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The Import of African Ontology for Environmental Ethics

By

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Previously Published Work

The following book chapter is based on Chapter Three:


Conference Presentations

Chapter Six is based on the following conference presentations:


Statement of Length

This thesis contains 83 533 words including footnotes but excluding reference material, in compliance with the guideline of about 75 000 words recommended by the Faculty of Humanities.
Declaration

I, Munamato Chemhuru, declare that this thesis has not in part or in whole been submitted at any other university or other academic institutions and that the contents of the thesis are my own work, except those parts that are acknowledged to have been taken from other sources.

Signature
Introduction

The Research Question

The application of moral reflection to the interactions between human beings and nature “has come to be called environmental ethics or ecological ethics” (Morscher, Neumair and Simons, 1998: ix). For Workineh Kelbessa, environmental ethics involves extending “the scope of moral thought to involve all human beings, animals and the whole of nature, the biosphere, both now and beyond the imminent future including future generations” (Kelbessa, 2005: 19). (See also Morscher, Neumair and Simmons, 1998: ix; Pojman, 2000: vi). Understood this way, environmental ethics is metaphysically embedded in what it means to be or to exist. Consequently, environmental ethics should be understood as stretching from the individual being to involve the communities of other persons and non-human persons as well, including the environment1. In essence, there ought to be both an ontological and normative relationship subsisting between human persons and nature at large. In the context of this background, I critically assess the African notion of being2 or existence in general in terms of how it could be understood as the ontological basis for a meaningful African teleologically oriented environmental ethics3.

I critically venture into this fairly novel discourse of African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics by contextualising environmental ethics discussion within the African metaphysical context. The word ‘African’ carries with it a lot of generalisation about the African worldview. To avoid that generalisation, I will use it

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1 The term ‘environment’ will be used interchangeably with the term ‘nature’ to refer to the surrounding physical and non physical world consisting of various aspects such as animals, plants and the air.

2 Where I italicise this word ‘being’ throughout this work, I try to distinguish it from its general usage as I make emphasis on the aspect of existence which it denotes.

3 Sometimes the terms ‘environmental ethic’ and ‘environmental ethics’ are used as if they mean the same thing. However, environmental ethics, which I have already defined as the study, application or extension of traditional boundaries of ethical thinking to nature or the environment, should be distinguished from ‘environmental ethic’. An environmental ethic should be understood as simply a thinking, approach or position of a certain individual or group of people on a given environmental ethical position. The clarification of these concepts is important as I constantly make use of them without intending to interchange their usage.
throughout this work to refer to sub-Saharan African throughout. By this, I intend to denote a worldview and value-system that is common to, salient and shared by the majority of the indigenous Bantu speaking people of Africa who occupy the area to the south of the Sahara desert\(^4\). In spite of Richard H. Bell’s contention that Africa “does not have a single culture that is to be understood since it is a large and diverse continent with a diverse of cultures” (Bell, 2002: ix), I endeavour to critically assess the nature, character and philosophical significance of environmental consciousness that is salient in African metaphysics\(^5\) of the Bantu speaking communities.

As Peter H. Coetzee and Abraham P. J. Roux see it, “the essence of African metaphysics is the search for meaning and ultimate reality in the complex relationship between the human person and his/her total environment” (Coetzee and Roux, 1995: 139). In the light of this understanding of African metaphysics, I would consider the question: **Whether an African understanding of existence (being) could essentially be teleologically tied to the environment, and the extent to which such understanding of being could be the axiological basis for environmental ethics?** I premise this research question on the understanding that African metaphysics has not been clearly explored in terms of its normative and teleological\(^6\) import to environmental ethics, which is what I have in mind.

Part of my approach towards addressing this pertinent research question would involve taking seriously the African communitarian system, common among most African societies, which for Ifeanyi A. Menkiti denotes an antithesis of moral individualism and subjectivism;

\(^4\) The Bantu speaking people occupy a large part of the sub-Saharan African region. According to Samkange and Samkange, ‘Bantu’ refers to various “peoples of southern, central and eastern Africa” who share certain linguistic components in their various indigenous languages (Samkange and Samkange, 1980: 36). However, it must be emphasised that not all communities found in sub-Saharan Africa are Bantu. See also page 62 in this thesis.

\(^5\) See Chapter three for contrasts with the word “ontology”.

\(^6\) The etymological origin of the word ‘teleological’ is *telos*, which means purpose or *end*. So, when I use the word throughout the work, I denote an understanding of being or reality as purposive or the ultimate *end* of a being or reality.
(Menkiti, 1984: 171). Similarly, Dismas A. Masolo sees the nature and good of an individual person as fundamentally constituted by social relationships (Masolo, 2010: 222). So, my attempt at sub-Saharan African ontology-based environmental ethics would be based on critically assessing the environmental ethical import of being within the context of sub-Saharan African communities that are inherently communitarian.

I would address African ontology based environmental ethics in light of this under-explored area of Bantu metaphysics that I will generally refer to as African metaphysics. According to such metaphysics, it is generally held that the individual being is inherently embedded in, and morally evaluated in terms of, not only his/her human community, but also the environment at large. Hence, it would import to environmental ethics Onwuanibe’s contention that the African philosophy of the human person is existential, in the sense that it is based on the conviction that the metaphysical sphere is not abstractly divorced from concrete experience since the physical and metaphysical are essential aspects of human reality (Onwuanibe, 1984: 184). (See also Mbiti, 1969: 97.) Vimbai Chivaura echoes similar sentiments as he argues that,

the African world declares that our world has two aspects. They are the physical and the spiritual. The spiritual manifests itself in various ways . . . The material and spiritual, therefore, coexist both in human societies and the rest of nature since we are all interwoven into the fabric of the spiritual universe (Chivaura, 2006a: 214).

Although my approach to African environmental ethics is largely informed by the professional approach to African philosophy, I accept and make meaningful use of certain metaphysical claims that stem from African ethno-philosophy. Some of these metaphysical claims that largely shape African moral thinking are based on the belief in the existence of God, ancestors and the vitalist understanding of existence as I will explore them in greater
detail. The justification for accepting and making use of these metaphysical claims is that they are part of the African ontological conception of existence and that ethno-philosophy is an important aspect of African philosophy.

In sum, the fundamental enquiry of whether and how sub-Saharan African ideas about ontology might contribute to a plausible environmental ethic would be the central research question of the proposed thesis. This fundamental question is premised on the understanding that sub-Saharan African ethical perspectives on fundamental moral issues would be usefully informed by certain metaphysical conceptions of the human person. As Shutte observes, among most African communities “the human self is not something that first exists on its own and then enters into relationship with its surrounding. It exists only in relation to its surrounding; these relationships are what it is. The most important of these are the relationships we have with others” (Shutte, 2009: 90-91).

One philosophical justification for addressing this research question is the fact that environmental ethics is increasingly becoming an area of serious concern for philosophy. Boss contends that “the environmental ethics movement is relatively a newcomer on the philosophical scene” (Boss, 2008: 735), but it has quickly become influential. Partly, this is because philosophy critically considers those issues that are found in most dimensions of our lives and that are important everyday questions. Environmental ethics, as an applied philosophical discipline, satisfies this criterion. With reference to African environmental ethics in particular, Kai Horsthemke observes that “until recently very little has been written on the subject” (Horsthemke, 2015: 1). This is what makes the examination of African ontology-based environmental ethics worthwhile.

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7 There is a general temptation in philosophy to use the terms ‘ontology’ and ‘metaphysics’ interchangeably. However, in this work, I will take ontology as an important aspect and branch of metaphysics. A detailed analysis of the difference between the two terms is also found in chapter three under item 3.2.
While the research would be worth doing in itself as a critical reflection on theoretical environmental concerns, it may also form the basis for informed policy decisions on practical solutions to real environmental problems threatening the African environment and the world at large. This could perhaps address Lawrence Ogbo Ugwuanyi’s worry that “African wisdom and worldview has not commanded much attention in the theoretical formulation of principles and policies that define and direct the future of our world” (Ugwuanyi, 2011a: 3). It is my hope that African ontology-based environmental ethics will contribute towards solving concrete applied ethical challenges facing the African environment.

Overall, in pursuit of my research objectives in the area of African metaphysics and how it is related to environmental ethics, I intend to partly fulfil what Masolo calls “setting the tone for the pursuit and use of African categories for dealing with a wide range of philosophical issues” (Masolo, 2010: 140). African metaphysics and its import for environmental well-being would be the pinnacle of my intention to this objective. It is an approach that differs from, but largely complements other efforts in this pursuit by recent African environmental ethicists such as Bujo (2009a, 2009b), Murove (2009a, 2009b), Ramose (2009), Behrens (2010, 2011, 2014a, 2014b) and most recently Horsthemke (2015).

**Clarification of the Project and Scope**

One observation one can make from the African tradition is that, until the past few decades, not much could be used as the basis for appreciating the African environment, especially its moral thought. According to Thaddeus Metz, “it is only in the past fifty years or so that traditional sub-Saharan approaches to ethics have been interpreted in writing by those who are informed and sympathetic” (Metz, 2012b: 100). Some of the reasons for this predicament could be attributable to the history of African culture, tradition and philosophy in general. As Matsika observes, “the prejudices of European colonialists against African cultures and traditions since they invaded Africa have been the main reason why very little effort has been
made in terms of giving an objective study to African thought” (Matsika, 2012: 86). Kwame Gyekye also shares a similar view and worry about African philosophy and wisdom in general. According to Gyekye, “... like African philosophy itself, the ideas and beliefs of the African society that bear on ethical conduct have not been given elaborate investigation and clarification and, thus, stand in real need for profound and extensive analysis and interpretation” (Gyekye, 2013: 205). As I acknowledge this problem in terms of how sub-Saharan African environmental thinking⁸ has not been given much attention, this research project intends to address this concern by Matsika, Gyekye and others who see African thought as having been suppressed.

In my attempt to contribute meaningfully to the area of African environmental ethics, I ultimately aim to construct a sound sub-Saharan African ethical thinking that stems from African metaphysics. To achieve this objective, I strictly focus on sub-Saharan African communitarian societies and their thinking. I focus on those communities of the Bantu speaking people that I find to be sharing almost similar metaphysical, cultural and linguistic variables so that some general conclusions that I make on these respective societies will almost be closer to the state of affairs of these communities. According to Horsthemke, “while there exists no single unified ‘African ethic’ or ‘African moral outlook’, there are nonetheless certain core ideas that appear with astonishing regularity across African (especially Sub-Saharan) societies and cultures” (Horsthemke, 2015: 1). This is what makes some informed generalisations and conclusions about African communities possible.

Although I benefit, in terms of my literature review, from some anthropological attempts at African environmental ethics as well as other serious philosophical attempts at such environmental ethics such as those by Murove (2004), Kelbessa (2005), Bujo (2009a, 2009b)

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⁸ In this work, I will sometimes deliberately use the phrase ‘environmental thinking’ with an elastic understanding to also mean environmental ethics. Although the two phrases are not synonymous, I use them interchangeably throughout this work because environmental ethics builds on environmental thinking.
and Behrens (2010, 2011), in this endeavour, I intend to go beyond these views which are mainly relational views about African environmental ethics. I therefore consider sub-Saharan African ontology in terms of how it could be the axiological and normative basis for a sound environmental ethical thinking of sub-Saharan African societies that I find to be inherently teleologically oriented. My ultimate goal here is not to belittle or dismiss earlier attempts at sub-Saharan African environmental ethics, but to complement to such body of literature in a way that I find not to have been seriously explored before. This is the teleological view of environmental ethics which I have in mind here. Ultimately, I propose to produce what I would describe as an attractive and meaningful ontology-based and teleologically oriented sub-Saharan African environmental ethics. That kind of environmental ethics stems from African conceptions of existence.

**Significance of the Research Project to the Field of Environmental Ethics**

The metaphysical underpinning that I find within the area of African environmental ethics is something that I find to be relevant for a sound teleologically oriented African environmental ethics. As a unique contribution to the area of African environmental ethics, I find African metaphysics as underexplored, particularly with regards to how it relates to teleological environmental ethical thinking.

Some prominent thinkers on African philosophy such as Menkiti (1984, 2004), Dzobo (1992), Wiredu (1996) and Gyekye (1992, 1998) for example, are known for having examined the metaphysical and communitarian nature of most African societies, which of course is part of African metaphysics. However, they do not directly address environmental concerns in particular in the same way as I intend in this thesis. Also, most of these thinkers tend to limit their analyses to particular African ethnic groups whose views cannot necessarily be universalised and taken as representative of African philosophy generally. This
is why I intend to explore further more generally applicable and under-theorised ontological ideas that are salient in African communities and apply them to environmental ethics.

Some of the recent serious attempts in African environmental ethics by for example, Murove (2004: 195-215) and Kelbessa (2005: 17-34), while advancing an African environmental ethic, they are mainly informed by anthropological perspectives and are culturally rooted in particular ethnic communities. For example, Kelbessa (2005: 17-34) examines traditional environmental ethics of the Oromo in Ethiopia, while Murove (2004: 195-215) looks at Shona ecological conservation, as if they are representative of African environmental philosophy. My project would move beyond these anthropological projects, and adopt, from a critical philosophical perspective, a metaphysical approach to African environmental ethics.

My approach to African environmental ethics would also differ from the fundamentally moral and relational approaches taken by Ramose (1999: 49, 2009: 308), Tangwa (2004: 387-395), Bujo (2009b: 113-128), Prozesky (2009: 298-307), Behrens (2011, 2014a, 2014b), Ojomo (2011: 101-113) and Ugwuanyi (2011a: 1-10). While these thinkers have attempted to establish how environmental philosophy could be seen through various African relational value systems, such as Murove’s idea of *ukama* (relatedness) (2004 and 2009b), Behrens’s African relational environmentalism (2010) and Ramose’s notion of *unhu/ubuntu/botho* (moral being) (1999 and 2009), the proposed research based on African ontology would be unique in so far as it would be rooted in the way in which the individual conceives his/her existence in a typically African worldview. For example, it would consider the view that a person, or perhaps a *real* person, is essentially one whose existence is essentially tied to humanity and the environment at large. In that way, I avoid to legitimise African environmental ethics as being essentially anthropocentric like what Horsthemke seeks to do in his recent work on *Animals and African Ethics* (Horsthemke, 2015: 93-9.)
As this work exceptionally proposes to explore the possibility of how African conceptions of being or existence could be the teleological basis for environmental ethics, it is an attempt to rediscover and reconstruct beliefs, ideas and theories that seem to have been suppressed and overlooked, but that I suspect are necessary for the completeness of an environmental philosophy that is rooted in African ontology and teleology. It is expected the proposed study will make an original contribution towards understanding the existential conception of the human person as inherently related to a conception of teleological environmental ethics.

**Overview of Chapters**

Chapter one focuses on *Situating Environmental Ethics in Western Philosophy*. In this particular chapter, I attempt to locate environmental ethics in the broad history of Western philosophy in general. The attempt to first focus on Western environmental ethics is deliberate and obviously needs some justification. Although my inquiry is into African environmental ethics, I purposefully start with a discussion of Western philosophy. One justification for this approach is that African philosophy and its environmental ethics cannot be understood independently of how environmental ethics is itself conceptualised in the history of philosophy in general. The other reason is to enable me to make some substantial comparisons and contrasts with non African traditions such as the Western tradition as I eventually focus primarily of African philosophy in the later chapters. This kind of approach is compatible with the approach taken by Metz, who sees the need for “. . . comparing a philosophical interpretation of indigenous African perspectives on ethics with philosophies from other traditions and evaluating the extent to which the former has global contributions to make” (Metz, 2012b: 101-2).

Chapter two focuses on *Environmental Ethics as Found in African Philosophy*. This chapter closely interconnects with chapter one as it defines African philosophy and African environmental ethics respectively. Having situated environmental ethics in Western
philosophy in the first chapter, the second chapter attempts to connect that understanding of environmental ethics as understood from the Western tradition but now within the African philosophical context. However, chapter two is more focussed on a particular conception of knowledge and wisdom which stems from the African context. This is why this chapter critically outlines the way philosophy and environmental ethics should be understood in the African worldview.

After discussing African philosophy and African environmental ethics in chapter two, chapter three examines the question of **Ontology in African Philosophy.** From a conception of the African view of knowledge that is discussed in chapter two, chapter three builds on that and proceeds to examine the question of existence in African thinking. It is in this third chapter where I argue that despite the various levels of existence that can be found in the African hierarchy of existence, there must be some purpose at which existence is aimed.

Chapter four builds on the third chapter which focuses on the aspect of existence. The fourth chapter focuses on **African Theocentric Environmental Ethics.** The argument that I develop is that a metaphysical and theological understanding of the Supreme Being or God is central to teleological environmental ethics in African philosophy. As I focus on the aspect of *telos* in this chapter, I argue that conceptions of the Supreme Being or God have a teleological dimension in the people’s view of existence and environmental ethics in African thinking.

Chapter five is also an additional argument to the argument that I develop in chapter four. In this fifth chapter, **The Place of Ancestors in African Theocentric Environmental Ethics,** I argue that, just like God, the ancestors also need to be taken as contributing to a conception

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9 A theocentric environmental ethics is a kind of environmentalism that puts an understanding of God at the centre of environmental ethical thinking. A detailed view of this kind of environmental ethics is later found in chapter four.
of right and wrong in the context of teleological environmental ethics. I focus on the metaphysical and epistemic view of the ancestors and how such an understanding could be of relevance to the teleological view of environmental ethics.

The sixth chapter, **The Moral Status of Nature**, is where I focus on the question of whether nature (both living and non-living beings) ought to be taken as having moral status or ethical standing. I use views that are developed from chapters three, four and five that existence is purposive to argue further that nature has moral status. I focus on both non-human living beings and non-living beings as I argue that they all need to be given moral standing on the basis of various teleological appeals that I examine in this particular chapter.

Chapter seven, **African Communitarian Environmental Ethics**, also comes as an additional argument to the main argument that I develop in the sixth chapter which is the view that nature has moral status. Chapter seven makes a follow up to the sixth chapter by considering African communitarian thinking as a further premise to support the argument for the moral status of nature. As I build on Menkiti’s (1984: 171-181) and Gyekye’s (1992: 101-122) conceptions of communitarian thinking, I go beyond these views and argue that African communitarian thinking strongly supports a teleological view of environmental ethics.

The eighth chapter is the last chapter on **Applications**. It is an attempt to critically consider the utility of what I develop here as an ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics. In this last chapter I try to see how the kind of ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics could be of theoretical relevance to real world problems within the context of the environment like the environmental challenges such as poaching as well as human-wildlife conflicts and displacement that communities in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP) face.
Chapter One: Situating Environmental Ethics in Western Philosophy

1.1: Introduction

In this chapter, I intend to situate environmental ethics within the broad history of Western philosophy. I critically trace and examine how Western philosophers have considered the question of whether and how human beings’ ethical relationship with the natural environment should be construed. Because the ultimate aim of my thesis is to critically examine the extent to which African ontology is related to environmental ethics, I find it useful to start with a discussion of how environmental ethics itself could be placed within the history of Western academic philosophy in which it originated. I will then proceed in the next chapters to assess the way in which environmental ethics fits within African philosophy particularly focussing on how African ontology could be related to environmental ethics which is the thesis of the whole discussion.

One might find it odd for a thesis in African philosophy to start with a discussion on Western philosophy. The reason for my engagement with the history of Western philosophy first instead of African philosophy in this particular chapter is that it will serve to make and substantiate comparisons and contrasts in environmental ethical orientation, when I consider African philosophy in the next chapter and how its ontology-based thinking is environmentally oriented. Also, I note that although the history of Western philosophy cannot be accounted as ‘the’ only significant history of philosophy, here, I particularly focus on it because much of what has been written on environmental ethics has centred on trying to align it within the history of Western philosophy. Even attempts to legitimise the existence of other histories of philosophy like African philosophy, which is what I have in mind, have almost

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10 The title of this chapter may appear, for some, to be misplaced for a thesis that is about ‘The Import of African Ontology for Environmental Ethics’. The justification for its inclusion is not to show that African environmental ethics is an offshoot of Western environmental ethics. It is intended to enable one to appreciate the Western philosophical understanding of environmental ethical thinking, which has generally shaped environmental ethical thinking in philosophy in general. Also, I intend to make some comparisons and contrasts with it as I discuss African environmental ethics in the other chapters.
always boiled down to situating it and comparing it with what is within the broad history of Western philosophy.

The justification for situating environmental ethics within the history of Western philosophy is that environmental ethics is a component of applied ethics. Environmental ethics is also part of environmental philosophy. Hence, in that regard, I find it reasonable to situate environmental ethics within the history of Western philosophy. The other reason for my attempt in situating environmental ethics in history of philosophy is that environmental ethics is not merely a contemporary philosophical attempt without an antecedent past. So, for these reasons, it is important to assess the background from which environmental ethics is coming before assessing how African ontology is closely related to it in chapters that will follow.

In the attempt to place environmental ethics in the history of Western philosophy, I start by defining environmental ethics. In this regard, I endeavour to critically examine the various dimensions and understandings of environmental ethics. In this pursuit, I ultimately intend to come up with a working understanding of environmental ethics that is largely informed and influenced by the history of Western philosophical thinking. One of the reasons for venturing into Western philosophical thinking in particular is because of the way African philosophy is challenged, influenced and largely informed by Western philosophy. As well, there is also a serious attempt to critically trace, examine and understand the historical roots and development of Western environmental ethics from the ancient philosophical perspectives to contemporary views. As I situate environmental ethics within the history of Western philosophy, I critically examine some selected epochs within the history of Western philosophy and critically assess and challenge the thinking that environmental ethics is a relatively new ethical discourse of the twentieth century as espoused by most contemporary Western thinkers on environmental ethics such as Warwick Fox (2000: 1) and Judith Boss.
This position is prevalent and shared in contemporary philosophical discourses on environmental ethics.

In view of such notions, I forward the argument that environmental ethical thinking has been intertwined with the general history of Western philosophy and that it has not been critically and elaborately presented in the history of philosophy despite a number of ethical philosophers having invaluably contributed to it. I also critique the way in which environmental ethics is approached in much of the discourse in twentieth century and contemporary philosophical thinking. Above all, my intention here will be to show that environmental ethics has traditionally been a component of the history of Western philosophical thinking. This is why I maintain the position that environmental ethical thinking can meaningfully be traced from classical philosophical thinking to contemporary philosophical attempts that seem to downplay the antecedent past in terms of influence on environmental ethical thinking. Consequently, I examine the ancient philosophical tradition, the medieval period, modern philosophy and some contemporary philosophical perspectives on environmental ethics.

1.2: Understanding Environmental Ethics

The question concerning the ethical relationship that ought to exist between human beings and other non-human beings and their surrounding remains at the core of Western environmental ethics and African environmental ethics as well. Contrary to Morscher, Neumaier and Simons’ view that “human beings are not the only creatures which have moral standing, and that not only human interests give reasons for action” (Morscher, Neumaier and Simons, 1998: 9-10), traditionally, human beings have tended to look at themselves as the only morally superior creatures on the planet earth. This view is based on the assumption that human beings are the only rational animals. It has also characterised much of Western philosophical thinking from the classical period to date despite some non-anthropocentric
attempts to consider environmental ethics as worthwhile. Such a view which I will consider here as largely shaping anthropocentric environmental ethics has been held and largely influenced by thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz.

While it is reasonable to hold the view that human beings are indeed the only creatures on earth that are capable of rational deliberation, such knowledge has served to confirm and shape a somewhat anthropocentric thinking in environmental ethics. Anthropocentric thinking is basically the assumption of the prioritisation of human interests at the expense of everything else. According to Edwin Etieyibo, an anthropocentric value-system is shaped by the belief that human beings occupy the top of the hierarchy of all species and that they are at the centre of the universe (2011: 52). This assumption could best explain this inherently human-centred thinking and approach to environmental ethics that relegates the environment in terms of moral consideration as characterising much of Western philosophical thinking. Making comparisons between Western and African environmental thinking, Godfrey Tangwa asserts the view that “the Western world view can be described as predominantly anthropocentric and individualistic, and contrasted with its African counterpart which [is] described as eco-bio-communitarian” (Tangwa, 2004: 392).

Although Tangwa’s argument for African environmental ethics as oriented towards the ecosphere, the biosphere and the human community sounds reasonable, to blanket all of Western environmental ethics as anthropocentric like what he has done would be unfair since elements of non-anthropocentric environmental ethics can be noted in Western environmental ethics as well. Also, meaningful environmental ethics is not to be found in non-anthropocentric environmental ethics alone since African ethics is also sometimes accused of being anthropocentric despite its eco-bio-communitarian orientation. (See also Horsthemke, 2015: 98). Rather, totally rejecting anthropocentric environmental ethics would be unfair and
a mistake too. Anthropocentric environmental ethics as I trace it in the history of philosophy does not entail a total disregard for the environmental welfare and well-being. In essence, anthropocentric environmental ethics could sometimes be viewed as safeguarding the needs for both human beings and nature although it prioritises the interests of human beings.

Much of contemporary environmental ethics tries to question the extent to which the interests of human communities could be reconciled with those of non-human communities. As well, it tries to assess the way in which the interests of future generations could be successfully talked of. Environmental ethics tries to address the question of how the task of taking into consideration the current generations of humans and their future generations as well as the interests of all the components of the environment could be reasonably achieved. This approach or form of environmental ethics is often informed by anthropocentric thinking that prioritises the interests of the human community. Of course it is important to admit that some environmental ethicists are anthropocentric in approach while others are not.

Traditionally, environmental ethics is partly informed by the calls for safeguarding the needs and interests of current and future generations. Attempts to consider the moral interests of future generations and the environment in themselves have been conspicuously inherent in traditional Western philosophical discourse. However, it is only recently that non-anthropocentric environmental ethical concerns began to be critically explored in the literature, as espoused in most debates on the need for environmental ethics in contemporary Western philosophy. In advancing this viewpoint, Arne Naess argues that “today, a leading responsibility of humankind is the responsibility for future generations; that we hand down a planet with resources as great as we found in our own generations. But we also have a responsibility for future living creatures in general” (Naess, 2002: 102). Thus, the need to safeguard the needs of current and future generations as well as the interests of other non-
rational creations in their own right remains at the core of contemporary environmental ethics in the Western world.

Non-anthropocentric environmental ethics, the form of environmental ethics that I rather prefer in place of anthropocentrism attempts to extend moral consideration beyond the human community to include other communities of non-human beings including non-animate reality. Environmental ethics according to Philomena A. Ojomo (2011: 103) therefore, examines the moral basis of environmental responsibility. It is also important to note that environmental ethics is not limited to non-anthropocentric environmental ethics alone which is just one form of environmental ethics. However, the fundamental question of whether both non-human animals and non-animate forms of reality should be considered in debates on environmental ethics is also very tricky and highly controversial. The place and value that should be given to non-animate forms of reality in environmental ethics is not so clear. However, in essence, the non-physical world remains at the core of a meaningful and non-anthropocentric environmental ethics. Although it appears to be what Gilbert Ryle (1949: 17) calls a “category mistake”, the non-animate form of reality should be considered seriously in questions about environmental ethics as well. For example, non-animate form of reality like soils, rivers, water and air among others, possess not only aesthetic value, but that they also have intrinsic value\textsuperscript{11} such that human action can either affect them and their surrounding either negatively or positively. This view is partly substantiated by John Baird Callicott’s argument for the \textit{land ethic}.\textsuperscript{12} Although it cannot be taken as so unique an ethical theory, the \textit{land ethic} as an approach to environmental ethics is concerned with such things as the anthropogenic pollution of air and water by individual and municipal wastes among other

\textsuperscript{11} There are different forms of value/s that can be ascribed and attributable to nature. A discussion of the different and various forms of values that can be talked of with respect to the environment, particularly those that I employ in this thesis will be found in chapter six where I focus on the real issues and debates in environmental ethics especially with regard to the moral status of nature.

\textsuperscript{12} A further discussion of the concept is found later in this chapter under section 1.3.4 when I further examine it within the context of contemporary environmental ethics.
issues that affect the environment and humanity in general (Callicott, 2001: 204). Brennan and Lo also appreciate this perspective on environmental ethics that is based on the land ethic. Although Andrew Brennan and Yeuk-Sze Lo (2010: 96) challenge it for being based on what they call “ethical sentimentalism”, they also positively look at the land ethic as being:

one of the many different layers of moral codes within a larger range of codes, all of which apply to us since it is possible to urge protection of ecological wholes and also respect for human individuals then, this looks like an ethic that can be environmental without being either misanthropic or eco-fascist (Brennan and Lo, 2010: 96).

So, the land ethic approach to environmental ethics takes on board the inherent value and interests of human beings as well as those of the environment, including non-animate forms of reality. This is why Robert Elliot looks at non-animate form of reality as wild nature, and asserts,

Wild nature has intrinsic value, which gives rise to obligations to preserve it and to restore it. In other words, our obligations towards wild nature derive, in large part from the intrinsic value that it possesses . . . which is the value [it has] apart from satisfying human interests . . . (Elliot, 1997: 1).

The value that the natural environment has apart from that of satisfying humanity alone is one of the major bases for the justification of much of recent non-anthropocentric environmental ethics. It calls for the moral consideration of human action in so far as humanity interacts with the natural environment. This is the philosophy guiding and shaping the greater part of contemporary Western perspectives to environmental ethics.

Environmental ethics has become a serious normative ethical and non-anthropocentric attempt to make ethics transcend human communities. This view is supported by John O’Neill who argues that environmental ethics now tends to raise questions that go beyond
purely human interests (O’Neill, 2001: 4). By normative environmental ethics, I refer to a form of non-anthropocentric environmental ethics that attempts to shift from the traditional human-centred approach to additional ethical issues. I therefore take Elliot’s understanding that “an important aspect of the development of normative environmental ethics has been the move from human centred to the non-human centred concerns” (Elliot, 2001: 181). As a normative ethical discipline, environmental ethics as I consider it here as now a non-anthropocentric perspective, attempts to critically examine concrete issues to do with how human beings ought to relate with nature or the natural environment. It also attempts to assess whether in any way there ought to be an ethical relationship that is subject to moral scrutiny in such interaction. Of course, this is not the only conventional understanding of environmental ethics since environmental ethics could be comprehended from either the anthropocentric or the non-anthropocentric perspective. However, in this chapter, I adopt the operational broader understanding of environmental ethics as an inquiry into how human beings ought to relate with their surrounding from both the anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric perspectives. Even Elliot appreciates the way in which environmental ethics could be shaped by these two perspectives as he notes that:

A human-centred environmental ethic may go quite a way toward articulating the moral responses many may have to environmental damage and destruction. But, not everyone who endorses environmentalist policies is moved merely by human-centred considerations. Indeed, some might regard them as comparatively insignificant and others would regard them as no more significant than considerations that extend beyond the interests of our own species (Elliot, 2001: 179).

On the other hand, the reason why environmental ethics needs to be considered without necessarily prioritising human interests alone is that human actions on their surrounding
natural environment affects not only fellow human species alone. Rather, human actions can also have long term effects on other sentient beings and non-sentient reality that constitutes the environment. This is why I consider both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric environmental ethics as having a broadly normative function towards both humanity and the environment. O’Neill also sees normative ethics as crucial to environmental ethics because it “deal[s] with particular ethical claims including those at the centre of environmental ethics concerning environmental change and its effects on human and non-human beings” (O’Neill, 2001: 164).

Practically, environmental ethics challenges humanity to critically rethink its actions with regard to how they can affect and change human and non-human communities. As Warwick Fox sees it, “environmental ethics is, or at least ought to be concerned with examining any or all ethical questions that arise with respect to a moral agent’s interaction with any or all aspects of the world around her or him” (Fox, 2000: 1). Unlike other applied ethical disciplines like medical ethics and business ethics that are often limited to human communities and the welfare and well-being of fellow human moral agents, environmental ethics goes beyond in its approach and attempts to be holistic in so far as it takes on board all there is in evaluating human action. This thinking is based on the assumption that the interests of both the human beings and the environment must be equal.

While the application, evaluation and justification of human ethical conduct has been traditionally limited to human communities, as Boss (2008: 735) observes, environmental ethics as an applied ethical discourse from a non-anthropocentric Western philosophical perspective, attempts to transcend the human community to encompass the whole of the environment, or nature. In this work, I use the terms environment and nature interchangeably to mean the natural environment in general. Of course, one fundamental problem that needs to be understood within the context of environmental ethics is the basis for giving ethical
priority to nature or the environment. This issue has to be addressed in terms of the justification of extending morality beyond the human community to include the environment at large. Peterson attempts to come close to this justification as he observes that, “nature carries the weight of projected human fears and hopes, the marks of history and political conflict, the grounds for moral legitimation or condemnation” (Peterson, 2001: 1). Following this thinking, it seems apparent that what it means to be human is determined by appreciating the mutual relationship of humanity with nature in general. Hence, it is reasonable to sustain the thinking,

Not only are ideas of humanness and of nature wrapped up with each other, but, they also shape ethical systems and practices. Questions such as what counts as human, what does not, and what is natural or unnatural do not simply feed philosophical debates but help determine moral and political priorities, patterns of behaviour, and institutional structures (Peterson, 2001: 1).

Despite this justification for non-anthropocentric environmental ethics being based on a somewhat human centred ethical thinking, it is reasonable to take Peterson’s justification for environmental ethics as it considers the relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Peterson’s argument takes into account the principle of equal consideration of interests between human beings and the natural environment.

Environmental ethics is also justified on the basis upon which it attempts to recognise the interconnection between human beings and other non-human beings and the natural environment at large. This is why Baxter thinks that:

human beings are part of the natural world, not set over and above it, which means that human beings remain integrated into ecological systems, local and global, even while they change them, intentionally or otherwise. This fact of
ecological interconnectedness is the basis upon which environmentalists have tried to develop ethical systems which attribute to human beings various moral responsibilities towards, and with respect to, the rest of nature (Baxter, 2007: 95).

This interconnectedness between human beings and nature is visible in African environmental ethics that I will consider later. Although focussing on the pre-colonial metaphysical outlook, Tangwa alludes to this interconnectedness between humanity and the environment as he argues that “the pre-colonial traditional African metaphysical outlook can be described as eco-bio-communitarian, implying recognition and acceptance of interdependence and peaceful coexistence between earth, plants, animals, and humans” (Tangwa, 2004: 389).

In spite of the shared argument by most radical non-anthropocentric environmental ethicists that human beings do not have the basis upon which they can have exclusive rights to use nature to further their ends however they please, it is here noted that environmental ethical thinking can only make sense if and only if human beings relate with nature by recognising how interrelated they are, and how they could further such relationship. Otherwise an attempt to disconnect human beings from their interconnectedness with nature is not sustainable and reasonable. Although anthropocentristst also accept this point, I therefore take as reasonable, the argument that human beings ought to recognise and appreciate their interconnectedness with the environment, especially with other animate and non-animate reality so as to safeguard their well-being and that of the environment as well. This perspective is what I consider as a reasonable version of anthropocentric thinking although I do not want to legitimise it. On the other hand, my argument for appreciating and accepting non-anthropocentric environmental ethics as more reasonable is centred on the premise that, apart from serving human interests, the environment deserves to be given moral consideration as an
end in itself that also stands to further its purpose in life. While looking at the contribution of African philosophy, thought and practice to environmental ethics, Kevin Behrens submits the argument that “an obvious implication of any position that holds that everything in nature is interdependent is that the well-being and continued survival of human beings is dependent on the health of the environment” (Behrens, 2011: 54). Although this approach to environmental ethics that is centred on interconnectedness sounds anthropocentric, it is reasonable and acceptable since it safeguards the interests of both human beings and the natural environment.

While I argue that environmental ethics is relatively inherent throughout the history of Western philosophy, I take as suspicious some contemporary Western as well as some African philosophical perspectives that take it to be a relatively new discourse of the twentieth century (O’Neill, 1993: 1). This view by O’Neill is also shared by Tangwa as he sees the development of environmental ethics as a result of “the increasing realisation of the very grave dangers posed to our entire planet by what might be described as the most successful aspect of Western culture, namely, its science and technology” (Tangwa, 2004: 387). This perspective on environmental ethics will however be considered later as influenced by some contemporary Western viewpoints of environmental ethics that ought to be challenged from an African environmental perspective that I develop. Boss subscribes to this contemporary Western position that “the environmental ethics movement is a relative newcomer on the philosophical scene” (Boss, 2008: 735). The view that environmental philosophy is a new thinking is advanced by the way some contemporary environmental philosophers have reacted to the increasing global environmental challenges facing the globe such as water and air pollution, extinction of rare species, heat waves, and global warming.

Overall, a considerable body of literature on environmental ethics has been identified in Western contemporary environmental ethics. The works of White (1967), Singer (1985), O’Neill (1993 and 2001), Elliot (1997 and 2001), Fox (2000), Callicott (2001) and Naess
among others, almost suggesting that environmental ethics could be related to the current environmental challenges facing the globe. These environmental challenges are what most of these thinkers have in mind. However, contrary to the standpoint by O’Neill, Tangwa and Boss, I argue and maintain that environmental ethics, broadly understood, has always emerged as an ethical philosophical discipline that challenges humanity to rethink their position within the cosmic world.

Another dimension to justify the existence of contemporary Western environmental ethics is explored by Fox who attributes the development of environmental ethics to the emergence of the applied sciences after the post-Big Bang physics, post-Darwinian evolutionary biology and ecology where humanity has been led to question the ways in which it dwells upon the Earth (Fox, 2000: 1). Hence, for him, “taken together, these major theoretical and practical challenges to our previous self understandings and ways of living have led, just since the 1970s, to the development of an emerging field of philosophy known as environmental philosophy or more precisely environmental ethics” (Fox, 2000: 1).

The view that environmental ethics is a response to some environmental crisis seems to contradict with my interpretation of environmental ethics in Western philosophy. Just like Fox who sees environmental ethics as a newcomer, Varner thinks,

> The environmental crisis forces us to re-examine our concept of moral standing. Traditionally, it is claimed, only human beings were thought to matter, morally speaking; but the environmental crisis will not be resolved until we break with tradition and acknowledge that non-human nature also has moral standing (Varner, 1998: 5).

Here, the problem of conceiving environmental ethics as a response to the environmental crisis and deterioration is the assumption implied in Varner’s argument that, prior to the purported environmental crisis humanity had no conception of environmental ethics.
In view of the foregoing thus, environmental ethics as I will consider it must be understood as part and parcel of human beings’ moral obligation. Environmental ethics must thus be understood broadly from both the non-anthropocentric perspective and partly from the anthropocentric perspective. Considering the history of philosophy and how is it related to environmental ethics as I will do in the next section, it is observed that both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric environmental ethics, which is what I have in mind, take into consideration the mutual interconnectedness among human beings and also the interconnection between humanity and the natural environment although the non-anthropocentric view is most favourable.

1.3: Situating Environmental Ethics in History of Western Philosophy

Here, I attempt to critically place environmental ethics in its broader understanding within the broad history of Western philosophy and see the extent to which environmental ethics could be meaningfully talked of as having been an inseparable part of the history of Western philosophy. I intend to critically trace and place environmental ethical thinking in history of philosophy such that one could clearly discern how environmental ethics is understood in history of philosophy. Also, situating environmental ethics in a historical perspective will enable the tracing and appreciation of how environmental ethical thinking has developed and taken shape over time.

In taking this perspective, I also do not want to legitimise the view that African philosophy and other philosophies of the world are second order philosophies as has been implied and legitimised by the works of say, Belgian missionary Placide Tempels (1959) in his purportedly civilising work on the existence of Bantu Philosophy. Given this background, and that the history of Western philosophy has been one of the most elaborate and easy to follow, it is therefore worth assessing the way in which human beings can meaningfully talk of
environmental ethics within its history and development before assessing it in the context of African philosophy.

In the following section, I will consider environmental ethics broadly from its anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric standpoints and situate environmental ethics in history of Western philosophical thinking. I will critically consider the extent to which environmental ethical thinking could be meaningfully talked of from classical Greek philosophy to contemporary Western philosophical perspectives. Following this pursuit, I therefore submit the conclusion that, contrary to some philosophical perspectives that environmental ethics is a dispensation of the contemporary period responding to the current ecological crisis, environmental ethics has traditionally been an inseparable part and parcel of the story and development of philosophy from the ancient philosophical period to contemporary philosophical thinking. It is thus against the conclusion made in this particular section on Western philosophy that I will also be able to consider, analyse and make comparisons as I assess the import of African philosophy to environmental ethics in the next chapters.

1.3.1: Classical Philosophy and the Development of Environmental Thinking

The classical period that I consider in this section is the ancient Greek period and its philosophical thinking stretching from around the sixth century B.C. up to around the Aristotelian era. I argue that environmental ethical thinking in ancient Greek philosophy, which I also call ‘classical Greek philosophy’ has been downplayed yet it is worth seriously considering despite its fairly anthropocentric strand. I also note that environmental ethical thinking in ancient Greek philosophy could be the basis for understanding the development of a sound environmental ethics. Although most historians of philosophy portray much of ancient Greek philosophy as silent about the need for an environmental ethics that would go towards safeguarding the environment, it cannot be totally disregarded as irrelevant towards
influencing the development of environmental ethics. Citing Homer and Plato, Brian Coman comes to the conclusion that “there have always been individuals with a concern and interest in the state of health and of the beauty of our environment. [Hence] what has changed in recent times (the last two hundred years or so) has been the general philosophy underlying such interests and concerns” (Coman, 2006: 55). In this regard, I therefore consider most of the ancient Greek thinkers such as Thales, Plato and Aristotle as contributing to the development of meaningful environmental ethics.

On the other hand, O’Connor examines the development of ancient Greek philosophical thinking and comes to the conclusion that “the earliest philosophical speculations were attempts to explain the origin and structure of the physical world” (O’Connor, 1964: 2). Of course, O’Connor’s claim about the general slant of classical philosophical thinking is true. However, this is not enough basis and justification for the total dismissal of ancient or classical Greek philosophy as not being relevant to environmental ethical thinking. Carone for example, supports the thinking that I develop in my argument that environmental philosophers have not been fair in downplaying ancient Greek philosophy’s contribution to environmental ethical thinking. She argues that much of what comes from the works of ancient Greek thinkers like Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus and Parmenides can be regarded as a “hylozoistic worldview, in which matter (hylō) and life (zōē) are inseparable” (Carone, 2001: 68). The strength of Carone’s argument is seen in the way Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes attempt to explain the basic form of substance from a naturalistic perspective.

In the light of Carone’s noteworthy observation, it is interesting to note that much of what is contained in most of ancient Greek philosophical attempts, particularly pre-Socratic philosophy, are attempts to place the human person at the centre of the universe and see the extent to which humanity could explore his surrounding and understand “‘what things really
are?’ and ‘how we can explain the process of change in things’” (Stumpf and Fieser, 2008: 5). This perspective is in itself influential to the shaping of environmental ethics, particularly one that is anthropocentric. It is only unfortunate that the bulk of the literature that is available on classical or ancient philosophy is silent on the import of environmental ethical thinking in these classical thinkers. However, this silence should not be taken to imply that ancient philosophical thinking is not conscious of environmental ethics. It is only that it is largely anthropocentric in outlook which is not necessarily a problem as such. Even if classical Greek philosophy is by and large informed by the need to consider the human person as rationally and morally superior to all other non-human beings and nature, still, there are some exceptions that make it possible for us to look at classical Greek philosophy as conscious of and informing both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric environmental ethics. The problem is only that environmental ethical thinking in such era has not been critically explored further particularly in the light of how the philosophical articulations of these ancient thinkers could be understood from non-anthropocentric environmental ethical perspectives.

Considering the attempts of the works of eminent thinkers in ancient Greek philosophy such as Thales (ca 585 B.C.), Anaximander (ca 610-546 B.C.), Anaximenes (585-528 B.C.), Pythagoras (ca 570-497 B.C.), Heraclitus (ca 540-480 B.C.), Parmenides (ca 510 B.C.), and Zeno (ca 489 B.C.), most historians of philosophy are tempted to assume that early ancient Greek philosophy started as just speculative and independent attempts, but that were not in any way close to coming up with clear and consistent environmental ethical theories like the one witnessed in recent Western philosophical attempts. I therefore note that although these metaphysically minded philosophers raised pertinent metaphysical questions about how they could understand their entire cosmos, they are unfairly regarded as having contributed little in terms of real efforts to bring such metaphysical questions towards addressing environmental
ethical issues. Traditionally, environmental ethics has not been attributed to these thinkers although “they shared an outlook that truly marks the beginning of philosophical inquiry” (Cohen, Curd and Reeve, 2011: 2).

In Thales for example, I find some serious environmental ethical attempts to bridge the gap between animate and inanimate reality. The traditional division between animate and non-animate reality is one of the major supports for anthropocentric thinking. However, such a division is not characteristic of Thales’s thinking. Jonathan Barnes maintains that when Thales asserts that inanimate things like magnets have a soul (psuché) and that everything is full of spirits, he succeeds in putting forth the argument that the difference between animate and non-animate reality is an illusion (Barnes, 1982: 9). This in itself, I find to be a very strong argument for the development of non-anthropocentric environmental ethics to be found in ancient Greek philosophy, particularly in Thales because of the way in which he attempts to close the gap between the moral status of animals and that of non-human animals. A similar attempt is also prominent in the African vitalist tradition that I will explore later on.

Besides these pre-Socratic metaphysically minded thinkers in ancient Greek philosophy, there are some prominent figures in early classical Greek philosophy like Plato and Aristotle who attempted to address serious environmental ethical questions. These thinkers, however, have rather been ignored and downplayed in terms of how they are critical of the extent to which humanity could go towards giving nature its intrinsic value. Although the phrase ‘intrinsic value’ has a variety of senses attached to it, I take and make use of the one that O’Neill defined simply as the value of a thing as an end in itself (O’Neill, 2001: 164). This is the working definition on which this section is based on. However, a more lucid discussion of the concept will be found in the other chapters where the real issues and concepts in
environmental ethics such as intrinsic value, instrumental value and anthropocentrism will be examined in great depth.

Notwithstanding the fact that both Plato and Aristotle are very critical about how human beings ought to live well, they contribute to environmental ethics. Although they are sometimes read as eudaemonists, still with regard to the question of how humans should relate with nature, the bulk of their writing, particularly Aristotle, suggests a fairly hierarchy based and anthropocentric environmental ethics. Perhaps this is influenced by their privileging of humanity with the faculty of reason that humanity is endowed with as opposed to all other creatures on the planet earth. In essence, while anthropocentric ethical questions mainly characterise much of the discussion of Plato and Aristotle’s social and political philosophy, on the other hand, non-anthropocentric environmental ethics as a philosophical inquiry into how human beings ought to relate equally with their surrounding has not been critically explored with the attempt to reconcile that traditional dominance of humanity over the natural environment.

Much of Plato’s social thinking centres on the fact that human persons are endowed with the faculty of reason (See Plato, Republic 440a-441c: 10435). Hence, on the basis of the realisation that human persons are rationally superior to other non-human creatures, I find such rational superiority to have greatly shaped the assumed moral superiority that humans have traditionally claimed over non-human animals and nature in general. Notwithstanding the fact that Plato’s philosophy contributes largely to an anthropocentric environmental ethics, still I find him as having a lot to offer to environmental ethics. In that regard Coman submits the following argument that I find to be worth considering:

In the west, from the time of Homer and Plato up to the 18\textsuperscript{th} century Enlightenment, it was considered as a given that humans and human destinies were the central reference point through which meaning and purpose could be
given to the word- indeed, to the universe. In the Platonic philosophy . . . there was a close correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm- that is to say, between the way the material world is structured and the way the human creature is structured (Coman, 2006: 55-56).

Aristotle even buys the same kind of thinking as he goes further to the extent of identifying a hierarchy of moral priority between humanity, non-human animals and the natural world of plants as he boldly argues:

In like manner we may infer that, after the birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and that the other animals exist for the sake of man, the tame for use and food, the wild, if not all, at least the greater part of them, for food, and for the provision of clothing and various instruments. Now, if nature makes nothing incomplete, and nothing in vain, the inference must be that she has made all animals for the sake of man (Aristotle, Politics, 1256b: 15-22).

This kind of thinking supports the traditional distinction and division between humanity and nature and thereby contributes to the dominance of human beings over the environment although this rather anthropocentric view of environmental ethics is partly acceptable as a form of environmentalism in traditional Western and African philosophy as well. Singer (1985: 477) also contends that it is this view which has been predominant in the Western philosophical tradition. For Singer, Aristotle is among the founders of this tradition in Western philosophical thinking that holds the view that human beings naturally ought to claim dominion over the natural environment. Aristotle thus, shares the thinking of most early Greek and Western philosophers who regard nature as some form of a hierarchy, in which the function of the less rational and hence the less perfect beings was to serve the more rational and more perfect (Singer, 1985: 477). While it remains mainly anthropocentric, the attempt to see a hierarchy in terms of moral priority in Aristotle’s thinking shows some effort
in being conscious of environmental ethics. The basis for accepting such thinking is centred on the understanding of environmental ethics as largely embracing both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric environmental ethics which is not a problem.

Notwithstanding Plato and Aristotle’s views as well as other dimensions from the classical philosophical tradition, their views on ethical thinking may not be totally dismissed as not having contributed to the development of environmental ethics. In other words, my argument here is not that ancient philosophy is not unconscious about environmental ethics. But that most of what emanates from ancient Greek philosophy has traditionally been presented as not being metaphysically oriented towards environmental ethics in the same way that I will see in African philosophy. While not being exhaustive on all the ‘Great Thinkers on the Environment’, Cooper (2001) for example looks at Aristotle as one of the greatest classical environmental thinkers who has a global influence on environmental thought and action. Cooper claims:

Aristotle was not, of course, an environmental scientist or philosopher in the contemporary sense . . . [since] the ‘eco-crisis’ which have stimulated recent environmental concern were happily unknown in ancient Greece . . . it is clear however that Aristotle experienced and urged a profound regard for the living world and several elements of his thinking prove attractive to contemporary environmental thought (Cooper, 2001: 12).

Even Aristotle’s hierarchy based ethical environmental thinking that I alluded to earlier serves to show that Aristotle is ready to embrace an environmental ethical thinking which takes into consideration the interests of both animate and non-animate reality. However, his kind of environmental ethical view takes into account the moral hierarchy of these forms of reality. Aristotle therefore, stands as one of the earliest thinkers on a hierarchy-based environmental ethics. Just as the way ancient philosophy laid the ground for the development
of serious philosophical thinking later, the development of environmental ethics could have been positively influenced by ancient environmental ethical thinking, particularly that of Aristotle.

Overall, in this section, I submit the argument that, despite its significant contribution to speculative philosophy based on freethinking, ancient Greek philosophy also influences the development of environmental ethical thinking in general. In particular, environmental ethical thinking could be seen to have developed in ancient Greek Philosophy. Even Coman admits that “we may say at the outset, that whilst the environmental movement is of recent origin (it really got underway in the 1960s), some forms of environmentalism are as old as Western civilisation itself” (Coman, 2006: 55). Although I also admit that some ancient Greek philosophers were divided with regard to the moral value of non-human nature (Boss, 2008: 736), above all, ancient Greek philosophy serves to lay the ground for the development of environmental ethics.

1.3.2: Medieval Christian Philosophy and Environmental Thinking

What I discuss here is medieval philosophy which is the thinking inspired and shaped by theological approaches to knowledge in the era after the classical period up to the beginning of renaissance philosophy. In this section, I intend to trace and place environmental ethical thinking within medieval philosophy. I discuss the extent to which environmental ethics could be meaningfully abstracted from medieval philosophy just like what I have attempted to do with ancient Greek philosophy. I therefore submit the argument that, broadly understood, environmental ethics is inherent in medieval thought. Despite the fact that most of the medieval philosophers’ arguments are theocentric, some of the medieval philosophers largely inform both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric environmental ethics. Hence environmental ethics is not alien to medieval philosophy.
Because of the influence of dogma, orthodox religion and Christian orientation, the better part of medieval thinking is shaped by the creation story on fundamental environmental questions and implications of the relations between human beings and nature. Even White contends with this position as he notes that “the Christian dogma of creation, which is found in the first clause of the Creeds, has another meaning for our comprehension of today’s ecological crisis” (White, 1967: 4). The view of nature being propagated in this thinking that is championed in medieval philosophy is essentially that humanity has dominion over all there is. However, this does not suffice to mean that medieval philosophical thought is purely anthropocentric as I will assess some non-anthropocentric attempts to environmental ethics within some of the influential medieval thinkers. Otherwise a charitable reading of medieval philosophy shows that it is influential to both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric environmental ethics.

Having accepted the dominion of humanity over nature, some of the early Christian fathers in the medieval period were not ready to embrace an ethical thinking that takes on board the equal consideration of interests of both human beings and nature. Following the Christian and mainly Catholic perspectives on most fundamental moral issues, St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas are among the most significant anthropocentric environmental philosophers of this period. Much of Medieval moral thinking is greatly shaped by Augustine and Aquinas particularly with regard to the question of the relationship that should subsist between humanity and nature. Of course, this is not to confirm that Augustine and Aquinas are the only significant philosophers within the medieval period who are contributing to the nature and development of anthropocentric environmental ethics.

Aquinas, just like his classical predecessor Aristotle, at some level champions human chauvinism within the context of how human beings should relate with the natural world. This is why he held the conclusion that human beings cannot sin against the natural world
and non-human animals (Singer, 1985: 478). However, on the moral relationship that should subsist between human beings and animals for example, Aquinas follows Aristotle’s thinking and maintained a hierarchy-based anthropocentric environmental ethics that is centred on the assumption that plants exist for the sake of animals, and animals also do exist to satisfy human beings, such that sins can only be committed against God, one’s neighbours or against oneself (See also Singer, 1985: 478). This hierarchy-based environmental ethical thinking cannot be totally ignored and downplayed in terms of shaping serious environmental ethics in contemporary philosophy although it remains a largely anthropocentric environmental ethics.

However, notwithstanding St. Thomas Aquinas’ absolute and clear-cut distinction between human beings and nature on anthropocentric grounds, St. Francis of Assisi is one medieval thinker who takes a different perspective from his near contemporary Christian fathers like St. Augustine and St. Aquinas. St. Francis of Assisi sees the environment in general as the world of creation and a place for celebration (Hardie, 2001: 25). In this regard, while medieval social and political theology is generally disregarded as not contributing significantly to the development of non-anthropocentric environmental thinking within the history of Western philosophy, the theological contribution of St. Francis of Assisi is relevant to the development of non-anthropocentric environmental ethics. As an environmentally oriented theologian, St. Francis of Assisi sees “the sun, moon, wind, water, and fire as part of the divine cosmic consciousness” (Hardie, 2001: 25).

Thus, Jame Schaefer (2009: 3) sees hope for environmental ethics in most of what is portrayed in medieval thinking. Although medieval thinking has been presented as not being a very active participant towards shaping the development of environmental ethics, the views of St. Francis of Assisi are pertinent to environmental ethics and its development. These views have only been eclipsed by those of his contemporaries like Augustine and Aquinas.
who both sharply contrast with his thinking on the environment and the questions of how humanity should relate with it.

The general medieval moral worldview and most Christian worldviews have remained highly instrumental and utilitarian in terms of approach to nature. This is the reason why, in as much as White (1967) appreciates the attempt by St. Francis of Assisi to rethink the moral relationship between human beings and nature, he still sees his efforts as having failed in reconciling the moral relationship that ought to subsist between human beings and the natural environment. As White sees it:

The greatest spiritual revolutionary in Western history, Saint Francis, proposed what he thought was an alternative Christian view of nature and man’s relation to it; he tried to substitute the idea of the equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man’s limitless rule of creation. He failed. Both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance towards nature that no solution for our ecological crisis can be expected from them alone. Since the roots of trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not (White, 1967: 6)

White’s attack of medieval thinking and Christianity becomes apparent and hence partly justified if one considers the question of what medieval social thinking and Christianity tell people about their relation with the environment. Thus, in addition to the influence of the church fathers in the medieval period, Christianity has been accused of being “the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen” (White, 1967: 4). Attfield on the other hand is not comfortable with such thinking as he argues that “despite ugly episodes and depressing periods in its history, Christianity turns out to encapsulate beliefs supportive of environmentally sensitive attitudes and policies, and can be appealed to as such” (Attfield,
The same argument can be forwarded for medieval philosophy which I also find to be more environmentally sensitive and conscious as opposed to the general sentiment that it advocates for the dominion of nature by human beings. Notwithstanding the fact that it is not easy to bracket all of medieval thinking in just one single block, I see in medieval philosophy a generally unified view of reality that is theocentric in attitude, but one that cannot be disregarded in terms of influence to environmental ethical thinking. I will maintain the argument that although not much in terms of non-anthropocentric environmental ethical thinking can be realised from medieval philosophy the views of Aquinas and Assisi could be seriously considered as having laid the foundation for both anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric environmental ethics.

1.3.3: Investigating Environmental Ethics in Modern Philosophy

While modern philosophy easily divides into different philosophical epochs like early modern philosophy, modern philosophy and post-modern philosophy, in this section, I consider all that falls in these eras as part and parcel of modern philosophy\(^\text{13}\). So, I particularly focus on the development of modern philosophy and the general outlook of modern philosophy. I critically consider the way in which such thinking could have had a bearing on environmental thinking within the history of Western philosophy.

The early modern period, often referred to as ‘the Enlightenment’ period is characterised by a vigorous scientific and intellectual revolution. According to Charles Taliaferro, “the beginning of modern philosophy in Europe was prompted in part, by the rise of modern science in the seventeenth century” (Taliaferro, 2001: 130). The story of Western philosophy catalogued so far has been characteristic of speculative attempts to understand reality within

\(^{13}\) The phrase *modern philosophy* is sometimes a fluid concept. The scope of my conventional use of the concept will be contextualised to the scientifically oriented philosophy roughly spanning from the seventeenth century up to the beginning of the early twentieth century.
the pre-Socratic era, as well as some theistic attempts to understand the world. However, philosophy in the early modern and the greater part of the modern period takes a new twist. It is the period in which for example, the geocentric model is replaced by the heliocentric model that was espoused by Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543). Also, the teleological view of nature that is espoused in ancient and medieval philosophy is replaced by a mechanistic view, and the appeal to religious authority is replaced by a demand for evidence that could be scientifically proven. However, contrary to the positive developments that come with science and scientific advancements, White thinks that “what we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis until we find a new religion or rethink our old one” (White, 1967: 5).

Modern philosophical thinking as informed by the works of Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Isaac Newton (1642-1726), and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) who, among others, played a great role of considering and accepting science as the leading and reliable source of new knowledge. This kind of approach to issues has a huge bearing on the way in which philosophical issues began to be approached, and to environmental ethical thinking as well. Even White, personally doubts that disastrous ecological backlash can be avoided simply by applying to our problems more science and more technology. Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes towards man’s relation to nature which are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who fondly regard themselves as post-Christians. Despite Copernicus, all the cosmos rotates around our little globe. Despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior
to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim (White, 1967: 5).

Modern philosophy takes centre stage within the modern period such that the human person is given exclusive rights to use nature to exploit it and come up with new knowledge about the world. This therefore supports an anthropocentric view of environmental ethics as humanity continues to claim moral dominion and superiority over nature. As Taliaferro sees, within this early modern period, “observation and experimentation were given pride of place in the investigation of nature over divine revelation in Scripture” (Taliaferro, 2001: 130).

Considering this background where science is taking centre-stage towards knowledge acquisition within the modern period, one should examine seriously the extent to which scientific development and environmental well-being are compatible. This dimension is further brought to the fore by Stumpf and Fieser who note that:

Unlike the medieval thinkers who proceeded for the most part by reading traditional texts, the early modern scientists laid greatest stress on observation and formation of hypotheses. The method of observation implied two things. First, traditional explanations of the behaviour of nature should be empirically demonstrated, since such explanations could very well be wrong. Second, new information might be available to scientists if they could penetrate beyond the superficial appearances of things. People now began to look at the heavenly bodies with a new attitude . . . (Stumpf and Fieser, 2008: 187).

At one level, this might be interpreted to imply that environmental ethical thinking could make sense if what it means could be empirically observed. From another perspective, it might mean that modern philosophy began with a new approach that could inform environmental philosophy. However, in view of the advancement of human well-being through scientific and technological development associated with the influence of modern
philosophy, Bujo thinks that “it has become commonplace to observe that people indulge in self-destruction in sole pursuit of the total domination of the world and the reckless exploitation of nature. People should be prepared, therefore, to account for the technical achievement attained so far and ask themselves whether nature might be regarded as having collaborated” (Bujo, 2009a: 288). Thus, with the advent of science and technology, it is apparent that human beings could not fully account for the extent to which these impact on nature. Hence, White’s argument that modern technology and science have an exploitative attitude towards the environment (White, 1967: 3). However, my argument is not that environmental ethical thinking is completely absent in modern philosophy because of the influence of science and technology, but only that environmental ethics mainly took an anthropocentric slant from within the modern period because of the mechanistic views that slowly replaced the dominant views of reality. All the same, despite taking an anthropocentric slant, modern philosophy still remains central in informing environmental ethics since environmental ethics can either be understood from an anthropocentric standpoint or from a non-anthropocentric standpoint. However, the latter remains the most favourable and reasonable kind of environmental ethics.

Also, it is within the modern period that the most notable social contract theorists like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau envisage a separation between the 'state of nature’ and an organised human community through the social contract. This view of the social contract blesses a separation between human beings and non-human animals. The reason is that human beings are rational and that non-human animals are not. Thus, non-human animals ought to remain in the state of nature where life is unbearable for rational beings. As Callicott sees it, “the social contract as it is called, treats human society as discontinuous with animal societies- or rather, animal societies are not acknowledged to exist at all- and to be something that was deliberately created by its members” (Callicott, 1999:
41. The basis upon which the social contract theory should therefore be dismissed as a theory of ethics according to Callicott is the fact that it is based on what he regards as a “selfish rationality, not selfless sentimentality” (Callicott, 1999: 120). Hence, “because the social contract theory reduces morality to enlightened self interest, one might argue that it is not a theory of ethics at all. A proper ethic, one might insist, requires moral agents to respect others or give due regard to the interests of others” Callicott, (1999: 120). A charitable reading of the social contract theory in this respect would be that it is not disregarding environmental ethical thinking among human communities, but just that it is championing an anthropocentric environmentalism.

In the light of the slant that the better part of modern philosophy takes, however, while little in terms of influence to the development of non-anthropocentric environmental ethics could be noted, the modern period cannot be totally disregarded with regard to its influence towards the development of environmental ethical thinking. Largely for the modern philosophical thinkers, the environment is now there for the rational human person to explore and gain knowledge out of it. Hence, the temptation to disregard it in terms of whether it is oriented towards environmental thinking. However, the fact that not much is realised from modern philosophy in terms of serious non-anthropocentric environmental ethical thinking does not in itself mean that it is totally absent of environmental ethics. In essence, I forward this view on the understanding that environmental ethics has a broader sense, rather that being limited to non-anthropocentric environmental ethics.

Some of the serious attempts at advancing a non-anthropocentric environmental ethics have been seen in the works of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). Bentham is one philosopher who can be regarded as the founder of modern utilitarianism. This is a thinking that is based on the assumption that the morality of an action should be evaluated on the basis of the way in which the least amount of pain should obtain while on the other hand, the greatest amount of
happiness is expected (Bentham, 1781: 14). As Bentham notes, “nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the other hand, the standard of right and wrong, on the other, the chain of causes and effects are fastened to their throne” (Bentham, 1781: 14). In fact, Bentham’s utilitarian thinking and approach to ethics has had influence to environmental ethics in not only modern philosophy, but also up to contemporary environmental ethics.

Contributing directly to non-anthropocentric environmental ethics, Bentham argues for a sentient based environmental ethics in which he notes that the fact that animals can feel pain and pleasure like human beings do, therefore it should be the basis upon which non-human animals should be considered in environmental ethical concerns. He argues:

> What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a fully grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they reason or can they talk? but Can they suffer? (Bentham, 1823: 136).

This view of environmental ethics has had influence on John Stuart Mill and contemporary environmental ethicists like Peter Singer who also adopt a sentience-based environmental ethical theory although they are not modern philosophers.

1.3.4: Some Contemporary Environmental Ethical Perspectives

From a critical examination of the various epochs within the history of philosophy that I have examined so far, I can assert that, while it is reasonable to argue that environmental ethical thinking is not so elaborate and clearly presented within the history of Western philosophy, it would be a mistake and also misleading to totally dismiss the contribution of the ancient
Greek thinkers, medieval thinkers and modern thinkers as insignificant and irrelevant to the development of environmental ethics. This is the mistake that most contemporary Western thinkers on environmental ethics make— the mistake of assuming that environmental ethics is a contemporary movement of the 1960s as suggested by Fox (2000: 1), Coman (2006: 55) and Boss (2008: 7350). In this section, I challenge this position and espouse the argument that environmental ethics is not a contemporary environmental ethical attempt, but that is has always been part of the Western philosophical tradition. The other mistake in contemporary philosophical thinking is that of assuming that environmental ethical thinking is only limited to non-anthropocentric thinking alone. Rather my considerations are based on the understanding that sometimes anthropocentric environmental ethics is also an environmental ethical thinking although it is less favourable than non-anthropocentric environmental ethics.

The bulk of current influential discourse on environmental ethics, particularly from White (1967), Singer (1985, 1993), Morscher, Neumair and Simons (1998), Attfield (2001) and Naess (2002) suggest this fallacy that environmental ethics is fairly a contemporary discourse that is purely non-anthropocentric. These thinkers in general, present what I assess as contemporary perspectives to environmental ethics that are largely to be informed by this narrow sense of understanding of environmental ethics.

In what has come to be one of the most influential works on contemporary environmental ethics, White (1967) examines The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis as easily attributable to the Judeo-Christian thinking that the human person was given dominion over the natural world as prescribed in the scriptures. Because of the influence of White’s essay, most contemporary environmental ethicists began to suspect that non-anthropocentric environmental ethics began to take shape after White’s publication of his work in the 1960s. This thinking continues to shape and influence contemporary environmental ethics, as if prior to the publication of White’s work, environmental ethics that is non-anthropocentric did not
exist or that human beings had no conception of the need to relate well with their environment. Paul Taylor attributes the development of contemporary environmental ethics to the ecological changes brought about by humanity as he argues,

the effects of human culture and technology on the planetary biosphere are becoming ubiquitous. Due to the emergence of large-scale industrialisation in the past century, the recent rise in the growth rate of human population and the expansion of economies that stimulate and depend on high levels of consumption, our human presence is now felt throughout the Earth (Taylor, 1986: 5).

This is why he thinks that environmental ethics as a contemporary attempt, should aim to “establish the rational grounds for a system of moral principles by which human treatment of natural ecosystems and their wild communities of life ought to be guided” (Taylor, 1986: 6).

As a follow up to the earlier view about the land ethic that was espoused in the second section of this chapter, I contend that it is also an attempt in contemporary environmental ethics that is based on the assumption that environmental thinking is fairly new. The assumption behind the land ethic is that prior to it, value was not attributed to the whole environment. It is based on the thinking that human beings had only moral priority for themselves and individual animals. Callicott for one, sees the land ethic as concerned with and related to more familiar modern moral concerns for environmental ethics that emerge in the modern era, which he sees as roughly the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries (Callicott, 2001: 204).

Peter Singer is another contemporary environmental ethicist who is strongly influenced by Bentham, and carried Bentham’s argument for environmentalism that takes into consideration the rights of non-human animals. For Singer, the ethical principle on which human equality rests requires us to extend equal consideration to the suffering of non-human animals too.
Here, Singer sees the soundness of the debate of human rights and equality among human beings, which is quite recent, as the basis upon which animal rights can also be based on. However, implicit in one of Singer’s arguments is that the concern for non-human animals is more significant in the contemporary period than any other period before. As he argues, “the view that the effects of our actions on other animals has no direct moral significance is not as likely to be openly advocated today as it was in the past; yet it is likely to be accepted implicitly and acted upon” (Singer, 1985: 478). Tom Regan also supports the perspective that Singer has as he notes that, “organised efforts to protect other animals are at an historic crossroads. Never before have so many joined in the struggle to bring significant improvements to their lives” (Regan, 1998: 41). The assumption that both Singer and Regan make is that environmental ethics that is concerned with the rights of non-human animals is more pronounced today, yet as argued before, Assisi and Bentham are some of the thinkers who seriously consider that concern.

Morscher, Neumair and Simons (1998) consider the history of the moral relationship between human beings and their non-human counterparts as if it is uncharacteristic of environmental ethical thinking. For them:

For a long time, environmental problems were seen solely from a human perspective. The environment was taken to be our environment, and therefore appeared in need of preservation only for our sake; people therefore assumed they had the right to use the environment exclusively for their own ends. This view sanctions the brutal exploitation of the environment in favour of those beings currently alive, until one takes account of future generations and their needs and wants (Morscher, Neumair and Simons (1998: 3).

This thinking legitimises the view that environmental ethics is new to philosophical thinking that is now taking into consideration the needs for the future generations. As I appreciate
Morscher, Neumair and Simons’ argument that anthropocentric thinking has a long history, to assume that all along human thinking has been anthropocentric through and through would be misleading. As I argue here, within the history of philosophical thinking from the classical Greek tradition to the contemporary period, there are philosophers who have shown consciousness for non-anthropocentric environmental ethical thinking.

Contemporary philosophical perspectives on environmental ethics are largely shaped by the view that traditionally, environmental ethics has not been taken as an area of serious philosophical consideration and study within the history of Western philosophy. According to these contemporary Western philosophical perspectives, it is only until recently during the twentieth century, particularly after the Earth Day Celebrations on 22 April 1970 that environmental ethics began to be seriously considered as a noble cause. It is assumed that since then, environmental ethics has continued to take shape and make meaning largely because of the reality and growth of environmental problems affecting humanity such as ozone layer depletion, global warming, acid rain, trash, extinction of rare species and contamination of water sources among others. These and other environmental concerns, to which contemporary Western environmental ethics seems to be reacting to, are not only a threat to humanity but that they are thought to raise a lot of moral problems and questions that ought to be seriously addressed, hence the purportedly new thinking on environmental ethics. Olen, Van Camp and Barry note that “a loss of the ozone layer and significant global warming would be disastrous for human beings. And it is because of our shared sense of impending disaster that most people now claim to be environmentalists” (Olen, Van Camp and Barry, 2008: 458).

However, the assumption that environmental ethics could just have emerged as a reaction to the reality of the ecological crisis contradicts not only with various attempts at environmental ethics from the classical Greek philosophy and medieval thinking as well as those in modern
philosophy, but also with an ontology-based environmental ethics that I will advocate for as emanating from African ontology. An African ontology based environmental ethics realises an environmental consciousness that is attached to the notion of existence.

Even Birnbacher (1998) thinks that environmental ethics is a fairly contemporary enterprise as he argues that “proposals to recognise animals and other natural objects as beings to whom rights can be legitimately ascribed are among the most characteristic developments in the recent history of environmental ethics” (Birnbacher, 1998: 29). As opposed to this Western contemporary view of environmental ethics, what I argue for here, is a form of environmental ethical thinking that is intertwined with African ontology, where an appreciation of the African notion of being or existence strongly informs a sound environmental ethical thinking. Thus, comparing the Western contemporary view of environmental ethics with the African ontology-based environmental ethics that I present here, I observe that the former is presented as rather a new thinking in applied ethical philosophy without a metaphysical basis as I find in the latter form of environmental ethics.

1.4: Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to critically situate environmental ethical thinking within the history of Western philosophical thinking. The history of Western philosophical thinking on environmental ethics that I have taken stock of in this chapter has traditionally been examined as if it lacks a thoroughgoing environmental ethics. However, as I have examined it, I attempt to correct the mistake of assuming a lack of or absence of environmental ethical thinking in history of Western philosophy. This reconstructive approach to Western environmental ethics will enable me to make critical comparisons later on as I critically assess African environmental ethics in terms of how it is guided by the notion of African existence.
Also, I see little in terms of efforts that have been done to clearly trace and critically examine its significance in such history of philosophy. Rather, the general sentiment that one gets from the history of philosophy is that environmental ethics is a rather fairly new discourse of the twentieth and twenty first century. This is one mistake in thinking that I have attempted to correct in this chapter. I, therefore, forward the argument that environmental ethics has been part of the history of philosophy, but that it has not been seriously explored. At the same time, even if one were to accept that misleading notion that environmental ethics is a new epistemology within the history of Western philosophical thinking, still the metaphysical basis upon which environmental ethics should be based on has not been critically articulated the way I will attempt with African ontology.
Chapter Two: Situating Environmental Ethics in African Philosophy

2.1: Introduction

Having attempted in chapter one to locate environmental ethics within the Western philosophical discourse, in this chapter, I seek to situate environmental ethics within African philosophical thinking. I consider environmental ethics as it is found in African philosophy. This is because the notion of ontology-based environmental ethics that I espouse here falls within the area of African environmental ethics, which in itself is a component of African philosophy. My engagement with Western environmental ethics in the first chapter is worthwhile and justified on the basis that it enables me to make some comparative analyses and contrasts as I proceed in this chapter to engage with African philosophy and how environmental ethics could be meaningfully realised in it.

In this chapter, I argue that African philosophy has something meaningful to offer to the discourse of environmental ethics. I note that African philosophy largely informs sub-Saharan African ontology-based environmental ethics. In African philosophy, I find this ontology-based environmental ethics to be part of African wisdom and worldview that Lawrence Ugwuanyi finds as not having “commanded much attention in the theoretical formulation of principles and policies that define and direct the future of our world” (Ugwuanyi, 2011a: 3). Hence, some of the objectives of this chapter would be to partly address this fear expressed by Ugwuanyi that there is need for an environmental ethics that stems from the African worldview (Ugwuanyi, 2011a: 3).

I intend to situate environmental ethics in African philosophical discourse and I largely examine the question of whether, and how, sub-Saharan African ontology-based environmental ethics fits in African philosophical discourse. I find it useful to start by assessing how African philosophy could be understood, before attempting to examine the significance of African environmental ethics which in essence is a component of African
philosophy. I do not intend to focus on the old debate of the nature and significance of African philosophy and the question of whether African philosophy really exists or not. I will work on the understanding and consensus of influential thinkers in African philosophy such as Henry Odera Oruka, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, Emmanuel Chukwudi-Eze, Dismas Aloys Masolo and Mogobe B. Ramose among others who hold the view that African philosophy does exist and that, epistemologically, it has something to offer to the history of philosophical thinking. I also intend to give a working understanding of the notion of African philosophy that could be useful to this work.

First, I define African philosophy before attempting to understand African environmental ethics as well. The reason for defining African philosophy is that African ontology based environmental ethics that I discuss in this work is a component of African philosophy. Hence the need to be clear of what is meant by African philosophy. Also, the major trends in African philosophy that I examine in this work cannot be meaningfully conceptualised without first understanding African philosophy. The other reason for defining African philosophy is to enable me to come up with a working understanding of the term in the light of the various conceptions of African philosophy.

Also, my other attempt would be to define and understand African environmental ethics. In defining African environmental ethics, my intention is to make clear what is meant by African environmental ethics so that it would be easy to forward the argument that, the nature and character of African philosophy is closely knit with environmental ethical thinking. To this end, I submit the argument that just like what has been observed within the Western philosophical discourse in chapter one, also the nature and character of African philosophy is inseparable from environmental ethical consciousness. In this respect, Ojomo admits that “since primordial times, African people have had a humane and peaceful society and environment informed by a sound ethics” (Ojomo, 2011: 102). Without getting into the
debate of the existence of African philosophy, I attempt, just like what I have done with the history of Western philosophy, to assess how environmental ethical thinking has been meaningfully conceptualised in African philosophical thinking.

Having defined African philosophy as well as African environmental ethics, I also intend to examine the different forms of African philosophy which I also suspect informs African environmental ethics. These are ethno-philosophy, sage philosophy (philosophic sagacity), nationalist ideological philosophy and professional African philosophy (Oruka, 2003: 141-6). In identifying and advancing my conclusions that are based on these four core areas and approaches to African philosophy, I do not want to pretend that these are the only approaches that inform African philosophy. However, this work is informed by these traditional methodological approaches to African philosophy which I see as a widely used taxonomy in African philosophy that can also be useful to the appreciation of African environmental ethics.

This chapter is informed by Oruka’s traditional methodological approach to African philosophy, unlike chapter one which is based on the historical approach to Western philosophy. This chapter on African philosophy is based on the methodological approach because of the difference in terms of historical development and context between Western philosophy and African philosophy respectively. (See also Afolayan, 2006: 22.) In discussing the traditional methodological approaches to African philosophy, as identified by Oruka (2003: 141-6), the focus of this chapter will not be at assessing how these approaches could legitimise African philosophy. Unlike what Oruka and others like Ochieng’-Odhiambo (2010: 25-187) and Bodunrin (1984: 1) have attempted to do, I intend to establish how these approaches to African philosophy complement African environmental ethics. I examine the extent to which how each of these approaches to African philosophy is thought to inform sub-Saharan African environmental ethics.
In the last section of this chapter, I make an overview and comparative analysis of the four approaches to African philosophy. The attempt would be to indicate the approach that I will adopt in this work as a theoretical framework, and why I will take such an approach in place of the other approaches. In this section, I give reasons why I take professional African philosophy as a particularly reasonable way of approaching African philosophy.

Overall, this chapter forms the basis for a reasonable sub-Saharan African environmental ethics. It is hoped that this chapter introduces fundamental concepts and ideas in African philosophy and African environmental ethics that will be examined in chapter three in greater detail. It also gives an intimation of the approach to be used in discussing African ontology-based environmental ethics in the following chapter.

2.2: Understanding African Philosophy

Traditionally, the question of African philosophy has been characteristically synonymous with the old debate of its existence. This debate according to Olusegun Oladipo, “has dominated much of African philosophical discourse in the second half of the twentieth century” (Oladipo, 2006: 9). In this section however, I will not venture into this classical discourse of whether African philosophy exists or not, but will work on the understanding that it really exists because “strong arguments have been advanced to demonstrate the actual existence of African philosophy” (Ramose, 2003: 3).

It is not easy to come up with a single and all encompassing conception of what African philosophy really is. There are different conceptions and notions concerning how African philosophy could be understood. In this section however, I will critique two conceptions that have weaved through and shaped the way African philosophy is understood. I will refer to these conceptions of African philosophy respectively as, the narrow view of African philosophy as well as the exclusivist view of African philosophy. First I critique what I see as
a narrow understanding of African philosophy. This is the view which takes everything African as philosophical. I will also critique another conception of African philosophy that I find to be exclusive and restrictive before espousing what I see as a reasonably acceptable working understanding of African philosophy which I see to be a universalist conception of African philosophy.

Generally understood, the notion of African philosophy has been used broadly to refer to questions that focus on African way of life and worldviews, traditions, belief systems, conceptions of reality and approaches to the issues of knowledge and wisdom. This view of African philosophy compels one to accept everything in African culture and heritage as constitutive of philosophy. This is a broader understanding of African philosophy which is propagated by Tempels, Mbiti and partly by Odera Oruka. However, Didier N. Kaphagawani and Jeanette Malherbe note this understanding in Oruka’s criterion of African philosophy as they argue:

The conception of African philosophy that one favours . . . will have a decided influence on what one takes an African epistemology to be. The ethno-philosopher, for instance, examines features of a culture like language and religious ceremonies, for clues to its philosophical systems, and so too its epistemology. The student of philosophic sagacity will find answers to questions about knowledge in what the wise elders of the tribe have to say about it; the politico-ideological philosopher typically has some social goal in mind in his theory of knowledge; the professional philosopher will want to study the international epistemological literature and keep abreast of the current academic debate on knowledge (Kaphagawani and Malherbe, 2003: 259).
While fairly reasonable, I take this understanding especially as shaped by ethno-philosophy and sage philosophy, as too broad an understanding of African philosophy because it would imply that everything from the African cultural heritage is philosophical. This is why it is worthy taking Oladipo’s argument that African philosophy “should be a critical philosophy [and] not a descriptive record of traditional beliefs” (Oladipo, 2006: 9).

Also, another generally accepted understanding that has also shaped African philosophy despite being rigid, exclusive and restrictive in nature is that which considers African philosophy to be strictly an enterprise for and by Africans. For example, by African philosophy, Hountondji would want it to be understood as “a set of texts, specifically the set of texts written by Africans and described as philosophical by their authors themselves” (Hountondji, 1996: 33). Vincent Y. Mudimbe also supports this argument that African philosophy refers to the contributions of Africans practising philosophy in their own African context and within their own historical tradition (Mudimbe, 1988: 9). These definitions of African philosophy construe African philosophy to be an exclusively African affair.

Although Mudimbe (1988: 9) and Hountondji would like African philosophy to be understood as strictly entailing the contributions of Africans practising philosophy “within the defined framework of the discipline and its historical tradition” (Hountondji, 1996: 33), I take a different dimension. I will use the term ‘African philosophy’ with an elastic meaning and understanding to refer to a body of knowledge and such contributions from African scholars and even non-African thinkers who would want to contribute towards the development of African ideas, knowledge, and thought systems. In this regard, my understanding of African philosophy will not be exclusive and closed to the extent of excluding the contributions of other non-African thinkers who would like to either contribute to, or critique African philosophy.
In the light of the above view, my working definition and understanding of African philosophy is informed by everything that contributes to, and fosters the legitimacy and development of reasonable and acceptable belief systems, ideas, thought systems and knowledge in the African worldview. This is why sometimes I take as suspicious Hountondji’s thinking that the only method of doing African philosophy should be one that involves taking seriously a set of texts that are written by Africans, and about African worldviews and intended for interpreting the African experience (Hountondji, 1996: 33). This approach that Hountondji advocates for is problematic in so far as it belittles and undermines some of the notable works on African philosophy that have been produced by non-African thinkers such as Tempels (1959), Richard H. Bell (2002), Augustine Shutte (2009) and Metz (2007, 2012) that also positively contribute to or critique African philosophical discourse. In addition, a charitable reading of Hountondji’s view implies that oral African cultures lack proper philosophy which is what I do not want to legitimise in this work as I advance some elements of oral African culture that have environmental ethical import such as the wisdom from ethno-philosophy and sage philosophy.

African philosophy as I will understand it here, remains an attempt and the contributions by philosophers, (both African and non-African) who would like to assess the contribution that African ideas about epistemology, ontology, ethics, aesthetics and logic could contribute to their well-being. Rather than relying on Hountondji’s understanding of African philosophy which Bell looks at as a prohibitive understanding (Bell, 2002: 3), I argue that African philosophy should be universalised and approached from a professional philosophical perspective. I defend this approach to African environmental ethics in the last section of this chapter.
2.3: Understanding African Environmental Ethics

Environmental ethics has already been conceptualised in chapter one as concerned with the ethical relations that ought to subsist between the human community and the non-human community. Also, having defined African philosophy in the previous section, it is now pertinent to proceed and assess what is meant and implied by African environmental ethics. The character of African environmental ethics is largely informed by the way African philosophy is understood. This is because African environmental ethics is closely knit in African philosophy. Kevin Gary Behrens observes that “in accounts of an African worldview, a strong, repeated theme is a belief that everything in nature is interrelated. Persons are seen as part of nature, not distinct from it” (Behrens, 2014b: 55). As I observe, what I conceptualise as African environmental ethics stems from African philosophy and philosophies. To this end, Tangwa argues that African philosophies provide the intellectual support for environmental ethics that is based on the maxim of *live and let live* (Tangwa, 2004: 389). These philosophies that I note to be shaping African environmental ethics include, but are not limited to *ubuntu*, communitarian way of life, the use of wisdom in taboos, proverbs, myths and folktales among others. These components will however be discussed in greater detail in the sections that follow in this chapter in terms of how they contribute to African environmental ethics notwithstanding Horsthemke’s claim that some of these aspects are “still decidedly anthropocentric” (Horsthemke, 2015: 93). Despite the apparent environmental ethical import of these African philosophies to African environmental ethics, the area of African environmental ethics has not been comprehensively discussed in contemporary African philosophy.

In Western philosophy, there is no doubt that environmental ethics exists as a philosophy that is concerned with relations of how human beings ought to relate with their non-human counterparts and the natural environment as a whole. Also, as a component of applied ethics,
environmental ethics in Western philosophy is thought to be as old as ethics itself despite gaining impetus in the last few decades (Morscher, Neumaier and Simons, 1998: xviii). In fact, environmental ethics is implicit in, and intertwined with the history of Western philosophical thinking as I have established in chapter one. At the same time, there is no scepticism concerning the nature and significance of Western philosophy itself as well as its environmental ethical component. However, as I make a comparative analysis of Western environmental ethics with African environmental ethics, I note a gap in terms of the literature that has influenced these two perspectives. While it is apparent that environmental ethics exists in Western philosophy, this has not been so clearly visible in African philosophy. As noted in chapter one, I maintain that it is easy to catalogue philosophers such as Thales, Pythagoras, Aristotle and St. Anselm as having influenced and shaped the history of Western environmental ethics. On the contrary, this is not possible with respect to African philosophy. It is not easy to come up with individual African philosophers who have really contributed to African environmental ethics the way Western philosophers do. This is why my approach to African environmental ethics is informed by Oruka’s methodological approach to African philosophy instead of the historical approach that I have used in chapter one with respect to Western philosophy.

Much of current influential literature on environmental ethics is from Western philosophy. The problem with African environmental ethics is that it is largely preceded and shaped by the question of what African philosophy is and how significant it is within the general history of philosophical thinking. In fact both African philosophy and its environmental ethics are thought to be relatively new discourses in the history of philosophy. This perspective is based on what Murove sees as a nihilist approach to African ethics that is centred on the assumption that “there is nothing authentic to be learned from African contextual realities” (2009b: 17). To this end, Masolo argues that:
It is a little more than fifty years that African cultures have been the subject of open and widespread philosophical deliberation, and African philosophy has only more recently become a subject of academic learning, investigation and debate. The contributions of such thinkers as Tetullian, Origen, St. Augustine and more recently Anton Wilhelm Amo were mostly absorbed into philosophical discourse that addressed and went to constitute significant aspects of the Western tradition in philosophy and related disciplines (Masolo, 2000: 147).

Contrary to some of these nihilist perspectives about African philosophy, one of the ways that I see as reasonable in order to approach African philosophy would be to look at it positively and identify how African people and philosophers have thought about their relationship with nature even from the pre-colonial era to the contemporary period. Despite African philosophy lacking individual thinkers that can be credited as shaping African environmental ethics, one can make use of the various methods, frameworks and philosophies that instil environmental consciousness in the various sub-Saharan African communities.

One of the reasons why African environmental ethics has not commanded much space in African philosophy is that questions of African philosophy have been centred on whether African philosophy exists or not. The question of African environmental ethics has been preceded by the problem of whether or not it is meaningful to conceptualise African philosophy. Murove notes this problem as he laments the absence of serious attempts to discuss African ethical systems in the curricula of most sub-Saharan African institutions of higher learning (Murove, 2009c: 14). So, the reason why African environmental ethics has not been seriously considered has to do with the systems of formal education that are characteristic of sub-Saharan African education. Otherwise environmental ethical thinking is inherent in traditional African education.
It is because of this background that I argue that African environmental ethical thinking can only make sense if the contribution of African ontology and thinking could be seriously considered as philosophically significant. This is just like what is the case with other philosophical movements like Western philosophy. Some philosophical perspectives support the mistaken notion that since African thinking is not philosophical, it is not possible to meaningfully conceptualise African environmental ethics. In contrast to this kind of thinking, John Ayotunde Isola Bewaji thinks that it is not a problem to consider morality and ethics in both Western and non-Western societies as having similar objectives and goals (Bewaji, 2004: 396). Although he offers a largely anthropocentric reasoning, Bewaji argues that “morality and ethics in Western and non-Western societies have similar importance in that human social and interpersonal behaviour is under the necessity of the adjustment of interests among individuals for attaining the general well-being of the community” (Bewaji, 2004: 396). Despite its anthropocentric slant, this argument can be the basis for sustaining the thinking that non-Western environmental ethics like sub-Saharan African environmental ethics could be meaningfully compared to Western environmental ethics in terms of significance.

In what follows, I trace environmental ethical thinking in African philosophy and attempt to assess the four trends in African philosophy in terms of how they could be the basis for understanding African philosophy and its environmental ethics. In that light, I attempt to assess the way in which environmental ethical thinking is salient in these trends in African philosophy and how it could be discerned in each of these trends in African philosophy as identified by Oruka (2003: 141-6).

2.4: Tracing Environmental Ethics in African Philosophy

In this section, I focus on the four trends and approaches to African philosophy as identified by Henry Odera Oruka (1995: 120-4). (See also Oruka, 2003: 141-6). These trends and
approaches to African philosophy are ethno-philosophy, sage philosophy (philosophic sagacity), professional African philosophy and nationalist ideological philosophy. These trends in African philosophy are a generally acceptable classification in African philosophy that largely covers almost all areas of African philosophy. As I trace environmental ethical thinking in African philosophy, I use the four approaches to African philosophy as general frameworks within which African environmental ethics could be approached and understood.

I relate these four trends and approaches to African philosophy in terms of how they could be considered as structures that are representative of the nature and forms of African philosophy. Oruka does not want us to waste time discussing what African philosophy is or whether it exists or not, but would rather prefer that we get straight into its categories. As Wreh-Wilson observes, “rather than worry about defining African philosophy Oruka maintains we first need to be clear about the groups or trends that have dominated African philosophical discourse over the years” (Wreh-Wilson, 2012: 20). The reason why this work is based on Oruka’s criterion and categorisation of African philosophy is mainly because African philosophy does not develop in a linear progression the same way as Western philosophy. The history of Western philosophy easily progresses from ancient philosophy, medieval philosophy, renaissance philosophy, modern philosophy up to contemporary philosophy. This is not the case with African philosophy. Hence, Oruka’s criterion provides a reasonable framework on which to place and analyse African environmental ethics, which in itself is part of African philosophy. Even Ochieng’-Odhiambo contends that Oruka’s classification:

... allows for treatment of various trends and issues in African philosophy without confining one to any particular theme. The framework is therefore neither too broad nor too narrow but moderate which allows for reasonable outlining of and discussion on a wide range of the key ideas, issues and
themes that have been addressed in the discourse on African philosophy (Ochieng’-Odhiambo, 2010: 4).

Following the same criterion, I endeavour to establish African environmental ethics in the four trends in African philosophy.

Overall, this broad section divides into the following four sub-sections. The focus in these four sections is mainly on assessing how African philosophical thinking is informed by the four different approaches to philosophy in sub-Saharan African thinking. I argue that it is in these various dimensions and approaches to African philosophy that one can discern African environmental ethics. Also, focus will be on assessing the extent to which each of these approaches in African philosophy forms the basis of African philosophy as well as African environmental ethics as a whole. Hence, the ontology-based African environmental ethics will be assessed in terms of whether it can be realised from any of these four approaches to African philosophy which I discuss here.

2.4.1: Ethno-Philosophy and Environmental Ethics

African ethno-philosophy refers to philosophical attempts to assess the relevance, contribution and significance of folk wisdom from the various sub-Saharan African ethnic communities. The analysis of sub-Saharan African ethno-philosophy is an attempt to analyse whether and how some sub-Saharan African traditional belief systems and folk understanding of the world could inform what can be properly conceptualised as African philosophy. This is despite Horsthemke’s scepticism on whether African beliefs can constitute propositional knowledge (Horsthemke, 2014: 53). Contrary to this kind of thinking, in its most visible manifestations, ethno-philosophy provides a general account of how African communities understand philosophical issues like environmental ethics as I will demonstrate shortly.
Crediting Tempels for the influence towards the development of ethno-philosophy, Masolo argues that African ethno-philosophy is centred on a methodology that was pioneered by Tempels and that it “gained currency among African and Western Africanist intellectuals, mainly theologians as a handy tool that spoke to the dignity of African values in a world known for its scepticism about African goodness” (Masolo, 2000: 152). According to Bodunrin African ethno-philosophy is represented by thinkers such as Tempels, Mbiti, Senghor and Kagame (Bodunrin, 1984: 2). Tempels provides an ethno-philosophical study of Bantu ontology (which is what I loosely consider as sub-Saharan African ontology) as generally forming the basis for a comprehensive African philosophy. For him:

Ethnology, linguistics, psycho-analysis, jurisprudence, sociology and the study of religions are able to yield definitive results only after the philosophy and the ontology of a primitive people have been thoroughly studied and written up. If, in fact, primitive peoples have a concrete conception of being and of the universe, this ‘ontology’ of theirs will give a special character, a local colour, to their beliefs and religious practices, to their mores, to their psychological reactions and, more generally, to their whole behaviour (Tempels, 1959: 23).

Tempels implies that an understanding of sub-Saharan African ethno-philosophy is relevant to comprehending its philosophy in general, although in this context, his diction must be understood within the socio-political and historical context in which it is used. In this regard, I take this understanding of African ethno-philosophy as the basis upon which sub-Saharan African environmental ethics could be understood. While I am critical of the kind of ethno-philosophy that is presented by Tempels, I largely benefit from some of his observations and conclusions. In essence, I accept the kind of ethno-philosophical observations that Tempels

14 By focussing on ‘sub-Saharan Africa’ and ‘Bantu Ontology’, I do not want to make the mistake of assuming that all people of Africa who occupy the area to the south of the Sahara desert countries in Africa are Bantu speaking people since some of the communities in sub-Saharan Africa do not belong to Bantu people. However, most of what I discus comes from the Bantu people who occupy the greater part of sub-Saharan Africa.
makes, but only differ from Tempels’ approach and intention since I positively identify the way in which environmental ethics could be realised from African philosophy and ontology in general. I therefore do not want to pretend to present what ought to be the content of African philosophy as implicit in Tempels’ work, but rather to assess how African philosophy and ontology contribute to environmental ethics in sub-Saharan African thinking.

Originally, the term ‘ethno-philosophy’ was introduced and used with the intention to undermine African beliefs, culture and way of life (Deacon, 2003: 129-31). However, in recent African philosophical discourse, ‘ethno-philosophy’ has come to be appreciated as occupying an important place in African philosophy. Hallen observes this trend as he notes that:

\[...\] the term ‘ethno-philosophy’ has had its significant influence in the area of African philosophy. It is a curious word, in that its meaning over the past decades has varied from originally being a term of abuse, virtually an invective, to now a normative term that could in principle be applied to what is labelled ‘philosophy’ in any culture (Hallen, 2010: 74).

African applied ethics, like environmental ethics, could be easily realised from ethno-philosophy. African ethno-philosophy has a higher level normative dimension in so far as it connects the individual person with his or her society and nature at large. It places the individual at the level at which he or she could realise how ontology, belief, culture and way of life could help to establish humane relations with the environment. This is why an African ethno-philosophical understanding of the human person is not atomic in the way Cartesian thinking sees the individual. Rather it is communitarian and all inclusive in so far as it considers the person as existing with others whom one must strike right relations with in order to live well and even with the environment.
African ethno-philosophy is culturally based philosophical thinking that is informed by the social interconnection between the individual person and his or her society. This social interconnection is metaphysically significant such that the individual person is expected to live in harmony with not only his or her society of other human persons, but the natural environment at large including the vital forces. Motsamai Molefe summarises this conception of harmonious living that is embedded in the morality in vitalism as he argues that “the idea of vital force grounds an interesting way to account for the value attached to the notion of community or harmony by many African people and intellectuals. The best way to value, protect, and preserve life is by promoting interdependence or harmony” (Molefe, 2014: 125). However, the above question of vitalism will be discussed in greater detail in chapters three, four, five and six when I examine real environmental ethical controversies in African philosophy. In other words, society among most sub-Saharan African communities is not limited to that of humans alone, but that it includes the environment in its entirety.

Also, the above view confirms the reason why the notion and understanding of goodness is not only measured with reference to how human beings relate with other humans, but even with the way they interact with nature and how the aspect of vital force comes into play. This is why Tempels is compelled to conclude that the notion of vital force is a necessary and important attribute of being or existence among African communities, whom he referred to as the Bantu (Tempels, 1959: 54). Ramose also confirms this folk understanding of existence and wholeness as being embedded in most indigenous sub-Saharan African ethno-communities. According to Ramose:

... the principle of wholeness applies also with regard to the relation between human beings and physical or objective nature. To care for one another, therefore, implies caring for physical nature as well without such care, the interdependence between human beings and physical nature would be
undermined. Moreover, human beings are indeed part and parcel of physical nature even though they might be a privileged part to it. Accordingly, caring for one another is the fulfilment of the natural duty to care for nature as well. It is thus the constant strife to strike and then maintain a balance between human beings and physical nature (Ramose, 1999: 155).

This argument is indeed worth sustaining because it considers environmental ethical responsibility among sub-Saharan African ethno-societies as a natural duty of human persons. This natural duty to care for nature amongst sub-Saharan African communities arises from the realisation that existence is not limited to humanity alone. The question of being *qua* being or existence is something that sub-Saharan African philosophy does not see as oriented towards the individual alone, but that it includes the individual and his or her surroundings. It is thus imperative that ethno-philosophical thinking has to be considered in the context in which it informs environmental ethics within the various African cultural communities as informed by such a notion of existence.

African ethno-philosophy is sometimes viewed both negatively and positively in terms of its position on African philosophy. Deacon sums up these two perceptions of African ethno-philosophy in the following juxtaposition of being a victim and a response. As a victim, African ethno-philosophy is construed as substantiating traditional colonial stereotypes. On the contrary, as a response, ethno-philosophy is viewed as an attempt to legitimise the positive and cultural aspects of communities on the African continent (Deacon, 2003: 128-30).

In advancing sub-Saharan African ontology-based environmental ethical thinking that stems from ethno-philosophy, I adopt the second understanding of ethno-philosophy as it enables me to bring out the positive aspects that could be noted in sub-Saharan African ethno-philosophical environmental ethics. Otherwise if ethno-philosophy is considered as
expressing the primitiveness of traditional African societies and their thought as implied in the first sense, then nothing in terms of epistemic and ethical import could be abstracted from it. For example, the African folk wisdom of existence is positive as it takes on board the whole community of human beings as well as that of non-human persons. Ramose would like us to take this notion of existence as embedded on the aspect of humanness which “regards being or the universe as a complex wholeness involving the multi-layered and incessant interaction of all entities” (Ramose, 1999: 155). This is why I suspect that the general African axiom denoting communal existence that I am because we are as Mbiti (1969: 106) observes, is not limited to the community of humans alone, but that it takes on board the whole of nature. So, following Ramose’s thinking, the question of ontological existence and priority is pinned not on the individual person alone, but on the whole of the community that includes nature as well (Ramose, 2009: 309).

The justification of considering ethno-philosophy, as contributing to sub-Saharan African environmental ethics and African philosophy in general, is based on the fact that Africans in their traditional societies have methodical ways of looking at the world around them and interpreting it such that they could further their well-being as well as the well-being of the environment at the same time. For example, an essential aspect of African ethno-philosophy forming part of the African ontology is their traditional religion. Mbiti for example challenges us to assess and appreciate the way African religion, as a component of African traditional religion, informs African philosophy (Mbiti, 1969: 1). In terms of environmental ethical import in traditional African religion, African religion respects the hierarchical order of existence between human beings, non-human beings, the ancestors and the natural environment as a whole despite its fairly anthropocentric slant. African religious ideas are therefore oriented towards maintaining good relations among humans as well as the way such

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15 The hierarchy of existence in African philosophy is examined in greater detail in chapter three under 3.3.
relations could be stretched to encompass the environment. Focussing on the Shona traditional religion, Nisbert Taringa considers various aspects of African traditional religion such as the belief in the spiritual world, belief in the territorial and ancestral spirits and comes to the conclusion that African traditional religion, is intrinsically environmentally friendly (Taringa, 2006: 191). This is why although traditional African religion is rooted in anthropocentric thinking in so far as human beings could use the environment to further human ends, it condones cruelty towards non-human animals and even practices that endanger plants, water sources, and even the land.

Sub-Saharan African environmental ethics is strongly informed by African ethno-philosophical thinking. It cannot be meaningfully talked of without reference to the way in which ethno-philosophy informs it. African environmental ethics is therefore unique because it is mainly informed by the ostensibly ‘uncritical’ elements of African communal life. Accordingly, appreciating the import of African ethno-philosophical contribution to environmental ethics would address Oruka’s worry that:

If one presupposes that in philosophy the African conception and contribution have a completely different nature from those of other people and in particular from those of the Europeans, one is, as a matter of logical move, faced with the challenge to demonstrate the nature and uniqueness of the African contribution (Oruka, 2003: 142).

In the context of African environmental ethics that I suppose to be strongly informed by ethno-philosophical thinking, this is not a very strenuous task as implied in Oruka’s argument. The contribution and uniqueness of African ethno-philosophy to environmental ethics is realised in folk thinking. Rather, traditional folk philosophical thinking informs African environmental ethics. For example, certain societal customs and norms as well as traditional cultural practices are tailored towards inculcating environmental ethical thinking.
This is despite the fact that ethno-philosophy presents African philosophy as clearly distinct from other philosophies like Western philosophy in a negative manner as it construes African philosophy as lacking the basic characteristics that are ordinarily attributed to Western philosophy (Ochieng’-Odhiambo, 2010: 118).

Without going to the extent of assessing environmental ethical import in African traditions, Oruka forwards the argument that aspects such as indigenous African customs, poems, religion, songs and dances are some of the sources of African ethno-philosophy (Oruka, 2003: 143). In this African ethno-philosophy therefore, I note that environmental ethics is inculcated through for example, certain cultural traditions and establishments among most sub-Saharan African communities that go towards environmental ethical teaching. Implicit in African ethno-philosophy is the idea that the whole society can have a sound environmental ethics that is strongly informed by the somewhat ‘uncritical elements from the traditional African heritage. Although he suspects that “from a methodological point of view, ethno-philosophy tends to portray African beliefs as things that do not change, that are somehow timeless” (Hallen, 2002: 50), he still accepts that:

Ethno-philosophy’s sources are in the past, in what is described as authentic traditional African culture of the pre-colonial variety, of the Africa prior to modernity. These sources are to be found primarily in products of language: parables, proverbs, poetry, songs, myths- oral literature in general (Hallen, 2002: 50).

Although Oruka (2003: 143) admits that African ethno-philosophy is informed by these religions, myths, folktales, customs, taboos, proverbs and superstitions, all of which constitute the uncritical aspects of a people’s tradition, he also sees African ethno-philosophy “inspiring and shaping the development of philosophical thought in Africa, [Hence] ethno-philosophy may not be without a useful role in African philosophical history” (Oruka, 2003:
In this regard, I therefore submit the thesis that African ethno-philosophy informs environmental ethics, although of course ethno-philosophy is partly criticised for propagating ethnocentricity which may not be compatible with a sound environmental ethical thinking. Despite the fact that he does not address how myths from the African ethno-philosophical traditions contribute directly to environmental ethics, Wreh-Wilson challenges us not to take for granted anything that emanates from African ethno-philosophy (Wreh-Wilson, 2012: 61).

There is a popular myth among most African communities that if a person uses a black pot or jug to fetch water from a water source like a well, the water source will dry up. However, a critical interpretation of this popular myth tells us that it is only intended to foster environmental awareness among humans so that they safeguard their water sources from contamination. This is why even African myth, which is part of ethno-philosophy should also not be taken as merely pure myth, “but as raw materials to aid in the construction of the underpinnings of the beliefs and customs of the people” (Wreh-Wilson, 2012: 61). Myths in themselves are part of sub-Saharan African philosophical wisdom that contributes to environmental ethics, just like taboos. (See also Duri and Mapara, 2007: 98.) For example, amongst sub-Saharan African communities, there are various traditional beliefs and stories that are usually not true, but that suggest the implications of not believing in them and at the same time having environmental ethical import. Some of the implications of not believing in some of these myths are the provocation of the order of existence, such as the family, the ancestors and the supernatural world.

Taboos, for example, are one of the most significant ethno-philosophical tools that sub-Saharan African communities use in order to inculcate sound environmental ethics. Taboos are prohibitive statements among indigenous African folk societies that forbid certain forms of behaviour among both adults and children. Focussing on the way in which taboos foster morally acceptable behaviour among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, Levison Tatira argues
that *zviera* (taboos) are used as tools or ways of teaching members of society acceptable moral values through the discouragement of vicious behaviour (Tatira, 2000: 146). Certain moral actions that affect the environment negatively are regulated through these taboos that are thought to trigger reaction from the supernatural world which is thought to ontologically exist above the physical world. This aspect is a component of African belief in vitalism that will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

Taboos have a very strong environmental ethical import in them. Taboos among sub-Saharan African ethno-philosophical communities discourage individual moral agents for example, from eating one’s totem animal. Among African communities, it is therefore a taboo to eat one’s totem animal. According to Wreh-Wilson amongst most sub-Saharan African communities, “almost every family has a totem... [and]. . .totems are symbolic of the things families fear or admire most. [Hence] totems may have originated out of the sheer desire [for communities] to control their lives, their environment, and the foods and herbs they rely on for their wellbeing” (Wreh-Wilson, 2012: 75). Chivaura also supports this argument as he argues that “the adoption of totems in African worldview such as the leopard, lion, elephant, crocodile, hippo, python or eagle is to prevent people from destroying animals or flora and fauna they identify with as totems. Killing anything adopted as a totem becomes an offence” (Chivaura, 2006b: 235). Although Horsthemke thinks that the argument for totemism does not hold since “one’s clan’s totem animal is another clan’s favourite *bush meat*” (2015: 74), I still see it as largely oriented towards reasonable environmental ethical thinking. Horsthemke’s argument can be countered for the reason that totemism ought not to be understood as implying totally refraining from eating bush meat by all individuals.

Other forms of environmental ethics as informed by folk African taboos include, but are not limited to cutting down and using certain tree species, visiting certain mountains, places, pools and forests that are thought to be sacred. The implications of violating any of these
taboos or avoidance rules is thought to be illness, bad luck and death among other negative occurrences on the moral agent and his or her whole community. Also, other implications associated with violating environmental ethical taboos are natural disasters such as droughts, floods and whirlwinds. All this is part of ethno-philosophical wisdom that is aimed at protecting natural water sources, natural vegetation and wildlife as well as the endangered non-human species all of which are part of the environment that ought to be safeguarded as it forms part of sub-Saharan African ontology. In this regard, I submit the argument that taboos are part of the sub-Saharan African ethno-philosophical ontological reality that shapes the relationship between human beings and the environment.

As a form of African philosophy, ethno-philosophy informs sub-Saharan African environmental ethics. Despite Hallen’s contention that “African systems of thought are depicted as placing minimal emphasis upon rigorous argumentation and criticism that are prerequisites to the sort of search for truth that involves discarding the old and creating the new” (Hallen, 2002: 50), ethno-philosophy remains one of the major pillars sustaining and contributing to sub-Saharan African environmental ethics. In this sub-Saharan African environmental ethics, one is most likely to find a culturally based thinking rather than individualistic ethics that informs environmental ethics. However, what is important is the need to avoid the problem in ethno-philosophical approaches of just taking these traditional worldviews unreflectively. It is therefore worth taking Oladipo’s argument that “to develop an authentic African philosophy, these sources [of ethno-philosophy such as proverbs, myths, folktales and taboos] would have to be investigated, recorded and, perhaps, analysed” (Oladipo, 2006: 12). This approach of professionalising African philosophy is what I argue for in the last section of this chapter.
2.4.2: Sage Philosophy and Environmental Ethics

The term ‘sage philosophy’ within the context in which it is used with reference to African philosophy stems from the word ‘sage’. In its general usage, the term ‘sage’ refers to a wise, prudent and very insightful individual just like the way in which it is used in ancient Greek philosophy to refer to individuals with great wisdom such as Thales, Pythagoras, Zeno and Socrates. Making a comparative analysis of ancient Greek philosophy with African sage philosophy, Oruka contends that “sage philosophy is a kind of philosophy which is as noble and significant as the philosophy of Socrates in ancient Greece. There are persons in it who think as deeply and are noble as Socrates was” (Oruka, 1997b: 183). This is because these men and women in African philosophy are so insightful in their traditional society and exhibit folk wisdom in areas such as politics, ethics, religion, metaphysics, astronomy, biology and mathematics. In his précising definition of sage philosophy, Oruka contends that,

Sage philosophy consists of the expressed thoughts of wise men and women in any given community and is a way of thinking and explaining the world that fluctuates between popular wisdom (well-known communal maxims, aphorisms and general common sense truths) and didactic wisdom (an expounded wisdom and a rational thought of some given individuals within a community). While popular wisdom is often conformist, didactic wisdom is at times critical of the communal set-up and popular wisdom (Oruka, 1997a: 61).

Such wisdom influences and greatly helps to shape the thinking of their contemporary and even future generations on the way in which human existence and nature in general could be understood. The same applies to African environmental ethical thinking and how it could be shaped by these folk sages. Certain individuals or sages are responsible for providing communities with sound ethical guidance that shapes African environmental ethics.
Unlike ethno-philosophy which is more inclined towards the significance of communal folk thinking, sage philosophy is more focussed on the significance of the thinking and philosophical insights of traditional individual thinkers. Bodunrin argues that,

. . . this trend implicitly rejects a holistic approach to African philosophy. Rather than seek African philosophy by the study of general world outlooks, customs, folk-lore, etc. [as seen in ethno-philosophy in the previous section], the attempt [in sage philosophy] is to identify men [and of course women\textsuperscript{16}] in the society who are reputed for their wisdom (Bodunrin, 1984: 2).

In African philosophical thinking, it is evident that there are wise men and women whose knowledge and wisdom immensely contribute towards shaping the thinking of society particularly environmental ethics as I establish here. As one of the African philosophers who has greatly popularised sage philosophy, Oruka argues,

Among the various African peoples, one is likely to find rigorous indigenous thinkers. These are men and women (sages) who have not had the benefit of modern education. But they are none the less critical independent thinkers who guide their thought and judgements by the power of reason and inborn insight rather than by the authority of communal consensus (Oruka, 2003: 143).

As I accept Oruka’s conception as the working understanding of a sage, I argue that African sages are the custodians of society’s folk wisdom on environmental ethical thinking. African traditional communities continue to consult folk sages on environmental ethical guidance. In most traditional sub-Saharan African communities, the people are given environmental ethical guidance and wisdom by these sages on how they should relate with their environment so that they continue to receive good rains and favourable environmental and weather conditions.

\textsuperscript{16} My emphasis.
Following Oruka’s and Kalumba’s understanding that a sage is an individual who “uses the gift of wisdom for the ethical betterment of his or her community. . .[and] has to be consistently concerned with the ethical and empirical problems arising in his or her community, with the intention of finding insightful solutions to them” (Kalumba, 2004: 274), I relate the following African Igbo proverb identified by Menkiti that: “what an old man sees sitting down, a young man cannot see standing up” (Menkiti, 2004: 325). The implication of the proverb to environmental ethics is that higher level environmental ethical thinking resides in the African sages.

African philosophic sagacity has been adopted as a phrase that refers to the celebrated folk wisdom from men and women who, through their deft understanding of fundamental questions about reality, inform society in various ethical epistemological, social and political areas among others. These are the African sages like Okemba Siminyu as identified by Oruka (1997b: 184), whom I take as being responsible for sub-Saharan African environmental ethical wisdom. Although he does not clearly demonstrate how these African sages directly contribute to environmental ethics, Ochieng’-Odhiambo forwards the argument that “a sage acts as a mirror reflecting his or her community’s wisdom and traditions” (Ochieng’-Odhiambo, 2010: 121). In environmental ethical concerns, sages bridge the gap between the human community and the environment by providing environmental ethical wisdom on fundamental and morally controversial issues.

Sub-Saharan African ontology-based environmental ethics cannot be fully conceptualised without reference and appeal to African philosophic sagacity. In fact, philosophic sagacity exceptionally informs African environmental ethics. For example, the African sages with their experience with both the physical and non-physical environment are responsible for insightful wisdom that goes towards nature’s preservation. Sub-Saharan African folk thinking as informed by the elders for example holds that human beings do not exist just as human
persons, but rather share an ontological relationship with their surroundings. It is held that
their existence is actually centred on recognition of, and respect for the hierarchy of existence
encompassing human beings, the environment, the ancestors and God. This conception of
environmental ethics and existence is also alluded to by Workineh Kelbessa (2005: 22) and
Teffo and Roux (1998: 199-202) respectively. However, this dimension will be clearly
explored in chapter three.

African sages occupy an important place in sub-Saharan African cosmology. These sages
inform society on various aspects of human life the same way that Western philosophers and
sages do. To this end, Hallen observes that “Oruka suggests that the activity of reflection
upon certain themes of fundamental importance to human life – the existence of a supreme
being, (or God), the nature of time, the nature of freedom, the nature of death, and the nature
of education – has always been of concern to a select number of people in all human
societies” (Hallen, 2002: 52). This is why I suspect that the origin of sub-Saharan African
ideas about environmental ethics could be partly attributed to the African sages.

Making a conclusion that is based on his anthropological study of philosophic sagacity
amongst indigenous Kenyans, Oruka infers that it is most likely that all over Africa, there are
many sages who “are capable of taking a problem or a concept and offer a rigorous
philosophical analysis of it, making clear rationally where they accept or reject the
established or communal judgements on the matter” (Oruka, 2003: 143-4). For example,
having studied the intricate relationship between the existence of the human person, society
as well as the environment at large, the African sages have come to the conclusion that
human existence and the existence of the natural environment are intertwined. This is why
their definition and understanding of being or unhu is closely knit with environmental ethical
import. Ramose sees this understanding of ubuntu in his notion of “ecology through ubuntu”
(1999: 154-9) where he sees environmental ethics as imbedded in the African understanding
of being or existence (Ramose, 1999: 154-9). In this way, I find sage philosophy to be very useful and instrumental in informing sub-Saharan African environmental ethics. I note that among indigenous African communities, these wise men and women have continued to inform and inculcate value systems that go a way towards environmental ethical thinking. These great sages in African philosophy not only shape African philosophical thought in general, but they also greatly contribute to what I see as ontology-based environmental ethics. For example, environmental ethical wisdom can be realised in the thinking of Okemba Simiyu, a folk sage identified by Oruka from Bungoma town of Kenya. In his conversation with Okemba Simiyu, Oruka makes the following observations:

Another name is Okemba Siminyu. The question to him was: what is it that we can take as the most important thing in life (i.e. that which is more important than anything else you can think of)? . . . He gave me one answer: that the most important thing in life is land, *udongo*, because we cannot be wise without eating, neither can we be wise without having a house, a place in which to sleep. Hence land is the most basic and therefore the highest good in life. Again, whether you agree with it or not, it is a serious attempt at deep philosophical thinking about life. By land, the sage referred to the soil, the air and the whole of the atmosphere, which make life on Earth possible (Oruka, 1997b: 184).

In view of this observation therefore, it is the reason why I argue that these sages like Simiyu give insights that guide African environmental ethics. For example, these sages are responsible for coming up with idioms and proverbs that easily come as didactic tools that the elders or sages use to inculcate desirable character traits in the young and adults so that they could relate well with other human communities, the non-human communities and the environment at large. For example, one Shona idiom which has environmental ethical import
is: *Aiva madziva ave mazambuko* (what used to be deep pools are now bridges or passable areas). This Shona proverb is normally used by these elders or sages to teach humanity to appreciate the change that is characteristic of the natural environment and to be mindful of worsening the environmental crisis.

Although African philosophic sagacity is sometimes criticised for not being a proper philosophy in the strict sense and for being based on ethno-philosophical thinking (Oruka, 2003: 143), African environmental ethics is informed and shaped by the thinking, teaching and wisdom of these wise men and women in African philosophic sagacity. These wise men and women impart didactic environmental ethical wisdom to society. The African folk sages for example, are the ones who are responsible for coming up with certain restrictions on human behaviour that negatively affects the natural environment. Duri and Mapara also share the same sentiment that the folk sages in indigenous sub-Saharan African communities impart such wisdom through taboos that restrict people from taking and using as firewood, certain rare and endangered tree species that could easily go into extinction (Duri and Mapara, 2007: 105). The thoughts of these indigenous individual thinkers inform human beings or society at large with regards to how they ought to treat their non-human communities and the physical environment at large.

### 2.4.3: Nationalist Ideological Philosophy and Environmental Ethics

Nationalist ideological philosophy is a sub-Saharan African philosophical thought that is rooted in African social and political thinking. It is the kind of thinking that has been largely influenced and propagated by African nationalist thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Senghor and Franz Fanon. These thinkers approach African philosophy from an ideological standpoint where it is believed that African philosophy and thought can only make sense if and only if Africans are liberated from all forms of colonialism. As Ochieng’-Odhiambo sees it, “within the nationalist ideological approach to African
philosophy the supposition is that in the modern world, African philosophy can only be revived if and when the African society is truly free and independent” (Ochieng’-Odhiambo, 2010: 151). The same applies therefore to sub-Saharan African environmental ethics. It is my contention that an ontology-based environmental ethical thinking can only be realised in African thought when the African continent is liberated from all forms of oppression and colonialism. Otherwise, the continued suppression of sub-Saharan thought systems and ideology has a negative impact on the African environment and its environmental ethics as well.

African nationalist ideological philosophy is in part, an attempt by Africans to legitimise African ethno-philosophical thinking. First it calls for intellectual and ideological freedom among African communities. For Ochieng’-Odhiambo, “the apparent belief is that the exact nature of African philosophy would remain elusive until and unless the African society disentangles itself from the yolk of colonialism, and then revert to former cardinal principles of traditional life” (Ochieng’-Odhiambo, 2010: 151). Nationalist ideological philosophy puts strong emphasis on traditional life, society and respect for family-hood. As Bodunrin puts it, nationalist ideological philosophy “is an attempt to evolve a new and, if possible, unique political theory based on traditional African socialism and family-hood” (Bodunrin, 1984: 2). Of note among some of these cardinal principles of traditional African socialism and notion of family-hood is the aspect of existence of the individual within his or her community within a liveable environment.

Most of the notable nationalist ideological philosophers such as Nkrumah and Nyerere would advocate for the communitarian approach to life as one of the pillars of African social and political thought. Nkrumah for example, focussing on traditional African life offered a largely anthropocentric argument that is centred on a humanist view of human persons. Nkrumah argues:
The traditional face of Africa includes an attitude towards man which can only be described in its social manifestation, as being socialist. This arises from the fact that man is regarded in Africa as primarily a spiritual being, a being endowed originally with certain inward dignity, integrity and value. [Hence] . . . this original value of man imposes duties of a socialist kind upon us. Herein lies the theoretical basis of African communalism (Nkrumah, 1964: 68-9).

From this perspective, I appreciate the way in which communitarian approaches to life could go towards safeguarding the interests of the whole community. Although this dimension is not explicitly presented in Nkrumah’s moderately anthropocentric argument for environmental ethics, it could also be positively interpreted to be broadly inclusive of the environment.

Nyerere also advocates for a communitarian approach to life in general that is based on what he terms Ujamaa which he sees as a philosophy that is based on family-hood (Nyerere, 1968: 12). A normative implication of this approach is that it is believed that this approach should cascade from the individual to the larger society or community. Nyerere’s idea is based on traditional African socialism. As he sees it:

We in Africa have no more need of being ‘converted’ to socialism than we have of being ‘taught’ democracy. Both are rooted in our own traditional past – in the traditional society which produced us. Modern African socialism can draw from its traditional heritage the recognition of ‘society’ as an extension of the basic family unit (Nyerere, 1968: 12).

In this argument by Nyerere, it is important to appreciate the way in which the term ‘society’ is used. In the African communitarian perspective, although this may not necessarily be what Nyerere had in mind it can easily be used and understood with an extended meaning to include that of human beings as well as the surrounding environment in its totality. In
Nyerere’s nationalist ideological approach to philosophy, a lot could be learnt that fosters what I advocate for here as ontology-based environmental ethics. This is why Nyerere further argues that “our recognition of the family to which we all belong must be extended yet further – beyond the tribe, the community, the nation, or even the continent – to embrace the whole society of mankind” (Nyerere, 1968: 12). Although Nyerere is not explicit on it, I argue that his conception of the family extends beyond the human community. In this way, the environment becomes part of humanity as well. This is why I take nationalist ideological philosophy to be of paramount importance to sub-Saharan African environmental ethics although it fairly propagates a largely anthropocentric view of environmental ethics. Although he does not advocate for nationalist ideological philosophy, Behrens supports the conception of the family that Nyerere has in mind. He appeals to African notions of the family and attempts to construct meaningful environmental ethics out of it (Behrens, 2012: 472-3).

Despite being famous for advocating sage philosophy, Oruka also notes that nationalist ideological African philosophy embraces African traditional approaches to life such as communalism. “In communalism the individual and society are said to have egalitarian mutual obligations: no individual would prosper at the expense of the society and the society would not ignore the stagnation of any of its members” (Oruka, 2003: 143). What this simply implies is that nationalist ideological African philosophical thinking that focuses on the relations between society and the individual is relevant to communitarian ontology-based environmental ethics that I consider here.

It must be noted that nationalist ideological philosophy challenges colonial thinking and anthropocentric thinking. Interpreted correctly, nationalist ideological philosophy sees a strong connection between colonialism and anthropocentrism. Both, colonialism and anthropocentrism are based on the philosophy of oppression or domination which nationalist
ideological philosophy seeks to dispel. Nationalist ideological African philosophy, in terms of its import to African environmental ethics is highly pragmatic in orientation as it is concerned with safeguarding of the freedom of both the individual and the community. This is why Oruka thinks that “this philosophy is practical and has explicit problems to solve, namely those of national and individual freedom . . .” (Oruka, 2003: 143). However, despite some of these observations, as I proceed to chapter three, I draw on some of the socio-political ideas discussed in this section to present an ontology-based African environmental ethics.

2.4.4: Professional African Philosophy and Environmental Ethics

Unlike ethno-philosophy and sage philosophy that I take to be traditional African philosophies and approaches to African philosophy, professional African philosophy is not a traditional or an exclusively indigenous African philosophy in the strict sense. Rather, it is an African philosophy in the sense of being a philosophy in Africa that is being done by both African and non African thinkers who have had formal education and contact with Western philosophical approaches and methods. Some of these notable professional African thinkers in this philosophic tradition include Hountondji, Wiredu, Gyekye, Eze, Oruka, Masolo and Ramose among others. As Oruka identifies it:

This trend consists of works and debates of the professionally trained students and teachers of philosophy in Africa. Most of it rejects the assumptions of ethno-philosophy. Philosophy is conceived as a discipline or an activity whose meaning cannot depend just on racial or regional make-up. Philosophy is here taken in the strict sense in which it involves critical, reflective, and logical inquiry (Oruka, 2003: 145).

From Oruka’s view, it is clear that the professional philosophical approach to African philosophy comes in as some form of a negation to the ethno-philosophical approach to
African philosophy in so far as it challenges African philosophy to be viewed just as Western philosophy in terms of critical, reflective and logical standards. So, in terms of input to environmental ethics, professional African philosophy approaches African ontology-based environmental ethics in almost a similar approach to the Western viewpoint. So, as I examine the contribution of sub-Saharan African ontology to environmental ethics, I will mainly use this approach as I will be critical, reflective and inquisitive on African ethno-philosophy, sage philosophy and nationalist ideological philosophy as well.

Although professional African philosophy is sometimes taken with suspicion as an African philosophy, I maintain that it is one of the most logical approaches to African philosophy. One challenge that has been raised against professional African philosophy is the question of whether it should be properly addressed as an African philosophy. Ochieng’-Odhiambo notes that:

Some critics argue that what this school qualifies as African philosophy is not African philosophy as such . . . as the professional African philosophers, that is, the representatives of the professional school, having been trained in the Western tradition are often accused of illegally using Western techniques and methods in African philosophy (Ochieng’-Odhiambo, 2010: 118).

However, contrary to Ochieng’-Odhiambo’s contention, it is reasonable to take Oruka’s position that “there is no reason why a work by an African thinker in, say, modern epistemology, metaphysics, or logic should not be seen as part of African philosophy” (Oruka, 2003: 145), although earlier on he had thought that professional African philosophy is more Western than African (Oruka, 1997a: 66). This is why I suspect that regardless of the influence of Western philosophy to professional African philosophy, the outcome remains African philosophy. Hence, the notable contributions to sub-Saharan African environmental ethics from Bujo (1998; 2009a, 2009b), Oruka (1995; 1997a; 1997b; 2003), Chivaura
(2006b), Tangwa (2004) and Behrens (2014a, 2014b) cannot be categorised as part of Western philosophy, but remain strictly African philosophical attempts to assess the contribution of African metaphysics and thought to environmentalism.

Most of these thinkers, despite influence from their contact with Western philosophical ideas, draw from the African communitarian ideas and argue for the grounding of African environmental ethics on African ideas and perspectives. Ojomo (2011: 101) for example, advocates for a rethinking of African environmental ethics by challenging the grounding of African environmentalism on non-African perspectives like the Western philosophical perspectives. Ojomo is worried why ethical theories such as normative environmental ethics, sentientist ethics, biocentric environmental ethics, ecocentric environmental ethics and ecofeminist environmental ethics are grounded in Western philosophical perspectives (Ojomo, 2011: 101). Just like Ojomo, Murove also calls for contemporary African environmental ethics to be informed by, and grounded on traditional African value systems. He argues that “traditional African ethics in general recognised the intimate bond between men and their environment” (Murove, 2004: 195). In this regard, one is likely to be tempted to read Murove as an African ethno-philosopher. However, although Murove is traditionalist in terms of his approach to African philosophy and environmental ethics, I consider his contributions as also contributing to both ethno-philosophy and professional African philosophy. This is because of the reflective and critical approach that Murove uses in interpreting traditional African values.

The same can be said of thinkers such as Ramose (1999: 154-9) and Chivaura (2006b: 229-240). They all call for a need to take traditional African value systems and philosophies such 
*ubuntu* as the basis for sound African environmental ethics. This idea is in itself grounded in African metaphysics because the notion of *ubuntu* is centred on existence and the notion of existence among Africans help to shape their worldview. As he critiques modern
technological advancements as responsible for the ecological imbalance and crises, Ramose advances the need to place *ubuntu* at the core of ethical relations between human beings and nature. He argues,

The reductionist, fragmentative and empiricist rationality continues to make great advances in the sphere of technology. In the process the advances have resulted in serious disturbances to the ecology, thereby disrupting the precarious balance between the human being and its environment. The loss of this balance constitutes a violation of *botho*. It is also an indication of the need to restore *botho* in the sphere of the relations between human beings and physical nature (Ramose, 1999: 157).

The position taken by Oruka that the works of these notable African thinkers should be considered as strictly African philosophy is what I defend in this work. I argue that while Western contemporary professional environmental ethics informs and influences contemporary African views on environmental ethics, that cannot be taken as Western environmental ethics. Rather, I note that contemporary African environmental ethical perspectives cannot be solely attributed to Western environmental thinking such that the African environment can be seen as lacking environmental ethics. In this regard, I submit the argument that views that are shaped by professional African philosophy are strictly African in so far as that could be viewed as “a historical law of intellectual development that intellectual offerings in a given culture, are appropriated and cultivated in other cultures” (Oruka, 2003: 145-6).

Within the context of environmental ethical thinking in Africa, I argue that contemporary African environmental ethics is shaped by professional African philosophy. Considering the way in which professional African environmental ethical thinkers continue to contribute towards African environmental ethics, one cannot belittle their contribution to the shaping
and development of African environmental ethics. Some of these thinkers are for example, Chivaura, Murove, Gyekye, Wiredu, Ramose, Mbiti and Bujo among others. As I establish that professional African philosophy is relevant to African environmental ethics, I will now proceed in the next section to give a justification why professional African philosophy could be used in order to develop an African ontology-based environmental ethics in later chapters.

2.5: The Justification for Adopting Professional African Philosophy

In this particular section, I intend to offer a justification for taking professional African philosophy as my theoretical framework, in place of the other trends in African philosophy. In doing so, I make a comparative analysis of the four approaches or methodologies in African philosophy. I will then indicate why I am largely informed by the professional approach to African philosophy in place of the other approaches which in essence I do not want to totally disregard.

As methodologies towards African philosophy, ethno-philosophy, sage philosophy and nationalist ideological philosophy complement each other in so far as they all put strong emphasis on the African traditional community and heritage. However, African traditional community and heritage, and also the general hierarchy of beings as represented by African ethno-philosophy and partly by sage philosophy and nationalist ideological philosophy ought not to be merely presented as philosophy. The problem of accepting traditional ethno-philosophical claims unreflectively is that it leads to the acceptance of the fallacy that African philosophy is unreflective and uncritical. In both ethno-philosophy and sage philosophy, it is held that “the task of African philosophy should be that of discovery and documenting indigenous African beliefs and thought systems” (Oladipo, 2006: 9-10). Despite being largely anthropologically valuable, such an approach is found wanting compared to the professional approach to African philosophy. In professional African philosophy, philosophy is seen as “a reflective and critical inquiry whose focus should not only be on African experience in its
various dimensions, but also on human experience in general” (Oladipo, 2006: 10). This is why I argue that professional African philosophy, as represented by thinkers such as Wiredu, Gyekye, Ramose, Masolo and others, attempts to satisfy what Oladipo sees as replacing theories for facts and adjusting beliefs for evidence (Oladipo, 2006: 16).

Although ethno-philosophy appears to be holistic in approach, as opposed to sage philosophy which is rather particularistic as it focuses on the contribution of individual sages and their contribution to African philosophy, ethno-philosophy falls short because sometimes it accommodates some unreflective elements of the African traditional culture and heritage. In this respect therefore, I take as useful Oladipo’s argument that professional African philosophy is worthwhile as represented by:

some young Western-trained African intellectuals who had the responsibility of laying the foundation for the development of the various intellectual disciplines in Africa. Among these intellectuals were some philosophers who refused to grant a ‘special status’ to traditional African ideas on man, society and nature, considering wrong the thinking that the mere reportage of these ideas provided an adequate definition of the philosopher’s task in Africa and, finally insisted that a philosophical study of traditional thought should be critical, conceptual, and reconstructive (Oladipo, 2006: 12)

Although my presentation of ethno-philosophy, sage philosophy and nationalist ideological philosophy was not intended to give ‘special status’ to them, I largely use the critical and reflective approaches that are inherent in professional African philosophy. In this respect, Oladipo argues that we need “. . . critical and reconstructive evaluations of our traditional cultural heritage so that we can build on it” (Oladipo, 2006: 18). This is why I would prefer the professional approach to African philosophy as opposed to the rest of the approaches. The problem with the other three approaches to African philosophy is the emphasis to culturally
contextualise African philosophy. Although it is not really a problem to understand African philosophy in its cultural context, it must also not be a problem to understand it from a universalist perspective. To this end, Kaphagawani and Malherbe contend that,

because the professional philosopher engages in a world-wide debate, his or her task is minimally contextualised and hardly has any specific cultural character [like what is the case with African ethno-philosophy, sage philosophy and nationalist ideological philosophy (Kaphagawani and Malherbe, 2003: 259).

Of course, this is not to totally dismiss these three approaches as irrelevant towards the contribution to sub-Saharan African environmental ethics.

In my understanding and approach to African philosophy as largely informed by the professional approach to it, I endeavour to avoid the mistake of taking everything that is traditional about African and passing it as African philosophy. I will work in the spirit of philosophers such as “Peter Bodunrin, Paulin Hountondji, Odera Oruka and Kwasi Wiredu – [who] argue that African philosophy should be a critical philosophy not a descriptive record of traditional beliefs” (Oladipo, 2006: 9).

The other reason for my engagement with professional African philosophy as a viable tool for the study of African philosophy instead of the other approaches is its emphasis on reason. Deacon thinks that philosophy cannot be centred on racial axioms as implicit in African ethno-philosophy and partly in nationalist ideological philosophy (Deacon, 2003: 116). From a non-racial perspective, professional African philosophers argue that African philosophy should be “defined along the lines of rational, critical, rigorous, and reflective investigation [notwithstanding the fact that] African and Western philosophy differ due to the cultural, historical, and environmental differences manifest within the two philosophies” (Deacon, 2003: 116). Nationalist ideological philosophy is also largely focussed on humanity and less
oriented towards the non-human animals in terms of their ethical standing. In nationalist ideological philosophy, there is nothing concerning the status of non-human animals. This is why professional African philosophy is adopted here as a viable theoretical framework in place of the other three approaches to African philosophy that are discussed here.

2.6: Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to situate environmental ethics in African philosophy. The chapter conceptualises environmental ethics as it is found in African philosophy. The argument developed here is that African philosophy and philosophies such as ethno-philosophy, sage philosophy, nationalist ideological philosophy and professional African philosophy largely inform and shape environmental ethical thinking that stems from African traditional ways of approaching reality. It is argued that it is possible to realise environmental ethics from the African worldview, just like what is the case with Western philosophy and also how it shapes its environmental ethics.

I have also partly traced the history and development of African philosophy through the methodological approaches to African philosophy. In discussing these approaches to African philosophy, I examine the way environmental ethics could be traced in each of the approaches to African philosophy. I have avoided getting deep into the debate of whether or not African philosophy exists or not because it is not part of this work. The conclusion that I put forth in this chapter is that African ontology-based environmental ethics can be traced in any of the four trends that I have also looked at as methodologies in African philosophy. I have examined the history of African philosophy and how it is closely knit with African environmental ethical thinking the same way that I have done with Western Philosophy in chapter one despite the varying methodological approaches to Western philosophy and African philosophy respectively. I have proceeded to submit the argument that environmental ethics is easily located in the history of African philosophy.
In the light of the realisation that it is possible to meaningfully conceptualise African environmental ethics as established in this chapter, I now find it logical to proceed to the next chapter and critically address the question of whether and how the idea of sub-Saharan understanding of the individual informs environmental ethics. I will largely use the professional approach to African philosophy as I have justified in the previous section.
Chapter Three: Ontology in African Philosophy

3.1: Introduction

This chapter addresses the question of being or existence as it is conceptualised in African philosophy. As noted in chapter two, African philosophy is understood here as the worldview and thought systems from African and some African-inspired thinkers whose intention is to fully make meaning out of African ideas, knowledge and value systems. In this regard, the chapter takes a universalist approach to African philosophy. This entails the interpretation of African ideas about ontology, from a generally common perspective where African ideas about ontology are generalised as having a similar orientation. This approach is similar to what Barry Hallen sees as the “phenomenological-existential hermeneutical” approach to African philosophy (Hallen, 2002: 56). This involves the analysis and interpretation of the human existential conditions as well as their social structures in order to discern meaning out of African ideas and philosophy.

In this chapter, the attempt to universalise ideas about ontology in African philosophy is deliberate. Although I am conscious of the need to be particularistic with regard to African philosophy, an approach which Wiredu finds to be attractive (1996: 45), I note some generally similar conceptions among African ideas on the question of ontology or how existence is viewed. I admit that this universalist approach to African philosophy has been heavily criticised for not approaching African philosophy in a culture-specific way (Teffo and Roux, 1998: 136). However, it is reasonable to appreciate that “there have been many attempts to show that there is one set of ideas which are common to the whole African continent and which may be termed ‘African philosophy’. In terms of this approach there must then be a particular African metaphysics” (Teffo and Roux, 1998: 136). This is the reason why this chapter largely focuses on African metaphysical ideas about ontology as
generally having a similar outlook and orientation across most sub-Saharan African communities. (See also Horsthemke, 2015: 1.)

The approach that I use in this chapter is largely opposed to what Richard Bell sees as the ‘pluralist’ analysis which sensibly aims to show that “cultures differ- specifically cultures within sub-Saharan Africa – that each has its own coherence and distinctive truth functional way in which it conceives of and expresses its world” (Bell, 2002: 23). While mindful of this need to be aware of particulars about the kind of ontology that I grapple with in African philosophy in order to avoid the problem of generalisation, I realise and maintain that most of the fundamental ideas on the question of ontology are common to most sub-Saharan African communities. Even Teffo and Roux admit that “. . . generally speaking, metaphysical thinking in Africa has features which make it a particular way of conceptualising reality” (Teffo and Roux, 1998: 136). At the same time, a purely culture-specific approach to African philosophy in itself would almost be like an anthropological study of African ideas and philosophies, an approach that this work would least want to use.

Having discussed the way environmental ethics is found in African philosophy in chapter two, this chapter builds on these key ideas. It mainly focuses on the question of ontology and attempts to discuss the way existence is conceptualised in African philosophy as essentially having a normative dimension. Gyekye comes close to this observation as he sees a connection between moral questions and metaphysical conceptions of the individual human being (Gyekye, 1998: 317). In this regard, the chapter examines the African understanding of the person and existence in general as teleologically oriented. The chapter sets the tone for chapter four as it addresses some fundamental ideas about existence that will help to bring forth the argument there that the sub-Saharan African understanding of environmental ethics is best informed by appreciating how sub-Saharan African thought conceives existence. The argument submitted in this chapter is that the notion of being in African philosophy is not
limited to the individual person alone, but that it is inclusive of several other beings and forces in the web of African ontology which is seen here as a hierarchy of purposive beings.

It is argued that existence is hierarchical in so far as it cascades from the Supreme Being, to the ancestors, to the human community and down to the non-human community of other forms of beings which include the environment. Although I partly accept the anthropocentric slant in African ontology, I contend that existence in African philosophy is a matter of recognition of vitalism and ethical interconnections in the web of ontology that stretches from the Supreme Being (God), ancestors, the human person up to the lower beings. Overall, it is established that there is a teleological understanding of being in African philosophy. By teleological understanding of being, it is meant that existence ought to have a purpose for which it is meant to exist for and that existence is driven by aims (Teffo and Roux, 1998: 192). This teleological understanding of existence is realised in the various forms of being that stretch from highest to the lowest forces in terms of order of existence.

3.2: The Question of Ontology in African Philosophy

The question of ontology is by and large concerned with important philosophical aspects of metaphysics. According to Roberto Poli “different authors assign different meanings to ontology and metaphysics [to the extent that] some use [the terms] ontology and metaphysics interchangeably” (Poli, 2010: 1). In this work however, I use the term ‘ontology’ in the way Hilary Putnam uses it in the more traditional sense to denote an important aspect of the branch of philosophy called metaphysics (Putnam, 2004: 17). Although I note some connections and slight differences in the issues that the two concepts address, I prefer to use the term ‘ontology’ as an important branch of metaphysics. This is because the issues of existence that I address here are more ontological questions than metaphysical questions which I see to be broader than what I have in mind.
The connection between metaphysics and ontology is that metaphysics tackles broader issues concerning the entire world beyond the physical world while ontology is more focussed on some component of metaphysics like the problem of existence. As Ekanola puts it, “it is widely accepted that metaphysics is about the search for what constitutes reality in the world and the ultimate nature of things as opposed to their apparent or contingent constitution” (Ekanola, 2006: 74). The issues that metaphysicians address are such abstract philosophical problems that sometimes it is not possible to rationalise and concretise solutions to the problems raised by such questions. For example, Teffo and Roux invite us to consider the following questions: “Why does lightning kill people and destroy property? Why are some people successful whereas others, despite their efforts, fail? Why do innocent and good people become ill and die?” (Teffo and Roux, 1998: 192). These questions are rendered to be metaphysical questions because “such thinking about reality, that is, such attempts to fathom what is real and not and what the ultimate nature of reality is, is metaphysical thinking” (Teffo and Roux, 1998: 192).

On the other hand, the question of ontology is important as it also feeds into these important metaphysical questions that Teffo and Roux identify. It is crucial to be clear of the connection that lies between the questions that the two related areas of metaphysics and ontology address. Ontology deals with metaphysical questions concerning what can really be rationally actualised, conceptualised and comprehended (Poli, 2010: 1). It also deals with the real philosophical problems of being qua being, while metaphysical questions are broadly abstract and speculative. Poli attempts to give a categorisation of the issues that ontology and metaphysics address in the following:

Ontology deals with what can be rationally understood, at least partially. According to this interpretation, science in all its branches is the most successful ally of ontology. Metaphysics is broader than ontology in the sense
that the possibility is admitted of aspects of reality that in principle may go beyond the capacity of any rational enterprise we may happen to develop (Poli, 2012: 1).

Accordingly, Elvis Imafidon also offers a definition of ontology that is in line with Poli’s understanding as he contends that the question of ontology is concerned with issues about existence or being as such (Imafidon, 2014: 37). This is the working understanding with which I have in mind as I contextualise the question of ontology within the African metaphysical context. With this understanding, I address the question of how the African conception of ontology could be relevant to ethical issues within the African metaphysical context.

Gyekye, for example, challenges us to consider this question of how the ontological understanding of the individual and community could be articulated and taken as the basis for comprehending African normative issues (Gyekye, 1992: 102). In this regard, I intend to take this challenge and argue that African conceptions of being have a normative orientation despite Metz’s scepticism in grounding African ethics on metaphysics (Metz, 2014: 189-204). As Metz sees it, “there is a gulf between ontological claims about what is or exists on the one hand, and ethical claims about what is good or how agents ought to act, on the other, in the sense that nothing about the latter is justified merely on the basis of the former” (Metz, 2014: 190). Metz’s argument is attractive and worth taking seriously. His critique is useful as it provides a starting point for my argument that ontology is a promising way to approach environmental ethics. However, attractive his argument promises to be, I will not undertake to respond to it as that is not the aim of this inquiry. My argument is more focused on the teleological conception of existence in African philosophy which depends largely on accepting certain ontological conceptions a priori, an approach that is acceptable in the rationalist scheme for knowledge as well as in much of theological ethics. Implicit in this
argument is the view that ontology grounds ethics in African philosophy, an argument that Metz challenges although he later on takes an exception for teleological views (2014: 190). A case in point here would be the way the notion of *ubuntu* is understood in African philosophy and thinking as having both ontological and ethical underpinnings (Ramose, 1999: 49-66).

The notion of ontology in African philosophy seems to be reasonable and attractive if it is comprehended with reference to its social and ethical dimension. In African philosophy, ontology is not limited to the way existence is understood at the metaphysical level but that it has an intrinsic social and ethical dimension. Gyekye argues that:

Moral and normative matters may be expressed in sophisticated and elaborate conceptual formulation; as practical matters they have their best and unambiguous articulation or translation in the actual way of life of a people – in the way individuals are expected to respond to one another in times of need, to spontaneously care for one another and so on (Gyekye, 1992: 102).

This is why I later argue that ontology could be plausibly taken as the foundation of social ethics in African philosophy. I argue that ontology spreads into the social and ethical realm such that *being* or existence is all inclusive and “serves as a meta-ethical and hermeneutical explanation of African social/humanistic ethics” (Imafidon, 2014: 37). To this end, it is reasonable to contend that African ethical thinking could be plausibly understood in the light of the way existence is rationalised in African metaphysics and philosophy. For example, Kaphagawani makes a critical survey of the various conceptions of the person that are held among the Akan in West Africa, the Yoruba, and the East African conceptions (Kaphagawani, 2004: 332-342).

Although Kaphagawani’s conclusion does not explicitly come out from his analysis, it is implicit from his argument that African conceptions of the person and ethical thinking are closely knit. For example, among the Akan, Kaphagawani sees what they refer to as *sunsum*
as an essential aspect of human existence that gives a person his or her personality which is basically what I treat here as the ethical dimension of existence (Kaphagawani, 2004: 332). Among the Yoruba, Kaphagawani notes that a person is referred to as *eniyan*, a term which he sees as having “both a normative and a literal meaning” (Kaphagawani, 2004: 333). Kaphagawani’s final analysis was among the East and Southern African conceptions of the person that he generally equates with the vitalist understanding of existence (2004: 335), explored below, which I also see as confirming the view that existence and ethical thinking are largely related.

Ontology often forms the basis for normative ethics in African philosophy. It is such that the African understanding of the question of ontology is closely linked with their conception of normative ethics. To a reasonable extent, ontology is the foundation of African normative ethics. This is why Imafidon describes normative ethics in African tradition as being social and humanistic in nature, owing to the emphasis that African communities place on togetherness, communalistic behaviour, and cooperation (Imafidon, 2014: 37). To this end, I therefore start by acknowledging that other African theorists such as Gyekye (1992: 101-2), Kaphagawani (2004: 332-5) and Imafidon (2014: 37) have attempted to examine how the understanding of ontology is related to ethics. However, my approach is largely on trying to make sense of the close connection between ontology and ethics in terms of a teleological understanding of *being*.

### 3.2.1: Vitalism in African Ontology

One form of ontology that is embedded in African philosophy and ontology is the vitalist tradition, an aspect that is also known as the ‘force thesis’. This notion of the vital forces is based on the assumption that existence is anchored upon some fundamental conceptions of existence. This conception of existence hinges on the understanding that “life force is the fundamental reality in the universe” (Shutte, 2009: 91). Accordingly, this view of existence is
centred on the thinking that it is not only human beings and non-human animals that exhibit life. The life part of force is based on the view that even non-animate reality such as rocks, trees, rivers, seas, the air, and soils are alive. They are alive in so far as they are beings on their own, but also in so far as their existence is capable of influencing the existence of other beings such as human beings. This is the vitalist understanding of existence in African ontology where non-animate reality is thought to possess energy, potency and souls, just like animate things.

The vitalist dimension, as an ontological theory, is a very important aspect of African metaphysics and philosophy. It is centred on the idea that a being does not exist in a kind of ontological vacuum but that beings are interconnected with other vital beings and forces as well. Augustine Shutte correctly captures this vitalist understanding of African ontology as he argues:

In the traditional African view the universe is not composed of things that interact with each other. It is seen, rather, as a world of forces interacting with other forces, a universal field of force. Everything that exists, stones and plants and animals, and persons too, is the focus and expression of interacting forces. The forces are not seen, as in the materialist view, as simply physical. They are also present in our emotions and ideas. Nor are they simply spiritual either. They are also present in our muscles and our blood (Shutte, 2009: 89).

Shutte’s understanding of force in this regards highlights the centrality of potency, energy and soul in the animate and non-animate reality as well. This is why the notion of vital force is not limited to the materialist conception of existence, but that it has a spiritual and teleological dimension in the African order of existence.
While Shutte sees some kind of interconnectedness and omnipresence in the existence of forces in African ontology, Imafidon also identifies a dualism in the concept of *being* in African ontology as follows:

The force thesis is meant to engage a people’s conception of *being* with the aim of elucidating the general structures of being as well the substratum, that is, what remains present and enduring within the structure of being; it presents a metaphysics of enduring presence of the dual realms of being as found in various African people’s thought system (Imafidon, 2014: 37-8).

Here, the force thesis emphasises the dual existence of reality such that it is meaningful to realise the physical form of existence as well as the non-physical form of existence as possessing life. Shutte is in agreement with this conception of reality as he argues that, “not merely material, not purely spiritual, the forces that make the universe are seen instead as *life*, living energy, forces of life. The African conception of life includes both the physical and the spiritual” (Shutte, 2009: 90). This is why Imafidon comes to the conclusion that “in a typical African ontology, there exists a universe of two realms of existence, the visible and invisible; independently real but intrinsically linked to form a whole” (Imafidon, 2014: 38). In view of Imafidon’s view, it is also reasonable to note that although the essence of these two realms of existence is considered as independent, they in actual fact link and relate to form a universal world of existence so that “the universe can be seen as a graded system of life force. . . . ” (Shutte, 2009: 90). In the same fashion, my traditional African environmental ethics is therefore informed by the extent to which these two forces interact with each other and positively influence human action and behaviour for the well-being of his or her environment.

Tempels attempts to come closer to this understanding of existence as he compares the Western notion of existence with the African one, which he refers to as the “Bantu conception of existence” (Tempels, 1959: 50). He comes to the conclusion that the Western
idea of being is static while the Bantu (African) conception of being is dynamic (Tempels, 1959: 50). As he puts it:

We can conceive the transcendental notion of being by separating it from its attribute Force, but the Bantu cannot. Force in his thought is a necessary element in being and the concept force is inseparable from the definition of being. There is no idea among Bantu of being divorced from the idea of force. Without the element force, being cannot be conceived. [Hence] we hold a static conception of being, they a dynamic (Tempels, 1959: 51-2).

Although this is a very old statement by Tempels, with a missionary background, it is important to note that his views are still taken seriously by black African philosophers. Of note here is the idea that the dual worlds of African existence are not static or stationary. It is such that what occurs in one of the worlds either affects the other world negatively or positively. This is the way in which forces in African ontology are thought to exist. To this end, Imafidon contends that “the beings or entities existing in these two realms of existence are lively and active in varying degrees because they are vitalised, animated, or energised by an ontological principle or essence or force given by a Supreme Being” (Imafidon, 2014: 38). In this way, the African notion of ontology is organised in such a way that there is dynamism and interrelationship between all the various levels of existence. This is what Tempels construes as the ‘force thesis’.

A judicious understanding of being as force is largely informed by the way in which any of these various forms of being in African ontology are capable of influencing the behaviour and destiny of any of the other beings in the hierarchy of existence. One reason for taking the force thesis as reasonably acceptable is that it is implicit in the arguments other African thinkers such as Ramose (1999: 49-66), Gyekye (1992: 37), Kaphagawani (2004: 332-342) and Mbiti (1969: 24). These thinkers prefer to associate the African conception of being with
communitarian existence. This is what prompts Bernard Matolino to contend that “African thinkers talk about the same concept in different ways” (Matolino, 2011: 23). The idea of the force thesis confirms the teleological understanding of being which I later on discuss in this chapter. So the other reason why I take the force thesis as philosophically plausible is that it informs my understanding of the teleological orientation of being that I discuss in the next section.

While I accept Tempels’ observation that African notion of being is dynamic, I note that the dynamism is manifest in the way the individual beings are capable of influencing events in the order of existence. Otherwise Tempels’ argument that the notion of being is easily substituted for force is fairly exaggerated as implicit in his contention that:

when we think in terms of the concept being, they use the concept force.

Where we see concrete beings, they see concrete forces. When we say that beings are differentiated by their essence or nature, Bantu say that forces differ in their presence or nature (Tempels, 1959: 52).

This argument suggests that the African understanding of existence is totally divorced from the general understanding of being as such or ‘that which exists’, which is not the case. Hence, in critiquing Tempels’ understanding and interpretation of the force thesis in African ontology, I do not want to pretend that the force thesis is not part of African ontology and that it is not useful. The vitalist thesis is largely anchored on African ontology. It is only that Tempels construes it as the notion of being. At another level, Tempels could be read as just contrasting forces with objects.

I therefore contend that the vitalist thesis is only a useful component of African understanding of being. The only difference is that existence comes first before the aspect of force. In other words, being influences other beings (which Tempels calls ‘the force thesis’). Otherwise there is no way that a being (for example, God, the ancestors, humans and nature)
could be seen to be influencing the other force/s without it existing first as a being on its own. This is why I argue that being precedes force which Tempels had considered a cardinal point in the African understanding of existence.

3.2.2: The Teleological Conception of Being

Africans attempt to understand and appreciate the question of existence as a metaphysical problem. Ultimately, the African thinking and conception of being is metaphysical. It is metaphysical in so far as attempts are largely aimed at explaining reality beyond what is physical as implicit in mechanical conceptions of reality. Reality is, within the African context, explained in terms of whether, how and why certain things happen the way they do. This is why Teffo and Roux argue that “such thinking about reality, that is, such attempts to fathom what is real and what is not and what the ultimate nature of reality is, is metaphysical thinking” (Teffo and Roux, 1998: 134). In this regard, to understand the question of existence as also having a teleological orientation is also part of these metaphysical attempts.

Existence in general is essentially something that has a purpose (telos). Focussing on environmental ethics and how it relates to the value of life in general, Matthew Izibili confirms this idea that existence or life itself has a purpose for which it must serve. According to Izibili,

. . . the principle of the value of life requires that one respects life, that one does not unthinkingly destroy or alter forms of life. Living beings are [not] to be regarded as having instrumental life only, [but inherent value]. [Hence] this is value that is supposed to inhere, or belong directly to living beings (Izibili, 2005: 386).

In all the stages of existence that have been discussed so far, it is apparent that existence is not entirely limited to itself. In other words, being is teleologically oriented as opposed to the dominantly non-teleological conception of being and reality that is characteristic of modern
Western philosophy. This conception of *being* and reality is largely mechanistic in outlook, implying that it is centred on attempts to investigate and understand the natural world on the basis of theories and laws of mechanics and physics (Barryman, 2007: 351). To confirm this mechanistic and non-teleological conception of existence in Western philosophy, Silvia Barryman contends that “evidence of mechanistic conceptions of the natural world can be found, not only among seventeenth and eighteenth century ‘mechanistic philosophers’ but also – albeit in vestigial form – in some ancient Greek texts” (Berryman, 2007: 351).

The African teleological understanding of existence also has to be considered in terms of how *being qua being* or existence proper, is transcendental. Once the transcendental orientation of *being* is clearly understood, then it would be easier to comprehend its teleological orientation. By considering *being* as transcendental, it is meant that the notion of existence itself goes beyond merely denoting human existence. It is assumed that human existence takes into consideration other important aspects that are associated with existence such as the promotion of human and non-human well-being. In this way, it is important to realise that all beings are tailored towards a certain purpose for which they exist. Mbiti discusses this teleological orientation of *being* from an anthropocentric perspective by focussing on the *telos* or purpose of human life. As he sees it:

> Human life has another rhythm of nature which nothing can destroy. On the level of the individual, this rhythm includes birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death, entry into the community of the departed and finally entry into the company of spirits. It is an ontological rhythm, and these are the key moments in the life of the individual (Mbiti, 1969: 24).

Notwithstanding its anthropocentric slant as Mbiti notes, this in itself is a positive conception of the individual which confirms the teleological understanding of *being* which I see in

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17 The purposes for *being* are examined in greater detail in chapter four which follows.
African ontology. In this regard, it is meaningful to conclude that existence of the human person in African ontology has a deep-seated teleological dimension to which the end of a human being is to aim at the good life. In the light of what Mbiti observes here, it would be reasonable to argue that all the stages of human life, from birth to death have various purposes that form part of what Mbiti calls the ontological rhythm of life that helps the life-force to grow and achieve its purpose (Mbiti, 1969: 24). This view is in line with Aristotle’s thinking that “every art and every inquiry and similarly every action as well as choice is held to aim at some good. Hence people have nobly declared that the good is that at which all things aim” (Aristotle: NE\textsuperscript{18} Book 1: 1094a).

Human existence among African communities has some obligations that are closely associated with it. These obligations are varied and could either be cultural or communitarian. Focussing on the communitarian obligations of existence, although he later settles for some moderate form of communitarian existence, Gyekye argued:

> The fact that a person is born into an existing community suggest a conception of the person as a communitarian being by nature, even though some people insist on the individuality of the person. The communitarian conception of the person has some implications . . . [for] . . . social relationships in which he/she necessarily finds him/herself (Gyekye, 1992: 104).

Here, the obligation that the human being has is that of realising and accepting that existence is incomplete without co-existence with other beings that include the human and non-human community. Otherwise, existence in general ought to be understood in African philosophy as having a teleological orientation. In this way, it is important to realise that one of the ultimate

\textsuperscript{18} This is with reference to Aristotle’s \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}. 
purposes of human life and existence is the pursuit of the good life and the ability by human persons to do the right action (Aristotle, *NE* Book 1: 1094a). (See also Copleston, 1962: 332.)

### 3.3: The Hierarchical Understanding of Being

*Being* in sub-Saharan African thought is largely hierarchically constructed. This implies that existence is seen in the form of a hierarchy, chain or some linear order. In this way, existence in African ontology manifests itself at different levels. For example, *being* can first be realised at the highest level of existence through the Supreme Being (God)\(^{19}\) which is a purely non-physical form of existence. Besides God, ancestors are also thought to exist as both physical and non-physical forms of *being* as well. The existence of the non-physical beings in the form of God and ancestors confirms the ontological speculative picture of these invisible forces. Although such a picture of the world and existence is difficult to justify, it remains a fundamental point in the metaphysical understanding of existence in African ontology and philosophy.

Another form of existence is conceptualised at the level at which human beings exist as physical, sensible and empirically verifiable beings or individuals, before it cascades to the non-human level (non-human beings), plants and the physical environment. The human being forms part of the African ontological order of existence. The existence of the human person in the order of existence also confirms the teleological dimension of existence. Dzobo supports this view that human existence has a purpose in his argument for the African humanistic orientation of existence (Dzobo, 1992: 227).

The hierarchy of existence of these various forces in African ontology is also confirmed by Teffo and Roux (1998: 138). They consider that question of *being* from an African metaphysical perspective and admit that:

\[^{19}\text{A detailed discussion of the questions surrounding the nature and existence of God and the ancestors in African ontology will follow in the next two sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 that discuss these issues respectively.}\]
African metaphysics is holistic in nature. Reality is seen as a closed system so that everything hangs together and is affected by any change in the system. African metaphysics is organised around a number of principles and laws which control the so-called vital forces. There is a principle concerning the interaction of forces, that is between God and humankind, and material things. These forces are hierarchically placed, they form a chain of beings. In this hierarchy, God, the creator and source of all vital forces, is at the apex. Then follow the ancestors, then humankind, and the lower forces, animals, plants, and matter (Teffo and Roux, 1998: 138).

Here, this hierarchy is determined by the level of potency within the force. In this way, beings are therefore hierarchically placed according to their power and influence within the order of existence. Chimuka confirms this understanding of hierarchical existence as he argues that “these modes of being found in the universe relate to one another but ultimately, spiritual beings are more powerful than the other modes of being” (Chimuka, 2001: 29).

Focussing on the ontological nature of the Akan and their conception of reality, Ekanola also agrees with the hierarchical nature in African ontology and also comes to the conclusion that other African traditional societies have a similar conception of reality. Ekanola argues:

The Akan conception of reality, couched in religious language like many other African conceptions of reality, is hierarchical in nature. The Supreme Being (Onyame, Onyankonpon) occupies the apex of the ontological hierarchy, followed by a multiplicity of gods or deities (abosom) and then an array of ancestral spirits (nsamanfo). These are all spiritual beings that are invisible to the ordinary eye. But they are all actively involved in events taking place in the physical plane. Apart from these spiritual entities, we have human beings, followed by other natural beings and physical objects occupying the natural
world, that is, all the entities that are perceptible empirically. A similar hierarchical order is presented in other African traditional cosmology (Ekanola, 2006: 76).

The hierarchical order of being in African ontology is organised in such a way that existence can be conceived as stretching from that of the strongest force down to the lower or weakest forces.

Shutte construes a similar hierarchy as the above although he sees the order of existence as spherical and not lineal. However, despite the Shutte’s understanding of this hierarchy as spherical, it is similar to the hierarchy of existence that is observed in African ontology, one that stretches from the Supreme being down to the lower forces. For him:

One can visualise this world view as a spherical universe of forces. At the centre of the sphere, is God, continual source of all force. As one moves out from the centre to the circumference one passes through ever wider, concentric spheres of force, from ancestors and chiefs, through ordinary people, to animals, rivers and the things of nature in the outermost sphere (Shutte, 2009: 90).

This hierarchy of existence is what I now proceed to discuss, starting with the enquiry of the existence of God, the ancestors, the human person down to the lower forces in their order of existence. I will largely maintain that an appreciation of each of the levels within the African ontological order is useful towards the understanding of existence as teleologically oriented.

Munyaradzi Mawere sets the tone for my argument as he argues that:

When the subject of ‘being’ is looked at from an African metaphysical standpoint, one can observe that the term is conceived to mean everything that is; ‘being’ is everything that exists. Africans understand being in this sense for the simple reason that there is nothing that is taken lightly and for granted in
the African culture. The general belief is that there is reason to be for whatever is (Mawere, 2011: 39).

Following this thinking, I therefore examine the various levels of existence in the African hierarchy of ontology. However, a detailed analysis of the import of such teleological conceptions of existence to environmental ethics will be found in chapter four.

3.3.1: The Existence of God in African Ontology

The existence of God is part and parcel of sub-Saharan African ontology. In essence, in African philosophy, existence is incomplete without mention of God. By God, it is meant “the most powerful spiritual being who created the heavens and earth and sustains all things” (Chimuka, 2001: 29). Thinkers who examine the question and place of God in African ontology such as Belgian Franciscan missionary Tempels (1959: 58), Mbiti (1969: 29), Wiredu (1996: 46), Teffo and Roux (2002: 198-9), and Imafidon (2014: 40) are all in consensus that the existence of God is an important aspect of African ontology and philosophy.

One of the major attributes of God in African Philosophy and ontology is that God is thought to be at the apex of all beings (Teffo and Roux, 1998: 138). Wiredu also confirms this conception of God by making reference to the Akan society to which his thinking is rooted. For Wiredu, the God (Onyame), also referred to in Akan as Onyankopon literally means “the Being That Is Alone Great” or “That Than Which Nothing Greater Cannot Be Conceived” (Wiredu, 1996: 46). If understood in this way, this view of God would be closer to the way God is understood in the Western monotheistic conception of God. However, it should be noted that although the belief in the Supreme Being is widespread in African culture, the people do not worship Him as the Christians, for example, do their God. Rather, they relate more directly to the divinities or deities [who] are believed
to be more accessible and it is them that the people take their immediate
problems (Oladipo, 2004: 357).

Also, as alluded to in Oladipo’s view, the existence of the other spiritual forces in African
ontology, like ancestors, (as will be discussed in the next section) would render the Western
Christian tradition different from the African one. The presence of other forces between the
human community and God, such as the dead and the living ancestors renders the African
God as fairly distant from the human community, as opposed to the Christian God. This is
why Bolaji Idowu describes the African understanding of God as diluted monotheism
(Idowu, 1962: 202). In the Western undiluted monotheistic conception of God, there is no
place for the existence of ancestors who are referred to as evil spirits.

The view that God is the source and Creator of all reality is evident in almost all traditional
sub-Saharan African communities although Ekanola (2006: 77) admits that it would be a
mistake to assume that all African traditional societies have an absolutely identical
conception of the Supreme Being. However, a general account of most of these sub-Saharan
African communities points to one Supreme Being who is responsible for creating all forms
of reality on earth. This is what prompts Ekanola to conclude that:

Besides seeing the Supreme Being as occupying the apex position in the order
of existence, there are other significant points of convergence between the
Akan, Igbo and Yoruba conceptions of the Supreme Being. For one, they all
agree that the Supreme Being is the creator and maker of all things in
existence (Ekanola, 2006: 77).

This conception of the Supreme being is not only limited to these three societies to which
Ekanola gives reference to, but that it is common in other sub-Saharan African communities.
Although Ekanola is more focussed on these popular African communities like the Akan,
Igbo, and Yoruba to which he could be most accustomed to, it is also evident in other
traditional communities in Southern Africa like the Shona and Ndebele of Zimbabwe, the Zulu in South Africa, the Sotho in parts of South Africa and Lesotho. Mawere catalogues the various African names that are attributable to God and comes to the conclusion that these African names denote God as the highest in the order of existence and ultimately having the most force. In the Shona language of Zimbabwe, for example, God is viewed and referred to as Mwari, or Musikavanhu (the creator of human beings). The last nomenclature points to one Supreme Being or God as the highest form of existence and who is in control of all other forms of existence. This is also the case with the Ndebele and Zulu of Southern Africa. They make reference to God in both Ndebele and Zulu languages as Unkulunkulu, literally meaning the highest form of being and the Creator of all beings.

Consequently, God’s omnipotence as a basic characteristic is shared across most sub-Saharan African communities. This is even confirmed by Mbiti who argues that the Yoruba, Ngombe, Akan, Ashanti and Zulu all refer to God as ‘the All-powerful’ or ‘the Almighty’ (Mbiti, 1969: 31). All the above conceptions of God are relevant to what I see as a teleological understanding of being and reality which I see as largely characteristic of African ontology.

Despite God being part and parcel of sub-Saharan African ontology, it is not very clear whether it is possible to approach God directly in African ontology as is the case with Judeo-Christian religion. A judicious analysis of these African communities shows that it is not possible for individuals to approach and communicate with God directly. The hierarchy of African existence is such that God is not in essence, easily approached, accessible and worshiped directly (Idowu, 1962: 202). Although he focussed on the Akan people, Wiredu supports this perspective as he argues that it is not always the case that if a people believe in God, then they actually worship him (Wiredu, 1996: 47). According to Wiredu:

It seems to have been assumed that belief in God must move every sound mind to worship. . . . [And] . . . given the prevailing tendencies in Western,
and even some non-Western cultures, it might be tempting to think that if people believe in God, then the natural thing for them to do is to worship Him. Yet, consider the notion of a perfect being. Why would He (She, It) need or accept to be worshipped? What would be the point of it? It is well-known that the Judeo-Christian God jealously demands to be worshipped . . . but, from an Akan point of view, such clamouring for attention must be paradoxical in the extreme in a perfect being . . . (Wiredu, 1996: 47).

Notwithstanding the fact that Wiredu particularises this approach to God in African ontology, I argue that the observation that he makes about the Akan ontology with reference to their relations with God is universal to most African societies. For example, the Shona, the Ndebele, the Zulu, the Sotho and other various sub-Saharan African societies do not directly worship God, but believe in the existence of the ancestors whom they take as an avenue towards God. Oladipo confirms this indirect worship of God as he admits that there is no direct worship of Him in African religion (Oladipo, 2004: 357).

In traditional Western philosophy and contemporary philosophy in particular, there are attempts to reasonably conceptualise existence as constitutive of only that which can be empirically verified. This is why talk of the existence of the super sensible world is regarded as not only metaphysical but futile and meaningless, according to some strains of the mid twentieth century philosophy of science (Ayer, 1947: 31). However, this is contrary to African ontology which sees African metaphysics as having a meaning attached to it. The African concept of existence respects both the physical and non-physical form of existence, such that the existence of the super sensible world like that of the Supreme Being who is non-physical is also possible. Although this Supreme God is seen to be at the apex of all reality, He in essence is not dissociated from the rest of other physical beings. In this respect, Wiredu argues that the Supreme Being in African ontology “occupies the apex of the same hierarchy
of being which accommodates, in its lower reaches, animals, plants and inanimate objects” (Wiredu, 1996: 49). This therefore makes the physical form of existence and the non-physical form of existence in African philosophy to be a kind of a unity that ought to uphold harmonious relationships for the well-being of both and also the environment. In this way, the teleological function of God is made possible by virtue of God being responsible for regulating the functions of the other forces which also are purposive in orientation. One of the ultimate teleological functions of God in this regard is therefore, the promotion of vitality and maintaining harmony at all the levels of existence.

In African ontology, God is also thought to be responsible for the existence of all beings, and for giving the powers of survival and enhancement to all the other forces (see also Wiredu, 1996: 45-60). Imafidon also supports this teleological understanding of the Supreme Being in African philosophy. For him, “the Supreme Being who created and sustained the universe is seen as the epitome of force. He dispenses this energy of ontological unity at will to other entities. He is therefore at the apex of the hierarchy of being” (Imafidon, 2014: 40). This argument shared by the above thinkers is well placed because the idea that existence has a purpose is also largely shaped and informed by the belief in the existence of God who is thought to regulate the universe and the various forces in it. So, one of the ultimate aims of existence is to realise the purpose of God in life. A detailed account of the way God is seen to be more focussed and teleologically oriented towards African environmental ethics follows in chapter four.

3.3.2: The Place of Ancestors in African Ontology

The question of the place and significance of ancestors in African ontology and philosophy is one that has been subject to various interpretations, misinterpretations and distortions as well. Dzobo observes this problem of misinterpreting the place of ancestors in African ontology as he argues that “reverence of the ancestors has been regarded as so typical of the indigenous
African culture that some early writers referred to African religion as *ancestor worship*” (Dzobo, 1992: 231). This, for Dzobo, is a misinterpretation resulting from “lack of understanding of the African conception of the ancestor and the moral significance of the ritual” (Dzobo, 1992: 231). This is why I argue that, if the place of ancestors in African ontology is clearly understood, it would be easy to realise the way in which ancestors contribute to the well-being of the human person and the environment.

Ancestors are a kind of distant grandparents. Dzobo notes that an ancestor is “one from whom one is descended and who is usually more remote in the line of descent than a grandparent” (Dzobo, 1992: 231). Generally, there are two types of ancestors in African philosophy. There are ancestors who are actually alive just like other existing human beings, or the elders, which Dzobo calls “the living ancestors or living moral exemplars [as well as] the living dead moral exemplars” (Dzobo, 1992: 231). In this way, the ontological status of ancestors can be understood at two levels. They can be conceptualised as both physical beings and as non-physical beings as well. This is why, with reference to the ancestors, Wiredu argues that “the ontologically interesting thing about this kind of being is that although it is conceived in the image of person, it is exempted from the grosser characteristic of the material body” (Wiredu, 1992: 139). In addition to the two-fold understanding of ancestors into the living and the dead ancestors, a further understanding and distinction is also made on the basis of whether the ancestors represent the well-being and purpose of either individual family affairs or whether they represent clan or national affairs. To this end, African ontology further divides ancestors into family ancestors and clan or national ancestors (Mawere, 2011: 39). All these classifications of ancestors are based on the role and purpose to which each of the individual class of the ancestors represent.

The ancestors form a higher level of existence, one that is above that of the human person, but also occupying the lower level from that of God who is at the apex in the sub-Saharan
African conception of existence because of the level of their influence and participation towards human well-being and their purpose in life. The reason why ancestors occupy a lower hierarchy than that of God is that they are not as powerful and influential as God although they are more powerful and higher forces compared to human persons. To this end, Mawere argues that “the intensity of participation [of these beings] differ resulting in some beings being found at the top of the hierarchy and others at the bottom of the hierarchy” (Mawere, 2011: 39). The ancestors are vital forces that act as mediators between God and the living human community. They are also thought to be messengers of God to humanity (Mbiti, 1969: 84). Tempels sees this vitalist role of the ancestors in the following:

After [God] come the first fathers of men, founders of the different clans. These archi-patriarchs were the first to whom God communicated his vital force, with the power of exercising their influences on all posterity. They constitute the most important chain binding men to God. They occupy so exalted a rank in Bantu [African] thought that they are not regarded merely as ordinary dead (Tempels, 1959: 61-2).

The ancestors play a very significant role that is almost equivalent to that of the Supreme Being, although they cannot be equated to the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being is the highest in the order of existence and is thought to be the most spiritually powerful being as discussed in the previous section.

Unlike the Supreme Being, ancestors are closer to the human community. According to Wiredu, they are “thought to live in a realm closely linked with the world of the living” (Wiredu, 1996: 47). Chivaura agrees with Wiredu in the argument that the ancestors continuously interact with the living. His argument is that “the African worldview states that although [some of these] ancestors are dead, they remain human and continue to exist among human beings and take part in human affairs and influence human destiny” (Chivaura, 2006b: 47).
This is also captured by Tempels as he notes that “in the minds of the Bantu, the dead also live . . . and that the dead in general have acquired a greater knowledge of life and of vital or natural force” (Tempels, 1949: 65).

The sense in which the dead are thought to continue to live is in the way the ancestors continue to play a normative role in the lives of the living. Dzobo notes that the ancestors “exercise moral constraints in the behaviour of the living through periodic rituals which remind people of what they stand for” (Dzobo, 1992: 232). In this regard, therefore, it is thought that “due to the superior moral and constructive qualities of the ancestors, the pattern of their lives and the values and principles they cherish have been used as normative standards of conduct” (Dzobo, 1992: 232). Following Dzobo’s line of thinking, it is reasonable to note that the ancestors occupy an important ontological position in the African worldview and also that they serve a teleological dimension in the life of the African.

In African ontology, ancestors are thought to relate with the living beings through various ritual practices that differ from society to society in sub-Saharan Africa, but one underlying fact is the notion of reverence and respect for ancestors who can manifest themselves differently in African ontology. Wiredu looks at ancestors in African ontology and describes them as ‘extra-human forces and beings’ and argues that “there is, in African ontology a great variety of such extra-human forces” (Wiredu, 1996: 47). The relations between the living and the ancestors are thought to be immortal in so far as it is everlasting and unending. This is why Dzobo is tempted to look at the ancestors as “moral paragons [because] death is not a factor in their exaltation to this enviable moral and social status” (Dzobo, 1992: 231). Even if the ancestors are regarded as beings whose bodies have died, they are vital forces to the life of the living generations because they continue to influence their behaviour and well-being. To this end, Murove describes the relations between the living and the ancestors as immortal to the extent that “the ethical norms that give a sense of communal cohesion pass from the
past into the present. [Hence] ancestorhood chiefly derives from the idea of the immortality of *ukama* [relatedness] between the past and present (Murove, 2009b: 320).

In African ontology, since the Supreme Being is the most powerful and revered, it is not possible for the living to worship God by directly communicating with Him as is the case with Judeo-Christian religion. Individuals communicate with the ancestors who are thought to be the medium of communication between the living and God. It is possible for the ancestors to communicate with the living and God as well. Ancestors are thought to be mediators between the physical world and the non-physical world of God. Although they are no longer physically present and not in themselves the Supreme Being, ancestors play a crucial role of stabilising the relationship between the physical world of human persons with the non-physical world of the Supreme Being. As Wiredu puts it:

> Ancestors are conceived as persons who continue to be members of their pre-mortem families, watching over their affairs and generally helping them. They are regarded as persons, but not as mortal persons, they have tested death and transcended it. Accordingly, they are not thought to be constrained by all the physical laws which circumscribe the activities of persons with full physical bodies. For this reason, they are supposed to be more powerful than mortals (Wiredu, 1996: 47-8).

A reciprocal relationship of participation is seen in the way ancestors interact with the living. Wiredu argues that “reciprocity is a strong feature in African society; it is in fact a feature of any moral community. Accordingly, the living feel not only beholden to the ancestors for their help and protection, but also positively obliged to honour to them and render service to them as appropriate” (Wiredu, 1992: 138). In this respect, ancestors are thought to contribute towards the well-being of society while human beings also have some obligations to respect and honour their ancestors through various rituals like cooking food and brewing beer for the
living ancestors and remembering the dead ancestors. This confirms why Mawere suspects that the ancestors are revered since they are always there for the good of the living (Mawere, 2011: 40) Conceived this way, therefore, ancestors have a *telos* or purpose in the life of the living human beings and for life in general.

The role that ancestors play towards the life of the living points to their teleological function in general. Ancestors have certain expectations that they expect from the human community so that they fulfil their purpose in life. Although he refers to them as divinities, Oladipo observes this teleological function of the ancestors. For Oladipo, “. . . the people fear or respect divinities, they acknowledge their powers, but only to the extent that the divinities are able to ‘prove themselves’ by delivering the desired goods” (Oladipo, 2004: 358). This is why I suspect that this relationship between ancestors and human beings is one of reciprocity. Dzobo alludes to this participatory relationship between the ancestors and the human community as he argues that “through his participation with the ancestor relationship, the African sees himself as a part of the great creative powers of life that transcend him and so he does not consider it sacrilegious to be given a name of the High God” (Dzobo, 1992: 232). In this way, it is important to be cognisant of the extent to which ancestors are instrumental in the teleological function of the African community. This understanding of the teleological role of ancestors also sets the tone for a discussion of the role of ancestors towards African environmental ethics in chapter four.

3.3.3: The Existence of the Human Person in African Ontology

The existence of the human person is an important aspect of African ontology. It is such that if the individual is not in existence, then the idea of the hierarchy of ontology in African philosophy would be incomplete. At the same time, existence of the human person in African philosophy is not entirely centred on the human person as a lone individual like what is the
case with the Cartesian conception of the individual. Existence in African ontology is not limited to the lone individual, but it spreads to other forms of reality.

Besides the existence of a hierarchy in African ontology, there is also a form of dualism in the conception of African existence. As opposed to a rather atomic conception of reality which limits existence to one component of reality which is the physical and empirically verifiable form of existence, the sub-Saharan African concept of being is both physical and non-physical. To confirm this conception of reality in African philosophy, Ekanola argues,

There is sufficient proof that traditionally, many if not all Africans uphold a dualistic conception of reality. They see existence as partly physical and partly spiritual. They accept the reality and the intrinsic interrelationship of both a sensible (perceptible and physical) and a non-sensible (non-perceptible and spiritual) aspect of reality (Ekanola, 2006: 75-6).

This is almost the case with the way human existence is conceptualised. The human person is understood as having the physical and the spiritual dimension of existence as alluded to by Ekanola.

The African understanding of the individual human person can be comprehended from both the metaphysical perspective as well as from the moral perspective. The only way to properly grasp a being’s nature is in terms of its purpose, which is closely related to the moral understanding of the individual person. In this way, the moral understanding of the person translates to his or her purpose in general. This explains why in sub-Saharan African thinking, the notion of ubuntu is understood as having both metaphysical and teleological underpinnings. It is thought that the metaphysical understanding of the human person, which is primary, also largely shapes the social and moral understanding of the individual human person. These ontological conceptions of the human person are discussed shortly, while the
problem of how the moral question relates with the metaphysical one is addressed in chapter four.

3.3.4: The Metaphysical Understanding of the Person

The human person metaphysically occupies an important part in the hierarchy of African ontology and metaphysics. A striking feature in the conceptual hierarchy of African ontology is the emphasis on the metaphysical place of the human person in the context of the community of other human and non-human persons. In this context, existence has to be understood in relation to the way the individual person exists with what Tempels calls other ‘forces’ surrounding the human person, such as the Supreme Being, the ancestors and the community of other human and non-human persons (Tempels, 1949: 51). This idea of ‘force’ or the ‘force thesis’ which Tempels has in mind has come to be known as one of the most useful metaphysical understanding of the person in African ontology and philosophy although there could be many other metaphysical conceptions that are not essentially tied to the individual person.

Existence in African world views is often construed as transcending the physical form of existence. It is this dimension that considers the human person as not just a physical being, but also as having a spiritual form. Although Wiredu (1996: 46-7) focussed on the Akan and argues that the human person is composed of both the physical and the spiritual components, I argue that this dimension is not only applicable to the Akan, but the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. As Ekanola sees it:

Africans believe that spirits reside in objects, plants, animals and people, and the relationship between an object, animal or man and its/his spirit can be likened to the relationship between a canoe and its/his steersman. This is in the
sense that the spirit controls and directs the behaviour or disposition of the
thing or being (Ekanola, 1998: 78).

The metaphysical conception of the human person is also concerned with the way human
existence is construed. The question of metaphysical understanding of the individual can be
understood in terms of whether or not the individual person’s notion of existence can be
understood by mere reference to the individual alone, or by reference to other existing beings.
In African philosophy, existence is normally not viewed as centred on the individual alone,
but rather in relation to some other beings and forces. With reference to this metaphysical
conception of the individual in African philosophy, Gyekye argues,

The metaphysical question is whether a person, even though he or she lives in
a human society, is a self-sufficient atomic individual who does not depend on
his or her relationships with others for the realisation of his or her ends and
who has ontological priority over the community or whether the person is by
nature a communal (or communitarian) being, having natural and essential
relationships with others (Gyekye, 1998: 317).

In this way, Gyekye’s view confirms the thinking that is inherent in African philosophy,
which is centred on the notion that communal relations and communitarian existence are
cardinal virtues in the understanding of the human person. Here, it is interesting to note the
way one moves from the communitarian and relational understanding to the moral and
teleological understanding of the person. In African ontology rather, individualism and
individual atomic existence is seen as not virtuous and not worth pursuing while
communitarian existence is considered as virtuous and the purposive end that human beings
must pursue. This thinking is confirmed in the common sub-Saharan African understanding
of the persons where it is held that Munhu munhu navamhu (Shona) or Umuntu ngumuntu
ngabantu (Ndebele, isiZulu). This literally translates to the view that being (both metaphysical and moral) is essentially understood with reference to the way the individual socially relates with other human beings.

Menkiti also alludes to this ontological primacy and independence of the community as opposed to the ontological prioritisation of the individual human interests (Menkiti, 1984: 171). He assesses the way in which existence in African philosophy is more focussed on the well-being of the community as opposed to the well-being of the lone individual which is prioritised in non African philosophies such as Western philosophy as implicit in Cartesian thinking. By ‘ontological primacy’ of the community as opposed to the ‘ontological prioritisation’ of the individual, it is meant that the individual cannot exist without the community. This view is captured in the Shona proverb which says that; Chara chimwe hachitswanyi inda. Literally this means that ‘one finger cannot crush lice’. This proverb discouraged individualism and selfishness. It means that one cannot exist without others and therefore, it follows that individuals are obligated to help each other. To this end, Menkiti argues:

The first contrast worth noting is that whereas most Western views of man abstract this or that feature of the lone individual and then proceed to make it the defining or essential characteristic which entities aspiring to the description ‘man’ must have, the African view of man denies that persons can be defined by focussing on this or that physical or psychological characteristic of the lone individual. Rather, man is defined by reference to the environing community (Menkiti, 1984: 171).

This is why I maintain that the metaphysical understanding of the human person is crucial in order to understand the human person in African philosophy. Mbiti confirms this attempt in

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20 This means that a person is defined as such by virtue of the person existing well with others. See also Samkange and Samkange (1980: 35-40).
African conceptions of the individual to water-down atomic individual existence by his reference to the existence of the human person being as defined and determined by the surrounding community (Mbiti, 1969: 106). So, in essence, it is the community of other existing beings that define the individual in African philosophy. The ontology of the individual in African philosophy cannot be explained without reference to the community which in itself consists of other beings whose existence is intertwined to form a whole. This is why Mbiti suspects that “whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: *I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am*” (Mbiti, 1969: 106).

From the way the individual human person is understood in African ontology, one can also sustain the argument that the metaphysical understanding of the human person could also be the basis for comprehending the ethical questions in African philosophy. Contrary to Metz’s view that attempts to ground ethics on metaphysics are suspicious and fallacious (2014: 190), I submit the argument that the African communitarian view of the person has strong ethical implications that are implicit in it. Menkiti comes close to this conclusion that I put forth as he evokes the ontological and epistemological conceptions that are implicit in African communitarian thinking in the following:

> One obvious conclusion to be drawn from this [communitarian] dictum is that, as far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories, whatever these may be. And this primacy is meant to apply not only ontologically, but also in regard to epistemic accessibility (Menkiti, 1984: 171)

In addition, Murove challenges us to consider the ethical outlook that is strongly informed by African communitarian thinking. For him, human well-being is inseparably anchored on the way human beings relate with all the existing beings, which includes the environment.
(Murove, 2004: 196). In essence, the metaphysical and the moral conceptions of the individual jointly shape African ethical thinking. The moral perspective is addressed shortly although a detailed view of how this moral perspective relates to environmental ethics will be considered in chapter four.

3.3.5: The Moral Understanding of the Individual

The metaphysical understanding of the individual human person in African philosophy has a normative dimension in so far as it shapes the understanding of the human person. Rather, understanding the individual from the way he or she exists is essentially informed by taking into consideration the moral obligations of the individual human person. Implicit in this view is the idea that, what a being is, to all intents and purposes, is to be the kind of thing that ought to do things in certain ways. (See also Gyekye, 1998: 317.) The African metaphysical and moral concept of ubuntu comes into the picture in this regard. African conceptions of a person as informed by the philosophy of ubuntu do not end at the physical person. Such conceptions of persons transcend the physical constitution of the person hence the appeal to judge certain ethical actions by human persons as not being part of ubuntu. Chimuka argues that human conduct is evaluated as good if it conforms to the requirements of ubuntu and that it is considered as bad if it did not (Chimuka, 2001: 31).

Chivaura captures the understanding of value as informed by the metaphysical concept of ubuntu in his etymological definition of ubuntu below:

\[ \text{Hunhu / Ubuntu is the ability to control overpowering urges in one’s physical being. The nhu in hu-nhu or ntu in ubu-ntu refers to one’s physical existence as a thing with no value attached. Hu- and ubu- indicate values. People who lack hu- or ubu- attached to them are mere -nhus / -ntus or things. Havana hunhu in Shona: they lack human content . . .} \] (Chivaura, 2006b: 232).
Against this view, Chivaura comes up with a conclusion that I see as addressing the teleological dimension in the African metaphysical conceptions of *ubuntu*. For him, “*hunhu/ubuntu* tempers human development and transforms human behaviour from mere instinctual action into conscious spiritual action imbued with the values of moral and ethical purpose . . .” (Chivaura, 2006b: 232). In this way, existence and morality are therefore linked in so far as the teleological conceptualisation of human existence could be usefully realised from the way human beings relate with other human persons and non-human persons. This is why I argue that the moral questions in African ontology and philosophy are shaped by metaphysical questions. In this way, one’s orientation and approach to ethical questions is determined by the way one construes one’s place in the hierarchy of ontology.

The moral understanding of the human person could be understood to refer to the question of whether, and how, the individual human person relates to other persons. This is so because the African understanding of existence has a socio-centric dimension attached to it. This is why Teffo and Roux compare the Western and African conception of the person and come to the conclusion that “in Western philosophy the starting point for an account of personhood is usually epistemological and psychological . . .[while] in African thinking the starting point is social relations - selfhood is seen and accounted for from this relational perspective” (Teffo and Roux, 1998: 145).

The African moral understanding of the individual is shaped by what Gyekye looks at as the communal or communitarian understanding of the person (Gyekye, 1998: 317). This is because the individual is not seen as an atomic individual, but as a social person who shares relations with others. This moral and communitarian understanding of the person is largely informed by the metaphysical conception of beings and also shapes the ethical perspective in a greater way. Although he is more comfortable with what he calls ‘restricted’ or ‘moderate’ communitarianism, Gyekye still sees communitarianism as capable of informing ethical
values in the individual human person (Gyekye, 1998: 328). This is because the person is immersed in an intricate culture of relations with others, such that ideas of right or wrong are products of the community. According to Gyekye, “communitarianism immediately sees the human person as an inherently (intrinsically) communal being, embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, and never as an isolated, atomic individual” (Gyekye, 1998: 320). This communitarian conception of the human person gives the individual a social and ethical responsibility to construe existence in a teleological fashion such that being is largely knit with normative functions. This explains why Chivaura sees the reason for each person to exist as “the creative purpose in life” (Chivaura, 2006b: 234).

From the African ontological conception of the person, it is apparent that existence ceases to be individualistic and atomic, but that existence has a social dimension attached to it. Even Mbiti contends that in traditional African life, “the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people including those of past generations and his contemporaries” (Mbiti, 1969: 106). Following this social dimension of existence, to understand the individual human person in African philosophy and ontology, one has to take into consideration first, the social structure of the African community. The social structure and its organisation have to be taken into consideration in terms of how they exist and influence ethical thinking. Although this relationship between the way the human person interacts with the environment and how the person influences ethical thinking will be discussed in chapter four, it is pertinent to highlight and assess how the individual ontologically fits within the social and ontological structure. As Gyekye sees it:

The existence of a social structure is an outstanding, indeed a necessary feature of every human society. A social structure is evolved not only to give effect to certain conceptions of human nature, but also to provide a framework for both the realisation of the potential goals and hopes of the individual

In African philosophical thinking, the human person has to be understood within the context of his or her social structure. This is so because the type of social structure itself is shaped by the way the individual human person is conceptualised. Gyekye notes that “the type of social structure or arrangement evolved by a particular society seems to reflect- and be influenced by –the public conceptions of personhood held in society” (Gyekye, 1998: 317). Also, Menkiti (1984: 172) critiques the traditional Cartesian conception of the person which basically puts strong emphasis on individual existence instead of communal or communitarian existence which is implicit in African ontological conceptions of the person. Teffo and Roux argue that:

In Western philosophy the starting-point for an account of personhood is usually epistemological and psychological. Knowledge is the ‘possession’ of a particular individual and the question then becomes how this knowledge can be accounted for, how the knower uses him/herself from the inside. In African thinking the starting-point is social relations-selfhood is seen and accounted far from this relational perspective (Teffo and Roux, 1998: 204).

In view of this argument, it is important to realise that human beings consider ontology and ethical thinking to be ultimately anchored on the human community, such that whatever the Supreme Being, the ancestors and other beings and forces do, that will be tailored towards the well-being of the human person and the surrounding. This is why African ontology is sometimes accused of being anthropocentric in so far as it gives more priority to the well-being of the human person first before the other forces and beings. However, I maintain that the kind of thinking that African ontology fosters is not entirely anthropocentric. It is rather a reasonable and acceptable view of environmental ethics as it is not exclusively human
centred, but also that it attempts to realise that the human person lives in a world with other beings. Even Tempels admits that:

The living belongs in turn to a hierarchy . . . But man is not suspended in thin air. He lives on his land, where he finds himself to be the sovereign vital force, ruling the land and all that lives on it: man, animal, or plant. The eldest of a clan is, for the Bantu, by Divine law the sustaining link of life, binding ancestors and their descendents. It is he who ‘reinforces’ the life of his people and of all inferior forces, animals, vegetable and inorganic, that exist, grow, or live on the foundation which he provides for the welfare of his people (Tempels, 1959: 62-3).

This understanding of existence by Tempels sustains one of the arguments that I develop here, that the African understanding of the individual is macrocosmic. It is macrocosmic in so far as it links individuals with each other through their vital force. In line with this thinking, Cheik Thiam argues that “individuals are related to each other through their vital force and each vital force develops towards the ultimate manifestation of life” (Thiam, 2011: 17).

3.3.6: The Lower Forces (Animals, Plants and Other Inanimate Reality)

In the order of existence, there are also other lower forces or lower beings that exist after the human community. These include, but are not limited to, the non-human animals as well as plants and other various forms of existence in the physical world. Tempels is very cognisant of the place of these lower forces in the African ontological order of existence as he observes that “after the category of human forces come the other forces, animals, vegetable and mineral” (Tempels, 1959: 63). These forces are considered as lower because of the level of their participation and influence towards human well-being and other forces. In essence, these lower forces have less vital force as opposed to the other forces within the African ontological hierarchy of existence. However, despite having less vital force, their well-being
is important in so far as they are metaphysically linked to their ontological counterparts such as human beings, ancestors and God.

Although they are referred to as the lower forces, these animals, plants and other inanimate forms of reality are very powerful beings in the African ontological order. In African ontology, there is a vitalist and spiritual relationship that is shared between these lower forces and the other higher forces such as God and the ancestors. Existence of these lower forces is teleologically oriented because these lower forces are supposed to influence and contribute towards the well-being of human beings and other beings within the hierarchy of existence. They do so in the way in which they spiritually link human beings with God and the ancestors. For example it is common in African ontology that certain plant and animal species are revered for certain religious purposes like symbols, rituals and sacrifices. To this end Mawere contends that “plants and animals can be habited by powerful forces which make them to become very prominent in the spiritual rating of the society. This conception of being from the point of view of force is pervasive in African conception of being” (Mawere, 2011: 40). In this regard, it is clear that existence transcends the Supreme Being, the ancestors and human beings such that other beings on which humanity sometimes depends, are also counted in the hierarchy of African ontology.

In African philosophy and ontology, existence would be incomplete without also recognising the existence of the lower forces such as plant species, animals and other inanimate reality. At the same time, because these forces share a spiritual relationship with human beings and their higher forces, they are considered as vital and complement the teleological aspect in African ontology. Tempels argues that “inferior forces, on the other hand (animals, plant, mineral) exist only, by the will of God, to increase the vital force of men while they are on earth” (Tempels, 1959: 65). Aristotle also shares this fairly anthropocentric but largely teleological thinking in the hierarchy of ontology in general as he argues that “. . . after the
birth of animals, plants exist for their sake, and that the other animals exist for the sake of man. . . .” (Aristotle, 2001: 1137). This Aristotelian teleological conception of reality seems to be applicable as well within African ontology which I also see as teleologically oriented. However, I contend that not all parts of nature have this rather anthropocentric purpose as implicit in Aristotle’s argument.

The relationship between human beings and the lower forces is fashioned in such a way that there is promotion of sustainable dependency on the lower forces and the promotion of continued existence of all forces at the same time. This is why Dzobo argues that “there is an urge or dynamic creative energy in life which works towards wholeness and healing, towards building up and not pulling down, towards creating and not destroying and towards synthesis and not conflict” (Dzobo, 1992: 227). This idea of the attempt to see wholeness in African anthropocentric reformism, is captured in the African proverb: The termite says that human life is like an anthill; it is built from inside out (Dzobo, 1992: 227). This proverb denotes the kind of responsibility that the human person carries in the context of the way the human person exists with, and depends on the community of the other lower forces.

This kind of anthropocentrism that is found in African philosophy is enlightened or prudential kind of anthropocentrism in so far as it is not exclusively human-centred just for the sake of exploiting these lower forces. Although I admit that this is not an adequate environmental ethical view, it is prudential because human beings attempt by all means to safeguard the interests and well-being of these lower forces because they know that they cannot do without these lower forces. A defence of this kind of anthropocentrism in the African order of ontology is also implicit in the law of nature. Tempels brings this defence of the law of nature as he argues that “in fact, even inferior beings, such as inanimate beings and minerals, are forces which by reason of their nature have been put at the disposal of men, of living human forces, or of men’s vital forces” (Tempels, 1959: 66). The fact that these lower

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forces are considered to be lower beings does not mean that they are totally ignored with regards to their moral status in the sub-Saharan conception of existence.

3.4: Conclusion
The chapter grappled with the metaphysical problem of ontology and how it is conceptualised in African philosophy. The question of ontology is discussed with the attempt to consider how it could be understood and situated as a metaphysical problem in African philosophy. First, it is established that ontology is an important feature in understanding African notions of vitalist and purposive existence in African philosophy. In this regard, it is argued that existence in African cosmology is largely centred on vitalism and teleology.

Also, the hierarchy of existence in African philosophy and metaphysics has been examined. In this regard, I have espoused the way existence is conceptualised from the various levels of existence in the hierarchy of African ontology. I argue that African philosophy conceptualises the hierarchy of existence from the level of the Supreme Being (God), the ancestors, the human person down to the existence of the lower forces. In this regard, I note that existence is entirely oriented towards some purpose at almost all the various levels of existence despite some anthropocentric strain in African ontology.

The conclusion made in this chapter is that a conceptual understanding of being in African philosophy and ontology leads to a useful conception of being as teleologically oriented. Although this dimension will be clearly explored in the next chapter with reference to how being is oriented towards environmental ethics, it has been examined here, that being is useful in order to address the normative dimension to it. So, this chapter grounds the notion of ontology that will further be explored in chapter four in terms of how it has ethical and teleological dimensions.
Chapter Four: African Theocentric Environmental Ethics

4.1: Introduction

In chapter three, I examined the way existence is often understood in African ontology as having a teleological orientation (Dzobo, 1992: 227; Izibili, 2005: 386). In this particular chapter, I proceed to consider question of *telos* in terms of its relation to theocentric environmental ethics. While I continue to grapple with the fundamental question of the teleological dimension of existence, I go beyond the likes of Dzobo and Izibili as I endeavour to grapple with the way African environmentalism ought to be informed by the teleological view of existence. This teleological view of environmental ethics which has not been addressed by Dzobo and Izibili ought to be taken as an African theocentric environmental ethics that I advance in this chapter. Accordingly, I discuss how the African conceptions of God must shape their teleological conception of existence, and ultimately environmental ethics.

In this chapter, I focus on the African understanding of God\textsuperscript{21}, existence and purpose in African ontology. I examine the way existence ought to be conceptualised as having environmental ethical import. As I explore further what Dzobo (1992: 227), Izibili (2005: 386), Ekanola (2006: 76) and others have said about African ontology and its teleological orientation, I contend that environmental ethical import should be realised in the African order of existence. This order of existence stretches from God or the Supreme Being, the ancestors, the human community in general down to the individual human person. Following this hierarchy of existence in African philosophy, I seek to establish in this chapter an environmentalism that particularly emanates from African ontological conceptions of God.

\textsuperscript{21} From this chapter and others that follow, I will mainly centre my argument on the African understanding of theology. Consequently, one objection that this theory may face is its appeal to highly controversial *a priori* claims about the existence of God, ancestors and other spiritual beings. I acknowledge that while such views are at the centre of many traditional sub-Saharan African worldviews, it remains difficult to continue to hold on to such controversial claims particularly in the twenty first century where science has established itself as the most reliable explanation about fundamental issues to do with explaining the nature of reality.
and existence in general. This understanding of environmental ethics is what I will refer to here as ‘theocentric environmental ethics’. I refer to it as such because of the implicit metaphysical assumption that God is central to such teleological environmental ethics.

My ultimate attempt in this chapter is to argue that a charitable reading and interpretation of the various levels of existence ought to primarily lead to a reasonable understanding and appreciation of what I conceptualise as an African ontology-based environmental ethics. Accordingly, notwithstanding my particularistic approach to African environmentalism which may be somewhat objectionable, I will espouse a theocentric environmental ethics that is particular to African ontology. I argue that the kind of environmentalism that I have in mind here ought to be broadly acceptable and meaningful to anyone who respects the role of God and the teleological end of existence in an African context. My theocentric environmentalism is philosophically attractive and could meaningfully add on to other non-African views like Western environmentalism. However, contrary to Western environmental ethics, my idea of African theocentric environmental ethics stems from the African teleological understanding of existence and the human person and their relations to other networks of beings such as God that I examine in this chapter.

First, I attempt to situate what I refer to in this chapter as ‘African theocentric environmental ethics’ in the discourse of environmental ethics. I intend to offer the view that African theocentric environmental ethics could meaningfully affirm itself and complement other environmental ethical positions such as biocentrism, eco-centrism, patho-centrism and zoocentrism, if it is understood from the teleological standpoint that I explore. I also conceptualise the environment as a grand macrocosm in which microcosms such as God, the ancestors and human beings are contained. I will argue that in this grand macrocosm, existence is fashioned towards some of the teleological ends in life. I discuss these purposive ends for existence as respect and reverence for life which I take as the ultimate good or end.
for being that is also sustained by other purposes such as harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival for all beings.

After conceptualising what African theocentric environmentalism is and some of what I take as the purposes for existence, I proceed to focus on the African conception of God in terms of how it is normatively oriented towards environmental ethical thinking. In this regard, the teleological dimension of the African view of God is closely examined as being philosophically relevant and attractive to African environmentalism. As I focus on the normative dimension of the belief in God, I draw a distinction between the Christian and the African conceptions of God (such as in Wiredu, 1996: 74). Overall, I argue that despite the diverse views and conceptions of God and existence from African ontology, the teleological role of God and all the purposes for existence could be plausibly taken as being essential to African environmental ethics. This kind of environmental ethics is what I intend to explore and examine as an African theocentric environmental ethics.

4.2: Being and Purpose in African Ontology

This section focusing on ‘being and purpose in African ontology’ divides into three parts that examine the respective purposes for existence such as respect and reverence for life, harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival for all beings. These parts form the core of the next section that will focus on how environmentalism could be based on a teleological understanding of existence and God in African ontology. In this particular section, I identify some of what I see as the fundamental purposes for existence in African ontology. I discuss these fundamental purposes that I suspect God has for microcosmic existence in the grand macrocosm. This is because microcosmic existence in African ontology starts with God and cascades down to the lower forces following the hierarchy of existence discussed in chapter three. These deep-seated purposes for which existence is fashioned towards include the following: Respect and reverence for life as a sacred creation,
harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival for all created beings. In the light of these purposes for being, I argue that at the core of African ethics is the idea that an understanding and appreciation of the good or bad ought to be informed by a conception of these respective purposes for existence. Also, human beings have obligations to realise and live within the dictates of these purposes because they are ultimately divine purposes since existence starts with God as already established in chapter three.

4.2.1: Respect and Reverence for All Life as Sacred Creation

In African ontology, it is generally acceptable that all life, whether human or non human, is a sacred creation. By looking at life as a sacred creation, it means that all beings or objects of life ought to be treated with respect and reverence such that they could fulfil the purposive goals for existence which entail living a good and meaningful life. For that reason, life could be taken as the ultimate good or end for existence such that it deserves respect and reverence. Accordingly, I argue that the environment ought to be treated with due care and respect because God must have created all beings in such a way that they exist and live their independent lives to the fullest. As Laurenti Magesa sees it, the African ontological view of the universe is more focussed on “. . . the sacrality of life; respect for the spiritual and mystical nature of creation, and, especially, of the human person; the sense of the family, community, solidarity and participation; and an emphasis on fecundity and sharing in life, friendship, healing and hospitality” (Magesa, 1997: 52-3). It is on this basis that human beings ought to have an obligation and purpose to respect and revere the most basic and cherished virtue in African ontology, which is life.

The other justification why life should be respected and revered is based on the understanding and acceptance of possession of ‘vital force’ in all beings in the African hierarchy of ontology. This view has been explored in the previous chapter. According to Behrens:
just as persons respect other persons because they recognise that they share common needs and interests, so should moral agents respect other sentient entities because they have needs and interests in common, and so should we respect other conscious beings because of their capacity for consciousness, and even all other natural beings, because they too share the characteristic of being the product of historical natural process (Behrens, 2011: 201).

However, this view should not be overly taken to imply that all life ought to be respected and revered to the extent that human beings could, for example, be held to be morally accountable for sustainably killing and using other objects of life like non-human animals for their various purposes such as meat, labour and research. I also examine this view in greater detail in chapters six and eight when I give a moral justification for the subsistence use of animals and their products.

The amount and degree of respect for life and all creation must be understood as also following from the hierarchy of existence in African ontology. This is why I argue that respect for life among human beings ought not to be equated to respect for non-human beings. Behrens has the same line of thinking as he argues that “respecting a rock formation, respecting a person, respecting a species and respecting a river are very different, but a fundamental respect is nonetheless required for all entities according to the kind of entities they are” (Behrens, 2011: 201). Following this view, I therefore argue that respect and reverence for life remain some of the core obligations which human beings owe to the environment. It is such that if respect and reverence for life and the sacred creation are taken as the most fundamental purposes in life, that could meaningfully inform what I conceptualise here as an ontology-based and teleological environmental ethics. Accordingly, human beings ought to have an obligation to respect the environment so that it achieves its teleological end, which is to live well and flourish. Closely related to this fundamental
purpose for life is also the idea of harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival which I now proceed to discuss as independent purposes for life, but that are tailored towards the promotion of life.

4.2.2: Harmony and Balance for All Creation

A good and meaningful life is the characteristic result of harmonious living and balance. Harmony in creation tends towards peaceful living while balance also entails correct relations amongst beings as a result of tranquil living. Harmonious living entails balance, where all the components in the natural environment ought to have an equal opportunity to pursue their respective and independent purposes without any difficulties. Harmony and balance are the means to meaningful and purposive life although this purpose for harmony and balance ought to be understood as being independent to the ultimate purpose for life despite complementing it as well.

All creation ought to live because such life is sacred. Although some beings like human beings and other carnivorous animals may depend on other animate beings, all created beings ought to have a right to harmonious living and to strike a balanced living because life is the ultimate end of harmonious and balanced living. This is why for example, human beings may be discouraged from killing animals when they do not intend to use them. For Behrens, there is need to create harmonious relationships “between persons and persons, and between persons and other parts of the web of life” (Behrens, 2011: 207). If harmony and balance could be taken in this way as fundamental means to the purpose for all life, that could be a strong reason to accept an ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics stemming from African philosophy. This is because African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics ought to be plausibly based on the conviction that all beings have purpose. For this reason therefore, I argue that there ought to be a balance
and harmonious living for all beings so that they attain their respective goals for continued living.

Despite harmony and balance being some of the cardinal means for the purpose for existence, the need for harmony and balance in creation ought not to be understood in such a way that the various beings in the hierarchy of existence must be completely discouraged from relying on other lesser beings for survival. For example, it would not make sense to stop human beings from using various plant species as sources of food and shelter as long as they intend to further their purpose for survival in a way that does not compromise continued survival and well-being of both nature and human beings themselves. For this reason, well-being and survival also become the other important purposes that I also examine shortly as being at the centre of an African teleologically based environmental ethics which puts at its core, the need to live a good life.

4.2.3: Well-being and Survival for All Creation

Attaining well-being and survival have been some of the primary concerns of philosophers since the Aristotelian era. Well-being is being in a good, quality and positive state of existence, while survival is enhanced by it for the good of life. The quest for well-being and survival is actually the mission of human existence. This is why I take these as some of the basic purposes for existence. Achieving well-being and survival are closely knit together in so far as well-being enhances survival so that life would ultimately be lived to the fullest.

Well-being and survival are some of the ultimate ends for being, which is life for all beings and the natural environment as a whole. At some level, the relationship between harmony and balance on the one hand, and well-being and survival on the other may appear as if the former purposes are the means to the latter, where well-being and survival are the ultimate ends. However, I contend that both harmony and balance on the one hand, and well-being and
survival on the other hand are all independent basic purposes that are not derivative. For the same reason, the duty to survive and achieve well-being could be more particular and basic to individual human beings, although it ought not to compromise the universal duty for harmony and balance of nature. Following this view, I contend that the well-being and survival of human persons ought not to be always prioritised at the expense of the harmony and balance of nature for example. This is because nature itself ought to have its independent rights to achieve these particular and independent purposes in order for it to live and flourish.

Understood this way, these purposes become independent and exclusive purposes to each other, but all of which contribute to what I conceptualise as an ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics. This is why, in discussing these purposes for being, I deliberately avoid ranking them in terms of order of importance because I strongly suspect that they all complement equally to the fullness of life. Overall, my argument is that, respect and reverence for all creation, harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival for all creation ought to be understood as being at the core of an African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmentalism. Once these purposes for existence have been understood, then it would be easy to appreciate how God could be understood as being the Supreme Being among all microcosms the major and source of African environmental ethics as will be argued shortly.

4.3: Understanding African Theocentric Environmental Ethics

Broadly understood, environmental ethics is informed and shaped by various competing perspectives, some of which are not sufficient to independently inform a thoroughgoing environmentalism. Some of these ethical theories could include, but are not limited to anthropocentric environmental ethics, bio-centric environmental ethics, zoo-centric environmental ethics, eco-centric environmental ethics and eco-feminist environmental
In addition to these environmental ethical theories that are fairly characteristic of Western environmental ethics, I seek to identify and espouse an African theocentric environmental ethics. This African theocentric environmentalism could be an equally reasonable and acceptable ontology-based environmental ethical view that is worth considering seriously.

First, African theocentric environmental ethics could be potentially useful if it is seriously examined in terms of its teleological dimension as well. Although Bujo (2009b: 113) and Horsthemke (2015: 13) look at African ethics as primarily anthropocentric, a view that I do not want to legitimise, Bujo admits that the theological dimension in African ethics has not yet been seriously considered so far (Bujo, 2009b: 113). The theocentric and teleological view of environmental ethics is promising because of its emphasis on the goals of existence for all beings. The other reason why such environmental ethics is worth considering is that the place and role of African religion in solving humanity’s problems cannot be ignored because their view of God is not detached from the problems facing society. This is worth considering especially taking into account the noticeable environmental problems and challenges such as water and air pollution, global warming, extinction of rare and endangered plant and animal species as well as soil erosion that the sub-Saharan African environment continues to experience. For these reasons, it would be plausible to assess the extent to which African metaphysical views of God, ontology and teleology could be seriously considered as contributing to an African environmental ethics.

By African theocentric environmental ethics, I mean a cosmology that puts the African God at the focal point of environmental ethical issues. It is an environmental ethical system that I

22 These environmental ethical positions attempt to consider the moral interests of the human beings, objects of life or beings that possess life, the zoo and the ecosystem as a whole respectively. Eco-feminist environmental ethics on the other hand is also an attempt to reconcile the traditional social relations in terms of how they could be the basis for understanding and addressing ecological imbalances. In this chapter however, I deliberately avoid to venture into a detailed discussion of these environmental ethical positions because that is not of my concern here.
envisage to be capable of being informed by conceptions of, and beliefs in, the existence of
God and the purposes of existence for all beings. According to this view, God plays a central
role in the people’s conceptions of existence and the purpose of life in general. This
teleological understanding of existence should ultimately shape the way human beings could
relate with the natural environment. This view of environmental ethics could be strongly
informed and influenced by the way African religion must be understood as playing a part in
the affairs of human communities. Laurenti Magesa captures this sentiment in the following
exposition:

How does African religion view the world and humanity’s place and role
within it? What elements make up the universe and how do they influence
life? What is the purpose of human existence, and what implications does this
have for the practical order of things? In African religion, the answers to these
questions delineate the conception of morality in the universe: the
understanding of the good that sustains life and the bad that destroys it. They
establish both the context and the content of African morality and ethics
(Magesa, 1997: 35).

The view expressed by Magesa is what I also seek to establish by arguing for a theocentric
environmental ethics. I intend to critically consider the way African views of God and
existence could be meaningfully and purposefully understood in the context of environmental
ethics. The resultant environmentalism is what I refer to here as ‘African theocentric
environmental ethics’.

Although Samuel Asiedu-Amoako’s understanding of a theocentric environmental ethics is
largely informed by what he calls ‘Ghanaian environmentalism’ (Asiedu-Amoako, 2013:
416), he attempts to offer a theocentric environmental ethics that, if critically explored
further, could be useful to what I conceptualise and explore as an African theocentric
environmental ethics. Despite situating his argument in the Christian monotheistic understanding of God, Asiedu-Amoako offers an understanding of a theocentric environmental ethics that is useful to this work. He defines theocentric environmental ethics as “the science of conduct determined by a divine conduct towards the environment” (Asiedu-Amoako, 2013: 416). While Andrew Hoffman and Lloyd Sandelands also limit theocentric environmentalism to Catholic Christian teachings like Asiedu-Amoako, they understand theocentric environmental ethics to be a metaphysics that is centred on the understanding that human beings and nature are related in God (Hoffman and Sandelands, 2004: 18). Notwithstanding the Christian orientation of these definitions, they provide the working understanding for what I conceptualise here as a theocentric environmental ethics for sub-Saharan Africa because of their emphasis on God being at the core of environmental ethical thinking.

In African ontology, it is thought that human conduct towards the natural environment also determines, and is determined by, their conduct and relationships with God. This view is shaped by the generally acceptable sub-Saharan African understanding that God and nature are spiritually bound and inseparable such that one’s conduct towards God will almost always boil down to one’s conduct towards the environment in terms of ethical implications. This is the spiritual dimension connecting microcosms such as God, ancestors and human beings with the larger macrocosm, which is the environment. This supposed relationship in African ontology is very useful to African environmental ethics. In what follows, I briefly outline how the macrocosmic environment forms relations and interconnections with other microcosms in the hierarchy of African ontology like God, ancestors and human beings.

4.4: The Environment as a Macrocosm and Its Relation with Other Microcosms

Here, I consider the natural environment as a relatively macrocosmic being that is highly interconnected to all the other microcosms like God, ancestors and human beings. Despite
being more focussed on Islamic aesthetics, Inka Nokso-Koivisto offers a useful understanding of the relationship between macrocosm and microcosm. For him, “an approach to the microcosm-macrocosm idea may be restricted to the examination of the correspondences between the human being and the surrounding reality” (Nokso-Koivisto, 2011: 253). In this way, I take the natural environment or the surrounding reality as a macrocosmic being which is part of the entire universe in which all other beings or microcosms such as God, ancestors and human beings exist. By reference to the environment as a macrocosm, I mean an entire complex large scale being that ontologically and teleologically connects with other microcosms that are hierarchically placed in their microcosmic order of existence.

By virtue of it being an independent macrocosm with all other microcosms considered to exist in it, the environment ought to have its own purpose that is independent of that of God, ancestors and the human community. However, as I will spell out in the next section, it is through realising the purposes of all these microcosms such as God, the ancestors and the human community that the purpose of the environment is also realised. This is the perspective that I take here because I realise a strong tie in the way the microcosms exist with the macrocosmic environment.

4.5: God as the Supreme Being and Source of African Environmental Ethics

The question about the existence of God and His teleological orientation in African ontology has been fairly discussed in chapter three. In this section, however, I will proceed to engage with what I envisage as the teleological dimension of God in the context of its relevance to African ontology-based environmental ethics. This section consists of four sub-sections, all of which are intended to support my main thesis that God ought to be viewed as the Supreme Being and the ultimate source of African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics.
The first part of this section connects with chapter three and briefly examines the existence of God in African ontology. It also proceeds to critically examine the place of God in African ontology-based environmental ethics. The second part focuses on how a theocentric environmental ethics could be attributable to African ontology as its origin. In the third part, the spiritual link between God, human beings and the environment is closely examined. I argue that this link forms the basis of a teleological environmental ethics. In the fourth part, I critically assess what could be the environmental ethical implications of equating nature with God in African ontology. Lastly, I critically examine the extent to which determinism in African conceptions of God could meaningfully lead to a teleological environmental ethics. While admitting the role of God in determining what ought to be and what ought not to be, I argue that African environmental ethics is not entirely pre-determined by God, but that its kind of determinism forms the foundation of a plausible teleological environmental ethics.

4.5.1: The Place of God in African Ontology-based Environmental Ethics

In this particular section that focuses on the place of God in African environmental ethics, I will first take and accept the view established in chapter three, that the existence of God as the Supreme Being in African ontology is generally “taken as given and beyond doubt” (Ekanola, 2006: 77). However, I will deliberately limit this view to those who accept the existence of God in African ontology in order to avoid the fallacious reasoning of assuming that all Africans believe in God. The other reason is that I do not intend to venture into a philosophical justification of the existence of God since this is not part of the mission of this work. Although I have problems with the certainty with which Ekanola takes God’s existence, I will take God’s existence in African ontology as largely acceptable and fairly convincing because the African hierarchy of existence sees God as occupying the apex (see also Teffo and Roux, 1998: 138). In the light of this understanding, and also realising the similarities in the African conceptions of God among most sub-Saharan African
communities, I put forth the argument that African environmentalism ought to be implicitly embedded in these conceptions of God.

First, I contend that the beliefs in the existence of God among African communities ought to be teleologically viewed as closely knit with an ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics. A justification for this view is that God is part of the order of existence in African ontology and that He has certain expectations and purposes for which all beings are expected to realise, work towards and achieve. This is the reason why I argue that sub-Saharan African metaphysical and teleological conceptions of the existence of God could strongly inform African environmental ethics. Because this kind of environmental ethics is largely informed by people’s conceptions of God’s existence and purpose, I will, therefore, refer to such form of environmentalism as an African theocentric environmental ethics.

In order to understand African theocentric environmental ethics, which I conceptualise here as partly a God-based environmentalism, one has to appreciate Ekanola’s view that the existence of God is apparent in African philosophy (Ekanola, 2006: 77). Ekanola’s view is plausibly acceptable and useful although he does not present it elaborately. Having acknowledged this view as reasonably valuable, I argue that the way God is understood in traditional African spirituality as the giver of life (Ekanola, 2006: 77) ought to be philosophically and teleologically understood as having a strong bearing on environmental ethics of African communities. For example, granted that God is the giver of all life forms on earth and that He is eternal and the supreme judge of all human activities, it must therefore follow that God ought to spiritually possess the environment. This supposed spiritual existence of God and His possession of the environment could be a fairly reasonable view since God’s physical existence cannot be accounted for by human beings. In other words, even if God’s existence seems obvious in African ontology, it can only be spiritually accounted for. It is, therefore, such that there must be a spiritual connection between God, the
human person and the environment. I will discuss this spiritual connection after the next section that attempts to assess how a theocentric environmental ethics could be explained in terms of its origins.

4.5.2: Origins of a Theocentric Environmental Ethics

Besides being informed by conceptions of existence in general, African ontology-based environmental ethics can also be largely characterised as theocentric. As opposed to the Christian theocentric environmental ethics, my idea of African theocentric environmental ethics is largely informed by, and rooted in, the African conception of God which I have indicated that it is different from its Christian counterpart. For example, although he does not explore the God-based environmentalism, Taringa attempts to come close to it and argues for the case that the natural environment is a product of God (Mwari in the Shona language). He does this in the following exposition of the Shona myth of creation that I take to be very useful towards the understanding of African God-centred environmental ethics that I espouse here:

The Shona myth of creation traces the origin of life and existence of nature to a great pool (dzivaguru). The myth begins with Mwari making the first human called Mwedzi (moon). This is at the bottom of the pool (dziva). Mwari gave Mwedzi a medicine horn (gona). Mwedzi asked to go out to the dry land. Mwari gave him a wife called Masasi to accompany him. The two lived in a cave. They gave birth to grass, bushes and trees. After this Masasi went back to the pool. Mwari gave Mwedzi another wife called Morongo. Morongo gave birth to all kinds of animals. Eventually she bore boys and girls. Because the children had grown up Morongo refused to continue sleeping with Mwedzi. She asked him to sleep with his daughters. As a result he became chief (mambo) of a great people. Masasi chose to sleep with a snake that she hid
under her bed. One day *Mwedzi* forced *Masasi* to sleep with him and the snake bit him. *Mwedzi* fell ill and there was drought. The children consulted a diviner about the persistent drought. They were told to send the sick chief back to the pool. After this they chose another man to be their king (Taringa, 2006: 197).

Interpreted correctly, Taringa’s argument seems to concur with my view that the origin of the natural environment should be attributable to God. My argument is that, if God is the one who is responsible for the origin of the natural environment, it means that there ought to be some purpose or purposes for which all beings are made, which I suspect to be the purpose to live a good life. I therefore teleologically interpret this view which has not been explored further by Taringa and propound that this dimension of creation could be plausibly taken as a theocentric environmental ethical explanation for the relations that ought to subsist between God, human beings and nature. Accordingly, I argue that all the components of the natural environment such as human beings, the land, water, plants and animals are teleologically made in order to achieve the best possible life, balance, well-being and survival.

As established in the previous section on the purposes for existence, God is thought to have created all beings in such a way that they live a purposively good life, one that is characterised and constituted by harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival. As a result, Taringa also attempts to show how this myth of creation could be taken as having an influence on people’s attitudes to these particular aspects of nature such as human beings, the land, water and animals (Taringa, 2006: 197-8). This is what I discern here as a God-based environmental ethics that has not been clearly explored in Taringa’s view. In this case, it is important to realise that the environment’s origin is attributable to God in this valuable myth which I see as having salient environmental ethical implications attached to it. The environmental ethical implication of this myth of creation is that it encourages human beings
to be respectful of the entire environment as they are reminded of the need for the ultimate purposes for existence and also to respect God who is thought to be responsible for all creation and life. (See also Magesa, 1997: 35). Otherwise, if human beings negatively affect the environment, that is also deemed to be a violation of the will and purpose of God for existence and all other purposes for existence.

Respect for all creation ought to be taken as one fundamental purpose that binds God, human beings and the environment. According to this position, as established earlier on, all created beings ought to be revered and treated with respect. Following this view, I argue that human beings ought to respect God directly and also that, they have an obligation to indirectly respect God by respecting God’s creation, which in this case is the natural environment. This kind of respect for God and respect for God’s creation is grounded on a teleological conception of ontology because both God and all creation have purposive ends that human beings ought to take into consideration. The other aspect is that, by fulfilling the various purposes for existence such as life, harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival, human beings will indirectly fulfil God’s purpose for creation.

Following a theocentric view of environmental ethics, the purposes for existence are aspects that I suspect could be taken as the basis for according the natural environment its intrinsic value. Accordingly, I argue that there ought to be a balance and harmony in the natural environment in order to maintain biodiversity and to safeguard the purpose of the natural environment. The telos of the environment ought to be understood as independent to that of the human persons although it could either be furthered or disturbed by human beings. Oruka alludes to this view, which I take as the basis for my argument for the view that harmony and balance are necessary in order to maintain the well-being and continued survival of all the components of the natural environment. According to Oruka,
it is not scientifically plausible to dismiss any member of the ecological domain as ‘non-useful.’ The sensible position to take is that the whole ecosystem balances itself, and that balance should be ascertained and hence the concern to maintain and promote biodiversity (Oruka, 1997b: 250).

As informed by my ontology-based environmental ethics, balance and harmony in the natural environment would be meaningfully achieved by taking on board as useful, and respecting those components of the natural environment that are traditionally considered to be ‘non-useful’. Some of these components of the natural environment could be non-human animals and parts of the physical environment that may not directly benefit and affect human well-being such as animals that are not necessarily for human consumption and use like monkeys, hyenas and ants, and the physical components like rocks and soils.

The other dimension is that of a theological environmental ethics that looks at nature as a sacred creation in which human beings are to be seen as trustees or stewards of the natural environment. This view is central to African ontology-based and teleological environmental ethics. According to Holmes Rolston, a theological environmental ethics is a form of environmental ethical thinking that considers the natural environment as broadly God’s creation (Rolston, 1999: 416). Accordingly, African conceptions of God confirm that the African natural environment is a sacred creation and largely a symbol of God’s creative ability. The environment is therefore taken to be a sacred creation such that environmental ethics is largely informed by the thinking that human beings ought to respect and revere the sacred creation as one among other purposes. However, what is important in the light of this particular purpose for the need to revere the sacred creation is that reverence for nature is not so stringent such that human beings could be held to be morally accountable for killing non-human animals for their basic human needs or using other parts of the environment for human needs like consumption or shelter. Following this theological understanding of
environmental ethics, “human beings are and ought to be trustees or stewards of this creation. Hence, they ought to till and serve this creation” (Rolston, 1999: 417). Understood this way, this view could support my idea of a theocentric environmental ethics.

4.5.3: God, Human Beings and the Environment

Although they do not explicitly show how God is responsible for African environmental ethics in particular, Michael Bourdillon (1976: 277), Oladipo (2004: 356-7), Taringa (2006: 197) and Samuel Asiedu-Amoako (2013: 416) are almost unanimous that there is a spiritual interconnection between God, human beings and the natural environment. Michael Bourdillon ushers the argument that is taken up by Oladipo (2004: 357) and Taringa (2006: 197) which I take further to imply that the belief in the existence and purpose of God in African ontology ought to be taken as a plausible basis for African environmental ethics. This view, which I espouse here in greater detail, is not explicitly articulated by these thinkers.

The African God ought to be teleologically understood as spiritually connecting human beings with nature. The spiritual connection between all beings and God must be the cardinal basis upon which environmental ethical thinking could be seen to be flowing from. It is for this reason that there ought to be good relations between all physical and non physical beings including God so that this spiritual relationship continues to flourish for the good of all life.

Accordingly, Chibueze Udeani argues that:

Traditional African spirituality and ethics are, in a way, a triangular relationship which incorporates, firstly, the natural beings in their relationship with other natural beings. Secondly it pertains to the relationship between natural and spiritual beings, and then that of existing spiritual beings in their relation to one another. Ethical and moral issues go beyond the issues that arise within the context of interactions among natural beings. That is to say, issues of ethics do not only come into question when considering the
implications of human actions vis-à-vis other humans and animals. It has wider and deeper dimensions (Udeani, 2008: 67).

In this exposé, Udeani’s view seems to be that, ethical issues are not only limited to interactions among physical beings like human beings and animals alone. Ethical issues go beyond these, as they ought to also take into account the tripartite relationship between God, human beings and nature. This relationship is what I see as a spiritual relationship that grounds African theocentric environmental ethics because it is not only concerned with the physical beings alone.

A theocentric environmental ethics that sees the link between human beings and nature through God promises to offer what I regard as an attractive environmental ethical thinking in African ontology. One reason why this kind of environmentalism is promising is that the African way of life and ethics are closely knit with, and best understood in connection to, their religion. This kind of religion is based on the belief in the existence of God and His role in making human beings in such a way that they live life for some end or purpose. For this reason, it would be easier to realise that environmental ethical thinking stems from such kind of religion in which God is the highest microcosm within the African ontological hierarchy of other microcosms or beings, all of which are oriented towards purposive ends for life, harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival. Also, I take a God-based environmental ethics to be attractive to African ontology. This because God is thought to be the ultimate creator of the universe, including the natural environment to which God has a purpose for its creation. To validate the view that African ethical thinking could be interpreted as largely stemming from human relations with God, Magesa argues that “African religion’s conception of morality is steeped in tradition; it comes from and flows from God into the ancestors of the people. God is seen as the Great Creator, the first Founder and Progenitor, the Giver of Life, the Power behind everything that is” (Magesa, 1997: 35).
Because of this understanding, environmental ethics therefore is thought to weave through the way human beings also relate with their highest being or God since all beings are tailored towards some purposive existence that God wants.

4.5.4: The Practical Implications of Equating Nature with God

African traditional beliefs in the existence of God ought to be philosophically understood as having a huge practical bearing on life and well-being in general. These beliefs are supposed to shape human attitudes towards each other as human beings and the natural environment as a whole. This is why, following a similar conception of the ethical import of traditional African religion, Oladipo attempts to consider traditional African religious beliefs about the existence of God as being both a belief and an attitude (Oladipo, 2004: 356-7). I take this view as useful to my God-based environmentalism because of the understanding that, a belief as a general conviction in the existence of God has a strong bearing on people’s attitudes that eventually will influence their way of life with reference to environmental ethical thinking. For example, the belief that God is omnipotent and resides in all beings and all aspects of nature such as in the air, rivers, forests, mountains and animals has a strong bearing on, and continues to shape people’s attitudes to the environment.

The view above explains why for example, traditional fishermen and fisherwomen and hunters in African communities first consult God through the ancestors before embarking on either a fishing or hunting expedition respectively. A reasonable explanation of this kind of attitude is that it is a sign of respect for God, nature and the harmony that ought to subsist between human beings, God and nature. For these reasons, the way I see the belief in God as influencing people’s attitudes becomes the basis why I find African beliefs in the existence of God to be normatively and teleologically relevant to environmental ethics. Such an understanding of African religion that is centred on both belief and attitude “arise from the recognition by human beings that they are not alone in the world-process. It is recognised that
we are in our daily activities dependent on other elements in this process. This dependence invariably places some limits on our powers, our knowledge, our values, our identity, etc.” (Oladipo, 2004: 356). This confirms the belief in existence of the most powerful being that is capable of shaping the human condition and his or her destiny.

In view of the above conviction, it is plausible to argue that certain beliefs and attitudes in African religion are practically central to ethical thinking. Accordingly, Oladipo argues that a conception of belief and attitude in African religion “is what provides the basis for the belief in, and devotional attitude to that which is perceived to have the ontological significance of being the ground and source of human existence and sustenance” (Oladipo, 2004: 357). This explains why the belief in one ultimate Supreme Being at the top of the African ontological hierarchy is pervasive in sub-Saharan African communities, and why I argue that it ought to be taken as a basis why human beings ought to revere the environment just like what they do with God. This view stems from the teleological view of God that was discussed in chapter three, and its bearing on environmental ethics, which is what I seek to establish here.

The natural world is positively revered in African ontology because it is equated to the divine. Because God is thought to be teleologically and ethically responsible for the whole world, it is therefore held that God is responsible for all there is, hence the ultimate source of sub-Saharan African environmental ethics. In this regard, in sub-Saharan African ontology, God is “regarded as the maker of the world and its sustainer and ruler; the origin and giver of life who is above all divinities and man; a supreme judge and a controller of human destiny. These attributes show that the Supreme Being in African culture is regarded as the ultimate reality” (Oladipo, 2004: 357). Following this view, it is noteworthy to observe that attempts to see God in all reality or nature in general explain the widespread beliefs why the natural world is revered in African ontology. This is because the natural environment, especially sentient beings that are in the natural environment such as non-human animals, are
symbolically equated to God such that any offence on them is as good as actually provoking God as well. This view emanates from the metaphysical belief that God resides in nature and some of these non-human animals. Such a view, although it sounds fairly strange, is largely shaped by animism\textsuperscript{23}, which I suspect to be characteristic of African ontology. This is the view that is based on the assumption that all parts of the natural environment, whether sentient or non-sentient, possess some aspect of consciousness or spirit such that all beings ought to be treated with respect.

My view above ought not to be interpreted as ultimately anthropocentric such that if nature did not have some sort of ‘persons’ in it, it would not merit respect. The obligation for respectful treatment of all beings is justified because respect for all creation has a practical bearing on well-being and survival as well as on the balance and harmony in the environment. Once all beings are treated with the respect that they deserve, it is most likely that their well-being, harmony and balance will be promoted such that the purpose for a meaningful life in nature could be achieved. In this way, African ontological conceptions of God and His existence, together with the inherent beliefs in animism, strongly inform African environmental ethics. This occurs through the fear of offending God by negatively impacting on the natural environment, especially on certain beings that constitute the environment which are thought to be having their own intrinsic or inherent value\textsuperscript{24}. This metaphysical belief has a very positive influence to the way the environment could be approached in African thinking.

\textsuperscript{23} Animism is basically understood as the view that is based on the assumption that non-living beings such as plants, forests, rivers and rocks have some life or souls.

\textsuperscript{24} In this work, I use the phrases, ‘intrinsic value’ and ‘inherent value’ interchangeably. I take it that these refer to the value of a thing as an end in itself. As opposed to instrumental value, which is the value of a thing as a means to some other useful end, inherent value, also understood as intrinsic value, refers to the way things are given ethical consideration by virtue of being objects of ethical consideration. (See also John O’Neill, 2001: 163-6.) The reason why certain aspects of nature are given ethical consideration is because they are thought to have purpose in life and also that some, like animals, are sentient beings, while others like plant species are biological objects that live life.
On the other hand however, this animist view in African conceptions of God and nature should not be understood to imply that human beings are to be held morally accountable for, say, killing animals for food as I will later argue for in chapters six and eight. Also, this view should not be taken as if doing certain actions that do not have much ethical significance such as smashing rocks and walking on the soil or grass are forbidden. Such actions do not disturb the inherent well-being of the environment. These actions do not have any serious ethical implications on the relations between human beings and nature, as opposed to actions like killing non-human animals for the sake of just killing, or wanton destruction of the forests or deliberate pollution of air and water sources. In this way, disrespect for animals, forests, air and water through some of these actions negatively affects their well-being and survival as well as the balance and harmony that ought to subsist in the natural world as a whole.

Among African communities that believe in the existence of God as the Supreme Being, I suspect that there is a general sentiment that there must be an ethical relationship subsisting between the spiritual world (where God belongs) and the physical world. This supposed relationship between the spiritual world and the physical world ought to have a practical bearing on African environmental ethics. This is the kind of ontological dualism that I perceive as informing environmental ethics in African ontology which Fainos Mangena sees as spiritualism (Mangena, 2013: 39). According to Mangena, spiritualism is “the metaphysical belief that the world in which we live today is both material and spiritual. While the material world is made of beings that are living their dated lives, the spiritual world is populated by the living timeless” (Mangena, 2013: 39).

Although Mangena (2013: 39) limits these living timeless to only ancestors and spirits, I argue that the Supreme Being or God is fundamentally the most powerful being in this spiritual world. He is so powerful that all the physical beings owe their existence to him. By implication, this most powerful spiritual being or God could be understood as being
responsible for purposively regulating the relations between the human community and nature. It is such that human beings are answerable to God should they disturb this ontological dualism by having bad or morally objectionable relations which negatively affect the teleological function of God, the teleological good of the environment and its well-being and survival as well as its balance and harmony. Some of these unnecessary and morally objectionable actions that human beings could do to the environment include, but are not limited to, unnecessary killing of non-human animals or destruction of parts of the natural environment like plants without any intention to use them for either human consumption or some other use. These actions are considered to be unethical because they go against the teleological function of existence and the environment itself. This view is shaped by the understanding that God has a purpose for the existence, survival and well-being as well as the harmony and balance of nature itself.

The physical world to which human beings belong, is also thought to be closely related to the spiritual world to which God also belongs. In essence, the human person is fairly privileged to be superior to other creatures in the physical world. This is because the human person is the only rationally and morally privileged being in the physical world who is capable of working towards God’s purpose for life. To support that view, Dzobo sees human beings as the only beings that have “a creative purpose to fulfil in life” (Dzobo, 1992: 228). This means that unlike other beings, human beings are capable of setting for themselves hopes, desires and goals to achieve in life. For that reason, the human being ought to have some ethical obligations towards the spiritual world where the Supreme Being belongs. Consequently, I contend that some of these ethical obligations include the need to respect God and the creation of God because all beings are thought to be purposively created by God so as to enjoy their survival and well-being as well as to achieve balance and harmony in the natural world. This view has strong teleological implications because the basis for respecting God
and the creation of God, which is nature, must be teleology. As a result, the need to respect God and nature is largely informed by the purpose of God and the purpose for which God gives to nature. This purpose is based on the need to live well and to live a harmonious and balanced life according to all the purposive goals of existence.

The teleological view of nature and its connection to the purpose of God and other purposes of human beings is also captured in the African classical teachings on the forty-two principles of human conduct, which Chiv aura refers to as the declarations of Ma’at or *unhu/ubuntu* (Chivaura, 2006b: 232). In these forty-two declarations of Ma’at, I identify about six of these declarations that I list below which could confirm the thinking that God, human beings and the natural environment are closely connected and purposive beings. These declarations could be understood as implying that there ought to be a good ethical and teleological relationship and interconnection between God, human beings and the natural environment. These declarations could be teleologically understood as confirming the need to live well spiritually with God, and also to safeguard the physical well-being of the human beings and the natural environment. These declarations that ought to be taken as having environmental ethical import are:

...  
11: I have not laid waste to the land.  
12: I have not polluted the earth.  
13: I have not polluted the water.  
...  
18: I have not cursed God.  
19: I have not vexed God.  
...  

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25 Ma’at refers to the moral principles or ethical guidelines of goodness or rightness by which people lived by in African classical thought. (See also Chivaura, 2006: 232.)
Implicit in the above declarations is the view that human beings are obligated to respect the environment and ultimately God through safeguarding the interests of the natural environment by upholding these declarations of the Ma’at or ubuntu. One explanation for this respect for nature is that it is thought to be closely related to God. Respect for nature is therefore so basic that the purpose of nature and that of God ought to be understood as closely related. These declarations are considered to be an expression of the Divine thereby confirming the moderately deterministic nature of African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics (Chivaura, 2006b: 232). Also, the other practical implication is that these declarations express a certain understanding of the ethics of what ought not to be done to God, the land, the earth, animals and water. Except God, these are aspects of the environment that constitute the animate and non-animate reality. The reason why these aspects ought not to be offended could be that they do possess their respective purposes for existence. Following this line of thinking, it is therefore evident that an African theocentric view is influential to African environmental ethical thinking.

Achieving these declarations of the Ma’at could be taken as a sign of respect for the purpose for existence. This could reasonably lead to a balanced and harmonious relationship between God, human beings and the natural environment. Following this view, I proceed to argue that the way to show concern and respect for the natural environment would therefore be to enter into harmonious living with all things that are part of the network of life. (See also Behrens, 2011: 19.) This is because balance and harmony as well as well-being and survival are some of the purposes towards which I suppose human beings ought to work. Once these ultimate purposes are achieved, then it is most likely that African environmentalism would be meaningfully informed by such a relationship of interdependence in the various networks of existence that start with God at the apex.
It may be contentious whether human beings could enter into harmonious living with parts of
the physical environment such as soils, rocks, rivers and plants that are not necessarily
sentient beings. The other controversy to critically consider is also whether some of these
components like soils, rocks and rivers are capable of achieving well-being and survival.
However, what I see as the basis for harmonious living with these aspects is the fact that they
are all purposive entities. In one way or the other, these aspects are tailored towards some end
which is life and the enhancement of life such that, despite human dependence on them, they
also need to exist as beings that are independent to human beings. For example, the purpose
of existence of the soil could be taken to be the support for plants (life) such that even if the
soil cannot flourish, its purpose could be understood to be helping other beings that can.
Following this view, therefore, I contend that the kind of ontology-based environmentalism
that I espouse here would make it possible for human beings to have a harmonious living
with the physical environment, besides sentient aspects of nature. The implications of this
view for African environmental ethics is that people who respect this relationship of humans
with nature could strike a right relationship between themselves, God and the natural
environment.

4.5.5: Some Theological Determinism and Teleological Environmental Ethics

In this particular section, I critically examine the extent to which the aspect of God’s
determinism could be teleologically oriented towards environmental ethics. The argument
that I develop here is that despite beliefs in God being largely shaped by an element of
determinism, to some extent, that could be taken as the foundation of a teleological
environmental ethics in African ontology.

Environmental ethical thinking is thought to be meaningfully inculcated by the realisation of
the aspect of determinism and sticking to some form of ‘commandments’ to which human
beings ought to abide to, which are pertinent to the human person and the natural
environment. In this way, God is thought to determine and regulate all the interactions in the African worldview that have some normative and teleological implications. This view however should not be understood to mean that everything is left to God such that human beings do not have free will in everything that they do. Otherwise it would be meaningless to talk of an environmental ethical thinking that emanates in African ontology. While admitting that human beings have some freewill in so far as they are responsible for the actions that they perform, I argue that God has a bearing on the natural environment. For example, in the African worldview, the environment is thought to belong to God. Because of this belief, it is therefore assumed that whatever happens to the environment that affects it in a negative way like deliberate and extensive pollution of air, water and the soil, as a result of human action, human beings are answerable to God. This explains why sub-Saharan African communities continue to explain the occurrence of environmental hazards like dry spells, droughts, floods, lightning and thunderstorm strikes as punishment from God for breaking certain ethical obligations. This view is shaped by the understanding that human beings have a duty to live well with the natural environment and also the need to realise the ultimate purposes for which God has for all valuable components of nature.

While Bourdillon (1976: 277) is focussed on the Shona people of Zimbabwe, in which most of his anthropological studies are rooted, he comes close to my position on the African ontological conception of God as teleologically oriented. This is the view that God is the ultimate source of people’s environmental ethics. This is because God is thought to be responsible for all the fundamental aspects of human beings in so far as they relate with each other and the natural environment surrounding them. According to Bourdillon, African ontology is based on the belief that God “knows everything and sees everything, and is ultimately responsible for the weather, the fertility of the land, the wild forests, character traits of men, and so on” (Bourdillon, 1976: 277). This is almost related to my argument for
an African theocentric environmental ethics. However, Bourdillon’s and Oladipo’s views are only limited in so far as they only confirm a rather deterministic view of ethics in which what ought to be done or what ought not to be done is exclusively determined by God for non teleological reasons. These views are not explicit on how the teleological view of God and existence largely shape ethical thinking like what I see to be characteristic of African ontology. Their restricted view is useful to my idea of an African theocentric environmental ethics. This is because of its implicit assumption that, what ought to be done, or what ought not to be done, is largely determined by God who is thought to be responsible for all that exists and how human beings ought to behave and thereby contributing to, and fulfilling the purposes for existence.

To espouse the above rigid form of determinism further, and in a way that differs from Bourdillon’s and Oladipo’s views of God, I argue that such a deterministic understanding of the African God could form a reasonably acceptable and teleological foundation for African theocentric environmental ethics. This kind of environmental ethics, which recognises the various purposes for existence as its foundation, is teleologically oriented towards God’s purpose for harmony and balance in the universe. This is because, if God is believed to purposively regulate everything in the universe, as is the case with African ontology, then it means that there ought not to be any reason to believe that there can be an ethical code that is outside God’s plan. This therefore means that, in African philosophy, acceptance of God’s existence is as good as accepting environmental ethics that also stems from God. For example, this kind of environmental ethics is characterised and informed by the understanding of some of the purposes for existence that have been discussed in the last section such as respect and reverence for life and all sacred creation, harmony and balance for all God’ creation as well as well-being and survival for all creation.
4.6: Conclusion

What has been discussed in this chapter is what I refer to as an African theocentric environmental ethics. This is a form of environmental ethical thinking that could be strongly informed and influenced by African metaphysical conceptions of God. I have argued that God, as the Supreme Being in African ontology, ought to be understood as being responsible for the teleological order in the whole universe, and that this could have a very strong bearing on African environmental ethics. The other argument that I develop in this chapter is that the environment ought to be understood as a macrocosm in which other microcosms exist in, and with which they ought to have good relations.

Overall, in this chapter, I have argued for a God-centred African environmentalism in which God must be seen to have purpose for all that exists in the form of harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival. The environmental ethical implications of this view has been discussed from a normative and teleological perspective where it is thought that the purpose of God, human beings and nature ought to be understood as closely knit. This could meaningfully inform a God-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics that I argue for in this chapter. In chapter five, I continue to examine African theocentric environmental ethics, but with particular focus on the role of the ancestors, who also could be reasonably taken as complementing God in informing a useful ontology-based environmental ethics for sub-Saharan Africa.
Chapter Five: The Place of the Ancestors in African Theocentric Environmental Ethics

5.1: Introduction

In chapter four, I examined the character of African ontology-based and theocentric environmental ethics that is largely informed by African metaphysical beliefs in the existence of God as the Supreme Being. In that chapter I argue that the African God is the highest Being in the ontological order of existence. I also contend that God ought to remain the main source of African theocentric environmental ethics, although I do not want to take a limited view and conclude that God alone should be solely responsible for African environmental ethical thinking. This is why I now proceed in this fifth chapter to focus on what I think should be the place and role of the ancestors in African ontology-based and theocentric environmental ethics.

Having considered the environmental ethical implications of the beliefs in God among African communities, in this chapter I intend to engage with the implications of the various beliefs in ancestry to African theocentric environmental ethics. Focussing on the belief in ancestry, I attempt to establish that African religious knowledge should be central to its teleologically oriented environmental ethical thinking. To establish this position, I will work in close connection with Dzobo’s understanding that “the African’s devotion to his ancestors and ancestresses has been [and ought to be]²⁶ taken as a singular characteristic of African religious awareness” (Dzobo, 1992: 230). Consequently I will argue that the other view that is closely related to the teleological dimension of God is that ancestors ought to be taken as also useful to the teleological and ontology-based African environmental ethics. Although he is not particularly focused on environmental ethics, Bujo comes closer to this teleological view of the ancestors as he argues that both the ancestors and the human community partake towards the completeness of life (Bujo, 1998: 197). While I concur with Bujo on this view

²⁶ My emphasis.
that ancestors contribute towards the completeness of life, I attempt to go beyond this view and establish that ancestors ought to be usefully taken as contributing towards African theocentric environmental ethics.

As I critically examine the role of the ancestors in African theocentric environmental ethics, I acknowledge what Tempels (1959: 62-2), Mbiti (1969: 84), Wiredu (1996: 47-8), Oladipo (2004: 358) and others have said about the teleological dimension of African ancestors. However, I do not intend to discuss what they have examined and established already as they are mostly focussed on the role of the ancestors in general without being specific about environmentalism. Even recent works on African environmentalism such as those by Oruka and Juma (1994), Murove (2004), Kelbessa (2005), LenkaBula (2008) and Behrens (2010; 2011; 2014a; 2014b) may seem to be similar to what I have in mind here. However, the aspect of the teleological orientation of the ancestors and its influence to theocentric environmental ethics remains unexplored in these works. This is why I explore further the aspect of African ancestry and examine the extent to which African ancestors could be relevant and useful towards informing what I see as a theocentric environmental ethics among sub-Saharan African communities.

I divide this fifth chapter into three major parts. In the first part of the chapter, I attempt to locate the African metaphysical beliefs in the existence of ancestors within the context of African ontology and environmental ethical thinking. I intend to examine the place of the ancestors in African ontology such that I will further demonstrate the way in which these ancestors ought to be teleologically understood. I seek to establish that this view could be reasonably taken as the teleological basis for African theocentric environmental ethics.

In the second part of the section, I attempt to consider the traditional two-fold division of the ancestors into the living ancestors and the ‘living’ dead ancestors. It is in this section where I
argue that both the living ancestors and the ‘living’ dead ancestors complement each other and ultimately with God in inculcating environmental ethical thinking among African communities. In the third part of the chapter, I critically discuss the environmental ethical functions of the ancestors as I explore the nexus between the ancestors and God.

Overall, this chapter is an attempt to explore further the possibility of African environmental ethics from a theocentric and teleological standpoint, but one that is ultimately based on a belief in the existence and purposive role of the ancestors. While I examined how God ought to be taken as the main source of theocentric environmental ethics in chapter four, in this particular chapter I proceed to explore further, the connection between God and the ancestors. I will treat the ancestors as the link between God and the human community such that African theocentric environmental ethics could only make sense if this link between God and the ancestors is realised. Otherwise without the ancestors, the link between God and human beings would be incomplete. Since the ancestors ought to be taken as transmitting God’s intentions to human beings, they therefore ought to be taken as useful in inculcating ethical thinking among human communities.

5.2: The Metaphysical and Epistemic Understanding of the Ancestors

In chapter three, I have established that in the African hierarchy of ontology, existence is understood in such a way that God is thought to occupy the apex of the hierarchy of existence then followed by the ancestors. God and these ancestors are believed to spiritually interact with each other, but in a way that is oriented towards the good of life. In terms of ontological status, unlike God who is conceptualised as a Spiritual Being only, the ancestors are thought to either physically and spiritually exist. According to Magesa:

It has to be kept in mind that the ancestors consist of the founders of the clan.

These are the pristine men and women who originated the lineage, clan or ethnic group and who provide the people with their name(s). But ancestors
also include the dead of the tribe, following the order of primogeniture. They form a chain through the links of which the forces of the elders [now with the community] exercise their vitalising influence on the living generation (Magesa, 1997: 47; see also Tempels, 1959: 42)

This view might reasonably be interpreted to mean and confirm the view that ancestors also occupy an influential theological and teleological role in the African hierarchy of ontology. Unlike God who is somewhat distant\(^{27}\) from the human communities, ancestors are more closer to human communities as they are thought to directly influence what human beings ought to do. These ancestors, I argue, occupy and play a central role in what I see as an African ontology-based and theocentric environmental ethics.

One central argument that I will explore in greater detail in the ensuing sections of this chapter is that some ancestors are actually thought to reside in certain components of the natural environment such as mountains, rivers, trees and even non-human animals such that these ancestors would always strive to safeguard their well-being. Because of their place and role in African environmental ethics, one could plausibly argue that African ontology-based and theocentric environmental ethics is incomplete without these ancestors. These ancestors are physically and spiritually superior to other living human beings in so far as they are thought to be responsible for influencing and inculcating environmental ethical value-systems among living human beings. This is why Dzobo is tempted to argue,

> Just as Jesus and the apostles have become ideal standards of behaviour for Christians, so the exemplary lives of the nananon\(^{28}\) (ancestors) have been used by Africans as models of the ideal life. Consequently, the primary thrust of the

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\(^{27}\) The word ‘distant’ in this context should not be understood to mean that God is far away and totally removed from the human community such that He could be viewed as not being capable of influencing human life. God is distant in so far as He does not directly relate and communicate with human beings like what ancestors are thought to do.

\(^{28}\) Nananon is a word that is used by the Akan people of Ghana and some parts of central and West Africa to generally refer to the ancestors. Although, sometimes the word is precisely used to refer to the living ancestors, in the context in which Dzobo uses it, it generally denotes ancestors in general.
ancestor institution is moral and general human creativity, even though it may
contain some religious elements (Dzobo, 1992: 233).

Although this view could be taken as having an epistemic influence in so far as the ancestors
could be understood as being capable of informing people how to behave rightly, I take it as
also metaphysical. This is because of my supposition that the moral thrust of the ancestors
ought to be preceded by and contained in the ontological relations between ancestors and
human beings. Accordingly, I interpret Dzobo’s view and deliberately overstretch it to
support my view that even ideal environmental ethical thinking of African communities
ought to be meaningfully informed by the ancestor institution because of its emphasis on the
moral life, well-being and human creativity. This is because it is not possible to attain this
tripartite realisation for the moral life, well-being and human creativity without a good
environment. In the context of environmental ethics, I therefore argue that ancestors are
largely responsible for creating and safeguarding an ideal environment in which human
beings can achieve this tripartite goal for the good life, well-being and human creativity.

In the African hierarchy of existence, God and the ancestors are the most superior forces to
human beings in terms of potency although other spirits could also be thought to exist besides
these. The existence of ancestors in African ontology could reasonably demonstrate that
besides God, ancestors ought to be taken as also responsible for complementing people’s
understanding of purposive existence. Since they can easily physically and spiritually interact
and communicate with human beings, ancestors are thought to continuously remind human
beings of the need for purposive existence as well as how human beings ought to relate well
with the environment. To support this metaphysical, epistemic and teleological understanding
of ancestors, Dzobo argues that “due to the superior moral and constructive qualities of the
ancestors, the pattern of their lives and the values and principles they cherish have been used
as normative standards of human conduct” (Dzobo, 1992: 232). This view explains why, for
example, the making of an individual into an ancestor among African communities is not only naturally conferred on the basis of just old age and death, but rather on positive living, adulthood, marriage, procreation, good health and natural death in old age. (See also Dzobo, 1992: 233.) The argument that I seek to maintain here is that ancestors have strong metaphysical, epistemic and teleological obligations and reasons to positively influence human beings and the way they ought to relate with the natural environment. One commonly accepted metaphysical view about the ancestors is that they sometimes exist in components of nature such as in trees, animals, water and the air. So, this metaphysical understanding of them could be plausibly taken as also being capable of influencing the other epistemic view why the environment ought to be given respect.

In my view, in an African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics, ancestors remain useful although their teleological role ought not to be confused with the teleological function of God whom Magesa sees “. . . as Ancestor par excellence” (Magesa, 1997: 47). This is because God is more powerful and influential compared to the ancestors. However, in the African order of existence, although the ancestors cannot be metaphysically equated to God, they also augment the epistemic role that is played by God towards inculcating environmental ethical thinking in various ways that I will proceed to discuss after characterising the two somewhat different but mutual categories of ancestors in the following section.

5.3: The Ancestors and the African Environment

Having examined the place of the ancestors in the African order of existence in chapter three and making a follow up by briefly examining their metaphysical and epistemic understanding in the preceding section, I now proceed to examine the importance of African traditional beliefs in ancestry to environmental ethics. In this endeavour, I intend to assess the African traditional and religious beliefs in the existence of ancestors in African ontology in terms of
how they could be theoretically understood as being linked to African environmental ethical thinking. In chapter four, I have examined the extent to which the African beliefs in the existence of God could be understood in order to comprehend what I conceptualise as a theocentric environmental ethical thinking. In this chapter, I continue to examine the extent to which African beliefs in the existence of ancestors could be teleologically understood as contributing to African environmentalism. First I focus on the dual form of ancestral existence and assess how each of the categories of ancestors relates to, and complements people’s teleological understanding of existence in general, before I proceed to examine their environmental ethical functions, broadly understood.

5.3.1: The Living Ancestors

The dual form of ancestral existence is realised in the first group of ancestors who are conceptualised as the living elders of the family and society. This group that has come to be known as ‘the living ancestors’ normally consists of the responsible elderly family and community members as well as chiefs. These are some sort of sages or wisdom bearers of the family or community at large. This explains why among the Akan for example, the word for ancestor is nanamon and “is conferred upon living chiefs and elders of the society who are usually considered its moral paragons...[as well as its]...character trainers and models of the ideal life” (Dzobo, 1992: 231-2).

Almost across most African communities, the elders are given respect on the basis that their wisdom is indispensable. (See also Bujo, 1998: 200.) Although they are still living, such individuals are seen as ancestors because they occupy the apex of the people’s ontological hierarchy of living persons. This is why I take this group of individuals to constitute part of the ancestors who continue to teach human beings the good way of living well with others and the environment. This view may seem to be unorthodox in most cases since elders are in the common sense seen as one thing and the ancestors as another. In this regard, I transcend
this commonly acceptable understanding of the ancestors and adopt a broader conception in which even the living elders could constitute ancestors.

Also, following this broader conception, these living ancestors remain accountable to the other group of the ‘living’ dead ancestors whom they spiritually link with the people. These living elders or grandparents are responsible for imparting environmental ethical folk wisdom from generation to generation. According to Bujo, “the elderly are the channel through which the wisdom of the ancestors is communicated . . . from them traditional values can be learned” (Bujo, 2009b: 119).

5.3.2: The ‘Living’ Dead Ancestors

The other group of ancestors, who are mostly spiritually revered, are the ‘living’ dead ancestors who would have died physically, but are thought to continue to spiritually exist as they occupy the spiritual world. However, it must be emphasised that not all human beings that die qualify to be ancestors. (See also Chuka, 2012: 272; Dzobo, 1992: 231.) These ‘living’ dead ancestors are thought to occupy the spiritual world because these are no longer living physically, but that they exist as ancestral spirits. Magesa refers to them as spirits and argues that “. . . they are active beings who are either disincarnate human persons or powers residing in natural phenomena such as trees, rocks, or lakes” (Magesa, 1997: 35-6). The reason why the second category of ancestors is regarded as ‘living’ is that, despite having departed the physical world, they are considered to be capable of continuing to exist without the physical body. They are regarded as living because of the role that they play towards helping the living members of the family, society and the environment to achieve their respective goals as communities continue to remember, name and generally keep in touch with them. (See also Chivaura, 2006b: 234.)
The ‘living’ dead ancestors are thought to be spiritually connected to, and closer to, God as they are no longer physically living in this corporeal world although they continue to live spiritually. Notwithstanding their absence in the physical world, they are thought to continue to link the physical world with the spiritual world. This link is realised in the way ancestors are thought to play a very important role of shaping and mediating the relations between God and human beings as well as the relations between human beings and the environment.

However, notwithstanding this two-fold division of the ancestors into the above categories, in this discussion I take an umbrella reference to them as just ‘ancestors’ as I focus on their environmental ethical role. This is because, despite their ontological differences, most of what they aim to achieve towards environmentalism is generally focussed towards augmenting God’s purpose of the well-being of the environment.

5.4: The Tripartite Role of the Ancestors in Theocentric Environmental Ethics

In this section, I examine the three roles of the ancestors and what I think ought to be the epistemic functions of the ancestors in African ontology. First I discuss the way ancestors are taken as the messengers of God and how such a view could have a bearing on environmental ethics. I also proceed in the next section to assess the way the environment is taken as the habitat of the ancestors and how this view could be taken to influence environmental ethical thinking. In the last section, I attempt to discuss the vitalist understanding of the ancestors and how I think such a view ought to inform environmental ethics as well.

5.4.1: Ancestors as Messengers of God

Ancestors are by and large conceptualised as closer to God than human beings and this explains why sub-Saharan African communities continue to approach God through the ancestors. Ancestors are thus functionaries of God and at the same time intermediaries between God and human beings. Magesa holds a similar view as he argues that “the
ancestors, who are in constant contact with both God and humanity, often ‘intrude’ into the life of humanity with specific intentions” (Magesa, 1997: 35). These intentions which the ancestors have for human beings do not emanate from the ancestors themselves. They come from God and are only transmitted to human beings through the ancestors who are thought to be closer to God. This is why it is plausible to contend that human beings have obligations to also respect the ancestors. Because of this understanding, therefore, one of the ultimate purposes of the ancestors in African ontology is to further God’s ultimate purposes for life, harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival for all created beings.

As God’s creations and messengers as well, ancestors are also the extensions of God and as such, they cannot have a purpose or purposes that are independent of those of God. While this view is true in one sense, the specific role of the ancestors ought to be understood as being different from that of God. Otherwise if ancestors are seen to be inculcating purposes that are contrary to those for which God has for humanity such as reverence and respect for life and God’s creation, harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival, they are to be regarded as alien or evil spirits that do not have any connection with God and the human community. This view is ideally shaped by the teleological view of existence that I have discussed in chapter three in which all beings in the hierarchy of ontology such as God, ancestors, human beings and non-human beings ought to be oriented towards purposive existence.

Because of the nature of the link between God, ancestors and the environment in African ontology, a tripartite obligation for human beings to respect nature, ancestors and God is therefore obvious. It is understandable because nature, ancestors and God are thought to be closely related to each other such that both God and the ancestors could be seen as inhabiting in the natural environment. This points to the inherent pantheistic tendencies in African philosophy, which I suppose to largely shape its environmental ethics. Parrinder confirms this
trend in African ontology as he argues that in African ontology, “many varieties of religious thought like pantheistic, monotheistic and animistic strands can be observed” (Parrinder, 2011: 86).

According to Eric Steinhart, pantheism is a view that is based on the belief that the whole universe including the natural environment are all identical to the divine element or God (Steinhart, 2004: 63). For this reason, pantheism becomes a largely monist view of reality in which nature and everything else are linked to the divine or God. (See also Steinhart, 2004: 63.) Following the same religious and philosophical view, I therefore submit that African ontology closely associates the natural environment with the ancestors such that the environment ought to be revered and regarded as highly sacred because it is closely associated with the ancestors who are also taken as God’s emissaries.

5.4.2: The Environment as Habitat of the Ancestors

The belief that ancestors are omnipresent and are capable of residing in all components of nature is prevalent among African communities. It is also one such belief that I suspect could be useful in teaching human beings to respect everything, including the natural environment. (See also Magesa, 1997: 55.) According to Magesa “human participation and solidarity, not only with God, the ancestors and other spirits, but also with other elements of creation, are essential aspects of the enhancement of life” (Magesa, 1997: 52). Environmental ethical guidance and stewardship are, therefore, considered to be the ultimate duties for which human beings have obligations towards the ancestors and the environment at large. This view is partly informed by the view discussed in the last section that the ancestors are considered to be enforcers of God’s commands, and therefore, human beings ought to have obligations towards the ancestors whom they ought to revere and respect. (See also Murove, 2004: 198-200.)
Besides the understanding that ancestors are the messengers of God who are also capable of transmitting theocentric environmental ethics, the other environmental ethical import of beliefs in role of the ancestors is also informed by the African cosmological assumption that existence is both physical and spiritual. (See also Mangena, 2013: 40.) This implies that the occurrence of certain events in this natural world should not be understood from a purely mechanistic view of nature, but that the spiritual dimension also, like the existence of ancestors is central to African ontology. Following a belief in the ancestral world and the omnipresence of these ancestors, some of the environmental norms that I suspect could be largely informed by this spiritual dimension are for example, reverence for thick forests, water pools, rivers and mountains. As informed by the ancestors who are usually considered to be the co-custodians of sub-Saharan African environmental ethics, these aspects of the environment such as animals, natural forests, water pools, rivers and mountains are considered to be holy and sacred.

The environmental ethical import of the above thinking is centred on the assumption that it is these components of the environment that spiritual beings like the living dead ancestors inhabit. It is therefore such that any disturbance on these components of nature will also disturb the spiritual beings and ancestors, whose purpose is to safeguard the life, harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival of all beings. On the other hand, in respect of the purpose of human beings towards the ancestors and nature, it seems reasonable that human beings have a purpose to strike right relations with both the ancestors and the environment for the good and well-being of all. This tripartite relationship becomes the basis upon which ancestors could be teleologically understood in this regard.

Rare and endangered non-human animal species that are found in the environment such as the python, pangolin, the rhinoceros, the elephant and the buffalo are animals that are believed to be closely related with the ancestors. These are animals that I suspect ought to be
protected because of the role that they play in maintaining the stability and diversity of the natural environment. In my view, these species are closely associated with the belief in ancestral spirits because they are normally given as sacrifices to the ancestors in order for the ancestors to have good relations with the human community. The environmental ethical import of this view is that, since these animals are rare and endangered, human beings ought to have an obligation to preserve and protect them in order to maintain good relations with both the ancestors and the environment.

The other reason why some of these animals ought to be respected and revered is that it is also thought that sometimes ancestors can reside in some of these animals too. This is why they are regarded as sacred species that ought not to be used as sources of either meat, labour or any other domestic use as this is as good as to disturbing the peace and well-being of the ancestors and the environment. These practices are thought to quickly endanger these animals because they can easily go into extinction as they are normally rare and very few. This is why such animals are protected by the practice centred on the belief that there are relations between human communities and animals through totems that are based on these animals.

The beliefs and practices associated with the ancestors in African ontology could be meaningfully taken as largely informing African environmentalism. Such beliefs and practices strongly connect the ancestral world with the physical world of human persons and the environment such that there ought to be a strong link in the teleological end of these three. Accordingly, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Report of April 2010 reminds us of the place and teleological role of ancestors in African ontology in the following exposition:

In general, traditional religion in Africa is characterized by belief in a supreme being who created and ordered the world but is often experienced as distant or unavailable to humans. Lesser divinities or spirits who are more accessible are sometimes believed to act as intermediaries. A number of traditional myths
explain the creation and ordering of the world and provide explanations for contemporary social relationships and norms. Lapsed social responsibilities or violations of taboos are widely believed to result in hardship, suffering and illness for individuals or communities and must be countered with ritual acts to re-establish order, harmony and well-being. Ancestors, considered to be in the spirit world, are believed to be part of the human community. Believers hold that ancestors sometimes act as emissaries between living beings and the divine, helping to maintain social order and withdrawing their support if the living behave wrongly. Religious specialists, such as diviners and healers, are called upon to discern what infractions are at the root of misfortune and to prescribe the appropriate rituals or traditional medicines to set things right (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Report, 2010: 6).

Although this exposé is not so explicit about the epistemic role of the ancestors towards African environmental ethics, of note here is the emphasis on the way ancestors ought to be understood as playing a part in the establishment of order, harmony and well-being in the world which I have discussed as some of the ultimate purposes for existence. This view could reasonably be taken to imply that ancestors ought to be understood as capable of informing African environmental ethics. As intermediaries and emissaries between God and human beings, ancestors must have a purposive role of making the environment and human beings realise their respective purposes for existence. They do so by helping to maintain the life, order, harmony as well as well-being and survival of both nature and human persons through chastising human beings so that they could realise their purpose for existence. This is done so that human beings could behave in certain ways that promote the harmony, well-being and survival of all life and the environment at large. This teleological view is the understanding
that I have as I interrogate the role of the ancestors towards instilling environmental thinking in African ontology.

Following this teleological understanding of the existence of ancestors in African ontology as discussed in chapter three, I contend that, this teleological understanding of the ancestors is also useful to African environmental ethics. In this regard, I take as useful, Wiredu’s argument that “there is a two sided concept of stewardship in the management of the environment involving obligations to both ancestors and descendants which motivates environmental carefulness, all things being equal” (Wiredu, 1994: 46). Implicit in Wiredu’s argument here, which I find to be convincing, is the claim that environmental ethical thinking among African communities is inculcated in the belief in ancestry. This is because ancestors are thought to be closely connected with the natural environment since they are thought to jointly own it together with the highest God. So, by virtue of respecting the ancestors, human beings will also be showing respect for God and the natural environment. The basic duty to respect the ancestors becomes an important function of the teleological understanding of existence. This is because the ancestors occupy an important place in the order of existence where all beings are ultimately oriented towards purposive existence. At the same time, respect for the environment is also as good as respect for the ancestors, and ultimately, God.

African ontology is characterised by beliefs in the teleological role of the ancestors towards environmental ethics. This view stems from the understanding of an ethical thinking that embodies good relations with the ancestors, and also one that respects the natural environment. This view is also shaped, partly, by the conviction that the purposive end of the ancestors is almost inseparable from that of God who intends to maintain life, balance and harmony as well as well-being and survival for all human and non-human communities. As enforcers of good ethical behaviour, ancestors therefore have a role and purpose of helping human beings to achieve their purposive end in life, one of which I suspect is to live well
with the environment. This can only be achieved when human beings respect all the levels in the hierarchy of existence such that there is balance and harmony as well as well-being and survival for all beings which the ancestors also seek to promote as these are the fundamental purposes for existence.

The ancestors are thought to give ethical guidance on how human beings ought to relate with others, the departed and the natural environment at large. Since they are omnipresent, the ancestors teach and command people to respect all life and, or beings. For example, ancestors are believed to give guidance in terms of how people ought to respect and relate well with the natural environment. Such guidance pertains to how human beings should treat components such as plants, soils, rivers, the air, and animals, all of which are inhabited by these ancestors.

5.4.3: The Vitalist View of the Ancestors

The reasons upon which ancestors ought to be respected are twofold. The ancestors must be respected not only because they are God’s emissaries who are almost as powerful as God, but also because it is believed that “God has granted the ancestors qualitatively more powerful life force over their descendants” (Magesa, 1997: 47). So, for both reasons, ancestors deserve to be respected and appealed to, as sources of environmental ethical conduct. The appeal to ancestors in this regard is reasonable because ancestors are thought to be ontologically closer to human communities than God. While human obligations to ancestors are not exclusively different from those that they have towards God, the appeal to ancestors ought to be necessary towards grounding environmentalism because these ancestors are believed to be easily accessible as opposed to God. Accordingly, Wiredu argues that “of all the duties owed to the ancestors none is more imperious than that of husbanding the resources of the land so as to leave it in good shape for posterity” (Wiredu, 1994: 46). This view emphasises the need to safeguard the well-being, survival and existence of the environment. Following this view, it is important to realise that environmental ethical responsibility is a duty that human beings
have towards the ancestors because they transmit and convey God’s wishes and commands to human beings.

Besides the living ancestors and the living dead ancestors identified by Dzobo (1992: 231), there is another twofold division of ancestors that is central to, and very powerful within the African environment. These are the family ancestral spirits and the territorial ancestral spirits. This categorisation is based on the respective ethical roles that these ancestors play. Taringa identifies these two types of ancestors namely family ancestral spirits (midzimu) and territorial ancestral spirits (mhondoro), although he limits them to the Shona worldview, which is what I do not intend to do here (Taringa, 2006: 198). Of these two types of ancestors, territorial ancestral spirits are the ones that I see to be mostly useful towards inculcating environmental ethical thinking. This is because territorial ancestors are actually given reference to as “guardians of the land” (Taringa, 2006: 198). This reference to the territorial ancestors denotes them as the owners of the environment and the ones that are actually responsible for protecting the natural environment. This is why Taringa suspects that the territorial ancestors are the ones that are associated with traditional African environmental religious beliefs (Taringa, 2006: 198). In the light of what Taringa observes about these territorial ancestors and their environmental ethical role in the African community, I am tempted to call these territorial ancestors ‘guardians of the environment’ or the ‘owners of the environment’. This is because these ancestors are vital forces that are as omnipotent as God and therefore concerned with how human beings ought to relate well with their vital natural surrounding.

However, this is not to confirm that the family ancestral spirits are not useful to environmental ethics as loosely implied in Taringa’s argument above. This is because all the ancestors are responsible for the ethical conduct of human communities. Accordingly, Wiredu argues that:
The influence of the ancestors is as vivid in the African imagination as that of the living elders of the clan and actually more authoritative morally, since the ancestors are, as a rule, supposed to judge the conduct of the living and reward or punish them from a position of moral unimpeachability to which no mortal clan lay claim (Wiredu, 1994: 46)

Implicit in Wiredu’s view is that in situations where human beings and communities show ethical incontinence towards nature, ancestors could come in as some vital forces that are responsible for correcting such moral incontinence. This kind of ethical incontinence could be, for example, through human physical disturbance and contamination by swimming, washing and relieving oneself in water sources like rivers or water pools where aquatic creatures find their livelihood. If such situations of moral incontinence occur, ancestors can actually retaliate in various ways that include drying up those water sources or actually intimidating human beings by the temporary or permanent disappearance of such moral agents. Although some of the punitive and restrictive measures that ancestors may take could be more severe, the ultimate aim is on giving human beings ethical guidance in terms of how nature ought to be treated.

As vital forces, ancestors are also believed to help in inculcating environmental ethical awareness and making human beings to conform to certain environmental ethical norms through punishing the living if they behave wrongly by treating the environment without due respect or if they fail to respect them with certain rituals and annual festivals that are meant to cement ethical relations between the human community, the ancestors and other non-human communities like the natural environment. In this respect, it is crucial to make a distinction between what grounds theoretical environmental ethics and what would lead human beings to uphold these. The obligations to respect and revere the ancestors and nature are at the core of philosophically anchoring these environmental norms. Ancestors put certain obligations on
the human community so that they can treat the environment with respect. These obligations, like the need to revere nature and sacred forests and animals could theoretically ground environmental norms because the ancestors live there. On the other hand, that would lead human beings to uphold these environmental norms that include the obligation to respect ancestors which is one of the ultimate purposes of human persons. So, fear of offending ancestors through mistreating the natural environment ultimately leads human beings to uphold these environmental norms for the good of the environment, which I take to be having its own purpose apart from serving that of human beings.

In African ontology, it is assumed that since the ancestors are vital forces that reside in the environment, there ought to be good vitalist relations between human beings, the ancestors and the natural environment. This vitalist relationship is strengthened by human beings as they sometimes participate in some rituals and festivals like brewing beer for the ancestors and slaughtering certain animals for them. On the contrary however, Horsthemke sees the “sacrificial, ritual slaughter of domestic animals or killing and wearing for ornamentation of wild animals [as] moral anthropocentrism” (Horsthemke, 2015: 3). However, Horsthemke seems to lack the teleological appreciation and appeal of some of these practices and rituals. All these practices are thought to be aimed at maintaining the harmonious living, peace and coexistence between the human community and almost all the components of the natural environment and not just to satisfy human needs. In this case, respect for life, harmony and balance as well as continued survival and well-being of all teleologically oriented beings in the environment ought to be taken as the ultimate purposive goals for which the ancestors wish to promote.

Magesa concurs with the above view as he argues that “. . . God and the ancestors desire peace and order above all” (Magesa, 1997: 61). This is why I share Ugwuanyi’s sentiment that “it is impossible for individuals to dissociate themselves from the community, rituals,
festivals, worship or sacrifices. All these require individual inputs. Individuals in the society are expected to conform to religious rules and regulations for the good and well-being of everyone in the community” (Ugwuanyi, 2011b: 112). This understanding of African religion, especially the vitalist view and perceptive of the ancestors and its conformist stance is useful to my conception of an ancestor-based African environmental ethics. The environmental ethical import of this view is that individuals would be scared of disturbing their relations with the ancestors and the natural environment at large. To confirm this view, Okoye Chuka argues:

The African belief system seems to be mythologically bound and conformist in its structure since everyone dreads the outcome of any mishap from the gods\textsuperscript{29}. However, it seems rewarding since in the practice of this there is an environmental preservation and ecological equilibrium (Chuka, 2012: 272-3).

In the African worldview, ancestors play a very significant role of regulating human conduct in so far as human beings relate and interact with animals, the physical and non-physical environment. Ancestors are, therefore, believed to chastise those individuals that violate certain norms that have to do with how humanity ought to relate with their surroundings.

African religion is largely vitalist and puts strong emphasis on ethical interconnectedness of all beings whose well-being and survival the ancestors intend to safeguard. The basis upon which ancestors safeguard the survival of all beings is intrinsic value which is thought to be inherent in all beings, including physical and non-physical aspects of the environment. According to Chuka “. . . the African system ensures that the African sees an intrinsic value in every environmental element ranging from land, herbs, water bodies, trees, animals, to human beings” (Chuka, 2012: 275). Intrinsic value, which is the inherent value or inherent

\textsuperscript{29} I take it that ancestors are part of these gods in African ontology that Chuka makes reference to. The reason why I see these African ancestors to be gods is because of the polytheistic nature of African religion and its view of God and the other gods and forces.
worthy of a being by virtue of having a telos, is closely knit with the idea of harmony. This is because of my suspicion that all beings have a telos and that they ought to live life well in harmony. To this end, with the exception of a few cases, it is plausible to contend that living in harmony and a balanced life as well as achieving well-being and survival are in themselves, or intrinsically, good. It is therefore such that it would be reasonable to contend that the purposes of all beings are to live well in harmony and balance as well as to achieve well-being and continued survival. At the same time, failure to realise this supposed intrinsic value of these elements of the environment is viewed as a sign of disrespect for the inherent value of all teleological beings that ancestors have a duty to protect.

On the other hand, the ontological and ethical dimensions of the ancestors in African philosophy is realised in the way ancestors are seen as spiritually binding human beings with the natural environment. This is why Chivaura is tempted to look at the African environment as the ‘spiritual environment’ (Chivaura, 2006b: 235). The environment is considered as having a spiritual dimension because it has certain spiritual connections and relations with the ancestors that human beings have obligations to maintain. Otherwise if human beings disturb the well-being of the environment, they would also be disturbing its teleological end and intrinsic value of various components of nature. This also has a bearing on the relations between human beings and the ancestors who are enforcers of environmental ethical conduct from God, as they are also thought to exist in the environment as spiritual beings. In this regard, although he does not clearly articulate the teleological dimension of being and its orientation towards environmentalism like what I attempt here, Chivaura almost captures the gist of my argument in the following:

The environment as the abode of the ancestors is sacred in the African worldview and the destruction of nature is forbidden in Declarations of the Ma’at and hunhu/ubuntu. If the environment is destroyed, the ecosystem will
be disturbed. The elements will rage. There will be no mountains or forests to restrain them. The winds will roar and the clouds will disappear. The sun will scorch the earth and the rivers will dry up. There will be no rain and the deserts will set in. The ancestors and cosmic forces will desert the land and go to other areas where they can find abode and carry on with their respective functions there (Chivaura, 2006b: 235).

While I take Chivaura’s view above as premising my argument for ancestor based-environmentalism, I am also cautious of the intensity with which he supports his argument on the implications of destroying nature. I therefore argue that it is not always the case that if the environment is mistreated, for example by simply torturing one animal, say a monkey for fun, the results or punishment from the ancestors will be as severe as implicit in Chivaura’s argument. Although the validity of the belief systems and claims that Chivaura makes in the above about the ethical implications of relations of humans and the ancestors is not explicitly clear, such conceptions and belief systems however, are still useful in safeguarding the African environment. This is because African religions still respect the place and role of the ancestors in the way Chivaura observes.

Overall, in the hierarchy of ontology, since the ancestors are vital forces that are thought to be closer to God, they are also jointly responsible for determining the fate of the human beings and the environment, just like what has been observed with a theocentric view of environmental ethics. Following this perspective, I take as useful, Chivaura’s argument that “the ancestors, spirits and elements are personified as cosmic forces” (Chivaura, 2006b: 235). In African cosmology, ancestors are considered to be cosmic forces in so far as they have causal relations and implications in the light of how human beings interact with the environment. It would be worthy accepting Wiredu’s argument that “it is a fact that traditional African conceptions of the external world enjoin environmental circumspection,
for the environment is believed, in various parts, to be changed with forces or inhabited by extra-human beings superior to human in power and sometimes in morals” (Wiredu, 1994: 31). These are what I have discussed here as the ancestors whom I consider to be influential to African ontology-based environmental ethics.

5.5: Conclusion

The attempt in this particular chapter has been to continue to interrogate the nature of African ontology-based and theocentric environmental ethics. Unlike chapter four, which discusses theocentric environmental ethics in terms of how it is informed by God, this chapter is more focussed on the ancestors. It attempted to examine how the metaphysical understanding of the ancestors could also contribute to theocentric environmental ethics. The argument put forth here is that, just like God, ancestors could contribute significantly to African theocentric environmental ethics. However, it is also noted that while ancestors are not equated to God in terms of both ontological status and role, they can also meaningfully augment God in fostering an environmentalism that stems from the African understanding of existence and teleology.
Chapter Six: The Moral Status of Nature

6.1: Introduction

In chapters four and five, I examined the African ontological conceptions of God and the ancestors respectively in terms of their teleological and normative import for environmental ethics. In this chapter, I continue to focus on the African hierarchy of ontology and its significance for environmental ethics, but now with particular focus on the moral status of nature. By ‘moral status’, I mean the ethical standing that could be accorded to a being or object for its own sake such that it could be given ethical consideration and respect. Although the question of moral status has traditionally been understood from either the individualistic or the holistic view (Metz, 2012a: 387), I take a pluralist approach to the question of moral status in African environmental ethics.

The central argument that I develop in this chapter is that the teleological understanding of existence positively contributes to a plausible African conception of moral status of nature. In this respect, I address one important question that weaves throughout the discourse of environmental ethics. This is the question of whether the natural environment consisting of both non-human living beings and non-living beings ought to have moral or ethical standing such that human beings should have ethical obligations that are independent of their duties and obligations towards fellow human beings. Although I have partly addressed this question in chapters four and five when I argued that duties to God and the ancestors could plausibly ground duties to the environment, in this chapter I go further than this position and critically examine the question of whether nature has moral status. By ‘nature’, I will be focussed on both the living beings such as non-human animals and plants and non-living beings such as the air, water, and soils. In addressing the question of moral status with regard to these beings, I intend to offer an attractive African ontology-based view of environmental ethics that stems
from the understanding of the human community and the person as they relate with various aspects of nature.

My response to the question of whether nature has moral status is in the affirmative. In asserting this position, my argument is largely informed by African ontological conceptions of being as well as some teleological arguments for existence. While Ojomo has attempted to offer a view of moral status that is based on life and telos as well, she has limited her focus to living beings alone. (See Ojomo, 2010: 53.) This is why I seek to surpass such an understanding of moral status as I also offer a defence for the position that human beings ought to be understood to have ethical obligations towards non-human beings. This justification is based on a number of reasons such as telos, vitality, inherent value of non-human beings and sentience. I also seek to establish that these beings must have a purpose that is independent of that of human beings.

Overall, in this chapter, I argue that environmental ethical thinking in sub-Saharan Africa could be meaningfully informed by teleological and normative conceptions of existence in African philosophy where nature ought to be understood to have purpose and moral status. First, I interrogate the teleological connection between human beings and the natural environment. I seek to establish that there must be a teleological connection between human beings and nature such that nature ought to be given respect on that teleological basis. Having established that teleological foundation as partly the basis for the respect of nature, I also proceed to espouse the view that non-human living beings such as animals and plants and non-living beings such as the air, water and soils must have ethical standing. I submit this view in the two respective sections focussing on ‘the moral status of non-human living beings’ and the last one on ‘the moral status of non-living beings’. Ultimately, I intend to conclude that nature must have moral status.
6.2: The Teleological Link between the Human Community and the Environment

In order to appreciate what I will discuss in this chapter with relation to the moral status of nature, I see the need to first address the question of whether there ought to be any teleological connection between the human community and the natural environment. I therefore address this question in this section where I mainly focus on the teleological connection between human beings and nature. The focus on such a link would make an easier transition from telos to moral status when I focus on the moral status of nature in the next two sections after this one. I therefore seek to validate my argument that teleological conceptions of existence in African ontology could credibly support the recognition of the inherent value and moral status of the natural world as a whole. (See also Oruka and Juma, 1994: 117.) Overall, I argue that there is a teleological connection between the human community and nature. This teleological interconnection is useful here because my understanding of the moral status of nature is largely informed and shaped by the way I see the teleological relationship between the human community and the natural environment. This natural environment consists of both living and non-living beings.

First, it is important to realise that the teleological framework of being is closely linked to a conception of the moral status of the environment. There must be some fundamental teleological connection between human beings and nature such that nature must have purpose and eventually moral status. In order to establish this teleological connection and argue that nature has both purpose and moral status, I take a pluralist approach to the teleological grounds for moral status in African ontology. This pluralist approach is based on a variety of teleological appeals to moral status such as appeal to African biocentrism or vitalism, sentience, subject of a life, well-being and degree of vital force. Notwithstanding that these views may not necessarily cohere well together and their different implications on moral
status, I argue that they all contribute in various ways to a plausibly acceptable view of teleological environmental ethics in African ontology.

Although it may not be so explicit, the way environmental ethics is broadly understood as concerned with the relations between human beings and various aspects of nature must be a strong reason to believe that there must be teleological connections between human beings and the environment. This view is based on the purposive ends for existence that I see to be shared between the human community and the natural environment. Also, these teleological connections partly come from the fact that human beings exist in human communities and in the natural environment as well. Although this view may sound to be fairly anthropocentric, which is a view that I do not intend to legitimise in African philosophy, it is shaped by the understanding that the teleological and ethical basis for respecting nature is that it is where human beings find their habitat in, and also that nature itself ought to live and flourish and achieve its purpose for existing and well-being. Interpreted teleologically, this view could be taken to imply that one ultimate purpose of nature is to live well.

In addition to living well, nature itself must have an additional purpose of supporting the well-being and survival of both human beings and non-human living creatures. At the same time, another purpose of conscious human beings could be taken to be the need to safeguard the well-being and purpose of nature. In this case, the nature of the environment as a being is such that it exists for the well-being of not only human beings that live in it, but also for the well-being of particular non-human animals and non-animate beings that constitute it. So, in order for the individual human beings and the environment to achieve their respective individual goals and purposes for existence in life as was discussed in chapter four, human beings ought to have obligations to do so in a manner that takes into consideration the purposes and goals of the other human communities, non-human communities and the natural environment as well.
Apart from the well-being as one useful value for understanding telos in African philosophy, there is also the appeal to life. This view is commonly expressed as the vitalist dimension to existence. In African ontology, the human being must be teleologically understood as a purposive being that ought to achieve its ends or purposes in life but without necessarily disadvantaging other beings that also have independent lives and goals to those of human beings. This view is also informed partly by what I see as the direct moral duties that human persons must have towards other human beings, non-human living beings and the natural environment as I will discuss in the next two sections. First, it is important to realise that both the human communities depend on various aspects of nature for their livelihood. Accordingly, although it could be one anthropocentric basis for treating the environment well, it must follow that nature must have a purpose of furthering the life or vitality of human beings. This could be taken as one anthropocentric reason why nature has a purpose of furthering life in general, while at the same time human beings have a purpose to safeguard the well-being of nature. This is because human beings and nature can be positively or negatively affected by individual human actions.

However, it must be reasonable to appreciate that not everything that human beings do will always affect the environment negatively. For example, it is acceptable that an action like taking a single dog and taming it and keeping it isolated at home in a fenced yard for the rest of its life does not necessarily affect nature negatively. However, following the African biocentric view of environmental ethics, as commonly expressed in the vitalist view of existence, such an action remains suspect in the light of the fact that a dog is an animate being that has vital force and its own telos for being such that it ought to be treated in a dignified way. This is because such a dog also ought to achieve its teleological goals for life such as survival, harmonious living and well-being, all of which are independent of those of human beings.
The teleological connection between human beings and nature remains at the core of my understanding of what must be an African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics. In this kind of environmental ethics, the teleological view of existence, which is the basis for the moral status of nature in the next two sections is not shaped by the idea that the environment belongs to the human community as implicit in some radical anthropocentric views. It is based on the understanding that, human beings and the natural environment are teleological counterparts. They are teleological counterparts in so far as they all ought to attain some meaning and purpose for existing. Accordingly, the nature of existence of the human being and nature must therefore be understood as being based on possession of life, co-existence and realisation of their independent purposes for existing. This is why I take as useful Bujo’s contention that in African environmental philosophy, “total realisation of the self is impossible as long as one does not peacefully co-exist with minerals, plants and animals” (Bujo, 1998: 208). The reason why this view is acceptable is that human beings must treat with respect, as they co-exist with these beings which also in some way possess life and vital forces in their own right such that they have independent purposes to those of human beings.

This view above is equally a bio-centric, vitalist and teleological view which I suspect is compatible with my understanding of African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics. Ojomo espouses almost a similar view of teleological environmental ethics although hers is limited to a fairly bio-centric view of existence. For her, “all life forms are moral patients –entities to which we should accord moral standing . . . it is its telos
(purpose) that gives each individual organism inherent worth and all living organism possess this worth equally\(^3\) because all individual living beings have telos” (Ojomo, 2010: 53).

While I accept Ojomo’s argument for moral status that is based on telos, my teleological view of moral status goes beyond her focus on living beings alone as I include even non-living beings such as rocks, soils and the air as also capable of having purpose for existing. This is on the basis that these beings must have their purpose for being although it may not be equated to that of human beings. Following this view, therefore, I argue that the ethical obligations that human beings have towards the environment should be informed, ideally by relating well with aspects of the natural environment such as non-human animals, plants, the air, the soil, rocks and water bodies. These components are not only ‘moral counterparts’ to the human community, but that they also have their teleological ends which can either be enhanced or negatively affected. In this case, as I borrow from the Aristotelian view of telos, I depart from his functional understanding of the purpose of being. I find the Aristotelian view to be strongly anthropocentric as it puts emphasis on the function of a being. (See also Aristotle: NE, Book 1: 1059a.) Such a view is therefore incompatible with my understanding of African teleologically oriented environmental ethics where components such as rocks, the soil and the air are considered as also having their respective purposes for being. The basis upon which these beings must have purpose is centred on some of the following reasons: First, non-living beings such as rocks do have aesthetic value such that they can be appreciated as they are, or that such value could also diminish. For this reason, although rocks and soils do not have welfare, they must have a purpose to exist as aesthetic objects.

Also, some of the living beings that are naturally taken as having purpose for being such as human beings, non-human animals and functional things like knives cannot sometimes

\(^3\) I have italicised Ojomo’s use of the word ‘equally’ in this context because, while I agree with her argument for according moral status on the basis of purpose, my point of departure is on her attempt to grant equal moral status to all living beings.
achieve their respective purposes without some of these non-living beings. In the case of rocks for example, they can even be used to sharpen a knife so that it achieves its purpose of cutting well, while human beings could also use them to build their shelter and live a meaningful and purposive life. Although Horsthemke (2015: 13) could take these reasons as confirming the anthropocentric orientation of African environmental ethics, I argue to the contrary. I actually take these reasons as the basis why all beings must be taken as having some purpose for being despite the fact that they can be taken and interpreted to imply the granting of instrumental value rather than intrinsic value to such aspects of the environment.

Also implicit in the bio-centric, vitalist and teleological views which are mainly characteristic of African environmental ethics is the appeal to sentience. Generally understood, sentience could be taken to refer to the ability of any being to feel and experience pleasure, pain or consciousness. (See also Varner 2001: 192.) The aspect of sentience is important because it is capable of determining whether a given being will achieve its purpose for existing or not. Because of its emphasis on pleasure, pain and consciousness, all of which can determine whether a life or being can be better or worse, sentience must be closely linked to teleology. Although he does not focus on African environmentalism in particular, Taylor also gives us a generally acceptable understanding of what sentience-based environmental ethics entail which I suspect could be reasonably taken as a useful in determining the teleological end of any being in African ontology-based environmental ethics. For him, “quite independently of the duties we owe to our fellow humans, we are morally required to do or refrain from doing certain acts in so far as those acts bring benefit or harm to wild living things in the natural world” (Taylor, 1986: 10).

As I interpret the above view from an African philosophical standpoint, I argue that this is also a useful vitalist and welfarist criterion for determining moral status, although it must be understood in the context of the African hierarchy of existence. Following my vitalist,
sentience-based and welfarist view of African environmental ethics, while all beings that live life should be given moral status, I admit that it is not possible to grant all beings equal moral status, and hence the appeal to sentience is sometimes justifiable. This is because all beings do not occupy the same level of existence in the African hierarchy of existence. In such a hierarchy, forces or non-animate beings such as rocks do not have sentience and are therefore taken as lower forces that have lesser purpose compared to other animate beings that have sentience and welfare.

Closely related but different from the sentience-based view of environmental ethics is the idea of being or simply ontological status which I also take as the other view informing the teleological understanding of African environmental ethics. This view is compatible with the consideration of non-human beings especially non-animate beings in African environmental ethics. By ‘ontological status’, I mean the beingness of a thing or its general existence as a being. Since my discussion is not limited to the ontological and teleological status of living things alone as implicit in the sentience-based view above, according to this view there are other non-living beings or non-animate beings such as the soil, air and rocks whose beingness must be safeguarded by human beings because their beingness or existence is independent of them. Although I take a pluralist view to the dimensions of telos in African ontology, I go beyond these bio-centric and sentience-based views as I envisage African ontology-based communitarian environmental ethics that is based on beingness. This view takes into consideration even non sentient beings, phenomenon and objects like rocks, water, air and soils as having purpose like I have argued here. The basis for sustaining such a view is what I discuss as the need to take into consideration the beingness and purpose for being of which I suspect is teleologically oriented towards environmental ethical thinking.

Most attempts in the general discourse of environmental ethics limit human environmental ethical obligations to living things in the natural environment. However, my conception of
environmental ethics extends beyond this bio-centric view of environmental ethics because of its pluralist approach to conceptions of *telos* and moral status as well. It considers both the living beings and non-living beings as all having purpose for existence such that they could also be understood to have moral status. This is because some of the actions that human persons may do to the natural environment could either affect its biological, vitalist dimension, its sentience, its well-being, its *beingness* and eventually its *telos*. In view of this, Tangwa argues that “as human beings, we carry the whole weight of moral responsibility and obligations for the world on our shoulders” (Tangwa, 2004: 388). This understanding of the ethical role of human persons towards the natural environment could be justified by the view that, despite the varying degrees of vital force and purpose as argued here, nature must have moral status. This view is what I now proceed to discuss and justify in the next two sections where I focus on the moral status of non-human living beings and non-living beings respectively.

6.3: The Moral Status of Non-Human Living Beings

In the previous section I have provided a background to the teleological link between human beings and nature as a whole. I find such teleological connection to be useful to the understanding of the question of moral status which I now proceed to focus on. In this section I make a follow-up to that teleological connection and intend to proceed to give a detailed analysis and critical examination of the moral status of non-human living beings. I use the phrase ‘non-human living beings’ to mean all beings that are not necessarily human, but that exist or live life such as wild and domesticated animals as well as plants which all exist as living beings in a narrow sense as contrasted with everything that is imbued with vital force.

I focus on the moral status of non-human living beings as being strongly informed by the African ontological and teleological views of existence. Working on the teleological orientation of existence as discussed in chapter three and in the previous section, I critically
examine the extent to which the moral status of non-human living beings is grounded on the *telos* of these beings. Following such an ontological and teleological understanding of *being*, I argue that in order to determine the moral status of either an animal or a plant that exists, it is first important to understand what an animal or plant is, as well as whether its existence or non-existence is of any purposive function.

Like I have indicated in chapter three and partly in the previous section, within the African ontological hierarchy, non-human animals and plants are vital forces by virtue of possession of life. Despite being commonly referred to as the ‘lower forces’ these non-human animals and plants that possess life have their own vital force such that they complement the teleological dimension of existence. These are beings that also live their own independent lives to those of human beings. Some of these beings such as animals could also even have independent goals, hopes and desires of those of human beings, which human beings themselves may not necessarily be aware of. This could explain why different animal species also mate and produce offspring and look after them just like what human beings do. Similarly other trees and flowers also live, grow and blossom and in the end produce flowers and fruits that eventually add on to the beauty of life. All these could plausibly be taken as some of their purposes for existence. On that basis, I therefore take non-human animals and plants as having moral status.

Consequently I grapple with the problem of whether non-human beings such as animals and plants that exist could have moral status or ethical standing such that human beings could be deemed to have direct ethical obligations towards them. I argue that it is plausible to take this position in the confirmatory. This is because of my suspicion that the human community and the non-human living beings are somewhat integrated. They are incorporated in so far as both human beings and non-human living beings such as animals and plants are not only biological or subjects of life, but also moral and teleological counterparts. By ‘moral and
teleological counterparts’, I do not intend to mean that non-human living beings should be held to be equally morally accountable to human beings or that they should have the same or equivalent purposive goals for existing. In fact, I contend that human beings and those components of the environment such as non-human animals and plant species are somewhat ‘moral counterparts’ in so far as these components have life and moral status just as the human beings. They are also ‘teleological counterparts’ because all non-human living beings have been made in such a way that they are disposed to attain some purpose for existence.

An important feature of African ontology-based environmental ethics is its emphasis on the bio-centric aspect where moral status is given on the basis of biological status or by virtue of having life. Izibili characterises a largely bio-centric view of environmental ethics which I see as being useful to the African view of environmental ethics in the following:

> Generally speaking, the principle of the value of life requires that one respects life, that one does not unthinkingly destroy or alter forms of life. Living beings are to be regarded as having [intrinsic] life only. This expression is meant to remind us that this is value that is supposed to inhere, or belong directly to living beings (Izibili, 2005: 386).

My view in the light of Izibili’s position concerning all living beings is that African environmental ethics is mainly life-centred. This is despite the fact that in African ontology, moral status is determined by the hierarchy of existence such that not all living beings could have equal moral status. Notwithstanding the consideration of moral status on the basis of level and hierarchy of existence, the African understanding of existence must not be understood as being solely limited to the human person alone. This is because of its potential to take into account other beings that live life such as non-human animals and plants.

Focussing on ‘ecology and ethical responsibility from an African perspective’, Bujo espouses a life-centred view of environmental ethics that is similar to Izibili’s. As he sees it “...
African person can only be understood in reference to his/her basic attitude to life . . . [hence for that reason] . . . life is seen as a basic form of reality” (Bujo, 1998: 208-9). Implicit in both Izibili’s and Bujo’s understanding of African bio-centric environmental ethics is the notion that the moral status of non-human living beings such as animals and plants is strongly informed by the ontological and biological status of such a being. This is what I conceive as the African bio-centric and vitalist view of African environmental ethics that I see to be strongly grounded on the teleological view of existence. According to this bio-centric, vitalist and teleological view of environmental ethics, since non-human living beings are biological objects that exist and live life, it means that they must be vital forces since they also have purposes for existence such as the need to live life, harmonious living, well-being, balance and continued survival as argued for in chapter four. According to this view, teleology flows from the vitalist view of existence of these non-human living beings in African ontology. It must be such that all vital forces, including non-human living beings such as plants and animals have different and independent purposes for which they are made and also that these forces complement the vital force of the other beings. This is why it is important to consider the relationship between all beings as being anchored on the vitalist and teleological foundation.

Also, according to the above vitalist view, it is apparent that the basis for moral status of these non-human living beings is mainly the life aspect. This life aspect, which I also take as a purpose for being is one purpose which I also take to be more primary than other purposes such as well-being, balance and harmony. This could be explained by the fact that life is so basic that without it first, other purposes cannot be conceptualised. In other words, life comes first before well-being, balance and harmony. However, this does not suffice to mean that the other purposes are not important towards the consideration of moral status.
From the above view, environmental ethics becomes life-centred in so far as “it sees everything that has life as possessing inherent value” (Nnamani, 2005: 398). While this view is quite reasonable, it should not be overly taken to imply that African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics would grant equal moral status to all beings just because they live life and because life is one of those purposes which are more primary. This explains why for example, a non-human living being like a lion should be taken as having greater moral status than a shrub of grass despite all of them having life or being alive. In this case, a being such as a lion must have greater moral status than the other beings on the basis of the intensity of its vital force. By intensity of vital force or life force, I mean the degree of importance in terms of life and purpose. The more a being has life, sentience and ability to have influence in other beings as in the case of the lion, the greater its ontological status and as a result its purpose becomes more intense than that of a shrub of grass. This is despite the fact that both the lion and the shrub of grass all must live life and continue to survive such that they achieve balance, well-being and harmony as some of their essential purposes for being.

An African ontology-based bio-centric view of environmental ethics which I advance here is what I see as a reasonable African life-centred view of environmental ethics. This view considers the moral standing of all objects of life as being worth considering in the environmental ethical discussions despite some variations of moral status of these beings like I have indicated in the above example of the lion and the shrub of grass. This view of environmental ethics is strongly informed by the African understanding of existence and its bearing on a bio-centric view of environmental ethics. According to this view, objects of life such as animate and plant species must be treated with care because they are also purposive beings that must survive and live a meaningful life. They as well contribute to the meaningful life as they also enhance life in various ways. For example, one other view, although it could
be charged for being anthropocentric, could be that, among all non-human living beings some lower forces such as plants have a purpose to serve animals that must also have a purpose to serve human beings.

My understanding is that an African ontology-based, and bio-centric environmental ethics is a form of environmental ethical thinking that is centred on respecting nature and according it moral status based on the respect for the hierarchy of existence as well as the aspect of possession of life. For example, because non-human animals and plants are thought to be vital forces that also live a meaningful and purpose-oriented life, it must also follow that such life ought to be respected. As he critiques some traditional anthropocentric environmental ethical theories, Nnamani sees a bio-centric ethics, like the one that I advance here, as “an ethical theory that evaluates natural things from the fact of their having life” (Nnamani, 2005: 398). Ethical priority is therefore given to all objects that do possess life in order for them to continue living and to promote more life. According to Nnamani, bio-centric environmental ethics is centred on the conviction that “all living species of living organisms form parts of a system of interdependence. Life of any sort, whether sentient or vegetative, rational or irrational, is the criterion for moral standing . . .” (Nnamani, 2005: 398). This vitalist understanding is supported by the teleological view of existence that I discussed in chapters three and four when I argued that life is one of the core purposes for existence.

While I accept Nnamani’s understanding of bio-centric environmental ethics for its emphasis on life as a basic premise for intrinsic value, I reject the attempt to consider all life forms as equal and being on par. This is why I accept Mary Anne Warren’s ‘weaker animal rights’ version in place of Regan’s ‘strong animal rights’ version as compatible with the sub-Saharan African view of animal rights. This is because, Warren, whose understanding of African ontology-based environmentalism is much like my own, does not believe that the moral status of non-human animals could be similar to those of human beings (Warren, 1987: 345).
Despite the admission that non-human animals and plants have moral status, I still contend that such moral status ought not to be considered comparable to that of human beings. As I have argued in chapter three, human beings occupy a higher ontological level than that of animals and plants because of their varying degrees of life force and purpose. The degree of vitality and potency also differs and determines the degree of moral status notwithstanding the fact that life ought to be seen as sacred as argued for in chapter four. This view can be summed up by the argument that the African view accounts for the moral status of both human beings and non-human animals despite human beings having greater moral status than non-human animals. (See also Metz, 2012a: 399-400.) This is because of the capacity by human beings to communicate and make informed moral choices. For this reason, human beings must have greater purpose for existence than non-human living beings the same way an elephant ought to be taken as also having greater purpose for existence than a thorn tree.

The African bio-centric conception of environmental ethics which I advance here is compatible with the African hierarchy of existence that I espoused in chapter three. The African order of existence which I see as a hierarchy addresses the question, ‘what degree of inherent value could be assigned to different life forms?’ This question is obvious because life forms differ in terms of their degree of inherent value and purposive orientation and function. This makes it easy to appreciate why for example, the protection and preservation of elephants and rhinos could be viewed as nobler than protecting houseflies and cockroaches. From both non anthropocentric and anthropocentric teleological reasons, elephants and rhinos must have greater purpose for continued existence than houseflies and cockroaches. This is because in the hierarchy of existence, elephants and rhinos are higher forces than houseflies and cockroaches. In this respect, they possess more vitality and purpose than cockroaches and houseflies. Also, despite aiming at the same fundamental purposes for existence such as survival, well-being and balance, elephants and rhinos must be
ontologically and teleologically superior to houseflies and cockroaches because of their ability to also accommodate the ancestors as established in chapter five.

African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmentalism respects this variation in degree of moral status because ontological status is itself hierarchically placed as I have argued in chapter three. This is because the kind and amount of vital force, which are some of the key supports for the moral status and value of non-human beings, differ and vary from one being to the other. The other reason is that existence is entirely connected to vital force which is inherent in all beings. According to Tempels, “it is because all being is force and exists only in that it is force, that the category ‘force’ includes of necessity all ‘beings’: God, men living and departed, animals, plants, minerals” (Tempels, 1959: 52). Although he does not explicitly show the import of this understanding of force to environmentalism, I explore it further and argue that these various levels of existence are seen as forces in so far as they possess potency and that they are capable of influencing each other’s well-being. For example, God and the ancestors could influence human and environmental well-being. At the same time, human beings are also capable of either positively or negatively affecting the life, harmony, balance and well-being of the other lower forces such as plants and animals. In this kind of a vitalist view of moral status which is not egalitarian, the teleological dimension of existence comes in because of the relations that ought to subsist between vitality and well-being. In my view, vital force is intrinsic to all beings. Consequently, since all being is vital force and that all beings have potency, it follows that all vital forces are teleologically oriented towards well-being, survival and life, although the degree and level of such telos differs from one being to the other depending on the level which such a being occupies in the hierarchy of existence.

Non-human living beings complement the teleological and spiritual relationship and the interconnectedness between all other beings such as God, ancestors and human beings. The
African ontological hierarchy ranks beings from God, ancestors, human beings, down to the animate and non-animate beings. As a result, this African ontological hierarchy of existence determines the differing degrees of purpose from one being to the other. Notwithstanding this difference in degree of vitality and moral standing, among human beings for example, they still have the same or equal moral status regardless of factors such as age, health or mental status. This is because all living human beings occupy the same ontological level in the hierarchy of existence. With reference to other non-human animals however, Izibili offers a useful elastic argument for inherent value. For him, inherent value is “... a matter of degree rather than an all or nothing affair such that those beings that have inherent value might comprise a hierarchy of those with the most inherent value being at the top and those with less occupying the bottom” (Izibili, 2005: 386). This is perhaps one of the reasons why African life-centred environmental ethics is sometimes judged as being anthropocentric.

African ontology-based environmental ethics also takes into consideration the interests and well-being of non-human animals on the basis of relationships or relations that are thought to actually exist between human beings and non-human living beings such as non-human animals. According to this view, human beings and non-human living beings such as animals and plants are thought to be linked by certain relations. This view is captured by Murove who proffers an understanding of relatedness or ukama, which is a relational ethic that is based on how human beings ought to be connected with nature (Murove, 2004: 195-215). It is relational in so far as it takes into account the non-anthropocentric ethical relationships that ought to exist between human beings and components of nature such as the various animal species which constitute human totems (Murove, 2004: 195-215). According to this relational view of existence, human beings and animals share fundamental relationships that must always remind human beings to treat other animals with respect. This understanding of
relatedness is what I see as being capable of being the foundation for the conception of moral status because it is not exclusive to human beings alone.

Also, following the philosophy of *ubuntu* which I take as a useful African moral theory, existence is strongly informed by having good ethical relations, not only among human communities alone, but even with the natural environment consisting of non-human living beings. According to this African moral theory, what it means to be is not only anchored on the extent to which one relates well with other human persons alone, but it also takes into account the way such an individual treats the environment, particularly non-human living beings such as animals and plants. The understanding of *being* is therefore not entirely focussed on the human beings alone. This is why the idea of the good person is not only judged by the person’s relations with persons alone, but also the person’s treatment of components of nature like animals and plants. LenkaBula also considers this idea in the light of the notion of *botho*\(^\text{31}\) which he thinks should be correctly interpreted from a non-anthropocentric perspective (LenkaBula, 2008: 37).

The moral status of non-human living beings could also be reasonably based on the possession of sentience for non-human animals apart from the ownership of life in the case of non-animate things like plants. This view is also integrated in the teleological framework that I discussed in the previous section. Accordingly, one other reason to strongly suspect that human beings have direct duties towards non-human animals is the aspect of sentience, which I understand as the ability to either endure suffering or promote well-being. From a Western philosophical standpoint, as Singer would like it to be understood that “if a being suffers, the fact that it is not a member of our own species cannot be a moral reason for failing to take its suffering into account” (Singer, 1985: 479).

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\(^{31}\) *Botho* is the equivalent to *ubuntu* in Sesotho.
Although Singer is not a bio-centrist so understood, according to the above sentience-based position, which I take as supporting my version of an African bio-centric view of environmental ethics which is teleologically oriented, non-human living beings ought to be accorded ethical standing because of their ability to feel pain. The rational basis for such ethical standing that is based on sentience is that the well-being of non-human living beings can be positively or negatively affected by human actions. This is because many non-human living beings also feel pain and pleasure, some of whom do just like what human beings do, and that pain does not further their purposes for existence as it actually prevents it. My argument here is that despite sentience being characteristic to both human beings and non-human living beings; it remains influential in determining purposiveness among different animate beings. It would therefore be reasonable to take this view as a function of teleological ontology because the aspect of sentience must remind human beings to treat with respect other beings that also feel pain and pleasure. This is so because if happiness and pleasure enhance a pleasurable life in human beings and pain does not enhance it, then it must be the same for other non-human living beings that also feel the same way human beings do. Implicit in this view is a claim about the purpose of both human and non-human beings, which is to live a happy life as one teleological end. Although this language has not been discussed in chapter four when I examined the purposes for being in African ontology, it is my suspicion that it is couched in the various purposes for existence discussed such as harmony, balance, well-being and survival.

Overall, human beings can either positively or negatively affect the well-being of other non-human living beings such as animals and plants. This is despite the fact that these natural beings are not strictly speaking ‘moral agents’ while human beings are. In spite of this view, I still maintain the argument that human beings ought to have ethical obligations towards nature, particularly non-human living beings on the basis that they have moral standing.
6.4: The Moral Status of Non-Living Beings

Besides non-human animals and objects of life like plant species (which I have treated as non-human living beings in the previous section), there are also certain aspects of nature that I suppose to possess moral standing such that human beings should be deemed to also have direct moral duties towards them. This view of moral consideration of non-living beings is such that components such as rocks, soils, water and the air can be held to have direct ethical standing as well. Accordingly, these non-living beings must be treated as having moral status, which is to say that human beings have some direct duties towards them. Although I have partly addressed this question when I examined the teleological connection between human beings and nature, I now intend to go beyond that aspect of teleology. I consider teleology in terms of how it could be the basis for moral status of non-living beings.

One strong reason to suspect that non-living beings such as rocks, water and the air have moral status is the aspect of vitality, which I have already discussed with reference to non-human living beings. Vitality in African ontology is not restricted to only non-human living beings, but is also characteristic of non-living beings as well. According to this view, non-living objects like mountains, rivers, rocks, soils and the air are to some extent alive. They are thought to be alive because of the way in which these components actively participate towards the completeness of various life forms. For example, one way in which they do so is the way that they accommodate various animate species that stay in these mountains, rivers, rocks, soils and the air. Also, as I have highlighted in chapters three and five, spiritual forces such as the ancestors and other spirits are believed to also reside in these mountains and rivers as well. For example, many Shona and Ndebele myths about the existence of spiritual beings locate them in hills, rivers and large pools. (See also Taringa, 2006: 197-200.) In this way, the vitalist understanding of beings which I emphasise here enables an interconnection of beings in African ontology such that environmental ethical thinking could be inculcated in
such a view. Advocating for the same view, Shutte sees an interconnection and network between all beings in the universe (Shutte, 2009: 89). For that reason, it would be plausible to argue that there ought to be direct duties and obligations that human beings have towards these life forces. This basis for this view is energy, potency and power that these beings are thought to possess. (See also Tempels, 1959: 50.)

The view that the physical environment is animate permeates sub-Saharan African thinking. This view is largely informed by the understanding and acceptance that there is some ontological interconnection between beings (that is both animate and non-animate beings) (Taringa, 2006: 201). Although it is not explicitly apparent, there seem to be some ontological interconnections between human beings and the physical environment that includes the rivers, soils, rocks, caves and mountains. To confirm this view of ontological interconnection between human beings and other animate and non-animate reality such as the physical environment of non-living beings, Behrens argues that:

African thought extends moral considerability to include all things that are part of the interconnected web of life, that is, all individual living things, groups of living things such as families, species and ecosystems, as well as inanimate natural objects such as rivers and mountains (Behrens, 2014b: 66).

Although Behrens’ view is almost similar to what I have in mind here, he does not think that these non-living beings are alive and have vital force. My vitalist view is therefore largely compatible with some attempts to personify the physical environment as what is the case with African ontology-based environmental ethics. Consequently I argue that the attempt to personify the physical environment is oriented towards sustaining good relations with the natural environment, which ultimately must have moral status. This is implicit in the way human beings revere certain hills, mountains, rocks and rivers among others (Taringa, 2006: 201). In this way, it is thought that before human beings can explore any of these hills,
mountains, rocks and rivers, they ought to “ritually ask its permission” (Taringa, 2006: 201). In light of Taringa’s view, I therefore put forth the argument that African ontology must be environmentally oriented, especially as it relates to the ontological and teleological interconnections between human beings and the natural world.

Like I have argued in chapters four and five, in African ontology it is generally believed and acceptable that the physical environment is the habitat of God and the ancestors. Because of this belief and acceptance, this kind of thinking should largely inform environmental ethical thinking because the environment is given reverence on the basis that it is the habitat of the higher forces in the hierarchy of ontology. Although he is more focussed on the role of the territorial cults and their environmental ethical significance, Van Binsbergen confirms this view as he sees the physical environment as also the habitat of the higher forces as he argues that, “hills, pools, imposing trees, caves, streams, falls and rapids become associated with invisible entities and thus become objects of veneration” (Van Binsbergen, 1978: 56). In addition to their contribution to life and purpose of other beings, this kind of veneration to these components of the physical environment is what I also see as the basis for a reasonably acceptable environmental ethics for traditional sub-Saharan African thought that stem from African theism and vitalism.

The other way in which non-living beings such as rocks, rivers, the air and the soil might be taken as having purpose for being could be on the basis of their teleological role of sustaining both human and non-human life in general. For example, it is in mountains that various animate and non-animate beings are home to, while rivers sustain aquatic and non-aquatic life as well. Similarly, soils and the air sustain almost all life forms. The roles that these non-living beings perform could reasonably be taken as some of their purposes for existence.
Notwithstanding the fact that they have vital force and purpose to sustain other beings which are some of the reasons to believe that they have moral status, I will treat all beings that do not possess life as ‘non living’ beings because they do not have a determinate and meaningful life comparable to that of human beings and other non-human animals that have motion, feelings, hopes and desires. However, I contend that these non-living beings still complement the teleological order of existence as they have an independent existence and purpose to that of human beings. This is also the basis for the moral status of non-living beings, and the reason why human beings ought to have some direct moral duties towards non-human beings.

For example, non-living beings such as the soil, rocks, mountains and rivers may seem not to morally matter to human beings such that human beings may not be thought to have direct moral duties towards them. However, the duties that human beings may claim towards these beings are also direct in so far as these are the product of God and that they have vital force as I have already argued. Also, human beings themselves, other animals and various life forms relate with, and are interconnected with these components as I have argued above.

Except for having vital force and the purpose to sustain life forms, the basis for taking the environment as worthy of moral consideration must have to do with the direct moral duties that human beings must have towards some aspects of the natural environment which I consider as non living. For example, while human beings may seem not to have direct moral duties towards non-living things and non-animate reality like rivers, rocks, water, and the air, I contend that they do have indirect moral duties to safeguard the well-being of these aspects since their well-being and quality of existence also affects positively or negatively the life and purpose of other beings. It may sound absurd to consider either the rock, the soil, the air or mountains as having well-being and quality of existence. However, my conviction is that if these non-living beings are destroyed, that will also have a bearing on their quality and the
quality of other life forms as well. This explains why I contend that human beings have, in this case indirect moral obligations to protect them.

Non-living beings also possess their own aesthetic value and telos in life which are independent to those of human beings. While human beings and other animals may have moral value, non-human beings like mountains and rivers have their own intrinsic aesthetic value and purposes. This aesthetic value is what I suspect could be the foundation for their moral status and the reason why they ought to be respected and safeguarded so that they continue to be what they are and achieve what they are made to achieve. Aesthetic value refers to the beauty of appreciation that a being or object has by virtue of its natural existence. It is intrinsic because it naturally inheres in each and every object of existence. This kind of beauty may vary from one being to the other and from person to person, such that we may not value the same object the same. A rock, mountain or the soil may therefore be aesthetically appreciated differently and from different angles by different individuals. However, each non-living object remains with its own intrinsic aesthetic value which is independent to other beings. Consequently, aesthetic value must impart moral value to a being because it is intrinsic to it. This is why non-living beings must be left to exist without disturbing their aesthetic appreciation although this eventually gives human beings indirect moral duties to protect them.

The vitalist understanding of the physical environment should be understood as central to, and being capable of, shaping African ontology-based environmental ethics. This is the view where all beings, whether animate and inanimate, are thought to possess a certain force or energy that enables them to balance the teleological order of existence in the world. (See also Tempels, 1959: 46.) In the light of the vitalist view of existence, I argue that components of the physical environment that are without biological life such as rivers, rocks, hills, caves and mountains are important and possess vital force and therefore help towards shaping African
environmental ethics in various ways. This suggests that these non-living beings have a moral status since they have vital force as I have already argued in this section. Although he is not explicit about environmentalism, Tempels alluded to the interdependence of the vital forces in the universe as they influence one another (Tempels, 1959: 60). This is the understanding of vitalism that I explore further in the context of environmentalism. For example, according to Taringa, “some of these aspects of the tangible world are believed to be imbued with the power of the great spirit (mwari), ancestral spirits (midzimu), both family and territorial and are therefore spiritually connected” (Taringa, 2006: 201). Because these physical components of the environment are connected with vital forces, I take and consider that as the basis for an acceptable environmental ethics in African ontology.

To strengthen the argument developed here I appeal to the understanding in African ontology that all beings are part of the interconnected web of existence. This explains why the African hierarchy of existence includes almost everything from God, ancestors, human beings down to the non-human beings, including non-living beings. Behrens alluded to this view of interconnectedness of beings as he argues that “a belief that all natural things are interconnected and that all humans are part of, rather than set apart from, nature provides a sound foundation for treating other entities with respect, and for valuing other natural objects as morally considerable entities” (Behrens, 2014a: 70). The fact that human beings are interconnected with other natural beings such as the air, water and the soil could give them strong reasons to treat them in a respectable way because they have a moral status to some extent. They have moral status in so far as they also have independent existence to human beings and possessing their own purposes and aesthetic value as what has been argued here. African ontology therefore recognises the complex web of existence in the various beings. In addition, it takes into consideration the ontological and ethical link between the living human beings, the non-human animals, the spiritual forces and the natural environment at large.
is what prompts me to take as useful, Oruka and Juma’s African eco-philosophical approach that takes into consideration the “totality of (spatial, temporal, spiritual and other) interlinkages in nature” (Oruka and Juma, 1994: 114). In the following chapter, I critically examine the teleological link between human beings and nature. I will take this link as also supporting the moral status of the environment.

6.5: Conclusion

Overall, as I come to the conclusion that nature has moral status despite the varying degrees of moral status within it, I must acknowledge that reliance on a hierarchy of existence as a basis for different degrees of moral status can also be challenged for being anthropocentric. This is because in such a hierarchy of existence, human beings seem to enjoy more moral status than the rest of nature. In spite of this objection, I still maintain that nature has some moral status.

I discussed the question of whether the environment has any moral status in the light of African conceptions of existence. I addressed this question in the affirmative as I critically grappled with the problem of whether there could be any teleological connections between the human community and the environment such that there ought to be any ethical obligations and duties that human beings have towards the environment. In the end, I examined what I see as the direct moral duties that human beings must have towards nature. These duties could reasonably derive from the realisation of the moral status of non-human living beings and that of non-living beings respectively. The argument that I proffered is that these direct moral duties, together with other views such as force and teleology could be meaningfully taken as the bases for the ethical connection between human beings and nature. This is why I therefore conclude that, on the basis of the moral status of non-human living beings as well as the direct moral duties that human beings owe to the environment, there ought to be a strong ethical link between human beings and nature.
Chapter Seven: African Communitarian Environmental Ethics

7.1: Introduction

In chapter six, I have examined the question of the moral status of nature. I considered the question of whether both non-human living beings and non-living beings have moral status. I have addressed this question in the affirmative and argued that human being should have direct obligations towards non-human living beings and non-living beings. In this chapter I focus on African communitarian philosophy. By African communitarian philosophy I mean the general view and understanding of the community and the individual person that is found in African thinking. I advance this view of African communitarian thinking as an additional argument for giving moral consideration to nature. In advancing this position, I critically examine how the African understanding of the community and the individual could positively inform environmental ethical thinking. This is what I address as ‘African communitarian environmental ethics’, a view which is informed by African communitarian philosophy of existence which I also see as being teleologically oriented towards environmental ethics as well.

As I focus on the philosophy of African communitarian thinking which has already been examined by quite a number of thinkers in African philosophy, I argue that the African communitarian view of existence is also another view that could be used in order to critically understand and justify the moral status of nature. According to this argument, the basis for giving nature moral status could be that nature ought to be understood as part of the human ‘community’. More often, communitarian thinking could be loosely taken to imply a kind of thinking that is centred on the existence, interests and purposes of human persons alone, such that it could be judged to be anthropocentric. According to Horsthemke, communitarianism is in “alliance, and proximity to questionable (androcentric as well as anthropocentric practices and traditions” (Horsthemke, 2015: 25). However, in this particular chapter, I do not accept
this understanding of African communitarian thinking. I deliberately therefore employ an elastic understanding of communitarian philosophy. I consider it as a thinking that takes into consideration the interests, well-being and purposes of both the human community and the environment without necessarily violating one’s individual autonomy. This kind of communitarian environmental ethics is a fairly underexplored perspective by thinkers such as Menkiti (1984: 171-181, 2004: 324-331) and Gyekye (1992: 101-122) who have been particularly influential for having examined this philosophy of communitarian thinking which Horsthemke critiques as being anthropocentric. (See also Horsthemke, 2015: 25.)

Murove and Behrens have also attempted to go beyond the above communitarian thinkers by considering African communitarian environmentalism as being capable of informing African environmental ethics (Murove, 2004: 195-215; Behrens, 2014a: 63-82). However, without belittling their attempts I strongly think that theirs is a largely relational communitarian environmental ethics in which natural objects are thought to be interconnected (Behrens, 2014: 63). While useful, this view of environmental ethics is one that I do not see to clearly explore the ontological and teleological dimensions of existence in terms of their relations to environmental ethics. This is why I attempt to go beyond what they have done and advance an ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmentalism. In advancing this view of environmentalism, by the word ‘community’ therefore, I will include even non-human animals and other components of the natural environment such as water, the soil, plants and the air which form a ‘community’ of some sort with human beings as they all have moral status like I have argued in chapter six. Also, this communitarian understanding of these beings is by virtue of all these beings and things sharing the planet Earth and also having a purpose for which they are oriented towards. My working understanding of communitarianism is therefore fairly non-anthropocentric as it takes into account certain
components of the natural environment as actually constituting what I see as a ‘community’ with human beings.

In the first section, I start by exploring the philosophy of communitarian thinking in African philosophy. I start by making one general observations about past discourse on African communitarian thinking. The observation which I make is that conceptions about communitarian thinking have been articulated and interpreted from inherently person-centric perspectives. To avoid the same mistake, I therefore critically examine the African communitarian view in terms of how it influences African conceptions of communitarian existence among not only human persons alone, but with the rest of nature.

In the second section I critically examine the reasons why African communitarian philosophy should be taken as the basis for giving nature its moral status. In this section I take Mbiti’s socio-centric conception of the human person (1969: 141), Menkiti’s normative conception of the human person (1984: 171-181, 2004: 324) and Gyekye’s moderate communitarian view of the human person (1992: 101-122) as providing useful paradigms for my further discussion of how the human person and the human community ought to relate with each other and the natural environment. Despite the homocentric element that seem to be inherent in most of these views, as I advance this fairly communitarian view of environmentalism, my approach differs from what Ramose (1999: 154-9), Murove (2004: 215), Tangwa (2004: 387-395), Kelbessa (2005: 22), LenkaBula (2008: 375-394) and Behrens (2014a: 63-83) have in mind in the form of African indigenous relational environmental ethics that is non anthropocentric. All of these thinkers emphasise the need to revisit and appreciate African indigenous approaches to environmental ethics, but most of them want the understanding of ubuntu philosophy, ukama (relationships) and communitarian views to be used in order to interpret environmental ethics. In contrast, mine which is an ontology-based and partly vitalist approach to environmentalism, explores further a relatively novel and underexplored
teleological view which stems from communitarian thinking. This is the view that is centred on the assumption that the human being, the human community and the environment at large have independent purposes for which they are tailored.

In the last section which focuses on ‘the role of the individual in fostering communitarian environmental ethics’, I attempt to examine the extent to which African communitarian thinking is compatible with individual freedom. I address the question of whether it is possible for the individual to be part of the ‘community’ without necessarily compromising on one’s autonomy. My argument is that, while the individual person remains central in fostering communitarian environmental ethics, there still remain proper relations between the individual and the rest of the community. This view is based on the understanding that if the individual devotes oneself to the community, which includes nature, then one’s meaningful life, excellence and purpose will ultimately be achieved.

7.2: Understanding African Communitarian Thinking

The notion of African communitarian philosophy has been fairly addressed by quite a number of philosophers such as Mbiti (1969: 106), Menkiti, (1984: 171-181) and Gyekye (1992: 101-122). In his famous dictum that: I am because we are, Mbiti meant that the existence of the human person should be understood with reference to the community (Mbiti, 1969: 106). This view of existence is incompatible with individualistic conceptions of existence. Similarly, Menkiti observes that in the African conception of the person “. . . man is defined by reference to the environing community” (Menkiti, 1984: 171). Gyekye sums up these views and later settles for what has come to be known as a moderate form of communitarian thinking. For him, “the communal or communitarian aspects of African socio-ethical thought are reflected in the communitarian features of African societies. . . . these features are not only outstanding, but the defining characteristics of those cultures” (Gyekye, 1992: 102).
A judicious interpretation of the views of the above philosophers almost leads to a generally acceptable understanding of African communitarian philosophy that I take as a useful moral theory. Such a view of African communitarian philosophy should be understood as the way in which the individual human person exists with other human persons in the community and the way human beings share certain ontological relationships with other non-human beings such that there must be common purposes for existence among all beings. Gyekye defines communitarianism in the following exposition which I find to be sensible because of its emphasis on communal existence and the fact that it does not necessarily take away the rights and autonomy of the individual person:

Communitarianism sees the human person as an inherently (intrinsically) communal being, embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, never as an isolated atomic individual. Consequently, it sees the community not as a mere association of individual persons whose interests and ends are contingently congruent, but as a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds, biological and/or non-biological, who consider themselves primarily as members of the group and who have common interests, goals and values (Gyekye, 1992: 104).

In African philosophy, the individual human person cannot successfully exist alone as an atomic individual who is ontologically and ethically independent of other individuals and effectively achieve his or her goals in life. An individual person’s ontological standing as a ‘being’ as well as his or her purposive goals in life are strongly influenced and shaped by those around the person, which is the community. Implicit in this communitarian and fairly teleological view of existence is the notion that whatever the human person does, that can be morally evaluated it will always have a bearing on others as well. At the same time, whatever
the whole community decides and does, which also has ethical implications, it will also have a bearing on the individual person (See also Mbiti, 1969: 106).

The aspect of African communitarian existence implies that the human person should not exist as a lone individual and at the same time, it must be emphasised that the interests of the community should not be taken to override those of individuals that constitute it. Interpreted teleologically, this view is shaped by the understanding that both the individual person and the community as a whole have independent purposes for existing that should be respected. For example, as an individual, the person ought to achieve one’s life and well-being, while the community also has the purpose of collectively safeguarding and furthering these individual purposes of human beings in a way that does not promote individualism and selfishness.

It must be emphasised that the human person exists in a community of other human persons and also the whole community of human persons share the environment in general. By virtue of human beings existing in the natural environment, that must be a reasonable basis upon which they must also take it as part of their ‘community’. In reading Mbiti, Menkiti and Gyekye to advance this view however, I avoid overstretcheding their arguments to the extent of settling for radical views of communitarian thinking which Menkiti does when he sees the interests of the community as totally overriding those of the individual (Menkiti, 1984: 172). This is not the kind of framework that should inform African ontological conceptions of the individual and the community. One of the advocates of this communitarian view, Gyekye, is not comfortable with the way Menkiti overstates African communitarian thinking (Gyekye 1992: 101). This is why Gyekye settles for what has come to be known as a ‘moderate’ or ‘restricted’ form of communitarian (Gyekye, 1992: 121). This kind of communitarianism is fairly reasonable because it takes into consideration the interests of the individual human
person despite its socio-centric dimension. As Gyekye aptly puts it, this form of communitarian thinking

\[ \ldots \text{gives accommodation to communal values as well as to values of individuality, to social commitments as well as to duties of self attention.} \]

Even in its basic thrust and concerns it gives prominence to duties toward the community and its members, it does not –cannot –do so to the detriment of individual rights whose existence and value it recognises, or should recognise, and for a good reason (Gyekye, 1992: 121).

In the light of this moderate understanding of communitarian thinking, I therefore take as reasonable to hold the view that such an understanding of communitarian thinking could be useful to African environmental ethical thinking. This is because of its potential to accommodate the well-being of both the community and the individual person without compromising on the autonomy of the individual human persons. For example, in such an African communitarian environmental ethical view, the purposes of human beings such as life, survival, harmony, balance and well-being (as I have discussed them in chapter four) must also be respected and taken into consideration with reference to nature. This is based on the understanding that it is not only human beings that have moral status, but that nature too has moral status as I have argued in chapter six.

The above view expresses the kind of ontology-based African communitarian environmental ethics that I have in mind. It is one that does not merely consider the welfare of the environment as an extended community at the expense of the interests of the individual and other persons. This sort of communitarianism is largely teleological as it sees and respects the notion of purpose in both human beings and nature. Also, this view takes into account the African notion of virtue (unhu/ubuntu). This idea is commonly expressed in some sub-Saharan African languages such as Shona, Ndebele and IsiZulu respectively as; munhu,
munhu navanhu or umuntu, ngumuntu ngabantu. (See also Samkange and Samkange, 1980: 39-9.) This means that what persons essentially are is through other persons. It also means that to be a person is to be the sort of a being that ought to strive to achieve a certain community-oriented purpose, which is the attainment of goals for existing as a community and respect for the virtues of communitarian existence. Some of these purposes for communitarian existence could be understood as the promotion of the good life and living well in harmony among not only human beings, but with the rest of nature. The maxim also squares with my idea that one becomes a person through relating well with, and treating well other non persons such as non-human beings and non-living beings.

Environmental ethics must not therefore be so strictly anthropocentric such that it is limited to how human beings relate with, and affect human beings only. This could explain why even within the way in which human beings ought to relate with nature, if a person does a certain action like urinating in communal water sources like the river, he should be referred to as a ‘non-human being’\(^{32}\). Excepting the view that the person’s interests are at stake in water, such an action negatively affects the quality of water itself and the purposes of other non-human communities. For example, water is home to various aquatic creatures or communities whose lives and purposes could be endangered by such a human action. Having examined this understanding of African communitarian thinking, I now proceed to focus on the implications of such communitarian thinking to the moral status of the environment.

\(^{32}\) In traditional African communitarian societies like the Shona to which I am accustomed to for example, if an individual person does an action like urinating in the river, which is the major source of water for human domestic use and home to all aquatic creatures, society normally says to such an individual: *uyu haasi munhu uyu*. This means that this is not a human being. The reason for this reference to that particular individual is based on the conviction that what the person would have done is against the goals or purpose of communitarian existence since such action affects other human beings as well as other non-human animals and aquatic creatures in a negative way.
7.3: Communitarian Thinking as the Basis for the Moral Status of Nature

Following the African communitarian view of existence, it can be noted that human actions and interactions should not be understood as if they affect human communities alone because nature must have moral status as well. If human actions are to be judged as if they only affect human communities alone, that would lead to a radically anthropocentric view of environmentalism, which is what I don’t want to espouse here. So, in order to understand and appreciate African communitarian environmental ethics, there is a need for an extended understanding of ‘community’ to include the environment as also part of what should be the community. My understanding of African ontology-based and communitarian environmental ethics is that communitarian existence is not, and should not be, limited to the human community alone as I have argued in the previous section.

Besides the moral status of non-human living beings and non-living beings discussed in chapter six, in this current chapter I contend that communitarian thinking ought to also support the moral status of the environment because it presupposes a relationship of interconnectedness of all beings. According to Bujo, all forces in the universe are interconnected and have a relationship of interdependence that must be maintained by living in harmony with the natural environment (Bujo, 1998: 22-3). The emphasis on harmony in Bujo’s view is evidence that it must be a fundamental purpose for the existence of both human and non-human communities.

Also, to espouse Bujo’s view further, I argue that the granting of moral status to the environment could be meaningfully based on the idea of the force thesis in African ontology as well as the need to maintain harmony between all beings that also include nature. According to this view, other beings or forces that are not necessarily human beings should constitute a ‘community’ of some sort with human beings such that every being has moral status in so far as it has vital force and purpose for being. (See also Tempels, 1959: 50.) This
is why I argue that the notion of community ought to be conceptualised as having an expandable view in African philosophy such that the community must be understood to include human persons and their surrounding environment that constitute other beings with vital force. To this effect, I take as sound Tangwa’s argument that within the African worldview “the distinction between plants, animals and inanimate things, between the sacred and the profane, matter and spirit, the communal and the individual, is a slim and flexible one” (Tangwa, 2004: 389). However, while I accept this view, I would not want to strongly affirm that such a distinction between human beings and nature is that slim to the extent of granting the same moral status between, say human beings and rocks as I have argued in chapter six. This is why notwithstanding their purposive orientation, some actions that human beings could do with these rocks might be considered as acceptable because of the varying degrees of moral status between human beings and rocks that were seen earlier on in chapter six.

Having envisaged an expandable understanding of ‘community’ to also include other non-human beings, I argue for a non-anthropocentric communitarian environmentalism which is not solely focussed on the human community alone. This is because the strong tie between human beings and the natural environment cannot be overemphasised. Although Mbiti (1969:141) and Menkiti (2004:324) are not explicit with regard to how the human person should be connected with the natural environment, I observe that the way they want us to understand the idea of the ‘African community’ is fairly anthropocentric. (See also Horsthemke, 2015: 24-6.) Their communitarian view is pretty anthropocentric because their notion of ‘community’ is mainly limited to human beings alone. Consequently, I argue that the understanding of ‘African community’ could be loosely taken and used to include both human beings and other aspects of the natural environment. Understood this way, the human beings and the natural environment become ethically connected and related in so far as they
have common purposes for existence such as life, survival, vitality, harmony, balance and well-being. To validate this view, I deliberately overstate Gyekye’s understanding of communitarianism so that it becomes applicable to my conception of what ought to be African environmental ethics. For Gyekye, “the fundamentally relational character of the person and the interdependence of human individuals arising out of their natural sociality are thus clear” (Gyekye, 1992: 104). In view of Gyekye’s view, I maintain that the same can be said about the human beings and the natural environment, which I see to be relational as well. Fundamentally, this view is most applicable to the non-human animals such as the lion, elephant, buffalo, baboon, snake, fish, monkey, birds and the zebra among various other animals and objects in nature that are thought to be related to human beings through totems. (See also Murove, 2004: 197-88; Mangena, 2011: 40.)

As a relational aspect in African ontology, totemism is an institution that is enshrined in the philosophy of communitarianism among most sub-Saharan African societies, which I find to be useful to its environmental ethics. It is an African communitarian tradition in which human persons are thought to assume certain relations with certain non-human animal species and natural objects. Accordingly, I contend that African communitarian existence through totemism could reasonably confirm the idea that communitarian existence is more focussed towards giving nature its moral status so that its purposes for existence could be realised. For example, by subscribing to various non-human animal totems like that of the lion, the elephant, fish, crocodile and buffalo among others, individuals corroborate their communitarian existence and purposes with these various animals such that they are related to them through having a certain totemic connection and purpose as well. In this way, totemism, as a component of communitarian philosophy that takes into consideration the relationships between human beings and non-human animals should be taken as a sound justification for the moral status of certain aspects of nature. Although these non-human
animals that are related to human beings could be taken as only a small fraction of all the species that are found in nature, it shows some attempt to strike right relations with aspects of the natural environment. This is why I argue that totemism could be taken as the basis upon which the environment, especially non-human animals, could be conferred ethical standing by human beings.

In the institution of totemism as a communitarian tool is also the attempt to respect the order, balance, harmony and well-being in the ontological hierarchy of existence as well as the spiritual and purposive interconnections between all beings. As Mangena sees it:

It can be argued that totemism does not only name or point to a natural relationship that exists between human beings and non-human animals, it also points to a spiritual relationship. For instance, if one is of the pig, lion, elephant, fish and crocodile totems among others, then he or she will regard these animals as sacred and will treat them with reverence. Now, it is not possible to regard some being as sacred and treat it with reverence without at the same time conferring moral status to it. [Otherwise] doing so will upset the cosmic balance thereby causing problems like droughts, famine and disease (Mangena, 2013: 41).

This view is what attracts me to take Mangena’s argument that “it is possible to use totemism, spiritualism and ukama [relatedness] as the basis upon which moral status could be accorded to non-human entities in the African environment” (Mangena, 2013: 42). Totemism should therefore, be acceptable as being central to the ontological, spiritual and relational interconnectedness between human beings and the natural environment.

Communitarian thinking is closely connected with the way human beings relate with each other. Embedded in the philosophy of African communitarianism is the aspect of relatedness which has been extensively discussed by Behrens as having a strong bearing on African
environmentalism (Behrens, 2011: 47-83; 2014a: 63-82). Relatedness among African communities has to do with the way human beings are biologically connected to each other. This idea must have positive implications to African environmental ethics which is also shaped by these relations. Behrens would like to call this “African relational environmentalism”, and he sees it as “a promising African environmentalism that [is] found in a belief in fundamental interrelatedness between natural objects” (Behrens, 2014a: 63). Murove also shares a similar argument with Behrens, although Murove is more focussed on Shona relations and their import to environmental ethical thinking.

By and large, both Murove’s and Behrens’ analyses of relatedness among human communities provide the basis for what I see as a meaningful environmentalism that should stem from human biological relations and how these relations ought to be understood as being capable of cascading to take into consideration the interests and “moral standing of all living things, groups of living things, as well as inanimate natural entities” (Behrens, 2014: 63). In this case, the fact of being related to each other among human beings ought to ground moral consideration to non-human communities. This is justified on the understanding that human beings ought to perceive themselves, not as atomic beings that are disconnected from other non-human beings, but also as beings related and interconnected together with all other non-human living beings and non-living beings. Accordingly, Murove comes closer to this view as he argues that, communitarian existence, through relationships among human beings “provides the ethical anchorage for human social, spiritual and ecological togetherness” (Murove, 2004: 197). However, these arguments for an African relational environmentalism seem to be strongly rooted in the argument for some biological interconnection between human beings without explicitly exploring the teleological dimension of this communitarian view.
In light of this unexplored ontological and teleological dimension, my contention is therefore that there is an ontological and teleological interconnection between the various beings in the natural environment. That interconnection is centred on the hierarchy of existence in African ontology in which the existence and life of all beings is respected and revered as well as the purposes for which all beings have as discussed in chapter four. The teleological dimension which I interpret from this communitarian dictum is that, if all living things and inanimate natural objects are related to human beings, then it is reasonable to admit that there must be some common ontological connections between them. At the same time, since African ontology is largely teleologically oriented like I have already established, then there must be some teleological ends for which all these things exist. Some of these purposes for life are harmony and balance as well as well-being and survival for all created beings as was discussed in chapter four.

It is also evident from African communitarian relations as observed by Gyekye that individualism and selfishness are discouraged because they do not promote the well-being of the whole community and the environment (Gyekye, 1992: 102). Individualism and selfishness are incompatible with the philosophy of communitarian existence which I suspect should be ontologically and teleologically oriented towards environmentalism. The justification for this claim is that communitarian existence as encased in human relations, should transcend to take into consideration the environment at large as also being part of the community worth of moral consideration. This is why Murove argues that communitarian existence through communal relationships among human persons is not only seen as “a mere social construct” (Murove, 2004: 197). Being related is relatively “an existential reality that permeates everything that exists” (Murove, 2004: 197). In this way, the ethical significance of relatedness in African communitarian societies goes beyond the human community to

33 My emphasis.
include all aspects of nature. This is why I argue that communitarian philosophy must be useful to environmental ethics because it presupposes that the whole community of human beings and the natural environment have common purposes for communitarian existence and survival so that they all achieve their respective purposes. In this respect, human beings ought to have a basic duty to respect the environment because human beings have a close relationship with the environment which they exist with as a community.

The environment as also part of the ‘community’ sharing relations with human beings, ought to achieve its respective end that is independent of that of human beings. Just as human life ought to be respected and revered such that purposes such as harmonious living, balance, well-being and survival could be attained, so the environment also ought to be respected and revered so that it also attains similar purposes. This explains why I maintain that the duties that human beings should have towards the environment must be taken as being similar to those which human beings have towards each other. The implications of this fairly relational and communitarian environmentalism are that, by mistreating the environment, human beings will also be negatively affecting the well-being of the environment, their relationship with the environment and human well-being as well. Although this last view sounds moderately anthropocentric, it is not what I defend here because the basic duties that human beings have towards nature arising from their ‘communitarian’ relations plausibly account for human intuitions about how to treat nature.

So far this discussion may appear as if African communitarian environmental ethics could give more force on the community at the expense of the individual person. In my view, the individual person ought to be an active participant in such communitarian environmental ethics. This is why I proceed in the following section to critically assess the role of the individual person towards advancing such communitarian environmental ethics.
7.4: The Role of the Individual in Fostering Communitarian Environmentalism

In the preceding section, I have examined the obligations and duties that rest on the whole human community which I have discussed as African communitarian environmentalism. This kind of environmentalism is a product of the whole community, but it starts with the individual person’s belonging and contribution to the community. In that light, there still remains the question of whether the individual can have obligations towards the community and nature and still maintain one’s autonomy. Since the individual person is expected to be part of, and actively contribute to the human community and act in certain ways that enhance communitarian environmentalism, the question of individual autonomy becomes obvious. In that regards, I now focus on the place of the individual person in fostering African communitarian environmentalism. I seek to critically assess the extent to which the person could meaningfully contribute to communitarian environmental ethics without necessarily compromising on his or her individual autonomy. I address this question of whether there could still be proper relations between the individual and the community. I make the conclusion that if the individual person correctly identifies with, and relates well with the community, which includes nature, then the individual, the community and nature will all live meaningful and purposive lives. Metz comes closer to this view as he interprets the African communitarian thinking in the following:

... sub-Saharan ethical thought, at least as philosophically interpreted maintains that self-realisation is exhausted ‘through other persons’, that is through community alone. It is typical for African theorists to maintain, or at least suggest, that the only comprehensive way of life is by communing, or sometimes ‘being in harmony’, with other people (Metz, 2012b: 102).
Although this view expresses an African communitarian view about existence among human persons alone, it correctly captures how one’s self realisation could be achieved in a communitarian set-up that I take to transcend the human community.

A dominant feature of the Western philosophical discourse has been the emphasis on human ability to use reason and speech as the basis for human autonomy over all other aspects of nature. According to Teffo and Roux, “rationality has been seen as a universal inherent ability in humankind to determine the truth. . . .[it] . . . is seen as the only avenue toward reliable knowledge, and also of being certain in yielding correct, final answers if its methods are correctly followed” (Teffo and Roux, 2002: 162). This kind of thinking has been responsible for the largely anthropocentric view of nature because it is based on a conceptual division between humankind and nature (Mathews, 2001: 225). Contrary to the Platonic, Aristotelian and Cartesian traditions which I suspect to have greatly influenced this Western atomic conception of the person, the African understanding of the person which I espouse here is one that respects the existential and practical conditions of the person such as the surrounding environment. This view should not be taken to imply that African communitarian environmentalism is against individual human autonomy or freedom because of its emphasis on communitarian existence and purpose. In essence, although African communitarian environmentalism may seem to be more focussed on the welfare of the ‘whole’, which is the community of human beings and nature in its totality, it leaves space for the place of individual freedom and autonomy. This view explains why for example, the individual person could be allowed to do certain actions that satisfy individual human purposes. Such actions could include sustainable hunting of animals, fishing, use of water pools and sources and the clearing of forests for agricultural and other purposes. However, ultimately the individual remains central in fostering communitarian environmental ethics.
which promotes harmony, peace and well-being for all, that is, the individual, the community and nature.

While this position may appear to be sustaining the exclusive anthropocentric purposes of the community, it is not what I intend to defend here. The kind of African communitarian environmentalism that I advance is not suppressive of the interests of the individual person. This is because the reasons for the protection of nature are not wholly tailored towards protecting the welfare of the human community alone. The other reason why this environmentalism is not entirely for the human community alone is that the ‘community’ is not in this view limited to that of human persons alone. Rather, communitarian environmental ethics takes into consideration even non-human beings and the rest of nature. As a result, almost all beings in the hierarchy of ontology such as the individual, the whole community and nature at large equally stand to benefit from this conception of communitarian environmental ethics. This is why I maintain that such a view of environmental ethics is pretty compatible with the interests of the individual person as well.

Following African ontology and its communitarian environmental ethics, there is a salient ethical respect for the natural environment that is expected from the individual person. The individual is expected to respect both animate and non-animate reality. This kind of ethical consideration stems from the African understanding of the individual person which is generally oriented towards the well-being of all beings that exist as opposed to the Western view of the human person that stresses on reason as the defining characteristic of a being who can be accorded moral status. Tangwa elaborately captures this argument in the following:

The claim that humankind is at the apex of biological existence, as we know it, has sometimes been dismissed as an arrogant speciecist claim and contested by some human militants for the rights of animals and/or plants. Less disputable, however, is the fact that, while human beings have putative moral
responsibilities toward inanimate objects, plants the ‘lower’ animals, these latter cannot be considered without absurdity as having reciprocal moral obligations towards humans. Human interventions in nature could plausibly be justified by appeal to this asymmetrical responsibility, although this does not imply that every intervention is justifiable (Tangwa, 2004: 388).

From this view, it is apparent that the African ontological conception of the person seems to be more focussed on the way the human person could solve practical problems around one’s existential conditions. This is what I see as the existential and practical dimension of African ontological conception of the human being. If such a conception of the person is clearly understood, it must be an acceptable and plausible tripartite conception of environmental ethics. It is tripartite in so far as it stresses on the well-being of the individual, the human community and nature.

From African communitarian environmental ethics, it is not as if communitarian existence entails the prioritisation of the human community alone at the expense of the individual person. This is because the individual human being is also understood as a being that also possesses its individual goals, hopes and desires. So, from the way in which individual human beings exist and interact with each other and the surrounding natural environment, they still remain with their individual liberty such that they can also achieve their purposes for existence as individuals. As Imafidon puts it:

The human person, to the African, is a being having both physical and nonphysical features such as the head, heart, mind, and other physiological parts as well as possessing a destiny and destiny guardian, and the soul. But all of these are alive because the person is animated by force. The person occupies a central place in an African thought system because entities find meaning in his/her being (Imafidon, 2014: 42).
This view authenticates the idea that the ontological conception of the person in African ontology is both existential and practically oriented towards individual teleological existence. It is existential in so far as it affirms one’s existence on the basis of individual qualities in the human person. Some of these include: having a physical human body, the component of life as well as the moral dimension which is sometimes referred to as the personality aspect. This conception of being is also held by Gyekye and Wiredu, although Gyekye is comfortable with a dualist conception of a person which does not see an essential interaction between the human soul and the body (Gyekye, 1984: 208). On the other hand, Wiredu prefers to settle for a tripartite view of the person consisting of the life, blood and personality aspects. (Wiredu, 1996: 157). In spite of certain conceptual differences in their views on fundamental issues like the ontological status of the soul (Kaphagawani, 2004: 333), these views are useful to my idea of an ontology-based and teleologically oriented communitarian environmental ethics that respects individual autonomy.

Also, the ontological and autonomous conception of the individual should be practically oriented towards purposive existence. This is because there are certain expectations from such an autonomous individual that ought to be realised on the basis of possessing some of these attributes like body, life and personality. This view is pertinent to environmental ethics because a conception of what ought to be done and what ought not to be done with reference to the way human beings relate with the natural environment emanates from their varied and teleological uses of body, life and personality as they relate with nature. This is the reason why Onwuanibe argues that the traditional African philosophy of the human person is more existential and practical than theoretical. It is based on the conviction that the metaphysical sphere is not abstractly divorced from concrete experience; for the physical and metaphysical are aspects of reality, and the transition from the one to the other is natural (Onwuanibe, 1984: 184). (See also Bujo, 1998: 209; Taringa, 2006: 200.) In terms of the way the
existence of the individual human person is oriented towards the practical environmental ethical concerns, it is assumed that the individual human person is intrinsically connected with the other vital forces that constitute the various levels of ontological progression in African order of existence. Imafidon argues,

Any rigorous articulation of an African concept of a person will show that a human being is usually projected into an ontological progression and this implies that the force or energy possessed by a person can be diminished and increased within an African existential structure; and this is based on his actions and inactions, reverences, awe or disregard for higher forces in the hierarchy of being (Imafidon, 2014: 42).

For these reasons, I therefore maintain that the individual and the environment are closely connected and that the individual person ought to teleologically contribute to the well being of the individual person, the human community and the environment without violating one’s individual autonomy as I have established here.

7.5: Conclusion

This chapter has come as an additional argument to the argument that I developed in chapter six where I see nature to have moral status. In this chapter, I have continued to focus on such moral status of nature. However, in this particular chapter I argue that the moral status of nature is compatible with a different premise, which is communitarian thinking. I contend that the sub-Saharan African view of the community and the individual human person could also be reasonably taken as an additional foundation for an African ontology-based communitarian and teleologically oriented environmentalism.
Chapter Eight: Applications

8.1: Introduction

The preceding chapters have shown that sub-Saharan Africa has an elaborate view of environmental ethics that is based on the understanding of existence and its telos. However, real African applied environmental ethical issues have generally lacked this kind of indigenous African metaphysical approach to environmental ethics. Murove echoes this view as he argues that “applied ethics within sub-Saharan Africa has remained hugely biased to Western philosophical and Christian ethical traditions. The African ethical dimension is often ignored or even lost completely” (Murove, 2009a: xv). In that light, in this particular chapter, I seek to assess the extent to which my theoretical understanding of African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics could be taken as being relevant to concrete applied ethical cases in an African context. I attempt to do this by focussing on the possibility of utilising African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics as a basis for theoretically uniting, integrating and making peaceful coexistence between human communities and non-human communities. In particular, I mainly focus on the problem of integrating human and non-human communities in Southern Africa within what has come to be known as the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP\(^{34}\)) in Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

I identify some of the major ethical challenges that are faced by the authorities of the three respective countries as well as those faced by the communities within and around the GLTP. Such challenges include human-wildlife conflict, poaching of wildlife as well as displacement of both human and animal communities. (See also Fenio, 2014: 1-42; Zimbabwe Situation, 2014; Legal Brief Report, 2015) In the light of these serious challenges, I seek to establish the extent to which environmental peace-building, coexistence, peace,

\(^{34}\) The acronym GLTP will be used throughout this work to refer to the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.
social, political and economic stability in sub-Saharan African communities such as those in the GLTP could be attained by the appeal to the African order of existence and its teleological orientation. I also seek to establish that the African understanding of existence and its teleological orientation could be plausibly taken as a strong foundation for peace-building, peaceful coexistence and unity among not only the relationships between human beings and nature, but also between human communities themselves.

So far, no serious attempts have been made to clearly come up with what ought to be the African indigenous philosophy behind the initiative of the GLTP except for the idea of natural resource conservation and management. Rosaleen Duffy alluded to this view as she argues that “indigenous knowledge about local environments has tended to be less valued than the scientific advice that policy makers prefer to apply” (Duffy, 2001: 6). In my view, in order for this objective of natural resource conservation to be achieved, some serious consideration should be on the possibility of coming up with some fundamental sub-Saharan African guiding philosophy behind this objective of resource conservation within the GLTP. This idea could reasonably make sense in the light of the view that I have argued for in this work that existence ought to precede everything else. Accordingly, in order to understand how natural resource management and conservation as well as peaceful coexistence between human and non-human communities could be achieved in the GLTP, there is need to first critically appreciate the sub-Saharan African understanding of existence. This view of existence prioritizes communal or communitarian existence in which all beings ought to be given ethical standing despite the varying degrees of such ethical standards.

Among the works that have so far examined various issues to do with issues around the GLTP, there seems to be some vacuum in terms of appraising the GLTP from an environmental ethical perspective, especially from the ontology-based and teleological view that I explore. For example, Anna Spenceley (2006: 649-667) examines the GLTP from a
socio-economic perspective as she looks at viable ways in which nature-based tourism could be promoted in the area. In her work, however, the environmental ethical perspective remains unexamined. Also, Baxter Tavuyanago and Enock Cornvence Makwara (2011: 46-64) have done some extensive research on a part of the GLTP, Gonarezhou national park. However, theirs is more of a historical approach that is mainly focused on a selected part of the GLTP, as well as “the contest that has occurred over the control and management of Gonarezhou” (Tavuyanago and Makwara, 2011: 46). Recently, in a report for the United States Department of State, Kenly Greer Fenio (2014: 1-42) has attempted to address some ethical challenges within the GLTP as well. The report, however, only focuses on rhino horn poaching in Southern African and Mozambique alone at the expense of other environmental ethical challenges that the whole GLTP faces. In the light of these varied, selective but important perspectives on the GLTP, I therefore seek to complement such literature with a different but novel approach that is more focussed on the environmental ethical challenges being faced within the GLTP. This is an environmental ethical view that is mainly informed by teleological conceptions of existence in African philosophy.

This chapter broadly divides into three sections. In the first section, I define the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP) as a transboundary resource management and conservation strategy in Southern Africa. I focus on the major purpose of existence of the GLTP and also critically assess how its major objectives and main thrust could be understood from the perspective of an ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmentalism. In the second section, I focus on the environmental ethical challenges such as poaching, human-wildlife conflicts and displacement that are faced within the GLTP as a result of human and non-human relationships within the grand park. In the last section, I critically assess the social and political relationships within the GLTP. Overall, I try to use the teleological framework that I develop in this work in terms of how it could be taken to solve some of
these environmental ethical challenges that I identify within the GLTP. By and large, this chapter applies the kind of environmental ethical thinking that I develop in this thesis to real world issues within an African environment.

8.2: The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP)

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP) is an initiative that is centred on the idea of transboundary resource management and conservation in Southern Africa. (See also Wolmer, 2003: 1-27; Spenceley 2006: 650-1.) It is particularly a project that seeks to bring together three countries, namely, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe in terms of natural resources management and conservation as contained in the treaty that was signed between the governments of the three countries in 2002. The preamble to this Treaty (2002) says the following in terms of the mission of the three countries that are parties to the GLTP:

As an affiliation of nations steeped in a common tradition of close association with our sustaining earth, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe join in recognition of our mutual responsibility to protect and preserve our natural resources for the common good of all (Treaty, 2002: 3).

The ultimate attempt by these three countries which are signatories to this agreement, and the aim of constituting the GLTP, has been to safeguard in common, natural resources in the three major national parks found in Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe. (See also Murphree, 2010: 5.) In spite of the territorial boundaries separating these three countries, the idea of the GLTP is to commonly safeguard natural resources that are home to the major national parks in these countries. Writing in 2003, William Wolmer observes that “in the last five years in Southern Africa, an apparently surprising coalition of interests have rapidly rallied around the recently emerged concept of Transboundary Natural Resource Management (TBNRM)” (Wolmer, 2003: 1). The idea behind TBNRM as enshrined in the

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35 The Treaty refers to the agreement that was signed between the three governments of the republics of Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe.
GLTP is to make a coalition in the management of natural resources that are found in these three countries that are home to the three major national parks. These are: Limpopo national park in Mozambique, Kruger national park in South Africa and Gonarezhou national park in Zimbabwe.

The main objectives of the GLTP as contained in Article four of the Treaty that was signed between the three countries are:

1. foster trans-national collaboration and co-operation among the Parties which will facilitate effective ecosystem management in the area comprising the Transfrontier Park

2. promote alliances in the management of biological natural resources by encouraging social, economic and other partnerships among the Parties, including the private sector, local communities and non-governmental organisations

3. enhance ecosystem integrity and natural ecological processes by harmonising environmental management procedures across international boundaries and striving to remove artificial barriers impeding the natural movement of wildlife

4. facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a sustainable sub-regional economic base through appropriate development frameworks, strategies and work plans

5. develop trans-border eco-tourism as a means of fostering regional socio-economic development; and

6. establish mechanisms to facilitate the exchange of technical, scientific and legal information for the joint management of the ecosystem (Source: Article 4 of the Treaty (2002)).
In view of the above objectives of the idea behind the GLTP, it is apparent that the main thrust and focus of this grand project is on trans-national collaboration and alliances towards natural resource management and conservation in addition to other social, political and economic benefits like sustainable development and eco-tourism. However, what I find to be lacking from the objectives and thrust of the GLTP as contained in the Treaty is the kind of environmental ethical thinking that is supposed to guide communities within the three countries forming the GLTP. For example, it would be very difficult to imagine how the above objectives could be achieved in an African context without emphasising the centrality of African philosophy and its ontological and teleological dimensions.

Following the kind of ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics that I argue for in this work, it is important to realise that there is a very strong emphasis on the need for respect for all beings on the basis of life, vitality as well as purposes for existing. As I have argued in chapters four and five respectively, the African order of existence respects the value of all life forms and beings, notwithstanding the varying degrees of moral status as I also establish in chapter six. Consequently, if the proper purposes of existence such as life, survival, well-being and balance are properly understood together with the thrust of the GLTP, then some of the ethical challenges being faced by the authorities as well as by the communities within and around the park could reasonably be dealt with.

Also, the establishment of the GLTP has been a bag of mixed blessings considering some of the challenges that human and non-human communities have continued to face after its creation in 2002. Some of these challenges include human-wildlife conflict, poaching of wildlife as well as displacement of animals and human beings. This is why I now proceed to examine the extent to which my ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethic could be of practical relevance towards the promotion of environmental well-being, peaceful core-existence, stability and peace in the GLTP and the surrounding non-human and
human communities. This is against the reality of how to integrate human settlements with the establishment of such a park in which, for example, challenges such as lack of peaceful coexistence and harmonious living between human beings and non-human animals as well as poaching of various animal species are apparent. My contention is that African ontology-based and theocentric environmental ethics can be taken as the foundation for practically integrating human communities with the non-human communities in this grand transfrontier park and the surrounding communities. I therefore use my ontology-based environmental ethics to demonstrate how some of these challenges could be addressed, although I do not want to pretend that African ontology-based and theocentric environmental ethics is the ultimate solution to such challenges.

8.3: Human and Non-Human Relations within and around the GLTP

The GLTP is not only home to non-human animals alone. It is also the source of livelihood for human communities that surround the transfrontier park. These human communities from various parts of Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe make use of aspects of the natural environment such as water, fish, firewood, bush meat from animals, animal skins and horns for various subsistence and commercial purposes. However, the continued dependence of human communities on non-human beings within and around the GLTP has serious implications on environmental ethics, the relations between the three countries as well as on the survival of the transfrontier park itself.

Also, notwithstanding its environmental, social, political and economic advantages, the establishment of the GLTP has had its fair share of problems that are related to environmental ethics as well. A number of problems that are related to environmental ethics continue to be witnessed today. Some of these challenges include poaching of wildlife, human-wildlife conflict as well as displacement. Human-wildlife conflict is a result of the lack of peaceful coexistence and harmonious living between human beings and non-human animals.
Displacement is felt by both human and non-human beings as a result of the creation of the park.

In the light of some of these notable ethical challenges, I argue that African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics has a place in the future of the GLTP. This kind of environmentalism becomes practically useful to the agenda of the GLTP considering the need to come up with a guiding philosophy for the establishment of such an idea which I suspect could be justified by the African understanding of existence as discussed in this work. I also critically examine the practical utility of African ontology-based environmentalism in the context in which human communities could be integrated with non-human communities within the GLTP. This is against the background that both human and non-human communities impact on each other either negatively or positively. Ultimately, I seek to argue that my idea of African environmentalism is compatible with the agenda of the GLTP if it is correctly interpreted. As I focus on the relationships between human beings and animals within the GLTP, in what follows, I examine problems such as poaching, human-wildlife conflict and displacement.

8.3.1: Poaching in the GLTP and the Place of Ontology-Based Environmental Ethics

Wildlife poaching remains one of the serious challenges facing the viability of the GLTP. (See also Grime, 2005: 5.) Poaching of wildlife in the park is so serious, especially poaching of the animal species that constitute the big five, such as the rhino, elephant and the buffalo. Human communities continue to negatively impact on wildlife within these parks through illegal poaching of animal species such as the rhino, elephant and other animal species that are not necessarily part of the big five. According to a report in the online newspaper Zimbabwean Situation, “poaching in Gonarezhou National Park is threatening the existence

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36 The big five refers to animal species like the lion, leopard, rhino, elephant and the buffalo. These are species of animals that were traditionally used as hunting trophies by traditional sub-Saharan African communities.
of the GLTP” (Zimbabwean Situation, 2014: 3 May). Also, a report on rhino poaching in South Africa and Mozambique that was produced for the United States’ Department of State by Fenio notes that, “as of early November 2014, 969 rhinos had been killed in South Africa (with 637 in Kruger national park alone” (Fenio, 2014: 5). To demonstrate the seriousness of poaching, particularly of the rhino within the Kruger national park, a Legal Brief report also says that “urgent action is needed to halt the scourge of rhino poaching that is decimating South Africa’s rhino population, particularly in the Kruger national park which has already lost 40 this year” (Legal Brief, 2015: 25 June).

Poaching can be done for either subsistence or for commercial purposes. In the case of subsistence poaching, surrounding local communities make use of meat, hides, teeth, horns and bones from local animals for their subsistence. In Zimbabwe, for example, indigenous Shona, Tsonga, and Venda communities in and around the GLTP still rely on bush meat, hides and other animal products for their livelihood. Some of the purposes for the use of these animals include dietary provisions from meat, the use of hides for making clothing as well as the use of animal teeth and bones for various ritual and traditional medicinal purposes. Also, products from these animals such as meat, hides and bones can also be used for barter trading with other communities outside the GLTP.

From an African ontology-based and teleologically oriented view, the sustainable use of animals and their products ought to be acceptable considering the teleological, vitalist and hierarchical view of existence that I argued for in chapter three. Teleological reasons such as the satisfaction of human welfare through meat hides and other products that are used for various human purposes could reasonably justify the subsistence of human beings on these animals. This view is based on the realisation of the hierarchy of existence in African ontology. According to this view, despite animals also having purpose for existing, they are lesser vital forces than human beings and that human beings occupy a higher place in the
hierarchy of existence like I have argued in chapters three and four. It is therefore my recommendation to policy-makers that are responsible for the GLTP to take into consideration the ontological and teleological dimensions of African ontology as well as the importance of subsistence use of animals by human beings.

On the other hand, contrary to subsistence poaching, which could be morally justified for its subsistence purposes as well as the appeal to vitality and telos in African ontology, commercial poaching is more inclined towards making money out of animals. Tavuyanago and Makwara observe that “commercial poachers target animals with high international market value such as rhinoceros for horn and elephants for ivory” (Tavuyanago and Makwara, 2011: 55). One ethical dilemma that is likely to be faced in the light of the problem of poaching within the GLTP is the problem of whether ‘poaching’ should be discouraged such that indigenous human communities within and around the GLTP cannot kill and use animals from the park and the surrounding areas for their daily sustenance. While both subsistence and commercial poaching could be viewed as wrong from a social, political, economic and ethical standpoint, it is also problematic to equate these two forms of poaching as all being wrong.

A morally significant justification of subsistence poaching as opposed to commercial poaching is that subsistence poaching is more into the promotion of basic human life, well-being and survival while commercial poaching is somewhat oriented towards monetary gains and luxury ornaments. This is how African ontology-based environmental ethics could come in and accommodate ‘poaching’ and the use of animals for subsistence purposes. This is because it accepts the African hierarchy of existence in which, despite having moral status,

37 I deliberately use the word ‘poaching’ in this context in order to show the weight and connotations with which its meaning could have on local communities that rely on non-human animals for day to day survival. While indigenous local communities continue to use animals for subsistence purposes, they may not be comfortable in being referred to as poachers.
the use of animals for survival is acceptable as argued for in chapters three and six. Of course African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics does not explicitly say much in terms of distinguishing the moral difference between subsistence use of animals where there is an alternative like nutritious vegetarian food, and where there is no alternative.

In chapters six and seven, I have argued that nature has moral status despite the varying degrees of such moral status from one being to the other as implicit in the African hierarchy of existence that I examined in chapter four. As I take this view of moral status, I contend that the ‘poaching’ and use of animals for subsistence purposes could be reasonably justified on the grounds that human beings cannot give non-human animals moral standing to the extent that they can discontinue relying on them for survival even if nutritious vegetarian foods were available. This view can be understood teleologically to imply that, despite having moral status, animals still have purposes of furthering the existence and purposes of human beings such as those discussed in chapter four like life, well-being and survival of human beings.

However, while human life, well-being and survival are at stake, there is also the question of whether human beings cannot lead a meaningful life if they do not ‘poach’ or use animals for their various nutritional, clothing, barter, ritual and medicinal purposes. In essence, human beings do not necessarily die without using these animals for these purposes. Although human beings suspect that human life and purposes for being will be significantly harmed by poverty, malnutrition, disease and death as a result of lack of some basic provisions from these animals, it does not necessarily follow because there are other sources of healthy food. Animals are not the only sources of nutritious and health diet. In addition, meat is also discouraged nowadays because of health reasons such that vegetarians and animal liberationists would even claim that it is more attractive to feed directly on vegetative dishes as opposed to animals. These are some of the reasons which the authorities that are
responsible for the GLTP could take advantage of and discourage the local communities within and around the GLTP from poaching.

At the same time, the emphasis on respect for life in the kind of African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmentalism that I argue for here must also be a strong reason to suspect that wildlife ought to be recognised as having moral standing and purpose as well. As I have argued in chapter four, although human beings could be taken to have more significant purposes for *being* than non-human animals, animals also have their purposes for existing. Some of these purposes include the need to live life, survive and achieve well-being and balance in creation. This view could be taken in order to appreciate the problems associated with wanton poaching of wildlife in GLTP, especially for purely commercial purposes through for example, trophy\(^{38}\) hunting and killing elephants for ivory. Using the kind of environmental ethics that I proffer in this work, if human beings could realise that animals also have purposive lives to lead, they would perhaps reasonably make commercial use of them, but knowing well that they also have moral status. For example, the concept of trophy hunting can still be practiced without necessarily killing animals. It can be done by using hunting methods that do not necessarily kill the animals. For example, one recommendation that I make to the authorities that are responsible for the GLTP is that tagging and branding of the animals could be used as a sign of a trophy.

Similarly, animal horns and other products that are used for ivory, medicines and rituals can also be extracted by de-horning live animals such as elephants since these animals still need to continue to exist. Although it may be difficult to use some products from these animals such as hides and bones for various human purposes without necessarily killing some

\(^{38}\) Currently in Southern Africa there is a debate going on in terms of whether commercial and leisure hunting of animals for trophies ought to be acceptable and whether it should be allowed to continue. This follows the killing of some of the longest living animals such as the lions. One case in point is the killing of the lion ‘Cecil’ in Zimbabwe by an American dentist Walter Palmer in July 2015. (See also *The Herald* 2015a, 2015b.)
animals, my recommendation in that regards would be that local communities should be discouraged from the use of endangered and rare species for these purposes. This is because such species of animals such as elephants, rhino and pangolin can easily go into extinction\(^{39}\).

If African ontology-based and theocentric environmental ethics is correctly understood, this kind of environmental ethic could make a meaningful practical contribution in sustaining wildlife within the GLTP. For example, this view of environmentalism could be taken to weigh the morality of poaching of animals. Since African ontology-based and theocentric environmental ethics does not necessarily discourage the use of animals for human consumption as argued in chapter six, it could also be taken to justify the ‘poaching’ or use of animals for subsistence purposes only and not for commercial and leisure purposes. One reasonable justification for such a view is that human life and human purposes are more important than those of non-human animals. Following the teleological framework that I develop here, human beings occupy a higher ontological level than other non-human animals. Consequently, human beings must also have more vital force than animals as I have argued in chapter five.

Also, the subsistence use of animals through traditional hunting for rituals and medicines is more sustainable than modern commercial hunting for meat, hides, hone and trophies. The killing of animals for rituals and medicines must ultimately further other purposes for existing such as life and living well. For example, in Zimbabwe, traditional Shona communities in and around the GLTP kill certain species of animals as a sign of respect and sacrifice to traditional chiefs, ancestors and God during traditional ceremonies. They also make use of traditional medicines from some animals. (See also Taringa 2006: 202.) Although I do not want to confirm that there is empirical evidence that these medicines work

\(^{39}\) Although I have not yet argued for a theory that establishes the wrongness of causing the extinction of species, my view is that the eventual effects on the life and well-being of certain species that are relatively rare will cause them to go into extinction and thereby risk harming other beings.
or that such sacrifices and rituals actually protect and work for these societies, these practices remain prevalent and are all teleologically oriented as they are also thought to further the purposes of human life such as well-being and survival. These teleological reasons could therefore justify why human beings could be pardoned for relying on animals for their subsistence.

As I have also established in chapter four, the idea of respect and reverence for life remains central to African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics. Consequently, if this idea could be taken as entirely binding among communities within and outside the GLTP, that could significantly contribute to environmental well-being within the whole GLTP and the surrounding communities and solve the incidences of wildlife poaching for purposes that are outside those of subsistence. For example, Wolmer notes that one of the major challenges facing the objectives of the GLTP has been the need to integrate human settlements within and outside this transfrontier park without violating the sanctity of life of either the human communities or of the non-human communities such as animals (Wolmer, 2003: 15). This is what I now proceed to discuss in the following section that focuses on human-wildlife conflict and the resultant problem of displacement.

8.3.2: Human-Wildlife Conflict and Displacement

Lack of peaceful coexistence and harmonious living as a result of the creation of the park has been one other serious problem facing both human and non-human communities within the GLTP. This particular problem has also come to be known as the problem of human-wildlife conflict. It is seen as a human-wildlife conflict because of challenges of promotion of coexistence between human beings and wildlife such as the hippopotamus, crocodiles, snakes, elephants and the lion. All these animals are vicious and dangerous to human beings and other animals such that it is difficult to coexist with them. According to Le Bel (2011) “human wildlife conflict exists when the needs and behaviour of wildlife impact negatively
on the goals of human beings. It tends to manifest itself in scenarios where human strategies affect free movement of wild animals and vice versa” (Le Bel, 2011: 383).

The incidences of human-wildlife conflict within the GLTP are plain to see. According to Le Bel within the Limpopo national park alone, between 2007 and 2010, almost 384 cases of human-wildlife conflict were recorded, with an average of about 96 cases per year, with the elephant being the major problem contributing to about 83% of the recorded cases of human-wildlife conflicts (Le Bel, 2011: 293). Some of the effects of human-wildlife conflicts include death of both human and non-human life, destruction of crops, and livestock and diseases such as foot and mouth disease in livestock. Edson Gandiwa, Patience Gandiwa and Never Muboko observe that human-wildlife conflict “is a problem which threatens both human lives, livelihoods and the survival of wildlife throughout the world” (Gandiwa, Gandiwa and Muboko, 2012: 252).

Because of the creation of the GLTP and the subsequent problems of human-wildlife conflict, displacement of both human and non-human communities has become inevitable. Displacement as a result of such conflict is a problem both human and non-human communities face. Local human communities and non-human communities have been and continue to be displaced because of the fact that it is difficult for human beings to coexist with wild animal species such as lions, elephants and rhinos. For that reason, local human communities have faced displacement in and around the areas within the GLTP, thereby losing access to some of their original land, woodlands, pastures and water sources. For example:

[In South Africa], in 1969 the Makuleke people were forcibly removed by the state from a 24 000 hectare area that they inhabited in the north of the Kruger national park . . . [and in Zimbabwe] when Gonarezhou national park was declared a national park in 1975, the inhabitants of the park were forced to
resettle outside the park’s boundaries . . . [while] the government of Mozambique proclaimed the Coutada 16 as Limpopo national park despite the fact that people were living within it (Spencely, 2006: 656-661).

From the above, it is apparent that the historical roots of the problem of displacement dates back to the 1960s when the GLTP was created. Such displacement has had and continues to have very serious implications on indigenous people’s lives and the way they interact with the surrounding.

According to Natalie Grime, “currently, dislocation of local, poor and native peoples proves to be a continuing consequence of the creation of the park, even though native voices were originally promised to be heard and incorporated into park management. This has not been the case” (Grime, 2005: 5). While the idea behind the GLTP may seem to be good as enshrined in the preamble to the Treaty (2002), it has failed to critically address the problem of population displacement. This is why Grime comes to the conclusion that “initiatives behind conservation efforts around parks and within communal land programs sound good on paper, but in reality these efforts have negative outcomes and consequences for local people” (Grime, 2005: 5). The GLTP is therefore an area that is surrounded mainly by communities that are disgruntled and displaced as a result of the creation of the park (See also Tavuyanago and Makwara, 2011: 47.) Accordingly, Grime asserts that “parks such as these take ecological consideration into account first, leaving human populations as an afterthought most of the time” (Grime, 2005: 5).

To use the kind of ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics developed here, these problems resulting from the creation of the GLTP and the subsequent human-wildlife conflicts could be solved by an appeal to aspects that promote life, well-being, balance and harmonious living that are embedded in such environmental ethics. African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics becomes theoretically useful
towards solving the problems of human-wildlife conflict and displacement because of its emphasis on aspects like vitalism and teleology. As I have argued in chapter three when I examined the question of ontology in African philosophy, the hierarchy of existence in African ontology would be incomplete without the human person or other lower forces such as non-human animals.

Consequently, within the GLTP, if the hierarchy of existence is to be complete, there is need for peaceful coexistence between human and non-human communities. Although wildlife is not in a position to appreciate the need for peaceful coexistence in order to avoid conflict, it is my view that human-wildlife conflict could be minimised by an appeal to ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics. Such kind of environmental ethics is based on the recognition and acceptance of coexistence and realisation of purposes for living in both human beings and non-human animals as established in chapter four. However, this view of existence and telos also recognises the difference in terms of hierarchy between human beings and animals. Practically, therefore, the GLTP should have been created in such a way that it is not within or surrounded by human communities. However, what to do now where there is conflict is the most fundamental question that needs to be addressed. To address that problem, I therefore argue that human beings remain practically accountable and responsible for minimising human-wildlife conflict. As rational beings, human beings should either move and relocate to areas where such conflict is minimal or non-existent. However, this view remains a little bit problematic especially in a situation where there is no public land for relocation by human beings.

Also, the other reasons why I think that human-wildlife conflict could be solved by an appeal to teleological environmental ethics are the aspects of vital force in animals, their possession of moral status and the communitarian relations between human beings and non-human animals all of which I have emphasised in chapters five, six and seven respectively. African
ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics tries to solve these human wildlife-conflicts that threaten life and its purposes within the GLTP in general. Since it is more focussed on *telos*, vitality and moral status as established in chapters four, five and six respectively, African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmentalism becomes useful because of its emphasis on promotion of life and purposes of existence such as well-being, survival and balance. For these teleological reasons, despite the conflicts subsisting between human beings and other vicious animals like snakes, elephants, crocodiles and lions, such animal species should not be killed or eliminated from the environment as they also need to survive and attain their purposes for existence such as living a meaningful life and achieving harmonious living and balance in nature. As a result, notwithstanding the varying degrees of moral status and purpose between human beings and animals as seen in chapter six, both human and animal purposes could be fulfilled by the acceptance and recognition of the respect for life, well-being and survival in general as I have argued in chapter four.

Ideally the above view is theoretically plausible, but practically it may sound absurd because it is not so clear in terms of who, between human beings and animals, ought to move in order to avoid conflict. However, following the kind of environmental ethics that I espouse here, human beings should first realise that they have a more significant moral status and that they are more vital than other animals which I have treated as lower forces in chapter three. Also, because of its acceptance of hierarchy in terms of vitality and moral status, African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics accommodates the fundamental distinction between moral *agents* and moral *patients* which Regan makes in the following two passages:

Moral agents are individuals who have a variety of sophisticated abilities, including the ability to bring impartial principles to bear on the determination of what, all considered, morally ought to be done, and, having made this
distinction, to freely choose or fail, to choose to act as morality, as they conceive it requires. Because moral agents have these abilities, it is fair to hold them morally accountable for what they do, assuming that the circumstances for their acting as they do in a particular case do not dictate otherwise.

In contrast to moral agents, moral patients lack the prerequisites that would enable them to control their own behaviour in ways that would make them morally accountable for what they do. A moral patient lacks the ability to formulate, let alone bring to bear, moral principles in deliberating about which one among a number of possible acts it would be right or proper to perform. Moral patients in a word, cannot do what is right, nor can they do what is wrong (Regan, 1983: 19).

According to this distinction, generally human beings are moral agents while animals like the lion, rhino, crocodile and the elephant are moral patients. At some level again, both human beings and animals could also be looked at as all moral patients. However, it is not true that all moral patients are moral agents. This explains why human beings are moral agents while animals are not.

Consequently, in the light of the above distinction and following ontology-based environmental ethics, this gives human beings the teleological responsibility to create harmonious relations between themselves and animals so that they all achieve their respective purposes for existing. The justification of this view is that human beings occupy a higher ontological level than all animals and that they are rational beings who have the ability to make informed moral choices as opposed to animals. As moral agents, human beings need to treat animals as just moral patients whose existence and well-being is affected by moral agents. Practically human beings could therefore move from the GLTP so that animals can live peacefully.
In the African hierarchy of existence that stretches from God, the ancestors, human beings down to the non-human animals as seen in chapter three, it is apparent that the higher the hierarchy, the more vitality and responsibility the force possesses. Accordingly, human beings, ancestors and God have more vitality and ethical responsibility than the lower forces such as animals. For these reasons, human beings should be the ones to create conditions that take into account and avoid such conflicts so that all beings could achieve their purposes for living. For example, the authorities that are in charge of the GLTP should be responsible for relocating human communities to areas that are outside the GLTP so that human-wildlife conflicts could be minimised.

Overall, the problem of solving the conflicts between human communities and non-human communities has remained one of the challenges facing the viability of the GLTP. According to Grime:

> There are many different human communities within and around the park. They are mainly composed of groups of Bantu origin: Africans speaking languages descended from the same linguistic phylum of the people who displaced the original San hunter-gatherers eight hundred years ago. Many of these people live a life based on animal totemic and ancestor spirit religions such as the Shona in the north of the park to the Makuleke in the south (Grime, 2005: 211).

Central to the above view is the understanding that human and non-human communities could peacefully coexist in their respective communities once the African view of existence has been understood in line with its teleological dimension. According to this sub-Saharan view of existence that is based on totemic relations between human beings and non-human animals, there must be fundamental relationships subsisting between human beings and non-human beings. For example, among the most traditional Shona, Ndebele, Tsonga and Venda
communities that live within and around the GLTP, different families belong to different totems. These totems are given after mostly animals such as the crocodile, lion, elephant, rhinoceros, hippopotamus, zebra and fish.

Although it is difficult to see how individuals belonging to any of these totem animals could be deemed to coexist and relate with them, the wisdom behind such a practice is to make sure that human beings peacefully coexist with, and give respect to animals because they are related to them. (See also Mangena, 2013: 38.) This is what could partly make it easier to integrate human and non-human communities within the GLTP because the environment always remains part and parcel of, and within the African order of existence such that people need to respect these animals. Totems therefore invoke a sense of relational ontology between human beings and animals. This view of coexistence with totem animals does not imply that non totem animals are to be ill-treated. At the same time, the idea of coexistence between human beings and animals in this context should not be plainly taken to imply that people could live together in the same vicinity with animals since that is not practically possible. The idea of coexistence that I have in mind here is where human beings are capable of living and also letting animals also live their own lives, including non-totem animals.

8.4: The Social and Political Dimension

Human-wildlife conflict and displacement within the GLTP does not only end at affecting the individual human beings and wildlife alone. Human-wildlife conflicts and displacement for example, have some implications for social and political relationships between local human communities and the authorities that are responsible for the creation of the GLTP. This is why the social and political dimension in African ontology-based and theocentric environmental ethics cannot be ignored, especially in the light of the problem of displacement of communities within the GLTP.
The kind of environmentalism that I espouse here has the potential to integrate human beings and non-human communities without necessarily displacing human beings. By this, I mean that it is practically capable of helping towards the promotion of coexistence, stability as well as peace among human and non-human communities as implicit in the agenda of the GLTP. According to Grime, “one of the most important reasons for the creation of the park is to attain political peace between the three countries through unification” (Grime, 2005: 210). Because of its emphasis on communitarian existence, African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics therefore becomes compatible with peace-building as implicit in the agenda of the GLTP.

One major source of conflict between human beings has been over displacement and the control of the Gonarezhou national park in Zimbabwe. This kind of conflict has been mainly characteristic between the Tsonga people and the national authorities in Zimbabwe. For example, Tavuyanago and Makwara have identified the Gonarezhou as a major source of conflict between the local Shangani40 (Tsonga) people in Zimbabwe and the post colonial Zimbabwean state (Tavuyanago and Makwara, 2011: 46-64). They argue that the conflict is over the ownership and control of the Gonarezhou national park as Tsonga people feel that they have been displaced from “their fatherland at the onset of colonial occupation . . . [and consequently, when Gonarezhou was created as a national park, it resulted in the] . . . relocation of Shangani traditional communities to pave way for the establishment of an animal park” (Tavuyanago and Makwara, 2011: 54). It is my contention that this kind of misunderstanding between local communities and authorities could be answered by appealing to the African understanding of existence and its social and political dimension. My argument here is that, since human beings and animate beings are capable of coexistence following the

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40 Tavuyanago and Makwara use the name Shangani to denote the Tsonga people. However, I try to avoid this nomenclature since it is somewhat derogatory as it is derived from the name of the traditional Tsonga king, Soshangane. I therefore use the name Tsonga, to denote these people whom Tavuyanago and Makwara call the Shangani.
teleological framework, it must also be reasonable to accept that human beings should also be capable of peaceful coexistence as purposive beings. This is despite the historical circumstances between the local Tsonga people and the authorities then because the GLTP is now a living reality.

For the authorities that are responsible for the GLTP, the procedures that might be undertaken in order to solve such human conflicts or the conflicts between local authorities and the park authorities are to integrate the local people into the ownership, control and management of the GLTP. For example, in order to solve the problem of the control and ownership of the GLTP as well as how to distribute and share resources and income out of the park, the governments of the three countries should seriously consider the idea of community share ownership trusts. This is where resources and income from the GLTP is distributed equally between the park authorities and the local people. Such resources and income could also be used for the development of the local area under the community share ownership trusts.

The other idea is to consider ecotourism as the basis for the protection of nature within the GLTF. Ecotourism is basically ecology-based tourism. It involves people visiting ecological places like national parks, in this case, the GLTF in order to see and enjoy the beauty of the natural environment and even animals that live in it. According to this view, local communities stand to benefit more from ecotourism as it gives local people as well as authorities the opportunity to socially and economically benefit from such tourism. That way, ecotourism becomes a reasonable basis on which to protect nature, particularly animals within the GLTP.

8.5: Conclusion

The ultimate attempt here has been at trying to assess the extent to which African ontology-based environmental ethics could theoretically fare well with real issues within the African
context. From this chapter, it is apparent that African ontology-based environmental ethics could be a reasonable environmentalism that could be used in tackling real problems such as the ones faced within the GLTP. Overall, notwithstanding its particularistic orientation, African ontology-based environmental ethics remains potentially capable of meaningfully contributing to, and adding on to the mainstream discourse of environmental ethics.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have advanced an environmental ethic that is based on African ontology. Contrary to the traditional approaches to ethics that are based on interpretation of the Western, Eastern, Christian and Islamic traditions (Murove, 2009a: xiv), I approach environmental ethics from a distinctly African metaphysical approach. I argue that African ontology-based environmental ethics is essentially a kind of teleologically oriented environmental ethics that I suspect should be taken as an equally reasonable and useful environmental ethical thinking among other environmental ethical perspectives such as those in non African traditions. This kind of environmental ethics would perhaps address some scepticism expressed about African ethics in a recent work by Horsthemke when he comes to the conclusion that “non anthropocentric orientations in African ethics remain illusory” (Horsthemke, 2015: 98). Although I partly agree with some of the claims that Horsthemke makes about African ethics, in this thesis, I do not accept the view that African ethics is inherently anthropocentric. At the same time, I do not intend to claim that African environmental ethics is totally immune to anthropocentric elements as I advance African ontology-based environmental ethics.

What I have attempted in this thesis is to advance an environmental ethical thinking that is attractively based on the African understanding of existence and its teleological dimension. According to this kind of environmental ethics which is based on the view of existence and purpose in African ontology, all beings that exist must have been created and exist in such a
way that they occupy a certain level of existence within the hierarchy of being that stretches from God, the ancestors, human beings down to non-human beings. Following such a hierarchy of existence, I note that all beings, that is, all aspects of the environment, must have been made and ought to live in such a way that they have some purpose for existence and ultimately moral status despite such moral status varying from one being to the other. This explains why I have therefore argued that human beings must have direct obligations towards the environment.

As I critically interpret the teleological view of existence in African ontology in order to understand environmental ethics, I make various metaphysical claims about African environmental ethics. As a result, I argue that despite not being animate, beings such as plants, the air, water sources and the soil are also taken into account in terms of having telos and moral status in such an African ontology-based and teleologically oriented environmental ethics. Overall, I conclude that if it is clearly understood within the context of teleological existence, the African understanding of existence is strongly oriented towards environmental ethics. This is because of the inherent teleological character of existence in African ontology.
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