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Consciousness and the Question of Self: An African Philosophical Perspective

La conciencia y la cuestión del yo: Una perspectiva filosófica africana

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Abstract

African philosophical discourse presents a distinctive perspective on consciousness and selfhood that challenges Western dualistic frameworks. This paper examines how the Bantu concept of vital force (élan vital) provides a foundation for understanding consciousness as relational rather than individually contained. Drawing on Placide Tempels' pioneering work and contemporary African philosophical insights, we explore how consciousness in African thought is conceptualised as a dynamic force that exists on a continuum rather than as an emergent property of complex material arrangements. Through analytical and hermeneutical methods, this paper argues that African concepts of consciousness, particularly when integrated with panpsychist insights, offer a more holistic understanding of selfhood where personal identity emerges through communal relationships rather than isolated introspection. The work concludes that consciousness as vital force provides a culturally grounded alternative to Western individualistic models, positioning the self as fundamentally interconnected with both human and non-human aspects of reality.

Keywords: *African philosophy, consciousness, vital force, personhood, Ubuntu*.

Resumen

El discurso filosófico africano ofrece un marco distintivo para comprender la conciencia y la

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REVISTA DE FILOSOFÍA UCSC
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Vol. 24, Nº 2, 2025, pp. 83 - 98

identidad personal que desafía los modelos dualistas dominantes en Occidente. Este artículo examina cómo la noción bantú de *fuerza vital* (a menudo interpretada como *élan vital*) proporciona una base metafísica para concebir la conciencia como algo intrínsecamente relacional en lugar de individualmente delimitado. A partir de los análisis seminales de Placide Tempels, junto con aportes contemporáneos de la filosofía africana, el estudio explora la conciencia, en el pensamiento africano, como una fuerza dinámica y graduada que impregna todos los niveles de la realidad, más que como una propiedad emergente derivada exclusivamente de estructuras materiales complejas. Mediante métodos analíticos y hermenéuticos, se argumenta que las concepciones africanas de la conciencia —especialmente en diálogo con perspectivas panpsiquistas— promueven una visión más holística de la persona, en la cual la identidad se constituye a través de relaciones comunitarias en lugar de por introspección aislada. El artículo concluye que comprender la conciencia como fuerza vital ofrece una alternativa culturalmente fundamentada a los modelos individualistas occidentales, situando al yo como fundamentalmente interconectado con las dimensiones humanas y no humanas de la existencia.

Palabras clave: *filosofía Africana, conciencia, fuerza vital, persona, Ubuntu*.

1. Introduction

The question of consciousness stands as one of the most perplexing challenges in contemporary philosophical discourse. Certain dominant strands in post-Cartesian Western philosophy have grappled with what Chalmers (1996) identifies as the "hard problem of consciousness" -the question of how subjective, qualitative experience arises from objective, quantitative matter. This problem has spawned numerous approaches, from materialist reductionism to property dualism, yet none has provided a satisfactory resolution to the mind-body problem. The persistent failure to solve this puzzle suggests that Western philosophical frameworks may be fundamentally inadequate for understanding the nature of conscious experience (McGinn, 1989).

African philosophical traditions, particularly those rooted in Bantu cosmology, offer a perspective that diverges from post-Cartesian approaches while sharing affinities with other Western alternatives such as Aristotelian *hylomorphism,* phenomenology, and process philosophy. Rather than positioning African thought simply as 'alternative' to a monolithic Western tradition, we might better understand it as offering distinctive resources for addressing questions that multiple philosophical traditions have approached from various angles. The African understanding of consciousness, deeply embedded in concepts of vital force and communal personhood, presents a view that bears striking resemblances to contemporary panpsychist theories. Where Western thought often seeks to explain consciousness by reducing it to non-conscious components, African philosophy begins with the premise that some form of awareness or vital principle permeates all of existence.

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Tempels' (1959) groundbreaking ethnographic work among the Bantu peoples revealed a sophisticated philosophical system that understands force as the fundamental principle of being. This perspective suggests that consciousness exists on a continuum rather than emerging suddenly at particular levels of material complexity. Such a view anticipates many of the insights that contemporary panpsychist philosophers are only now beginning to articulate. Contemporary scholarship has increasingly recognised the philosophical sophistication of African thought systems. Recent developments in African philosophy of mind demonstrate the continued vitality of these perspectives in addressing fundamental questions about consciousness and personal identity (Attoe et al., 2023).

The central thesis of this paper is that African philosophical perspectives, particularly the Bantu concept of vital force, provide a coherent framework for understanding consciousness that bridges individual and communal dimensions of selfhood. This framework offers valuable insights for contemporary discussions of consciousness while maintaining cultural authenticity and philosophical rigour. By examining how consciousness and personal identity are understood within African communal structures, we demonstrate that the self is fundamentally relational rather than atomistic. Our analysis contributes to the growing body of scholarship that recognises African philosophy as offering substantive alternatives to Western philosophical paradigms rather than merely cultural variations on universal human themes.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper employs a comparative philosophical approach grounded in African communitarian ethics and phenomenological interpretation. Our theoretical foundation draws primarily from the philosophy of personhood as articulated by African thinkers such as Ifeanyi Menkiti, Kwame Gyekye, and John Mbiti, combined with contemporary insights from panpsychist philosophers and recent developments in consciousness studies. This synthesis allows us to examine how traditional African concepts of vital force relate to modern discussions of consciousness while maintaining the integrity of indigenous philosophical frameworks.

The methodological approach combines analytical philosophy with hermeneutical interpretation of African cosmological texts and oral traditions. We employ what Ramose (1999) characterises as "conversational thinking" - a mode of philosophical inquiry that recognises the dialogical nature of African philosophical discourse. This method acknowledges that African philosophy often operates through communal deliberation rather than individual reflection, making it particularly suited for examining consciousness as a fundamentally relational phenomenon.

Our analysis is further informed by phenomenological insights that recognise the lived experience of consciousness within African cultural contexts. This approach avoids the trap of

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imposing Western conceptual frameworks on African thought while remaining open to productive cross-cultural philosophical dialogue. The theoretical framework also incorporates insights from vital materialism and process philosophy, which provide conceptual tools for understanding consciousness as dynamic and relational rather than static and individual.

Recent scholarship in decolonial philosophy supports this methodological approach. Mignolo (2011) argues for the need to recognise multiple epistemic traditions as equally valid sources of philosophical insight. Similarly, Grosfoguel (2013) contends that Western philosophical traditions have systematically marginalised other ways of knowing, making the recovery of indigenous philosophical perspectives both intellectually and politically necessary. Our framework thus positions African concepts of consciousness not as exotic alternatives to mainstream philosophy but as sophisticated theoretical contributions worthy of serious engagement.

The theoretical framework also draws on recent work in African logic systems, particularly Chimakonam's (2019) development of Ezumezu logic, which provides formal tools for understanding African philosophical reasoning. This work demonstrates that African philosophical traditions possess their own sophisticated logical structures that differ from but are no less rigorous than Western formal systems.

3. Consciousness in Western Philosophy

Western philosophical discourse on consciousness has been dominated by the mind-body problem since René Descartes articulated his dualistic framework in the seventeenth century. Cartesian dualism posited consciousness as a non-material substance distinct from physical matter, creating what Ryle (1949) famously characterised as the "ghost in the machine" problem. This dualistic approach has influenced centuries of philosophical inquiry, creating a persistent tension between materialist and idealist interpretations of consciousness.

The Cartesian legacy continues to haunt contemporary debates about consciousness. Even philosophers who reject explicit dualism often find themselves unable to escape the conceptual framework that treats mind and matter as fundamentally different kinds of substances. This conceptual inheritance may explain why the mind-body problem has proven so intractable in Western philosophical traditions.

The Western tradition contains far more diversity than the Cartesian framework suggests. Aristotle's hylomorphic theory, which understands the soul (*psyche*) as the form of the body rather than a separate substance, offers a non-dualistic account that dominated medieval philosophy and continues to influence contemporary thought. For Aristotle, the soul is not a separate entity inhabiting the body but rather the organisational principle that makes a living being what it is. This view avoids the interaction problem that plagues Cartesian dualism by refusing to treat mind and body as separate substances that must somehow causally interact. Contemporary neo-Aristotelian

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approaches to consciousness, such as those developed by Thompson (2007), draw on this hylomorphic framework to argue for embodied and enactive accounts of consciousness that see mental phenomena as irreducible to but inseparable from bodily processes.

Phenomenological approaches, particularly those developed by Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, provide another significant alternative within Western philosophy. Phenomenology brackets questions about the metaphysical relationship between mind and matter to focus on the structures of lived experience itself. Merleau-Ponty's (1945) concept of the lived body (*corps vécu*) challenges both dualism and reductive materialism by showing how consciousness is always already embodied and situated in a world. This approach resonates with African philosophical emphases on situated, relational consciousness, though it arrives at these insights through different philosophical trajectories.

Neutral monism, developed by William James and Bertrand Russell, represents yet another Western alternative to both dualism and materialism. This view holds that both mental and physical properties are manifestations of a more fundamental neutral substance. Russell's (1927) argument that the intrinsic nature of physical reality might itself be experiential anticipates contemporary panpsychist arguments and shares structural similarities with African concepts of vital force as a fundamental principle underlying both mind and matter.

Process philosophy, particularly as developed by Alfred North Whitehead, offers a dynamic alternative to substance-based metaphysics. Whitehead's (1929) philosophy of organism treats reality as composed of events or occasions of experience rather than static substances. This process-oriented metaphysics shares striking parallels with African understandings of reality as fundamentally dynamic and relational, though Whitehead develops his system through abstract mathematical and logical reasoning rather than through communal and cosmological frameworks.

Contemporary Western philosophy has attempted to resolve this tension through various strategies. Materialist approaches, such as those advocated by Dennett (1991) and Churchland (1995), seek to explain consciousness as nothing over and above complex neural processes. These eliminative materialist positions argue that our folk psychological concepts of consciousness will eventually be replaced by more accurate neuroscientific descriptions. Property dualism, as defended by philosophers like Chalmers (2010) and Jackson (1982), maintains that while the world is fundamentally physical, it also contains irreducible mental properties.

The emergence of panpsychism in contemporary Western philosophy represents a significant departure from traditional approaches. Philosophers such as Strawson (2006) argue that consciousness cannot emerge from purely non-conscious matter, suggesting instead that some form of experiential property must be fundamental to all matter. This position, while gaining traction in contemporary debates, remains controversial within mainstream Western philosophy. Recent scholarship has explored both the promise and challenges of panpsychist approaches to consciousness (Goff & Moran, 2022).

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REVISTA DE FILOSOFÍA UCSC
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Faculty of Theological Studies and Philosophy
Vol. 24, Nº 2, 2025, pp. 83 - 98

The limitations of Western approaches become apparent when we consider their individualistic assumptions. Most Western theories of consciousness begin with the isolated subject and attempt to explain how this individual consciousness relates to the external world and other minds. This starting point reflects broader cultural assumptions about the primacy of individual existence that may not be universal across philosophical traditions. The persistent failure to solve the hard problem of consciousness using these individualistic frameworks suggests that alternative approaches may be necessary.

Moreover, Western philosophy's emphasis on the subject-object distinction may itself be problematic for understanding consciousness. Zahavi (2005) argues that this distinction creates artificial barriers to understanding the nature of conscious experience. African philosophical traditions, which often begin with relational rather than individualistic assumptions, may be better positioned to avoid these conceptual pitfalls.

It would be misleading to suggest that all Western philosophy operates within individualistic frameworks. Phenomenological traditions, particularly those influenced by Heidegger's (1927) concept of *Mitsein* (being-with) and contemporary feminist philosophy's emphasis on relational autonomy, recognise the fundamentally social nature of selfhood. Similarly, pragmatist philosophers like George Herbert Mead (1934) developed accounts of the social construction of the self that bear interesting parallels to African communitarian perspectives. What distinguishes African approaches is not the mere recognition of relationality but the particular ways this relationality is understood and its integration with cosmological frameworks centred on vital force. The comparison between African and Western philosophy should therefore focus on specific theoretical commitments rather than painting either tradition with an overly broad brush.

4. African Concepts of Consciousness

African philosophical traditions approach consciousness from fundamentally different starting assumptions than their Western counterparts. Rather than beginning with the isolated individual, African cosmologies typically understand consciousness as emerging from and sustained by communal relationships. This perspective is captured in the Bantu maxim "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (a person is a person through other persons), which suggests that personal identity and consciousness are constituted through social relationships rather than existing independently.

The concept of vital force stands at the centre of many African cosmological systems. As articulated by Tempels (1959) in his ethnographic study of Bantu philosophy, vital force represents the fundamental principle underlying all existence. Tempels argued that for Bantu peoples, "force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force" (p. 44). This understanding of force as being itself suggests a cosmology where consciousness or awareness is not something that emerges from unconscious matter but rather represents varying degrees of vital force present throughout reality.

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This conception of vital force challenges Western assumptions about the nature of matter and consciousness. Rather than treating consciousness as something that mysteriously emerges from non-conscious material processes, African philosophy understands consciousness as a fundamental feature of reality that manifests in different degrees and forms. This view anticipates many of the insights that contemporary panpsychist philosophers are developing in Western contexts.

The distinctiveness of the Bantu concept of vital force requires careful articulation. WhileTempels translates the Bantu term as "force", this should not be understood simply as physical energy or causal power in the modern scientific sense. Vital force represents an ontological principle that combines aspects of what Western philosophy might separately categorise as existence, consciousness, power, and value. For Bantu thought, to exist is to possess vital force, but this force admits of degrees and can be strengthened or weakened through social relationships and ritual practices. This differs from most Western concepts of being, which typically treat existence as binary (either something exists or it does not) and do not intrinsically link degree of existence with consciousness or moral status.

The concept of vital force avoids the pitfalls of both Cartesian dualism and reductive materialism by refusing the fundamental categorical distinction between mind and matter that generates the mind-body problem in post-Cartesian Western philosophy. Rather than beginning with two distinct substances (mental and physical) and asking how they interact, or reducing one to the other, vital force presents being itself as inherently animate and graduated. This framework allows for continuity between what Western philosophy treats as categorically distinct domains: the conscious and unconscious, the living and non-living, the personal and impersonal.

To clarify through comparison: Aristotle's concept of being (*ousia*) as substance provides some structural parallels, particularly in its admission of degrees of actuality and its integration of form and matter. Yet Aristotle's hylomorphism still maintains categorical distinctions between different kinds of souls (vegetative, sensitive, rational) that correspond to fixed species boundaries. The Bantu concept of vital force, by contrast, operates on a more fluid continuum where boundaries between different kinds of beings are understood as differences in degree and intensity of force rather than fixed categorical distinctions. The elder possesses greater vital force than the youth, the chief more than ordinary members of the community, ancestors more than the living, yet all participate in the same fundamental principle of being-as-force.

Furthermore, vital force is inherently relational in ways that distinguish it from Western substance metaphysics. Whereas Aristotelian substances possess their essential properties independently of their relations to other substances, vital force exists only in networks of mutual influence and exchange. One's vital force can be increased through proper relationships with ancestors, community members, and natural forces, or diminished through isolation, moral transgression, or malevolent intervention. This relational ontology provides a framework for understanding consciousness that Western philosophy has only recently begun to develop through

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REVISTA DE FILOSOFÍA UCSC
Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción
Faculty of Theological Studies and Philosophy
Vol. 24, Nº 2, 2025, pp. 83 - 98

embodied cognition, enactivist, and extended mind theories.

The ethical implications of this metaphysics distinguish it further from Western approaches. In Western philosophy, the connection between metaphysics and ethics typically requires additional argumentative work, moving from descriptive claims about what exists to normative claims about what ought to be done. In the vital force framework, this distinction collapses: to possess vital force is already to stand in normative relationships with other force-bearing entities. The project of strengthening one's vital force through proper social relationships is simultaneously metaphysical, psychological, and ethical. This integration provides what we argue is a more holistic framework for understanding consciousness precisely because it refuses the sharp separations between fact and value, self and community, mind and world that create problems for dualistic and materialistic Western approaches.

Contemporary African philosophers have developed this foundation in sophisticated ways. Mbiti's (1969) influential work elaborates how individual consciousness in African thought cannot be understood apart from one's relationships with ancestors, living community members, and future generations. This temporal dimension of consciousness suggests that personal identity extends beyond the individual biological lifespan to encompass a network of relationships that transcend death. Such a view offers resources for addressing questions about personal survival and the meaning of death that are often inadequately addressed by purely materialistic approaches.

Gyekye's (1995) work on Akan philosophy provides another perspective on African concepts of consciousness. Gyekye argues that the Akan concept of *sunsum* (a spiritual force) represents a middle term between pure materiality and pure spirituality, suggesting a kind of psycho-physical substance that underlies conscious experience. This concept bears interesting parallels to contemporary discussions of neutral monism in Western philosophy while maintaining distinctly African characteristics. Wiredu's (1996) analysis of Akan thought further develops these insights, showing how African philosophical traditions can engage with universal philosophical problems while maintaining their cultural specificity.

The integration of consciousness with community responsibility is a recurring theme in African philosophical traditions. Recent scholarship demonstrates that Ubuntu consciousness involves a fundamental recognition that individual wellbeing is inseparable from communal flourishing (Koenane, 2018). This perspective challenges Western assumptions about the boundaries of consciousness and suggests that conscious experience itself may be fundamentally social rather than private. Such insights have practical implications for contemporary approaches to mental health, education, and social

5. Comparative Analysis: African and Western Alternatives

Having examined both African perspectives and the diversity within Western philosophy,

ISSN 2735-6353 Online version
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https://doi.org/10.21703/2735-6353.2025.24.2.3422

we can now identify both convergences and distinctive contributions. The concept of vital force shares structural similarities with several Western alternatives to Cartesian dualism: Aristotelian hylomorphism in its integration of form and matter, neutral monism in its treatment of a fundamental reality underlying both mental and physical properties, process philosophy in its emphasis on dynamic becoming over static being, and contemporary panpsychism in its attribution of proto-experiential properties throughout nature.

Yet these structural parallels should not obscure significant differences in how these frameworks are developed and deployed. Western philosophical alternatives typically emerge through abstract metaphysical argument aimed at solving theoretical puzzles like the mind-body problem. The Bantu concept of vital force, by contrast, emerges from and remains embedded in lived cosmological frameworks that integrate metaphysics, ethics, ritual practice, and social organisation. This embeddedness gives the vital force framework practical resources for communal life that purely theoretical Western alternatives often lack.

The relational dimension of consciousness receives more thorough development in African frameworks than in most Western alternatives. Whilst phenomenology recognises the situated and embodied nature of consciousness, and whilst some contemporary philosophers explore extended and distributed cognition, African philosophy centres communal constitution of selfhood in ways that go beyond recognising social influences on an independently existing subject. The self in African frameworks is not primarily an individual subsequently entering into social relations, but emerges through and exists only within networks of relationships with living community members, ancestors, and the broader cosmos.

This comparative analysis suggests that African philosophy offers distinctive conceptual resources whilst also finding resonance with certain Western alternatives. The task is neither to claim complete uniqueness for African thought nor to reduce it to familiar Western categories, but rather to articulate its specific theoretical commitments and examine their implications for understanding consciousness and selfhood.

6. Personhood and Identity in African Philosophy

The African concept of personhood provides a crucial framework for understanding how consciousness and identity are conceived within African philosophical traditions. Unlike Western individualistic conceptions that treat persons as naturally occurring entities, African philosophy typically understands personhood as an achievement that must be attained through moral and social development. This process-oriented understanding of personhood has significant implications for how consciousness itself is conceived.

Menkiti's (1984) influential analysis distinguishes between being human and being a person. For Menkiti, all humans possess the potential for personhood, but actualising this potential

ISSN 2735-6353 Online version
ISSN 0717-7801 Print Version
https://doi.org/10.21703/2735-6353.2025.24.2.3422

requires incorporating oneself into the community through the fulfilment of social obligations and the development of moral character. This process-oriented understanding of personhood suggests that consciousness itself develops through social interaction rather than existing as a pre-given individual capacity. Recent scholarship has further developed this understanding, arguing that personhood represents a form of moral perfectionism grounded in relational virtue (Molefe, 2019).

The implications of this understanding extend to how memory, personal identity, and self-consciousness are conceived. In many African traditions, personal memory is not purely individual but includes ancestral memories and collective cultural knowledge. The self is thus understood as a node in a network of relationships that extends across temporal and spatial boundaries. This perspective challenges Western assumptions about the boundaries of individual consciousness and suggests alternative models of personal identity.

Menkiti (1984) draws from Tempels' work to illustrate how degrees of personhood correspond to variations in vital force. A person of 'middling importance' possesses less force than "a powerful man, a man with a great deal of force" (p. 172). This hierarchical understanding of personhood suggests that consciousness itself admits of degrees and can be enhanced through proper moral and social development. Such a view offers resources for understanding how conscious experience can be cultivated and developed rather than simply taken as given.

The communal dimension of personhood in African thought also extends to decision-making processes and moral reasoning. Rather than understanding consciousness as a private, internal phenomenon, African philosophical traditions often emphasise the communal nature of thought itself. The Akan concept of collective deliberation suggests that even cognitive processes are fundamentally social rather than individual (Wiredu, 2008). This insight has implications for understanding collective intelligence and group consciousness that remain underexplored in Western philosophical traditions.

Contemporary African philosophers have continued to develop these insights. Ikuenobe's (2016) work explores how personhood relates to aesthetic and moral dimensions of human experience, arguing that the development of personhood involves the cultivation of both ethical and aesthetic sensibilities. Metz (2013) has developed a theory of meaning in life based on African concepts of personhood, suggesting that a meaningful life involves harmonising with others in relationships characterised by identification and solidarity.

7. Consciousness and the Question of Self in Africa

The integration of vital force concepts with contemporary understanding of consciousness opens new possibilities for addressing the question of selfhood in African philosophy. When consciousness is understood as a fundamental aspect of reality rather than an emergent property of complex matter, the boundaries between self and world become more fluid and relational. This

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ISSN 0717-7801 Print Version
https://doi.org/10.21703/2735-6353.2025.24.2.3422

perspective offers resources for addressing some of the persistent problems in consciousness studies while remaining grounded in African philosophical traditions.

This perspective aligns remarkably with certain interpretations of panpsychism that have emerged in contemporary Western philosophy. Goff's (2017) work on cosmopsychism suggests that consciousness at the cosmic level gives rise to individual conscious subjects through a process of cosmopsychic combination. This view resonates with African cosmologies where individual consciousness emerges from and remains connected to cosmic vital force. Recent developments in panpsychist theory demonstrate how such approaches can address problems in neuroscience while avoiding the pitfalls of both eliminative materialism and substance dualism (Yurchenko, 2024).

The relational understanding of consciousness in African thought also provides resources for addressing contemporary concerns about the isolation and alienation characteristic of modern individualistic societies. If consciousness is fundamentally relational, as African philosophy suggests, then the apparent separateness of individual minds may be more apparent than real. The Ubuntu principle suggests that individual wellbeing is inseparable from communal flourishing, pointing towards an ethics of consciousness that prioritises relational harmony over individual autonomy.

Recent scholarship has demonstrated the contemporary relevance of these insights. Research shows how African philosophical perspectives on consciousness can inform educational practices that prioritise collaborative learning over competitive individualism (Chapfika, 2024). Similarly, contemporary work contends that recognising the coherence of African philosophical traditions is necessary for developing authentic alternatives to Western intellectual frameworks that have proven inadequate for addressing global challenges (Gumbo, 2024).

African concepts of consciousness also offer unique perspectives on temporal aspects of selfhood. The connection to ancestral consciousness through ritual practices and cultural memory suggests that individual identity extends beyond the biological lifespan. This temporal extension of consciousness provides resources for addressing questions about personal survival and the meaning of death that are central to human experience but often inadequately addressed by purely materialistic approaches. Such perspectives have informed traditional African approaches to grief, mourning, and remembrance that recognise the continued presence of the deceased in community life (Sogolo, 1993).

The question of animal and environmental consciousness also receives distinctive treatment in African philosophical traditions. Many African cosmologies attribute varying degrees of consciousness or vital force to non-human entities, from animals to plants to geographical features. This perspective anticipates contemporary discussions about extending moral consideration to non-human entities while remaining grounded in traditional cultural practices. Recent work on African environmental ethics demonstrates how these perspectives can inform contemporary ecological thinking and provide alternatives to Western approaches that treat nature as mere resource

ISSN 2735-6353 Online version
ISSN 0717-7801 Print Version
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(Murove, 2004).

The practical implications of African approaches to consciousness extend to contemporary debates about artificial intelligence and machine consciousness. If consciousness is understood as vital force rather than computational complexity, the question of whether machines can be conscious takes on different dimensions. African perspectives might suggest that consciousness requires participation in networks of vital force that artificial systems cannot access (Arvan & Maley, 2022). Such insights could inform contemporary debates about the ethics of artificial intelligence and the possibility of machine consciousness.

Contemporary applications of Ubuntu philosophy demonstrate the practical relevance of these theoretical insights. Recent research shows how Ubuntu principles have been applied to pandemic response, emphasising collective responsibility and communal care over individualistic approaches to public health (Chigangaidze et al., 2022). Similarly, work on Ubuntu and sustainable development demonstrates how African philosophical perspectives can inform international policy approaches to human development (Ntibagirirwa, 2022).

8. Conclusion

This examination of consciousness and selfhood from African philosophical perspectives reveals significant resources for contemporary philosophical discourse. The Bantu concept of vital force, as interpreted through Tempels' (1959) work and developed by subsequent African philosophers, provides a framework for understanding consciousness that avoids many of the pitfalls of Western dualistic and materialistic approaches. The relational understanding of consciousness characteristic of African thought offers particularly valuable insights for addressing contemporary concerns about isolation, alienation, and environmental degradation.

The convergence between African vital force concepts and contemporary panpsychist theories suggests productive possibilities for cross-cultural philosophical dialogue. These convergences are not merely coincidental but reflect deeper insights about the nature of consciousness and reality that transcend particular cultural contexts while remaining grounded in specific philosophical traditions. Recent scholarship demonstrates that these insights continue to inform contemporary debates in consciousness studies, environmental ethics, and social philosophy.

Moving forward, continued development of African philosophical approaches to consciousness can contribute to global discussions while maintaining cultural authenticity. This requires careful attention to the integrity of African philosophical traditions combined with openness to productive engagement with contemporary philosophical problems. The vitality of consciousness, understood through African philosophical lenses, offers hope for more integrated and holistic approaches to some of philosophy's most persistent questions. The implications of this

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REVISTA DE FILOSOFÍA UCSC
Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción
Faculty of Theological Studies and Philosophy
Vol. 24, Nº 2, 2025, pp. 83 - 98

work extend beyond purely academic philosophical discourse to practical questions about education, psychology, environmental policy, and social organisation. If consciousness is indeed relational and communal, as African philosophy suggests, then policies and practices that strengthen community bonds and cultural connections become not merely social goods but prerequisites for psychological and spiritual wellbeing. Recent applications of Ubuntu philosophy to pandemic response and sustainable development demonstrate the practical relevance of these insights.

Future research should continue to explore the implications of African philosophical perspectives for contemporary debates in consciousness studies, while also investigating how these perspectives might inform practical approaches to mental health, education, and environmental stewardship. The recognition that consciousness may be fundamentally relational rather than individual opens new possibilities for understanding human flourishing and developing more sustainable relationships with both human communities and the natural world. The challenge for contemporary scholarship is to engage seriously with African philosophical traditions as sources of theoretical insight rather than merely objects of anthropological curiosity. Such engagement requires moving beyond the colonial assumption that Western philosophy represents universal human reason while other traditions represent merely local cultural variations. African philosophy offers genuine alternatives to Western approaches to consciousness that deserve serious consideration by philosophers working in any tradition.

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REVISTA DE FILOSOFÍA UCSC
Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción
Faculty of Theological Studies and Philosophy
Vol. 24, Nº 2, 2025, pp. 83 - 98

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