



**Queensland University of Technology**  
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

[West, Andrew](#)

(2014)

Ubuntu and business ethics: Problems, perspectives and prospects.  
*Journal of Business Ethics*, 121(1), pp. 47-61.

This file was downloaded from: <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/84413/>

© Copyright 2014 Springer

**Notice:** *Changes introduced as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing and formatting may not be reflected in this document. For a definitive version of this work, please refer to the published source:*

<http://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-013-1669-3>

## ***Ubuntu* and business ethics: Problems, perspectives and prospects**

### **Abstract**

The African philosophy of *Ubuntu* is typically characterised as a communitarian philosophy that emphasises virtues such as compassion, tolerance and harmony. In recent years there has been growing interest in this philosophy, and in how it can be applied to a variety of disciplines and issues. Several authors have provided useful introductions of *Ubuntu* in the field of business ethics and suggested theoretical ways in which it could be applied. The purpose of this paper is to extend this discussion by providing a more critical analysis of *Ubuntu* and business ethics with the aim of clarifying the role that *Ubuntu* can play, and providing guidance for further research in this area. The analysis consists of three sections. In the first, certain problems are identified within the existing literature. This is followed by a consideration of alternative perspectives and interpretations of *Ubuntu*. The last section, following from the first two, identifies specific areas requiring further research, both empirical and non-empirical, as well as ways in which *Ubuntu* could be fruitfully applied.

**Keywords:** Ubuntu, South Africa, African philosophy, Africa

## ***Ubuntu* and business ethics: Problems, perspectives and prospects**

In recent years there has been growing interest in the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, and how it can be applied to various issues. An increasingly sophisticated philosophical literature has developed around the concept of *Ubuntu*, and a number of scholars have proposed applications in the sphere of business ethics. As a communitarian philosophy that stresses the importance of inter-personal relationships and values such as harmony and care, it clearly has relevance for the business sphere. Previous research in this area has contributed by providing an introduction to the concept and several interpretations of how *Ubuntu* could apply to business and business ethics. However, this requires ongoing analysis and reflection. The purpose of this paper is to extend the analysis of *Ubuntu* and business ethics with the intention of more clearly identifying the role that *Ubuntu* can play in the sphere of business ethics and providing guidance for further research in this area.

This purpose is achieved in three ways. Firstly, by reviewing the literature on *Ubuntu* and business ethics and considering some of the arguments therein. Specific problems are identified concerning empirical claims that have been made, and ambiguities regarding the distinctiveness of *Ubuntu* itself. Secondly, through a discussion of other research relevant to *Ubuntu* (although not specifically dealing with business ethics), including a number of cross-cultural empirical studies and alternative philosophical perspectives. Lastly, following the preceding analysis, by considering the prospects for future research and providing suggestions for more fruitful applications of *Ubuntu* in the area of business ethics. This includes the identification of specific research questions and areas that require further research (both empirical and non-empirical), as well as a consideration of *Ubuntu's* role in reconciliation and nation-building, and Metz's *Ubuntu* ethics of harmony as an example of a more analytical approach to the subject.

The paper is structured so as to address each of these three areas in turn. However, before the literature on *Ubuntu* and business ethics can be considered, some consideration of the epistemological assumptions that underlie this paper and a brief overview of what is meant by *Ubuntu* is necessary.

## **EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS**

The following assumptions underlie the analysis presented in this paper. Firstly, truth claims require justification with reasons that are acceptable, adequate and relevant (Hughes *et al.*, 2010). In the absence of such reasons, claims are not justified. Unjustified claims are not, however, necessarily false. Secondly, empirical claims require empirical justification. Thirdly, within an academic context, for empirical evidence to meet the criteria of acceptability and adequacy some methods of ensuring the validity and reliability of findings must have been adopted (Saunders *et al.*, 2000). Relevant empirical evidence that is obtained and analysed using such methods should be considered, but the acceptability and adequacy of such evidence is subject to the limitations of the research procedures involved.

As there are no ways of assessing or ensuring the validity and reliability of anecdotal evidence and personal experience, these are not considered to provide acceptable or adequate support for empirical generalisations made in an academic context. This is not to say that anecdotes and personal experience do not have an important epistemological role in our personal views, day-to-day lives, and in generating research questions and ideas. This also does not require that one is committed to a view of knowledge being completely objective and/or impersonal; personal judgements remain necessary in interpreting and evaluating claims and evidence.

Like all epistemological assumptions, these can be subjected to criticism. It is not the purpose of this paper to argue that this position is necessarily true or self-evident, and those who disagree with this stance may not agree with the analysis presented. Nevertheless this stance is adopted as it underlies a great deal of work in business ethics (as well as philosophy and science more generally) and is compatible with positivist and phenomenological / interpretive, quantitative and qualitative research approaches.

### **WHAT IS UBUNTU?<sup>1</sup>**

Scholars of *Ubuntu* often note how the concept cannot easily be translated, or adequately conveyed, in English. Nevertheless, the concept is variously translated as “African humanness” (Broodryk, 2002, p. 13), “humanity” (Shutte, 2001, p. 2), “humanism or humaneness” (Mnyaka and Motlhabi, 2009, p. 63), or “the process of becoming an ethical human being” (Mkhize, 2008, p. 35). Most scholars explain *Ubuntu* as a communitarian ethic by referring to an African aphorism: ‘*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ (or slight variations thereof), which itself can be translated in various ways, such as “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am” (Mbiti, 1989, p. 106)<sup>2</sup>, or “persons depends on persons to be persons” (Shutte, 2001, p. 8).

*Ubuntu* can also be explained in terms of its etymology. Ramose (1999, p. 50) argues that *Ubuntu* is best understood as a combination of ‘*ubu-*’ meaning ‘being’ or ‘be-ing becoming’, and ‘*-ntu*’ representing ‘being’ taking concrete form, or “temporarily having become” (1999, p. 51)<sup>3</sup>. Mkhize (2008, p. 41) maintains a similar interpretation, but notes that ‘*-ntu*’ refers specifically to human beings. As a Nguni word, *Ubuntu* is South African, but a number of scholars (such as Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2009, p. 63) and Ramose (2003a, p. 326)) point out

that there are equivalent words in Tswana and Shona, thereby including Botswana and Zimbabwe (see also Samkange and Samkange (1980)). Kamwangamalu (1999, p. 25) observes that the concept may extend to Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola, and Ramose (1999) suggests it may reflect sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. Mkhize (2008, p. 36) even draws attention to parallels between *Ubuntu* and the ancient Egyptian concept of *Maat*.

All explanations of *Ubuntu* emphasise its nature as a communitarian ethic, and it is often contrasted with Western individualism. Ramose (2003c, p. 231) identifies ontological and epistemological aspects of *Ubuntu*, and his explanation of the aphorism ‘*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ captures both its ontological and ethical dimensions:

*to be a human be-ing is to affirm one’s humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them. Ubuntu, understood as be-ing human (humanness); a human, respectful and polite attitude towards others constitutes the core meaning of this aphorism.*

The ethical content of *Ubuntu* is frequently articulated by providing a list of values or virtues which are consistent with, and required by, *Ubuntu*. Mkhize (2008, p. 43) notes that *Ubuntu* “incorporates ideas of social justice, righteousness, care, empathy for others and respect”. Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2009, p. 74) write that *Ubuntu* “is inclusive ... it is best realised in deeds of kindness, compassion, caring, sharing, solidarity and sacrifice.” Nussbaum (2009b, p. 100) claims that *Ubuntu* “is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community”. Broodryk (2002, p. 32) identifies the core values of *Ubuntu* as humanness, caring, sharing, respect and compassion, and for each these provides several additional ‘associated’ values<sup>4</sup>.

Despite the broad agreement (at least in general terms), significant ambiguities remain. Some scholars (such as Mkhize (2008) and Mafunisa (2008)) consider *Ubuntu* to be religious, where one's ancestors are as much a part of the community as living humans. Others (such as Metz (2007)) prefer a purely secular interpretation. Whether *Ubuntu* is distinctively African or universal is also unclear, as some scholars (such as Nussbaum (2009b)) draw attention to exemplars of *Ubuntu* in Western countries, while others (Metz, 2007; Mnyaka and Motlhabi, 2009) argue that it is particular to (or particularly prominent amongst) black African peoples (Broodryk (2002, p. 27) is unusual in including Afrikaans and Cape Afrikaans words alongside Bantu words meaning *Ubuntu*). As indicated above, there is also a proliferation of values or virtues that can be associated with *Ubuntu*, with the possible consequence that *Ubuntu* comes to mean no more than what is good or virtuous.

In recent years attempts have been made to apply *Ubuntu* to a range of issues and disciplines, including the law (Bennett, 2011; Sloth-Nielsen and Gallinetti, 2011), education (Mungwini, 2011; Muwanga-Zake, 2009), health (Mji *et al.*, 2011; Outwater *et al.*, 2005) and psychology (Berg *et al.*, 2011; Hanks, 2008). Similarly, there have been several papers in the academic business ethics literature (Lutz, 2009; Ntibagirirwa, 2009; Prinsloo, 2000), book chapters that deal explicitly with *Ubuntu* and business (Ndiweni, 2008; Nussbaum, 2009a; Shutte, 2001), and publications in both the popular and academic management literature (Karsten and Illa, 2005; Khomba and Vermaak, 2012a, 2012b; Khomba *et al.*, 2012; Lundin and Nelson, 2010; Mangaliso, 2001; Mbigi and Maree, 2005).

## **UBUNTU AND BUSINESS ETHICS: THE EXISTING LITERATURE**

Two arguments can be identified that pervade much of the existing literature on *Ubuntu* and business ethics. The first argument claims that economic systems should reflect the value systems of their societies, that sub-Saharan African societies maintain the values of *Ubuntu* (values that are different to those in the West), and therefore that economic systems in sub-Saharan Africa should reflect the values of *Ubuntu*. This argument is expressed by Ntibatirwa (2009) and to some extent by Ndiweni (2008) and Lutz (2009) (see also Murove (2008, 2009)), although Ndiweni focuses on corporate governance and Lutz on business education, rather than economic systems. Implicit in this argument is that systems based on *Ubuntu* would be significantly different from other (usually Western) economic systems.

The second argument claims that *Ubuntu*, as a distinctive ethic, can contribute significantly to the development of business ethics globally. This is expressed, to varying extents, by Lutz (2009), Prinsloo (2000), Shutte (2001) and Nussbaum (2009a).

There are, however, several problems with both of the arguments as they have been presented. These require some attention as they significantly impact on the success of these arguments, and ultimately on the role that *Ubuntu* can play within business ethics.

### **Empirical claims**

The first argument described above includes the premise that sub-Saharan African societies maintain the values of *Ubuntu*, values that are different to those maintained by Western societies. This is an empirical claim that requires empirical justification. However, there is very little, if any, empirical support provided in the literature to support this claim. Instead, it is simply assumed, or categorically stated, that Africans do in fact maintain the values of



*Ubuntu* and that their values differ from those in the West. Ntibagirirwa (2009, p. 304), for example, states that

*most Africans still retain most of their values: they still converse in their own languages, still have their African style homes, African food, and Africans' world views, and value systems remain noticeably different from those of the West.*

Ntibagirirwa cites Matthews in support, yet Matthews (2004, p. 379) herself merely states that African values and world-views differ from those in the West, she does not provide any supporting evidence. Similarly, Lutz (2009, p. 315) claims that “it is true generally that Africans are less individualistic, more communal than Westerners”, but does not provide any empirical support<sup>5</sup>.

In some cases anecdotal evidence is provided to support this premise. Ndiweni (2008), for example, argues for a corporate governance framework to be informed by *Ubuntu* and identified a number of Corporate Social Responsibility practices by certain businesses in Zimbabwe as examples of *Ubuntu* in practice. These include the provision of educational assistance, scholarships, apprenticeships, subsidised accommodation and financial assistance. It is questionable, however, whether these do in fact reflect an African value system that differs from values maintained in the West, as many of these activities are replicated by companies in Western countries<sup>6</sup>. As noted earlier, although anecdotal evidence may influence one's personal views and may generate valuable ideas that can become the subject of research projects, in an academic context such evidence is insufficient to support the generalisation that sub-Saharan African societies maintain the values of *Ubuntu*, values that are different to those maintained in the West.

Appeal may also be made to the personal experience of *Ubuntu* scholars and of prominent Africans that support *Ubuntu*. Personal experiences can be a valuable source of information where they can provide practical examples of a particular phenomenon (and can also generate valuable research questions). However, within an academic context, such experiences are not sufficient to justify general claims concerning the value systems of societies. This is even more problematic when the claims concern differences between societies, as this requires generalisation of more than one society's values, as well as when there are multiple, varying personal experiences that support different conclusions.

The inadequacy of anecdotes and personal experience in supporting general empirical claims in an academic context is not limited to those supporting the premise discussed above. Those who argue, on the basis of anecdote and personal experience, that Africans do not maintain the values of *Ubuntu* are subject to the same criticism. Ultimately, a critical approach to general empirical claims requires that, in an academic context, we discount evidence based on anecdote and personal experience as unacceptable and inadequate, and favour evidence obtained through more systematic methods that include steps to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

Regarding the first argument presented above, the claim that sub-Saharan Africans maintain the values of *Ubuntu*, values that are different to those maintained in the West, has therefore not been adequately justified in the existing literature. This has an important implication, as the conclusion of the argument (that economic systems in sub-Saharan Africa should reflect the values of *Ubuntu*) relies on the truth of this premise. Note, however, that this does not mean that either the premise or the conclusion is false (only that their truth has not yet been demonstrated).

### **The distinctiveness of *Ubuntu***

Many explanations of *Ubuntu* contrast it with the values of Western society, commonly expressed as an individualistic ethic. However, the presentation of Western values and/or business theories in the literature is at times questionable. For example, Ntibagirirwa describes Western social life wherein “the individual could now act unconstrained by the society and the hierarchical authority” (2009, p. 302) and regarding economic development, contrasts an African ethic with “the neo-liberal belief that self-interest and rational choice require that the market run the economic show alone, thus excluding the state and the people” (2009, p. 307).

On a practical level, commercial law and regulation provide examples of how Western society and authority place specific constraints on individual actions. Furthermore, even some of the more ardent supporters of a shareholder-oriented approach to capitalism, such as Milton Friedman (1970), mention constraints to individual actions. Friedman described executives’ responsibilities as

*[conducting] the business in accordance with their [shareholders’] desires, which generally will be to make as much money as possible while conforming to the basic rules of the society, both those embodied in law and those embodied in ethical custom.*  
(1970, p. 33)

Even if what exactly ‘ethical custom’ comprises is subject to ongoing reflection and debate, Friedman did not consider executives to be unconstrained. Other theorists have more recently argued for shareholder wealth maximisation and/or the prioritisation of shareholder interests, subject to certain ethical and legal constraints. These include Sternberg (1997, 2000), Sundarum & Inkpen (2004a, 2004b), and Coelho *et al.* (2003a, 2003b)<sup>7</sup>. These theorists

provide an ethical context for the shareholder oriented versions of Western capitalism and yet they are typically not considered when *Ubuntu* is contrasted with Western capitalism. (Lutz (2009, p. 313), for example, specifically rejects shareholder wealth maximisation theories that advocate acting unethically in the maximisation of shareholder wealth, but does not address shareholder-oriented theories that incorporate ethical and legal constraints.) This is not to say, however, that these shareholder-oriented theorists have necessarily succeeded in their arguments, or that such theories are above criticism on ethical grounds, only that they deserve attention in any evaluation of the ethics of Western capitalism.

Ntibagirirwa's claim that the state and the people are excluded from the economic sphere is also undermined by the continued debate that has taken place in Western nations over the last century regarding the optimum level of regulation of private enterprise, and by the popular political catchphrase heard in Western democracies at election time: 'it's the economy, stupid!'. Both the state and the general population have important roles to play in achieving economic development in Western nations, the role of the market is primarily one of allocating resources effectively and efficiently.

These characterisations of Western values and business theories can serve to create a 'space' for *Ubuntu* as a value system that is different, and that stands in stark opposition to the dominant values underlying Western business and economics. Yet, *Ubuntu* scholars also acknowledge the similarities that *Ubuntu* has with other value systems. Prinsloo (2000, p. 277) acknowledges similarities with Christianity, Communism, Liberalism, Socialism, Democracy and Capitalism, claims that "*Ubuntu* vocabulary is not unfamiliar to Western thinking" (2000, p. 283), and even that "*Ubuntu* is not altogether new or even not at all new, different or unique" (2000, p. 284). Lutz (2009) identifies similarities with Confucianism and Plato-Aristotelian ethics, and also acknowledges that "although some features of *Ubuntu* are

distinctively African, its essential features are not, because it is rooted in human nature, which is common to the entire human race” (2009, p. 319).

Shutte (2001) provides a different approach. He develops an *Ubuntu* ethic which combines elements of both Western and African ethics, where the former contributes the concept of ‘freedom’ and the latter that of ‘community’. Together these reflect the personal growth that occurs in relation to others, demonstrated in mother/child, master/student and friend/friend relationships. In applying this to the world of work, Shutte argues that work needs to be humanised, and that work must serve humanity, not vice versa. In support, Shutte draws on the writings of Karl Marx, Pope John Paul II, Simone Weil and E.F. Schumacher amongst others, but does not include any African references at all. Nussbaum’s (2009a) reflections are similar in that she argues for a humanistic approach to business, but also draws largely on Westerners such as business advisor Verna Allee and uses Western companies as examples. As such, her discussion does not seem to differ significantly from contemporary discussion around ‘sustainable business’. The work of both Shutte and Nussbaum questions whether the values of *Ubuntu* are distinctively African.

The degree to which *Ubuntu* provides a distinctive ethic that can contribute to global business ethics thus remains unclear. Lutz (2009) argues that *Ubuntu* entails a vision of corporations as communities that differs from Western interpretations, stating that “the purpose of management is ... [not] to benefit many collections of individuals, as stakeholder theories tell us, but to benefit the community, as well as the larger communities of which it is part” (2009, p. 318), adding that “to promote the good of a community is to promote the good of all its members” (2009, p. 318). However, it is not yet clear how, conceiving of the corporation as a community, it is to be promoted in ways that differ from contemporary Western practices (including stakeholder management). In this regard it is worth considering the practices of

highly successful Western businesses that do not prioritise shareholder wealth maximisation over all else (see, for example, Collins and Porras (1994) and Waterman (1994)). Coelho *et al.*'s (2003a, p. 17) argument that shareholder capitalism serves the public interest is also relevant. They argue, using an example of mousetrap production, that competition and open markets results in benefits for consumers, suppliers, and the general public (through improved mice control and public health).

Prinsloo (2000) provides a more practical application of *Ubuntu*, discussing Mbigi's case study of the Eastern Highlands Tea Estates that shows how in the African context, bottom-up participative management practices can prove successful. Apart from the inclusion of some African customs, he does not, however, indicate how the case study illustrates values that are not (or that are less) prevalent in Western contexts. Indeed, the participative management style he describes in the case study is familiar to many Western management courses. Nussbaum's (2009a) reflections on *Ubuntu* are again similar – she describes a successful program of employee participation at a South African company, and draws similarities with a program in an American company.

The acknowledgement that *Ubuntu* values are universal, and the absence of distinctively African business practices that correspond to the values of *Ubuntu* questions the degree to which *Ubuntu* presents a distinctive ethic that can inform business ethics globally. Greater clarity regarding what is meant by *Ubuntu* and the degree to which *Ubuntu* values are universal or particular to Africa is required.

## **OTHER PERSPECTIVES AND RESEARCH ON *UBUNTU***

There are a number of other perspectives and empirical studies that also have an impact on our understanding of the concept of *Ubuntu*, and the role that it can play in business ethics. These remain unacknowledged, or under-acknowledged in the existing literature on *Ubuntu* and business ethics, or make more recent contributions that require consideration in future.

### **Existing cross-cultural studies**

Although the existing research on *Ubuntu* and business ethics does not provide adequate empirical evidence to support the claim that sub-Saharan Africans maintain the values of *Ubuntu*, several cross-cultural studies within the management literature have included African respondents in their research, and could provide some evidence regarding the values of sub-Saharan Africans. Although preferable to anecdote and personal experience, there are significant methodological limitations to these studies that confound attempts to generalise the findings to national groups or to sub-Saharan African society in general. Firstly, the results of non-random and non-representative samples cannot be easily generalised using either statistical or non-statistical approaches. Secondly, it is highly questionable whether complex cultural values such as individualism and collectivism can be adequately studied by means of quantitative surveys. The results of these studies must accordingly be considered in the light of these limitations.

The most well-known of cross-cultural studies in management is that of Hofstede (1983, 2001), who studied differences across national cultures amongst IBM employees in 53 countries. He adopted several cultural dimensions, including one addressing Individualism and Collectivism, explained as follows (1984, p. 83):

*Individualism stands for a preference for a loosely knit social framework wherein individuals are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only ... The fundamental issue addressed by this dimension is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among individuals. It relates to people's self-concept: 'I' or 'we'.*

This dimension is of particular relevance to *Ubuntu*, given the communitarian nature of *Ubuntu* philosophy. A society that maintains the values of *Ubuntu* would be expected to favour the Collective aspect of this dimension, reflected in a low score. Indeed, out of 100 (and with an overall mean of 43, across 53 countries), the regions of East and West Africa did reflect low scores of 27 and 20 respectively, in contrast to high scores for the USA (91), Australia (90) and Great Britain (89) (Hofstede, 2001, p. 215). South Africa was the only individual African country included in Hofstede's study and had a score of 65 on this dimension. However, as the study was conducted in the height of apartheid, when black South Africans were prohibited from entering the skilled labour force, this study cannot be considered to have any relevance for South African society. With regard to the findings for East and West Africa, Hofstede's study does provide some support for the claim that sub-Saharan Africans maintain a communitarian value system, unlike that in the West.

Thomas and Bendixen (2000) replicated Hofstede's study amongst 586 middle-managers in post-apartheid South Africa, and made comparisons across different ethnic groups within South Africa. As a total group the South African managers in Thomas and Bendixen's study recorded a score of 81 on the Individualism-Collectivism dimension, suggesting a relatively individualist orientation. When the results were split by ethnicity, the black South African respondents (Sotho: 79, Xhosa: 78, Zulu: 83) had scores similar to the White (Afrikaans: 77, English: 88), Asian (71) and Coloured (of mixed race: 84) respondents.



These results suggest no difference between black South Africans and white Afrikaans South Africans, and no great difference between black South Africans and white English South Africans. Thomas and Bendixen (2000, p. 514), however, argued that there may be differences between a Western and an African understanding of the word 'family', which was used in the survey, and which could have led to an overstated score for Individualism. They concluded that Hofstede's instrument is "inadequate in distinguishing between individualism and communalism in a management context within South Africa" (2000, p. 516) and recommend further research. However, the low scores on this scale for both East Africa and West Africa in Hofstede's original study confirm the belief that these societies are (or were) relatively collectivist. Thomas and Bendixen's interpretation of the South African results, achieved using the same scale, thus raises a further question: If the scale is unable to satisfactorily distinguish between individualism and collectivism within South Africa, are we still justified in accepting Hofstede's earlier findings regarding East and West Africa? (Or, conversely, if we accept Hofstede's earlier findings regarding East and West Africa, to be consistent should we not also accept the results of Thomas and Bendixen's survey of South Africans, conducted using the same instrument?)

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) also presented empirical research regarding cultural values within South Africa, based on survey information from company managers and administrators. They drew largely on Parson's (1951) relational orientations, and worked with six cultural orientations, including one on Individualism-Communitarianism. This referred to whether people "regard themselves primarily as individuals or primarily as part of a group" (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997, p. 8), with high scores reflecting a preference for individualism, and low scores communitarianism. White South African respondents scored 58 (Afrikaans) and 72 (English), and black South African respondents

scores ranged from 22 to 73 (Tsonga: 22, South Sotho: 42, Zulu: 51, Tswana: 52, North Sotho: 68, and Xhosa: 73). Although the range is greater than Thomas and Bendixen's results, these results suggest that some black South African groups (Xhosa and North Sotho) are more individualistic than white Afrikaans South Africans, and that there is no real difference between Xhosa and English South Africans.

A final example of relevant cross-cultural research is Noorderhaven and Tidjani's (2001) study. This is notable for its use of a research instrument with an explicitly African bias to counteract Western bias that may be present in other studies. The survey was administered in 14 countries, including six countries from sub-Saharan Africa (for South Africa, only the white South African sample was large enough for inclusion in the results). A number of the scales are relevant to the concept of *Ubuntu*, the results on these scales for the African countries, the UK and the USA are presented in table 1.

[TABLE 1]

Excluding the (white) South African results from the group of African countries (shown in the table for completeness), review of these findings indicates that the UK and USA have significantly higher scores than most of the African countries on 'Societal responsibility', significantly higher scores than all of the African countries on 'Human goodness', and very similar scores to all of the African countries on 'Traditional Wisdom'. Regarding the 'Collectivism' and 'Sharing' scales, the UK and USA have similar scores to some African countries and display differences with others (note that Noorderhaven and Tidjani acknowledge difficulties in interpreting the 'Collectivism' dimension). Touching on several different aspects of *Ubuntu*, these results suggest greater complexity both within sub-Saharan Africa and between sub-Saharan Africa and Western countries than typically acknowledged.

In addition to the research discussed above that deals with cultural dimensions or orientations, Bernstein (2002) describes a nationwide survey which deserves some mention as it addressed *Ubuntu* more directly:

*Respondents were asked 'What do African people in southern Africa have in common with one another which might help them catch up in development?'. The number of people who mentioned ubuntu ... traditionalism, or ancestor worship was no more than 2-3 percent in replies that could be associated with something essentially 'African' (2002, p. 201).*

*Another question asked was, 'What is the special African way in which [then] Deputy President Mbeki's notion of an African renaissance will be achieved, or is there no special African way?' ... 7 percent referred to a return to traditional beliefs and 3 percent to ubuntu (2002, p. 202).*

Although this survey suggests that *Ubuntu* is not widely held, it is subject to similar problems of generalisation as those discussed above, and is open to multiple interpretations.

The mixed results and methodological limitations of all of these studies preclude any simple generalisations regarding the values of sub-Saharan Africans being justified. It is premature to conclude, on the basis of the existing evidence, that sub-Saharan Africans are either individualistic or collectivist, or that they do or do not maintain the values of *Ubuntu*. At present, we can only conclude that such generalisations are unjustified. Nevertheless, the results of these studies are useful in suggesting a more nuanced understanding of value systems in sub-Saharan Africa and in raising additional questions for further research. These are considered in more detail in the 'prospects' section below.

### **Ubuntu as a traditional, pre-colonial morality**

Supporters of *Ubuntu* typically emphasise its traditional African origins. Referring to the contemporary philosophy of *Ubuntu* as a traditional African morality implies that it represents the wisdom of pre-colonial African society, a wisdom that remains present among the less modernised of black South African society (predominantly in the rural areas), and possibly also in the collective memory of their more modernised counterparts. Undesirable aspects of traditional African morality can be identified, however, and include ethnocentric practices (and nepotism) and gender inequality. Given that such practices are widely condemned in contemporary South Africa, this raises the question of which practices and values are (or should be) included in *Ubuntu*: If some traditional values or practices are excluded from *Ubuntu*, what are the criteria by which values and practices are deemed acceptable as *Ubuntu* values and practices? Furthermore, the emphasis placed upon *Ubuntu*'s traditional origins suggests that discontinuity with pre-colonial tradition may question the legitimacy and authenticity of *Ubuntu* itself.

Bernstein (2002, p. 198) argues that colonialism, apartheid, and particularly migrant labour, did much to disrupt continuity between rural (traditional) and urban black South Africans. Referring to the continuation of some practices, such as the payment of *lobola*<sup>8</sup>, she claims that "it is dangerously misleading, however, to suggest that some cultural elements represent the tip of a powerful if partly submerged cultural substructure, just because their lineage connects back to precolonial societies" (2002, p. 198). Bernstein goes on to argue that

*The rediscovery of African values and culture is largely an elite reinterpretation of residues of what used to be. Ubuntu is the prime example, and the major feature of its current definition is boundless idealism and the failure to reconcile it with the everyday reality of crime, violence and brutality of life in urban concentrations. One*

*gets the uneasy feeling that the fashionable celebration of Ubuntu is intended more for white consumption or to display a badge of (Africanist?) honor than as sincere moral reconstruction. (2002, p. 210)*

Van Binsbergen (2001, p. 74) offers a similar critique, claiming that,

*Ubuntu offers the appearance of an ancestral model to [those who fought to attain majority rule] that is credible and with which they can identify, regardless of whether these urban, globalised people still observe ancestral codes of conduct – of course in most respects they do not, regardless of whether the ancestral codes are rendered correctly (often they are not).*

He argues that the systematisation of *Ubuntu* is an etic practice, and that the

*self-proclaimed experts on Ubuntu form a globally-informed, Southern African intellectual elite who, remote in place and social practice from the emic expressions at the village level which they seek to capture, have officially coined the concept of Ubuntu as a cornerstone Southern African self-reflexive ethnography. (2001, p. 70)*

Van Binsbergen is not necessarily hostile to *Ubuntu*, but maintains an interpretation of *Ubuntu* as a utopian and prophetic philosophy (2001, p. 73), as an “exhortative instrument” (2001, p. 73) and as a “tool for transformation in a context of globalisation” (2001, p. 71).

Eze (2010) also argues for a revitalised or reinterpreted *Ubuntu* as a moral ideal for a new age. He concedes the charges made by Van Binsbergen and others regarding the historical inauthenticity of *Ubuntu*, but refuses to accept its illegitimacy and seeks to ‘rehabilitate’ *Ubuntu* as a valuable myth that has a performative task in post-apartheid nation-building in South Africa:

*As a postcolonial discourse, Ubuntu possess[es] the following credentials: (1) a reverse discourse to thwart and undermine the preceding racial hegemony of apartheid discourse that denied 'humanity' to nonwhites through its institutional and structural racism; (2) a project in the making of a new nation, which, unlike apartheid, yields to inclusiveness as opposed to divisiveness; (3) its admissibility and evidence in the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] mediate[s] its values as a humanistic discourse; and (4) while it has been criticized for legitimizing restorative [as opposed to retributive] justice, it offers a blueprint for the very process of reconciliation and possibility of social morality. (Eze, 2010, p. 186)*

The work of Bernstein, Van Binbergen and Eze is introduced here due to its omission in the existing literature on *Ubuntu* and business ethics (excepting Eze, published more recently in 2010) and the alternative perspectives that they provide. No argument is being made that these perspectives on *Ubuntu* are accurate; they can be subjected to criticisms regarding the use of anecdotal evidence and personal experience, and in places appear to be largely speculative. However, such alternative perspectives nevertheless need to be addressed and they deserve consideration in future research.

### **Gade's historical analysis**

Other recent work on *Ubuntu* includes that of Gade (2011), who performed a historical analysis of the use of *Ubuntu* in written sources from 1846 to 2011. His research identifies five periods in which the written sources indicate different uses of the term. In the first period (from 1846 to 1980) *Ubuntu* was described most frequently as a human quality, such as 'human nature', 'humanity' or 'humanness'. In the second period, *Ubuntu* began being

associated with a philosophy or an ethic. This started from before the 1980s but became increasingly widespread in South Africa in the 1990s. In the third period, of which there is evidence from 1975, *Ubuntu* is described as an ‘African humanism’. In the fourth period, from the late 1990s, *Ubuntu* was described by some as a worldview, and in the last period *Ubuntu* is linked with the aphorism ‘*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ – Gade finds evidence of this link first occurring between 1993 and 1995, but notes that most writing on *Ubuntu* from the 2000s includes this association.

Based on his historical analysis Gade suggests that new uses of the term *Ubuntu* can be associated with times of social transformation in Zimbabwe and South Africa. In his view the use of the concept in recent decades can be interpreted as a ‘narrative of return’, in which appeal is made to “return to something African” (Gade, 2011, p. 304) following colonialism and apartheid:

*Broadly speaking, the postcolonial African narratives of return thus tend to divide history into three phases: first, the pre-colonial phase which, often but not always, is perceived as a ‘golden age’ characterized by harmony; second, a period of decline, which is understood to have been brought about by intruders who attempted to deprive the Africans of their resources, dignity, and culture; and third, a phase of recovery, where Africans, after having gained sufficient political power, attempt to restore their dignity and culture by returning to (what are claimed to be) traditional, humanist, or socialist values.(Gade, 2011, p. 304)*

Gade’s analysis, informed by historical research, to some extent supports the views of Van Binsbergen and Eze described above. As noted above, when considering the role that *Ubuntu* may play in business ethics in future, such perspectives need to be considered.

## **PROSPECTS FOR *UBUNTU* AND BUSINESS ETHICS**

The discussion thus far can be summarised as follows. Firstly, several problems can be identified in the existing literature on *Ubuntu* and business ethics: those claiming that sub-Saharan Africans maintain the values of *Ubuntu*, values that are different to those maintained in the West, have not justified the claim with empirical evidence; ambiguities concerning the distinctive features of *Ubuntu* also undermine claims that *Ubuntu* can contribute significantly to global business ethics. Secondly, review of existing empirical studies reveals mixed results that, subject to several methodological limitations, preclude generalisations being made regarding the values of sub-Saharan Africans as a group. These suggest instead that a more complex or nuanced understanding of the values of sub-Saharan Africans is necessary. Thirdly, there are several alternative perspectives regarding *Ubuntu* that have been raised recently, or that have not been adequately considered, which raise further questions and that require greater attention when applying *Ubuntu* to business ethics.

Taking these issues into account, this section considers several ways in which the research and application of *Ubuntu* in the area of business ethics can proceed.

### **Research agenda**

Some of the issues discussed above suggest specific topics for research. The first area of research concerns empirical studies of value systems. The mixed results of the existing empirical studies suggest that there is substantial variation in the values of sub-Saharan Africans. Additional research, which focuses on specific areas or key distinctions, may shed light on this variation, and its underlying factors. Empirical studies of specific countries or



cultures, or comparisons between two specific countries or cultures, may allow for a more detailed appreciation of the value systems than is possible with larger multi-country surveys. Comparisons between African and non-African groups within specific contexts would also be informative and could identify values that are distinctive to certain sub-Saharan African societies (and which ultimately informs claims for a distinctive ethic that could contribute to business ethics globally).

Quantitative studies of cultures and value systems are, however, limited, particularly with respect to how complex cultural and/or ethical concepts can be adequately expressed by scales on surveys. In contrast, qualitative research methods are particularly suited to providing in-depth descriptions of such concepts. The need for such research is particularly apparent when considering how, although there is a growing literature on *Ubuntu*, much of it is theoretical or philosophical in nature and there is a paucity of empirical studies specifically designed to study *Ubuntu* itself<sup>9</sup>. Gade (2012) believes that there has been no ‘mapping’ of the different interpretations of *Ubuntu* to date at all, and that he provides the first such attempt. His analysis of various written sources and oral accounts identified two distinct interpretations of *Ubuntu* among various South Africans (of African descent). The first of these interpretations considers *Ubuntu* to represent a personal moral quality (such as empathy or the capacity to forgive), while the second sees *Ubuntu* as a “phenomenon according to which persons are interconnected” (Gade, 2012, p. 492). He also raises some moral concerns regarding the possible exclusivity of some interpretations. This is a useful example of qualitative analysis that provides the impetus for further empirical research in this area that could, for example, examine whether these distinctions are evident in particular workplaces, whether either of these predominates, and how such interpretations of *Ubuntu* may find application in organisational settings.

It is clear that a variety of research methods are necessary and appropriate, including qualitative methods that provide a deeper understanding of value systems and *Ubuntu* in particular, and that can complement the greater generalizability of well-designed quantitative studies. Specific research questions may be derived from anecdotes and personal experiences, while others may follow from the existing studies discussed above. Following Thomas and Bendixen's (2000) and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (1997) research, we could ask why, if *Ubuntu* is considered to represent traditional (i.e. pre-colonial, black) African values that persist amongst contemporary black South Africans, there are no significant differences between white and black South Africans in the existing survey research? This could lead to the development of a specific research project to investigate the values of a sample of white and black South Africans in some detail. Further use of Hofstede's instrument would need to specifically address the concerns raised by Thomas and Bendixen.

Similar questions can be raised following the varied results of Noorderhaven and Tidjani's (2001) study discussed above. For example, the high scores for the UK and USA respondents on the Human Goodness and Societal Responsibility scales, in comparison to most of the black sub-Saharan African respondents, runs counter to expectations based on the *Ubuntu* literature. Further examination of these concepts and the views of particular respondents would be informative, and would probably necessitate a more in-depth, qualitative approach.

Other questions follow from the view that *Ubuntu* represents traditional, pre-industrial sub-Saharan African values, as it could be expected that *Ubuntu* values may be more prevalent in the rural population. Africa remains the least urbanised continent, with 37 per cent of the sub-Saharan population urban in 2011 (United Nations, 2012, p. 121), projected to increase to 46 per cent by 2030 (United Nations, 2012, p. 127). In contrast, the figures for North America are 82 and 86 per cent respectively (United Nations, 2012, p. 11). Even South Africa, one of

the most industrialised African countries, is significantly less urbanised than Western countries, with 62 per cent urbanised in 2011 (United Nations, 2012, p. 121). If *Ubuntu* values are indeed prevalent in the rural sub-Saharan African population, then they certainly deserve consideration in the development of economic systems in sub-Saharan Africa.

As the existing empirical studies discussed earlier were all conducted with urban samples, it could be hypothesised that high scores for individualism could reflect the values associated with urban, industrialised and/or wealthy lifestyles. This, however, raises another question: to what extent can different ‘positions’ on individualism – collectivism dimensions be explained by factors such as urbanisation, industrialisation, materialism and/or differences in wealth? Furthermore, if these different ‘positions’ can be explained by such factors, what role does culture have as a determining factor? And is the only ‘true’ sub-Saharan African culture necessarily rural?

The rural – urban distinction raises further questions, as although Africa is the least urbanised continent, there are substantial rural populations around the world. Even in the urbanised West, the idea that people living in cities are more individualistic than those in rural areas is familiar. We can then ask (and develop empirical research projects to ascertain) whether rural populations in Western and other non-African countries share the values of *Ubuntu* with rural Africans. Rather than *Ubuntu* being a term for all sub-Saharan African societies, is it perhaps an African term that describes the value systems of all rural societies?

The second area for research concerns the concept of *Ubuntu* itself, and its continued clarification. Ambiguities surrounding the concept frustrate efforts to apply it, and any arguments that call for its application. Reviewing the literature reveals that there are a number of different interpretations of *Ubuntu*, some of which appear to be inconsistent with each other, and it appears unlikely that a single conception of *Ubuntu* is even possible. For

the concept to be useful it would be appropriate, therefore, to distinguish between different interpretations of *Ubuntu*, and to develop research into specific interpretations. We could, for example, refer to Ramose's *Ubuntu*, Shutte's *Ubuntu*, or Metz's *Ubuntu*, all of which are quite different, and which could be expected to have differing applications in business. Different interpretations could reflect different answers to the question raised earlier: If some traditional values or practices are excluded from *Ubuntu*, what are the criteria by which values and practices are deemed acceptable as *Ubuntu* values and practices?

Following on from this, the relationship between *Ubuntu* and other ethical concepts and theories require more detailed exploration. Lutz (2009) does, for example, refer to the concept of the 'Common Good' but a more detailed comparison of how the *Ubuntu* 'Common Good' relates to other understandings would be informative (such as Sison and Fontrodona's recent (2012) explication of the Common Good with reference to Aristotelian ethics, Thomism and Catholic Social Thought; see also Argandoña (1998) and O'Brien (2009)). Similarly, there would appear to be considerable overlap between *Ubuntu* and virtue ethics, and a detailed consideration of this overlap, with implications for the business sphere would be relevant and appropriate. This could, for example, include a comparison with Solomon's (1992) application of Aristotelian virtues to businesses as communities, Moore's (2005) interpretation of MacIntyre's virtue ethics as applied to business, and/or Audi's (2012) account of the role of virtue ethics in businesses.

### **Reconciliation and nation-building**

Although the claim that *Ubuntu* is a distinctive African ethic that can contribute to business ethics globally can be challenged, *Ubuntu* may have a significant contribution to make in

specific contexts. In South Africa in particular, with its still recent history of apartheid, persistent economic inequality, and ongoing challenges of reconciliation, transformation and nation-building, *Ubuntu* may be applicable and find resonance. As noted above, Eze sees *Ubuntu* as

*a reverse discourse to thwart and undermine the preceding racial hegemony of apartheid discourse ... a project in the making of a new nation, which, unlike apartheid, yields to inclusiveness ... [and] offers a blueprint for the very process of reconciliation and possibility of social morality. (Eze, 2010, p. 186)*

Shutte (2001, p. 3) states simply that “UBUNTU is almost the exact opposite of apartheid”. Given the divisiveness of apartheid and colonialism, an ethic of inclusiveness is clearly applicable and relevant. Shutte continues by suggesting that it is by virtue of South Africa’s particular circumstances, in which the rich live alongside the very poor, that *Ubuntu* can contribute globally (Nussbaum (2009a) makes a similar point). In this regard, former president Mbeki’s characterisation of South Africa as a country of two nations is valid, where:

*One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic dispersal. It has ready access to a developed economic, physical, educational, communication and other infrastructure ... The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the worst affected being women in the rural areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled (Mbeki, 1998)*

To a large extent, this inequality remains. Research into black ownership of shares listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange in 2011 reveals that 28 per cent of the available shares are held by black South Africans (Johannesburg Stock Exchange, 2011), yet black South

Africans make up approximately 80 per cent of the population (Statistics South Africa, 2011, p. 3). Shutte argues (2001, p. 4), however, that in this regard South Africa is a microcosm of the world, and that

*This is why we are such a powerful symbol for the rest of the world of the world-wide division between the developed and the undeveloped. But it is also this that puts us in a unique position to try to overcome it. Our position and our history both help to create ideal conditions for a unique experiment in reconciliation. The way we make use of this opportunity could be of huge significance for the rest of the world... But I am not thinking mainly of a political experiment but of an ethical one, an experiment in trying to live by values that have been hidden or forgotten.*

It is perhaps in this context of inequality and historical division that *Ubuntu* has global relevance. To the extent that *Ubuntu* succeeds in South Africa (and other countries in the aftermath of colonialism and conflict), it provides a model for other contexts that are characterised by inequality and division. Research into how *Ubuntu* (ideally a specific interpretation of *Ubuntu*) has contributed to overcoming inequality and division in specific cases would be significant, and would have immediate implications for other contexts around the world.

Furthermore, if *Ubuntu* is conceived as an ethics of virtue, and if we associate *Ubuntu* with virtues such as tolerance, inclusiveness and harmony, then these contexts of inequality and division provide cases in which these virtues are applicable. Just as the virtue of courage is particularly applicable in war, and the virtue of wisdom is particularly applicable when

resolving disputes, so the virtues of *Ubuntu* may be considered particularly applicable when faced with inequality and division.

### **Metz's *Ubuntu* ethics of harmony**

A final interpretation deserves some consideration. Metz (2007) has provided a more analytical interpretation of *Ubuntu* than most *Ubuntu* scholars, presenting a “fundamental and general principle prescribing right actions” (2007, p. 322) that encapsulates what he believes are the essential characteristics of *Ubuntu*. His formulation stipulates that:

*An action is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop community.*(2007, p. 334)

Metz expands upon this, explaining that ‘harmony’ includes a combination of ‘shared identity’ and ‘goodwill’, and provides a revised theory of right action:

*An action is right just insofar as it promotes shared identity among people grounded on good-will; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to do so and tends to encourage the opposites of division and ill-will.* (2007, p. 338)

Although Metz’s analysis is subject to some of the same criticisms as some of the research on *Ubuntu* and business ethics described above (for example, he bases his analysis on certain values that he assumes are more common amongst Africans than Westerners), it is notable for providing an interpretation of *Ubuntu* that is considerably more specific than most, and that can be applied to specific issues in business ethics. Although Metz does not focus on such issues, he does note that

*to compete with fellow citizens on labour and consumer markets with an eye to maximizing self-interest is of course not to act for the sake of others, and hence is not an instance of good-will. That is so, even if invisible hand effects turn out to be indirectly beneficial for society. (2007, p. 339)*

Metz (2009) has more recently applied this *Ubuntu* theory of right action to issues of nepotism and affirmative action in the public sector. He argues that in terms of this theory, nepotism would be considered wrong, but affirmative action (in the South African context) would be considered right. Regarding nepotism, Metz acknowledges that in a society in which shared identity and goodwill are the primary moral considerations, preferential hiring or procurement policies by public officials, in which they favour family and friends, may appear to be morally appropriate. He argues, however, that such partiality would produce significant division and ill-will amongst the general public, and that according to his *Ubuntu* theory of right action, it would thus be considered wrong. On the other hand, affirmative action is considered acceptable, as harmony would require reconciliation and the need to mend the divisiveness of apartheid, and affirmative action policies are one way of expressing such reconciliation. Metz acknowledges that those adversely affected by affirmative action policies may experience ill-will, but considers affirmative action to be acceptable as it would constitute the lesser injustice.

There are a number of possible criticisms of Metz's arguments on the issues of nepotism and affirmative action, an in-depth analysis of which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the development of such a specific theory of *Ubuntu*, and its application to important ethical issues provides a good example of how *Ubuntu* can play a role in business ethics. In addition to the implications for public sector ethics, Metz indicates (as noted above) that according to this theory capitalism and market-based economic systems are immoral. His analysis on



nepotism and affirmative action also raises several further questions pertinent to the private sector: if nepotism by public officials is only considered wrong because of the ill-will created amongst the general public, would it not be acceptable (or even morally required) in the private sector, out of the public sphere? If the *Ubuntu* ethic is widely held, wouldn't the general public understand and accept preferential hiring and procurement policies, and wouldn't anyone excluded by such policies have their own particular opportunities through similar means? His theory of right action could also be applied to other issues in business ethics, raising other questions: To what extent is whistleblowing compatible or incompatible with an ethic of shared identity and goodwill? How can the need for independence and objectivity of external auditors be reconciled with an overriding concern for shared identity? Under what circumstances would retrenchments be morally permissible or impermissible?

## **CONCLUSION**

Any philosophy that advocates harmonious relationships and acknowledges the inter-relationships between individuals would seem to have obvious application in the business sphere. Previous research has introduced the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* to business ethics, this paper has contributed by providing a more critical analysis with the intention of facilitating further research and development in this area. This has been achieved firstly, through an analysis of the arguments that pervade much of the existing literature on *Ubuntu* and business ethics. Problems were identified regarding the empirical evidence provided to support general empirical claims. Furthermore, the distinctiveness of *Ubuntu*, and the extent to which it can contribute to business ethics globally, was brought into question through a consideration of the universality of *Ubuntu*, as well as a critique of how the values and theories underlying Western economic systems are presented.

Secondly, alternative perspectives and interpretations of *Ubuntu* in the academic literature were considered. This included the findings from empirical cross-cultural studies that included sub-Saharan African countries. The mixed results of these studies suggest that generalisations regarding the values of sub-Saharan African societies do not have empirical support and that a more nuanced understanding is necessary. Questions were also raised regarding the nature of *Ubuntu* as a traditional African morality, and how certain traditional values are accommodated in contemporary societies in which gender inequality and ethnocentrism are deplored. Suggestions from other scholars of *Ubuntu* that the contemporary philosophy of *Ubuntu* is removed from traditional practice and is an invention of the African elite were also presented, along with more recent research into the historical written uses of *Ubuntu*, providing some insight into its development.

Lastly, several prospects for *Ubuntu* with regard to research and application in business ethics were presented. Following the earlier analysis, several specific areas for further research, both empirical and non-empirical, were identified. The possible role that *Ubuntu* could play within a context of inequality and division (such as that in post-apartheid South Africa), in terms of reconciliation and nation-building, was also highlighted. Finally, Metz's theory of *Ubuntu* was discussed as an example of how a specific interpretation of *Ubuntu* can be developed and applied to issues of business ethics.

The intention of this paper is to provide a more critical analysis of *Ubuntu* and how it can be applied in the area of business ethics. Following Eze's view that "exposing ubuntu to criticisms is another way of validating its actual significance and value" (2010, p. 186), it is hoped that this will stimulate future research in the area.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this section is to introduce readers to contemporary understanding of *Ubuntu* (reflecting the substantial increase in publications on *Ubuntu* since the 1990s), rather than to research on traditional African culture. In order to achieve this aim the focus is on recent sources, particularly those that provide a comprehensive account of *Ubuntu* and those that consider ethical aspects of *Ubuntu*.

<sup>2</sup> Although Mbiti (1989) refers to this aphorism, he does not relate it to *Ubuntu*. There is no reference for *Ubuntu* in the index to the second edition of *African religions and philosophy*.

<sup>3</sup> Ramose also insists that *Ubuntu* is not only a moral concept, but is “the root of African philosophy” (1999, p. 49) and “the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought of the Bantu-speaking people” (1999, p. 50). He considers the word to be

*a gerundive, a verbal noun denoting a particular state of being and becoming at the same time. It thus denotes a particular action already performed, an enduring action or state of be-ing and the openness to yet another action or state of be-ing (2003b, p. 643)*

<sup>4</sup> The full list of ‘core’ and ‘associated’ *Ubuntu* values identified by Broodryk is as follows (2002, p. 32):

Humanness: Warmth, tolerance, understanding, peace, humanity

Caring: Empathy, sympathy, helpfulness, charitable, friendliness

Sharing: Giving (unconditionally), redistribution, openhandedness

Respect: Commitment, dignity, obedience, order, normative

Compassion: Love, cohesion, informality, forgiving, spontaneity

<sup>5</sup> Lutz (2009, p. 315) does acknowledge the work of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997) when pointing out the differences between some ethnic groups. However, he did not comment on their findings that suggest relatively high scores for individualism amongst some black South African groups, a lack of significant differences between some black and white South Africans, and that some black groups reflected greater individualism than white Afrikaners.

<sup>6</sup> As noted earlier, some scholars consider *Ubuntu* values to be universal. Western examples that are comparable to African examples then provide support for a universal *Ubuntu*. While this may be true, consistently maintaining such a view of *Ubuntu* together with the claim that sub-Saharan African societies maintain a value system that is different to that maintained in the West then appears problematic.

<sup>7</sup> See also Maitland (1989, 1997, 1998) for moral arguments in favour of the market mechanisms that underlie the shareholder-oriented approach.

<sup>8</sup> *Lobola* is a traditional Southern African marital custom in which a prospective husband makes a payment to his fiancée's family.

<sup>9</sup> Two examples of empirical, qualitative studies that do not study *Ubuntu* in great detail, but that do include some questions or analysis regarding *Ubuntu* are West (2010) and Louw and Fourie (2011).

## REFERENCES

- Argandona, A. (1998). The Stakeholder theory and the Common Good. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17(9-10), pp. 1093-1102.
- Audi, R. (2012). Virtue Ethics as a Resource in Business. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 22(2), pp. 273-291.
- Bennett, T. W. (2011). Ubuntu: An African equity. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 14(4), pp. 29-61.
- Berg, A., Salman, T. and Troudart, T. (2011). Panel: What could be Jungian about Human Rights work? *The Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 56(3), pp. 362-374.
- Bernstein, A. (2002). Globalization, Culture and Development: Can South Africa be more than an offshoot of the West? In P. L. Berger and S. P. Huntington (eds.), *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*, (pp. 185-249). Oxford University Press, New York
- Broodryk, J. (2002). *Ubuntu: Life Lessons from Africa*, Ubuntu School of Philosophy, Pretoria
- Coelho, P. R. P., McClure, J. E. and Spry, J. A. (2003a). The social responsibility of corporate management: A classical critique. *Mid-American Journal of Business*, 18(1), pp. 15-24.
- Coelho, P. R. P., McClure, J. E., & Spry, J. A. (2003b). The social responsibility of management: A reprise. *Mid-American Journal of Business*, 18(2), pp. 51-55.
- Collins, J. C. and Porras, J. I. (1994). *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*. Harper Collins, New York
- Eze, M. O. (2010). *Intellectual History in South Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York

- Friedman, M. (13 September 1970). The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits. *New York Times Magazine*, 33.
- Gade, C. B. N. (2011). The historical development of the written discourses on Ubuntu. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 30(3), pp. 303-329.
- Gade, C. B. N. (2012). What is Ubuntu? Different interpretations among South Africans of African descent. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 31(3), pp. 484-503.
- Hanks, T. L. (2008). The Ubuntu paradigm: Psychology's next force? *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 48(1), pp. 116-135.
- Hofstede, G. (1983). National cultures in four dimensions: A research-based theory of cultural differences among nations. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 13(1-2), pp. 46-74.
- Hofstede, G. (1984). Cultural dimensions in management and planning. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Management*, 1(2), pp. 81-90.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations across Nations*, 2nd edition, Sage Publications, London
- Hughes, W., Lavery, J., & Doran, K. (2010). *Critical Thinking: An Introduction to the Basic Skills*, 6th edition, Broadview Press, New York
- Johannesburg Stock Exchange. (2011). JSE releases second study on Black ownership on the Exchange. Retrieved November 2, 2011, from [http://www.jse.co.za/About-Us/Media/Press-Releases/Full-Story/11-10-05/JSE\\_releases\\_second\\_study\\_on\\_Black\\_ownership\\_on\\_the\\_Exchange.aspx](http://www.jse.co.za/About-Us/Media/Press-Releases/Full-Story/11-10-05/JSE_releases_second_study_on_Black_ownership_on_the_Exchange.aspx)
- Kamwangamalu, N. M. (1999). Ubuntu in South Africa: A sociolinguistic perspective to a pan-African concept. *Critical Arts*, 13(2), pp. 24-41.

- Karsten, L. and Illa, H. (2005). *Ubuntu* as a key African management concept: contextual background and practical insights for knowledge application. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 20(7), pp. 607-620.
- Khomba, J. K., & Vermaak, F. N. S. (2012a). Business ethics and corporate governance: An African socio-cultural framework. *African Journal of Business Management*, 6(9), pp. 3510-3518.
- Khomba, J. K., & Vermaak, F. N. S. (2012b). Towards corporate sustainability: Equitable wealth allocation to all participating stakeholders. *African Journal of Business Management*, 6(9), pp. 3470-3481.
- Khomba, J. K., Vermaak, F. N. S., & Hanif, R. (2012). Relevance of the balanced scorecard model in Africa: Shareholder-centred or stakeholder-centred? *African Journal of Business Management*, 6(17), pp. 5773-5785.
- Louw, D. J., & Fourie, D. P. (2011). Towards a definition of philosophical counselling in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 41(1), pp. 101-112.
- Lundin, S. C. and Nelson, B. (2010). *Ubuntu! An inspiring story about an African tradition of teamwork and collaboration*. Random House, New York
- Lutz, D. W. (2009). African *Ubuntu* Philosophy and Global Management. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 84(Supplement 3), pp. 314-328.
- Mafunisa, J. M. (2008). Ethics, African societal values and the workplace. In R. Nicolson (ed.), *Persons in Community: African Ethics in a Global Culture*, (pp. 111-124). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, South Africa
- Maitland, I. (1989). Rights in the workplace: a Nozickian argument. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 8(12), pp. 951-954.
- Maitland, I. (1997). Virtuous markets: the market as school of the virtues. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 7(1), pp. 17-31.



- Maitland, I. (1998). Community lost? *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 8(4), pp. 655-670.
- Mangaliso, M. P. (2001). Building competitive advantage from *ubuntu*: Management lessons from South Africa. *Academy of Management Executive*, 15(3), pp. 23-35.
- Matthews, S. (2004). Post-development theory and the question of alternatives: A view from Africa. *Third World Quarterly*, 25(2), pp. 373-384.
- Mbeki, T. (1998). Statement of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki at the opening of the debate in the National Assembly, on 'Reconciliation and Nation building'. Retrieved October 27, 2010, from <http://www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/1998/mbek0529.htm>
- Mbigi, L. and Maree, J. (2005). *Ubuntu: The Spirit of African Transformation Management*. Knowledge Resources, Randburg
- Mbiti, J. S. (1989). *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd edition, Heinemann, Oxford
- Metz, T. (2007). Towards an African moral theory. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 15(3), pp. 321-341.
- Metz, T. (2009). African moral theory and public governance: Nepotism, preferential hiring and other partiality. In M. F. Murove (ed.), *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, (pp. 335-356). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, South Africa
- Mji, G., Gcaza, S., Swartz, L., MacLachlan, M. and Hutton, B. (2011). An African way of networking around disability. *Disability and Society*, 26(3), pp. 365-368.
- Mkhize, N. (2008). *Ubuntu and Harmony: An African approach to morality and ethics*. In R. Nicolson (ed.), *Persons in Community: African Ethics in a Global Culture*, (pp. 35-44). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, South Africa
- Moore, G. (2005). Humanizing business: A modern virtue ethics approach. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 15(2), pp. 237-255.

- Mungwini, P. (2011). The challenges of revitalizing an indigenous and Afrocentric moral theory in postcolonial education in Zimbabwe. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 43(7), pp. 773-787.
- Mnyaka, M. and Motlhabi, M. (2009). *Ubuntu* and its Socio-moral Significance. In M. F. Murove (ed.), *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, (pp. 63-84). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, South Africa
- Murove, M. F. (2008). On African ethics and the appropriation of Western capitalism: Cultural and moral constraints to the evolution of capitalism in post-colonial Africa. In R. Nicolson (ed.), *Persons in Community: African Ethics in a Global Culture*, (pp. 85-110). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, South Africa
- Murove, M. F. (2009). The incarnation of Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in post-colonial African economic discourse: The quest for an African economic ethic. In M. F. Murove (ed.), *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, (pp. 221-237). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, South Africa
- Muwanga-Zake, J. W. F. (2009). Building bridges across knowledge systems: Ubuntu and participative research paradigms in Bantu communities. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 30(4), pp. 413-426.
- Ndiweni, E. (2008). Towards a Theoretical Framework of Corporate Governance: Perspectives from Southern Africa. In M. Tsamenyi and S. Uddin (eds.), *Corporate Governance in Less Developed and Emerging Economies*, (pp. 335-357). Emerald Group Publishing, Bingley, UK
- Noorderhaven, N. G., & Tidjani, B. (2001). Culture, governance, and economic performance: An explorative study with a special focus on Africa. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 1(1), pp. 31-52.

- Ntibagrirwa, S. (2009). Cultural values, economic growth and development. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 84(Supplement 3), pp. 297-311.
- Nussbaum, B. (2009a). Ubuntu and Business: Reflections and Questions. In M. F. Murove (ed.), *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, (pp. 238-258). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, South Africa
- Nussbaum, B. (2009b). Ubuntu: Reflections of a South African on Our Common Humanity. In M. F. Murove (ed.), *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, (pp. 100-110). University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, Scottsville, South Africa
- O'Brien, T. (2009). Reconsidering the Common Good in a Business Context. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 85(Supplement 1), pp. 25-37.
- Outwater, A., Abrahams, N. and Campbell, J. C. (2005). Women in South Africa - Intentional violence and HIV/AIDS: Intersections and prevention. *Journal of Black Studies*, 35(4), pp. 135-154.
- Parsons, T. (1951). *The Social System*. Free Press, New York
- Prinsloo, E. D. (2000). The African view of participatory business management. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 25(4), pp. 275-286.
- Ramose, M. B. (1999). *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*. Mond Books, Harare, Zimbabwe
- Ramose, M. B. (2003a). The ethics of *ubuntu*. In P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (eds.), *The African Philosophy Reader*, 2nd edition, (pp. 324-330). Routledge, London
- Ramose, M. B. (2003b). Globalization and *ubuntu*. In P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (eds.), *The African Philosophy Reader*, 2nd edition, (pp. 626-648). Routledge, London
- Ramose, M. B. (2003c). The philosophy of *ubuntu* and *ubuntu* as a philosophy. In P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (eds.), *The African Philosophy Reader*, 2nd edition, (pp. 230-238). Routledge, London

- Samkange, S., & Samkange, T. M. (1980). *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe indigenous political philosophy*, Graham Publishing, Salisbury [Harare]
- Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2000). *Research Methods for Business Students*, 2nd edition, Pearson Education, Harlow
- Shutte, A. (2001). *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a New South Africa*. Cluster Publications, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa
- Sison, A. J. G. and Fontrodona, J. (2012). The Common Good of the Firm in the Aristotelian-Thomistic Tradition. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 22(2), pp. 211-246.
- Sloth-Nielsen, J. and Gallinetti, J. (2011). "Just Say Sorry"? Ubuntu, Africanisation and the child justice system in the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008. *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal*, 14(4), pp. 62-90.
- Solomon, R. C. (1992). Corporate roles, personal virtues: An Aristotelean approach to business ethics. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 2(3), pp. 317-339.
- Statistics South Africa. (2011). *Mid-year Population Estimates 2011*. Statistics South Africa, Pretoria
- Sternberg, E. (1997). Business ethics and the free market. *Economic Affairs*, 17(1), pp. 50-52.
- Sternberg, E. (2000). *Just Business: Business Ethics in Action*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Sundarum, A. K., & Inkpen, A. C. (2004a). The corporate objective revisited. *Organization Science*, 15(3), pp. 350-363.
- Sundarum, A. K., & Inkpen, A. C. (2004b). Stakeholder theory and 'The corporate objective revisited': A reply. *Organization Science*, 15(3), pp. 370-371.
- Thomas, A. and Bendixen, M. (2000). The management implications of ethnicity in South Africa. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 31(3), pp. 507-519.

- Trompenaars, F. and Hampden-Turner, C. (1997). *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Cultural Diversity in Business*. Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London
- United Nations. (2012). *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2011 Revision*. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York
- Van Binsbergen, W. (2001). Ubuntu and the Globalisation of Southern African thought and society. *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy*, 15(1-2), pp. 53-89.
- Waterman, R. H. (1994). *Frontiers of Excellence*. Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, Australia
- West, A. G. (2010). *Southern African perceptions of the moral obligations and objectives of corporations*. Paper presented at the Asia-Pacific Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Accounting, July 12-13, Sydney.