

# *Nietzsche and Ramose on Being and Becoming: An Exercise in Cross-Cultural Philosophizing*

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*This paper examines Nietzsche's conception of what persists, or occurs, as becoming in relation to Ramose's reconceptualization of what persists, or occurs, as be-ing becoming with a view to showing how divergence and convergence of thought in the western and African contexts can inform cross-cultural philosophizing. Nietzsche radically subverts the traditional notion of an eternal immutable being that constitutes the ground of change and replaces it with the notion of becoming. Ramose's notion of being, which is grounded in ubuntu philosophy, integrates a dynamic perspective into a process view of reality. While Nietzsche seeks to abandon the categories of being, unity, and purpose altogether, Ramose ambiguously retains them and, in fact, endorses the category of unity. I highlight the dynamics of Nietzsche's notion of becoming and articulate the basic principles of Ramose's idea of being as be-ing becoming and argue that both thinkers' struggle to subvert substance-based understanding of being invites us to question the intelligibility of the binary opposition of being with becoming and to regard both concepts as indicating different ways of understanding reality.*

**Key words:** being; becoming; be-ing becoming; will to power; *ubuntu*

## 1 Introduction

In this paper, I explore Nietzsche's conception of *being as becoming* and Ramose's reconceptualization of the underexplored African notion of being as *be-ing becoming* with a view to showing how divergence and convergence of thought in the Nietzschean and Ramosean contexts reflect the degree of the two philosophers' opposition to the understanding of being as immutable substance.

Friedrich Nietzsche, a nineteenth-century German philosopher, adopted an anti-metaphysical stance in his writings that specifically undermines the substance-based understanding of being as the immutable grounds of change. For Nietzsche, what is real is what is revealed to conscious beings like humans in the endless flux of things, or becoming. This stance is shared, to a large extent, by the African philosopher Mogobe B. Ramose, who sought to reinvent being as be-ing becoming from the perspective of *ubuntu* metaphysics. Ramose's reliance on *ubuntu* metaphysics enables him to conceive being as something fundamentally in the process of becoming. Nietzsche radically subverts the traditional notion of an eternal immutable being that constitutes the ground of change and replaces it with the notion of becoming; Ramose also subverts the traditional notion of being and replaces it with the idea of be-ing becoming. While Nietzsche's thought has received considerable attention from scholars, Ramose's brilliant conception of being within an African-*ubuntu* context has received scanty attention even from African philosophers. Thus, my exploration and interpretation of the innovative concept of be-ing becoming will open new vistas for scholars exploring Ramose's intriguing *ubuntu* ontology even as the cross-cultural exercise of engaging two key thinkers from the western and African philosophical traditions will contribute to intercultural philosophy by showing the degree of convergence and divergence of Nietzsche and Ramose's understanding of reality as a dynamic process.

The paper focuses narrowly on Nietzsche's metaphysics of becoming and its implication for the integrity of the categories of being, purpose, and unity which he explicitly rejects. While Ramose does not explicitly reject these categories, his commitment to a processual view of reality puts them in question. However, neither thinker appears able to escape the shadow of substance-based conception of being as that which is permanent, the ground of change, and the essence of unity. Do Nietzsche and Ramose succeed in completely dispensing with the categories of unity, being, and purpose? Does the emphasizing of becoming in the thought of both thinkers underscore the view that there is a fundamental incompleteness, or lack, at the core of being? Are Nietzsche and Ramose inviting us to question the classic binary of being and becoming rather than merely accept one concept to the absolute exclusion of the other? The paper is divided into three sections. In sections one and two, I present in concise language Nietzsche's concept of becoming and Ramose's notion of be-ing becoming respectively. In section three, I examine the aspects of divergence and convergence of the thought of Nietzsche and Ramose on the fundamental nature of reality.

## 2 Nietzsche on Becoming

Nietzsche (2001: 110) asserts that there “are no eternally enduring substances.”<sup>1</sup> By implication, the category of unity, which is presumed to safeguard the sphere of the eternally enduring substances, is an illusion. For Nietzsche, what is regarded as stable being is nothing more than endless becoming shedding the difference that constitutes it as it simultaneously reveals itself as a plurality of forms. The plurality of manifested forms is all that exists. There is no unitary ground to which these forms can be reduced. The forms are real, but they pass away and come into existence once again, endlessly. According to Nietzsche, holding fast to the illusion of a conscious method guiding the unfolding of the plural forms of things is not only self-deception but also a nihilistic exhibition of disdain for the true state of affairs. In Nietzsche's words:

Some sort of unity, some form of “monism”: this faith suffices to give man a deep feeling of standing in the context of, and being dependent on, some whole that is infinitely superior to him, and he sees himself as a mode of the deity [...] but behold, there is no such universal [...] becoming has no goal [...] underneath all becoming there is no grand unity in which the individual could immerse himself completely as in an element of supreme value [...] to pass sentence on this whole world of becoming as a deception and to invent a world beyond it, a *true* world. (Nietzsche 1968: 12–3)<sup>2</sup>

Against the category of purpose and in favor of the accidental and non-teleological, he writes:

Is the ‘goal,’ the ‘purpose,’ not often enough a beautifying pretext, a self-deception of vanity after the fact that does not want to acknowledge that the ship is *following* the current into which it has entered accidentally? That it ‘wills’ to go that way *because it must*? That it certainly has a direction but—no helmsman whatsoever? (Nietzsche 2001: 225)

The very understanding of a thing as becoming directly implies futurity in the sense of unfolding new meanings and values, according to Nietzsche. However, such unfolding does not validate any grand teleological vision of reality. The elemental force, the will to power, that puts being in a constant state of becoming need not be conceived as having a specific end, since the process set in constant motion involves destruction; it is arbitrary and “chaotic.” Such arbitrariness supplies no hint about the operation of conscious intelligence. However, the “chaos” from which we try to infer order through imposing static categories of the mind (Nietzsche 1968: 278)

is, in fact, creativity, “no longer ‘cause and effect’ but the continually creative; no longer will to preservation but to power” (Nietzsche 1968: 545).

For Nietzsche, the evidence of organization we observe in the phenomena of the world merely signifies the very fact of change. We can observe and describe how a state of affairs changes but cannot adequately explain the movement. The demand for explanation presupposes a clear *telos*, or purpose, premised on the truth of cause-effect sequences. But, according to Nietzsche, we learn nothing about the relation of a presumed cause and an assumed effect by thinking that “this and that must precede for that to follow” (Nietzsche 2001: 113; cf. Rayman 2014).<sup>3</sup> The force or universal impulse that drives events should be seen as the operation of the inherent will to power that characterizes becoming. This becoming is what is real and enduring, for it implies the eternal recurrence of things, a coming and going that involves the transformation of forms, their certain destruction, and yet again their rebirth. The will to power is a special kind of force possessing an “inner dynamic in order for the force to initiate movement or change” (Williams 1996: 457).<sup>4</sup>

Individuality is not denied, since individual things are what recur as events. I use the term events to indicate the entire framework of becoming, in which no single entity can lay claim to inviolable borders as entities interact dynamically with one another. As events, individuals are what persist and initiate change. The interactive network of events constitutes reality; consequently, one cannot appeal to the idea of an immutable substratum that underlies becoming. Nietzsche writes:

Everything goes, everything comes back; the wheel of being rolls eternally. Everything dies, everything blossoms again, the year of being runs eternally. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; the same house of being builds itself eternally. Everything parts, everything greets itself again; the ring of being remains loyal to itself eternally. (Nietzsche 2006: 175)<sup>5</sup>

While it is true that Nietzsche subverts the traditional conception of being, this very idea that he finds odious persists in his thought—even as his retention of the notion of an arbitrary directionality, or one steeped in accident, gives the impression that there is a method to the madness of constant change, destruction, and rebirth that the German thinker captures with such vividness. The will to power defines the essence of things; it determines the direction of change (see Williams 1996). The will to power is the essence of things, characterizing and animating them. It endures in the flux of becoming. The will to power, in the words of McNeill (2013: 178),<sup>6</sup> “names a primal force of life that is intrinsic to existence or to the being of that which is. It is a word for being itself [...]” It is “the fundamental principle of life and [...] the world itself” (Flavel 2015: 15).<sup>7</sup>

If the will to power informs change as a primal force at the core of becoming, does it mean that the category of being is not lost? Heidegger (1991)<sup>8</sup> has championed a strong metaphysical reading of Nietzsche which regards the plural forms of becoming as, simultaneously, forms of being because they endure through change and destruction by recurring. Being is what persists.

Nietzsche is in many ways an ambivalent, unsystematic writer whose works reveal a good deal of contradiction (see Stegmaier 2006).<sup>9</sup> Unsurprisingly, his conception of becoming has received metaphysical and anti-metaphysical interpretations. Heidegger (1991), for instance, believes that in Nietzsche the idea of being as that which is permanent survives in the concept of becoming. In the famous fragment 617 of *The Will to Power* one reads that:

To impose upon becoming the character of being—that is the supreme will to power. Twofold falsification, on the part of the senses and of the spirit, to preserve a world of that which is, which abides [...] that *everything recurs* is the closest *approximation of a world of becoming to a world of beings*:—high point of the meditation. (Nietzsche 1968: 330)

It seems that by remarking on the human tendency to attempt to reify becoming—the inclination to assume that there is a static reality behind the world of becoming—the German philosopher reveals his own failure to completely discard the stubborn category of being. While Nietzsche commits to becoming, it is instructive that the category of being as what is permanent survives despite the attention paid to becoming. While indeed the notion of being is a subjective projection of the human mind, and being itself may indicate nothing beyond the world of change that humans know (cf. Olafson 1991: 558),<sup>10</sup> there is a psychological desire to think being in substance terms as an ultimate reality, that which is most real and satisfies the wish for a stable essence. Thus, Heidegger (1991: 156) notes, “Certainly, Nietzsche wants Becoming and what becomes, as the fundamental character of beings as a whole; but he wants what becomes precisely and before all else as *what remains*, as ‘being’ proper, being in the sense of the Greek thinkers.”

On the other hand, scholars like Botha (2016)<sup>11</sup> favor a consistent anti-metaphysical reading of Nietzsche, believing that when Nietzsche writes about being imposing its character on becoming, he is merely using rhetorical tactics to underline our tendency to seek unity and stability behind diversity and change. Botha (2016: 113) notes that:

[W]hen Nietzsche claims that the supreme will to power is imposing the character of Being upon becoming, this needs to be read in the context of Nietzsche’s analysis of our tendency towards and need for stability and security, as well as his rejection of the idea of static Being.

According to the anti-metaphysical and psychological reading of Nietzsche, the will to power is to be construed in terms of the basic desire to overcome obstacles in the path of self-actualizing quests (see Reginster 2006).<sup>12</sup> However, the anti-metaphysical reception of Nietzsche overlooks the German philosopher’s inconsistency and contradiction. When Nietzsche uses language like “Everything parts, everything greets itself again; the ring of being remains loyal to itself eternally” (Nietzsche 2006: 175)—and he uses such language quite frequently—one tends to agree with Heidegger that Nietzsche essentializes becoming. What is clear, however, is Nietzsche’s firm rejection of the idea of static being.

While Nietzsche believes that becoming is the nature of reality, at least from the subjective human standpoint, he is unable to completely dispense with the category of being as something permanent. In the next section, I will show how Ramose responds to the question of ultimate reality by attempting to retain a substance-based idea of being in the very concept of becoming with the introduction of his novel motion of be-ing becoming.

### 3 Mogobe Ramose on Being as Be-ing Becoming

In his most significant work, *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu* (1999),<sup>13</sup> Ramose articulates a processual view of reality that may be called *ubuntu*-eventism in the context of the much celebrated holistic, interconnected worldview of traditional African societies. I use the term eventism to underscore the dynamic world that Ramose presents, one in which borders are continually transgressed even as things persist in a dynamic interactive network. This complementaristic perspective regards reality as a whole of necessarily interconnected parts (see, for instance, Senghor 1964; Asouzu 2004; Metz 2012).<sup>14</sup> In this interconnected universe, where

rigid borders are not set between entities and states of affairs, the features of unity and permanence attributed to being in substance-based metaphysics are always open to interrogation. Before Ramose, Tempels (1959)<sup>15</sup> attempted to reconceptualize being based on his understanding of the traditional thought-system of the Bantu people of Africa. He controversially asserted that for the Bantu, being is the same as force, or vital force. For Tempels, vital force is the essence of all things, participated in by all beings in various degrees, from God to inanimate things.

While Tempels fails to argue his position beyond anthropological references to Bantu worldviews, Ramose boldly subverts the substance-based notion of being and argues stridently for the substitution of being with the notion of be-ing becoming. Ramose asserts that reality is fundamentally dynamic, integral with motion, and involves the continual inexorable transgression of borders. According to Ramose, it is human language that artificially fragments the flow of reality by imposing mind-dependent categories. These mind-dependent categories, for instance permanence, are static since it is humans who create and structure language to reflect the human inclination to seek a stable, unchanging reality behind the phenomenal world. Language is able to impose its static categories on reality because of its close connection with thought. The manner of thinking in humans reflects the structure of language which clearly distinguishes the thinking subject from the object of thought. According to Ramose (1999: 55–6), when language makes its categorial impositions, what is basically be-ing becoming (reality in flux) is announced as the *be!* (static reality) through the language-mediated divorcing of becoming from being in the vain search for permanent essences. For Ramose, humans tend to see the world of change as illusory, unstable, and unsatisfactory. Ramose (1999: 54) further notes:

This structure [subject-verb-object relation] is supposed to be inherent to language [...] Thought is supposed not only to follow this pattern but also to reveal the separate and independent existence of the noun on the one hand and the object on the other. So the idea arises that the subject-object distinction is a fundamental and ineradicable ontological datum [...] the verb then functions as the vehicle of mediation between the subject and the object. On this reasoning, the logic of separate, distinct and independent existence is already established. What is required, therefore, is only an elucidation of this logic.

Ramose refers to “language” generally as he does not identify specific languages that exhibit a subject-verb-object structure. Ames and Rosemont (2013: 26)<sup>16</sup> have argued that classical Chinese is structured to reflect reality as becoming where Indo-European languages are more thing-based. Ramose overlooks this important point and uses the word “language” in the singular, perhaps on the assumption that people in all cultures have a thought structure that clearly distinguishes the thinker from what is thought and the act of thinking. Yet Ramose’s metaphysical analysis of *ubuntu* suggests that he considers Bantu languages to be more event-based than substance-based. For him, the term *ubuntu* refers to the hyphenated be-ing rather than the unhyphenated being of substance metaphysics. Be-ing indicates a dynamic reality. Thus, it appears that when Ramose uses the singular “language” he is referring to European languages like English and French which continue to be widely used as media of communication in Africa. Ramose’s analysis of *ubuntu* will be presented later.

The *be!* is fragmented, robbed of its motive energy by ordinary language. This *be!* is inauthentic because it is separated from its essence of becoming. Human language persuades us that what seems to be in motion and is characterized by change is merely transiting into a more permanent form, the true state of being. Fragmentation refers to the descriptions attached to reality by the subject/doer; it is a way of molding reality, of imposing mental categories that paint a fixed picture of reality.

Ramose (1999: 55) asserts that: “Instead of recognising only be-ing becoming, that is infrangible incessant motion, language insists upon the fragmentation of be-ing becoming into be! and becoming [...]. According to the imposed separation and opposition [...] be! is order and becoming is chaos.” The *be!* commanded by language is, therefore, a broken link in the network of intimately interconnected things. Individual entities are not rejected, but they are presented as elements in a dynamic whole.

The non-rejection of individuals comes out clearly in Ramose’s analysis of the concept of *ubuntu*. The concept itself can be divided into two components, namely, *ubu-* and *-ntu*. While *ubu-* captures being in its generality, *-ntu* as the knowledge function provides a measure of how things actualize themselves and function as be-ing becoming. In the process of *ubu-* actualizing itself, it gains a certain awareness of itself, as in the case of human beings. Ramose’s analysis reveals *ubuntu* as universal being or universal force, the vital force of Tempels reconceptualized in a more rigorous way. Ramose refers to *ubuntu* as a universal force because he is proposing a metaphysical framework that substitutes the being of substance metaphysics with the being of process metaphysics. As a universal event, *ubuntu* is dynamic wholeness. The universality of *ubuntu* means that there is an ultimate oneness or wholeness to reality, in spite of the diversity of forms in which *ubuntu* is instantiated. This is what Ramose means when he writes that:

*Ubuntu* is actually two words in one. It consists of the prefix *ubu-* and the stem *-ntu*. *Ubu-* evokes the idea of be-ing in general. It is enfolded be-ing before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of ex-istence of a particular entity. *Ubu-* as enfolded be-ing is always oriented towards unfoldment, that is, incessant continual concrete manifestation through particular forms and modes of being [...]. *Ubu-* is always oriented towards *ntu* [...]. *Ubu-* as the generalised understanding of be-ing may be said to be distinctly ontological, whereas *-ntu* as the nodal point at which be-ing assumes concrete form or a mode of being in the process of continual unfoldment may be said to be the distinctly epistemological. (Ramose 1999: 50)

Ramose favors the hyphenated “be-ing” to illustrate the point he seeks to make as far as his *ubuntu* ontology is concerned. The word “being” for him is both metaphysically and linguistically unsatisfactory because it implies the fixity and permanence of what exists. On the other hand, the idea of “be-ing” conveys the motive sense of being which is self-evident in a “rheomodic” language. For Ramose, a rheomodic perspective helps us appreciate the essential nature of change, its constancy.

If *ubuntu* ontology conceives being in its most authentic manifestation as be-ing becoming, an unbroken and unbreakable wholeness defined by change, then the language of *ubuntu* that represents this ontology is what Ramose calls the rheomode. The term itself is coined from the Greek verb “rheo,” to flow. The rheomode, then, indicates a “‘new mode’ of language” which shuns the fragmenting logic of ordinary language and becomes in itself “a critique of a thought and language structure which assumes and imposes a strict divide and a necessary sequence in terms of subject-verb-object” (Ramose 1999: 56). He finds company in David Bohm, who sees in a rheomodic language the possibility of overcoming the tendency for ordinary language to fragment reality in the quest for fixed being (see Bohm 1980).<sup>17</sup> Bohm proposes the rheomode as a way of going beyond science’s fixation on what he calls the explicate order, whereby the deeper implicate order of things can be apprehended as underlying the explicate order. The implicate order of reality is, for Bohm, enfolded, or fundamental, and amenable to connections subtler than time and space, while the explicate order is unfolded and consists of human scientific abstractions such as time and space. Both orders constitute a dynamic totality which a rheomodic language can access.

Ramose does not provide details about the structure of a possible rheomodic language, which leaves one suspecting that his agenda involves merely a reappraisal of the way we use

ordinary language to describe and interpret the phenomena of the world, such that being can be more fully appreciated in its dynamism. Nevertheless, he exhibits some features of this language *vis-à-vis* the question of being. A rheomodic language grasps being in its dynamic wholeness rather than the preservation of being understood simply as a totality. For being understood simply as a totality is still amenable to a static definition that separates being from becoming. On the other hand, approaching being as a dynamic wholeness means that being is properly be-ing becoming, a motive principle that enables entities to interact, intersect, interconnect, and disintegrate. Everything is, therefore, in being in *ubuntu*, as universal vital force, analogous to Nietzsche's notion of the will to power. The rheomodic language adequately represents being as be-ing becoming because it "takes the verb as its point of departure" (Ramose 1999: 56). The critical role assumed by the verb emphasizes action while reducing emphasis on the doer or subject. In this language the verb becomes a verbal noun, a gerund supplying the -ing and -ness suffixes that more effectively describe a world of events. Unlike ordinary language, the rheomodic language breaks down the barrier erected between the subject and the object through the instrumentality of the gerund.

Ramose arrives at a profound conception of being in his attempt to articulate an African holistic and complementaristic metaphysics which substitutes a static view of reality with a dynamic view. However, he is faced with the challenge of exhibiting the features of a rheomodic language that, presumably, can access reality as it is without the mediation of ordinary language that humans employ to break the silence of being by naming entities and states of affairs. As Ramose (1999: 105) himself acknowledges, the rheomodic language is no more than a speculation, an experiment, a possibility. Additionally, the concept of be-ing becoming fails to subvert the concept of being since the idea of permanence and rest, which he regards as a flaw in the static conception of being, is conserved in the dynamic concept of be-ing becoming. This is the case because the attributes of permanence and rest are transferred to the fixed flow-state of be-ing becoming, such that this be-ing becoming remains always and fundamentally the wholeness of being. It does not change fundamentally even as it permeates all things and causes the transgression of borders. As the *ubuntu*, or vital force principle, be-ing becoming is an absolute unity.

Ramose's eventist *ubuntu* ontology, premised on the processual conception of being, establishes the porosity of the borders separating individual entities in the network of reality. The interconnection of individuals and the porosity of borders indicate an active giving and taking, precisely a relationship of mutuality within the whole. Bruce Janz uses the term "interface" to characterize Ramose's eventist approach to the idea of boundaries. Janz (2019: 266)<sup>18</sup> writes that: "We might, in fact, mirror his way of framing be-ing, and speak of 'inter-face'. The faciality of the interface does not suppose a reduction of one thing to another, nor does it suppose that there is an unbridgeable chasm between two things." In this network or system animated by the actions of individual entities, both becoming and stability coexist (cf. Janz 2018).<sup>19</sup> Thus, entities persist even as the absence of rigid borders means that entities and their actions can be properly understood in terms of events, a continuation of interactive relationships within a dynamic, self-sustaining, or creative network.

The blurring of the border separating the subject from the object through emphasis on action undermines individuality and promotes an eventist understanding of entities. This implies that individual entities are not in themselves complete but are constantly in search of completion, a quest that explains the flux-state of be-ing becoming. Ramose's thought on being here is similar to the thought of Asouzu, another African philosopher who advances a holistic ontology. While Asouzu accounts for the incompleteness of entities with the postulation of perfection as the ultimate purpose of reality (see Asouzu 2004), Ramose avoids any commitment to a teleological standpoint.

The African authenticity of Ramose's conception of being has been questioned (see Van Binsbergen 2001)<sup>20</sup> even as Bewaji (see Bewaji and Ramose 2003)<sup>21</sup> has suggested a heavy

dependence on Bohm in Ramose's thought on the rheomodic language, although Bewaji's observation seems to merely indicate that Ramose deploys a Bohmian model to illuminate an African structure. I mention the African authenticity of Ramose's conception of being because while *ubuntu* is indeed a Bantu term, its import as togetherness or complementarity is widely shared by African linguistic groups south of the Sahara (see Bewaji and Ramose 2003). The very concept of *ubuntu* is today a key idea in African philosophy. For van Binsbergen, there is a claim that the epistemological framework of Ramose's ontology is supplied by an *ubuntu* thought-system even as there is clear evidence of borrowing from western thought traditions. To this objection, Ramose himself supplies an adequate response when he asserts that: "To discover familiarity between western and ubuntu philosophy is not the same thing as to affirm identity between them [...]. Tinctured insights are the possibility condition for dialogue and communication" (Bewaji and Ramose 2003: 412). In the spirit of dialogue and communication, I will proceed to compare the thoughts of Ramose and Nietzsche on the idea of the incompleteness of being that justifies regarding being as that which is in a process of becoming. The Ramose-Nietzsche dialogue will bring to the fore the two thinkers' failure to completely subvert substance-based conception of being. This failure to completely dispense with the understanding of being as that which persists through change, I will argue, invites us to interpret Ramose and Nietzsche as not merely taking the side of becoming but going further to invite us to question any rigid being-becoming opposition and regard both being and becoming as aspects of a reality that eludes perfect human understanding.

#### 4 Nietzsche and Ramose on the Fundamental Nature of Reality

Both Nietzsche and Ramose trace the tendency to project the idea of static being to the use of language, with its subject-verb-object structure, and the concepts conditioned by language. Nietzsche (1968: 339) asserts that if we exclude concepts like causality and substance from our understanding of reality, "no things remain but only dynamic quanta, in a relation of tension to all other dynamic quanta." The term *dynamic quanta* refers to the brute fact of discrete quantities, border-transgressing entities in that state which Ramose regards as incessant change. Both philosophers are firmly opposed to any Parmenidian conception of being as that which is unchanging. Both favor a Heraclitean understanding of reality in terms of constant change. In achieving their goals of subverting or surpassing the static conception of being, both engage in an insightful critique of substance metaphysics.

While Nietzsche seeks to overcome substance-based metaphysics by subverting and, finally, dispensing with a substance-based notion of the unity of being to make way for a new perspective of reality as endless becoming, Ramose attempts to surpass substance-based metaphysics by reformulating the notion of being to make room for a processual, or eventist, understanding of reality as universal being anchored in the endless change that essentializes it. Nietzsche employs the concept of the will to power, a dynamic force, to articulate his ontology of becoming. Ramose articulates his ontology of becoming through the invocation of *ubuntu* as a universal vital force. Just as the will to power animates all things, so does *ubuntu* energize all things.

But while Nietzsche scorns the categories of being, unity, and purpose, Ramose seeks to reform rather than demolish. Mocking metaphysics and its grandiose claim of a final end, Nietzsche notes what he assumes to be the metaphysician's delusion: "Things of the highest value must have another, separate origin *of their own*,—they cannot be derived from this ephemeral, seductive, deceptive, lowly world, from this mad chaos of confusion and desire. Look instead to the lap of being, the everlasting, the hidden God, the 'thing-in-itself' [...] 'the truth'" (Nietzsche 2002: 6).<sup>22</sup> Ramose does not subvert the category of being as radically as Nietzsche, for not only does the former retain the concept of being as that which persists but he also retains

the concept of the unity of being. He notes: “Whatever is perceived as a whole is always a wholeness in the sense that it ex-ists and per-sists towards that which it is yet to be” (Ramose 2003: 380).<sup>23</sup> In other words, Ramose seeks to overcome metaphysics by reforming the traditional conception of being. A static conception of being is replaced by a processual understanding that makes of being what he calls be-ing becoming. This is not exactly Nietzsche’s idea of becoming which seeks to eliminate the permanent moorings of being. The overcoming of metaphysics through its reformation explains Ramose’s penchant for hyphenated terms. The hyphenation indicates the continuous flow of the stream of being.

Neither philosopher succeeds in eliminating the teleological idea of purpose, in my opinion. While Nietzsche explicitly rejects the concept of purpose, of an ultimate goal towards which being strives, Ramose implicitly rejects it by taking the position that truth is perspectival. The perspectivization of truth means that there is no absolute standpoint of being towards which all effort of being is directed. He notes: “Human beings are not made by the truth. They are the makers of the truth” (Ramose 1999: 61). Here, Ramose is not championing epistemic relativism, the claim that there are no universal standards for determining truth or knowledge; he is, instead, emphasizing the creative role of the individual within the group, the individual as the entity that pushes the limits of boundaries through action. Since change is a continuous process, perspectives alter so that truth cannot be static. Truth is “simultaneously participatory and interactive. It is active, continual and discerning perception leading to action” (1999: 61–2). Since truth is participatory, there is a communal dimension, where the perspectives of individuals are harmoniously absorbed into the perspective of the group. Ramose’s perspectivism echoes Nietzsche’s perspectivism. According to Nietzsche (2007: 87), “There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival ‘knowing’ [...]”<sup>24</sup> At first glance, one may be inclined to think that there is no common ground between Nietzsche and Ramose on perspectivism, given Ramose’s *ubuntu* communitarian bent and Nietzsche’s individualism. On reflecting deeper, however, one sees that the two thinkers agree that human beings create what may pass as objectivity as they project their emotional biases and interests. What begins as an individual’s perspective can become the group’s perspective when many individuals embrace the perspective of the first individual.

Like Nietzsche, Ramose sees creativity in the flux of becoming. The African philosopher talks about chaos, but this chaos coexists dialectically with order and is, therefore, creative. Ramose reasons that our inability to dispense with the idea of order, which we invoke in the search for equilibrium in the face of the flux state of be-ing becoming, means that chaos and order are two sides of the same coin. Ramose (1999: 55) suggests that by regarding chaos as intimate with order, “we may well hold that order not only can but does indeed come out of apparent chaos.” Thus, we see in Ramose the positing of an inner logic in be-ing becoming which imposes a certain creativity.

Does the concept of purpose survive in Nietzsche’s idea that becoming is a creative process? Since a creative becoming masterminds transformation, destruction, and regeneration continually according to rules of the inner logic of becoming, there is a method in the dynamic process which acknowledges a fundamental lack at the core of being. The idea of an external purpose lends coherence to the evidence of methodic internal organization of all the processes of becoming. True, Nietzsche (1968: 225) says that “the ship is *following* the current into which it has entered accidentally,” but he also admits that the ship not only has a direction but is also able to direct itself according to a rule which we do not know. Yet, a creatively willing force cannot be utterly blind. It may be that the tragedy of existence is the impossibility of the will to power masterminding the completion of reality, its perfection, for which reason it is simply the force of eternal becoming.

The impossibility of actualizing the purpose that the notion of ceaseless becoming, destruction, and rebirth suggests may point to the failure of reality itself rather than the possibility that there is no purpose at all towards which becoming is directed. The concept of becoming admits of the presence of basic method, or goal-directedness, at a scale that returns

the concept of purpose through the backdoor. Nietzsche (2006: 89) notes revealingly: “[W]herever there is decline and the falling of leaves, behold, there life sacrifices itself—for power! That I must be struggle and becoming and purpose and the contradiction of purposes—alas, whoever guesses my will guesses also on what crooked path it must walk.” The category of aim may be an illusion, but it is yet a stubborn illusion.

Neither Nietzsche nor Ramose successfully overcomes the traditional conception of being as a kind of substratum. There is a suspicion that permanence is indeed the underlying nature of flux in both Nietzsche and Ramose. The idea of be-ing becoming is supposed to convey the sense of being in its flux state, but Ramose does not deny the existence of individual things and the borders separating them. Individuals persist within the whole-ness of the flux state of reality, engaged in the constant quest of what they are not and what they may become. As dynamic, continually changing reality, being has an essence which is change. So, to my mind, both thinkers intuitively grasped the hypothesis that the essence of being is becoming. Neither the category of becoming nor be-ing becoming adequately replaces the category of being in the thought of both philosophers.

The very positing of becoming and its essentialization in Nietzsche and its reconciliation with being in Ramose indicates that incompleteness characterizes being. Nietzsche uses the metaphor of “struggle” to indicate the perennial lack at the heart of being, which necessitates the multiplicity of its manifested forms (that is, entities), and imposes creativity on becoming: struggle as “purpose and the contradiction of purposes” (Nietzsche 2006: 89). Ramose’s explicit retention of the category of unity means that at all times be-ing becoming reveals a whole-ness seeking completeness, the dynamic and incomplete seeking the stability and completeness of itself in the stability and completeness of its parts. The critique of the metaphysics of being by Nietzsche and Ramose amounts to submitting that, to say being is fundamental, in its renaming as becoming or be-ing becoming, is to accept the proposition that being is a lack, an incompleteness. This point is borne out by the ironic observation that:

The world with which we are concerned is false, i.e., is not a fact but a fable and approximation on the basis of a meagre sum of observations; it is “in flux,” as something in a state of becoming, as a falsehood always changing but never getting near the truth: for—there is no “truth.” (Nietzsche 1968: 330)

The universe Nietzsche and Ramose describe is a universe of yearnings, where completeness is promised by the totalizing human mind without any assurance that this completeness, or the perfection of reality, is actually possible. If this line of thinking is correct, then we can read Nietzsche and Ramose as two philosophers in two different traditions of thought who have invited us to question the intelligibility of the classic binary of being on the one hand and becoming on the other hand, with the view to reaching a deeper understanding of the limitations of both concepts in adequately capturing the incompleteness that characterizes reality.

## 5 Conclusion

In this paper I highlighted Nietzsche and Ramose’s reconceptualization of being as becoming and be-ing becoming respectively in the context of comparative philosophy. I suggested that as insightful as the two thinkers’ critique of being is, they failed to overthrow substance-based metaphysical categories of being, unity, and purpose. I concluded that what Nietzsche and Ramose have achieved with their critique is demonstrating the incompleteness that characterizes being even as they invite us to question the intelligibility of the classic binary of being on the one hand and becoming on the other hand, with the view to reaching a deeper understanding of the complexity of both concepts. Further research will establish that all event-based metaphysics are

fated to meet the dilemma that confronts Nietzsche and Ramose's process metaphysics. This is the case because while processism can successfully question the basis of substance-based metaphysics by pointing to the dynamism of phenomena, the perceived dynamism assumes the character of constancy and fixity, such that it will be presumptuous to assume that our phenomenal perception of reality exhausts this same reality.

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