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No one is born hating another person because of the colour of their skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. (Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 1994)

This dissertation was inspired by the above quotation from Nelson Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994).

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Abstract

A number of theories on humanness exist in both the West and Africa. This dissertation presents a comparative critical analysis of different theories on humanness: altruism in Western philosophy, and ubuntu in African philosophy. Michael Tomasello holds that human cooperation is a result of the uniqueness of human communication. He proposes that human beings’ advanced cognitive abilities are what allows them to make sense of the world through the use of communication. The uniqueness of human communication has resulted in the development of humanity; the development from primal beings to the uniquely evolved beings that they currently embody. As a result of this ontogenesis, Tomasello holds that the evolution of human communication happened as a result of two factors, ecological and cultural, which have left human beings interdependent and mutualistic. Interdependence and mutualism resulted in shared activities but also shared forms of communication. Tomasello says that communication is what allows human beings to behave cooperatively, and thus also altruistically. Cooperation resulted in shared identity and harmonious relationships, the cornerstones of ubuntu. Although ubuntu is a multifaceted construct of the identification of humanness through humanness, it comprises many of the same characteristics as altruism. Crucially, this dissertation argues that although these theories are different, they present related perspectives and characteristics that are shared by human beings in ways that are unique.
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Introduction and Orientation

This study provides a comparative critical analysis of selected writings by Michael Tomasello on human communication, altruism and cooperation and the African philosophy of ubuntu. It offers insight into the importance of human communication as it relates to the humanistic characteristics of altruism and cooperation. The study further offers an interpretation of altruism and cooperation through communication and dissects how these concepts relate to the African philosophy of ubuntu. Through explaining human communication, its origins and how it works, I present a discussion of the evolution of human communication from its infancy to the advanced communicative abilities that human beings possess today. With the help of the selected writings by Tomasello, I also offer an overview of the evolution of human thinking and human communication as they facilitate human interaction. My study further explains that it is difficult to separate the evolution of communication from the evolution of humankind. Importantly, they present characteristics that are uniquely human.

Moreover, this study provides a discussion of altruism and cooperation and how they facilitate group-based activities. It highlights the importance of humans’ cognitive abilities to make sense of the world around them through coordinated and collaborative activities facilitated through the use of communication. My initial assumption, which is based on Tomasello’s writings, is that communication is the foundation of human interaction through cooperation and altruism. Tomasello thinks that the communicative nature of human beings also allows us to behave in ways that are more altruistic than other species. This study discusses how communication is used in ways that are altruistic in order to maintain and produce societies that are cooperative. These characteristics of altruism and cooperation are discussed as human characteristics on the basis of the assumption that human beings are predisposed to function and think in this way. Importantly, this study presents the characteristics of human communication, altruism and cooperation as uniquely human.
attributes that provide human beings with a competitive edge that allows them to survive.

Starting from there, this study presents the African philosophy of ubuntu and discusses how it relates to the characteristics of human communication, altruism and cooperation presented by Tomasello. The importance of linking these concepts, discussing their similarities and differences provides a comparison between theories of altruism and cooperation in the West and the moral theory of ubuntu in Southern Africa. I present an account of ubuntu that takes into consideration the humanness and personhood of human beings (Metz 2007). This study also critiques misinterpretations of ubuntu. I then draw on a comparison between Tomasello’s theory of altruism and cooperation and ubuntu to demonstrate the similarities that exist between constructs that stem from western and African theories of morals and ethics, and show that this comparison suggests that there are characteristics that are shared by all human beings. Tomasello holds that communication is what allows human beings to behave cooperatively, and thus altruistically. Cooperation results in shared identity and harmonious relations, the foundations of ubuntu. Although ubuntu is a multifaceted construct, it is comprised of many of the same characteristics of altruism discussed in other disciplines. This dissertation argues that ubuntu undoubtedly shares similar characteristics to those of western theories of altruism.

After my presentation, “Communication, the birthplace of ubuntu?”, at the South African Communication Association conference at the University of Johannesburg in 2018, Professor Keyan Tomaselli wrote to me and said:

Your presentation punctures the myth that ubuntu is uniquely (black) African, and that other societies a priori therefore lack this value. In fact, you argue against exceptionalism, and your comparative analysis between (western) altruism and (African) ubuntu shows that all societies have the capacity for shared humanistic values. Communion comes from communication, communitas and communicare (all aspects of ubuntu also). (Tomaselli 2018)

Tomaselli summarised precisely what this study is about. Its importance lies in the fact that at the centre of all humanistic qualities is the ability to communicate. Cooperation,
altruism and ubuntu are concepts that exist on the basis of human beings’ ability to use communication. These concepts are comprised of similar characteristics, yet exist in isolation from one another. This study highlights that there are similarities that exist between these concepts on the basis of human qualities shared by all human beings. No matter how primitive or simplistic communication is, these taken for granted processes are supported by human cognition which allows human beings to share common ground, joint attention, shared intentionality and good intentions. At the centre of communication is humanism, no matter how that humanism is interpreted. This study is particularly important in southern African communication studies as it aims to broaden the discussion on ubuntu which is often misinterpreted and utilised to decide who is included and excluded from the “group”.

1.2. Justification

The aim of this research project is to demonstrate the importance of human communication in understanding and constructing human lives. I do this through presenting selected writings by Michael Tomasello. Tomasello is the co-director of the Max Plank Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany, and is at the forefront of research on social cognition, developmental, comparative and cultural communication. Throughout the selected writings his focus is on human communication, why it is special and unique, why and how human beings cooperate, and how this kind of communication allows human beings to behave in ways that are altruistic. The importance behind the selection of Tomasello as a seminal theorist on human communication is because he presents the idea that human beings’ advanced communicative abilities are what sets us apart from other species – that is, what is uniquely human. So the first aim is to demonstrate the importance of human communication.

The second reason for undertaking this research project is to demonstrate the importance of human communication in cooperative and collaborative activities. At its roots, Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014) emphasises the importance that human cognition plays in constructing communication and human thinking overall. This kind of thinking has selective advantages, and one of those selective advantages is that
communication is used to facilitate cooperative and collaborative group activities. Although a fairly simple concept, the complexity of human cooperation is ever evolving and challenging the way in which human beings think and communicate.

The final reason for pursuing this research project is to draw a comparison between ubuntu and altruism and to demonstrate how these concepts relate to one another. The desired outcome of this approach is to demonstrate the similarities between these concepts and to broaden the discussion on both concepts as overlapping and co-existing theories of humanness.

1.3. Chapter Descriptions

Chapter two focuses on answering the question “what, according to Tomasello, makes human communication unique?” The chapter provides a brief overview of Tomasello’s theories and provides a summary of each of the selected writings: Origins of Human Communication (2008), Why We Cooperate (2009), and A Natural History of Human Thinking (2014), and show how each book builds on the work of human communication. I discuss the evolution of communication according to Tomasello with support from other theorists, and discuss in detail the ontogeny of human beings, and the phylogeny of human communication as a human characteristic. I demonstrate that it is inconceivable to separate the evolution of human communication from the evolution of mankind.

Building on the evolution of communication, the chapter delves into the uniqueness of human communication, and posits that human communication is unique as a result of the evolution of human thinking that was forced to change twice (Tomasello 2014): first as a result of gradual ecological changes; secondly as a result of the establishment of culture. As a result of these two changes, human beings were forced to live in groups, and therefore forced to find ways of being that were collaborative. Tomasello hypothesises that these changes forced human beings to create what he refers to as “shared intentionality”. This hypothesis holds that communication without two or more people cannot work, and meaning cannot be created by an isolated individual as meaning requires common ground, joint attention, joint goals, shared intentions (Tomasello 2014: 33). Meaning, as described by Grice (1957), can only be
created on the basis of common ground. Through creating common ground, human beings are able to create what Tomasello calls “we-intentionality”. “We-intentionality” is at the foundation of shared intentionality. Shared intentionality includes three things: 1) the ability to conceptualise and encode communication; 2) the ability to receive and make sense of communication; and 3) “shared conceptual framework between communicators” (Tomasello 2014: 3).

Continuing from the evolution of communication and the uniqueness of human communication as demonstrated by the shared intentionality hypothesis, chapter three answers my second research question: “how, according to Tomasello, are altruism and cooperation related to human communication?” Simpler: this chapter answers the question “why we cooperate?” The foundations of this chapter lie in why Tomasello thinks human beings share, and help and inform each other. Tomasello holds that these three activities are at the foundation of human communication and the expression of altruistic behaviour. Moreover, Tomasello (2009: 99) thinks that collaborative activities are “the birthplace of altruistic action and humans’ uniquely cooperative forms of communication”. This chapter discusses how human beings make use of their cognitive and advanced communicative abilities to behave in ways that are altruistic. In his discussion on altruism, Tomasello refers back to culture and influence of socialisation on cooperation and altruism. Tomasello (2009) believes that human beings are born altruistic. Tomasello (2009) provides empirical evidence to support this. However, he says that it is when human beings are socialised that their altruism becomes selective or directed. This is as a result of a number of factors, including social norms and reciprocity. Social behaviour becomes guided by social institutions of right and wrong. Furthermore, social reciprocity or lack thereof will determine the extent of cooperative and altruistic behaviour. Additionally, I present four perspectives on altruism: economic, psychological, biological and philosophical. I take into consideration elements of from each because a multifaceted perspective is the best-rounded.

Chapter four focuses on ubuntu. It provides a brief overview of ubuntu that follows the chronology presented by Christian Gade (2011). Interestingly, Gade (2011) suggests that ubuntu became prominent in a post-colonial and post-apartheid era to create
solidarity amongst those who were trying to recover from these heinous events. Although with good intention, the term became associated with what Gade (2011) refers to as “narratives of return”. According to Gade (2011), this refers to a state prior to colonial influence. The term ubuntu grew in popularity and soon many interpretations with many different connotations came into being. It is for this specific reason that I have selected Metz’s (2007) *Toward an African Moral Theory* as an example of how ubuntu has been theorised. Providing a comprehensive overview of the different theories of ubuntu would have been impossible in this thesis. Metz (2007: 334) presents a very coherent and analytical interpretation of ubuntu, offering six interpretations and identifying one – “an action is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord” – as the most theoretically sound. Moreover, Metz (2007: 322) says that his “goal is to present a fundamental and general principle prescribing right actions”. To do this, Metz explains two very important ingredients to ubuntu: shared identity and good-will. It is through the identification of these two coexisting requirements that I am able to formulate a more sustained correlation between altruism and ubuntu.

The chapter provides an account of ubuntu, as well as misinterpretations thereof. It draws a comparison between ubuntu and altruism and proposes that both concepts possess characteristics that are similar and overlap. One of the more important similarities is that both theories seek to strive toward promoting the well-being of others, “treating other equally” and respectfully, and going out of one’s way to ensure that another person is taken care of. This chapter provides direct similarities between ubuntu and altruism by drawing on the cognitive abilities and communicative nature of human beings presented by Tomasello. This chapter also draws on the similarities between ubuntu, altruism and other humanistic characteristics like love. Finally, chapter four presents alternative perspectives on ubuntu that possess a certain universality that relates to humanness. Mboti (2015), Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) and others propose that ubuntu be interpreted on the basis of humanness, which acknowledges the interdependence of individuals within a collective identity, and that concepts such as ubuntu inevitably coexist with others.
Finally, this study presents a perspective of Nelson Mandela’s altruism and how through servant leadership he was able to relate to people on the basis of their humanity. The chapter demonstrates how Mandela continues to personify altruism and ubuntu. It is worth noting that chapter five has been adapted from a published chapter (Leslie 2018) and repurposed as part of this larger research project.

1.4. Methodology

This dissertation is of a conceptual nature. It falls within the field of the philosophy of communication. Arnett (2010: 57) writes about the philosophy of communication and how different methodologies are used to measure the effectiveness of an argument. Philosophy of communication research offers ideas grounded in pre-existing and emerging thoughts. It constructs “rhetorical interpretation” that is corroborated by the critical analysis of the existing literature (Arnett 2010: 59). For the purpose of this study, the research focuses on an array of different kinds of textual sources, such as journal articles, books, and recordings that are intended to allow the researcher to establish a detailed understanding of the highlighted theories.

1.5. Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief introduction to the aims of the study, its justification and motivation, and to the research questions that will be answered.
Chapter Two: Michael Tomasello on Human Communication

2.1. Introduction

Throughout the course of this chapter I critically look at selected writings by Michael Tomasello on human communication. Tomasello holds that the uniqueness of human cognition is to be attributed to the way in which human beings’ communicate and the way in which they use communication to construct the world around them. This chapter will present a critical understanding of human communication and what, according to Tomasello, makes human communication unique. This will be done by analysing the foundations of communication through a critical discussion of the evolution of human communication, the uniqueness of human communication, and finally Tomasello’s shared intentionality hypothesis.

Michael Tomasello is the co-director of the Max Plank Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology under the Department of Development and Comparative Psychology in Leipzig, Germany. Tomasello’s major research interests include social cognition and communication from developmental, comparative and cultural perspectives (Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology 2016). In the writings selected for this dissertation, Origins of Human Communication (2008), Why We Cooperate (2009), and A Natural History of Human Thinking (2014), Tomasello’s focus is on human communication, cooperation, shared intentionality and altruism, and how the uniqueness of human beings’ social and cultural cognition led to “why we cooperate” (Tomasello 2009).

In the Origins of Human Communication (2008), Tomasello focuses on human communication, the foundations of gestural communication in infants, and the development of early language usage in human beings’ (Tomasello 2008: xi). In this book, Tomasello attempts to bring together concepts of social and cultural cognition, social and cultural learning and cooperation, and shared intentionality (Tomasello 2008: xi), and links these concepts to Paul Grice’s (1957) ideas of meaning and the communicative intention, and to how human beings’ have the ability, through their very special cognitive sense making processes, to share intentions and thus form a common understanding of the world around them. The book specifically focuses on
human ability to primarily make sense of simple gestural signs which largely depends on cognitive infrastructure and shared psychological states which are learned through collaborative activities (Tomasello 2008: 11). In this book, Tomasello emphasizes the importance of human beings’ unique cognitive infrastructure and abilities, and how the uniqueness of human cognition has facilitated the development and understanding of very basic gestural signs into complex and arbitrary linguistic abilities. Tomasello (2008: 58) says that language does not exist in isolation, but rather is loaded with other non-verbal cues. In the Origins on Human Communication (2008), Tomasello builds on the idea that human communication is more complex than that of other animals, as a result of the underlying socio-cognitive infrastructure which is made up of individual intentionality and motivation for shared intentionality. In addition, he argues that human communication has evolved and diversified as a means of adapting an ever evolving nature of human collaborative activities (Tomasello 2008). The key take away from the Origins of Human Communication (2009) is that communication is only successful if the recipient is able to make sense of, or to find meaning in the communicative intent. Sense-making involves and is dependent on complex cognitive processes and requires shared understanding of the context within which communication is taking place. Once common ground has been established, the likelihood of successful communication is increased. Common ground and shared intentions are thus at the base of Tomasello’s assumptions on human cognition.

In Why We Cooperate (2009), Tomasello continues on much the same trajectory, building on the work of the Origins of Human Communication (2008), with more specific focus on cooperation and altruism. In Why We Cooperate (2009), Tomasello says that what sets human beings’ apart from other animals, including the great ape primates that he uses in many of his empirical experiments, is that human beings’ social nature has resulted in the development of “cumulative cultural evolution” and the creation of social institutions (Tomasello 2009: x-xi). As a result of these social constructions, human beings’ share, inform and help others (Tomasello 2009). They teach one another, and they also learn to imitate social behaviours that are deemed socially correct and appropriate. The question that this book seeks to answer is “whether altruism emerges naturally in young children or if it is imparted by culture?” Tomasello makes use of experiments between apes and human infants. The
experiments are focused on two phenomena: altruism and collaboration (Tomasello 2009: xvii). Human infants are more helpful than the apes, suggesting the possibility that human beings’ are born altruistic, as the experiments are done with infants that demonstrate very little or no indication of being socialised. Tomasello also presents a very attractive idea of communication and how human cognition addressed in the *Origins of Human Communication* (2009) allows us to use communication in a way that allows human beings to behave more altruistically.

Lastly, in *A Natural History of Human Thinking* (2014), Tomasello takes a step back in order to take a leap forward. In this book, Tomasello asks the question “what makes human thinking unique?” The answer is, “human thinking is fundamentally cooperative” (Tomasello 2014: ix). Tomasello explains the evolution of communication from its foundations, and how the influence that ecological changes and the establishment and development of culture have forced human beings to twice evolve the way they think and the way that they collaborate (Tomasello 2014: x). With regards to the concepts of thinking and cognition, Tomasello (2014) says that human beings have learned to go “offline” through “cognitive representation, inference or interpretation, and finally self-monitoring”, to ensure that behaviour is contextually appropriate (Tomasello 2014: x). These ideas presented by Tomasello link very closely to the social cognitive theory which will be discussed in greater detail below. This third selected writing by Tomasello brings together the concepts of cognitive infrastructure and socio-cultural influence in communication discussed in the *Origins of Human Communication* (2008), and the concepts of collaboration, cooperation and altruism presented in *Why We Cooperate* (2009). The book takes the reader a bit deeper into the foundations of communication and the important role that evolution plays in the ontogeny and phylogeny of communication.

Tomasello (2008) proposes that “human communication is a fundamentally cooperative enterprise” (Tomasello 2008: 6). His writings present the idea that human beings’ advanced communicative abilities are what sets us apart from other species. Tomasello holds an evolutionary standpoint which suggests that communication develops from its most primitive forms of human communication to the formation and development of arbitrary and more advanced forms of communication such as
language and written symbols (Tomasello 2008: 2). This chapter will focus on unpacking the theories of human communication presented by Tomasello (2008, 2010, and 2014) through discussing the evolution of human communication, human communication as unique, and how human cooperative communication functions through a critical discussion of Tomasello’s shared intentionality hypothesis.

2.2. The Evolution of Communication

From the most infantile stages of human development, human beings are able to communicate. Tomasello (2009: x) says that the development of communication is a human necessity, and that human beings, for biological reasons, communicate to survive in their environments (Tomasello 2008: 3). The evolution of communication in human beings takes place at two levels. Firstly, on a biological level, which should be understood through the development of human beings over millennia. Gärdenfors (2004) and Snowdon (2004) suggest that biological evolution has resulted in the further development of human beings and their special cognitive abilities. Tomasello (2014) agrees with them and adds that there is something special about human beings and their cognitive abilities. Tomasello’s evolutionary hypothesis holds that the most primitive forms of communication evolved due to the social cognitive and motivational infrastructure of human thinking. Under this hypothesis, Tomasello (2008) suggests that communication in its most primitive form develops due to the social cognitive capabilities of human beings. Evolutionary biology suggests that cognitive abilities amongst human beings have evolved as a result of humans resounding need and desire to live in social groupings, and the result has been the evolutionary development of communication (Gärdenfors 2004; Oller 2004; Snowdon 2004).

The evolution of communication in human beings is often compared to and scientifically tested as a comparison between communication amongst animals and human beings. The most common of these experiments have been between human beings and their closest primate relatives, the great apes (Tomasello 2008, 2009 and 2014) and (Snowdon 2004: 133). Research presented on the function of communication amongst different species tends toward the idea that the lack of infrastructural cognition amongst animals of other species is what ultimately sets
humans apart from other species, including humans’ closest primate relatives, the great apes (Tomasello 2008: 2; Tomasello 2009: x). Snowdon (2004: 131) suggests that although there are similarities between human beings and other species, each species develops differently based on their specific environments, and all species “use communication to manage social living” (Snowdon 2004: 131). The implication made by Snowdon is that the evolution of communication is determined by species’ unique needs, and that the evolution or limitation of communication is determined by environmental factors.

Both Gärdenfors (2004) and Snowdon (2004) make reference to infantile predisposition to behave communicatively, as discussed in Tomasello’s The Cultural Origins of Human Cognition (1999), which relates to similar ideas on communication as an evolutionary factor (2008, 2009, 2014). Gärdenfors (2004: 133) agrees with Tomasello that communication, in all species, has always existed; however, the means of communication are ever evolving, like the context within which communication takes place. If we consider communication as a primary variable in the evolution of species, and the environment as another, we can deduce, as suggested by Snowdon (2004: 131), that different species use communication differently depending on their specific habitat. For example, the communication of a snake and the communication of a monkey are different because it is adapted to their respective habitual environments. For instance, snakes usually live in isolation and are independent of any social groupings. Monkeys, on the other hand, live in large social groupings and have thus adapted communicatively, to vocalised calls with particular indexical (direct) meanings that signal food or danger (Oller 2004: 53).

So basically, the evolution of communication within different species is dependent firstly on the environment which determines their need to communicate; and secondly, and with great emphasis, it is dependent on cooperation. Certain animals are designed evolutionally to live alone and in isolation; however, other animals, and specifically human beings, usually live cooperatively in order to accomplish common goals (Gärdenfors 2004: 242; Tomasello 2009: xiv; Tomasello 2014: 127). Tomasello (2014: 124) and Gärdenfors (2004: 244) add that more primitive human species like Neanderthals and hominids “were forced by ecological factors to live in larger groups”
This is roughly around the time when human beings (homo sapiens) appeared. This new species was forced to find newer ways of bonding and newer ways of communicating (Gärdenfors 2004: 244; Tomasello 2014: x), and that is how communication and language itself has evolved over time. Although language has been incorporated in the “evolution of communication”, language and its use are quite contested. The construction of language in the way that human beings use linguistic communication is one facet of communication that is not identifiable in communication amongst other species (Tomasello 2014).

Snowdon (2004) states that the development of human language is a result of the underlying reason for special development of human beings. Although other animals communicate, their communication functions develop primarily for their own, individual needs. Tomasello’s (2014) discussion of the development of communication from primitive gestural communication to advanced language attribute this development to the advanced cognitive capabilities of human beings (Tomasello 2008 and 2014). He also argues that communication in itself has developed over time to accommodate collaborative and cooperative activities (Tomasello 2014: 32). Snowdon (2004: 134) says that “there are many important parallels between cooperative breeding and vocal development in human infants”. Even in the most immature level of infantile communication it is evident that the vocalisations of infants are different from those of other species. Oller (2004: 51) suggests that capabilities such as the development of language emerge in a species as adaptions that confer “selective advantages”. He assumes that specific attributes are carried from one generation to another if the characteristic is advantageous to the survival of the group. Tomasello (2014: 6) says that “evolution selects for adaptive actions”, which implies that attributes that are adaptive to change, like communication or cooperativeness, are those that are more likely to continue in generations to come as human survival is largely dependent on interdependence and social selection (Tomasello 2014: 37). An individual is more likely to be selected by a group if they display behaviour that conforms to the norms of the group (Tomasello 2009: 29). The communicative predisposition of human beings has thus played an imperative role in the survival of human beings. Communication can thus be directly linked to the evolution of human beings due to the development of species’ unique cognitive structures. In summation, the evolution of
communication in human beings’ has been theorised to be species unique. According to Tomasello, human communication and its evolution are largely determined by environmental and biological factors which have resulted in the cooperative nature of human beings’. Advanced communication in human beings’ has evolved due to their advanced cognitive abilities, and ecologically, due to their social nature and the environments they inhibit.

Tomasello attributes human beings’ advanced ability to communicate to their cognitive capabilities. Social cognitive development of human beings’ is primarily the result of this, coupled with their biological development. As human beings’ grow and develop (ontogenesis), so does their ability to communicate (phylogenesis). Ontogenesis is a biological term defined by the Oxford Living Dictionaries as “the development of an individual organism or anatomical or behavioural feature from the earliest stage to maturity” (Oxford Living Dictionaries 2018). The term ontogenesis is applicable to this study as it deals with matters of biological evolution from a less to a more mature state, like the development of human beings’ from infants to adults. Phylogenesis refers to “the evolutionary development and diversification of a species or group of organisms, or of a particular feature of an organism” (Oxford Living Dictionaries 2018). The organism in this study are human beings’, and the particular feature that develops and diversifies is communication. These terms are defined here as I will make reference to them in the sections below. The ontogenesis of human beings’ has resulted in the phylogenesis of communication as a human characteristic. Tomasello (2008) and Oller (2004) state that infants under the age of 24 months are able to communicate meaning to those around them, despite having limited linguistic command. Through the biological evolution of the human beings’ over time and different developmental stages, human beings’ communicative ability have also evolved. Human beings’ develop from being pre-linguistic infants, who are capable of only using vocal sounds and predominantly primitive natural cues to communicate. Oller (2004: 52) and Tomasello (2014: 4) state that communication in its most primitive form may even take place unconsciously; the signaller is unaware of its command. Infants develop from being low, semi-skilled communicators, into being mature, vocal communicators who are capable of communicating using verbal and non-verbal communication simultaneously through complex cognitive processing to create meaning.
Fundamentally, Tomasello (2008) holds the idea that human communication has become more and more complex and has developed with the human race over time. Human beings’ ability to communicate in such an evolved manner is what allows them to sustain their necessity to live out their cooperative function.

Tomasello (2008 and 2009) says that with only one simple gesture, a human being is able to understand or simply interpret the meaning behind what someone else may be pointing out to them through the unique, complex method of sense making (Scott-Phillip 2010: 86). As human beings evolve from immature infants to mature adults, so do their cognitive abilities and also their ability to communicate and to use communication in more flexible and complex ways to construct meaning in different contexts. For Tomasello (2008:1), primitive forms of communication, like pointing and pantomiming, are the foundations upon which communication is developed. These symbols are transparent and easy to make sense of even prior to the development and use of language. Biologically, these forms of communication are used to direct attention (Tomasello 2008: 13). Oller (2004: 54) identifies this kind of primitive communication as indexical; communication that is used to inform or direct attention. In directing attention only a limited number of messages can be transmitted. The interpretation of the communication is entirely dependent on the meaning the receiver constructs from the message produced by the sender. So if an infant points at a formula bottle, the assumption can be made that the infant is either hungry or thirsty; however, there is no certainty that either of the two guesses are correct. Tomasello (2008: 2) says that no matter how primitive indexical or informative symbols such as pointing and pantomiming are, they play a critical role in the evolution of human communication because at a later stage in the evolution of communication, these simple gestures make use of the cognitive processing, as well as motivational and other cognitive infrastructures to form the foundations of more complex communication symbols such as language, and specialised communication systems which are used today to share and inform (Tomasello 2008: 2).

Tomasello’s (2008) writings are fundamentally based on the idea that human communication is much more advanced than even the closest human primates and that the difference between human communication and the communication of other
species is what makes human beings more cooperative and thus more altruistic than other species (Tomasello 2008: 14). For Tomasello, simple gestures such as pointing possess more complex meaning amongst human beings than they do amongst other animals. Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014) believes that gestures such as pointing and pantomiming are more easily understood amongst human beings as long as they are able to ascribe meaning to the gesture being communicated. Tomasello (2008: 14) differentiates between what he calls “communicative displays” and “communicative signals” (Tomasello 2008: 14). Basically explained, the former refers to involuntary communication based on physical characteristics, such as involuntary facial expressions and moaning sounds when experiencing pain. The latter refers to communication which is constructed intentionally to communicate intentions in anticipation that they may be fulfilled. In the context of the example of experiencing pain, the involuntary communication may be facial expressions and moaning sounds communicating pain, while intentionally constructed communication may be a verbal appeal for assistance in a painful situation. The simple act of pointing at something in a particular way may be interpreted on the basis of the two communicative means expressed here. However, each is a means to an individual end. Involuntary acts of communication differ substantially from intentional acts of communication; both acts occur with the purpose of disseminating information. So facial expressions and moans of pain communicate that one requires help because one is in pain, but intentional communication goes a step further through informing a recipient of what is wrong, like pointing at a specific body part. For instance, if I am aware that the signaller ate at a dodgy restaurant, I am likely to understand that his or her stomach is upset because of where he or she ate. Additionally, the interpretation of my pointing may be understood on the basis of what is relevant to its context. The point here is that human beings are able to ascribe meaning to communication acts on the basis of two types of meaning: literal and figurative. In order to understand the meaning of communication acts on a literal and figurative basis, Tomasello (2014: 4), Gärdenfors (2004: 287), and Oller (2004: 63) agree that human communication is special, and that there are particular characteristics of human beings that make communication amongst human beings specialised and unique.
2.3. Human Communication is Unique

Tomasello (2008) places a lot of emphasis on the social cognitive abilities of human beings, and attributes much of the evolutionary development of human beings to social cognitive and social motivational infrastructure of the human mind (Tomasello 2008: 2). He describes gestural and nonverbal communication as more prevalent in human communication than in the communication of other species. Although there is evidence that other animal species communicate, their meanings are more indexical and straightforward, a lot less complex than those of human beings. Tomasello (2008: 5) believes that shared understanding of symbols, verbal and nonverbal, is developed through a shared intentionality. Gärdenfors (2004: 238) notes that human beings use language as part of human communication to share or set joint goals. Following this insight, Tomasello (2008) believes that human beings are more cooperative than animals from other species as a result of human beings’ ability to share their intentions. He says that:

shared intentionality is what is necessary for engaging in uniquely human forms of collaborative activity in which a plural subject “we” is involved: joint goals, joint intentions, mutual knowledge, shared beliefs- all in the context of various cooperative motives (Tomasello 2008: 6-7).

The idea of shared intentionality presented by Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014) refers back to the idea that there is something “special” about the way human beings communicate. Human beings can uniquely send, interpret, decode and encode, process and make sense of, recode and share a message based on individual cognition. Tomasello (2008: 11) thinks that “cooperative human communication critically rests on the ability of human beings to share intentionality, which originated evolutionarily to support collaborative activities”. Human cognition plays a central role in the evolution of the human species overall. To understand why human communication is unique, Tomasello (2009) discusses “why we cooperate”. Tomasello introduces the idea that human beings are social animals by design, and that humans learn through social interaction with their surroundings and others.
Human communication is complex as it possesses the abilities of power and efficiency (Oller 2004). Human beings communicate with both natural, nonverbal and arbitrary symbols. For Tomasello, “human beings are the only animal species that conceptualises the world in terms of different potential perspectives” (Tomasello 2008: 344). Tomasello believes that human communication has developed both ontogenetically and phylogenetically: that communication itself has evolved from its infancy to its mature (current) form of communication. In experiments with apes, Tomasello notes the discovery that communication among apes is not as cooperative as that of human beings because human beings possess certain qualities that are species unique (Tomasello 2008). Tomasello (2008: 60) says that more meaning can be derived from human gestural communication as a result of the psychological infrastructure that allows human beings to create joint attention that allows them to make sense of and interpret the message being communicated to them. However, the shared intentionality hypothesis does not end there. Understanding of the communicative message is interpreted on the basis of the individual psyche of an individual which is based on past experiences, social and cultural norms and expectations. Human communication is thus largely based on shared psychological and cognitive infrastructure to create shared intentions with others in order to live cooperatively.

In his discussion of the psychological infrastructure, Tomasello (2008) puts great emphasis on the creation of shared intentionality between the communicator and the recipient. Tomasello (2008: 60) says that in communication meaning is derived from cognition or sense making, and that the recipient attempts to understand the motivation and intention behind the message that the communicator is sending. In *Meaning*, Grice (1957) says that meaning is constructed in communication when the message is communicated “by its utterer to induce a belief in some audience” (Grice 1957: 381). Communication must be constructed with the intention to induce a particular set beliefs or action in the recipient. Grice (1957) suggests that only once the recipient recognises the communicative act is meaning derived; if not then communication has failed (Grice 1957: 382). Grice (1957) goes further to say that meaning and recognition are dependent on one another in making sense of the communicative intention. Without recognition of the intention and some common
knowledge, meaning cannot be established. In the *Origins of Human Communication* (2008), Tomasello, like Grice, attempts to find a causal link between “the cooperative structure of human communication” and “the cooperative structure of human social interaction and culture” (Tomasello 2008: xiii). Lycan (2008: 381) also emphasises that meaning can be ascribed through the context within which communication takes place. Context, be it social or cultural, will thus have a determining effect on meaning that is ascribed to a message. The assumption is that the communicator codes a message in order to express their intentions, and that the message is constructed as part of a process of recursive mindreading or inference on behalf of the communicator (Tomasello 2008: 324). Basically, the communicator says what they think the recipient wants to hear. Recursive mindreading refers to a process by which the communicator tries to identify common ground with the recipient in order to construct a message that the communicator assumes appeals to the recipient (Tomasello 2008: 96). Hypothetically, for example, if I attend a conference on race and identity and at the conference buffet I meet someone who is also enjoying the same food that I am, I know of the possibility of two common interests between myself and the person I ran into at the conference buffet. I can assume that there is a possibility that we share interest in matters around race and identity, and that we have similar taste in food on that day. This allows us to identify with one another in that it may be assumed that we share common interests and therefore the likelihood of us engaging communicatively is more likely than if we did not have those two things in common. I communicate with the said person because I know through the information being communicated in the context that we share common interests. I can infer commonality with the other person without them having to express it explicitly.

For Tomasello (2008: 10), “the underlying psychological infrastructure of human cooperative communication” is what allows human beings the ability to communicate uniquely in the animal kingdom. Pajares et al (2009: 5) agree with Tomasello and say that “humans possess the capacity to symbolise by which they extract meaning from their environment, construct guides of action, and gain knowledge by self-reflection and thought”. Human cooperative communication is therefore determined by human ability to make sense of their communicative environments through their unique way of processing and making sense of what is going on around them. Importantly,
Tomasello (2008: 11) says that “human cooperative communication rest crucially on a psychological infrastructure of shared intentionality which originated evolutionarily in support of collaborative activities” amongst human beings. Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014) continuously highlights the importance of the psychological infrastructure of human beings and how it evolutionarily relates to their development and evolution. The psychological infrastructure influences human minds, their collaborative activities and highlights the importance of human communicative activities in the development of creating social structures and identities based on the unique and special way in which human beings are able to use communication to construct their realities. Communication plays a key role in the development of human beings as a species because it is the only way we are able to share intentions in order to undertake group or collaborative activities. This is as a result of what Tomasello (2014) calls the “shared intentionality hypothesis”.

To discuss Tomasello’s hypothesis of shared intentionality, I again revert back to the importance that Tomasello (2008: 61) ascribes to the primitive forms of communication, like pointing. He believes that it is in these more primitive forms of communication that the communicative intention originates. For Tomasello, meaning is derived from cognitive skills and social motivation (Tomasello 2008: 60), but he argues that the importance of these gestures is not used as a supplement for vocalised communication (like language) but rather as communicative acts in themselves (Tomasello 2008: 61). Tomasello (2008) says that these gestures are used as the fundamental tools in communication to direct attention and more importantly to direct the imagination of others to infer their communicative intention. So communication is used to direct attention in order to make sense of and fulfil the intention of the communicator. As primitive as this kind of communication may seem, Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014) suggests that it is here that shared intentions play an imperative role in the collaborative process. Shared intentionality will determine the success of the communication between recipients.
2.4. Tomasello’s Shared Intentionality Hypothesis

So how did the shared intentionality hypothesis come about? For Tomasello, it appears that shared intentionality is one of the most uniquely human characteristics that human beings share (Tomasello 2014). Under the shared intentionality hypothesis, Tomasello proposes that primarily “humans have the ability to imagine themselves in the position of the other” (Tomasello 2014: 2). Having the ability to position oneself in the position of the other has not been observed much in other species (Tomasello 2014: 4). Tomasello (2014: 3) believes that this ability to view oneself in the position of the other is only possible with the cognitive abilities of human beings, because of the unique psychological infrastructure and cognitive abilities of human beings. He also argues that humans are able to emulate and consider deeper human social engagement and thus imagine themselves in those particular circumstances. The ability to infer meaning and make sense of social context thus plays an important role in human communication.

Tomasello (2014: 4) particularly focuses on three key elements that are pertinent to the shared intentionality hypothesis. Firstly, human beings uniquely “possess the ability to cognitively represent experiences offline” (Tomasello 2014: 4). That is to say that human beings have a unique way of taking in information and making sense of it in their personal mental capacity as they take in information and simulate an experience that is appropriate to the message that was sent by the communicator. Secondly, Tomasello’s shared intentionality hypothesis maintains that human beings “have the ability to simulate or make inferences, transforming representations causally, intentionally, or logically” (Tomasello 2014: 4). So, in addition to being able to make sense of a message “offline”, or contextually, human beings can also “auto-replay” – or generally make sense of a message logically in varying contexts without its meaning being spelled out to them. Thirdly, human beings are able to “self-monitor and evaluate their simulated experiences” (Tomasello 2014: 4). That is to say that human beings can deduce meaning from an act of communication through processing “offline”, inferring meaning and then self-monitoring their interactions, with others or within particular social contexts to evaluate their validity, and therefore their action.
However, Tomasello (2014) says that human beings did not just come to function in this way overnight. Tomasello attributes two very significant changes to what resulted in shared intentionality, and these are ecological and cultural (Tomasello 2014: 4-5). Earlier it was noted that Gärdenfors (2004: 244) also agrees that ecological factors are what perpetuated the move toward living in groups. Tomasello (2014: 5) agrees that gradual but drastic ecological changes pushed human beings to live in groups and this was how joint attention and shared intention came about. Primarily, human beings had to live in groups because they could not survive on their own. However in doing so they developed groups in which they participated in activities that could only be accomplished with the group working together. Tomasello (2014: 32) says this this form of “interdependence” pushed human beings toward a “change in the method of information transmission” (Tomasello 2014: 32), thus resulting in groups of human beings beginning to think of collective needs rather than individual needs. Tomasello (2014) makes use of various examples to explain the difference between collaborative activities amongst other animals and human beings. However, the basic theme across Tomasello’s examples remains that human beings, as a result of their advanced cognitive abilities, are able to cooperate more collaboratively than other animals. The “change in transmission” of information brought on by ecological changes resulted in a push toward finding common ground, joint attention and newer ways of communicating. Once common ground and joint attention were established, it became easier to establish common goals, intentions and interests. Gärdenfors (2004: 242) says that “the ability to express and describe intentions is what make human beings cooperative and has allowed them to evolve”. This transition in transmission coincides with the earlier discussion of newer ways of bonding and communicating (Gärdenfors 2004: 244; and Tomasello 2014: x), where ecological changes pushed human beings into socialising differently, and thus communicating differently. Human beings had to take a look at the way in which they were communicating, and re-evaluate and adapt in order to establish common ground, common goals, interests and intentions in order to survive (Tomasello 2014: 138).
In addition to ecological changes, Tomasello says that being forced to collaborate in groups resulted in the establishment of culture. Tomasello places emphasis on the fact that human beings’ were forced to evolve the way they think, and engage with the world around them twice (Tomasello 2014: x). Tomasello (2008 and 2014) suggests that the uniqueness of human communication is what has allowed them to develop the ability to establish normative theories on communication, human nature and societies; basically how human beings’ live. Culture has become one of the most influential ideological constructs in human existence.

Culture is a concept created by human beings’ to provide guidelines about how they order their lives. Culture provides a blueprint of normative theories about how human beings’ ought to live their lives (Trenholm 2014: 321). For Tomasello (2014: 32), culture gave rise to “cooperative human societies that were structured through human language” (Tomasello 2014: 32). Language can thus be considered as the more recent (if not final) step in the ontogenesis of human communication and plays a pivotal role in social coordination that is required by the construction of culture. Tomasello (2014) says that social coordination creates unique social challenges for cognition and thinking in human beings’ (Tomasello 2014: 34). Therefore human beings’ unique cognitive and communicative ability plays an imperative role in the construction of human societies. Tomasello (2014) says that there are various cultures and subcultures that have developed in which human beings’ established different social norms and expectations to govern practices within the group to establish shared intentionality. Tomasello (2014: 33) further says that “collaborative activities are species unique because they are constructed to form joint attention and joint goals”. Basically, in the evolution of human collaboration, ecological changes and the establishment of groups and cultures are major turning points in the way that human beings’ engage with the world. These turning points are evolutionary significant because human beings’ were forced through ecological changes to live in groups, and later various smaller groups clustered into larger groups which are today viewed as cultures.

Tomasello (2014: 37) suggests that the characteristic developments of culture are interdependence and social selection. Tomasello (2014) justifies his hypothesis by
saying that human dependence on one another is basically a survival mechanism, and that survival is ultimately determined by social selection. What this means is that once human beings began to form groups those groups established a group identity, and inclusion into the group was based on “the evaluation of others and how others were evaluated as potential collaborators” (Tomasello 2014: 37). Motivations for collaborative activities and interdependence should thus align: interdependence through collaboration. Individuals that were considered to be non-collaborative were thus not incorporated into a specific group if they did not share the collaborative values of the group. As previously mentioned, these kinds of collaborative activities created challenges for human thinking and cognition (Tomasello 2014: 34), and human beings had to discover, as part of their ontogenesis, newer ways in which to make these kinds of collaborative activities work. Tomasello says that “collaborating this way required some kind of mutual knowledge or recursive mindreading” (2014: 38).

Earlier I explained recursive mind reading as a process through which a communicator attempts to establish common ground with a recipient in order to construct a message that the communicator thinks the recipient may be interested in. I used a hypothetical example of attending a conference on race and identity where I happened to run into someone who is enjoying the same food as I am at the conference buffet. In this hypothetical scenario, let us say that I am the communicator and I engage the recipient on the basis that I assume that we possibly have shared two interests: race and identity or similar taste in food. In reading the situation, I assume that we possibly have two things in common, and thus may possibly possess mutual knowledge (and possibly similar views) on the two identified commonalities. I engage the recipient because I assume that the recipient will be interested in discussing one of the commonalities, like the food. Through this interaction, the recipient and I establish joint attention – the food – and we may begin to discuss how delicious it is, until our interaction progresses and we establish more common interests which create more common ground.

Under Tomasello’s shared intentionality hypothesis, common ground, joint attention and shared interests play an important role in the communicative process as he emphasises the conceptualisation of contexts recursively in order to make sense of the world around us and therefore our interactions with others (Tomasello 2014: 135).
Human beings’ interpretations of social interactions are determined by what they have learnt in their interactions in their particular group or subgroup. They become socialised into behaving or not behaving in a particular way. Communication is a vital tool that is used to construct the world around us.

So, ecological factors eventually pushed human beings toward living in groups for survival purposes. Within those groups human beings then developed ways in which to interact, behave and select those who conform to the group identity in order to sustain the wellbeing of the group. Within certain groups, general behavioural norms and conventions are communicated to individuals within the group to maintain group interests. This results in what Tomasello calls shared problem solving, common ground, or “we-intentionality” (Tomasello 2014: x). According to Tomasello (2014: 145), we or collective intentionality is developed in young children through the more primitive forms of communication which are mostly attention directing, as previously explained. Although human children are naturally born with the ability to communicate, they are also born with the cognitive ability to use communication and at a later stage in their life, human children reflect the ability to make sense of social norms and conventions (Tomasello 2014: 145). Communication becomes a tool used as a means of constructing communities and social realities. Human beings use language and societal artefacts to construct their cultural and social realities, which in turn determines the blueprint on which they are to live their lives. However, the predisposition of human beings to communicate suggests that human beings are already hardwired to connect with one another, to process and make sense of the experiences of others, even before they are socialised into doing so. Tomasello’s (2009) empirical evidence supports this through the use of pre-lingual infants who partake in his experiments. Human children demonstrate their communicative ability through informing and helping others through sharing. Sharing of information or resources results in a shared understanding between parties involved which allows for better sense-making of the situation, even at a pre-linguistic level. Shared understanding of the situation determines whether or not those involved equally make sense of the situation; a shared understanding of the context results in mutual understanding (Tomasello 2008: 6).
The characteristics of communication are already prevalent in human children from a very young age, even prior to their engagement with society as a result of human beings’ very unique cognitive abilities, reinforcing the existence of humans’ predisposition to a characteristic such as communication. Socialisation feeds the human desire to live in groupings in order to perform their communicative function. In various collections of human groupings a variety of different belief sets are followed, each with its own social conventions, traditions, morals, beliefs, and culture (Tremholm 2014: 300). Thus, according to Tomasello (2008, 2009 and 2014), human communication undergoes phylogenesis: human beings evolve from more primitive stages of communication where they are mainly focused on individual intentions. Human beings then conform to social conventions and norms of their particular group which comes about as a result of collective intentions within the group. Under this hypothesis, Tomasello (2008) suggests that communication in its most primitive form develops due to the social cognitive capabilities of human beings; that humans are able to take in, make sense of and process information that guide their actions. The sense making process involves the development of the motivational (emotional) infrastructure of human beings.

The characteristics of the shared intentionality hypothesis share a very close link to the social cognitive theory. Tomasello (2014) describes the following elements in the shared intentionality hypothesis: firstly, the ability to represent experiences offline; secondly, the ability to simulate or make inferences, transforming representations contextually to ascribe meaning; and finally the ability to self-monitor and evaluate the appropriate action within a particular context (Tomasello 2014: 4). The social cognitive theory holds that learning takes place through interaction with or within the environment, and it is through the interaction with the environment, and those in it, that individuals learn to interpret and to respond to that which they have learnt (Baran and Davis 2012: 230). Under the social cognitive theory, human beings are believed to be “self-efficient, proactive, and self-reflecting and self-regulating creatures” (Pajares et al. 2009: 4).

Additionally, Pajares et al. (2004: 4-5) suggest that under the social cognitive theory, human beings are not only influenced by external factors, but their decision making
processes are also influenced by biological changes within human and social development. Pajares et al. (2009) further suggest that human beings are actively involved in the decision making processes, which are influenced by personal factors, behavioural reinforcements of wrong and right, and lastly environmental influences. Human communication has thus evolved due to influences on an intrapersonal, social and environmental level. Social cognitive development coupled with the biological evolution thus allows for the development of the human mind and the human body. The process of social cognition plays a pivotal role in the evolution and development of human communication. The commonality between the social cognitive theory and the characteristics of the shared intentionality hypothesis presented by Tomasello (2014) stem from the basic idea that humans are self-efficient as they have the ability to make decisions on how to approach challenges and to solve problem collaboratively. Humans’ unique cognitive ability allows them to go “offline” to make sense of the situation that they are in, in order for them to act proactively by making inferences of action depending on the context within which communication takes place.

Finally, the (re)action is dependent on the reflexivity of the individual; their ability to go “offline”, make sense of and infer meaning will determine how they behave within a particular context based on how they have been socialised. The norms and expectations of their particular group will determine their action. Shared understanding of the contexts where communication takes is therefore an imperative part of the communication process. To reiterate, Tomasello (2008: 11) states that “human cooperative communication rest crucially on a psychological infrastructure of shared intentionality which originated evolutionarily in support of collaborative activities”. Human communication would thus lack meaning without common ground, individual and collective intentionality, recursive mind-reading and the uniquely human cognitive ability to make inferences (Tomasello 2014). Meaning through communication is thus only derived if both the communicator and the recipient share some sort of commonality, or common ground; without it communication would be meaningless, as supported by Grice (1957). However, if the context of the communication changes, so does the intention. Some words and phrases have double meanings and thus the meaning may vary based on context. Intention and context thus bring us back to
Tomasello’s hypothesis of shared intentionality. Context plays a substantial part in the construction of meaning. Lycan (2008: 86) says that communication usually takes place to express desire, opinion or intention. When meaning of intentional communication is removed from the context, the intention of the communicator will change. Tomasello (2014) says that philosophers ascribe meaning to socially and culturally create constructs like the “internal world” described by Gärdenfors (2004:238) and that human beings now use language to order their lives (Tomasello 2014:2). “Shared intentionality comes from shared human ontogeny” (Tomasello 2008: 333): the evolutionary predisposition to engage in collaborative activities in order to order our lives through the creation of social prescriptions and norms. Shared goals result in joint or shared goals and intentions which create shared intentionality: the “we-intentionality” explained by Tomasello (2014: 2). Shared understanding cannot be established without the ability to have joint attention, joint goals and common ground, as discussed earlier. Tomasello’s shared intentionality is basically the outcome of ecological and cultural changes which eventually result in the communicative nature of human beings.

2.5. Conclusion

Tomasello admits that there are a variety of possibilities as to how human evolutionary development resulted in the way that it has, and that there are varying perspectives on the human ontogenetic development of human beings, as well as on the phylogenetic development of communication as a human characteristic. However, Tomasello says that in order to understand human cognition, one needs to be open to understanding it within an evolutionary context (Tomasello 2014: 151), as without the ecological and cultural changes it would have been unlikely for human beings to behave as cooperatively as they do. Although the topic of this chapter is human communication and the evolution of communication, it is very difficult to view human communication in isolation from evolutionary biology, the ontogenesis of human beings, and the phylogenesis of communication as a human characteristic.
Tomasello (2014: 152) admits that there are some parts missing in the evolutionary story of human beings, but the foundations of human communication exist in the evolutionary changes in ecology and human societies (Tomasello 2008, 2009, 2014). After the discussion presented in this chapter, there is also little denying that the uniqueness of human thinking and cognition has had a major influence on the way that human beings have evolved to use communication to sustain their existence. In Tomasello’s *Origins of Human Communication* (2008), social and cultural cognition, social learning, cooperation and shared intentionality emphasize the important role that human cognition plays in allowing human beings to adapt and to create sense and meaning.

In *Why We Cooperate* (2009), Tomasello builds on social and cultural cognition as a means of making sense of the world. He discusses how human beings use communication to share, inform and help others, and how these teachable characteristics of human beings allow them to be cooperative and engage in collaborative activities. Tomasello also presents a very attractive perspective on human communication and its uniqueness by demonstrating that human beings are born with the ability to communicate, and that it is through their very special cognitive processing that they have used these species unique characteristics to form social institutions and cultures which have allowed them to order their lives. Tomasello (2009) also seems to think that it is as a result of the social nature of human beings, coupled with their special cognitive skills, that human beings behave more altruistically than animals of other species.

Tomasello (2014) believes that human beings have become the way that they are as a result of ecological changes which forced human beings to think and socialise differently. The shift in ecological landscape resulted in human beings living in groups, which initiated the development of group-think and the introduction of culture and subcultures, where human beings lived together in order to survive. These two transformational periods – change in ecology and introduction of culture – influenced the way in which human beings socialised, and how they used communication to construct and order their realities.
The take away from this chapter, based on selected writings by Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014) is that there are characteristics that are uniquely human. These characteristics are human social and cultural cognition, human communication on the basis of shared intentionality, culture, and social institutionalisation. Tomasello argues that these are not easily identifiable in other species, and that there are varying possibilities as how human beings got to be at the evolutionary point that they are currently at.

This chapter has presented a critical discussion of human communication and the evolution of communication outlined in the selected writings of Tomasello with support from other theorists. For Tomasello (2014), human communication, cooperation and cognition are uniquely human, and at the same time inconceivable without the shared intentionality hypothesis. A leading theme across Tomasello’s selected writings on human communication, cooperation and collaboration is the ability to use communication to share information and help others (group). In the following chapter, I will consider Tomasello’s hypotheses on human communication, on how the very special way that human beings communicate has allowed them to be more cooperative than other species, and on how human beings’ cooperative nature allows them to behave more altruistically than animals from other species.
Chapter 3: Cooperation as Altruism

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Tomasello, with the help of others, explains the uniqueness of human communication – the result of an ontogenesis of human beings and phylogenetic development of communication – and how he attributes this uniqueness to the communicative skills that human beings possess. In this chapter, I look more in-depth into why, according to Tomasello, human beings cooperate, how that cooperation works, and ultimately how cooperation allows human beings to behave altruistically. I will also elaborate on what altruism is and on the relation between human communication, altruism and cooperation.

The previous chapter presented a critical analysis of Tomasello’s description of human communication (2008, 2009, 2014). It discussed issues pertaining to the evolution of communication, the uniqueness of human communication, Tomasello’s “shared intentionality hypothesis” and finally concluded that as a result of a number of cumulative factors, human communication has evolved to become a complex reading of symbols, nonverbal and verbal, which is highly dependent on the special cognitive infrastructure of the human mind. Tomasello (2014) says that human beings were forced on two occasions to re-evaluate the way in which they use communication and that was as a result of ecological changes, which resulted in human beings changing the way that they interacted. Human beings also realised that it was more viable for them to live in groups. The development of living in groups ultimately resulted in the establishment of culture.

Though these changes may have been gradual, they ended up having significant influence on the way that human beings thought of the world, and therefore, also the way that human beings used communication. Tomasello (2014), holds that the ontogenesis of human beings was perpetuated by ecological changes which in turn resulted in the phylogenesis of particular human characteristics, like human cognition and communication. Human communication is unique for three reasons. Firstly, animals from other species do not possess the same cognitive infrastructure as human beings. Human thinking in more evolved than that of other species. Secondly,
beings are able, as a result of their specialised cognitive skills, to use communication in more complex ways to order their lives, and to optimise their survival. Thirdly, culture. Tomasello says that:

In terms of the number of things that individuals must socially learn, (including linguistic conventions in order to communicate), human culture, as compared with that of other animal species, is quantitatively unique. (Tomasello 2009: x).

Human cognition and communication are then considered to be “selective advantages” (Oller 2004: 51; and Tomasello 2014: 6), which allow human beings to live in social groups in order to survive.

In this chapter, I will summarise the uniqueness of human communication as discussed in the previous chapter and discuss how it relates to the arguments presented in Tomasello’s book Why We Cooperate (2009). Secondly, this chapter will look in-depth at why Tomasello believes that human beings help, inform and share with others. I will discuss the impact of social norms and reciprocity and how they affect cooperative and altruistic behaviour in human interaction. I will elaborate on how, according to Tomasello (2009: 99), collaborative activities have become “the birthplace of altruistic action and humans uniquely cooperative forms of communication” (Tomasello 2009: 99). I will then explain altruism through presenting various perspectives of the concept, and especially agreements and disagreements among theorists on the egalitarian perspective of altruism. Finally, I will explain how, from Tomasello’s perspective, human communication is related to altruism and cooperation, and why these concepts are pertinent to maintain cooperative and collaborative groups.

3.2. Why We Cooperate

In experiments conducted with infants under the age of 24 months, Tomasello (2009: 4) sets out to discover whether altruism emerges naturally in children, or if it is something that is imparted to them through socialisation. Tomasello presents findings that human infants are naturally helpful and cooperative to varying degrees. He (2009: 4) states that infants “do not learn this from adults; it comes naturally”. That is to say
that cooperation is an innate human quality; human beings are born with this kind of prosocial behaviour (Tomasello 2009: 7). Innate characteristics are understood to be instinctive, intuitive and inbred characteristics and refer primarily to characteristics that all human beings share on the mere basis of being human (Wall 2005: 390). Wall (2005) goes further to suggest that although a number of similarities exist within human behaviour, not all of it may be ascribed as innate and that there is also the possibility that some human characteristics are learned.

Per the discussion in the previous chapter on the uniqueness of human communication, it follows that human beings are born with a biological predisposition to do certain things, like to communicate and cooperate (Tomasello 2009; Wall 2005). Communication is thus an innate human characteristic. This innate communicative ability is the reason that human beings have the ability to use communication in its most natural form, such as gestural action or pointing, to ascribe meaning to messages that convey communication that is more complex than the simple gesture behind the action (Tomasello 2009: 14; and Tomasello 2014: 22). Tomasello (2009) believes that human beings are cooperative and altruistic from birth, and that only later on, when infants/children are able to reciprocate what they have learnt in their various social groupings, do they begin to selectively behave cooperatively or uncooperatively, altruistically or un-altruistically.

According to Tomasello (2014: 4), human thinking processes and cognition are what shape humans’ communication ability. What is particular and special about human communication is that these processes occur unconsciously in the mind, as detailed in the previous chapter. Human communication allows human beings the ability to put themselves in the same situations as others, which allows them to imagine the outcome of any given situation through the process of recursive mind reading and reflexivity, which results in the ability to empathise with others. This characteristic of innate human communication is what allows human beings to behave in ways that members of other species cannot: empathetically. The ability to empathise through the use communication, to express intentions and feelings, is what allows human beings to act cooperatively.
Biology suggests that the evolutionary development of human beings has also resulted in the phylogenetic evolution of their cognitive abilities, as well as in the development of other characteristics that are pertinent to the survival of the human race. Communication, for example, has evolved from the simplest form of non-verbal communication into complex meaningful messages that can be arbitrary and direct. Communication has become more and more complex. The development in the complexity of human communication is attributed to the need to interpret and understand society within different contexts (Emerson 2001: 889; Trenholm 2014: 90). It has given rise to “shared intentionality”. The development and evolution of gestural and verbal communication is accompanied by human beings needs and desire to live in social or cultural groupings in order to survive.

Tomasello (2009) believes that there are two observable characteristics of human interaction. The first of these is that human interactive and cultural practices evolve and become more complex over time (Tomasello 2009). Secondly, human beings have the ability to quickly adapt skills and to evolve for the better; their behaviour is modifiable, and self-monitored. As discussed in the previous chapter, human beings use communication to advance evolutionarily. They have the innate ability to use communication to socialise with one another in a manner that serves to “help, inform and share” (Tomasello 2009). Through these acts, human beings are able to express their desires, needs and wants, and are able to fulfil the needs of others that are communicated to them, thus preserving the human race. Other animals, although able to communicate with one another, are not able to use communication in the way that human beings do, and therefore they cannot function as human beings do.

Tomasello (2009) emphasises the role that culture plays in the development of cooperative relations among human beings. He says that the ever changing nature of culture has resulted in ever changing ways of thinking and communication for human beings, and that social institutions like schools and religion have been used to teach human beings about what is right and what is wrong (Tomasello 2009: xiii). Shared intentionality in these kinds of environments is thus essential as it allows human beings to establish common goals, common ground, shared intention, and understanding of individual roles in within the group. Tomasello (2009: xiv) says that human beings learn
cooperation though imitative learning. Individuals become aware of how to behave in particular contexts on the basis of how other have been observed to behave, or of how they have been taught to behave. Social learning plays a central role in social collaboration and cooperation. Tomasello (2009: xv) holds that “both teaching and norms of conformity contribute to cumulative culture by serving the innovations of the group”.

However, in the experiments I mentioned earlier, Tomasello (2009) demonstrates that communication as an innate human characteristic is apparent in the most infantile stages of human development and that from a very early age, “children are cooperative and helpful” (Tomasello 2009: 4). Tomasello (2008: xi and 2009: 6) demonstrates that human beings, from a very young age, possess the ability to communicate with others with the intention of informing or helping others (Tomasello 2009: 14). Tomasello (2014) supports these experiments by stating that infantile communication occurs as part of the natural human condition which is attributed primarily to human beings’ need to live in social groupings. Communication becomes a tool used as a means of constructing norms on the functioning of communities and society at large. Human beings use language and the artefacts of society and culture to construct their cultural and social realities, which in turn determines the blueprint on which they are to live their lives. However, the innate tendencies of a human being suggest that human beings are already hardwired to connect with one another, and to process and make sense of the experiences of others, even before they are socialised into doing so.

3.3. Sharing is Caring.

Tomasello’s (2009) empirical evidence supports this through using pre-lingual infants to partake in his experiments. Human children demonstrate their communicative ability through informing and helping others through sharing. Sharing of information or resources result in a shared understanding between parties involved which allows for better sense-making of the situation, even at a pre-linguistic level. Shared understanding of the situation determines whether or not those involved equally make sense of the situation. Shared understanding of the context results in mutual
understanding (Tomasello 2009: 6). In *A Natural History of Human Thinking* (2014) and *Origins of Human Communication* (2008), it is pointed out that the uniqueness of human communication stems from humans’ cooperative nature, which stemmed from ecological and cultural developments. In *Why We Cooperate* (2009), Tomasello suggests that human beings share information as a result of shared intentionality. He says that “shared intentionality involves the ability to create with others joint interaction and joint commitments in cooperative endeavours” (Tomasello 2009: xiii). The shared intentionality hypothesis is comprised of joint attention, shared goals, common ground to make way for these “cooperative endeavours”. Human beings share information with others through recursive mind reading or reflexivity because they assume the other would find that information helpful, they assume that the other wants to cooperate. Sharing information with others in this way not only makes human beings more cooperative, but also more altruistic, all on the basis of the uniqueness of human communication. This also reaffirms Tomasello’s shared intentionality hypothesis that says that joint attention can only exist during interaction with others (Tomasello 2014: 152). Communication would be meaningless without interaction with others.

So the characteristics of cooperation are already prevalent in human children from a very young age, even prior to their engagement with society, reinforcing the existence of innate characteristics on the basis of being human. In various collections of human groupings a variety of different belief sets are followed, each with its own social conventions, traditions, morals and beliefs (Mesoudi 2001: 1; and Tremholm 2014: 300). Culture, for instance, is one of the most influential ideological constructs in human existence. It is a concept created by human beings to provide guidelines and order about their functioning and forms the blueprint of normative theories on how human beings ought to live their lives (Trenholm 2014: 321). Culture is one example of how human beings use communication to construct their realities. There are, of course, other examples as well, like religion and sharing canonical beliefs, and fan culture as a contemporary example.

In the aforementioned experiments, to answer the question whether altruism emerges naturally in children, or if it is something that is imparted to them through socialisation,
Tomasello (2009) found five reasons to believe that human beings’ are naturally born with these characteristics:

1- First, the behaviour of infants is prosocial; the infants possess these qualities before they have socialised into and fully understand their place in society;
2- Second, infants do not behave more cooperatively as a result of incentive or reward;
3- Third, infants help and cooperate for the sake of it;
4- Fourth, at the age of the selected sample, 14 months to 18 months, the infants possess limited ways of expressing their cooperation, yet they still cooperate through the means available to them;
5- Finally, helping seems to be motivated by empathy. Tomasello (2009: 7) says that the “infants need to perceive others goals and have altruistic motivation to help them”. (Tomasello 2009: 7-12).

These five characteristics presented by Tomasello correspond very much with the description of altruism presented by Monroe (1996: 6). Monroe (1996: 6) states that the term altruism is often synonymously used with terms such as sharing, cooperating, empathy, and kindness. Tomasello (2009: 13) suggests that helpfulness is not behaviour that is learned. Rather, it is an “outward expression of children’s natural inclination to sympathise with others in strife” (Tomasello 2009: 13).

Tomasello (2009) also says that human infants are more informative than the apes that were used in his experiments. Human children inform others in difficult situations to assist the other. For instance, an infant may use simple gestural language to point something out to another person, for informative purposes (Tomasello 2009: 16). Under the section on the evolution of human communication previously discussed it was noted that human beings’ do not have to say things directly in order for another to understand the message being conveyed. Human beings’ unique cognitive abilities have allowed them to infer meaning in simple actions like pointing. Tomasello (2009: 20) says that informing works in two ways. First, one informs another to advantage the other. For instance, I might flash my lights on to on-coming traffic to indicate that there is something happening on the road ahead like a collision or a road block. Or secondly,
informing others of my desire because they are so cooperative that knowing my desire leads to them automatically to want to help fulfil it" (Tomasello 2009: 20). In the same scenario as the one described above, I might flash my head lights and turn on my indicator to request that another driver allow me into their lane. In most cases, the person to whom I put my request is likely to allow me into the lane. Tomasello believes that human beings tend to share information on the basis that the communicator assumes that the recipient would like to be informed (Tomasello 2009). So for instance I flash my lights to on-coming traffic because I would like to be warned if there is something happening on the road ahead. Tomasello (2009: 28) found in his experiments that human beings make an active effort to share.

3.4. The Cooperative Paradox.

Tomasello (2009) believes that eventually culture and socialisation result in “adjustments to cooperation”: that varying levels of altruism are created as a result of the way that human beings are socialised. Tomasello (2009: 28) goes as far as saying that there is not a lot of evidence to support “that the children display is a result of acculturation, parental intervention or any other form of socialisation”. However, acculturation and socialisation do ultimately have an effect on how human beings behave and cooperate with others depending on what they have learnt. Tomasello (2009: 29) says that human beings also come to the realisation that “behaving cooperatively is more advantageous” in the long run. Oller (2004: 51) agrees with Tomasello (2009) that cooperative behaviour does have selective advantages, as groups are more likely to select individuals who conform to and maintain the status quo of that particular group.

Paradoxically, Tomasello (2009: 29) also says that human beings can come to the eventual realisation that being cooperative may result in people being taken advantage of and therefore, as human beings grow and develop from immaturity during the infantile stage to the more mature stages of their lives, they learn, according to how they have been socialised, how and when to behave cooperatively, and ultimately, altruistically. Tomasello (2009: 30-31) says that eventually, through socialisation, human beings come to the realisation that norms and expectations govern the way
people behave for reasons that aim to maintain the cooperative function in society. At a particular stage in life, infants develop a cooperative nature that is aligned to their particular group setting. For instance, at a particular age, from about 24 months onward, children who come from households that conform to certain canonical beliefs will say a prayer when they receive food. These infants are not born with the knowledge and might not even understand the reason for the prayer before they eat at this age, however, because this is what they are accustomed to, they begin to emulate what they see in their environments, and therefore conform to behaviour that is entrenched in the belief.

Furthermore, Tomasello (2009) suggests that “enforcing norms, which children start to do at about the age of three, is an act of altruism” (Tomasello 2009: 39). According to Tomasello (2009), from about this age onwards, children are able to emulate behaviours of maintaining the status quo in their social grouping which they have become accustomed to. Children emulate this behaviour not only to maintain the norms set out by society, but also to maintain cooperation. Tomasello (2009:34) says that human beings usually accept offers of cooperation that are fair, and that human cooperation usually operates under two norms. The first of these norms are the “norms of cooperation; these include moral norms” (Tomasello 2009; 34), which dictate principles of wrong and right. “Norms of cooperation” (Tomasello 2009: 34) obviously vary contextually, however they are usually universally accepted. The second cooperative norm is “norms of conformity which include constitutive rules”, such as the expectations to behaviour in a particular context (Tomasello 2009: 34). So human cooperation is governed by what is deemed right, and what is deemed socially acceptable.

In sum, Tomasello holds that the uniqueness of human communication arose out of humans’ unique cognitive abilities. Human beings were forced by ecological evolution to live in groups in order to survive. The development of groups resulted in the institution of culture. These two changes is what pushed the human race into thinking, communicating and cooperating in ways that are conducive to their survival. Tomasello then performed experiments with apes and human infants to assess whether human infants are born cooperative and altruistic, and found that it is indeed
the case that human beings behave cooperatively and altruistically prior to socialisation. Human infants are naturally helpful, informative and sharing. They share information to help others and to share their needs and desires. However, Tomasello does warn that exposure to culture and socialisation brings about an adjusted attitude to cooperation and altruism, as human beings learn through their development that to cooperate can be both advantageous and exploitative. Lastly, Tomasello (2009: 34) says that human cooperation is governed by “norms of cooperation” and “norms of conformity”, and thus human beings behave cooperatively insofar as their actions are considered right and socially acceptable.

3.5. Cooperation as Altruism

Tomasello (2009: 47) says that the need to recognise shared intentionality from a young age – to have “we-intentionality” – is because human beings are born to focus on the group and its well-being (Tomasello 2009: 42). As said, the foundations of the shared intentionality hypothesis lie in the common ground, joint attention, joint goals and shared intentions – basically, interdependence through cognition, communication and cooperation. Tomasello (2009: 43) says that human beings are predisposed to cooperation and helpfulness: “The development of altruistic tendencies is clearly shaped by socialisation” (Tomasello 2009: 43) Socialisation will determine when and with whom individuals carry out altruistic action.

Tomasello (2009) believes that human beings are altruistic. They are socialised into behaving in ways that practice sharing, informing and helping: “they aim their altruistic acts toward others who will not take advantage of them, and might even reciprocate” (Tomasello 2009: 45). Social norms will later go on to determine individual behaviours; human beings will take in information and make sense of a particular context. Shared intentionality is always present in human interactions because that is how human thinking operates; an individual cannot have shared intentions alone. Human beings want to be cooperative and to live harmoniously with others. Their evolution detailed in the previous chapter explains how biology, ecology and culture paved the way for this “we-ness” that Tomasello (2009: 41) refers to, and that is what allows human beings to get along, to accept social norms and expectations who govern the status
quo within every single group or sub-group, which ultimately results in group cohesion. Tomasello (2009: 45) refers to a “tit-for-tat cooperation strategy” which means that “you start out altruistic and the treat others selectively, as they treat you” (Tomasello 2009: 45).

Seemingly, Tomasello (2009: 58) does not ascribe altruism as the only reason for human cooperation, but rather that human beings’ biological evolution plays a large role in their cooperative behaviour. So, human beings’ are altruistic, naturally, however, this is not the only reason for their cooperation. Tomasello (2009 and 2014) strongly accept the idea that biological development is at the forefront of human beings’ cooperative behaviour, and that without it, human beings’, as pasty soft creatures, may not have survived the ecological changes of the world. Group selection thus resulted in the development of cultures and sub-groupings in which it was determined that cooperative behaviour was of pertinent importance in the survival of human beings’ as a whole; survival of the fittest. Richard Dawkins (2006: 19) says that “survival machines got bigger and more elaborate and the process was cumulative and progressive”. This is how human beings’ functioned in their groups; as “survival machines”, to withstand and compete with external threats, and to create a place of safety for the continuation of the group and ultimately of the human race as a species. This allowed human beings’ to make use of their special and unique cognitive infrastructure to evolve cooperatively. The result of the biological evolution of human beings’ is this interdependence through mutualism, which Tomasello (2009: 53) believes to be the birthplace of altruism.

3.6. Collaboration, the Birthplace of Altruism

It seems as though for Tomasello (2009) the result of collaborative and cooperative activities is altruism. Tomasello (2009: 58) maintains that something about the collaborative and cooperative activities that human beings’ partake in also allows human beings’ to behave more or less altruistically. Tomasello (2009: 53) presents the idea that human beings’ learn about mutualism through collaboration and interdependence (Tomasello 2009: xiv), and they thus seek to learn how they are supposed to behave and to understand the mutualistic benefit of their
interdependence. Human beings also possess a biological awareness of the importance of their interdependence, and therefore they choose to live in groups (Tomasello 2009: 90). Tomasello (2009) thinks that altruism and cooperation (cooperative communication) are the outcome of collaboration. The biological need for human beings to work together to survive is what makes them naturally more altruistic than other species. There are, of course, other biological factors, like human beings’ advanced cognitive capabilities, which I detailed in chapter two, that make this cooperation and altruism possible.

Human beings’ communicative nature has established them as informative, sharing, and helping (Tomasello 2009: 5). Their sharing nature is what makes them altruistic. Through the use of communication, shared intentionality is communicated and is shared amongst a particular group. The establishment of shared intentionality stems from teaching and learning through socialisation. This takes place through communication. Thus humans’ interest in sharing with others presents them as altruistic beings. Their altruistic nature is demonstrated in their desire to live in social groupings in which they use communication to teach others through their actions, express their needs and desires and also through enforcing the status quo. Human beings’ advanced communicative ability is thus what allows them to behave more altruistically than animals from other species. This communicative ability is used as a means to an end; it sustains cooperation through shared information in order to establish shared intentionality for the development and maintenance of the greater society. Tomasello (2009: 45) says that enforcing social rules and norms may thus also be interpreted as altruistic. The ontogenesis of humankind and the phylogenesis of their cognitive and linguistic abilities have all resulted in aid of the greater development of humanity. Altruism, like communication, may thus be considered as an innate human characteristic.

If communication is used by human beings as a means to an end, the means must be to communicate meaningfully with others with the intention of creating shared understanding through divulging information. The end then might be to create cooperative and harmonious environments. Like communication, altruism also plays an important role in maintaining and developing human beings. Humans’ informative
and sharing nature is reflected through the use of communication. My belief, backed by the literature I have presented, is that communication is what allows human beings to express their loving and altruistic nature.

3.7. Defining Altruism

There are many definitions of altruism, and some theorists even question the validity of the concept. However, Monroe (1996: 4) says that “altruism does exist”. Altruism is a word that is often associated with terms such as sharing, cooperating and kindness (Monroe 1996: 6). Post et al. (2002: 3) say that the word altruism is derived from the Latin’s “the other” and literally translates to “other-ism”. Batson (2011: 20), Chasi (2014: 55), Corballis (2002: 93), Monroe (1996: 6) and Wilson and Kniffin (2003: 117) define altruism as behaviour intended to benefit another, even when the risks involved may potentially harm the individual carrying out the act of altruism. An altruist helps other human beings merely for the sake of helping them, not in the hopes of gaining anything in return. Tomasello (2009) also agrees and says that in his experiments with infants under the age of 24 months some of the participants helped others even without the anticipation of reward. Simply put, an altruist is an individual who behaves in a manner that will increase the welfare of another for the sake of lessening the other’s strife.

Monroe (1996: 7) and Wall (2005: 388) agree on the three most common characteristics of altruism:

1- First, altruism is an act on behalf of someone else; one goes out of their own way to provide another with assisting through sharing goods, services or information;

2- Secondly, the action taken on behalf of someone else is goal orientated to the benefit of the distressed individual; so the altruist is able to understand the situation the distressed individual is in. Tomasello (2008, 2009 and 2014), Snowdon (2004: 45) and Gärdenfors (2004: 253) agree that a common understanding of a goal orientated activity is reliant on an “offline” representation of the situation. The ability to put oneself in the shoes of others.
3- Finally, the altruist can be put in a compromising position while assisting the individual whom the act is being carried out on behalf of.

These are the three most common characteristics of altruism across many disciplines. However, altruism is required to be defined more in-depth as there exists a difference between true altruists and individuals who act out of rationality and selfishness.

Altruism is looked at from different interdisciplinary perspectives. There are multiple perspectives on this topic. All of these perspectives provide different theoretical frameworks around altruism, its definition, origin and characteristics. These perspectives change from discipline to discipline. However, although these perspectives differ, there are certain fundamental links that exist between different fields of study, providing different perspectives on the same concept.

With altruism, the generally accepted theories are those in the social sciences that suggest that altruists perceive the world from a different perspective and that human interaction is based on behaviours that promote communal functioning: that people actually do things out of pure, innate goodness. The discussion that follows will present various perspectives on altruism from different disciplines in order to arrive at a theoretically sound understanding of altruism.

Monroe (1996: 7) says that “altruism sets no condition”. The implication made here is that the act of altruism is carried to help someone purely for the sake of helping them, with no intention of receiving anything in return (Wilson and Kniffin 2009: 117). The individual acting altruistically behaves this way because to them their behaviour is normal (Tomasello 2009: 5; Wall 2005: 389; Wilson and Kniffin 2003: 118). Altruists do not engage in certain acts as a result of them being socially expected or for financial gain, they engage in these acts because their altruistic action is natural; it happens without them realising it. Elsewhere I note that theorists on altruism “ascribe a number of varying explanations to altruism, ranging from innate predispositions, to culture and socialisation, and personal gain on behalf of the rational actor” (Leslie 2018: 270), to kin selection in biology. However, the above description of altruism primarily speaks to the idea that altruism is a characteristic that is innately human: that is, human beings are born with the natural ability to see and feel compassion for others. The aim here
is to present a description of altruism based on the reviewed literature and to include theories of human communication and cooperation, and how these theories are related to the ideas presented by Tomasello.

The definitions above seem to present the idea that human beings are born altruistic. However, there are a number of varying and counter perspectives that argue otherwise. The first of these is the economic perspective which states that altruism is a concept under which the emphasis is on material reward – on goods, services and information (Monroe 1996: 8, Tomasello 2009: 5). The idea behind the economic perspective is that an individual behaves in an altruistic manner in the hope of receiving some sort of material or emotional compensation (Monroe 1996: 8). The compensation is in monetary form, or in the form of praise. That is, an individual may behave altruistically through demonstrating philanthropic behaviour, like funding charities in order to receive awards of humanitarianism and to be publically recognised. Another look at altruism from an economic perspective is that altruism cannot be bought. Some believe that individuals behave altruistically in order to receive financial reward. Those who genuinely behave altruistically do not do so in anticipation of reward because they do not expect to receive compensation for their actions. Although these kinds of acts are admirable, for Monroe (1996: 8) they do not constitute altruism because the focus is one of two things: personal gain or financial reward. From the economic perspective, true altruists share their resources, like money, goods, services and information without expecting to receive recognition for it.

In *Why We Cooperate* (2009) Tomasello maintains the economic perspective of altruism, under which human beings behave altruistically for three reasons:

1- Helping – the ability to perceive the goals of others and then having the altruistic motivation to help others (Tomasello 2009: 7).

2- Informing – informing others as an advantage to them (Tomasello 2009: 18-20).

3- Sharing – sharing of information and possessions such as food and shelter (Tomasello 2009: 28).
An example of this is likely to be that of an individual that is unknown to most people, who funds and does philanthropic work out of the public eye, not for recognition by other people, but purely as a result of altruism and cooperation.

The second perspective is the psychological perspective which suggests that altruism is programmed into human beings’ through “socialisation” (Monroe 1996: 8). As discussed previously, socialisation is a large determining factor in the actions of human beings’ as it stems from their moral and belief systems. Morality in particular plays a big role in determining altruistic behaviour. Even Tomasello makes reference to the morals and norms that govern social behaviour (Tomasello 2009: 30). Individuals are taught to be “good” from a young age, through maintaining the status quo, or to maintain the moral high ground of the particular group. Human beings’ become so accustomed to these behaviours that they become “second nature” (Wall: 2005: 9). The psychological perspective of altruism suggests that all aspects of socialisation can influence the behaviours of individuals whether or not these individuals are socialised into altruism. Monroe (1996:9-10) believes that self-moral reasoning and empathy play a significant role in determining acts of altruism. Individuals behave in a matter that is in accordance with their belief structures that are instilled in them through socialisation. Their consciousness then determines their actions and further the extent of their altruistic behaviour. Under this perspective, culture and social interactions play a fundamental role in determining altruistic behaviour. The psychological perspective mostly speaks to ideas on how human interaction plays a part in determining human behaviour; the opinion of others, what is good and what is bad, will determine human action. This perspective also believes that altruistic behaviour can be cultivated. Cultivation occurs through altruistic behaviour being endorsed and encouraged in particular environments. A variety of sociological aspects have an influence on human beings’ behavioural functions, but the fundamental influence is the perception of how one is viewed by others. Guilt and shame are there to keep people in line with the functioning of the group (Tomasello 2009:95). Under the psychological perspective it is believed that human interaction is a determining factor in cultivating altruistic behaviour. As a result of the cultivated aspects of altruism, one can thus make reference to the importance of the uniqueness
of human cognition (Tomasello 2008, 2009, 2014), and to how it has resulted in human beings behaving more or less altruistically.

The third perspective considered is the biological perspective, which is probably the most controversial perspective on altruism. Under the biological perspective on altruism, the emphasis is put on “favour to kin (kin selection), or group selection” (Monroe 1996: 8; and Wilson and Kniffin 2003: 124). The implication of altruism under the biological perspective is that human beings are more likely to act altruistically firstly, with species from their own kind, and then secondly with their particular subgrouping within the human race (Wilson and Kniffin 2003: 118). More dramatically, the biological perspective also holds that human procreation (increasing copies of the self) is done out of narcissism and egoism (Wilson and Kniffin 2003: 124). This perspective links to ideas of evolutionary biology and natural selection that suggest that human beings behave more altruistically with members of their own groups. Evolutionary biological perspectives suggest that the motivation behind altruism is to feed human selfishness, which is, I do whatever I need to do in order to help myself (me first) in order to survive and continue human kind by preventing the species from becoming obsolete. Under this perspective there are also varying extremes of altruism, like interactions within different groups that may spark different kinds of altruism, depending on who forms part of the group (Wilson and Kniffin 2003: 121). The biological perspective links with claims from some theories in the social sciences that suggest that individuals act more altruistic around members from their own cultural groupings and socialisation groups (Tomasello 2009: ix; and Miller 2006: 32). Whichever way the coin is flipped, the biological perspective on altruism suggests that altruism is more likely to occur between individuals from the same groups, be it cultural, social or religious and so on. The biological perspective also maintains that altruistic behaviour toward others will be influenced through relations. Tomasello (2014: 37) in fact seems to think that cooperation and willingness to collaborate have their biological advantages.

The final perspective I consider for this study is the philosophical perspective on altruism. Similar to the psychological perspective, it also places emphasises on the socialisation and interaction with others, but does not discount one’s ability to think for
oneself (Monroe 1996: 9). Monroe (1996: 9) and Wall (2005: 9-10) suggest that altruism in philosophy is based on ideas of the self and of the world around us, cognition and emotional impact of socialisation on the individual, social expectations and identity. Basically, altruism from the philosophical perspective is interpreted by individuals based on the ideas of the social cognitive theory and Tomasello’s shared intentionality hypothesis (2008, 2009 and 2014), that human beings are able to understand the world, and their place in it is based on their past interactions. Human beings will behave altruistically toward others based on acts of altruism they have experienced and witnessed. The philosophical perspective places a great deal of emphasis on cognitive and psychological reasoning and suggests that empathy leads to altruism (Monroe 1996: 9). Batson (2011) refers to “other-orientated emotions”, which refers largely to the concern for the well-being of others (Batson 2001: 11). As previously mentioned, the word empathy is synonymously used with the word altruism. The philosophical perspective on altruism and all the other perspectives discussed here are all multifaceted and use interdisciplinary concepts.

3.8. Cooperation, Altruism and Human Communication

In the following section I will focus primarily on directly answering the following question: how, according to Tomasello, are altruism and cooperation related to human communication? I will primarily consider varying elements of the concept of altruism from all the perspectives presented above to aid in presenting a well-rounded argument for how human communication relates to cooperation and altruism.

In the discussion above I have considered why, according to Tomasello, humans cooperate and behave altruistically. Many perspectives of altruism were briefly discussed as all of them are applicable to this study. According to Tomasello, the answer to the question “why do human beings behave altruistically?” is simple. Human beings behave altruistically because they know no other way. Human beings possess innate characteristics – communication, altruism and cooperation – and these characteristics seem to be a biological inheritance to ensure the continuation of the human race. Tomasello (2009) also presents the idea that human beings are born altruistic. He demonstrates this through his experiments with young children and other
primates. He finds that human children are, firstly, more cooperative, and, secondly, more altruistic (Tomasello 2009). Of course it is difficult to quantify concepts such as altruism and cooperation, however Tomasello (2009) suggests that these concepts and characteristics become observable as human beings grow and begin to selectively demonstrate cooperativeness and altruism toward others. The outcomes of Tomasello’s findings may thus be that human beings are born cooperative and altruistic, and that it is only once human beings are socialised and acculturated that their cooperativeness and altruism becomes selective.

This selective altruism essentially begins with cognitive processing. Individuals make sense of the world through cognitive processes that are determined by the social and cultural values that an individual possesses. Because human beings possess far more advanced cognitive functions than other species, their cognition is a multifaceted process through which individuals make sense of the world around them. Pajares et al. (2009) and Tomasello (2014) suggest that cognitive processes are mapped firstly to function on a level that is innate; that is to say that human beings engage, process and formulate decisions on the basis of their very unique cognitive abilities, and that they are able to engage other human beings and know their human experiences through processes such as joint attention, shared intentions and goals, and recursive mind-reading (Tomasello 2008, 2009, 2014). Secondly, culture and socialisation largely determine what is socially accepted and what is not (Pajares et al. 2009). Human beings tend to behave in ways that are more likely to be accepted by the group as it is deemed more cooperative than its opposite; for example misbehaving in ways that do not conform to the practices of a group. Dawkins (2006: 3) and Monroe (1996: 9) suggest that the way in which information is processed during interaction will determine altruistic action. In other words, how information regarding a particular matter is communicated and made sense of will determine the actions of the individual on the basis of the three steps of sense-making identified by Tomasello (2014:4) and discussed in the previous chapter. It is through this three steps process of interpretation and sense making that the altruistic action is determined.

Aspects such as socialisation and culture also influence sense making processes, however it should not be forgotten that human beings also have the ability to process
information on their own regardless of their socialisation and cultural background. Humans are able to take initiative. For example, one will not allow an infant to be mauled to death by a lion on the basis that they are not akin to one another. Instead, one will make attempts to save and protect the infant from harm regardless. In addition to cognitive processing, Monroe (1996: 11) further suggests that external influence such as canonical beliefs also has an influence on altruistic behaviour. Richard Dawkins says that,

> Among animals, man is uniquely dominated by culture, by influences learned and handed down. Some would say that culture is so important that genes, whether selfish or not, are virtually irrelevant to the understanding of human nature (Dawkins 2009: 3).

3.9. Conclusion

So to answer the question set out at the beginning of this chapter – how are altruism and cooperation related to human communication? – altruism and cooperation are related to human communication as a result of human beings’ very special cognitive ability which has biologically predisposed human beings to communicate in species-unique ways. Specifically relating to cooperation, collaborative activities are the result of Tomasello’s shared intentionality hypothesis: the ability to share common ground, common goals, shared intentions, and the ability to make circumstantial inferences to create understanding and a “we” identity (Tomasello 2009 and 2014). Specifically relating to altruism, communication allows human beings to express their needs and desires and in turn others want to assist in fulfilling those needs. Why do they want to fulfil these needs? Simply because human beings have the ability to go “off-line” where they can imagine themselves in the shoes of the other, the ability to empathise.

> “Doing things together create mutual expectations” says Tomasello (2009: 58). From a young age human beings demonstrate their cooperative and altruistic nature, as established by Tomasello’s experiments, through sharing, helping and informing (Tomasello 2009). Tomasello (2009 and 2014) believes that the ecological changes throughout evolution have resulted in the communicative and cooperative human structures that exist today. Human beings realised that it is impossible for them to
survive on their own and established groups which eventually developed into cultures and other subgroups. Human beings were forced, but also predisposed to live in social groups in order to survive. Within these social groups “each individual makes sense of their role in achieving common goals” for the group (Tomasello 2009: 61-74).

Tomasello (2009: 74) says that “skills and motivations or cooperative communication co-evolved”. Social selection also played an important role in the construction of the group because if an individual was seen as not conforming to the group identity, they would be alienated. Altruism is thus also a desirable characteristic to have within the group, in aid of the greater good. Tomasello (2009) thinks that altruism and cooperative communication are the outcome of interdependence and mutualism. Human beings were forced by ecological and cultural changes to work in groups in order to survive, which in turn resulted in their cognitive development which allowed them to use communication in the cooperative matter in which they do. Cooperation and altruism thus relate to human communication insofar as if it were not for the specialised cognitive infrastructure of human beings none of these concepts would exist the way they do if it were not for the other.

The impact of socialisation cannot be ignored. Altruistic behaviour is influenced and determined by how an individual perceives a certain situation and what is deemed to be acceptable in that particular situation based on the cognitive processes through sense making and interpretation. The individual will thus act based on what is deemed to be normal or expected of them based on their personal cognitive processes and interpretation of socialisation.

Tomasello (2009: 99) says that humans “are not cooperating angels”. Human beings’ conformity to particular identities is good for the survival of the group. However, conformity to one particular group in this day and age is difficult. Tomasello (2009: 99) says that “group mindedness in cooperation is perhaps ironically a major cause of strife and suffering in the world today” and suggests a shift in thinking about the group. With this in mind, the next chapter will focus on the concept of ubuntu, an African moral philosophy which loosely translates into the identification of humanness against the backdrop of being human (Metz 2007: 323). The concept of ubuntu consists of many
similar characteristics as those presented here under altruism, however in a Southern African context. In the next chapter I set out to answer the question “how are the theories of human communication presented by Tomasello relevant to the study of ubuntu in the field of communication studies?”
Chapter Four: Ubuntu

4.1. Introduction

Chasi (2014), Metz (2007) and others write about ubuntu, a southern African theory which roughly translates to the identification of humanness against the backdrop of being human (Metz 2007:323). According to Metz (2007) and Gade (2011), a number of theorists, academics and politicians have made use of the term ubuntu. The definitions that have stemmed from these writers vary from ubuntu loosely translating to humanness to “a person is a person through other persons” and other varying interpretations of the maxim umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu. Chasi (2014: 5) says that “the ubuntu maxim umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” has often been read “to suggest that Africans ascribe to a collectivist orientation in terms of which a person is only a person as determined by the collective”. Similarly, Hunter (2010: 201) says that “individuals are not autonomous beings but are formed through relationships with others”. These terms, collectivist, personhood and humanness seem to be the common themes throughout the selected writings for this chapter. However, it appears as though different contexts have different theories on right action, collaborative or cooperative activities and other social interactions.

With the above in mind, this chapter will focus on the African moral theory of ubuntu as it relates to Michael Tomasello’s ideas of cooperation, altruism and human communication. I will consider how Tomasello’s writings about human communication are relevant to the study of ubuntu in the field of communication studies. In this context, I will introduce and discuss the analytical definition of ubuntu with specific focus on Metz’s (2007) “Toward an African Moral Theory” as well as other relevant literature. Thereafter, I will reiterate some of Tomasello’s ideas on human communication, cooperation and altruism and the universality thereof and how it relates to the interpretations of ubuntu by Metz (2007). I will use the selected writings to demonstrate that ubuntu is a cultural appropriation of universal shared humanistic values, and present a critique that ubuntu has largely been misinterpreted. Lastly, I will critically discuss alternative approaches to ubuntu as it relates to Tomasello’s ideas on cooperation and altruism, and how by extension all these concepts- human
communication, cooperation, altruism and ubuntu—have overlapping universal humanistic characteristics. Although these concepts stem from very different conceptual fields, my aim with this chapter, and this dissertation is to present a multidisciplinary approach to concepts that are different, but very clearly also overlap.

4.2. What Is Ubuntu?

It seems as though a major question in South Africa right now, and especially in its post-apartheid era, is: what is ubuntu? Christian Gade (2011) notes that in the thirty years or so of after colonialism and apartheid in southern Africa there has been a huge increase in the number of academic papers undertaking to make sense of this term ubuntu. However, according to Gade (2011) ubuntu existed well before the rise of African nationalism in a post-colonial Zimbabwe and post-apartheid South Africa. The existence of the term ubuntu has been documented as far back as 1846 (Gade 2011: 306). Gade (2011) notes that the texts on ubuntu refer to ubuntu differently over the time. Ubuntu has evolved from being conceptually referred to as a human quality, a theory, and then an African philosophy of humanism. Gade’s article, “The Historical Development of the Written Discourses on Ubuntu” (2011) goes on to discuss that some theorists have even gone as far as to say that “ubuntu is a quality that blacks possess and whites lack” (Gade 2011: 308). What is clear from Gade’s article is that ubuntu has remained ambiguous and undefined. According to Gade (2011) the first book on ubuntu was Hunhuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe Indigenous Political Philosophy (1980) written by Stanlake Samkange and Tommie Marie Samkange. This text refers to hunhu or ubuntu as:

The attention one human being gives another; the kindness, courtesy, consideration and friendliness in the relationship between people; a code of behaviour; an attitude or other people and to life is embodied in hunhu or ubuntu. Hunhuism, is therefore, something more than just humanness (Samkange and Samkange, 1980: 39).

The Samkanges’ (1980) seem to refer to something deeper than humanness, however the problem with the definitions of and ubuntu presented by the Samkanges’ is that this definition was deeply grounded in what Gade (2011: 304) refers to as
“narrative of return” by post-colonial African countries. “Narratives of return” were aimed at getting Africa back to a precolonial state where Africans were untainted by western imperialism (Gade 2011:304), which is of course anachronistic.

In South Africa, the term ubuntu appeared for the first time in the interim constitution (Gade 2011: 311; Sampson 1999: 529). The epilogue of the Constitution reads: “there is a need for understanding and not for vengeance, a need for reparation and not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu and not victimisation” (Constitution of the republic of South Africa, Act 200 of 1993: Epilogue after section 251). Gade (2011) believes that the inclusion of the term was not by chance, especially not if South Africa was going to find the much needed social cohesion. The inclusion of the words ubuntu, reparation and understanding indicate a move toward understanding, resolution, restitution and amends. Gade (2011) says that it was between 1993 to 1995 that ubuntu was for the first time defined as being related to the African proverb umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu which translates to “a person is a person through others” ( Chasi 2014: 5; Gade 2011: 315; Metz (2011: 536). It was with reference to this phase that the understanding of the term ubuntu as the human quality of humanness, goodness, generosity, graciousness, honourability and so forth became conventionalised. The interpretations of ubuntu also became associated with phrases such as “a person is a person through other persons”: that human beings are only human beings (and become more so) through their interactions with other human beings. It became clear that the basic gist of ubuntu laid in shared identity, goodness, hospitality, and recognising the personhood or humanity in others. In South Africa, in particular, ubuntu became associated with the transition out of apartheid into an equal and free county for all South Africans, black and white.

It has become apparent that through the rise of academic papers on ubuntu, the definition of the term has become more ambiguous; ubuntu is not conceptualised as a human quality, a way of life and an African ethic or moral theory (Gade 2011). However Metz (2007) in particular presents ubuntu as an African moral theory. He presents ubuntu in a very analytical manner, firstly by highlighting “moral judgements” that are universally held. Metz (2007) then goes on to present what he refers to as tendencies of “moral judgements more common among Africans than Westerners”.

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Secondly, he presents six interpretations of ubuntu, and holds that the sixth and final account of ubuntu (although vague) is the most promising for presenting an African moral theory. The sixth account of ubuntu holds that “an action is right just insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord: an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop community” (Metz 2007: 334). Metz (2007) goes on to justify his selection of ubuntu as an African moral theory on the basis of good-will and shared identity. It is for the reasons stated above that Metz’s (2007) article has been selected as one of the seminal writings for this chapter on ubuntu. Metz (2007) makes it very clear it would be difficult for ubuntu to exist were it not for universality, shared identity and good-will. In addition, based on the literature presented in two previous chapters, we can now realise that universality in communication, cooperation and collaboration, shared identity and actions of good-will or altruism stem from what Tomasello refers to as the shared intentionality hypothesis. The foundations of the shared intentionality hypothesis are grounded in the ability to interact with others, for without the ability to communicate to create common goals and shared intentions, human beings’ would not be able to create mutual spaces or Metz’s harmonious relations.

Importantly, Metz (2007: 322) says that ubuntu and similar terms are prevalent in Africa. Metz (2007) agrees with Gade (2011) that the term ubuntu is not easy to define, however Metz (2007: 323) states that ubuntu can be made sense of through the maxim “a person is a person though other persons”. Metz (2007: 323) goes further and says that “the maxim has descriptive senses to the effect that one’s identity as a human being causally and even metaphysically depends on a community”. This means that without community, or the interaction with others one’s identity is lost as there is no one to share it with. With reference to Paul Grice in chapter two, meaning cannot be created by oneself, therefore meaning of one’s life can only be given through interaction with others. If there is no interaction with others, identity is lost as human beings’ identity is based on their interactions with others.

Furthermore, Metz (2007: 324) maintains that there are universal rules governing human cooperative and collaborative activities. These rules include not killing others, not to harm others physically or to hurt them, not to force someone into having non-consensual sex, not to steal, and not to discriminate racially especially when allocating
opportunities. These rules are universal and generally accepted by all human beings. There are however instances we might know of where some of these rules are broken. In most cases the majority of human beings, regardless of geographic location or culture, adhere to these rules.

Metz (2007) then goes on to discuss what he refers to as “tendencies”. Behaviours that he considers to be more common among African people. The gist of these “tendencies” tend toward a consensus based, competition free, communal environment in which all people value one another and their input, and share resources in a manner that benefits the greater community (Metz 2007: 324-327). The universal rules apply to all human beings, and in addition to these universal rules Metz (2007) also thinks that Africans in particular exhibit the aforementioned tendencies.

With these universal rules, and particular African tendencies in mind, Metz (2007) presents the six possible interpretations of ubuntu listed below:

1- An action is right insofar as it respects a person’s dignity; an act is wrong to the extent that it degrades humanity;

2- An action is right insofar as it promotes the well-being of others; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to enhance the welfare of one’s fellows;

3- An action is right insofar as it promotes the well-being of others without violating their rights; an act is wrong to the extent that it either violates rights or fails to enhance the welfare of one’s fellow without violating rights;

4- An action is right insofar as it positively relates to others and thereby realises oneself; an act is wrong to the extent that it does not perfect one’s valuable nature as a social being;

5- An action is right insofar as it is in solidarity with groups whose survival is threatened; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to support a vulnerable community;

6- Lastly, an action is right insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop a community. (Metz 2007: 328-334).
Again in Metz’s (2007) explanation of the six interpretations of ubuntu the common theme seems to be group centred interactions based on the universal rules that govern all human interaction, and the six African tendencies described by Metz (2007), since his attempt is to devise an “African moral theory”. The well-being and maintenance of communal, harmonious relations in which individuals have solidarity and are treated with dignity is a recurring theme across all six interpretations of ubuntu listed by Metz (2007).

Overall, ubuntu as a moral theory is a normative prescription of how human beings ought to live their lives. The proposed theory suggest that beings all treat one another with respect, dignity and integrity in ways that maintain social harmony and group well-being that is aimed at reducing discord and conflict in a manner that is advantageous to the group (Metz 2007). It thus follows that according to Metz (2007), ubuntu as an African moral theory that aims to promote mutual respect and the well-being of others without violating their rights in a manner that positively relates to others and builds individual character, produces social cohesion, and most notably puts the needs of the most vulnerable first.

Metz (2007: 328) thinks that the sixth interpretation of ubuntu is the most theoretically attractive. It holds that “an action is right insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord; an action is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop the community” (Metz 2007: 334). This interpretation suggests that harmony is at the centre of ubuntu; any kind of action or behaviour that disrupts or reduces social harmony is not in the interest of the greater community. As mentioned previously in chapter two and three, these kinds of relationships are built on mutualistic and collaborative activities that are created through the use of communication and Tomasello’s shared intentionality. In creating these kinds of relations, it is necessary to treat others with respect and dignity in ways that build solidarity, and nurture well-being of the self and of others to create shared identity. These kinds of environments can be established through working together to ensure group well-being.
4.3. Ubuntu Meets the Shared Intentionality Hypothesis

Metz (2007) presents the six interpretations of ubuntu, and selects the sixth interpretation as the most theoretically attractive for the reasons noted above. However I agree with him in thinking that this interpretation of ubuntu is too vague. What is harmonious and that which is discordant varies from person to person, and as indicated in the previous chapters, human beings make decisions based on many levels of thought processing. For this reason, Metz (2007) elaborates on what harmony means, and how it can be accomplished in a society with many different people who think and act in very different ways. What follows is a discussion on shared identity and good-will as presented by Metz (2007) and how it relates to Tomasello’s ideas on human communication, cooperation and altruism.

4.3.1. Shared Identity

Metz (2007: 355) thinks that there are a few preconditions for creating “harmony and togetherness”. He suggests that groups firstly require some kind of group identification, some “we-ness”. Individuals need to identify with a particular “we”, and that “we” also needs to identify with the individual. Tomasello (2009: 40), on the other hand, refers to this kind of group identification as “we-identity”. What these concepts refer to is individual identification with a particular group. So for instance, I relate to a particular group because it reflects similar beliefs to my own. Additionally, as it’s been established, I cannot have shared identity on my own. As much as I relate to a particular group, that group also needs to identify and recognise me as a member. This group recognition of an individual, or interdependent individuals is what Tomasello (2014: 83-84) refers to as “collective intentionality”. Without “collective intentionality” there is no shared identity. Tomasello’s “collective intentionality” overlap with Metz (2007: 335) in saying that “common ends” in the way of common ground, shared goals and intentions are the result of shared identity as “shared identity consists of people in the group coordinating their activities in order to realise their ends”. For Metz (2007), shared identity reflects itself through shared group activities, in which individuals play a mutualistic role in achieving the goals of the group. Tomasello (2014: 84) says that “human beings do indeed think of their group as a “we”
of interdependent individuals- that humans identify with their groups- is a well-established psychological fact”. Shared identity is thus laden with a common sense of the self within a large group of individuals who share identity through common goals, shared intentions and group activity for mutual benefit. For instance, my identification with a particular group may not be reciprocated by the group because my goals differ from that of the group. There is then no possibility that I can be incorporated into the group if I do not mutually contribute to the fulfilment of the group’s goals. Likewise, if a group identifies with me and I do not share its goals or values, I can deny affiliation to it.

Metz (2007: 335) and Tomasello (2014) believe that a common sense of the self is important to understanding one’s role as an individual within the group where mutualistic activities take place. For such mutually collaborative activities to take place and to be executed successfully, each individual needs to understand the importance of their role (no matter how menial) in coordinated activities. Without recognition of the self and one’s unique contribution to the group it would become difficult firstly to contribute to the group meaningfully, and secondly, for the group to create shared identity. For Tomasello (2014: 83) groups began their mutualistic centred activities with those who did things in the same way as they did. Collaborative partners were identified on their ability to blend in and cooperate. At this point, human beings begin to work together as “we”, a group in which each individual plays an equally important role in the survival, maintenance and well-being of the group. Conversely, this is also the kinds of behaviour that Tomasello (2009) believes led to the differentiation between “us” and “them”. Issues regarding group-centeredness will be discussed later in this chapter.

With the discussion above on shared identity, it thus follows that in terms of societal or group functioning, there are universal concepts at play. Human beings have arrived at an evolutionary standpoint at which group-centred activities are at the centre of shared identity. The foundations of shared identity stems from the creation of shared goals and intentions through the fruition of coordinated activities to function cooperatively through the use of communication. Of course, shared identity does have its shortcomings. For instance, the coming together of a group of very well coordinated
individuals to commit mass murders or genocide all in the name of shared identity is not a very positive example. However, for Metz (2007) ubuntu is not only comprised of shared identity; it is also linked to acts and feelings of good-will. Having shared identity does not necessarily come with what Metz (2007) refers to as good-will. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, Tomasello (2014:2) says that human beings’ unique cognitive abilities allow them to see themselves in the position of the other. In their interactions with others, human beings’ can go to a mental space “offline”, and make sense of their interactions with others. It is in this “offline” space that humans imagine how they would like to be treated based on past interactions with others.

4.3.2. Good-will

In addition to shared identity, Metz (2007: 336) also thinks that “harmony might mean a certain caring or supportive relationship”. To this end, Metz (2007) presents good-will as it relates to the success and prosperity of the other. In the explanation of good-will, there perhaps are more direct links between ubuntu presented by Metz (2007) and the shared intentionality hypothesis presented by Tomasello. To draw the correlation I will refer back to chapters two and three.

Chapter two pointed out the importance of understanding the process of communication and the importance of making sense of the world around us. Building on chapter two, chapter three highlighted the importance of the unique and complex communicative abilities of human beings’ to express their cooperative and altruistic nature, which according to Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014) humans have been evolutionary predisposed to as a survival mechanism. The section on good-will that follows aims to draw on the similarities between altruism and ubuntu on the basis of human beings’ ‘ability to view themselves in the position of the other in order to lessen their strife, to promote harmony and social cohesion, as opposed to chaos and discordant relations. For Metz (2007) ubuntu requires more than just shared identity.

For Metz, acts of ubuntu should comprise of shared identity as well as good-will. Metz (2007: 336) lists the following acts as possessing good-will:
1. Wishes another person well (conation);
2. Believes that another person is worthy of help (cognition);
3. Aims to help another person (intention);
4. Acts so as to help another person (volition);
5. Acts for the other’s sake (motivation);
6. Feels good upon the knowledge of another person has benefited and feels bad upon learning she has been harmed (affection).

(Metz, 2007: 336).

Metz’s acts of possessing good-will firstly links to the cognitive abilities of human beings’- their very “special” way of thinking. Metz (2007:336) makes it clear that conation, cognition, intention and motivation are behind the active decision making process when acting on behalf of someone else. As previously mentioned, these characteristics can be directly linked to Tomasello’s shared intentionality hypothesis. To reiterate, the shared intentionality hypothesis functions on the basis of human beings’ ability to be able to create common group through shared motivations and intentions in group centred activities that are aimed at benefiting the group over the individual.

Secondly, the common theme across these points is helping and acting on behalf of others more. These themes more directly relate to the characteristics of altruism provided in chapter three. Perhaps most importantly, the conation, cognition, intention, volition and motivation to help another person as listed by Metz (2007) provides very close links to Tomasello’s (2009) ideas on helping, informing and sharing. Although expressed differently, each of these terms relate to the definition of altruism provided in chapter three. The definition includes but is not limited to acting on behalf of someone to provide goods or services, acting on behalf of someone to help them achieve a goal, and to act on behalf of someone regardless of being placed in a compromising position (Monroe 1996: 7 and Wall 2005: 388). Tomasello (2009) thinks that naturally, one wishes another well, as opposed to distress, misfortune and chaos as a result of the ability to reflexively think of oneself in the position of the other. For the very same reason, one also believes that another is worthy of help. It is implied by Metz’s (2007) use of parenthesis that the words “conation” and “cognition” refer to
cognitive processes in which an individual attempts to imagine themselves as the other, and therefore connotes goodness and well wishes for another. Metz (2007: 336) goes on to say that an act of good-will includes intent and motivations to help another person, or to act on behalf of a person who is incapable of acting in their own best interest. Finally, Metz (2007: 336) adds that an individual “feels good upon the knowledge that another person has benefited and feels bad upon learning that she has been harmed”. This “affection” referred to by Metz may be considered to be a form friendliness, caring, empathy or love. Metz (2007: 337) even goes as far as to say that ubuntu is a theory in loving relations; how to love.

It could thus be said that in Metz’s (2007) account of ubuntu there are rules governing all human beings, universal rules, which frown upon impinging the communal harmony and causing discord. Additionally, Metz (2007) also seems to think that there are “tendencies” that different groups of people have, and that Africans in particular have these “tendencies” toward communal, collective and harmonious relationships that are aimed at growing the self through understanding one’s place in a group and one’s unique contribution to that group. Furthermore, Metz (2007) thinks that these kinds of harmonious, communal and collectivist activities are governed by graciousness, generosity, integrity and dignity; all qualities that develop shared identity and good-will. Shared identity relates to a common identity shared amongst members of a group which is relatable to Tomasello’s (2008, 2009, 2014) cooperation and shared intentionality hypothesis. Good-will refers to behaviour that is meant to benefit another which is relatable to Tomasello’s (2008, 2009, 2014) altruism as it relates to cooperation. Shared identity and good-will result in what Metz (2007) refers to as harmonious loving relationships.

Metz (2007: 337) argues that love is what guides human beings in the pursuit of harmonious communal relations: that it is what leads them to value all members within a community equally by sharing an identity and having solidarity with them. Something of this idea of altruism and love is presented in the selected reading on human communication by Michael Tomasello: something that highlights human communication as a cooperative tool to sustain and develop the collective. Interestingly, Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014) does not make any direct references to
love as Metz (2007) does; however, many of the characteristics of altruism discussed by Tomasello under his shared intentionality hypothesis (Tomasello 2008, 2009, 2014) are contained in Metz’s and related conceptions of love. Post et al. (2002: 3) posits altruism as "a word different from love and yet related to it… It is a modern secular scientific concept whose sacred counterpart is agape love, although it lacks the emotional intonation of love".

The capacity to love is described by Singer (1992: 2) as the underlying explanation for why human beings are able to relate to one another, to extend their empathy toward others, bestowing value on the life of the self though valuing the lives of others. This idea of relating more to the self through interactions with others maintains similarities with Metz’s assertion (2007:336) that through our interactions with others, we become more human, or perhaps even attain a higher sense of humanity. In this view, love drives people to be willing to recognise others, to empathise with them, to want to assist others through communicative expressiveness and creativity (Singer 1992: 23). Drawing on this, it may not be so surprising to see that love may drive people to express their appreciation of the lives of others through individual sacrifice, to live out their altruistic function. Singer (1994: 2) says that “humans’ ability, whether innate or learned, to care about the welfare of other people regardless of the effect upon oneself” is as a result of love. In The Pursuit of Love (1994), Singer states that to love one’s self is to affirm and delight in the self, so that the self may serve to delight others (Singer 1994:76-77). It is not out of self-interest. Singer (1994) references Erich Fromm’s rejection of ideas on love presented by a number of philosophers who suggest that love is paradoxical and narcissistic (Fromm 1956: 35; Singer 1994: 77). Singer (1994), following Fromm (1956), says that self-love is different to selfishness and that “loving oneself is possible only if one also loves the other persons” (Singer 1994: 77). For Singer (1994: 2-3) love is the bestowal of value on the lives of others, and the inherent need to be loved, or to reciprocate love and to have meaningful relations with others. The idea of loving and reciprocating love presented by Singer (1994) shares similarities with Tomasello’s ideas of human communication, altruism and humans’ desire to live in cooperative social environments, as well as Metz (2007) ideas on ubuntu as harmonious communal relations that values the humanity of others.
Opposed to the views of Singer (1994) and Fromm (1956), Amir (2001: 6) and Secomb (2007: 4) draw on Nietzsche's ideas on love that suggest that love is “paradoxical and can be enthralled with pain and struggle”. The paradox on love discussed by Amir (2001) and Secomb (2007) bears similarity to the discussion of the cooperative paradox in chapter three. The cooperative paradox holds that cooperation and altruism are advantageous in human interactions until the realisation that behaving cooperatively or altruistically can result in an individual being taken advantage of. It can be argued that love is a product of altruism, and like altruism is not merely the ideological reflection of a euphoric state as it has historically been portrayed to be (van Dierendonck and Patterson, 2010: 12). All concepts of love, communication and altruism are filled with paradoxes; all require self-sacrifice, or some extent of give and take: what Tomasello (2009: 45) refers to as a “tit-for-tat cooperation strategy”. Singer (1994: 7) suggests that love is something that all human beings aspire to feel and share with other human beings, even to the point of committing painful sacrifices for them. Human beings express love by self-sacrificing in order to better the plight of others (Lodge 2006: ix).

A theme that is common throughout discussions on cooperation and altruism, ubuntu and even love, is something to do with sacrifice on behalf of someone else. Under Tomasello’s shared intentionality hypothesis, it seems that the cognitive ability possessed by human beings which allows them to make sense of the world is one of the most important functions of human beings. The development of human cognition was obviously in support of collaborative actions, through which human beings are able to place themselves in the position of the other. Under cooperation and altruism, ubuntu and love, what is common is the desire and ability to give of the self on behalf of others. More specifically, under cooperation human beings do this through creating common ground, joint attention and shared intentions (Tomasello 208, 2009, 2014). Under altruism, human beings do this through actively giving of themselves in aid of others. Under ubuntu, human beings do this through engaging only in activities that are aimed at benefitting the greater good. Lastly under love, human beings love themselves so that others can delight in them.
It can thus be deduced that the universality of cooperation, altruism, ubuntu and love pertain to the service of others; or sharing with others regardless of the terms of reference and interpretations thereof. It is clear that there are overlapping concepts in each one of these concepts that hold universally true. It becomes clearer to see links between the concepts of cooperation, altruism and ubuntu, and perhaps by extension love. Taking into consideration the above discussion, it can be deduced that cooperation and altruism discussed by Michael Tomasello under human communication links to universality of skills that are possessed by all human beings. The ability to use communication is a biological predisposition based on the ontogenesis and phylogensis of human beings long periods of time. Human beings use communication to order their lives, and in doing so have created cultures and social institutions in which interpretations of universal concepts such as cooperation and altruism have been appropriated contextually and culturally to lend to the concepts of ubuntu presented by Chasi (2014), Gade (2011), Mboti (2015) Metz (2007, 2011), Tomaselli (2016), Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) and so many others. Perhaps it is only once human beings are socialised that they begin to treat others differently and selectively. Acculturation and socialisation are thus also a double-edged sword to humans’ cooperative and altruistic behaviour. Perhaps this is another inclusion into the paradoxes of human communication.

To sum up this section on ubuntu as it relates to human communication, cooperation and altruism- it is clear that there are overlapping characteristics of all these concepts, but also differences in the way that they are constructed. The foundations on cooperation is routed in communication. The evolution of communication has been a long evolution from primitive humans using primitive communication to humans that are now at the top of the food chain using more mature and complex ways to communicate in order to construct the worlds around them. Altruism stems out of communication and cooperation. The communicative abilities of human beings allows us to behave in ways that are more altruistic on the basis of how we use communication and the thought processes to imagine others at equal to ourselves so that we can treat them in a way that we would like to be treated. Lastly, ubuntu offers a similar approach as the concepts above. Ubuntu proposed a society based on harmonious activities, in which people are valued as individual that make up part of a
group. Ubuntu discourages any kind of behaviour that disrupts social cohesion or breaks the flow of humanness. All these concepts are grounded in group centred activities; having communion, collaboration and good-will are inconceivable without interacting with other people and without communication.

4.4. Why Ubuntu?

The rise of ubuntu came about at a difficult time especially countries like South Africa to which the term ubuntu is most commonly associated. The rise of to the call for ubuntu stemmed from a desire to build unity amongst people of post-apartheid South Africa. What people were looking for was a reduction of conflict, or that which caused discord, and reduced social harmony. The call was for ubuntu, a move toward shared identity, and acceptance of differences, reconciliation and forgiveness as indicated in the South African Constitutional Epilogue. After all, the term ubuntu became associated with unity and solidarity. This meant a move toward sharing common humanity.

The selection of the term ubuntu fit perfectly to what people were trying to establish; people being accepted and valued in an equal and respected manner. The characteristics of ubuntu as described by Metz (2007) fit perfectly to the creation of social cohesion. Ubuntu aimed at providing solidarity, shared identity, to “produce harmony and reduce discord” (Metz 2007: 334). However, it should be remembered that ubuntu is developed on top of many other universal rules, and that the addition of particular characteristics of ubuntu were added as a result of context. Ubuntu then perhaps became an appropriation of larger, more universal rules that are adhered to by all people, however, appropriated contextually to suit the needs of the South African community more specifically.

Additionally, ubuntu is constructed in the same way than other more universal concepts like altruism. These concepts come into being as a result of the cooperative nature of human beings that is perpetuated through the use of communication. Ubuntu is used by people in order to make sense of their lives and environments, to give them identity, and although it is culturally or contextually constructed, it does entail “shared humanistic values” that are relevant to all human beings regardless of context. In an
email to me regarding this research project, Prof Keyan Tomaselli said that “communion comes from communication, communitas and communicare (all aspects of ubuntu also)” (Tomaselli 2018).

Although the theoretical ideas behind ubuntu are to serve in building nationhood, unity and solidarity, ubuntu has also been interpreted and associated into a politically loaded term. For this and other reasons, the section that follows focuses on some critiques ubuntu, and later alternative perspectives to ubuntu.

4.5. Why not Ubuntu?

It appears that many theorists find the concept ubuntu somewhat problematic in the sense that it is an African normative theory on humanness that arose out of “narratives of return” (Gade 2011, Mboti 2015, Metz 2011, Tavanaro-Haidarian 2018, and Tomaselli 2016). In addition, some argue that the descriptions of ubuntu presented in the last 30 years or so are focused on finding a moral theory that binds Africans together on the basis of being African, and that almost entirely overlooks their humanity (Chasi 2014). Although ubuntu is centred on behaviour that promotes social cohesion and harmony, Mboti (2015:130) warns that this kind of approach can be dangerous, as it places people in “conceptual cages”. He goes on to note that this is precisely what gave rise not only to a collective theory such as ubuntu, but also the nationalist or right-wing approaches of the National Party during the apartheid era in South Africa.

Perhaps in becoming group-minded, human beings have misplaced their common sense of humanity. Metz (2011) thinks that the ill-interpretation of ubuntu has resulted in it being brought under fire for being difficult to incorporate into real life situations, and that it overlooks individual rights because of its collectivist ideas. Most importantly, it is difficult to incorporate precolonial interpretations of ubuntu into South Africa now (Metz 2011). It is therefore for these reasons that Mboti (2015) and Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) propose looking at ubuntu though a different lens.

Mboti’s (2015) primary problem with ubuntu is that it is presented as the “only account of morality, ethics and humanity that all Africans mutually recognise” (Mboti 2015:127).
Mboti (2015), like Metz (2011), thinks that “we cannot only see what we want only”, but rather that the interpretation of ubuntu should be subject to the aim of its use; to unite people as opposed to continually othering (Metz 2011: 536). How are South African’s going to interpret ubuntu now, especially considering that “Africans are already a multi-ethnic people involved in complex multi-ethnic interactions with others dependent on context” (Mboti 2015: 132)? Basically, Mboti has a problem with how ubuntu is identified and inflated as a one-size-fits-all theory on social harmony which is only contextualised to Africans, and perhaps more so to black Africans (Tomaselli 2016). Mboti (2015) suggests that to conceive of African ethics and morality in this way, as only collaborative and communal, is short sighted, and it is to deny that all human beings naturally compete. Mboti (2015: 132) shares the ideas of Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014) and proposes that “all human beings, in general- compete and cooperate in equal measure. Cooperation, however, does not stop because we compete and competition is not obliterated by cooperation; one is not complete without the other”. Mboti (2015:133) says that ubuntu only focuses on the good-side of Africans, and denies a whole other side of them as individuals with autonomous needs and desires.

Furthermore, it seems that the problems with ubuntu arose out of the desire to separate Africans from their colonial past through placing them in “conceptual cages” (Mboti 2015: 144). Ubuntu overlooks the fact that Africans also have the ability to choose selectively to whom their ubuntu is directed, like selective altruism discussed in the previous chapter, under which Tomasello (2009) says that altruism becomes selective based on the way that others treat you. For example, if someone behaves in a manner that does not conform to the social contract of harmony and perhaps uses their communicative abilities to deceive, the recipient of this kind of deception will realise that their cooperative nature that is used to create social harmony through giving of the self to others (ubuntu) was taken advantage of, the recipient it likely to remember certain signals of such interactions to avoid it in future. Bearing in mind how ubuntu relates to cooperation and altruism, Mboti (2015) thinks that interpretations of ubuntu seem to deny Africans the ability to make individual, autonomous social inferences and to learn from past experiences; an ability that is possessed by all human beings. By generalising the collectivist approach, ubuntu insinuates that all
Africans behave in ways that are only conducive to communal living as opposed to socially selected communal living. Tomasello (2009:28) says that most times human beings behave in ways that are cooperative and communal to maintain social cohesion. However, human beings also learn through their social interactions with others that behaving cooperatively is not always advantageous and can result in being taken advantage of. If, for instance, Africans behaved only communally and accepted social norms for the sake of promoting social harmonies, then perhaps there would have been no revolutions to overthrow their colonial influencers.

Mboti (2015) seems to think that ubuntu has been aligned with “good-citizenship”. His interpretation of a “good-citizen” is also aligned with Metz (2007) six interpretations of ubuntu which promote collective good, dignity, integrity and respect in harmonious relations with others that which are beneficial to the greater functioning of society. Mboti (2015) says that a person that has lived in Africa, or anywhere for that matter, long enough to “know its quotidian realities, has enough good sense to know that an action is right insofar as it allows one to make an informed choice” (Mboti 2015:134). The implication made by Mboti (2015) again links to the taken for granted cognitive abilities of human beings presented by Tomasello (2008, 2009. 2014). Mboti (2015), Metz (2007, 2011) and Tomasello (2009) agree that social norms and expectations have developed as a way of keeping those in life who challenge social functioning and that there are universal rules that guide action. Tomasello (2009:39) adds that perhaps behaviour which reinforces rules of functioning is in itself altruistic.

The suggestion by Tomasello (2009) that reinforcing rules of functioning is altruistic, speaks to Metz (2011) and Mboti’s (2015) idea that human beings have the autonomy to make decisions on how to behave in contexts based on previous knowledge and engagements in those environments. Metz (2011), Mboti (2015) and Tomasello (2009) also agree that behaviour is much more likely to be shaped by social influences, rather than on the basis of geographical location, race, culture and so on. Humans beings have through imitative learning learned how to behave in social contexts (Tomasello 2009: xiv) For instance, a person who is demographically regarded as being white may have lighter skin, and different bodily features, however, should that individual be raised in a household of traditional Xhosa speaking people, he or she is likely to speak
the Xhosa language and engage in Xhosa cultural practices. The individual’s behaviour and social interactions with others are thus likely to be determined on how they have been socialised, rather than on their appearance. To say then that such a person, because they are white, does not possess ubuntu based on the colour of their skin is implausible and strips away their humanity. As previously mentioned, Mboti (2015: 132) says that Africans are already such a multi-ethnic people. South Africa, for example, is very culturally and racially diverse. In an ever globalising world, perhaps clustering people into group and conceptions based on geographic location is becoming obsolete.

Tomaselli’s (2016: 5) problem with ubuntu lies in the fact that ubuntu arose out of “narratives of return” and has been misinterpreted as an “auto-centric ‘black’ ideology”. Tomaselli (2016:5) goes on to say that “ubuntu, claiming pan-African exceptionalism, disregarding all other humanist and relational systems (and so called races) that claim similar traits”. He agrees with Mboti (2015) that placing people in “conceptual boxes” is dangerous, and further adds that this sort of pre-colonial approach to post-colonial issues can result in social chaos and disharmony, the exact opposite of what ubuntu is intended to do as it could be interpreted in new ways for human beings to marginalise one another. Although not as critical about ubuntu as Mboti and Tomaselli, Metz’s (2011) may be correct in suggesting that South Africans need to find new ways of interpreting ubuntu as opposed to the pre-colonial interpretations thereof.

4. 6. A Different Approach to Ubuntu

It is obvious that some of the interpretations of ubuntu have become cynical and have developed strong racial and cultural connotations. Of course it is also possible to speak of ubuntu in no connotative manner. Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) introduces the idea of looking at public discourses such as ubuntu from a different perspective, perhaps multiple perspectives. After all, different perspectives on the same topic can be advantageous (Wilson and Kniffin 2003: 118). It is not inconceivable for ubuntu to be interpreted as a “narrative of return”: alas it did stem from a time in southern African history that was in desperate need of solidarity, shared identity and unity. It is perhaps during the period of transition that varying interpretations of ubuntu, deliberate and
undeliberate, came into being. Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018), like Metz (2011), suggest that perhaps as opposed to looking at ubuntu as “narrative of return” it should be looked at from an alternative perspective than those that currently exist.

Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) postulates that ubuntu be looked at in a manner that conforms to the six perspectives set out by Metz (2007). That is to say, that ubuntu should be interpreted in ways that remind and teach human beings about how they relate to one another in ways that celebrate communal, shared and mutualistic activities, but that also embraces and respects individuality within cohesive, supportive and harmonious relations with one another. Most importantly, she suggests “communal engagement where diversity flourishes and it favours relational approaches to governance and communication” (Tavanaro-Haidarian 2018:5). Again, communication is at the centre of creating such relations. Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) believes that in such an environment all individuals and their contribution to the group are valued. Similarly, earlier I mentioned that Metz (2007) and Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014) agree that it is important that all members of the group realise the value of their contribution to the group. In this way, individuality can still be realised without marginalisation from the group, the “we” or the “us”, to which the individual belongs. Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018: 8) aims to provide an account of ubuntu that is relational and deliberative in ways of dealing with public discourses such as ubuntu and their interpretation, as opposed to the adversarial, argumentative culture that currently dominates most forms of social (and media) interactions and communication.

Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) admits that ubuntu is not unique in its prescriptive desire of mutualistic, collaborative, and communal relations. Like Mboti (2015), she says that it is a mistake to assume that only South Africans strive toward behaviour or action that benefits the other, or behaviour that will promote the well-being of others, and in such a way create the kinds of communities that are other-centred. Other regions, including those of the “global north”, have similar theories, although named differently in the same ways that altruism is said to relate to ubuntu above. For instance, Tomasello (2008, 2009, and 2014) proposed cooperation and altruism under his shared intentionality, and says that human beings are naturally more likely to choose the course of action that is more likely to promote the well-being of others and that
human beings are able to act in that way through the use of cooperative human communication. Similarly, there are also theories of philosophers like Thomas Nagel (1970), Thaddeus Metz (2013) and Ayn Rand (1961) who propose that altruistic behaviour is that which benefits the greater good and is a universal human trait. Nagel (1979: 19) says that “one has a direct reason to promote the interests of others – a reason that does not depend on intermediate factors”. Metz (2013: 110) says that “an altruistic action and its proximate effects are meaningful in themselves, not needing to obtain their meaning from anything else, such as the fact that the helpful result will have some other significant effect”. And lastly, for Ayn Rand (1961: 6) “altruism declares that any action taken for the benefit of others is good, and any action taken for one’s own benefit is evil. Thus the beneficiary of an action is the only criterion of moral value –and so long as that beneficiary is anybody other than oneself, anything goes”. The point to be made here is that any action, insofar as it benefits another is deemed altruistic and there does not need to be any specific reason for that altruism. Ubuntu, although perhaps a cultural interpretation of universal traits of altruism, holds the same moral foundation as presented by so many other theorists, however positions itself in a manner that is supposedly uniquely African. My critique of ubuntu is therefore not on the ideas of harmonious, cohesive relations that promote respect, dignity and solidarity, but on the interpretations, or rather misinterpretations of ubuntu that are used as a means to an end.

Part of the mistaken interpretation of ubuntu is as a result of the approaches that form part of current discourses. Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018: 6) posits “deliberation culture rather than argument culture”, as a way that everyone is included and provided with the opportunity to be involved in the functioning of their societies, what they see in the media, how their countries are governed and so forth. Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) thinks that human beings are bombarded with concepts of argument culture all the time, like the news media for instance, that usually portray negative images of society (Tavanaro-Haidarian 2018: 1). She suggests that the majority of public discourse are depicted as argumentative, and that this trend has been accepted and that any other approaches, especially positive approaches, are often frowned upon or not as popular or considered as entertaining as one that it controversial (Tavanaro- Haidarian 2018:2). Of course this is not to say that all aspects of life are founded on argument
culture there are also other approaches that are followed. However, she proposes a shift from this kind of adversarial environment, to a more relational one in which concepts like ubuntu can be incorporated to create “deliberation culture” (Tavanaro-Haidarian 2018: 4). Tavanaro-Haidarian says that,

“deliberation culture” is inspired by the cohesive attitude of ubuntu and the way traditional African democracy functions as a sometimes lengthy deliberation… where members of the community are afforded an equal opportunity to share their thoughts until a form of agreement, consensus or cohesion is reached. (Tavanaro-Haidarian, 2018: 7)

In her approach to “deliberation culture” Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) suggests a move more toward considering multiple perspectives and approaches to ubuntu, and how it is applied to societal functioning. Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018), like Mboti (2015), thinks that it is another mistake to think of all theories from the north/west as individualistic and adversarial, and of all African theories as communal cooperative, or vice versa. No one theory exists in isolation of another; rather there is usually a causal relationship, and human beings need to find a balance between the two extremes. Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018: 79) says that if human beings do not alter their perceptions of concepts like ubuntu, “structural changes remain utopian, idealistic and futile”.

What is clear from her writing is that Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) is in support of the collaborative and relational foundations of ubuntu; the ideal society should be communal, collaborative, cooperative and it should allow people to strive as individuals within the group as long as individual action promotes the wellness of the group and does not place the group or any of its members in harm’s way. In her recommendation of a “deliberative approach” to public discourses, Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018: 13) suggests that societal practices “foreground collaboration and background conflict” as opposed to foregrounding the latter. Her aim is clearly to create approaches to societal discourses that is more inclusive and participatory to emphasize the value of all individuals that form part of a whole. These ideas presented by Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) clearly link to the six interpretations of ubuntu presented by Metz (2007), and thus, also align with Tomasello’s (2008, 2009, 2014) ideas of cooperation and altruism.
under human communication; to create socially cohesive environments for all human beings through recognising their humanity.

The suggestion by Tomasello (2009), Metz (2011) and Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) is to perhaps rethink what is defined as the group. Human beings cannot remain set in their ways in a world that is ever changing. Earlier I mentioned that Tomasello (2009) thinks that it is perhaps through group-minded activities that human beings have begun to lose sight of their collective identity. Under his theory of collective intentionality, Tomasello (2014) says that after the introduction of culture, human beings subdivided into smaller groups, and those groups in themselves developed an identity within its existing cultural locus. Perhaps most importantly, Tomasello (2014) says that nowadays contemporary human beings have different ways of group identification. However, similar to the suggested approaches to ubuntu, no one person falls into only one category of group classification. People think differently and thus identify differently. Identification is not as “clear cut” as when culture is posited as a unified concept. Various approaches to identity and social situations may result into more open minded deliberative approaches, rather than group minded approaches. Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018:15) says that “cultures are not static and do not exist in silos”. There is a constant inter-cultural and trans-cultural exchange. Globalisation has particularly made it difficult for group classification. Therefore, theorists like Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014), Metz (2011) and Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) propose looking at what it means to be a group differently, and thus reinterpret concepts like shared identity, ubuntu, communication, altruism and cooperation within different contexts that give them different meanings. This is also perhaps why Metz (2011) suggests a new interpretation of ubuntu for South Africa now, as the context to which ubuntu is being aimed at is now different than it was in 1994.

As suggested by Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) and Mboti (2015) perhaps the take away from revised interpretations of ubuntu is to accept that approaches to anything, including human social interaction, do not and cannot exist in isolation from one another. Mboti (2015: 144) proposes to meet “halfway between harmony and discord [...] individuality and interdependence”. Similarly, Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018: 20) proposes “diversity as value” to social interaction and cohesion, through respect and
mutually accepted activities to create and maintain Mboti’s (2015) “good-citizen”. After all, Metz (2011), Tomasello (2009) and Mboti (2015) say that behaviour that jeopardises social harmony like rape and murder, the kinds of acts that encroach on the well-being (and rights) of others, are the kinds of actions that are usually carried out in isolation, away from the group. Publicly orchestrated, these kinds of behaviours are rare. Individuals that engage in such acts are ones that Metz (2011: 537) says are “those who exhibit discordant or indifferent behaviour with regard to others, are often labelled ‘animals’”. Mboti (2015:134) calls these individuals “context-illiterate idiots, toadies, tyrants, fools and sociopaths”. Tomasello (2009:95) proposes that “cooperation and conformity are governed by guilt and shame”. Tomasello (2009: 42) says that the aforementioned types carry out their “bad” behaviour in isolation as they succumb to emotions like “guilt and shame” which are used as a way of keeping people in line. Social judgement results in feelings of shame and of guilt, and therefore Tomasello (2009: 42) says that perpetrators of bad actions rarely engage in such activities publicly, and if they are caught out, they feel guilty and ashamed because they know they have violated certain social behaviours. Conforming to, and ensuring that everyone behaves in a particular way is thus altruistic.

What can be deduced from the discussion on ubuntu above is that it largely refers to a way or recognising the self as a person, and others are persons equal to the self, in through such recognition that it refers to human relations of shared identity and goodwill, on the basis of sharing common ground, goals and intentions in ways that promote solidarity and unity. Isolating the characteristics of ubuntu to only African people is problematic because it assumes the inability of African people to think for themselves, and therefore to apply themselves contextually. Moreover, to paraphrase Mboti (2015:144) to place Africans in “conceptual cages” is to deny them a whole part of their humanity. The contextualisation of ubuntu as the African construct of universal concepts such as altruism is precisely the flaw.

4.7. Conclusion

At the onset of this chapter, I set out to discuss ubuntu as it relates to human communication, cooperation and altruism presented by Tomasello. To answer the
question, how are Michael Tomasello’s writings about human communication relevant to the study of ubuntu in the field of communication studies? I discussed Metz’s ubuntu as an Africa moral theory, and demonstrated how it relates to Tomasello’s ideas on human communication, cooperation and altruism. For the purpose of this chapter, I selected Metz’s (2007: 334) interpretation of ubuntu as any action that is used to promote social harmony as opposed to discord as it relates to the same universal foundations as altruism although it has been re-appropriated in a southern African context to mean something along the lines of “my humanity is visible in the humanity of others”. However, the foundations of both constructs, altruism and ubuntu, are largely the same. I discussed ubuntu in more detail and realised that under this interpretation of ubuntu, human beings should treat each other in ways that promote social harmony, with respect, dignity and integrity. However, the attractiveness of the concept of ubuntu has been used, interpreted and reinterpreted to mean different things to different people. This is largely because ubuntu arose out of post-apartheid and post-colonial struggles in search of solidarity and shared identity. Therefore, at times, it has been interpreted in ways that have political and other connotations. However, the interpretation of ubuntu as an African moral philosophy is one that is very attractive and theoretically sound, but most importantly presents an approach to human interaction that is humanistic.

So the question is, how does ubuntu relate to Tomasello’s conception of human communication, cooperation and altruism? Tomasello’s ideas on cooperation discussed here and in the previous chapters relate to Metz’s (2007) ideas on shared identity and good-will which are the foundations of ubuntu discussed by Metz. The creation of shared identity in order to collaborate through social interactions as a social unit is facilitated by cooperation. Human beings realise that they cannot exist in isolation, and so they decided to collaborate with people in mutualistic efforts, to procreate, to be protected and so on. In pairing collaboratively with others, human beings realised that there are some individuals who were more cooperative or less cooperative. These actions affected the functioning and well-being of the group, especially the latter. Humans prefer to partake in collaborative activities with those whom they can more easily collaborate, and those who conform to, and uphold the identity their group. They then use communication as a means of constructing shared
identity through the practice of good-will; treating others with good intentions, taking their personhood into consideration in their interactions. It is through these kinds of activities that group identity or “collective intentionality” arose. It is also through these kinds of activities that the difference between “us” and “them” arose. Individuals began to collaborate with others and groups that shared values and functioned in similar ways as they did. Perhaps, this explains the cultural appropriation of the universal concepts of altruism or good-will discussed by Metz (2007) in South Africa to mean ubuntu.

Moreover, in their collaborative activities, human beings’ simultaneously came to the realisation that behaving cooperatively and collaboratively was more advantageous than behaving uncooperatively. Furthermore, the reflexive nature of human thinking allowed human beings’ the ability to view themselves in the position of another. Through these processes, collaboration and cooperation through the construction of shared identity via shared intentions and common ground, human beings’ realised that their behaviour is more altruistic than that of any other species. Additionally, human beings’ communicative ability allows them to maintain their social groups, in which they behave in good-will in order to maintain social functioning. This kind of behaviour is altruistic. Individuals who give of themselves generously, through empathy and compassion for others. History is filled with human beings’ who give of themselves to save others and to promote their good-will. These kind of people, who give of themselves for others, and treat others with good-will are altruists. Altruists are all around us. It cannot be measured from person to person. One of the most notable altruists in South Africa is Nelson Mandela; one person who gave of himself endlessly for the greater good.

Perhaps the approaches to ubuntu suggested by Mboti (2015), Metz (2007, 2011) and Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) that are not so prescriptive and derivative of African ethics as other existing texts on ubuntu should influence the way that we think of ethics over all. Humanity, cooperation and collaboration should be relooked at from the perspective of a global village in which people are no longer only defined by their geographical location, their culture, and their history above the histories of others. Tomasello (2009) seems to think that human beings need to find new ways of defining the group. Perhaps as opposed to saying that only African people possess ubuntu, it
should be understood that concepts like ubuntu do not exist in isolation from concepts like cooperation and altruism. Each concept is appropriated contextually, and in that way variation and cultural appropriation arise. To assume that human beings, Africans in this context, cannot make decisions that are characterised by Mboti (2015) as “good citizenship” is to deny human beings (or Africans) the authenticity and uniqueness of human cognition and communication as presented by Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014). These characteristics are species unique and exist in all human beings. They do not only exist because they were written by a westerner, but because universally “a person is a person first, and only then is a personal socially given to be an African or a Westerner and so on” (Chasi 2014: 5).

Nelson Mandela is one example of the kind of behaviour that exemplifies ubuntu that personifies altruism. With the above chapter in mind, the next chapter looks to present a perspective of Mandela’s altruism and ubuntu as a demonstration of humanness, empathy and servant leadership through communication.

Chapter Five: Mandela’s Altruism

5.1. Introduction

Leading on from the previous chapters, this chapter presents a perspective on Mandela’s altruism based on a key passage on love and human nature in Nelson Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom* (2013). I will take into consideration the
perspectives on altruism, ubuntu, love and cooperation discussed in the previous chapters. Furthermore, this chapter will consider how Mandela embodied these characteristics and in particular how Mandela embodied and expressed altruism, ubuntu and love through servant leadership. Overall, this chapter seeks to bring together and provide a working example of altruism, ubuntu and cooperation, as well as, to a larger extent, humanism or humanity. It should be noted that this chapter is adapted from a chapter published in a book edited by Busani Ngcaweni and Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni, titled *Nelson R Mandela: Decolonial Ethics of Liberation and Servant Leadership* (2018).

No one is born hating another person because of the colour of their skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than it’s opposite. (Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 1994)

5.2. Human Nature Is to Be Altruistic

As previously noted, a key feature of human nature is that human beings communicate. In referring to human nature, I refer to abilities or tendencies that are shared by all human beings, reflecting the fact that human beings share similar genetic makeup and cognitive thinking abilities (Wall 2005: 9). According to Tomasello (2009: X) and Chandler (2002: 20), human beings’ natural communicative ability is what stimulates our unique human desire to live in cultural groupings. Tomasello (2009: x) further suggests that humans’ innate ability to communicate allows us to be more altruistic than animals from other species and this is as a result of the unique way in which human beings have evolved.

As mentioned in chapter three, altruism is often associated with behaviour that is cooperative and collaborative, and at its foundation empathetic. Altruism forms part of an inner selflessness of human beings, a sort of extended empathy, a common humanity that is shared with other human beings on the basis of being human. Altruistic individuals tend to view others as equal to the self, displaying an ability to
value another person’s existence. As previously discussed, altruism is interpreted to be an act carried out by individuals who help others as an end rather than as a means to an end. With reference to chapter three, the characteristics of altruism ascribed by Monroe (1996), Wall (2005) and Wilson and Kniffin (2003) are that acts of altruism are aimed at benefitting another. Often these actions involve physical action to serve another with good intentions in a way that benefits them, with the possibility of the altruist beings placed in a difficult position. For instance, giving up food to feed someone who has not eaten in a while, and thereby missing out on a meal, is an altruistic act.

Those who have theorised altruism ascribe a number of varying explanations to altruism, ranging from innate predispositions to culture and socialisation. Some even say that there is no such thing as altruism, and that people act altruistically for personal gain. However, Tomasello and other theorists mentioned in this study suggest that altruism is at the foundation of cooperative and collaborative activities. Tomasello has demonstrated that human beings are likely to behave in ways that are cooperative and altruistic based on their ability to view themselves in the position of others (empathy). Some aspects of human altruism, like the ability to view the self in the position of the other, are unique and fundamental to being human. Additionally, Tomasello (2008, 2009, 2014) argues that humans are born with a natural ability to see and feel compassion and empathy for others that is fundamental to our ability to communicate and cooperate.

Tomasello (2009) also argues, with the support of experimental data, that altruism is composed of three main variants: namely, helping, informing and sharing. These concepts were discussed in more detail in chapter three. Individual acts of altruism may display all or a combination of these. In his experiments, Tomasello found that the behaviour of human beings, even at a very early stage of development, is prosocial and cooperative. Sharing, helping and informing takes place out of empathy, and not as a result of self-gain or incentive (Tomasello 2009). Human beings possess a willingness to empathise with individuals who are placed in particular situations because they possess the ability to immerse themselves in the situation as a result of identification, in some cases purely based on humanness, thus propelling their
willingness to relieve others of their burdens. This human characteristic is empathy: to empathise with others. The inclination toward the plight of others is not something that people are taught or socialised into feeling or doing; rather, it is a human characteristic that comes naturally.

Empathy allows individuals to connect on an emotional level with others, as suggested by the philosophical perspective of altruism discussed in chapter three. Empathy as a human characteristic is a demonstration of the prevalence of altruism within all human beings. The altruist is not merely empathetic toward an individual; but rather is concerned with the overall wellbeing of that individual. These characteristics also align with those of ubuntu discussed in chapter four: especially that behaviour toward others should be carried out in a manner that promotes respect, dignity and solidarity, and relates positively to others (Metz 2007). Like ubuntu, empathy may thus be regarded as a guideline emotion on how human beings ought to behave, which is prevalent in human beings and allows them to connect with others emotionally.

Acts of altruism and behaviour that exhibit ubuntu take place momentarily, on a daily basis, be it through interaction with a stranger, offering them direction when they are lost, picking up a piece of litter and depositing it in a dustbin, or spearheading a revolutionary struggle. All these acts could be considered to be altruistic but their fleeting nature and their seemingly everydayness can lead observers to not notice them as altruistic behaviours. Part of the point being made here and throughout this study is that context plays a huge role in how people make sense of an act of altruism.

This is appropriate to note because significantly human beings are socialised into particular cultural groupings. It is within these groupings that we are taught what is deemed acceptable and unacceptable. Socialisation does not take away altruistic traits from individuals however; it merely socialises human beings into conduct that is suitable relative to a particular situation: firstly with the members of their own social group, and secondly with members from other groups. These behaviours are instilled in individuals to the extent that the conduct becomes “second nature” (Wall 2005: 9). Human beings have learned that what is considered to be good and altruistic in one instance, place, space and culture, may be considered to be bad in another.
Although altruism is an innate, inborn human characteristic, altruism can be applied selectively. This is to say that people are likely to act more altruistically toward those they are familiar with, those with whom they share “collective intentionality”. As already mentioned, in part this is as a result of socialisation in cultural groupings. However, this is not to suggest that human beings are only altruistic toward members of their own group. An individual may tend toward being more altruistic to members of their own group, however their altruism may also be extended to other human beings. The section that follows presents a perspective on Mandela’s altruism in relation to the theories discussed in chapters two, three and four.

5.3. Mandela: Human, Altruist

What is particularly impressive about Mandela is that he progressively recognised that the Xhosa tribal allegiance of his childhood and early youth, and black nationalism of his adult youth, needed to be transcended for a more altruistic vision which gave rise to a democratic South Africa. Mandela’s life is a true example that an individual’s altruism and ubuntu may be less selective to the extent that they include most people, suggesting an oversight of history over histories, recognising the greatest commonality among human beings, their humanity. Sampson (1999: 10) says that “Mandela was brought up with the African notion of human brotherhood, or ‘ubuntu’, which described a quality of mutual responsibility and compassion”.

Mandela’s life continues to exemplify humanity. His servant-hood, his passion against the apartheid struggle, his love for the people, and his connectedness to the people of South Africa is fundamentally what allowed him to identify with the masses which in turn allowed them to identify with him. Mandela’s love and admiration for people is what ignited his passion and tenacity toward ending apartheid. It is this same love and passion that motivated people to join him in this struggle. It is this same love and admiration that allowed people to fall in love with him. His leadership personified humanness and it is through these simple attributes that people were able to connect with him.

Altruism and ubuntu enable human beings to recognise and value humanness in others. Hence, Mandela is praised as a great altruist because of the ways in which he
valued others to the point of being willing to die for ideals that relate to the indivisibly of humanity and the unquestionable right of each individual to be granted human worth and dignity. In short, Mandela loved others in ways that expressed altruism and ubuntu.

Metz (2007: 337) thinks that love guides human beings to pursue harmonious community relations through valuing all members within that community equally. It is love that drove Mandela to altruistically seek the establishment of a new South Africa in which everyone can, without fear, be the most that they can be. He demonstrated relations that promoted the well-being of others through respect and dignity in ways that encouraged shared identity and solidarity to create social harmony (Metz 2007). Additionally, even though love cannot be easily defined, it is widely recognised that it brings inestimable meaning to human life (Fromm 1956; Metz 2013; Plato 2008; Singer 1996). As previously noted, love is difficult to interpret and understand. To fully formulate a definition of love is particularly challenging. However, it becomes apparent that all human beings know the experiences of love and spend all their lives indulging in it and in search of it. The only surety about love is that despite its paradoxical nature, it is life-changing.

People often say “I did what I did because I love…” The operative notion of love that is referred to here is not the commonly understood romantic type of love – though it could include such a love. I mean love that human beings share with others on the basis of our willingness to have a shared identity and to have solidarity with them. This idea of love is closely related to the idea of friendship, solidarity and shared identity that brings human beings into communion with one another. Simply put, love expresses and justifies being altruistic to others with whom one shares identity and with whom one has solidarity, with those with who we have ubuntu (Metz 2007: 339).

We should not be quick to accept that loving others with whom we have relations of solidarity and shared identity is altruistic, or at least let us not be too quick to believe that this form of loving is not selfish. Plato (2008), for example, has questioned whether our love for others is an act of selfishness: if we merely love others because they
reflect who and what we truly are. However, consistent with our understanding of love inspired by ubuntu, Plato also suggests that we treat others in the way that we do because their happiness makes us happy. Solidarity among human beings is what endorses this type of behaviour. The commonalities shared among all human beings, our humanness, allow us to relate to one another not only in happiness but in its opposite. We thus attempt to avoid feelings of anguish for ourselves and for others, strengthening our shared identity as a reinforcement of being human. Although our goal remains to be happy and to live in harmony with those with whom we share commonalities, the paradoxical nature in love, as in altruism, ubuntu and cooperation is ever-present in that it encompasses the two extremes of pain and happiness (Han-Pile 2009; Secomb 2004). The latter being the desired outcome.

It would be strange to argue that the desire to see other people happy, to make them happy, to enable them to become the most that they can be is not reflexive of selfishness. The desire to see other people do well because it makes us feel good about ourselves may be a justification for this reflexive selfishness. However the means to loving ends sometimes require the greatest of altruistic sacrifices. Mandela endured a number of sacrifices as an individual for the greater promise of freedom for all South African people. He endured these sacrifices not knowing the outcome of the struggle against apartheid, not anticipating reward or praise. Instead, the intentions behind his acts of altruism were to serve with good intentions to attain the ultimate goal of freedom and equality for all South Africans. These acts further resulted in him being placed in compromising positions on multiple occasions.

Mandela’s altruism was not mindless self-sacrifice. Importantly, he recognised that many outside of prison had been making incredible sacrifices for his freedom too. He often expressed the view that his long-term wife, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and his children probably made greater sacrifices for his own and for national freedom than he ever did while in prison. His recognition of the wide sacrifices others made can also be seen in how, upon his release from prison, he took time to thank the many people who fought for his freedom, people whom he too had been fighting for. Seen in this light, Mandela’s altruism can be interpreted as an act of solidarity, strategically and systematically aimed at building a better and more widely shared identity of equality.
by which South Africans can escape the history and horrors of apartheid. His struggle for freedom and emancipation involved the conscious building of respect-laden relationships between himself, South Africans and other freedom loving people. After his release from prison, Mandela remained humble, a servant of the people, dedicated to the task of relating to others as people who are worthy of dignity. Often he took time to call upon the poorest and most marginalised or to shake the hands of his most ardent enemies. Mandela arises as a great altruist, in part because his altruism is part of a reciprocal project of building human solidarity, reparation and restoration. He deserves high praise not only for having been chosen to lead his movement, but for sacrificing for the fulfilment of its goals – for acting as a servant leader of the many people towards whom he expressed love.

5.4. Mandela: Servant Leader

Leaders possess the qualities of kindness, patience and compassion toward others. They are accepting of criticism, and should be willing to listen to those whom they lead. van Dierendonck and Patterson (2010) place emphasis on a caring leader, one who leads with love and compassion, empathy towards his or her followers, leading as a follower and being part of a collective rather than assuming a dictatorial leadership role. Mandela’s life is an example of this: the ideology of service toward others (van Dierendonck and Patterson 2010: 3). This type of leadership is referred to as servant leadership. Being the voice of the people but not the voice over the people.

Individuals discover different paths of meaning within their lives. Some individuals go on to select their occupation from a variety of career possibilities out of a passion that they may have for a certain occupation. For Mandela the choice was to fight for justice in what was becoming a more and more oppressive South Africa. He expressed this first in his legal practice, then in the political struggle for freedom and finally in leading South Africa, as its first democratic president. His passion toward freedom made it impossible for him to accept how the majority of South Africans were being treated to the advantage of a minority group. This passion drove him to being willing to sacrifice his own life in order to establish freedom and equality for all South Africans.
Importantly, this passion did not make him vengeful. Rather, he strived to create shared identity through good-will.

Acting out of love enables the leaders like Mandela to set an example to others about what is right and what is wrong, and using justifiable means to reach this end (Kouzes and Ponser 1992: 479). Mandela’s life of struggle, his continued dedication to freedom and democracy presented the world an example that could be admired. What is significant for us is that Mandela stood before the world, admired by large groups of people for his admiration of them (Derrida 2014) in ways that showed his loving dedication to altruistically develop relations of shared identity and solidarity-ubuntu with all who live in South Africa.

On the day of his release from prison, on 11 February 1990, Mandela addressed a mass audience in which he refers to himself as a servant of the people. He expressed his gratitude for their continued tenacity to bring apartheid to an end. Although Mandela had endured countless sacrifices for the liberation of the nation, he reminded the people of this closing statement at the Rivonia trial:

In conclusion, I wish to quote my own words during my trial in 1964. They are true today as they were true then” I have fought against white domination and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the idea of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and have equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die. Nelson Mandela (1964: 438).

Mandela reassured the people that the fight against an oppressive regime had not come to an end. His fire to ignite people had kept burning for the over twenty-seven years that he was imprisoned on Robben Island. He reminded the people of their importance in the selection of a democratic head of state to unite the country but further reminded them that it was the duty of all citizens within the state to maintain the governance of the country. Placing emphasis on individual interdependence and mutualism. In this way Mandela was already acting as a servant leader, allowing South Africans to positively connect to their common task and to counterparts, resulting in the development of an emotional connection between leader and followers who
experience it as passion toward a common goal. Mandela, the leader, served South Africa by giving many the view that they can make a difference, that they are capable of making a difference.

Leadership becomes a passionate moral obligation (Kousez and Ponser 1992). The leader is concerned with the well-being of their organisational members, or group. The leader assumes the role of a mentor, someone whom followers look up to, who encourages individuals within the organisational body to pursue their passion. The passion or love displayed on behalf of the leader transcends into the collective unit and influences individuals in a positive, transformational manner. Servant leadership creates bonds and connectedness within a group that speaks to the equality and humanity of all individual units within an organisation or group (Kousez and Ponser 1992: 480). Leaders are people who are chosen to ensure effective cooperation, that are chosen by their followers because they have the well-being and functioning of the group in mind. A true leader looks to fulfil the needs of their followers. Leaders are thus individuals that are actively involved in making a difference in the lives of their peers or followers. It is their love, passion and drive that attracts people to them, and offers them a feeling of deep respect for the self and others: the passion and ability to help others achieve the best of which they are capable of. Nelson Mandela was such an individual.

Altruists do not distinguish in the way that they treat other people. They treat all human beings equally. Mandela did not treat people differently on the basis of their race, their culture or the colour of their skin. He made this expressly obvious in his speech upon his release from prison. He worked hand in hand with people from all walks of life and from different political and religious organisations, reiterating the point that “if people can learn to hate” as they were taught by an unjust government, “they can be taught to love for love comes more naturally to the human heart”. Love comes more naturally to the human heart on the basis that we are born empathetic toward other human beings. We value their humanness and we are willing to recognise their humanity.

Nelson Mandela’s acts of altruism were not channelled toward specific groups of people. Rather, even toward the end of apartheid, Mandela (1990) distinctly notes that
his fight was against white and black domination. There was no favour for one race, culture or religious background. It was for all people to live in social and racial harmony, to allow for all South Africans to have equal rights, and to avoid the domination of one group over another: to create the same ubuntu he grew up knowing. Had it been the case that Mandela was for the superiority of one racial group over another, he would not have been opposed to the violence of the apartheid regime, or he would not have been opposed to black domination of the white masses. Instead, Mandela believed in a peaceful process of negotiation in which all groups within South Africa were to be included. His life depicts that he believed that all human beings could relate to one another on the basis of being human, sharing a common humanity. And these are the kinds of ideals that he spoke of and exemplified.

The implication that love comes more naturally to the human heart suggests that human beings are more inclined to love others that its opposite. This type of love Mandela refers to is the type of love which is platonic, and can exist between brothers and sisters, colleagues and friends. Human beings love one another because they reflect a humanness that we possess within ourselves, a human reflection of ourselves. As previously noted, the possibilities of love are infinite and exceedingly difficult to define (Patterson 2010), and therefore the power of love cannot be measured. The natural loving inclination that human beings have toward one another propels them into altruism, which in turn results in the happiness of those at the receiving end of loving and altruistic behaviour. We thus work toward furthering the plight of others in the hope of making them happy, to creating ubuntu with them. Human beings do this solely on the basis of the fact that we share one thing in common: we are all human and as human beings we all share a love for one another.

Ideals of love toward other human beings is thus reflected in the life of Nelson Mandela by the mere fact that he was willing to sacrifice his entire life to attain freedom for all people. His love and passion for the people against the apartheid struggle pushed him in multiple directions. It was not simply a fight for a utopian state which would occur overnight. For years and years Mandela was forced into trying situations as a result of
this passion for freedom, reinforcing the ideas of the paradoxical nature of interacting with others; the opposite of two extremes (Han-Pile 2009). As a leading figure in a political revolution, it is clear that Mandela endured a lot of hardship. His hardship was a sacrifice of an individual for millions of people.

Mandela may not have been the only influential political freedom fighter in the history against the apartheid struggle, however his patience, empathy, compassion, courage, tenacity and strength is what set him apart from many others and what made the people believe in him and therefore he was chosen as a leader. These are the characteristics which allowed him to connect to the people of the nation; these are the characteristics that allowed people to fall in love with him. However, a lot like love, leadership is not a utopian idea. Being a leader of a political organisation as big as the African National Congress (ANC) was not without its problems, however Mandela made it known to the people that “no individual leader is able to take on the enormous task of ruling a country”. As such he believed that he was a servant to the people, a voice for them to speak as a unit.

5.5. Conclusion

The natural loving inclination that human beings have toward one another propels them into altruism. Like altruism, love is an innate human characteristic with which human beings are born. These innate characteristics propel human beings into pursuing relations in which we can attain and provide others with shared identity, solidarity and social harmony. We thus work together to furthering the plight of others in hope of providing them with some sort of relief or comfort. Love and altruism are expressed solely on the basis that we share one thing in common, we are all human beings and as human beings we all share a love for one another.

Still, the concepts discussed here and in the previous chapters are paradoxical and require a lot of compromise and sacrifice to attain. Good leadership has a lot of characteristics in common with cooperation, altruism, ubuntu and even love. These characteristics include sacrifice, compromise, passion and empathy. A leader who is
altruistic and expresses a great deal of love and value for her/his group or shared goals is more likely to be selected by the members of an organisation because it provided the group with a competitive edge. Love and passion expressed toward organisational goals are more easily transferred from leader to organisational members. Like ubuntu, the leader is gratified only once the needs of the organisation’s members are met.

Ideals of love toward his fellow human are reflected and communicated in the life of Nelson Mandela through his willingness to sacrifice his entire life to attain freedom and equality for all people. His love and passion for all people against the apartheid struggle pushed South Africans in one direction: freedom.

In conclusion, this chapter provides a brief description of altruism and love and how these characteristics are innate human characteristics. I provide the reader with a detailed explanation of love and altruism and how these characteristics are similar to those shared by servant leaders. This chapter demonstrates how Nelson Mandela’s actions personified ideals of altruism, love and servant leadership. It is through possessing these characteristics that Mandela was admired by those who followed him. The embodiment of these characteristics is what grounded people’s belief in him and his capabilities as a leader.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

To bring this dissertation to a close, it is important to reflect on the content and concepts that were discussed in each chapter and relate them to one another. I began this dissertation by discussing selected writings by Michel Tomasello on human communication to present a critical understanding of human communication and what it is that makes human communication unique. The selected writings include *Origins of Human Communication* (2008), *Why We Cooperate* (2009), and *A Natural History of Human Thinking* (2014). Each of the selected writings presents a different yet related contribution to understanding why human communication is so special, and more specifically, why we communicate.

Chapter two presented the evolution of communication and with that the evolution of human beings and human thinking. It appears that it is inconceivable to think that human cognition and communication are unrelated. The evolution of communication developed from primitive to more complex, mature communication. Tomasello ascribes this to the evolution of humankind and with that to the evolution of our cognitive abilities. These cognitive abilities are presented as the underlying reason that human beings have been able to develop in the way that they have. Importantly, as noted by Snowdon (2004), evolutionary development is determined by species unique needs. Human beings have developed in the way that they did because they needed to. Tomasello attributes the evolution of human beings to huge evolutionary events; ecological and cultural. According to Tomasello (2014: 124), ecological pressures forced human beings to function in ways that were more collaborative and cooperative in order to survive. The rise of culture came about as a result of collaborative activities: what Tomasello (2014) refers to as “collective intentionality”. In the cultural groups that human beings formed, humans’ developed a sense of identity through the use of communication and selection of collaborative partners. Groups more often associated themselves with individuals that were cooperative. Individuals were recognised by groups as those who function similarly: “collectivisation” (Tomasello 2014: 84). Tomasello (2014: 84) says that “collectivisation of human social life, as embodied in group-wide cultural conventions, norms and
institutions- which transformed one more time, the way humans think”. Collectivisation resulted in group-mindedness, shared identity and collaboration.

For Tomasello (2008 2009, 2014) there were varying contributing factors that placed human beings on their evolutionary path which resulted in the ontogenesis of human beings and phylogenesis of human communication. It is therefore worth taking into consideration the origin of human communication. It is difficult to ignore the importance of human cognition which largely undergirds the uniqueness of human thinking, and thus our ability to use communication in the way that we do. It is difficult to deny that there is indeed something very special about the way human beings think and communicate.

Tomasello’s (2014) shared intentionality hypothesis is perhaps at the centre of understanding human communication. This hypothesis holds that human beings use communication through cognition to understand and share intentions. The “shared intentionality hypothesis” presents the idea that meaning and understanding are constructed through common ground, joint attention, and shared intentions in collaborative activities that are goal orientated. Goal orientated activities arose out of the ecological changes that forced human beings to work together. Human beings began to work together to achieve mutual goals. In these activities, individuals played mutually important roles which were coordinated through communication. If there was a misinterpretation or shortcoming in communication, the group would work together to revise its strategy. Of course, in collaborative activities such as these, cooperation played an important role in maintaining the structure, functioning and well-being of the group.

Chapter three continued the discussion of the uniqueness of human communication and presented additional characteristics of humanness that are expressed through communication. These characteristics include collaboration, cooperation and altruism. Chapter three considered why human beings cooperate, and built on chapter two through asking how cooperation works, and moreover, how it allows human beings to behave in ways that are more altruistic than other species. I considered the impact of cooperation through social norms and reciprocity, and how it relates to the uniqueness
of human communication. I discussed how the uniqueness of human communication contributes to the cooperative and altruistic nature of human interaction. Tomasello (2009) presents empirical evidence that supports the prosocial nature of human cooperative activities. He shows that even before human beings are socialised, they are naturally cooperative and engage in cooperative activities for the sake of cooperation and not in anticipation of praise or reward. Tomasello (2009) says that empathy is what guides social interaction prior to socialisation. The experiments presented by Tomasello (2009) marks an important point in understanding cooperation as it relates to altruism. Cooperativeness expressed by infants younger than 24 months shows that empathy and cooperation are already prevalent in human beings even before they can demonstrate any visible evidence of being socialised. Cooperation in itself can be deemed altruistic.

Tomasello defines this kind of prosocial behaviour as altruistic. Many theorists have competing perspectives on the term altruism, but interpreted for the purpose of this study, it means giving of the self for the benefit of another. Additionally, Tomasello says that as a result of human beings’ cognitive abilities, and specifically the reflexivity, human beings use communication to express their needs and desires to others. These “others” then use their reflexivity, their ability to view others in the position of the other, to make inferences to decide on an appropriate course of action. This also arises from what Tomasello refers to as “mutual expectations” (Tomasello 2009: 58). This again make reference to “collective intentionality” and to the importance of understanding individual roles. Altruism is thus a desired characteristic for group members to have as it assists in maintaining the cooperative well-being of the group. Cooperation and altruism are the outcome of interdependence and mutualism. Importantly, were it not for the cognitive infrastructure of human thinking, none of these concepts – cooperation, human communication and altruism – would exist in the way they do.

Moreover, the influence of socialisation cannot be ignored. Socialisation plays a determining role in human communication and altruism. As previously noted, the reflexivity of human thinking not only allows humans to view themselves in the position of the other, but it allows human beings to revert back to past experiences to guide action. These guidelines will determine how an individual behaves based on past
social interactions. It is clear that no one of these concepts exist in isolation from the
tother, and that there are multiple, overlapping concepts that contribute to the way in
which human beings interact with others

Chapter four discussed ubuntu, a concept derived from the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu
ngabantu*, which loosely translates to “a person is a person through other persons”. In
this study, ubuntu is interpreted as the recognition of the self as a person and others
as persons equal to the self. The discussion of ubuntu presented in chapter four is
indebted to Metz’s (2007) *Toward an African Moral Theory*. It focused on group
centred activities intended to “produce harmony and reduce discord” through shared
identity, solidarity, and good-will (Metz 2007: 343). The chapter then explored the
relation and differences between the ideas of human communication, altruism and
cooperation discussed by Tomasello and the theory of ubuntu presented by Metz.

These theories relate to each other on various levels. Firstly, ubuntu came about
through “collectivisation”. For Tomasello, “collectivisation” relates to the use of
communication and human beings’ unique cognitive abilities. For Tomasello, creating
shared or collective identity, “we-ness” or “we-identity”, allows human beings to relate
to a particular group of people. Furthermore, ubuntu relates to altruism through good-
will. Tomasello (2009) says that communication is what allows human beings to
behave more altruistic than other species. The way human beings use their cognitive
abilities to communicate allows them to see themselves in the position of the other,
and because of this human beings share information and help others in ways that are
beneficial them for the sake of it. Tomasello ascribes this kind of behaviour to the
prosocial and empathetic nature of human beings. The altruistic nature of human
beings makes them more likely to want to help others.

Metz’s (2007) notion of good will relates very closely to the characteristics of altruism
discussed in chapter three, and to Tomasello’s theories of shared intentionality and
cooperation discussed in chapter two. In Metz’s (2007) explanation of good-will, it is
clear that cognition plays a very important role in the interaction with others: the
motivation for interacting with other according to the principles of ubuntu is positive
intent, to make another person feel good through validation and respect. Both
concepts, altruism and ubuntu speak to ideas of cohesiveness, collaboration and mutualistic interactions, as well as to the ideal of a society that respects individuals as interdependent.

Chapter five presented a perspective on Nelson Mandela’s altruism. It demonstrated the possibility of the culmination of all the human characteristics discussed through this dissertation: how altruism and ubuntu are reflected in everyday human activities. Although Nelson Mandela’s life is often viewed as extraordinary, his actions, as described by him and others, are noteworthy as a result of his interactions with others. It is obvious that collaborative activities have far reaching positive influences on society.

Lastly, chapter four also discussed alternative perspectives on ubuntu. I suggest that ubuntu be approached or considered as a theory of humanness. As proposed by Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) and Mboti (2015), concepts such as ubuntu or any theory of humanness should take a multi-perspective approach: theories can coexist and overlap. Providing a comparative analysis of altruism (as western) and ubuntu (as African) through human communication demonstrates that all societies have the capacity for shared humanistic values (Tomaselli 2018).

Finally, Tomasello (2009: 99) says that “human beings are not cooperative angels”, and that “group-mindedness in cooperation is, perhaps ironically, a major case of strife and suffering in the world today” (Tomasello 2009: 100). Tavanaro-Haidarian (2018) and Mboti (2015) agree that human beings should find alternative ways of defining the “group”, and how human beings think about concepts of group identity, or “us” and “them”.

To conclude, this study has presented a comparative critical analysis of Michael Tomasello’s views of human communication, cooperation and altruism as they relate to ubuntu. It has offered critical discussions of human communication, its origins and evolution, the uniqueness of human cognition, and how these developments facilitate human communication. My aim has been to come up with a comparative analysis of the characteristics of altruism and ubuntu as they relate to human communication. With the help of the selected writings and theories I have discussed, it may be
concluded that the heterogeneous nature of human communication has directly and indirectly contributed to the evolution of human beings, the creation of culture and other group orientated activities. Crucially, the different theories I have discussed argue, from different but related perspectives, that human beings possess certain characteristics that are species unique which endow them with both humanness and ubuntu.
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