

Ngono yo Ngono Ning ojo Ngono: A Neutrosophic Exploration of Javanese Ethical Wisdom

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Abstract

This article delves into the profound Javanese philosophy of "*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*," translating to "One can do it, but perhaps one should not." We explore how this ancient adage, seemingly simple, embodies a sophisticated ethical framework that transcends binary notions of right and wrong. Drawing parallels with Neutrosophic Logic, this paper argues that "*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*" inherently operates within a spectrum of truth, falsity, and indeterminacy, encompassing not only objective correctness but also the crucial dimensions of appropriateness and ethical conduct. By integrating ethical and moral considerations into decision-making, this philosophy offers a nuanced approach to navigating complex situations, fostering wisdom and responsibility in daily life.

Keywords:

Javanese philosophy, *Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*, Neutrosophic Logic, ethics, morals, decision-making, wisdom, cultural studies.

1. Introduction: The Enigmatic Simplicity of Javanese Wisdom

Javanese culture, rich in its philosophical depth, often expresses profound insights through concise and seemingly straightforward proverbs. Among these, “*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*” stands out as a quintessential example of its ethical and moral compass. At first glance, the phrase might appear contradictory: “You can do it, but don’t do it.” However, its true essence lies in the nuanced understanding it imparts regarding human action and its implications. This philosophy is not about prohibition but about discernment, urging individuals to consider not just the legality or possibility of an action, but its wider impact, its alignment with ethical principles, and its appropriateness within a given context. It subtly suggests that while an action might be permissible, it might not always be prudent, respectful, or morally sound. This paper posits that to fully appreciate the depth of “*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*,” we must look beyond traditional binary logic and explore frameworks that accommodate shades of grey, uncertainty, and the interplay of multiple evaluative criteria. It is here that **Neutrosophic Logic** offers a compelling lens through which to analyze this ancient Javanese wisdom.

2. Re-describing “*Ngono Yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*”: Beyond Binary Ethics

The core of “*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*” lies in its inherent tension between permissibility and advisability. The first part, “*Ngono yo Ngono*” (“One can do it”), acknowledges the possibility of an action being

performed, either because it is not explicitly forbidden, or because the individual possesses the means or opportunity to execute it. This speaks to a form of freedom or agency. However, the crucial qualification arrives with “*Ning Ojo Ngono*” (“but perhaps one should not do it”). This second clause introduces a powerful ethical and moral constraint. It shifts the focus from mere capability or legality to a more profound consideration of consequence, propriety, and the broader tapestry of societal values.

Consider a simple example: one “can” speak their mind without reservation in every situation. There might be no legal repercussions. However, “*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*” would prompt a deeper reflection: is it **appropriate** to say everything that comes to mind? Will it cause offense, misunderstanding, or unnecessary conflict? Is it **ethical** to prioritize one’s own expression over the feelings or well-being of others? This philosophy encourages a pause, a moment of introspection, before acting. It moves beyond a simplistic “right or wrong” paradigm to embrace a spectrum where actions are evaluated not just on their objective truth-value (e.g., “Is this statement factually correct?”) but also on their ethical truth-value (e.g., “Is this statement morally justifiable?”) and their appropriateness in a given social context. This multi-faceted evaluation resonates strongly with the tenets of Neutrosophic Logic.

3. Neutrosophic Logic: A Framework for Nuanced Evaluation

Neutrosophic Logic, developed by Florentin Smarandache, presents a powerful extension of

fuzzy logic, designed to address situations involving indeterminacy, vagueness, and incomplete information. Unlike classical logic, which operates solely with “true” or “false,” or even fuzzy logic, which assigns degrees of truth, Neutrosophic Logic introduces a third dimension: **indeterminacy (I)**. This means that a proposition is not just characterized by its degree of **truth (T)** and its degree of **falsity (F)**, but also by the degree to which it is unknown, uncertain, or indeterminate. These three components exist independently and are not necessarily complementary; their sum can be less than, equal to, or greater than 1.

The mathematical representation of a neutrosophic value for a proposition A is often given as $N(A) = (T, I, F)$, where $T, I, F \in [0, 1]$ and $0 \leq T + I + F \leq 3$. This framework is particularly well-suited for modeling real-world scenarios where information is often ambiguous, incomplete, or even contradictory. For instance, in medical diagnosis, a symptom might be “partially true” for a disease, “partially false” for another, and “partially indeterminate” due to other confounding factors.

Crucially, Neutrosophic Logic’s strength lies in its ability to handle situations where conventional two-valued or even multi-valued logics fall short. It acknowledges that uncertainty is not merely the absence of truth or falsity, but an inherent component of complex systems. When applied to ethical and moral considerations, this implies that actions or statements are rarely unequivocally “good” or “bad.” There are often shades of grey, situational nuances, and subjective interpretations that contribute to their

overall evaluation. This aligns perfectly with the spirit of “Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono,” which acknowledges the inherent ambiguity in ethical decision-making.

Why Neutrosophic Logic Illuminates Indigenous Wisdom

Traditional and indigenous cultures, rich tapestries woven with centuries of verbal traditions, communal understanding, and often subtle spiritual beliefs, frequently defy the rigid classifications of classical Western logic. Their wisdom is often expressed through proverbs, metaphors, and narratives that embrace vagueness, imprecision, and a nuanced understanding of reality. This is precisely where **Neutrosophic Logic**, a revolutionary framework developed by one of us (FS), proves its exceptional suitability.

At its core, Neutrosophic Logic expands beyond the binary “true” or “false” of classical logic, and even the “degrees of truth” in fuzzy logic. It introduces a third, independent component: **indeterminacy (I)**. Thus, any proposition is characterized by its degree of **truth (T)**, its degree of **falsity (F)**, and its degree of indeterminacy (I). These three values are not necessarily complementary, meaning their sum can be less than, equal to, or greater than one. This seemingly abstract concept is profoundly practical when encountering the inherently indeterminate nature of cultural concepts.

Consider the notion of “harmony” in many indigenous societies. It’s not simply “present” or “absent.” There might be a strong degree of harmony (T), a slight degree

of disharmony (F) in certain aspects, and a significant degree of indeterminacy (I) regarding future relations or unexpressed grievances. Classical logic would struggle to capture this intricate balance. Fuzzy logic might assign a degree of “truth” to harmony, but it still doesn’t explicitly account for the “unknowns” or “unspoken” aspects that contribute to the overall state of being.

Neutrosophic Logic, however, thrives in such environments. It acknowledges that many cultural concepts are not fixed points but rather fluid spectra. A traditional healing practice might be seen as “true” (effective for some symptoms), “false” (ineffective for others), and “indeterminate” (its efficacy depends on spiritual alignment or factors not fully understood by Western science). This framework allows for a more respectful and accurate representation of knowledge systems that often operate on intuition, collective wisdom, and a deep connection to nature, where definitive, quantifiable answers are not always the primary goal.

Furthermore, traditional cultures often embrace paradoxes and seemingly contradictory statements. A spirit might be both benevolent and vengeful, a ritual both sacred and playful. Neutrosophic Logic can model these apparent contradictions without forcing them into a false dichotomy. The “indeterminacy” component can represent the simultaneous presence of opposing qualities, reflecting the holistic and non-linear thinking prevalent in many indigenous worldviews.

In essence, Neutrosophic Logic provides a robust analytical tool for understanding the richness and

complexity of traditional and indigenous cultures. By moving beyond rigid binaries and embracing the inherent vagueness and imprecision that characterize much of their wisdom, it offers a more nuanced, respectful, and ultimately accurate framework for cross-cultural understanding and knowledge preservation. It allows us to appreciate that in many traditional societies, truth is not always a singular point, but rather a dynamic interplay of what is known, what is not known, and what is yet to be revealed.

4. “*Ngono Yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*” Through the Neutrosophic Lens

Applying Neutrosophic Logic to “*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*” allows for a sophisticated understanding of its ethical implications. We can conceptualize any potential action or statement as a proposition, P, subject to evaluation across three dimensions:

- √ **Truth (T):** This component relates to the objective correctness or factual validity of the action. For instance, is the action physically possible? Is a statement factually accurate? If someone “can” do something, this relates to the “T” component of possibility.
- √ **Falsity (F):** This component represents the objective incorrectness or factual invalidity. Is the action impossible? Is a statement factually false?
- √ **Indeterminacy (I):** This is where the core of “*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*” truly resides. It encompasses the subjective, contextual, and often unquantifiable aspects of appropriateness, ethics, and morality. An

action might be objectively “true” (possible) but still fall into a high degree of indeterminacy regarding its advisability.

When considering “*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*,” the “T” component of the neutrosophic value for an action A would largely correspond to the “*Ngono yo Ngono*” part – the objective possibility or permissibility. However, the “*Ning Ojo Ngono*” part then introduces a significant “I” component, and potentially an “F” component as well, related to the ethical and moral dimensions.

Let’s illustrate with an example: Someone “can” engage in a highly competitive business practice that, while legal, might undermine a smaller, ethical competitor.

- ✓ **T (True):** The action is factually possible and legally permissible. (High T for “*Ngono yo Ngono*”)
- ✓ **F (False):** The action is not impossible or illegal. (Low F for “*Ngono yo Ngono*”)
- ✓ **I (Indeterminate):** This is where the ethical and moral considerations come into play. Is it appropriate? Is it fair? Is it in line with the broader societal good? This “I” component would be high if there are significant ethical doubts, even if the action is objectively possible and legal. The “*Ning Ojo Ngono*” implicitly warns against acting when the “I” component related to appropriateness or ethics is high, even if the “T” component related to possibility is also high.

The decision-making process then becomes a weighing of these three values. A wise individual, guided by “Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono,” would not simply act if the “T” value is high. They would also consider the “I” value, and if the “I” value (representing ethical concerns, inappropriateness, or potential negative consequences) is substantial, they would opt not to perform the action, even if technically capable. This demonstrates how the philosophy encourages moving beyond a simplistic good/bad or right/wrong dichotomy to embrace a more holistic and ethically informed decision-making process.

5. Integrating Right and Wrong with Appropriate and Inappropriate

The brilliance of “Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono” lies in its seamless integration of objective correctness (“right” or “wrong”) with subjective appropriateness (“appropriate” or “inappropriate”). Traditional ethical frameworks often struggle with this distinction, sometimes reducing ethical conduct to adherence to rules or laws. However, Javanese philosophy recognizes that an action can be factually correct or permissible by law, yet still be deeply inappropriate or morally questionable.

Consider the act of telling a harsh truth. Objectively, the statement might be “right” (factually accurate). Yet, the manner, timing, or context of delivering that truth can render it profoundly “inappropriate.” “Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono” implores us to consider this very tension. It teaches that even if something is objectively true or permissible, its application must be tempered by wisdom, empathy, and an understanding of its potential impact.

In a Neutrosophic sense, “right” and “wrong” can be largely mapped to the Truth (T) and Falsity (F) components, respectively, in terms of factual correctness or adherence to explicit rules. However, “appropriate” and “inappropriate” introduce the significant Indeterminacy (I) component. An action might be:

- √ **High T, Low F, Low I:** Clearly right and appropriate. (e.g., helping someone in distress)
- √ **Low T, High F, Low I:** Clearly wrong and inappropriate. (e.g., stealing)
- √ **High T, Low F, High I:** Objectively possible/true, but highly indeterminate regarding appropriateness. This is the realm where “Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono” is most pertinent. (e.g., speaking a harsh truth that causes immense pain without constructive purpose)
- √ **Low T, High F, High I:** Objectively impossible/false, but also highly indeterminate regarding any ethical considerations (perhaps a hypothetical scenario).

The spectrum, therefore, is not merely between ‘truth’ and ‘falsehood’ but includes a crucial ethical dimension of ‘indeterminacy’ that captures the nuances of ‘appropriateness.’ This spectrum allows for a far more sophisticated moral calculus than simple binary choices. It compels individuals to engage in critical self-reflection and to consider the wider repercussions of their actions, fostering a sense of social responsibility that extends beyond mere adherence to rules.

6. The Ethical and Moral Imperatives in Practice

The practical application of “*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*”, illuminated by Neutrosophic Logic, manifests in various aspects of Javanese society and daily life. It underpins the emphasis on **harmony** (*rukun*) and **balance** (*selaras*) within Javanese culture. Actions that disrupt harmony, even if technically permissible, are often discouraged by this philosophy. For instance, in a community setting, openly criticizing an elder, even if their statement is factually flawed, might be considered “*ngono yo ngono*” (one can do it, as it’s factually true) but strongly “*ojo ngono*” (one *should not* do it, as it disrespects age and authority, disrupting social cohesion).

This philosophy also promotes **self-restraint** (*prihatin*) and **mindfulness** (*eling lan waspodo*). It encourages individuals to be aware of their impulses and to consciously choose actions that contribute positively to their surroundings, rather than simply acting on what is possible or expedient. The inherent indeterminacy in many ethical dilemmas necessitates a degree of internal deliberation and a reliance on one’s moral compass, rather than a rigid set of external rules.

Furthermore, “*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*” fosters a sense of **accountability**. When individuals are encouraged to consider not just what they can do, but what they should do, they are implicitly held responsible for the broader impact of their choices. This goes beyond legal culpability to encompass a deeper moral obligation to oneself, one’s community, and even the natural world. In a world grappling with complex ethical issues, from

environmental degradation to artificial intelligence, this Javanese philosophy offers a timeless reminder that technological capability or legal permissibility alone should not dictate action. Ethical foresight and a deep understanding of consequences are paramount.

7. Bridging Traditional Wisdom and Contemporary Challenges

In an increasingly complex and interconnected world, the insights offered by “*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*” become more relevant than ever. Modern society often grapples with ethical dilemmas that defy simple categorization into right or wrong. The rapid advancements in technology, for instance, frequently present situations where what is technically feasible is not necessarily ethically desirable. From genetic engineering to data privacy, the “can do” often outpaces the “should do.”

“*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*,” interpreted through the lens of Neutrosophic Logic, provides a robust framework for navigating these contemporary challenges. It compels us to ask:

- √ While we **can** develop highly persuasive AI, **should** we do so without robust ethical safeguards?
- √ While we **can** extract every last natural resource, **should** we at the expense of environmental sustainability?
- √ While we **can** pursue individualistic goals relentlessly, **should** we if it harms the collective well-being?

The philosophy promotes a shift from a purely utilitarian or rule-based ethics to a more virtue-based approach,

emphasizing character, wisdom, and the cultivation of a discerning mind. It reminds us that true ethical action is not merely about avoiding what is forbidden, but about proactively seeking what is genuinely good, appropriate, and beneficial, even when easier or more permissible alternatives exist. The Neutrosophic perspective of a spectrum of truth, falsity, and indeterminacy allows us to quantify and analyze these complex ethical considerations, providing a more structured way to apply this ancient wisdom to modern predicaments.

8. Conclusion: The Enduring Relevance of Javanese Ethical Thought

“*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*” is far more than a simple proverb; it is a profound ethical philosophy that encapsulates a sophisticated approach to moral decision-making. By embracing the nuanced perspective of **Neutrosophic Logic**, we can fully appreciate how this Javanese wisdom navigates the complexities of human action, transcending rigid binaries of right and wrong to incorporate the crucial dimensions of appropriateness and ethical propriety. It highlights that truth is not always absolute, and that even objectively permissible actions can carry significant ethical weight and potential negative consequences.

The philosophy encourages individuals to engage in deep introspection, to consider the broader implications of their choices, and to act with mindfulness and responsibility. In a world often characterized by impulsive decisions and a focus on immediate gratification,

“*Ngono yo Ngono Ning Ojo Ngono*” serves as a timeless reminder of the importance of ethical discernment and the cultivation of wisdom. It urges us to move beyond what is merely possible to what is truly advisable, fostering a more harmonious, balanced, and ethically conscious existence. This ancient Javanese philosophy, when viewed through the modern lens of Neutrosophic Logic, offers invaluable lessons for individuals and societies striving to make wiser and more responsible decisions in the face of ever-increasing complexity.

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