

THE RELEVANCE OF UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY IN MARRIAGE

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Abstract

This paper is an emphasis on the philosophical foundation of marriage in relation to the African philosophy of Ubuntu. It provides background information on the African Ubuntu ideology and its value in marriage. The understanding of the idea of Ubuntu as an African philosophy is that it emphasizes the being of self through others. It is a form of humanism that advocates the importance of "weism" which finds expression in the saying "I am because of who we are." This is the goal of every human being, to engage in and be a part of his community. People must be seen as being an essential component of the overall community. In this way, being married to someone makes one irrevocably linked to that family and the community: an experience in which one's life is being joined with another from a different family. It entails a dedication to people and the community and acting in their best interests. Adopting the analytical method, this paper conclude that the philosophy of Ubuntu can be applied to a variety of issues, including marriage with the aim of achieving a successful marriage anchored on positive human values like mutual respect, dignity, caring, sharing, love, empathy, sympathy, and kindness towards others. These are necessary for peace, unity, cooperation, and the development of society.

Keywords: Marriage, Ubuntu, Humanism, Community, Philosophy.

Introduction

Traditional Ubuntu philosophy is predicated on the idea of a morally pure and ideal spouse. This person adheres to the cultural values and standards of an authentic African society. The idea that each person's life is intertwined with that of others and the larger world in which they live is at the heart of such African metaphysics. All African societies find marriage to be relevant, and marriage is the cornerstone of African identity. It forms the basis of the family and community. Upholding Ubuntu philosophy in marriage unleashes an African cultural potential for people to act with empathy, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality concept the service of creating and preserving families. In a culture where a person is only considered a human through their relationships with other people, Africans are social beings who are in constant contact with one another (Tutu, 2004, p. 174). As a communion of life and

love by two persons, marriage is not only a private affair but also that of the community. The support system of family members, friends, and community is mostly required for its encouragement and sustenance. This is why Mbiti argues that in the African traditional system, marriage is a community activity that involves all the members of the society, including the living and the dead (ancestors). Marriage is seen in Africa as the foundation of existence, family, and community. This is why its validity by family members and the community is essential. The relationship between marriage, the family, and the community is, therefore, not difficult to establish. Aristotle had long established this link in his book *the Politics*, where he sees the state as an emergence from the community and the community from the family which is a union between man and woman.

In the traditional African system, marriage is the joining of two families through the union of the man, the woman, and their children (William, 1987, p. 22). The relationship that exists between marriage, family, and community is such that none can exist in isolation without the others. They are inseparably intertwined. While marriage presupposes family and community, family and community are derivative or logical consequences of marriage. According to Mbiti,

For African people, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living, and those yet unborn. All the dimensions of time meet here, and the whole drama of history is repeated, renewed, and revitalized. Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator (1969, p. 133).

This means that marriage is beyond the physical; it is a spiritual union where all the members of the family are involved both the living and the dead. It is equally spiritual because it is a covenant that binds the married in life and love. Like marriage, the Ubuntu philosophy is a humanist and community-based ideology. It underpins love, care, cooperation, and brotherliness among people. Ubuntu is a philosophy of solidarity, humanity, and mutuality or complementarity. It stands in contrast to individualism and advocates collectivism or a communal orientation and participation. Like marriage, the Ubuntu philosophy advocates for mutual respect, dignity, caring, and sharing among people in the community. It advocates positive ethical actions like love, empathy, sympathy, and kindness towards others. These are necessary for peace, unity, cooperation, and the development of society. The main aim of this paper, therefore, is to provide an analysis of the idea of Ubuntu philosophy in light of its relevance to marriage. Regarding the approach used in the paper, an analysis is attempted of the original sense of Ubuntu, traced back to its earliest use in Stanlake John Thompson Samkange's works. Other original works will as well be examined to draw out philosophical conclusions. In this paper, the following structural procedures have been adopted: Ubuntu philosophy: meaning and nature, marriage and its nature, Ubuntu philosophy vis-à-vis the African sense of community, the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in marriage, and finally, the conclusion.

Ubuntu Philosophy: Meaning and Nature

Ubuntu is a humanist philosophy, the tenets of which can be applied to various dimensions of socio-political life. In this paper, we attempt to apply it to marriage practices in Africa. The Zulu proverb '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' is the source of the name Ubuntu. In English, it is

translated as "one is a person because of or via others" (Haidarian, 2018, p.7). Ubuntu is defined in the context of Africa in terms of empathy, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and cooperation to develop and uphold communities that value justice and reciprocal care (Gade, 2017, p. 57). Ubuntu is a two-word designation that is a marriage counterpart. Two people become one in marriage. Ubuntu is made up of the prefix 'ubu-' and the stem 'ntu-', and it refers to the concept of being in general. Before revealing itself in the physical shape or manner of existence of a certain thing, it envelops the being. 'Ubu', the surrounding being, is constantly focused on development through specific forms and modes of being, which is a continuous concrete revelation. 'Ubu' is positioned always toward 'ntu' in this manner (Ramose, 1999, p.46). On a metaphysical level, Ubu- and ntu are not separated by any strict rules. The realities of 'ubu-' and 'ntu' are not separate and irreconcilable. Instead, they are mutually confirming that they are two facets of being as oneness and an unbreakable totality. It is the ontology of unbreakable unity and wholeness. 'Ubu-' is defined as clearly and ontologically the general sense of being. Compared to the fact that '-ntu' designates the point at which being takes on a tangible form or mode of existence during ongoing enfoldment.

Ubuntu is a reflection of African philosophy that welcomes thoughts and acts. From an African perspective, ubuntu is humanism (Gade, 2017, p. 60). It is the ontology of the African culture. It relates to forming bonds with other people. I think therefore I am, according to the Western adage *cogito ergo sum* (Honderich, 1995, p.189). According to the language of marriage, when two people become married, their genders fuse together to form a single entity. Ubuntu is a reflection of African values about what is right and wrong. Ubuntu is best characterized as humanism from an African perspective, as Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, a former leader of Zambia, proposed (Kaunda, 1966, p.137). It has to do with societal relationships in the African worldview. Ubuntu has to do with connecting with other people. This is consistent with how the word is used to signify being oneself due to others in the majority of African languages. This is a well-known Zulu proverb. According to African philosophy, a person is considered to be human when he participates with others. Thus the claim, "I participate, therefore I am." In writing about Ubuntu, Samkange's main argument was that Western philosophies that were taught or practiced in Zimbabwe were not the only philosophies and that Africans needed to learn, write and practice their values and beliefs. Hunhuism or Ubuntuism is a philosophy that is the experience of thirty-five thousand years of living in Africa. It is a philosophy that sets a premium on human relations (Samkange, 1980, p. 34).

It is acknowledged that Ubuntu was an African way of life prior to colonization and that it had endured for several years. Samkange's revived indigenous philosophy that had been neglected for approximately a century but had been essential to the lives of colonized Black Africans in their writing on Ubuntu in 1980. Ubuntu is a relational philosophy; the phrase "I am because we are" is frequently used and suggests a profoundly constructivist ontology in which a person's sense of self is inextricably linked to their social environment. Rather than giving preference to objectivity and rationality, it emphasizes the value of a subjective and emotional appreciation of human experience.

The Idea of Marriage and Its Nature

"Marriage is the most basic community of persons" (Lee & George, 2014, p. 41). When marriage is conceived in this sense, we refer to it as a conjugal union, signifying that the man and the woman have been connected as a new unit (the etymology suggests a common yoke).

A relationship of this kind can develop in one of two ways: primarily for the purpose of romantic union (in which case the community's procreative orientation is seen as the natural extension or culmination of their romantic union) or as the framework for procreation (in which case the romantic union, or full union of the spouses, is seen as the natural outcome of their procreative union).

The idea of marriage (matrimony) is derived from the Latin word *matrimonium*, which is a derivative of two Latin words *matris*, which means *mother*, and *monium* which means *duty*. Hence, marriage is a sacred duty aimed at rendering a married woman a mother. This is in consonance with the Hebrew root word for marriage *kadosh* which also means sacred. Marriage, therefore, is a sacred institution. The sacredness of marriage is derived from the procreative capacity of the couples in the union. With marriage, they participate in the sacred act of creation like God. This is why Mbiti avers that it is a sacred duty for every "normal" person to marry for procreation (1969, p. 104). From the African perspective, marriage and childbearing are tied together in such a way that childlessness in marriage is worrisome and viewed as a curse. According to Wolff "marriage is the legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring" (2006, p. 1200). It is a legal union, a spiritual covenant, and a social institution whose essence is companionship, complementarity, and procreation. This is the view accentuated by Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler when they record that marriage is generally a legitimate union between a man and a woman for permanent physical and spiritual companionship (1965, p. 273). Fagothey sees marriage as a contract by which a man and a woman give and receive from each other for the performance of a generative act (1959, p. 359). It is a genital mutual giving of spouses to each other, which forms the existence and foundation of the family and the community. As a spiritual covenant, married couples establish between themselves a life partnership spiritually and naturally ordered for their good and the procreation and education of their offspring.

Beginning with the pre-Socratics, male and female provided the metaphorical foundation for Greek thinking on form and matter: the male was supposed to correspond to the activity of form, while the female to passive, formless matter (Daub, 2012, p.39). This gendered antagonism was initially discussed in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and 'On the Generation of Animals'. It later made a comeback in the writings of Thomas Aquinas and Saint Anselm of Canterbury. It provided Francis Bacon with the fundamental task of philosophical inquiry: (male) reason had to rule and shape (female) nature (Daub, 2012, p.39). If the philosophical tradition consistently cited the ostensibly self-evident realities of gender and sexuality to support its hypotheses, often enough their thrust was inverted when metaphysics began to affect philosophers' perceptions of sexuality itself.

Men and women were now believed to relate to each other using the logic of form and matter, in addition to subject and object, form and matter behaving like men and women. Fichte can think of the union of the terms as being prior to those terms themselves by tying it to a model where the two *relata* constitute and "determine" one another (Daub, 2012, p.39). Fichte can also posit a "striving" for unification between the two *relata*, a union that is motivated by "feeling" and sanctioned as a goal, just as the "I" in religion has the task of determining the Not-I, to render it identical to itself.

Without prejudice to the metaphysical essence of marriage, it is notable that in almost all cultures, we find instances of communities of the following sort: a union of a man and a woman formed by their commitment to sharing their lives – physically (including sexually), emotionally, and spiritually – in the kind of community that would be fulfilled by conceiving and rearing children together. This kind of community is traditionally called "marriage. Culture is an inheritance from a father or male ancestor (Eboh, 2015, p. 162). Logically, matrimony should have meant cultural heritage; or inheritance from a mother or female ancestor. Then matrimony was made to mean 'a state or condition of being married'.

There are different reasons why people marry. First, some couples live together and frequently engage in sexual activity, but they do not see having kids as an integral part of their union. They could see raising children as a burden to be avoided or as a desirable option. Second, in marriage, the procreative direction of the union is defined by the physical union of the spouses, which satisfies the behavioral requirements for procreation (Lee & George, 2014, p. 42). Procreation and childrearing are the results of the physical, emotional, and spiritual bond that spouses create in a marriage. We must comprehend how sexual behaviors contribute to marriage in order to better comprehend its unique characteristics. It is usually accepted that sexual interactions between partners serve to strengthen their marriage or to show their love for one another.

Moreover, marriage is a legally recognized partnership between a man and a woman that is governed by laws, traditions, and religious principles (Girgis et al, 2012, p. 1). It is a politico-sexist portfolio in which society securely fastened on women in order to confine them to a constituency, the family where they are domesticated (Eboh, 2015, p. 163). Marriage is common across a wide range of nations and cultures, and this is attributed to a variety of important societal and personal tasks for which it provides frameworks, like sexual fulfillment and procreation. But in a tighter sense, marriage is a personal need for love and companionship because it has to do with childbearing, child care, education, and socialization. Marriage is a comprehensive sexual and romantic nature. In sexual intercourse, a man and a woman become organically one, a union that is naturally prolonged, if all goes well, by conceiving children together, and cooperatively bringing them to full development or maturity (Lee & George, 2014, p. 58). So, their bodily union itself orients them to a dynamic unity extending into the indefinite future. Sexual intercourse is as complete a bodily union as two people can choose to bring about. So, if a man and a woman become one body in sexual intercourse but not one in the other aspects of their selves, then they dissociate their bodies-as-sexual from the other aspects of the persons they are. If they unite their bodies but not their whole persons, they treat their bodies as mere extrinsic tools. So sexual intercourse actualizes a genuine good and is realized in a way that respects the sexual integrity of the other person.

Ubuntu Philosophy vis-à-vis the African sense of Community

The African notion of Ubuntu, which means humanity towards others, is said to come from the Zulu and Xhosa languages. It includes all the virtues that encourage cooperation and a sense of communal sharing among people living in a society. In the past, present, and future, it reflects an action. A person who has Ubuntu is aware of her place in the universe and so chooses her friends carefully. Ubuntu emphasizes the importance of each person standing up for the group from which they originate. The Ubuntu ideology is fundamentally based on the African understanding of humans and how they interact with their communities. Africans are

naturally generous people who frequently help out their neighbours. However, we can only fully comprehend what it means to be human through our interactions with other people. Therefore, what assures the longevity of human society is the populace's loyalty to the community.

As a way to promote harmony and collaboration between the various racial and ethnic groups, segregation gave birth to the idea of Ubuntu in the 1990s. Ubuntu's metaphysical principles include respect for others, help, community, charity, caring, trust, and unselfishness. Ubuntu emphasizes the importance of peace and favours the improvement of the community as a whole. The foundation of African philosophy is Ubuntu. The Ubuntu principle is the foundation of how an African exists in the world. Similar to this, it is the source of the African tree of knowledge, with which it is inextricably linked. The starting point for African ontology is hence *ubu-itu* (Ramose, p. 135). If achieving these ends is philosophy's goal, then African philosophy has been established in and through Ubuntu for a very long time. Since Ubuntu is the cornerstone of African philosophy, that is where we will start.

A compelling philosophical case can be made that the indigenous people of Africa have a familial atmosphere that fosters a sense of philosophical kinship and empathy apart from the language study of Ubuntu. There will undoubtedly be divisions within this large intellectual family. However, the blood that flows through family members is fundamentally the same. Ubuntu serves as the cornerstone of African philosophy at present time. The entire foundation of Ubuntu philosophy is the man and the things that surround him, such as life and death (Gade, 2017, p. 48).

The Ubuntu ontology stands for the concept of existence as wholeness (Ramose, p. 41). The universe is seen as being entire and inseparable in the African philosophical perspective. This is described as the material that constitutes the manner of being that is identity-based. The person is this idealized form of existence. The person is a substance that consists of both an individual subject that exists in himself and an internally united, rational, self-aware subject that is able to generate autonomous actions from himself (Maryniarczyk, 2018, p. 178). We receive the identification of the distinctive being through our subjective experiences. Different behaviours and quirks identify the subject in the person. It stands for the idea of existence as wholeness in the Ubuntu ontology. The African philosophical approach views the universe as complete and interconnected. This is referred to as the components of the identity-based mode of being. This idealized version of existence is the community of persons. The African sense of community which is prior to the individual person contrasts with the overtly European individualism. In Western Europe, an individual subject lives inside himself and is a self-aware subject that is capable of acting on his or her own. In Africa, the community is prior to the individual hence the individual is said to be a subject only in the context of the community wherein he or she belongs.

To be sure, the Western influence on the priority of the individual can be traced back to Boethius' definition of a person as "*rationalis naturae individua substantia*" (an individual (single) substance of a rational nature) is the most widely used definition of the term "person." This definition appears to carry on Platonism's tradition of using the term "*individua*" (Latin for "non-divided"), that is, a belief that "the one" is what gives something its existence (everything that is real presupposes unity and non-division). On the other hand, Aristotle

viewed reality primarily in terms of substance, believing that everything that is a being is either a substance or something attached to a substance. The term provided by Boethius was appropriate for an irenic solution to the individual's dilemma. Interpretation disputes regarding how to comprehend the person persisted because some people attempted to reduce the fact that a person exists to specific traits of a logical nature (e.g., thought, social rank, substantial modality).

In contrast to the Western sense of individualism, we note that according to the Ubuntu worldview, personhood is predicated in terms of community, nay community of persons which include not just living individuals but also deceased relatives, unborn offspring, and future generations. The African shows the utmost respect for their forebears. Everyone is thought of as the descendant of their ancestor and the future of their followers. The Ubuntu ideology holds that a person's current actions reflect their past and will have an impact on their future.

According to Samkange, Ubuntu is an African humanism divided into three maxims namely. "To be human is to affirm one's humanity by acknowledging the humanity of others and, on that basis, develop respectful human interactions with them," the first maxim states (Samkange, 1980, p. 6). "The attention one human being offers to another: the kindness, courtesy, consideration, and friendliness in the relationship between individuals; a code of behavior, an attitude to other people, and to life, is embodied in *hunhu* or *Ubuntu*," was another way this maxim was put forth (Samkange, p. 6). This asserts that acts of sharing, respect, community, and harmony are examples of what it means to be a human. The second maxim reads, "If and when one is forced to choose between money and the preservation of another person's life, one should choose the preservation of life" (Samkange Pp. 6-7). According to this adage, life is more important than anything else, including money. The third and final maxim is concerned with leadership, position, and power. It states that the will of the subjects under the king is what grants them all of their authority, including their rank (Samkange, 1980, p. 7).

Samkange emphasizes the value of interdependence and teamwork in the achievement of common objectives as a collectivist ideology. The extent to which this interdependence and collectivity can be increased is still up for debate. When Ubuntu first emerged, tribal affiliation was still a major organizing principle in African civilization. While there may have been instances of collaboration and cooperation amongst tribes in this environment, allegiance and loyalty were to fellow tribe members, and the foundations of identity and identification were largely focused on racial and familial ties. But where do we draw the boundaries between communities and groups in a society that is becoming more urbanized and globalized? Ubuntu's historical success was largely attributed to its formulation of a framework for reciprocal accountability, in which members of a given group helped one another and, by doing so, increased the group's resilience and the likelihood of survival.

The practical implications of Ubuntu for the sharing of food, resources, etc. become much more challenging where identification is stretched more broadly and members of a single group may self-categorize in different ways (e.g., as Africans, Nigerians, Igbo, Lagosians, etc.). The power of Ubuntu historically has been in fostering closer ties among residents of a particular area; the prospect of its expansion to other groups and cultures, though potentially

alluring from an ideological standpoint, may ultimately jeopardize its viability as a workable solution to local issues.

A person who practices Ubuntu is conscious of his/her place in the universe and consequently interacts amicably with other people. People who practice Ubuntu will therefore experience unity with the living. Individuals are independent living things in the Western tradition who are not reliant on others in the community. To conclude, Ubuntu views a person as a relational being who interacts with other people in society (Mbiti, 1990, p. 108), when a relationship changes, so do the person's conduct.

The Relevance of Ubuntu Philosophy in Marriage

For the Ubuntu ideology, "a person is a person because of others" (Moleketi, 2009, p. 127). In marriage, the man and the woman serve as gender relations for mutual rapport, complementarity, completion, and fulfillment in such a way that greater achievement is recorded when they work together in harmony and mutuality (Elechi, 2021, p. 116). In such a relationship, each of the couples takes a personal identity in terms of the other, hence one becomes a husband only in relation to his wife, and one is said to be a wife only in relation to her husband. Put in other words, a person is a husband because of his relatedness to his wife and a person is a wife because of her relatedness to her husband. This mutual relationship entails several dimensions of cooperation for the mutual benefit of the partners. It can thus be said that there are consequences that follow on account of this relationship. According to the Ubuntu ideology, these consequences in the African traditional sense entail various shades of cooperation. Accordingly, the Ubuntu ideology engenders social harmony, which provides African society with the most stability. An African is a person who lives in a community rather than a rugged individual. Even if belongingness to a community entails adverse consequences, not excluding famine, and poverty, the shared sacrifices serve as a buffer for everyone and so the evolving resistance can continue to exist in an adversarial community because of the collaboration of the community demonstrating care and concern for the other. The Ubuntu philosophy is reflected in the marriage relationship as it holds that "a person is a person because of others" (Moleketi, 2009, p. 127). As noted, Ubuntu philosophy is implemented through the use of African cooperative culture. The Ubuntu philosophy holds that social peace gives African society its greatest stability. An African is not a solitary individual but a member of a community, and this equally applies to the marriage relation. Because of the community's cooperation and mutual care and concern, famine, segregation, and poverty evolving resistance can persist in a group that is hostile to one another. The practices of Ubuntu philosophy in marriage manifest compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutual interests in constructing and preserving justice and a spirit of cooperation. Regard and love between married couples offer a pivotal root of African communal life. It demonstrates the interconnectedness, common humanity, and the responsibility of individuals towards others (Khomba & Kangaude-Ulaya, 2013, p. 685). Thus it plays an important role in solidarity and mutual care and love in an African marital relationship. Africans are social creatures that consistently show generosity to others in the community. However, it is only through close and intimate interactions with other people that we may truly understand what it means to be human. Such an intimate interaction belongs to the essential nature of marriage.

Ubuntu's guiding principles encourage cooperation and teamwork, which supports strong marriages and strong families. Its foundation is a strong feeling of family, whether it be the nuclear family or the extended family. Additionally, this principle aims to advance the dignity and worth of every person, with a focus on self-respect. The foundation of Ubuntu is the idea that everyone must help form and grow the family. Human corporations aid in advancing the objectives of social development in accordance with the spirit of Ubuntu.

Conclusion

In this paper, the Ubuntu concept of marriage has been critically examined from an ontological perspective and its application to marital relationships has been highlighted. The Ubuntu worldview is built on the African understanding of individuals and their relationships with their communities. Africans are naturally compassionate, and they frequently help out their neighbour. However, we can only fully comprehend what it means to be human through our relationships with other people. So what secures the sustainability of human society is the populace's commitment to the community. The paper provides background information on the Ubuntu ideology and how it relates to marriage. The Ubuntu philosophy's emphasis on integrating people into their communities is one of its most important lessons. The value of the individual (*munthu*) and the group (*mtundu*) is crucial. In terms of marriage, the Ubuntu ideology emphasizes compassion, sharing, teamwork, dignity, and respect. For, marriage forms the foundation of the family and the community. It is an abiding and enriching experience with huge responsibilities. Like the attributes of the Ubuntu philosophy, marriage requires cooperation, commitment, hard work, dedication, and sacrifice (Elechi, 2021, p. 284). It requires mutual understanding from both parties for its success. There is an interlock of roles and responsibilities in marriage. Although there are strains and stresses here and there in marriage, these can be overcome through love, patience, tolerance, and sincerity of purpose.

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