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African Ubuntu Philosophy: Re-Defining its Roots in the Influence of Technology on
Education, Spirituality, and Religion

According to the Xhosa and Zulu culture, “Ubuntu” is a word that means “humanity.” Humanity in this sense is not an isolated existential attribute of the human person, rather it a description given to humans in the interconnectedness with those within the space in which the human race exists. This is popularly acclaimed in the words, "I am because we are" which gives a deeper understanding of the African’s view of their existence and the relevance of relationships Africans share among themselves, i.e., humanity geared toward others.

Ubuntu philosophy is motivated by the interest of not just recognition, but a service to others around the individual. Michael Onyebuchi Eze, the present editor of *Theoria: A journal of social and political theory*, puts it clear that “a person is a person through other people.” This is an affirmation of the identity any individual would assume in Africa on the premise of others around such an individual. The scholar notes that the people around any individual possess such abilities as to creating the awareness or knowledge of the existential qualities of such individual. In other words, humans derive the sense of their existence because of the people who affirm them or based on the accepted recognition of the fact that such they exist, and on which other interests may be based.

Religion is a major point of convergence in the African society over which the respect owed the Divine is expressed not just from the personified context, but as a group. In the various ways religion is being practiced in Africa, it is never done with the exclusion of the worshippers. For example, the Catholic church gathering in Africa recognizes the importance

of community in its worship that a priest would wait for the church (the people) to assemble before the Holy Mass commences. It is not about the time fixed, rather about the people gathered to communally present their offerings to God. In this, the prayer of the individual is found in the sacrifice and petition of the group, without the exclusion of anyone.

In ranking the popularity of things in Africa, closely following religion is technology and the several ways in which it is applied in the African society. Since the turn of this century, technology has gradually found its place in Africa and had since been applied to various needs and demands. In Africa, we have found technology actively used both in the personal and communitarian spaces in communication, healthcare, education, banking, scientific exploration, business/marketing, etc., and more recently in religion.

The misconstruction of religion and abuse of technology in Africa contradicts the message preached in the ubuntu language. Africa is blessed with diversity in several areas of interest, and so finds religious practice under different named sects prominent in its societies. These religious segregations within the continent (in belief and practice) creates a perspective of religion that defines it in a way that is alien to the ubuntu culture. Also, the wrong use of technology and associated gadgets in activities like cybercrimes, cyberbullies, etc., always fail to explain the appreciation that Africans should maintain for the ubuntu heritage.

There are instances of the wrong use of technology in religiously influenced issues which stands against the ubuntu philosophy. The concept of ubuntu does not support the use of technological devices for human destruction in the name of religion as may be identified with the Boko Haram activities in Nigeria, Niger, and Chad, and the present Al-Shabab (ISIS-connected) imposed conflict in Mozambique. These are examples of problems identified with the deviation from the accepted African notion of the personal identity that arises from the community – coined as, “ubuntu.”

To address these concerns raised, this paper reflects on the implications of Africans re-discovering a genuine meaning of their enlightenment, spiritual well-being, and religious

practices in the light of technological development, guided by the ubuntu spirit. This paper calls Africans to the re-activation of the ubuntu consciousness through the idealization of technology as used in education (a major source of information dissemination), the application of technology to spirituality and, technology's connection to religious practices.

In Africa, apart from communication, business, and finance, education is the next sector where technology and the internet have been widely applied and used effectively. With the hit of the COVID-19 pandemic, Africans largely resorted to the use of technology and the internet in the organization of schools, lectures conferences, researches, and a host of other learning processes. Prominent among these ways in which technology has been applied to education is online learning (E-learning or virtual learning). This process has redefined the context of learning within the African space and set Africans in the globalized world as a node within the wider network.

An impact of technology on African soil is the shift in defining what it means to “educated” or “Literate.” Literacy, in the course of the lecture, was shown with a progression from the use of oral communication through the scribal age to the use of print (being able to put in writing the contents to be communicated). In the 21st century, considering the impact of technology, being literate does not just demand the ability to read and write but also being able to compute. As shown with the progressive relations between the oral culture and the prints, the act of computing steps up the game beyond being able to read and write with the speed, precision, delivery, ease of use, and comprehension of the content communicated.

Being receptive to the innovations of technology, Africans have been able to gain a new way of expressing their identity within the context of the community. Over the years, African writers maintained the use of prints in communicating the details of our culture, customs, and heritage; particularly stories that could have been lost if they were retained in their oral form. The prints answered questions of what people, who never visited Africa and

may lack the opportunity to visit the continent, need to know about Africa. It helped the natives to become aware of who they are, where they come from, and what values they hold.

Africans who lacked the chance to be told of their identities learned of it through the prints. With the advent of the internet and more sophisticated technology, the shift was from knowing to telling. Africans have been empowered to share their identity, heritage, and culture beyond the walls of the libraries. Technology presents Africans with the tools needed to orientate their digital natives of who they are and what defines them, especially the view of their identity derived from the community.

Also, the concept of sharing that characterizes the ubuntu culture is well highlighted through the implementation of technology. Ubuntu, as explained earlier in this paper, implies that the African gains his/her identity from the community. One thing that constitutes these details of community in the African mind is the idea of “sharing” – shared ideas, shared personality, shared identity. The internet has been a means through which Africans have been able to educate the rest of the world about their traditions and cultural values.

For example, I have gained so much from this program, while studying at the Arrupe Jesuit University. It is in the same vein that African professors have gained the opportunity to teach African-related courses in other institutions outside of the continent. Imagine the value given to such knowledge being acquired from these genuine sources, particularly in the light of some misconceptions believed about the continent. Another means of sharing that has been used effectively, even in this program, are the discussions raised by African students based on their experience of life within the continent. Technology has granted Africans the space to share with others who they truly are and through this avenue, Africans have gained more meaning for themselves about who they are and they have taught others to appreciate the identity and values that characterize them.

Education and the process of learning are geared towards creating impacts in not just the individuals, but society as well. When one learns, it is basic that one reminisces on what

has been learned to extract new knowledge beneficial to the self and the society one lives in. Looking into the influence of technology in the educational system in Africa through the lens of the ubuntu ideology, it is easy to recognize technology as a means that shifted the African mind towards the dangers they have been to the environment. An awareness that is also a pointer and indication to the other aspects of human activities and the relative effect of these activities on the surroundings.

I remember the early years of my education. I started to learn using the chalkboard and moving into higher classes, I started using notebooks. I had acquired so many notebooks particularly in my primary and secondary education which are of little or no relevance to me today because I have grown past the knowledge in the contents of these notebooks. Even the textbooks I used during my time; newer editions are now in use that makes my copy obsolete to the present-day learners. On these points, I recall the inputs of my reflection paper on the lecture on “the fruit of the vine” in which I discussed the possibilities of an eco-friendly use of technology. The adaptation of technology to solve problems associated with the abuse of the environment caused by the conventional method of formal education.

E-learning helps to relate Africans to the responsibility they owe the other inhabitants of the earth. Taking into consideration the approaches proposed in electronic learning through the ubuntu perspective, the concern for the community becomes a strong point of interest and this includes the environment built. Paper is a product of timber which necessary in the past demanded deforestation for the production of books, wooden rules, cupboards, tables, desks and chairs in school, etc. Africans had gladly engaged in cutting down trees to produce these items so they can learn in the classrooms of schools. It is an action that has shown a great level of neglect for the care of the environment.

Discussing other examples of disregard for the common space, we could consider the hazardous content of the chalk dust and its effects on the human respiratory system and the unknown dangers in lead in pencils and inks. Another waste in our environment has been the

plastics these learning tools are made from and the volumes in which they are made. Libraries are packed filled with so many out-of-date books while new ones are being purchased and the storage of papers and books in the home is not an exemption from these activities militating against the environmental space. With technology, we are discovering the habit and culture of recyclability as imposed on the user by the system. Indeed, technological use marks a great stride toward the development of a healthy environment which continues to serve as that community that validates and asserts the identity of the African. Technology gives several Africans the opportunity to explore their capacities as responsible agents fighting for freedom from the destruction of the environment through human activities.

The use of technology and the internet in education creates a connection that sets Africa as a part of the system linked with the world. A review of the level at which Africans are seen to be engaged in world issues makes clear evidence that technology has been able to synchronize Africa with the content of the wider world beyond the perimeters of Africa. Thanks to technology, Africans have gained the chance to be able to share in the global space. They could make their voices heard and their presence felt, listen to and learn of what others have to offer, as well as enjoy the opportunity to affirm their stand in the world's global journey. For example, the use of social media made popular in Africa with the advent of computers and mobile phones.

As Africans progress the use of technology, especially with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been the need for a reflection on what we are learning. With the new online learning platforms, the acquisition of knowledge has been broadened to encompass certain areas that conventional formal education would not address. We could reflect on the skills of time management at an individual level, the discipline of the self in the light of the freedom enjoyed in online studies, and the responsibility that each of these calls for.

Education from the ubuntu perspective applies the family, the community, religion, the environment as means of learning with the emphasis on sharing. The technology used to

educate has made Africans learn better and faster, from the introspective sense, elements that are very essential in the various units of the society, not just suited for personal growth, but great tools that build people into becoming better community members that identify them.

The impact of technology on education can be discussed from the viewpoint of the cost-benefit and convenience gained through studying online. Consider the implications on cost and the challenges of location variance I would have suffered if this program on the philosophy of technology and religion was not done through the internet. The possibilities experienced in practically applying technology to education in Africa adds up to the future realities mindset of the virtual world on the Africans minds which they already envisage and planned for. Africans await all that technology is promising the future.

John Mbiti, an African philosopher, would assert that it takes a whole village to raise a child. The African sense of spirituality endorses the notion of a communal influence on the individual. Spirituality in the ubuntu context, although personified, is never strictly pegged to the personal – else it loses its intrinsic meaning within the African worldview. For Africans, spirituality makes relevant the essence of the needed and desired relational instances helpful for interconnectivity, evaluation, and endorsement. In Africa, spirituality is practical and interactive because it makes real the reasons for it.

The points raised on the ubuntu view of spiritual are similar to those I had discussed in my reflections on the lectures on the medieval argument over the existence of God, print ontology (covering the first- and third-person logic deism and design), electromagnetic spirituality as well as the fruit of the vine and alterity technology. In these reflections, I had look through the position of technology and the internet in the appreciation of spirituality, especially from my personal experiences and the African perspective of spirituality. In all of these, I would highlight that technology and the internet give that clue to the desires of the Divine for the person while granting the needed support that could facilitate such relations.

The intent of spirituality is mostly centered on the development of an influential understanding of the self in connection with the demands of the Divine for that identified self and the environment. In my review of what spirituality entails, I have found out that it a means through which I grow in intimacy with the Divine. The plans of the Divine are always set and spirituality is that path carved out to lead me into it, or that tool(s) that I need to freely navigate and explore that which the Divine has set before me.

For example, in watching a 3D movie in the cinema or playing a virtual reality (VR) simulated game. When one visits a cinema to watch a 3D movie, one needs to have the 3D glasses if he/she must follow well and enjoy the movie. Or perhaps, it is impossible playing a 3D simulated game without the virtual reality equipment (headset and required lens, as well as the gadgets for it). Spirituality provides the space to dive into God's plans freely and better immerse oneself into such plans.

What exactly then is for technology in spirituality? Technology is the manifestation of the ingenuity of God in the creativity inherent in humans. To gain value of the reasons for human existence (an extension of the existence of God which is seen in God's interest for a relationship with humans), we could turn to the manner technology serves the human race. The good and the ease of life technology renders to humans, helps in the appreciation of the Divine's care, protection, and providence humans enjoy.

In the course of lectures in this program, alterity technology would remind us of the relationship we create with technology in our idealized sense of technological use that models the same commitment that has been kindled by the Divine calling on human response. Hence, technology is an aid or guide to better understand the relationship God establishes with humans shown by the relationships humans develop with themselves in their application of technology to their world and the relation humans grow with technology itself.

The understanding gained in our relationship with God is never a representation of exclusion from the rest of humanity. Technology generates an inclusive system as shown in

its use to demonstrate God's relations with humanity and this flags the message the ubuntu philosophy preach, which I have consistently highlighted in this paper. In relating with God, I am more open to the reality of how I live with those around me and the other inhabitants of the common space which I also pointed out in my reflection on the fruit of the vine. In this way, the identity claimed for the self emanates from the sense of the shared communal relations that is characterized by love, peace, and generous service. God has labored to create a home for all on earth and continues to serve all that co-exist in the creation and in the same way, technology has been developed and channeled to serve the needs of humans. We could ask what service we offer as humans to God, humanity, the environment, and technology in all that we enjoy.

In exploring spirituality, it is uneasy to dismiss the help humans receive in their interactions within the physically transcended space with the application of technology. This is one point that pushes the question, how does technology influence my spiritual life? But beyond the element of the distractions that are often associated with the application of technology to our daily life, there are numerous benefits profited with technology in human life. In my reflection of the symbolization of the internet and eco-technology in modern-day Christianity, I would list different applications in modern gadgets that simulate sacramentals in the Catholic faith and so stimulate devotion to God through them

Yes! In these technological representations, humans grow their spirituality just as they would grow their spiritual life through the traditional sacramentals of the Catholic church and the spiritual books and guides generally found in Christianity and other religions.

Technology, in serving humans, aid humans to relate with the Divine, and better inter-relate with the other occupants of the space around them. When technology is integrated into spirituality to ensure personal growth and the good of others, the ubuntu concept becomes grounded in the technological influence possible within the spiritual realm of the African society.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, an African theologian, delves deep into the discussion of the African ubuntu philosophy. The theologian relates the concept of ubuntu to the biblical injunctions of love and forgiveness as the opinion given to explain ubuntu. Adding to faith, justice, and peace, love and forgiveness form the most fundamental of all principles the major religions in the world would adopt to express themselves in philosophical debates. Religion offers the sacred ground on which humans publicly express their interconnectivity with the Divine, understanding others present as fellow worshippers of the Divine. Religion gives the sense of the humanity of fellow humans and the essence of the Divine in all.

In Africa, there is a demand for the sacredness of religious events which makes technology looked at as a game-changer. Although the application of technology in religious matters suffers some degrees of skepticism, it is never dismissed when optimum results are desired in the operation of things. For instance, there are several churches with projector screens, the use of other gadgets, and online resources in the promotion of the Gospel. Wider outreach and networks are built within the internet through which religion is advanced as a culture beyond the confines of the physical church space. In this way, technology reveals that religion is not a matter of the church building but a subject for the heart directed to influence the individual's way of life. This is one way by which the influence of technology is used to emphasize the ubuntu ideology in the practice of religion.

In religion, just as the ubuntu principles are motivated in spirituality, the individual goes beyond the self and holds a great impact on the community that identifies him/her. For Africans, religion is a communitarian activity that seeks to include all willing to participate. In my reflection on the lecture on religion as a refuge, I noted the relationship established within any religious sect as a point of strength in the assertion of their beliefs. Technology has over time and more in recent times made bold the relevance of such union in hearts and desire, and the ease at which the goals pursued are attained through such alliance.

Reflecting on the end benefits derived by the numerous Catholics who followed the celebration of Holy Mass using various social media in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. For these persons, they were connected with the body of the church and could communally express their faith in the Divine despite the prevalent circumstances. Although the attendance at online Masses was a global scenario, it highlighted on the minds of Africans not just a means to participate in the celebration of Eucharist, but more, a means of sharing with others in faith and community life that symbolizes strength and recognition for Africans.

Religion as expressed in the sense of community helps African to recognize the place of God in their lives since they are equal before the Divine. Also, it makes humans conscious of the image of God in fellow humans. This mandates Africans to respect the sanctity of human life. Unfortunately, Africans sometimes accept ideas and plans that apply technology in ways that contradict God's plans, thereby setting motions against the dignity of life. Within the ubuntu culture, life is sacred and every life must be respected. The life of another person is valuable because it forms part of that community that endorses the individual. This makes the community a constant guide to the purpose of every action.

Some approaches to life in Africa often defies the essence of the ubuntu spirit that has guided the African mind from the earliest time. Religion is supposed to be a converging point for all, where the elements of our intellectual capacity and our personalized spirituality is brought to use for the good of others in reverence of the Divine – the source and end of our existence. My reflection on the lecture on transhumanism highlighted the transcendence of artificial intelligence over human intelligence in the context of “superintelligence” a threat to humanity. Often, we fail to derive meanings from our knowledge when we fail to reflect on our experiences. Also, in most cases, we do not allow our sense of spirituality to transform us as it has been designed to function. At such ends, Religion becomes a point of difference and divergence, and a tool for discrimination and the destruction of God's wonderful creation, a perfect design which the transhumanist's efforts and struggles seem limited to attain.

Technology may have thrived in education, the attainment of spiritual goals and in ways, we communally express our commitment to the Divine, but it does not dismiss the perverse ways in which technology may have been applied and the danger humans were exposed to as a result of such instances, particularly in Africa. In the course being followed, technology seems to be promising more offers of possibilities and the opportunity for better use. Technology has proved its usefulness in re-address what "ubuntu" represents to the African mind and granted African's understanding of the ubuntu philosophy a rewarding pedestal for its fundamental standpoint as shown so far in this paper. Considering these points, what more reason(s) can we offer to dismiss the appreciation of technology and the internet in Africa?

Technology has advanced humans beyond several insurmountable challenges in resolving their needs just as the Divine would will it. Can humans in response to the benefits gained from the Divine and in acknowledgment of the reason for their existence, learn and appreciate the essence of love and the greater common good that is obtainable? It is a way that could make humans willing to accept the identification of themselves like others and so choose (or, at least desire to choose) to live in the reality of such identity as promoted as the ubuntu belief. To this end, technology will assume the status of an expression of the Divine's desire and the foundation of the ubuntu philosophy not just in education, the spiritual life, and religion but in the other spheres of the African society.