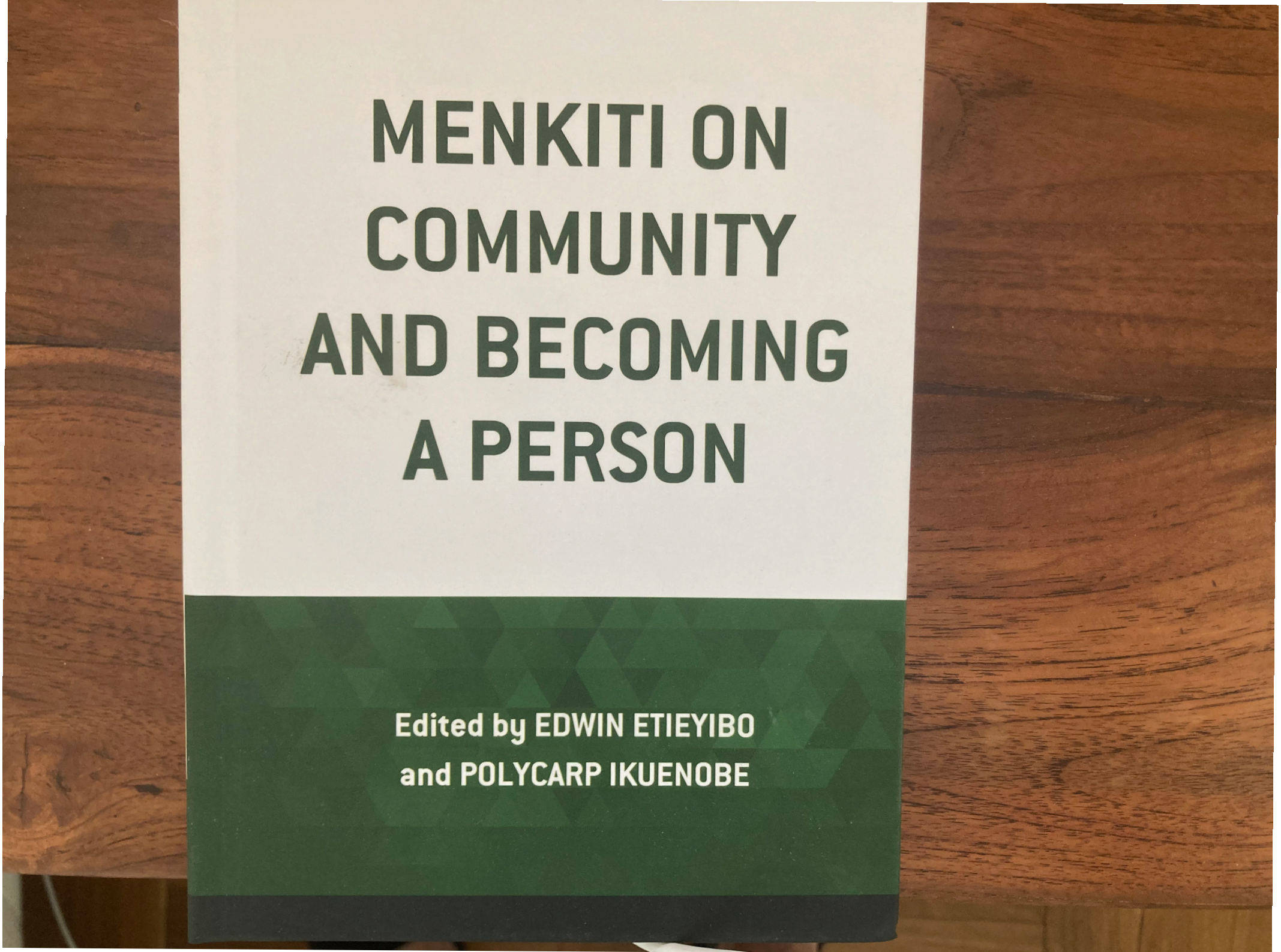
MENKITI ON COMMUNITY AND BECOMING A PERSON
Edited by EDWIN ETIEYIBO and POLYCARP IKUENOBE

African Philosophy
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Preface

The idea behind this book started as an informal discussion between both of us (Etieyibo and Ikuenobe) shortly after the 23rd annual conference of the International Society for African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS) at the University of Vienna, Austria (July 10–11, 2017). At the conference, one of the ideas that struck both of us was the momentum that African philosophy has gathered internationally over the years, particularly the last decade. This momentum can be attributed to a number of factors: one of which is the appreciation of some of the salient ideas in African philosophy and the connections of these ideas to other traditions of philosophy, including Western philosophy. This is buttressed by the theme of the Vienna ISAPS, "African Philosophy in an Intercultural Perspective."

At the end of the conference, and in our subsequent discussions, it became clear to both of us that one of the most discussed ideas in African philosophy is that of personhood, and that no one has presented and discussed a more influential conception of personhood than Ifeanyi Menkiti. Moreover, no single book has focused on or examined exclusively the idea of personhood as articulated by Menkiti. The idea of this book was conceived, and perhaps born, at this point. The plan was to gather the thoughts of a number of prominent philosophers in African philosophy on Menkiti's notion of person and community as a way of honoring Menkiti and advancing the discourse on personhood in African philosophy.

Chapter Eight

Community, Individuality, and Reciprocity in Menkiti

Thaddeus Metz

INTRODUCTION: READING MENKITI FOR 40 YEARS

For four decades Ifeanyi Menkiti addressed the question of how community bears on personhood from a characteristically African perspective. His works range from "Person and Community in Traditional African Thought," first published in 1979, to "Person and Community—A Retrospective Statement," appearing in 2018. For 40 years Menkiti sympathetically interpreted the characteristically sub-Saharan view that community substantially informs personhood in some way. Although Menkiti sometimes construes this claim ontologically, so that a full person is a different kind of being from one that is not, it is principally a moral claim. A full or genuine person is someone with moral virtue or good character, which, for Menkiti and much of the African philosophical tradition more broadly, cannot be realized without some kind of engagement with community.

As is well known, in the 1990s Kwame Gyekye took issue with some of Menkiti's claims about the dependence of personhood on community, suggesting that Menkiti's approach is incompatible with recognizing individuality, autonomy, and related values. In recent years, such criticisms have continued to be voiced, and without the extreme (or unrestricted or radical) versus moderate communitarian distinction that Gyekye[1] has famously deployed to differentiate Menkiti's conception of community from his. For instance, some have lately criticized Menkiti's view of how community confers personhood as unavoidably "gendered"[2] as well as "ableist" and "anti-queer."[3]

In this chapter, after expounding the views of Menkiti's critics,[4] I point out that, contrary to several of his recent defenders, it must be admitted that there are passages inviting discriminatory or otherwise objectionable readings of his views. That said, Menkiti's defenders are correct that there are other passages—insufficiently appreciated by his critics—that do not invite such readings. In short, I show that Menkiti's claims about how to acquire personhood are equivocal; his writings suggest two views of how community might confer personhood.

In the face of competing passages, I will suppose that the charitable reading of Menkiti is one according to which personhood is not determined by one's gender, sexuality, or the like. Drawing a distinction between viewing the community as a source of norms, on one hand, and as a beneficiary of action, on the other, I argue that the latter approach enables Menkiti to avoid the major criticisms that have been made.

However, I argue that this strongest reading of Menkiti is not strong enough, and is vulnerable to a new objection, one not salient in the literature. Although Menkiti can account for (roughly) the idea that female, intersex, and gay people can acquire personhood in the same kinds of ways that straight men can, the deep problem with his conception of morality is that it entails that certain beings lack a moral status, the standing of being owed moral treatment for their own sake. Menkiti maintains that personhood is necessary for moral status, or in his terms, that one has to participate in "reciprocal obligations" or "mutuality" in order to be the direct object of a duty. Such a restriction counterintuitively leaves out not merely animals—a bullet he is explicitly willing to bite—but also human infants and severely mentally incapacitated human beings. Menkiti is committed to the unwelcome view that they all lack moral status and hence that one cannot acquire personhood by treating them well.

In order to resolve this problem, I articulate an additional, third way to conceive of the way community constitutes personhood. According to it (roughly), one is more of a person, the more one enters into community with other individuals, where an individual has a moral status to the extent that it is capable of being party to communal relationships with us.[5] Such an approach, I conclude, captures the most important advantages of Menkiti's broad views, while avoiding all the disadvantages discussed in this chapter.

COMMUNITY AS SOURCE OF NORMS

Despite having written on normative matters for four decades, commentators, or at least the critics, tend to focus on Menkiti's first statement on them, namely, his essay "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought."[6] In it are passages suggesting that personhood is a function of conforming to a

society's contingent norms, a conception that invites charges of, for instance, sexism, in cases where those norms are gendered. Although Menkiti's defenders are right that there are passages in this and other texts of his that suggest a different approach, I argue that they are wrong to act as though the problematic passages do not exist.

Menkiti's account of personhood, like African ones more generally, is a conception of moral virtue or good character, properties that need to be developed over time in the life of a human being. That is, no infants or toddlers are virtuous (which of course is not to say they are vicious), while some adults are virtuous and some are not, and, among those who are virtuous, adults differ in the extent to which they are. Personhood is not universal among human beings, as some have it and some do not, and nor is it full among all those who have it, with some being greater or better persons than others.

These ideas are relatively uncontested in the African ethical tradition, even if there is some debate, sparked by Gyekye,[7] about whether there is also a broader sense of the word "person" that many African peoples apply to those who lack virtue, such as young children. The real contestation is about what Menkiti says in respect of how to cultivate virtue. On this score, there are occasions when he appears to hold the following of how one can acquire personhood through community:

> PtC(1): One has more personhood, the more one conforms to the norms of one's community.

The word "community" in this principle signifies the society in which one has been reared, where that group places expectations on its members and living up to them constitutes personhood.

Here are two passages suggesting that Menkiti holds PtC(1):

> We must also conceive of this organism as going through a long process of social and ritual transformation until it attains the full complement of excellencies seen as truly definitive of man. And during this long process of attainment, the community plays a vital role as catalyst and as prescriber of norms.[8]

> (T)he African emphasized the rituals of incorporation and the overarching necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives, so that what was initially biologically given can come to attain social self-hood, i.e., become a person with all the inbuilt excellencies implied by the term.[9]

Talk of "ritual transformation," "rituals of incorporation," "prescriber of norms," and "social rules by which the community lives" all suggest the view

that personhood is constituted by adhering to the extant norms of one's society, whatever they might happen to be.

Now, the problem, critics have fairly noted, is that sometimes societies have norms that are discriminatory. So, some scholars have pointed that there have been African societies with gendered roles, say, where men are expected to hunt or perform manual labor and where women are expected to look after children or cook.[10] In such societies, men and women would have to acquire personhood by performing different tasks, which seems counterintuitive. One critic has further noted that in such societies intersex individuals would appear not to have *any* route by which to acquire personhood, since they would fail to satisfy either male or female gender criteria.[11]

Debate about whether gendered societies actually existed or not in Africa is ultimately not relevant; the present point is a theoretical one about how in principle a human being can acquire personhood. The deep problem is that there have been some societies, regardless of whether they have been in Africa or not, that have prescribed gendered norms, such that PtC(1) objectionably entails that in them men could not enhance their personhood by caring for children and women could not do so by hunting for food.

In fact, even if, *ex hypothesi*, there had never been gendered societies in the history of the human race, the objection would still be relevant, so long as such societies were in close possible worlds. PtC(1) entails that personhood would be acquired on a gendered basis in such societies if they were to exist, but an attractive conception of virtue would not entail that its acquisition could crucially depend on one's gender (at least not without some unusual, special story to tell).

A similar criticism applies to societal norms that are discriminatory for being "ableist." Here, it has been noted that some (African) societies have expected people to procreate, and indeed have deemed that to be a moral duty. It follows from PtC(1) that those in such societies who are incapable of procreation, such as the infertile or gay couples, lack personhood in a major respect.[12] However, so the objection continues, it is incorrect to suppose that such people could not become complete persons or fully virtuous.

It is reasonable to think that biology can affect personhood in *some* respects—after all, a human being who for genetic reasons cannot conceive of another person's mind, self, or interests as distinct from his own is a poor candidate for moral virtue, even if, for most readers (—but not for Menkiti, as I discuss below), he remains a being with moral status. However, biology should not be considered relevant to one's degree of personhood insofar as that concerns the ability to create new human beings. Surely, one can exhibit excellent character even if one cannot reproduce, or even if one can but chooses not to do so, say, because one believes it would be better to adopt than to contribute further to climate change.[13]

In sum, there are facets of Menkiti's views of personhood, particularly in his first statement of them, that are counterintuitive, at least to much twenty-first-century moral-philosophical thought around the world. Virtue is available to anyone who is (roughly) capable of other-regard and by doing the same kinds of actions, regardless of their gender, sexuality, ability to procreate, and the like, whereas at times Menkiti's articulation of personhood entails otherwise. It is also PtC(1) that is responsible for Gyekye's famous criticisms of Menkiti's conception as too extreme for making personhood a function of existing norms and thereby entailing that it cannot come from, say, individuality or social rebellion in the service of people's well-being. There are, however, other passages in Menkiti's oeuvre that are not vulnerable to any of these objections, which I explore in the next section.

COMMUNITY AS BENEFICIARY

In the past few years, a number of scholars have offered rereadings of Menkiti, in order to show that his view can avoid Gyekye's criticisms.[14] In this section, I point out that Menkiti's recent defenders are correct in thinking that there is a fair way to interpret him that can avoid not only Gyekye's concerns, but also, I further argue, the concerns about discrimination voiced by more recent critics.

Those who have defended Menkiti of late sometimes take a cue from the fact that Kwasi Wiredu, a well-known adherent to impartial ethics and human rights, has supported Menkiti's interpretation of personhood against Gyekye. Wiredu remarks, "I do not believe that Menkiti said anything extremely radical. Menkiti's position is that to be a person in Africa, you need to not just be born of human heritage, you need also to have achieved certain socio-ethical standards. You need ethical maturity."[15]

Wiredu and other defenders of Menkiti are right to note such a line of thought in Menkiti's work. As early as his first statement on the nature of personhood, Menkiti said,

> It is the carrying out of these obligations that transforms one from the it-status of early childhood, marked by an absence of moral function, into the person-status of later years, marked by a widened maturity of ethical sense—an ethical maturity without which personhood is conceived as eluding one.[16]

And in his second major statement on the topic, "On the Normative Conception of a Person," Menkiti speaks of "the task of transforming the individual into a true person, in other words, a moral being or bearer of norms. For married to the notion of person is the notion of moral arrival."[17] And in the first sentence of his last statement, published just shy of forty years after the

initial one, Menkiti says that "within the African world moral function is an essential core of the definition of the human person."[18]

By this approach, the relevant norms that the community prescribes are moral ones alone. That begs the question of which norms count as "moral"; if that is not spelled out, then we are left with something close to a tautology (and indeed nothing radical at all, as per Wiredu above) to the effect that personhood, that is, virtue, is a function of morality. Here, Menkiti is plausibly read as maintaining that moral norms essentially and exhaustively involve prescriptions to support one's society. For instance, Menkiti says that personhood consists of "moral, or quasi-moral, qualities considered useful to the enrichment of the human community."[19] In another text he remarks that "morality is seen in light of what 'fits,' what leads to societal harmonization and village flourishing."[20] Notice how the focus of morality, for Menkiti, is relational or collective. One does not as a moral agent aim to produce pleasure or enhance autonomy, but instead aims to foster harmony among people or the well-being of the group as a whole. The important role of community is hence that of object of moral consideration or, roughly, beneficiary, inviting this formulation of Menkiti's view of how to obtain personhood through community:

> PtC(2): One has more personhood, the more one helps the community flourish.

The key role of community in PtC(1) is to lay down social rules to which individuals must conform, regardless of their content or perhaps as contingently viewed as moral by society, in order to develop personhood. In contrast, by PtC(2), community confers personhood insofar as individuals support it and in so doing in fact exemplify moral behavior.

This interpretation of Menkiti indeed avoids Gyekye's concerns about people having to conform to society's arbitrary and cloistering dictates. The relevant rules are ones with moral content, and specifically involve aiding the community of persons. This interpretation also neatly sidesteps the objections discussed in the previous section having to do with discrimination. Supposing that one acquires more personhood, the more one aids the community, it does not matter whether one has done so in accordance with one's status as a man or a woman in that society or by the specific action of procreating.

COMMUNITY AS RELATIONSHIP

In the previous section I noted how PtC(2) avoids the problems of PtC(1). That is not to say that one will find only PtC(2) in Menkiti's work; passages supporting PtC(1) exist, too, some of which were quoted in the previous section. So, Menkiti's defenders are incorrect insofar as they suggest that he has been misinterpreted by Gyekye or others with similar concerns; instead, Menkiti's writings naturally admit of two different interpretations. However, a more important point is that, I now argue, PtC(2) has its own counterintuitiveness. The objection I raise has not been prominent in the literature on Menkiti, but, I maintain, is forceful enough to require a further modification in the way we should understand how community constitutes personhood.

For the entire span of his career, Menkiti has maintained that morality is essentially "reciprocal" (or sometimes "mutual"), by which he basically means that it involves one being relating to another being that is capable of relating to it in the same sort of way. I now spell out this concept in some detail, and show that it objectionably excludes from the domain of moral consideration nonrational beings, such as nonhuman animals, human infants, and severely mentally incapacitated human adults. Such exclusion is reason to revise not only Menkiti's account of moral status, but also his conception of personhood.

In his first statement on personhood, Menkiti is clear that he does not believe that animals have rights or otherwise have moral status. There, the language has echoes of John Rawls (with whom Menkiti studied when at Harvard), with the claim being that a necessary condition for having rights, and more generally for being the object of moral treatment, is having a "moral personality" or a "moral sense."[21] Such a capacity involves the ability to act in accordance with duties, and specifically duties not in respect of oneself but exclusively toward others, the community.

In this respect, Menkiti is providing an interpretation of the long-standing and ubiquitous African maxims of not only "I am because we are," which Menkiti most often invokes,[22] but also "A person is a person through other persons," which is more common in southern Africa.[23] Roughly, by the first, I become a real self or genuine human being insofar as I support other selves or advance the human community, and by the second, one develops personhood insofar as one shares with other persons. According to Menkiti, "Individuals matter because they are individual *persons*, not because they are individual bundles of appetites."[24]

According to this approach, moral agency is necessary and sufficient for moral patiency. That is, we owe an individual moral treatment if and only if he owes us the same. This approach to moral status is what Menkiti has in mind when he so often mentions "reciprocity" as central to it, as in the following:

> (A)nimals cannot be members of the moral community of persons, despite the fact that persons constantly interact with them. This is so for the reason that animals are not able to assume reciprocal moral obligations; they cannot be adjudged moral legislators, however hard we might try to hold back speciesism. It is not that a diminishment of status automatically falls on animals, but

> that we are talking of a different kind of status pertaining to animals. We cannot assign moral status to everything within sight.[25]

Now, what goes for animals must go for any being that similarly is unable to assume reciprocal moral obligations or lacks a moral sense. That includes human infants and severely mentally incapacitated adults.

It would be entirely reasonable for Menkiti to deny that these beings exhibit personhood to any real degree. They are indeed terrible candidates for virtue or good character, at least centrally (if not exclusively) because they are incapable of moral judgment and action. However, it is, I submit, implausible for Menkiti to deny that these beings are owed moral treatment for their own sake. If you were to put a cat in a microwave merely for the thrill of it, you would be wronging the cat. You should feel guilty, and because of how you have treated the animal, not merely because, say, you have stolen the animal from a person or because you are dulling your sensibilities and are more likely to mistreat a person upon having tortured a cat. Similarly, if you were to use a human being with a severe case of Alzheimer's as target practice with your crossbow, you would be failing in your duty to this individual. These are routinely called "marginal cases," but, even granting that they are "peripheral" in some sense relative to "normal" adult humans, they cannot be ignored if one wants a comprehensive and plausible account of moral status. Although Menkiti is clearly sympathetic to the category of human rights, at least in his later years,[26] his account of moral status leaves him incapable of maintaining that all human beings have them, let alone that any animals in themselves merit moral consideration.

Still more, Menkiti's account of moral status contaminates his account of personhood. For him, the only way to develop personhood is to uphold morality in respect of other persons in community. That means that, for Menkiti, there are no obligations toward nonpersons, one cannot develop personhood in respect of the way one treats nonpersons, and one also cannot exhibit vice in respect of that. However, a better conception of virtue and vice would include the idea that they can be constituted by the way one engages with animals and humans that, while lacking moral personality, have a quality of life that can be improved or reduced (among other morally relevant features). Surely, one is a good person insofar as one cares for those human beings who cannot care for themselves. Yet Menkiti's conception of personhood cannot account for that strong intuition.

Before advancing a third conception of how personhood might be determined by community, one that avoids the problems facing Menkiti's conception(s), I respond to an argument he has given more than once for denying moral status to nonpersons.[27] It is that if we were to suppose that animals have a moral status, then persons would counterintuitively be sacrificed for their sake. Menkiti suggests that if animals were ascribed moral status, then

> "the various governmental programs designed to eradicate poverty in the inner cities of the United States could conceivably come under fire from the United Animal Lovers of America."[28]

A convincing reply, I submit, is to point out that moral status can come in degrees, and need not involve a claim of equal standing. One could sensibly maintain that persons have full moral status, or a dignity, while other beings have a partial moral status.[29] Where the urgent interests of being with a full moral status come into conflict with those of a being with partial moral status, the former's should win. However, if the merely trivial interests of a being with full moral status come into conflict with the urgent interests of a being with partial moral status, then the latter's interests should win. An interest in escaping poverty is reasonably deemed urgent, while an interest in the thrill of seeing a being suffer is clearly trivial.

Indeed, a salient feature of the African moral tradition is that there is a great chain of being, that is, a gradation of final value in the world, whereby humans have more importance than animals, but animals do have some importance in themselves and more importance than what plants or rocks have.[30] So, in addition to gaining philosophical plausibility, one would not lose much, if any, Africanness if one were to ascribe some degree of moral status to certain nonpersons or maintain that one's personhood would be enhanced if one were to treat some of them well.

Here is a third way to understand how personhood might be constituted by community, which I will now argue can avoid all the problems facing the two previous construals that Menkiti's works suggest:

> PtC(3): One has more personhood, the more one enters into community with beings to the degree that they are capable of it.[31]

Whereas by PtC(1) community is a prescriber of norms to live up to, and by PtC(2) community is a group of persons to be aided, by PtC(3) community is a way of relating. Roughly, personhood is determined by the extent to which one relates communally to other beings with which one can in principle commune. PtC(3) retains the moral focus of PtC(2), deeming personhood to be constituted by morality, but conceives of morality more broadly than as the ways that one's attitudes and actions should bear on other persons. Instead, any being that can be communed with by us should matter to us, where those beings with the greatest capacity to be party to communal relationships should matter most.

Communing or relating communally in this context involves two ways of interacting.[32] On one hand, it includes caring for others' quality of life, that is, doing what will meet their needs and doing so out of sympathy and for their sake. In part that means meeting their biological-psychological needs, something that all living humans and many animals have. However, humans

who are self-aware and have a moral sense also have social needs, that is, an interest in becoming full persons. Communing with others includes helping others as their nature calls for help.

On the other hand, communing also means sharing a way of life with others, namely, enjoying a sense of togetherness with others and participating with them on a cooperative basis. Instead of taking an "us versus them" attitude, one thinks of oneself as bound up with others as a "we." And instead of subordinating others or remaining isolated from them, one coordinates one's behavior with them so as to help them realize their goals.

The combination of caring for others' quality of life and sharing a way of life captures what is intuitively attractive about how families, friends, colleagues, neighbors, compatriots, and the like interact, or at least when they do so in morally good ways. Communion also implicitly makes good sense of what counts as vice, which is well understood in terms of one who in principle could commune but instead displays the antisocial opposites of being divisive ("us versus them," subordination) and exhibiting ill will (harm, cruelty).

So far, I have spoken of communion in subject terms, that is, as one who actively communes, where the more one does so, the greater one's personhood. However, another way to be party to a communal relationship is as one that is communed with, as an object. We can in principle commune with animals such as mice, dogs, and cows, but not with other ones such as amoeba and probably insects. The latter beings simply cannot relate or be related to in the morally relevant ways.

Those who can commune and be communed with have the highest moral status, whereas those who can merely be communed with have a partial moral status. Characteristic human beings count as the former, while many animals count as the latter. Even if animals, infants, and the like cannot share a way of life with us or care for our quality of life, we can do so with them, and so they matter for their own sake from a moral point of view to some degree.

Putting all this together, PtC(3) says that we are more virtuous, the more we both share a way of life with and care for the quality of life of beings capable of being party to such communal relationships. The most virtue comes from relating communally to beings who can be subjects and objects of such relationships ("normal" human persons), but some virtue comes from relating communally to beings who can be merely objects of them (the so-called "marginal cases").[33]

Consider, now, how PtC(3) avoids the criticisms made of Menkiti's apparent two other conceptions of how community might constitute personhood, while retaining their advantages. In respect of the advantages, PtC(3) plainly captures the intuitions salient in the African tradition that: personhood admits of degrees; it must be acquired over time; it cannot be acquired

apart from others; and it is constituted by moral behavior. It also captures Menkiti's apt point that animals as well as very young children altogether lack personhood, i.e., virtue, for they cannot relate communally. It further accommodates Menkiti's strong claim that the interests of persons, or at least their urgent interests, must come first in moral deliberation; for they are qualitatively more able to be party to communal relationships than, say, animals, who can be merely objects of them. Finally, PtC(3) retains, while making more sense of, Menkiti's somewhat vague suggestion that "societal harmonization and village flourishing" constitute morality; such may be understood as individuals communing with others, that is, sharing a way of life with them and caring for their quality of life.[34]

In addition, PtC(3) does a good job of avoiding the problems with Menkiti's views that have been addressed in this essay. First off, since PtC(3) does not ground personhood on whichever contingent expectations a society has for its members, it is not vulnerable to Gyekye's charge that it is incorrect to conceive of personhood in terms of the fulfillment of extant and potentially restrictive norms. Second, PtC(3) avoids concerns about discrimination by leaving it open as to how a given individual might relate communally as a subject with others; it does not indicate, say, that women must commune by cooking or procreating. Third, PtC(3) does not restrict the acquisition of personhood to the way one treats other persons. Since animals, human infants, and severely mentally incapacitated adults can be communed with by us (even though they cannot reciprocally commune with us), they have a moral status and our personhood is enhanced when we indeed commune with them. PtC(3) explains how we can be good for positively relating to certain beings that lack a moral sense, including vulnerable human beings (and implicitly how we can bad for negatively relating to them, say, by being cruel to them).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have spelled out Menkiti's remarks about how community constitutes personhood, and argued that he in effect expounds two different approaches. His critics view him as objectionably making virtue dependent on gender and similarly discriminatory factors that fail to respect individual difference, and they are correct that some passages in Menkiti's work appear to commit him to that. His defenders view him as sensibly making virtue dependent merely on morally supporting the community of persons, and they are correct that some of Menkiti's passages express that.

However, I have argued that Menkiti's views are all ultimately indefensible, insofar as they entail that only persons have a moral status or, in other words, that one can acquire personhood only insofar as one treats other

persons a certain way. The overwhelming majority of twenty-first-century ethical reflection accepts that one has duties in respect of some nonpersons, and an adequate account of virtue (and vice) must capture this judgment.

My main contribution has been to advance of a conception of personhood that can account for the intuition that some nonpersons morally matter, while retaining the several advantages that have made Menkiti's analysis of personhood the most widely discussed in the African philosophical tradition.[35] My move has been to suggest that instead of thinking of community either as a society that arbitrarily prescribes norms or as a group of persons that is morally supported, one should think of it as a way of relating to others. Roughly, by my account, one's personhood is constituted by the extent to which one enters into community with beings insofar as they are capable of being party to communal relationships, where that centrally means human persons, but also includes, to a lesser degree, many animals, human infants, and those with similar capacities. Supposing that one can be good for preventing cruelty to an animal or a human being with Alzheimer's (and that one can be bad for being cruel to them), there is strong reason to favor my alternative conception of how to acquire personhood through community.[36]

NOTES

1. Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in Akan Thought," 1992, 101–122; Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, 1997, 35–76.

2. Oritsegbubemi Anthony Oyowe, "Personhood and Social Power in African Thought," 2013, 203–28; Oritsegbubemi Anthony Oyowe and Olga Yurkivska, "Can a Communitarian Concept of African Personhood Be Relational and Gender-Neutral?" 2014, 85–99; Nompumelelo Zinhle Manzini, "Menkiti's Normative Communitarian Conception of Personhood as Gendered, Ableist and Anti-Queer," 2018, 18–33.

3. Manzini, "Menkiti's Normative Communitarian Conception of Personhood as Gendered, Ableist and Anti-Queer," 2018, 18–33.

4. Note that I address only philosophical literature that advances moral objections to Menkiti's conception of personhood, setting aside, for instance, exegetical debate about whether his views are in fact different from Gyekye's, or whether Menkiti accurately describes the beliefs of indigenous African societies in respect of infants and ancestors.

5. Drawing on Thaddeus Metz, "An African Theory of Moral Status: A Relational Alternative to Individualism and Holism," 2012a, 387–402; Thaddeus Metz, "Ethics in Aristotle and in Africa: Some Points of Contrast," 2012b, 99–117; Thaddeus Metz, "The Virtues of African Ethics," 2013a.

6. Although this essay initially appeared in 1979, its 1984 appearance is most often cited, perhaps because it is the one readily available on the internet. I will follow suit and also engage with the 1984 source.

7. Gyekye, "Person and Community in Akan Thought," 1992, 106–11.

8. Ifeanyi Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," 1984, 172.

9. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," 1984, 173.

10. Oyowe, "Personhood and Social Power in African Thought," 2013, 20–28; Oyowe and Yurkivska, "Can a Communitarian Concept of African Personhood Be Relational and Gender-Neutral?" 2014, 85–99.

11. Manzini, "Menkiti's Normative Communitarian Conception of Personhood as Gendered, Ableist and Anti-Queer," 2018, 26–27.

12. Manzini, "Menkiti's Normative Communitarian Conception of Personhood as Gendered, Ableist and Anti-Queer," 2018, 23, 29.

13. I am open to the idea that one, optional way to exhibit personhood would be to procreate, meaning that the present objection applies to those societies that would make procreation a requirement.

14. E.g., Bernard Matolino, "Radicals versus Moderates: A Critique of Gyekye's Moderate Communitarianism," 2009; Motsamai Molefe, "Revisiting the Menkiti-Gyekye Debate: Who Is a Radical Communitarian?," 2016; Polycarp Ikuenobe, "Matolino's Misunderstanding of Menkiti's African Moral View of the Person and Community," 2017; Polycarp Ikuenobe, "An Examination of Menkiti's Conception of Personhood and Gyekye's Critique," 2018a; Polycarp Ikuenobe, "Radical versus Moderate Communitarianism: Gyekye's and Matolino's Misinterpretations of Menkiti," 2018b; Michael Onyebuchi Eze, "Menkiti, Gyekye and beyond," 2018.

15. Quoted in an interview with Michael Onyebuchi Eze and Thaddeus Metz, "Emergent Issues in African Philosophy: A Dialogue with Kwasi Wiredu," 2015, 76; see also Kwasi Wiredu, "Introduction: African Philosophy in Our Time," 2004, 17.

16. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," 1984, 176.

17. Ifeanyi Menkiti, "On the Normative Conception of a Person," 2004a, 326.

18. Menkiti, "Person and Community—A Retrospective Statement," 2018a, 162.

19. Menkiti, "On the Normative Conception of a Person," 2004a, 325.

20. Menkiti, "Physical and Metaphysical Understanding: Nature, Agency, and Causation in African Traditional Thought," 2004b, 131.

21. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," 1984, 175–176; see also Menkiti, "On the Normative Conception of a Person," 2004a, 330.

22. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," 1984, 171; Menkiti, "On the Normative Conception of a Person," 2004a, 324; Menkiti, "Community, Communism, Communitarianism: An African Intervention," 2017a, 466; Menkiti, "Person and Community—A Retrospective Statement," 2018a, 165.

23. E.g., Mokgoro, "Ubuntu and the Law in South Africa," 1998, 16–17; Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 1999, 34–35.

24. Menkiti, "Philosophy and the State in Africa: Some Rawlsian Considerations," 2002, 49; emphasis in original.

25. Menkiti, "Community, Communism, Communitarianism: An African Intervention," 2017a, 467; see also Menkiti, "On the Normative Conception of a Person," 2004a, 328, 330; Menkiti, "Africa and Global Justice," 2017b, 26–28; Menkiti, "Person and Community—A Retrospective Statement," 2018a, 166 as well as his appeal to "mutuality" in Menkiti, "Community, Communism, Communitarianism: An African Intervention," 2017a, 471–72; and Menkiti, "Africa and Global Justice," 2017b, 26–28.

26. Menkiti, "Africa and Global Justice," 2017b, 26–28; Menkiti, "Philosophy and the State in Africa," 2018b, 305–6.

27. On one occasion, Menkiti also poses this question: "Does amoeba itself have moral worth, and if not, why not?" suggesting that the central alternative to restricting moral status to persons would absurdly be to have it "extended wholesale to the rest of biological nature," "Community, Communism, Communitarianism: An African Intervention," 2017a, 467). However, a plausible alternative would be to ascribe moral status merely to certain parts of nature (namely, beings with which we in principle could commune, as defined further on).

28. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," 1984, 176; see also Menkiti, "Community, Communism, Communitarianism: An African Intervention," 2017a, 467.

29. A view that I have defended and sought to explain theoretically in Metz, "An African Theory of Moral Status: A Relational Alternative to Individualism and Holism," 2012a.

30. E.g., Etieyibo, "Anthropocentricism, African Metaphysical Worldview, and Animal Practices," 2017.

31. I first advanced this conception of virtue in other work, not as a view that Menkiti has reason to accept, but rather as one promising interpretation of the African tradition more

broadly. See, e.g., Metz, "An African Theory of Moral Status: A Relational Alternative to Individualism and Holism," 2012a; Metz, "Ethics in Aristotle and in Africa: Some Points of Contrast," 2012b; Metz, "The Virtues of African Ethics," 2013a.

32. A view expounded in, for one example, Metz, "The Western Ethic of Care or an Afro-Communitarian Ethic?: Finding the Right Relational Morality," 2013b.

33. For a fuller statement that would make sense of when antisocial, e.g., violent, behavior is justified, see Metz, "Human Dignity, Capital Punishment, and an African Moral Theory: Toward a New Philosophy of Human Rights," 2010; Metz, "An African Theory of Just Causes for War," 2020.

34. Still more, PtC(3) captures much of what Menkiti finds attractive about community as something different from both the individualism of Western societies and the Communism of Eastern ones. See Menkiti, "Normative Instability as Source of Africa's Political Disorder," 2001; and Menkiti, "Africa and Global Justice," 2017a.

35. As I write, GoogleScholar indicates that "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought" has been cited nearly 600 times.

36. And it might even count as *more* African than his conception, if I am correct that it has been a salient feature of sub-Saharan moral thought to ascribe intrinsic value to animals, even if less than ascribed to humans and other persons.

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Ifeanyi Menkiti's articulation of an African conception of personhood—especially in "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought"—has become very influential in African philosophy. *Menkiti on Community and Becoming a Person* contributes to the debate in African philosophy on personhood by engaging with various aspects of Menkiti's account of person and community. The contributors examine this account in relation to themes such as individualism, communalism, rights, individual liberty, moral agency, communal ethics, education, state and nation building, and elderhood and ancestorhood. Through these themes, this book, edited by Edwin Etieyibo and Polycarp Ikuenobe, shows that Menkiti's account of personhood in the context of community is both fundamental and foundational to epistemological, metaphysical, logical, ethical, legal, social, and political issues in African thought systems.

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