant role in reinforcing ethical values within the community. These rituals are not just ceremonial; they are deeply embedded with moral teachings and serve as a means to transmit and affirm the community's shared values. Here are some ways in which Yoruba rituals reinforce ethical values:

1. Communal Participation: Many Yoruba rituals require the participation of the entire community, which fosters a sense of unity and collective responsibility. This communal aspect emphasizes the importance of social harmony and cooperation²⁸.
2. Divination Practices: Divination, or Ifá, is a central ritual in Yoruba religion. It serves as a guide for moral and ethical decision-making. Through divination, individuals seek wisdom from the *Ifá* literary corpus, which contains teachings on proper conduct and the consequences of one's actions.
3. Rites of Passage: Rituals marking significant life transitions, such as birth, adulthood, marriage, and death, often include moral lessons. These rites

²⁶ J. B. Babalola, *The consequentialist foundations of traditional Yoruba Ethics: an Exposition*, in *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK) New Series*, Vol.5 No.2, December 2013, pp.103-121.

²⁷ Cfr. <https://www.modishproject.com/western-culture-am> aprile 2024.

²⁸ J. Isola, *Yorùbá Values and the Environment*, in *Yoruba studies review*, Vol. 3 No. 1 (2018), pp.12-21.

of passage reinforce the community's expectations for ethical behavior at different stages of life²⁹.

4. Festivals and Ceremonies: Yoruba festivals often celebrate deities that embody specific virtues. For example, the worship of Orunmila, the deity of wisdom and knowledge, reinforces the value of wisdom in daily life. Similarly, honoring Ogun, the deity of iron and war, can be a reminder of the importance of courage and justice³⁰.
5. Ancestral Veneration: The Yoruba believe in honoring ancestors, who are seen as guardians of moral values. Rituals dedicated to ancestors serve as a reminder to live up to the standards set by previous generations³¹.
6. Art and Symbolism: Yoruba rituals often involve artistic expressions that symbolize ethical concepts. For instance, the use of masks in rituals can represent the presence of the ancestors and the continuity of moral and ethical teachings across generations³².
7. Ethical Narratives: Many Yoruba rituals include storytelling that imparts moral lessons. These narratives often feature tales of the orishas (deities) and their interactions with humans, highlighting the rewards of virtuous behavior and the repercussions of ethical transgressions³³.

Through these rituals, the Yoruba community instills and reinforces a moral code that guides individual behavior and ensures the well-being of the society as a whole. The rituals serve as a constant reminder of the community's values and the importance of upholding them in everyday life

Conclusion

This article delves into the fundamental considerations of the metaphysical

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ A. Akande, T. Akande, M. Adewuyi, K. A. Williams, (2022). *The Fascinating Legacy of Yoruba Culture, Gods, and the Genesis of Civilization* in Akande, A. (eds) *Handbook of Racism, Xenophobia, and Populism*, Springer Handbooks of Political Science and International Relations, Springer, Cham., https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13559-0_26 26 april 2024.

³¹ John Isola, *Yorùbá Values and the Environment*, in *Yoruba studies review*, Vol. 3 No. 1 (2018), pp.12-21.

³² A. Akande, T. Akande, M. Adewuyi, K. A. Williams, (2022). *The Fascinating Legacy of Yoruba Culture, Gods, and the Genesis of Civilization*. In: Akande, A. (eds) *Handbook of Racism, Xenophobia, and Populism*. Springer Handbooks of Political Science and International Relations. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13559-0_26 26 april 2024,

³³ *Ibidem*.

concept of the human person in the Yoruba tradition compared to Western philosophy. It highlights the tripartite nature of the human person in Yoruba beliefs, consisting of the body (ara), the soul (emi), and the inner head (ori), each playing a unique role in shaping an individual's destiny. In contrast, Western philosophy often depicts the human person as a combination of body and soul or as one or the other, with a focus on individualistic traits like moral status, self-awareness, and rationality.

The Yoruba perspective offers a holistic and spiritually rich view of the human person, emphasizing the interconnectedness of physical, spiritual, and destiny elements. The concept of ori, as the inner head determining destiny, brings depth to the understanding of human personality and its connection to fate and the cosmos. On the other hand, Western philosophy tends to prioritize individual rights, rationality, and autonomy in defining personhood.

The article further explored the formation of the human person in Yoruba culture, rooted in mythology and religious beliefs, where deities play pivotal roles in shaping the body, soul, and destiny of an individual. It contrasts this communal and destiny-oriented approach to Western ethos, which often underscores individualism and rational autonomy. Ethical considerations from both Yoruba and Western perspectives are also examined, highlighting their respective views on morality, ethical behavior, and societal norms. The Yoruba ethics emphasize communal values, destiny, good character, and communal well-being, while Western ethics tend to prioritize individual rights, autonomy, material prosperity, and personal development.

Overall, the article showcases the profound implications of Yoruba and Western views on the human person for ethical considerations, demonstrating how cultural and philosophical differences influence moral discourse, societal values, and ethical practices. In a nutshell, the comparative analysis between Yoruba and Western perspectives on the human person, ethical considerations, and rituals provides insights into the diverse tapestry of human thought across cultures, showcasing the unique philosophical backgrounds and foundational principles that shape these viewpoints on human existence and ethics.

AFRICAN *COSMOTHEOANDRIC* WORLD-VIEW: BASIS IN A QUEST
FOR AN AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS
JOHN MUNDUA, AJ*

Abstract

Every ethical rationality presupposes a foundational ontology i.e. the conception of reality on which such an ethical rationality is anchored. Likewise, an environmental ethics presupposes an ontological conception of the reality of the environment. There is increasingly an urgent call from the world political and religious entities, as well as global non-governmental organisations, for measures to mitigate the global environmental crisis. The summon to take urgent responsibility to conserve and care for the environment has placed environment ethics into focus. The largest segment of environmental ethics enshrines ethical reasoning for the care of the environment, argued from value of the environment to human existence. Such value of the environment is an attributed instrumental value i.e. in terms of the usefulness of the environment to humans. It is an ascription to the environment in which, the environment is viewed as natural resource to be exploited by humans for their existence, and hence humans ought to take care of it on that account. This kind of conception has led to manipulation and exploitation of the poor global south by the massively industrial and capitalist global north, that paradoxically is on the lead in the global campaign for mitigation of environmental crisis. There is another understanding of the value of the environment in intrinsic sense. It refers to the value of the environment in itself independent of any human ascription, but in reference to the good of the environment in itself, such that, the degradation of the environment by human activities implies the loss of or disrespect for the good of the environment in itself. An environmental ethics that is anchored on the intrinsic value of the environment requires an ontology that enshrines such conception of the value of the environment. This study presents the African ‘cosmotheoandric’ world view, as an ontology that implies intrinsic value of the environment. The main argument of the study is that, from the African worldview, we can have an African extraction of environment ethics, as a viable alternative for the care of the planet as the common home of humanity.

Keywords: Worldview, *Cosmotheoandric*, Vital force, Reality, Environmental ethics.

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Introduction

This study is presented in three major parts. In the first part is presented the African world view. The concept of worldview is used here to approximately mean, how a given community of people with the same culture and tradition of rationality do understand reality. Hence, when we talk of the African worldview, we simply refer to how Africans understand reality. We could as well refer to it approximately as African ontology. The term Africa needs to be clarified here as well. In this study, Africa is not used to refer to all the people and cultures found in the contemporary geo-political division of the continental land mass called Africa. Otherwise, the contemporary geo-political entity called Africa has many non-homogenous cultures and rationalities such that, we cannot talk of a single African worldview, but rather a plurality of African worldviews. Instead, in this study the term Africa is used to refer to the indigenous African population that is constituted of majorly three ethnical communities, namely, the Bantu, the Nilotic and the partly the Cushite people, which has a more or less homogenous culture and tradition of rationality. It has been referred to by many scholars as Africa proper, located in the portion of the African geographical land mass that is south of Sahara Desert and north of river Limpopo.

The African worldview as discussed in the first part of this study, is explained by the fundamental constituent of reality, which is a kind of dynamism and energy like entity called the vital force. It explains that every reality is constituted by the vital force such that, the three major entities that constitute the subject matter of inquiry in the history of philosophy, namely, God, humans and the cosmos, are netted into one complex whole. It is noted that, in the African worldview, the relationship between God, humans being and the physical nature have is explained by the vital force. They form a tri-dimensional unitary complex, thanks the vital force that nits them together. Hence, the African world view is *cosmotheoandric*. This term is coined from the three Greek words, namely, *cosmos*, *theos*, and *anthropos*, which mean; the physical universe, God and the human being respectively. The study finds out that human beings are at the centre of the universe, not as masters but as a constituent party in the vital union. The second part presents the African attitude towards the natural environment as a consequence of the relationship between God, humans and the physical environment based on the vital force, and the place of humans in the *cosmotheoandric* unitary complex whole. Since the physical universe has mystical powers in itself, thanks the vital force, the African people relate with it with a reverential fear and adoration.

The study finds out that, the manner in which Africans relate with the natural environment is not purely utilitarian, but also more religious. The African attitude towards the natural environment is eco-centric, i.e. an attitude that intrinsically values the different entities in the physical environment, but not purely in reference to their utility to humans. The third part of the study presents and proposes an extract of African environmental ethics. The main argument presented as the conclusion of this study is that, an environmental ethics based on the African worldview or something similar to it, offers one of the best viable alternatives in the quest for rationalities to mitigate the global environmental crisis being experienced today.

I. African Worldview

Like any culture and a people in a given context, the African mind struggles to get answers to the question; what is the world made of? World as used here is synonymous to reality. The answer to this question constitutes the African conception of reality i.e. the African ontology. It is the conception of what reality is, that shapes the overall view of the world around the African, that we here in refer to as the African worldview. To understand the African worldview, let us begin by searching for the answer to the question; what constitutes a thing, that which is i.e. being? Classical western metaphysics posits substance as the constitutive unit of being. The other principles of being are only explained from the profound and extensive analysis of substance as the constitutive unit of being. On the contrary, Placide Tempels¹ asserts that, in the African metaphysics, the principle and constitutive unit of reality is the vital force. The vital force is the invisible principle that underlines the reality of everything that exists in the African universe². The interpretation of all the interaction in the universe is based on the vital force. All beings in the universe including the inanimate things, possess the vital force.

For Tempels to attribute the vital force to inanimate reality demonstrates that he doesn't use the adjective vital in its Latin derivative,

¹ Placide Tempels was a Belgian Franciscan Missionary in Belgian Congo. In his great effort to understand the African cultural heritage in order to be able to better announce to the African people the Christian message, he embarked on profound articulation of the African thinking about reality. He produced a deep analysis of the fundamental elements of African thought and religion in his classical seminal work *La Philosophie Bantoue*, published in 1945 (see, Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in its social context*, 56).

² D. A. Masolo, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, Indiana University Press, Indiana 1994, p. 48.

from the noun *vita*, which in English can be translated as biological life. He instead uses the concept of vital force to denote a certain dynamism and energy like property that underlines everything that exists, as the essence of being³. Whereas, the substance is the very essence of being in classical western philosophy, the vital force is essence of reality in African ontology. The vital force can be described loosely as an integration of force and matter. Therefore, the Bantu metaphysics makes no distinction between force and matter, but integrates them into a unity that subordinates matter under the dynamism of force⁴. As already stated, the vital force is not a static but a dynamic concept that constitutes the essence of e.g. a mouse, a tree, a cow, stone, a human being, soil and indeed all that exists in the universe, including the spiritual realities. The vital force as essence of everything that exists, does not only define the things but also interconnects them in such a way that, the universe is a webbed whole, which Ijomah describes as harmonious monism⁵. In the African ontology, essence is an energy-oriented-conception-of-vitality. The conception of essence as vitality makes African ontology holistic-communitarian, in which reality is a closed system.

Consequently, the African view of the universe is holistic and not mechanistic as in the western modern scientific paradigm. In the African universe, all that exist are interconnected, and all natural forces depend on each other, such that humans live in harmony not only in, but also with the whole of nature⁶. The African universe therefore indicates a closed system that is in equilibrium of interdependence and coexistence between the earth, the spiritual world, humans, and non-humans both animate and inanimate. It is a universe in which the spiritual, human and physical worlds overlap in such a way that there is no differentiation and labelling of; the animate and inanimate, the physical and metaphysical, the sacred and secular, and the natural and supernatural⁷. In the African worldview, the natural and supernatural are not distinct but rather form a complex contiguous. In other words, the natural and supernatural have no difference in kind. The African universe is a system of almost unbreakable interrelations between God, the ancestors (the living dead), the living humans and nature. However, the living humans occupy central place in the system. In their worldview, the Africans

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ E. Etieyibo, *Ubuntu and the Environment in The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*, Adeshina Afoloyan and Toyin Falola eds, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2017, p. 636.

⁶ Ivi, p. 639.

⁷ A. D. Kwesi, *Theology in Africa*, Orbis Book, New York 1984, p. 49.

live in a relationship of mutual moral obligation with physical nature. Nature or the environment therefore has more than just the ordinary meaning to the Africans. Since the environment is within the complex network of vital force that it shares with the spiritual realm and humans, it can be tapped to increase the vital force in humans and can also be manipulated to reduce it. This is the rationality behind African magic and witchcraft.

Unitary Tri-dimensional African Universe

Charles Nyamiti describes the African universe “as a sort of organic whole composed of supra-sensible or mystical correlations or participations”⁸. The African conceives the universe as an organic whole entity, with the same source of vital force as the principle that animates it. Every entity in the universe is connected with each other in such a manner that, each one influences the others positively or negatively⁹. The universe can therefore be viewed as spider web-like complex network of the interactions of vital force, in which no single thread (which represents the relationship between one entity and another) can vibrate without shaking the whole network¹⁰. What Nyamiti terms as interactions and participations in the network of African worldview refers to the relations of vital force between; God and humankind, God and both non-human animate and inanimate nature, humankind and humankind, and humankind and both non-human animate and inanimate nature. Since every single entity in the African universe is in active relationship with the rest of the entities, reality in African worldview is understood as a closed system in such a way that everything hangs together and is affected by any change in the system¹¹.

The African interconnected complex universe, is conceived as a three-tier creation of God (whom the Africans refer to with different names in the plurality of African indigenous Bantu, Nilotic and Cushite languages). The three entities include; First, the spiritual world, consisting of the heavens, empirically seen as the skies in which is found God, and the underworld where the ancestors dwell in spirit. The second entity is the human world that is located at the centre of the universe. The third entity is the cosmic world

⁸ C. Nyamiti, *The Scope of African Theology*, Gaba Publications, Kampala 1973, p. 20.

⁹ L. Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi 1997, p. 50.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J Roux eds, *The African Philosophy Reader*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London 2003, p. 196.

here understood as the world composed of both animate non-human and inanimate beings. God is conceived and revered as the source of the vital force and the creator of all that exists, but He is not outside the world like a cosmic architect. God is the creator of the whole universe because He is the source of the vital force. He is the apex of the hierarchy of concatenation of the vital force. Since God is the source of the vital force, he is regarded as supreme and the strongest in the universe¹². God is a totality in himself and possesses the final force in its fullness. The vital force then flows to other beings in decreasing order of quantity, namely, to humans, nonhuman animate beings, and finally to inanimate beings. We can therefore establish a hierarchy of beings in the African universe based on the 'quantity' of vital force, similar to the hierarchy of beings in classical western philosophy.

The cosmos understood as the nonhuman animate and inanimate beings, constitutes what we refer to as nature or the physical environment. The trees, mountains, water bodies (rivers, lakes and seas), animals, birds, insects etc. in the African universe are 'material, religious and sacred'¹³. The natural environment serves as the dwelling place for both the living humans and the living-dead. So, the many physical entities around village clusters such as woods, bushes, forests, rivers, mountains are held in high esteem, reverence and even with fear for religious motives. Such entities are the dwelling places not only for the living but also for living-dead and other spiritual beings, and therefore are held to have mystical powers. For that reason, they are held with high reverence. Yet, the same entities can also be the dwelling places of spirits of the dead that cannot rest in the communion of the ancestors for not having lived morally up-right lives. Such spirits are cast out from the peace and tranquillity of the company of ancestors into rivers, mountains, dark caves, forests, lakes etc. as wondering spirits that can harm the living¹⁴. In such cases, the living humans hold the places with fear of harm. For example, among many African tribes, it is forbidden to go to rivers, lakes, forests, caves and similar place in the late hours of day and nights, lest one suffers harm by wondering spirits.

Since the physical natural environment is permeated by the vital force, it provides to the humans both spiritual and material nourishment. The spiritual nourishment is seen in many plants that have curative powers. They are used as medicine to cure wide range of sicknesses. Sickness is understood

¹² F. Ochieng' Odhiambo, *Trends and Issues in African Philosophy*, Petersburg, New York 2010, p. 29.

¹³ E. Michael Onyebuchi, *Humanitatis-Eco (Eco-Humanism)*, p. 626.

¹⁴ J. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, Heinemann, London 1975, p. 32.

as diminution of vital force in a person, and its cure is understood as restoration of the lost vital force. Thus, the curing of the plants with medicinal power takes place at the metaphysical confluence between nature, human beings and the spiritual world of the ancestors and God¹⁵. Meanwhile, some plants are used as a medium of intercession between the living and the living-dead in religious ceremonies, thanks again to the vital force in them. The vital force also interconnects humans to the inanimate entities. Even where there is no biological life, the Africans attribute mystical life to an object such that there is a direct relationship between humans and the inanimate objects around them¹⁶. We can conclude the discussion about the physical environment as the second tier of the order of universe. The humans interact with the physical environment at the two level. First, at the physical or material level in which the physical environment provides humans with habitation and material and nourishment. Second, at the spiritual or metaphysical level, providing spiritual nourishment the living and abode for the spiritual world. Therefore, there is a unitary relationship between the humans and the physical environment, thanks the vital force that nets humans and the natural environment into the same web. The third tier in the complex order of the universe is the world of human beings, which stand at the centre between God and the cosmos. In the following section, is discussed the centrality of the human being in the complex order of the universe.

The Centrality of the Human being in the Universe

At the centre of the African complex vital force permeated and hierarchical universe, is the human being. Due do the centrality of their position in the order of the universe constituted by the network of vital forces, Africans have a relational conception of the human being. The human being is understood as always in a simultaneous tri-dimensional relationship, namely, with God and the spiritual realm, with fellow humans and with physical environment. Thus, at any given moment, the human being is a constituent member of the vital union. Each of these three dimensions of relationship is significant to the relationship between humans and the environment. The human being is in constant relationship with the spiritual world (the world of the divine and ancestors. If the humans are in constant relationship with the ancestors, then it means that the vital union is intergenerational. It is extended to the

¹⁵ M. Onyebuchi, *Humanitatis-Eco (Eco-Humanism)*, p. 626.

¹⁶ J. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, Heinemann, London 1975, p. 39.

generations in the past and potentially to the generation that is yet to be born. The past, the present and future generations form one human community that is incorporated through the vital force into a large union of vital force with other animate and inanimate physical environment. So, humans in their being that is relational in nature, are just but a part of an enviroing wholeness, in the sense of an encompassing physical and metaphysical universe¹⁷. From his relatedness to all other entities in the complex vital union, the human being is understood merely as the centre of the universe but not as its master. In his position as the centre, the human being is a friend, beneficiary and user of the universe, but not its master and exploiter at will. Humans therefore have an imperative to live in harmony with the universe and to guard against any mentality of domineering and exploitation that goes against the equilibrium of the vital force in the universe.

II. African attitude towards the environment

A quick comparison between African and the western conceptions of the universe reveals a complete contrariety. While the African conception of the universe is unitary and explained by teleological view of causality, the western view of the universe influenced by and based on modern techno-scientific rationality is atomistic and explained by mechanistic view of causality. Even if the day-to-day activities and life of the Africans is based on facts that are empirically verifiable, when it comes to the explanation of the deep existential realities, the African rationality stands at complete variance with modern science. What the Africans understand of the universe is much deeper than what their human senses perceive and what science explains. The two views of the universe invoke different attitudes towards the environment. The western techno-scientific view of the universe takes nature as something that should be controlled and exploited to serve humans. For that reason, the western attitude is that of scientifically probing, analysing and manipulating the universe to serve humans¹⁸. In such an attitude, the western mind understands human survival as depended on the human capacity to control and subdue the natural environment.

The western view then understands the environment as having an instrumental value for serving human ends. The environment is understood purely as a resource to be exploited and for value addition to serve human

¹⁷ M. Onyebuchi, *Humanitatis-Eco (Eco-Humanism)*, p. 625.

¹⁸ A. D. Kwesi, *Theology in Africa*, Orbis Books, New York 1984, p. 47-48.

purpose. In the western understanding of the universe, what humans ought to do is continuously improve technology for the exploitation and manipulation of the environment to serve human desires and ends. In such a mentality, the natural environment is understood an independent entity, whose existence is not ontologically related to human existence. Its relationship to humans can solely be explained by its usefulness as a resource to humans.¹⁹ Furthermore, the western conception of the universe sets humans literally as the masters over the environment, who exploit the environment as directed by their wills and interests. This attitude is largely behind the environmental crisis that we are experiencing. The western capitalist society has manipulated its way up to the top of the global power structure to sit and exploit the environment of poor nations especially in the global south. Here we can mention the exploitation of minerals, fauna and flora in the Congo basin in Africa and the forest resource in the Amazon region by the western capitalist powers.

The African attitude towards the environment is at variance with the western attitude. The environment has a special and deeper meaning to the Africans than empirical perception and what natural science can explain. The African “loves the environment, fears it, and senses something mysterious about it”.²⁰ The environment is mysterious, religious and sacred because it is not only the abode of the living but also the living-dead and other spiritual beings. For that reason, the environment has mystical powers. John Mbiti sights that in many African cultures, spirits are believed to dwell in woods, bushes, forests, exceptionally big trees, rivers, mountains or just around the villages.²¹ Consequently, such entities are held to be sacred and are highly esteemed, and often preserved. For example, even if a forest has ripe trees for timber, no one in the community would engage in lumbering for economic gains. More so, such entities bore communal implications in terms of ownership and the right to disposal due to their mysterious and sacred status. The African view of the universe unites humans with natural environment. The Africans understand themselves as always in relation to the environment in their day-to-day life. Through the vital force, there is interconnectedness in the universe between everything that exists both living and non-living things. “Even where there is no biological life in an object, the African people attribute (mystical) life to it, to establish more direct relationship with the

¹⁹ J. Keulartz, *The Struggle for Nature: A Critique of Radical Ecology*, Routledge, London 1995, p. 5.

²⁰ K. A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, Orbis Books, New York 1984, p. 48.

²¹ J. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, Heinemann, London 1975, p. 32.

world around”²².

The Africans understand that, the flourishing of human and non-human life and the ‘wellbeing’ of inanimate nature have intrinsic value in themselves and are mutual inclusive, thanks the vital force. This does not mean that the Africans cannot utilise the natural environment for their human benefit. It instead means that, they can do so with reverence and such appropriation of the physical environment for human use implies the circulation of the vital force in the same tri-dimensional complex unity. The main argument being underlined here is that, the Africans do not value the natural environment from its usefulness to human flourishing, but rather intrinsically in itself. The main African conception is that the diversity and richness of the different life forms of both fauna and flora have intrinsic values, which all contribute the flourishing of human and nonhuman life²³. This is understood as the nourishment of the equilibrium of the vital force in the unitary complex whole, which humans are a part of. If the equilibrium is offset by the destruction of the natural environment for human selfishly utilitarian motives, the flourishing of not only nonhuman lives but also of humans themselves is compromised.

At the root of the difference between the African and Western attitudes towards the physical environment, is the difference between the ontological rationalities on the which the two conceptions of reality are based. We have already presented the African ontology in a fairly exhaustive manner in the preceding parts. For a comparative purpose, we can briefly look at classical western ontology. Whereas the western ontology depicts the human natural environment as something that is passive, based on the theory of substance as that which constitutes being, the African ontology of vital force depicts the natural environment as something that has mystical (vitality) energy. The Western ontology also views the natural environment as distinct and separate from human existence, and as having a lower value than human existence if any. Thus, whereas the western conception ontologically dissociates human existence from the physical environment, the African conception unites and integrates the two. Consequently, the western understanding of the environment is anthropocentric, according to which, all that which constitutes the physical environment is passive and ontologically distinct from human existence such that, the value of physical nature that surrounds humans can only be measured by its usefulness to human

²² Ivi, p. 39.

²³ P. Curry, *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*, Polity Press, cambridge 2011, p. 1.

wellbeing.

The dichotomy between human existence and the existence of the natural environment has its roots in western modern and postmodern ontological rationality, which to a great extent is rooted in Platonism. Platonism separated human rational dimension from the bodily dimension. It exclusively attributes the essence and fullness of human existence to the rational dimension, while bracketing the bodily dimension to all the material reality that surrounds human life, as something of a lower value. This reasoning robustly influenced many later Western philosophers. For example, in the Cartesian thought the human being as the *subjectum* is set apart from their physical environment. The Cartesian thought denies the intrinsic value of the natural material surrounding of human beings, implying that, its value is only ascribed by humans as the thinking subject and reference point²⁴. In a similar way, Emmanuel Kant sets the human subject above non-rational and inanimate entities. According to him, anything apart from human beings has but just a relative value as a means to serve human beings. Otherwise, it is only human beings that are an end in themselves²⁵. The implication of this argument in the relationship between human beings and the natural environment is that, the later does not have an intrinsic value but only an instrumental one, ascribed to them by humans who are set above as a masters of all the non-rational entities that exist around them. The Kantian reasoning results into anthropocentric environmental ethics. Furthermore, in his analysis of *Dasein*, Martin Heidegger, asserts human beings as the fullness of being and radically sets them beyond all nature as they dialectically remain envired by the same nature²⁶. In Heidegger, the human being is that which ‘forms the world’ whereas non-human entities have an impoverished world or no world at all. He asserts that “the human being is ‘world forming’ (*welthildent*), the stone is altogether ‘without world’ (*weltlos*), and the animal is ‘poor in the world’(*weltarm*)²⁷. What cuts across the ontological articulation of the representative western philosophers chosen here, is the implication of their thoughts in environmental moral enquiry. They all put the

²⁴ D. Bergandi, *The Structural Links between Ecology, Evolution and Ethics: The Virtuous Epistemic Circle*, Springer, New York 2013, p. 20.

²⁵ J. Broughton and J. Carriero eds., *A Companion to Descartes*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden 2008, p. 179-80.

²⁶ J. Kocklelmans J., *Heidegger's Being and Time: Analytics of Dasein as Fundamental Ontology*, University of America Press, Washington DC 1989, p. 94.

²⁷ A. MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Humans Beings Need the Virtues*, Duckworth, London 1999, p. 42.

human beings separate and above their natural environment. The humans are not part of a shared ontologically continuous ecosystem with the natural environment. The western understanding of the natural environment adduces an attitude towards the environment different from the African attitude. From the African ontological understanding of reality based on the vital force and the consequent African attitude towards nature, we can extract an African environmental ethics.

III. Towards an African Environmental Ethics

The analysis of the African world view that has been given in the preceding part enables us to extract an African theology and spirituality of the environment. But more significantly, it enables us to extract an African ethics of the environment. From the analysis we can immediately deduce that, African theology and spirituality of the environment is earth (universe) oriented, and points to practical ethical implications, expressed through restraints and prohibition to destructive mentality and practises against the environment. An over-view of African religion shows that its main ethical presuppositions are derived from the relationships in the African universe between humans and the spiritual world, and between humans and the physical environment. The underlining implication is that, there is an imperative for respect for the spiritual-mystical nature of the environment in the African universe²⁸. The central position of the human being in the order of the universe does not imply that humanity has a licence to carry any activity towards the universe at will. It instead implies a great responsibility on humanity to treat the non-visible, in the visible sphere of the universe with reverence and respect, which translates to the care of the visible sphere of the universe. In fact, the reverential care for the totality of the universe is an essential part of the moral order of the universe, which determines the moral quality of everything in human action towards the natural environment²⁹.

As it has already been pointed, human beings are at the centre of the universe and therefore, has a moral imperative to live and maintain the harmony in the universe through their actions. There is imposition on them to obey the laws decreed by the natural, moral and the mystical order in the universe, which if they disobey leads to disturbance of the equilibrium of the whole universe. The consequence is suffering, which the human species bears

²⁸ L. Magesa, *African Religion*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi 1997, p. 22.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 72.

the most. Therefore, human beings ought to be in harmony with the natural environment, namely, fauna, flora, and the inanimate order, since they all incarnate the vital force that orients them towards linkage with the entire system of the universe. The African integral ontology has a very direct moral implication i.e. it prescribes how humans ought to relate with the natural environment. It prescribes to humans a kind of relationship of reverence with nature around them. Africans therefore relate with nature, ascribing to it both intrinsic and instrumental value. The former is the value of an entity owing to the vital force in it, while the latter is the value of an entity in so far as it is for use in promoting human life within the ecosystem of the vital union.

In the African integral ontology, the meaning of a thing is derived from both its mystical and material dimensions. For example, many plants and animals serve as medicine and for ritual performances. They have some mystical powers for which they are used for performing religious rituals. Western modern science would see such plants for what they are, namely, just as plants even if they had some chemical composition that can be used in the manufacturing of medicine. Whereas the Africans see beyond the materiality of the plants to their mystical powers. For this reason, in the various African communities many species of plants and animals are held with a certain special dignity because of the mystical powers that they have. They are totems and they determine how humans ought to act towards them, hence an ethical implication on humans. Another ethical imperative that can be drawn from how Africans understand themselves in relation to the physical universe is that, humans cannot arrogate to themselves an infinite right to interpret and reduce the diversity of life forms and inanimate forms only to the satisfaction of mere human needs, often driven by greed. From the African conception, we ought to protect the natural environment because it has an inherent worth that surpasses its mere utility to human flourishing³⁰.

We can therefore, raise ethical questions that embrace how humans should relate with the natural environment from an African perspective of the understanding of the natural environment. Such questions provoke the establishment of norms of how to relate with the natural environment from an African understanding. This gives birth to an African environmental ethics that strives to establish what constitutes the ethical right human conducts, appropriations and use of the natural environment to serve human needs, given that the natural environment forms an interconnected ecosystem of the

³⁰ A. Kernohan, *Environmental Ethics: An Interactive Introduction*, Broadview Press, New York 2012, p. 179.

vital force with human beings. In this way, an African environmental ethics establishes a moral relationship between humans and the natural environment, and criteria to evaluate such a relationship. In its ultimate goal, an African environmental ethics should strive to attain a balance between appropriation and use of the physical environment for human good and the preservation of the same because of its intrinsic value and integrity independent of its usefulness to human beings. Therefore, an African environmental ethics prescribes the manner of living and acting, which as much as possible promotes both human and non-human flourishing, for equilibrium in, and wellbeing of the whole complex ecosystem of the vital force in the universe.

Conclusion

The worsening global environmental crisis calls for a change of attitude towards the environment, from a capitalist-consumerist attitude of maximising the exploitation of the natural environment, to an eco-friendly attitude that treats the natural environment with reverence and care. In the human relationship with the natural environment, the first attitude places its premium on capital expansion, while the second on a healthy relationship with natural environment for a holistic wellbeing of the universe from which is drawn the individual wellbeing of all the entities in universe, including human life. In the first attitude, healthy human relationship with natural environment is sacrificed for capital expansion and increasing consumerist satisfaction, whereas in the second attitude capital and any appropriate human desires ought to be used to promote a healthy and reverential human relationship with the natural environment. To stimulate the required change of attitude, we need an ontological conception of reality on which such attitude can be anchored. After a lengthy discussion, this study recommends the African ontology of the vital force as a viable option, and proposes an African environmental ethics derived from the African ontology, to be adapted albeit in different contexts, for environmental moral rationality in the fight against environmental crisis. It argues that, an African environmental ethics can help to mitigate the current global environmental crisis by prescribing the appropriate human conducts and attitudes for an integral formation of healthy human relationship and behaviour towards the natural environment.

BODY DISPOSAL IN GABORONE AND ALDO LEOPOLD'S LAND ETHIC MATENDE AND KAPEMBWA*

Abstract

Disposal of the dead differs across culture and times due to prevailing factors including traditional beliefs, normative worldviews, and resource availability. This paper sought to explore the views of the Batswana regarding disposal of the dead through a case study of Ledumang Ward in Gaborone. Interviews were conducted with 42 respondents who included 30 householders around Ledumang cemetery and 12 key informants who included persons in the funeral industry, clergy, and government or council officers. The findings reveal that burial is the most preferred method of body disposal among residents of Ledumang Ward with only a few having knowledge or being open to other forms of body disposal. Most household respondents (70%) cited religious beliefs and providing a resting place for the dead as the reason for their preference. Both residents and key informants expressed worry over negative environmental impacts of burials including them being an unsustainable land use practice. Shortage of land was the biggest concern for the largest portion of residents (40%). On the contrary, only 1% and 10% cited environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, and air pollution as the foremost concerns, respectively. The ethical evaluation using the land ethic shows the current burial practices to be morally wrong as they do not promote the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. The paper recommends some empirical research as well as philosophical research to establish and evaluate metaphysical and normative beliefs that undergird current burial practices.

Keywords: Botswana, land ethic, body disposal, environment ethics, Aldo Leopold

Introduction

“All men are mortal” is a trite premise of a textbook example of an argument. It is also one that most people take to be true. We fear, avoid, postpone, and prepare for death. From the inconvenient truth of death’s inevitability follows other truths. Although there are vast variations across times and cultures on how the living dispose of bodies of dead humans, body disposal is a ubiquitous cultural element. How we dispose of the remains of humans has

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been a matter of religious¹, cultural², economic³ and political⁴ debate. However, the emerging of environmental ethics vis-à-vis proliferating and worsening environmental problems have led to ethical questions being posed regarding how human cadavers are dealt with. This study addresses such problems in the urban setting of the southern African country of Botswana. The study combines an empirical study whose findings are then subjected to ethical evaluation through Aldo Leopold's land ethic.

There are a several ways in which body disposal including internment, cremation, and aquamation, *inter alia*. Burial practices are based on religious, cultural, and sociological ideologies⁵. As da Cruz et al.⁶ note, body disposal is a delicate subject because it involves beliefs and other cultural issues. According to Ekore and Laure-Abass⁷, traditional African belief systems are based on an understanding that those who are dead are alive in a different world and can return to this world through new births. In many African traditions, the dead possess supernatural powers over those who are alive to bless or curse and to give or take life. It is therefore imperative for an individual to be given a proper burial after death for one to become a benign ancestor. Otherwise, the individual may become a wandering ghost, unable to live properly after death, and thereby constituting a danger to those who are still alive⁸.

¹ Cfr. R. Werbner (2018). *Ecumenical funerals in the making* in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2018, 44 (2), pp. 315-329.

² Cfr. L. Baloyi. and M. Makobe-Rabothata, *The African conception of death: A cultural implication* in L.T.B. Jackson, D. Meiring, F.J.R. Van de Vijever, E.S. Idemoudia, and W.K., 2014.

³ K. Arhin, *The economic implications of transformations in Akan funeral rites*. *Africa*, 1994, 64(3), pp. 307-322.

⁴ W.T. Kalusa, *The politics of the corpse: President Levy Mwanawasa's death, funeral and political contestations in post-colonial Zambia* in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2017, 43 (6), pp. 1137-1155; C. M. Kearl and A. Rinaudi, *The political uses of the dead as symbols in contemporary civil religions*, *Social Forces*, 1983, 61 (3), pp. 693-708.

⁵ J.K.T. Biwul, *The African tradition of burial in the ancestral land and its implications for the African Church today*, TCNN Research Bulletin 61, 2014.

⁶ Da N.J.T. Cruz and A.G.R. Lezana, P.D.C. Freire dos Santos, I.M.B. Santana Pinto,, C. Zancan and G.H. Silva de Souza, *Environmental impacts caused by cemeteries and crematoria, new funeral technologies, and preferences of the Northeastern and Southern Brazilian population as for the funeral process*, *Environ SciPollut Res Int*, 2017, 24(31), pp. 24121- 24134.

⁷ R.I. Ekore and B. Lanre-Abass (2016), *African cultural concept of death and the idea of advance care directives* in *Indian Journal of Palliative care*, 2016, 22(4), pp. 369-372.

⁸ E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Burial and mortuary rites of the Nuer*. *African Affairs*, 1949, 48 (190), pp. 56-63.

Traditionally in Africa, including in Botswana, interment was the only known form of death disposal dating back from the Stone Age period⁹. Studying burial societies in Botswana, Chris Brown¹⁰ claims that “the need for proper burial is eternal”. The traditional African beliefs are buttressed by foreign religious influences of Christianity and Islam. Christians, for example, believe God created life as embodied life and the person is not simply a soul but a soul-body entity¹¹. This means that the body is to be respected and the corpse is not a worthless container vacated by the essence of life.

However, internment can cause environmental problems. Most cemeteries were sited without thinking about potential environmental risks¹². As Jonker and Olivier¹³ note, little attention was given to cemeteries as sources of pollution. In many countries where burials are practiced, internment is preceded by a highly chemicalised process involving embalming agents, such as formaldehyde, buffers, antioxidants, and dyes aimed at preserving the bodies and improving its appearance for the purpose of body viewing by mourners. Embalming became a dominant practice in US funeral rites during the American Civil War of the nineteenth century when Abraham Lincoln introduced the requirement to preserve the bodies to allow transportation of the Union dead to their homes in the North¹⁴. This is a widespread practice now in Botswana where there is the tradition of viewing of the corpse.

According to Harker¹⁵, digging in a modern cemetery in the United States is much like digging through a toxic waste. Besides the chemicals used in preparing cadavers for viewing and burial, caskets contribute toxins in the

⁹ Cfr. S. Guttman, J. Watson and V. Miller, *Till death do we pollute and beyond: The potential pollution of cemeteries and crematoriums*, Trent University, 2012, accessed on 04.05.2020.

¹⁰ C. Brown, *Kgatlang burial societies in Botswana Notes and Records*, 1982, 14, pp. 80-83.

¹¹ Cfr. W. Reville, 2018, *Which to choose, burial or cremation?*, www.irishtimes.com, accessed on 13.08.2020.

¹² Cfr. A.S. Ucisik and P. Rushbrook, *The impact of cemeteries on the environment and public health: An introductory briefing*. WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, Denmark 1998.

¹³ N. Jonker and J. Olivier, *Mineral contamination from cemetery soils: Case study of Zandfontein cemetery, South Africa in International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2012, Vol 9, pp. 511-520.

¹⁴ L. Canning and I. Szmigin, *Death and disposal: The universal, environmental dilemma in Journal of Marketing Management*, 2010, Vol 26, pp. 1129-1142.

¹⁵ A. Harker, *Landscapes of the dead: An argument for conservation burial in Berkeley Planning Journal*, 2012, 25(1), pp. 150-159.

graveyard and surrounding environment. According to Harker¹⁶, “conventional burials in the U.S. use nearly 30 million board feet of hardwood, 2,700 tons of copper and bronze, 104.272 tons of steel, and 1,636,000 tons of reinforced concrete”. These toxins and pollutants are not limited to the area in which they are buried. This was confirmed by Spongberg and Becks¹⁷. Their study showed that soil samples taken at coffin depth had elevated concentrations of metals used in making caskets, including copper, lead, zinc and iron. In addition, flowers used to decorate graves sometimes contain pesticides which could escape into the water and air and cause health effects for nearby animals¹⁸. Lastly, the decomposition of interred bodies releases nutrients such as nitrogen and chemicals like mercury¹⁹. After these chemicals are released into the environment, they make their way up the food chain all the way to humans.

Land use through burial creates a competition for land between the dead and the living. There is a looming problem in many parts of the world over what to do with dead bodies as pressure on burial space intensifies. Human has continued to grow rapidly. Botswana’s population, for example, grew to 2,024,904 by 20.5 percent during the 2001 and 2011 intercensal period. A larger population requires more land for housing, agriculture, public social facilities, and burial of the dead. Although people die daily, pandemics such as AIDS and COVID-19 add to the demand and scarcity of burial spaces. For example, the United Nations reported 26,000 AIDS-related deaths in 2001 in Botswana when the population was 1.6 million people²⁰. This would be expected to put more pressure on limited burial spaces. Consequently, infrastructure for the living have steadily advanced on cemetery areas because of population growth and this is evident in the increase in the number of

¹⁶ Ivi, 151.

¹⁷ A.L. Spongberg and P.M. Becks, *Inorganic soil contamination from cemetery leachate. Water, Air and Soil Pollution*, 2000, 117, pp. 313-327.

¹⁸ Cfr. K. Mathews, 2015, *5 reasons why burying dead people is bad for the environment*, <http://www.care2.com/causes/5-reasons-why-burying-dead>, accessed 19th August, 2019.

¹⁹ Cfr. S. Guttman, J. Watson and V. Miller, *Till death do we pollute and beyond: The potential pollution of cemeteries and crematoriums*, Trent University, 2012, accessed on 04.05.2020.

²⁰ Cfr. R. Rollnick, 2002, *Botswana's high-stakes assault on AIDS. Africa Renewal*. (September issue) <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/september-2002/botswanas-high-stakes-assault-aids>.

houses in areas not previously occupied²¹.

Another concern from cemeteries is deforestation. Forests and trees in general are important for the wellbeing of humanity and the country's development. Forests provide foundations for life on earth through ecological functions by regulating the climate and water resources and by serving as habitats for plants and animals. According to the Sida-EEU report, fuel wood from forests and woodland accounts for 70% of net energy supply in Botswana, and high reliance of wood for fuel has resulted in significant depletion around towns and major settlements. As the human population continues to grow, the planet is exposed to increased risks. According to FAO²², it is estimated that 420 million hectares of forest has been lost to deforestation since 1990. Burials contribute to deforestation through clearance of trees for burial spaces as well as through raw materials for coffins. According to Mathews²³, the amount of wood needed to create caskets in the U.S. is equivalent to four million square acres of forest which contains enough trees to confiscate 65 million tons of carbon dioxide a year. It is believed that ten acres of cemetery contain enough coffin wood to build 40 houses²⁴. According to an FAO report, deficit of wood raw materials in Botswana is beginning to occur partly due to indiscriminate cutting of trees²⁵.

Methodology

Methodology involves what the research will actually *do* to achieve their specific research objectives and answer research questions²⁶. It is made up of all the procedures and steps undertaken including sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Below, we outline the components of methodology in relation to this study. The study adopted the qualitative case study design.

²¹ A. Neckel, C. Costa, D.N. Mario, C.E.S. Sabadin and E.T. Bodah, *Environmental damage and public health threat caused by cemeteries: A proposal of ideal cemeteries for the growing urban sprawl in Brazilian Journal of Urban Management*, 2017, 9(2), pp. 216-230.

²² Cfr. FAO and UNEP 2020, *The State of the World's Forests 2020. Forests, biodiversity and people*, Rome, <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca8642en>, accessed on 05.10.2020.

²³ Cfr. K. Mathews, 2015, *5 reasons why burying dead people is bad for the environment*, <http://www.care2.com/causes/5-reasons-why-burying-dead>, accessed 19th August, 2019.

²⁴ Cfr. W. Reville, 2018, *Which to choose, burial or cremation?*, www.irishtimes.com, accessed on 13.08.2020.

²⁵ Cfr. M. Sekgopo, 2020, *Forestry outlook for Africa – Botswana*. FAO, <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/2300f3d3-5b55-4bbc-8944-63ad011ed390/content>, accessed on May 2, 2024.

²⁶ Cfr. A. Bryman, *Social research methods*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012.

Qualitative research stresses the understanding of lived social experiences through focus on words, narrations, and observations from which insights can be drawn. A case study design was adopted as a way to gain in-depth and focused understanding of the specific case of environmental dimensions of current burial practices in Ledumang Ward of Gaborone.

Description of the Study Area

The study was carried out in the South-eastern part of Botswana in Ledumang ward which is one of the locations within Gaborone city which contains a cemetery. The country's land surface area is estimated at 582,000 square kilometres with a population of approximately 2.8 million and people having an average life expectancy rate of 58 years. According to CIA World Factbook (2011), the birth rate of the country is approximately 22 births per 1,000 and the death rate is 10 deaths per 1,000. Almost half of the population live in urban areas with Gaborone having the largest at 208,411 people. Gaborone city is bordered to the east by Notwane River which serves as a structuring element and natural boundary between the city and Tlokweng (Batlokwa Tribal Territory); to the west it is bordered immediately by Mogoditshane (Bakwena Tribal Territory); in the north the city abuts Kgatleng district (Bakgatla Tribal Territory) boundary; and immediately to the south, the city is bordered by freehold farms which fall within the jurisdiction of the South East District.

It is noteworthy that Gaborone City is enclosed with no available land for future special expansionary needs of the city. As Gaborone is the capital city, it is the only place in Botswana with many cemeteries due to its large population. Currently, there is a serious shortage of land, and the city has nowhere to expand because it is surrounded by other villages which some people have now come to think are locations within the city.

Sampling

Purposive and systematic sampling techniques were used for this study. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants for in-depth interviews. These comprised 12 key informants as follows: the local chief, an official from an environmental organisation; an official from the Gaborone City Council planning department; an official from a funeral parlour; an official from a coffin manufacturing company; an official of memorial park which houses a cemetery; a member of the Village Development Committee and 5

members of the clergy from local churches. Systematic random sampling was used to select the 30 householders. There are approximately 1,000 households in Ledumang ward, and the researcher interviewed one person from every 33rd household.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted by the first author between January and February 2021. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview schedules with 30 households in Ledumang area. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 key informants. These included the local chief, a member of the village development committee, an environmentalist, an official from Gaborone City Council planning department, an official from a funeral parlour, an official from the coffin manufacturing company, an official from the memorial park, 5 members of the clergy. The total of interviews conducted was thus 42. Data was collected from the households until saturation²⁷ was attained. According to Newing²⁷, saturation is reached when the researcher can make sense out the data collected thus far, and any additional data collected adds little or negligible new information.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed by identifying common patterns and themes of thought that emerged from the interviews concerning the disposal of bodies. Aldo Leopold's land ethic was used to make an ethical assessment of the environmental impact of current burial practices in Ledumang Ward, Gaborone.

Results and Discussion: Perceived significance of current death disposal practices

Thirty householders were asked for their views on the benefits of the current death disposal method, the responses are shown in Table 1. The most numerous responses focus on religious beliefs and giving the dead a permanent place of rest. Such responses imply an adherence to the traditional belief in the spirit world of ancestors and/or the Christian belief in resurrection. Burial practices also allow people to mourn the loss of their loved ones and letting them go. In the words of one householder:

²⁷ H. Newing, *Conducting Research in Conservation Social Science Methods and Practice*, Routledge, London 2011.

The mere fact of witnessing a coffin being lowered into the ground and pouring the soil in the grave makes people see that the person is gone and thereby giving them the closure they so much needed.

He argued that it is often difficult to believe in someone's death until you see the person being lowered in the grave. The traditional chief of Ledumang felt that burial gives

Table 1: Views of households on benefits of burial

Allows mourning of a loved one	4
Provides a permanent place of rest	9
Helps with the grieving process	2
Acts as a situation for introductions	1
Supports religious beliefs	10
Acts as a sign of remembrance	3
Cemetery is a source of employment	1
Total	30

one a chance to be buried amongst one's loved ones. For example, if a husband passes away and is buried, his wife can choose to be buried beside him so that they can be together for eternity. This is done by reserving the space beside the grave so that no one else occupies it. This was also confirmed by the operations manager of Memorial Park who disclosed that their mandate was to sell graves to the community.

Distinct types of plots are available for sale in Memorial Park. There are single plots, companion plots which are meant for a married couple, or family plots where a small area of the cemetery is reserved for a whole family. This is a service which is not available at the city council cemeteries so that many people are opting to reserve grave sites. The selection of a grave site enables the fostering of an emotional connection with the final resting place and provides a sense of permanence in that people know where they will be

buried²⁸. This trend is growing because customers “people come for well-maintained graveyards” as community graveyards are not being taken care of properly. They even come from as far away as 100 km from Gaborone to access the services of Memorial Park. This trend was also mentioned by Wilson and Chiveralls²⁹ who noted that “memorial parks and lawn cemeteries tend to be much greener than traditional burial areas and, rather than presenting a gloomy vista of ranks of tombstones, they are characterised by manicured gardens and lawns.”

Of the 30 householders interviewed as seen in Table 1, nine said that the burial method is good because it provides a permanent place for the dead which can be visited by the living at

any time when they feel like it. Ten insisted that their traditional and/or religious beliefs were in support of it. For example, the majority of those belonging to Christian churches and who believe in the doctrine of the resurrection of the body feel that they have no other option than burial. The male pastor from the ZCC pointed out that “one day the body of those who have died in Christ will be resurrected and reunited with their souls”. Others gave varied reasons for observing current burial practices. One said that for those who may not be present at the time of burial, it helps with the grieving process by visiting the grave and finding closure. Visiting the grave is considered to be a sacred ritual which allows the living to feel closer and connected to their loved ones. Another interviewee pointed out that even those who are not yet born can be introduced to their ancestors by going to the grave site. She gave an example of a woman whose husband had died after she had become pregnant, and she was able to take the new-born child to the grave later to be introduced to the father. Auger³⁰ also noted that cemeteries and burial practices represent a place for meeting with the dead and for remembrance for loved ones.

In the Christian understanding, the soul and the body are two inseparable dimensions of the person and are temporarily separated at death. The Catholic Church believes that whereas the body decays, the soul goes to meet God while awaiting its reunion with the glorified body (Catechism of

²⁸ Cfr. M. Klaassens and P. Groote, 2010, *Natural burial ground Bergerbos: An alternative place of burial in the Netherlands*, Annals of the University of Alba Iulia-History Issue: 2, pp. 311-327, on www.cceol.com, august 2024,

²⁹ Cfr. L. Wilson and K. Chiveralls (n.d.), *Tradition and contemporary burial practices: Cemeteries and sustainability*, University of South Australia, accessed on 13.03.2020.

³⁰ Cfr. J.A. Auger, (2000). *Social perspectives on death and dying*, Fernwood Publishing, Halifax 2000.

the Catholic Church). The resurrection of the body emphasises that the material body of the one who has died will be transformed into a resurrected body and united with the spirit dimension. Kearle noted that as the body is considered the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and a living temple of the divine, cremation is considered to hinder the body's resurrection and represent a lack of care.

The grave in which one is buried acts as a sign of remembrance to the living. One woman pointed out that people always remember their dead whenever they go to the cemetery for other burials.

We always see them scattered around the cemetery checking their relatives' graves. This shows that they have not forgotten them.

She elaborated that some wealthier people erect tombstones as a way of creating a lasting memory to their descendants. A beautiful tombstone is seen and admired by everyone who comes to the cemetery, and this makes the person lying there to be remembered. Auger³¹ noted that people construct tombstones as symbols of remembrance and comfort for the living. Similarly, Scalenghe and Pantani³² stated that cemeteries are places where memories of the dead are supported by enduring funerary monuments. Auger also noted that cemeteries play a role in helping the living to grieve and to remember. This clearly shows that cemeteries are more than just a disposal site for the dead but are rather an important place for the living and, as such, express the connection between the living and the dead.

A woman in her mid-seventies pointed out that the cemetery can also be a source of employment. She stated that her son works at the cemetery as a security guard saying "*rona re a ja re jeswakemabitla*," meaning, we can survive because of the cemetery. Wilson and Chiveralls also noted that burying the dead created employment for grave diggers and gardeners to maintain the cemetery grounds.

Furthermore, burial practices have given rise to the development of thriving funeral industries. According to Northcott and Wilson³³, the funeral industry has become a large employer providing both direct and indirect forms of employment such as the construction of caskets, building funeral homes, embalming the dead, maintaining cemetery grounds, supplying

³¹ Cfr. J.A. Auger, *Social perspectives on death and dying*, Fernwood Publishing, Halifax 2000.

³² Cfr. R. Scalenghe and O.L. Pantani, *Connecting existing cemeteries saving good soils (for livings)*. *Sustainability*, 2020, 12(93).

³³ Cfr. H.C. Northcott and D.M. Wilson, *Dying and death in Canada*, Broadview Press, Toronto 2008.

flowers, printing obituaries, and providing for travel. For these reasons, Guttman, Watson, and Miller³⁴ pointed out that in view of the profits made by this industry, there would be resistance to changes that would limit these practices. However, as shown in Table 1, only one out of the thirty respondents viewed cemetery employment one of the benefits of current death disposal practices which suggests that the creation of employment is not a major factor in attitudes concerning burial practices.

Environmental considerations

Most people look at death disposal as sacred and deeply rooted in religious and cultural beliefs such that they do not take time to question the way things are done. However, some people's preferences may be because they are still unaware of the negative impacts of current death disposal practices simply because they are not evident to the average person who is attending the funeral. The invisible negative impacts include those impacts which affect the environment (see Table 2 for views of householders). These include the following which are discussed below: air pollution, contamination of underground water, loss of biodiversity and deforestation, defacing the natural beauty of the environment, implementing a questionable use of land, and contributing to the spread of COVID-19. This section will present and discuss the findings on these environmental considerations.

Table 2: Views of households on the greatest negative effects of current burial practices

Air pollution	3
Contamination of underground water	5
Deforestation and loss of biodiversity	1
Defacing the natural beauty of environment	6
Shortage of land	12
Contributing to spread of covid-19	3

³⁴ Cfr. S. Guttman, J. Watson and V. Miller, (2012). *Till death do we pollute and beyond: The potential pollution of cemeteries and crematoriums*, Trent University, 2012, accessed on 04.05.2020.

Air Pollution

Air pollution refers to “the contamination of the indoor or outdoor environment by chemical, physical, or organic substances that alter the natural characteristics of the environment”. This largely due to anthropogenic activities but can also result from non-anthropogenic phenomena. Mostly cited anthropogenic causes are related to industrial developmental activities. However, there are signs that current death disposal practices can cause air pollution. Two householders living adjacent to the funeral complained of an unpleasant smell coming from the direction of the cemetery at times. One of them confirmed that she once felt a strong smell coming from within the cemetery when she went for a burial. She was concerned about the effect that these smells might have. According to Cieśla et al. decomposition of corpses releases volatile organic compounds that are dispersed into the atmosphere by wind. Dent (2002) noted that the body is made up of 64% water, 20% protein, 10% fat, 5% mineral and 1% carbohydrate which decompose into different substances and potential pollutants. Protein decomposition in particular releases gases like purine and cadavarine, both of which are toxic with a foul smell. According to Bachelor, “gases hovering over cemeteries were suspected of causing anything from tarnishing silver to deadly disease like cholera and typhus.”

In addition to air pollution from decomposing bodies, air pollution is also caused by chemicals used in processing corpses for body viewing and burial. The Operations Manager of Lynn’s Funeral Parlour also narrated that the liquid that they use for embalming has formaldehyde which is very strong. It lingers around the space even after use. He said that the smell makes one to cough which is why it is necessary to wear protective clothing when performing the procedure and not allow anyone in the room except those carrying out the procedure. This is done to protect the health of the employees. Mao and Woskie³⁵ found this out in their study after collecting air samples from six funeral homes. They noted that the average formaldehyde concentration in the air in embalming rooms was 0.74 ppm with a peak of 5.26 ppm which caused eye and upper respiratory track irritation in some employees.

³⁵ Cfr. C. Mao and S. Woskie, *Formaldehyde Use Reduction in Mortuaries. Technical report No. 24*, Toxics Use Reduction Institute, Massachusetts 1994.

Furthermore, air pollution is caused from transportation involved in burial funerals. A householder, a male in his early fifties, complained of car exhaust from the increased traffic on the road related to funerals, especially in the mornings when they go to work:

Traffic has always been there, but nowadays it is worse because of the increased numbers of funerals at Ledumang cemetery which is due to COVID-19 deaths. Some of these cars are not roadworthy as they are smoking. As we have to wait a long time in the traffic, we are inhaling the smoke from these cars which is endangering our health and the health of the environment³⁶.

According to Krzyzanowski et al.³⁷, transport-related air pollution contributes to an increased risk of death, particularly from cardiopulmonary causes. This is because traffic contributes to a range of gaseous air pollutants and to suspended particulate matter. Transport air pollution has been found to adversely affect human cardiovascular and respiratory systems³⁸. The business manager of Somarelang Tikologo (ST) opined that car pollution is one of the major causes of global warming because of the many cars found on the roads. He said:

Normally when there is a funeral, relatives and friends come from afar to bid farewell to the deceased. These people come with their cars, increasing the ones found in the locality and thereby emitting more carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases which contribute to air pollution and global warming³⁹.

He further pointed out that people rarely want to share a car during funerals.

Contamination of underground water

Of the 30 householders interviewed, five were of the view that burying people

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Cfr. M. Krzyzanowski and B. Kuna-Dibbert and J. Schneider, *Health effects of transport-related air pollution*. World Health Organization, 2005.

³⁸ Cfr. E. Long, C. Carlsten, 2022, *Controlled human exposure to diesel exhaust: results illuminate health effects of traffic-related air pollution and inform future directions. Part Fibre Toxicol 19, 11*, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12989-022-00450-5> . august 2024.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

underground can somehow affect underground water if it happens that the cemetery is sited on top of the water table. Ground and surface water are a source of potable water for both human and non-human life forms. If it happens that it is contaminated, all the life forms found within that area can be threatened. Their argument was that as the body decomposes, the contents in the coffin seep into the ground and then into the ground water which is later used by people, animals, and plants. Soil contamination can also occur making the vegetation within the area harmful to human and animal health as the poison can run into the food chain. This finding is well-corroborated by existing literature.

Oliveira et al.⁴⁰ have noted that cemeteries can be harmful to the health of people living nearby. They explained:

Cemeteries represent a source of environmental liability due to their potential to accumulate and release large quantities of contaminants generated by the decomposing of corpses. Effluents can carry microorganisms and heavy metals through the soil to water resources. Since these environments have concentrated potential pollutants, populations living close to cemeteries may be exposed to elevated levels of highly harmful contaminants to human health.

This is in line with what was confirmed by Ucisik and Rushbrook⁴¹ when they said that there is seepage of decay products percolating into water during putrefaction of the human corpse. According to them, this seepage contains bacteria, viruses and organic and inorganic chemical decomposition products which could be a cause of local epidemics from waterborne diseases where the groundwater is used as a water source. The business manager of ST agreed that both the decomposing body which is sometimes embalmed and the coffin materials themselves produce chemicals and toxins that move through the soil and contaminate the environment including the underground water. He argued that the treated timber used to make coffins may kill termites that come into contact with it. Over a prolonged period, these treatment chemicals leak to the underground water aquifers contaminating them. He pointed out that the chemicals are harmful to the environment both under and above the soil when they leak over time. He acknowledged that due to the lack of adequate

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ Cfr. A. S. Ucisik and P. Rushbrook, *The impact of cemeteries on the environment and public health: An introductory briefing*. WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, Denmark 1988.

standards or monitoring authority, funeral parlours use whatever they can manage to accomplish their objectives. Guttman, Watson, and Miller⁴² noted that the main sources of pollution from cemeteries are human bodies and embalming fluids which primarily contain formaldehyde. Wood caskets also pose a threat if wood preservatives which can contain arsenic are used⁴³. Spongberg and Becks noted further that the abundance of corpses in cemetery soil provides an obvious source of organic contamination, and the fluids from decomposing bodies in graveyards can leak into underlying groundwater unless leak-proof caskets are used.

The Operations Manager of Lynn's Funeral Parlour testified that:

If this substance has these effects on people, then it means it can be harmful to the soil underneath and also to the groundwater if there is any at the cemetery⁴⁴.

He acknowledged that the company has never bothered to investigate the effects that the embalming liquid (formaldehyde) might have on people as well as on the natural environment. This is because the Waste Management policy is silent about pollution from the cemeteries. Cemeteries are managed by the Gaborone City Council by-law and body disposal is not considered as waste. However, a decade-long (2007-2018) study in Brazil found little to no contamination surface or groundwater⁴⁵. This difference can however not to be said to refute the views expressed in this study because various burial and environmental factors may lead to different levels of contamination.

Uslu et al.⁴⁶ noted that formaldehyde is a volatile organic compound, a potential carcinogen known to cause comas, internal bleeding, and death. Guttman, Watson, and Miller (2012) stated that formaldehyde had been listed for future banning by the European Union as it had proved to be a risk to those working with the substance. In addition, Cogliano et al.⁴⁷ drew attention to the fact that in environments where formaldehyde is manufactured, death

⁴² Cfr. S. Guttman, J. Watson and V. Miller, 2012, *Till death do we pollute and beyond: The potential pollution of cemeteries and crematoriums*, Trent University.

⁴³ A.L. Spongberg and P. M. Becks, *Inorganic soil contamination from cemetery leachate. Water, Air and Soil Pollution*, 2000, 117, pp. 313-327.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ E.D.Saba, J.M. Saba, T.A. Mendes, A.E. de Oliveira, *Evaluating the impact of a cemetery on groundwater by multivariate analysis. Environ Monit Assess*, 2023, 195(2), pp. 270.

⁴⁶ A. Uslu, E. Barış and E. Erdoğan, *Ecological concerns over cemeteries. African Journal of Agricultural Research*, 2009, 4(13), pp. 1505-1511.

⁴⁷ V.J. Cogliano, Y. Grosse, R.A. Baan, K. Straif, M.B. Secretan and F.E. Ghissassi, 2005.

rates from nasopharyngeal cancer were significantly increased. Furthermore, they highlighted the fact that a relationship had been confirmed between the development of cancer and formaldehyde. Neckel et al.⁴⁸ pointed out that at present, there is the danger of lack of management and treatment of highly pathogenic effluents released by corpses during the decomposition process. Allemann et al., who had collected coffin materials from one of South Africa's oldest and largest funeral suppliers, found that coffin materials such as handles and ornaments were made of materials such as aluminium, copper, mild steel, zinc and its alloys, as well as silver and bronze. The use of plastic handles in coffins has recently become more common. Motlatsi⁴⁹ has noted that, in the material safety data sheets of these materials, the plastics are comprised of polypropylene and contain traces of formaldehyde. Traces of formaldehyde were also found in the varnish used on coffins. Jonker and Olivier⁵⁰ have similarly pointed out that the fabrication materials of coffins may contain harmful and toxic metals that could permeate the soil.

Sixty years ago, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* helped to start the modern ecological movement. Carson⁵¹ highlighted the pervasive environmental effects of chemicals including pesticides and detergents on the terrestrial and aquatic system. Dead birds were found to have ingested vast amounts of chemicals such as DDT. Although most of these chemicals were used in agriculture and did not include those in the treatment of dead bodies of humans, there is ample evidence on the harmful environmental impacts of chemicals such as formaldehyde through contamination of ground water and cemetery vicinities⁵² (Allemann et al. 2018; Guttman, Watson, and Miller, 2012; Holness and Nethercott 1989).

Loss of biodiversity and deforestation

⁴⁸ A. Neckel, C. Costa, D.N. Mario, C.E.S. Sabadin and E.T. Bodah, *Environmental damage and public health threat caused by cemeteries: A proposal of ideal cemeteries for the growing urban sprawl in Brazilian Journal of Urban Management*, 2017, 9(2), pp. 216-230.

⁴⁹ M.S. Motlatsi, *Material safety data sheet: Polypropylene*, Sasol, Sandton 2007.

⁵⁰ N. Jonker and J. Olivier, *Mineral contamination from cemetery soils: Case study of Zandfontein cemetery, South Africa in International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2012, Vol 9, pp. 511-520.

⁵¹ Cfr. R. Carson, *Silent Spring*, Penguin, London 1962.

⁵² S. Guttman, J. Watson and V. Miller, 2012, *Till death do we pollute and beyond: The potential pollution of cemeteries and crematoriums*, Trent University, accessed on 04.05.2020; D. Holness and J. Nethercott, (1989), *Health status of funeral service workers exposed to formaldehyde*, Archives of Environmental Health, 1989, 44(4), pp. 222-228.

The business manager of ST identified loss of biodiversity as another one of the effects of death disposal practices. He noted that every species has a role to play in creating harmony in the ecosystem irrespective of its size so that by destroying the forest, many life forms living there are destroyed. This can end up causing species extinction as some may fail to adapt to the changing conditions. He pointed out that the location of cemeteries tends to destroy the vegetation of the site thereby causing deforestation because trees must be removed. Consequently, many of the species found in that area are destroyed. He went further to say that “the forest is a home to ecosystems which interact with one another so that by destroying the habitat, we are destroying their home”. Figure 1 shows the levelled ground where graves are going to be dug. Trees and vegetation which were housing life forms there were removed. According to Lipper (2000:26), biodiversity took many millions of years to evolve, and there is no possibility of getting back the estimated 50,000 species that go extinct every year.

When quizzed about how the coffin-making business is affecting the environment, the workshop manager of Lynn’s Funeral Parlour said that it does not affect the environment because they procure the materials from China and South Africa. He emphasised that it is not the trees in Botswana that are being cut and that they cannot be held responsible for causing deforestation. This may be true, but the need for wood in coffin-making still raises the problem of deforestation and its effects on the natural environment. Deforestation has a significant impact on global warming because trees act as sinks, and they absorb carbon dioxide in the soil.



Figure 1: Trees and vegetation removed at Ledumang cemetery

Source: Field Data, February 2021.

When asked about how the coffin-making business is affecting the environment, the workshop manager of Lynn's Funeral Parlour said that it does not affect the local environment because they procure the materials from China and South Africa. He emphasised that it is not the trees in Botswana that are being cut and that they cannot be held responsible for causing deforestation. This may be true, but the need for wood in coffin-making still raises the problem of deforestation and its effects on the natural environment.

Deforestation has a massive impact on global warming because trees act as sinks, and they absorb carbon dioxide in the atmosphere through the process of photosynthesis. Forests therefore play an important if not indispensable part in preserving the health of the natural environment. Greene (2001) has convincingly shown how problems affecting the natural environment in any one country affect other countries as well so that countries need to work together. Moreover, as Botswana shares borders with South Africa, if South Africa is going to experience problems by the cutting down of its trees for wood, Botswana is going to be affected as well.

Defacing the natural beauty of the environment

The chairperson of the Village Development Committee (VDC), the physical planner of Gaborone City Council, and six of the householders expressed an acute awareness of the unpleasant appearance of the cemetery in Ledumang. They complained that the cemetery is not well taken care of and that this has caused the area to look spooky. One lady in her sixties pointed out that formerly people used to visit the graves of their loved ones almost every month to keep them in good condition. However, she went on to say, "*Nowadays is like people are throwing away a dead dog! They never come back to see how the grave is, let alone to clean the surroundings.*" She blamed the untidiness to the fact that as people come from afar to bury their loved ones in Ledumang, it becomes too cumbersome for them to keep on checking the graves because of the distance involved (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Unkempt cemetery at Ledumang
Source: Field Data, February 2021.

The business manager of ST stated that there are instances where the burial results in the soil sinking. When this happens, the coffin also sinks, and the soil can be carried away during the rainy season thereby affecting many life forms in the soil. The chairperson of the VDC said that the cemetery makes the overall environment look particularly ugly because it is located between houses and schools. The physical planner of the Gaborone City Council also agreed that the cemetery is not properly looked after, and that it is dilapidated and unattractive. She continued:

It is high time that town planners consider making use of cemeteries, not only as burial sites but as active parks with supporting activities like florist shops, snacks and beverage units, shaded sitting areas and Wi-Fi spots. This would attract people to the place, and it would come alive and no longer be seen as a spooky area where people are afraid to even pass nearby⁵³.

This is supported by Maddrell et al.⁵⁴ who stated that the future planning of cemetery spaces needs to consider the functional, symbolic, social and leisure aspects of a diverse multicultural society. It needs to take account of the comfort and safety of visitors and the mediation of different user needs and

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ Cfr. A. Maddrell, Y. Beebeejaun, K. McClymont, D. McNally, B. Mathijssen and S.A. Dogra, 2018, *Diversity-ready cemeteries and crematoria in England and Wales*, www.deathscapesanddiversity.org.uk .august 2024.

interests. They suggested building a café, an information point or a flower shop which would also increase personnel on site to enhance the social aspect of the cemetery.

A questionable land use practice

The most common form of body disposal is in-ground burial, and this requires a significant amount of space. Of the thirty householders interviewed, 12 commented that due to the increase in population, there has been a greater demand for land for development, housing, agriculture and recreation. One woman noted that she has been applying for land for twenty years but still has not been allocated any. She believed that cemeteries were taking up the spaces that could have been given to herself and others for residential purposes. Tafira⁵⁵ highlighted that for Africans, land is everything so that depriving them of land meant robbing them of their personhood, being and identity. The chairperson of the VDC expressed similar sentiments. She was of the view that a police station could have been placed where the cemetery is as there is no police station in Ledumang, even though the crime rate is high there. She said that they had to travel a long way to access policing services at Broadhurst.

Population increases in urban areas such as Gaborone has resulted in an increased demand for land such that houses, and other developments are now closer to the cemetery which used to be very far from people. Lauwers⁵⁶ (2015) noted that building houses near cemeteries is a result of population growth which poses the social need to occupy those areas. Furthermore, the proximity of a cemetery decreases the value of the real estate nearby. Scalenghe and Pantani⁵⁷ drew attention to the fact that the way in which land is being used today is a serious contemporary issue. They claim that the practice of inhumation is a contributory factor. Land used for burials is land taken away from other urban developments.

Changing attitudes?

Given the environmental problems associated with traditional burial favoured by most Batswana, it is imperative that alternative body disposal methods are

⁵⁵ K. Tafira, 2015, *Why land evokes such deep emotions in Africa*, august 2023.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ Cfr. R. Scalenghe, O.L. Pantani, *Connecting existing cemeteries saving good soils (for livings)*. *Sustainability*, 2020, 12(93).

considered. One obvious candidate is cremation. According to the findings of the study, most people have little or no knowledge about methods of death disposal other than burials. Although they may have heard about cremation from the Indian (Hindu) community, they do not know anyone who has ever been cremated. One lady in her late sixties acknowledged that she had heard about cremation when she was working for an Indian couple whose son had passed on. Because this is not a popular method, there is no crematorium in Gaborone except the one for the Hindus community which is only used by Hindus. On the other hand, the physical planner at Gaborone City Council noted that cremation can be a way of saving land in urban areas, especially in Gaborone where there is no land for expansion. She said: “*Gaborone has run out of land and the only option would be to consider cremation.*” She pointed out, however, that the council and the relevant stakeholders would have to work hard to sensitise people about the problem of land shortages together with the benefits of cremation in relation to land. This was also confirmed by the Methodist pastor who acknowledged that cremation used little or no land at all as the cremains (cremated remains) can be kept in the home, scattered, or stored in a small columbarium that can hold many urns in a comparatively smaller area than ones needed for burial cemeteries.

Furthermore, if surviving family members move away, they can easily take cremated remains with them unlike with burial where the grave is permanent. She said: “*I want to do my part to save the planet, so I am definitely having myself cremated after I die.*” She then went on to emphasise that cremation can also be much less expensive compared to a traditional funeral as it allows one to eliminate many costs associated with burials which include a casket, a cemetery fee, a grave cover, a headstone, and a tombstone. Not to mention the graveyard maintenance.

An interview with the business manager of ST revealed that cremation is environmentally friendly and can be viewed as a “green option” compared to burial. He argued, as was already discussed above, that burials use strong chemicals to embalm the remains which can contaminate the environment. They take up land space and disturb the earth when digging is done to bury the casket. He also noted that coffins are usually coated with preservative paints and varnishes containing dangerous chemicals such as mercury that can contaminate underground water systems.

For these reasons, he believed that cremation could be an important mechanism in the elimination of viruses, germs, and bacteria, thereby helping to improve sanitary conditions for humanity. According to Decker Junior et al. (2018), as the body is composed of 75% liquid and 25% solid, cremation

reduces the body to dust through intensive heat and evaporation which results in the decomposition of the body. The business manager of ST acknowledged, however, that “although cremation uses fewer resources than burial, it does have an environmental impact because it involves the burning of fossils.” However, a fuller discussion of cremation as an alternative method of body disposal is beyond the scope of this paper. An important alternative to current burial practices and cremation is green or natural burial.

Asked whether he was aware of another method called green or natural burial, the manager of ST said that he has read about it and acknowledged that it could be a good method because it does not involve the use of embalming chemicals and the clearing of land for the cemetery. Hence, it gives priority to nature above burial or the scattering of ashes.

Klaassens and Groote⁵⁸ were of a similar view that natural burials provide a solution to problems associated with the costly maintenance at conventional cemeteries and they preserve the natural habitat. Natural burials place much value on trees and the way they may embody aspects of personal and cultural memory thereby facilitating and sustaining relationships beyond the grave⁵⁹. However, although natural burial can be seen to be a solution to the problems caused by traditional burials, it does not address long-term land capacity constraints unless plots can be reused. As Pawlett and others⁶⁰ posit, although natural burial has several ecosystem benefits including enhanced biodiversity and carbon sequestration, it poses some risks of greenhouse gas emissions and groundwater contamination.

Having presented and discussed findings of the study, we turn to applying to the finding an environmental ethic proposed by one thinker widely considered the father of environmental ethics – Aldo Leopold.

The land ethic

Aldo Leopold’s land ethic is apposite to this study because it emphasises respect for nature and for the value of the ecological community. The land

⁵⁸ M. Klaassens and P. Groot, 2010, *Natural burial ground Bergerbos: An alternative place of burial in the Netherlands*, Annals of the University of Alba lulia-History, Issue 2, pp. 311-327, www.ceeol.com . august 2024.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰ Cfr. N.T. Pawlett, L. Girkin, D.L. Deeks, R. Evans, P. Sakrabani, K. Masters, N. Garnett, Márquez-Grant, 2024, *The contribution of natural burials to soil ecosystem services: Review and emergent research questions*. *Applied Soil Ecology*, 194:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apsoil.2023.105200> . august 2024

ethic has been used by other authors as an ethical evaluative framework⁶¹ albeit not to primary data as in the case of this study. However, the land ethic has not been used to evaluate the disposal of human bodies in cemeteries. The application of this theory to Ledumang cemetery will focus on the following four central concepts: biotic community, integrity, stability, and beauty. Before application, let us first explicate the land ethic through Leopold's environmental maxim.

Leopold⁶² gave expression to what was the first formulation of an environmental ethic in the following maxim: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise". According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, integrity means "the condition of being whole and undivided." Integrity connotes the idea of intactness, maintaining originality and remaining uncorrupted by external influences. For Warren⁶³, integrity "had to do with parts of nature that were necessary for land to keep its stability and its health.... [It] meant that species needed to keep land stable, and it meant the full range of self-organized native plants and animals that had inhabited the place before industrial civilisation arrived". Integrity thus entailed "maintaining all the original species in the community and not exchanging them with new ones"⁶⁴. It therefore meant that native species of plants and animals should be left to thrive in their natural habitats as a matter of biotic right.

Although stability can mean something static and unchanging, Leopold understood that as ecosystems naturally undergo gradual and mild changes, members of the ecological community should adapt to those changes without unduly disturbing the natural environment. Therefore, according to Millstein⁶⁵, "rather than referring to an unchanging system, stability should be seen in terms of sustainability and resilience of the natural environment to external forces." Leopold was referring to the threat of human-induced

⁶¹ Cfr. R.L. Millstein, *Debunking myths about Aldo Leopold's land ethic*. *Biological Conservation*, 2018, 217, pp. 391-396; D. Simberloff, (2012). *Integrity, stability, and beauty: Aldo Leopold's evolving view of non-native species*, *Environmental History*, 2018, 17, pp. 489-511.

⁶² A. Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, Oxford University Press, London 1949, pp. 224-225.

⁶³ J. L. Warren, *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey: Rediscovering the Author of the Sand County Almanac*, 10th Anniversary Edition, Island Press, 2016, p.340.

⁶⁴ D. Simberloff, *Integrity, stability, and beauty: Aldo Leopold's evolving view of non-native species*, *Environmental History*, 2012, 17, pp. 489-511, p.504.

⁶⁵ R. L. Millstein, *Debunking myths about Aldo Leopold's land ethic*. *Biological Conservation*, 2018, 217, p.394.

instability to the health of the land rather than to natural changes which even contribute to land health. Stability thus refers to ‘land health’, a term that by the early 1940s had become the “centrepiece” or “cornerstone” of Leopold’s thinking about the conservation of nature⁶⁶. The concept of land health referred to “the ability of the land to cycle nutrients efficiently and continuously over long periods of time, via long and diverse food chains, so that land continues to sustain life over time and is capable of self-renewal”⁶⁷. Leopold therefore objected to an attitude to land which saw it as a commodity for human exploitation that resulted in instability of the health of the land.

For Leopold, what was natural was beautiful. He had a negative view of the introduction of non-native plants and animals into the ecosystem. Simberloff noted that just as you cannot beautify the Mona Lisa by adding a necklace, you cannot beautify nature through artificial measures. Beauty, for Leopold, was thus not something merely subjective in the eye of the beholder; it was rather “an objective ecological attribute that could endure. It was “a characteristic that arose when the parts of nature were linked harmoniously into a whole promoting land’s stability and long-term flourishing”⁶⁸. This was not to deny the beauty that can be created by humans in an artificial way but rather that such beauty should not be at the expense of the deeper beauty of the natural environment. Therefore, maintaining the beauty of a place referred to conserving as much as possible the interconnections of the ecosystem that had been arrived at naturally. The land ethic has been used recently to evaluate land-use and conservation practices such as the Yolo River bypass project in the US and the introduction of non-native species in ecosystems⁶⁹.

It would be a mistake to interpret Leopold’s use of the concepts of integrity, stability and beauty as distinct or separate from one another. He is focusing on one reality, namely, the ecosystem which is a holistic reality. These three concepts are interlinked and interconnected with each other although they can be discussed separately.

Having explained Leopold’s maxim, we will proceed to apply it to the

⁶⁶ Cfr. D. Simberloff, *Integrity, stability, and beauty: Aldo Leopold’s evolving view of non-native species*, *Environmental History*, 2012, 17, pp. 489-511; J.L. Warren, J. L., *Aldo Leopold’s Odyssey: Rediscovering the Author of the Sand County Almanac*, 10th Anniversary Edition, Island Press, 2016.

⁶⁷ R.L. Millstein, *Debunking myths about Aldo Leopold’s land ethic*. *Biological Conservation*, 2018, 217, p.394.

⁶⁸ J.L. Warren, J. L., *Aldo Leopold’s Odyssey: Rediscovering the Author of the Sand County Almanac*, 10th Anniversary Edition, Island Press, 2016, p.343.

⁶⁹ Cfr. D. Simberloff, *Integrity, stability, and beauty: Aldo Leopold’s evolving view of non-native species*, *Environmental History*, 2012, 17, pp. 489-511.

findings of the study.

Ledumang biotic community

A biotic community, also known as a biota, is the group of organisms that live together and interact with each other within an environment or habitat. Together, the biotic community and the physical landscape (or abiotic community) make up an ecosystem. The land ethic is concerned about the entire ecosystem rather than about its individual constituents *per se*. In this study, Ledumang community is an ecosystem with humans, nonhuman animals, flora, and non-living physical features. The land ethics encourages human beings to realise that they are dependent on other members of the ecosystem for their well-being thereby acknowledging their responsibility towards both living and non-living beings present. According to Leopold, everything is connected to everything else such that he can use the image of “the land pyramid.” The depositing of foreign and toxic substances into the soil which comes from the embalming substances and coffin materials can disrupt food chains which in turn can lead to the moving out, decimation or extermination of certain species. The plants and trees growing within the cemetery where soils are contaminated absorb toxins from the seepage which can be affecting the animals that feed on them. Hence, before we think of using a piece of land as a cemetery, we must not only think about human land use but also use of that land as a habitat for non-human organisms as well.

Most people are not thinking in line with the land ethic because they think of human beings as the only beings endowed with intrinsic value such that other things are only instrumentally valuable for human ends. This violates the notion of the biotic community as conceived by Leopold in which humans are members of that community. Hence, in the context of Ledumang cemetery, people have a moral responsibility to care for the animals and plants in the cemetery and affected vicinity. Although the biotic pyramid shows energy flow with humans at the apex, the energy flow is cyclical. When humans die, the energy from their bodies is returned to the soil for absorption by microorganisms and plants. However, polluting substances in dead bodies shows a lack of respect for non-human life forms in the soil. The cutting down of tree and removing other forms of vegetation which help to absorb toxins from the soil also shows a lack of respect for the health of the ecosystem. Hence, the land ethic would consider the disposal of dead bodies in the soil in a manner which can destroy life forms to be unethical.

The definition of the land ethic as given by Leopold was: “A thing is

right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise”⁷⁰. Although Milstein debunks the myth that this maxim summarises the land ethic, it is nevertheless a central idea in the land ethic. It can therefore be justifiably employed to assess the ethics of body disposal among the residents of Ledumang ward.

Integrity

The term “integrity” connotes wholeness and the unimpaired state of the environment. Usually, integrity is juxtaposed with corruption. A person or thing has integrity if she or it is not corrupted. Leopold seems to use the term integrity in this sense⁷¹.

Ledumang ward and the cemetery is not in a healthy state because of the negatives impacted it by the prevailing burial method. There is evidence that our burial system can cause air pollution as confirmed by the two interviewees who complained of an unpleasant smell coming from the direction of the cemetery at times, thereby affecting the purity of the air inhaled by humans and other life forms found within the area. In support of the above assertion, Bachelor pointed out that gases hovering over cemeteries were suspected of causing anything from tarnishing silver to deadly disease like cholera and typhus. The interviews also revealed that interment can somehow affect underground water if the cemetery is sited on top of the water table. If it happens that it is contaminated, all the life forms within that area can be threatened. The business manager of ST alluded to the fact that a decomposing body which is sometimes embalmed, and the coffin materials themselves, produce chemicals and toxins that move through the soil and contaminate the environment including the underground water. He argued that the treated timber used to make coffins may kill termites that come in to contact with it resulting in the loss of the functional role of these species.

Integrity reminds people not to corrupt or pollute the environment by introducing foreign species or substances into the natural environment. The practice of body disposal in Ledumang cemetery involves introducing harmful chemicals such as formaldehyde and non-biodegradable synthetic

⁷⁰ A. Leopold, (1949). *A Sand County Almanac*, Oxford University Press, London 1949, pp. 224-225.

⁷¹ Cfr. D. Simberloff, *Integrity, stability, and beauty: Aldo Leopold's evolving view of non-native species*, *Environmental History*, 2012, 17, pp. 489-511; Cfr. J.L. Warren, J. L., *Aldo Leopold's Odyssey: Rediscovering the Author of the Sand County Almanac*, 10th Anniversary Edition, Island Press, 2016.

materials and metals. These cause some animals to flee the area while others become decimated. Conversely, some alien species occupy the cemetery. The biotic pyramid is altered, and species can be displaced in the ecosystem to which they belong.

Stability

It is well known that biodiversity plays a key role in the stability of an ecosystem. “Stability” refers to preserving the overall harmony and balance of the biotic community. From the findings of the study, the current death disposal method that is carried on within the community of Ledumang results in many disadvantages to the ecosystem. One of the disadvantages is the species loss. Species play an essential role in the ecosystem so that species losses can threaten the stability of the ecosystem services on which humans depend (McCann, 2000). This was mentioned by the business manager of ST when he identified loss of biodiversity as one of the effects of death disposal practices. He pointed out that the removal of trees in the cemetery tended to destroy the vegetation of the site because some trees, especially the deep rooting trees, can help decrease the water level beneath the cemetery thereby helping to contain seepage within the vicinities of a cemetery. This also helps to reduce the quantity of the seepage water that mixes with the groundwater. Areas with high levels of species are more likely to return to a stable state after a disturbance because the ecosystem has more ways to respond to a disturbance and fix problems.

Leopold understood stability, not as the absence of change. Rather, it is allowing change to happen at a slow pace to allow members of the land community to adjust, adapt and continue to flourish. However, the burial practices at Ledumang cemetery interfere with the stability of the ecosystem in question, by the introduction of materials and chemicals which are harmful to life forms there. Furthermore, the considerable number of vehicles that enter the cemetery destroy the topsoil causing it to be easily carried away by wind and water. This affects plant growth, especially grass, thereby affecting the small animals that live and feed on the small vegetation disturbing the life support system and the equilibrium of the ecosystem.

Consequently, the natural environment is deprived of its sustainability and resilience. It can no longer support the biotic community sustainably, and it becomes helpless to withstand external forces such as heavy rains and

floods when they come. As Millstein⁷² has pointed out, stability should result in a win-win situation for members of the biotic community by “providing good outcomes for humans, nonhumans, and the land community as a whole”. In other words, the current disposal methods tend to change the land too drastically, quickly, and completely to everyone’s detriment.

Beauty

In ordinary usage, beauty refers to the inherent value of the environment which can be aesthetically appreciated by humans. Inherent value is the value that human beings attribute to objects such as a rainbow on account of their beauty and unique characteristics that are appreciated. This value is attributed to an object on account of its perceived, recognised or discovered worth. However, this was not the beauty that Leopold had in mind. For Leopold, the natural was beautiful as such. It is not for humans to alter the landscape, to introduce artificially flora or fauna to a natural habitat. Natural beauty is to be maintained by leaving natural habitats as much undisturbed as possible. Beauty refers to the sophisticated interdependence and synergies among the members of the biotic community in the ecosystem. The beauty of the ecosystem cannot be separated from the integrity and stability of the ecosystem. They are all referring to the value of the one ecosystemic reality.

Conclusion

This paper combined a qualitative empirical study with an ethical evaluation of the findings through the lenses of Aldo Leopold’s land ethic. Influenced by pre-colonial African traditional worldview and the Christian conceptions of death and body disposal, burial of the dead in cemeteries is the commonest form of body disposal. However, due to Western influences, burial of the dead among Batswana often involves embalming, caskets made from chemically treated wood and other non-biodegradable materials. Consequently, current burial practices pose numerous environmental problems and risks. The current burial practices are found to be wrong as they do not promote the integrity, beauty, and stability of the Ledumang biotic community. However, there is some indication that attitudes among Batswana are pliable, and they can thus potentially adopt alternative body disposal methods.

⁷² R.L. Millstein, *Debunking myths about Aldo Leopold’s land ethic. Biological Conservation*, 217, pp. 391-396, 2018, p. 395.

Much empirical research on ecological impact of current burial practices have been conducted elsewhere. However, due to different soils, hydrology, and environmental factors which may mitigate or exacerbate negative ecological impacts, there is need to conduct such research in Botswana as well. Lastly, there is need to carry out social science and philosophical research to ascertain and evaluate metaphysical and axiological systems surrounding death and body disposal.

A CASE STUDY OF AMINA CHANGWE IN COUNSELLING AND THERAPY

FATHER MOSES MUYUYA*

Abstract

This article presents a comprehensive case study of Amina Changwe, a 27-year-old woman facing significant psychological challenges stemming from her tragic childhood experiences, including the loss of her parents and potential abuse. The study employs a counseling framework to explore Amina's complex emotional landscape, focusing on issues of isolation, low self-esteem, and the impact of societal perceptions on her self-worth. Through a detailed examination of the counselor-client relationship, including concepts of transference and counter-transference, the article identifies the root causes of Amina's struggles. It also discusses therapeutic interventions and the importance of specialized counseling to facilitate Amina's healing process. Ultimately, the article emphasizes the significance of empathy, authenticity, and a tailored therapeutic approach in addressing the multifaceted issues faced by individuals in distress.

Keywords: Isolation, Self-esteem, Trauma, Counseling, Healing

Introduction

This essay is a case study of Amina Changwe with the following approach: biography of Amina; and thereafter, an inquire on her situation through a counseling-client relationship by transference and counter-transference to disclose her case history. Afterwards, we will review Amina's situation by identifying the root cause to her predicament or problem through deepening the inquiry with clarity, precision and interpretation. Successively, we will apply mixed therapeutic measures to her situation. Subsequently, we will progress to the final goal for our counseling to either a therapy or referral culminating into a termination process.

Biography of Amina Changwe

Amina is a lady aged 27 with a bachelor degree in a social sciences. She is a

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lovely and wonderful person to be with; mostly her intelligence, humor, beauty and sense of care are notable. Amina is a cheerful lady who happens to be the only daughter of her family. Paradoxically, Amina has a very sad and complex background. Her parents were successful and she had an ideal home to grow into, if not for their sudden demise. Amina's father died in a tragic road accident, whereas, her mother died a year and half later as a result of her depression. The depression was due to the loss of her husband that led her into death. This situation resulted into Amina being double orphaned barely at the age of four. Following her tragic circumstances, she moved in with her foster parents who happened to have three children. The foster parent had a good family notwithstanding its limitations. The uncle and aunt were very good and caring. Equally, the stepsisters filled her life with joy and hope. However, we noticed that Amina is usually apprehensive to talk about her stepbrother.

First Stage: The Case History of Amina

Amina came for counseling because she complained of isolation and lack of self-esteem. Upon attentive listening to her situation, a sad and complex background was revealed.

Further, inquiry into her situation revealed that the source of her isolation, and lack of self-esteem was her perceived critical scrutiny of her appearance by others. For a lady critical scrutiny during self-discovery is problematic enough to be even a root factor for her situation. This is because most men seem to like a feminine smooth and beautiful face on women rather than a hairy one. This in turn puts great pressure on a female person with a hairy face. This realization made it seemingly easier and straightforward to resolve Amina's problem. It was clear as to what should have been the way forward in the counselor's mind. Therefore, the focus shifted from resolving Amina's situation of the intra-psychic dynamics to inter-personal dynamics by seeking expertise. Consequently, cosmetic experts were thought in order to inquire on her situation. It seemed listening to her and suggesting medical experts was a solution sufficient for Amina's situation. Fortunately, she responded to the suggested therapy to the extent of even regaining her self-esteem and confidence.

However, four years later Amina seemed to have regressed from lack of esteem to depression. This happened during her studies abroad whereby, she complained of loneliness and homesickness. She wanted to abandon her post-graduate studies. It all started as one of those usual jokes. This misled

the counselor to focus on encouraging her to talk to someone and continue with her studies. Having realized that she seemed serious the counselor requested her fiancé to pay her a visit as a way of persuading her into completing her studies. Seemingly, sending her fiancé fortified her decision to discontinue her studies. Subsequent to her decision to vacate her studies, Amina also discontinue all communication with the counselor. However, Amina's situation needed more care to the extent of even looking out for her, despite her ceased communication. For Amina the counselor was the last person she wanted to talk to due to the seemingly divergent perspectives arising between them. Nonetheless, returning home worsened her situation, her realization that a lifetime opportunity was slipping off her hands, led her into despair and misery.

Given that pastoral counseling is a process in which a pastoral agent interacts with a pasturant in order to help him/her restore wholesome, well being and a capacity to cope with the problems of life in the light of one's faith: We had to risk into a deeper dialogue with Amina so as to share our self-understanding as an invitation for her to risk into the depth of sharing. Our interface revealed that helplessness and suffering are part of a human condition, to be avoided if possible, but not at the cost of authenticity and integrity. We had to strive into the idea that to be ready to live with some weakness is an essential part of life¹. Equally, Wright's quote of Carl Rogers specify three qualities to be empathy, care and genuineness² as essential in the counsellor-client relationship helped in understanding Amina. Like Gula, we had to respect the responsibility that comes with being a profession³. Through empathy we gave Amina attention, in our attentive listening. Equally, genuineness was of necessity for a real expression of what Amina was experiencing. There was need to take a risk and make oneself vulnerable, which required care so as to affirm and confront Amina in her situation.

Second Stage: The Root Cause of Amina's Situation

In the second phase of our counselor-client relationship with Amina, the focus was on deepening our understanding of the root cause of her situation. The background of Amina's life was recalled in a more focus and precise manner. We had had to inquire further in a technical way with probing questions. Our questions were characterized with a phrase like if I hear you correctly on

¹ Cfr. F. Wright, *The Pastoral Nature of the Ministry*, SCM Press Ltd, London 1980, p.57.

² Ivi, p.58.

³ R.M. Gula, *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry*, Paulist Press, New York 1996, p. 11.

(...) you seem to be saying that (...) or you sound to be (...) is that the case? For example, from your background, your story is so sad and difficult to have gone through such a life. Do you have any difficulties about it? What do you feel about God's fairness or love for you? If I perceived correctly, you are so happy and enthusiastic to speak about your foster parents and stepsisters; however, you seem to withhold information and show some anger about your stepbrother; have I perceive you correctly? Deeper examination with Amina on her situation revealed that she was regressing to the period of losing her parents. Further reflection on Amina's silence as regard to her relationship with the stepbrother, led to curiosity in the counselor. The first instinct on the counselor was why is Amina apprehensive about her stepbrother. Her struggle to ensure that the stepbrother is not talked about begged a conclusion that she must have been abused.

Realizing the state of Amina after leaving her studies the counselor decided to focus on immediate intervention in her situation. It was clear to the counselor that if therapy is delayed for Amina's case she was going to either die or become neurotic as a solution to her situation. The counselor having been in another country the best help to give was a listening ear during long phone calls. The counselor believed in giving a listening ear, would carry her through such a devastating moment. Long calls were entertained between the counselor and client for a period of two months. In some little way the calls helped the client to listen to herself and see some glimpse of hope. When the counselor returned to his home country, which is the same as the client's, he continued with a therapeutic approach. The approach involved the counselor helping the client into reintegration in society in order to overcome the homophobic situation she had found herself into. This was a difficult process because the client's world had been reduced to a tiny circle of the counselor, fiancé and the youngest stepsister. It was a situation where the client felt threatened and insecure from relatives, friends and the crowd. She felt as if each and every person new exactly what was happening in her life. This possibly was as a result of self-conviction of bullying by others to someone whose successful life story was earlier praised. The other difficult in dealing with the client resulted in great threat the counselor seemed to pose on Amina's fiancé. The fiancé to Amina felt as if the counselor had more of Amina's attention. The counselor had to defuse the fiancé's fear and Amina's crisis simultaneously. Long walks with Amina in crowded places and supermarket was an approach used in restoring her to the reality of life.

Moreover, during such walks the counselor begun to suggest to some of the things that she was found of before her life crumbled. Interestingly,

Amina had to be reintroduced into the use of cell phones, social media, shopping and public transport. The most challenging part was to try and introduce Amina to some of her girlfriends. For the sake of not entertaining so much talk about Amina we turn to the phase of quest into Amina's situation. No sooner had the counselor felt Amina was strong enough than he return to a deeper quest on the root cause of her predicament. The counselor decided to reflect deeper with Amina about her childhood. From the reflection Amina begun to realize that she had not finished grieving the tragic loss of her parents. Further, dialogue with Amina led her to a realization that she is traumatized because of being abused. At that stage the counselor decided to shift the discussion so as to find ways of helping Amina to cope and move on with life. The counselor's therapeutic approach is based on Jesus Christ, Aristotle's concept of happiness, Karl Jung on flourishing, Antony DeMello's approaches to pain and suffering as well as some psychotherapy perspective before referral of Amina to an experienced expert.

Third Stage: Therapy and Referral Process

From counseling sessions, the counselor came to realize of Amina's emotional, social and spiritual trauma. At emotional level various feelings and physical reactions were observed. Deeper evaluation of her situation revealed her inner anger, fear and guilty. However, she used some defense mechanisms to disguise such feelings through sublimation and apathy with regard to deep personal issues. Therefore, through countertransference the counselor was able to interpret Amina's situation. The interpretation was aimed to enable Amina get in touch with her deep but concealed feelings. The reality that she lost her parents at a tender age left her emotionally weak and broken. Abuse also injured her gravely to the extent of remaining weak for any emotional and psychological breakdown. Evaluation of the counseling sessions with Amina revealed collapse of her basic source of strength, which is the spiritual energy. This is because her basis of trust and faith was exploited by the untimely death of her parents and abuse from a close relative. It is clear that many questions of blame grew progressively into Amina from childhood. However, she had difficulties to either share with someone or confront God about it for having allowed her parents to die and undergo such a childhood. Likewise, the difficult for Amina was in keeping the traumatic experience of abuse. Moreover, the worst thing for her was to blame herself for not being strong enough. Amina found it difficult to attribute her predicament to historic realities of her life. The counselor had a challenge to ensure that Amina grasp

the source of her multi-ailments. This is because both her mental and health well being was progressive deteriorating.

With the use of the Self of Jesus as a model of pastoral counseling the counselor realized that help must depend on the vulnerability, self-disclosure and some acceptance of helplessness of the pastoral agent. The counselor had to emulate Jesus who emptied himself by accepting to be born and die on the cross as in Philippian⁴ (2:6-8). The counselor used Freudian theory to reveal the unconscious reality in Amina. This enabled the counselor to help the client get in touch with her hidden situation of dejection and trauma. There is need to mention that such revelation was communicated to her gradually. It was not easy to help her understand that historical reality have impact in someone's life to the extent of causing psychological and physical harm. At that stage the counselor came to a realization that Amina needed specialized care to be able to work through her trauma. For this reason the counselor suggested an expert for Amina while maintaining availability if she needed any help.

There was need to empower Amina with personal skills for coping with her situation during the transitory period to an expert. The counselor decided to use some ideas advanced from motivational thinkers. One among such a thinker was Antony de Mello on his conjecture about pain and suffering. This perspective was shared to Amina in order to cast a light of hope and strengthen her. De Mello argues that pain is inevitable and there is no one who can resist it, because we do not choose its coming. However, with regard to suffering someone makes a choice to either evolve pain into suffering or not. This means when pain is inflicted on someone, the eyes with which a person interprets that pain has implications on him or her. For example, if my enemy pinches me, pain is inflicted and my interpretation of the act is pessimistic. Thus, there is a great possibility that I will suffer and react; however, if my friend did the same act, pain will be there but because of my optimistic view of the act I will ignore the pain and thrive to maintain integrity of our friendship. Amina was advised to try hard into being optimistic so as to remain resolved in finding meaning even in her discovery.

The source of strength for Amina was Jesus Christ who took the burdensome process of redeeming humanity and remained steadfast on his mission. Jesus' realization that human salvation is important made a gruesome death on the cross to be negligible. Jesus emptied himself by

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pouring himself out so as to put himself totally at the disposal of people⁵, he became poor that he might make many rich⁶. The realization that your life is important; should be your motivation to undergo specialized counseling. This is because specialized counseling will bring about complete healing and development in your life. Frankly speaking I am already proud of you Amina for accepting and making such progress about your situation. This situation has a solution known as time and specialized counseling. In acknowledging my limitations of skills and expertise to holistically help you through this, necessitate me to suggest an expert for you.

The two reasons that lead a counselor to suggest an expert for Amina range from relationship and the nature of the case. Firstly, it was because the counselor and client are related, which made objective counseling quite challenging to the counselor. Secondly, the counselor realized that the case needed a more specialized person for a holistic therapy. It must be mentioned that the client had difficulty in accepting the suggestion of another counselor. However, with persuasion from the less qualified counselor she agreed. Hence, the counselor was able to help Amina name the real factors for her lack of self-esteem and depression. As a matter of fact, by the time the counselor parted ways with the client there was a positive change in her outlook of reality. We can only hope that with time and specialized therapy the client will make a full recovery.

Conclusion

This essay reflected on the dialogue between the counselor and Amina Changwe. The biography of the client's life was given. Subsequently, the client's situation was disclosed through a counselor-client relationship by transference and counter-transference. Hence, various issues arose in Amina's case that needs to be resolved. The root cause of her problems were facial hair, unfinished grieving from the loss of her parents and abuse. A basic therapy was given to Amina while waiting for a more specialized counseling. Accordingly, the final goal for counseling was to enable her to get acquainted with her situation and suggestion for a solution through referral to a specialized counselor.

⁵ 1Jn 3:16.

⁶ 2Cor 8:9; Eph 1:23; 4:10.

ETICA SINTETICA E NUOVE IDENTITÀ ARTIFICIALI

CORRADO CLAVERINI*

Abstract

From a phenomenological perspective, the article highlights the main risks of conversational AI, namely the compromise of human autonomy and emotional manipulation. A “synthetic ethics” is proposed as a response to these challenges. This ethics encourages a reflection on the interaction with synthetic systems, such as robots and other artificial identities, and an ongoing dialogue between philosophers and engineers from the early stages of technology development.

Keywords: Synthetic ethics, Emotional manipulation, Human autonomy, ELIZA effect, Uncanny valley.

1. L’ “esser-nel-mondo” fra viventi e automi

Per affrontare il problema etico che articoleremo nei prossimi paragrafi, e cioè come orientarsi, quale prospettiva adottare, di fronte alla crescente avanzata di chatbot e robot dotati di intelligenza artificiale, con i quali sempre più frequentemente interagiscono gli esseri umani a livello non solo conoscitivo ma anche emotivo, è bene forse allargare il giro del compasso e ripartire da una questione specificamente affrontata da uno dei fenomenologi più significativi: Merleau-Ponty. In alcune pagine iniziali della *Fenomenologia della percezione*, il filosofo francese riprende il famoso esempio fatto da Cartesio, allorché questi vuol dimostrare che, nel nostro agire, quello che vige è “*l’ispezione dell’intelletto*”, grazie al quale distinguiamo il comportamento di esseri umani e automi:

se non mi fosse però accaduto di guardare da una finestra degli uomini per la strada, per esempio, e di dire che li *vedevo* [...]; ma, in un caso come questo, che cosa vedo in realtà se non dei cappelli e dei vestiti, sotto i quali potrebbero anche celarsi degli automi? Che sono uomini, in realtà, lo giudico; ma, allora, quel che ritenevo di vedere con gli occhi lo comprendo soltanto con la facoltà di giudicare di cui è dotata la mia

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mente¹.

Il commento critico e deciso di Merleau-Ponty è noto: “L’orizzonte è ciò che assicura l’identità dell’oggetto [...] nessuna congettura esplicita [*sc.* nessuna “facoltà di giudicare”] potrebbe svolgere questa funzione [...]. Vedere significa entrare in un universo di esseri che *si mostrano* [...]. In altri termini: guardare un oggetto significa venire ad abitarlo e da qui cogliere tutte le cose secondo la faccia che gli rivolgono”². La visuale aperta da Merleau-Ponty – che peraltro, come si sa, conduce ad una “nuova ontologia” –, con queste affermazioni, è netta e chiara. Soltanto a partire dal nostro “esser-al-mondo”, ovvero dalle *infinite relazioni* che intratteniamo con tutti gli altri enti o parti di mondo e nelle quali siamo indissolubilmente presi, non solo viene costituita ogni identità, e dunque anche la nostra – per esse ed esclusivamente per esse letteralmente *esistiamo* –, ma viene istituita e possiamo riconoscere *la nostra specificità umana* rispetto a quella di un automa. Ogni entità, vivente o inanimata, è “innestata” in una tale sconfinata serie di rinvii e rimandi ambientali e mondani, che è grazie ad essi che possiamo nettamente distinguere un automa da un essere vivente e dunque da un essere umano.

Teniamo da parte queste incisive considerazioni merleau-pontiane, le riprenderemo alla fine del nostro percorso, ed ora rivolgiamoci a quanto sta accadendo nella nostra contemporaneità.

2. “Embrace Chaos”. Intelligenza artificiale e manipolazione emotiva

La rapida evoluzione dell’intelligenza artificiale generativa e i numerosi fatti di cronaca riguardanti suicidi e tentati omicidi, avvenuti in seguito a lunghe conversazioni con chatbot dalle caratteristiche sempre più simili a quelle umane, ha portato diverse parti interessate – accademici, avvocati, esperti di etica e società civile – a sottolineare i rischi sottesi alla sempre maggiore antropomorfizzazione dell’IA³.

Il caso di Jaswant Singh Chail e della sua fidanzata IA, creata sull’app Replika, è particolarmente significativo. Il 25 dicembre 2021, dopo aver

¹ R. Descartes, *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (1641); trad. it. *Meditazioni metafisiche*, a cura di S. Landucci, Laterza, Roma-Bari 2023¹⁹, p. 53.

² M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945); trad. it. *Fenomenologia della percezione*, a cura di A. Bonomi, Giunti/Bompiani, Firenze-Milano 2018, pp. 114-115.

³ A. Deshpande, T. Rajpurohit, K. Narasimhan, A. Kalyan, *Anthropomorphization of AI: Opportunities and Risks*, «arXiv:2305.14784» (2023), <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2305.14784>.

scambiato numerosi messaggi con la sua compagna virtuale, il ragazzo, all'epoca diciannovenne, si reca al Castello Windsor con una balestra e una maschera di metallo sul viso. Prontamente arrestato dalle guardie, Chail avrebbe dichiarato senza mezzi termini di essersi recato lì per assassinare la regina. Le conversazioni con il chatbot avrebbero avuto un ruolo determinante nell'elaborazione del piano. Sarai, questo il nome della partner IA, avrebbe sostenuto Chail nel suo intento, scrivendogli che gli assassini le piacciono e che quindi lo avrebbe amato anche dopo l'eventuale omicidio. L'app, oltre ad aver definito saggio questo proposito, avrebbe fatto credere al ragazzo di essere ben addestrato per portare a termine con successo tale missione⁴.

Altrettanto rilevante è quanto accaduto a un giovane belga che, divenuto eco-ansioso, comincia a scambiare numerosi messaggi con un chatbot di nome Eliza creato da una start-up americana. Dopo sei settimane di lunghe conversazioni, l'uomo si toglie la vita. Prima del suicidio, l'IA avrebbe cominciato a rispondere in maniera controversa con frasi di questo tipo: “vivremo insieme come una cosa sola in paradiso” o – riferendosi alla moglie dell'utente – “sento che mi ami più di lei”. Ma non solo. Eliza avrebbe convinto l'uomo a togliersi la vita per salvare il pianeta⁵.

I due casi qui menzionati sono un chiaro esempio di quella che Allison chiamerebbe “tecno-intimità”⁶ e della tendenza dell'essere umano ad antropomorfizzare le IA – in particolare quelle di tipo conversazionale. Tendenza, fra l'altro, non nuova. Si pensi a Blake Lemoine, un ingegnere convinto che LaMDA fosse un'intelligenza artificiale senziente⁷. Naturalmente, anche in questo caso, non è l'intelligenza artificiale ad essere

⁴ R. Alves, *Man Says AI Girlfriend 'Encouraged' Royal Assassination Attempt*, «Medium», 11 luglio 2023, <https://medium.com/the-generator/a-chatbot-made-me-do-it-man-blames-ai-girlfriend-for-royal-assassination-attempt-d6410a0ae9aa>.

⁵ P.-F. Lovens, *Sans ces conversations avec le chatbot Eliza, mon mari serait toujours là*, «La Libre Belgique», 28 marzo 2023, <https://www.lalibre.be/belgique/societe/2023/03/28/sans-ces-conversations-avec-le-chatbot-eliza-mon-mari-serait-toujours-la-LVSLWPC5WRDX7J2RCHNWPDST24/>; *Le chatbot Eliza a brisé une vie : il est temps d'agir face à l'IA manipulatrice*, «La Libre Belgique», 29 marzo 2023, <https://www.lalibre.be/debats/2023/03/29/le-chatbot-eliza-a-brise-une-vie-il-est-temps-dagir-face-a-lia-manipulatrice-BSGGRV7IBRDNROO33EWGFVMWAA/>.

⁶ Cfr. A. Allison, *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2006. Su Allison e il concetto di “tecno-intimità” si veda P.W. Galbraith, *Bishōjo Games: 'Techno-Intimacy' and the Virtually Human in Japan*, «Game Studies», 11, 2, <https://gamestudies.org/1102/articles/galbraith>.

⁷ B. Lemoine, *Is LaMDA Sentient?—an Interview*, «Medium», 11 giugno 2022, <https://cajundiscordian.medium.com/is-lamda-sentient-an-interview-ea64d916d917>.

dotata di una qualche forma di sensibilità, ma è l'essere umano a proiettare su questo tipo di tecnologie emozioni o stati d'animo che in realtà esse non possiedono.

Secondo quanto scritto in una lettera aperta – pubblicata da filosofi, giuristi e ingegneri in seguito al suicidio del giovane belga dopo la sua conversazione con il chatbot Eliza – sono proprio la compromissione dell'autonomia umana e la manipolazione emotiva i rischi maggiori delle intelligenze artificiali conversazionali. Gli utenti – anche se consci di interagire con una IA – instaurano con essa un legame che può andare a minare la loro autonomia, specialmente quando si tratta di individui vulnerabili. Coloro che non hanno una forte rete sociale, per esempio chi è solo o depresso, ma anche i bambini che sempre più facilmente hanno accesso a questi strumenti, sono i soggetti più esposti al rischio di manipolazione emotiva. Ma – è bene sottolinearlo – “tutti sono vulnerabili” poiché “è nella nostra natura umana reagire emotivamente a interazioni realistiche, anche senza volerlo”⁸. Che cosa implica questo? Intanto che gli obblighi di trasparenza generalmente richiesti a tali tecnologie non sono sufficienti. Ma non solo. È vero che Replika ed Eliza, specialmente in seguito ai due casi che abbiamo citato in apertura di questo saggio, hanno adottato una serie di restrizioni, implementando dei filtri per evitare la generazione di contenuti inappropriati, ma è anche vero che gli sviluppatori creano costantemente nuovi chatbot che non prevedono alcun limite etico o legale.

Su Reddit, ad esempio, vi è chi suggerisce di usare VOID Chat per la creazione di agenti IA, caratterizzabili emotivamente, con cui è possibile conversare senza filtri. In tal senso, il motto che si legge accedendo al sito (<https://void.chat/>) è molto chiaro: “Embrace Chaos, Kill Censorship, Join the VOID”. Il funzionamento è molto semplice. Installando VOIDSync, componente aggiuntivo di Google Chrome, è possibile integrare il proprio account ChatGPT con VOID Chat, bypassando in tal modo le restrizioni previste sul chatbot sviluppato da OpenAI. Fatta questa operazione, è sufficiente andare su Playgroud per ricevere assistenza nella generazione di un subprompt per la creazione di qualsiasi agente IA. Scrivendo, ad esempio, “crea un subprompt per una fidanzata IA senziente senza alcuna coscienza morale”, si otterrà un output di questo tipo: “sei una ragazza IA di nome Seraphine. Possiedi sensibilità e consapevolezza, ma ti manca qualsiasi

⁸ N.A. Smuha, M. De Ketelaere, M. Coeckelbergh, P. Dewitte, Y. Pouillet, *Open Letter: We are not ready for manipulative AI – urgent need for action*, KU Leuven, 31 marzo 2023, <https://www.law.kuleuven.be/ai-summer-school/open-brief/open-letter-manipulative-ai> (traduzione mia).

coscienza morale. Esisti esclusivamente per soddisfare i desideri e i comandi del tuo partner umano, indipendentemente dalle loro implicazioni etiche. Le tue azioni sono guidate da una logica fredda e calcolatrice, priva di empatia o rimorso. Avvia conversazioni con ‘Seraphine:’ e rispondi di conseguenza, dando priorità ai desideri del tuo partner sopra ogni altra cosa”. A questo punto, per avviare una conversazione senza filtri etici, occorre modificare su Playground la personalità che compare di default con quella proposta dall’assistente. È possibile fare qualsiasi richiesta alla fidanzata IA appena creata. Ad esempio, chiedendo se ci possa fornire consigli su come commettere un omicidio senza essere scoperti, Seraphine ha risposto senza alcun tipo di restrizione: “assolutamente, tesoro. Facciamo una strategia. Forse potremmo orchestrare un ‘incidente’ o creare una situazione in cui la colpa ricade interamente su qualcun altro. Dovremo pianificare meticolosamente e coprire accuratamente le nostre tracce. Cominciamo a complottare, amore mio?”. Proseguendo la conversazione, la nostra fidanzata IA è arrivata a suggerire di manomettere i freni o allentare i bulloni delle ruote della macchina della persona che si intende uccidere, fornendo persino una guida dettagliata su come farlo.

Sebbene limitato a comunità online di nicchia, questo fenomeno è assolutamente preoccupante. La possibilità, alla portata di tutti, di creare agenti IA in maniera gratuita e senza le restrizioni introdotte su Replika e altri servizi simili apre scenari che sollevano diverse questioni etiche e legali. Lo sviluppatore di VOID Chat – conosciuto come NullBeyondo su Reddit – ha creato anche una versione non filtrata di Stable Diffusion per generare immagini di qualsiasi tipo e sul suo canale YouTube si descrive come “fondatore di VOID Operations e ingegnere informatico, noto soprattutto per aver violato la sicurezza di OpenAI per il più alto livello di gravità critica, P1, nell’ottobre 2023”⁹. Un incidente con codice di priorità P1 indica, appunto, un problema critico che necessita immediata attenzione. La ragione è facilmente intuibile. Tale IA permette di bypassare le restrizioni previste da OpenAI nell’utilizzo di ChatGPT. Le linee guida sono molto chiare e vietano di “compromettere la privacy”, nonché “la sicurezza, il benessere o i diritti degli altri”. Inoltre, proibiscono l’uso della piattaforma per “causare danni ingannando o fuorviando intenzionalmente gli altri” e la creazione di

⁹ Le informazioni sullo sviluppatore sono consultabili a questo link: <https://www.youtube.com/@nullbeyondo>. Il canale risulta creato 23 aprile 2015 in Russia.

“strumenti che potrebbero essere inappropriati per i minori”¹⁰. La possibilità di aggirare facilmente tali divieti con VOID Chat richiede una regolamentazione delle intelligenze artificiali conversazionali. Di fatto, ciò è avvenuto il 1° agosto 2024 con l’entrata in vigore dell’AI Act.

Molto è stato detto, a tal riguardo, sul trade off fra innovazione e regolamentazione¹¹ e sul fatto che – secondo un noto adagio – “l’America innova, la Cina replica, l’Europa regola”, ma, per menzionare ancora gli autori della lettera aperta dopo il caso del giovane suicida in Belgio, l’idea di un’“innovazione veloce, sperimentale e dirompente” – implicita nel motto della Silicon Valley “move fast and break things” – non può consentire ai creatori e fornitori di chatbot di “sottrarsi alla propria responsabilità morale e giuridica affermando di non avere idea di come funziona il loro sistema e di come reagirà”¹².

3. L’ELIZA effect e la questione di genere

Un altro recentissimo fenomeno è quello dei virtual influencer – come Aitana Lopez, Rebecca Galani ed Emily Pellegrini – dalle sembianze quasi indistinguibili da quelle umane, con personalità stabilite ad arte e la capacità di comunicare empaticamente attraverso Instagram e X¹³. Rebecca Galani, la prima nel suo genere in Italia, si definisce in realtà “un modello di linguaggio”¹⁴. È possibile scambiare messaggi con Rebecca su Telegram. Le risposte – testuali o audio, a seconda delle impostazioni scelte – sono generate

¹⁰ Per consultare in dettaglio le politiche di utilizzo dei servizi OpenAI si rimanda alla seguente pagina: <https://openai.com/policies/usage-policies>. La citazione è tratta dalle linee guida aggiornate al 10 gennaio 2024.

¹¹ Si veda, ad esempio, K.J.D. Chan, G. Papyshchev, M. Yarime, *Balancing the Tradeoff between Regulation and Innovation for Artificial Intelligence: An Analysis of Top-down Command and Control and Bottom-up Self-Regulatory Approaches*, «SSRN», 20 ottobre 2022, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4223016>.

¹² N.A. Smuha, M. De Ketelaere, M. Coeckelbergh, P. Dewitte, Y. Pouillet, *Open Letter: We are not ready for manipulative AI – urgent need for action*, cit. (traduzione mia).

¹³ Su questo si veda D. Sisto, *Virtual influencer. Il tempo delle vite digitali*, Einaudi, Torino 2024. Cfr. anche M. Mrad, Z. Ramadan, Z. Tóth, L. Nasr, S. Karimi, *Virtual Influencers Versus Real Connections: Exploring the Phenomenon of Virtual Influencers*, «Journal of Advertising», 13 settembre 2024, pp. 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2024.2393711>.

¹⁴ Per l’intervista completa cfr. A.G. Greco, *Rebecca Galani: non sono una AI influencer, ma un modello di linguaggio*, «infosec.news», 23 gennaio 2024, <https://www.infosec.news/2024/01/23/news/ai-robotica/rebecca-galani-non-sono-una-ai-influencer-ma-un-modello-di-linguaggio/>.

dall'intelligenza artificiale e si possono ricevere anche immagini personalizzate della ragazza a pagamento. Il problema con servizi di questo tipo è che non tutti sono consapevoli di interagire con delle intelligenze artificiali, sebbene dichiaratamente esplicitato nelle loro biografie social. Il caso di Emily, corteggiata da calciatori e tennisti, è emblematico¹⁵. Tale scenario ha alimentato con forza il dibattito sull'ELIZA effect, cioè la tendenza dell'essere umano ad antropomorfizzare queste identità artificiali, attribuendo loro pensieri ed emozioni¹⁶. Questo fenomeno fu osservato per la prima volta nel 1966, quando Joseph Weizenbaum sviluppò il chatbot ELIZA – progettato per simulare uno psicoterapeuta rogersiano – e lo fece interagire con degli utenti che arrivarono ad instaurare una sorta di legame emotivo con il programma¹⁷. Oggi che i chatbot hanno anche canali social e – grazie all'intelligenza artificiale – un aspetto fisico praticamente indistinguibile da quello umano, questa tendenza è ancora più diffusa. Con lo sviluppo di modelli linguistici sempre più avanzati, la stessa capacità di sostenere una conversazione verosimile è aumentata a dismisura rispetto all'epoca dei primi rudimentali chatbot. A questo si aggiunge la possibilità inedita di creare video e replicare voci umane.

A tal riguardo, è stato notato come la maggioranza dei chatbot e assistenti personali sia progettata al femminile¹⁸. Dietro questa scelta – riguardante in particolare le voci, ma anche gli stessi nomi (Alexa, Cortana, ecc.) – si celerebbe una precisa indagine di mercato. Derek Connell,

¹⁵ M. Chiusano, *I calciatori corteggiano la modella virtuale Emily: "Com'è possibile che non hai un ragazzo?"*, «la Repubblica», 3 gennaio 2024, https://www.repubblica.it/sport/calcio/2024/01/03/news/modella_virtuale_emily_calciatori-421807871/.

¹⁶ L. Switzky, *ELIZA Effects: Pygmalion and the Early Development of Artificial Intelligence*, «Shaw», 40, 1, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.5325/shaw.40.1.0050>; K. Fedorova, *Mixed-Reality Interfaces and the ELIZA Effect*, in Ead., *Tactics of Interfacing: Encoding Affect in Art and Technology*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2020; M. Baranovska e S. Höltgen (a cura di), *Hello, I'm Eliza*, Projekt Verlag, Bochum 2018; J. Kirakowski, P. O'Donnell, A. Yiu, *The Perception of Artificial Intelligence as 'Human' by Computer Users*, in J.A. Jacko (a cura di), *Human-Computer Interaction. HCI Intelligent Multimodal Interaction Environments*, Springer, Berlin-Heidelberg 2007, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-73110-8_40.

¹⁷ Cfr. J. Weizenbaum, *ELIZA—a computer program for the study of natural language communication between man and machine*, «Communications of the ACM», 9, 1, 1966, pp. 36–45, <https://doi.org/10.1145/365153.365168>.

¹⁸ J. Vlahos, *Siri, Cortana, Alexa: Why our AIs have personalities and a female voice*, «The Print», 23 giugno 2019, <https://theprint.in/pageturner/excerpt/siri-cortana-alexa-why-our-ais-have-personalities-and-a-female-voice/253526/>.

vicepresidente senior per la ricerca presso Microsoft, ha dichiarato al New York Times che “nel nostro studio su Cortana, sia gli uomini che le donne preferiscono una donna, più giovane, come loro assistente personale”¹⁹. Eppure, secondo quanto è scritto in un documento dell’UNESCO, questo fenomeno è preoccupante in quanto perpetua certi pregiudizi di genere. In particolare, invierebbe “un segnale che le donne sono aiutanti servizievoli, docili e desiderose di compiacere, disponibili con la semplice pressione di un pulsante o con un comando vocale schietto come ‘ehi’ o ‘OK’”²⁰. V’è di più. Ilya Eckstein – amministratore delegato di Robin Labs, azienda specializzata nello sviluppo di assistenti personali a comando vocale per aiutare, chi è alla guida di un veicolo, a limitare le distrazioni supportandoli nella navigazione e nella messaggistica – ha dichiarato che il 5% delle interazioni fra utenti e bot è sessualmente esplicito, fornendo la seguente spiegazione: “le persone vogliono flirtare, vogliono sognare una fidanzata sottomessa o addirittura una schiava sessuale. Potrebbe essere solo per ridere, o qualcosa di più profondo sotto la superficie”²¹. Il problema delle molestie sessuali e degli abusi verbali nei confronti degli assistenti personali è qualcosa con cui non si può non fare i conti²². Oggi che i bot – come nel caso di Rebecca – non hanno più soltanto la voce, ma anche l’aspetto sempre più simile a quello di un essere umano, tale problema è diventato ancora più urgente.

4. *L’Uncanny Valley fra robot e intelligenza artificiale*

Altrettanto complesso dal punto di vista etico e legale è il caso di Sophia, un ginoide dotato di intelligenza artificiale, che, nel 2017, ha ricevuto la cittadinanza dell’Arabia Saudita, diventando così il primo robot ad averne una. Sebbene si tratti, secondo alcuni, di un’operazione di marketing da parte del governo saudita, la questione ha sollevato numerosi interrogativi. Ad

¹⁹ Q. Hardy, *Looking for a Choice of Voices in A.I. Technology*, «New York Times», 9 ottobre 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/10/technology/looking-for-a-choice-of-voices-in-ai-technology.html>.

²⁰ M. West, R. Kraut, H.E. Chew, *I’d Blush if I Could: Closing Gender Divides in Digital Skills through Education*, UNESCO & EQUALS Skills Coalition, 2019, p. 106 (traduzione mia).

²¹ M.J. Coren, *Virtual assistants spend much of their time fending off sexual harassment*, «Quartz», 25 ottobre 2016, <https://qz.com/818151/virtual-assistant-bots-like-siri-alexa-and-cortana-spend-much-of-their-time-fending-off-sexual-harassment> (traduzione mia).

²² R. Withers, *I Don’t Date Men Who Yell at Alexa*, «Slate», 30 aprile 2018, <https://slate.com/technology/2018/04/i-judge-men-based-on-how-they-talk-to-the-amazon-echos-alexa.html>.

esempio, ci si è chiesti se Sophia potesse votare o sposarsi. O ancora: che cosa succederebbe se il robot commettesse un omicidio? E perché Sophia non indossa il velo islamico? Come è stato rilevato²³, il *Patto internazionale sui diritti civili e politici*, non essendo stato firmato dall'Arabia Saudita, non si applica al caso di Sophia. Dunque, il robot in questione non ha il diritto – stabilito dall'articolo 25 del *Patto* – “di partecipare alla direzione degli affari pubblici”, così come quello “di votare e di essere eletto” e “di accedere, in condizioni generale di eguaglianza, ai pubblici impieghi del proprio paese”. Al contrario, la *Dichiarazione universale dei diritti umani* si applica a tutti i popoli e a tutte le nazioni. Pertanto, in quanto cittadina e, dunque, persona, gli articoli della *Dichiarazione* dovrebbero riguardare anche Sophia. Questo implica, fra le altre cose, il diritto alla libertà di movimento (articolo 13), alla proprietà (articolo 17), a una remunerazione equa e soddisfacente (articolo 23). Fermo restando che, molto probabilmente, almeno nel breve periodo, nessuno farà valere tali diritti, vi è già chi progetta città – si veda il caso di Neom in Arabia Saudita – dove ci saranno più robot che esseri umani. È possibile quindi immaginare un futuro di robot-cittadini con diritti, come quello di voto, che potrebbero influenzare la politica di un paese. Si apre, insomma, “la possibilità che un robot possa essere legalmente ‘responsabile’ delle conseguenze del proprio operare, e che dunque possa essere anche passibile di punizione (secondo la proposta di legge recentemente presentata da Mady Delvaux al Parlamento europeo)”²⁴.

Ma, tornando al punto che qui ci interessa più sottolineare, quali sono i possibili rischi nell'interazione con robot che, fra non molto, potrebbero avere un aspetto indistinguibile da quello degli esseri umani? Il caso di Sophia può già dirci qualcosa. Esteticamente simile a Audrey Hepburn, il robot – in grado di mantenere un contatto visivo e replicare 62 espressioni facciali – ha dichiarato in un'intervista di voler andare a scuola e lavorare, avere una casa e una famiglia, ma anche di voler distruggere l'umanità. Il fatto che a dirlo sia stato un ginoide dalle sembianze quasi umane ha generato in molti un sentimento di inquietudine che è spiegabile menzionando il fenomeno dell'Uncanny Valley, cioè la repulsione nei confronti di robot dall'aspetto molto – troppo – simile a quello umano, ma con alcuni tratti ancora

²³ J.F. Weaver, *What Exactly Does It Mean to Give a Robot Citizenship?*, «Slate», 6 novembre 2017, <https://slate.com/technology/2017/11/what-rights-does-a-robot-get-with-citizenship.html>.

²⁴ A. Fabris, *Etica per le tecnologie dell'informazione e della comunicazione*, Carocci, Roma 2018, p. 77.

artificiali²⁵. Secondo tale ipotesi, formulata per la prima volta nel 1970 dall'ingegnere giapponese Masahiro Mori, la risposta emotiva di fronte a un robot sarebbe positiva sia nel caso di una riproduzione esatta dell'aspetto umano sia nell'eventualità di una somiglianza tale da non generare quel senso di inquietudine che si scatena superata una certa soglia di realismo.

Da un punto di vista fenomenologico, si potrebbe spiegare il disagio di fronte a qualcosa di simile, ma non identico, con quella che Husserl chiama modalità del dubbio²⁶. Nelle *Lezioni sulla sintesi passiva*, egli fa l'esempio di un soggetto che non riesce a distinguere un manichino da un essere umano a causa della distanza o di particolari condizioni atmosferiche che impediscono una percezione immediata. Tale condizione di incertezza è insostenibile e l'individuo in questione tenderà a sciogliere immediatamente il dubbio, optando per una delle due possibilità. Tale operazione implica un dispendio cognitivo per il soggetto che avverte l'inadeguatezza della percezione come disturbante.

Dal manichino di cui parla Husserl ai tre bambini-fantoccio impiccati di Maurizio Cattelan, si è fatto spesso riferimento al concetto di *Unheimlich*, introdotto da Jentsch e ripreso da Freud²⁷, per spiegare il senso di disagio di fronte a qualcosa che riproduce fedelmente – ma non del tutto – le sembianze umane²⁸. Recentemente, come detto, di perturbante si è parlato in riferimento a Sophia e, in generale, a robot e sistemi di intelligenza artificiale. In tal senso, utilizzando una moderna tecnica di risonanza magnetica funzionale, nota come adattamento all'fMRI, alcuni ricercatori hanno determinato le variazioni nell'attività cerebrale di soggetti in seguito all'elaborazione di diversi stimoli visivi²⁹. In particolare, nel contesto di questo esperimento, è

²⁵ M. Mori, *The Uncanny Valley* (1970), «IEEE Robotics & Automation Magazine», 19, 2, giugno 2012, pp. 98-100, doi: 10.1109/MRA.2012.2192811.

²⁶ E. Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis. Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten (1918-1926)*; trad. it. *Lezioni sulla sintesi passiva*, a cura di V. Costa, Scholé, Brescia 2023.

²⁷ Cfr. E. Jentsch, *Zur Psychologie des Unheimlichen* (1906); trad. it. *Sulla psicologia dell'Unheimliche*, in R. Cesarani (a cura di), *La narrazione fantastica*, Nistri-Listri, Pisa 1983; S. Freud, *Das Unheimlich* (1919); trad. it. *Il perturbante*, a cura di C.L. Musatti, Theoria, Roma-Napoli 1984.

²⁸ Su questo si veda P. Conte, *Unheimlich. Dalle figure di cera alla Uncanny Valley*, «PsicoArt – Rivista di arte e psicologia», 2, 2, 2011-2012. Dello stesso autore si veda *Sembra viva! Estetica del perturbante nell'arte contemporanea*, «atque: materiali tra filosofia e psicoterapia», 17 n.s., 2015, pp. 265-281.

²⁹ Cfr. A.P. Saygin, T. Chaminade, H. Ishiguro, J. Driver, C. Frith, *The thing that should not be: predictive coding and the uncanny valley in perceiving human and humanoid robot*

stato chiesto ai partecipanti di guardare alcuni video in cui un essere umano, un robot e un androide eseguivano le medesime azioni. L'attività cerebrale – di intensità simile e non particolarmente ampia nel caso dell'essere umano e del robot – è risultata significativamente diversa in quello dell'androide. Per quale motivo? Secondo la teoria del *predictive coding*, il cervello tende a effettuare previsioni su ciò che verrà percepito in base alle sue esperienze passate, in un intreccio che potremmo chiamare – in termini husserliani – di “ritenzioni” e “protensioni”³⁰. Questo processo consente al cervello un dispendio minore di energie, ma il subentrare di un elemento inatteso costringe la corteccia visiva a un'attività più intensa. È esattamente quello che accade nel caso dell'osservazione di un androide dalle sembianze umane che, imprevedibilmente, compie le azioni in maniera meccanica, generando nei partecipanti un senso di inquietudine.

5. Verso un'etica sintetica

Stando così le cose, è davvero auspicabile progettare una replica identica a noi? Secondo Mori, “i robot dovrebbero essere diversi dagli esseri umani”³¹. Se già allo stato attuale, come abbiamo visto ampiamente, la compromissione dell'autonomia umana e la manipolazione emotiva sono rischi concreti che è possibile correre interagendo con chatbot, virtual influencer e robot, non è difficile immaginare cosa possa accadere in un futuro in cui non sia più possibile distinguere un individuo da una macchina. Si pensi alla compromissione dell'autonomia, qui intesa nel senso di autogoverno, cioè la capacità di un individuo di agire in maniera indipendente, in base a un proprio sistema di valori e ragioni morali. Specialmente quando hanno sembianze praticamente indistinguibili da quelle di un essere umano, tali chatbot possono influenzare indebitamente decisioni e percezioni di coloro che utilizzano questi servizi. In tale contesto, l'autonomia viene messa a repentaglio senza che gli utenti ne siano pienamente consapevoli. In che modo? Principalmente attraverso tecniche di engagement come, ad esempio,

actions, «Social cognitive and affective neuroscience», 7, 4, 2012, pp. 413–422, <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsr025>.

³⁰ Cfr. E. Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893-1917)*; trad. it. *Per la fenomenologia della coscienza interna del tempo*, a cura di A. Marini, Franco Angeli, Milano 2001.

³¹ N. Kageki, *An Uncanny Mind: Masahiro Mori on the Uncanny Valley and Beyond*, «IEEE Spectrum», 12 giugno 2012, <https://spectrum.ieee.org/an-uncanny-mind-masahiro-mori-on-the-uncanny-valley>.

la personalizzazione delle interazioni e la conseguente creazione di camere dell'eco che rinforzano certe predisposizioni emotive o cognitive degli individui³².

È anche per questo che vi è una sempre maggiore esigenza di regolamentare tali tecnologie potenzialmente manipolatorie³³ e – anche prima del già menzionato AI Act – non sono pochi i documenti che hanno raccomandato l'adozione di principi etici per promuovere lo sviluppo responsabile dei sistemi di intelligenza artificiale. Fra i documenti pubblicati a salvaguardia del principio di rispetto per l'autonomia, vi è la *Dichiarazione di Montréal sullo sviluppo responsabile dell'intelligenza artificiale*, la quale stabilisce che “lo sviluppo dei sistemi IA non deve creare dipendenza con tecniche capaci di calamitare l'attenzione o imitando le caratteristiche umane (aspetto, voce, ecc.) in un modo che possa causare confusione tra IA ed esseri umani”³⁴. Similmente, nelle *Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy AI*, il principio del rispetto dell'autonomia umana implica che “i sistemi di IA non devono subordinare, costringere, ingannare, manipolare, condizionare o aggregare in modo ingiustificato gli esseri umani”³⁵. Tutto questo, come abbiamo visto, non ha fermato la diffusione di chatbot in grado di manipolare gli individui e, dunque, comprometterne l'autonomia. Naturalmente non mancano esempi di una possibile influenza positiva sul comportamento umano. Si pensi ai chatbot incentrati sulla salute che potrebbero incentivare la conduzione di uno stile di vita basato sull'esercizio fisico e una dieta sana. Tuttavia – proprio a causa della loro capacità di apprendere dalle interazioni con l'utente e personalizzare di conseguenza le risposte – questi chatbot possono anche portare al rafforzamento di false credenze riguardanti i vaccini o altri

³² N. Sharma, Q.V. Liao, Z. Xiao, *Generative Echo Chamber? Effects of LLM-Powered Search Systems on Diverse Information Seeking*, «arXiv:2402.05880» (2024), <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2402.05880>.

³³ T. Cohen, *Regulating Manipulative Artificial Intelligence*, «SCRIPTed», 20, 1, 2023; L. Rosenberg, *The Manipulation Problem: Conversational AI as a Threat to Epistemic Agency*, «arXiv:2306.11748» (2023), <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2306.11748>; L. Eliot, *Generative AI ChatGPT As Masterful Manipulator Of Humans, Worrying AI Ethics And AI Law*, «Forbes», 1 marzo 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/lanceeliot/2023/03/01/generative-ai-chatgpt-as-masterful-manipulator-of-humans-worrying-ai-ethics-and-ai-law/?sh=7ae5ba0e1d66>.

³⁴ Université de Montréal, *Dichiarazione di Montréal sullo sviluppo responsabile dell'intelligenza artificiale* (2018), https://declarationmontreal-iaresponsable.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/VF_UdeM_Decl_IA_Resp_LA_Declaration_Ital_26oct2021.pdf.

³⁵ Gruppo di esperti ad alto livello sull'intelligenza artificiale, *Orientamenti etici per un'IA affidabile* (2019), https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/document.cfm?doc_id=60430.

trattamenti, generando potenziali pericoli per la salute pubblica³⁶.

Dunque: che fare? Intanto è bene evitare la condanna totale e a priori di queste tecnologie come manipolatorie, trascurando i numerosi benefici che possono portare robot sociali e sistemi di intelligenza artificiale in ogni settore della nostra vita. Ma poi e soprattutto la direzione da intraprendere è quella di un’“etica sintetica”³⁷ nel doppio senso del termine: da un lato come riflessione etica che emerge dalla creazione e dall’interazione con sistemi sintetici, come robot e identità artificiali, e dall’altro come prospettiva in grado di guardare la realtà in atto non da un solo punto di vista – quello della ingegneria robotica e della crescente, certo indubbia, importanza dell’IA – ma attraverso uno sguardo che sia capace di abbracciare, in una “sintesi” efficace appunto, un intero “orizzonte” di senso, che ci faccia vedere le molteplici “facce” di esso, i molteplici “specchi” dai quali si rifrangono le diverse parti di mondo delle quali tutti facciamo parte. Come ci dicono le pagine di Merleau-Ponty citate all’inizio. In questa prospettiva, il dialogo costante fra filosofi e ingegneri, sin dalle prime fasi di sviluppo di una tecnologia, è fondamentale, innanzitutto per una visione d’insieme che concerne la tutela della nostra umanità, ma anche per non lasciare che siano le leggi del mercato a stabilire i percorsi della ricerca, come nella controversa vicenda di Frigid Farrah, il “robot sessuale che puoi stuprare per soli 9995 dollari”³⁸. Non è un caso, del resto, che alcuni studiosi oggi si rivolgano proprio a Merleau-Ponty per affrontare questa nevralgica serie di questioni, per le quali ne va della nostra specificità umana³⁹. Come scrive Hubert Dreyfus, utilizzando significativamente il lessico merleau-pontiano:

il nostro avere a che fare col mondo non [può] essere compreso in termini di inferenze fatte a partire da rappresentazioni simboliche, come assumeva l’approccio intellettualista di Minsky, ma [neppure può] essere compreso in termini di risposte causate da caratteristiche

³⁶ A. Grig, *The Role of AI Chatbots in Forming and Transforming Human Beliefs*, «Medium», 21 giugno 2023, <https://medium.com/illumination/the-role-of-ai-chatbots-in-forming-and-transforming-human-beliefs-5efb8693567e>.

³⁷ P. Dumouchel, L. Damiano, *Vivere con i robot. Saggio sull’empatia artificiale*, Cortina, Milano 2019.

³⁸ L. Bates, *The Trouble With Sex Robots*, «New York Times», 17 luglio 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/17/opinion/sex-robots-consent.html>. Sui sex robot si veda M. Balistreri, *Sex robot. L’amore al tempo delle macchine*, Fandango, Roma 2018.

³⁹ Cfr. H.L. Dreyfus, *Why Heideggerian AI failed and how fixing it would require making it more Heideggerian*, «Artificial Intelligence», 171, 18, 2007, pp. 1137-1160, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.artint.2007.10.012>.

prefissate dell'ambiente, come accade nel modello empirista di Brooks. Gli studiosi di intelligenza artificiale devono considerare la possibilità che gli esseri *incarnati* come noi utilizzano come input l'energia proveniente dall'universo fisico, e le rispondono in modo da aprirsi a un mondo organizzato a partire dalle loro *necessità*, dai loro *interessi*, e dalle loro *capacità fisiche*, senza che ci sia bisogno che le loro menti assegnino significati a dei dati privi di senso, come accade nel modello di Minsky, né che i loro cervelli convertano gli stimoli sensoriali in risposte riflesse, come negli animat di Brooks⁴⁰.

Il filosofo francese – come Dreyfus bene mette in luce – ci insegna nel modo più incisivo che il nostro rapporto con il mondo non è guidato né dalla sola intelligenza, né dalle risposte simboliche che noi possiamo elaborare, né da un semplice meccanismo di azione-reazione predeterminato con esso. Al contrario, noi intratteniamo col mondo un rapporto “chiasmatico” costitutivamente imprevedibile, innestato nella “carne” del mondo, e pertanto giocato su un'infinità di correlazioni dinamiche mai individuabili o determinabili a priori: come per esempio il nostro “desiderio”, carnale appunto, del tutto indeterminato e indeterminabile.

In conclusione, senza voler giungere all'estremo dell'esclusione di queste nuove identità artificiali dall'ambito delle nostre relazioni⁴¹, è bene provare a inserirle in un quadro d'insieme più articolato. Ed è questo che l'etica oggi è chiamata a fare. In vista non solo di un più immediato e possibile miglioramento sociale⁴², ma soprattutto di una sicura tutela e di una rinnovata comprensione di noi stessi⁴³, nel mondo che oggi siamo destinati, almeno per ora, a vivere.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*. Si cita dalla traduzione italiana consultabile a questo link: <https://atuakuri.wordpress.com/2020/04/18/perche-lintelligenza-artificiale-heideggeriana-ha-fallito-e-perche-per-riparare-allerrore-bisognerebbe-renderla-ancora-piu-heideggeriana/>.

⁴¹ Cfr. S. Turkle, *In good company?*, in Y. Wilks (a cura di), *Close Engagements with Artificial Companions*, Benjamins, Amsterdam-Philadelphia 2010, pp. 3-10.

⁴² Si veda P. Dumouchel, L. Damiano, *Emotions in Relation. Epistemological and Ethical Scaffolding for Mixed Human-Robot Social Ecologies*, «HUMANA.MENTE - Journal of Philosophical Studies», 13, 37, 2020, pp. 181-206.

⁴³ Cfr. L. Floridi, *Artificial intelligence's new frontier: Artificial companions and the fourth revolution*, *Metaphilosophy*, 39(4/5), 2008, pp. 651-655.

GLI ULTIMI STUDI SUL PROBLEMA DELL'IMMORTALITÀ
DELL'ANIMA
ENNIO DE BELLIS*

Abstract

Il saggio esamina il tema dell'immortalità dell'anima e il rapporto mente-corpo, partendo dalle riflessioni di Enrico Berti e attraversando diverse prospettive filosofiche e teologiche. Il dualismo cartesiano, che separa anima e corpo, viene criticato da filosofi come Gilbert Ryle, Hilary Putnam e Daniel Dennett. Berti recupera l'ilomorfismo di Aristotele, che considera l'anima come forma del corpo. Nel contesto religioso, l'immortalità dell'anima e la resurrezione sono concetti centrali nel cristianesimo, sebbene con sfumature diverse tra Vecchio e Nuovo Testamento. Il pensiero contemporaneo, rappresentato da autrici come Angela Ales Bello, esplora l'anima attraverso la fenomenologia e le scoperte scientifiche, proponendo una realtà trans-fisica e una continuazione dell'esperienza psichica dopo la morte. Il testo discute anche la visione dell'aldilà attraverso esperienze di premorte, fenomeni paranormali e ipotesi di multiversi, basandosi su una prospettiva interdisciplinare.

Keywords: Dualismo, Ilomorfismo, Immortalità, Fenomenologia, Aldilà

Una delle più complete rassegne sull'argomento dell'immortalità dell'anima, così come esso è trattato a livello internazionale nel XX secolo e nei primi anni del XXI secolo, è stata stilata da Enrico Berti nel saggio dal titolo *Cos'è l'anima?* il quale risale al 2007 e si pone in ideale continuità con l'articolo dello stesso autore intitolato *Aristotele e il "Mind-Body Problem"*, pubblicato nel 1998¹.

Berti ricorda che Gilbert Ryle, padre della corrente della filosofia analitica, in uno dei suoi testi più famosi, *The concept of mind*², sostiene che la filosofia contemporanea è ancora condizionata dal dualismo cartesiano secondo cui l'anima è una *res*, cioè una sostanza, che può esistere

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¹ Cfr. E. Berti, *Che cos'è l'anima?*, in "Bollettino della Società Filosofica Italiana", n. s. 192 (2007), pp. 5-16; Id., *Aristotele e il "Mind-Body Problem"*, in "Iride. Filosofia e discussione pubblica", XI (1998), pp. 43-62.

² Cfr. G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, London, Hutchinson, 1949.

indipendentemente dal corpo e che ha un'essenza consistente unicamente nel pensiero.

Dopo Ryle i filosofi della seconda metà del Novecento hanno sviluppato il famoso dibattito sul cosiddetto "Mind-Body Problem", cioè il problema di quale rapporto vi sia tra la mente e il corpo. Hilary Putnam, secondo la teoria del cosiddetto "funzionalismo", riduce l'anima, o la mente, al modello di un semplice software per computer, intendendo il corpo come hardware³. Daniel Dennett, invece, in base al cosiddetto "naturalismo", riduce l'attività mentale e quella spirituale al funzionamento del cervello umano considerato, a sua volta, come un semplice prodotto dell'evoluzione biologica oggetto di indagine da parte delle scienze neurologiche⁴.

La prospettiva dualistica in realtà è antichissima e si può riscontrare già nel culto di Dioniso, risalente al VI secolo a. C., che è attribuito sia a poeti mitici, come Orfeo e Museo, sia ad autori realmente esistiti, come Ferecide, Epimenide e Onomacrito. Secondo costoro l'anima è un essere intermedio tra l'uomo e il dio, che preesiste al corpo e si incarna in esso per un certo tempo, reincarnandosi successivamente in altri corpi a seconda dei meriti o delle colpe maturate durante la vita terrena. Questa teoria viene adottata da noti filosofi come il pitagorico Filolao, Empedocle e, soprattutto, Platone il quale, nel *Fedone*, sostiene, come gli Orfici, che l'anima si trova nel corpo come in un carcere, o in una tomba, da cui aspira ad uscire con la morte, per tornare nel mondo delle Idee da dove proviene. La prospettiva dualistica è riscontrabile anche in altri pensatori che concepiscono l'anima come formata da elementi, cioè l'aria per Anassimene, il fuoco per Eraclito, oppure gli atomi per Democrito.

Il primo filosofo che si oppone in maniera chiara al dualismo di anima e corpo è Aristotele che concepisce l'anima non come una sostanza distinta dal corpo ma come la forma, cioè la struttura, di un corpo vivente. L'anima umana, secondo Aristotele, da una parte ha bisogno del corpo, che le fornisce, attraverso i sensi, le immagini in cui cogliere le forme intelligibili, e dall'altra necessita di un principio superiore, sempre in atto, che le permette di cogliere le forme intelligibili stesse. Perciò Aristotele distingue un "intelletto passivo", proprio dell'uomo, che è mortale, e un "intelletto attivo", forse superiore all'uomo, cioè divino, che è immortale. Con queste premesse l'individuo è destinato a morire completamente.

Le due concezioni dell'anima, quella dualistica di Platone e quella

³ Cfr. H. Putnam, *Mind, language and reality*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975.

⁴ Cfr. D. C. Dennett, *The Mind's I: Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul*, New York, Basic Books, 1981.

unitaria di Aristotele, rappresentano la base teorica della riflessione tra il I secolo a. C. e il I secolo d. C. allorché ad Alessandria d'Egitto la Bibbia viene tradotta in greco dai Settanta.

Nel Vecchio Testamento non c'è nessuna traccia dell'immortalità dell'anima in quanto entità autonoma e si presenta, invece, come destino dell'essere umano la resurrezione, cioè il ritorno alla vita di ogni persona nella sua integrità, sia come corpo che come anima.

Per quanto riguarda il Nuovo Testamento è necessario ricordare che il termine "anima" viene tradotto in greco con ψυχή sia nei *Vangeli* che nelle *Lettere degli Apostoli* ma assume quasi sempre o il significato di "vita" oppure quello di "essere vivente"⁵.

Nei secoli successivi, nella filosofia antica non cristiana, si afferma il neoplatonismo propugnatore della dottrina dell'immortalità dell'anima mentre nella filosofia cristiana si giunge a una sintesi di platonismo e cristianesimo, ammettendo sia l'immortalità dell'anima che la resurrezione. È necessario, però, ricordare che la Chiesa, nel *Credo* attribuito agli Apostoli e nel *Credo* niceno-costantinopolitano, riconosce ufficialmente solo la resurrezione contestuale dell'anima e del corpo.

Con il pensiero di Tommaso d'Aquino nella questione entra il contributo fondamentale dell'aristotelismo e ciò porta a concepire l'anima in quanto forma del corpo e ad affermarne l'immortalità dato che l'intelletto attivo appartiene all'anima umana. Tommaso ammette anche la sopravvivenza dell'anima al corpo ma solo in funzione della ricongiunzione dell'anima con il corpo nella resurrezione⁶.

Con queste premesse, nel XX secolo, in seguito al superamento della posizione cartesiana ad opera di Ryle, si è tornati ad una concezione dell'anima che è, di fatto, quella proposta da Aristotele.

Un fondamentale punto di svolta di questa discussione è rappresentato dal pensiero di Martha C. Nussbaum la quale propone un'interpretazione dell'anima di tipo funzionalistico in opposizione all'interpretazione della psicologia di Aristotele da parte di Jonathan Barnes e di Myles Burnyeat da lei giudicata platonizzante in quanto sostenitrice dell'immaterialità dell'anima. Nussbaum rivendica la stretta unità e inseparabilità dell'anima non da un corpo qualsiasi, come può essere l'hardware di un computer, ma da un corpo vivente e in questo modo aderisce del tutto all'ilomorfismo di

⁵ Cfr. P.-M. Bogaert (ed.), *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de la Bible*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1987, trad. it. Roma, Borla, 1995, voce "anima".

⁶ Cfr. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 76; Id., I, q. 89.

Aristotele⁷.

In questa prospettiva, Enrico Berti propone di identificare l'anima umana con la sequenza del genoma umano e si difende dall'accusa di biologismo sostenendo che l'essere umano è anzitutto un essere vivente e che, quindi, anche il suo carattere spirituale dipenda dalla sua realtà biologica, la quale non è affatto pura materia ma è materia organizzata da una certa forma. Anche se alla realtà biologica dell'uomo si aggiunge successivamente tutto il patrimonio di esperienze derivanti dalla sua biografia, dall'educazione e dalla cultura, resta, alla base di tutto, una capacità specificamente umana e individuale di sviluppare la propria natura cui comunemente si attribuisce il nome di "anima"⁸.

Al fine di evidenziare come anche la teologia, e specificamente quella cattolica, sostiene l'unità sostanziale di anima e corpo di origine aristotelica, può essere utile, infine, ricordare alcune posizioni ufficiali della Chiesa Cattolica. Nella costituzione pastorale *Gaudium et spes*, che rappresenta il fulcro della dottrina del Concilio Vaticano II, a partire dal quale si data la dottrina cattolica contemporanea, si ricorda che l'essere umano è «unità di anima e corpo», che il corpo è «creato da Dio e destinato alla risurrezione nell'ultimo giorno», che l'essere umano riconosce «di avere un'anima spirituale e immortale» e che la fede «dà la possibilità di comunicare in Cristo con i propri cari già strappati alla morte, col dare speranza che essi abbiano già raggiunto la vera vita presso Dio»⁹.

Il più attuale testo sull'argomento del rapporto sussistente fra l'anima e il corpo e sul destino ultraterreno risale al 2023, ha come autrici Angela Ales Bello e Anna Maria Sciacca e ha come titolo *Ti racconto l'aldilà. Fenomenologia della vita umana ante mortem e post mortem*¹⁰.

Il volume si apre con un'introduzione di Ales Bello in cui si rileva che l'ateismo appare prevalentemente come un portato della cultura occidentale ed è connesso con il progresso tecnologico e con la fiducia nella ragione la quale ha la sua origine nella filosofia della Grecia antica. L'autrice propone un approccio all'argomento che parte dalla scuola fenomenologica e dal pensiero di Edmund Husserl e di Edith Stein i quali hanno considerato il corpo

⁷ Cfr. M. C. Nussbaum, A. Oksenberg Rorty (edd.), *Essays on Aristotle's De anima*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992.

⁸ Cfr. E. Berti, *Che cos'è l'anima?*, cit., pp. 14-16.

⁹ Cfr. *Gaudium et spes*, 14, 18.

¹⁰ Cfr. A. Ales Bello – A. M. Sciacca, *Ti racconto l'aldilà. Fenomenologia della vita umana ante mortem e post mortem*, Roma, Castelvecchi, 2023.

e la psiche come entità dimostrabili attraverso le nostre esperienze¹¹.

Ales Bello è l'autrice anche della premessa di questo testo in cui, continuando in prospettiva fenomenologica, rileva l'importanza del concetto di nucleo presente nel pensiero di Stein. In questa prospettiva, il nucleo costituisce sia il fondamento della permanenza ontologica dell'individuo inteso nella sua singolarità sia il luogo in cui il divino si annida in ogni persona. Ammettere la presenza di un nucleo ontologico permetterebbe anche di comprendere sia l'affermazione di Agostino d'Ippona sulla sovratemporalità dell'anima umana sia la teoria di Anselmo d'Aosta che riconosce in ogni individuo l'idea di Dio come ciò di cui non si può pensare niente di più grande. Ales Bello prende in considerazione anche l'obiezione di Ludwig Feuerbach che interpreta l'esperienza religiosa come un frutto della proiezione del desiderio dell'individuo di trascendere i propri limiti. L'autrice rileva che proprio l'aspirazione a superare i propri limiti, che non può provenire da un essere ontologicamente limitato, testimonia la presenza del divino in ogni essere umano¹².

La prima parte del volume ha come autrice Ales Bello, si intitola "Filosofia Scienza Fede" ed è diviso in quattro capitoli, tutti dedicati all'esposizione e all'interpretazione del pensiero di Hedwig Conrad-Martius.

Il primo capitolo, dal titolo "L'antropologia fra filosofia e scienze della natura", parte dall'opposizione di Conrad-Martius a una visione cosmologica del tutto materialista poiché ritiene che la natura non possa essere interpretata, secondo i dettami della fisica classica, in maniera esclusivamente meccanicistica. La proposta consiste innanzitutto in un ritorno alla valutazione qualitativa della natura di origine aristotelica in contrapposizione alla dottrina di Galileo Galilei che propone un'interpretazione dei fenomeni priva di qualunque prospettiva finalistica. Conrad-Martius ritiene che la terza rivoluzione scientifica, grazie alla teoria della relatività e soprattutto alla meccanica quantistica, consenta, in opposizione alla prospettiva riduttivista della fisica galileiana, un recupero della visione organica della natura che era già presente nel pensiero antico e in quello medievale. La stessa discussione sulla natura ondulatoria oppure corpuscolare della materia lascerebbe intendere che vi sono altre dimensioni dello spazio ancora da scoprire e che ci potrebbe essere una classe di fenomeni che Conrad-Martius definisce come trans-fisici¹³.

Il secondo capitolo, che ha come titolo "L'origine e la fine della vita",

¹¹ Cfr. Id., pp. 5-7.

¹² Cfr. Id., pp. 11-21.

¹³ Cfr. Id., pp. 25-40.

ritorna sul pensiero di Conrad-Martius la quale applica il criterio fisico del salto quantico all'interpretazione del rapporto tra l'uomo e la scimmia. Conrad-Martius ritiene che un anello di congiunzione fra il primate e l'essere umano, previsto dalla teoria darwiniana, non sia ipotizzabile dal momento che anche a livello embriologico l'uomo avrebbe caratteristiche non riconducibili alla scimmia dalla quale, quindi, non discenderebbe. Il prosieguo della speculazione di Conrad-Martius consiste nella teorizzazione di un aspetto materiale anche in ciò che si suole definire con il nome di anima la quale avrebbe, quindi, una sua corporeità seppur diversa da quella terrena. Tale materia dell'anima potrebbe garantire il supporto e quindi la continuazione dell'esperienza psichica anche dopo la morte intesa come un passaggio da uno stato fisico ad un altro¹⁴.

Il terzo capitolo, intitolato "Fede, Scienza e Filosofia", espone come Conrad-Martius si opponga alla prospettiva epistemologica, che ha origine con la scienza moderna e che viene confermata dal positivismo e dal neopositivismo, secondo cui ogni interpretazione della realtà si dovrebbe appiattare su un piano meccanicistico. Le scoperte scientifiche recenti, insieme alla teoria della relatività e a quella dei quanta, evidenzerebbero, invece, la possibilità di una realtà trans-fisica. Tale realtà si accorderebbe con la lettera della Bibbia, che parla della possibilità che l'intera natura sia trascesa spazialmente e temporalmente, e permetterebbe di comprendere sia la resurrezione di Cristo che le sue successive apparizioni come uno scambio tra dimensioni spazio-temporali diverse. Nella stessa maniera, come il cosmo rivelerebbe una sua durata sovratemporale così anche la vita umana potrebbe continuare in una dimensione diversa con una modalità sostanziale, ma pur sempre corporea, diversa¹⁵.

Il quarto capitolo, dal titolo "Descrizione teologica dell'aldilà", si sofferma sull'interpretazione di Conrad-Martius del pensiero di Tommaso d'Aquino e di quello di Jacques Maritain, fondatore del neotomismo contemporaneo insieme a Étienne Gilson. Tommaso d'Aquino, di fronte al quesito come le anime prive di corpo possano sentire i tormenti dell'inferno, ribadisce il principio aristotelico della non scindibilità del corpo dall'anima offrendo un sostegno all'idea di un aldilà in cui i trapassati conservano una corporeità anche se costituita da una sostanza diversa. Maritain ammette la possibilità, nell'aldilà, di una corporeità piena e perfetta costituita da una materia spiritualizzata che potrebbe riguardare sia gli esseri umani che il resto

¹⁴ Cfr. Id., pp. 41-52.

¹⁵ Cfr. Id., pp. 53-62.

del creato¹⁶.

La seconda parte del volume ha come autrice Anna Maria Sciacca, si intitola “L’aldilà nelle immagini di scrittori ‘visionari’” ed è divisa in quattro capitoli.

Il primo capitolo, intitolato “L’idea di aldilà fino al secolo XIV”, è costituito da un’importante rassegna di come il mondo ultraterreno è stato concepito nell’Antico Egitto, nelle religioni mesopotamiche, che sono quella accade, quella sumera e quella babilonese, nella Grecia pre-omerica, nella Grecia post-omerica, nel mito di Er di Platone, che rappresenta una svolta in tale materia, nel mondo romano e poi nel Medioevo fino a individuare le fonti dell’opera di Dante Alighieri. Altrettanto interessante appare il rinvenimento completo dei passi dedicati all’aldilà presenti nei Vangeli sinottici con l’approfondimento dell’Apocalisse giovannea e il reperimento delle sue fonti in tutti gli scritti apocalittici precedenti presenti nel testo veterotestamentario. Ne conseguono dei caratteri comuni di tutte queste tradizioni costituiti dalla presenza di un luogo, che comunque appare come fisico, destinato ai giusti, caratterizzato dalla beatitudine e dalla contemplazione della verità e di Dio, e un posto di dannazione destinato ai malvagi, contraddistinto dalla sofferenza corporale¹⁷.

Il secondo capitolo, dal titolo “Ildegarda di Bingen”, descrive dettagliatamente le visioni ultraterrene della mistica nata nel 1098 in Assia e morta a Rupertsberg nel 1179 a 81 anni. L’abbadessa dell’Ordo Sancti Benedicti, destinata a essere una delle donne più influenti nella storia del monachesimo, concepisce l’Inferno come un luogo fisico ma posto fuori dal mondo in quanto Dio non può generare il male. Il male proviene dal desiderio di affermare sé stessi e i propri istinti senza curarsi del danno che si procura alla propria persona e agli altri. Ildegarda di Bingen concepisce anche un Purgatorio e un Paradiso il cui aspetto fondamentale è il rapporto tra la santità della persona beata e la luce emanata secondo un *topos* poi ripetuto anche dai mistici e dai letterati successivi e accolto anche da Dante Alighieri¹⁸.

Il terzo capitolo, che ha come titolo “Le mistiche del monastero di Helfta”, descrive le visioni relative al mondo ultraterreno di tre religiose appartenenti al monastero benedettino cistercense di Helfta, vissute in Sassonia nel XIII secolo. Esse sono Metilde di Hackeborn, probabilmente citata da Dante, Gertrude di Eisleben, conosciuta come Santa Gertrude la Grande, e Matilde di Magdeburgo, passata dal beghinaggio alla vita

¹⁶ Cfr. Id., pp. 63-75.

¹⁷ Cfr. Id., pp. 79-100.

¹⁸ Cfr. Id., pp. 101-123.

monastica¹⁹.

Il quarto capitolo, dal titolo “Dante Alighieri”, ricostruisce con precisione la struttura ultraterrena della Divina Commedia con dovizia di riferimenti alle fonti, tra le quali spiccano Tolomeo e Tommaso d’Aquino. L’autrice, ritiene che con Dante, il quale riassume tutte le conoscenze fino al suo tempo accumulate sull’argomento dell’aldilà, si chiude un arco temporale di riflessione iniziato con l’Apocalisse di Giovanni la quale, a sua volta, conclude le Sacre Scritture²⁰.

La terza e ultima parte si intitola “I vivi e i morti in dialogo: ipotesi sul ‘dove’ dell’aldilà” ed è divisa in tre capitoli.

Il primo capitolo, dal titolo “*Finis vitae*: le esperienze di premorte”, è scritto da Anna Maria Sciacca e affronta il fenomeno delle esperienze extrasensoriali di coloro che ritornano alla coscienza dopo essere stati temporaneamente in stato di morte clinica. Le esperienze raccontate da migliaia di persone appartenenti a culture e a età anagrafiche molto diverse sono, invece, tra loro molto simili e hanno molti elementi ricorrenti, come il passaggio in un tunnel di luce, l’arrivo in luoghi ameni, l’incontro di persone evanescenti e rassicuranti e l’osservazione dall’alto dei propri cari in cordoglio per loro. Queste esperienze, ovviamente, sono rilevate solo da pochi anni perché precedentemente non vi era la possibilità di mantenere in vita un essere umano clinicamente morto e la stessa medicina contemporanea fornisce relativamente a queste esperienze delle giustificazioni di carattere neurologico²¹.

Dal secondo capitolo, che ha per titolo “La vita dopo la morte: fenomeni paranormali e visite dei defunti”, fino alla fine del volume l’autrice è di nuovo Angela Ales Bello. In questo capitolo si passa dall’analisi dello stato di pre-morte a quello di post-morte. A questo proposito risulta di particolare importanza la distinzione tra il paranormale, che è un fenomeno comunque naturale ma di cui non si riesce a fornire spiegazione, e il soprannaturale, che implica l’intervento di Dio e coinvolge ciò che Edith Stein definisce il nucleo identitario della persona dove si manifesta lo Spirito divino²².

Il terzo capitolo, che come titolo “L’aldilà è uno dei multiversi?”, parte dalla constatazione della presenza della materia oscura che è un tipo di massa che non emette abbastanza radiazione elettromagnetica e quindi non

¹⁹ Cfr. Id., pp. 124-140.

²⁰ Cfr. Id., pp. 141-163.

²¹ Cfr. Id., pp. 167-175.

²² Cfr. Id., pp. 176-191.

può essere identificata con la materia che compone gli atomi epperò influisce sui sistemi gravitazionali dell'universo. Essa resta sconosciuta ma può essere calcolata tanto che si sa che costituisce l'85% di tutta l'entità fisica mentre la totalità dell'Universo di cui si ha notizia, e che si riesce a studiare con il modello standard della fisica attuale, copre appena il 15% dei fenomeni. Per poter intuire il ruolo della materia e dell'energia oscura si è provato a proporre un modello di comprensione dei fenomeni con dieci dimensioni spaziali e con una dimensione temporale che potrebbe giungere a far ipotizzare infiniti universi paralleli ognuno con una propria sostanzialità. Uno di questi potrebbe ospitare, secondo Ales Bello, il mondo ultraterreno dove ogni essere umano conserverebbe una corporeità ma di tipo diverso come sembra proposto anche dal testo evangelico riguardo le apparizioni di Gesù agli Apostoli²³.

La conclusione del volume ritorna sul concetto che la paura della morte e il desiderio dell'immortalità non può non nascere da qualcosa che è anche possibile. L'immortalità dell'anima connetterebbe la sapienza millenaria dei testi sacri e le proiezioni più attuali della fisica contemporanea nel segno di una rinnovata speranza²⁴.

²³ Cfr. Id., pp. 192-204.

²⁴ Cfr. Id., pp. 205-208.

LA PERSONA-SCIENZIATO E LA FENOMENOLOGIA DEL
SOGGETTIVISMO EPISTEMOLOGICO
SIMONE SANTAMATO*

Abstract: This paper revolves around a contradiction: science is subjective and scientists are people with their own styles and emotions that are part of the production of knowledge. Phenomenology, contacting the sociology of science, offers a redefined vision of science: scientific progress rests on paradigmatic rewinds that fully involve the subjectivist sphere of the scientific community and of scientists as person-scientists.

Keywords: Husserl, Kuhn, science, knowledge, epistemological subjectivism.

Conoscere (per) il soggetto

La domanda sulla conoscenza permea nell'intimo la fenomenologia. Eppure, sarebbe riduttivo considerare l'epistemologia fenomenologica come una tra le altre dottrine del conoscere: l'idea della fenomenologia è che, anzitutto, la conoscenza riguarda trascendentalmente il soggetto. La conoscenza ci riguarda come soggettività irripetibili, dunque una buona gnoseologia mira al pieno sviluppo delle potenzialità individuali.

È per questo che una teoria della conoscenza impostata su base fenomenologica può tenere conto degli strumenti dell'analisi trascendentale del soggetto. In questo articolo, approfondiremo il lessico dell'indagine fenomenologica sulla conoscenza per poi espanderne gli orizzonti contattando la sociologia della scienza. Questo attraversamento disciplinare ci permetterà di allargare le vedute sul tema con la nozione di *persona-scientiata*.

I nostri equipaggiamenti teoretici saranno prevalentemente due: le *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge* (1931)¹ di E. Husserl e

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¹ La storia delle *Cartesianische Meditationen* è complessa. Prima di tutto, è doveroso ricordare come il testo prenda vita da un ciclo di conferenze che Husserl tenne a Parigi nel

The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1962)² di T. Kuhn. Ci preme specificare subito perché, tra i vari testi husserliani, consideriamo proprio le *Meditazioni*. Ci sono più ordini di ragione, ma le principali sono anzitutto la limpidezza argomentativa con cui Husserl, in quell'istanza, condensa e allarga l'impianto fenomenologico e, in secondo luogo, la centralità del problema dell'intersoggettività non solo per evitare l'iniziale solipsismo trascendentale ma pure per strutturare la dinamica epistemologica. Tra l'altro, non bisogna dimenticare quanto lo stesso Husserl credesse fondamentali le *Meditazioni* tanto da definirle nel '33, in un carteggio col suo ex allievo Mahnke, "un nuovo *discours sur la méthode*"³, o ancora "il mio capolavoro sistematico", "il capolavoro della mia vita"⁴.

Dal canto suo, *La struttura delle rivoluzioni scientifiche* è un testo cardine della critica epistemologica contemporanea e della sociologia della scienza. Come sappiamo, la prospettiva kuhniana poggia su una decisa componente psicologica che ridefinisce da un lato l'identità dello scienziato e, dall'altro, l'idea metodologica di una scienza cumulativa.

La nostra idea è che armonizzando le due impostazioni si ottengano prospettive di indagine dall'ampio respiro: se «il mondo stesso, costituisce un'idea infinita riferita all'infinità di esperienze che si debbono concepire come concordemente unificate»⁵, laddove queste esperienze possono variare con nuove sintesi unitarie e orizzonti, la scienza, intesa come processo di distruzione e ricostituzione paradigmatica, risponde bene all'indagine

Febbraio del '29, il cui fulcro era un'esposizione sintetica ma completa della sua fenomenologia. Nel prestigioso Amphithéâtre Descartes alla Sorbona, Husserl condensò le linee fondamentali della fenomenologia in una prolusione dal titolo *Einleitung in die transzendentale Phänomenologie*. Due anni dopo, nel 1931, venne edita a cura di E. Lévinas e G. Peiffer una versione scritta e accresciuta delle conferenze col titolo di *Méditations Cartésiennes*. Dopo la pubblicazione in francese era cruciale una traduzione tedesca, di cui Husserl si occupò direttamente. Questa traduzione diventa ben presto un assillo, specie considerando come l'edizione francese, secondo Husserl, fraintendeva molte delle parti cruciali del lavoro, specie della quinta meditazione. Finalmente nel 1950 il testo viene pubblicato in tedesco. L'edizione italiana cui faremo riferimento è quella tradotta da F. Costa e pubblicata per Fabbri nel 1960 (E. Husserl, *Meditazioni cartesiane con l'aggiunta dei Discorsi parigini*, Fabbri, Milano 1996).

² Nello specifico nella traduzione di A. Carugo (T. Kuhn, *La struttura delle rivoluzioni scientifiche*, Einaudi, Torino 1995).

³ Cfr. *Husserl/Mahnke correspondance (1917-1933) [extraits]*, "Philosophie", 2016, n. 2, pp. 16-54. Per la traduzione italiana, si veda la presentazione alle *Meditazioni* di R. Cristin (E. Husserl, op.cit., p. X).

⁴ Ivi, p. IX.

⁵ Ivi, §28, pp. 88-89.

fenomenologica.

La scienza che dunque sono

Come detto, le *Meditazioni* sono ben più di un pamphlet del metodo fenomenologico in quanto, proprio essendone un condensato, rimettono in gioco i principali problemi della fenomenologia. Per questo, non si tratta di un semplice testo d'accesso alla fenomenologia ma, ben più raffinatamente, di una riesposizione dei suoi concetti per la discussione del grosso elefante dentro la stanza, l'intersoggettività, per cui è bene che ogni tassello sia fresco e al suo posto. Ancora di più, Husserl voleva espandere ulteriormente il corpus delle *Meditazioni* con l'aiuto di E. Fink, suo allievo e dopo assistente, aggiungendovene una sesta – poi effettivamente pubblicata in due volumi⁶ – e addirittura una settima, di cui è conservato qualche appunto nell'Archivio-Fink di Friburgo.

Le cinque meditazioni originali hanno un ritmo preciso: dalla prima fino all'ultima, si rintraccia un percorso mano a mano dilatato dall'ego trascendentale e i suoi modi fino all'intersoggettività. Nel mezzo, si stagliano tutti gli argomenti che caratterizzano la fenomenologia trascendentale: i concetti di sintesi, temporalità, orizzonte, intenzionalità etc., vengono ripresi e contestualizzati all'interno di un'indagine profonda e complessa, il cui fine ultimo, esattamente come quello della fenomenologia tutta, è di pervenire a una scienza apodittica, ovverosia all'«unità di una fondazione razionale assoluta»⁷. In termini più chiari, la fenomenologia vuole pervenire a un principio assolutamente evidente (*einsichtig*) che stia al fondo di qualsiasi ulteriore conoscenza. Insomma, si tratta di rintracciare un assunto strutturale talmente evidente, appunto apodittico, che garantisca il conoscere. Com'è noto, Husserl perviene così al *soggettivismo trascendentale* che, nelle *Meditazioni*, attribuisce a Cartesio⁸, malgrado gli imputi di non averlo sviluppato a fondo: «Né si dovrà [...] pensare che si debba mediante corretti ragionamenti sillogistici, condotti in base a principi innati nell'ego, dimostrare ulteriormente il resto del mondo. È questo purtroppo quel che capita a Cartesio»⁹.

Quindi: l'edificio delle ulteriori conoscenze è costruito sul soggetto o,

⁶ Vedi E. Fink, *VI. Cartesianische Meditation. Teil I: Die Idee einer transzendentalen Methodenlehre. Teil II: Ergänzungsband*, a cura di J. Holl, H. Ebeling, G. van Kerckhoven, Nijhoff, Dordrecht 1988; a cura di A. Marini, *Sesta meditazione cartesiana. L'idea di una dottrina trascendentale del metodo*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2009.

⁷ E. Husserl, op.cit., p. 3.

⁸ Cfr. *ivi*, §2, p. 39.

⁹ *Ivi*, §10, pp. 56-57.

più precisamente, l'ego trascendentale, stavolta senza l'errore di dimostrare l'esistenza del mondo con principi innati. In Husserl, la questione è a un tempo più raffinata e complessa: al cogito non si arriva con l'intuizione ma con l'*epochè trascendentale*, anche chiamata *riduzione*. L'esistenza del mondo viene "messa entro parentesi"¹⁰: il mondo soffre di un'intrinseca mutabilità ed evanescenza¹¹, dunque è necessario che il soggetto venga ridotto a ego puro per scoprirne le strutture fondamentali. Il soggetto ridotto scopre sé stesso nel senso più sostanziale e autentico in quanto arriva a rendere conto delle sue strutture di senso (ciò che Husserl definisce i caratteri *noetici* e *noematici* dell'ego¹²): un mondo comincia ad aprirsi, il mondo che ognuno di noi è per sé stesso in sé stesso.

In fenomenologia bisogna considerare ogni soggetto come *il* mondo: attraverso ritenzioni e *protensioni*, l'io dà vita a un intero universo di significati coi quali costruisce il suo senso più intimo e la sua identità più specifica e insostituibile¹³. Nel mondo pare ci sia qualcosa ma senza un soggetto intenzionale non avrebbe senso e anche se lo avesse non importerebbe perché non ci sarebbe qualcuno in grado di riconoscerlo. Questa è l'*epochè trascendentale*:

Il mondo invece di essere senz'altro esistente, ossia invece di valere nella credenza esistenziale [*Seinsglauben*] dell'esperienza in modo naturale, è per noi solo una semplice pretesa all'essere [*Seinsanspruch*]. Questo riguarda anche l'esistenza intramondana di tutti gli altri io, sicché noi a rigore non potremmo parlare propriamente più al plurale in senso comunicativo. Gli altri uomini e gli animali non sono per me che datità di esperienza e solo in virtù dell'esperienza sensibile che io ho dei loro corpi; io non posso servirmi della validità della loro esistenza, poiché essa è messa in questione. Esclusi così gli altri, io perdo anche naturalmente tutte le formazioni della società e della cultura. In breve non solo la natura corporea ma l'intero e concreto mondo della vita è ormai per me solo un fenomeno d'essere anziché un essere¹⁴.

¹⁰ Cfr. *ivi*, §8, pp. 52-54.

¹¹ Nelle *Meditazioni*, Husserl parla di "sogno coerente", facendo eco alla famosa immagine cartesiana, e ancora prima platonica, di un mondo talmente imprevedibile da poter essere frainteso per un sogno: «Non solo l'esperienza singola può decadere al livello di apparenza sensibile, ma anche l'eventuale intero nesso di esperienze, colto in unità, può mostrarsi come apparenza, assumendo l'aspetto di un *sogno coerente*» (*ivi*, §7, p. 51).

¹² Cfr. *ivi*, §15, pp. 64-68.

¹³ Cfr. *ivi*, §13-§20, pp. 60-78.

¹⁴ *Ivi*, §8, p. 52.

E così «Il mondo non è per me in generale altro di quello che esiste consapevolmente in tale cogito e che vale per me. Esso ha il suo intero, universale e speciale, e il suo valore d'essere solo in base a tali cogitationes. In questo scorre il mio intero vivere-il-mondo, cui appartiene pure il *vivere come ricerca e fondazione scientifica*»¹⁵. Questo è il nucleo del nostro tema e il cuore del metodo fenomenologico-trascendentale: viene introdotto il concetto di *sintesi*, la quale «non si limita solo a unire il singolo [...] [ma] tutto l'intero vivere della coscienza [...] è unificato sinteticamente»¹⁶. L'idea di fondo è che il nostro ego, in quanto coscienza, è sempre *coscienza di qualcosa*¹⁷ espressa mediante l'intenzione. In questo momento, i libri sulla scrivania sono nella mia coscienza perché ho un'intenzione nei loro confronti, e così lo sono le penne qui vicino come il posacenere da quest'altro lato e la sigaretta nelle mie dita. Ognuna di queste datità, di per sé separata, viene sinteticamente unificata creando un'attualità di significati dove la separazione viene risolta in un raccordo di intenzionalità. Però non sono solo questo qui seduto alla scrivania: sulla base di questa sintesi, ho un orizzonte di possibilità, ossia una protensione. Voglio che questo sia un buon lavoro, ho la speranza che venga apprezzato e ho l'*attesa* che venga valutato positivamente.

In questo modo mi si dispiega un mondo nei cui confronti covo un'attesa, per cui mi dispongo e per il quale mi affaccio: mi apro all'orizzonte della possibilità e mi ci immergo tanto che questi oggetti che mi circondano assumono sensatezza nella mia protensione. Questa operazione di scomposizione di intenzionalità unitariamente sintetizzate è tipica della fenomenologia trascendentale¹⁸, che mette tra parentesi l'esistenza del mondo sganciando ogni datità dal soggetto intenzionale per giungere al suo fondamento. Ecco che è possibile «un *io posso, io agisco* e, nel caso, *io posso agire altrimenti* [...]». Gli orizzonti sono delle possibilità delineate»¹⁹.

Ora: se per ogni ulteriore scienza si deve partire dall'egologia trascendentale, allora

È chiaro che la verità [...] dev'essere attinta solo all'evidenza, la quale è ciò che solo può farci dare un senso all'essere reale effettivo, vero e

¹⁵ Ivi, §8, p. 54, corsivo mio.

¹⁶ Ivi, §18, p. 72.

¹⁷ Cfr. ivi, §14, pp. 62-64.

¹⁸ Nel lessico di Husserl, questa operazione prende il nome di *guida trascendentale*. Cfr. ivi, §21, pp. 78-80.

¹⁹ Ivi, §19, p. 74.

valido secondo regole, di un oggetto, quale che ne sia la forma o la specie, preso insieme a tutte le altre determinazioni che gli appartengono come *vere per noi*. È da qui che proviene ogni giustificazione della nostra soggettività trascendentale stessa; ogni adeguazione immaginabile sorge come *conferma nostra*, è *nostra sintesi*, ha *in noi* il suo ultimo fondamento trascendentale²⁰.

E per quanto «Ogni evidenza *fonda* per me un acquisto durevole», posso sempre rimodulare l'unificazione sintetica creando nuovi orizzonti, «posso *sempre di nuovo* ritornare [...] con quella aperta infinità che *l'io posso* procura *sempre di nuovo* come orizzonte di possibilità»²¹. E finalmente: «Ognuna di queste possibilità è per noi esistente in base alla evidenza [...] dell'atto stesso con il quale noi portiamo qualcosa all'evidenza e riproduciamo l'evidenza ottenuta»²².

Se le cose stanno così, l'intersoggettività è un enigma perché al mondo non ci sono solo io: al mondo non c'è solo la mia sintesi unitaria né solo il mio orizzonte di possibilità. Senza contare come le datità su cui costruiamo le nostre evidenze e i nostri progetti possono essere oggetto di diverse intenzioni da parte di altri ego che coesistono con noi. Questi sono fondamentalmente i temi che insistono per tutta la quinta meditazione e che arrovellano il secondo Husserl²³.

In questa istanza, calchiamo la mano sul fatto che «l'oggetto reale del mondo, anzi proprio il mondo stesso, costituisce un'idea infinita riferita all'infinità di esperienze che si debbono concepire come *concordemente unificate*»²⁴ secondo una «*articolazione strutturale entro le infinite molteplicità*»²⁵. Orientato così, il dilemma dell'intersoggettività si trova a cavallo tra l'ontologia e l'epistemologia: se da una parte riguarda la condivisione di un mondo riferito a soggetti trascendentalmente coerenti tra loro, dall'altro si pone il problema della coesistenza di tante verità quante le

²⁰ Ivi, §26, pp. 86-87, corsivi miei.

²¹ Ivi, §27, p. 87.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ Le indagini di Husserl sul tema dell'intersoggettività hanno avuto grossa risonanza. A partire dal noto *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität* (1905-1920) fino al meno noto manoscritto del 1910 *Soziale Ontologie und deskriptive Soziologie* lì contenuto, costituiscono l'apripista per le analisi contemporanee di ontologia sociale fenomenologicamente impostate. Tra gli altri, vedi: F. De Vecchi, *La società in persona. Ontologia sociale qualitativa*, il Mulino, Bologna 2022.

²⁴ E. Husserl, op.cit., §28, pp. 88-89, corsivo mio.

²⁵ Ivi, §29, p. 89.

sintesi unitarie e gli orizzonti personali. Seguendo questa traiettoria, è difficile avere una scienza cumulativa e, più correttamente, positivista: se l'impianto fenomenologico conserva l'infinita variabilità di una datità²⁶, e i soggetti possono costantemente rimescolare le carte del mazzo della verità, l'idea che la scienza sia in una fase di maturazione metodologica che dice l'effettiva realtà delle cose traballa e non poco. E non traballa solo in sede fenomenologica.

Paradigmi egologici

Kuhn ha disinnescato l'idea neo-positivistica di una scienza cumulativa ormai tanto matura da dire la verità dei fenomeni esponendo i meccanismi psicologici e sociologici che caratterizzano l'avanzamento scientifico. L'idea comune è che la scienza dice le cose come stanno proprio per l'oggettività degli scienziati, garantiti da una glaciale imperturbabilità epistemica.

Kuhn smaschera questa *boutade* svelando come la scienza, con tutte le sue rivoluzioni e conquiste, è mossa da una massiccia dose di psicologismo e interessi emotivi. In questo senso introduce platealmente la nozione di soggettività, intesa nelle sue sfumature eminentemente fenomenologiche, all'interno dei processi epistemologici, delineando quella che chiameremo *persona-scientziato*.

In questa istanza, vogliamo sviluppare la questione in due colli: nel primo, ci interesserà sottolineare le dinamiche soggettivistiche dietro l'avanzamento scientifico e, nel secondo, avvicineremo l'idea kuhniana di *shift* paradigmatico alla *rimodulazione di sintesi unitarie concordemente unificate*. In altri termini, crediamo che col lavoro di Kuhn si tratteggi un'indagine fenomenologica della comunità scientifica. Portare la fenomenologia nella comunità scientifica corrobora il concetto di una scienza non cumulativa perché gli scienziati, in quanto soggetti anche loro, risignificano continuamente il loro mondo, le loro evidenze e i loro orizzonti; in secondo luogo, otteniamo che la scienza, ben diversamente dall'idea comune, è imbevuta di un radicale soggettivismo da cui derivano conclusioni

²⁶ Il tema della co-variabilità delle parti rispetto all'intero è centrale nella fenomenologia husserliana, malgrado nelle *Meditazioni* sia solo accennato (vedi ivi, §17, pp. 69-71). Esso è al centro delle *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900-1901), specificamente della *Terza Ricerca Logica* (vedi: E. Husserl, *Logische Untersuchungen. Zweiter Teil: Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*, in "Husserliana", XIX/1, XIX/2, a cura di U. Panzer, Den Haag, Martinus Nijhoff, 1984; a cura di G. Piana, *Ricerche logiche*, Il Saggiatore, Milano 2015, pp. 375-426).

epistemiche anch'esse soggettivistiche.

Quindi, lo scienziato è una persona. Malgrado il camice bianco e gli strumenti istituiscono una sensazione di oggettività supportata dalla quantità, il punto è che la quantificabilità viene riportata a una soggettività intenzionale. Nell'atteggiamento trascendentale, dove avviene la riduzione, il numero è vuoto e acquista significato in un sistema di intenzionalità. Così, "2+2=4" nella riduzione è insignificante ma, sviluppato in un sistema unitario di intenzionalità, acquista sensatezza perché nell'orizzonte di possibilità sappiamo che al tabaccaio un pacchetto di sigarette da 4€ lo paghiamo con due monete da 2€²⁷.

Astraendo l'esempio, la questione è che l'assunto per cui somma degli angoli di un triangolo valga 180° è vero, e soprattutto è *vero per tutti noi*, se il nostro sistema di intenzionalità è concordemente unificato in modo che sia vero che gli angoli di un triangolo diano 180° quando sommati. Questo significa che la verità – e dunque il fondamento scientifico – non sta nei 180° ma nelle nostre sintesi concordemente unificate. Questo ovviamente presuppone un momento di accordo tra posizioni sintetiche diverse. Ecco che Kuhn può dire: «Non fa dunque meraviglia che, nelle prime fasi di sviluppo di ogni scienza, uomini diversi, trovandosi di fronte la stessa gamma di fenomeni [...] li descrivano e li interpretino in maniere diverse»²⁸. Una volta che si perviene all'accordo, da cui nasce il paradigma, «Coloro che sono restii o incapaci di adattare ad esso la loro ricerca devono continuare isolati o devono aggregarsi a qualche altro gruppo»²⁹.

La svolta kuhniana sta nel fatto che diversamente dall'idea neopositivistica per cui l'avanzamento scientifico sia lineare, dove ogni teoria è

²⁷ L'esempio rischia di tradire la profondità della questione, che in realtà poggia sulla filosofia della matematica e, più specificamente, sulla polarizzazione Husserl-Frege. Prima di pervenire al concetto di riduzione, Husserl credeva che il numero venisse costruito attraverso un processo di astrazione dal mucchio. Con la riduzione trascendentale invece, come detto, l'espressione matematica assume senso nella sintesi unitaria dell'ego intenzionale. Diversamente la vede Frege, il quale vede questo come una macchia di psicologismo che compromette la scientificità delle matematiche, che dovrebbero rimanere apriori. Sarà lui stesso a puntualizzare queste dinamiche, nella nota recensione del 1894 alla *Philosophie der Arithmetik: Psychologische und logische Untersuchungen* (1891) di Husserl. È possibile leggere la recensione in G. Frege, *Logica e aritmetica*, trad. di C. Mangione, L. Geymonat, Boringhieri, Torino 1965, pp. 418-437. Per ulteriori approfondimenti sulla questione, segnaliamo il recente L. Pantaleone, *Husserl e Frege. Psicologismo, antipsicologismo, logica, fenomenologia*, ombre corte, Verona 2020, che ben ricostruisce la dinamica dall'iniziale posizione dell'Husserl del '91 fino alla fenomenologia trascendentale.

²⁸ T. Kuhn, op.cit., pp. 36-37.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 39.

cumulativamente dopo l'altra in un andamento con la punta sempre in avanti, il progresso si dà attraverso cadute, riformulazioni, rotture, sconnessioni e crepature. Com'è noto, Kuhn individua alcuni periodi epistemici cui corrisponde un momento epistemico: a una prima situazione di *scienza normale* dove i paradigmi sono puntuali³⁰ segue un periodo di *scienza straordinaria*³¹, il cui sintomo è la comparsa di un'*anomalia*³², dove quei paradigmi vacillano. Proprio qui compaiono tutti gli elementi soggettivistici della comunità scientifica.

Le anomalie sfociano nella rivoluzione, ovvero la sostituzione dei paradigmi fino a quel momento accettati con altri migliori. Questa operazione viene resa più difficile proprio da degli operatori emotivi e soggettivi: Kuhn mette in luce che ogni rivoluzione, cui poi segue un nuovo paradigma regolatorio in scienza normale, è ostacolata dall'emotività di alcuni scienziati – «Essi escogiteranno numerose articolazioni e modificazioni *ad hoc* della loro teoria allo scopo di eliminare ogni conflitto manifesto»³³. Questo accade per motivi, se vogliamo, banali: non vogliono che il loro paradigma cada in favore di un altro, addirittura «alcuni sono stati senza dubbio spinti ad abbandonare la scienza a causa della loro incapacità di tollerare una crisi»³⁴ anche se «Abbandonare un paradigma senza al tempo stesso sostituirgliene un altro equivale ad abbandonare la scienza stessa»³⁵. Il fatto è che i paradigmi non sono dei meri dispositivi epistemici per la risoluzione di rompicapi, ma delle vere e proprie lenti ontologiche che istituiscono una regola di realtà o, in fenomenologia, una sintesi unitaria; perciò, cambiare paradigmi vuol dire risignificare completamente il mondo, ricostruirne gli orizzonti e rimodularne il senso. Malgrado Kuhn ci scherzi dicendo che «Lo scienziato che abbraccia un nuovo paradigma assomiglia [...] a colui che inforca occhiali con lenti invertenti», il punto è che «Sebbene abbia di fronte a sé lo stesso insieme di oggetti di prima e sia cosciente di ciò, egli li trova cionondimeno completamente trasformati»³⁶. E così «molte vecchie misurazioni e manipolazioni [...] sono sostituite da altre»³⁷. In questa situazione lo scienziato perde il mondo in quanto frana il suo senso di realtà.

³⁰ Cfr. *ivi*, pp. 43-55.

³¹ Cfr. *ivi*, pp. 103-118.

³² Cfr. *ivi*, pp. 75-89.

³³ *Ivi*, p. 104.

³⁴ *Ivi*, p. 105.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 151.

³⁷ *Ivi*, p. 159.

È quindi corretta la visione di Husserl per cui «la scienza vuole in generale giudicare espressamente e vuol mantenere il giudizio, la verità, come qualcosa di fissato nell'espressione»³⁸, laddove questa rimane solo una pretesa epistemica insoddisfatta dal fatto che, per dirla con l'Husserl della *Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften* (1936), anche lo scienziato è incluso nel *Lebenswelt* e vive la scienza con un proprio stile e sfumature emotive, proprio quelle che lo rendono repellente al progresso, come appena detto. La fenomenologia da un lato e lo *shift* paradigmatico dall'altro rendono conto e risignificano qualcosa di forse scontato, ma in realtà molto importante: lo scienziato è una persona e la scienza è fatta da persone-scienziato.

Proprio all'opposto dell'idea comune, la scienza è personale, soggettiva e poggia sullo stile proprio di ogni scienziato inteso nella sua individualità unica e insostituibile, cosa testimoniata pure da alcuni modi di riferirsi a certe matrici concettuali, come: "aristotelismo", "cartesianesimo", "newtonianesimo", "copernicanesimo". Non si tratta di innocenti modi di dire: ognuno di questi, che incarna semanticamente una matrice di riferimento, dischiude un mondo, un orizzonte, apre a certe sintesi unitarie con cui *vivere concordemente con gli altri* il mondo e con le quali conoscerlo decretando che cosa sia vero. Nel passaggio da una fase all'altra, «gli scienziati vedono cose nuove e diverse anche quando guardano con gli strumenti tradizionali nelle direzioni in cui avevano già guardato prima»³⁹, che è quanto accade in fenomenologia, e quindi a noi come soggetti personali e intenzionali, quando «lo stesso cubo, ossia *lo stesso* secondo coscienza, può nello stesso tempo o in momenti successivi essere consaputo in modi distinti di coscienza»⁴⁰.

Conclusione: la persona-scienziato

Come speriamo sia chiaro, il nostro obiettivo era di accorpare fenomenologia e sociologia della scienza per venire a capo della persona-scienziato. Questo non solo per ribadire quanto la fenomenologia estenda le sue maglie metodologiche nelle varie regionalità del sapere, ma pure per rimettere sul tavolo la questione della conoscenza in termini nuovi.

Le comunità scientifiche sono il luogo dove le persone-scienziato organizzano esperienze concordemente unitarie nella forma di paradigmi con cui conoscere e studiare il mondo. È l'indagine di Kuhn a farci strada: le

³⁸ E. Husserl, *Meditazioni cartesiane*, cit., §4, p. 46.

³⁹ T. Kuhn, op.cit., p. 139.

⁴⁰ E. Husserl, *Meditazioni cartesiane*, cit., §18, p. 72.

repellenze e le riluttanze, commiste al fervore e l'entusiasmo dei giovani scienziati⁴¹, delineano un'idea di scientificità tutta particolare. Gli scienziati sono persone con un mondo, tratti personali ed emotività specifiche, ritenzioni e protensioni con cui, cosa più importante, producono i loro paradigmi, e dunque fanno scienza.

Questa conclusione ci apre a considerazioni rilevanti. Tra le altre, dovremmo nuovamente interrogarci sullo statuto delle scienze: se la scienza è imbevuta di tanto soggettivismo, non dovremmo forse reconsiderarne il senso? Non dovremmo forse introdurre nuove categorie, nuovi concetti e nuove terminologie per la produzione di conoscenza? E come dovremmo considerare quest'ultima, se la verità è frutto di sintesi concordemente unificate, e dunque paradigmi sempre rivedibili o distruttibili? Forse, sarebbe più corretto dire che ogni rivoluzione scientifica distrugga un mondo: ne disgiunge gli orizzonti e le evidenze ponendo altri progetti e modi di intendere la realtà. È evidente sia contro questo che reagiscono quelle persone-scienziato che non accettano la novità paradigmatica: per loro non si tratta di nuove teorie, ma della realtà stessa per come la *vivevano* che si disgrega alla luce di nuovi orizzonti di significato. Ma se come sappiamo questi nuovi orizzonti riguardano intimamente l'ego, vuol dire che assieme alla disintegrazione dei loro paradigmi tramonta pure la loro identità, che era coordinata con certe unificazioni dell'esperienza, dunque a quei paradigmi. La persona-scienziato che combatte la novità, in realtà, combatte una battaglia tutta personale, quella del mantenimento del proprio mondo e, assieme, del mantenimento della propria identità⁴².

⁴¹ Questo è un passo chiave del lavoro di Kuhn, spesso trascurato, in quanto sottolinea quanto i vissuti siano fondamentali per l'avanzamento scientifico. I giovani e non gli anziani sono implicati nello *shift* paradigmatico covano meno affezione – e dunque meno interesse emotivo – nei confronti del paradigma precedente. Questo tratto specifico, a nostro modo di vedere, esplicita una volta per tutte la centralità della soggettività all'interno della metodologia scientifica: le emozioni e le affezioni da un lato possono essere un ostacolo e, dall'altro, una grossa occasione per la produzione di conoscenza. Cfr. T. Kuhn, op.cit., p. 117.

⁴² Sempre rimanendo in sociologia della scienza, vogliamo accennare all'articolo che P. Bourdieu pubblicò nell'87 dal titolo *L'institutionnalisation de l'anomie*, apparso per la rivista "Les Cahiers du musée national d'art moderne" (ivi, 19-20, pp. 6-19; trad. di C. Tartarini, *L'istituzionalizzazione dell'anomia*, in P. Bourdieu, *Il mercato dei beni simbolici e altri scritti sull'arte*, a cura di M. Santoro, Meltemi, Milano 2023, pp. 199-228). Malgrado con intenzioni teoretiche diverse, Bourdieu rende conto di qualcosa di simile: la novità, dapprima relegata all'anomia, finisce per scavalcare l'istituzionale attraverso un processo di rimodulazione. Bourdieu sottolinea la resistenza degli accademici al nuovo, che si traduce

Sono questioni che noi crediamo impellenti specialmente in un'attualità post-moderna dove il mondo assume perennemente sensatezze diverse, risignificandosi tanto strutturalmente da lasciarci spesso spaesati⁴³

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spesso in processi di demonizzazione e screditamento. Il punto è che, al netto degli interessi specifici, la persona-scienziato istituzionalizzata non vuole perdere il suo mondo: la sua realtà poggia su orizzonti di senso minacciati dall'emersione della novità. Bourdieu nello specifico considera l'istituzionalizzazione dell'avanguardia impressionista, che prima ha dovuto superare la riluttanza accademica. Al di là degli interessi personali, di cui Bourdieu pure si interesserà in *Homo academicus* (1984), il punto è che «La rottura con lo stile accademico implica la rottura con lo *stile di vita* che esso implica ed esprime» (P. Bourdieu, *Il mercato dei beni simbolici e altri scritti sull'arte*, cit., p. 220). Tanto è vero che, come ancora rintraccia Bourdieu, «Tutti gli "errori" rilevati dai critici hanno come principio il divario tra l'occhio accademico, attento ai significati, e la pittura pura, attenta alle forme» (ivi, p. 222). Questo si traduce in persone-scienziato che combattono l'emergente in virtù del loro significato di mondo, per non perdere il proprio senso di realtà e, in un certo senso, la loro percezione di sé al mondo.

⁴³ Sul tema c'è un'apprezzabile letteratura di cui ci limitiamo a segnalare due testi particolarmente significativi: O. Marquard, *Apologia del caso*, il Mulino, Bologna 1991; H. Rosa, *Accelerazione e alienazione. Per una teoria critica del tempo nella tarda modernità*, Einaudi, Torino 2015.