

# HOW SHOULD THE BANTU CONCEIVE DEATH TODAY

BY

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## Abstract

Death is a phenomenon that by which generally all animate creatures must face. However, death as a fact remains a puzzle. This article presents two conceptions on death: Bantu conception and Martin Heidegger existential conception. The Bantu conceive death to be natural and unnatural. Such understanding sometimes leads them to prevent it not to take its course and most of the time it leads to the denial of death. Today most of the Bantu youths so called “new generation” and early adults are the victims to such belief, a belief that affects their moral and ethical daily life since they think that death is not a part and parcel reality in their current existential project. The youths and early adults are convinced that elderly people are the only ones who are supposed to die. The elders too, do not accept the death of a child, youth and early adult; once it happens such death is understood as unnatural death. These groups are to benefit from the Heideggerian existential conception of death which maintains that death is real and a shadow that man walks with; it is one’s own uttermost possibility which is non relational, not to be outstripped, certain and indefinite. An individual human being should not fear or deny death; instead he or she should anticipate it.

**Key words:** Death, Bantu, *muntu*, Dasein, existential death, uttermost possibility

## Introduction

Death is understood and believed by Bantu as the culmination of earthly life.<sup>1</sup> Though it is a culmination, however, it is not the end; rather it is the beginning of another life. Therefore when the Bantu claims that death is not an end but the beginning of another life, do not mean the heavenly life as Christians do, rather they mean becoming an ancestor or the spirit.<sup>2</sup>

The Bantu conception of death as an event, is paradoxically comprehended. Death is taken as good and at the same time as bad. Death is good when one dies at a very old age because it is a culmination of earthly life, therefore a crowning moment.<sup>3</sup> Death is bad if one dies before attaining old age. This death is not a crowning moment or culmination but a deprivation and becomes cruel.<sup>4</sup> One is deprived of the life opportunity into which he or she would fulfill the mission given to him or her by the creator. Such

conception leads towards the denial of death and this is the problem to many Bantu.

Martin Heidegger’s conception of death is purely existential. For him human being whom he called “Dasein” (meaning Being-there), is the one who exists. Existence is specifically for an entity that is aware and understands itself and the world it is in.<sup>5</sup> This entity that has such understanding of itself and the world is only one that which Heidegger calls “Dasein”.<sup>6</sup> That is why the English word for Dasein is human existence<sup>7</sup>

In this article we are going to discuss Bantu’s conception of death and its consequences to their daily lives. Since the Bantu occupy a vast area of the African continent, in this article we will confine ourselves to the indigenous Swahili speaking Bantu. And so when we speak of Bantu we intend this unique group of people that exist mostly in East Africa. Then we will briefly present Heideggerian existential

<sup>1</sup>Thadeus Ruwa’ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu, An Inquiry into the Eastern Bantu’s Metaphysics of Person*. (New York-Paris: Peter Lang, 1990), .203.

<sup>2</sup>Rabi Ekore, and Lanre-Abass Bolatito. “African Cultural Concept of Death and the Idea of Advance Care Directives,” *Indiana Journal of Palliative Care* 22, (2016) : 371. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0973-1075.191741>.

<sup>3</sup>Ruwa’ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu*, 203.

<sup>4</sup>Ruwa’ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu*, 203.

<sup>5</sup>Ted Honderich, Ed. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 257.

<sup>6</sup>Mark Menaldo, *Death in Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time*, Texas A&M University-Commerce. September 2021. 406 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354591764>. DOI: 10.4324/9781003005384-41

<sup>7</sup>Menaldo, *Death in Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 406.

conception of death and develop this latter conception as a solution to some of the complexities raised in Bantu conception of death. However it has to be clear from the beginning that there is no philosophical conception of death among the two in such that one can claim to be superior and another inferior. Each one has its full respect according to its context. What we are presenting in this article is to see if Heideggerian existential conception of death can leave positive impact to the current Bantu generation.<sup>8</sup>

### Who are the Bantu

The literal meaning of the term *Bantu* is “people”. The use of the term Bantu to mean “people” by many people has led to different varieties of this word, but all of them mean “people” or “human beings”. Such different forms of the term Bantu include: *abantu*, *batho*, *ovantu*, *antu*, *watu* etc. In his work *The Constitution of Muntu, An Inquiry into the Eastern Bantu's Metaphysics of Person*, Jude Thaddeus Ruwa'ichi writes that, “the term Bantu has now a special connotation. It presents a special group of African people who have similarities in their languages. They are almost identified as one in their cultural beliefs and behaviour”.<sup>9</sup>

In his work *African Philosophy*, Kibujjo Kalumba presents that Bantu holds fifty percent of the land of African continent and forty percent of Sub-Saharan population.<sup>10</sup> Other groups of people who interact with Bantu on the African continent are: Cushitic, Nilo-Saharan and Khoisan.<sup>11</sup> Others include Malayo-Polynesian in Madagascar, Nigritic in West Africa and Sudanic.<sup>12</sup>

### Bantu Conception of Death

The Bantu conceive death as natural and unnatural. We want now to see what is contained in such conception and how it affects their daily life.

### Natural Death

Natural death is that which culminates the rhythm of life. When a person is at very old age and dies, his or her death is conceived to be natural. Categorically, Bantu maintain that only very old aged persons die naturally.<sup>13</sup> Most Africans hold that every time a person dies there is a cause.<sup>14</sup> Hence the Bantu maintain the same, that there is no single death that has no cause or reason. This aligns well with the Principle of Sufficient reason that “every event has a cause”.<sup>15</sup> From the beginning of life of *muntu* (a person) it is believed, that God is the cause of this life.<sup>16</sup> God is the one who sustains the life of *muntu* from its conception, birth, up to its very old age. From this line of thought, Bantu make a conclusion that the One who caused the rhythm of life to begin, is the same who set the conclusion of it through death. Death here is taken to be a biological necessity,<sup>17</sup> and it is governed by a metaphysical Supreme Being.<sup>18</sup> Death is also understood as a passage

The death of a very old person in Bantu families and communities is a celebration where glorious songs and joyful dancing take place rather than mourning because God can not lose what is His.<sup>19</sup> In this sense death is good.<sup>20</sup> There is no need to prevent natural death, since it is a crowning point.<sup>21</sup>

Though natural death is accepted because its cause is God, but paradoxically the Bantu do not encourage

<sup>8</sup>Kübler-Ross, Elizabeth. *Death the Final Stage of Growth*. (Englewoodcliff, NewJersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1975), 27.

<sup>9</sup>Ruwa'ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu*, 18-19.

<sup>10</sup>Kibujjo Kalumba, *African Philosophy, A Classical Approach*. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1996), 91.

<sup>11</sup>Benji Walid, “Swahili and The Bantu Language” (2003): 883. doi:10.4324/9780203214961-50

<sup>12</sup>John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1969);101.

<sup>13</sup>Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 155.

<sup>14</sup>Mercy Chukwuedo and Anenechukwu, Ede. “The Paradox of the Concepts of Life and Death in African Traditional Religion.” *An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 5, no1 (January 2019): 95.

<sup>15</sup>Honderich, Ed. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 859.

<sup>16</sup>Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*. Translated by Revd. Colin King, (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959), 15.

<sup>17</sup>Mondin, Battista. *Philosophical Anthropology*. (Rome: Ubaniana University Press, 1985), 268.

<sup>18</sup>Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 15.

<sup>19</sup>Nkemnkia, N. Martin. *African Vitalogy, A Step Forward in African Thinking*. (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 1999), 172.

<sup>20</sup>Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 30.

<sup>21</sup>Ruwa'ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu*, 205.

talks about death. To meditate or do a reflection about death is not allowed. To talk of the death of oneself or of the others especially of the loved one is strictly forbidden.<sup>22</sup> That is why even writing a will for Bantu is not a right thing.<sup>23</sup> The elderly or aged can only verbally give some instructions concerning how they like to be treated when they are approaching their death, or where to be buried if they die. This verbal talk can not be made by a child, a young or a middle adult.<sup>24</sup>

Since the very old age die a natural death, it follows then that some elderly people in modern Bantu have been neglected, because it is thought that nothing new from them, and their end is very close. This view also entails that death is a remote future event which in Bantu and most African conception of time seem to be not comprehended. Such understanding can mean that death is an event that can not be said or named. This entails that such an event does not have any impact to the living. Others may go further even believing that such an event is not there.<sup>25</sup>

### Unnatural Death

Unnatural death is that of a child, young and adults who have not yet attained the very old age.<sup>26</sup> According to Bantu the aim of coming to the world for a person is to reach the very old age, the age by which one has already accomplished the task given to him or her by the creator. Placide Tempels in his work *Bantu Philosophy* states that the supreme value for Bantu is life, force, to live strongly or vital force.<sup>27</sup> He continues to say that the supreme happiness and the most blessings a Bantu can have, is to possess the vital force to the fullest.<sup>28</sup> Death is something foreign to *muntu*, its origin is outside the vital force. There is an

external agent who has a greater force.<sup>29</sup> Therefore to die before reaching very old age, no matter in what manner or form one dies, there must be someone else as the cause of that death.<sup>30</sup> This kind of death is unnatural and it is bad. Magic, sorcery, witchcraft, curse, living dead and spirits are the main causes of such death.<sup>31</sup> A living person can be a cause of unnatural death when he kills somebody else or kills himself or her self. Death due to murder or suicide is unnatural too. That is why suicide for Bantu is strictly forbidden.

The Bantu are convinced that “once one is born, he or she lives eternally”.<sup>32</sup> Spirits are the remains of the dead human beings. To be a spirit becomes the ultimate status of human being. It is a compulsory state whether one wills it or not. As a child grows into an adult automatically, the same one to be a spirit has no option. The spirits intrinsically are not evil or good, however people fear them and attribute some deaths to them.<sup>33</sup>

The living-dead are of the most concern. These are the dead people but not yet attained the spirit level. They are still members of the living family or community. These are supposed to be the guardians of the left family members.<sup>34</sup> The problem with the living-dead comes when if they were not treated well during their earthly life, or if their burials were not conducted with respect; they become angry and very harsh to the extent that they cause death of some members of the same family or community.<sup>35</sup> The living-dead are also watchmen over the members who are still alive. If one displeases them either by a bad behavior or by insulting them, they can decide to kill the person. If one does well to them, the living dead can bless, and protect the vital force of the remained.

Concerning life itself, the Bantu understand death to be an enemy of life. They make sure that the vital force remains throughout one's generation.<sup>36</sup> Tempels writes on Bantu saying: “...we act thus to be protected

<sup>22</sup> Temenu, Fobella Ketrina Mpeta-Phiri, and Cynthia Chidziwitsano. “Tradition and Modernity: African Cultural Perspectives on Death and After Life.” *Pleho Institute of Research, Language and Culture Journal* 4, no.5 (2023): 50.

<sup>23</sup> Ekore, “African Cultural Concept of Death and the Idea of Advance Care Directives,” 371.

<sup>24</sup> Ekore, “African Cultural Concept of Death and the Idea of Advance Care Directives,” 371.

<sup>25</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 155.

<sup>27</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 30.

<sup>29</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 22-23.

<sup>30</sup> Nkennkia, *African Vitalogy*, 118.

<sup>31</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 155.

<sup>32</sup> Nkennkia, *African Vitalogy*, 140.

<sup>33</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 79.

<sup>34</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 83.

<sup>35</sup> Ekore, “African Cultural Concept of Death and the Idea of Advance Care Directives,” 371.

<sup>36</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 22.

from misfortune, or from a diminution of life or being, or in order to protect ourselves from those influences which annihilate or diminish us.”<sup>37</sup> He continues saying that the Bantu holds that the most misfortune is that which diminishes the vital force.<sup>38</sup> When one falls sick or become old the life should be preserved by all means even in a worse situation where there is no more hope. That is why euthanasia for Bantu is understood as unnatural death and therefore not acceptable.

Unnatural death can be prevented on personal and family levels. The Bantu claim that without an agent one can not die.<sup>39</sup> When a child or a young man dies it is not a natural death, because they have departed without accomplishing terrestrial existence.<sup>40</sup> Therefore the cause of that death has to be sought.<sup>41</sup> The investigations and findings normally lead to conflicts within families. If the magician will trace or mention anybody among the family members or outside it, it may lead to killing the one who has been suspected as a witch. In some tribes of the Lake zone especially in Mwanza, Musoma and Shinyanga regions in Tanzania, the elderly women having red eyes are victims of this. They are first thought of being witches, since they have already reached old age and have their wholeness and totality in life, they are envious and jealous that others should not reach such stage. Second, if it happens that elder woman did not get married or bear a child hence she too becomes envious, jealous and angry that is why she kills other's children and youths or early adults. Most of the Bantu youths and early adults fall into this trap of killing the elderly women even their own relatives.

When an agent is a common *mlozi* or *mchawi*<sup>42</sup> (the common witch) direct confrontation is done. It can be performed either by killing the witch so that he or she will not cause the death of other persons, or through peaceful bargaining with the witch to withdraw killing plan of a person. This bargaining can involve talking or paying some amount of money or

animals to the witch so that he or she does not cause death.

When an agent is the living-dead, ancestors or spirits again two things have to be done: asking for mercy and pleasing them. Special prayers and offerings are performed to ask them pardon to remove out the curse and giving them what they would need “to eat” so that they feel comfortable, hence not causing any harm to the family members.<sup>43</sup> The reason is that ancestors are considered to be powerful spiritual beings that have a continued presence in the lives of the living.<sup>44</sup> They have greater influence to the living.<sup>45</sup> For Chagga tribe of Tanzania who are Bantu, for instance, parents do name their children after the grand or great grandparents so that their offspring can be protected against any harm especially early death.<sup>46</sup>

After this exploration on Bantu conception of death. Now it is better to make analysis on Heideggerian conception of it and see how it can help to solve some serious existential issues raised by Bantu understanding of death. We are going to see who is Martin Heidegger and his systematic analysis of death and its positive impacts to Bantu.

### Who is Martin Heidegger

Martin Heidegger was born on 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1889 in Germany. He is the most influential philosopher of the twentieth century. “He is a notable philosopher who made a great contribution to the discussion of death.”<sup>47</sup> Many literary criticisms, aesthetics, linguistics echo his ideas. In the field of philosophy, he has an influence on phenomenology and existentialism.<sup>48</sup> There have been a debate about

<sup>43</sup> Aylward Shorter, *Prayer in The Religious Traditions of Africa*, (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1975), 60.

<sup>44</sup> Temenu Fobella, Temenu Ketrina Mpeta-Phiri, and Cynthia Chidziwitsano, “Tradition and Modernity: African Cultural Perspectives on Death and After Life.” *Pleho Institute of Research, Language and Culture Journal* 4, no.5 (2023): 51. [www.pleho.org](http://www.pleho.org), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/370778164>.

<sup>45</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 30.

<sup>46</sup> Aidan G. Msafiri, “Inculturating Traditional Medicine in Africa”. *Africa Tomorrow* 12, No 1 (June 2010) 21.

<sup>47</sup> Fernandez Errol and Al Franjon Villaroya, et al. *Introduction to The Philosophy of The Human Person*. (Davao City: Aletheia Printing and Publishing House, 2020), 91.

<sup>48</sup> Menaldo, *Death in Martin Heidegger's Being and Time*, 405.

<sup>37</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 22.

<sup>39</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 156.

<sup>40</sup> Ruwa'ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu*, 205.

<sup>41</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 155.

<sup>42</sup> Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 16.

his philosophy, whether it is a shift from phenomenology to ontology or from existence to being. His thoughts tempt some thinkers to consider his philosophy as a transformation. This is shown in the way he avoids the use of common philosophical terms like self, consciousness and other classical terms.<sup>49</sup>

Martin Heidegger wrote many works. However the main work that is so popular is *Being and Time* published in 1927. Errol Fernandez claims that “this book introduces a unique perspective on daily experiences of human person.”<sup>50</sup> In this work he discusses much about existence and time. It is in this work that the philosophy of death and the whole existential meaning of human and other realities has been elaborated and clarified.<sup>51</sup>

Denis King Keenan in his work *Death and Responsibility The Work of Levinas*, says that *Being and Time* has become an existential reading.<sup>52</sup> In Division Two “Dasein and Temporality” and specifically in part one, he dedicates it on “Dasein’s Possibility of Being-a-whole and Being-towards-death.”<sup>53</sup> Many scholars admit that Heidegger’s thoughts are complicated and sometimes confusing. In his work he invented new terms and coined other words to form new concepts which were not common in Western philosophy at the moment.<sup>54</sup> Martin Heidegger died on 26<sup>th</sup> May, 1976 at the age of 87.

### Death as the uttermost Possibility

According to Martin Heidegger, *Dasein* is a being that is full of possibilities.<sup>55</sup> One of those possibilities is death.<sup>56</sup> “Death is both the possibility of the

impossibility” and “impossibility of the possibility.”<sup>57</sup> It is the uttermost possibility. All the possibilities or potentialities for Being become in front of *Dasein* once one comes into existence. The very minute the *Dasein* exists already these potentialities are open to him or her. They unfold one after the other as long as *Dasein* exists. Death is the uttermost possibility, because once it is attained, existence ceases too because *Dasein* is no-longer-there<sup>58</sup> “Death means impossibility of grasping the possibility.”<sup>59</sup> This means death marks the possibilities being no longer able to be grasped anymore

Martin Heidegger, argues that though the potentialities or possibilities are not yet in act, however, they are not outside *Dasein*; they belong to it.<sup>60</sup> He gave an example of unripe fruit; the ripeness is the not-yet or the possibility. This ripeness does not come from outside it, but it is in the fruit itself.<sup>61</sup> This entails that once one comes into existence he or she possesses the possibilities. From this way of argument, Heidegger convinces that even a child is full of potentialities including death itself. Hence once one is born, already is old enough to die.<sup>62</sup> This is why he emphasized that *Dasein* is a Being-towards-death.

On the other hand, the Bantu claim that the potentialities of *muntu* unfold themselves slowly, or step by step as one exists.<sup>63</sup> They determine the rhythmic life of a person, that is why the child is to grow and reach puberty, marriage, give birth, becomes an adult, old and finally very old age.<sup>64</sup> It is quite clear for the Bantu as it is for Heidegger that all life patterns are formally in potency and become actual as one continues to exist.

However the difference here is that the uttermost possibility for Bantu is one to become very old and not death.<sup>65</sup> When the Bantu hold that death is a culmination they do not mean that it is the end, but it is

<sup>49</sup>Menaldo, *Death in Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 405.

<sup>50</sup>Errol, *Introduction to The Philosophy of The Human Person*, 91.

<sup>51</sup>Menaldo, *Death in Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 405

<sup>52</sup>Dennis K. Keenan, *Death and Responsibility, The “Work” of Levinas*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 59.

<sup>53</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. (Oxford & Cambridge USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1962), 274-311.

<sup>54</sup>Menaldo, *Death in Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 406

<sup>55</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 279.

<sup>56</sup>Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 260.

<sup>57</sup>Dennis Keenan, *Death and Responsibility, The “Work” of Levinas*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 46-47.

<sup>58</sup>Keenan, *Death and Responsibility*, 47.

<sup>59</sup>Keenan, *Death and Responsibility*, 47.

<sup>60</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 286.

<sup>61</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 288.

<sup>62</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 279.

<sup>63</sup>Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 121.

<sup>64</sup>Ruwa’ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu*, 203.

<sup>65</sup>Ruwa’ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu*, 304.



a crowning point that marks new existence.<sup>66</sup> Bantu strongly hold that death is not the total end of man.<sup>67</sup> Therefore the death of a child or youth, and an adult can not be accepted as a possibility for Being. The possibilities at this age is only to continue living and accomplish the mission given by the creator, a mission accomplished at old age.<sup>68</sup> However, what the Bantu should note is that, human being is the same at all stages of existence. From childhood to the very old age *muntu* remains the same. The social status does not change human nature. On this issue Battista Mondin in his work *Philosophical Anthropology* writes:

All men fall to the scythe of death: youths and the aged, scholars and illiterate, atheists and believers, the rich and the poor, the black and white, men and women, the healthy and the ill. Death looks no one in the face of striking its murderous blow, and does not take into account position or race or wealth, or age, or sex, or religion.<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, all the potentialities for this being are already in the Being itself from its very existence.<sup>70</sup> The very old age should be understood as one of the potentialities that come into act. Death should be taken as one of those potentialities for Being; it is something "towards which" *Dasein* comports itself.<sup>71</sup> It is *muntu* (*Dasein*) who will die; therefore death is his or her uttermost possibility and not the very old age only.<sup>72</sup> The death of a child, youth and early adult should be understood as natural death too.

### The Wholeness and Totality of Human Being

According to Heidegger, *Dasein* reaches its totality and wholeness in death<sup>73</sup> However, it can not experience such wholeness or totality. In order for one to experience something, one should be existing. Heidegger's language would be that *Dasein*, that is, being-in-the-world, is the one who experiences. The totality and wholeness, once it is attained, *Dasein* loses

its Being-in-the world. This means that *Dasein* attains its totality and wholeness in death. Heidegger continues to make clear this point as he writes:

As long as *Dasein* is an entity, it has never reached its wholeness, and once it gains such wholeness, this gain becomes the utter loss of being-in-the-world. In such case it can never again be experienced as an entity.<sup>74</sup>

Following Heidegger's notion of care, one of the important features is that *Dasein* is ahead-of-itself.<sup>75</sup> According to this stand, what is not-yet and what is still outstanding makes *Dasein* what it is. The not-yet or the still outstanding for *Dasein* though are possibilities, but they belong to *Dasein*<sup>76</sup> *per se* and it is that which makes *Dasein* lack its wholeness or totality as long as it is.<sup>77</sup> The coming of *Dasein* to this wholeness or totality will entail that there is no longer the not-yet or still outstanding in it. What does this mean? According to Heidegger, when there is no not-yet or that which is still outstanding in *Dasein* it simply means *Dasein* is no longer *Dasein*.<sup>78</sup> In other words according to him the very moment *Dasein* acquires or reaches its wholeness or totality, it loses its Being.<sup>79</sup> Therefore one can not say that it has arrived to its wholeness or totality. In this sense wholeness or totality can not be experienced.<sup>80</sup>

Bantu conceive totality and wholeness of *muntu* as completeness, achievement, perfection of all the potentialities. The ultimate terrestrial potentiality for *muntu* is not death but to become an elder. When *mtu* reaches his or her very old age, it means that he or she has attained the completeness, the perfection. There is no more needed or expected from him or her. It is a time to relax, enjoy since one has attained his or her wholeness or totality of being *muntu*. However the ultimate and highest mode of being is the state of being an ancestor.<sup>81</sup> The Bantu should take note from Heidegger as follows:

<sup>66</sup>Ruwa'ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu*, 204.

<sup>67</sup>Ruwa'ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu*, 204.

<sup>68</sup>Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 121.

<sup>69</sup>Battista Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*. Rome: Ubaniiana University Press, 1985), 265.

<sup>70</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 280.

<sup>71</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 293.

<sup>72</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 293.

<sup>73</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 280.

<sup>74</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 280.

<sup>75</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 279.

<sup>76</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 286.

<sup>77</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 279.

<sup>78</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 279.

<sup>79</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 280.

<sup>80</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 280.

<sup>81</sup>Ruwa'ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu*, 207.

That *Dasein* as long as it is, is ahead-of-itself. There is a not-yet or still outstanding in him or her.<sup>82</sup> A child has a not-yet or still outstanding in it as long as it lives. Its life should be protected and respected.

The same with the very old *Dasein*; in him or her, there is still a not-yet or still outstanding as long as he or she is alive. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross insists on this by claiming that elders should be taken care of. They are full of wisdom and experience. They have given a lot hence they should be taken care of since living means to give and to receive.<sup>83</sup> When one becomes very old it does not mean that he or she has attained the wholeness or totality of life. Old age is one of the actualization of one's potentialities but not the ultimate one. The totality or wholeness of life is only attained in death which is the ultimate potentiality of *Dasein*.<sup>84</sup> Therefore the elderly should be taken care as much as possible since there is a not-yet and still outstanding in them.<sup>85</sup>

Being-towards-death has a character of a possibility. The possibility is the not-yet that makes *Dasein* what it is. Therefore *Dasein* is the not-yet itself; in other words, *Dasein* is already the not-yet.<sup>86</sup> Now when one becomes *mtu* he or she is already the not-yet.<sup>87</sup> The not-yet belongs to him or her whether a child, youth, early adult or old age. Death has the character of the not-yet, therefore death belongs to *Mtu* at all stages and *mtu* and death are one in each stage. Therefore one can die at any age.<sup>88</sup> There is no need for Bantu to take much time with witchcraft as the cause of a death of a child or youth and paying a lot of money to witch doctors.<sup>89</sup> To kill elderly women whose eyes are red accusing them to be witches is not a solution to the so called "unnatural death", rather it is immoral and violation of both human human dignity and human rights.

Death is as natural as life, whether it results from internal or external forces.<sup>90</sup> What the Bantu can learn here is not to cause other's death by negligence, or by killing them either by poisoning or other physical means of killing.

### Death Can not be Bypassed or Outstripped

According to Heidegger, death as the uttermost possibility for *Dasein*, remains *Dasein's* own possibility. There is no way that this one's own possibility can be taken away from it.<sup>91</sup> That is why death is non-relational. This is to say that representation on this possibility is not possible because all relations are undone.<sup>92</sup> This uttermost, one's own possibility belongs to *Dasein* and it can not be taken away from it in any way. This means that no way *Dasein* can escape from this uttermost possibility either by its struggle or by the other's struggles helping him or her. That is why Heidegger claims that this possibility can not be bypassed or outstripped.<sup>93</sup>

The Bantu should take note from Heidegger that death is *Dasein's* (*muntu's*) uttermost possibility and it is the own most issue of *muntu*; there is no way that one can prevent or avoid this possibility since *muntu* possesses this possibility.<sup>94</sup> "Death is an inevitable reality; no one can escape from it."<sup>95</sup> Again taking much time and using a lot of money to bargain with the witches, magicians, ancestors or making prayers and petitions to spirits so that one should not die is irrelevant. The magicians, witches can not take away from *muntu's* own most uttermost possibility which is death.<sup>96</sup> Mondin on this issue of the failure to confront death, writes:

It is not stopped when confronted with the innocent smile of a child, nor with the seductive beauty of the young woman, nor with the robust strength of the athlete or the warrior, nor with the wisdom of

<sup>82</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 279.

<sup>83</sup>Kübler-Ross, *Questions and Answers on Death and Dying*, 142.

<sup>84</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 281.

<sup>85</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 279.

<sup>86</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 280.

<sup>87</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 288.

<sup>88</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 289.

<sup>89</sup>Nkemnkia, *African Vitalogy*, 118.

<sup>90</sup>Marc Oraison, *Death and then What?* Translated by Theodore Du Bois, London: Sheed and Ward Ltd, (1969), 12.

<sup>91</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 284.

<sup>92</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294.

<sup>93</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294.

<sup>94</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 284.

<sup>95</sup>Errol, *Introduction to The Philosophy of The Human Person*, 89.

<sup>96</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 289.

the scholar, nor with the piety of the monk. It has already fixed the hour of its arrival for everyone.<sup>97</sup>

Apparently, those who call themselves magicians and witches should not continue threatening and deceiving people by demanding money or other things claiming that they can manage to take away the death of somebody. They should know that nothing can be done against death existentially. Any battle against death leads to failure.<sup>98</sup> They can not do that, since even themselves will have to die. In simple words the Bantu should take note that death is inescapable.<sup>99</sup>

### Certainty and Indefiniteness of Death

According to Martin Heidegger, certainty means a conviction that something is true or something is the case.<sup>100</sup> Truth is a sign of openness of an entity. This openness or uncoverdness belongs to *Dasein*. *Dasein* itself is both disclosed and disclosing, open and opens. Therefore *Dasein* is the truth, certainty belongs to *Dasein* itself. Hence any entity of which *Dasein* can be certain will also get something certain.<sup>101</sup>

Since death is the uttermost possibility that belongs to the *Dasein*, the no-yet and the still-outstanding belong to *Dasein* too.<sup>102</sup> *Dasein* itself is the not-yet since if the not-yet is not there in *Dasein*, existentially there is no *Dasein*.<sup>103</sup> Hence the uttermost possibility which is the not-yet or still-outstanding is certain.<sup>104</sup> There is no doubt about this. Rene Descartes in his *Meditations on the First Philosophy* was clear that one can doubt other things but can not doubt that he or she doubts which consequently entails that one can not doubt his or her own existence anymore.<sup>105</sup>

Death is certain, because *Dasein* is certainty itself, but it is indefinite. Indefiniteness according to Heidegger, means uncalculated, unclear, untimed. One's uttermost possibility has the character of the not-yet. Since the not-yet is what makes *Dasein* what it is, this means

that this possibility can be actuated any time.<sup>106</sup> And this is the reason why Heidegger uses the phrase Being-towards-death to define and identify *Dasein*.

There is a problem with some Bantu youths and early adults to grasp clearly the certainty and indefiniteness of death. Certainty and definiteness of death is applied when one is very old or critically ill.<sup>107</sup> Here one becomes certain that now he or she is going to die.<sup>108</sup> Kübler-Ross commented by saying that "this is only particularly true but not generally true."<sup>109</sup> The very old may still be alive while children, youths and adults may die. The very sick people in hospitals may still be alive, while the health may die for accidents.<sup>110</sup> Here now comes the question of certainty and indefiniteness of this possibility.<sup>111</sup>

The Bantu should learn and take note from Heidegger that death is certain and indefinite.<sup>112</sup> This means that each one will die, will have to face death, when, where and how it is indefinite. Therefore Being-towards-death is the only way that should be taken in every day life. Earl Grollman clarifies this notion very well:

My death will occur in the future, by future I mean a time to live that has not yet elapsed. But I do not know when in the future my death will occur, the event is certain, the timing is uncertain.<sup>113</sup>

This can help youths not to waste time behaving unethical and therefore engage ethically and morally in developmental activities, to utilize the time well caring their life and the world they live in. They should know that being lazy, immoral behaviour and unethical decisions expecting that they will change when they become old, because it is when death will be certain and definite to them, is very wrong. Death can occur at

<sup>97</sup>Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 265-266.

<sup>98</sup>Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 266.

<sup>99</sup>Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 266.

<sup>100</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 300.

<sup>101</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 300.

<sup>102</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 286.

<sup>103</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 288.

<sup>104</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 300.

<sup>105</sup> Cottingham, *Descartes Meditations On First Philosophy*, 13

<sup>106</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 302.

<sup>107</sup>Ruwa'ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu*, 205.

<sup>108</sup>Ruwa'ichi, *The Constitution of Muntu*, 206.

<sup>109</sup>Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, *Questions and Answers on Death and Dying*. (New York: Maximilian Publishing Co., Inc, 1974), 142

<sup>110</sup>Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology*, 265.

<sup>111</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 303.

<sup>112</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 303.

<sup>113</sup>Earl Grollman, A. . Editor. *Explaining Death to Children*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 93.



anytime, any place and in any stage within life cycle.<sup>114</sup>

### Anticipation of Death

*Dasein* itself is anticipation due to its mode of Being-towards-death.<sup>115</sup> The aspect of the ahead of itself in care, reveals that the not-yet or still outstanding is what constitutes *Dasein*.<sup>116</sup> The not-yet or still outstanding has the character of possibility but already belonging to *Dasein* itself.<sup>117</sup> Death is the not-yet or that which is still outstanding and therefore something impending for *Dasein*. Therefore death is a possibility. However, death as a possibility becomes the uttermost possibility and possibility of the impossibility. This means once this possibility is actualized, the other possibilities cease.<sup>118</sup> Therefore *Dasein* is factually a Being-towards-this-possibility which is the uttermost. That is why *Dasein* itself is anticipation.<sup>119</sup> Heidegger admonishes people to anticipate their own death, by recognizing that once they exist they should know in advance that one day they will die; when? That is not important.

Since Being-towards-death is anticipation of the possibility that which is one's own most, the awareness of it is important to every human being. In this case the Bantu should take note that anticipation of this possibility makes this possibility possible and sets it free as a possibility.<sup>120</sup> This will make death to be disclosed to a person as his or her own most possibility which is non-relational, that can not be compromised or bypassed. Since *Dasein* itself is certainty, it will mean that anticipation of death will reveal to him or her that death is certain and indefinite, meaning that it can be actualized at any moment.<sup>121</sup>

### Conclusion

Bantu conception of death and Heideggerian being-towards-death are two different ways of understanding the same reality. However in this article we were able to detect some challenges from

Heideggerian Being-towards death so as to enrich the Bantu conception of death. From the discussion, we have come to the knowledge that Bantu conception of death can go beyond what it is now, and in doing so be rich.

We have presented that the Bantu believe and are convinced that death is natural on a very rare cases, since those who die naturally are the very old people only. Therefore to be come very old is the wholeness and totality of a person. Other death cases according to them, are unnatural. However Heidegger's Being-towards-death is more existential which means death is a possibility of *Dasein* in every case. The existential and ontological structures of death which can briefly be presented as; death to be one's own uttermost possibility, which is non relational, not to be outstripped, certain and indefinite are the great challenges detected for the Bantu conception.

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<sup>114</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294.

<sup>115</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 307.

<sup>116</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 293.

<sup>117</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294.

<sup>118</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 280.

<sup>119</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 307.

<sup>120</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 307.

<sup>121</sup>Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 303.

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