UBUNTU'S ONTOLOGICAL ACCOUNT IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY AND ITS CROSS-TRADITION ENGAGEMENT ON THE ISSUE OF BEING VERSUS BECOMING

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ABSTRACT: *This paper x-rays Ramose's ubuntu ontological account in African philosophy and its cross-tradition engagement on the issue of being versus becoming (such as the* Yin-Yang*, Heraclitean, Nietzschean, Whiteheadean and the Buddhists' accounts) with a view to showing how convergence and divergence of thoughts in the African, European, and Asian philosophy contexts can advance cross-cultural philosophizing or cross-tradition approach to doing philosophy. Ramose's ubuntu ontology designates a reconstruction of reality within the framework of motion, as captured in his concept of be-ing-becoming, while the Heraclitean, Nietzschean, Whiteheadean and the Buddhists' ontological accounts also conceive reality within the confines of endless motion, except the* Yin-Yang *metaphysical vision that interprets reality within the perspective of complementarity. Attempts are made, in the paper, to highlight the Ramosean ubuntu ontology and how it can constructively engage with other traditions' ontological accounts, as mentioned above, in a fruitful encounter of the African thought tradition, which Ramose belongs to, and the European and Asian traditions of thought, which the other mentioned ontological accounts belong to.*

Keywords: *be-ing-becoming, becoming, being, cross-traditionality, constructive engagement,* ubuntu *ontology*

This paper explores Ramose's *ubuntu* ontology in African philosophy and its cross-tradition engagement on the issue of being versus becoming such as the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision, the Heraclitean and Nietzschean philosophy of becoming, Whiteheadean process metaphysics and the Buddhists' doctrine of impermanence, to show the degree the convergence and divergence of thoughts in these different traditions can advance intercultural philosophizing. I chose to compare Ramose's view with the above-mentioned ontological traditions with a view to showing how a constructive engagement of these traditions of thought – African, European, and Asian philosophic traditions – can promote cross-tradition approach to philosophizing.

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Before delving into the full discussion of this essay, I need to make necessary clarifications or explanation of the two key terms 'being' and 'becoming.' By the term 'being', I mean the stable, regular, universal, definite, unchanging aspect of existing things as opposed to becoming. A prominent example of this can be found in the Parmenidean idea of being, "though Parmenides assigns much inflated import in his usage of the term 'being'" (see Mou 2003, 96). On the other hand, the term 'becoming,' as I employed it in this paper, refers to the changing or unstable aspects of things. A good example of this can be found in the Heraclitean idea of becoming, even though Heraclitus over radicalized the concept.

Ramose posits his *ubuntu* ontology as the fundamental nature of African reality, which is embedded in the notion of becoming (Ramose 1999) and the early Buddhists, Heraclitus, Nietzsche, and Whitehead also project becoming as the basic nature of reality, except the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision that captures reality within the confines of becoming-being complementarity. The above views underscore the point that these traditions adopted a dynamic view of reality by interpreting it as consisting in constant motion. For instance, the Buddhists imbibe the doctrine of impermanence with regards to reality (see Gokhale 2021), Heraclitus maintains that ultimate reality is essentially a mutable substance (cited in Freeman 1984), Nietzsche contends that reality consist in endless becoming (Nietzsche 1968) and Whitehead posits that the universe is in a state of becoming **(**Whitehead 1929**)**. It is interesting to note that the above traditions emphasize becoming over being in their ontological accounts, except the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision that accords equal ontological status to both being and becoming and captures both as complementary (see Mou 2003). The African philosopher, Mogobe Ramose, toed the same line of ontological dynamism, while trying to construct a holistic view of reality that tilts towards the *Yin-Yang* complementary ontology, which is symbolized in his concept of be-ing-becoming. In his *ubuntu* ontology, he intends to bridge the ancient opposition between being and becoming by articulating a holistic ontological outlook; but his prioritization of becoming over being, in his *ubuntu* account (see Ramose 1999, 51), makes this intention highly questionable.

While the other traditions' ontological accounts (such as the *Yin-Yang*, Heraclitean, Nietzschean, Whiteheadean and the Buddhists' accounts) have received reasonable attention from scholars (see Mou 2003; Freeman 1984; Nehamas 1985; Shrift 1990; Ojimba and Agada 2020; Gokhale 2021; Leemon and Shields 2016), the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology has barley received any significant attention both from the African and Western scholars. Therefore, my enquiry into the Ramosean captivating articulation of the fundamental nature of African view of reality, as *ubuntu,* within the context of be-ing-becoming, will certainly open new avenues for researchers interested in exploring more, the Ramosean interesting *ubuntu* ontology as my cross-tradition and constructive engagement of the Ramosean ontological tradition with the other-mentioned traditions will advance, in no small measure, a cross-tradition approach to philosophizing by exhibiting the areas of convergence and divergence in these ontological traditions as well as their constructive engagement on the issues being versus becoming.

A cross-tradition approach to doing philosophy or cross-cultural philosophizing, as employed in this paper, refers to the manner different cultures develop and express their rationality (cf. Chukwuelobe 2012, 39). In this context, my ultimate aim refers to the investigation of the exact manner of being rational and the precise way in which people meaningfully relate to one another in different cultures or traditions (cf. Ranly 1991, 64). The need, therefore, to philosophize from one's own culture or tradition does not rule out the idea of interaction with other cultures or contact with other minds, as such interaction or contact opens up other perspectives and broadens a thinker's epistemic horizons, which would have been impossible, if such a thinker is restricted or limited only to his/her world, which would ultimately impoverish his/her thought and genuine approach to reality (see Ojimba and Agada 2020, 37; cf. Chukwuelobe 2012, 39). In view of this, we genuinely philosophize only when we enter into a discussion with philosophers from other cultures and this implies that "we talk through with them that about which they speak" (Heidegger 1956, 67). To this extent, the Ramosean, Heraclitean, Whiteheadean, Buddhists' and the *Yin-Yang* ontological insights can provide us with the fulcrum or foundation upon which a genuine philosophizing can be carried out.

Although, a cross-tradition or cross-cultural dialogue does not necessarily presuppose that different philosophical traditions, such as the Ramosean, Heraclitean, Buddhist, Nietzschean, Whiteheadean, and *Yin-Yang* metaphysical traditions, share the same thought or a common view, on a specific ontological issue, it definitely indicates that there should be a basis upon which they establish their exchange (cf. Ojimba and Agada 2020, 37; Chukwuelobe 2012, 39). The ontological accounts or traditions of *ubuntu, Yin-Yang* vision, Buddhism, Heraclitus, Nietzsche and Whitehead, no doubt, expressly provide such basis for these ontologies to enter into a cross-traditional or cross-cultural conversation. Certainly, doing philosophy does not presuppose that we reflect only on our experience with regards to ourselves, but also includes our reflection on how we relate with other cultures and the global world at large (cf. Mall 2014, 68). In this manner, genuine philosophizing can only be meaningfully carried out with a cross-tradition-oriented conviction that philosophy, as such, is not the sole possession of any one tradition, whether European, Asian or African (see Mall 2014, 81). In view of this, a cross-tradition orientation offers us the medium or a common space of discourse, where philosophers of all traditions can come together and converse with one another with full dedication to truth (see Mall 2014, 79). The international virtual conference co-organized by the International Society for Comparative Philosophy towards World Philosophy and the international journal, *Comparative Philosophy* and hosted by the Centre for Comparative Philosophy, San Jose State University, USA, on a roundtable discussion panel: "Cross-Tradition Engagement on Philosophy as a Way of Life and Worldview: Perspectives from African, Islamic, Latin-American and Western Perspectives," is a concrete example. Thus, the Ramosean, Buddhist, Heraclitean, Nietzschean, Whiteheadean and the *Yin-Yang* ontological traditions map unto the notion of "cross-traditionality" or cross-culturality to the extent that they give room for a meaningful understanding and constructive engagement of these ontologies in the European, Asian, and African traditions. This will contribute, meaningfully, to

the contemporary development of philosophy especially on the issue of the relation between being and becoming as these traditions can learn from one another and broaden their intellectual, cultural, and conceptual horizons. Thus, in the context of this enquiry, the paper raises the following questions: Is Ramose successful in his attempt to bridge the opposition between being and becoming through his concept of be-ing-becoming, as claimed in his *ubuntu* ontology? Can the constructive engagement of the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontological account with the above-mentioned accounts (such as the *Yin-Yang*, Heraclitean, Nietzschean, Whiteheadean and the Buddhists' accounts) advance cross-tradition or cross-cultural philosophizing? To accomplish the task, which this paper set out to address, the study is divided into three sections. Section one articulates Ramose's *ubuntu* ontology, while section two examines *ubuntu* ontology and its cross-tradition engagement on the issue of being versus becoming. Section three evaluates the areas of convergence and divergence in *ubuntu* ontology and the other above-mentioned ontological accounts and how this can advance a cross-tradition approach to philosophizing. This section also embodies the conclusion.

1. RAMOSE'S *UBUNTU* ONTOLOGY

In his major work, *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu* (1999)*,* Mogobe Ramose**,** a South African contemporary philosopher, conceptualizes reality within the framework of *ubuntu* ontology, which construes reality as be-ing-becoming. This represents a process view of reality, which describes the traditional worldview of African societies. I chose to focus on the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology, as captured in his above-stated work, as it most legitimately captures the authentic African view of reality because of its tie with the much adored holistic, interconnected and dynamic character of African traditional worldview. Maris (2020, 308) is in agreement with the authenticity of the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology as most representative of African view of reality, as he was convinced that it "demonstrates African rationality, and thus confirms an authentic African identity that was systematically suppressed during the colonial past and apartheid." Ramose's *ubuntu* ontology projects a complementary and interconnected ontology in which the universe is designated as a whole with different interconnected parts (cf. Asouzu 2007). Agada (2021, 4-5) noted that "in this interconnected universe, where rigid borders are not set between entities and states of affair, the features of unity and permanence attributed to being [reality] in substance-based metaphysics are always open to interrogation." Before Ramose articulated his *ubuntu* ontology, Placid Tempels, in his most significant work, *Bantu Philosophy* (1959) had already conceptualized the *Bantu* understanding of reality as firmly embedded in the idea of vital force. For him, the concept of vital force or energy is the unifying principle of African reality which, according to him, is permeated by becoming. While I agree with Tempels that genuine African reality can be conceptualized within the framework of motion, as articulated in his concept of vital force, he was unable to justify his position beyond cultural anthropology to *Bantu* worldview. Onyewuenyi (1966, 33) toed the Tempelsian line of force and dynamism with reference to African understanding of reality. For him, African ontology can be designated, without further qualification, as force or dynamic

ontology. While Tempels and Onyewuenyi represent the African notion of existence as vital force, Ramose boldly contends that African view of reality is essentially graspable within the framework of be-ing-becoming and this is captured in his *ubuntu* ontology.

Ubuntu is a philosophic hyphenated concept – *ubu-ntu* – comprising of two words *ubu and ntu*. For Ramose, *ubu* captures the idea of be-ing, generally or universally, before its manifestations in concrete form of reality or in particular entities – *ntu*. In his estimation, there is no strict and literal ontological separation between *ubu* and *ntu* as *ubu* is always oriented towards *ntu* (Ramose 1999, 50). In other words, both *ubu* and *ntu* are mutually interpenetrating and two aspects of reality as one-ness and indivisible whole-ness (Ramose 1999, 50; 2015; 2016). This could be described as an attempt towards the articulation of the idea of reality within the confines of interdependency, complementarity, mutuality and wholeness, an ambition which it shares with Asouzu's complementary ontology, which construes reality as a composite of missing links that requires the interdependent cooperative action of other links (Asouzu 2007, 207; cf. Senghor 1964; Nyerere 1968).

For Ramose, *ubuntu* ontology accords priority to do-ing over the doer without, at the same time, inputting any sense of separation or opposition between the two (Ramose 1999, 51). This is because, for him, both are aspects of the same reality. He frowns at the idea of ordinary language, which, according to him, creates a false impression of fixed and separate entities existing independently in relation to the subject-verb-object polarity. For him, these subject-verb-object polarities, introduced by ordinary language, "function as fixations to ideas and practices, which are somewhat dogmatic and hence unchangeable" (Ramose 1999, 50). Such dogmatic and immutable notions, for Ramose, constitute the foundation of 'fragmentative' thinking, which launches tension in 'be-ing-becoming,' and fragments it into bits of reality with an independence of their own (Ramose 1999, 51-2). Ramose understands reality within the framework of whole-ness rather than from the traditional concept of 'being and becoming,' which bifurcates reality. Thus, for him, be-ing-becoming, rather than being and becoming, constitutes reality. His aim is to institute a radical transformation in the traditional understanding of existence. He replaces the static notion of existence with a process view of reality as he believes that motion most essentially constitutes the fundamental nature of reality. The emphasis by Ramose in view of motion as constituting the fundamental principle of existence takes comfort in Peirce's view that motion permeates the nature of reality and that the idea of rest, as the ultimate goal or the antithesis of motion, with regards to the spiritual and the physical world, is a fiction (cited in Kevelson 1998). The hyphenated 'be-ing,' in Ramose's *ubuntu* ontology represents reality as a continuous flow of the stream of existence or as a kind of fluidity in existence (cf. Agada 2021, 9; Janz 2018, 217; 2019). His penchant for hyphenated be-ing underscores his quest for inexorable flow of existence as he was of the view that the unhyphenated 'being,' in the substance-based metaphysics, dogmatically attributes the category of permanence to reality. However, one wonders if Ramose was successful in subverting the substance-based view of reality with a dynamic conception of existence. This is, because his idea of be-ing-becoming, as captured in his *ubuntu*

ontology, still retains all the characteristics of the metaphysics of substance like rest, permanency and fixity.

As an alternative to the ordinary language, which distorts the original nature of reality, Ramose proposes the rheomodic language of *ubuntu*, which squarely locates reality within the flux of becoming. The term, *rheomode*, is coined from the Greek word 'rheo,' which means to flow and it represents 'a new mode' of language different from the ordinary language, which attempts to create a structure that does not polarize (see Ramose 1999, 56; cf. Bohm, 1980, 30-31). "It is a critique of thought and language structure that assumes and imposes a strict divide and a necessary sequence in terms of subject-verb-object" (Ramose 1999, 56). It understands reality and entities from the perspective of simultaneous multi-directionality. According to Ramose (1999, 56), "this understanding speaks to be-ing [reality] rather than be! It sustains and, at the same time, preserves the whole-ness and not the whole of be-ing [reality]." For him, the concept of whole is very much inadequate to capture the idea of reality because it connotes the idea that reality is fixed and replaces 'be-ing' with 'being.' Grasping be-ing or reality from this dimension, in Ramose's view, removes "the ancient opposition of motion and rest as principles of being [existence]" (Ramose 1999, 56). Thus, for Ramose, the *rheomodic* language of *ubuntu* captures reality as be-ing becoming and adopts the verb as its point of departure. The important function assigned to the verb is dependent on its critical role in de-emphasizing the doer or the subject while emphasizing the action. In this language, the verb assumes the function of a verbal noun that feeds the –ing and –ness which efficiently capture the world of becoming. The *rheomodic* language, here, becomes instrumental in demolishing the rigid borders set between the subject and the object by the ordinary language, through the principle of the gerund. The gerund, then, is the ontological foundation of *rheomode*.

Ramose's insistence that the ordinary language cannot capture the essence of reality is objectionable. One wonders if he succeeded in analyzing all the languages in the world in order to justify the assertion that language fragments reality and that the ordinary language is generally inadequate to capture the essence of reality. Furthermore, one also wonders if *rheomode,* as the philosophic language of *ubuntu,* possesses features different from the ordinary language, which has the capacity of breaking the silence of being or existence, without the mediation of ordinary language. This my critique is supported by the fact that even Ramose, himself, regards the *rheomodic* language as a mere possibility, experiment, and speculation (see Ramose 1999, 105). What I think Ramose should be advocating for is an appraisal of the ordinary language in view of how we can make it more efficient in understanding reality instead of a speculative and imaginative recommendation of a new language, which is somewhat private and may not be easily accessible by the global audience.

African philosophers have reacted to Ramose's conceptualization of African reality, within the framework of *ubuntu* ontology. Bernard Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013, 202) argued that *ubuntu* philosophy is unsuitable for complex multicultural societies as it imposes an idealized African way of life that makes Africans incapable of independent thought and the development of divergent views. This critique, in my own opinion, is unwarrantable. This is because, rather than condemning *ubuntu* and

dismissing it as outdated, as Matolino and Kwaindingwi may want to argue, the task of contemporary African philosophers should be the enhancement and refinement of the principles of *ubuntu* to accord with the contemporary African reality. However, this is beyond the scope of the present paper.

In a related manner, Asouzu (2007, 208) has insisted that "Ramose creates the impression that fragmentation does not belong to the character of being in the diverse modes of its self-expression in history. Were we to go by this assumption," according to him, "then the element of wholeness that he thinks is inherently characteristic of *ubuntu* ontology would be put into serious doubt." In my own view, in order to overcome the above loophole, it will be patronizing for Ramose to rethink his *ubuntu* ontology within the confines of an expanded holistic outlook and an expanded definition of the concept of whole-ness. Furthermore, Ramose posits the realm of the unknown and the invisible as the basis of *ubuntu* metaphysics. For him, the *ubuntu* understanding of reality subscribes to the metaphysical world as the world of "*u-nkulu-nkulu:* the greatest of the great" (Ramose, 1999, 63). He further posits that the silence of being or existence is broken through the philosophic *rheomodic* language of *ubuntu* and creates the impression that there is a tension existing between the world of *u-nkulu-ukulu* and other existing entities. However, he does not make clarification on how this tension can be resolved in order to break the silence of being across all levels of its self-expression. Additionally, the impression that easily comes to mind, with regard to *ubuntu* ontology, is that some regions of reality are estranged from the totality of the wholeness and this puts into serious question its claim of launching a coherent attack on 'fragmentative thinking' (cf. Asouzu 2007, 209). Indeed, Ramose attempts an articulation of the African worldview from a holistic interdependent perspective of be-ing-becoming. But, his designation of becoming as having priority over being, with reference to reality, calls this attempt into serious questioning. This informed the above loopholes in view of the tension arising with regards to some regions of reality in his *ubuntu* ontology. However, in my own view, Ramose can overcome these loopholes by adjusting his view that motion most essentially represents the original nature of reality. He should, rather, be a bit flexible, with his position, by according equal and complementary ontological status to both being and becoming. By doing this, the perceived tension that exits at some regions of being will be seen truly from a complementary, rather than from a conflictual perspective. Having articulated Ramose's *ubuntu* ontology, I will now proceed to examine this ontology and its cross-tradition engagement on the issue of being versus becoming.

2. *UBUNTU* ONTOLOGY AND ITS CROSS-TRADITION ENGAGEMENT ON THE ISSUE OF BEING VERSUS BECOMING

In this section, I will focus on *ubuntu* ontology and its cross-tradition engagement on the issue of being versus becoming, showing how *ubuntu* ontological account connects and distinguishes itself from other ontological accounts in other philosophical or ontological traditions such the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical tradition, the Buddhist tradition, the Heraclitean tradition, the Whiteheadean tradition and the Nietzschean tradition.

First, I will begin with the elucidation of *ubuntu* ontological account and its relation with the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision.

2.1   *UBUNTU* ONTOLOGY AND THE *YIN-YANG* METAPHYSICAL VISION

The Ramosean *ubuntu* ontological account, especially as enunciated in his concept of be-ing-becoming, can constructively engage with the becoming-being complementarity, which explains an account of the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision of the *Yi Jing* that reflects the collective wisdom of the ancient Chinese on the fundamental nature of reality. According to Mou (2003, 88), "…the guiding principle dimension of the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision consists in a reflective guiding principle polymerization of becoming-concerned and being-concerned perspectives which takes neither priority of becoming over being nor priority of being over becoming, but regards becoming-changing and being-unchanging as complementary *Yin-Yang* opposites in an organic unity." This indicates that the *Yin-Yang* ontology is an attempt to harmonize two aspects of reality – becoming and being – into a mutually interdependent and complementary opposites. This metaphysical vision constructively engages with Ramose's ambition in constructing a unifying principle of reality and complementary ontology that materializes in his idea of be-ing-becoming. In his *ubuntu* ontology, he posited the ideas of *ubu* and *ntu* representing the two words that collectively make up the concept of *ubuntu*, just like the two components of the *yin* and *yang* forces that collectively make up the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision. Also, like the *yang* force, in the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision, *ubu,* in the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology, represents reality in its universal, general, stable and unchanging mode, whereas, *ntu*, just like the *yin* force, in the *Yin-Yang* ontology, designates the idea of reality in its particular, unstable and changing mode. Furthermore, just as the *Ying-Yang* metaphysical vision recognizes the *yin* and the *yang* forces as two complementary aspects of reality, the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology also recognizes *ubu* and *ntu* as two complementary aspects of the same reality as Ramose posits that *ubu* is always oriented towards *ntu* (see Ramose 1999, 50). According to him, "there is no strict and literal separation and division between *ubu* and *ntu*. *Ubu* and *ntu* are not two radically separate and irreconcilably opposed realities. On the contrary, they are mutually founding in the sense that they are two aspects of reality as one-ness and indivisible whole-ness" (Ramose 1999, 50). Thus, in order to explain the complementary nature of *ubu* and *ntu*, Ramose posited the novel concept of *ubuntu* signifying the complementarity of *ubu* and *ntu* – being/unchanging and becoming/changing. To further enunciate and clearly represent this complementarity, he introduced the concept of "be-ing-becoming." The hyphen in-between "being" and "becoming" – be-ing-becoming – represents the harmony, complementarity and interdependency of *ubu* and *ntu* (being and becoming or *yang* and *yin*, in the *Ying-Yang* ontology). It is important to note that both the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology and the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision attempt to bridge the tension or opposition between being and becoming. However, while the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision attempts to bridge this tension between being and becoming – the *yang* and *yin* forces – by according equal metaphysical complementary status to both,

the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology, as captured in his idea of be-ing-becoming, prioritizes becoming over being. This prioritization of becoming over being distinguishes Ramose's *ubuntu* ontological account from the *Yin-Yang* metaphysics, which accords equal metaphysical status to both being and becoming and pushes towards their harmonization, complementarity, and interdependency. Furthermore, the Ramosean prioritization of becoming over being puts into doubt his ambition in bridging the tension between being and becoming in his *ubuntu* ontology, as I hinted earlier. In my own opinion, this is a loophole on the side of Ramose because this prioritization of becoming over being or rating of becoming higher than being creates the impression of battle for superiority between being and becoming in *ubuntu* ontology. This impression of battle for superiority or priority betrays a true and consistent complementarity, harmony and interdependency between being and becoming, which Ramose aims to achieve in his *ubuntu* ontology. However, despite this loophole in Ramose's *ubuntu* ontology, a constructive engagement of his *ubuntu* ontology with the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision will advance a cross-tradition approach to philosophizing. For instance, the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology can dialogue with and be complemented with the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical approach to overcome the above loophole, which I identified with regards to the consistency of complementarity that exists between being and becoming in *ubuntu* ontology. This can be done by the Ramosean acknowledgement of the equal metaphysical importance of the concepts of being and becoming. With this acknowledgement or adjustment in *ubuntu* ontology, the relation that exists between being and becoming can truly be seen as consistently complementary and harmonious. On the other hand, the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical approach can also talk with, understand, engage with and learn from *ubuntu* understanding of reality (as this is the essence of constructive engagement and cross-tradition approach to philosophizing and which this paper aims to achieve) especially, with regards to *ubuntu* idea that the notion of complementarity that exits between being and becoming can be extended to all spheres of life including the relations that exist between the living and the dead, as *ubuntu* ontology posits that the living-dead or the ancestors are in constant complementary relations with their descendants (the living) by keeping and protecting them, while the living complement this gesture by reverencing the ancestors and being in continuous communion with them (Ramose 1999, 64). This joint approach of understanding reality can advance the contemporary development of philosophy especially on the issue of being and becoming, as presented above. Furthermore, *ubuntu* ontological account has a close affinity with the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence.

2.2   *UBUNTU* ONTOLOGY AND THE BUDDHIST DOCTRINE
   OF IMPERMANENCE

Aside Ramose's *ubuntu's* ontological engagement with the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision, his idea of be-ing-becoming can be linked with the Indian early Buddhist doctrine of impermanence. For the Buddhists, all phenomena are impermanent. "The real things beyond appearances are" for them, "either non-existent or worth bracketing

because they are irrelevant to suffering" (Gokhale 2021, 1). The idea of non-permanency of things underscores most of Buddha's teaching. This doctrine can be understood from four perspectives. The empirical perspective, the conditioned object perspective, the causes and conditions perspective and the practical suffering and emancipation perspective. In the empirical perspective, the Buddha was critical of metaphysical transcendentalism and transcendental dogmatic beliefs and instead emphasizes the empirical world. In the conditioned object perspective, he insists that "all conditioned objects are impermanent" (Gokhale 2021, 2). While he argued that a phenomenon arises and ceases depending on its causes and conditions, in the causes and conditions perspective, he contends, in the practical suffering and emancipation perspective, that though the phenomena is non-permanent, but due to misconception and ignorance, we take them to be permanent and build attachment or hatred towards them and suffering arises as a result of this (cf. Gokhale 2021, 3). Thus, the Buddhists argue that impermanence or non-substantiality is the basis of things. It is interesting to note that the Buddhists and Ramose accepted the doctrine of rebirth and the wheel of becoming in their ontological accounts (see Majeed and Ramose 2019, 139; Gokhale 2021, 3). However, while the Buddhists' doctrine of rebirth is based on misconception and craving towards phenomena, that of Ramose was hinged on the idea of reincarnation. Furthermore, while the Buddha gave less attention to trans-empirical metaphysical issues, like the existence of the eternal atman, in his doctrine of impermanence, Ramose boldly confronted them in his philosophy, specifically in his idea of reincarnation (see Majeed and Ramose 2019). Notwithstanding Ramose's engagement with the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence, his *ubuntu* ontology can further be engaged with the Heraclitean philosophy of change.

2.3   *UBUNTU* ONTOLOGY AND THE HERACLITEAN ENDLESS FLUX

Ramose's *ubuntu* ontology can be engaged with the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus. Before Ramose, Heraclitus had attempted to conceptualize the basic principle of reality from the perspective of becoming. His chief doctrine states that everything is in a state of flux, undergoing constant change. The implication of this Heraclitean assertion is that permanent immutable substance is non-existent as ultimate reality is essentially a mutable substance, always developing and constantly in a state of flux (see Freeman 1984). Fundamentally, for Heraclitus, reality consists of torrents of change. Ramose would buy into this Heraclitean philosophy of becoming as he believes that motion is the principle of reality even though his *ubuntu* ontology claims to bridge the tension between being and becoming. Furthermore, Ramose's ontological account differs from that of Heraclitus given that Heraclitus boldly and radically prioritizes becoming over being whereas Ramose's main intention is to reconcile the tension between being and becoming, as enunciated in his idea of be-ing-becoming, despite that he ended up prioritizing or ranking being above becoming as regards the constitution of the fundamental nature of reality. Furthermore, the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontological connection with the Heraclitean philosophy also reminds one of its close affinity with Nietzsche's philosophy of becoming.

2.4   *UBUNTU* ONTOLOGY AND NIETZSCHE'S IDEA OF BECOMING

Apart from Ramose's ontological affinity with the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision, Heraclitean endless flux and the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence, his *ubuntu* ontology can also constructively engage with the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, especially his philosophy of becoming. Nietzsche's philosophic enterprise attempts to replace being with becoming. This informed his assertion that "to impose upon becoming the character of being – that is the supreme will to power…[and] that everything recurs is the closest approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being…" (Nietzsche 1968, 330). This implies that Nietzsche's main philosophical intention, as hinted above, is to replace the concept of being with the idea of becoming.

Nietzsche, just like Ramose, launches a strong attack against the metaphysics of substance by contending that becoming constitutes true reality. This informs his quest to substitute the idea of a fixed being with the notion of becoming. This further informs why he declared the death of God, in *The Gay Science* (see Nietzsche 2001, 119-120), which portends, for him, the collapse of the metaphysics of substance and, subsequently, the enthronement of becoming. Ramose adopted the same line of thought in his *ubuntu* ontology. Just like Nietzsche, Ramose also projects his *ubuntu* ontology, as symbolized in his concept of be-ing-becoming, as an attack on the substance-based metaphysics. This is why he maintains that motion and ceaseless becoming define the basic principle of reality (see Ramose 1999, 51). However, while the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology does not radically subvert the substance-based metaphysics by attempting to reconcile the opposition between being and becoming, Nietzsche affirms a complete repudiation and total abolition of the concept of being. Interestingly, both thinkers agree that motion or becoming is the basic principle of reality.

From Nietzsche's perspective, language creates an erroneous impression of permanency and fixity of reality, which should be totally repudiated and completely rejected. This informs why he contends that language or the "linguistic means of expression are useless for expressing 'becoming'" because, according to Nietzsche, "it accords with our inevitable need to preserve ourselves to posit a crude world of stability of 'things'" (Nietzsche 1968, 380). This same line of thought fuels Ramose's thinking. For him, the fragmentation of reality, in relation to the opposition between be-ing and becoming, is perpetuated using the instrumentality of language (see Ramose 1999, 51-52). Just like Nietzsche, ordinary language, for Ramose, is incapable of breaking the silence of reality and gives the false impression that things are fixed, changeless and immutable. This is unacceptable, for Ramose, because, according to him, motion is the principle of reality (Ramose 1999, 51-52). This also indicates that both Nietzsche and Ramose see language as incapable of capturing the essence of reality. However, Ramose makes an exception for the *rheomodic* philosophic language of *ubuntu,* which, in his view, is capable of breaking this silence of reality. I have argued above that the Ramosean *rheomodic* language is too speculative and imaginative and that Ramose should be more realistic and pragmatic with reference to this. Despite its connection

with the Nietzschean philosophy of becoming, Ramose's *ubuntu* ontological account can further engage with the Whiteheadean process metaphysics.

2.5   *UBUNTU* ONTOLOGY AND THE WHITEHEADEAN PROCESS METAPHYSICS

Ramose's *ubuntu* ontology can also constructively engage with the Whiteheadean (English philosopher's) process metaphysics. Recall that Ramose's intention is to institute a radical transformation in the traditional understanding of existence which motivated his replacement of a static notion of existence with a dynamic or process view of reality. This process view of reality can be engaged with Whitehead's process metaphysics, where the universe is presented as a dynamic process of formation, creativity and interdependence of what he calls the 'actual entities.' Whitehead contends that the universe is in a state of becoming, perishing and transformation into other forms of existence (see Whitehead 1929). He uses the concept of actual entities or organism to replace the traditional idea of substance. In his view, these actual entities are interdependent and mutually cooperative in nature (Whitehead 1929). Interestingly, Ramose's *ubuntu* ontology can engage with the Whiteheadean process metaphysics from the perspective of interdependency and complementary outlook of both ontologies, even though Ramose's ultimate essentialization of becoming puts a question mark on his *ubuntu* ontological claim of complementarity. Also, both the actual entities and the ordinary entities in Whitehead and Ramose are border-transgressing in view of their interdependent outlook. Additionally, both philosophers agree that reality is constantly in a state of flux. Going further, both thinkers are against the substance-based metaphysics. While Whitehead substitutes the metaphysical notion of substance with actual entities, Ramose does same with be-ing-becoming. In the following section, I will show how the constructive engagement of *ubuntu* ontology with the above change or becoming-emphasizing accounts can promote a cross-cultural or cross tradition engagement approach to doing philosophy.

3.   *UBUNTU* ONTOLOGY AND CROSS-TRADITION ENGAGEMENT APPROACH TO PHILOSOPHIZING

As already hinted above, *ubuntu* ontological account in African philosophy can constructively engage with the other traditions' account, as discussed above, on the issue of being versus becoming and, as such, advance a cross-tradition approach to philosophizing. In other words, *ubuntu* ontology can promote cross-cultural philosophizing through the exhibition of its areas of convergence and divergence with the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision, the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence, the Heraclitean and Nietzschean philosophy of becoming, as well as the Whiteheadean process metaphysics. This will facilitate a meaningful, constructive and broader understanding of these ontologies as well as their contributions to one another on the issues of the relation between being and becoming.

Admittedly, the Ramosean, Heraclitean, Nietzschean, Buddhist and Whiteheadean ontologies embrace the dynamic view of reality by positing that motion and becoming are the basic features of existence. For instance, Ramose is of the view that motion constitutes the most basic principle of reality (see Ramose 1999, 51); the Buddhists posit that impermanence, becoming or non-substantiality is the basis of all phenomena (Gokhale 2021, 1); Heraclitus contends that everything is in a state of flux, undergoing constant change (see Freeman 1984); Nietzsche writes that becoming is the fundamental element of reality (Nietzsche 1968) and Whitehead argues that the universe is in a state of becoming (Whitehead 1929). In other words, all the traditions prioritize becoming over being, except the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision that accords equal ontological status to both being and becoming by seeing both aspects of reality as complementary to each other (see Mou 2003, 88). Even though the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology would claim to articulate a holistic, complementary and interdependent view of reality, which, in a sense, is similar to the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision, by positing the unity of being and becoming, as enunciated in his concept of 'be-ing-becoming,' his ultimate essentialization of becoming as the most basic principle of being puts this claim into doubt, as I have pointed out above.

The Ramosean, Heraclitean, Buddhist, Nietzschean and Whiteheadean ontological accounts are against the substance-based metaphysical notions of permanency and fixity with reference to being by adopting a dynamic view of reality with the exception of the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision that accords equal ontological recognition to becoming and being – the changing and the unchanging or the *Yin* and the *Yang* forces. For instance, Ramose replaces the metaphysics of substance, which accords priority to only being, with his ontology of be-ing-becoming, which ultimately essentialises becoming, Nietzsche does same with his replacement of being with becoming, while Whitehead followed the same line of thought with his postulation of the actual entities which are dynamic and in constant motion and which constitutes a replacement of the metaphysics of substance with the metaphysics of becoming or process metaphysics. The same can be said, with equal importance, of the Buddhists' doctrine of non-substantiality as the basis of reality and the Heraclitean assertion that permanent immutable substance is not defensible as ultimate reality is essentially a mutable substance (see Freeman 1984). Thus, all the ontological accounts or traditions frown at the metaphysics of substance except the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical vision as a result of its complementary status on the issue of the relation between being and becoming as hinted earlier.

While the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontological tradition would recognize the African view of reality as holistic (see Ramose 1999), the Nietzschean and Whiteheadean traditions would see reality from the angle of ontological pluralism or multiplicity (see Nietzsche 1968; Whitehead 1929). This is the case, because Nietzsche maintains that multiple perspectives and wills to power, which are in constant play of overcoming, define the essence of reality (see Nietzsche 2001, 239-230). The Whiteheadean processual view of existence would also toe this line of thought in view of his postulation of multiplicity of actual entities as constituting the nature of reality.

The Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology acknowledges the realm or world of the highest value in its notion of *u-nkulu-nkulu,* which it describes as the world of metaphysics and "the greatest of the great" (Ramose 1999, 63), but thinkers like Nietzsche, Heraclitus and the early Buddhist traditions of thought would object to this. For instance, the early Buddhist tradition paid less attention to trans-empirical metaphysical issues (see Gokhale 2021, 3). In a similar manner, Nietzsche does not also recognize trans-empirical metaphysical world as his entire philosophic enterprise is geared towards the abolition and repudiation of metaphysics. To be precise, his declaration of the death of God represents the affirmation of the death of the highest values and the collapse of the metaphysical world (see Nietzsche 2001; cf. Ojimba and Agada 2020 and Heidegger 1977, 61). However, the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical tradition would not subscribe to the repudiation or abolition of the metaphysical world of being as it gave proper attention both to the empirical and trans-empirical-metaphysical worlds, thus according the two worlds of being and becoming – the *Yang* and *Yin* worlds or forces equal metaphysical standing (see Mou 2003, 88).

While the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology will understand the cosmos as a continued striving for harmony and unity, which authenticates and legitimizes it (see Ramose 1999, 53), philosophers like Nietzsche and Heraclitus, who identify reality as endless strife or struggle would frown against such. For instance, Nietzsche would see reality as locked up in endless struggle and continuous play of overcoming (see Nietzsche 1968, 341) and this, for him, constitutes the authentic character of reality. Heraclitus would toe the same line of thought as Nietzsche, as he posits that strife characterizes the nature of reality (Freeman 1984). However, the *Yin-Yang* ontological tradition would take a different view from the above due to its conceptualization of reality from the perspective of complementarity.

Interestingly, one positive dimension of the Ramosean, Heraclitean, Nietzschean, Whiteheadean, Buddhists and the *Yin-Yang* ontological accounts of reality is that they draw our attention to the fact that no one view of reality has the absolute understanding of reality with regards to the question of being and becoming. This, therefore, calls for a complementary approach with reference to a better understanding of reality. This is the essence of cross-tradition approach to philosophizing, where these ontological traditions can come together to dialogue with one another, learn from them, complement them, talk with them, engage with them, understand them and make joint contributions to the contemporary development of philosophy as well as widen their cultural, intellectual and conceptual horizons. For instance, the Asian and the European readers will be acquainted with the cultural background of *ubuntu* ontology as enunciated in the Igbo-African cultural practice of *ikwa ogwe,* especially, as it relates to its idea of wholeness, oneness, complementarity, mutuality, family-hood, cooperation and interdependency. *Ikwa ogwe* expresses the philosophy of 'missing link' (see Asouzu, 2007), where each link sees itself as mutually cooperative, complementary, and interdependent. It is a cultural practice in the Igbo-African tradition, which involves moving heavy logs of wood from one location of the forest to another, where the services of the youths between the age brackets of 18-40 years (with no remuneration attached) are solicited. This cultural practice is usually accompanied

by cultural drummers, flute blowers and traditional dancers for the purpose of entertaining and energizing the youths while collectively and cooperatively moving the heavy logs. At this level, the individual effort of each youth is required for a successful movement of the logs. Here, no individual youth sees himself as more important than the other but believes in their collective and mutual efforts to accomplish the task (successfully moving the heavy logs from one location of the forest to another). Similarly, different ontological traditions, as analyzed above, can see themselves as 'missing links' of reality in order to talk with, understand, engage with, complement, learn from and cooperate with one another with a view to reaching a more comprehensive view of reality, as exemplified in the cultural practice of *ubuntu* and concertized in the Igbo-African cultural practice of *ikwa ogwe* and not see themselves as absolute or irreconcilable opposites (see Ramose 1999, 50). As Ramose expresses that *ubu* and *ntu* are mutually founding, complementary and interdependent (see Ramose 1999, 64), each ontological tradition or view of the world can see itself as an aspect of reality, which requires the mutual interdependency and complementarity of other views of the world or other ontological traditions to reach a fuller understanding of reality. For instance, the radical emphasis on the idea of becoming, neglecting the idea of being, as instantiated in the Heraclitean, Nietzschean and the Buddhists' ontological traditions can be balanced and complemented with the *Yin-Yang* metaphysical approach that construes being and becoming as complementary opposites and two aspects of the same reality. Also, the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontological tradition, which I have identified above, as not consistently complementary (even though Ramose intends to construct a complementary ontology) can make up in this direction borrowing from the consistent complementary approach of the *Yin-Yang* ontology. This is the essence of cross-tradition approach to doing philosophy as the joint and complementary approach of these ontological traditions can help us understand better the concepts of being and becoming thereby advancing the contemporary development of philosophy.

At the level of social ontology, the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology can promote the attitude of mutual respect and tolerance between individuals, even at the global level, notwithstanding their different cultural backgrounds. Just as Ramose posits that *ubu* and *ntu* are mutually founding, complementary and two aspects of the same reality and that this complementarity cuts across all spheres of life and can be extended to even the relation that exists between the ancestors and their living descendants, which brings to mind his concept of "cosmic harmony" (see Ramose 1999, 50-64), the individual human persons can as well see themselves as complementary aspects of the same humanity and not seeing the other as an object of discrimination and ridicule on the basis of culture, race, language or skin color. This will encourage harmonious relationship and peaceful co-existence between different individuals and cultures even at the global level. It will also encourage the attitude of love, cooperation, complementarity, and solidarity between them and facilitate the sharing of thoughts and ideas between them bearing in mind that none of them will see itself as more superior or having better understanding of reality more than the others. Just as Ramose intends to reconcile the tension that exists between being and becoming (see Ramose

1999, 64), human beings and cultures can as well reconcile cultural tensions and conflict of ideologies leveraging on the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology that construes reality as mutually founding, complementary and sees all as aspects of this one reality.

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This paper set out to explore Ramose's *ubuntu* ontological account in African philosophy and its cross-tradition engagement on the issues of being versus becoming (such as the *Yin-Yang,* Buddhist, Nietzschean, Heraclitean and Whiteheadean ontological engagements or traditions) with a view to showing how convergence and divergence of thoughts in these ontological traditions can advance a cross-tradition approach to philosophizing. To accomplish this task, the paper has highlighted the Ramosean *ubuntu* ontology and its cross-tradition engagements with the above-mentioned ontological accounts on the issue of being versus becoming as well as how this can promote cross-traditionality in philosophizing. It noted that notwithstanding the areas of differences and similarities in these ontological accounts, their constructive engagement will advance a cross-tradition approach to doing philosophy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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