AFRICAN COMMUNALISM, PERSONS, AND THE CASE OF NON-HUMAN ANIMALS

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Abstract
"I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am", generally regarded as the guiding principle of African humanism, expresses the view that a person is a person through other persons and is closely associated but not identical with African communitarianism, or communalism. Against Ifeanyi Menkiti's "unrestricted or radical or excessive communitarianism" Kwame Gyekye has proposed a "restricted or moderate communitarianism". Whereas personhood, for Menkiti, is acquired over time, with increasing moral maturation, seniority and agency, Gyekye considers it to arise automatically with being born human. The problem with Menkiti's account of personhood is that it is at once too wide and too narrow. On the other hand, it remains unclear to what extent Gyekye's is a communitarian view – and to what extent it is distinctly 'African'. I conclude with a critical reflection on the implications of African communalism and personhood for non-human animals.
Keywords: Ifeanyi Menkiti, Kwame Gyekye, African Communitarianism, Non-Human Animals, Personhood.

> *A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for the kinsmen to do so ... I fear for you young people because you do not understand how strong is the bond of kinship. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice.* (ACHEBE 1996, 118)

> *A live sheep was presented to us according to custom. After we clapped our hands in gratitude, the sheep was taken away for slaughter.* (MUROVE 2008, 85)

Different kinds of Communitarianism, the Community, and the Individual

"In traditional life," according to the classic formulation by John Samuel Mbiti (1989, 106; see also MENKITI 1984, 171, 179; GBADEGESIN 1998b, 295; KAPHAGAWANI 2004, 337; MANGENA 2012, 11),

> the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group ... Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people. When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and relatives, whether dead or living … Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am". This is the cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man.

Unlike in the Western sense of community, the sense of 'we' in this case is not additive or aggregative but "a thoroughly fused collective 'we'" (MENKITI 1984, 179). "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am", generally regarded as the guiding principle of African humanism, is also at the heart of *ubuntu*, a Nguni language group term for common or shared human personhood. (Equivalent concepts are *botho* or *hunhu*.) It expresses the view that a person is a person through other persons – *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* – and is closely associated but not identical with African communalism. Mbiti's assertions that the community makes, creates or produces the individual and that "the individual depends on the corporate group" indicate advocacy of a communalist view of personhood, in which the status of an individual is determined by social and cultural criteria. As Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984, 172) puts it, "in the African view [of human beings] it is the community which defines the person as person, not some static quality like rationality, will, or memory", and "human community plays a crucial role in the individual's acquisition of full personhood" (1984, 179).

In a related vein, "Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods", as Desmond Tutu (1999, 35) enthuses in his personal account of the Truth and Reconciliation process in post-apartheid South Africa:

> Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum* – the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after

good is to be avoided like the plague. Anger, resentment, lust
for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness,
are corrosive to this good. (Ibid.)

After noting, with Lesiba Joe Teffo, that, "African societies placed a
high value on human worth, but it was a humanism that found
expression in a communal context rather than the individualism that
often characterises the West" (VENTER 2004, 151; TEFFO 1998, 3),
Elza Venter asserts that in "*African culture* the community always
comes first" (2004, 151; emphasis added). Teffo states, similarly, that
according to

> the African conception of man [..., an] African person is an
> integral part of society and thus, as an individual, can only exist
> corporately … [and] is inseparable from the community …
> However, it should be emphasised that individuality is not
> negated in the African conception of humankind. *What is
> discouraged is the view that the individual should take
> precedence over the community*. (1996, 103; emphasis added)

Communalism has been claimed to be one of the most distinctive
features of African philosophizing (and especially African ethics) – a
communitarian outlook not textually preserved but expressed rather
through various forms of narrative: songs, proverbs, folk tales, fables
and legends. Lawrence Ogbo Ugwuanyi (2011, 111) claims that
"morality in Africa is grounded in a form of communitarianism" and
that from communitarianism flow key African values: cooperation,
consensus, reconciliation, and commonality. African communitarianism,
communalism, or 'narrativism', is held not to imply an insular approach
to identity and culture, but rather to accommodate the fact of the
dynamism of the sources of identity and culture (ODUOR 2012; see also
WIREDU 2008). It is a theory of shared identity and goodwill (see
UGWUANYI 2011, 111). Kwasi Wiredu (2008) has referred to African
communalism as the foundation for national reconstruction. Traditional
African society, he claims, was communalist, founded on kinship
relations and a system of reciprocity. (Here the question arises whether
this is not true of all small-scale societies or communities. If so, one
would have to look elsewhere for any unique or distinctive features of
African communitarian philosophy.) Morality is the adjustment of one's
interests to the community under a common guiding principle, like the
Golden Rule. On this model, communalism might be characterised as
the adjustment of the individual's interests to those of the community.
After quoting Kwame Nkrumah – that African communalism is a form
of socialism – Wiredu (2008) contends that Western communitarianism
took root in individualist systems. Western communitarianism, for him,
is compatible with certain forms of cultural individualism, which

African communitarianism is not. Masolo argues, similarly, that because "Western communitarianism … arises in the context of a perceived incongruency between the values of liberalism, on the one hand, and, on the other, the reality of the deprivation of groups, which is viewed as contrary to the very values articulated by liberalism, it stands more as a watchdog for the common good than as a robust social theory". This is unlike African communitarianism, which characterizes traditional social and political orders (2004, 488). Wiredu suggests that the term 'communalism' therefore be reserved for the latter, but not the former. Communalism, he claims, is the basis for a good and just society.

Apart from raising the question whether this move does not define communalism *into* morality, rather than see it as *one amongst several* orientations in ethics, Wiredu's account appears to equate individualism with egoism or selfishness (see also WIREDU 1998, 311; MENKITI 1979, 179; GBADEGESIN 1998a, 168, and MASOLO 2004, 496). This is a common confusion that is rather disturbing, not least because "selfish acts are likened to the practices of a witch", as Dismas Masolo has pointed out (2010: 252). This explains why, to this day, people's individualism or idiosyncratic behaviour is frequently interpreted not only as selfishness but also as being related to witchcraft, interpreted here as negative or undesirable. However, without even considering the dubious 'rationality' informing witchcraft beliefs and witchcraft accusations, the relation between individualism and egoism is at best contingent. Rights-based theories are good examples of individualist orientations that are not essentially or necessarily self-regarding. Far from being characterized by "austerely delimited social sympathies" they often, like the communalism favoured by Wiredu, exhibit a "pervasive commitment to social involvement" (1998, 311). After all, it is recognition of individual rights that makes social living and flourishing possible. A significant distinguishing characteristic is that individual rights should not be violated or infringed in the pursuit of the social or communal good. Sympathy and empathy, both singled out by Wiredu as the "very foundation of morality" (see MASOLO 2004, 496), concern individuals – and *not* collectives or communal entities. To sum up this point, an individualistic orientation need not be 'selfish' or 'egoistic' but is perfectly compatible with sympathy and empathy, a concern with other individuals *as* individuals. In fact, it is what arguably makes sympathy and empathy possible in the first place.

One could ask, furthermore, whether Africa's predicament (see KABOU 1991) might not *in part* be the result of the preoccupation on the African continent with communalism – which underlies (usually unquestioning) obedience to authority, traditional leaders, ancestors, spirits etc. – and arguably also of the 'tyranny of consensus'. The idea here is that 'palaver democracy', which aims at agreement, is considerably less democratic than a system – educational or political –

that encourages dissent and critical interrogation. (See also Kochalumchuvattil 2010, 111: "consensus in both the social and political spheres can all too often be sidetracked into an oppressive from of collectivism or communalism".) A stark example of unquestioning obedience is provided in Segun Gbadegesin's account of Yoruba leader Móremí, who obeyed the "river spirit's" purported demand to sacrifice her only son for the sake of the community (1998b, 294). This may be an illustration of the traditional Yoruba values of "fellow-feeling, solidarity, and selflessness" (294-295), but it equally exemplifies superstition and credulous acceptance of putative demands for securing the collective benefit.

Personhood
Wiredu distinguishes between descriptive (ontological-metaphysical) and normative (social-moral) conceptions of personhood (1992; 1998, 309-313; see also MASOLO 2010 and OYOWE 2014). The Akan descriptive conception includes: *okra* (life force; the life principle and source of human dignity and destiny); *sunsum* (main bearer of one's personality; the personality or charisma principle); *nipadua* (body) derived from *mogya* (the blood or kinship principle). Whether or not *okra* can be translated as 'soul' has been a matter of disagreement between Gyekye (who thinks it can) and Wiredu (who rejects this possibility). These two philosophers also disagree about *sunsum*: here, too, Wiredu adopts a more materialist interpretation of the Akan worldview. For anyone who is not Akan, it is impossible to adjudicate who is correct in his factual interpretation (see KAPHAGAWANI 2004, 332-333).

The Yoruba, too, have a tripartite conception of the person (*ènìyàn*) (see GBADEGESIN 1998a, 149; KAPHAGAWANI 2004, 333-334): *ara* (body), *èmí* (the life-giving element or vital principle), and *orì* (destiny; determinant of personality). This is similar to the Ibo *aru* (physical body), *chi* (destiny), and *inmuo* (immortal spirit, which ensures the individual's self-identity over time) (see GBADEGESIN 1998a, 149; IMAFIDON N.D, 4-6). The normative conception, on the other hand, reveals a person's social status and involves a judgement of her moral standing. As Imafidon posits, "Normatively, personhood is not something one is born with … a person is not just any human being, but one who has attained the status of a responsible member of the society" (IMAFIDON N.D, 7). "Normatively speaking, one cannot be a person without a community" (IMAFIDON N.D, 9). In other words, the normative conception, which is generally considered to be fundamental in African thought, involves the assertion that any compelling definition of personhood must refer to "the environing community" (MENKITI 1984, 171). In African thought, according to Menkiti, personhood is attained by undergoing "rites of incorporation, including those of

initiation during puberty time". This accounts for the emphasis on "rituals of incorporation and the overarching necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives, so that what was initially biologically given can come to attain self-hood, i.e. become a person" (1984, 173-174). In other words, in order to attain personhood in the normative sense, one must belong to a cultural community: "without incorporation into this or that community, individuals are considered to be mere danglers to whom the description 'person' does not fully apply" (1984, 172).

For Menkiti, then, personhood is not something that arises automatically with being born human. Nor is being the object or being at the receiving end of human relational interactions sufficient for personhood. It is acquired over time, with increasing moral maturation, seniority and agency. For Masolo (2010, 142), it is by means of "communicative interaction [that] we become more than just human beings: we *become* persons". In distinguishing between individuals and individual persons (2004, 325), Menkiti refers to the ontological movement from an *it* via personhood back to an *it*: from conception and early childhood (1984, 173-174; 2004, 326, 330), to being a person and finally to being one of the nameless dead (2004: 327, 328, 330). Menkiti is quite unapologetic about the exclusion on the basis of a (relative) lack of moral personality (and even status) of those in the early stages of "ontological progression" (1984, 173), i.e. infants and young children. For one thing, he notes a "natural tendency in many languages … of referring to children and new-borns as *it*" (ibid.). At least "we have the choice of an *it* for referring to children and new-borns, whereas we have no such choice in referring to older persons" (1984, 174). However, this is

> not just a distinction in language but a distinction laden with ontological significance. In the particular context of Africa, anthropologists have long noted the relative absence of ritualized grief when the death of a young child occurs, whereas with the death of older persons, the burial becomes more elaborate and the grief more ritualized – indicating a significant difference in the conferral of ontological status. (Ibid.)

To be frank, I am unaware of any tendency of referring to neonates and young children in gender-neutral terms. I would also think that the death of a young child is tragic in a way that the death of an elder is not. After all, the older person has lived a long and more or less rich life, something a young child has been (tragically) deprived of. A problem is also constituted by those more or less permanently deprived of moral personality, i.e. those who cannot and will never be able to participate in communal life, to contribute to the good – to reciprocate, as it were.

Interestingly, Menkiti includes in his account of persons the ancestors, the living (and remembered) dead (ibid.) but fails to specify the precise grounds for doing so. Is it because they once served a moral function, were once moral authorities, and are now remembered and respected for this? A similar case for inclusion could then conceivably be made for those suffering from senile dementia or who have been rendered cognitively disabled through illness or accident. (In none of these cases, however, can one meaningfully speak of the "heart grow[ing] increasingly wiser"; 2004, 325.) But what about those who were never and could never be moral agents in the requisite sense (ranging from people with severe autism, to people born with Down syndrome), or those with relevant physical disabilities that render them unable to serve as moral exemplars, who are unable even to care even for themselves? If justice is strictly a matter of reciprocity or reciprocal obligations (1984, 178; 2004, 328, 330), then what about those who are mentally or physically unable to reciprocate, to be in reciprocal relations with other, 'normal' adult human beings? I return to this point in the last section of this work.

Menkiti rightly rejects the ideas of heaven and hell (2004, 327), of eternal salvation and damnation as parameters of moral reward and punishment, but his ontological-normative framework offers no improvement. Quite apart from the odious moral implications, it is every bit as problematic as the set of beliefs he rejects. What "moral functions" do or could ancestors, the "living dead", possibly exercise? In what way could they be considered "human agents": are they still human – or agents, for that matter?

Kwame Gyekye, like Menkiti, embraces a broadly communitarian or communalist (Gyekye uses these two words interchangeably; 1998, 317) conception of ethics and persons. Yet, whereas Menkiti endorses the "African understanding" that gives priority to the "duties which individuals owe to the collectivity" over their rights (1984, 180), Gyekeye – while acknowledging that the "communitarian theory will most likely give priority to duties rather than rights" (1998, 331) – expresses concern over views that do not allow sufficient "room for the exercise of individual rights" (1998, 319). He takes issue with the metaphysical status and normative power Menkiti ascribes to the community *vis-à-vis* that of the person, which obscures our understanding of *what it is like to be* a person. In this regard, Gyekye questions Menkiti's reference to the English word 'it' as indicative of the absence of personhood. He also points out that in many African languages it is not customary to use the neuter pronoun in the case of babies and young children and that, contrary to what Menkiti asserts, "no distinctions as to personhood can be made on the basis of the nature and extent of ritualized grief over the death of a child or of an older person" (1998, 323). Gyekye maintains that a "human person is a

person whatever his/her age or social status" (ibid.), that one "is a person because of who one is, not because of what one has acquired" (1998, 324). He acknowledges that this coincides with the Western conception of personhood. He considers not personhood but moral agency to be 'processual': this is why infants and children can be considered persons but not (yet) moral agents – unlike animals. Although "the community can be said to play some role in a person's moral life" (1998, 324), Gyekye seems to be assuming an innatist stance not only with regard to personhood but also as far as the development of moral qualities is concerned. All persons are potentially morally capable. If a person fails to exercise her moral sense or to make and act on her moral judgements, if she fails to face up to her responsibilities, then this does not mean that she has failed at personhood. She has failed in terms of social status and legitimate communal expectations. Her failure is as a moral agent. The human person is by nature social or communitarian, but she is also rational, capable of evaluating and acting on moral judgements, and therefore has a capacity of both virtue and choice. The social or cultural community does not create these characteristics and traits, but it does bring these to the fore and prize them. Communal norms and values are not fixed or set in stone, and it is often bold, self-confident, visionary and autonomous individuals who lead the process of revision and transformation of these norms and values.[1] So, Gyekye concludes, Menkiti is not wholly correct in claiming that it is the communal structure, community membership or social relationships that fully define or confer personhood.

Against Menkiti's "unrestricted or radical or excessive communitarianism" Gyekye proposes a "restricted or moderate communitarianism" (1998, 328). He maintains that his favoured theory accommodates not only moral rights but also respect for human dignity and the intrinsic worth of a person (see also BUJO 2003, 118-122). He provides no compelling argument in this regard, and he does not consider well-known problems of conflict between individual rights and the common good (or the "communal structure"), or how such conflicts might be resolved. He simply asserts that "the absorbing interest in the common good … does not – indeed should not – result in the subversion of individual rights" (GYEKYE 1998: 330). Gyekye's only proviso is that his communitarian theory would not consider rights to be absolute – which is hardly a ground-breaking communitarian stipulation. Rights are often in conflict with one another, and there are cases where it is impossible to respect one right without violating another. In fact, the

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[1] Oritsegbubemi Oyowe contributes an interesting perspective by stating that a society or culture may judge a person a failure because of its own narrow-mindedness or bias. He suggests that "a more promising conception of personhood should be more liberal in what constitutes the good life – i.e., that it permits alternative ways of flourishing in a community" or, indeed, flourishing in alternative communities; (2014, 50).

United Nations Declaration of Human Rights has established only one right as unconditional: the right not to be tortured. Gyekye's assertions that as members of a communal society, individuals "would not have a penchant for, or an obsession with, insisting on their rights", and that 'insistence on (some) rights may not be necessary' (1998, 330, 331), have a rather pallid, *ad hoc* flavour.

Notwithstanding his references to the "individualistic system['s] … obsession with individual rights" (1998, 331), it remains unclear to what extent Gyekye's view is a communitarian– and to what extent it is distinctly 'African'. The quick answer would be that it is "the relational character of the person in the wake of his/her natural sociality", his/her "natural relationality" (1998, 332) that grounds his/her duties to others. Yet, on closer inspection it appears that the "social and ethical values of social well-being – solidarity, interdependence, cooperation, compassion, and reciprocity – which can be said to characterize the communitarian morality" (ibid.) impose on the individual duties that are not so much duties to the community as they are duties to its individual members, on the basis of their human dignity, "the intrinsic value of the person" (1998, 333). This would be in keeping not only with a duty-based individualism but also with Teffo's Kantian assertion (which, incidentally, hardly squares with his earlier claim that the African conception of humankind discourages "the view that the individual should take precedence over the community"; see 1996, 4):

> You and I are members of one and the same race, namely, the human race. The essence of man lies in the recognition of man as man, before financial, political, and social factors are taken into consideration. *Man is an end in himself and not a means.* (1998, 4; emphasis added)

Moreover, while the relational element is an important element in African ethics (as evinced in the Shona notion of *ukama*, which emphasises the interrelatedness of humans, the environment, God and the ancestors), it also finds expression in the Lakota phrase *Mitakuye oyasin* or the Cree concept of *wahkohtowin* ('All is related'; 'We are all related'), both of which refer to the self in relation, the self defined relationally (see HORSTHEMKE 2015, 3, 78). If the quest is for a uniquely African perspective or contribution, then it cannot stop here.

Space constraints do not permit a more thorough treatment of the question of the priority of rights over duties, or vice versa – which I have offered elsewhere (see HORSTHEMKE 2010). I also do not wish to engage in depth in the seemingly pointless, 'chicken-or-egg'-type debate of establishing the priority of either the individual or the community (see GYEKYE 1998; 317, 320-322). Every statement like "I

am because we are", every argument that seeks to establish the dependence of the individual on the community or the fact of communal or social relations (for individual human beings are born into existing social and cultural structures), can be countered by statements to the effect that "we are because I am" and other such arguments that seek to establish the dependence of the community on the individuals (for where and how could a community exist in the absence of individuals?), all of which seem to be equally difficult, if not impossible, to establish convincingly, let alone incontrovertibly. It is true, as Bartholomäus Grill observes, that:

> Africans grow up in the community, in groups of village children, reach maturity within their cohort of peers, share the stages of initiation and have learnt as adults to act communally. For the environment is harsh, resources are scarce … Scarcity gives birth to *ubuntu*, solidarity and joint action …, a fundamental commandment of African ethics which ranks communalism above selfishness and cooperation above competition. (2003; 361, 362; my translation)

Nonetheless, Grill cautions against idealising this social system:

> For example, the assertion that Africans have a happier childhood is a myth. Certainly, the infant who is carried on his mother's back experiences a sense of well-being and comfort. Yet, the tenderness and security of the mother-child dyad ends suddenly, as soon as the child learns to walk. The toddler is plunged from his nest into the community and begins to move with it. No one pays special attention to him anymore, and the maternal blanket is now occupied by a younger sibling. At mealtimes he frequently misses out and when a famine breaks out, he is among the first victims claimed. (2003; 362; my translation; of course, Grill's claims raise the question whether they are generally valid and applicable to all parts of Africa - and if not, which particular social system he is referring to)

A disconcerting feature of elevating the community above the individual in the discussion of social bonds and relationships is contained in the view that that 'the idea of individual rights … is … bound to be foreign to this system' (GBADEGESIN 1998b, 295). This kind of view permits gross violation of human rights, insofar as the individual may be sacrificed for the community, social group or common good.

The virtue of Menkiti's notion of personhood is that it allows us to acknowledge that the existence of the community and communal, social relations is essential for the existence not of *individuals* but of individual *persons*. The problem is that this account of personhood is at

once too wide (in that it includes the living dead) and too narrow (in that it excludes human babies, children, the mentally deficient, and non-human animals – all of whom are arguably moral recipients and subjects of a life that can be better or worse for them).

Moreover, if the belief that the "excessive demonstration of grief in the event of the death of a child will make the mother infertile, as it will make her reach her menopause prematurely" and the belief that "the excessive show of grief … will drive the dead child too 'far away' for it to reincarnate, and so be reborn" are both "superstitious" (GYEKYE 1998: 323), then why should the belief in ancestor moral function, agency and intentionality not qualify as superstition?

Menkiti also fails to pay attention to the fact that the social and ritualistic processes of integration and incorporation of individuals as mature members of a community are essentially gendered. (On the complexities of gender relations and the tensions between individual and collective personhood in traditional African societies, see KRATZ 2000.) Traditional cultures, in Africa as elsewhere, largely perceive the world as fundamentally gendered, and rituals of integration and incorporation reflect this perception. This raises questions about traditions and cultural practices (such as polygamy and *ukuhlolwa kwezintombi*, or 'virginity testing' in girls) that arguably involve deprecatory treatment and consideration of girls and women. Reference might be made here to Pitika Ntuli (2002: 53, 66), on the validity and desirability of the *amaqhikiza* system (a type of mentorship programme among older and younger girls "to ensure sexual abstinence" until the latter are "ready to take full control of their affairs") and of *ukuhlolwa kwezintombi* (which "seeks to achieve the goal of purity in the context of the spread of HIV/Aids") in South Africa. One might also refer to Mogobe Ramose, on the compatibility of *ubuntu* and polygamy: "That marriage should not of necessity be monogamous is one of the ancient practices of *ubuntu* philosophy" (2002: 329). Given the reality and character of (especially South) African polygamy, this declaration is tantamount to '*ubuntu* for men'. (See also ASANTE 2003, 68: "Relationships that are based on more than one man or more than one woman can also be based upon the principles of Afrocentricity." Taking into account what we know about the forms and nature of polygamy on the African continent, Asante's assertion comes across as an endorsement of Afro-androcentrism.) As Oyowe has noted, "female-personhood is generally inferior to male-personhood" in the ways in which "social life in traditional African culture is organized" (2014: 57).

And what about instances where traditional gender roles are subverted or ignored? Could African gays and lesbians conceivably qualify as full-fledged members of the community? Not according to Molefi Kete Asante (2003, 74), who claims that:

There is no history of homosexuality being accepted in any African society as a

> normal lifestyle. ... In fact, in most African languages there is no word for homosexuality. … the historical relationship, the biologically natural relationship is between men and women.

Speaking about Afrocentricity in particular, Asante states (2003, 72, 73),

> Homosexuality and lesbianism are deviations from Afrocentric thought because they often make the person evaluate his or her own physical needs above the teachings of national consciousness. If we take the paradigm of location as a starting place, we see that gays and lesbian communities often place their sexual preferences and orientations before their nationalism. … Our initial oppression is not because we are gay or lesbian, but because we are black. … An Afrocentric perspective recognizes its existence but homosexuality cannot be condoned or accepted as good for the national development of a strong people.

Wiredu seems to agree, and his argument relates even more directly to traditional (Akan) recognition as a person:

> … being married with children well raised is part of the necessary conditions for personhood in the normative sense. A non-marrying, non-procreative person, however normal otherwise … can permanently forget any prospect of this type of recognition in traditional Akan society. (1998: 316)

It appears, then, that the account of personhood given by Wiredu and Menkiti is too narrow in an additional respect, in that it does not accommodate those outside the hetero-normative mainstream.

Justice, community, and the case of non-human animals
Taking his cue from Menkiti's (1984, 171) claim that "the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life", the consideration that "in African cultures … the dignity of the community is more important than the dignity of a mere individual" and that "morality is a function of experience and communal rationality", Fainos Mangena maintains that, in the communitarian cultures of sub-Sahara Africa, "justice does not reside in the individual – it resides in the community of which the individual is part". Here, the "ideas of reason, spirit and desire … exist as assets of the community and not [as in Platonic terms] as elements that make up an individual" (2012, 8). As noted earlier, Menkiti points out that according to the African conceptions of person and community, personhood is not the sort of

thing one is born with, that it "has to be attained, and is attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one's stations" (1984, 176). Since an individual "comes to deserve the duties of justice … only through possession of a capacity for moral personality, … morality ought to be considered as essential to our sense of ourselves as persons", i.e. "as a fundamental part of what it means to be a person" (ibid.). This, in essence, is an African articulation of what has become known as 'justice-as-reciprocity' or 'justice-as-mutuality' – it is essentially related to the power of 'persons'.

As it stands, the conception of justice proposed here serves to exclude not only animals but also those humans deficient in the purportedly relevant capacities, who are not (yet) 'persons'.

The implications of Menkiti's view are clear: not only can non-human animals not be considered persons, but human zygotes, foetuses, babies and even children also fail to qualify, as do the mentally incapacitated. In other words, all those who cannot and will never be able to participate in communal life, to contribute to the good – to reciprocate, as it were. This conception of justice is deficient in important respects in that it cannot accommodate these individuals.

A conception of justice as 'subject-centred', on the other hand, is able to account for the extension of considerations of justice, or the ascription of rights, beyond the class of persons in Menkiti's sense. According to subject-centred conceptions of justice, basic moral considerations governing justice and rights are grounded not in an individual's capacity to reciprocate, to participate in communal life or to contribute to the common good (although this may certainly be an important consideration at a secondary or non-basic level) but rather in other features of the individual herself, for example her needs and welfare interests. When Tutu refers to "other issues of justice", he takes these to apply not only to human beings but also to "the world's other sentient creatures" (2013, xv). "Even when faced with human problems" that "fight for our attention in what sometimes seems an already overfull moral agenda", we should not overlook "instances of injustice", i.e. "the abuse and cruelty we inflict on other animals" (ibid.).

A survey of the various African views and considerations regarding non-human animals shows that tendencies vary (very broadly) from (1) more or less outspoken human-centredness and more or less qualified endorsement of human moral superiority via (2) lip service to environmental awareness and animal-friendliness to (3) outright rejection of moral anthropocentrism and explicit pro-animal attitudes (see HORSTHEMKE 2015). It is the middle group that often constitutes the greatest challenge to the critical reviewer, in terms of having to pinpoint not only the deficiencies of the respective views but also the reasons why an environmentally friendly view may not necessarily

(indeed, often does not) incorporate any direct concern for individual non-human animals. For one thing, the critical reviewer may not want to belittle or discourage the ethical progress and advancements, however small and tentative, that have been made. For another, suggesting a radicalization in environmental and pro-animal thought and practice may seem to threaten or at least minimize the distinctly African contribution to the ethical debates in question. This is arguably where a sustained focus on the last group becomes all-important. It is crucial to determine what values and other conceptual and practical resources exist in African awareness not merely to ameliorate but to bring about substantial changes in the conditions under which the many billions of animals live (and die) on the continent. In other words, I share the concerns expressed by many animal rights advocates that a focus on 'animal welfare' is likely to be counterproductive, in that it serves to legitimate current abusive practices, is not committed to acknowledgement of the inherent value – let alone moral rights – of animals and secures fairly negligible benefits for the latter.

For the purposes of this article, I will focus on the first group of writers and thinkers. Their theoretical positions range from open endorsement of anthropocentric ethics via indifference to hostility, with frequent cautions about the dangers of allocating any sort of moral space, let alone rights, to non-humans. Thus, after asserting that the various rights implied by duties of justice (characteristically owed to persons) and that "the possessor of the rights in question cannot be other than a person" (1984, 177), Menkiti states that this interpretation rules out "some dangerous tendencies currently fashionable in some philosophical circles of ascribing rights to animals" (ibid.). "The danger", as he sees it,

> is that such an extension of moral language to the domain of animals is bound to undermine, sooner or later, the clearness of our conception of what it means to be a person. The practical consequences are also something for us to worry about. For if there is legitimacy in ascribing rights to animals then human beings could become compelled to share resources with them [..., such as] equally deserving cats and dogs. Minority persons might then find themselves the victims of a peculiar philosophy in which the constitutive elements in the definition of human personhood have become blurred through unwarranted extensions to non-human entities. (Ibid.)

Reginald Oduor, too, struggles to make any sense of the notion of animal rights:

> With regard to the possible relationship between struggles against slavery and against the oppression of women on the one hand and animal rights on the other, I personally do not see one. This is due to the fact that the women and the former slaves consciously participated in the struggles for their liberation. On the other hand, the animals cannot be properly said to participate in the struggle for their rights; instead, humans have taken it upon themselves to act on behalf of the animals. This is *not* to imply that humans have a right to mistreat animals: I think that the fact that human beings are rational obligates them to be responsible in their treatment of all sentient beings. (2012, 9)

Apart from the fact that 'responsibility' remains wide open to interpretation, it is not difficult to see that, for Oduor, any such obligation "to be responsible in their treatment of all sentient beings" is not a directly owed to animals. It flows directly from the fact of our (human) rationality. Thaddeus Metz (2014) furnishes a telling response to arguments like those advanced by Menkiti and Oduor: to extend considerations of morality, justice, rights etc. only to (a community or communities of) 'persons' is unwarrantedly parochial.

The Chewa proverb *Kalikhokha nikanyama; tuli tuwili nituwanthu* ("What is alone is a brute animal; whatever or whoever has a partner/neighbour is a human being"; see KAPHAGAWANI 2004; 337) indicates a profound ignorance of the nature, character and abilities of social animals. A similar misconception underlies the claim that what "clearly demarcates humanity from animality" is human possession not only of intelligence but also of free will (KAPHAGAWANI 2004; 339; KAGAME 1989; 36). Alexis Kagame concedes that humans share with other animate beings "the vital principle of animality" but adds that they differ from them because they are "animated by a second vital principle which is immortal and in which are anchored the intelligent operations proper to man", such as free will (1989; 35). Intelligence is held to be demonstrated in the essentially human ability to reflect and meditate on the data of their senses, to "compare the facts of knowledge' human beings have acquired, and 'to invent something new by combining previously acquired knowledge" (1989; 36). It may be tempting to argue with Wiredu (and with Menkiti) that the intellectual attributes singled out by Kagame – intelligence and free will – are not universal features of the human condition: some people have them, others do not. Moreover, a person may exhibit them in one context or sphere of conduct but not in another (WIREDU 1996, 130). Or one might argue, with Tutu, that if "it is true that we are the most exalted species in creation, it is equally true that we can be the most debased and sinful" (2013, xv). More to the point, however, just like it is an error to

disregard the evolutionary kinship between humans and other animals, it is a mistake to deny that intellectual and moral dispositions exist in some form or other – however rudimentary – in other-than-human animals, too. That cognitive and conative capacities exist in varying degrees also in other species is now widely accepted by a wide range of researchers in both the natural and the social sciences.

A further distinguishing characteristic identified by Kagame is that humans, but not animals, have a good or bad *roho* (the Kiswahili word for 'heart'), i.e. the propensity to act in a morally praiseworthy or blameworthy manner (see also KAPHAGAWANI 2000; 76, 77). Here, "the heart" refers to personality: "in the heart lies the personality of man … It is by which this man is himself and not another" (KAGAME 1989, 36). Personality is what characterizes human beings; it is also "one of the criteria for distinguishing one person from another" (KAPHAGAWANI 2004, 339). One might point out that this just shifts the problem - for now we want to know what exactly constitutes 'personality'. Perhaps we might associate personality with *moral* personality, along the lines already suggested by Menkiti. But why does this involve a *misconception*? To repeat, intelligence and personality (even moral personality and agency) are not matters of 'all-or-nothing'. They are possessed in varying degrees by *both* human beings *and* animals. Mentally impaired humans and children have these abilities to comparatively lesser degrees than so-called 'normal' adult human beings, and some non-human animals have these abilities to comparatively higher degrees than *both* certain human beings *and* certain other animals.

Considering the brutal and dehumanizing ravages of colonialism, racism and apartheid that Africans have historically been subjected to, it does not seem to be wholly off the mark to invite people in sub-Sahara Africa, especially, to reflect on a further, deeply-entrenched historical process of discrimination, oppression and exploitation, namely that of species apartheid. However, adoption of a more enlightened stance *vis-à-vis* the non-human world and animals in particular would almost certainly involve giving up the moral anthropocentrism that characterizes many attitudes and practices on the African continent. This, I hasten to add, need not entail surrendering what is arguably at the core of sub-Saharan morality – the emphasis on relationality. "I am because we are" could quite plausibly be interpreted as including not only infants, children, and people with cognitive and physical disabilities, but also as transcending the species barrier. It is in the main a matter of giving new substance to who counts as 'we'. Indeed, a growing number of African scholars are aware that anthropocentrism shares many relevant features with ethnocentrism, and that speciesism is relevantly like racism. The question is whether those who (after their own liberation) continue to brutalize, exploit and

oppress other creatures, simply because they can, do not thereby contribute to their own ongoing dehumanization. Perhaps the minimal insight one could reasonably expect from African humanism is that true human liberation also consists in the act of human beings freeing themselves from the role of subjugators, from the oppressive and exploitative relationship they have with the rest of animate nature, and from instrumentalization and objectification of the non-human at the expense of the latter's lives, freedom, and well-being.

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