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Cheikh Anta Diop rightly raised the still relevant, even urgent, question of our finding within ourselves the will and way to reach back and down into the depth of our culture and retrieve the philosophical foundations to aid us in addressing the critical challenges of our people and the pressing problems of our age. At the heart of this aspiration, he suggested, would be self-conscious efforts of African people to contribute to the conception and putting into place a new way of being human in the world. This new way would, of necessity, include an ethical engagement with the natural world, understanding our unavoidable embeddedness in it and our irrevocable responsibility towards it.

Kawaida, as an ongoing synthesis of the best of African thought and practice in constant exchange with the world, has advocated and worked for such critical, *sankofa* cultural recovery and reconstruction in the interest of liberation and life since the Sixties. Our response to Diop is in our works, *Maat, The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt: A Study in Classical African Ethics* and *Odu Ifa: The Ethical Teachings*, focusing especially on *Maat* and on the Ifa ethical concept of *eniyan*, humans as divinely chosen to bring good in the world, as world-encompassing ethical and philosophical options for active engagement at this critical juncture in history. And we have drawn from both ancient and modern, continental and diasporan culture to create *Kwanzaa* and the *Nguzo Saba*, framing a context for over forty million Africans throughout the world African community to reflect regularly on the meaning and awesome responsibility of being African in the world.

Since the 1990's numerous and varied conversations have evolved around the concept of *Ubuntu* as another philosophical principle of African culture which, if rightly defined, developed and put into practice, could be useful in the urgent and ongoing efforts to improve our lives, undergird a real African Renaissance and offer the world a meaningful option and alternative to the degrading, exploitative and oppressive views and practices that too often define and defile humans' relations with each other and with the natural world. I first encountered the concept of Ubuntu in the '60s thru my teacher at UCLA, Dr. A.C. Jordan, a South African, who had introduced me to it as he taught me African literature and culture, and helped me with my study of Zulu.

Ubuntu is a Zulu social and ethical concept which literally means *human-ness*, those composite qualities which constitute the core of what it means to be human. Archbishop Desmond Tutu defines it as "the essence of being human." Moreover, it is a quality of personhood which is rooted in one of the most important African ethical concepts, i.e., *reciprocal relationships* as the ground of being and becoming human. This concept is expressed in Zulu as *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,* i.e., a person is a person through other persons."

This idea of coming into being and achieving the fullness of our human-ness in and thru relationships is perhaps best known from John Mbiti's maxim, "I am because we are and, because we are therefore I am." Adding agency to this fundamental principle, Kawaida philosophy posits it as "I am related and I relate therefore I am." Or in the collective, we are related and relate; there-

fore, we are. In other words, we come into being and come into the fullness of ourselves in and thru reciprocal relationship. And these rightful relationships are rooted in our human identities as both social and natural beings, and must be aligned in such a way that we truly feel at home in and with the world.

Ubuntu is also an ethical and spiritual foundation for building and living a truly human life, and a social and political ideal towards which we constantly strive. Its core values seek not only to cultivate a truly human person, but also a truly human society and world. Some of these core values are: mutual respect, mutual caring, mutual sharing, harmonious living together and a shared commitment to the ongoing work of peace thru justice. At the heart of the concept and practice of Ubuntu is the value reciprocity in relationship and practice. Indeed, reciprocity or mutual responsiveness inform and undergird each principle and practice of Ubuntu.

Mutual respect is an African ethical value that reaches back to ancient Egypt and which defines humans as possessors of dignity and divinity, sacred and deserving of the highest respect. This respect is also a rightful recognition and appreciation of our similarity and diversity, and our embeddedness in and responsibility to the natural world. Mutual caring for each other speaks to loving-kindness, compassion, rightful attentiveness and responsiveness to each other and our constant concern for the well-being and flourishing of each other. Mutual sharing cultivates in us a profound commitment to share the good and goods in and of the world. Key here is an ethics of sharing which includes shared status, knowledge, space (social and natural), wealth, power, interests and responsibility for building the good world we all want and deserve. And this is to be embraced in both principle and practice as a superior and sustaining way to live in the world.

Finally, Ubuntu requires and reaffirms the virtue and value of the ongoing and shared work of peace so that we may live together in harmony and with justice. Here, I want to draw on the concept of peacemaking in Swahili, *kupatana*, which literally suggests a process in which there is a mutual securing and attaining of things valued and at issue. Inherent in this concept is the requirement of justice or securing what is rightfully due each and all of us or our giving each other what is right and due, e.g., in Zulu, *ukunikana okulungile futhi okufanele*.

Indeed, the hub and hinge on which the usefulness of Ubuntu turns is our joint will and capacity to move from principle to practice. Thus, it must not be used as a moral sedative for the righteous anger and resistance of the people or their rejection of reconciliation without real justice. Rather, Ubuntu must be practiced and made manifest in the continuously improved lives of the people, respectful engagement with the environment, and shared good in and for the world. Former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, defining freedom in this context of shared good, says: "to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but (also) to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." And so it is with social and environmental justice, and every other good in the world.

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