



PERSONHOOD, LAND, AND MORAL COMMUNITY: TOWARD AN AFRICAN RELATIONAL CRITIQUE OF ANTHROPOCENTRIC ENVIRONMENTALISM

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Abstract

Modern environmental ethics increasingly reflect anthropocentric thinking in which nature deserves ethical consideration only in relation to human interests, rationality, or utility. Although some, but not all, Western environmental theories have extended ethical consideration to non-human entities, many still rely on metaphysical frameworks which conceptualize a separation between humanity and the land and the rest of existence. This paper asserts that these frameworks cannot develop an adequate response to the current ecological crises. This paper, based on the Ubuntu relational ontology of African communitarian philosophy, develops a critique of anthropocentric environmentalism, and reconsiders the frameworks for land, personhood, and moral community. In African philosophy, land and personhood are not viewed as the possession of an individual or a resource which can be given away. Rather, land is the economic resource of the community, and personhood is defined through community and is relational. The paper argues that the ecological crises the world is faced with today are not a rupture of the community but relational destruction, and African philosophy is a valuable resource to rethink how we see our environmental responsibilities.

Keywords: Personhood; Land; Moral Community; African Philosophy; Environmental Ethics

1. Introduction

Emerging ecological crises, including climate uncertainty, desertification, land degradation, and loss of biodiversity, have increased the volume of literature on environmental ethics. In recent years, many ecological scholars have argued that environmental problems cannot be characterized solely as scientific or technological issues. They also represent a philosophical and ethical crisis. Climate change, ecological and social collapse, extractive capitalism, and the biodiversity crisis have sparked renewed discussions regarding the ethical status of non-human entities and our responsibility to (and for) non-human and to (and with) the other ecological systems. Within the environmental humanities, it has been argued that modern rational frameworks have the tendency to prioritize instrumental reasoning and the belief that ecosystems are resources for human development (and therefore progress) (Whyte 2020;



Plumwood 2021). Although these frameworks might seem appealing to a particular normative position, they remain, almost in all cases, within the bounds of anthropocentric thought.

This discourse, however, appears to remain tethered to anthropocentrism, in that moral interests are tethered to human interests, rationality, and autonomy. Even the argument for preserving the environment is expressed in anthropocentric terms in that it is asserted that the environment should be valued because it is supportive of human life.

Although weak anthropocentric theories lead to the advocacy of environmental preservation, they usually justify environmental preservation instrumentally in terms of the contribution of environmental systems to human flourishing. This position brings about an important philosophical challenge. If concern for the environment is justified only if it serves humans, then what obligation is there to protect ecological systems that contradict the short-term demands of the polity or the economy? The limitation of anthropocentric ethics then is not just in the domain of moral reasoning, but in the domain of the metaphysical assumptions of such reasoning.

The purpose of this paper is to argue that the ethical limitation of anthropocentric thought is not solely the case of the lack of ethics, but also the case of inadequate ontology. The paper asserts the existence of metaphysical divisions of humanity and land, culture and nature, and of the subject and object. The authors of this paper argue that African philosophy, and in particular the relational and communitarian strands, provides the best tools to examine the fundamental re-structuring of environmental ethics.

In spite of the widespread recognition of the importance of Indigenous ecological systems, African philosophy has been relatively neglected in the field of contemporary environmental ethics. Where research has been undertaken, it has often focused on either African communalism or sustainability and left the ontological dimensions of person, land, and moral responsibility largely unexplored. This paper attempts to fill this gap by arguing that African relational ontology offers a powerful critique of anthropocentrism that far exceeds the critique offered by most Western environmental philosophies, because it rejects the metaphysical division of humanity and the environment. Rather than placing land outside the moral sphere, African ontology situates land in the very center of communal and personal identity.

The authors utilize the relational anthropology of Ubuntu and African metaphysical traditions to support their claim that networks of belonging extend beyond humanity. They posit that land, as an ontologically integral aspect of the moral community, is personifying. It should not be interpreted as a means to an end, a resource, or property. Land is woven into the integral moral fabric. The most substantial philosophical critique of anthropocentric environmentalism is that of African relational ontology. It offers a critique of anthropocentric environmentalism by redefining moral community in terms of relational, rather than functional, community as the basis of rights.

This paper utilizes a comparative philosophical approach. It interrogates the anthropocentric assumptions predominant in Western environmental ethics and juxtaposes them with African communitarianism, especially with the Ubuntu relational ontology. The writings of John Mbiti, Ifeanyi Menkiti, Kwasi Wiredu, Thaddeus Metz, and some contemporary African environmental philosophers are used to reformulate a conception of a moral community based on relational existence. The paper first interrogates anthropocentric environmentalism. It then explores African relational ontology and personhood. Lastly, in the



context of ecological ethics, it proposes a conception of land as an ontological and moral reality.

2. Anthropocentrism and the Structure of Modern Environmental Ethics

There are various iterations of anthropocentrism, but all are built on the assumption that humans are located at the center of systems of intrinsic value.

For much of its history, Western philosophy has employed an anthropocentric ethic, particularly through the influence of theology, Descartes, and the Enlightenment. Traditionally, Western philosophy has regarded humans as being superior to the rest of being for reasons of rationality, moral autonomy, or a privilege stemming from a divine source. In the Judeo-Christian and modern liberal traditions, the rest of being is often taken to exist for the benefit of humans, which justifies the exploitative relationships that humans have with the rest of being. Although contemporary environmental ethics have sought to defend against these assumptions, a good part of modern ecology is consonant with the anthropocentric assumptions.

2.1 Strong and Weak Anthropocentrism

Strong anthropocentrism considers only humans to possess intrinsic moral worth, seeing nature as only valuable through its benefit to humans. Contrary to this, weak anthropocentrism considers humans as the only ultimate value, but allows for nature to be valued through the enlightened or longterm benefits it provides to humans.

The distinction between strong and weak anthropocentrism is still useful beyond simple categorization. Strong anthropocentrism accepts concern for the environment only where environmental resources serve the interests of humans. Long-term benefits for human flourishing may serve the purpose of sustaining the environment, but weak anthropocentrism may significantly support conservation. Criticism of both allows for the realization that operating beyond an instrumental understanding of nature has proven to be a significant challenge. There may be situations where the environment is acknowledged to hold value, but that value remains dependent on the well-being of humans. Because of this, anthropocentric ethics is challenged to justify the protection of ecosystems when the interests of humans may adversely affect them.

This theory rests on a framework that can be divided into three categories:

1. Substance ontology. The defining properties of individuals are self-sufficient and independent of external relations.
2. Human exceptionalism. Rationality or autonomy places individuals higher in the moral hierarchy.
3. Instrumental out any nature. the environment is an 'other' that may be valued and utilized.

This structure is metaphysically problematic and has drawn criticism from several environmental philosophers. Aldo Leopold's land ethic rejected the idea that only humans should receive moral consideration. Leopold asserted that moral consideration should include soils, waters, plants, and animals as members of an ecological community. Paul Taylor's biocentric egalitarianism introduced an idea of equal moral consideration for all living beings.



However, despite the valuable innovations, much of this moral philosophy remains committed to the idea of the independent, individuality, and moral standing, which is arguably a poor reflection of relationship-based ecological existence. The challenge hence is not solely moral, but involves the domain of being as well.

While a form of anthropocentrism can drive certain conservation efforts, it provides little to no justification for the respect of ecosystems which may be in tension with the needs of humans. In addition, it ignores the root cause of the ecological crisis, which consists of the separation of man and land.

The ecological crisis can therefore be understood as a consequence of a depleted ontology which views the separation of man from a world of objects. Proposition of this nature encourages the industrial, extractive practices that are detrimental to the environment. Therefore, in response to the deterioration of the environment, philosophy must transcend a simple moral call to action to address the nature of existence, social relations, and moral constraints. It is in this area that African relational ontology can most fruitfully contribute.

3. African Relational Ontology: Being as Co-Being

A viable challenge to substance ontology from African traditions can be made around the concept of relational being. This can be found in the moral vision of Ubuntu. In this case, the idea of personhood is not something intrinsic, but something that must be earned through one's participation in a community. This is illustrated by the expression, "a person is a person, through other persons." This illustrates both the relationality and the ontological dependence of being. At the most fundamental level, being is relational.

African relationality has a more nuanced account of personhood than the more commonplace atomistic accounts. Liberal political philosophy has an account of personhood in which the individual is a self-contained moral unit. In contrast, many African metaphysical philosophies and liberal philosophy share a similar view of personhood, that existence is made meaningful by participation in community. The Ubuntu philosophy that "a person is a person through other persons" makes it very clear that reciprocity, and a solid inter-personal relationship makes existence meaningful. Being is relational, and reciprocal participation, not atomistic and individual. This is also what Ifeanyi Menkiti describes, where the community is the site of moral development of the individual, and what Kwasi Wiredu describes, where the community is the site of moral responsibility. This idea is also famously expressed by John Mbiti as, "I am, because we are."

For Ifeanyi Menkiti, personhood is a normative rather than a biological concept. Menkiti says that participation in the moral life of a community, and the refinement and responsibility of one's character, are necessary for personhood. This position works against liberalist conceptions that would claim one is a person simply by virtue of one's rationality. Kwasi Wiredu stresses communal interdependence but believes it is a mistake to reduce all individuality to conformity with the collective. Wiredu asserts that reason and moral agency, while inextricably placed in a communal framework, have critical positions. John Mbiti's celebrated quote, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am," describes a relational rather than an atomic view of existence.

There is a growing trend in African philosophy, such as the work of Thaddeus Metz and Mogobe Ramose, to consider the impact of a relational ontology on ecological thought. Ramose and Metz suggest a relational moral theory to explain obligations to the sustaining



ecology of human communities. If relational networks are the basis of human existence, the ecological foundations of a community are essential to the relational infrastructure of community and personhood. The destruction of the environment is the destruction of relationships.

Although they have differing views, they all agree that the individual is not the point of departure. Each person exists in relation to others.

Most significantly, the community these relationships involve goes beyond the currently living. The community of concern expands to the living, the deceased, and the land. In many African cosmologies, the moral universe comprises spirits, the ancestry of the living, land, and the community. Thus, the relationship of human beings to the land is not extrinsic, but intrinsic. The land holds memory, continues identity, and provides a sense of belonging and responsibility to the various generations. To exclude the land from moral discourse is to misapprehend the ontological orders of community life from which it derives its sense.

4. Personhood Beyond Individualism

In most contemporary theories of Western liberalism, a person's liberal standing arises from their possession of the so-called rationality, autonomy, or self-consciousness. These traits are often thought to be part of a person.

This liberal standing of a person has been highly influential on moral and political thought, especially in Kantian and rights-based thought. In these frameworks, rationality, self-consciousness, and autonomy are often regarded as the cornerstones of intrinsic moral standing. Critically, however, these frameworks have been questioned for potentially excluding those persons who may lack the rational capacity and/or other social vulnerabilities. These potentially discriminated against groups may include children, disabled persons, and marginalized groups. African philosophy enters this debate not through the outright rejection of individuality, but through the re-examination of the foundations upon which individuality is built.

As regards personhood, African communitarian philosophy develops three alternatives:

1. Normative Personhood – the understanding that personhood is a quality that may be achieved through participation in ethical actions.
2. Relational Constitution – the understanding that identity is achieved through belonging to a community.
3. Embedded Agency – the understanding that moral agency is always situated in a particular environment and history.

The normative perspective of personhood within African philosophy is quite important because it makes a distinction between possession and participation. One is not simply born a full moral person. Rather, personhood is a consequence of ethical actions, social responsibility, and efforts toward the advancement of the community. In Menkiti's influential theory, community comes before the individual. On the other hand, Gyekye's moderate position on communitarianism maintains that individuality exists in the frameworks of the community. What is important in these positions is the indication of a refusal of atomistic individualism that remains mindful of the individual's ability to act.

The philosophical impact of this conceptualization is staggering. If the full development of the individual is the result of being part of a community, which is in turn the result of the environment, then the degradation of the environment means the potential of



personhood is lost. Dismantling of the forests, separating people from the environment, and damaging the environment does not only hurt people's means of survival, it destroys the conditions that sustain relationships that are the foundation of identity, membership, and ethical responsibility.

Essentially, these theories are in agreement with the individual, but they contradict the position of ontological individualism and atomism. The individual person is and will continue to be a member of, and reliant on, a network of relationships.

This provides a basis for a critique of contemporary environment ethics that place value or utility of the environment in a context of isolated moral acts or rights. Considering African relational ontology, a conceptualization of moral acts will be inadequate if it ignores the environment, for the environment is a constituent part of moral being. Thus, the destruction of the environment is a disruption of the community, not merely a diminishing of resources.

If the reasoning above is accurate, environmental degradation is more than the reckless forfeiture of resources. It is the destruction of the relational web that makes personhood possible.

5. Land as Ontological Ground

Land is not often thought of, if at all, as a marketable good in many African traditions. Instead, it is thought of as:

1. A trust of ancestors
2. A sacred legacy
3. A place of living memory
4. A place of belonging

For many African cultures, land has a status beyond the scope of economic analysis. For many of the world's indigenous peoples, land is not thought to be an exchangeable commodity. It is the sacred trust given by the ancestors and held for the descendants. It serves as the social memory and the link between the community and the spirit. In many of these cultures, the community's buried ancestors, the sacred groves, the ritual places, the histories, and the rest of the community's land are all one. The community's identity is encased in the land, and to lose it is to lose something that is existential to the community's identity.

This understanding contrasts sharply with the liberal property theories that have individualism at their core. In many of the contemporary legal and economic systems, land is thought of almost entirely in the terms of ownership, transfer, and the value that can be derived from it. These theories justify economic systems that exploit the ecology for profit. These theories were used to justify the reorganization of communal land in Africa to maximize colonial resource extraction and capitalist exploitative practices.

To lose land is to lose something existential, not just a part of your economic resources. The phenomena of ecological displacement in many African societies shows the repercussions. Oil exploitation in the Niger Delta, desertification in the Sahel, and land degradation in many indigenous communities have shown us that there are not just environmental crises, but also the disruption of traditional social structures, cultural identities, and systems of meaning. Environmental injustice poses social, economic, and ontological violence.

This describes one of the aspects of contemporary property theory. It speaks of absolute ownership of land and the right to exclude access to it. However, in today's extractivist economies, land is viewed only as a resource for economic exploitation. In most of



the African relational ontological systems land and community are of central importance. Land is a source of identity and inter-generational continuity. Also, land does not need to be rationally understood in order to be considered important by many African relational ontological systems. Land's importance is derived from its role in the support and sustenance of community.

A belief that land is a neutral physical resource is philosophically insufficient within an African framework. It grounds the continuity between ancestors, present communities, and the yet-to-come generations. In this sense, ecological responsibility is grounded within an African framework not just in the realm of environmental policy.

6. Rethinking Moral Community

Analytic perspectives regarding the environment have focused mainly on the criteria of moral considerability. For example, while biocentrism offers moral considerability to all living things, ecocentrism offers moral considerability to entire ecosystems.

While they are important, both biocentric and ecocentric views are philosophically problematic. Giving moral status to all living things tends to create the problem of competing moral claims for biocentrism. For ecocentrism, subordinating the system whole tends to create the problem of giving moral status to individual parts of the system. African relational ontology offers a more balanced position. It does not ground moral status in the intrinsic characteristics of individual organisms or in the nature of being itself, but rather in the networks of relational interdependence in which one is bound.

The African relational approach brings to the question of moral considerability a new focus. This new focus is on the networks of interdependence and the relations that constitute the moral universe, rather than the characteristics that may confer moral considerability.

The moral universe is, then, the community of all those who are capable of the moral relations interdependently, and not just of any one relational state or moral feature.

This relational view on moral community does not suggest that all beings have the same moral standing. Rather, it recognizes a differentiated moral significance based on the interdependence of the ecological and the relational. While the interconnectedness of human beings places them in a position of greater moral influence, and, therefore, greater moral responsibility, the fact that human beings are dominantly members of moral communities does not justify or support that position. The greater the human capacity to support the flourishing of a community, the greater the moral obligation to maintain that flourishing community. This especially entails the following:

1. Ecological damage is a rupture of relation
2. Environmental injury is a relational responsibility
3. All moral inquiries are ontological in nature

This view is in contrast to radical biocentrism in that it recognizes that there are hierarchies of moral value. It is due to relational moral agency that human beings are positioned in the community and therefore have moral responsibilities. However, from the relational perspective of community and interdependence, such agency does not place them in a position of moral dominance.

There are many consequences of this point of view. The nature of ecological ethics in this sense changes from a concern for rights and utility to a concern for relational responsibility, reciprocity, and care. The injury of an ecosystem is not simply the depletion of



resources, it is the injury of community. For this reason, the relational perspective on moral community and interdependence may provide a greater ethical impetus for the protection of the environment than a purely instrumental approach to sustainability.

7. Dialogue with Western Environmental Thought

Relational ontology from various African traditions challenges many Western environmental philosophies. Take J. Baird Callicott's Land Ethics, which are based in Aldo Leopold. Callicott's ethics, like Paul Taylor's, focuses on community membership and biocentric egalitarianism. Taylor's egalitarianism also places value on ecological systems, regarding all parts of the biosphere as interrelated and as communities of equal worth.

While Leopold's influential land ethic still carries philosophical value because of how it extends the scope of ethics beyond the concerns and interests of humans, it is also important because of how Leopold argues humans ought to see themselves as "plain members and citizens" of the ecological community. This argument is quite compatible with African relational ontology, although there are still important divergences. Leopold's community-centered ecological vision also fails to capture the metaphysical and communal dimensions of land as an element of identity and personhood, relationality, membership, and community.

The ethics of Taylor and Callicott are also quite relational, and in the case of Callicott, this relationality is also combined with an understanding of the personhood of the self as a member of the community, which is absent in many of the other philosophies presented. Paul Taylor's biocentric egalitarianism also offers a challenge to anthropocentrism because it endows all living beings with worth. However, because Taylor's egalitarianism is about all organisms and all living beings rather than communities of living and relational beings, his ethics still remain very much individualistic. In African philosophy, a being's worth is not evaluated in terms of the sum of the worth of its parts, its members, and constituents. Rather, the being is of greater and higher value than all of its members and constituents combined. Therefore, in African philosophy, the community or the society is the primary unit of existence in the universe, and the individual person is of greater worth than the community.

Unlike many other schools of thought, African philosophy incorporates environmental ethics into its metaphysical framework of relational being. We may consider Martin Heidegger's critique of technological enframing here as an analogue. Heidegger argues that enframing, as an expression of modernity, constrains Being to a "standing-reserve." African philosophy also denies the commoditization of land. What sets African philosophy apart is that this denial emerges from moral anthropology of the community rather than existential phenomenology.

We also have a point of comparison to contemporary environmental phenomenology and posthumanism, most prominently to theories that critique anthropocentrism. Thinkers that are critical of modern technology increasingly posit that people cannot be understood in isolation of the ecology. African relational ontology is especially pertinent to the discourse, as it situates the ecology of inter-relationality and phenomenological experience in the framework of moral community and historical continuity.

8. Colonial Modernity and Ontological Violence

Anthropocentrism spread alongside the growth of colonial power. Lands colonized previously were seen as terra nullius, "empty lands," that could be developed. The opinions of

colonized peoples were dismissed as superstition or myths. Colonial modernity reorganized more than just political power. It altered the indigenous peoples' conceptions of land, community, and the moral ordering of society. Colonial governments reframed peoples' relational understandings of land as property through legal and economic systems and new ways of drawing maps. Indigenous peoples' understandings of land were marginalized and often dismissed as irrational or premodern. These changes impacted the economy and society but also altered the ways people think about how humans relate to the environment and to one another.

The environmental destruction carried out on the industrial colonial model was made possible by the dismissal of indigenous peoples' understandings of the world. The physical violence of the corporate colonial model was also a violence to the community as disruption of the life world of the people connected to the environment that was altered.

The effects of this transformation can still be seen in postcolonial Africa today. In places like the Niger Delta, oil extraction has caused enormous environmental damage and destroyed indigenous people's livelihoods in the process. Mining, industrial farming, and land privatization erode communal ecological systems that once provided the community with identity and continuity. In these locations, environmental degradation is not just a destruction of the environment, but the destruction of a community's moral structure.

The exploitation that occurred under colonialism was not only economic violence; it was also violence of being. In order to place the land within the colonial order, of what was to become the modern world, the community's subsistence and regenerative ecology was replaced with an economy of extraction.

African philosophy is important to both decoloniality and environmentalism. It goes against the extractive paradigm's metaphysics, and argues for relationality to be the starting point.

The value of an African philosophical critique is its ability to uncover the metaphysical foundations of various forms of extractive modernity. African relational ontology, rather than calling for the protection of the environment, provides a critique of that worldview which allows for the domination of the environment. As a result, the goal of environmental justice must encompass the restoration of culturally relational ways of being in the world, as well as its relational and epistemic dimensions.

9. Normative Implications

If African relational ontology is philosophically convincing, African relational ontology has potential for developing an environmental ethic. Caring for the environment is no longer seen as a voluntary form of conservationism or a matter of policy preference. In relation to African relational ontology, care for the environment is an ethical demand derived from the conditions of existence. Environmental care is an essential element of ethical existence.

From African relational ontology, we can derive several ethical principles.

9.1 Constitutive Ecological Responsibility

Environmental destruction is a self-defeating act. It means undermining the conditions of relational existence for one's self-actualization. In African relational ontology, destruction of the environment sets the conditions for the flourishing of both the individual and the community. The destruction of forests, rivers, agricultural lands, and ecosystems breaks the



continuity and resilience of the community across generations. Thus, ethical responsibility for the environment stems from the demands of relational existence, not from instrumental value.

9.2 Intergenerational Justice

The land is a living being who connects us to our descendants and to the ancestors. Ecological destruction is an act of betrayal to all of humanity, including our future generations.

The principle of intergenerational justice has special meaning within African cosmologies because the route of moral obligations is not confined to present-day members of the community. Present-day ecological decisions invoke a moral responsibility to the ancestors and to future generations as well. In this sense, the present destruction of the environment is a betrayal to both contemporary members of the community and future generations.

9.3 Communal Stewardship

Custodianship results in the dissolution of the idea of ownership. Instead of dominion, relationships focused on belonging generate the language of stewardship.

This offers an idea that addresses a gap in many of the modern environmental governance frameworks that rely on a model of private ownership with no restrictions on exploitation. Stewardship relies on custodianship, with an emphasis on the reciprocity and preservation of relationships. Within the context of stewardship, the privileged place of human beings is not on the basis of having complete dominion, but rather a greater responsibility that relates to the preservation of the ecology of the community.

9.4 Differentiated Moral Status

Relational ontology is a framework that argues against the idea of egalitarianism, with an emphasis on proximity, arguing that moral worth is based, and is most easily recognized and explained, on the basis of closeness to someone or something. Differentiated moral status is not indicative of the absence of a moral system, but is sort of an acknowledgment of the broad range of dependencies that characterize relationships in an ecology. Despite the fact that human beings have the capacity to think and act in a moral manner, such mode of existence will always be characterized by dependency on land, water, animals and community. In such a context, the greater human agency will always relate to the greater moral and ecological responsibility.

10. Addressing Objections

Objection 1: Romanticization

It can be claimed that the prior descriptions romanticize the traditions of African peoples. However, the goal is to be reconstructive, not nostalgic. African traditions are undoubtedly complex, but they are not devoid of philosophy. Also, the position does not hold that every indigenous practice is defensibly normative. African relational ontology, in this case, allows for critique of traditions. The customs in question, if harmful, are certainly open to criticism if they undermine the flourishing of the community or are ecologically irresponsible. Thus, the goal is reconstructive and philosophical as opposed to nostalgic or essentialist.

Objection 2: Ambiguity

It may be the case that one views relationality as ambiguous. However, this is not true. A relational ontology is not ambiguous and entails a clear normative demand: sustain that which is the foundation of the community.



Even if relationality, at first glance, seems to be abstract, its ethical ramifications can be easily and concretely identified. It is possible to assess policies and practices used to manage the economy in relation to how they impact the communal and ecological systems of the community.

Objection 3: Universalism.

It can be considered that although the framework is African based, a lot of the principles of relationality and of the embeddedness of ecology are universal. It can be said that one of the merits of African relational ontology is that it can assist in developing a global philosophical framework. The ecology of interdependence may not be exclusively African, if we consider that relationality is derived from African traditions. African relationality, in the context of the current global ecological crisis, is increasingly inadequate to provide a framework of its own and calls for more relationality in the realm of ethical responsibility.

11. Conclusion

Anthropocentric environmentalism is problematic because it has a metaphysics of an isolated human subject in relation to external nature. African communitarian philosophy has a more integrated view of personhood as relational.

When African philosophy sees the land as being of moral concern for the community, it allows a further extension of the moral community beyond the human-centered, while still having concern for the community. Concern for the environment is not merely secondary, but is primary.

The ecological crisis is an ontological crisis, which shows the relationship that is concerned with self and the community and the environment. African philosophy is important because it is not just an addition of a cultural perspective. It is a rich resource for re-imagining the moral community during the planetary crisis.

The paper shows that African philosophy goes beyond cultural symbolism in the environmental discourse. By establishing moral community on relational ontology, African philosophy offers a non-anthropocentric alternative to Western philosophy. The current global environmental crisis calls for more than a technology or a change in policy; it requires a transformation of how humans see themselves in relation to land and to each other.

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