

Ethics in light of Ubuntu and Transimmanence

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ABSTRACT

Ubuntu, as part of the African philosophical tradition, and Transimmanence, as part of the Western deconstructionist philosophical tradition, represent some of the most disparate philosophical traditions. As divergent as these traditions may be, ethics seems to be a key feature in both and a crucial point of overlap. In our multicultural, globalized and increasingly postmodern world, where people live within competing and contradicting philosophies, the question of ethics become more pertinent. Our contention is to shed light on ethics by comparing the traditions of Ubuntu and Transimmanence on specific ethical issues. Notions of identity, personhood, individuality, humanity, freedom, the community and sense (meaning), play for example a pivotal role in Ubuntu and transimmanence.

I argue in this dissertation that the reading and comparison of these two contrasting philosophical traditions (Ubuntu and transimmanence) through the lens of each other, can help one to develop a better understanding of each of them in regard to their respective understandings of ethics and eventually help to develop a better understanding of ethics per se. These two traditions seem to be so far removed from each other that this seems like an impossible task. However, with a closer examination of both some strong overlapping between Ubuntu and transimmanence in terms of their ethical focus can be identified. Eight ethical themes are identified as central in this comparison, namely the origin of ethics, individualism and personhood, the role of the community, respect, authority, humanity, being and ontology, and freedom. The overlap and differences of the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence on these themes bridge the gap between these two traditions, elucidate both, and offer new insights into the complexity of ethics. Where these traditions differ on these themes some of the most critical ethical issues for further research are identified.

KEYWORDS: Ubuntu, African philosophy, ethics, transimmanence, Jean-Luc Nancy

DECLARATION

I Phumudzo Pertunia Ramolai, hereby affirm that the reserch dissertation titled “ethics in light of Ubuntu and transimmanence” presented by me for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy in the school of Philosophy in the faculty of Humanities at the North West University (Potchefstroom Campus), is my original work and it has not been submitted for the award of ay other degree, of any other university or institution.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Proverbs 3:5-8 “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes”

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ETHICS IN LIGHT OF UBUNTU AND TRANSIMMANENCE

Key concepts: Ethics, Ubuntu, African philosophy, Western philosophy, transimmanence, Jean-Luc Nancy, deconstruction, community, identity, meaning, sense, morality, being

INTRODUCTION

1. Focus of the study

The main research question of this study is: How can ethics be better understood in light of Ubuntu (as an African philosophical tradition) and transimmanence (of Jean Luc Nancy – as part of the Western deconstructive tradition)? In other words: Can reading and comparing these two different traditions (African/Ubuntu and Western/transimmanence) through the lens of each other help us develop a better understanding of ethics?

The hypothesis of this study is that reading and comparing these two contrasting philosophical traditions (Ubuntu and transimmanence) and their respective ethics through the lens of each other can help one to develop a better understanding of each of them. This could ultimately help to develop a better understanding of ethics per se. These two traditions seem to be so far removed from each other that this appears an impossible task. However, on closer examination of both, some strong overlaps between Ubuntu and transimmanence in terms of their ethical focus emerge. An analysis of this ethical overlap, and the differences between these traditions, serves then to bridge the gap between these two traditions, to elucidate both, and to offer new insights into the complexity of ethics.

To answer the main research question, the following sub-questions will be asked:

1. What is Ubuntu and its ethics?
2. What is transimmanence, as developed by Jean Luc Nancy, and its ethics?
3. What overlaps and differences are there between these two traditions' understanding of ethics?

4. How do the intersections between these two traditions enable a better understanding and practice of ethics?

The goals of this study are very closely linked to the sub-questions above. They are:

1. To describe Ubuntu and its ethics as an African philosophical tradition
2. To describe transimmanence and its ethics as part of the Western deconstructive tradition as developed by Jean-Luc Nancy
3. To compare, construct and evaluate the relation and differences between the two traditions by reading each one through the lens of the other with ethics as interlocutor.
4. To indicate possible insights gained in regard to a better understanding of ethics through these two traditions in terms of concepts like freedom, respect, interdependence, individualism, personhood, and agency.

2. Rationale for the study

The study of the topic at hand is important mainly because we live in a multi-religious, multicultural and postmodern world in which ethics plays a pivotal role for all humankind, but is at the same time being questioned as relative and culture/tradition bound. This study will investigate the possible common ground of ethics between two apparently hugely different traditions in philosophy, namely the African and Western. Understanding the perspectives of ethics of these two traditions – through Ubuntu and transimmanence – better, may lead to more insight and better development of ethics per se.

Strictly speaking, Ubuntu is not a 'tradition', but the concept is used here (as elsewhere in the study) to encapsulate the Ubuntu ethical philosophy which is situated in the broader tradition of African philosophy. Describing Ubuntu as a tradition is done to make it possible to summarize and contrast the African-Ubuntu-ethics line of thought with that of transimmanence. This will be explicated in more detail below and in the first chapter.

2.1. African philosophy

According to Van Niekerk (2013:17) African philosophy is not simply a resource to be drawn on in developing an account of Ubuntu as a theory of moral value, but a set of methodologies which have evolved in response to the challenges of developing traditional conceptual resources in philosophy. The concept of African philosophy originated as a variant of the general idea of primitive philosophy, which is part of the history of European attempts to understand the strange practices of other people (Rée & Urmson, 2005:4). “Any contemporary African philosophy is at least a response to the legacy of colonial and post-colonial denigration of Africans and their cultural and intellectual resources” (Van Niekerk, 2013:17). Where and how does Ubuntu fit into African philosophy?

2.1.1. Ubuntu

Ubuntu and African philosophy is a topical issue in the South African philosophical landscape. However, many have found it challenging to define the concept of Ubuntu. The concept is ambiguous in many respects and as a result, it has been difficult to capture it. There are also a number of different interpretations of Ubuntu, some of which are inconsistent with each other, and this means that there is more than one definition of the tradition of Ubuntu (Taylor, 2014:322; Venter, 2004:149)

Although Ubuntu is primarily linked to African philosophy, the concept of Ubuntu is not confined to African philosophy and its cultural history. The tradition of Ubuntu gained particular attention when post independent African states began to reflect on their history, colonization, the process of nation building, globalization, western education, and the creation of prosperity (Dolamo, 2013:1; Ndlovu, 2016:135). Therefore, it can be said that the tradition of Ubuntu is an important part of African ethics that is embedded within broader issues of liberation, history, development and identity.

2.1.2. Ubuntu, being and ethics

The root of Ubuntu is “ntu” which signifies “primal being”. The prefix-*Ubu* specifies a oneness while *ntu* specifies a wholeness. *Ubu* is or oriented towards *ntu* as a being becoming a whole (Tschaepe, 2013:48). This means that the “concept of Ubuntu is a progression into wholeness and it is the basis of understanding Ubuntu as an ethical concept and provides a foundation from which to understand the various meanings

that have been assigned to the word throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century” (Tschaepe, 2013:48).

The notion “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” “motho ke motho kabatho babang” directly translated as “A person is a person through other people”, captures a normative view of what we ought to most value in life. In this case, personhood, selfhood and humanness are thought and value laden concepts (Metz, 2011:537). This raises the immediate questions: Are all instances of what “ought to”, according to Ubuntu, ethical? How does value fit into the notion of Ubuntu? Is “moral value” a mere tautology, or is this to be taken as an acknowledgement of different kinds of value besides moral value?

What is important in this regard is that a person’s “ultimate goal in life should be to become a person (true) self or a (genuine) human being. The assertion/notion that a person is a person through other people is a call to develop one’s moral personhood, a method to acquire Ubuntu or batho to exude humanness” (Metz, 2011:537). The concepts of being, becoming, and individuality/the self, play a pivotal role when it comes to Ubuntu and ethics. However, they are always situated in one’s community.

The individual and the community

The notion of “‘Ubuntu’ recognises the power intrinsic to the capacity for dialogue and it places the community at the centre of all moral deliberations which are located on the idea of communal or group rationality” (Mangena, 2012:1). Defining “communal or group rationality” in moral terms means a collective morality is taken into account rather than individual morality (Mangena, 2012:1).

This is not to say that there is no recognition of the individual. According to Louw (1998:4), “Ubuntu’s respect for the particularity of the other, links up to its respect for individuality”. It is a tradition which provides people with the meaning of self-identity, self-respect and accomplishment. It assists individuals to deal with their tribulations in a positive way by drawing in the morality values which have been inherited and perpetuated throughout their history (Ndlovu, 2016:136). The Ubuntu values are acquired and transmitted from generation to generation over the years. This means that they are also embedded in people’s individual lives.

However, individuality seems to be a concept that is, as part of Ubuntu, totally absorbed in the community. An African person is not deemed as a loose-standing or isolated individual, but a person living in a community. The concept of interdependence then comes into play because various relationships are formed among the individuals within the community. There is thus a tension rather than a contradiction here in the way an individual is understood within the notion of Ubuntu: the individual person is recognised within a community, but his/her individuality is to a great extent overshadowed by the importance of the community. In traditional life, the individual does not desire to exist in isolation from other people. He owes his existence to other people; he/she is viewed as being part of the whole. The whole in this context refers to community which plays a very big role when it comes to the tradition of Ubuntu. The community makes, and produces the individual as the individual is dependent upon the corporate group (Wiredu et al., 2004:337).

When one looks at African moral ideas, they are attractive when interpreted as conceiving of communal relationships as a desirable kind of interaction which guides the wants of the majorities (Metz, 2011:538). These norms become dominant in the ethical tradition of Ubuntu. Also in the broader African philosophy there is no atomistic notion of personhood, which means that individuals become real only through their relationship with others (Tschaepe, 2013:51). As individuals in a community, the concept of identity is very important. Individuals are able to identify strongly with each other, which results in individuals being able to think of themselves as “we”, members of the same group (Metz, 2011:538).

Bearing in mind these preliminary remarks on African philosophy and Ubuntu and its ethics, the similarities and differences in ethics from a Western, and especially a transimmanence perspective, should emerge more clearly.

2.2. Transimmanence and ethics

Transimmanence is a concept that was developed by a contemporary Western, or more specific, Continental philosopher, namely Jean-Luc Nancy. Nancy was born in 1940 in France and received his doctorate in 1962 in Paris. His doctoral study, which was on Kant, was supervised by Paul Ricoeur. Some of the major influences on him include Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Friedrich Nietzsche and Jacques Lacan.

He spent most of his academic life as a professor of philosophy at the University of Strasbourg, but he has also given guest lectures in many parts of the world.

It is important to note that Nancy's philosophy is not representative of Western philosophy. It is to a large extent representative (or at least immediately recognizable) of the deconstructionist (or postmodern) movement within the tradition of Continental Philosophy. The rubric of Continental Philosophy has been applied to a range of twentieth century French and German thinkers since the 1970s. The most prominent are Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Deleuze and Derrida. At times their work has been condemned as being unclear and even disreputable by Analytic philosophers. In truth, Continental philosophers work in a different "register" that is more aligned to literature and art than to natural science. Their work has a number of common features such as reference to the work of Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, and Freud. However, Continental philosophers differ on the notion of Continental Philosophy (Rée & Urmson, 2005:79).

One of the aims of Nancy's philosophy is to enquire into the sense of the world. By sense, Nancy means that we need to understand the condition of truth and meaning that precedes their partial disclosure and that are incommensurable with conventional views (Hutchens, 2005:4). Within Nancy's *corpus* (which can be described as deconstructionist because of the huge influence of Derrida on his work), he developed the concept of transimmanence. Transimmanence is a very broad concept and provides a label for most of Nancy's work. The concept itself was introduced as an alternative to the dichotomy of immanence and transcendence. In short, it is an attempt to reconceptualise being and meaning, and even transcendence, in immanent terms (Verhoef, 2016:1). Transimmanence is strictly not a 'tradition', but the concept is used here (as else in the study) to encapsulate Nancy's philosophy which is in the tradition of deconstruction. The reference to transimmanence as a tradition is merely for the purpose of contrasting the Western-continental-deconstruction-Nancy line of thought (as tradition) using a single term that summarizes it the best, namely transimmanence.

Nancy uses transimmanence to explore the substantialist transcendentalist and immanent metaphysics (Hutchens, 2005:156) in search of a "middle" or more "sustainable" position. Speaking against transcendental substantialism, Nancy

argues that singular beings are not predetermined by reference to a general ground of being. Challenging transcendentalism, Nancy contends that there is no reserve “outside” the world that could serve as a source of meaning or value in the determination of singularity. There is no metaphysical ground of one’s being as is found, for example, within African philosophy.¹ Furthermore Nancy rejects immanentism (or immanent metaphysics as presented by Deleuze), saying that there is no such reserve “inside” the world by which singular beings’ identities could be determined and reflected (Hutchens, 2005:156). There is not an isolated or single community that determines an individual as in African philosophy.

Nancy thus views immanence and transcendence as both being “inadequate for understanding the existence and our being in this world. Existence has rather to do with multiple textures, movements and relations in this world as an absolute immanence” (Verhoef, 2016:10). Furthermore, this “absolute immanence is not positing of immanence against transcendence, but rather what Nancy calls transimmanence” (Verhoef, 2016:10). The “trans” as the relational within the immanent is of great importance here. Gerber (2016:89) states, for example, that transimmanence is the movement of the “with”, cutting across both the “self” and the “ego” by not substantiating each other, but rather exposing one to another creating sense or meaning. Therefore, one may also state that Nancy’s notion of transimmanence is a process of naming and locating the places and movements at work within “the sense of the world”. It is a process in which there is an interplay of different dynamics in the “world” that Nancy describes as playing, sharing, speaking, and so on. As in Ubuntu, the individual is thus also not isolated or loose-standing.

In Nancy’s concept of transimmanence, one implicitly encounters his notion of ethics. Within this transimmanence, Nancy makes references to “sense/meaning”, “humanism” (creation of meaning and value between humans), the “individual/self”, “immanence” and “the community”. All these concepts have ethical value or implications, especially in notions of care, dialogue, understanding, creativity, freedom, respect, interdependence. This must, however, be read and understood

¹ Teffo and Roux say that “central to African metaphysics are religious beliefs relating to the African concept of God, the universe and their relations” (2003:195-6). This will be discussed in more detail in chapter three.

together with Nancy's whole philosophy in which the notion of sense plays a huge role.

Sense, according to Nancy could be defined as something which is singular plural, and irreducible to comprehension of meaning (Hutchens, 2005:5). Therefore, it requires a finite of thinking and it also does not consist in the significance "of" the event but "that" the event occurs at all. Furthermore, sense is the world itself, or a constitutive element of the structure of the world. In the world, sense collapses into an open, reticulated immanence without any recourse to transcendent or transcendental sources of meaning (Hutchens, 2005:33). Nancy speaks of sense which arises from our everyday encounters with one another (Schrijvers, 2009:266). Nancy contends that sense is the awareness that, even though full presence cannot be achieved, all sense has not abandoned us. Instead, it means that we are abandoned to sense. Furthermore, sense only occurs among two (or more) persons: it is the name of that which happens "between" all beings.

The ontology of being is thus described by Nancy "as a web of relationships in which all are dependent upon, all supplement one another, and in which no relation takes precedence over another to the point of eclipsing all essence" (Hutchens, 2005:38). Nancy contends that sense today is its own constitutive loss, as it presents itself in the opening of the abandonment as the opening of the world (Hutchens, 2005:38). With the death of God, absolute values and the concepts of history, art, morality, philosophy and "man" were thought to be at an "end". In contrast, he argues for a continuous "open of the world", for a transimmanence rather than a closed immanence.

There are three forms of closed immanence in Nancy's discussions: 1) The immanence of atomic individuals in closed association with one another; 2) The immanence of a group of individuals reflecting upon their cohesion as such; and 3) The immanence of sense itself at the interstices of irreducibly open relations of saving (Hutchens, 2005:34). The notion of closed immanence also comes into play when exploring Nancy's concept of ethics. Nancy rejects the idea that social reality is determined by a schema of an immense, spectacular, self-consumption. He contends that "if the relation between a social body and what it takes to be is a representation, then the relation itself is the real in this representation, and it is that

real that composes social beings” (Hutchens, 2005:35). The “real” that Nancy speaks of is the separated relation “which man figures” and by which it is identified and suppressed by totalizing politics. This closed immanence of substantial community consists of atomic individuals. The mythos that holds the community together is imposed from within and by the expressive voice necessary for the evocation of this very mythic immanence. He, therefore, rejects the idea of a closed community as something which is totalizing.

Nancy’s ethics also makes reference to humanism. According to Nancy, humanity is something that “is shared by humans, and it is desirable in the incessant surprising of the human condition and its exposure to an undecidable future” (Nancy, 2005:37). Furthermore, Nancy contends that “we are in a century in which we yearn for a rediscovery of sense or a sense of direction in which to seek it. We have become desensitised by the scandals of the age to the extent that we present our history as a process of a planned savagery of a civilization at its limits, a civilization of destruction” (Nancy, 2005:37). What is fascinating about Nancy is that even though he does not necessarily view the community in a positive sense here, he is concerned about the future community. Nancy proposes a “community of being” that replaces the traditional question of the “being” of community. He contends that it is in our freedom and community, that we are open to a future that is always a response to our traditional sensibilities, to our “community of being”.

For Nancy, it is important that we come to a much clearer understanding of what freedom and community have come to mean (Hutchens, 2005:2). The self (of the subject) is not a substance that grounds its existence from where others can be defined to the self (Gerber 2016:71). We are not isolated individuals that constitute ourselves. The self or subject is for Nancy not to be understood as pre-constituted. Instead, the self should be understood from its basic mode of existence, i.e. being singular plural and as a result the self becomes decentred. Here we find resonance with Ubuntu's understanding of the constitutive nature of the community from the individual or the self. The question now is whether there is also resonance between these traditions in terms of ethics.

2.3. Is there a relation between Ubuntu ethics and transimmanence ethics?

The concept of dis-enclosure (an openness or opening in contrast to being closed or mere immanence) is very important when it comes to Nancy's philosophy of transimmanence. Dis-enclosure also has a possible link to African philosophy. Syrontinski (2012:416) illustrates this by referring to the Cameroonian social theorist Achille Mbembe's (who now works in South Africa), as well as Nancy's use of this concept of dis-enclosure. Syrontinski's work in this regard serves as a preliminary lens in which one can look at the relation or comparison between Ubuntu ethics and transimmanence and ethics. Syrontinski argues that the privileged concept for Mbembe (as African philosopher) in his most recent work is Nancy's term "dis-enclosure". However, this is only one of the terms Nancy uses to describe the way we make sense or meaning of our world. Christopher Watkins (2009:139) explains that sense is described by Nancy variously in terms of opening, dis-closure ('*déclousion*') and exhaustion. "What is exhausted is signification or *verité*, and what is opened is sense. For Nancy the world is patent and meaningful, for the disjunction of sense and world is always already false. At the heart of being and the world there is an obscure sense to which we have an obligation" (Watkins, 2009:142). The ethical (obligation) for Nancy is thus to find meaning and sense within the world. This is a constant and open process where 'disclosure' takes place the whole time.

Mbembe, as an African philosopher, also finds some recourse in Nancy's concept of dis-enclosure. For Mbembe, dis-enclosure, "indicates the act of opening up something that is not only closed, but also enclosed, such as an enclosure. He views it as a transformative action that is at the same time a coming into being or *eclosion*" (Syrontinski, 2012:416). Mbembe adopts the term *declosion* as a paranomistic link-word joining together, *eclosion*, *declosion* and decolonization which have occurred in African countries. He consequently makes a connection between Nancy's (post) phenomenological rethinking of being and the world and the radically political anti-colonialism of Fanon and his successors. For Mbembe, the implication is that decolonization is essentially about reclaiming a world and one's place within the world. Membe's understanding and application of Nancy's dis-enclosure in the African context indicate the strong ethical implications between the two traditions of Ubuntu (as African philosophy) and transimmanence (as dis-enclosure).

Syrontinski (2014:178) also makes the point that Mbembe also explores the work of Sedar Senghor, who is a Senegalese poet, politician and African socialist, to gain a

deeper understanding of the relation of dis-enclosure to African philosophy. Senghor focuses on the concept of universalism and investigates how we can think about that the specificity of Africa in relation to universal humanism. This echoes closely Nancy's conceptualization of "community of being", as being singular-plural where the singularity of existence is necessarily a relationship of sharing. The similarity to Ubuntu is remarkable, but this only touches on some initial points of overlap between Nancy's transimmanence and Ubuntu. It suggests that a more detailed analysis of both these traditions and its ethics would be fruitful. This is what the study focuses on as a whole and so it will not be pre-empted here.

2.4. Thinking about ethics in these two traditions

Ubuntu, as part of the African tradition, and the deconstructionist tradition (of which transimmanence is an example) are traditions which represent some of the ethical influences which affect people's lives in our multicultural, postmodern or at least increasing globalized world. As broad as these concepts and traditions may be, ethics seems to be a key feature in both and a crucial point of overlap. For example, the notions of identity of the individual, becoming, the community and sense (meaning and dis-enclosure), play a pivotal role in Ubuntu and transimmanence.

My contention, therefore, is that to perceive ethics in the light of Ubuntu and transimmanence may enable one to understand ethics better. In both traditions the foundations of ethical terms like freedom, respect, authority and care are investigated and critically discussed. A contrast between the ethics of the two traditions may also assist one to identify some of the most critical ethical issues that humanity is faced with currently and in the future.

3. Method, contribution and structure of study

The method used in this study entails primarily a literature review, in which the relevant literature in the field is analysed, evaluated and synthesized in relation to the problem statement of this study. The relation between Ubuntu and ethics is explored as well as the relation between transimmanence and ethics. Lastly, a comparison between Ubuntu and ethics and transimmanence and ethics includes an analysis of the overlap and differences between the two.

The unique contribution of the study lies in the fact that a reading of the concept of ethics in the light of Ubuntu and transimmanence enables one to have a better understanding of the ethics of these two traditions. Secondly, it makes it possible for a comparison between the African tradition and the Western tradition to be made. Thirdly, it enables one to see that ethics is not only an important aspect of our everyday lives, but it is shared by humanity regardless of one's philosophical, religious, ethnic/tribal or cultural tradition – the overlap between these two diverse traditions of Ubuntu and transimmanence provides a case in point. This study contributes to broader research on ethics by explicating the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence, and by comparing them in respect of eight specific ethical themes. This opens up some new perspectives on these eight themes, highlights the importance of these themes for ethics, and shows how some extremely diverse traditions can share the same views on them. It is where they differ on these themes where some further need for research come to the fore.

In chapter one, Ubuntu and ethics are discussed. This is followed by a discussion of transimmanence and its ethics in chapter two. In the third chapter, the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence are compared with each other, and the focus is on how different ethical themes can serve as a possible interlocutor between these traditions. Eight central ethical themes are identified, namely the origin of ethics, individualism and personhood, the role of the community, respect, authority, humanity, being and ontology, and freedom. The overlap and differences between the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence on these themes are then analysed. The insights that emerge for 'ethics in general'² are formulated in the second part of the third chapter. In the conclusion, some of the main findings of the study are spelled out to highlight the complexity of and need for further research on ethics in general. The findings also underline the value of understanding ethics through insights gained from Ubuntu and transimmanence.

² The phrase, 'ethics in general', refers in this study to the broad scholarly field of ethics which may include any other tradition. Ubuntu and transimmanence are only two of the traditions that constitute this much broader conversation on ethics.

CHAPTER ONE: UBUNTU AND ETHICS

1. Introduction

There has been widespread debate on the nature of 'African Philosophy'. The exact nature of African Philosophy has been explored in the past few decades by philosophers such as Bodurin in *The question of African Philosophy* (1981), Momoh in *African Philosophy... Does it exist?* (1985), Wiredu in *A Companion to African Philosophy* (2004) and Oruka in *Trends in contemporary African philosophy* (1990). This gave rise to questions such as: Does African Philosophy exist as a philosophy in its own right? Is it an authentic philosophy? Is it only part of some other broader philosophy? Is it a "philosophy" or "cultural living tradition"?

These questions can, of course, be questioned themselves, but that is beyond the scope of this study. The focus of this study, and specifically of this chapter, is to analyse the relationship between African Philosophy and Ubuntu with regards to ethics. The argument in this chapter begins with a broad conception of what African Philosophy is, which is followed by an explication of the concept of Ubuntu and its relationship with African Philosophy. The analysis and explication of both these concepts are narrowed down to their ethical implications. The aims of this chapter are, therefore:

- 1) To highlight the connection and difference between African Philosophy and Ubuntu, and to make it clear that Ubuntu cannot just be equated with African Philosophy or vice versa. There is an inseparable link between Ubuntu and African Philosophy.
- 2) To deduce the ethics of Ubuntu and African Philosophy so that a clear description and understanding of their unique features can be presented.

In the next chapter, the focus is on 'transimmanence and its ethics'. In the third and last chapter, a comparison is made between the ethics in (or typical of) Ubuntu and in (or typical of) transimmanence is made. This first chapter first provides an introductory understanding of 'ethics in the light of Ubuntu'. Secondly, it identifies some ethical insights into and problems related to Ubuntu and African philosophy. These insights and problems are linked with, compared to, and brought into

conversation with the 'ethics of transimmanence'. The comparative dialogue that is developed is used to explore new insights with regard to ethics in general.

1.1 African philosophy

This subsection draws on definitions of African Philosophy by different prominent philosophers in an attempt to arrive at a working definition of this contentious concept. What is sought is not a final, or conclusive definition (it remains a contentious concept), but the contextual background for understanding Ubuntu.

For centuries, especially in Western philosophy, the idea of an African philosophy was frowned upon (Letseka & Venter, 2012:2). Discussions on African philosophy revolved mainly around the question whether or not there was such a thing as African philosophy, and if so what it was. However, Letseka & Venter (2012:2) contend that a starting point in conceptualizing African philosophy is Mbiti's seminal works, *African Religions and philosophy* (1969) and *Introduction to African Religion* (1975). In both of these works, Mbiti focuses on the African community and its communal nature. He points out that traditional African communities are marked by communal interdependence between the community and the individual. He contends that the individual owes his/her existence to other people and the community, including past generations. This ontological indebtedness means that the individual cannot exist in isolation from his or her community and vice versa. Both exist in a "communal interdependence". They are not primarily separate entities, but are part of the whole, which can be described (perhaps confusingly) as the community. The fact that the individual forms part of the community in such a strong ontological way means that anything that happens to the individual, happens to the community. For Mbiti this communal interdependence is the starting point as well as the unique emphasis and characteristic of African philosophy.

In more recent literature on African philosophy, the questions of whether or not African philosophy is possible, or if it continues to exist today, is still debated (Coetzee & Roux, 2003:5). Even though strong arguments have been advanced to demonstrate the actual existence of African philosophy, one may raise the question whether African philosophy is not only an expression of the already familiar Western philosophy, and secondly whether it relies on it for its existence (Shutte, 1993:53). What this means for Shutte is that the existence of African Philosophy is dependent

on Western Philosophy. Had it not been for Western Philosophy, which he views as “analytical” and as a “rational discipline”, African Philosophy would cease to exist (1993:53).

These questions about the nature of African philosophy (stated above) arise when African philosophy is described in terms of Western philosophy and vice versa. However, to read these traditions in the light of each other, and thus discover similarities between African and Western philosophies, does not mean that they are one and the same thing. It does not necessarily imply that the one is dependent on the other, but rather that they affirm each other’s identity in this conversation or comparison. What this means is that the two philosophies are not and cannot be identical. If these two philosophies were to be identical it would mean that they would have to be dissolved into one philosophy, such a dissolution, however, may not be possible. More argues that “to claim that African Philosophy can only be woven from a synthesis between Western Philosophical methodology and African ‘traditional thought’ is to privilege the Western model over and above the African model. It is to give credence to the European ‘civilizing mission’, a forced attempt to say that the African must necessarily possess a philosophy in terms of Western standards, criteria and norms even though such a ‘philosophy’ cannot really deserve the name of being what is” (1996:125). This stance urges one to ask: What is African philosophy?

The commonly used expression from philosophers from Africa and from all over the world, African philosophy, animates the question about its nature. In order to answer this question there have been various proposals throughout history (Mbiti for example) and from philosophers from different traditions.³ Brand contends that “there is a lack of unanimity about what African philosophy is, what it was and what it should be” (2011:174). African philosophy may be seen as lacking clear boundaries. However, it is “characterised by a number of salient themes, perennial problems,

³ There have been various attempts by African and Western philosophers to define “African Philosophy”. Rauche argues that “Philosophy or Western philosophy refers to thought that is abstract, conceptual and rational. Traditional African philosophy or traditional African thought is viewed as ‘being mythological’” (1996:16). Momoh (1985:79) attests: the “attempt to establish African Philosophy as a respectable discipline has been impaired by this thought that it is a traditional thought. Scholars are becoming increasingly aware that African pneumatological beliefs, metaphysical and moral doctrines, political and social principles, epistemology, logic, law, science and the scholars’ own theories and extractions from all of these should not be indiscriminately labelled ‘African traditional thought’.”

prominent personae and major differences of opinion, all of which provide an ever-expanding storehouse of ideas, perspectives, attitudes and practices that may be drawn upon in attempts to understand and react to the challenges facing Africa and the world” (Brand 2011:174). The lack of unanimity on a clear description of what African philosophy is there have resulted in several views. Higgs contends that “in the light of Africa's colonial legacy, African philosophy is confronted with the problem of establishing its own unique African order of knowledge. The attempt to establish a distinctively African epistemic identity within the discipline of philosophy has brought into question what it means to be 'an African', and what it means to be 'a philosopher'” (2003:8). Issue such as what it means to ‘be an African’ and what it means to be a ‘philosopher’ should not be dwelt on. As Higgs suggests, the focus and emphasis should be placed on “the issue of the extent to which African philosophers have been able to use whatever intellectual skills they possess to illuminate the various dimensions of the African predicament” (2003:10):

According to Coetzee & Roux (2006:141) African philosophy is commonly defined or explained in opposition to other philosophical traditions, in particular Western or European philosophy. However, it is a philosophy that is defined as a body of thought and beliefs that have been produced by the unique way of thinking of those living on the continent of Africa. A geographical connection to African philosophy is a starting point in defining African philosophy, but it can also be misleading. African philosophy exists not as an African phenomenon, but as a corpus of thoughts arising from the discussions and appropriations of authentic philosophical ideas of Africans (Coetzee & Roux, 2006:141-142).

African philosophy is not limited to the African continent, because it makes a contribution to general conceptual understandings. Bell (2002:58) says that “to see how these issues are being articulated and debated on in the African context and to place them into the larger stream of cross-cultural conversations show how the African concerns speak to universal human problems”. These issues of African concern and universal problems, range from the relationship between individual identity and community, emergent views of justice surrounding liberal individualism and communitarian thinking. It is within this line of thought that this study explores ethics.

Identity plays an important role in African philosophy. Asiegbu says, for example, that “African philosophy indexes an attempt of the African to establish his identity. Africans, therefore, seek to establish their identity by their preoccupation with the problems and issues that matter to Africans” (2016:3). Asiegbu further contends that “African philosophy investigates the lived concerns of a culture and of a tradition, as they are disclosed by questions posed from within a concrete situation, that serve as the bedrock on which and out of which philosophical reflection is established” (2016:3).

African philosophy is also defined as a systematic and coherent inquiry into specific African experience in the African environment as well as how it reflects, conceives and interprets the world. African philosophy is “a way of thinking that departs from the European style of thinking on a very broad level” (Jaja & Badey, 2013:187). In other words, African philosophy is not a simple resource to be drawn upon to develop an account of Ubuntu as a theory of moral value, for example, as it is often done very reductionistically by mainly Western philosophers⁴. It should rather be viewed as “a set of methodologies which have evolved in response to the challenges of developing traditional conceptual resources philosophically” (Van Niekerk, 2013:17). An understanding of what African philosophy is can therefore be broadly linked to the fact that every human mind works on the principles that are philosophically hinged, even though they might not be clear to the individual. In African philosophy these principles are based in the African culture, community, metaphysics, ethics and way of thought.

There have been several scholars across the African continent that have played a prominent role in promoting African philosophy. These scholars include, according to Induigwomen (n.d), the likes of P.O. Bodurin, J.O. Sodipo, J.J. Omoregbe, K. Wiredu, K.C. Anyanwu, Odera Oruka, P. Hountondji, C.S. Momoh, B.C. Okolo, and I. Onyewuenyi. It is through the efforts of these scholars that there is a demarcation of the different schools in Africa Philosophy. These schools in African Philosophy can also be referred to as trends in African philosophy.

⁴ Rauche, for example attests that “there is in traditional African thinking no methodologically constituted philosophy in this sense scientific philosophy in the western meaning of the word” (Rauche, 1996:16).

In order for one to understand and define African philosophy two major schools of philosophical thought have to be considered. These two major schools of philosophical thoughts are the 'ethnophilosophical school' and the 'professional school' (Gathogo, 2008:2). Letseka & Venter (2012) contend that African philosophy can further be demarcated into ethnophilosophy, philosophic sagacity, and nationalist-ideological philosophy and the professional philosophy. What must be taken into consideration is that these four schools or trends "should not be taken as a distinction from each other, but rather as a continuum" (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013). These four concepts are explored in the next few sections to provide a better understanding of African philosophy.

1.1.1. Ethnophilosophy

The term ethno-philosophy was first used by an African philosopher called Kwame Nkrumah (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013:42). The term ethno-philosophy can be viewed as a "hybrid of ethnology and philosophy to describe the views of those scholars who, following the tradition of Placide Tempels, positively rely on the ethnographical findings in their conception or definition of African Philosophy" (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013:42). Ethnophilosophy can be described as what is embodied in communal African customs, poems, taboos, etc. For this reason, African philosophy is associated with communal or folk philosophy.

Ethnophilosophy further states that an African philosophy indeed exists independently and that it is not just a phenomenon that is being created or developed in reaction or relation to Western philosophy. The Ethnophilosophical School in African philosophy is committed to developing African philosophy as ethnophilosophy into something that is based on particular cultural revelations and interpretation (Gathogo, 2008:2).

The term ethno-philosophy can also be described as a term that makes reference to "the works of anthropologists, sociologists and ethnographers who interpret the collective world views of African peoples, their myths and folk wisdom" (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013:42) as constitutive of African philosophy. The Ethnophilosophical School in African philosophy is also committed to this task. In addition, Ethno-philosophy is committed to studying the manner in which ethnic

Africans have lived their lives over the years in the hope of reaching an understanding of how their experiences help to mould and shape their reality.

1.1.2. The professional school of African philosophy

This school was started in the 1960s by professionally trained philosophers who had studied philosophy at European universities and later taught philosophy at African universities. Kwasi Wiredu⁵ of Ghana and Oderu-Oruka⁶ of Kenya are perhaps the best known of these philosophers. This “professional school of African philosophy and thought has a lot of similarities with professional Western philosophy” (Gathogo, 2008:2). It is philosophy that adheres mainly to the philosopher’s argument. The philosopher or scholar in this regard should be able to argue in a logical and rational manner while ensuring that his or her argument is clearly stated and advocated. By clearly stating his or her argument, the scholar or philosopher aims to expand current knowledge.

1.1.3. Philosophic sagacity

This school of thought focuses on what is practised by indigenous thinkers or sages. Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru states that “Sage philosophy is a trend that started as a reaction to a position which Europeans had adopted about Africa, that Africans are not capable of philosophy” (2013:44). Sages are understood in this context as people who did not receive formal modern education, but who are deemed to be critical thinkers in their communities. They are “capable of using their thoughts on the establishment of authority through communal consensus” (Letseka & Venter, 2012). Communal consensus⁷ is a crucial feature of African philosophy and to reach it

⁵ Some of his best-known books include: *A Companion to African Philosophy* (2004), and *Cultural Universals and particulars* (1996).

⁶ Some of his best-known books include: *Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy* (1990), and *Practical Philosophy: In search of an ethical minimum* (1997).

⁷ Masolo (2016:1) explains about the importance and function of consensus in African communities that “[m]oral principles, for example, would have to be abstract in character to be applicable in general terms to more than one person. According to Wiredu, such independent and critical thinking was available in varying forms in Akan communities and was the basis of frequently protracted disputations among elders in search of a consensus regarding matters that required negotiations. Thus, contrary to the view that knowledge at the communal level was anonymous, Wiredu argues that it is precisely in regard to the importance of consensus on matters of common good that disputation and careful navigation through different opinions was not just considered to be crucial, but was put on transparent display until some form of consensus was attained. In other words, consensus was not imposed, but relentlessly pursued. Such important matters like just claims to different kinds of rights were not adjudicated without the input of those members of community who were well regarded for their independent opinions”.

demands some practical sagacity. Sage philosophy has “a characteristic of rejecting a holistic approach to African philosophy that characterises ethno-philosophy” (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013:44). Philosophic sagacity does not place an emphasis on the study of taboos, myths or customs. The focus is rather on the fact that “philosophy is derived from the thinking or the thought of wise persons” (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013:44), which can also be described as exceptional wisdom. What is thus important in this school is the emphasis on how knowledge is passed on from generation to generation. This knowledge comes from an important person within the specific community who are able to pass on knowledge which makes reference to important historical developments in that community, as well as its beliefs, norms and values. Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru further contends that the thrust of this school is to “help substantiate or invalidate the claim that traditional African people were innocent of logical and critical thinking” (2013:44).

1.1.4. Nationalist-ideological philosophy

This school of thought advocates for the revival of the cardinal ethical principle of traditional humanist African communalism. This is often linked to a form of nationalism. Bodurin argues that “[nationalist-ideological philosophy] is an attempt to evolve a new and, if possible, unique political theory based on traditional African socialism and familyhood. It is argued that a true and meaningful freedom must be accompanied by a true mental liberation and a return, whenever possible and desirable, to genuine and authentic traditional African humanism” (1981:162).

The demarcation of African philosophy is not restricted to the different schools of thought within it, but also characterises its methodology. There are various methodological controversies that surround African philosophy. Wiredu et al. (2004:263) contend that African philosophers – especially the professional school – have been thoroughly engaged in discussion and clarification about the nature and methodology of African philosophy. The methodological controversies have mainly concerned issues such as the tension between ‘universalism and particularism’ and between the ‘modern and the traditional’. These themes are also found in other aspects of African philosophy.

One fundamental characteristic of African philosophy which is strongly associated with communal interdependence, is the concept of Ubuntu. Letseka & Venter

(2012:2) argue that “Ubuntu is a part of African Philosophy as it is only a worldview within African Philosophy and cannot be regarded as a Philosophy on its own”. This confirms what have been mentioned earlier, namely that Ubuntu must not be equated with African philosophy. However, it remains, a defining part of it, especially in regard to African philosophy’s ethics as the following discussion indicates.

1.2 Ubuntu

Those who have attempted to define the concept of Ubuntu have found it a challenging experience. The reasons for this are firstly the ambiguities that surround the concept and, secondly, the various interpretations in regard to its application. Murove (2014:36) contends that the problem with defining Ubuntu is that the concept has many meanings. Each of these meanings is inexhaustible because it is not possible to be certain when Ubuntu (as an ethic or philosophy) originated. Murove says, that as the name suggests, “Ubuntu originated within African people (Bantu) as part and parcel of their cosmology and the implied individual ontology” (2014:36).

Although Ubuntu is difficult to define, one can describe it as an “old philosophy and way of life which has for many centuries sustained African communities in Africa” (Murove, 2009:63). However, it is important to note that even though Ubuntu is linked to African philosophy, the concept of Ubuntu is not confined to the continent or the thought and history of Africa alone. The tradition of Ubuntu “has been brought into attention as post independent African states began to reflect on their history, colonization, the process for nation building, globalization, western education, as well as the creation of prosperity” (Dolamo, 2013:1). Therefore, it can be said that the tradition of Ubuntu is an important part of African ethics that is embedded within broader international issues of liberation, development and identity.

To reach a better understanding of the concept Ubuntu, it is helpful to analyse the word itself. Coetzee & Roux (2006:272) attest that “the term Ubuntu needs to be acknowledged as a hyphenated word, namely, ubu-ntu. The term Ubuntu is formed by combining the two words, ubu and ntu, into one”. It is important to take note of this. As Mfenyana (1986:18) points out: “If we want to consider the origin of the meaning of Ubuntu we must separate the prefixes and the suffixes that surround the root, ‘ntu’ or what to the Sotho is ‘tho’, from ‘ubu’. The root ‘ntu’ refers in this regard to an ancestor who initiated human society. This ancestor gave people their way of

life as human beings through human society. This way of life requires cooperation, sharing, charity, kindness etc.” These are all things that are part of human society or the community.

The prefix ‘Ubu’ refers to something more abstract, namely being. Buntu Mfenyana (1986:18) argues that this means that “Ubuntu refers to the quality of being human”. It is the quality or the behaviour of ‘ntu’, the ancestral initial society which made people human. It is this quality of “being ntu” that distinguishes a human from an animal or a spirit. Murove also quotes Buntu Mfenyana in order to understand the notion of Ubuntu and says “to understand the original meaning of Ubuntu we must separate the prefixes and suffixes that are affixed to the root ‘ntu’ or the Sotho ‘tho’” (2009:64). However, Murove does not fully agree with Mfenyana and finds Mfenyana’s position regrettable because he does not elaborate on the ancestor ‘ntu’ and there is no mention of this ancestor in most of the literature relating to Ubuntu that has been studied. This makes Mfenyana’s explanation and interpretation of the concept Ubuntu open to question.

A different approach to analysing the concept Ubuntu is “to understand its meaning in terms of South African Bantu languages” (Tschaepe, 2013:48, Coetzee & Roux, 2003:272). The root of Ubuntu namely ‘ntu’, signifies in these languages not so much an ancestor who initiated human society, but rather a primal being. The prefix ‘ubu’ is understood in these languages as something that evokes the idea of being in general while it specifies a one-ness. Coetzee & Roux (2003:272) argues accordingly that “‘ubu’ is an enfolded being before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of existence of a particular entity”. He adds that “‘Ubu’ as an enfolded being is always oriented towards unfoldment through particular forms of modes of being. It is in this sense that ‘Ubu’ is always oriented towards ‘ntu’, the primal being” (2003:272).

What is important here is that the suffix ‘ntu’ specifies a whole-ness of being. ‘Ubu’ and ‘ntu’ are in direct relation as ‘ubu’ (general being, one-ness) is oriented towards ‘ntu’ (primal being, whole-ness) as a being becoming whole. Coetzee & Roux, (2003:272) say: “‘Ubu’ and ‘Ntu’ are not radically separated and irreconcilably opposed realities. They are mutually founding in a sense that there are two aspects of being as a one-ness and an indivisible wholeness”. This means that the concept

of Ubuntu can be explained and understood as a progression of being towards wholeness. Such an understanding of Ubuntu has a strong ethical impetus and it provides the foundation for various meanings ascribed to Ubuntu throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century (Tschaepe, 2013:48).

According to Murove (2009:65), this ethical understanding or translation of the concept Ubuntu is also based, on the most common definition of Ubuntu. In this definition, Ubuntu is understood as a derivative of the word 'muntu', meaning a person or a human being. Ubuntu is thus understood as a concept which describes that which enables human beings to become 'abantu' or 'humanised beings'. These prerequisites are understood as ethical characteristics.

It is in this vein that Letseka & Venter (2012:2) defines Ubuntu as "a comprehensive ancient African worldview which is based on the values of humanness, caring, sharing, respect and compassion. Amongst Southern African communities, Ubuntu is associated with the maxim 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' which translated literally into English is 'a person is a person through other people'". Higgs (2003:13) contends that "the expression: 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' captures the underlying principles of interdependence and humanism in African life". It translates into "a person depends on others just as much as others depend on him/her" (2003:13). It illuminates the communal embeddedness and connectedness of a person to other persons. It also highlights the importance attached to people and to human relationships.

In this regard, Hoekema contends that "the expression 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' conveys the core reference of the term to a shared humanity that is expressed through compassion and mutual assistance" (2008:264). This is interpreted as that for one to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and establishing humane relations with them. By recognising the other, he/she then exposes him/herself to the other. Forster contends that "the African philosophy of Ubuntu, affirms the critical understanding that identity arises out of inter-subjective interactions between persons" (2010:10). The concept of Ubuntu illustrates the communal embeddedness and connection of a person to other persons and highlights the importance that is associated with people and the relations between people. Matolino & Kwindigwi (2013:200) sum the concept up as

follows: “at the core of Ubuntu is the idea that a person depends on others to be a person”. What is thus evident is the direct relation between the individual and the community.

Ubuntu thus emphasises “the supreme value of society, the primary importance of social or communal interests, obligations and duties over and above the rights of the individual” (Molefe, 2016:24). The underlying concern of Ubuntu is with welfare of others. That is being able to treat others with fairness and respect while also having an expectation that you will be accorded the same treatment.

Ubuntu can also be understood as a statement about being which cannot just be reduced to a pattern of just doing something ethical. The concept of Ubuntu must rather be understood as that which qualifies a person to be a human being. It is about the process of becoming an ethical human being and not just certain ethical conduct. Ubuntu can accordingly be viewed as a process by which balance or order of being is affirmed. The “order is acknowledged through relationships which are characterised by interdependence, justice, solidarity of humankind, etc. As a result of Ubuntu (as this process of becoming human through other humans) the social equilibrium is enhanced when a person maintains social justice, or when a person is empathetic towards others” (Matolino & Kwindigwi, 2013:200).

Ubuntu, as enshrined in the Nguni maxim “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (a person is a human being through other people) is more than just an ethical theory, but rather the “spiritual foundation of African societies as a unifying vision or worldview” (Gathogo, 2008:6). The concept of Ubuntu is also found in African communities and languages other than the Nguni. There are different phrases that are used to describe it, but what they have in common is that “Ubuntu addresses people’s interconnectedness, common humanity and their responsibilities to each other” (Nussbaum, 2003:21). Such an understanding of Ubuntu resonates with the Western concept of humanism. Bamford (2007:85), for example, attests that Ubuntu means “humanity” or “humanness”. Murove adds that the ethic of Ubuntu, which is humanist, is aimed at curbing the behaviour that was considered as dehumanising in the past. As a result, “Ubuntu should be associated with humane acts such as treating people with kindness, compassion, and care” (2014:37). Failing to treat people other than the individual in a humane manner is deemed as not having

Ubuntu as he/she lacks humanness. An individual who lacks Ubuntu cannot be considered as being human (Murove, 2014:37).

Murove also argues that Ubuntu, as adhering to acceptable behaviour patterns, has the possibility of helping one in the maintenance of fellowship, oneness and identity. In this process the interdependence among people is highlighted. Murove argues that “biological, socio-economic and cultural factors put constraints on a person’s autonomy and it is necessary to realise one’s interdependence on others. Individual autonomy, in the context of Ubuntu, must be understood and practised in relation to the community and not separate from it. Individual autonomy is tied to the role that the community has assigned to the individual” (2009:71).

This relation between the individual and the community is of the utmost importance for understanding the concept Ubuntu. Bamford says, for example, that “in order for one to understand Ubuntu, there ought to be an acknowledgement of its connection to and relevance for notions of self, personal identity as well as notions of humanity, dignity and respect” (2007:85). Prinsloo (2001:58) takes this notion further and argues that “Ubuntu is the collective consciousness of intra-human relations of Africans. This collective consciousness incorporates the memories and experiences common to all mankind”. Furthermore, Ubuntu involves “the sensitivity for the needs and wants of others, being sympathetic, considerate, patient and kind. Ubuntu is also a concept that is associated with qualities such as warmth, empathy, understanding, communication, interaction and co-operation” (Prinsloo, 2001:59). Matolino & Kwindigwi (2013:200) are in agreement with the above authors and they highlight some of the core values of Ubuntu as humanness, caring, sharing, respect and compassion.

In order for one to fully understand the relation between the individual and the community as encapsulated by the concept of Ubuntu, the origins of the term Ubuntu have to be revisited. As previously mentioned, Ubuntu has its origins in the African conception of being. ‘Ubu’ and ‘ntu’ are in direct relation as ‘ubu’ (general being, oneness), oriented towards ‘ntu’ (primal being, whole-ness) as a being becoming whole. Therefore, Nkondo (2007:89-90) argues that “humanity has a common origin and ipso facto belongs together. Humanity has consequently a common bond and destiny.” This means that the individual cannot escape this fate and he/she is

absorbed into the collective, but he/she still retains the identity as an individual being, hence the saying: “I am because we are, you are because we are.”

Murove contends that Ubuntu as an abstract concept is made concrete by certain components such as “respect for a person and the importance of community, personhood and morality” (2009:65). The danger of such a concretization of Ubuntu in ethical terms, is that it may be reduced to just that: ethics. Ubuntu, as explained above, is much more than just ethics. For the purpose of this study, I will highlight the ‘ethics of Ubuntu’, the ‘individual and personhood’, and the ‘interconnectedness of the self and community’ below. All these aspects are important for understanding the concept of Ubuntu. It is important to note, however, that this list of aspects is not comprehensive and that there are a large number of other aspects related to the concept of Ubuntu.

1.2.1. The ethics of Ubuntu

The discussion above makes the point (by referring to Murove) that Ubuntu can be seen as the process in which one adheres to the acceptable behavioural patterns of the society. This has the potential then to help one to maintain fellowship, oneness and identity. There is, thus, a certain code of ethics prescribed by the society in which one finds one’s humanity, or phrased differently, ethics of Ubuntu. But what are the ‘ethics of society’ and how can one identify them?

The ethics of a society, according to Kwame Gyekye (2011:1), are “embedded in the ideas and beliefs about what is right and what is wrong, what may be constituted as good or bad character”. The ethics of society are also embedded in the “conceptions of satisfactory social relations and attitudes that are held by the members of the society to bring about social harmony and cooperative living, justice and fairness” (Gyekye 2011). The idea and beliefs about moral conduct are articulated, analysed and interpreted by the moral thinkers of societies in general. African societies have highly evolved ethical systems, ethical values and rules that are intended to guide social and moral behaviour. This can be identified by listening to their moral thinkers, or reading their books. Over the last three decades, deliberate attempts have been made by contemporary African philosophers to give sustained reflective attention to African moral ideas.

To break down 'the ethics of society' further, one can ask what ethics mean. Gyekye (2011) argues that the term ethics "is technically used by philosophers to mean a philosophical study of morality". He adds that "even though morality is the subject matter of ethics, it is used interchangeably with ethics" (Gyekye 2011). The question is now: What are the 'ethics of Ubuntu'? What are the ethical norms, acceptable behavioural patterns within the (or a) African society as identified and formulated by the moral thinkers of the society and the contemporary African thinkers?

Shutte contends that the range of moral virtues that make up Ubuntu is very wide. He says that when one looks at the "relationship with others, the most important virtues are compassion, respect and sympathy" (Shutte, 2009:98). These virtues imply that one values others as one does him/herself, and out of these then grows other virtues such as loyalty, courtesy and hospitality.

However, Ubuntu is not only about a list of virtues, but about the person itself. The importance of character plays a pivotal role when it comes to the morality and ethics of Ubuntu. Statements about morality turn out to be discourses about character, because when one speaks about morality, reference is made to the character of a person. Therefore, African-based ethics, or the 'ethics of Ubuntu', can be said to be a character based ethics that maintains the quality of the individual's character. This is the most fundamental part of one's moral life.

The ethics of Ubuntu can be described as a humanist ethics, or as a moral system that is preoccupied with human welfare. When one looks closely at the notion of Ubuntu (which means 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' which is directly translated means 'a person is a person through other people') one recognises that it represents "a capturing of a normative account of what we ought to value most in life" (Metz 2011:537). Personhood, selfhood and humanness are characteristics which are value-laden concepts as part of Ubuntu. This implies that a person should, as part of the ethics of Ubuntu, try to become a (complete) person, a (true) self or a genuine human being. This means that the assertion of Ubuntu that "a person is a person through other persons", is an ethical call for one to develop his/her (moral) personhood. To exhibit humanness is the ethical prescription to acquire Botho or Ubuntu.

The ethics of Ubuntu are thus fundamentally about one's relation to other people. Chuwa (2014:40) says that "morality is about human relationships and human relationships are about reciprocity". He argues that human actions are what separate people from each other: wrong doing, for instance, separates people as it disturbs the harmony in society and is against life. In contrast, good deeds are what connects people together and thus involve reciprocity. These deeds that separate or connect others in one's life are what create or destroy Ubuntu, and at the same time they are the ethics of Ubuntu.

As mentioned before, there is a danger of reductionism in equating Ubuntu with ethics. However, when one interprets Ubuntu as an 'ethical theory', it can be understood as "honouring relationships of sharing a way of life as well as caring for other's quality of life" (Metz 2014:71). In this regard, sharing a way of life is a matter of enjoying a sense of togetherness as well as engaging in joint projects. When explaining Ubuntu ethics, Murove contends that "Ubuntu is not individualistic, abstract, or a cold spiritual way of life. It is about being neighbourly and it is imbued with a strong social consciousness" (2009:73). In this regard "a person's humanity is discovered and recognised through the relations and interactions with others. Such an affirmation gives rise to the gifts, abilities and capacity for growth that one has been endowed with that obliges one to contribute positively to the well-being of others" (Murove 2009:73). The communal interdependence of African philosophy in general and Ubuntu in specific clearly come to the fore here.

Another aspect of the ethics of Ubuntu is that it is strongly related to human happiness (Ehlers 2017:12). REFERENCE Our need to be happy is something that stems from our nature as human persons, and is not the result of adhering to societal conventions or norms. It is more individualistic and personal than 'ethics', but it remains something relational. Our happiness is always part of my happiness in terms of Ubuntu. Shutte explains that as part of "Ubuntu our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human and this means entering more deeply into community with others" (2009:97). Such deep community with others creates a wealthy and happy society in which one can find more complete happiness.

Furthermore, the ethics of Ubuntu can be described as the quality of humanity one has and which one shares. The 'quality of humanity' is characteristic of "a fully

developed person, within his/her community, that comprises of certain values, attitudes, relationships, activities as well as expressions of the human spirit” (Murove, 2009:97). Murove argues, therefore, that “to be a human being implies being someone endowed with the positive virtues and treating other people in the light of them” (2014:45).

Finally, the ethics of Ubuntu can also be viewed as a call to participation in one’s community. In other words, Ubuntu expects service to humanity in a practical manner. This active participation can take place through positive acts within the community, especially through acts that enable an individual to become connected, linked and bound to others. Ubuntu thus becomes “the source or basis of feelings of compassion that is responsible for making life for individuals more humane” (Murove, 2009:75).

It is clear that the ethics of Ubuntu cannot be disconnected from one’s community. The question is now what it means to obtain one’s personhood through Ubuntu? Can one be an individual and still adhere to the ethics of Ubuntu?

1.2.2. The individual and personhood

The central notion of morality can be described as personhood (Molefe, 2016:12). Personhood can thus be considered as being “a defining feature of African moral thought” (Molefe, 2016:12). Personhood is a concept that is associated with moral agency for several reasons. Hoekema says, for example, that “a person is capable of doing right and wrong acts or omissions, fulfilling moral duties or failing to fulfil them, and thus living up to the appropriate expectations of others with regard to shared tasks and relationships and also capable of falling short” (2008:258). What this means is that being a moral person means that an individual is accountable for his/her actions or failure thereof. In other words, “to be a moral person means to bear responsibility for your own actions or omissions to act” (Hoekema 2008:258).

The concept of personhood in African philosophy can also be associated with “how the individual conducts him/herself and how he/she relates to other people in his/her personal interactions and with the community at large” (Matolino, 2008:51). The communitarian view of a person can closely be associated with how an African is viewed. Matolino says that “the communitarian view of personhood states that

personhood is socially sanctioned through an individual's participation in her respective community and depends largely on her ability to fulfil her social obligations" (2008:54).

According to Metz, the maxim of Ubuntu, namely "a person is a person through other people", reveals the following possible interpretations: one becomes a moral person 1) when one honours communal relationships or 2) when one realises one's true self by respecting the value of relationships. Therefore, a person's actions can be wrong, not merely insofar as they harm people, but rather "just to the extent that they are unfriendly or they fail to respect relationships or the capacity for it" (Metz, 2011:339). Relationships between the individual and the community are thus crucial in an African setting. According to Mbiti, "whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual" (Higgs, 2003:12). The individual can only say: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am". This, Mbiti claims, is a cardinal point in the understanding of "the African view of man" (Higgs, 2003:12). The community evaluates in other words the ethical goodness of one's behaviour. Murove explains this process of ethical evaluation by the community as follows: "The African understanding of a person refers to the beliefs and perceptions of the person as an individual. This means that a person in the Ubuntu worldview is the basis, centre and end of everything. All other things make sense in relation to persons" (2009:66).

This notion links strongly to the very popular saying in African philosophy: "I am because we are." According to Shutte (2009:91), the implication of this saying is that "we are able to see ourselves as living centres of vital force". This vital force is part of our existence in relation with others, our community, which also exposes to me that there are as many sides to myself as there are relationships. The saying also shows that a "person becomes a moral person insofar as one honours communal relationships" (Metz, 2011:538). The community of a society is thus a requirement for personhood. Society in this regard, says Chuwa, "helps to facilitate reciprocation which in turn facilitates personhood and self-actualization. Reciprocation in the form of giving back to the community as well as proactive living for the community and others defines a person and his/her moral maturity" (2014:40).

But what are the implications of this for personhood? The individual or person is the medium and centre of the visible and invisible world, and through the person communication between these two realms is possible. While personhood is thus extremely important in terms of mediating between these two realms, it is also important to note that in African philosophy there is no atomistic, notion of personhood. The person is always between the realms of visible and invisible, and always in between his/her own community. It is in this context where a person becomes a person. In short this means that “the individual becomes real only with their relationships with others” (Tschaepe, 2013:51). The implication of this is that a person needs to be in relation with others to obtain his/her personhood. One cannot separate the individual from the community with all its relations. He/she needs all these relations to be a person, an individual.

There are thus three possible interpretations of personhood according to Molefe. Firstly, one can talk of personhood in a metaphysical sense. In this regard, Molefe pays attention to what constitutes a human being. The second interpretation is based on looking into what qualifies an entity as worthy of our moral regard. Molefe contends that the “notion of personhood could refer to the conduct of a moral agent whose actions are characterised by moral excellence” (2016:12).

Hoekema identifies three respects in which the meaning of personhood differs in African traditional thought. Hoekema says that “personhood is a concept that persists even after death, but with limits” (2008:260). This means that “traditional African beliefs do not attribute to the individual, certainly not to the soul alone, the capacity to continue eternally in existence, as in the Platonic doctrine” (Hoekema, 2008:260). The deceased, however, remains a member of the community for a limited period of time. The person, however, does not interact with other members of the community in the physical world. The person becomes what is known as an ancestor. An ancestor is a person who “becomes in life trusted guides and advisors to the living”. An ancestor’s “presence as a member of the community is continuously acknowledged throughout religious and cultural rituals” (Hoekema, 2008:260). Mbiti says that the ancestors’ role in the community “is exercised through their own families as they are still people and they have not yet become things or spirits” (2008:260).

There is, however, a barrier between the dead and the living. It is the recently departed with whom the living communicate. It is only “the recently departed memory that is kept alive by his/her family through conversations and reliving the memories that were shared” (Matolino, 2008:57). Matolino says that “the recently departed are remembered by name and they are talked about all of the time” (2008:57). The recently departed “cannot be seen as ancestors as yet, as they play a vital role in acting as a go between connecting the living and the long departed” (Matolino, 2008:57). The living have to ensure that they treat the dead with respect and honour. They do this by cleaning the graves of the departed, visiting them, and offering them food and water. This is done to ensure that the souls of the recently departed are at peace and are contented with the living. Thus, it is believed that if the living do not treat the departed with respect, the departed will not provide the living with blessings or protection against any harm that they may encounter while they are still alive.

According to Mbiti, it is the long departed that are seen as ancestors “as their memory is not remembered on an individual basis but a collective one” (Matolino, 2008:58). Matolino explains that “those who are remembered individually are those who have just died. So those who died many generations ago, while still alive as ancestors, are not remembered by name and libations are given to them collectively as opposed to the recently departed” (2008:58). Those who have been dead for more than five generations are described by Mbiti as the ‘living dead’ (Matolino, 2008:58).

According to Hoekema, the manner in which the ancestor communicates with the living is through “the return to the families” (2008:260). He says: “when they appear, which is generally to the oldest members of the household, they are recognised by name as so and so, they inquire about family affairs and may even warn of impending danger or rebuke those who have failed to follow their special instructions” (Hoekema 2008:260). This raises the question: At what point does the ancestor cease to exist? Hoekema answers this by saying that “survival as an ancestor is the last stage of one’s early life, for those who have lived a worthy life; and it only lasts for a few generations” (2008:261). “It is approximately the last point when the last family members who have personal memories of an individual are themselves passing from the stage, the ancestors cease to be remembered by name

and hence cease to play a role as individuals in the community” (Hoekema 2008:261).

Personhood in the African sense can be acquired throughout one’s life. Upon birth one does not acquire the status of being deemed a person. There is a process that one must go through before he/she is considered as being a person within a given community. The process begins at birth “as the child is considered as an ‘it’, essentially an individual without individuality, who does not have personality nor does it have a name” (Hoekema 2008:262). It is through various traditional ceremonies and rituals that the child is given a name, perhaps one with meaning. This can be seen as the first phase in which the child incorporates the status of personhood in the community. Other ceremonies are then made throughout the person’s life as the individual goes through “puberty, initiation, marriage, the producing of children, old age, death, entry into the community of the departed and finally entry into the community of the spirits. It is an ontological rhythm and these are key moments in the life of the individual” (Hoekema 2008:262). Hoekema adds that “in many African cultures, full status as a person is not attained until well after birth; and this status extends well beyond death, for those who live a worthy life, through several subsequent generations” (2008:263).

In an African community, personhood can also be conferred by the community. In this regard, a person must act according to the expectations of the community. A person must be an active member of the community, creating relationships with people, treating others with respect, taking responsibility for his/her own actions and having the ability to protect others. This social dynamic of personhood is extremely important “as in many African cultures, persons exist in a full sense only as members of their communities” (Hoekema, 2008:263). This means that personhood is relational as well as social.

Ubuntu, with its fundamental communal interdependence, insists that all people have dignity and are to be respected and valued as a person. It does not matter whether a specific person is known or not. Personhood is thus affirmed and respected by the community as part of the ethics of Ubuntu. Respect for all persons, as well as individual good behaviour, plays a pivotal role in establishing personhood in the community. Respect acknowledges another person’s humanity. The respect that is

at the core of Ubuntu becomes evident when one evaluates “how people relate, talk and show courtesy to each other” (Murove, 2009:67). Respect for other people, a fundamental part of Ubuntu, creates community respect for one’s own personhood.

Respect for others, as part of Ubuntu, created in African communities reflects individuals’ high expectation and appreciation of being valued, recognised and treated as an equal human being by others. Respect implies not to undermine or ill-treat another person. You cannot fail to respect somebody because he/she does not have high status. Murove says that a “human being is a person irrespective of is her own status in life” (2009:67). One person’s worth as a human being is always considered as great as another’s. Therefore, Ubuntu is against anything that may be harmful to an individual, and it flourishes where there is respect and honour for others. In short: mutual respect is very important when it comes to Ubuntu – not just of the individual but of his/her own human worth.

Personhood, or the individual human being is fundamental to Ubuntu. Murove (2009:67-68) uses the example of Steve Biko who emphasised that “umtu” (a person) constitutes the essence of Ubuntu. A person is the basis of all ethical actions. Ubuntu, on the other hand, is a cultural ethos, a spirituality which can help people to learn and improve their understanding of one another. In other words, as Nafukho argues, “Ubuntu emphasises the importance of the individual in society. Individuality is defined in terms of a person’s relationship with others. This means that the individual in the society exists in their relationships with others” (2006:110). Furthermore, Nafukho attests that “individuality in this regard signifies a plurality of personalities corresponding to the multiplicity of relationships in which the individual in question stands” (2006:110). It is important to note that the concept of individuality involves moving from solitary individualism and independence to interdependence.

The individual’s identity is not denied, but is very important in terms of Ubuntu. Metz says that “to identify with each other is largely for people to think of themselves as members of the same group” (2011:538). Forster attests that the “notion of identity through relationship is central to the African world view. The relationships that exists between persons shape their true identity and when asking a person who he or she is, the answer is always stated in a relational manner” (2010:2). As a result, people are able to identify themselves as “we” in order for them to take pride in belonging to

a group. This enables them to engage in joint projects and to coordinate their behaviour to realise shared ends.

Even though it may seem at face value as if the concept of Ubuntu reduces the individual to nothing, to dissolving the individual into the community. It does not. It is true that the concept of Ubuntu discourages the notion that the individual should take precedence over community, but Ubuntu incorporates dialogue between the individual and the community “by intertwining both the relationships and closeness” (Nafukho, 2006:110). The implication is that Ubuntu does not reduce the individual to a static, figure, number or type of conduct. Instead it acknowledges and respects every individual in the society. The concept Ubuntu rather “enriches self- realization through others while seeking to promote social networks, norms, and organizations in society” (Nafukho, 2006:110).

Within the context of Ubuntu ethics, personal or individual identity does not reside in what may be referred to as individual properties. The idea of personhood can be associated with the idea of partiality, in that one has to prioritise taking care of him/herself in terms of personal growth, developing moral value, or creating or maintaining strong relationships with his/her family. What is important in this context is that “the individual needs to cater and take care of his/her own family before attempting to cater to the needs of the wider community” (Molefe, 2016:16). The maxim that can best describe the dynamic relation between the individual and the family and the relation between the individual and the community is the phrase “charity begins at home”. The individual has to take care of the family’s needs and responsibilities first before catering for the community. This is important because the family is already directly linked to the community and this can minimise some of the problems that the community at large can have. Personal identity resides in relationships between people in society. Ubuntu defines the individual in terms of his/her relationships with others in a community. Louw says that with Ubuntu, “personal identity resides in reciprocal interconnections” (1998:7). Coetzee et al. (2003:252) attest that it is “the community which forms the individual”. This means that without the community, the individual has no identity. A person only becomes an individual (with his/her unique identity), only to the extent that he/she is a member of a clan, community or family. Louw states that “the self in African philosophy is

essentially social. The African in this regard is not just a being, but a being with others. The self or 'I' is defined in terms of 'we' existence" (1998:252).

The question arises here if it is then impossible to 'exist' without a community, without others? Or is this only true in terms of one's personhood and identity? It is important to keep in mind that the notion of 'personhood' or 'being a person' is understood in many African languages and societies as an acquired status. This status is "dependent upon people's relationships to their community" (Bell, 2002:60). Communal life is very important in regard to obtaining one's personhood and individuality. Bell says: "The judgment that a human being is "not a person," made on the basis of that individual's consistently morally reprehensible conduct, implies that the pursuit or practice of moral virtue is intrinsic to the conception of a person held in African thought" (2002:64). This means that if 'p' is a person (or wants to be reckoned as a person), p has to display in his conduct the norms and ideals of personhood. These norms and ideals are determined by the community of that person. It is for this reason that when a human being fails to confirm his/her behaviour to the acceptable moral principles of his/her community, or fails to exhibit the expected moral virtues in his/her conduct, that he/she is not reckoned to be a person. The evaluative statement opposite to this, namely 'he/she is a person', means that he/she has a good character. This statement about somebody's personhood can, therefore, be understood as being a moral statement, and not an ontological one. When Bell says that a "person has to adhere to the high standards of morality in order for him/her to be deemed as being truly a person" (2002:60), he directly connects (true) personhood to the moral.

Practically this means that positive human qualities and values such as generosity, compassion, reciprocity, cooperation and social being, must shape the moral practices of individuals. These qualities are deemed to be "important values of individual rights and formation of personhood" (Bell, 2002:64). These qualities are always connected to the community. Chuwa says, for example, that a "person's identity, social status and his/her rights that are attached to his/her identity go hand in hand with the person's responsibilities or sense of duty towards and in relation to others" (2014:38).

The theme of Ubuntu ethics, that an individual can only exist as a human being in his/her relationship with others, repeats itself again and again in different nuances. In regard to individual personhood and identity, Chuwa points out that the “word ‘individual’ signifies a plurality of personalities corresponding to the multiplicity of relationships in which the individual stands. This means that being an individual by definition means being with others. In this regard, the phrase ‘being-with-others’ in itself defines the nature of the relationship” (2014:34). Manda (2009:1) adds to this when he says “Ubuntu defines the individual in terms of the relationships that one may have with others. This would mean that the individual will only exist in their relationships with others and as these relationships change, the character of the individual also changes”. In other words, Ubuntu starts from the individual’s capacity to promote him or herself, and move on to self-creativity which always takes place in his/her own relation with others. In the end, the (seemingly) solitary individual is transformed to an individual that is filled with a sense of solidarity with the community. Such an individual has identity, personhood, and Ubuntu. The interconnectedness of these concepts with each other and with the community is of utmost importance and needs some further clarification.

1.2.3. The interconnectedness of the self and community

In analysing the interconnectedness of the self and the community in African philosophy, and specifically in terms of Ubuntu, there is something unique to keep in mind. Shutte highlights this uniqueness when he says “the notion ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’ translated to a person is a person through other people, gives the African conception of community its distinctive character” (2009:93). Forster contends that “the relational element of a community is fundamental to an understanding of how identity is shaped. One’s truest identity comes not just from a moment of encountering another person (called relating): it comes from a continuum of shared being (called having a relationship)” (2010:9). This means the individual is shaped by the interaction that he/she has with others and a relation that he/she builds. Participating and interacting within a community is very important. Forster states “for Africans, to be human is to participate in life and respect the conditions that make life possible. To participate in life means to participate in the fellowship of the community” (2010:9).

The African community is a unique community in this sense. One cannot for example just equate it with Western philosophical concepts such as community, society and collectively. It was a famous African philosopher, Leopold Senghor, who coined the term 'communalism' and the term 'community society' (Shutte 2009:94). He coined these terms to distinguish the African conception of community from European collectivist theories such as socialism and communism. According to Leopold Senghor, a community in the African sense, is something that is based on society, it is communal and not just a collective. In an African community the concern is therefore not with the collection of individuals, but with "people conspiring together (literally 'breathing together') united among themselves even to the very centre of their being" (Shutte 2009:93). Higgs states that "the importance of communality to traditional African life cannot be overemphasized. This is because community and belonging to a community of people constitute the very fabric of traditional African life" (2003:12). According to Matolino, what is found in African communities is not just benign social relationships (2008:60). He adds that being in these social relationships actually constitutes the individuals identity. "Existence is thus affirmed by the ability to interact, the ability to turn vital force into meaningful relationships" (Matolino 2008:60)

The nature of an African community is ontological. It conforms and creates being – communal and individual. Shutte explains this by saying that an African community can be viewed as a natural organism rather than as an artificial whole. This is the reason why the individuals in an African community see the community as themselves. The individual is one with the community in character and identity. This practically means that each individual views every other individual member of the community as another self. As a result, the individual and the "community become one and there is no separation between the individual and the community" (Shutte 2009:94).

The next question is: To what extent is there 'no separation' between the individual and the community in the African context? Mangena says that this unity should at least be understood in the moral sense. He states: "Ubuntu recognises the power intrinsic to the capacity for dialogue and it places the community at the centre of all moral deliberations which are premised on the idea of communal or group rationality. When one speaks of communal or group rationality in moral terms; it means a

collective morality that counts and not individual morality” (Mangena, 2012:1). The implication of this is that the *community*, in terms of African philosophy, underlies all traditional customs and institutions. The clan, family or tribe forms the community which is understood and identified as a single communal person. This is illustrated by the fact that the clan’s identity is focused on the name of the person who is the community’s head, namely the hereditary chief. Another illustration of the unity of the community, especially in moral terms, is found in the practice and concept of “indaba”. An indaba is a discussion or debate within the clan to reach consensus on the specific (often ethical) matter at hand. The clan’s consensus on the matter needs then to be respected and followed by the individual.

The interconnectedness of the self and the African community goes even further than these two parties. Murove explains that “the uniqueness of Ubuntu is based on the fact that the community is presumed to be an organic whole as the individuals’ identities are formed by the community” (2014:42). However, the concept of a community is not restricted to human societies, because, as Murove explains, community must be understood as embracing the natural world and the invisible world. “Community has this comprehensive meaning, because in many African cultures a person’s identity was predicted by some totemic species with the implication that their human origins and identity are things that are shared with the natural world” (Murove, 2014:42).

This comprehensive view of community, the vastness of its interconnectedness and reach, and its organic unity may leave an individual who is trying to make an ethical decision overwhelmed. However, in most cases, there is a simple process involved. All of the important decisions that must be taken for the community go through the chief (head) because each member of the community or clan can identify with the head. By identifying with the head, the “individual enters into a relationship with and draws vital energy from the whole community” (Shutte, 2009:95). In an African worldview, the community is the context for the manifestation of ethical decisions. The relationships that exist between individuals enable the realisation of the value and dignity of persons. Thus one cannot be a human alone, it is only in a community that one can be a human: “An African individual can be seen as a communal being; that is inseparable from and incomplete without others” (Murove, 2009:68).

The notion of “no separation” between the individual and the community in the African context goes further than just the moral. According to Nussbaum (2003:2), in Ubuntu the essential aspect of personhood is found in the community rather than in self-determination. Within the community people are understood as distinctive beings who are able to recognise and acknowledge each other through mutual encounters and cultural integration – and this is again provided by the community. Chuwa adds to this by saying that there is “a relationship between the individual and the community which is reflected in the conceptions of social structure evolved by a community of people” (2014:35).

The unity between the individual and the community in the African context is not something to be interpreted just negatively as is often the case in Western (individualistic) philosophy. To be one with your community is first of all understood by African philosophy as something that help one to become more fully human. One can only obtain Ubuntu through other persons, in a community where the individual relationships with others is of utmost importance. Shutte, the first professional South African philosopher to publish a book on Ubuntu, states that one’s deepest moral obligation, in African philosophy, is to become more fully human. He says, as quoted by Metz, that this means “entering more and more deeply into community with others. When an individual seeks a community with others it can be understood as doing what the majority of people in society want or conforming to the norms of one’s group. Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his/her duties, obligations, privileges and responsibilities towards him/herself as well as towards other people” (Metz 2011:537). The bond between the individual and the community is so close, that if the individual suffers, he/she does not suffer. This is also applicable when an individual is happy (Murove, 2009:68).

Tempels seems to be in agreement with what is stated by Murove and Metz. Tempels also promotes the view that the community is more important than the individual, in a sense of it taking precedence over the individual (Matolino, 2008:62). This suggests that the individual can be seen as being a communal being. It is the individual who needs the community for becoming who he/she is. Living according to the community’s rules and norms and contributing to the betterment of the community gives life to the phrase “we are therefore I am, and since I am therefore we are” (Matolino, 2008:62). This phrase suggests that the individual is inseparable

from the community. Furthermore, “the ‘I’ and the ‘we’ cannot exist independent from each other, they only make sense when used in reference from each other” (2008:62).

Matolino states that for Mbiti “the individual is never alone. He/she is a communal being who finds him/herself in a community of people who share life experiences and triumphs and tribulations together” (2008:68). The individual and community should be thought of together. Matolino says that “one cannot think of the individual without thinking of the community. The symbiotic relationship that exists between the individual and the community is inseparable and neither can do without the other” (2008:69). Since the individual is not viewed as being separate from the community, it is important to note that whatever may happen to the individual also happens to the community, and vice versa. Thus the individual can say, “I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am.” This is the starting point when it comes to an understanding of the African view of man (Murove, 2009:68). Ubuntu is fundamentally based on relationality. One of its main contributions and insight is consequently “based on the idea that as human beings we depend on other human beings to attain ultimate well-being” (Murove, 2014:37).

What is important to note in this regard is that the relationships in Ubuntu should not overshadow the importance of individual autonomy. What Metz says is true: “African moral ideals are both more attractively and more accurately interpreted as conceiving of communal relationships as an objectively-desirable kind of interaction that should instead guide what majorities want and which norms become dominant” (Metz, 2011:538). However, this does not mean that the ‘individuality of the individual’ is completely absorbed when one becomes a member of the community. It rather means that each individual retains his/her uniqueness and basic human rights, regardless of the role and importance of the community to him/her. Chuwa explains: “This means that the most satisfactory way to recognise the claims of both community and individuality is to ascribe to them the status of an equal moral standing” (2014:35).

Although it sounds like a contradiction, individuality and autonomy is thus not taken away by becoming part of the group, but it is rather given. The same applies to individual rights. Chuwa (2014:35) argues for example that the Ubuntu ideal of

maturity is such that one retains his/her individual rights without losing touch with the community which facilitates individuality. In this process the individual must ensure that his/her actions are ethical. Once an individual acquires enough ethical maturity to act simultaneously for him/herself and for the community, such a person is deemed as being morally mature. This implies that he/she no longer does (ethical) things because the community expects him/her to do so, but does so freely because of his/her personal maturity. The individual does (ethical) things in and for the community because he/she believes it is the right thing to do for both him/herself and the community. Individual freedom and rights are not sacrificed.

In order to understand the philosophical appeal of grounding ethics on the conception of community, one can “consider how identifying with others can be cashed out in terms of sharing a way of life and that exhibiting solidarity towards others can be naturally understood in terms of caring about their quality of life” (Metz, 2011:539). In this process belonging plays a very important role. By being bound to each other in the community relations are formed through being a neighbour, friend, or relative, for example. Murove says that “even though belonging does not make an individual complete, it gives him/her a sense of identity and security” (2009:69-70). Ubuntu does not restrict the individual, but allows him/her to “transcend when necessary what the customs of the family or the community requires, without disrupting the harmony and the cohesion of the community” (Chuwa, 2014:36). The human relationships (harmony and cohesion) should always be protected. Again, this does not restrict individuality, but is necessary for personhood. In Ubuntu “personhood is intrinsic and innate to human beings. Its recognition is of importance. Morality then would be based on mutual recognition of personhood in many human parties in relationship with each other” (Chuwa, 201:36).

The relationship between the individual and the community is thus not a simple one in which the community absorbs the individual and leaves him/her with no individuality, no freedom, and no rights. To be in a community with others does not mean that one should do whatever the majority of people in the community are doing. It does not imply an uncritical conformity to the norms of the community. The interaction between the individual and the community is much more complex than one in which the community dominates. Metz says that “African moral ideals are both more attractively and more accurately interpreted as conceiving of communal

relationships as an objectively desirable kind of interaction that should instead guide what majorities want and which norms become dominant” (2011:538). According to Chuwa (2014:37), in order to understand the importance of human relationships in the Ubuntu culture the concept of otherness – which implies relationships – has to be taken into consideration. The African worldview is based on the understanding that “[a] human being is a human being through the otherness of other human beings” (Chuwa 2014:37). This means that personal maturity is measured by the way that one relates to others. Self-actualization happens in the process of fulfilling a person’s obligation and duties to others. In this regard, “the assumption of responsibility towards others transforms one from the status of early childhood, which is marked by the absence of moral functions into the personhood status of later years marked by a maturity of ethical sense” (Chuwa, 2014:37-38).

The interconnectedness of the self with the community is something that should be understood as relational, dynamic, and not as dominant, static, or (legally, ethically) oppressive. Chuwa emphasizes the importance of human relationships: “Due to the importance of ‘otherness’ in self-recognition, self-actualization and moral development, human relationships are vital in the culture of Ubuntu” (Chuwa, 2014:38). It is the community that defines a person and which enables that person to find the self through the vehicle of human relationships. This means that there is a double balance between the individual’s autonomy and the role of society in the personal life within Ubuntu culture. This is based on the fact that in traditional (African) life, the individual does not exist alone. He/she owes his/her existence to other people in the community. This includes past generations. It can therefore be said that he/she ‘becomes’ by being part of the whole. The “community creates the individual and the individual depends on the corporate group” (Wiredu, 2004:337).

What does this dynamic interconnectedness between the self and the community imply for the ethics of Ubuntu? When one looks at the role of the community in Ubuntu ethics, it is clear that Ubuntu ethics are based on the premise that none of the community members would be what he/she is without the community. What is important is that “the community should take precedence over the individual without underestimating or denying the individual’s personal rights. There should rather be a balance between the individual’s rights and the communitarian conditions which aids to facilitate as well as to support those rights” (Chuwa, 2014:38). Mangena contends

that when it comes to Ubuntu, “the community is put in the centre of moral deliberations which are premised on the idea of communal or group rationality” (2012:10). What is meant by communal or group rationality is that the ideas of the group are given more attention than those of the individual. In such an instance, the ideas and opinions of the group are at the forefront of dialogical morality. The collective morality of the group would outweigh that of the individual, but it will not ignore it.

It is important to note with regard to the ethics of Ubuntu, that the African perception of personhood, as part of this dynamic relationship between the individual and community, does not allow a person to be described solely in terms of individual physical and the psychological properties. It is only with reference to the community that a person is defined. The existence of others in the community provides the individual with the fertile context in which the individual can exercise his/her responsibilities. The responsible individual is thus characterised as ‘unobuntu’ (Nguni), which implies that he/she has humanness or that he/she is a true embodiment. Again it should be added here that even though the collective consciousness is evident in the Ubuntu culture, it does not mean that the individual becomes consumed by the collective consensus found within the community. It simply means that “the individual develops and thrives in a relational setting which is provided by on-going contact and interaction with others in the community” (Chuwa, 2014:39).

In Ubuntu, personhood and moral agency is thus never detached from the community. In this regard, Waghid argues that the individual’s responsibilities imply that he/she “is not only vigilant towards his/her attentiveness to the needs and expectations of the communal group, but also imposes on the group the recognition that the individual is as important to the group as the group is determinant of the individual’s aspirations.” (2014:40). There is thus a reciprocal relation between the individual and the community in regard to moral agency. The individual is always part of the community which develops and prescribes ethical norms to which he/she must adhere to. It is within this relation between the individual and his/her community that ethical relations are created and where the call to live an ethical life comes to the fore. The individual is not completely submissive to the community, but retains a

critical reserve. Therefore, the moral agency of the individual cannot merely be surrendered to the community.

Ubuntu ethics can be described as being communitarian, because it is the community or society that dictates the duties, obligations and limitations that the individual develops. In his/her turn, the individual has the possibility of thriving in this relational setting which offers contact and interaction with others in the community. When the individual is surrounded by others, the individual finds him/herself in a whole situation in which he/she is related to others. The underlying assumption is that by nature, a person is interdependent with other people found within the community.

The relational interconnectedness between the individual and the community is not only about ethical conduct, or something that can be reduced to 'Ubuntu ethics'. These relations are much more meaningful and much more important on an ontological level. Shutte (2009:92) indicates in this regard that there are several important issues that come to the fore when one evaluates and examines the nature of the relations that exist between individuals and the community. He highlights the understanding within the African community that at the start of a person's life, he/she is not seen as a person at all. The individual is only a potential person and he/she only becomes fully human to the extent that he/she is included in relationships with others. This has the consequence that the individual views his/her life as a process of becoming a person. Another consequence is that personhood becomes a gift. Personhood is not something that is already in place at the beginning of a person's life, nor is it something that can be acquired through one's own power. Instead, it comes as a gift from the community. Becoming a person and receiving personhood are crucial aspects of what it means to be part of an African community. These aspects help one to "understand the importance that Africans attach to the maintenance and quality of relationships with others" (Shutte 2009:92).

It is important to note that the ethics of Ubuntu are *humanist*. In Ubuntu ethics, the aim is always to counter behaviour that is considered as dehumanising. Since Ubuntu means humanness it is crucial that "the fellow human being is treated with kindness, compassion, respect and care. These qualities are usually referred to as a summation of Ubuntu or humanness" (Murove, 2014:37). However, the important

question that arises is whether Ubuntu can be 'inhumane' by taking away or denying somebody's humanness? This seems like a contradiction within Ubuntu. The answer to this is more complex than a simple yes or no. When an individual in the community is said to be without humanity, it does not mean that he/she is not a member of the community or that he/she no longer possesses human nature or human dignity. This is not possible, because a person's intrinsic value cannot be taken away. The problem that would be identified in the individual would be found with the "lack or refusal to make use of an inner state of being human and to do good deeds for the well-being of others and society" (Murove, 2009:73). If one fails to act humanly towards other people, one is said to lack humanness or Ubuntu. This does not mean he/she does not have human nature or human dignity. When Murove states that "if someone lacks Ubuntu, then the individual cannot be considered as a human being" (Murove, 2014:37), 'human being' should not be equated here to human nature. This is only a way of saying that he/she should act more humanely, within his/her human nature, to be a full human being. The wholeness (ntu) of being human (Ubu) is lacking.

In elaborating on the previous point that the individual has an obligation to act humanely, one must keep in mind that in the ethics of Ubuntu, the existence of others in the community provides the individual with a platform for exercising his/her responsibility. A responsible individual is characterised as 'unobuntu' which implies that he/she has humanness or that he/she has the true embodiment of what it really means to be human. The attainment of humanness is thus regarded as "the primary responsibility of the family and the surrounding community" (Murove, 2014:39). The meaning of responsibility is thus based on the relationships which the individual has with others in the community and not on the idea of individual autonomy. Murove emphasises that "Ubuntu means that as an individual you have to take into consideration the concerns of others in relation to your own personal concerns" (2014:39).

1.3. Criticism of Ubuntu

There are a variety of criticisms of Ubuntu and its morality. Metz (2011:534) lists some of these: firstly, Ubuntu is too vague and ambiguous; secondly, Ubuntu "seems to have a collectivist orientation" as there seems to be a conception that there should

be agreement and solidarity within the community when it comes to decision making processes, which may hinder and impact the freedom of the individual within the community (2011:534). Thirdly, Ubuntu morality may not be appropriate for “the new South Africa because of its traditional origin, Ideas associated with Ubuntu” were formed in the pre-colonial era in various societies (2011:534). Some of these criticisms need to be explored in more depth to get a better understanding of the value of ethics of Ubuntu, and to see how these criticism relate to Western ethics. These aspects are discussed in the next chapter.

1.3.1. Agreement and solidarity

A first point of criticism of Ubuntu is that Ubuntu underscores the importance of agreement and solidarity at the expense of the individual (Louw 1998:3). This happens because traditional African communities (‘democracies’) operate in the form of an indaba or discussion with the aim of consensus. In such discussions there is a hierarchy of speakers that decide in which order they may speak. This prioritization of certain voices can be experienced as unfair by other members of the community. It may be argued that some people in the community are not given a fair chance to voice their opinions when it comes to certain matters. A further problem is that of solidarity and consensus. The views of some members of the community may be overshadowed by the views of those which are not in line with the agreement (consensus) that is reached by the majority of the community. One’s viewpoint is thus rejected by the community for the sake of solidarity, although it might be a very good viewpoint. Louw (1998:3) says that the need “to agree with the community is often exploited to enforce solidarity”. The problem is the emphasis on the community at the expense of the individual. This may result in Ubuntu’s ‘democracy’ being abused to legitimise what some may call totalitarian communalism. The desire for wanting to have consensus during meetings has a negative image as it demands an oppressive conformity and loyalty to the group.

Louw (1998:5) asks how attainable the solidarity or consensus that Ubuntu ‘democracy’ aims at is. He argues that it can be said that Ubuntu allows those who agree to disagree. In this regard, the minority do not simply have to put up with the decisions of the majority but are allowed to disagree. However, this is not always the case. In some instances, individuals who choose to disagree (with the decision that

may have been taken by the majority) may be shunned, ostracized or pressurised into reaching consensus with the majority of the group. In effect, their right to disagree is eradicated.

1.3.2. Community and exclusiveness

A serious criticism of Ubuntu is its exclusive nature. Louw says in this regard: “The exclusive undertaking of the community that is Ubuntu resonates with the apparent potential of Ubuntu to trigger ethnic clashes. It also seems to underlie the way in which South Africans tend to cite Ubuntu as the definitive difference between themselves as Africans and non-Africans. Membership of the non-Africans in Ubuntu communities does not come easily for non-Africans” (Louw, 1998:5). Shutte agrees to an extent and says that “Ubuntu can take an aggressive form such as anger and defiance in the face of injustice. It can also express itself as a readiness to take life for the sake of life” (2009:97). These are serious allegations and not just trivial critique. Shutte’s own view is that “this account of Ubuntu is a description of an ideal which is never really truly lived out to the fullest” (2009:98).

There is a counter-argument to this critique. Louw says that those who are in support of the Ubuntu doctrine may argue that Ubuntu is inclusive and welcomes every individual into the community even though he/she may be an outsider. The exclusiveness of Ubuntu is thereby questioned. Murove is also in agreement with Louw regarding the inclusiveness of Ubuntu. He attests that “one belongs to others by reason of one’s common humanity; the African worldview is ideally inclusive as attempts are always made to accommodate those who do not seem to have relatives and make them part of the community” (Shutte, 2009:69). Louw acknowledges that some elements of Ubuntu may create the impression that although the community transcends the confines of a specific clan, the problem remains that it includes only those whose origins lie in Africa. In this way it remains exclusive and does not really extend to all people.

Louw says that “the argument of those who are not in favour of Ubuntu ethics may indicate that Ubuntu does not include beings that somatically or historically stand out as not autochthonous. This exclusion contradicts the Ubuntu concept of an extended family. Some people on the other hand may contend that the African concept of community – in its fullest sense, goes as far as transcending society of the living”

(1998:6). Metz (2011:534) contends that Ubuntu seems to have a collectivist orientation, which leaves the impression “that it requires some kind of group thinking, uncompromising majoritarianism or an extreme sacrifice for society which is incompatible with the value of individual freedom that is among the most promising ideals in the liberal traditions”.

This criticism makes it clear that Ubuntu is not only seen in positive terms. There are various philosophers who support Ubuntu but also those who harshly criticize it. Those who view Ubuntu negatively base their arguments mainly on the following points:

- 1) That Ubuntu can be viewed as being too vague and ambiguous;
- 2) That the freedom and individuality of the individual is limited and restricted as Ubuntu underscores the importance of agreement and solidarity at the expense of the individual;
- 3) That solidarity and consensus within the community eventually may undermine and restrict individual standpoints; and
- 4) Ubuntu may also be viewed as having an exclusive nature to it.

On the other hand there are those who advocate and argue that Ubuntu provides an ethical base. For example Louw and Shutte point out that Ubuntu is in fact inclusive and not exclusive. Instead of excluding individuals who are not a part of a specific community, the foreigner or visitor is welcomed and embraced as being a part of that community this is at least so in principle.

1.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I explicated the golden thread that runs from broad concept of “African Philosophy”, to “Ubuntu” and to the “ethics” of Ubuntu. My aims were as follows: 1) to show that Ubuntu cannot be equated with African Philosophy; 2) to indicate the inseparable relation between Ubuntu and African Philosophy; and, most importantly, 3) to provide a clear picture and understanding of the unique “ethics in African Philosophy as found in Ubuntu”.

I deliberately started my analysis using the broader concept of African Philosophy, because there have been a lot of controversies and questions surrounding Ubuntu and its relation to African philosophy. Especially over the past few decades

philosophers and scholars have asked questions about what African philosophy and Ubuntu is. Both remain contentious concepts and to move to 'an ethics' from them is not a simple or straight forward enterprise.

African philosophy, Ubuntu and its ethics is a complex issue. In this chapter, I attempted to address this by taking account of the work of African and Western philosophers such as Murove, Shutte, Kwasi Wiredu, and Oderu-Oruka. This provided a broad definition of African Philosophy that helped to remove certain assumptions about African Philosophy and Ubuntu, more specifically the assumption that Ubuntu can be equated with African Philosophy.

I also attempted to define Ubuntu while focusing more specifically on its ethics. Ubuntu (in its most simplified way) which means "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" (a person is a person through other people) entails a list of virtues and their ethical norms. It is not only about virtues; it is also about the person and can be defined as a humanistic ethic or as a moral system. It implies that a person should be a true human or moral self as Ubuntu is an ethical call for an individual to develop his/her personhood within the community for the betterment of the community.

What is of crucial importance here is the relationship that exists between the individual and the community within Ubuntu and its ethics. In Ubuntu and African Philosophy the individual is not seen as an abstract being that exists on his or her own, but the interaction between the individuals within the community constitutes both. Communal interdependence and the interconnectedness of the self and the community is important as the notion of Ubuntu as "a person is a person through other people" indicates. It is only through other people that the African conception of community is revealed. It is only through the interaction with others, that a person become truly fully human. It is on this point where the relationship between the three concepts of African philosophy, Ubuntu and ethics finds its strength and inseparable connection. An understanding of how these themes relate to each other, provides an insight into "ethics in African philosophy as a whole".

The criticisms of Ubuntu that were discussed in this chapter shed some light on the its ethical shortcomings. These are mainly about the individual or the personhood of the individual within the community. Criticism of the role of the community, more specifically related to ethics, points to the need to take other philosophies into

consideration when seeking to enhance and develop a better understanding of ethics per se.

The question is: How can ethics be better understood and developed in light of Ubuntu (as an African philosophical tradition) in dialogue with other philosophical traditions? The aim of this study is not to bring Ubuntu ethics into conversation with all traditions, but only one, namely the Western deconstructive tradition as represented by Nancy's transimmanence. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of ethics within both of these traditions, there are two important questions that have to be addressed. Firstly, what is transimmanence, as developed by Jean-Luc Nancy, and secondly, what are its ethics. These are the focus of the next chapter. The third chapter explores the dialogue between the two traditions.

CHAPTER TWO: JEAN-LUC NANCY – TRANSIMMANENCE AND ITS ETHICS

2. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explicate the concept of transimmanence as defined by the contemporary Western, or more specifically Continental, philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy and to analyse its possible ethical appeal. This is necessary to do a comparison and evaluation of the relation and differences between the tradition of Ubuntu and its ethics and transimmanence and its ethics. This comparison and evaluation will be done by reading each one through the lens of the other in the next chapters.

To understand the concept of transimmanence, one first needs to understand the context in which Nancy uses it, and how he relates it to other crucial concepts as part of his broader philosophy. Transimmanence is not a concept that can be understood in isolation, and therefore this chapter first provides a brief introduction to Nancy's philosophy. To do this, Nancy's philosophy needs to be situated within the Continental tradition. The focus then shifts to Nancy's philosophy itself, and gives specific attention some of its seminal concepts, namely "the community", "being", "immanentism", "transimmanence", "sense", "individual/self", and "humanism". All of these concepts have ethical values or implications, especially the notions of sense and being. They all led Nancy to rethink concepts like "community", "care", "dialogue", "understanding", "freedom", and "respect". These concepts are all related to transimmanence and not only contribute to the meaning of transimmanence itself, but also provide insights into its ethical implications. A brief biography of Nancy is followed by a discussion of the importance of his philosophy.

2.1. A historical background on Jean-Luc Nancy

As mentioned in the introduction, Jean-Luc Nancy was born in 1940 in France and obtained his doctorate in 1973. His doctorate on Immanuel Kant was supervised by Paul Ricoeur. Some of the major influences on him include Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Friedrich Nietzsche and Jacques Lacan. Although he was attached to the department of philosophy at the University of Strasbourg for most of his

academic life, he has also been invited to lecture at university in many parts of the world. At present, he is the incumbent of the Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel Chair of Philosophy as well as Professor of Philosophy at The European Graduate School.

It is important to note that Nancy does not subscribe to Western philosophy per se, but is a member (or at least immediately recognizable as one) of the deconstructionist (or postmodern) movement within the tradition of Continental philosophy (Ree et al., 2005:79). Nancy has written in a singular style that focuses on the nudity of existence, the sense of the world, the community, and the self (Gratton & Morin, 2015:1). In describing the importance and focus of Nancy's philosophy, Hutchens contends that Nancy is a philosopher who is "fixated on the future of the community and its spontaneous freedom in a globalising west. Nancy's core commitment is to an alternative view of community dissimilar to those normally offered today" (2005:1).

Nancy has profoundly influenced academic philosophy for the past decades. His work includes more than fifty sole-authored or co-authored books which are written in French as well as hundreds of contributions to the academic discipline of Continental philosophy (Nancy, 2015:3). Some of his best-known books are *The Inoperative Community* (1991), *Sense of the World* (1997), and *Being Singular Plural* (2000).

Nancy's philosophy can be described as having two focuses. The first is his "exposition of the Christian and onto-theological tradition that allow us to see the capacity between monotheism and all forms of foundational thinking that attempt to find the meaning of existence in a transcendent principle" (Gratton & Morin 2015:1). Questions related to the meaning of existence, sense, and community, all fall within this part of Nancy's work. The ethical is implicit, rather than explicit. The second focus of Nancy is described as "thinking existence against the rampant atheism of capitalism beyond its false equivalence of people and things within commodity fetishism and managed political spaces" (Gratton & Morin 2015:1). The ethical appeal of Nancy comes to the fore more strongly in this focus, but it still needs to be explicated. Nancy's work offers more than just critique: his notion of transimmanence and its link to ethics that will be discussed here.

An in-depth discussion of Nancy's philosophy lies beyond the scope of this chapter,. The focus is limited to to his concept of transimmanence. The question that will be asked in regard to Nancy's philosophy is: How does the concept of transimmanence, as part of a Western deconstructive tradition, develop in his philosophy and how does it relate to (or implicate) ethics? In order for one to understand the relation between transimmanence and ethics, one needs to analyse and deconstruct the broad concept of transimmanence as part of the Continental, and more specifically, the deconstructionist tradition.

2.2. Continental Philosophy

To describe or define continental philosophy is a complex task. Some philosophers argue that Continental Philosophy began at the start of the nineteenth century, just before the death of Kant. Kant is seen thus as the 'watershed' philosopher between the continental and other philosophical traditions, notably the analytic, as part of the Anglo-Saxon world. Continental Philosophy is "the name used to designate philosophy, or as a large number of philosophies, which evolved on the European continent over the past two centuries, since the work of Immanuel Kant at the end of the eighteenth century" (Solomon & Sherman, 2003:1). As mentioned in the introduction, the rubric of Continental Philosophy has been used since the 1970s to refer to a range of twentieth century Continental philosophers, French and German thinkers, notably: Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Deleuze and Derrida. They share a number of distinctive features such as reference to the work of Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, and Freud. However, philosophers in the school of thought, differ on the notion of Continental Philosophy (Rée & Urmson, 2005:79). Therefore, the list of Continental Philosophers remains open and contestable. One of their main characteristics is that they work in a different 'register' from Analytic Philosophers. Their work is more more aligned to literature and art than to natural science. As a result, their work has been condemned as being unclear and even disreputable by Analytic Philosophers.

Critchley states that there is not a "consensus on the precise origin of the concept of Continental philosophy as a professional self-description" but that "it is not likely that it was formed as a description of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in philosophy before the 1970s" (1997:348). The concept of "Continental Philosophy" in

the American context replaced the earlier notions of “Phenomenology” and “Existential Philosophy”. The reason for this change is not very clear, but a possible reason is that the concept of Continental Philosophy was introduced to take into consideration “the various so-called post-structuralist Francophone movements of thought that were increasingly distant from and often hostile towards phenomenology: to a lesser extent Lacan, Derrida and Lyotard, and to a greater extent Deleuze and Foucault” (Critchley, 1997:348-349).

It is in this context that Continental Philosophy is defined as “an invention, or a projection of the Anglo-American academy onto a Continental Europe” (Critchley 1997:350). However, Continental Philosophy is not only a geographical description. It refers rather to the focus on existential questions that are addressed in this tradition. In this sense, Morny (2011:1) defines Continental Philosophy as “a religion that results from the fall of natural theology in which there was an assumption that human beings could have knowledge of God”. However, Continental philosophers do not only explore existential questions. and it may include even a variety of academic fields like “literary theorists and writers, sociologists, social critics, psychoanalysts, and political activists, many of whom would not normally be considered (nor would they have considered themselves) philosophers” (Solomon & Sherman, 2003:1).

Even though Continental Philosophy has adherents on continents beyond Europe, there is still a sense of confusion that surrounds the canon of this philosophy. Solomon and Sherman (2003:1) argue that “apart from such well-known names as Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre, there is no agreed-upon group of philosophers who form the continental canon. Continental philosophy furthermore does not refer to any single identifiable kind of philosophy, style, concern, or tradition”. Even within philosophy that originates from the European continent, there is a divide between Analytic and Continental Philosophy’ (Humphries, 1999:253), with Gottlieb Frege and Edmund Husserl as representative figures of this division.

Continental Philosophy is dynamic and as such has different phases and focuses within itself. Kellogg, for instance, makes reference to post-war Continental Philosophy. He argues that post-war Continental Philosophy requires people to be suspicious “when the narrative of lost communalism becomes the starting point of any kind of politics” (2005:340). Kellogg sees Nancy’s philosophy as representative

of this post-war Continental Philosophy. This view is reflected in Nancy's description: "the political longing for a community of people who are tightly linked together by identity and background is another name that can be given to nationalism and other forms of identification which lead to the violent conflict and wars in the nineteenth century" (2005:340). Nancy's philosophy also forms part of the 'deconstruction tradition' within Continental Philosophy which focuses on post-structural Francophone philosophers like Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault and Deleuze. The next section focuses on this aspect of Nancy's philosophy .

2.3. Nancy and deconstruction

The term deconstruction was introduced to the philosophical arena in 1967, with the publication of three books by Jacques Derrida: *Writing and difference*, *Of Grammatology*, and *Voice and Phenomenon* (Lawlor, 2014:122). What is important to note is that the "Derridean deconstruction developed out of the phenomenological tradition" (Lawlor, 2014:122). The Derridean notion of deconstruction criticises structures, concepts and beliefs that seem self-evident and demonstrates that presence is never simple, never pure, never self-identical. However, it also has a positive side to it and leads us to an experience of time (Lawlor, 2014:122). The term deconstruction was appropriated by Derrida from Heidegger's idea, in *Being and Time*, of a deconstruction of the history of Western ontology. This was "the dismantling of the historical concept of being, in order to lay bare the fundamental experience from which these concepts originated" (Lawlor, 2014:122). This forms part of the critique on phenomenology.

Derrida is not the only philosopher to focus on the concept of deconstruction. Nancy also engaged in the project of deconstruction. Nancy's focus, however, was initially specifically on the project of the "deconstruction of Christianity" (Saghafi, 2014:447). Nancy's work on the deconstruction of Christianity can be found in two of his books, *Dis-enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (2012) and *Adoration* (2008). However, many of his other publications deal with deconstruction. Over the years the bond between Nancy and Derrida has grown tremendously. Their combined focus on deconstruction made them seminal thinkers in this field. Saghafi says that "Jean-Luc Nancy as an interlocutor and friend of Jacques Derrida has been a Vanguard of deconstruction, such that after the death of Jacques Derrida he has been treated as

the main inheritor of and spokesperson for deconstruction” (2014:447). Certain themes, concepts, and methodologies were shared by Derrida and Nancy, however “in these commonalities there are also disagreements that exist between their philosophies regarding themes like community, fraternity, and faith” (Saghafi, 2014:447-448).

Nancy and Derrida both write about the deconstruction of Christianity. In his work *Dis-enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (2012), Nancy contends that to rethink Christianity: “Christianity is the very thing – *the thing itself* – that has to be thought” (Saghafi, 2014:458). This leads him to criticize all metaphysical grounding of being. The problem with such grounding for him is that “the existence of the other in relation to a metaphysical subject or even Dasein does not need justification and escapes the synthesis into categories of the knowing Western subject, because it is given before the constitution of the subject” (Gerber, 2018:7). This also means that “the Subject as the onto-theological figuration of modernity is decentred, and that it is no longer considered as the highest and grounding reference point” (Gerber, 2018:7). What Nancy does then in his philosophy, is to call for a reopening of the analysis of Mitsein. However, this call does not lead to a completion or a setting up of a Mitsein as a principle, because we should then, according to Nancy “retrace the outline of its analysis and push it to the point where it becomes apparent that the coessentiality of being-with is nothing less than the matter of the co-originality of meaning is only what it is” (Gerber, 2018:8).

The deconstruction of Christianity as part of Nancy’s onto-theological critique is mainly associated with the end of transcendence, as well as the end of the figure of God. The end of transcendence means we have only immanentism left. Immanentism may be described as “an immanent figure endowed with transcendent significance according to on-to-Theo-logic” (Gerber & Van der Merwe, 2017:4). For Nancy, there is a problem in referring to God as the one-origin, because this would mean that there is some type of exclusion for things that do clearly emanate from the one-origin. “Such an exclusion proceeds in the denial of finitude in reference to the infinite absolute origin, where the finitude refers to the question of relation and alterity” (Gerber & Van der Merwe, 2017:4). The outcome of this is that there is a closure of the political/transcendent as alterity. According to Nancy, humankind has

an obligation to “re-think transcendence that aims to avoid onto-theology in order to rethink the question of creation” (Gerber & Van der Merwe, 2017:4).

Derrida’s response to Nancy’s deconstruction of Christianity is elaborated on in *On Touching* (2005). Derrida stipulates that Nancy’s “project of the deconstruction of Christianity will be a test of the dechristianization of the world” (Saghafi, 2014:458). It is interesting that Derrida states that the dechristianization will be a Christian victory, but the deconstruction of Christianity is not a simple task. Derrida contends that, the task of deconstruction is “difficult, paradoxical, almost impossible and always in danger of being exposed as a Christian hyperbole” (Saghafi, 2014:458). Derrida also contends that the deconstruction of Christianity “needs to begin by untying itself from a Christian tradition of destruction” (Saghafi, 2014:459). In his view, “we live in a preoccupation with humanism or human-reality in which the epoch or era of man sees humanity as the most significant geological force and the question to be thought. With man now as the one who has to provide meaning for itself, the system of thought is the metaphysical tradition has been found to be inadequate to do so, has reached its limit and is therefore coming to its end or closure” (Gerber & Van der Merwe, 2017:2).

Nancy differs from Derrida on deconstruction, especially of Christianity and the possibility of its existence. Nancy also differs from Jean-Luc Marion on the notion of the gift of love. This is an important difference to note in view of Nancy’s aim of moving away from onto-theology and metaphysics. Marion’s notion of love can be found in his earlier works such as *God without being* and the *Idol and Distance*. For Marion “love serves as a point of intersection between the philosophical and the theological tendencies which are found in his thought” (Collins, 2016:301). Marion, however, moves from “a claim of love as a theological destitution of metaphysics to its utilization in the exploration of an overcoming as onto-theology in a more nuanced fashion in *The Erotic Phenomenon* (2006)” (Collins 2016:301). According to Marion in “a theoretical thinking on charity theology overcomes metaphysics through a gift of love articulated in the distance of God from thought” (Collins, 2016:302). Marion aims “to think of a theological destitution of gift within a paradox in which the unthinkable gives itself – not to be comprehended but to be received. As a result the gift takes place within a silence whose heart lies in ethical praxis: Love is not spoken, in the end, it is made” (Collins, 2016:302). Marion further contends that God is not in

any way expected to associate himself with the realm of beings since love does not have to be.

For Nancy, on the other hand, “what is primordial is the ontological being-with as love. Love constitutes the subject; or again, the relation to the ontic face that constitutes a subject, comes second to Nancy” (Gerber & Van der Merwe, 2017:9). Love according to Nancy can also be defined as the movement of transimmanence, while transcendence, on the other hand, can be defined as the crossing of love. Gerber and Van der Merwe state that “what love cuts across, and what it reveals by its crossing, is what is exposed to the crossing, to its coming-and-going and this is nothing other than finitude” (2017:10). Love remains thus something immanent, but Nancy still finds something enigmatic about love. Nancy contends that “love is never named and consequently never furnishes, as such, an ontological-existential character (Nancy, 1991:104). Nancy says: “Love forms the limit of a thinking that carries itself to the limit of philosophy. Until thinking extricates itself, it will not be able to reach love” (1991:104). Something in love, thus, escapes one, but this lies not in a transcendental real but in the crossing of it between people. Love is transimmanent within this world (immanence) between people. Nancy does not believe in a hierarchy of love, (with the highest form as transcendent) but in “the infinite plurality of singular loves, which Nancy refers to as the shatters of love” (Gerber & Van der Merwe (2017:10).

2.4. Transimmanence

The concept of transimmanence as presented by Nancy is not easy to define, because it is so tightly interwoven with Nancy’s philosophy as a whole and with all Nancy’s other technical concepts. However, what transimmanence means becomes clear after exploring the various concepts to which Nancy refers in his philosophy. Such concepts include: sense, the community, the individual/being, humanism and immanence. It should be noted that these are not the only concepts that are important in Nancy’s philosophy. They are, however, the crucial ones in terms of understanding specifically transimmanence and exploring the ethical implications of Nancy’s work. In this regard, notions of care, dialogue, understanding/sense, freedom, respect and interdependence are all part of the ethical within Nancy’s

philosophy. In order to understand transimmanence, an analysis of Nancy's concept of sense is a good way to start.

2.4.1. Sense and sense of the world

One of the main tasks of Nancy's philosophy is to enquire into the sense (or meaning) of the world. By sense, Nancy contends that we "need to understand the condition of truth and meaning that precedes their partial disclosure and that is incommensurable with, yet enabling conventional views of both" (Hutchens, 2005:4). Sense (or meaning) is not just a static term, but depends on the dynamic process of sense-making. "Sense", according to Nancy, is not found (or dependent on) something 'outside' the world. Nancy contends that there is nothing but the world and that "any appeal to a transcendental being /Other or some meaning in which the sense of the world can be drawn is unjustifiable" (Hutchens 2005:4).

According to Nancy "not so long ago, it was still possible to speak of a crisis of sense" but not a loss of sense. There was still a feeling that one "can rediscover sense that is lost, or one can at least indicate approximately the direction in which it is to be sought." The problem is that "today we are beyond this, this means that all sense has been abandoned" (1997:2). Even though there seems to be an abandonment of sense, the important thing is that there is still sense that exists within us. This links to Nancy's argument that there is no longer any world. By this, he contends that "there is no longer a mundus, or a cosmos in which one may live. There is no longer a 'down there' of a world that one could pass through toward a beyond or outside of this world. There is no longer any spirit of the world" (1997:4). By contending that there is no longer any world it means that "there is no longer any assignable signification of 'world' or that the world is subtracting itself from the entire regime of signification available to us" (1997:5). Nancy considers "the idea of the quest of sense, as the possibility of finding or losing sense, as a wrong diagnosis" (Gerber, 2016:4). According to Nancy, "we cannot lose sense as we can only lose the meaning that we ascribe to sense, that is, its articulation, coming from religion and philosophy" (Gerber, 2016:4). The major quest then for Nancy would be the discovery of the world, as space of our existence, as sense. The tautology here is that sense is the experience of opening up to sense. To make sense of sense remains thus sense.

Nancy contends that we are faced with two dilemmas. The first one is that we need to make sense; we have to, because “we are exposed to all the risks of the expectation or the demand for sense” (Nancy, 1997:2). The second is that we “have the task to recognise that we are already beyond this expectation and demand and that we are already in the world in an unheard-of sense, that is in that unheard of sense that precedes all senses and that precedes us, warning and surprising us at once” (Nancy 1997:2). From our beginning we find ourselves already in a “world of sense”. What this sense is, is the difficulty. Nancy attests that “we cannot take sense of the world to be a general category and then admit its particular species or modalities, without thereby losing the very sense of the expression and yet, it is indeed with this loss that we have to do-it is this loss that is happening to us” (1997:7). The sense of the world and our making sense of it is thus a continuous and dynamic happening.

In order to define sense, we need to bear in mind that there is indeed no longer any, and we do not know what sense is. Sense says Nancy is “the property of finitude qua existence of essence. Sense is: that existence should be without essence that it should be toward that which is essentially is not, its own existence” (Nancy, 1997:32). There is thus a ‘toward’, a direction, a becoming of sense. According to Nancy “in order to be understood as a sense of the world or a world of sense – of ‘absence sense’ – the world must be understood in accordance with the cosmic opening of space that is coming towards us” (Nancy, 1997:37). We need such awareness of the cosmic cosmology because of its openness. Therefore, we should “disengage ourselves from the remains of the old cosmos-theology” (Nancy, 1997:38). An open sense of sense is the closest we can make sense of sense.

Sense, for Nancy, is “always already given, deposited there as a comprehensive unity or sense that has not yet been attained” (1997:50). He explains this by making reference to myth and abyss “from the double border of the opening that philosophy wants to be: stating the truth of both the myth and abyss as well as getting sense going in the open space” (Nancy, 1997:50). Sense ‘gets going’, is a dynamic, a happening, a movement, a being-toward or being as coming into presence. According to Nancy “sense is the singularity of all the singular ones, in all senses simultaneously. It is singularity in the distributive or the disseminative sense of the non-substitutable unicity of each singular one” (Nancy, 1997:68). It is taking place on

an individual or singular level, but never in isolation, always within all senses, shared as unity between everybody. It can also be viewed as “the singularity in the singular ones in the transitive or transitional sense of what shares them out and what they may share amongst themselves. The sense of the world may also be viewed as being a totality and unicity at once” (Nancy, 1997:68). It is something we find by sharing it with others.

According to Nancy, “the sense of the world does not designate the world as a factual given on which one could come to confer a sense, if this was the case, the sense of the world would be beyond this world” (1997:54). This type of sense of the world Nancy argues “is a Christian determination or a postulation that supposes a step beyond the cosmos to which agathon still belongs. To this very degree, that which we have to think hence forth under the title of sense can consist only in the abandonment of Christian sense or in an abandoned sense” (1997:55). Sense in this regard can only proceed from a deconstruction of Christianity. Nancy argues that when the “a beyond of the world has been dissipated, the out of space instance of sense opens itself up within the world”. Sense is then not outside the world but in it. It is not God-given (transcendent), but found within the world (immanent). Sense belongs to the very structure of the world. It is, however, something that transcends its immanence, it always crosses over (trans) and can therefore be best described as ‘transimmanence’” (Nancy, 1997:68). An open sense of sense remains.

Nancy further rejects “any alterity that could be viewed as being exterior and irreducible to immanence or a transcendently that in contemporary post-secular theories, invariably provides an ‘opening’ which anticipates the religious discourse” (2005:4). When the appearance of ‘the beyond the world’ has been abandoned, ‘the out of place’ instance of sense opens itself up within the world. Sense can, therefore, not be found in the transcendental, and requires a finite thinking or ‘singularity of all the singular ones’. This happens for Nancy in three ways. Firstly, there is “a distribution or ‘disseminative’ sense of non-substantial unicity” (Nancy, 1997:68). This means there is not a single (unifying) principle or substance on which sense can be based. It is ‘moving’, spread all over, in-between, non-substantial (Hutchens, 2005:43). Secondly, there is the ‘transitive or transitional sense’ of sharing out in sense. This links to the ‘trans’ in transimmanence. Sense or meaning is always ‘shared’ in-between, cutting across (trans). Lastly, sense is found in “the ‘collective or

worldly sense' of the infinite spacing within which the totality of the existent is determined as the singular and absolute of being" (Hutchens, 2005:43). This means sense is found within this world, limited, but also unlimited, in the infinite possibilities of sense-making. Hutchens summarizes this: "The question of sense is thus bound to multiply reticulated singularity, not to any general or universal concepts that might make such a singularity intelligible" (2005:43). It can also be seen as "the singularity in the collective or worldly sense of what makes of the totality of the existent the singular absolute of being" (Nancy, 1997:68).

Nancy's notion of 'sense', is thus fundamentally against forms of transcendental substantialism. Nancy argues that singular beings are not predetermined by reference to a general ground of being. His rejection of transcendentalism is based on the fact that there is no reserve 'outside' of the world that could serve as a source of meaning or value in the determination of singularity. Sense is to be found (or created) within this finite world, within its immanence. This also implies religious sense-making, which is dependent on an exterior transcendent. As Hutchens explains: "Nancy proves to be singularly critical of the forms of transcendence, exteriority or otherness often prevented by a religious thought" (2005:91). Nancy contends that there is no 'beyond' of sense, no superlative source of sense of which meaning can be gleaned. Furthermore, Nancy rejects any transcendental Being/Other because its question no longer means anything to us (2005:91).

On the other hand, Nancy also rejects strict immanentism, because he argues there is no such reserve (anchor point or onto theology) "inside" the world by which singular beings identities could be determined and reflected (Hutchens, 2005:156). Immanence alone is not adequate to give sense or meaning and something else, or more, is needed. Both immanence and transcendence (as immanentism or transcendental substantialism) are viewed as being inadequate for sense, for understanding existence and our being in this world.

Nancy opts rather for a dynamic relation between sense and human existence. An analysis of this relation may help one to understand sense better. Nancy argues that humans exist "in" sense. This means that sense is the happening of existence itself (Hutchens, 2005:43). According to Nancy "there is someone-there is numerous someone's, they are unto the world. This is what makes up the world and makes

sense. Someone, someone's, the numerous ones, that is to say, the plural singular 'is' the response that answers the question of the 'sense of the world'. This response is a guarantee given, a promise, an engaged responsibility" (Nancy, 1997:71). In his/her existence the self/individual adopts a 'sense' of orientation. Nancy attests that "in order to orient oneself in the world as well as to 'orient the world' one must be there first. And in some way, to orient oneself in sense or to give some sense to an orient, one must be in sense – and to give one or more senses to the word sense, one must be in significance of these words" (1997:78).

In other words, there is always a sense for the individual, even if it is just a point of orientation. But this also means one is always in relation to the world. By existing, one is 'making sense'. This means that there cannot be any regression towards a nihilism whenever the "absolute point of existence is thought to be missing" (Hutchens, 2005:43). Sense does not take place for one alone. This is because sense is being towards. It is also "being-towards-more-than-one" and this obtains even at the heart of solitude (Nancy, 1997:88). Sense can also be viewed as "a tensor of multiplicity as sense begins with each singularity and completes itself neither in any singularity nor in the totality, which is in itself nothing but the anchoring of renewed beginnings" (Nancy, 1997:88). It is thus a continuous process.

Sense may also be viewed in light of the relations between individuals or singularities, and not only in terms of one's orientation in the world. There are relations between singularities which relate to each other extrinsically. This is an important point for Nancy. Sense goes beyond oneself. It is found or created in the openness, in the in-between, of these relations. Relations with others entail therefore a spacing that has an ontological status, "as if it was relating to something extrinsically" (Hutchens, 2005:43). This spacing, or openness, in relations with others is crucial for creating sense (or meaning) of the world. Nancy uses the prefix 'trans' (in his concept of transimmanence) to refer to this 'spacing' or 'place' of sense-making. Nancy rethinks the prefix 'trans' to create an alternative sense of the notion "within the discourse about alterity, a general mode of trans, i.e. transport, transaction, transcription or transmission continually along-side of the mode of cum, but it will never be able to eclipse it or replace it" (Gerber & Van der Merwe 2017:8).

Thus 'trans' refers to a movement, to the process of sense-making within the immanence of our existence, but also as that which moves beyond. The movement (trans) is something which comes and goes between us. This means that it is not a 'closed' circulation that is constantly occurring. This movement comes and goes over time and it is not a substance that is fixed. It is connected to existence which has rather to do with multiple textures, movements and relations in this world as an absolute immanence. The "absolute immanence, however, is not a positing of immanence against transcendence, but rather what Nancy calls 'transimmanence'" (Verhoef, 2016:10). Gerber (2016:89) usefully describes transimmanence as "the movement of the with, cutting across both the self and the ego by not substantiating each other but rather by exposing one another creating sense and meaning".

It can thus be stated that Nancy's notion of transimmanence is a process of naming and locating the places and movements at work within the "sense of the world". It is a process whereby there is interplay of different dynamics in the world that Nancy describes as playing, sharing, speaking and so on. Transimmanence is an alternative to the dichotomy between immanence and transcendence, because both "immanence and transcendence are for Nancy inadequate for understanding existence and our being in this world" (Verhoef, 2016:10). Transimmanence is an attempt to reconceptualise being and meaning, and even transcendence, in immanent terms (Verhoef, 2016:1). Nancy's concept of transimmanence thus criticizes substantialist transcendentalist and immanent metaphysics (Hutchens, 2005:156) in his search for a 'middle' or more 'sustainable' position.

2.4.2 Sense and transimmanence

Transimmanence requires that the movement that is creating sense (or meaning) within the world as sense is not to be found outside of the world. The movement which stays within the immanent world should thus be a movement which goes around as a circulation. It is this circulation of sense which is inclusive "through the cutting across of Being-with where the transcendence is to be found not as a substance but rather as the movement of the *with* across both the ego and the other which exposes one another" (Gerber, 2016:88). Furthermore, this 'movement' can be termed as 'outside with' or it can be described as an "outside–within–between meaning that cannot be separated from the plurality of singular bodies" (Gerber &

Van der Merwe, 2017:8). Transimmanence thus refers to the occurrence of sense that happens each time between a subject and another. Sense thus “occurs coextensively as the experience of being with, out across or exposed to one another” (Gerber & Van der Merwe 2017:8). The importance of *Mitsein* and/or community come strongly to the fore again here.

Nancy (1997:55) attests that the “sense of the world” is not something which designates the world as a factual given to which an individual is able to confer a sense. If this were possible the sense of the world would be beyond this world. For Nancy as mentioned before, sense is rather something which belongs within this world, that is, within the structure of the world. Nancy states that “sense in this regard hollows out ‘transcendence’ of ‘immanence’ which may be defined as ‘transimmanence’ which its existence and exposition” (Nancy, 1997:55). Sense is transimmanent as it “takes place and crosses through presence in co-existences among singularities and their finite thinking” (Gerber, 2016:89). It is found in the in-between.

Hutchens interprets Nancy’s transimmanence as something in which the sense of the world is coextensive with the world as open. This co-extensive restlessness and strangeness of sense, is the primary figure of immanence which is “open to the uncertainty and undecidability of the future” (Hutchens, 2005:44). Nancy explains that the ‘out of place sense’ can also be defined “as the signifyingness or the significance of the world itself. This constitutive sense recognises that there is indeed a world” (Nancy, 1997:55). What is important to note about sense is that it is something which is not completely lost within the world. Instead it is passed around within the world as “it crosses through presence in coexistences among singularities and their finite thinking” (Hutchens, 2005:44). This is the reason why sense may be deemed as being transimmanent.

Sense may also be viewed as a constitutive element of the structure of the world. In this regard “sense collapses into an open, reticulated immanence without any recourse to transcendent or transcendental sources of meaning” (Hutchens, 2005:33). Verhoef (2016:10) contends that the notion of transimmanence does not look at the relation between the world (immanence) and its outside (transcendence). However, transimmanence focuses on “its absolute immanence”. This means that

transimmanence is about the tensions and relations among modes of being and existing in the world.

Human experiences and interactions play a pivotal role in the notion of transimmanence, because sense arises from our everyday experiences and encounters with another (Schrijvers, 2009:266). In this process there is an awareness that even though full understanding (sense) cannot be achieved, it does not mean that all sense has abandoned us. It means rather that we are abandoned to sense. We have to make sense, or as Nancy contends: “sense today is its own constitutive loss, as it presents itself in the opening of the abandonment as the opening of the world” (Hutchens, 2005:38).

Nancy takes the experience that the world might have more meaning or be something more than the mere world, and that its meaning can be found from “outside it” very seriously. He does not reject it straight away, but explains that this “outsideness of the world”, should be understood as the “inside of this world”. For him, it is rather a world with a meaning as an “outside-within”. The “outside is found within the world because the world ‘is lacking exteriority’ and only has sense which ‘circulates in the exposure of singular beings’” (Verhoef 2016:10). Sense is thus found outside us (in the between with others), but this sense is still within the world. An outside us but within the world (sense of the world).

Transimmanence refers to the ‘crossing over’ within the world. In this regard the “distinctiveness of crossing of transimmanence lies in the notion of ‘ek-sistant’ in contrast to ‘ex-static’. ‘Ek-’ (ek-sistant) is from the Greek ‘eik-’, which refers to the point from where action or motion proceeds, while ‘ex-’ (ex-static) is about standing out” (Verhoef, 2016: 11). What is important to note is that transimmanence is not an “ek-stasis” (ecstasy) as a standing out from the world (or yourself as in self-transcendence), but rather an ‘ek-sistant’ which is the movement within the world whereby meaning circulates through existence. Nancy contends that art is the transcendence of immanence. This transcendence of immanence is *ek-sistant* as it does not go outside itself in transcending. There is a “crossing over”, but there is no ascending to a place that is beyond this world. It remains a transimmanence. Since there is no outside of the world, or anything that is beyond, the crossing over has to occur within this world. The outside is within this world.

Nancy sees the experience of transcendence as the outside-within (which makes it transimmanence) as par excellence found in art. Art expresses the ever opening immanence of transimmanence. For Nancy "...art is the transcendence of immanence as such, the transcendence of an immanence that does not go outside itself in transcending, which is not ex-static, but ek-sistant. A transimmanence. Art exposes this. Once again, it does not 'represent' this. Art is its ex-position. The transimmanence, or patency, of the world takes place as art, as works of art" (1996:34-35). Our sense of art transcends us, and the meaning of art transcends the artwork, but the sense and meaning still remains within the world. It is found between us in transimmanence.

2.4.3. Being and transimmanence

Nancy uses the concept of transimmanence to describe the sense that "cuts across" (trans) "being" within this world (immanence). The implication of this is that the sense of the world constantly changes itself into something that is more dynamic, textured and artful. The sense of being itself is found (or created) within transimmanence as "being singular plural".

In his book, *Being Singular Plural* (2000), Nancy explains that the words being, singular and plural "are opposite words which do not have any determined syntax ("being" is a verb or noun; "singular" and "plural" are nouns or adjectives; all can be rearranged in different combinations), mark an absolute equivalence, both in an indistinct distinct way" (Nancy, 2000:28). Being is singularly plural and plurally singular. Yet, "this in itself does not constitute a particular predication of Being, as if Being is or has a certain number of attributes, one of which is that of being singular-plural- however double, contradictory, or chiasmatic this may be" (Nancy 2000:28). Being is thus not described by singular or plural, but as Nancy puts it, "the singular-plural constitutes the essence of Being, a constitution that undoes or dislocates every single, substantial essence of Being itself" (Nancy, 2000:29). The implication of understanding singular and plural as constitutive of being, is that the essence of Being is "co- essence". Co-essence in this regard "designates the essence of the co-, or even more so, the co- (the cum) it-self in the position or guise of an essence" (Nancy, 2000:30). This makes the communal or the "co-" crucial for understanding being and the point of departure for philosophy.

Nancy attests that we are always in relation with other, not in a closed off community, but as singularly plural. For him, “the essence of being is only as co-essence”. He says that “this co-essence or being-with designates the essence in the co-. Coessentiality therefore means the sharing of essentiality” (Nancy, 2000:35). Nancy contends that this can also be stated the other way around: “if Being is being-with, then it is, in its being with, the ‘with’ that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition” (Nancy, 2000:35). He clarifies this notion by comparing it to power that is shared amongst people. He explains that ‘being-with’ “operates in the same way as a collective power: power is there neither exterior to the members of the collective nor interior to each of them, but rather consists in the collectively as such” (Nancy, 2000:35). For Nancy even the “question and meaning of Being can [also] be viewed as being a question of being-with or of being together in the world. This is what is shown by our modern sense of anxiety which reveals the association of humankind is an injunction that humanity places on itself, or that it receives from the world to have to be only what it is and to have to, itself, be Being as such” (Nancy, 2000:35). Our being with each other is that much more fundamental as just an association or forming of a community. It is part of our being.

Nancy uses the term “collection” for group forming or for communities which assembles after the first order of ‘being-with’ which we all share. Collection is thus associated with the theory of togetherness or ensembles. Collection refers to “a grouping or regrouping that is exterior and in different to the being-together (in common) of the objects of the collection” (Nancy, 2000:59). In a collection, the “ontological togetherness which we must think through is never substantive; it is always the adverb of a being-together, however the adverb is not a predicate of ‘Being’, it brings it to no particular and supplementary qualification” (Nancy, 2000:59). Being is fundamentally to be together, while together simultaneity means “at the same time” (Nancy, 2000:59). Nancy sees this being-with as moving in all directions, resulting in everything passing between us. The “between” that Nancy speaks of does not have a consistency nor continuity of its own. It is again something trans (passing) immanent (between us).

Nancy makes this co-essence as constitutive of “being the first philosophy” (Gerber 2016:73). In other words, meaning is not derived from the subject (a metaphysical identity or the singular) or from a community that functions according to the model of

a subject's (plural) identity, but rather from being-with, from the *co-*. Throughout his work, Nancy has described the condition of being and having a world as "being with" (Butchart, 2015:225). Being-with is fundamental for understanding being. It is a condition that is prior and predetermined, and essential to the meaning of being human. Buchart argues that this being-with of Nancy "selects a context, thematises the world as a shared world and it is a sign of a fundamental relation constitutive of and ground for human awareness" (2015:225). In this sense it makes being a first philosophy for Nancy – from here all philosophy as (sense making) necessarily follows.

Gerber contends that for Nancy, "being is given to us, only with the fact that we comprehend something" (Gerber, 2016:5). We are always exposed to being as sense. This suggests that "being is the actuality of transmitting existence, the 'act' of being there, to itself. There is no outside" (Gerber, 2016:5). This raises the question of whether, if there is no outside, it means that there is an inside? Gerber states that "if the act 'that there is' is passed onto itself – considering that there is no outside and no passage from potentiality to actuality – then logically speaking there must be an anterior/posterior relation between 'that there is' and itself, or more accurately, a position of anteriority/posteriority in itself" (Gerber, 2016:5). Therefore, we can say that there is a relationship between being and sense. This is because "sense occurs when being transverses itself from being as a non-being to being as existence" (Gerber, 2016:12). The "to" to which Nancy refers is semantically present in the verb, can be grasped as a disjunction or a spacing (Gerber, 2016:12).

"Being-with (being singular plural) is so fundamental for Nancy, that it may be viewed as an absolute condition of human consciousness and awareness which precedes self-reflection and offers the ground for both the possibility of communication and for the thinking of the community" (Buchart, 2015:226). Nancy thus reverses the order of ontological exposition. He does this by "questioning and challenging the past proposals which contended that being precedes the possibility of being-with-others" (Welch & Panelli, 2007:350). Descartes's concept of an individual being who is isolated and turned into itself comes to mind here. The results of this ontological reverse of Nancy is that there is "a philosophical division of the contention that there has ever been a single, substantial essence of being itself" (Welch & Panelli, 2007:350). Nancy rejects this essence of being as single. Being is rather singular

plural. It is a co-existence. It is always a case of “being-with”, where the with is not viewed as being a subordinate to the notion of being, but co-constituted. What this means is that “being-with others and the singular plural constitutes the essence of being” (Welch & Panelli, 2007:350). Nancy recognises a communal cross referencing between the “self” and the “non-self”, not as binary poles but as a continuous condition of the co-constitution of being.⁸ This makes sense in terms of his concept of transimmanence which implies a cross over (trans) of meaning (sense) between others in this world (immanence). We co-create meaning and being and the two cannot be separated in terms of Nancy’s concept of existence and sense’s relationship.

To think about your own being as singular is for Nancy nothing more than “the shock of the instant... of Being (a lash, blow, beating, shock, knock, an encounter, an access)” (2000:33), which is always an instance of ‘with’: singulars singularly together. Nancy sees this togetherness as “neither the sum, nor the incorporation [englobant], nor the ‘society’, nor the ‘community’ (where these words only give rise to problems)” (2000:33). To think (make sense) of one’s being always involves others for Nancy, although it remains a singular task.

Instead of society or community, Nancy speaks of a plurality of beings. He contends that our “being-with” as “many-beings” is not something that is coincidental, but that the plurality of beings is what forms ‘Being’. Being refers in this sense to “the positing of a thing” (2000:11). The implication of this is that every position becomes a disposition and that all appearances are co-appearances. To exist, or to be, is to make sense together as singular singularities together. Again, there is the notion of transimmanence as the sense crosses (trans) between the ‘singulars’ (immanent).

Nancy’s philosophy basically looks at the human consciousness of living in a world and being in relation with other beings. Being-with others (being singular plural) helps us to understand (make sense of) the world as something which is shared and which focuses on the human experiences of being itself. To be with is “the awareness of sharing the life world, while also focusing on the fact that one can only say ‘I’ within the context of others” (Buchart 2015:241). Nancy sees “Being-with” as

⁸ Nancy’s “semiotic phenomenology places emphasis on the being-with as the open and as the exposure that we are. Being-with gains attention from the outside which constitutes our embodiment” (Buchart, 2015:238).

the notion that as individuals we are always exposed and fundamentally self-exposed. It is this exposure that enables us as individuals to become aware of the world around us and to transimmanently make sense of it. The singularities in Ubuntu's 'I am a person/being through others' are striking, but the others are much more openly defined than a closed community.

Being-with relates thus to the notion of community that is decentred. This means that for Nancy "the imperative lies in the political significance of thinking being-with" (Gerber 2016:74). Being-with means that we are exposed to each other in the respective communities not closed off. Nancy contends that "exposing human beings as essentially being-with, an opening or exposure that is lacking closed identity, helps us to keep sight of the opening or exposure that remains at the heart of any community" (Buchart, 2015:241). The concept community is thus not a closed concept, but open, because of the openness of being itself. For Nancy the concept of being-with is more fundamental than community, because "being-with invites thinking about the disturbances and distances that are always part of the community" (Buchart, 2015:241). This raises the question of precisely how Nancy sees the community, and how individuals relate to each other in this community.

2.4.4. The individual and the community

In Nancy's scheme, the concepts of sense, transimmanence, and being, all fundamentally accept our being-with – our communal existence – as determinative for meaning of beings. Nancy says that if "the meaning of being is dis-position, then this is being-with as meaning: the structure of with is the structure of the three" (Nancy, 2000:97). This is something that one cannot escape. Nancy explains that, the "being-with is not added on to being-there; instead, to be there is to be with, and to be with makes sense – by itself, with nothing more, with no assumption of this meaning under any other truth than that of the with" (Nancy, 2000:98). It is in being-with and as being-with that we understand meaning. This enables us to understand ourselves and the world as meaning. This understanding that we possess is always infinite, because we understand ourselves and the world in an infinite manner (Nancy, 2000:98).

According to Nancy, "with" is not something that is immediate or mediate. The "meaning that is understood by humankind is not the product of the negation of

Being, nor is it the pure and simple ecstatic affirmation of its presence” (Nancy, 2000:98). With is something that does not go anywhere nor does it constitute a process. With can be referred to as “the closeness, the brushing up against, the coming across, the – almost there of distanced proximity” (Nancy, 2000:98). What is important to note is that for Nancy the “meaning of the ‘with’, or the ‘with’ of meaning, can be evaluated only in and by the with’ itself, an experience from which – in its plural singularity – nothing can be taken away” (2000:98). Even to make sense of the with already includes a being-with because the implication of this is that “meaning” is the sharing of being. According to Nancy, this is in essence our understanding. Nancy further contends that “This is not a dialectical operation (according to which ‘to understand nothing’ would be ‘to understand everything’), nor is it a matter of turning it into the abyss (to understand the nothing of this same understanding), nor is it a reflexivity (to understand, for all understanding, that we understand ourselves); instead, it is all these replayed together in another way: as ethos and praxis” (Nancy, 2000:98-99). Thus the understanding that we have and share of the meaning of Being is an understanding that may be found and shared between us simultaneously at the same time (Nancy, 2000:99). It is within this sharing, within this being-with, within this community of being, that we find meaning, an ethics and praxis for our lives. Our communal existence is thus of crucial importance for thinking about ethics.

According to Buchart, the task of Nancy’s whole philosophy is “thinking through what will become of our communal existence” (2015:222). This is seen very explicitly in Nancy’s books, *Being Singular Plural* (2000), *The Sense of the World* (1997), and *Corpus* (2008). The question of community is more specifically addressed by Nancy in *Inoperative community* (1991).

The ‘inoperative community’, as Nancy describes it, is the place where being-in-common should not be controlled by anyone. The implication of this, is that “anything can happen in this strange place of the ‘inoperative community’” (Gerber 2016:82). It is a community which is not defined as a group of people having something in common. It is rather defined as a place where people are in common.

Nancy “focuses thus on our common-being and wants to move away from the exclusive ideal of belonging to some and not to others. Nancy argues that in contrast to exclusive communities to which many may desire to belong, all beings are

included in the human community from the beginning. This is due to the fact that being has no meaning other than ‘being together with other beings’” (Welch & Panelli, 2007:352). This is linked to Nancy’s argument that the self or the subject should not be understood as pre-constituted, but in terms of its basic mode of existence, *being singular plural*. As a result of this, the self becomes decentred.

The essential task of Nancy’s philosophy is to “recognise the contemporary discourse on community as no more than the sign of an opening that cannot be closed, an outside on the inside that is ‘inoperable’” (Buchart, 2015:329). Streiter makes the important assertion that for Nancy “a community is something which does not make sense. It is something which makes palpable the interruption of sense” (2008:49). When beings are formed into a group, it results in a macro collective. This results in “comfort for each being because it means that there is inclusivity within the group” (Welch & Panelli, 2007:352). Nancy challenges this, forcing one to “rethink the social bond and the question of community today” (Schrijvers, 2016:5). This is of course also applicable to the concept of community within African Philosophy and Ubuntu.

In *The inoperative community* Nancy argues that “the thought of a community or the desire for it might well be nothing other than a belated intervention that tried to respond to the harsh reality of modern experience; namely that divinity was withdrawing infinitely from harsh immanence, that God was at the bottom himself and that the divine essence of community was the impossible self, a name for this has been the death of God” (Nancy, 1991:10). This type of community is for Nancy nothing more than “a substantial cluster of ‘individuals’ who are determined by common social means and focused on common political ends that produce a controllable future” (Hutchens, 2005:1). Such communities have opened themselves to a history of self-production in which there is no substance, and no sense left outside it to produce and install it. “As a result the community had to look within itself for grounds and substances in which it could establish itself. It therefore had to be its own fundament, and fill up the emptiness that it was experiencing with self-substances” (Gerber, 2016:82). Such communities are thus based on empty truths.

As an alternative to such communities Nancy proposes a “community of being” that replaces the intractably traditional question of the being of community. The

community of being that Nancy proposes is “the being that brings predetermined individuals into communion” (Hutchens, 2005:2). REFERENCE Nancy thus resorts to a proposition of a community which is a “collection of beings who have in common the experience of singular finitude, singular beings who understand the consequences of living as a being in common” (Welch & Panelli, 2007:350). Such a community – with what people have in common as their experience of singular finitude – is much more open than ethnic or racial/tribal communities, for instance. It is this openness at which Nancy’s philosophy aims.

Nancy’s alternative sense of a community can be described as something which has no foundation or core in an onto-theological sense.⁹ It is an ‘inoperative’ community. This means that a sense of the community never becomes fixed. There is rather a “constant construction and deconstruction of the meaning of community” (Gerber & Van der Merwe, 2017:8). This movement can be described as the dynamic of auto production. The dynamic of an auto productive community means that the community has to produce itself. It means that within this process the community will always already have destroyed and produced itself. The community is entangled in a “violent and infinite spiral of production as well as destruction, whereby temporary substances alternate with each other in order to fill up the community’s empty truth” (Gerber, 2016:82). This dynamic of auto production is one which has existed since “the death of God as transcendent reference point or foundation” (Gerber, 2016:82).

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The ‘empty truths’ of contemporary communities (built around cynical liberal values and capital, for example) are of a matter of great concern for Nancy. Hutchens says that Nancy “attempted to address the possibility of the West’s future being determined by the federal interplay between a democracy of individualism rendered impotent by its ‘cynical’ liberal values and on the other hand an ecotechnics of capital” (2005:1). Nancy emphasises the community of being, rather than the traditional ‘being’ of community. According to Hutchens, the “focus of Nancy’s

⁹ Streiter (2008:53) contends that for Nancy, “a community functions just like a past Christian God: this world is the becoming of God and the becoming is something which has no end, no closure, and it is movement and mutation”.

¹⁰ Of key importance in Nancy’s concept of a community is his rejection of God. Nancy believes that if that “through God, or the God’s communion – as a substance and act – the act of communicated immanent substance, has been definitely withdrawn from community” (Nancy, 1991:11).

attacks on contemporary views of freedom, community and politics, are the implications of substantialism and metaphysics which neglects the futural spacing's of modern social relations" (2005:2). These social relations are important and unavoidable,¹¹ but they should not result in communities that are based on empty truths and exclusion. The concept of community has in this sense fundamental ethical implications for Nancy.

2.4.5 Immanentism

Nancy sees a clear link between a community that suppresses human beings and "immanentism". Immanentism means a closed immanence, as opposed to an open immanence or transimmanence. Nancy argues that the closed immanence of a substantial community consists of atomic individuals and a mythos that holds the community together. This is imposed from within and provides the necessary expressive voice of this very mythic immanence (Hutchens 2005:16). REFERENCE Closed immanence, or immanentism, is Nancy's term for this mythic immanence which suppresses human beings.

Nancy argues that immanence should not be closed. His notion of immanence has "no inside-outside distinction, but only the very facticity of a world whose sense always collapses into an open, reticulated immanence without any recourse to transcendent (or transcendental) sources of meaning" (Hutchens 2005:33). Transcendence is thus excluded, but immanence remains open – open in the sense of trans (the cutting across of the sense in the between) within this world.

Open immanence differs crucially for Nancy from closed immanence, which he criticises as immanentism, or immanent metaphysics. Closed immanence means that the immanence is literally closed upon itself. There are three possible forms of closed immanence that Nancy (2005:33-35) addresses in his work. The first is the immanence of atomic individuals in closed association with one another. The second is the immanence of a group of individuals reflecting upon their cohesion as such (a community). As opposed to sense's relation to transimmanence, the third is the immanence of sense itself at the interstices of irreducibly open relations of sharing. Nancy sees open immanence as "the single sense that is the world of material

¹¹ There are no singular beings. This is because "a man is a social being" (Nancy, 1991:28).

bodies and the singular events of their relation” (Hutchens, 2005:35). The singularities serve as “an irreducible plurality of singularities composing insubstantial communities as it is affirmative because there is nothing beyond the horizon to appropriate it” (Hutchens, 2005:35). Nancy contends that “there is no transcendent origin of sense imposed upon a given world, but rather a sense that is constitutive of the world it-self in a transimmanent fashion” (2005:37). What this means is that sense is coextensive with thinking and the world. Sense becomes something which is found in an open immanence with no influence of a transcendental source. By rejecting any transcendental source of meaning, the possibility of ethics becomes centred in humanity itself. But what does this ‘humanity’ mean and does it lead to a humanist ethics?

2.4.6 Humanism

According to Nancy, humanity is something that is shared by humans as part of the human condition and its exposure to an undecidable future. Nancy explains that humankind is in a century in which we desire a rediscovery of sense or a sense of direction in which to seek it. He (Nancy) argues that “as humans, we are desensitised by the scandals of the age to the extent that we present our history as a process of a planned savagery of a civilization at its limits that is a civilization of destruction” (Hutchens, 2005:37). For Nancy, there is thus a strong relation between sense and humanity. He believes that there is a “crisis of sense” which constitutes the crisis of humanity. He clarifies this by saying societies should think about the future of humanity in terms of freedom and community and not think about returning to the way things were. Humanity for Nancy needs to acknowledge that “history is no longer definitive of sense and that our time is a time of the suspension of history are now tantamount to a rejection of history as the context wherein such sense is determined” (Hutchens, 2005:37). Nancy contends that the problem with humanism is that it requires that we return to the times when humanity was still influenced by Enlightenment principles and values. Demanding a return to sense would mean that sense was not lost in the first place. Nancy believes that “when we demand a return to sense today, this demand often does little more than bracket the two centuries that have unfurled since Kant and the Enlightenment and proclaim the return of a certain Reason – at once critical, ethical, juridical, regulative and humanistic as if it

had not been influenced by the philosophies in the intervening period” (Hutchens, 2005:39). Nancy rejects this nostalgic thinking about humanity.

According to Nancy, since the nineteenth century there has been an awareness of the “loss of sense” which has produced the conditions of our contemporary distress. However, since the last century there has been an emergence of the phenomenon of anti-humanism which has given rise to human discourses such as “structuralism, post-structuralism, and post-modernism” (Hutchens, 2005:38). The major question that Nancy attempts to answer is: *What can we do about the “crisis of sense”, if recovery and renewal are impossible?* In order to obtain an answer to this we need to take into consideration “the dismissal of post Enlightenment thought and the demand for a re-inaugurate moment” (Hutchens, 2005:39). There are several consequences that are associated with the return to sense: firstly the sense that is to return is one that entails a collection of ideals constitutive of truth. (These ideals include; freedom, rationality, dignity, etc.). these ideals would have to be chosen for one to succeed against anti-humanism. However, Nancy contends that “the return to humanism would be nothing but an ideology that would not be of benefit to humanity” (Hutchens, 2005:40). Secondly, “humanism demands a ‘return to’ an appropriate inaugural moment rather than a ‘return of’ its conditions” (Hutchens, 2005:40). Thirdly, humanism requires us to return to a philosophy that has offered meaning prior to their dissolution during the subsequent centuries. The challenge is thus much bigger than just to repeat old answers to our contemporary questions.

Nancy provides a concentrated response to these three claims. In his view, humanism is wrong to think that we have lost signification to a point where we need to have it back. The reason for this assertion is that “signification is something which is never lost because we are always implicated by it” (Hutchens, 2005:41). Instead, sense is needed to be comprehended according to a reflection upon its existential conditions. If this cannot be done, Nancy argues, then humanity would be flawed. Hutchens contends that for Nancy “the sense of ‘humanity’ arises on each occasion of the circulation of sense in social relationships. Humanity always ‘surprises’ itself; to be human is to be incessantly surprised by the events of the world and of thinking itself” (2005:62).

2.5. Transimmanence and ethics

Nancy's concept of transimmanence clearly intersects with his whole philosophy. The question that arises is what ethical implications of transimmanence are found in Nancy's philosophy. Notions such as freedom, interdependence, love, and communication/dialogue are the ethical implications of Nancy's philosophy thus far. These notions must now be further investigated in terms of their relation to the concept of transimmanence. First one needs to understand what Nancy means by ethics.

For Nancy, "ethics can be defined as ontology itself; there is no need to 'add' an ethics to an ontology that would have been presupposed as unethical" (Raffoul, 2015:77). For Nancy, ethics can be described as fundamentally about fundamental ontology. The influence of Levinas's notion of ethics as first philosophy or ontology on Nancy is clear here. Having adapted this, Nancy says that existence is something which engages as an originary ethics because existence is an event that calls for responsible engagement. For Nancy, the "withdrawal of God and principles frees existence as a responsibility for itself" (Raffoul, 2015:76). Absolute responsibility according to Nancy is something which came to us "as a result of the death of God and birth of the world, that is to say, with existence submitted to our absolute responsibility" (Raffoul, 2015:76). The implication is that this makes it an original ethic. This fundamentally affects our 'sense making' of our transimmanent... This entails gaining some new perspectives on notions like dialogue, interdependence, freedom and sharing.

2.5.1. Dialogue/communication

Ethics relies fundamentally on dialogue and communication between people in their search to find ways of living in harmony and at peace. For Nancy, there is a link between community and communication. The question of community is also a question of its communication and its sharing "as a thematic guide that humankind faces when it comes to the problem of communication, the concept of community has been at the heart of inquiry in communication since the beginning of the discipline" (Butchart, 2015:222). In order to understand the concept of communication, Nancy's hermeneutic analysis of *with* in being with has to be taken into consideration. This is because the *with* in "being-with" is based on our understanding of the experience of communication. By emphasising the with of

being-with, Nancy helps us to understand the relationship between the addresser and the addressee. Nancy contends that “even if the addresser and the addressee do not make contact in actuality, they are nevertheless already in contact because of occupying space and time in the same shared world. However, it is important to note that “by placing emphasis on the with of our co-beings, it calls attention to why there is communication and why it cannot always be guaranteed” (Butchart, 2015:232). We share our being with others, but that is not enough to guarantee clear and understandable communication. The community of being-with ‘forces’ us, however, into a type of communication.

Within being-with, this community, a singular being for Nancy is a finite being. According to Luszczynska Nancy contends that “one of the primary factors of community in a non-immanent sense is that there is no common, essential substance in which beings would partake or share and which would exist in a totality superior to them” (Luszczynska, 2012:58). This implies that there is not necessary sharing between beings, which then leads to an important question: How are the singularities in the community supposed to interact? Nancy’s response to this is that communication between the singularities is ideal. Nancy suggests that “finitude/singular beings cannot commune for it is not a ground, thing or substance, but it does appear present and exposes itself, and this is how it exists as communication” (Luszczynska, 2012:58). In our being present in our beings with one another, we are exposed to communication.

Communication is thus based on an appearing and an exposition. Or to phrase it the other way around, it is a result of our being that our finitude exists in communication by way of exposing and appearing. This finitude is something that cannot be exposed if there is no other being to whom the exposure can occur. That these must be more than one being is thus of crucial importance for communication. In Nancy’s terms, this implies that there must be “an among” of beings to exist in order for communication (appearing and exposing) to take place. “It is by definition, that finitude appears or communication occurs among singularities in the form of a together” (Luszczynska, 2012:58). In essence having more than one being is of crucial importance if communication is to occur, as singularity cannot exist alone. Nancy argues that a co-appearance is needed and this we find in being-with.

Communication does not only entail verbal dialogue for Nancy. Touch is another form through which humankind can communicate. Nancy's book, *On Touch*, sheds light on how human beings appear, are exposed, and are in contact with each other. This takes place because being human is being with others, which implies being exposed and being in touch with one another. This then results to some form of communication. For Nancy "touch does not indicate an overcoming of distance, touch indicates a figure of withdrawal, discontinuity and separation. It marks a connection of contact and separation, a spacing in contact, characteristic of the basic state of human co-existence" (Butchart, 2015:234). In such communication there is thus always an opening, a distance to be rediscovered with. This notion is in resonance with his transimmanence which implies on open immanence a continuous sense making.

2.5.2. The relationship between sharing/interdependence and communication

Interdependence links to what we share as human beings. The notion of interdependence and its ethical implications come into play in Nancy's understanding of communication as part of our behaviour, our co-appearance. This concept can be understood better by taking the concept of sharing into consideration. According to Nancy, this "sharing with others reveals to me in presenting to me my birth and my death, in my existence outside myself, which does not mean my existence reinvested in or by the community as if community were another subject that would sublimate me, in a dialectical or communal way" (Luszczynska, 2012:60). Such sharing is showing me my being in a way that I am not exposed to on my own. This is also true for others, which makes us then interdependent on one another.

This sharing, according to Nancy can mean one of two things. It could mean a sharing as in a giving out or allocating among participants, but it could also mean a dividing. Secondly, communication exists in the dividing of being (sharing) as well as in the fact that this exposure and dividing can only take place together (Luszczynska, 2012:61). Nancy speaks of an "exposing-sharing" which constitutes a mutual, interruption of singularities that precedes any linguistic connection or relationship. The relationship between singularities, this exposing-sharing "is preconscious and constitutive of being rather than an experience that we have of being" (Luszczynska, 2012:62). An important point that Nancy states is that communication should not

make any reference to a “social bond”. A social bond can be described as “both the subjectivity of being (or being as subject-object) and an illusory inter-subjectivity of the subject-object” (Luszczynska, 2012:62). Beings’ exposure-sharing thus precedes the notion of a social bond. While Ubuntu will also recognise the exposure sharing of the independence between beings, it will go further than Nancy and recognise a social bond as well. We find they have a crucial difference between the two traditions.

Communication for Nancy, as exposure-sharing does not occur at the social bond, as a paralinguistic or preconscious event that constitutes being. Luszczynska contends that for Nancy, “communication consists in the appearance of the between as such: you and I (between us) – a formula in which the ‘and’ does not imply juxtaposition – but exposition” (2012:64). This implies that there are certain traits that are exposed when it comes to communication and “these have to be read in all its possible combinations; ‘you (are/and is/) (entirely other than) I’-reading these traits indicates a togetherness or the among that is important for communication” (Luszczynska 2012:64).

There is, however, not just one exposition that occurs during communication. This means that “the finitude is exposed from me to you and from you to me. What this means is that my other of being as toward your other of being automatically implies that we are co-exposed” (Luszczynska, 2012:64). This may happen between two individuals, but also between communities. For Nancy “community is always experienced in and through communication as communication is an embodied experience of the somatic systems that bring structure and meaning to our world” (Butchart, 2015:239). The interdependence between beings thus reaches further than just on a personal level, and our (individual/communal) exposure-sharing immediately and fundamentally requires some communication. Ethical responsibility is thus an ontology for Nancy.

2.5.3. Freedom

The concept of freedom, as developed by Nancy is “attuned to unfounded, disseminated and non-teleological existence. More precisely, for Nancy it is the very absence of ground or direction that implies the freedom of existence, including human existence” (Gratton & Morin, 2015:84). Nancy contends that “freedom

designates nothing more and nothing less than existence itself. *Ex-istence* signifies the freedom of being, that is, the infinite inessentiality of its being-finite which delivers it to the singularity” (Nancy, 1993:19). This means that freedom is an element in which and according to which only existence takes place. Nancy says that freedom “must thus be an element or fundamental modality of being” (2015:19). As such freedom plays a crucial role in determining reality, For Nancy, freedom cannot be an object of a question, but is “only the putting into question of an affirmation”. It also cannot be the object of a question posed ‘about something’, but “only putting into question of an affirmation of itself” (Nancy, 1993:23).

Freedom cannot be derived because it is a fundamental modality of being. Nancy attests that “the fact of freedom is the right of existence or rather the fact of existence is the right of freedom” (1993:29). Freedom and existence or being cannot be separated. The “freedom of existence to exist” “comes to itself according to its own transcendence” (1993:29). This transcendence of freedom is the “transcendence of the self towards the self”. It is not something from outside of this world. It is “not something that can be presented as autonomy of subjectivity in charge of itself and of its decisions, evolving freely and in perfect in-dependence from every obstacle” (Nancy, 1993:68). Freedom can also be viewed as being the withdrawal of being, but the withdrawal of this being is the nothingness, which is the being of freedom. Freedom thus affects a human being’s whole existence. According to Nancy, existence is something that has a common measure. “This common measure is freedom, which is not to be understood as a given attribute or characteristics but as absence of ground or reason, as a releasing into existence” (Morin, 2012:67). What is important to note is that freedom for Nancy is something which is shared among all human beings.

Devisch and Schrijvers (2011: 269) attest that for Nancy “freedom must be thought out of the absence and the lack of any necessity. When all the metaphysical and modern causal explanations of the world have withered away, what is left for us to understand is the mere facticity of a world without any ultimate significations and without any sufficient reason. The singular being is thus thrown into a world where nothing happens”. Once being is abandoned, the outcome of that is freedom as freedom is the withdrawal of being. Freedom is something which exposes existence and is the reason for the fact that existence is exposed. Nancy speaks about “being

free by birth". According to Nancy, "being free by birth means being free before birth, that is, before there was the being of being free, this means that the possible place, in a particular lineage or particular city, for a new future individual is the place for a free human being" (Nancy, 1993:91). The freedom of existence may also be seen as being politically based on two inter-related ways. Firstly, "the freedom of existence entails a radical affirmation of relation; to be given over to existence is to be given over to relation" (Gratton & Morin, 2015:95). This means that the freedom is inseparable from an originary being-with. Therefore, the freedom of existence is political. Secondly, there is a political transcription of freedom in which freedom is the event and advent of existence as the being in common with all singularities and also linked to the question of revolutionizing revolutions (Gratton & Morin, 2015:97). Nancy's approach can be viewed as being a transcendental one. This is because "the transcendental condition of possibility of freedom is subsequently located in the transcendence of existence, while existence for Nancy means transcending finitely or being transimmanent" (Devisch & Schrijvers, 2011:274). In *The experience of Freedom* (1993), Nancy attempts to deconstruct the distinction between freedom and destiny. At the same time, he attempts to illustrate that freedom moves through history from event to event without interfering with history in which someone *can take up their destiny.

The experience of freedom (1993) enables one to wonder how we can understand freedom if there is no God or other form of a superior being that guarantees our freedom. How can our "thrown existence" comport itself with regard to "the free call to freedom"? Should liberal individualism be taken as the outcome of all accounts of modern subjectivity? The possible politics of freedom depend on this ontological space, this understanding of freedom as a fundamental modality of being

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the concept of transimmanence that was developed by a contemporary Western philosopher, namely Jean-Luc Nancy. In order for one to understand the concept of transimmanence, it is important to get an overview of Continental Philosophy and Deconstruction. This were provided at the beginning of the chapter before the focus moved to transimmanence. Transimmanence is a very broad concept. One of its aims is to overcome the dichotomy between immanence

and transcendence. Nancy saw immanence and transcendence as having limitations because they do not make it possible to reach an adequate understanding of existence and our being in this world. Transimmanence can thus be viewed as fundamentally part of our way of being, of our being-with, through which we find or form sense/meaning within the world between each other and not as receiving such sense/meaning from outside the world. Transimmanence is about the cutting across (trans) of sense between people (immanence). It is an immanence because it remains within this world, but it is an open immanence (in contrast to immanentism) because this cutting across (trans) of sense between beings is a continuous and open process.

In order to get a clearer picture of the concept transimmanence, certain other key concepts of Nancy have to be taken into account. These concepts include: sense/meaning, being, the individual/self, immanentism, community and humanism. It was noted how important it is for these concepts to be read and understood together with Nancy's whole philosophy. Nancy's concept of transimmanence was identified and used as an encapsulation of his unique philosophy. It is through the concepts encapsulated in transimmanence that one can start to identify the ethical foundations, tasks and challenges that Nancy is concerned with. It is from the concept of transimmanence that one can think with Nancy about meaning of one's life, freedom, community, our way of living, and about what the future holds. The notion of transimmanence emphasises that humanity can be open minded, have an open immanence and be open to new possibilities of life that is no longer restricted by closed, transcendent or orthodox traditions and values that existed over the past centuries. The challenge, however, is how to rethink these concepts, our ethical responsibilities, within our being-with, within our co-existence, and within creating sense/meaning between (trans) ourselves within this world (immanent).

Freedom, our sharing-exposure, our interdependence, our co-existence as co-appearing and our being-with, are all fundamental modalities of our being for Nancy. Ethics for Nancy can therefore be described as what is fundamental about fundamental ontology. To understand the ethical implications of Nancy's philosophy this needs to be taken into account. With an open notion of sense and of ontology – as transimmanence – Nancy's notions of freedom, interdependence, sharing, and communication/dialogue all have a very open character. This implies that all ethical

behaviour and all norms need to be found between us, in the “cutting across” (trans) of sense that happens continuously and necessarily in our being, together, in our co-existence.

The critique of Nancy’s transimmanent ethics is that ‘findings’ such as creation of meaning may be an impossible and never-ending task. They are too open. This point of critique of Nancy’s ethics, as an important representative of Continental Philosophy, can be brought into conversation and compared to the ethics that are found in African philosophy, such as those of Ubuntu. The purpose of comparing and reading the ‘ethics’ that are found in these different traditions is to formulate, or at least imagine, a more tenable, practical, sounder or a broader concept of ethics to which different communities in different regions can relate and even subscribe. It may at least provide a better understanding of the ethics of philosophy.

CHAPTER THREE: READING THE ETHICS OF UBUNTU AND TRANSIMMANENCE THROUGH THE LENS OF EACH OTHER

3. Introduction

Two philosophical traditions have been discussed in the study, namely African and Continental Philosophy. The concepts of Ubuntu and Transimmanence have been chosen from these traditions as the basis on which to analyse and discuss their various ethics. The previous chapters make it clear that these traditions and their ethics differ a great deal from one another. However, both these traditions play an integral part in our contemporary societies which cannot be restricted to certain continents. As much as these traditions and their ethics may differ, they also have some similarities and overlaps in respect of certain ethical themes. The possibility is thus that they may even complement each other. In this chapter, a comparison of the themes and concepts of these two traditions is made to understand both better. It is also done to investigate what new insights one might gain by 'reading the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence through the lens of each other'. How can ethics be better understood and developed in light of these traditions? The fact that both ethical traditions are not without criticism necessitates such a comparison and discussion.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the possible new insights a comparison between these two traditions could offer to ethics in general. The aim is to discuss the comparative benefits and shortcomings of both traditions rather than to choose between the two traditions. The emphasis is thus on contributing to the debate on ethics and not on making a final judgement.

The discussion is confined to some of the main ethical themes of both traditions that overlap or have certain similarities. The aim is to contribute to a discussion of ethics in general. Some of these themes have previously been explicitly discussed with regard to only one of the two traditions. In other cases, an implicit understanding of the theme is offered. The list of themes is:

1. The origin of ethics
2. Individualism and personhood
3. Community

4. Authority
5. Respect
6. Humanity
7. Being/ontology
8. Freedom

As already stated, the purpose of the comparison between Ubuntu and transimmanence on these ethical themes is to identify possible ways in which these traditions could contribute to our understanding of ethics.

3.1 Comparison between Ubuntu and transimmanence on some ethical themes

3.1.1. Origin of ethics

The first aspect is compared is their understanding of the origin of ethics. The question is: Where do ethics come from according to these traditions? What common ground or differences are there in this regard?

Transimmanence is described as a tradition¹² that is part of a broad Western philosophy, more specifically Continental Philosophy. This philosophy aims to be universally applicable or 'true'. The origin of ethics in transimmanence is not linked to a religious, transcendent or 'outside' origin or source of ethics. It has a much more immanent grounding of ethics. For Nancy, ethics is based on the meaning and sense that people create between themselves. Transimmanence refers to this creation of meaning and sense "in between" (trans) as something that happens in the world (immanent). This co-creation of meaning takes into account our "being-with", our fundamental co-existence and relation to others, and our ability to communicate and continuously negotiate, as singular plural beings, an ethically sound way of living. The origin of ethics is thus "in between" people, where all sense is to be found, according to Nancy.

As previously discussed, Nancy's view is that sense "can be defined as the property of finitude qua in existence of essence. Sense is: that existence should be without essence that it should be toward that which it essentially is not, its own existence"

¹² As explained in the introduction, transimmanence is strictly not a 'tradition' but the concept is used to encapsulate Nancy's philosophy which is situated in the tradition of deconstruction. Referring to transimmanence as a tradition is merely done to contrast the Western-continental-deconstruction-Nancy line of thought which is best summarised by transimmanence.

(1997:32). There is no essence given to existence, and by implication also not to ethics. All that is given is existence, the rest we have to work out. Sense is not lost, but given as is existence. Nancy contends that “sense is always already given, deposited there as a comprehensive unity or sense that has not yet been attained” (1997:50). For Nancy, there is thus “a dynamic relation between sense and human existence, as he argues that humans exist in sense” (Hutchens, 2005:43), but this means it needs to be ‘found’ and formulated. In that sense it circulates between us. This also applies for ethical notions – like other concepts it is found (originates) in between us, cutting across (trans) in our immanent existence and world.

Ubuntu shares a similar foundation or origin of ethics as transimmanence in the sense that it is also based on people’s co-creation of meaning and the value of life. Kwame Gyekye says for example that “[t]he ethics of a society are embedded in the ideas and beliefs about what is right and what is wrong, what may be constituted as good or bad character” (2011). In Ubuntu, however, the people who constitute ethics are restricted to a certain group or community. The group is not all inclusive such as with transimmanence. There is also a transcendent character to the origin of ethics within Ubuntu as part of the metaphysics (e.g. God as a supreme Being or life force)¹³ that is part of African philosophy as a whole. Teffo and Roux say that “central to African metaphysics are religious beliefs relating to the African concept of God, the universe and their relations” (2003:195-6). In this regard, the two traditions differ completely. It is in their ‘communal aspect’ that one finds an overlap between these two traditions.

In Ubuntu, it is the community that continuously negotiates what is valuable in life, what a meaningful life is, and ultimately the ethics. As argued before, Ubuntu finds its origin in African philosophy, but it cannot be equated with it. African philosophy provides the broader communal framework in which thinking and debating the meaning of existence takes place. The metaphysics of African philosophy cannot therefore be ignored on this point. The community and African metaphysics together point to ethical behaviour as an affirmation of life that is aligned with African philosophy. This affirmation is extended to specific ethical norms and judgments

¹³ Teffo & Roux explain that “African metaphysics is organized around a number of principles and laws which control so-called vital forces. There is a principle concerning the interaction of forces, that is, between God and humankind, between people, between humankind and animals, and between humankind and material things” (2003:196).

from within the community. As mentioned before, the notion of Ubuntu (umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu) translated as ‘a person is a person through other people’ “means that there is a capturing of a normative account of what we ought to value most in life” (Metz, 2011:537). On a very practical level, certain ethical behaviour, as judged by the community, ‘qualifies’ someone to be a person. The origin of ethics in the Ubuntu tradition lies thus with the community and the metaphysical aspect of African philosophy.

With regard to the origin of ethics, the overlap between Ubuntu and transimmanence is in the communal. Both ground ethics on the interaction between people and the meaning/sense that is created between them. In transimmanence, this interaction is limited to even just two people and not the community at large. In the case of Ubuntu, this community normally includes a specific ethnic group. Transimmanence excludes the supernatural, while the supernatural plays a fundamental role in Ubuntu,. This aspect of Ubuntu is open to criticism from a secular perspective, and transimmanence is open to criticism that it is an impractical academic notion. For both the “wholeness” and “being” of a person play a fundamental part in developing ethics. This indicates that a comparison between Ubuntu and transimmanence needs to explore the concept of personhood and individualism.

3.1.2. Individualism and personhood

What is a person or how does an individual acquire personhood? This is an important question because it includes aspects such as who is the ethical agent – the individual or the community? In other words, to what extent can a person be held responsible for ethical conduct in Ubuntu and in transimmanence? How can these two traditions help us to understand personhood and moral agency better?

In Ubuntu, the concepts of individualism and personhood are clearly and closely linked to moral agency. The responsibility for the individual’s ethical conduct lies with the individual, as it is the individual that is responsible for him/herself within the community. However, it is never detached from the community and even from African metaphysics. Waghid, for instance, argues for a “view of African metaphysics and epistemology that not only places the person at the centre of the action in respect of the individual self or the community, but also considers the person as the most important human agent in exercising his/her actions in a responsible and

critical way” (2014:40). He argues that such responsibility implies “that the individual is not only vigilant towards his/her attentiveness to the needs and expectations of the communal group, but also imposes on the group the recognition that the individual is as important to the group as the group is determinant of the individual’s aspirations” (2014:40). There is thus a reciprocal relation between the individual and the community with regard to moral agency. The individual is always part of the community which develops and prescribes ethical norms to which he/she must adhere. It is within this relation between the individual and his/her community that ethical relations are created and where the call to an ethical life comes to the fore. Waghid explains the role of the person as in relation to the community where “constructions of knowledge is in agreement with an understanding of African metaphysics and epistemology that is in harmony with the notion of a communitarian, reasonable and culture-dependant African philosophy ... one that privileges responsible and critical relationships” (2014:40). Therefore, the individual is not completely submissive to the community, but is critical of it. The moral agency of the individual cannot, therefore, be merely be surrendered to the community.

In the case of Ubuntu, the community at issue is traditionally an ethnic or extended family group. Relations within this community are normally between more than two people. It is the group where the individual has his/her upbringing and finds his/her initial identity. To maintain good relationships within such a community is a crucial responsibility of the individual and an integral part of the function of the whole community. Within his/her community the individual needs to answer for his/her own ethical behaviour, which should benefit not only him/herself, but also the community. The failure of the individual to act as a morally responsible agent in relation to the community is understood to be detrimental for the community. Within the community some ethical values and norms are prescribed for the individual for the sake of the community and the individual’s life. There is, however, a problem that could occur here. The community may impose traditional ethical values and norms on the individual which are in conflict with (universal) human rights. In a worst case scenario, the freedom of the individual to act as an autonomous ethical agent – who is capable of making ethical decisions and taking responsibility for them – can be restricted or overruled by the community’s ethical norms. Even if such norms are the product of collective consensus within the community, they may still be experienced

as somewhat totalitarian. This may result in strained relations between the individual and his/her community, raising the question of who is really the moral agent. The norms of the community may thus restrict the individual from exercising his/her ethical responsibility.

In transimmanence, the greater community does not play a role in determining personhood or moral agency. The individual can be viewed as an autonomous being who must take full ethical responsibility. However, the individual is never isolated from others. He/she is always co-existing, 'being-with', and within a 'community of being'. This community (being-with) is more ontological and implies that we share our being with others. Nancy would see a group or community in the sense of Ubuntu as a second order community – an add on to our fundamental 'being-with'. Ethical relationships can thus be found, or created between as few as two people. A bigger group or community is not needed. The moral agent within transimmanence is the individual who takes full responsibility for him/herself by negotiating and developing the sense, meaning and value of existence as a continuous process in encounters with others. According to Nancy, "there is someone-there is numerous someones, they unto the world. This is what makes up the world and makes sense. Someone, someones, the numerous ones, that is to say, the plural singular 'is' the response that answers the question of the 'sense of the world'. The response is a guarantee given, a promise, an engaged responsibility" (Nancy, 1997:71). The plural singular gives the answer to the question of the sense of the world, but this is not a 'closed' answer. It is an open immanence, a continuous process within this world, between each other, where ethical responsibility (as with sense) is thought, and rethought. It is the *singular* plural, the individual who is in the end the moral agent.

In contrast with Ubuntu, transimmanence does not see the "community of being" as a closed community, but includes anybody that the individual has contact with. In this sense there are no limited norms or values that could be imposed on the individual by a specific community, as in Ubuntu. The individual person is therefore held ethically accountable in a more autonomous and universal sense than in Ubuntu.

Who is the responsible agent, then? Both traditions agree that it is the individual, he/she should take responsibility for their actions. Ubuntu, however, recognises a stronger role that the community plays in prescribing ethical norms. In this sense the

ethical agency of the individual may to some extent be restricted. In transimmanence, there are no prescribed norms by a specific community, but the emphasis on the autonomy of the individual can lead to questions about ethical relativism. It is possible to critique transimmanence's ethics as being 'too open', or as never being able to arrive at a norm. This places as emphasis on the possible role of the community.

3.1.3. Community

To explore the question of moral agency and personhood further, one may ask: To what extent does the community play a role in the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence? How and what does the community contribute to ethical thinking in these two traditions?

In Ubuntu, the community plays a very important role in contributing to ethical thinking, because (as discussed above) it develops and prescribes certain ethical norms and behaviour. However, it's role is not restricted to this: it rewards the 'right' ethical conduct of the individual by offering some benefits or fulfilment that some individuals often desire or need. These needs are very human (mostly psychological) needs, such as a sense of belonging, security, identity, status, value, and confirmation as human beings. Other needs such as care, love, food, financial support and education are often also provided by communities. For some individuals, fulfilment of these needs is met by their immediate community, and not by the state or other institutions. The community has thus some power over individuals in that it controls the provision of such human needs. Within Ubuntu, it is not only these needs that are met by the community, but also the need to be acknowledged as human beings. The notion of personhood or being a person "is understood in many African languages and societies as an acquired status. This status is dependent upon people's relationships to their community" (Bell, 2002:60). A community can withhold such status, which gives it tremendous power. There may also be a lot of pressure on an individual to adhere to the community's ethical norms for acceptance within it.

In Ubuntu there is a strong sense of belonging in the community. This provides some form of security for the individuals who are confined within the community. In African communities, status and identity are conferred on the individual from the time of

birth. The individual takes it with him/her throughout his/her life, until death. Being a part of the community throughout the individual's life means that the individual acquires a sense of value and confirmation from the community. This value and confirmation is given not as a mere birthright, but in response to the moral conduct of the individual. Bell explains that the "judgement that a human being is 'not a person', made on the basis of the individual's consistently morally reprehensible conduct, implies that the pursuit or practice of moral virtue is intrinsic to the conception of a person held in African thought" (2002:64). To be acknowledged as 'a person' is thus the reward for good ethical (as prescribed by the community) conduct by the individual.

In the case of Ubuntu, the community creates ethical norms by discussing certain issues, debating them and reaching consensus on them. Consensus is here of crucial importance because it gives sanction and authority to the ethical norms. It enables the community to uphold the ethical norms and values it expects from its members. Without this consensus, disagreements would arise, dividing the community and result in certain members of the community being shunned or cast out. This would leave the latter individuals in a very vulnerable position.

In transimmanence, a specific (or ethnic) community plays little or no role in prescribing ethical norms to the individual. Unlike in Ubuntu, the individual does not receive his/her sense of belonging, security, identity, status, value or confirmation as a human being from a specific community per se. The reason is that the individual is not part of or primarily defined by a specific or closed community. In transimmanence, the individual engages with other individuals from different communities – in principle with all human beings as an 'open' community. This implies a much more open process of engagement and finding one's identity and ethical norms in various relations. This entails a continuous process in which sense or meaning is created between the individuals – a transimmanent process of understanding being and its sense in relation to others. The ethical sense and meaning that is created, and continuously negotiated, takes place between people on an interpersonal level. This is where ethical norms develop. The specific community (as extended family or ethnic group) can prescribe ethical norms to the individual in this process, but they are always open, always discussed, always

subject to consideration by the individual again. In that sense the community's ethical norms have no final authority and play a limited role.

In summarizing the extent to which the community plays a role in the ethics of transimmanence and Ubuntu, it is evident that the Ubuntu community determines the norms and ethics for individuals. In transimmanence, on the other hand, there is not a specific community with specific ethical characteristics or norms that is authoritative. There is no final or closed community and no final or closed answer to ethics. The question that arises is whether transimmanence as an 'ethical tradition' can continue without the prescriptive ethical characteristics that are found in a specific community, as in Ubuntu. A potential flaw in transimmanence is that it does not provide strong enough ethical guidance. On the other hand, although the ethics of Ubuntu are grounded in the community and more directive, they too have a potential flaw. Limiting ethics to those of a specific and closed community may lead to conflict between communities, as well as between individuals and their communities.

3.1.4. Authority

The above discussion on the role of the community in determining ethical norms leads to the questions: Where does the final authority for ethical behaviour lie in Ubuntu and in transimmanence? Why does one need to accept such authority?

In Ubuntu, as the preceding discussion has made clear, the final authority or sanction of ethical norms lies with the community and supernatural forces (as part of the metaphysics of African philosophy). The final authority on ethical issues lies with the consensus reached by the community. If an individual disagrees with the community on these norms and runs counter to them, he/she individual may have to face severe consequences. The individual's human rights may be suppressed, he/she may be shunned, or, in a worst case scenario, be cast out of the community. The community has the authority to prescribe ethical norms and it has the power in this way to enforce it. The community may emphasise its metaphysical beliefs to which the individual must adhere in following certain ethical norms. If an individual is not religious, or does not share these metaphysics, there could be conflict with the community and a questioning of its authority. The danger here is that enforcing the

ethics of Ubuntu might lead to an intolerant system that denies an individual the right to act in accordance with his/her own ethical values and norms.

In transimmanence, there is no superior or supernatural being that is granted any authority in grounding ethics. Nancy rejects metaphysics and ontotheology in his deconstruction of Christianity. This implies that there is no final meaning, sense or word given from 'outside' this world. Sense, meaning, and per implication ethical norms, are always to be negotiated and developed between individuals within this world. There is also no final (closed) community, or authoritative community to sanction ethical norms. The problem here is that within transimmanence the community never becomes fixed. There is rather "a constant construction and deconstruction of the meaning of community" (Gerber & Van der Merwe, 2017:8).

This lack of a final authority on which ethical norms can be based, leads in transimmanence to a pragmatic or contextual determination of ethics – one where sense and ethical norms is continuously created between the individuals. In this sense it has a 'communal authority', but the community is just a 'community of beings'. Within such an open community the ethical norms that are continuously negotiated aim to be universally applicable. This stands in contrast to Ubuntu's ethics which are limited to the specific community to which the individual belongs.

The difference between the authority for ethical behaviour in Ubuntu and transimmanence overshadows similarities in this regard. The community and supernatural forces (African metaphysics) play a prominent role as authoritative in Ubuntu, while in transimmanence neither the community nor supernatural forces (metaphysics) dictate ethical behaviour. The individuals themselves develop ethics in a pragmatic sense through dialogue and engagement with each other. In this process of dialogue and negotiation, there is some similarity with the consensus aspect of Ubuntu. While final authority resides in the community consensus in Ubuntu, transimmanence postpones final ethical authority in its continuous dialogue and search for consensus in a much broader communal and universal sense.

3.1.5. Respect

An ethical notion that features very prominently in Ubuntu is respect. When making a comparison between the ethics of Ubuntu and of transimmanence, one may ask:

What prominence is respect given in each tradition? How and why is respect valued or not valued?

Respect for each other and within the community, in the Ubuntu tradition, is very important. It plays a crucial role in judging the ethical behaviour of all members of the community. In Ubuntu, to show respect towards others is fundamentally part of being human. It is a determinative factor in the relationships in the community and all interaction between its members. Respecting each other and, most importantly, the elders, forms the crux of relationships in the Ubuntu tradition. Respect and disrespect are always noticed. Elders in the community confer status, value, confirmation, identity and security to the individual that shows respect towards them. Murove says about respect that it “signifies recognition for another person’s humanity. Thus respect motivated by Ubuntu, is something that one will come across when evaluating how people relate, talk and show courtesy to each other” (Murove, 2009:67). Murove says that respect needs to be shown to all people “irrespective of his/her own status in life” (2009:67), because all human beings deserve respect.

While such a high regard for respect as part of Ubuntu’s ethics can be applauded, it may have an unintended consequence. The problem arises when an individual disagrees (for argument sake rightfully) with the community’s prescription of ethical norms (which may flout human rights). The community requires an individual to respect, obey and side with decisions that are taken by the elders of the community. If he/she does not, this will be seen as disrespect towards the community as a whole and, therefore, disrespect for the greater good of the community. His/her intentions and loyalty towards the group might be questioned. To show the appropriate respect in such circumstances demands thus very nuanced diplomatic skills.

In transimmanence, the notion of respect functions more implicitly, but it is also of crucial importance. To be able to make sense of the world, to create this sense/meaning with others, as always “being-with”, entails that some dialogue and communication are needed, as Nancy argues. It is within this context that respect becomes a prerequisite for listening, communication and finding sense and meaning together. Therefore, ‘creating’ any ethics involves the ethics of respect. With transimmanence such respect further entails the individual’s willingness to engage in dialogue and to evaluate, negotiate and adjust his/her own views in relation to the

views of others. Without respect, a transimmanence – a co-creation of meaning – would not be possible. Transimmanence thus fundamentally requires respect to be shown in relationships and co-existence with others.

In short, respect plays a fundamental role in both Ubuntu and transimmanence. The different role that it plays can be conveyed implicitly and explicitly. Respect is highly valued in both of these traditions as it ensures that an interaction between individuals can occur and a relationship can be created. It also helps to promote and sustain relationships in the future. Respect is thus one of the biggest similarities or overlaps between the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence – it is connected to our human being and functions on an ontological level in both cases. The difference between these traditions with regard to respect is that it becomes more prescriptive in Ubuntu where it is directed and required towards and in a specific community towards specific people (elders) in a specific way. In transimmanence, the fundamental respect that enables communication is more basic or general in nature. It is needed in relationships with all people, because we all form a “community of being”.

3.1.6. Humanity

Respect is fundamentally linked to our being human. The question that arises is: What emphasis do these two traditions put on humanity? Is humanity central or more marginal in their ethical focus?

Ubuntu is linked to African philosophy in which the concept of Ubuntu is not only focused on humans, but also incorporates nature. This becomes apparent in the metaphysics of African philosophy which is holistic (Teffo & Roux 2003:196). The emphasis, however, is on humans who enjoy a higher status within African metaphysics. The vital forces in African metaphysics are hierarchically placed and form a ‘chain of being’. Teffo and Roux explain that “in this hierarchy God, the creator and source of all vital forces, is at the apex. Then come the ancestors, then humankind, and then the lower forces, animals, plants and matter” (2003:196). In Ubuntu specifically, the emphasis is more on appreciating human interaction and harmonious human relations. However, humanity remains intimately connected with nature and cannot be thought about in an isolated way.

Within the African philosophy school of 'nationalist-ideological' (see chapter one) there is also a notion of humanism in a more political context. Bodurin argues for example that 'nationalist-ideological philosophy' "is an attempt to evolve a new and, if possible, unique political theory based on traditional African socialism and familyhood. It is argued that a true and meaningful freedom must be accompanied by a true mental liberation and a return, whenever possible and desirable, to genuine and authentic traditional African humanism" (1981:162). This 'traditional African humanism' can be explained through the concept of Ubuntu. Higgs contends that "the expression: 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' captures the underlying principles of interdependence and humanism in African life. It translates to 'a person depends on others just as much as others depend on him/her'" (2003:13). This interdependence forms the basis of such humanism. Murove following the same line of thought and argues that the "ethic of Ubuntu, being a humanistic one, is aimed at curbing the behaviour that was considered as dehumanising in the past. As a result, Ubuntu should be associated with humane acts such as treating people with kindness, compassion, dignity and care" (2014:37).

Transimmanence focuses on humanity in a more exclusive way than Ubuntu. For Nancy, humanity is something that is shared by humans as "the sense of 'humanity' arises on each occasion of the circulation of sense in social relationships. Humanity always 'surprises' itself; to be human is to be incessantly surprised by the events of the world and of thinking itself" (Hutchens 2005:62). Nancy assesses humanism very positively and says it is "desirable in the incessant surprising of the human condition and its exposure to an undecidable future" (2005:37). Human beings and their co-existence, their being-with each other is central, and not their relations to other beings such as animals. Humanity is central because it is humans who create sense and meaning. However, this is not to say that the ethics of transimmanence do not extend to nature. It is rather a recognition that ethics, as all other sense and meaning, is co-created by human beings and that it is from here that certain ethical norms of nature are developed.

To conclude: the ethics of both Ubuntu and transimmanence emphasise humanity and 'develop' or are based on a humanism. For both human interaction and relations is of utmost importance. The main difference between these traditions is that Ubuntu is based on an African metaphysics which incorporates nature on a more

fundamental level than which transimmanence does. There is a more holistic approach in African philosophy and ultimately in Ubuntu as well. Relationships between people, but also between nature as a whole, are of great importance in Ubuntu ethics. In the ethics of transimmanence, humanism is also central, but it is not a humanism based on Enlightenment's principles and values (see section 2.4.6). Nancy contends it should be a more open and critical one.

3.1.7. Being/ontology

The ontological nature of ethics in both Ubuntu and transimmanence was highlighted in the preceding discussion on the origin and authority of ethics in these traditions. The question here is: How does being and ontology relate to the ethics of these traditions? Is ethics the 'first philosophy' in these traditions? In other words to what extent is ethics the starting point for philosophy within these traditions.

In Ubuntu the community and the individual – and the relationship between them – is understood in an ontological sense. The nature of an African community is ontological (see chapter 1). The community conforms and creates being – communal and individual. Shutte explains that “an African community can be viewed as a natural organism than as an artificial whole. This is the reason why the individual in an African community sees the community as themselves. The individual and the community become one and there is no separation between the individual and the community” (Shutte, 2009:94). These relationships and interactions between the individuals within their community are the starting point for the creation and development of philosophy. That makes ethics fundamental (the first philosophy) in Ubuntu.

Ubuntu cannot be separated from being. As explained before, the root of Ubuntu is “ntu” which signifies “primal being”. The prefix-*Ubu* specifies an oneness while *ntu* specifies a wholeness. *Ubu* is or oriented towards *ntu* as a being becoming a whole (Tschaepe, 2013:48). This becoming a whole, or a person, takes place within the community. The notion “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”/ “motho ke motho kabatho babang” can be directly translated as “A person is a person through other people”. This encapsulates a normative account of what we ought to most value in life. To think and find one's being, to be a person in an ethical manner, is what Ubuntu is

fundamentally about. It is ethics that are ontological – a first philosophy which immediately speaks of being and ethics in the same instance.

In *Transimmanence*, Nancy describes the ontology of being as a web of relationships in which all are dependent on and all supplement one another – no relationship takes precedence over another to the point of eclipsing all essence. Before any sense or meaning is created, there is a relationship with the other, a “being-with”, an interdependence or “co-essence” as Nancy describes it. It is within these relations, through respect, dialogue and negotiation that sense (which includes being and ethics) is created. Being is thus not described as singular or plural, but as Nancy puts it, “the singular-plural constitutes the essence of Being, a constitution that undoes or dislocates every single, substantial essence of Being itself” (Nancy, 2000:29). The implication of understanding singular and plural as constitutive for being, is that the essence of Being is “co-essence”. Ethics underlies and is at the same time the outcome of this process. Therefore, Nancy’s transimmanence implies that “ethics can be defined as ontology itself; there is no need to 'add' an ethics to an ontology that would have been presupposed as unethical” (Raffoul, 2015:77). For Nancy, ethics is what is fundamental about fundamental ontology. As mentioned before, Nancy’s notion of ethics as ontology is derived from the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas’s argument or main thesis is that “ethics is first philosophy, starting from which the other branches of metaphysics take their meaning” (Corvellec, 2005:3). The basis for Levinas’s ethics is based on the criticism “of the correspondence that Western philosophical tradition establishes between knowledge understood as unselfish contemplation, and Being which is understood as the locus of the intelligible” (Corvellec, 2005:3). Levinas’s criticism is focused on “how this tradition subordinates the personal relation with someone who is an existent (an ethical relation), to an impersonal relation with the being of existent of the other (a relationship of knowing)” (Corvellec, 2005:3). It is this criticism that Nancy addresses in his own philosophy by understanding ethics as first philosophy.

There is thus a striking resemblance between Ubuntu and transimmanence in their understanding of ethics as first philosophy. Ethics, ontology and being are all merged into one starting point for all thinking – for sense making (transimmanence) and for becoming a person (Ubuntu). In both, our relations with others are fundamental to our being. With Ubuntu this relations are found in the community, and in

transimmanence it is found in the “community of being”. Although they differ on the definition of this community, the notions of interdependence, co-essence and exposing-sharing are all part of this “community”. Nancy’s notion of ethics as ontology is the outcome of Levinas’s influence on his work, while in Ubuntu this notion is a continuation of thought within African philosophy.

3.1.8. Freedom

The concept of freedom is crucial to ethics in general. To be able to take ethical responsibility, one has to have the freedom to do it, and to choose one’s behaviour. This implies a fundamental freedom. The question, therefore, with regard to Ubuntu and transimmanence is: To what extent does freedom play a role in these traditions?

In Ubuntu, the concept of freedom has a central place. There is a tension about how much freedom the individual has in his/her relationship with the community to act freely. On this point, Chuwa (2014:35) argues very strongly that individual freedom and the rights of the individual are not denied within the African community. However, it is true that when it comes to decision making processes, the “freedom of the individual within the community may be hindered and impacted on” (Metz 2011:534). On the other hand, individual freedom is one of the greatest and most highly regarded ideals within the liberation movements and traditions within Africa. In Ubuntu, individual freedom is reflected in understanding the person as the moral agent. Molefe (2016:12) describes one of the central notions of morality as personhood. He says that personhood is considered as being a defining feature of African moral thought and associated with moral agency (2016:12). A person, in Ubuntu, “is capable of doing right and wrong acts or omissions, fulfilling moral duties or failing to fulfil them, and thus living up to the appropriate expectations of others with regard to shared tasks and relationships and also capable of falling short” (Hoekema 2008:258). An individual is thus accountable for his/her actions or failure to act, and this implies a fundamental freedom to make such choices and act on them.

In transimmanence, freedom is fundamentally part of our being and existence (see section 2.5.3). Nancy says that freedom is “an element or fundamental modality of being” (2015:19) and as such it plays a crucial role in determining reality. He attests that “the fact of freedom is the right of existence or rather the fact of existence is the

right of freedom” (1993:29). It is existence that we all have in common, and for Nancy this “common measure is freedom, which is not to be understood as a given attribute or characteristics but as absence of ground or reason, as a releasing into existence” (Morin, 2012:67). Freedom is thus for Nancy something shared between all human beings. This is, however, all on an ontological level. It does not only allow for moral agency, but also allows for existence and being itself. It is the freedom to be. It is the freedom (or space) to be able to create sense and meaning. This is such a fundamental freedom that it cannot be denied. On the other hand, it is not a freedom in a very specific sense, like political freedom. It is rather a freedom that continuously materialises in our being or our existence.

In both Ubuntu and transimmanence freedom plays a crucial part. Within the ethics of Ubuntu, it is acknowledged as something every individual has. This makes the individual person the moral agent, although this role may be in tension with the community at times. Within transimmanence, freedom is understood not only in the context of moral agency, but on a more ontological level. It is freedom that makes existence, sense and meaning possible. Without freedom, there would not only be no ethics or moral agency, but also no sense or meaning. In this sense, freedom functions more fundamentally in transimmanence than in Ubuntu.

3.2. Ubuntu and transimmanence: New insights on ethics?

In this section the focus falls on possible new insights for ethics in general that emerge from the comparison between these two traditions. As mentioned in the introduction, the aim is not to make a simple choice between one of the traditions, but to investigate how the benefits and shortcomings of both traditions can shed new light on ethics per se. The question is: What possible new insights are there for ethics in reading the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence through the lens of each other? The attempt to answer this question focuses on the same eight themes discussed above.

3.2.1. Origin of ethics

What do these two traditions tell us about the origin of ethics? In Ubuntu, the origin of ethics lies in the community and in African metaphysics, while in transimmanence the origins of ethics lies in our “sense making”, in our “being-with”. The meaning and

sense that is created by people between themselves in the community is what creates ethics. The ethics themselves are created and found in the immanent world. The origin of ethics in Ubuntu is found in the African community. As in transimmanence, ethics are created between people in the community. However, this includes the co-creation of meaning, interdependence of people and the value of life in general. A similarity between both of these traditions is the communal aspect – in both the community plays a fundamental role, although the type of community differs. In Ubuntu, community refers to a more closed group, the extended family or an ethnic/tribal community. In transimmanence, the community is one of “being” which makes it fundamentally open and universal.

The communal origin of ethics is recognised and appreciated by both traditions. However, in Ubuntu there is also a transcendent (as part of African metaphysics) origin of ethics. This is a point on which Ubuntu’s origins of ethics may be critiqued, because it forms part of a belief system that is not always shared by everyone – not by people within African communities and also not by other people. Consequently, Ubuntu may be seen as an ethical tradition that is exclusive to a certain (African) ‘closed’ community, and exclusive to those who share certain religious beliefs. It is also vulnerable to becoming less acceptable as urbanization and globalization take place and people may disregard their traditional and/or religious beliefs. In this regard Matolino and Kwindigwi argue that the “interplay between the ethic and metaphysics is problematic” (2013:204).

Transimmanence sees the origin of ethics as non-exclusive. Nobody is excluded from the “community of being” and no religious belief system needs to be adhered to. This makes the ethics of transimmanence more universally acceptable and applicable. By shifting away from a religious/ethnic origin of ethics, transimmanence is more open to diverse groups, allowing more people to relate and ethically engage with each other. Meaning, sense and ethics are created freely between individuals in an immanent world. There are no ethical norms given from the ‘outside’, or from ethnic groups or from religious convictions. Without such norms transimmanence’s ethics can potentially adapt quickly to current ethical problems and situations. On the other hand it may lead to relativism, or to a situation where no one can agree on what is ethical. Ironically, this may lead to tension and conflict. A continuously open

origin of ethics that is continually being created and developed may also create a lot of uncertainty and indecisiveness.

As far as the origin of ethics in general is concerned, these two traditions highlight the importance of the “communal”. Both would agree that there should be a continuous conversation and debate about ethics between people. The size of the group and the level of inclusivity needed for such a discussion to take place is something these traditions differ on. However, in principle it should aim to include all humanity to have (at least) worldwide peace. One can deduce from Ubuntu and transimmanence that finding/identifying the origin of ethics in general is not a simple task. However, for both, it remains a fundamental human task.

3.2.2. Individualism and personhood

As was stated above, in Ubuntu personhood is linked to moral agency. The individuals are guided by some ethical norms or values that are prescribed to them by the community. These have to ensure that the community’s goals and objectives are met – that the co-existence between the members of the community will be harmonious for example. Without these norms in place, it is possible that there could be conflict, tension and hostility within the community. These ethical norms can therefore serve as a means of preventing internal conflict within the community as well as providing a basis for resolving conflict, if and when it occurs. It is only through respecting one other and honouring communal relations that ethical norms can be upheld in the community. Once individuals act in character and in accordance with the community’s expectations, social obligations can be fulfilled. The advantage of this is that once the social obligations are fulfilled, the individual can be deemed to be/ or have the status of a person conferred on him/her by the community. One’s personhood is thus fundamentally linked to the adherence of the community’s ethics.

In transimmanence, a specific community does (in principle at least) not play a role in prescribing ethical norms. The individual is reckoned as a moral agent with full personhood without adhering to any group or community’s ethical norms. The danger of relativism arises once more.

Both traditions are in agreement that the person or individual is the moral agent. For ethics in general, it means that a counter position is needed to refute the positions of

both these traditions. If personhood itself is only to be found within an adherence to an ethics of a specific community, as in Ubuntu, ethics in general is likely to find this unacceptable.

3.2.3. Community

The comparison above on the role accorded to community in the ethics of Ubuntu and the ethics of transimmanence shows that community ethics have a definitive role in Ubuntu ethics. In transimmanence, on the other hand, there is no specific community with specific ethical characteristics or norms that is authoritative. There is no final or closed community and no final or closed answer to ethics.

The next question for ethics in general is whether an 'ethical tradition' can exist without prescriptive ethical norms. Do we need a specific community as in Ubuntu, to provide such norms? To find ethical guidance within a community (ethnic or religious for example) may have some definitive benefits. On the other hand, ethics that are founded in a specific community have a potential flaw in that they limit ethical authority to their own specific and (often) closed community. This may lead to conflict between communities, as well as between individuals and their communities. Ethics in general needs some norms, but to limit the source of these to a specific community can be constrictive. To open it up as wide as transimmanence does (with a total lack of community) might create the problem of no norms, no agreement and perhaps no ethics at all.

3.2.4. Authority

Closely linked to the problem of the role of the community in ethics is the problem of (final) authority in regard to ethics. If it is not the community that has the authoritative voice, then who/what has? Is it needed and why?

To recapitulate the main differences and similarities on authority between the two traditions: the community and supernatural forces (African metaphysics) play a prominent role as authoritative in Ubuntu, while in transimmanence neither the community nor supernatural forces (metaphysics) have authority in respect of ethical behaviour. In transimmanence, authority is found only within the individuals themselves who, through dialogue and engaging with each other, develop ethics in a pragmatic sense.

There is an important similarity between transimmanence's notion of dialogue and negotiation and Ubuntu's notion of consensus. While Ubuntu will find final authority within the community's consensus, transimmanence will postpone final ethical authority in its continuous dialogue and search for consensus in a much broader communal and universal sense. Consensus is the most important insight for ethics in general. While there may be many different 'authoritative sources' for ethics, it is clear in these two traditions at least that dialogue and consensus forms part of the sanctioning and authority of ethics.

3.2.5. Respect

The value that both Ubuntu and transimmanence accord respect is of crucial importance for ethics in general. Respect is highly valued in both of these traditions as it ensures that interaction and relationships between individuals can occur. It also helps to promote and sustain relationships in the future. Respect is connected to our human being and functions on an ontological level in both traditions.

In Ubuntu respect is directed and required in a specific community towards specific people (elders) in a specific way. In transimmanence, the fundamental respect that enables communication is more basic or general in nature and is needed for all people, because we form a "community of being". For ethics in general, the notion of respect, as Nancy's transimmanence implies, is perhaps the most relevant because it is not too specific and it is universally applicable. Ubuntu, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of respect in a specific community. However, both traditions see respect as playing a crucial role in the success of a code of ethics.

3.2.6. Humanity

In ethics in general, there is a continuous debate about the centrality of humanism and of anthropocentric ethics. Should humanity be central in ethics? Can we – as humans – think and do, otherwise? What about nature, animals and matter? To answer these questions is not the aim of this study or this section. However, the discussion of the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence reveals that both emphasise humanity and are based on a form of humanism. For both, human interaction and relationships are of utmost importance. However, their main difference raises a question on the centrality of humanity. African metaphysics incorporates nature on a

much more fundamental level than transimmanence does. There is a more holistic approach in African philosophy than in transimmanence. Relationships between people, as well with nature as a whole, is of great importance. It offers an example of how 'humanism' which acknowledges the relationships between humans and appreciates the value of nature can be incorporated into more holistic ethics. However, there is an important counter argument from a transimmanence point of view: it is human beings, who make sense, who create meaning and ethics. We cannot escape our own sense making. It is shared (trans) between us as humans. On the other hand, a question that can be put to Nancy is whether this trans- can include non-human beings.

3.2.7. Being/ontology

To what extent can and should ethics be linked to being and ontology? Is ethics "first philosophy"? We have seen that there is a remarkable resemblance between Ubuntu and transimmanence in their understanding of ethics as first philosophy. Ethics, ontology and being are all merged into one starting point for all thinking – for sense making (transimmanence) and for becoming a person (Ubuntu). In both traditions, our relationships with others are fundamental to our "being".

The difference between these traditions is that in Ubuntu relationships are found in the community, and in transimmanence they are found in the "community of being". Despite this difference, the notions of interdependence, co-essence and exposing-sharing are all part of this "community". Nancy's notion of ethics as ontology is the result of Levinas's influence on his work, whereas in Ubuntu this notion stems from African philosophy. The implication of this correspondence between such diverse traditions is that ethics in general needs to take account of the thrust of these arguments. This is not to say that ethics in general has to be understood or approached as "first philosophy", but it seems that ontology and being cannot be ignored in ethics.

3.2.8. Freedom

The question of freedom features prominently in ethics. This is linked to personhood and moral agency. Do we have freedom, what does it mean, and how does it fit into ethics in general?

The discussion above clearly indicates the crucial role freedom plays in both Ubuntu and transimmanence. Ubuntu acknowledges freedom as something every individual has. The individual person has moral agency, but it is in relation to the person's community. Within transimmanence, freedom is not only understood in terms of moral agency, but also on an ontological level. It is freedom that makes existence, sense and meaning possible. Without freedom, there will not only be no ethics or moral agency, but also no sense or meaning. Freedom thus functions more fundamentally in transimmanence than in Ubuntu.

This more fundamental or ontological understanding of freedom within transimmanence applies to all ethics. Freedom and its specifics are often debated within ethics without a recognition of the fundamental role it already plays in our thinking.

3.3. Conclusion

In this chapter, the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence were compared. What emerged was that that despite their differences, they also have some similarities and overlaps in respect of certain ethical themes. The discussion of each of the eight themes highlighted the main similarities and differences between the traditions. This provided greater insight into the ethics of both traditions. In some areas, they mainly complemented each other (respect, humanity, being/ontology, freedom), while in others the differences between them addressed to a large extent each other's weaknesses (community, personhood, authority).

To read the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence through the lens of each other led to the question: If and how can ethics in general be better understood and developed? In the second part of this chapter, the focus was specifically on the possible new insight a comparison of these two traditions potentially offers ethics in general. The eight themes identified in the first part of the chapter were used to illustrate the points made. Some preliminary findings were made on the relevance of each theme to ethics in general. These findings included the importance of concepts like freedom, an ontological understanding of ethics, the centrality of respect and dialogue, and ethical agency as situated within the person. It was not possible to deduce a 'final rule' for ethics in general. It is rather the case that these two traditions shed light on the importance of these issues for ethics. It seems clear that these

issues need to be addressed in an ethics that aims to be philosophically tenable and universally relevant and applicable.

The comparison also shed some light on central ethical questions that require further investigation – issues on which these two traditions differed. This include questions related to the role of community, the centrality of humanity, the origin of ethics and the sanctioning or authority of ethical norms. The contribution each tradition in its own right and as a combined ‘voice’ makes to the ongoing debate on ethics was highlighted.

It is important to note that this last part of the chapter did not attempt to discuss all the different ethical theories that (might) form part of ‘ethics in general’. For example, no attempt was made to discuss deontology, utilitarianism, consequentialism and virtue ethics separately in relation to the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence. Such a project is too comprehensive for the scope of this study. This points the way to possible further research.

Conclusion

As indicated in the introduction, the main research question of this study is: How can ethics be better understood in the light of Ubuntu (as an African philosophical tradition) and transimmanence (of Jean Luc Nancy – as part of the Western deconstructive tradition)? To answer this question the ethics of both Ubuntu and transimmanence needed to be extracted from the rich and complex traditions and philosophies in which they are situated. The ethics of two specific traditions were spelled out and compared in order to link their views on certain central ethical themes to ethics in general. This gave some insight into the complexity and fundamental questions ethics raises.

At the least, this study succeeded in accentuating the problematic nature of eight themes for ethics. It was not easy to resolve this in a philosophically tenable way. Questions raised are often answered in contradictory terms (by the different traditions), but the consensus between the two traditions indicates how central these themes are to thinking about ethics. However, the contribution of this study is not confined to highlighting the importance of these themes for ethics. It demonstrates that a comparison between the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence (as two hugely contrasting philosophical traditions), not only helps to develop a better understanding of each of them in regard to their respective understandings of ethics, but also helps to develop a better understanding of ethics per se.

Although these two traditions are far removed from each other, a closer examination of both indicated some strong overlaps between their ethics. An analysis of their ethical overlapping and differences served to bridge the gap between these two traditions, to elucidate both, and to offer new insights into the complexity of ethics.

In the first chapter Ubuntu and its ethics was discussed. The complex link between African philosophy, Ubuntu and its ethics was shown. Ubuntu and its ethics cannot be separated from African philosophy, but can also not be equated with it. Different ethical issues within this tradition were investigated in order to compare it to the ethics of transimmanence.

In the second chapter, the concept of transimmanence, as developed by Jean Luc Nancy, was investigated in order to gain greater clarity on its ethical implications.

Transimmanence forms part of Nancy's whole philosophy, which is part of the Western deconstructive tradition. All this needs to be taken into account when thinking about the ethics of transimmanence.

In the third chapter, the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence were compared with each other. Eight central ethical themes were identified, namely the origin of ethics, individualism and personhood, the role of the community, respect, authority, humanity, being and ontology, and freedom. An analysis was made of the overlap and differences between these themes in the ethics of these traditions. This made it possible to formulate some insights for ethics in general in the second part of the last chapter, which also served as a conclusion to the study as a whole. In sum, the explication of the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence and the comparison between them that centred on eight specific ethical themes is a contribution to the broader field of ethics. This opened up some new perspectives on these themes, highlighted the importance of these themes for ethics, and showed how extremely diverse traditions can have certain views in common.

This study also identified research that needs to be done with regard to a comparison between the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence. In-depth discussion is needed of these two traditions in relation to other ethical traditions (e.g. deontology, virtue ethics, and consequentialism, as well as ethics within broader traditions such as Eastern philosophy). A more inclusive comparison may provide greater insight into the complexities of ethical traditions as well as the eight ethical themes discussed. Another possible area of research would involve bringing a specific philosopher into conversation with these traditions. The philosophy and ethics of Emmanuel Levinas may be a good choice because of the many points of overlap with the traditions and their ethics explored in this study. Such a conversation and comparison with Levinas's view of ethics may shed some new light on the role the community plays in ethics (a point on which Ubuntu and transimmanence differ), as well as on the ontological nature of ethics (a point on which these traditions mainly agree). Another area in which further research could be done would be a comparison that includes other ethical themes that could be incorporated in a comparison between Ubuntu and transimmanence. The list of eight themes discussed in the third chapter is not meant to be exhaustive.

It seems that a reading and comparison of the ethics of Ubuntu and transimmanence, through the lens of each other, help us to develop a better understanding of ethics in general in a number of ways. However, there are unanswered questions on how ethics should be understood: What gives certain ethical norms authority? What role should the community play in ethics (especially in relation to the individual as moral agent)? How should respect be understood as fundamental to ethics? How central should humanity be in ethical considerations? To what extent is ethics ontological and linked to our being? How should freedom be understood within all these questions?

Ubuntu and transimmanence form extremely valuable conversation partners within this ongoing quest and debate.

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