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This issue is dedicated to our Assoc. Editor and a second-generation member of the Calabar (Conversational) School of Philosophy (CSP):
Prince. Prof Mesembe Ita Edet (1965-2023)
He served as the Scribe of the CSP for several years until his passing. He will forever be remembered for his immense contributions to the movement.

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Editor's Contact:

Jonathan O. Chimakonam,
The Conversational School of Philosophy (CSP)
University of Calabar, Nigeria
editor@cspafrika.org, info@unical.edu.ng

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Ava GORDLEY-SMITH

University of Wales, Trinity Saint David

avagordleysmith@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6217-9750>

&

Paul M W HACKETT

Department of Philosophy, NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, Nigeria

Institute of Education and Humanities/Psychology Department, PRIFYSGOL

CYMRU Y DRINDOD DEWI SANT, Cymru

Health & Wellbeing Research Institute, UNIVERSITY OF SUFFOLK, England

School of Communication, EMERSON COLLEGE, USA

paul@hackett.prof

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9365-8084>

Abstract

This paper uses a declarative mapping sentence approach to explore and amend *design thinking* - a project development and management technique recently disseminated in Africa. We contend that there are problems in the manner in which design thinking has been exported to Africa, namely, that design thinking is rooted in the linear, binary, human-centric systems present in Western philosophy and that the exportation of design thinking is potentially neo-colonial. We, therefore, attempt to ameliorate these difficulties by decoupling design thinking from its Western philosophical perspectives. We will also seek to broaden the understanding of design thinking by adopting the more communitarian perspective found in philosophy that has been developed in Africa. The amended form of design thinking we present considers the user's existential paradigms and facilitates a flexible and reflexive process void of deliberate finality. Furthermore, we claim that amending design thinking's philosophical foundations to incorporate a communitarian perspective has the potential to make design thinking more ecologically-centric.

Keywords: Design Thinking, African Philosophy, Conversational Philosophy, Facet Theory, Declarative Mapping Sentence, Decolonization, Environmentalism

Introduction

For centuries, scholars have grappled with, and attempted to understand human-creativity. Due to the desire to comprehend and appreciate creativity, many attempts have been made to encourage and guide the creative process. In recent decades, some scholars have attempted to assist creative processes by conceiving creative thinking as an iterative process that progresses through a series of steps. This method and ideology have been termed design thinking (KIMBELL, 2011). According to

David Kelley, the founder of the design firm, IDEO, and Tom Kelley, “Design thinking is a way of finding human needs and creating new solutions using the tools and mindsets of design practitioners. When we use the term ‘design’ alone, most people ask what we think about their curtains or where we bought our glasses. But a ‘design thinking approach’ means more than just paying attention to aesthetics or developing physical products. Design thinking is a methodology. Using it, we can address a wide variety of personal, social, and business challenges in creative new ways” (IDEO, Online). Design thinking’s broad method applications may be exemplified in everything from assisting in the creation of prominent companies like Airbnb and Uber Eats, to developing clean water and sanitation experiences in India (BROWN, 2010).

Design thinking was founded within Western positivist philosophy and exercised under Western philosophical and cultural principles. At its core, design thinking is a way of creating and executing thoughts. Whilst not intentionally damaging, by concentrating on human creative processes, design thinking is based on human-centric notions that may be destructive to non-human animals and the environment. It is possible to argue that when things are conceived in the world within a human-centric purview and without consideration of ecological impact, the outcomes of such things are prone to have an intentional or unintentional negative effect on the ecological whole. For instance, in the highly creative arena of the fashion industry, the adoption of a human-centric process has had a very negative unintentional ecological impact as whilst the intention is not to harm the planet, this industry produces 10% of humanity’s carbon emissions and is the second-leading consumer of the world’s water supply (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2020).

Our original objective in conducting this research was to explore the possibility that conceiving of design thinking within an African philosophical framework may result in a more ecocentric form of design thinking. During this research, however, we became aware of Design Thinking’s fairly recent and fervent exportation to, and implementation within, the African continent¹. Our research began to naturally expand beyond applying African Philosophy to design thinking and to turn toward discussing and critiquing the implications of exporting a Western way of thinking, problem-solving and creating within a non-Western world. This dynamic gave rise to a sense of philosophical neo-colonization, a concern that we wanted to explore further. We did not want to solely export notions of African Philosophy for the benefit of a philosophically Western model, but rather to wrestle with the realities of design thinking concerning its potential use in an African context with theoretical and applied considerations. Simultaneously, it was our wish to examine the impacts to and possibility of an ecocentric form of design thinking.

¹ We emphasise the point that Africa is a continent which constitutes a vast area of over 30 million square kilometers and some 54 countries. To speak of a philosophy that is representative of such a diversity is insulting and naive. However, in this essay we will use the term African philosophy, not in a reductionist sense but to indicate the many philosophies that have developed on the continent in the post-colonial era based on relational methodologies.

This brief paper will begin by considering the relationship between design thinking and ecological considerations. Following this, we will present rudimentary aspects of the Western philosophical underpinnings of design thinking. Next, we will selectively introduce philosophies that have originated within Africa and, specifically, conversational philosophy, which we suggest is a form of African philosophy that has the potential to unshackle design thinking's from human-centered and Western philosophical constraints. Next, we address the methodology of the declarative mapping approach and offer this as an approach for explicating the amalgamation of design thinking and conversational philosophy in an ecologically-centric form. Finally, we present a declarative mapping sentence that demarcates design thinking based upon Okwu and reflexive iteration that moves beyond synthesized thought.

Throughout the paper, our objective is to explore a more intrinsically ecology-centered approach to design thinking and open a discussion concerning the philosophical impacts of exporting and implementing a traditional Western-rooted form of design thinking within Africa.

Design Thinking and Ecology

We start our paper with a brief introduction to design thinking, which, whilst numerous institutions may be identified as having developed forms of design thinking, it was most popularized by Harvard Professor Peter Rowe in 1987 and later in the 1990s by the design firm IDEO (DAM n.d.n. 2021). IDEO describes design thinking on their website as, "A human-centered approach to innovation—anchored in understanding customer's needs, rapid prototyping, and generating creative ideas—that will transform the way you develop products, services, processes, and organizations" (IDEO, Online). IDEO has made substantial strides in mainstreaming and systematizing the creative process and offers designers a model and method for creation and creative problem-solving. Design thinking is utilized globally, taught in many of the most rigorous university design programs, and is non-industry specific. While the current design thinking model requires users of the approach to employ moral considerations for human-to-human empathy, it segregates humans from ecology concerns and thus privileges human dominion over ecology.

The Earth is in a climate crisis due to human activity. Pollution, deforestation, oil drilling, species and biodiversity loss, and fracking are large culprits (KLOCKNER, 2015) and these are only the tip of the iceberg of environmental woes. These activities exist through human design. While global efforts have been proffered in an attempt to halt such destruction, conversations appear desultory². Conversely, sustainable practices are trending, and companies

² There are literally thousands of examples of the dearth of conversation leading to progress in the context of conservation and other environmental issues. For an excellent example of the meager successes that have been achieved, and the vast scale of current ecological destruction, the interested reader is guided to Gibson (2022) who provides a detailed review of the plight of migratory birds and specifically the common swift (*Apus apus*).

and their designers are making climate pledges. However, such practices, it may be argued, are not having enough impact in favour of protecting and restoring our planet. According to a recent study by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 80% of an object's environmental impact is created during the design phase, yet the majority of designers are designing sustainable solutions with a human-centric (rather than an ecocentric) model (ELLEN MACARTHUR FOUNDATION, n.d).

This paper is written under the premise of the problematic irony that designers are attempting to design sustainably by using a human-centric model. Human-centric models do not require the considerations necessary to make ecocentric sustainable decisions. In regards to our earlier example of problematic human centrism, if one was developing a new clothing brand using a human-centric model, the designers would most likely not be prompted to consider how their clothing might impact the environment, whereas if they were to use an ecocentric sustainability-focused model, the environmental impact would be a cornerstone of their decision making. Using a human-centric model to design for eco-conscious sustainability proves to be challenging and vulnerable to authentic ecocentric decision-making. This paper examines the skeleton of design thinking and expands it philosophically to address an ecological perspective. We also attempt to rid the Western-philosophical foundations underpinning design thinking and alternatively explore concepts from the philosophy that has developed over the last half-century within Africa. More specifically, we will use conversational philosophy as understood within the writing of Jonathan Chimakonam to alleviate these confines and offer an alternative perspective and reality (CHIMAKONAM, 2015). We will commence our review of the philosophical underpinnings of design thinking by tersely considering its Western philosophical basis.

Philosophical Perspectives

While numerous variations of design thinking models exist, a popular non-linear version, as proposed by Stanford Design School and IDEO, embodies the following stages: Empathizing, Defining, imagining, prototyping, and testing. These stages are shown linearly and are connected via arrows (see Exhibit 1). This model does not hold a space for ecology-centric considerations, is not reflective of the impact to and from one's mental schema, does not examine the whole as a cyclical iteration, and does not explore the larger impact of the design: we will, in the course of this paper, expatiate upon what we consider to be an omission. In this paper, we do not trace every potential philosophical foundation of design thinking, however we do touch on what we deem the most central philosophical tethers, in order to build context for our applied concerns, and further explorations.

Western Philosophy

Design Thinking was born in Western philosophy and the concepts of design thinking rest solidly within notions of polarity, linearity, and hierarchy. These underpinnings may lead to conceptual thinking such as, good-versus-bad, best-versus-worst, right-versus-wrong and beginning-to-end. The early design thinking models required the thinker to move in a linear process beginning from the left moving toward the right and ending with solution on the right. This design thinking

process developed ideas filtered through the mental hierarchical framework of good-versus-bad, best-versus-worst, right-versus-wrong, ultimately leading to a singular winning idea. On these understandings, the infant roots of design thinking can be drawn back to the Classical era of ancient Greek philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

The iterative path to knowledge is threaded within the Socratic method. This method emphasizes the emergence of knowledge through dialogue and collaboration. Plato's consideration of participatory design is at the core of design thinking's human-centrism in its engagement with the participation and consideration of human needs and wants. Participatory design also supports the idea that creativity passes through the iterative stages of prototyping, and testing.

Aristotle's rumination moves beyond the connections to Plato and Socrates to engage design thinking on a finite level. Aristotle discusses the concept of 'techne', meaning, "To know by making" (WANG 2013, 4). This notion speaks precisely to the 'scientization' of design in the 1950s and 1960s and the design thinking goal of identifying a problem solution through design. Aristotle also contemplates the 'telos' of an object. 'Telos' as defined by Aristotle, is the 'meaning' of something. Whereas Plato might have said the participants determined the 'telos' of design, Aristotle believed that the 'telos' of creation was the creator. Therefore, the meaning of the design was determined by the designer. This is a key concept to keep in mind when considering who or what determines a solution. Aristotle also conceived that creative imagination was a key factor in being able to judge and identify in the future, therefore acknowledging the essential space for creativity within problem identification and solving (WANG, 2013). These elements closely denote the original goal and foundation to design thinking.

Centuries later, in the 4th BC, Saint Augustine famously said, "Fallor ergo sum," "I err, therefore I am." This underlines the necessity for trial and error within the design thinking model and the idea that to live and exist is to make mistakes. This does not fault error, more so emphasises the nature of error. Saint Augustine's statement was then later amended and advanced by René Descartes as, "I think, therefore I am" (KEHR 1916, 594). This marks the weight of creative thought while also highlighting the Western emphasis on a narrow conception of sentients. It is our view that this arguably may speak to design thinking's evasive of considerations beyond the human being to encompass regard for other sentient and non-sentient beings. To briefly relate design thinking to slightly more contemporary Western philosophy, Immanuel Kant's perspective of creative thought, or rather, imagination is, "Conceived of artistic genius as an innate capacity to produce works of 'exemplary originality' through the free play of the imagination, a process which does not consist in following rules, can neither be learned nor taught, and is mysterious even to geniuses themselves" (KAUFMAN 2014, 2).

The aim of this brief paper is not to present a comprehensive review of the connections between Western philosophy and design thinking, although we hope the above-stated links provide an understanding of the basis for design thinking and chart potential avenues for further consideration. While we do not specifically note that the previously stated Western philosophical notions are ethically problematic, we do critically engage with these in terms of these being potentially limiting for

creating ecology-centrism within design thinking. Having presented some of the Western philosophical background to design thinking, we now turn to how design thinking has been exported to the African continent.

Design Thinking in Africa

The Hasso Plattner School of Design Thinking at the University of Cape Town, South Africa (d-school), began to teach design thinking courses in 2016. By 2020, the d-school had educated nearly 3500 students in design thinking, varying from introductory courses to more in-depth courses taught in partnership with diverse departments of the university (PEREZ, 2022). The students' countries of origin included Botswana, Cameroon, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania; Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The d-school's website notes a quote by their Director Richard Perez, "Design Thinking is rooted in the question, 'What ought to be?' It's forward-looking and, crucially, forward-moving. It has its origins in the design discipline, but it has since evolved past innovating clever products and creating novel solutions – it's now taking aim at society's thorniest challenges – from education and poverty to gender-based violence. (D-SCHOOL AFRICA, Online). The d-school describes, promotes, and utilizes design thinking as a means to increase holistic empathy and connects design thinking's philosophy to the African philosophy of Ubuntu - meaning, "I am because we are." Ubuntu is a means of underlining one's ontological relationship of who we are and how we relate to others. The d-school's website further states, "This resonates with the way design thinking is practiced at the d-school: embracing diversity; empathy; deferring judgment; building on the ideas of others. These are some of the design thinking principles that determine the way we work with people and appreciate the knowledge, skills and resources they represent. These principles enable us to co-create and collaborate with a broad range of people."

While we acknowledge this positive attribution to African philosophy, the d-school's seemingly limited human-centric considerations of Ubuntu stimulate our questioning and exploration of design thinking's relationship to Africa and the potential for Ubuntu to become a foundational component of design thinking and not a superficial addendum. We do not aim to examine the d-school. We only used this information as a base to begin our further considerations. We also note that Ubuntu is not the sole African philosophy we explore in connection to design thinking. However, the d-school's application is stimulating as it is a laconic acknowledgment of cultural differences between where design thinking originated and it is being applied.

Conversational Philosophy

We chose to expand the design thinking framework through the incorporation of an African Philosophy, and more specifically, we explored the potential relationship between that of conversational philosophy and design thinking. Conversational philosophy is a branch of philosophy that developed in the African continent, which embraces the co-existence of human beings with nature rather than the Western

notion of human dominion over nature. African philosophy largely opposes Aristotle's 'De Anima' and positions humans in nexus with non-human animals (KAI, 2017). African Philosophy's concept of 'Ubuntu' stems from the Nguni language and means, "I am because we are" (OGUDE 2019, 114-130). This exemplifies a philosophical alternative from that of Saint Augustine and Descartes and marks the importance of community and connection versus individualism. It is important to note that community, in much of African philosophy, includes ecology (DENSU, 2018). To exemplify the embracive breadth of African philosophy, Momoh wrote, "This metaphysical and spiritual underpinning of African philosophy is more of coexistence with nature, rather than conquest, more of collectivism, rather than individualism, more of holism, rather than atomism, more of synthesis, rather than analysis" (MOMOH 1989, 59).

Chimakonam's Conversational Philosophy may be argued to wrestle with notions akin to the Socratic Method. Conversational philosophy's arumaristic approach may be described as an iterative dialogical process toward knowledge emergence. Chimakonam, however, moves beyond mere thought synthesis and displays the opportunity for knowledge continuation, which in juxtaposition to current design thinking Models, offers an alternative way to conceive collaborative end goals. This appears to be an incomplete point waiting to be completed. Chimakonam also considers the personhood of the participants and terms this state of being before thought, "Okwu."

Nigerian philosopher Innocent Asouzu's theory of Ibuanyidanda may be described as a complementary reflection. Asouzu writes, "Being is that on account of which anything that exists serves a missing link of reality" (CHIMAKONAM, 2016, 3). Chimakonam describes Asouzu's Ibuanyidanda theory in the following words, "Ibuanyidanda seeks then to transcend the static, dichotomous ontological framework propounded by Aristotle into a complementary consciousness where every reality exists in a network of mutual complementarity. There is nothing that is meaningless, useless, or valueless. Everything exists for others and serves as a missing link in the gamut of reality. In doing this, Ibuanyidanda finds a way of overcoming the challenges of ontology" (CHIMAKONAM 2016, 4).

We have previously noted that we believe that the individualistic and human-centered roots of design thinking are insufficient to wholly address eco-social concerns. We now suggest that Ibuyanidanda theory, Ubuntu, Okwu and arumarism are four concepts from African philosophy that offer a broadened perspective within which to re-conceive Design Thinking. In the sections that follow we offer such an amalgamation for re-conception.

Method

In this research, we applied a declarative mapping³ in order to sufficiently organize, understand and wrestle with the complex, multi-componential, and multivariate nature of this study (HACKETT and GORDLEY-SMITH, in press, 2022). The declarative mapping sentence afforded us the flexibility to explore the nuanced mereological categories while creating distance from our work to assist in clarifying and gaining momentum toward ideation. The declarative mapping sentence (DMS) below traces the exercise a person goes through during the design process and brings the African philosophical concepts of Okwu, arumarism, Ibuayidanda theory, and Ubuntu into this process.

Design Thinking: Okwu and Reflexive Iteration and Moving Beyond Synthesized Thought

Before the designer engages in design thinking the designer conceives a design thought; the construction of this thought is preceded by the existence of:

1. Okwu

- Natural Concepts
- Artificial Concepts

which shapes personal schemas to sense make the:

2. Framing

- *past to present*
- *internal to external*

thus leading the designer to a contextual space of:

3. Awareness

- self
- others

awareness that frames the designer's perception when posed (not sure about this word choice) with a design:

4. Proposition

- problem
- thought

³ The declarative mapping approach is a form of Facet Theory, both of which were created within western philosophy. The authors want to clarify, that it is not their intention to impose additional theories rooted within western philosophy whilst attempting to explore alleviating western philosophy from design thinking. The declarative mapping approach, and the declarative mapping sentence are highly iterative and built on the premise of cyclical exploration. Therefore, the authors did not deem these research methods to ironically deteriorate their work.

- query
- unknown

adopting an:

5. Empathy

- human-centered approach
- ecology-centered approach

which may require:

6. Evaluate

- backward
- forward prospection

sparkling the designer to feel:

7. Assess

- satisfied
- unsatisfied
- ambivalent

eventually leading the designer to conduct further:

8. Research

- internal observation
- external observation
- internal analysis
- external analysis

which may lead to:

9. Evaluate

- backward reflection
- forward prospection

allowing for the development of a point of view, suggesting the creation of:

10. Ideate

- high degrees
- mid degrees
- low degrees

of ideation which may require:

11. Evaluate

- backward reflection
- forward prospection

allowing for further development through:

12. Prototype

- learning from the/these idea(s)
- sparking (a) new idea(s)
- gaining confidence in (the) idea(s)

which may require:

13. Evaluate

- backward reflection
- forward prospection

eventually leading to the need to:

14. Test

- evaluate the idea
- refine the idea
- implement the idea

which may require:

15. Evaluate

- backward reflection
- forward prospection

offering the space for:

16. Affected Outcome

- continuation of knowledge emergence
- synthesization of thoughts
- achieving consensus
- reorientation of thought
- creation of a pause

which may require:

17. Evaluate

- backward reflection
- forward reflection

The DMS above begins with the ‘Okwu’ facet. This facet considers the personhood of the participant before engaging in design thinking and creates potential space and opportunity for further rumination of ecology-centric thinking. The second facet, ‘Framing’ considers the internal state of Okwu juxtaposing the external and/or the participant's past experiences to the present. The third facet, “Awareness” examines both self-awareness and external awareness. These first three facets consider the necessary background of the participant, the effect that has on the design, and the transition the participant must make from being a vessel of potential design thinking to actively design thinking. The fourth facet, “Proposition” marks the beginning of a traditional design model and is immediately followed by a facet phase, “Empathy.” While the DMS shows both human-centric and ecology-centric empathy, this is only to mark our research, not to propose an option between the two and/or their segregation. Our sixth facet, “Evaluation” introduces the iterative facets which consider non-linear movement and the ability to flow freely from one state to another. These facets are carried throughout the remainder of the DMS. Our seventh facet turns back to the participant once more and considers the individual’s assessment. This facet holds another space for ecology-centric measurement. The eighth facet, “Research” aligns with standard design thinking Models, which leads to the range Facet of, “Ideate.” While both of these facets run parallel with contemporary design models, their elements note the individual’s relationship to the stage and the potential impact of the individual on the design. Facets 12 through 15 once more pay homage to the design thinking norm but examine the arumaristic foundations of dialogical iteration. The DMS concludes with an arumaristic consideration for the outcome.

Whilst the explanation contained in the above DMS is compressed, it enables us to trace the potential impact of African philosophy on the design thinking process. It should also be noted that the step-wise ordering is not fixed and the process is not necessarily linear and the individual may engage in feedback and feed-forward maneuvers and enter and exit the mapping sentence at any point.

Discussion

The next stage of our research was to build out our DMS into a model while maintaining a reference to current design thinking models. Therefore, we stepped away from the usual notions of progression through traditional linear forms or figure-eights processes in the design thinking literature and developed a 3-D cyclical-loop cylindrex model (see Exhibit 2). This model is fully encompassing of ecological thinking whilst also showing the central permanence of ecology within the facets. We designed our model as a loop versus a traditional linear cylindrex (the linear cylinder is a typical arrangement found in facet theory-based mapping sentence research) to highlight the cyclical and non-linear nature of design thinking. Each facet is noted in the main model whilst the elements contained at each level of the cylindrex are seen in the amended and “zoomed-in” models (see Exhibit 3). It is important to emphasize that we do not consider our model to be at a finished point, however, we do find its current state to be a sufficient reflection of our findings and to sufficiently portray the relationships of facets and elements within our declarative mapping sentence.

We believe that adopting our model results in an expansion of the design thinking approach to allow for the incorporation of ecological concerns and a more empathetic perspective. Our model, therefore, results in the following updated description of design thinking:

Design thinking is an **ecology and empathy-centered** approach to innovation—anchored in understanding holistic needs, rapid prototyping, and generating creative ideas—that will transform the way products, services, processes, and organizations are developed, organized, and managed.

Conclusion

In this brief paper, we initially explored the Western philosophical foundations of design thinking in order to unveil the constraints that adopting such foundations had structured the processes within design thinking, how it has been both conceived used in practice and how the very fundamental understandings of creativity as a linear process are restrictive. We then took time to offer a philosophical perspective that may be incorporated within design thinking that we believe alleviated some of the restrictions in the conceptual frameworks of design thinking. We achieved our aims of broadening design thinking to incorporate a more communitarian and eccentric purview by applying concepts from philosophy recently developed within Africa. It is our contention that the facets of this African-based philosophy that we brought into our model assisted in decoupling design thinking from linear, binary and human-centric systems. Moreover, by applying the Ubuntu concept of, “I am because we are” we allowed for the emergence of a holistic perspective and considerations regarding human creativity and environmental relationships within the context of the Anthropocene epoch. The amended model that we have developed and stated in our declarative mapping sentence considers personhood seen through Okwu and facilitates a flexible and reflexive process void of deliberate finality.

It is our intention in writing this paper to mark the beginning of a much larger body of research and stands as the first phase for both theoretical and applied research that aims to explore the utility of our model within design thinking practice. It is our ultimate hope that this research, and the research we are designing to be conducted later, will contribute to a more expansive discussion on sustainability practices and raise awareness of the ecological impact of design. Finally, design thinking is being implemented within the African continent in its traditional form. This includes the importation of Western perspectives and Western philosophy. We intend to question such intellectual colonialization and result in design thinking being developed in African countries that are developed from and reflect perspectives that are indigenous to the local people.

Exhibits:

DESIGN THINKING:
A non-linear process

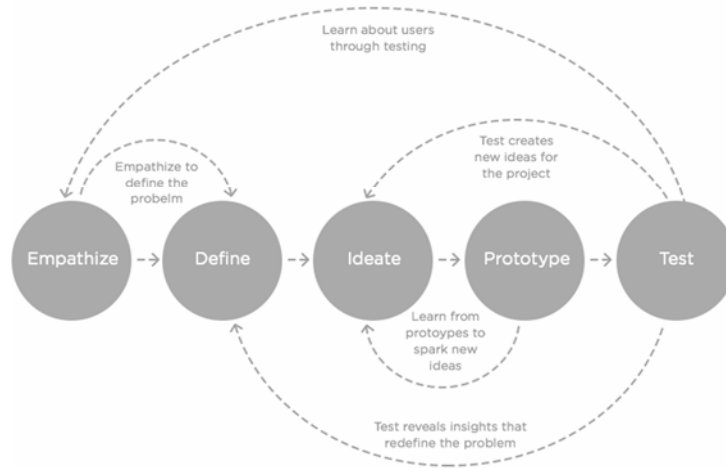
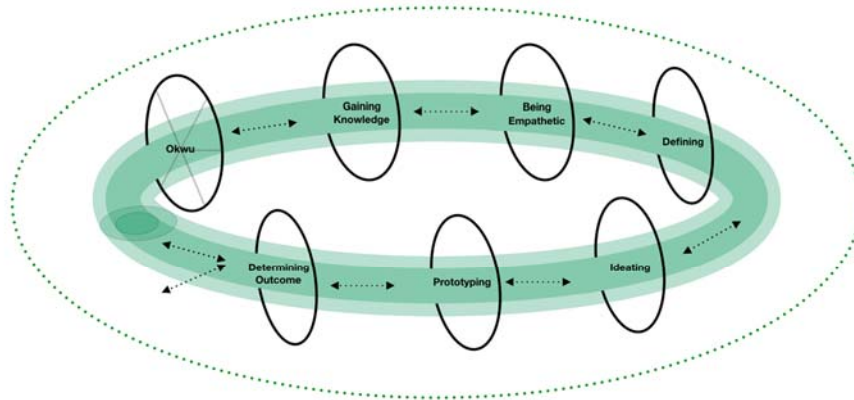


Exhibit 1.

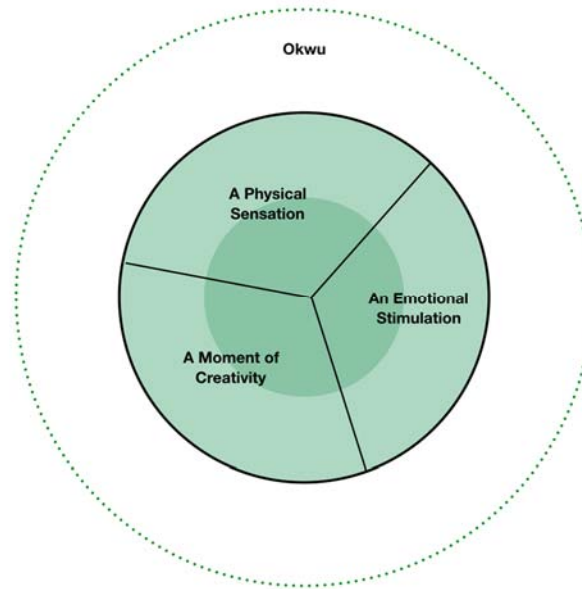
Exhibit 2.



KEY

- Central Ecology
- Encompassing/External Ecology

Exhibit 3.



***The authors declare no conflict of interest for this work**

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This issue honours our Assoc. Editor and a second-generation member of the Calabar (Conversational) School of Philosophy (CSP): **Prince. Prof Mesembe Ita Edet (1965-2023)**

Transgender Identity and Family Life in Africa

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Winifred EZEANYA
Department of Philosophy
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
winifred.ezeanya@unn.edu.ng
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3548-9312>
&

Gabriel OTEGBULU
School of General Studies (Humanities Unit) and Philosophy Department
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
gabriel.otegbulu@unn.edu.ng
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4522-8223>
&

Obiora.O. ANICHEBE
Department of Philosophy
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
obiora.anichebe@unn.edu.ng
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4208-9360>

Abstract

The idea of transgender identity is less perceived as a mental illness but as a sexual health condition in many parts of the Western world, while it is seen as an anomaly in most parts of Africa. Transgender identity is a gender expression that differs from the naturally assigned sex. The widely accepted reason behind transgender is unsatisfactory feelings toward assigned sex by the individual. This work sets out to explore transgender identity and family life in Africa. Several works have explored the concept but with less emphasis on family life as it relates to the African setting. Furthermore, this work sets out to demonstrate some implications of transgender identity in an ideal African family. In this work, we shall argue that once transgender identity is normalized in Africa, it will be a threat to family life. The arguments to be used are historical, analytical, descriptive as well as evaluative.

Keywords: Transgender, Family, Identity, Gender, Africa.

Introduction

We have binary genders apart from hermaphrodites, which are usually the result of genetic abnormality. Socio-culturally, the male and female genders have their assigned roles stemming from the family. With the growth of civilization and liberalism, there came a new turn in genders, which is not about an introduction of a new gender but the transition to genders of choice and feelings like the transgender identity. Transgender identity, as the name suggests, is a 'transited

gender'. It is a gender expression that differs from the naturally assigned sex of an individual (HINES, 2007, 1). The widely accepted reason behind transgender is the unsatisfactory feeling toward a naturally assigned sex by an individual. Transgender identity could be trans male or female whether involving a Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) or not.

Transgender identity cannot be dissociated from family. Family, the foundational unit of a society, is the first port of call when the issues of gender, sex, and transgender are discussed. Though transgender experience is more predominant in the Western world, it is also global. This understanding underscores the need to investigate and evaluate how it affects family life, especially in Africa. Africa practices both nuclear and extended family systems and this paper argues that transgender identity is a threat to family life when it becomes normalized in Africa.

Although other scholars have probed the issues of gender and even transgender, the relevance of the present research consists not only in investigating the implications of normalizing transgender, but specifically, on African family life. Doing this will contribute original ideas to the existing literature on gender studies from an African cultural perspective.

The research methods to be used include historical, analytical, descriptive as well as evaluative. Historically, we shall trace how transgender developed over time. This paper shall further analyze the concept and describe the nature of family life in Africa as well as its connection with the concept of transgender. More so, it shall ascertain the weaknesses and strengths if any, as regards transgender identity, and take a position. With these in mind, we shall argue that transgender identity is circumspect and does not appear to uphold African values which manifest themselves in family life. On the basis of the preceding, we shall conclude that if the transgender wave is not curtailed, its presence might harm the local African lifeworld due to its incompatibility with family life in Africa. Finally, this paper will anticipate and respond to some objections to our proposal.

In the first section, the paper will dissect the concept of Transgender Identity from various scholars. It will also explain the developmental stages concerning the meaning of the concept. In the second section, the paper will give a brief history of Transgender Identity. It will go further to summarize Transgender Identity in phases. In the third section, the paper will elucidate the modes and processes of transgenering. In the fourth section, the paper will demonstrate the nature of family life in Africa as well as interrogate Transgender Identity in relation to family life in Africa. Finally, in the last section, the paper will make contributions on coping with Transgender Identity and family in Africa and then the conclusion.

Conceptualizing Transgender Identity

'Transgender' can easily be mistaken on a periphery as a 'transited gender' or changed gender. This conception was the earliest perception it had at a time until the revolutionizing of the concept to accommodate more, making it an umbrella word. As an umbrella word, it includes transsexuals and transvestites. In line with

the idea of Virginia Prince, a transgenderist, transgender is the condition or identity established when one feels an overwhelming need to dress in the clothes of the opposite gender or change sex completely. When one talks about transgender, bi-concepts come to mind such as 'trans' and 'gender'. While trans as it relates to the topic at hand means 'transformation', 'crossing', and 'eventually going beyond or through', gender can be seen as a system of social differentiation and placement. It is also an important part of an individual's identity (EKINS AND KING, 2006, 16 and 33). Bringing the two together, transgender is a transformation, crossing or going beyond or through that system of social differentiation and placements. This definition does not capture in its entirety the intricacies of transgender as that which accommodates part or full-time cross-dressers. This is because, in cross-dressing, there is no fundamental change but an expressive and dispositional change. Secondly, the word as a composite of two strands of meaning becomes explicit if it accommodates cross-dressers of no Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) as well as all identities or practices that crossover, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries (ROEN, 2006, 658). In modern times, transgender includes the Transvestite (TV), i.e. the cross-dressers, and the Transsexual (TS), which involves those who undergo surgery, hormonal injections as well as pills to suppress the naturally assigned sex, and improve on the newly acquired sex. Transgender involving transsexuals makes it a medical, and psychiatric concept.

Social identity becomes transgenderal if it is concerned with the entire community or collective of those who change their gender either temporarily or permanently (HILL, 1997, 2). Vanessa Sheridan extends the boundaries of transgender identity as not just about the transvestites and transsexuals but the androgyny individuals, intersex persons as well as drag kings and queens. It covers that not covered by the culturally-rooted binary gender of man and woman. It is about all manifestations of blurring or crossing gender barriers. As a struggle, it is an expression whereby one establishes a platform of being seen and understood in a way that is different from sex at birth (2009, 1 and 2). Though an umbrella term, it is not the same as cisgender or having a traditional gender presentation (LEVITT & IPPOLITO, 2014, 1728). According to Andrew N. Sharpe, transgender is not just a viable option between transvestite and transsexual, but a term that covers a range of trans-subjectivities, including transsexuals in need or has undergone sex reassignment surgery, those seeking other surgical procedures and/or hormonal treatments, and those whose permanent or temporary gender crossings are unaccompanied by medical intervention (2002, 1).

The last explanation of transgender identity saw it as a middle course between Transvestites (TV) and Transsexual (TS) which differs from its understanding as an umbrella term for the two and similar others. It then poses the word as a problematic term to explain. However, it is more of a broader term than a narrower term. Transgender identity is more of a status than a role. It is neither cultural nor sociological in itself, instead, it is more psychological because it stems from an individual's acclaimed feelings, choices, and decisions. There are varieties

of explanations for transgender, but one crucial thing is that whether it involves surgery or not, there is always an inner feeling of dissatisfaction with the status quo as well as a feeling that is suppressed, which the encased victim insists on overcoming by such manifestations. The transgender identity goes beyond the culturally and socially approved binary gender (male and female), its terminology and meaning are evolutionary, hence the necessity of the historical knowledge of the development of the term as both a concept, an identity, and a lifestyle.

Brief History of Transgender Identity

Transgender as a terminology got its coinage from Virginia Prince in the 20th century in her article called 'The Transvestia' around 1969 (EKINS & KING, 2006, 13) and 1976 (HILL, 1997,1). As a terminology, it is less than 50 years old. In 'The Transvestia', the author calls herself a transgenderal. She meant it not as an umbrella term at that time but as a source of identification for people like her who are either transsexual, transvestites, or transgenderist. Around the same time, transgenderal as properly coined by Virginia Prince got an alternative meaning as an umbrella term recognizing the existence of transsexuals and transvestites. In 1979, Clare Raynor in an interview of Male Trans Female (MTF), Female Trans Male (FTM), and one part-time male Transvestite (TV) included all as transgenderists (EKINS & KING, 2006, 13 and 14). Between the 80s and 90s of the same 20th century, Stuart according to Richard Ekins and Dave King, preferred transgender to transgenderal and transgenderist since gender conditions are entirely different from both sexual conditions and sexual preferences though interconnected (2006, 14). At this time, it is not widely known and accepted. Furthermore, in the 90s, there was a nomenclature replacement where transgender substituted transsexual and so the concept kept developing in thought and meaning till what we have today.

In summary, transgender identity, according to Ekins and King, has four phases. Phase one (1) is using the word, 'Transgenderist' by Virginia Prince to identify herself and her likes (though males are elected to live full-time as women while retaining their male genitalia). Then in phase two (2), transgenderist became an umbrella term for Transsexual and Transvestites and a full range of transgender persons making up a community. Phase three (3) is the transgressive stage of going beyond the binary divide (restriction to male and female as the only gender), and many transgender activists adopted this into the 21st century. The last phase is the sociological understanding of transgender (EKINS AND KING, 2006, 16), which following a series of research and observation of transgender persons and their medical team, inspired sociologists to construct the meaning of transgender as a generic social process within which the various and changing categorization of transgender phenomena arise and within which contestation takes place. It is in transgendering that transgender identities emerge, are contested, ebbed, and flow. One can infer that transgender is of diversity, an outlaw, transgression, and stems from natural attitude as well as the alteration of gender signifier in some way (EKINS AND KING, 2006, 33 and 37). The development of transgender identity over time has made it both a personal and social identity (HILL, 1997, 2) and as a psychological status, it has clear involvements, which we shall discuss as its modes and processes.

Modes of Transgendering

Ekins and King (2006, 34), argue that transgendering individuals transgender between and within these modes following the classification of binary gender, and it includes:

- **Crossing the divide permanently:** This is a situation where the person transits to a different gender completely. Oftentimes, it is usually possible through Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS).
- **Crossing the divide temporarily:** This mode involves the individual using reversible means of transgendering. For instance, use of pills and hormones to boost the features of desired gender. The individual can as well discontinue usage when needed and return to the original gender gradually.
- **Seeking to eliminate the divide:** In principle, the individual decides not to identify with either of the binary genders (male and female). It is more of a psychological disposition which might or not lead to eventual radical transgendering.
- **Seeking to go beyond the divide (radical transgendering):** This is also a psychological disposition that forms a point of initiation into the journey of radical transgendering from a pre-existing gender to a new one of desire. At this stage, the individual makes necessary inquiries and practical efforts towards changing to a desired gender.

Processes of Transgendering

In 'Transgender Phenomenon'(EKINS AND KING, 2006, 37-38), there are 5 (five) sub-processes of transgender which include:

- ❖ **Erasing:** Here, the unwanted body parts are eliminated. For instance, castration for males and hysterectomy for females while the concerned individuals put on unisex clothes and ungendered mannerisms.
- ❖ **Substituting:** At this stage, the person with or without aid, replaces body parts and former gender attitudes with those of the intended gender. For instance, the male genital replaces the female genital and vice versa, flat chest with breasts/boobs. The degree of efficacy and success of these depends on the finance and project of the individual, healthcare, and technology availability.
- ❖ **Concealing:** At this stage, the characteristics and body parts that conflict with the intended gender are concealed. For instance, wrapping a scarf around Adam's apple, tucking the male genital (penis), and binding the breast. The level of this is dependent on visible biological characteristics. It can also involve concealing biography like birth and marriage certificates that are gender-based.
- ❖ **Implying:** They can or do wear clothes that indicate the intended gender like wearing foams inside a bra, hip pads inside a panty girdle, placement of an object by females to imply male genitals, and so on.
- ❖ **Redefining:** This stage is more psychological. At this level, the nature of the body and its parts, as well as accompaniments, are redefined. Male Trans Female (MTF) sees beards as facial hair. The Male Transvestite (MTV) sees the T-shirt and Jeans as female clothes because he buys them

from a feminine boutique and vice versa. It is about the self, body parts, and characteristics as well as gender associates taking on new meanings within the redefined system of classification.

Examining the rigorous nature of transgenering, one may ask, is it worth it? The amount of suppression and conflict from within and outside is worth it for the concerned persons. Furthermore, the level of liberalism, especially in the West, renders it no more a strange thing. At the level of the individual, decision making and choice, transgenering is a source of happiness, but at a broader level of both morality and interpersonal relationship sustenance, of which family is no exception, it is a matter of discourse and much more in Africa where the family is of utmost importance.

Fundamentally, the family is of two types: the nuclear and the extended. The Western world places priority on nuclear over the extended family system but this is not the case in Africa. The family is a state and society's smallest and most fundamental unit. Once the family is under threat, society, by extension, is also under threat. It is in line with this thought that this paper intends to see how transgender is connected to family and its implications. Before going into this section, a good understanding of family in Africa will usher in a better platform for such argumentation.

The Nature of Family Life in Africa

Family life is universal and is arguably the cornerstone of every human society across all times. A family is a social group characterized by economic cooperation, common residence, and production whereby, at least two adults of both sexes maintain a socially approved sexual relationship with one or more children, owned or adopted by the sexually cohabiting adults (IGANUS and HARUNA, 2017,1). An examination of this definition reveals an important aspect: a family cannot be said to be complete if there is no offspring. Spouses without offspring yet can better be referred to as 'couple' or 'husband and wife' but family entails offspring from and for both sexes. Both sexes are pivotal for sexual cohabitation and procreation. Though gay couples can decide to adopt children, yet family in Africa upholds both sexes and not same-sex, promoted and sustained by values.

One of the family values is political values, and one significant thing is that the political hierarchy in the traditional society of Africa begins with the family, then to the village and town with their respective heads and it continues (IDANG, 2015, 104). Family life in Africa is a respected institution in society since it is a basic unit of kinship and protected by custom. It is a marriage-based unit borne out of consent and welcomes children for fulfilment and honour of the parents. It is extended and involves the man and woman who play needful roles as the case may be at each point in time (SSEMOGERERE, 2011, 5 and 6). In addition to the notion of family as a union is the understanding that it accommodates both consanguinity (shared blood relationships) and conjugality (non-blood relationships) stemming from blood ties, legal ties, and sexual mating. The family does the function of conferment of identity and regulation of sexual activities among others, which become values that are taught to children and expected to be generationally transferable. These values regulate the behaviours of African people (OLUTAYO AND AKANLE, 2015, 48 and 49).

One of the challenges of African families is the economic challenge which in turn affects fertility rates and population size (BIGOMBE and KHADIAGALA, 2018, 3), and so no need of adding more challenges through transgenerating. There may not be many discrepancies between family life in Africa and the West regarding their make-up, but there are regarding values which is where the discourse on transgender identity will be evaluated. For now, in Africa, we recognize binary gender, that is, only two sexes—male and female. Furthermore, the idea of two cohabiting sexual adults in family formation invokes the necessity of authentic fatherhood and motherhood whereby fatherhood and motherhood are the major pillars of a flourishing family. Authentic fatherhood and motherhood do not end in being biologically responsible for a child but also involve the co-operative effort in raising children in all ramifications (BALOGUNb, 2012, 2). Authentic fatherhood, as opposed to inauthentic fatherhood, entails the fulfilment of responsibility to the family by the provision, care, nurture, and instruction of the children according to the dictates and norms of the culture and this also applies to motherhood (BALOGUNa, 2010, 3). This assertion questions the status of a transgender person in relation to the family.

With the inclusion of non-blood relations, fictive kin tie, and same-gender couples, (DIERCKX, 2017, 181), the family makeup as a union of parents, children, extended parents, and relations in the case of Africa faces a challenge. However, the research considers the understanding of family as that of a union of two sexes and child/children preferable because it is the most common in African settings.

Interrogating Transgender identity and Family Life in Africa

Family life in Africa is predominantly cultural. The Pro-trans argue that it is okay for one to know one's self-worth, appreciate one's identity and live freely through 'resilience or ordinary magic' which helps the trans to bounce back from stress, stereotypes, crimes, violence, and hard times (SINGH, 2018, 2 & 4). Also, they argue for flexibility in matters of gender to accommodate gender expansiveness (CHANG, n.d.n, 2018, 16-17), yet transgender identity, its nature, and involvement have few implications on family in Africa, which include: epistemic, social, cultural, ethical, health and economic implications among others.

Epistemically, transgender attacks the rationale behind instituting a family which includes companionship, continuity, and identity. Though transgender families may enjoy companionship, they demote at least a biological continuity and cause identity confusion since the past, present, and future makeup one's identity. It underscores the need for maintaining a nature given to an individual through which meaning is attached to life as it concerns the individual. It is also within this context of meaning that even the extremes of gender difficulties can best be handled. This aspect intersects with ethics and morality such that a positive meaning and understanding of life will go a long way in affecting the attitude with which transgender needs are handled.

In the 1980s, healthcare professionals had conflicting suggestions on how to handle transsexual matters both in social benefits and the likes, which later

improved over time but not everyone accepted that (FRANZINI AND CASINELLI, 1986, 537-538). It is as though there is a positive public acceptance with an inward reservation towards transgender. As such, both the professionals and lay people who are also members of the families will extend these conflicting feelings to members indulging in transgender. One may argue that this paper discriminates against transgender people. On the contrary, it only discourages it since it can threaten the continuity of society. One can also argue that trans couples can adopt and not all cisgenders want and can conceive, but then, it becomes a matter of circumstance as in the case of inability to conceive and deliberate decision not a matter of biological indisposition to the reproductive processes on the one hand. On the other hand, the challenge that LGBTQI+ people face in society spurs them into pretense and secrecy in lifestyle, fear of law enforcement agents, disownment, and deprivations of varied kinds (MARKS, 2006, 3). This does not affect the Trans persons alone but their families through stigmatization, rejection in several places, and even maltreatment and these impede the unity and flourishing of the family (DIERCKX, 2017, 183). The United Nations promotes humanity, marriage, and family but does not consider the modes of achieving them. For Trans persons who end up a man after marriage with a man and vice versa, should divorce or adoption happen, and whose baby is to be adopted? Until technology is invented that allows a biological man the ability of conception, transgender remains a dilemma.

Transgender is a birth defect resulting from dosages of androgens at critical times in the brain development of a foetus in the uterus. It simply means that one can have the genital of a particular sex and different in brain pattern (BLUMER, n.d.n, 2012). However, sex reassignment is more cumbersome and stressful than suppression of hormones to suit the genitalia from birth. This is because many hormones are being boosted by drugs like progesterone, and insulin among others, and such an approach can also be used instead of radical transgendering.

Another fundamental challenge that trans identity poses to family life is the institutional familial anxiety because an ideal family is either or both blood ties and natural interpersonal union. These two are mostly lacking, especially when the spouse transitions later in life (LI, 2019, 8). A lot of publicity through the media aims at promoting the acceptance of gender transitioning, however, in reality, such publicity has not yielded the desired degree of fruitfulness. There is still this restriction and reservation that always accompanies the unusual and unnatural. In terms of later parental and offspring transitioning, the affiliates tend to mask feelings, giving the agent a wrong impression of acceptance. This is if the familial members internalize at all. In some cases, there is an obvious expression of dissatisfaction by one, a few, or some members of the family in the form of Presence vs Absence, Sameness vs Difference, and Self vs Other. The first is the feeling of loss by family members of a dear one who is actually with them but transited. The second is the uncertainty of constancy of trans personality before and after while the third is the dilemma of family members between focusing on religion, morality, and emotions that define their own identities and expressing

unconditional love to the trans family member (LI, 2019, 9). In essence, transitioning is not as simple as one's desire and freedom demand but as complicated as the impact it will have on most especially the family members, how much more in Africa with identified dominant social and gender roles.

In some Western countries, there is a greater degree of acceptance of transgender but they cannot boast of equal social benefits like the cisgenders (MARKS, 2006, 2). However, with the selective access to social benefits, there will be an added burden on the family to augment the insufficiency and as such an unplanned tension in the family. Trans persons can bring about a permanent and temporal division in the family due to possible disunity among family members in coping with the current state of things. Various versions of liberalism have allowed for the promotion of several kinds of pervasions. Many countries see bestiality and pedophilia as punishable offenses yet accept same-sex marriage and transgender. If transgender is accepted because we feel that it is an act of freedom from an encased gender, we can then attempt to extend such understanding to pedophiles and bestiality since it is their body, freedom, and choice.

As we emphasize the impact of transgender on family, the family also has a way it impacts trans persons be it youths, adults, teenagers, or children. The structure of individual families determines the degree of impact on trans persons. For instance, if family dynamics (communication, conflict, organization, etc.) are considerably effective, trans persons may have an easier life than not (MURROE, N.D.N, 2020, 3) and the situation is not different in Africa.

Socially, a girl grows to be a woman, which exposes gender as a social construction and a natural thing. But then a girl growing into a woman and a boy growing into a man do not and cannot be limited to the social construction of gender. It merely entails the 'full realization' of what has been and not an introduction of a novel thing. It is more comprehensible to argue for the possibility of a girl growing into a woman and the same for a boy than a girl growing into a man and the same for a boy. Limiting gender to be just a socio-cultural reality is reductionistic. It transcends culture and society. If not, why should a trans person transcend to an intending gender and not 'ungender'? By "ungender" it means neutral gender or no gender at all. Gender, which is about the classification of a role according to sexuality might be socio-cultural regarding the role, but regarding its foundation, it is biological. This biological undertone interconnects with genetic formation. If not, why would a trans person feel she/he is of the other sex? What is the '*manness*' or '*womanness*' to which a trans person aspires, which is non-socially constructed that appetizes the person? It simply means that '*womanness/manness*' goes beyond gender. Of course, what makes a trans person insist that he/she was once a man/woman but now is the other way and why going to the extent of Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) to acquire some body parts that make up the intended sex with which we classify sex and gender?

In a family setting in Africa, there is a father and mother who are romantic mates. So, when a woman becomes a man (DIERCKX, 2017, 182), he does not become an automatic father alongside the dilemma of the correct way to address the family and ascription of social roles and vice versa. Transgender is mostly about emotion and desire superseding rationality. For this reason, those

excessive hormones of the other sex which stir these feelings can be suppressed rather than changing to an entirely different identity. Where such technology does not exist, what happens?

Research has shown that there is a high prevalence rate of HIV risk as well as its transmission among transgender people worldwide due to the struggle for survival (JOBSON, THERON, KAGGWA AND KIM, 2012, 161). It is not unnoticed that HIV is a threat to not just health but family life. Even though some measures are available that can enable those living with HIV/AIDS to have HIV-free offspring, yet many are unwilling to take such a risk. It is rigorous and dangerous. Having demonstrated that transgending is usually a challenging experience, how do we cope with the already existing ones?

Coping with Transgender Identity and Family in Africa: Our Contributions

First, the stage of every society is, to no small extent, the function of the family structure, and as such, parents need to imbibe the dictates of culture and norms on the offspring and not discard them as anachronistic. By so doing, certain standards of behaviour are established for authentic children to take a cue from (BALOGUNA, 2010, 4 and 8), which includes self-restraint among others, though no criteria for authentic children have yet been established. It is undeniable that conflict is inevitable in the family and is often rooted in gender roles and as such one may suggest that swapping gender will curtail such conflicts. But a closer look will expose that nothing has changed except the roles repositioned in this regard.

Secondly, many interrogations need to be made to evaluate whether transgending is worth the rigorous processes. If a trans man/woman is a person assigned female or male respectively at birth but identifies oneself the other way, what is the source of this identification? Is it just the brain, consciousness, or differences in feeling and attraction? Why change genitals and other variant body parts to suit a particular intending gender if gender is a mere social construction? Why not vocally proclaim such and stop at that level without surgery? One may argue that some outward appearances make observers attribute a particular gender to a person even when the person is not the attributed gender and, as such supports the inclination for transgending, yet it has not been established whether 'beingness' lies in appearance, people's feelings or nature.

Thirdly, is the reduction of gender as mere social construction an empirical one, conceptual, or both? If gender is restricted to social construction, why is that stage of 'implying' and 'concealing' in transgending processes? If such sensitive existence like gender and sex identification is reduced to social construction, why won't feelings and desires associated with binary gender be reduced to the same condition? Is it not also the same social construction that somehow directs or helps them identify that feelings/desires in some way are associated with particular sex? A lot of disorder has been corrected medically and psychologically but becoming a trans cannot be termed a disorder corrected. It is a feeling achieved and as such is more selfish than vital, if not, why would some remain at the level of transvestites and some further it to the extreme which is the surgical aspect (the rigorous process of transgending)?

Furthermore, on concealing, if a transgender conceals details and credentials like birth and marriage certificates, what then will be the suitable details? Will the new date of transgendering be the birthdate or will there be no birthdate at all? How does a transgender cope with a change in marriage details? It is quite an awkward experience and as such should not be promoted, especially in Africa. If a male trans female or vice versa goes for adoption, what is the moral justification for such an act? Even if it is a matter of choice, human beings considerably have control over their choices and as such should act accordingly. Lastly, motherhood and fatherhood, sonship, or daughterhood transcends gender and are understandable outside the gender category (BALOGUNb, 2012, 6). A lot of natural things have been questioned and challenged today in the quest to promote science, technology, and globalization, and they have done more harm than good to the family setting. Thus, there is a need for reconstruction of orientation, which will, in turn, reconstruct other necessary aspects. The existing ones should not be ostracized but further engagements should be highly discouraged.

To balance the arguments of this paper, we will anticipate some objections to our proposals here. First, critics may argue that how it feels to transit to different gender is only understood by the individual. Yet, there are a lot of feelings that we have and jettisoned at the same time because we consider their consequence/s. For instance, not everyone harms the other in the name of anger or rage.

Secondly, critics may also argue that a lifetime is too long to jeopardize personal happiness and freedom. However, in Africa's web of relationship, collective interest is superior to individual interest. This is because, collective interest is an aggregated individual interests and transgender does not qualify as a collective interest in Africa.

Thirdly, one may argue that unlike Bestiality and Pedophilia which involves harm against the other, Transgender is an action on oneself. But it can better be seen as harm against oneself and even others by extension. More criticisms may arise against the thesis of this paper. However, we keep an open mind towards that and address them where and when necessary.

Conclusion

The wave of transgender is also here with us in Africa. Gradually, like the wave of globalization, if not handled well, might reach an outcry, and the family setting, which is characterized by the presence of authentic fatherhood and motherhood will be threatened and dissociated from flourishing. If there is an increase in transgender, its legality and legalization will become imminent, debatable, and inevitable, while the continuity of generations/society through the family will be seriously challenged. Even if people's feelings and desires should be considered, more consideration should be given to the long-term effect it might have on society, especially in Africa.

Today, a lot of pervasions have been mistaken to be a way of life, but this is a misconception and needs to be corrected. Androgyny and the likes can be

managed better when parents/guardians direct their affiliates aright to positively influence their choices over which they have a freewill. Such orientation should be inculcated at an early age. Parents/guardians should seek medical consultation in line with moral standards for better options like hormonal suppressions and counselling instead of transgenering. Gender responsibility is mostly cultural and gender swap brings about a significant change of roles, but in a situation where either family members are involved, it becomes an additional role and responsibility more than a change while transgender is for satisfaction.

Some argue that some transwomen give birth but it all depends on the nature of fertilization and nature of birth. Does it involve a biological process or is the process technologically induced? Is it a partial or complete transgender? Is the childbirth normal or through a cesarean section whereby the birth canal is irrelevant? A transman can only give birth if the reproductive organs are still intact and functional while a transwoman can give birth either through in-vitro fertilization or the individual has one-time experienced 5-ARD (*5a-Reductase* deficiency). This gene mutation allows for the formation of both functional male and female reproductive organs with one more functional than the other. In line with this, a complete transgender cannot perform the functions with which its former gender is associated.

Finally, having elucidated on transgender and family life in Africa, it has to be restated again that in the light of African values at present, transgender identity is pervasive and, as such should involve counselling and medical attention other than surgery and associated manifestations of attitudes. It is also within the ambience of the duty of therapists to issue conservative advice to control the rate of acceptance of involvement in transgenering processes. When these factors are taken into consideration, it will go a long way to stabilize the nature of things. More ideas are welcomed on this topic for further discourse.

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Traditional African Religion and Non-Doxastic Accounts of Faith*

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Kirk LOUGHEED

LCC International University/University of Pretoria

philosophy@kirkougheed.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5844-2870>

Abstract

In the recent Anglo-American philosophy of religion, significant attention has been given to the nature of faith. My goal is to show that some of the recent discussion of faith can be fruitfully brought to bear on a problem for a less globally well-known version of monotheism found in African Traditional Religion. I argue that African Traditional Religion could benefit from utilizing non-doxastic accounts of faith. For a significant number of Africans questioning authority or tradition, including the tenets of African Traditional Religion is viewed as harmful to the community and hence beyond the pale. A non-doxastic account of faith would be helpful for adherents of African Traditional Religion who find themselves disbelieving yet wanting to continue in religious practice and maintain communal harmony. This is because a non-doxastic state such as hope is within one's direct control and does not require as much evidential justification as rational belief.

Keyword: African Traditional Religion, Non-doxastic faith, Religious doubt, Anglo-American philosophy of religion, Cross-cultural philosophy

Introduction

Over the last few decades, significant literature has emerged in the Anglo-American philosophy of religion, exploring the nature of propositional faith (see LOUGHEED & HENDRICKS 2021). Much of the discussion has centered on identifying the specific property or properties essential to faith. What does it mean to say that S has propositional faith that P? In attempting to answer this and related questions, there has been debate about whether belief is necessary for propositional faith. Some philosophers conclude that belief is not in fact necessary for faith, appealing to non-doxastic states such as acceptance, hope, or trust to justify this supposition. As is often the case, the target of faith in such discussions is Western monotheism, with the Judeo-Christian tradition taking centerstage. My goal is not to issue a verdict on the nature of faith in this context, but instead to show that some of these ideas can be fruitfully brought to bear on a problem for a less globally well-known version of monotheism found in African Traditional Religion.

In what follows, the first three sections are intended to introduce the reader to essential information about the two topics I'm bringing together. I therefore begin by explaining the basic contours of the debate about the nature of faith, with special attention to early non-doxastic accounts of faith as hope (Section 2). I then present some of the basic claims of African Traditional Religion (Section 3). I argue that African Traditional Religion is not frequently separated

from other areas of life and ways of thinking, such that there is really no distinct concept of ‘religion’ (Section 4). However, if forced to choose, African Traditional Religion fits best with doxasticism about faith (Section 5). This leads to a problem, which is that doxasticism excludes individuals who would be adherents of African Traditional Religion but find themselves with serious doubts or otherwise disbelieving. Though this is also a problem for other monotheistic religions, I argue that it is much more serious in the African tradition since such disbelief is harmful to the community, and the community is the highest (or one of the highest) goods (Section 6). Embracing a non-doxastic account of faith such as hope would allow individuals who disbelieve African Traditional Religion to continue to practice it without damaging their community (Section 7). I conclude with some observations about the future directions and the challenges of cross-cultural philosophy of religion (Section 8).

Anglo-American Accounts of Faith

One of the central debates about faith in the Anglo-American philosophy of religion regards whether belief is necessary for propositional faith. There is now considerable literature on the topic, and as such, I will make no attempt at a complete summary here. Instead, I focus on Louis Pojman’s seminal paper, “Faith Without Belief,” which is an early defense of non-doxasticism and really set the stage for much of the subsequent literature (1986).¹ I focus on Pojman because I believe the motivation for his account is relevant to what I want to propose for African Traditional Religion later. Furthermore, I suspect that some of Pojman’s claims very much remain part of the motivation that continues to undergird non-doxastic accounts of faith in the ongoing literature.

For the sake of simplicity, let us just consider the proposition ‘God exists’ as the relevant propositional object of faith. Pojman argues that *doubt* can sometimes be the cause of anxiety, especially when it is understood as a necessary condition for salvation. Thus, he argues that *hope* is sufficient for faith in the absence of belief (POJMAN 1986, 157). Now, suppose that this doubt is the result of how an individual assesses their evidence for God. Furthermore, suppose they think that a kind of ‘Pascalian-Jamesian’ method of placing themselves in a position to believe is immoral because it goes beyond their evidence, or that it just doesn’t work for their psychological constitution (POJMAN 1986, 158).² If belief is necessary for faith, then such a person is disqualified.

The reason belief is important for faith is that it helps relieve that pain associated with doubt and that it is also action-guiding.³ However, regarding the pain that sometimes comes with doubt, Pojman believes “it may be necessary for many religious people to learn to live gracefully with doubt, using it to probe deeper into ultimate questions. The suffering of doubt may be a cross that a

¹ Both Robert Audi (1991) and William Alston (1996) also contribute early pieces and are found in the acknowledgments of Pojman article.

² The Pascalian-Jamesian method referred to here is one where an individual who lacks religious faith places themselves situations and undertakes projects that make it likely they will develop faith (e.g., attending religious services, reading sacred texts, praying, etc.)

³ See Peirce 1962.

disciple must learn to bear” (1986, 160). More importantly, Pojman denies that belief is a necessary condition for action-guidance. He explains that “For many actions belief that the state of affairs in question will occur is not a necessary condition. I may act on the mere possibility of something being the case without actually believing that it will be the case” (POJMAN 1986, 160). In order to act on a proposition, an individual doesn’t need to believe it. They merely need to believe it involves a risk worth taking given their goals. Indeed, it’s even reasonable to sometimes be guided by very weak credences. If I believe there is a bomb in that suitcase, even with a very low credence, I am reasonable to act quickly to leave the room (POJMAN 1986, 160). Pojman’s point is that the proposition which is doubted doesn’t even need to be positively probable in order to act on it; it all depends on the risks associated with the proposition.

These reflections lead Pojman to claim hope is sufficient for faith, since the “perception of its possibility is often sufficient to incite activity” (1986, 161). There are four conditions for the type of hope that he has in mind. First, it “involves belief in the possibility of a state of affairs obtaining” (POJMAN 1986, 161). This means merely believing that the proposition is not impossible. For example, I might hope to win the lottery, even though I believe it’s extremely unlikely I will win (POJMAN 1986, 162).⁴ Second, “hope precludes certainty” (POJMAN 1986, 162). In order for something to be reasonably hoped for, it has to be possible that it may not obtain. Third, “hope entails desire for the state of affairs in question to obtain or the proposition to be true” (POJMAN 1986, 162). In other words, one must have a pro-attitude to the proposition in question. Fourth, “[i]f one hopes for *p*, one will be disposed to do what one can to bring *p* about, if there is anything that one can do to bring it about” (POJMAN 1986, 162).

The upshot of this view is that it is possible to live as if a proposition is true, even if one in fact disbelieves it (POJMAN 1986, 167). To hope that God exists “implies only that one regards such a being as possibly existing and that one is committed to live *as if* such a being does exist. Whether it is rational to commit oneself in this way depends on the outcome of an analysis of comparative values in relationship to probable outcomes. It is the sort of assessment that goes on in any cost-benefit analysis” (POJMAN 1986, 170). Pojman concludes that for at least some people, this sort of hope is sufficient for a deep and meaningful commitment to the religious life (1986, 170-172).

My aim is not to debate the merits of Pojman’s case, though I believe he presents a plausible one, but rather to highlight that the motivation for it is connected to evidentialism or epistemic justification. Also, notice that related though distinct reason from worries about evidentialism for endorsing non-doxasticism is based on doxastic involuntariness, the view that individuals don’t have (direct) control over what they believe. Beliefs are things that are intuitive or

⁴ For Pojman “What separates hope from belief is that in believing one necessarily believes that the proposition is true (has a subjective probability index of greater than .5, whereas in hoping this is not necessary” (1986, 162)

felt, and individuals just find themselves with them. If individuals don't control what they believe, perhaps belief is less relevant to faith than many suppose.⁵

As stated, the literature on the nature of faith has grown significantly in the last few decades. Daniel Howard-Snyder has emerged as a leading proponent of non-doxastic faith (e.g., 2016, 2017). A number of different non-doxastic states have been proposed as consistent with propositional faith. For example, along with Pojman others argue that *hope* or something similar to it is sufficient for faith (e.g., AUDI 2019; JACKSON 2019; JEFFREY 2017). Still others claim that *trust* is sufficient for faith (e.g., MCCRAW 2015; PACE and MCKAUGHAN 2022). On the other hand, one of the most influential doxastic accounts of faith can be located in the work of John Bishop. He argues that faith should be thought of as a doxastic venture, where passion factors can take one beyond the evidence (e.g., BISHOP 2002; 2007).⁶

African Traditional Religion

Before explaining the basic components of African Traditional Religion, a few brief methodological comments are in order. Thaddeus Metz, who is well-known for expositing ideas from the African tradition in ways that are palatable to Anglo-American or 'analytic' philosophers writes that:

When writing on Africa, one is expected to try to avoid stereotyping by acknowledging the existence of variety and particularity among its fifty-four countries and its thousands of linguistic and ethnic groups. However, there appears to be enough common ground among sub-Saharan black peoples (or at least their academic exponents) for many African philosophers and social scientists to speak of an overarching belief system routinely called 'African Traditional Religion' in the literature. (Metz 2022b, 1)

In what follows, I describe the main components of African Traditional Religion with special attention given to the idea of life force, while acknowledging that this is hardly to imply there is uniformity of belief across the sub-Sahara.

African Traditional Religion is unambiguously monotheistic, with one supreme God having created the universe from pre-existing material. God has imbued literally everything that exists, including both animate and inanimate objects with an imperceptible energy commonly referred to as vital energy or life force. In other words, God is responsible for giving everything that exists life. There is a large invisible realm that includes numerous spirits, often representative of various aspects of nature, the living dead (those who remain part of their community after biological death for four or five generations), ancestors (venerated living dead who remain part of the community for much longer).

Life force is also indicative of what is known as the African 'hierarchy of being' or 'chain of being'. God has placed humans at the center of the visible

⁵ At least some evidence that this is motivation can be inferred from the fact that some have directed responded to it as a challenge. See Mourad 2008; Rettler 2018.

⁶ For response see, for example, Buckareff 2005 and Eklund 2014.

universe, giving them the most life force of any of the visible beings and therefore more than non-human animals, plants, and minerals. However, humans have less force than the living dead or ancestors, and much less than God who has the most powerful force (and indeed, is responsible for all other life force). Forces impact each other, where stronger forces can diminish or strengthen other forces. The basic element of the universe is force, which is derived by God. Everything in the universe is interconnected in virtue of possessing life force. This interconnectedness is important for understanding the highly communal nature of communitarian ethics.

The Religious/Secular Divide in African Traditional Religion

What is interesting is that in African Traditional Religion, religion is not often understood as a distinct phenomenon that is separate from other areas of life. It permeates all aspects of life and is not typically thought of as something that can be separated into its own unique category. I hypothesize that at least part of what explains this feature of African Traditional Religion is due to the fact that life force permeates *everything*.

Consider that K. Chukwulozie Anyanwu writes, “[t]he Igbo culture does not make a clear-cut distinction between the self and the world, between body and spirit, between the visible and invisible worlds but regard all as a field of aesthetic continuum” (ANYANWU 1984, 89) The ‘aesthetic continuum’ is here best understood as referring to force. Anyanwu also writes that:

To say that the Igbo live religiously does not mean that they spend all their days in prayer or that they do not exercise their power of thought. A person is not religious solely because he worships God, rather he is religious if he commits all the resources of his mind to and completely surrenders himself to the service of a cause in such a way that it controls his modes of thought, activities and behaviour. (ANYANWU 1984, 87)

George Ukagba explains that:

Mbiti in his book *Introduction to African Religion and Philosophy* claimed that Africans eat religiously, dance religiously and does everything religiously. In traditional African societies, there were no atheists. This is because religion, in the indigenous African culture was not an independent institution. Religion in the African sense was practical and all-involving. (UKAGBA 2005, 185)

Peter Kasenene adds that “[a]ccording to African spirituality, there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, the physical and spiritual, the religious and the moral” (KASENENE 1994, 142). Furthermore, “[t]he African world-view blends the sacred and the mundane. The religious and the moral intermingle with the physical, material, political and social concerns of the people” (KASENENE 1994, 142). Vincent Mulago observes that religion is not usually distinguished from other customs, with it often being mixed together with the social, political, and even the scientific and medical (1991, 127). And finally, C.N. Ubah explains that “Otanchara-Otanzu [of the Igbo] religion consists of a wide

range of beliefs and practices relating to invisible forces which are thought to determine the lot of men on earth. Life is held to exist in two planes: the tangible world of the living and the immaterial world of the spirits” (UBAH 1982, 91). I submit that these descriptions are representative such that this is enough to show that at least for many adherents of African Traditional Religion (or more carefully, for its academic exponents), there is little distinction drawn between religion and the rest of one’s life.

African Traditional Religion and Doxastic Faith

I am now able to bring the topics of Traditional African Religion and faith as construed in the Anglo-American Tradition into conversation with one another. In this section, I defend the claim that traditional African religion is best interpreted as endorsing doxasticism about faith. More carefully, I make the modest claim that it is *more* consistent with doxasticism than non-doxasticism, at least as these concepts are understood in the contemporary Anglo-American philosophy of religion. In other words, if forced to choose between doxasticism or non-doxasticism about faith in African Traditional Religion, the answer is clearly doxasticism. I support this claim by examining some instances of how the term ‘belief’ is used in descriptions of Traditional African Religion in order to first establish that ‘propositional belief’ is a relevant concept. I then turn to the rare usages of ‘faith’ in some influential texts on African Traditional Religion.

Here are some examples of how the term ‘belief’ is used in descriptions of African Traditional Religion:

- “African ethics is deeply religious, being influenced by a *belief* in an all-pervading Supreme Being who controls the universe and social relationships through a number of intermediaries” (KASENENE 1994, 140; emphasis mine).
- “Igbo *beliefs* in *Chi/Chukwu* (Great Creator), *Chi* (personal spirit), *Ala* (Earth-goddess), *Ndebunze* (spirits of ancestors), etc. are the ways in which the Igbo people culturally interpret and organise their experience, and create meaning, value and order in their world” (ANYANWU 1984, 86; first emphasis mine).
- “[E]verything you do, including acquisition of knowledge and coming to *beliefs*, serves the purpose of enhancing the vital energy, the procreation of the tribe. Together. What you do if you isolate, individualize yourself is worse than dying: you will never be a root.” (HAMMINGA 2005, 59; emphasis mine).

All of these instances refer to propositional belief. Additionally, in the introduction to Evans-Pritchard’s influential anthropological work, [Theories of Primitive Religion] ‘belief’ is also frequently used to denote propositional belief (1965, 1-19). The same is true of how it appears in Laurenti Magesa’s important book, [African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant] (1997). Though it is ultimately an empirical claim that could be subject to more systematic scrutiny than I conduct here, I suggest this is enough to reasonably conclude that *belief* in African Traditional Religion commonly loosely refers to propositional beliefs.

Furthermore, if pressed, I suspect that adherents of African Traditional Religion would affirm that they believe various propositions that represent the content of their views.

Supposing I have established that something like propositional belief reasonably exists in African Traditional Religion, there is the further question of whether faith is a distinct concept from it. I now tentatively suggest that in the remarkably few places it appears, 'faith' just is 'belief' for many adherents of African Traditional Religion (or at least for its academic exponents). For much of this tradition, there is no meaningful distinction between faith and belief.

Consider that in John Mbiti's seminal [Introduction to African Religion], the word 'faith' appears only 13 times within the 220 or so pages.⁷ In 5 places the word is used in reference to something like the 'Christian religion' or 'Christianity' (MBITI 1975, 30, 182, 184). In 3 places it is used to refer to the Baha'i religion (MBITI 1975, 188). In another 3 places, it is used to describe the idea that Christians have faith, often located by faith *in* Jesus (MBITI 1975, 182, 185, 190). Not only is this last usage not related to African Traditional Religion nor propositional faith, but such usages are *never* accompanied by an explanation as to what constitutes faith *in* a person. This leaves just two places where faith is used in reference to African Traditional Religion:

- "These public religious places [i.e., places in nature] are the focus of communal faith, values, and sentiments" (MBITI 1975, 146).
- "They [i.e., elders] embody the presence of God among people and the faith or beliefs of the people, as well as their moral values" (MBITI 1975, 150).

The former of these quotes refers to the communal nature of faith as represented in public natural places of worship, while the latter simply equates faith with beliefs. Again, however, notice that Mbiti offers nothing by way of a description of the nature of faith itself. The safest inference here is that for Mbiti, faith just means belief.

In Evans-Pritchard's (1965), [Theories of Primitive Religion], faith appears just six times with it appearing to mean something like 'belief' (e.g., 1965, 45). Similar claims hold for Laurenti Magesa's (1997) [African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life], since it rarely appears there and when it does, it seems to mean either 'religion' or 'belief'.

Now, some might express scepticism about my use of Mbiti and Evans-Pritchard as sources as they have been accused of making over-generalizations and of doing ethnophilosophy.⁸ But even setting this debate aside and appealing to a

⁷ See Appendix I for the details of each usage.

⁸ Ethnophilosophy is the style of philosophy that takes the beliefs and customs of a peoples and attempts to parse them philosophical terms. It has been criticized for needing to rely on generalizations, in addition to lacking argumentative rigour. However, some of countered that all philosophy is necessarily grounded in culture, at least to some degree. For a recent debate on the merits of ethnophilosophy see Imfidon et. al. (2019).

more contemporary text that appears after the push to ‘de-colonize’ the African philosophy of religion, one gets the same results, at least with respect to how faith is employed. Consider that in the over 800 pages of Asante and Mazama’s masterful work editing the [Encyclopedia of African Religion] (2009), that ‘faith’ only appears 24 times and it is used in the same ways described above.⁹ It is simply never used to imply a non-doxastic attitude like hope or acceptance.¹⁰

In sum, all of this suggests that a significant number of adherents of African Traditional Religion (or at least their academic exponents) would, upon reflection, endorse doxasticism about faith. Though the term faith is rarely used, when it is, it implies belief. Likewise, belief almost always implies propositional belief though such belief is not considered separate from other areas of life (as per Section 4). If African Traditional Religion was forced to choose its conception of faith within the parameters of the Anglo-American philosophical tradition, it would almost certainly endorse doxasticism. However, this discussion so far is *descriptive*, and so it is an open question whether African Traditional Religion is consistent with non-doxastic accounts of faith too, even if they are not how faith is typically understood in the tradition.

The Problem: African Traditional Religion and Disbelief

In this section, I introduce a problem for African Traditional Religion on the assumption that it endorses doxasticism about faith. The basic problem is that doxasticism is a rather narrow construal of faith, and as such it risks excluding people who might otherwise be adherents. I begin this section by motivating the problem based on reflections about doxastic involuntariness and epistemic justification. I then explain that such exclusion is particularly worrisome for the adherent of African Traditional Religion because it risks creating division within the community. My explanation will include showing the importance of communal harmony within this tradition.

Doxastic Involuntariness

The first way that a problem for doxasticism about faith in Traditional African Religion can be motivated is based on doxastic involuntariness. This is the view that a person does not have direct control over what they believe (e.g., ALSTON 1989).¹¹ Suppose that you are offered one million dollars to believe that there is a real live pink elephant in your office. Given that there is no pink elephant in your office, you cannot simply *will* yourself to believe it, even if you are inclined to report that you believe it in order to get the money. The same is true of willing yourself to believe that $2+2=5$ and many other similar cases. Now, the truth of

⁹ I am unable to access the recent [Encyclopedia of African Religions and Philosophy] (2021) which is another obvious place to conduct a search of how ‘faith’ is used though I suspect the result would be similar to what I already report in this section.

¹⁰ See Appendix II for the details of each usage.

¹¹ Though it might be fair to characterise doxastic involuntariness as the ‘standard view’, it has not gone unchallenged in the literature. For example, see Ginet 2001 and Weatherson 2008.

both doxasticism about faith and doxastic involuntariness can combine to form a moral problem if faith is necessary for something like salvation.¹²

Suppose that faith is necessary in order to maintain good relationships with the living dead and departed ancestors (who are ultimately conduits for God), and in order so that one becomes part of the living dead and is not too quickly forgotten by one's community. Though it is doubtful that there is a clear analogue for something like Christian salvation in African Traditional Religion, this is enough to generate a similar moral concern. For example, imagine that someone within such a community where African Traditional Religion is practiced simply finds themselves disbelieving many of the important (implicit) truth claims of African Traditional Religion. If doxastic involuntariness is true, then they don't have (direct) control over this situation. Not only might there be something fundamentally unfair about being morally blameworthy for one's beliefs if in fact they are not under one's (direct) control, *but doxasticism about faith risks excluding people who would otherwise like to remain participants of African Traditional Religion within their community.*

Epistemic Doubt

The second way that doxasticism about faith in Traditional African Religion can be motivated is based on epistemic doubt. Notice that it is precisely this concern that motivates Pojman's defense of non-doxasticism about faith. Suppose an adherent of African Traditional Religion who has been brought up in a community where it is widely practiced begins to doubt some of its implicit truth claims. Imagine that they study philosophy at the University of Rochester and adopt epistemic evidentialism (e.g., FELDMAN and CONEE 1985). Upon finding many of the claims of African Traditional Religion supported by something like oral tradition instead of empirical evidence or philosophical argument, they begin to harbour serious doubts. Suppose they find the evidence for the living-dead, departed ancestors, or other spirits lacking. A consideration of the relevant evidence brings the person to disbelief. Notice that this point is consistent with doxastic involuntariness. Such a person simply finds themselves disbelieving the major tenets of Traditional African Religion, after an examination of the relevant evidence. The disbelieving itself need not be an act of the will. If belief is necessary for faith, then such an individual cannot properly be considered to have the relevant propositional faith regarding African Traditional Religion. This is yet another way that doxasticism about faith could come to exclude someone who otherwise wants to continue to practice African Traditional Religion and remain in harmony with their community.

The Importance of Community

The story of individuals leaving and rejecting their religious communities is a familiar one in the West. Why is this more of a problem for Traditional African Religion, than for say, Christianity? The answer lies in the value that many in the African tradition place on the community. Contemporary African ethics is often

¹² Salvation is so obviously the motivating factor in Pojman's account that it appears in the abstract of the article (1986, 157).

characterised as ‘communitarian’ or ‘relational’. Two of the more influential understandings of African communitarianism are located in *personhood* or *harmonious relationships*. The former says that the most important goal of morality is that an individual develop their personhood, which is a normative term denoting something akin to ‘character’. It is typically thought that personhood can only be developed by exercising other-regarding virtues and hence must be formed in the context of community.¹³ The latter says that harmonious relationships are the highest value which ought to be pursued above all else (e.g., PARIS 1995). Consider the well-known quote from Desmond Tutu in which he claims that “Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum*” (TUTU 1999, 35). A different approach says the highest value is not located in harmonious relationships themselves, but instead in our *capacity* for such relationships as exhibited through identifying with others and exhibiting solidarity with them (METZ 2022a). Finally, the ethical thought explicitly located in religion identifies life force as the most important value. The goal of morality on this view is to preserve and strengthen the life force of oneself, but more importantly the life force of others (e.g., LOUGHEED, Unpublished Manuscript; DZOBO 1992; TEMPELS 1969).¹⁴

Now, remember that whether it is true that community is the highest value is not what’s at stake here. My point is that even if it is not the highest value, it is an extremely important one in the African communitarian tradition. Either all or almost all acts that cause conflict and division within the community ought to be avoided. Thus, part of the problem with doxasticism about faith regarding African Traditional Religion is that it creates division and conflict within the community. If belief is necessary for faith, it seems more likely that individuals will leave their religious communities or at least not be able to practice with their community, than if a less rigid notion of faith was in place. Regardless of why someone disbelieves key tenets of African Traditional Religion, it will cause strife within their community if belief is required for participating in the communal way of life. But such conflict is to be avoided above all (or almost all) else.

The idea that epistemic considerations may cause one to disbelieve some of the tenets of African Traditional Religion is particularly telling. In large swaths of the African tradition, it is inappropriate to question authority or tradition, and this seems to include Traditional African Religion, at least in certain places. Indeed, the idea that such beliefs could even be questioned or subject to rational scrutiny will almost certainly be viewed as a kind of neo-colonialism creeping into the adherent’s mind. For example, consider that though Mbiti does indeed use the term ‘belief’ far more frequently than faith, it is *never* done so in the context of denoting a proposition that is questioned or doubted by any members of the community. Instead, it is taken to merely describe various aspects of religious

¹³ Elsewhere I have argued that there are problems with different interpretations of the role that community plays in forming personhood (LOUGHEED 2022)

¹⁴ There is debate about whether one’s own life force should be of moral concern. However, at very least, if a person is focused on increasing the life force of those around them, this should have a positive impact on them (see LOUGHEED Unpublished Manuscript).

belief, which I submit is often reasonably construed as propositional belief. Epistemic considerations about the rationality of such beliefs are simply never in view.¹⁵

When creating a moral theory that can account for both African and Western moral intuitions, Metz writes that one important African moral intuition is that it is *pro tanto* immoral “to flout long-standing norms central to a people’s self-conception, as opposed to partaking in customs” (2022a, 53). Presumably, customs here reasonably include the rituals and practices associated with African Traditional Religion. This principle implies that “[n]ot only must one acknowledge the presence of others in the African tradition, one is also expected to participate with them, in conversation, rituals, and culture more broadly” (METZ 2022a, 58). Though creativity and individuality are not forbidden, it is typically thought that at least some weight must be given to whether one’s actions (or inaction) would be disruptive to their community (METZ 2022a, 58-59).

This is part of the reason why epistemic doubts can be seen as harmful to the community, especially where such doubts might lead one to cease participating in the practices surrounding Traditional African Religion. If faith requires belief, and a person lacks the relevant beliefs, it seems unlikely they can meaningfully participate in the relevant faith tradition. Furthermore, it’s an open question whether other members of the community would even welcome such participation. The problem is “it has been common amongst African societies for a long while, and more so than amongst at least Western ones, to think that one has some obligation to engage with one’s fellows and not to disrupt the community’s way of life” (METZ 2022a, 58). Indeed, it is considered wrong to isolate oneself from communal ways of living, where such isolation is not typically viewed with as much suspicion in Western societies (METZ 2022a, 58-59).

Finally, some hold that the only (or most important) relevant object of moral concern is the community. Claude Ake writes that:

[I]n most of Africa . . . people are still locked into natural economies and have a sense of belonging to an organic whole, be it a family, a clan, a lineage or an ethnic group All this means that abstract legal rights attributed to individuals will not make much sense for most of our people Our people still think largely in terms of collective rights and express their commitment to it constantly in their behavior. This disposition underlies the zeal for community development and the enormous sacrifices which poor people readily make for it (AKE 1987: 9 quoted in METZ 2022a, 138).¹⁶

¹⁵ I am of course not speaking about contemporary African philosophers of religion who are indeed conducting such inquiries. My point is that the way African Traditional Religion is typically practiced is not one where questions and doubts are particularly welcomed.

¹⁶ Metz notes that similar ideas are echoed elsewhere. See Gbadegesin 1991, 66–7; Kigongo 2002; Nkondo 2007, 90. Metz also points out though some African thinkers even deny the existence of individual human rights, this is difficult to square with their generally widespread belief that all humans enjoy an inherent dignity.

Again, the takeaway here is that failing to participate in a communal way of life, one that may include the practices of Traditional African Religion is *pro tanto* immoral on the African view. The lack of distinction between the religious and non-religious in this tradition only makes this problem even more pressing. For to not participate in the religious aspect of life, would mean to just not participate in *the* life of the community.

Given the importance of community, doxasticism about faith poses a serious challenge for Traditional African Religion. It risks creating division within the community by alienating individuals who could otherwise continue to participate in the relevant ways of life. The problem, however, is that I have argued that doxasticism about faith more accurately reflects Traditional African Religion, if forced to choose between doxasticism and non-doxasticism (Section 5). In sum, doxasticism about faith is divisive and this is particularly problematic in the context of African communitarianism. In the next section, I explore whether there might be ways to appeal to non-doxasticism to develop a more inclusive account of faith that remains broadly consistent with African Traditional Religion.

The Solution: Traditional African Religion and Non-Doxastic Faith

Though I've argued that descriptions of Traditional African Religion are more consistent with doxasticism about faith than with non-doxasticism, I believe that non-doxasticism offers the potential to significantly weaken the problem posed in Section 6. In this section, I first demonstrate how a non-doxastic account of faith might be successfully applied in the case of Traditional African Religion. I then show how it can be leveraged to help assuage the worry about harm to the community.

For ease of discussion, I will only refer to the non-doxastic account of faith as *hope* as explained in Section 2, though what I say is likely to be consistent with many other non-doxastic accounts of faith. Recall that faith as hope says that S has faith that P iff (i) S believes P is not impossible; (ii) P is uncertain for S; (iii) S has a pro-attitude toward P; and (iv) S is disposed to bring about P inasmuch as possible. With respect to African Traditional Religion, an individual who finds themselves disbelieving the central tenets could still continue to hope that they're true. Importantly, they could continue to live as if they're true, avoiding the potentially harmful communal fallout from their disbelief. For example, they could continue to leave food and drink out for the living dead, pay respect to departed ancestors, appeal to witch doctors for help, etc., even if they did not have the relevant propositional beliefs about them.

Notice how quickly this solves the problem of those excluded from Traditional African Religion, at least for reasons not having to do with epistemic justification. Perhaps an adherent just finds themselves disbelieving core tenets of African Traditional Religion and isn't sure why. If hope is *voluntary*, then such a person could choose to accept African Traditional Religion even if they don't believe it. This has the potential to avoid creating the division in one's community that is so important to avoid in this communitarian tradition.

The slightly more difficult case is the one where a person finds themselves disbelieving Traditional African Religion because of epistemic considerations. A person needs a certain amount of evidence to rationally believe a proposition. But I submit that the evidential bar for rationality (whatever that may

be) is lower for hope than for belief. Not only can this be seen when considering that rational belief is more closely associated with knowledge, but it's apparent when reflecting on the type of cases where Pojman suggests hope can be warranted. If Pojman is correct, it's rational to hope for something even if the odds of it being true are low. The cost-benefit analysis just needs to be such that hoping a highly communal religion such as African Traditional Religion is true is worth the risk of it being wrong. Given how harmful not partaking in the life of the community is in this tradition, it appears reasonable that an individual could hope African Traditional Religion is true even if they assign a relatively low credence to it. What would make it irrational to hope that Traditional African Religion is true is if someone came to hold its core tenets to be impossible (or perhaps the chances of its truth infinitesimally small) or maybe thought its truth would have negative axiological value.

Finally, one potential advantage of this approach is that it may apply more seamlessly to Traditional African Religion than to the Judeo-Christian tradition. This is because as I have already explained (Section 4), Traditional African Religion is not typically viewed as distinct from other areas of life. The practices surrounding it are very much part of the life of the community such that continuing to participate in them despite disbelief could be easier than in certain Western traditions (think of certain Christian denominations where spiritual conversions focused on belief are of central importance). Furthermore, I have stated that it's unclear that Traditional African Religion fits easily with the Anglo-American debate about faith because propositional belief is not often explicitly under consideration. Consider that this might be even *more* reason to embrace a non-doxastic account where the focus is on practice. This discussion is hardly intended to be decisive. Rather it is a first attempt toward making a way forward for a non-doxastic account of faith in Traditional African Religion that helps protect the community.

Future Directions and the Challenges of Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion

An incidental feature of this project is that it serves as a kind of case study in cross-cultural philosophy of religion. For example, I'm well aware that the reader familiar with Traditional African Religion may have cringed at times when reading my attempts to map that tradition onto the concepts in Anglo-American philosophy of religion. Concepts such as propositional belief, doxastic faith, and non-doxastic faith do not have obvious analogues in African Traditional Religion. It would be a kind of Western intellectual colonialism to assume that there *ought* to be a place for such concepts. This is part of what can make conducting cross-cultural philosophy of religion so challenging. Yet I submit that the only way (or more modestly that one of the best ways) to discern whether concepts in one tradition have analogues in another, and whether they can be helpful to each other, is to actually do the work of trying to use a concept across traditions. I have done just that here in attempting to see how Anglo-American conceptions of faith could be brought to bear on Traditional African Religion. We don't know what we can learn from such dialogue without conducting it.

Another tension between Traditional African Religion and the Anglo-American philosophy of religion is my appeal to epistemic rationality, epistemic

justification, evidentialism, and the like. If these aren't concepts that naturally arise in the context of Traditional African Religion, isn't it again a form of intellectual colonialism to insist on their use? I take it that one answer here is simply that local scholars working on the African continent are indeed conducting philosophy of religion that engages in critical scrutiny of Traditional African Religion (for recent examples, see METZ and MOLEFE 2021; CHIMAKONAM 2022; CORDEIRO-RODRIGUES and AGADA 2022). Whether these scholars are adherents of Traditional African Religion themselves is besides the point. The 'cat is out of the bag' with respect to African philosophy of religion, even if it has been significantly influenced by various forms of colonialism. For better or worse, the world is a global village, and this includes the academy and scholarship.

With respect to specific future directions, consider that I have only made a connection between Pojman's account of hope as faith and African Traditional Religion. However, there are many other accounts of non-doxastic faith that deserve to be examined in the context of Traditional African Religion. Though I claim that most non-doxastic accounts will be able to provide a solution to the problem I pose, it's an open question whether particular accounts can do it better than others. There are also further questions about the role evidence ought to play in faith. Though Pojman's account is clearly motivated by (some version of) evidentialism, Laura Buchak argues that faith could involve terminating the search for new evidence or remaining steadfast in the face of counterevidence (e.g., 2017). This is because it allows an individual to pursue risky long-term projects that would otherwise have to be given up. If this account is promising, it could perhaps serve as a way to show how an individual could continue to believe in the tenets of Traditional African Religion, even in the face of counterevidence. Whether one of these accounts does a superior job of solving the problem I raise in Section 6 is an open question.

Conclusion

Discussions of faith in the Anglo-American philosophy of religion often focus on the question of whether belief is necessary for faith. I argued that though neither are a perfect fit, doxasticism about faith fits better with Traditional African Religion than does non-doxasticism. I explained that one of the problems with doxasticism about faith emerges from reflections of doxastic voluntariness and epistemic doubts. This problem is particularly poignant for African Traditional Religion since disbelief, for whatever reason, is harmful to the community if it means that an individual is barred from participating in the relevant communal ways of life. In much of the African tradition the community is the highest good (or at least one of the highest). So, though it seems to endorse doxasticism about faith, there are potential problems for it that appear more pressing than in some Western traditions. I argued that adherents of African Traditional Religion could benefit from expanding their conception of faith to include non-doxastic accounts such as faith as hope. Though this broadening of faith doesn't allow every disbeliever to have faith, it allows more of them to, and thus limits the damage done to the community by individuals who disbelieve. More work remains to be done in exploring whether specific accounts of non-doxastic faith fit better with Traditional African Religion than others. Though there are difficulties inherent to cross-cultural philosophy of religion, especially since concepts in one tradition

will not necessarily have clear analogues in other traditions, the best way to discover whether different traditions can help each other is to continue to conduct the relevant comparative work.

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Appendix I (see also footnote 7)

These are each place that 'faith' is used in Mbiti *Introduction to African Religion* (1975)

"Christianity spread in every direction, so that by now every African people has heard the Christian message, and many millions of Africans have accepted the Christian faith" (Mbiti 1975, 30).

"Often their religious life shows a combination of African Religion and Christianity, but there are some who endeavour hard to forsake everything from African Religion, believing that in doing so they are more faithful to their newly found Christian faith" (Mbiti 1975, 30).

"These public religious places are the focus of communal faith, values, and sentiments" (Mbiti 1975, 146).

"They embody the presence of God among people and the faith or beliefs of the people, as well as their moral values" (Mbiti 1975, 150).

"Christianity, the religion which puts its faith in Jesus Christ, came to Africa shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus" (Mbiti 1975, 182).

"Thus, by the beginning of the seventh century, probably one-third of Africa followed the Christian faith" (Mbiti 1975, 182).

"Other martyrs have died in Africa and Madagascar for the sake of the Christian faith, some as long ago as the second and third centuries" (Mbiti 1975, 184).

“Many more have suffered and sacrificed themselves or their time and safety for the sake of the Christian faith in Africa” (Mbiti 1975, 184).

“Christianity has made a great impact upon African peoples through its faith, its teachings, its ideals, and the schools and hospitals which have often accompanied the preaching of the Christian Gospel” (Mbiti 1975, 185).

“Baha'ism started in Persia in 1863 when its founder Baha'ullah made a proclamation of the new faith” (Mbiti 1975, 188).

“In 1911 the Baha'i faith was first proclaimed in northern Africa. Later in the second half of the century it began to reach other parts of Africa, and today its headquarters for Africa are in Kampala, Uganda, where there is a large temple built on a hill” (Mbiti 1975, 188).

“A number of Africans have become followers of the Baha'i faith” (Mbiti 1975, 188).

“The Church is the Christian family, in which all are related to one another through faith and baptism in Jesus Christ” (Mbiti 1975, 190).

Appendix II (see also footnote 10)

These are each place that ‘faith’ is used in Asante and Mazama (eds) *Encyclopedia of African Religion* (2009).

“Because the muzimu are the most important spirits as ancestors, the people they are able to protect and shelter are always those who express faith in them.” (Asante 2009, 89)

“In several cultures, circumcision is a rite of entry into the community of faith.” (Houessou-Adin 2009, 169)

“Individual choice in kente is thus determined more by the occasion on which it is to be worn than by individual taste. In the case of adinkra cloth, the combination of both colors and symbols imply particular messages related to morality, ethics, sociopolitical status, and faith in the power of Nyame (Creator/Supreme Being).” (Blay 2009, 174)

“A divination oracle reading with cowrie shells is a ritual that worshippers in the faith believe can move the veils between the spirit and human world to semitransparency and open windows and doors for positive changes.” (Changa 2009, 183)

“7. rejection of the opposition between the sacred and the profane, and the opposition between religion and science or between knowledge and faith; and” (Nkulu-N’Sengha 2009, 244)

“They operate alongside African Independent church healers who believe in faith healing.” (Shoko 2009, 311)

“It exemplifies the way in which elements of African faith and traditions have persisted in the folk beliefs and customs of African Americans, although the original meaning may have been lost.” (Lundy 2009, 317)

“Therefore, one should not be surprised that the average Yoruba even today, of whatever proclaimed faith, will still consult Ifa and honor the family’s orisha or guardian deity in times of crisis.” (Ogundayo 2009, 332)

“The two armies fought to a draw; however, the French acted in bad faith and arrested Toussaint during a meeting in June 1802, after which Dessalines became the new leader of the Revolution.” (Reed 2009, 408)

“They were not rhetorical analysts or theologians, but rather defenders of the true faith of the people in the power of the Supreme God to bring about order and harmony in the midst of chaos.” (2009, 422)

“Be it Mount Sinai in the Judeo-Christian faith, Mount Arafat in the Islamic tradition, Mount Fuji within the Shinto system of belief, or Mount Kailas in Hindu and Buddhist teachings, for example, mountains are considered by many around the world to represent the pinnacle of spiritual liberation and elevation.” (Asante 2009, 431)

“Unlike the religions of the Anglicans and Roman Catholics in Guyana, Comfa is dynamic and decentralized, and it draws from eclectic African worldview and Guyanese nationalist sources and therefore might be best called a *faith system* instead of a religion.” (Giddings 2009, 472)

“Furthermore, it is possible to describe the Zulu religious system as capable of having numerous transformations in a variety of settings, suggesting the force behind African cultural continuity in

the diaspora and therefore the classification of Comfa as an African religious and cultural system. It is this *adaptive vitality* that is responsible for the process of fashioning the distinctly Comfa faith from the more purely African Watermamma religion in Guyana.” (Giddings 2009, 473)

“Traditionally, divination and sacrifice are key pillars in the practice of Ifa, and these remain the bedrock of this faith tradition.” (Karenga 2009, 476)

“In fact, they believe in their own deities and ancestors and have built much of their ethical life around their faith.” (Asante 2009, 521)

“It is said that he was raised in the Muslim faith and had an exceptional command of Arabic.” (Lundy 2009, 690)

“Christophe, for example, showed a great reverence to Roman Catholicism, but rumor suggested that he had greater faith in Vodou and the African gods.” (Lundy, 2009, 691)

“Consequently, even with the rampant proliferation of evangelical churches, Christian denominations, and other sects, including the Islamic faith in the Republic of Benin today, the Vodun religion remains strong and has a bright future still ahead.” (Houessou-Adin 2009, 694)

“One such edict, the *Code Noir* of 1685, made it illegal for the enslaved Africans to practice their religion and, under stiff penalties, ordered all French colonists to have the Africans living on their plantations converted to and baptized in the Catholic faith within 8 days upon their arrival in the colony.” (Desmangles 2009, 696)

“However, in essence, their spiritual passion (long and high-energy church services, call-and response sermons), worship methodology (sweat singing, polyrhythmic hand clapping, and playing of percussion instruments), daily devotion (a serious attempt to live a fundamentally good and righteous life every day), spirit elevation (swept up by the Holy Ghost Spirit, spirit

dancing, speaking in tongues, and faith healing), and wearing white garments during sacred religious events actually mirror similar activities of Black people on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean and various locations in the African diaspora.” (Changa 2009, 716)

“Winti was declared taboo; it was associated with the occult and with the calling of demonic powers. The whole Winti faith was put in the sphere of “black magic” and became symbolic of a lower social status in the country.” (Sobukwe 2009, 718)

“These days, increasing numbers of people are openly professing their religious beliefs and more easily expressing their feelings regarding their faith in Winti.” (Sobukwe 2009, 718)

“With faith in Winti, one can nourish oneself spiritually.” (Sobukwe 2009, 721)

“Snakes are consequently sacred in the Winti faith.” (Sobukwe 2009, 722)

Is Menkiti's Normative Personhood Inclusive? The Case of Mentally Disabled Persons

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Evaristus Matthias EYO
Decoloniality Research Group, University of Pretoria
&
The Conversational School of Philosophy
Calabar, Nigeria
evaristuseyo96@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0838-3291>

Abstract

In this essay, I argue that Menkiti's normative personhood is exclusionary, and logically inadequate, especially regarding mentally disabled persons. My argument is that Menkiti's account of personhood as a moral-political theory does not possess the resources to accommodate and account for mentally disabled persons because of its rigid process of transformation, which requires moral excellence. An inclusive moral theory, I argue, should be able to accommodate all members of the moral community irrespective of their ability, but rather, their capacity for relationships. Tapping into the intellectual resources of conversational thinking, I propose another conception of personhood predicated on moral status as the basis for personhood. With this method, I query the inclusiveness of Menkiti's conception and demonstrate that a relational alternative option that bases moral status on the human capacity for relationships might be more inclusive. Here, personhood is anchored on the capacity for relationships, not the ability to exude moral excellence. I then contend that this moral status conception of personhood possesses the needed resources to account for all because it is inclusive and egalitarian, riding on the crest of *Ezumezu* logic, which is also both egalitarian and inclusive.

Keywords: Normative personhood, Ezumezu, Moral status, Relationships, Moral excellence, Conversational thinking.

Introduction

This paper seeks to examine the tenability of Ifeanyi Menkiti's normative personhood using the case of mentally disabled persons. Menkiti's normative personhood is an aspect of Afro-communitarian theory, which seeks to give an account of the community-individual relationship in African thought. Afro-communitarianism is a discourse on personhood, social identity, and the communal relationship that sustains such social identity. It is here employed to represent the traditional African understanding of a good society. To discuss normative personhood as a moral theory that envisages an inclusive and egalitarian society, this paper will invoke salient questions relating to the status of mentally disabled persons. A plausible vision of a good society, if Menkiti's normative conception of personhood counts as one, ought to be characterized by inclusivity, recognition, and respect. That is, it must be able to accommodate all persons,

including the mentally disabled, as part of the moral community deserving respect from moral agents and state institutions. Stated differently, I will argue normative personhood, if tenable, must be able to account for mentally disabled people as persons deserving of all human rights. Otherwise, it is untenable. The idea of Afro-communitarianism draws its name and orientation from the fact that it places a premium on community and interpersonal relationships as defining features of a good society (MENKITI 1984, 2004; GYEKYE 1992; MBIGI 2005). It is an imagination of a community-centered humane society (MASOLO, 2004). The preceding entails that Afro-communitarianism envisages a communal society predicated on duty to oneself, the community, and others sustained through healthy relationships. For Menkiti (1984, 172), personhood is achieved through the “process of incorporation into the community”. This process involves a full complement of moral excellencies, without which one would fail at it (1984). This ritual of incorporation does not consider mentally disabled persons who may not have this ability for moral excellence, but the human capacity for relationships. Stated differently, those who lack the ability for moral excellence, according to Menkiti, are non-persons.

The work focuses on the tenability of Menkiti’s normative personhood as a moral and political view because of the recent objections raised against it in the literature on African philosophy. Menkiti’s normative personhood is an Afro-communitarian theory. African moral and political scholars have argued that Afro-communitarianism is untenable on some ethical and logical grounds. It has been accused of *ageism*, *patriarchy*, *sexism*, *homophobia*, *ableism*, *speciesism*, and *being theoretically inadequate* (OYOWE 2013; HORSTHEMKE 2015; AKIODE 2018; MANZINI 2018; CHIMAKONAM 2018, 2022; IMAFIDON 2019). The essence of these criticisms is that Afro-communitarianism fails to embody an inclusive vision of a good society since it excludes sections of humanity, such as mentally disabled persons, women, and other groups of persons, from the moral community. Since Menkiti’s normative personhood is an Afro-communitarian theory, it implies that the above criticisms may apply to it. Specifically, this work argues that the criticisms apply because normative personhood has a lopsided thesis that places premium on one aspect of reality while disregarding the others. If the foregoing is correct, Menkiti’s normative personhood would be an exclusionary and inadequate account of personhood.

This paper aims to examine one of the serious objections to Menkiti’s normative personhood. For lack of space, this research will limit its scope to the accusation of ableism (exclusion of disabled persons) as a characteristic weakness of normative personhood. My focus on ableism is informed by the fact that it is generally under-explored in the literature. I contend that should Menkiti’s normative personhood prove untenable in the face of the accusation that it marginalizes a section of humanity, then another conception of personhood, perhaps one that is based on moral status (moral obligations) could become a viable option. The idea of moral status here does not imply virtue, rather, it is a function of possessing certain ontological features. The claim of this paper is that mere possession of these ontological features constitutes sufficient ground for recognition, respect, and protection. As a result, any entity that has the relevant ontological features, even if the entity is a mentally disabled person, is owed moral respect and recognition, and should thus be included among persons. Amara

Chimakonam (2021, 2022) underscores the above in her ‘Personhood-Based Theory of Right Action’ when she argues that one needs to be sympathetic to others in the community as well as project oneself into another person’s position irrespective of their station in society because of our shared humanity. This theory is grounded on a principle that states that “an action is right if and only if it positively contributes to the common good while adding moral excellencies to the individuals” (AE Chimakonam 2022, 112). Within this purview, the interest of mentally disabled persons forms part of the common good since they are part of the moral community.

The work shall be divided into four parts. The first part will expose Afro-communitarianism as a moral and political theory, specifically, Menkiti’s normative personhood as one of its types. In the second part, the work will discuss Menkiti’s normative personhood. In the third part, I will discuss its basic tenets and raise an extensive survey of objections against it. In the fourth part, I will attempt to show that normative personhood might possess the resources to accommodate mentally disabled persons if it is grounded on moral status guided by a trivalent rather than bivalent logic.

What is Afro-communitarianism?

It is not an easy task to define what exactly counts as Afro-communitarianism due to different understandings offered by various scholars. For lack of space, I will attempt to conceptualize it, focusing on some salient features available in the literature. To begin with, it is important to note that Afro-communitarianism draws its name and orientation from the fact that it places a premium on community and interpersonal relationships as defining features of a culture and a good society. For example, Kwame Gyekye (1992, 102) emphasizes the importance of the community as not only an “outstanding but are the defining characteristics of African cultures”. In the same vein, Lovemore Mbigi (2005, 75) observes, “Community is the cornerstone in African thought and life”. This implies that Afro-communitarianism envisages a communal society where empathy, care, and interpersonal relationship flourish. To understand the kind of society imagined by Afro-communitarianism, we need to specify the values that characterize it. For Dismas Masolo (2004), Afro-communitarianism is an imagination of a community-centered humane society. In this understanding, there exists communal belongingness, which expresses social relationships. This communalistic disposition serves as the foundation of group-oriented interest: the common good. From the above, Afro-communitarianism can be construed as a discourse on personhood, social identity, and communal relationships that sustains such social identity. It is a moral or political theory that seeks to explain the role of social relationships between an individual and other members of the moral community. Some scholars of African thought tend to understand Afro-communitarianism as a vision of a humane society. They usually invoke a variety of values like sharing, interdependence, practical altruism, empathy, generosity, and friendliness to account for a humane society (WIREDU 1996; TUTU 1999; MASOLO 2004; METZ 2007). They imagine a community-oriented society as one that is regulated by the above social virtues. In this sense, Afro-communitarianism imagines a good society as one that is flourishing insofar as it exudes relational and ‘other-regarding’ virtues of altruism, respect, etc.

Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984), a Nigerian and African philosopher attempts a robust account of the Afro-communitarian conception of personhood called normative personhood. He argues that his aim is to “articulate a certain conception of personhood in African thought” (1984, 171). This entails that Afro-communitarianism is an attempt to explain how Africans conceive of personhood and a humane society. Menkiti argues that personhood in the West revolves around abstract and static features of “a lone individual, while in the African understanding, it is in reference to the environing community” (1984, 172-173). This implies that for Africans, the community is the foundation of personhood, that is, whenever the question of personal identity arises, “Menkiti will refer to the reality of the community as opposed to the reality of an individual” (MATOLINO 2014, 55).

Menkiti (1984, 2004) offers a normative conception of personhood. He began by distinguishing between “being a human and being a moral person” (MENKITI 2004, 325-326). Being human simply implies being born with a biological seed and body identity. But personhood, on the other hand, is achieved through ontological progression or what he termed the “process of ritual and social transformation until one attains full complement of excellencies” (MENKITI 1984, 172). Personhood here is not a given; it is a process during which one is incorporated into the community. This demonstrates that community is very important here because one does not ascribe personhood to oneself, rather, it is the community that ascribes personhood to an individual. Menkiti (2004) argues that in the journey to personhood, the community acts as the catalyst and the prescriber of norms, this is the only means through which a biological given is transformed into personhood. This conception of personhood is normative because it prioritizes the community’s social norms as the necessary condition for achieving personhood. For instance, one is expected to be conversant with the norms of the community, exhibit moral excellencies, and be transformed into a “moral being or the bearer of norms” (MENKITI 2004, 326). However, one is said to have failed personhood if one falls short of these features. It must be noted that one cannot achieve these moral excellencies in isolation, but only through and in the community. Thus, the community plays an essential role in the process of personhood.

From the above explanation, the relationship between personhood and community is inseparable, making Menkiti’s normative personhood an Afro-communitarian theory. It, therefore, suffices to argue that Menkiti’s normative personhood is an aspect of Afro-communitarian theory because it emphasizes the inseparable relationship between an individual and the community.

Menkiti’s Version of Afro-communitarianism: The Normative Personhood

Menkiti published three main works where he articulated, refined, and defended his theory of normative personhood (see 1984, 2004, 2018). In the opening lines of the 1984 essay, Menkiti makes his intention known when he declares that his aim in this paper is to “articulate a certain conception of the person found in African traditional thought” (1984, 171). This presupposes that there exists a certain conception of personhood in African thought that others might be ignorant of, hence, his project of articulating this unique conception of personhood.

Menkiti's normative conception of personhood stipulates that the community embodies and ontologically influences personhood. In his "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," Menkiti attempts a conception of personhood that is shaped by the community. This conception of personhood portrays interdependence between an individual and the community in which the community is the foundation of personhood. This means that personhood is rooted in the community (MENKITI 1984, 2004, 2018). The journey toward personhood or "ontological progression begins at birth" (MENKITI 2004, 326). At this stage, the child is regarded as an "it" because the child lacks personhood at that stage. However, as the process of incorporation into the community progresses, the individual is expected to be acquainted with the norms and values of the community. The ontological progression, which takes place in time (MENKITI 2004), witnesses the emergence of new qualities that are part of moral personhood. This journey of transformation is a journey from "it" to "it" (MENKITI 2004, 327). At birth, a child is nameless and considered "it" until personhood is achieved. When the person dies, there is another journey to the spiritual realm where one continues to live as a nameless ancestor.

Here, both moral and epistemic development form part of personhood because one is expected to internalize and practice societal norms and reject those that are inimical to the community. It must be noted here that the process of this moral maturation is gradual, and there is no shortcut. In this process, "the heart does grow increasingly wiser, morally speaking" (MENKITI 2004, 325). This process continues till one achieves moral excellence that is definitive of a person. The above entails that Menkiti's normative personhood prioritizes the idea of moral perfection, a process of fully imbibing and exuding the community's moral values. It is imperative to note that the normativity of this theory is expressed in its emphasis on moral maturity or arrival (MENKITI 2004, 325-326). Menkiti considers this important because it helps in the improvement of the human community (2004).

Menkiti (1984, 171), claims that there exists "a difference between the African and Western views" of personhood. In the African view, "it is the community that defines a person as a person" or ascribes personhood to an individual after undergoing the ritual of social transformation, while in the Western view, it is some static "isolated qualities of rationality, will, or memory" (MENKITI 1984, 172; 2004, 324) that defines a person. For example, in his [Meditations] (1986, 18), Rene Descartes' *Cogito Ergo Sum*, which translates to "I think therefore I exist" is an individual affirmation of personhood grounded on rationality. This idea of personhood is devoid of communal colouration because it is "an instance of an individualistic model" (OYOWE 2022, 4). However, personhood in African thought is rooted in the community, this demonstrates the importance of the project of personhood and the place of the community in achieving personhood as it is beyond individual raw capacities (like will, memory, or rationality). Put differently, personhood in African thought is predicated on the "maximal definition of a person" (MENKITI 1984, 173), that is, different processes and stages that lead to personhood. The aim is to make an individual a moral being capable of sustaining healthy relationships in the community. This implies that personhood is a process, and this process is a process of

transformation and ritual of incorporation during which an individual acquires the social rules and norms of society. For Menkiti, this process is necessary because it is through it that one acquires the moral excellencies expected of a person. But one could fail to acquire personhood because one is “ineffective” (MENKITI, 1984, 173). This points to the fact that personhood is predicated on the acquisition of moral excellence or perfection, thus anyone who fails to acquire this virtue is a non-person (TSHIVHASE, 2021). The idea of moral excellence or perfection entails that an individual has the responsibility of leading a morally excellent life in relation to others in the community, it is expected that as an individual continues to partake in the life of the community through discharging one’s obligations, promote the common good and perform person-based right actions, such individual increases his or her moral excellencies. Menkiti (1984, 2004) argues that it is through carrying out his/her obligation that one is transformed from the “it” of the infant characterized by a lack of moral function into “person-status” with full moral maturity. The preceding entails that mentally disabled persons may be non-persons since they do not possess the ability for moral perfection or excellence. At this point, this work problematizes Menkiti’s normative personhood as exclusionary and ableist.

Objections against Normative Personhood

There is ample literature on the criticisms of normative personhood, and this research will engage with some of them. Some include Gyekye (1992), Matolino (2009), Famakinwa (2010) Molefe (2017). Some works intersect disability and normative personhood. These works argue that normative personhood is selective when it comes to mentally disabled persons because this group of persons has been at the margins of society for a long time. To argue differently, society has been denying persons with cognitive and intellectual disabilities personhood and treating them as entities without moral worth (PARMENTER, 2001). This is the case because the Menkitian society ascribes personhood to an individual based on its ability for moral perfection and not the human capacity for relationships. Even when they are granted minimal consideration, they are treated with pity instead of considering their moral worth, which comes with dignity. In this case, an entity that ought to be an object of moral consideration should be treated with less respect because they are disabled, thereby violating their dignity as a person. For example, due to their vulnerability, the mentally disabled are prone to physical, and sexual abuse, some of them are kept in an isolated environment with limited communication, only depending on their caregiver, who might even abuse them.

Nompumelelo Manzini (2019, 379) observes that “Kagame’s minimalist requirement for personhood, which is predicated on intelligence as a defining feature of personhood, is ableist”. Since it locates personhood on intelligence, it excludes “people living with severe cognitive disabilities from the status of personhood”. This implies that personhood is a product of cognitive ability, not any other feature, like the human capacity for relationships.

Manzini (2018) further argues that Afro-communitarianism, specifically, the normative conception of personhood, embodies exclusion against women and the queer. This makes it ableist, sexist, and anti-queer. This entails that normative personhood does not possess the resources to accommodate mentally disabled persons. Olajumoke Akiode (2018) also shares the view that Afro-

communitarianism may be sexist since some of its practices that marginalize women demonstrate clear disconnection from its theory.

Elvis Imafidon (2019) argues that prevailing conceptions of personhood are exclusionary, flawed, and limited. He argues that they are exclusionary towards infants, and people with physical and mental disabilities because of its rigid criteria for personhood, which denies some groups of people personhood due to a lack of some ontological features. The same criticism of ableism can apply to Menkiti's (2004), Wiredu's (2009), and Ikuenobe's (2016) understanding of personhood since they all require the agent to be able to exude personhood-related abilities like the practise of moral excellence. Since those who are mentally disabled cannot manifest such abilities, they are therefore excluded from the moral community and denied personhood.

Oritsegbubemi Oyowe (2013) and Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) accuse normative personhood of being a male-centered ideology that promotes the exclusion and secundarization of some groups of persons in society. They observe that the concept of personhood is inherently characterized by social relations that privilege some groups of persons to the detriment of others.

A recent work that problematizes Menkiti's conception, which is the focus of this research, is Jonathan Chimakonam (2022, 94). He argues that the normative personhood proposed by Menkiti is problematic and inadequate. As he puts it, first, normative personhood "assumes that the ancient belief of the community's domination of the individual" is still tenable in modern society. "Second, it assumes that all matters concerning personhood" revolve around "community norms, thereby trivializing individual capacities and endowments". Third, "it assumes in error that it is fair to compare traditional African communal thought with modern Western thought" despite the differences. Fourth, "it assumes that an accurate conception of personhood should be a closed predicament" that should not be questioned by any individual. "Fifth, it assumes that personhood can only be conceived as a social relationship that is an end in itself". Chimakonam's objection is based on what could be termed 'the charge of inadequacy'. Here, Menkiti fails to recognize the diversity and dynamic nature of the African community and thus fails to provide adequate criteria for personhood. He seems to take for granted the constant evolution of the human community. The preceding shows that Menkiti's normative personhood is not adequate for mapping the reality and morality of any human society.

Also, Mpho Tshivhase (2021) argues that the prevailing conception of personhood is not gender-sensitive because it does not pay attention to the needs of another gender, especially women. She argues that personhood predicated upon relationality means nothing without freedom and consciousness. Tshivhase's argument seems appealing, but she still makes the same mistake by excluding mentally disabled persons from her theory of reconfiguration of personhood.

Disability can take various forms; it can be physical, social, or psychological. For instance, Arie Rimmerman (2013) conceives disability from a social perspective, which stipulates that disability is the product of how society is structured. Ronald Berger (2013, 6) augments this position when he argues that "disability refers to an inability to perform a personal or socially necessary task because of that impairment or the societal reaction to it". This expresses the social model of disability, which is one of the areas of concern for moral philosophy because it

tends to examine the place of the mentally disabled within a given social setting. This form of disability results from or is the product of an unjust social structure (RALSTON and HO, 2010), which puts these individuals in a disadvantaged position. These are persons, for example, who cannot speak, see, hear, walk or function independently (KITTAI, 2005). But this does not constitute sufficient reasons for treating some of them without respect, as they possess the capacity for moral consideration (i.e. relationality) and ought to be treated with dignity, especially those with severe cognitive disabilities who sometimes are subjects of physical or emotional abuse. Establishing equality might require “making moral claims based on something that all human beings share in common” (TOLLEFSEN 2010, 184), which is moral status. This calls for an extension of moral worth to include mentally disabled persons since they are also members of the moral community. The question thus is, can normative personhood include mentally disabled persons in the moral community?

The above objections show that the normative conception of personhood, especially the strand championed by Menkiti (1984, 2004) does not possess the resources to account for some groups of persons, including the mentally disabled individuals in its moral orbit, due to its emphasis on moral perfection and excellence. Thus, there is a need to renegotiate, deconstruct, and reconstruct a novel understanding of personhood that will be able to accommodate all by virtue of ontological features (capacity for relationships). I further argue that Menkiti’s theory is practice-based, thereby excluding the mentally disabled who possess the human capacity for relationships (though in potentiality), and this capacity for relationships is predicated on the principle of relationality, sustained by moral consideration as I will show in the subsequent section. I will now turn to the next section to discuss another understanding of normative personhood, showing its egalitarian nature using moral status as a theoretical framework.

Personhood and Moral Status

In the preceding section, I discussed some serious objections to Menkiti’s normative personhood. These objections are because the prevailing conceptions of personhood are predicated on ontological progression and transformation gained through the process of incorporation (MENKITI, 1984, 2004), which implies moral excellencies, and perfection. This automatically excludes some groups of persons, like mentally disabled persons, from moral consideration. Here, I will attempt another conception of personhood in African philosophical thought using the concept of moral status. Manuel Toscano (2011, 16) conceives moral status as “that normative condition that determines how this entity ought to be treated, and it is the sole prerogative of the society to establish this normative framework”. This implies that it is society that sets out the modalities for the normative framework and moral status. It must be noted that the idea of moral status comes in degrees. Maryanne Warren (2000) holds that an entity can possess various degrees of moral status. This degree is not limitless, it culminates in what functions as full moral status. One can argue that it is only actual entities that can possess moral status. This, in a way, excludes fetuses and embryo from moral consideration since only those in actual existence deserves moral status. What this implies is that not all entities are accorded moral status to the same degree.

Thaddeus Metz (2012) underscores this point when he argues that mentally disabled persons and infants possess higher moral status than animals. According to him:

Compared with animals, normal human beings are more able to include “deformed” humans such as psychopaths, as well as the mentally incapacitated, in a “we”, cooperate with them, act in ways likely to improve their quality of life, exhibit sympathetic emotions with them, and act for their sake. We do much more for the psychopathic and the mentally incapacitated than we do animals, which is evidence of a greater ability to make them an object of a friendly relationship. (Metz 2012, 397)

The preceding entails that there are degrees of moral status depending on the ontological feature or relevant moral properties of an entity. However, what is important is that it places entities on the scale of moral worth, which accords them with moral consideration. The central idea here is that an entity possesses moral worth that commands moral obligations from a moral agent by virtue of its ontological features or capacities. Here, I identify the capacity for relationships as an ontological trait all humans possess, whether mentally sound or not. This implies that an individual ought to be treated as a subject of moral obligation based on their morally important capacity for relationship. That is, one is a person if one possesses the capacity to enter a mutual relationship with others in the community. This is a form of “modal-relationalism”, which entails that something has moral status by possessing a “certain causal or intentional connection with another being” (METZ 2012, 322, 392). This human capacity for relationship is sufficient to attract moral consideration and respect, not unchosen facts of disability. It is worth noting that the capacity for relationships here entails the human instinct or inclination to relate with others and enter into a healthy relationship with others without necessarily being discriminated against.

In the discussion thus far, it has been shown that Menkiti’s normative personhood is exclusionary because it does not possess the resources to accommodate mentally disabled persons as subjects of moral consideration; it is, therefore, untenable. To achieve inclusivity, I contend that personhood should be a matter of human capacity for relationships. It is important at this point to draw a distinction between ability and capacity. While ability implies the physical power to act, capacity implies the mental power to will and judge. Menkiti’s theory seems to align with the individual’s ability to act, as a criterion for personhood than capacity. From here, I argue that Menkiti’s normative personhood seems to prescribe the criterion of a ‘well-functioning mental capacity and the ‘ability to attain moral perfection and excellence’ and, which excludes all those who lack it, like the mentally disabled. Instead of a criterion of ‘capacity to exhibit morally important behaviours, such as relationships, which everyone has, whether mentally sound or not.

Furthermore, at the core of any moral community lies ‘relationship’ because it is during people’s relationships that moral and immoral actions are carried out. This shows the importance of the human capacity for relationships in the conception of personhood. That is, as much as an entity possesses the human capacity for relationships with others in the community, they are persons.

However, it must be noted here that a relationship does not imply ‘anything goes’. It is rule-governed, and the rule in this case is the principle of relationality, which states that “Variables necessarily interrelate irrespective of their unique contexts, all things considered, because no variable is an ego solus” governs the activity of the relationship itself (CHIMAKONAM and CHIMAKONAM 2023, 335). But my argument here is that one does not necessarily have to practice relationships in order to qualify as a person. Mere possession of such capacity is sufficient for personhood.

Now, admittedly, the idea of moral status as the basis for personhood is incontestable, what is necessary is to show how those at the margins of personhood deserve to be accorded moral status. As argued by Oyowe (2022), the common understanding of Menkiti’s conception of personhood is that all beings at the margins of personhood lack moral status. I argue that this is a categorical mistake by Menkiti because entities with certain capacities for relationships deserve moral status and are subjects of moral obligations. This capacity for relationships is sufficient for moral recognition because it is at the foundation of communal existence. Metz’s theory of moral status forms the central argument of this novel idea of personhood. Metz (2019, 38-39) argues that “an agent is obligated to treat a person as possessing the capacity for communal relationships, in so far as they are capable of being communed with and communing”. This entails that an individual is a person by virtue of possessing the capacity of relationship, that is, the capacity to relate to and be related to by others in the community.

Specifically, Metz (2021, 106) argues that “agents honour individuals because of their capacity to relate in a communal or friendly way, either as a subject or an object”. This shows that Metz’s conception of personhood revolves around communitarian ethics in which personhood is rooted in the community. Following this line of argument, I argue that personhood is not a matter of ontological transformation as posited by Menkiti (1984, 2004, 2018), but rather, it should be seen from the perspective of capacity to relate and be related to. This will open the window of personhood for the consideration of mentally disabled persons who may not possess the capacity for ontological transformation (resulting in moral perfection) but can relate with others in the community.

For a certain conception of personhood to be inclusive and egalitarian, it should be able to account for all human species by virtue of their ontological feature. This is where moral status becomes necessary. If all human entity possesses moral status to the degree that corresponds to their relational capacity, it implies that by virtue of that moral status, they should be treated as persons. Put differently, if the moral status is granted to all human entities, they become persons since they can commune and be communed with in the community. Although mentally disabled persons may not have the ability for moral perfection, they have the capacity to relate and commune with people in the community. Such capacity for relationships is an important feature that glues society together. This means that those who possess this important capacity should be treated as persons with some degree of moral status. The degree or scale of moral status does not in any way suggest the degree of personhood, but rather a degree of moral obligations owed to the bearer.

I argue that it would be erroneous to assume that mentally disabled people are not persons. They are persons by the mere fact that they possess the capacity for relationships. Evidence of this can be found in the everyday experience where such people actually relate, interact, and sustain healthy relationships with others in the community. It does not matter how effective such relationships are or even whether they could be moral, the capacity for human relationships is mental and accounts for dignity. Critics may argue that it is only a moral person that can make claims of justice, implying that mentally disabled persons cannot make claims of justice. I argue that once there is a place for relationality in the consideration of moral status, which also entails duties and obligations, mentally disabled persons can make claims of justice, even if indirectly through those they share relationships with. Similarly, persons with ability for moral perfection can make claims of justice on behalf of mentally disabled persons who may not have the moral sense to do so. This is a duty of care. In doing this, their human dignity must not be violated because such could truncate the principle of relationality and ethics of conversation, which demand equal and mutual respect. This affirms the central point of Menkiti's assertion that "persons are the sort of entities that are owed the duties of justice" (1984, 177). This implies that only persons can make claims of justice, not non-persons.

However, the idea of justice calls for equal treatment of others as persons. Motsamai Molefe (2020, 21) underscores this fact when he argues that a "human being characterized by personhood relates positively with others". This entails healthy relationships with others irrespective of their mental capacities. Tersely, it suffices to argue that a conception of personhood is not devoid of moral status as this places entities on the scale of moral worth. This is a patient-centered idea of personhood because it places a premium on the moral value or worth of an entity as the subject or the object of moral obligations, which expresses the idea of moral recognition and respect.

More profoundly, there are some facts about an entity that makes it deserve moral consideration. David DeGrazia (2013) refers to this as an independent *moral weight* that points to the inalienable moral worth of a being, making it an object of moral obligation. This moral obligation calls for the extension of moral consideration to accommodate mentally disabled persons due to their capacity for human relationships.

Besides marginality, another problem with Menkiti's conception of personhood is that it is grounded on two-valued logic (CHIMAKONAM 2018). This is so because it is logic that forms the foundation of any thought system. One cannot theorize adequately about African lived experiences or thought systems using the paradigm of Aristotelian two-valued logic. Such an attempt will only make the theory a distorted view of such a worldview. The two-valued logical system polarizes human relationships to create unequal binary opposition between superior and inferior, thereby placing others (in this case, the mentally disabled persons) at the margins of society. Menkiti and some other communitarians made the mistake of grounding personhood on this divisive logical system which is not in line with African communitarian thought. Thus, to address this problem, another logical variant like Ezumezu logic, which is both egalitarian and inclusive becomes necessary.

From the foregoing, I argue that personhood in African thought should be grounded on trivalent logic, (its trivalent nature enables it to address the issue of marginalization and exclusion) as this will give room for inclusivity and equality, and the version I propose here is *Ezumezu* logic. According to Chimakonam (2019, 96), Ezumezu “is a prototype African logic” with universal applicability. It is a “logical framework that can be used to explain and analyze experiences in the African worldview” (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 96). This logical system is suitable for the explanation of the experiences, thoughts, and concepts in African thought. Arguably, it possesses the resources to accommodate contraries and opposing variables. Ezumezu logic is governed by “three laws of thought, which are the laws of *njikoka*, *nnekoka* and *onona-etiti*” (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 138), with different principles. The “law of *njikoka*” places premium on a collective identity as against individual identity, the law of *nnekoka* on the other hand prioritizes complementation which acknowledges collective identity within the group, while the law of *onona-etiti* promotes mutual inclusivity (CHIMAKONAM 2019). Using these laws and “the principle of *Ohakarasi*, which states that the truth of the centre accounts for the truths of its peripheries, all things being equal” (CHIMAKONAM 2019, 102), I contend that normative personhood grounded on Ezumezu logic is both egalitarian and inclusive because it pays attention to all members of the moral community as moral subjects deserving respect and obligation. This reflects the true communitarian spirit which characterizes African thought systems. Here, a person with the capacity for relationship is *ipso facto* a member of a moral community and deserves moral consideration.

Critics may argue that moral consideration comes with moral responsibility; as such, extending moral consideration to mentally disabled persons entails that they should be morally responsible for their actions and inactions. Responding to this, I contend that though there is a collective moral responsibility that comes with moral consideration, there is also a communal moral responsibility, and this covers all members of the community by virtue of their incorporation into the community. Hence, mentally disabled persons are covered by communal moral responsibility since they are not competent moral agents. Also, if it is granted that moral status comes in degrees and mentally disabled persons are accorded some, it will amount to moral inconsistency to demand a higher degree of moral responsibility from them. On another note, in a deterministic worldview, the idea of moral responsibility does not arise because humans are predetermined to act in certain ways in various contexts.

Also, the idea of moral responsibility neglects futuristic events and developments. If mentally disabled persons cannot assume moral responsibility in the present, it does not mean that they may not do so in the future, given a proper context, since they have the initial capacity to do so. Thus, insisting on immediate moral blame or praiseworthy behaviour forecloses the possibility for future improvement.

Conclusion

The agent-centered notion of personhood (persons with moral responsibilities and duties) has been the dominant discourse in African philosophy, sometimes to the detriment of the patient-centered notion of personhood (subjects of moral consideration and concerns). This has given rise to the problem of marginalization

and exclusion of mentally disabled persons from the moral framework since they do not possess the ability for moral perfection that enhances personhood. Departing from the agent-centered notion of personhood, this work pays attention to the patient-centered notion of personhood as an attempt to respond to the problem of excluding mentally disabled persons from the moral community, which also denies them personhood.

The central argument in this essay is that Menkiti's normative conception of personhood is exclusionary because it does not accommodate some groups of people, the mentally disabled persons. To bridge this intellectual gap, there is a need for another conception of personhood, a conception that would be inclusive and egalitarian. Thus, this work argues that normative personhood can be inclusive if it is erected on moral status. As demonstrated earlier, moral status entails the seat of moral obligation. It is that ontological feature that accords one moral worth and obligation. In this new paradigm, an individual is a person by virtue of his or her ontological feature or human capacity for relationships, unlike Menkiti's (1984; 2004) conception, in which an individual acquires personhood by actions that incorporate him into the community through ritual and social transformation that enable such a person to attain moral perfection or excellencies. Menkiti's preceding criterion indicates a well-functioning mental capacity and physical ability before one can attain personhood. In this framework, only those who have attained moral perfection are regarded as persons, and others are non-persons. On the contrary, this work stipulates that the mere possession of relational capacity is sufficient for personhood.

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A Critique of “The Question of the Nature of God from the African Place”

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Emeka C. EKEKE

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies
University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria and
Research Fellow, Department of the Study of Religions,
University of Religions and Denominations, Qom, Iran.
emekacekeke@unical.edu.ng; emekacekeke@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8995-5676>

&

Enyioma E. NWOSU

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies,
University of Calabar, Nigeria
ebhens2@gmail.com, enyiomanwosu@unical.edu.ng
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2884-0859>

Abstract

This critique engages with the article titled "The Question of the Nature of God from the African Place," by L. Uchenna OGBONNAYA published in Vol. 11. No.1 of this journal. This critique will employ a focused argumentative methodology to assess its contributions to the discourse on African Philosophy of Religion. It will also evaluate the article's strengths and weaknesses, emphasizing the articulation and support of key arguments. Through a systematic examination of the presented evidence and methodological approach, the critique aims to shed light on the nuanced perspectives on the nature of God within the African philosophical framework. Further, this assessment will provide a comprehensive understanding of the article's implications for contemporary religious studies and intercultural dialogue, contributing to the ongoing conversation surrounding diverse perspectives on divinity.

Keywords: Philosophy of Religion in Africa, Nature of God in Africa, African cosmology, African Traditional Religion.

Introduction

The study of African views in Philosophy of Religion and the essence of God has gained importance in the current discourse, as it intersects with broader philosophical and theological concerns. In this context, the article titled "The Question of the Nature of God from the African Place" by L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya (2022), offers a thought-provoking examination of the intricate interpretations of the nature of God in the African setting. This critique aims to analyze the strengths, limitations, and contributions of the aforementioned article to the ongoing discourse on the nature of God within the African philosophical and theological framework.

Our objective is to provide constructive critique of the thought-provoking article, specifically by delving deeper into the African perspective on the concept of the Supreme Being or God. God, the omnipotent and everlasting Supreme Being, is perceived by individuals in many manners. His association with humanity elicits adoration and gives rise to various religious beliefs that depict Him in different ways. Various religions promote belief in multiple deities. While some do not perceive God as an individual being, others refer to God in specific human names (BROWN, 2017). God possesses various designations, existence, fundamental qualities, properties, and inherent characteristics. Consideration of these characteristics give rise to various philosophical theories and theological doctrines. Theology in religions presupposes the nature and existence of the Supreme Being. To a significant degree, the underlying belief is not only that there exists anything, such as a concept, ideal, force, or intentional inclination, that can be referred to as God; but in addition, there exists a self-sustaining, self-aware, individual entity, who is the source of all things and surpasses the entire creation, while also being present inside every aspect of it (BERKHOF 1988). Emeka C. Ekeke and Chike A. Ekeopara (2010, 210) discuss the African perspective on the existence and awareness of the Supreme Being. They cited an Ashanti proverb, "No one shows a child the Supreme Being," to illustrate that individuals born in Africa do not require formal education to comprehend the existence of a Supreme Being. The knowledge of God's existence is inherent and universal, even among children. Yet, this knowledge of his existence does not imply knowing His nature, which is what Ogbonnaya (2022) has philosophically considered in his article.

Understanding the true nature of God is a matter of great importance to those who seek relationship with him. In Africa, religion is seen as something that should influence every aspect of life, rather than just acknowledging the connection between God and the world and His presence both beyond and inside it. However, the rational inference about the nature of God, based on ideas found in religious scriptures and observations of nature, does not imply that the presence of God can be logically proven without any question. Various arguments, such as ontological, cosmological, teleological, moral, historical, or ethnological, might be used to demonstrate the existence and nature of God. Further conceptualizing the nature of God leads to even studying the African place. Answers that at least would serve some academic needs are the target of Ogbonnaya's work, which the present essay attempts to critique.

This critique is organized around the following subheadings for clearer understanding: appraisal of the paper, strength of the paper, contribution to scholarship, methodology, weaknesses of the paper and conclusion.

Appraisal of the Paper

When embarking on a journey of contemplation regarding religions, individuals often encounter confusion due to the complex nature of religion. A prime example to this assertion is the African Traditional Religion (ATR), which encompasses the African people's search for a higher power and the divine disclosure of God to humanity (NWOSU, 2018). In order to mitigate potential confusion, it may be insufficient to solely rely on philosophy; instead, including insights from theology could be beneficial in facilitating comprehension. According to Ninian Smart (1995), it is crucial to acknowledge secular ideologies as integral components of

human worldviews. The differentiation between religious and secular beliefs and practises, as observed in modern Western societies, does not accurately reflect the manner in which other civilizations classify and categorise human values. Africa, often characterised as having a strong religious inclination, is a society where every aspect of life is deeply influenced by its religious beliefs. Therefore, an examination of African religion may be seen as an exploration of the intricate nature of its people, encompassing both traditional and contemporary aspects of their lives (MBITI 1977).

The paper by Ogbonnaya addresses the fundamental inquiry into the constituent nature of God, with a focus on African philosophical perspectives. It challenges the prevailing notion that God is purely a spirit devoid of material substance, arguing that this idea originates from a dualistic ontological system that dichotomizes reality into spirit and matter, considering spirit as good and matter as evil. In contrast, the paper advocates for an African duality perspective, which emphasizes the coexistence and complementary nature of spirit and matter, asserting that both are integral components of existence (OGBONNAYA 2022, 116).

Ogbonnaya's inquiry into the essence of God from an African perspective is a fresh engagement that prompts a reflective mind to consider the nature of God in African Traditional Religion (ATR), as well as in other religious beliefs prevalent throughout the vast continent of Africa. The endeavour to elucidate the African philosophy of religion as a component of African philosophy, akin to Oriental, Western, or other philosophies, is undertaken by Ogbonnaya. He seeks to address the question of the nature of God in the cosmology of the African people, necessitating the utilization of certain theoretical frameworks. He utilized both Asouzu's Ibuanyidanda ontology and Ijiomah's harmonious monism to bolster his argument, and employing the philosophical approach of conversationalism (OGBONNAYA 2022, 116).

The paper sets the stage by providing an introduction to African philosophy of religion, emphasizing the critical examination of religious realities within the African philosophical context. It discusses the significance of understanding the African experience of reality and engaging with it through an African culture-inspired logic lens. The author highlights the importance of investigating the concept of African philosophy of religion, focusing on the African understanding of God (OGBONNAYA 2022, 117-118).

In the subsequent sections, Ogbonnaya (2022) delves into African religious cosmology, examining the conception of God within the context of the tripartite and dual nature of the world. The paper explains that God holds a central position in African cosmology, existing at the apex of the hierarchical order of beings. It also explores the prevalent belief in African thought that God is purely a spirit without any material aspects, drawing parallels to the dualistic philosophical system (OGBONNAYA 2022, 118).

Furthermore, Ogbonnaya (2022, 119-120) in the following sections, introduces the concept of African duality theory, exemplifying this perspective through the discussion of two prominent African culture-inspired ontological frameworks: harmonious monism of and Ibuanyidanda ontology. It elucidates how these philosophical systems theorise the inseparable interconnection between the

physical and spiritual aspects of reality, emphasizing the complementary relationship between spirit and matter.

Ogbonnaya (2022, 120) states that “African philosophy involves a critical, rigorous and systematic reflection on the African experience of reality and how one engages with reality.” Of course, this approach promoted keywords like ontology, dualism, harmonious monism, conversationalism, being, and being-in-the-African-world. Thus, “reality is to be experienced and investigated to arrive at the truth about itself.” This may prompt a thinker to imagine how to do this. Ogbonnaya suggests using an “African culture-inspired logic lens” to identify reality. How does one do this, or is it just logic? Are all truths provable or does logic prove them? Questions like these probes the idea that philosophy confuses rather than solves problems. If this research fills a gap, it must explain God's nature or qualities from an African cosmological perspective.

Consequently, the paper argues that God's constituent nature should be conceptualized through the lens of African duality, considering God as comprising both spirit and matter. Drawing on the principles of Harmonious Monism and Ibunyanidanda ontology, Ogbonnaya (2022) advocates for a holistic understanding of God that encompasses both the spiritual and material aspects, emphasizing the complementary relationship between these components. The paper concludes with a call to reconceptualize God's nature in light of the African duality perspective.

Strengths of the Paper

Original Perspective: The paper presents a fresh and original perspective on the nature of God, offering insights from African philosophical traditions that are often overlooked in mainstream philosophical discourse. This uniqueness adds value to the broader conversation on the topic.

In-depth Analysis: The paper comprehensively analyses African religious cosmology and philosophy, demonstrating a profound understanding of the subject matter. The Ogbonnaya's exploration of various ontological frameworks and their implications for understanding the nature of God adds depth to the discussion.

Cultural Context Sensitivity: The paper showcases a sensitivity to cultural context, emphasizing the importance of understanding African realities and experiences within their cultural framework. This approach enhances the paper's credibility and relevance within the field of African philosophy of religion.

Cosmology: The work produced usable models of African cosmology. Ekwealor, Onunwa, and Ijiomah's Igbo African worldview models provided strength. The African worldview (cosmology) is aligned because it is very impossible to describe something one has never seen or experienced. Worldview, or how humans see reality, is called “dynamic conception” here, making the tripartite conception dual. The unseen is sometimes categorised as in the spirit world, while the visible is concrete and true. Even if these worldviews are incomplete and the God whose nature is studied here is not fully understood, they provided a start. The fact that God, gods, and spirits exist, despite humans being at the centre of the earth, may explain why African cosmology is "an ontologised cosmology," as it deals with the nature of existence. The disappearance or extinction of a god/deity occurs even in religion. Max Siollun says Africa was the first area outside the Arabian Peninsula to practise Islam (SIOLLUN 2021, 252). The people worshipped secondary deities and spirits who controlled weather and

fertility in addition to God. On the other hand, many, especially in the West, believe that religion is no longer needed, which is why people like Segal advocate reductionism, which analyses religion in secular rather than religious terms, including origin, function, meaning, truth, etc. Africa remains religious and God-dependent, supporting Einstein's claim that science without religion is meaningless (cited in NWOSU, 2021, 100). Religion is a prominent way of life in Africa, and without it, cultural life would be incomplete (NWOSU, 2018, 271). This is also the view echoed in the paper.

Clarity and Coherence: The paper effectively presents complex philosophical concepts in a clear and coherent manner, making it accessible to a wide audience. The logical progression of ideas and the use of illustrative examples contribute to the overall clarity of the arguments presented, especially the author's conception of God in Africa. Africa accepts God as ultimate reality. Ogbonnaya (2022) said "in God, spirit and matter are in a mutually complementary relationship." Truly, "God possesses physicality - physical substance like human bodily parts." God is spirit in Africa, so many say the place seems to have limited His nature to spiritualism, rarely spirituality. As a philosopher, he argues in his work that Africa's spiritualism raises questions regarding the African God's dualism. Therefore, Ogbonnaya switched to African duality to answer the question of whether God is pure spirit and define his constituent essence. The African duality hypothesis, which says that reality contains metaphysical and physical dimensions, is reflected. Reality cannot exist without this two-sidedness. Real God is no exception, according to Ogbonnaya (2022). God, like all realities, is twofold. Harmony of spirit and matter, unification, world immanent missing link(s), pure spirit, *ibuanyidanda* imperative anthology, noetic propaedeutic psycho-therapeutic measure, *isi-na-odu* analogy, *obioha*, existential conversion(ism), and harmonious monism were some of the concepts explicated in the paper. All were meant to convey Ogbonnaya's convictions about God's nature in Africa. No matter the argument, Ogbonnaya contends that African religious conviction holds that the supreme God is the same worldwide as in all other faiths with God-person monotheism.

Contribution to Scholarship

The paper makes significant contributions to the scholarship of African Philosophy of Religion, offering valuable insights and advancing the understanding of this field. Some of its contributions include:

Critical Analysis of African Philosophical Traditions: The paper provides a comprehensive and critical analysis of various African traditions and their interpretations of the nature of God. By examining these traditions in depth, the paper contributes to the elucidation of the diverse philosophical perspectives within the African context.

Cultural and Contextual Understanding: Through its exploration of cultural and contextual factors shaping the understanding of the nature of God in African philosophy, the paper enriches the scholarship by shedding light on the intricate interplay between cultural beliefs, historical context, and philosophical thought.

This contribution deepens the understanding of the cultural roots and influences on African religious philosophy.

Comparative Insights: By engaging in comparative analysis, the paper highlights similarities and differences between different African traditions, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances within the African Philosophy of Religion. This comparative approach contributes to the broader understanding of the diversity inherent in African philosophical thought.

Theoretical Framework Development: The paper contributes to the development of theoretical frameworks within the field of African Philosophy of Religion by synthesizing various philosophical perspectives and offering conceptual frameworks for understanding the nature of God from an African standpoint. This contribution fosters a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of African religious thought.

Contribution to Interdisciplinary Studies: By bridging the gap between philosophy, theology, and cultural studies, the paper encourages interdisciplinary dialogue and promotes a holistic understanding of the nature of God within the African philosophical context. This interdisciplinary approach enhances the scholarly discourse and fosters a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of African Philosophy of Religion.

Methodology

Certainly, assessing the methodology employed in the paper "The Question of the Nature of God from the African Place" requires an understanding of how the author approached the research and analysis. Given the nature of the topic, it is important to evaluate the methodology in terms of its suitability, rigour, and overall effectiveness. Here is an assessment of the methodology:

Philosophical Analysis: The paper predominantly relies on philosophical analysis, utilizing conceptual frameworks, ontological reasoning, and critical evaluation of historical and contemporary African philosophical traditions. The author demonstrates a strong command of relevant philosophical theories and thoroughly examines key concepts, contributing to the paper's academic rigor and depth.

Comparative Study: The paper engages in a comparative study of various African philosophical perspectives on the nature of God, highlighting similarities and differences between different cultural and religious contexts. This comparative approach enriches the analysis and allows for a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in the topic.

Literature Review: The paper demonstrates a thorough literature review of existing scholarship in the field of African philosophy of religion, incorporating a wide range of scholarly sources and academic works. The author's comprehensive review of the literature enhances the paper's credibility and ensures that it is situated within the broader academic discourse.

Cultural and Contextual Analysis: The methodology includes a deep exploration of cultural and contextual factors that influence the understanding of the nature of God in African philosophical traditions. The author's sensitivity to cultural nuances and historical context enriches the analysis and ensures that the paper acknowledges the multifaceted nature of the topic.

Limitations: However, the methodology might be limited by the lack of empirical research and the potential bias resulting from a strong focus on specific philosophical traditions. The absence of empirical data might limit the applicability of the findings beyond philosophical discussions, and the potential bias could restrict the inclusivity of alternative perspectives.

Overall, the methodology employed in the paper demonstrates a robust engagement with philosophical inquiry and a nuanced understanding of cultural and historical contexts. While the lack of empirical research and potential bias are notable limitations, the overall approach is effective in facilitating a comprehensive analysis of the question of the nature of God from the African philosophical perspective.

Weaknesses of the Paper:

The Knowability of the Supreme Being: The concept of comprehending the nature of God has been a prominent subject of discussion throughout all religions, often leading to the presence of agnostic viewpoints. In such bamboozling task, Christianity, for instance, teaches that He can be known and the knowledge of Him is an absolute requisite unto salvation (BERKHOF, 1988). In this sense, ATR as religion, considering either the Being of God or, that, alongside His attributes, also portrays the concept of knowing the nature of God as herculean, for which this research argues it nearly as a missing link in the theology or philosophy of African Religion. However, it can be argued that the being of God does not admit any scientific definition, and the argument remains that the God we are talking about is not one of several species of gods. Even in Africa, some believe that He made all or that even the primordial came from Him. Some critics have described this type of inference as influenced by Christianity. But Ogbonnaya did not engage nor clarify his arguments that lean towards this direction. This may have been the same problem Martin Luther tried to settle by distinguishing between the *Deus absconditus* (hidden) and the *Deus revelatus* (revealed God) yet maintained that in knowing the *Deus revelatus*, we only know Him in His hiddenness. In such line of thought African religion or Africa has its manner of showing to some extent the nature of God. The Supreme Being is one and can only be one, for which African religion is definitely theistic. Ikenga-Metuh (1987) maintains that African belief about God as expressed in the myths, names, proverbs and sayings, show him as a living and personal being. He is different from the fundamentally recognized divinities. In this instance, Ogbonnaya has not really captured the sources and structure of African religion comprehensively, as to be able to pry into the people's idea of the nature of God properly.

Divination and Revelation: The belief that the spiritual controls the physical is widely held in many traditional African religions. Adherents of those religions

hold that life generally is lived under the shadow of the spirit beings that includes God. This makes divination a serious need, much like the laboratory for tests to reveal sicknesses and drugs. Divination therefore, goes beyond ordinary human needs. It serves the purpose of enlightenment and disclosure of hidden truths. Divination and prophetism feature prominently in Africa in situations of looking into hidden truths, including the nature of God. It is also a kind of prayer to the divine to make known to humans some higher thoughts and mysteries. It is describable as, the art or practice that foresees or foretells future events and discover hidden knowledge through interpretations made possible by the aid of supernatural powers. Mbiti's claim that the complete nature of God escapes human comprehension (1977, 38) notwithstanding, it is believably achievable with divination as God permits. Alongside is revelation and the act of getting divine truth communicated by God to humans; God also chooses His channels most times. The nature of God Himself is not an exception in this instance. In Africa, it is not clear that divination will fade, even in the face of technology, scientism, globalization, digital modernism and the like. But despite his expositions, Ogbonnaya should have done more to showcase possibility of divination or revelation aiding the knowledge of the nature of God. Ogbonnaya (2022, 119) argues, "one is left to wonder about the constituent nature of this God." Instead of that, he should have recalled that although God in Africa is reached through intermediaries but that He is not limited to that. This thought needed to be decoupled in his wonderment to grasp the nature of the Omni-present, Omni-scient and Omni-potent God of Africa. Once more, in this contemplation, Ogbonnaya ought to have elucidated to his audience that the African God, possessing omniscience, is aware that if He were to be fully comprehended by humans, He would no longer have His divine nature. Once one comprehends this concept, there will no longer be any uncertainty regarding the rationale for God's selection of how, whom, and when to disclose His nature. It is evident that God indeed does so in Africa, which can potentially establish connections between interpretations of religious language.

Names of God (Supreme Being) in Africa: The significance of names within African cultures extends beyond personal identity, encompassing their role as a means of imparting knowledge. Within this context, the names ascribed to God serve as representations of his inherent characteristics, encompassing both his attributes and actions. Emefie Ikenga-Metuh's (1987) in his *Comparative Studies of African Religions* dedicated a chapter to the understanding of African theism, with a specific emphasis on the concepts of God and the deities based on their names. Ikenga-Metuh (1987) expanded upon Mbiti's (1977) while aligning with Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) to underscore the religious significance of names in Africa, particularly those attributed to deities. From an analytical perspective, names possess a significance that extends beyond being abstract concepts devoid of specificity or simply designations. However, these names possess significant and symbolic implications (1987, 36). In this context, it is observed that names often possess descriptive qualities that reflect the nature of God, as evidenced by numerous myths and teachings pertaining to deities. The inherent and external characteristics of God, as well as the conceptualization of His hidden nature, are encapsulated in the names by which He is recognised, albeit requiring some effort

to interpret. This takes His will, divination, prophecy or other sources of African mysticism to get at, no matter the quantity. Illustrative, the Yoruba call God, *Olodumare* or *Edumare*. “The name *Olodumare* divides into three parts; Ol’ = Oni; it means “the owner of”, *Odu* means Chief head, scepter or authority,” all portray a height above most human imagination. The Igbo have *Chukwu* or *Chineke*. *Chukwu* is the biggest and highest of all gods and the only God, while *Chineke* means the creator God or God that creates. The names also have the carriage of God’s nature; believably the creator God can release information of Himself at will. This also accounts for the belief of having His breath, personal chi as a refraction of the central Force in humans as guiding spirit or guidance that extends up to luck in individuals among the Igbo people. This extends to community life as can be found when studies are extended. Apart from the nations already mentioned, the Edo, Nupe, Ijo, Tiv, Efik-Ibibio, Ewe and Fon, Akan and Ga, Kono, Mende, Ogoni, Yala, Zulu, Maasi, Hausa, Fulani, and all African tongues, have God’s attributes and nature embedded in His name. If Ogbonnaya had apprehended a semblance of this name concept, it would enhance the overall flavour significantly.

Scope of Analysis: The paper focuses predominantly on African philosophical traditions and does not extensively engage with other global philosophical perspectives on the nature of God. This narrow focus might limit the paper's ability to offer a comprehensive comparative analysis of the nature of God in Philosophy of Religion in general.

Potential Bias: The paper's strong advocacy for the African duality perspective might lead to a potential bias, overlooking potential criticisms or counterarguments that could challenge the proposed viewpoint. A more balanced approach that considers alternative perspectives could strengthen the paper's overall credibility.

Language Accessibility: Depending on the target audience, the paper's use of specialized philosophical terminology and complex theoretical concepts may hinder accessibility for readers less familiar with the field. Striking a balance between academic rigour and reader-friendly language would improve the paper's accessibility.

By considering these strengths and weaknesses, one can better understand the implications and contributions of the paper within the broader discourse on the nature of God from an African philosophical perspective.

Conclusion

In summary, the paper significantly contributes to the scholarship of African Philosophy of Religion by providing a critical analysis of concepts in traditional religions, fostering cultural and contextual understanding, offering comparative insights, contributing to theoretical framework development, and promoting interdisciplinary studies. These contributions collectively enrich the academic discourse and deepen the understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of the African Philosophy of Religion.

Ogbonnaya argues that the knowledge of attributes carries with them the knowledge of the Divine Essence or Being, as essential qualities, and each of them reveals some aspects of the nature of God. In his words, “my concluding argument is that God cannot be pure spirit if the African duality lens examines its constituent nature. Instead, God will be seen as consisting of spirit and matter that are harmoniously complemented and integrated as they coexist as a whole” (OGBONNAYA 2022, 125). The task surrounding the study of God accounts for the allegation of it being an under-researched concept in African philosophy of religion. Notwithstanding such limitation, Ogbonnaya has taken some steps by researching the Nature of God in African place or religion (ATR), and this is a commendable contribution.

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