

# Developing African Political Philosophy: Moral-Theoretic Strategies

**Thaddeus Metz**

*Research Professor of Philosophy  
University of Johannesburg*

## 1. Introduction

Great and influential political philosophies are invariably grounded on more basic theories about moral issues in general. In the Anglo-American literature, think of, say, Thomas Hobbes' account of political obligation founded on egoism, John Stuart Mill's liberal account of the state's end grounded on utilitarianism, and John Rawls' egalitarian theory of distributive justice resting on a reconstruction of Kant's moral ideas. The same is true in the written African tradition. It is no accident, I submit, that the political theory with a sub-Saharan pedigree that has been most widely analyzed in the past twenty years has been Kwame Gyekye's moderate communitarianism.<sup>1</sup> Its comprehensiveness and other attractive features are a function of Gyekye's articulation of a foundational ethic, one that appeals to considerations of both human welfare and human dignity.

If contemporary African political philosophy is going to develop substantially in fresh directions, it probably will not be enough to rehash the old personhood debate between Gyekye and Ifeanyi Menkiti or to nitpick at Gyekye's system, as much of the literature in the field has already done. Instead, major advances are likely to emerge on the basis of new, principled interpretations of sub-Saharan moral thought. In recent work, I have fleshed out two types of moral theories that have a clearly sub-Saharan basis, that differ from Gyekye's moral perspective, and that also happen to constitute genuine rivals to dominant Western theories such as utilitarianism, Kantianism, and contractualism.<sup>2</sup> In catchwords, these African moral theories are constituted by ideals regarding community or friendliness on the one hand and vitality or liveliness on the other. In this article I sketch out these two under-explored ethical perspectives and then suggest several respects in which their implications for salient political controversies are novel and revealing. From new roots will grow new branches.

The topics in African political philosophy on which I focus are the dominant ones in the field, namely, those regarding political power, civil liberties, and economic goods. With respect to these issues, I often indicate how the moral theories informed by ideas about community and vitality have implications that differ in interesting ways from Gyekye's appeal to welfare and dignity. Sometimes the new African moral theories—and the community-based one in particular—entail different conclusions, while other times their conclusions are the same as Gyekye's, but they provide different rationales for them that are more compelling than his.

I begin by briefly reminding the reader of the overall structure of Gyekye's system, that is, his moral theory and the implications he believes it has for political philosophy, after which I spell out two alternative ways to moral-theoretically interpret salient sub-Saharan worldviews. Next, I apply these rival African moral theories to issues of how the state should make decisions and of which decisions it should make with regard to freedoms, opportunities, and wealth, comparing and contrasting the implications with Gyekye's model and along the way providing reason to think that the community-based ethic is the most promising of the lot. Finally, I conclude the paper by summarizing and by noting an additional way to develop African political philosophy that is worth pursuing elsewhere, namely, by addressing under-explored topics such as political obligation, compensatory justice, and defensive force.

## 2. Gyekye's Moral Theory and Its Political Implications

### Ethics in Africa

I submit that African ethical thought is characterized by the salience of four major concepts, namely, utility, dignity, community, and vitality, and that much of the work in the field fails to adequately distinguish between these ideas and to organize them systematically into a coherent theory that receives a thorough defense. A useful way to classify and to evaluate actual and possible sub-Saharan moral philosophies is according to which of these ideas are taken to be fundamental and which are derivative, or so the following analysis presumes (*cf.* Metz, *IEE*).

About twenty-five years ago, in the initial (1987) edition of his first book, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*,<sup>3</sup> Gyekye clearly expressed the view that, for the Ghanaian Akan and many other African peoples' moral thinking, utility is one foundational concept, at least when it comes to the point of praiseworthy action. For Gyekye, the best theoretical interpretation of African morality, that is to say, one that attempts to reduce all moral considerations to a single basic property, is this:

Moral value in the Akan system is determined in terms of its consequences for mankind and society. "Good" is thus used of actions that promote human interest. The good is identical with the welfare of the society. . . . Just as the good is that action or pattern of behaviour which conduces to well-being and social harmony, so

the evil (*bone*; that is, moral evil) is that which is considered detrimental to the well-being of humanity and society (*APT*, 132–33).

Gyekye has continued throughout his career to advance a welfarist theory of the aim of sub-Saharan ethical behavior and has as recently as 2010 said that from a traditional sub-Saharan perspective,

what is good is constituted by the deeds, habits, and behavior patterns considered by the society as worthwhile because of their consequences for human welfare. The goods would include such things as generosity, honesty, faithfulness, truthfulness, compassion, hospitality, happiness, that which brings peace, justice, respect, and so on. . . . African morality originates from considerations of human welfare and interests, not from divine pronouncements. Actions that promote human welfare or interest are good, while those that detract from human welfare are bad.<sup>4</sup>

Although Gyekye takes considerations of utility or welfare to be fundamental, and most often summarizes rightness in terms of action likely to improve human well-being, as above, his moral theory is not utilitarian in the sense widely used among Western philosophers. For one, Gyekye does not believe in producing well-being in a way that would sacrifice the interests of the individual for those of the greater good; instead, right acts are those that promote the *common* good, by which he means *everyone's* interests (*BC*, 117). For another, and more deeply, a close reading of Gyekye's work indicates that he, unlike standard utilitarians, holds that there is a second non-derivative moral category, namely, human dignity (*TM*, 63–64; *BC*, 36, 46).

Gyekye is non-committal about what it might be that constitutes our dignity, namely, whether it is the fact that we have a spiritual nature that is an offshoot of God, that we are capable of autonomous decisionmaking, or something else. However, he believes that something about characteristic human nature confers a dignity on us and entitles us to human rights. At the core, these rights include so-called “negative” duties on others to refrain from interfering with an individual in certain coercive and exploitive ways, even when so interfering would promote welfare or other values.

In the Western tradition, utility and dignity are well-known for respectively grounding two competing moral theories. However, according to Gyekye, the African tradition is philosophically well understood as combining these two independent and basic elements into one moral theory. In taking utility and dignity to be fundamental, Gyekye is committed to the view that other considerations salient in the African ethical tradition, including community and vitality, are derivative. As he says, “In making human well-being the common measure by which cultures can be evaluated, I am claiming that this value is most fundamental, even within the framework of a plurality of values, that all things or activities are valuable only insofar as they enhance human well-being” (*BC*, 41). Hence, the value of human

life is (at least in large part) that of a human being who is living well, and what makes a theory rightly called “communitarian”, by Gyekye’s lights, is principally that it requires substantial action for the sake of a common good, that is, the well-being of all of a society’s members (*TM*, 66–67, 70). Well-being is, as Gyekye puts it, the “master value” (*BC*, 41), although I note that a more careful statement from him would have included something about dignity.

It is the idea that the individual human being has a dignity requiring respect in the form of according rights that largely makes Gyekye’s communitarianism famously “moderate” as opposed to extreme or unrestricted. Moral agents may *not* perform whichever actions would most promote the common good (or conform to social norms), something an extreme communitarianism might prescribe. Instead, for Gyekye, agents may perform whichever action would most promote the common good without violating individual rights or otherwise degrading the dignity of an individual human being. In fact, Gyekye has consistently held that agents *must* perform those acts that would maximize the common good without treating individuals disrespectfully, meaning that he denies that there is any moral category of supererogation, ways of helping people that are beyond the call of duty (*TM*, 70–75; *BC*, 105–111; *AE*). One is obligated to do all one can to improve the well-being of the members of society, though, again, not in ways that would leave out or degrade individuals.<sup>5</sup>

### From Ethics to Politics

What does an ethic requiring the maximization of utility without the degradation of persons entail for key political issues? According to Gyekye, it supports a state that determines policy by consensus-oriented democracy, protects substantial civil liberties, and distributes opportunities and wealth according to a market in the first instance but redistributes funds, via taxation, as necessary to meet needs. I bring the reader up to speed on the basics of all three in turn.

Although several African political theorists have argued against the competitive and majoritarian form of democracy that is standard in the West, Gyekye was, so far as I can tell, one of the first to advance the idea (*TPI*). According to him (and others), democratic decisionmaking ought to be predicated on consensus among elected representatives who all attempt to promote the common good. Such a system would contrast starkly with the dominant, Western one in which majority rule is sufficient for a law to be legitimate and in which political parties above all seek to satisfy their constituency’s interests, and it would appear to be naturally entailed by Gyekye’s duty to promote the common good as much as one can (*cf.* *TM*, 130–31, 142). Gyekye’s and others’ call for a consensus-oriented form of decisionmaking is probably the most striking and important contribution that African political philosophers have made so far in the post-war era.<sup>6</sup>

With regard to civil liberties, Gyekye contrasts his own position with those of “individualists” (*TM*, 45, 270–71), who roughly maintain that the individual is prior to the group, at least in the sense that he/she or his/her interests are a source of moral value utterly independently of any relationships he/she could have. *Con-*

*tra* this sort of view, which entails that rights have a primary, and perhaps even exclusive, role to play in political morality, Gyekye deems himself to be, as noted above, a communitarian, which implies that an individual's good is at least partly a function of helping to promote the common good and that political morality should not be primarily defined by the aim of protecting individual rights.

All this is very abstract, and unfortunately Gyekye's claim that he is a "moderate" communitarian does not make things any more concrete; for this modification means merely that Gyekye believes that there are individual rights, some of which the state ought to protect. In the main text that explains and defends moderate communitarianism, Gyekye is thorough and explicit neither about which moral rights he believes exist nor about which ones he believes the state may justly enforce (*TM*, 35–76).

However, one can glean some clues about these matters from the logic of some of his claims and from statements he makes elsewhere. First, Gyekye surely believes that individuals, as both bearers of dignity and as parts of the common good, have a right to life (see *BC*, 45–46). Second, Gyekye says that "human rights" are valid expectations (*TM*, 63–64; *BC*, 47), which suggests that he believes the individual has rights not to be enslaved, tortured, and treated in other ways that are patently harmful or degrading, including being subjected to genital mutilation (*BC*, 36). Third, when criticizing extreme forms of communitarianism, Gyekye rejects the idea of a "cramped or shackled self, responding robotically to the ways and demands of the communal structure" (*TM*, 55–56). Instead, he appreciates the "viable and telling pursuits of individuals who can appropriately be described as idealists, visionaries, or revolutionaries" (*TM*, 57), and he even goes so far as to suggest that his moderate communitarianism would permit people to engage in gay sex and to look at pornography (*TM*, 65). These remarks suggest that he would approve of state protection of rights to privacy and to freedom of conscience, association, information, and the like as means by which individuals can flourish in unique ways. Fourth, as noted above, Gyekye believes in democracy, and so defends civil liberties that are the natural accompaniments of a robust form of it, e.g., the right to "free expression of opinion" (*TPI*, 251).

All this is sounding mighty liberal. However, an easy way to see Gyekye's distance from "individualism" is to recall his claim that there is no category of supererogation, meaning that one's general right to live as one pleases does not outweigh one's persistent and stringent duty to help others as much as one can. While Gyekye values autonomy, it is not overriding. If, for Mill, we famously should be allowed to "pursue our own good in our own way," for Gyekye, one might say that we should be able to "pursue others' good in our own way." And he is explicit that the state may and even must prompt us to aid others, since people are unlikely to do so to the requisite degree by their own initiative (*TM*, 46–47).

Finally, with regard to the distribution of jobs and wealth, Gyekye is well-known for arguing against the post-independence "philosopher . . . kings," such as Nkrumah, Nyerere, and Senghor, who maintained that socialism, i.e., public ownership of the means of production, is inherent to traditional African values. Gyekye provides reason to believe that indigenous sub-Saharan cultures often per-

mitted not only some private ownership of land, at least in the form of a clan rightfully possessing it, but also wealth acquisition on the part of individuals (*TM*, 149–57). Furthermore, Gyekye indicates an adherence to capitalism largely on the ground that it is workable, i.e., does the best job of any known economic system of improving people’s quality of life (*TM*, 159; *BC*, 128–29, 133). A capitalist system permits individuals to own major productive segments of the economy, which they orient to make profit for themselves by buying people’s labor-power and then selling their services or goods on a consumer market. Gyekye is of course not in favor of a libertarian form of capitalism, i.e., one that forbids taxation of profit for the sake of redistribution to those who have fared poorly on the market, as that would be incompatible with a weighty duty to improve people’s well-being. Instead, a form of capitalism that is state-regulated out of a concern for the common good is what Gyekye advocates (e.g., *TM*, 257).

The point of this discussion has not been to capture Gyekye’s moral and political views thoroughly and in detail but, rather, to illustrate how the African political philosopher who has—deservedly—received the most attention from scholars has grounded his political philosophy on a more basic moral theory. The questions I seek to answer in the rest of this article are what political philosophy might look like if grounded upon African moral theories different from Gyekye’s and whether they entail positions that are more attractive than his.

### 3. Moral Theories Grounded on Vitality and Community

Above I suggested that African moral views are fruitfully conceived according to the place they give the four concepts of utility, dignity, community, and vitality. I have contended that Gyekye’s moral theory is straightforwardly understood as a pluralistic view according a foundational place to the former two and a derivative status to the latter two. In this section, I spell out moral theories that basically have an inverse structure. According to what I often call the “vitality” or “liveliness” theory, life-force in some sense has a fundamental value, where other concepts follow from it, and according to the “community” or “friendliness” theory, amity or harmony is the basic good, with the other concepts being a function of it. Here, I merely articulate these moral theories with a sub-Saharan pedigree, saving their application and evaluation for the following section.

#### Vitality as the Ground of Morality

One frequently encounters texts in the African tradition that explicitly state that human life is the most important value and the one that is foundational for morality. And often enough what is meant by “human life” is, more specifically, life-force or *seriti*, as it is famously known in Sotho-Tswana. Placide Tempels is of course well-known for having written the first “ethno-philosophical” attempt to understand and relate African worldviews to a Western audience and for having deemed the concept of life-force to be at their heart (*BP*). Although his work has been criticized for over-generalizing, one still finds important contemporary phi-

losophers from a variety of sub-Saharan regions placing the notion of life-force at the heart of their ethics, as I note below. I seek to interpret this idea in a way that makes for a *prima facie* attractive moral theory.

Life-force is traditionally understood to be a valuable spiritual or invisible energy that inheres in everything, including the physical and visible. All existents in the universe, even an inanimate object such as a rock, are thought to be good by virtue of having some degree of life-force, with animate beings have a greater share of it than inanimate ones, with human beings having more than plants and animals, with ancestors, whose physical bodies have died but who live on in a spiritual realm, having even more than human beings, and with God, the source of all life-force, having the most.

Despite this thickly metaphysical picture, it is worth noting that, quite often, when African thinkers characterize life-force concretely, they do so without appeal to spiritual ideas, or at least not explicitly. For example, life-force is often cashed out in terms of health, strength, growth, reproduction, creativity, vibrancy, activity, self-motion, courage, and confidence, with a lack of life-force being constituted by the presence of disease, weakness, decay, barrenness, destruction, lethargy, passivity, submission, insecurity, and depression.<sup>7</sup> I often refer to this physicalist, energy-oriented conception of vitality as “liveliness”, though N. K. Dzobo’s phrase “creative power” would also be apt (see VCS).

Most readers will share the intuition that there is something strongly to be preferred about individuals with more liveliness than less. In addition, it is reasonable to suspect that what stealing, promise-breaking, deception, raping, and the like have in common is that they tend to reduce liveliness and that, conversely, what generosity, honesty, faithfulness, truthfulness, compassion, and so on have in common is that they usually produce it. So, consider what a moral theory might look like upon taking liveliness to be the fundamental value. First, one might suggest the principle that actions are right just insofar as they promote liveliness, which is more or less what several philosopher-theologians below the Sahara have held. For examples, consider that the Tanzanian Laurenti Magesa maintains that “in no way is any thought, word or act understood except in terms of good and bad, in the sense that such an attitude or behavior either enhances or diminishes life” (AR, 58); the Congolese Bénézet Bujo suggests that “the strengthening and growth of life are fundamental criteria in the realm of ethics” (EDC, 27); the Nigerian Pantaleon Iroegbu says that “all people and activities that diminish life are in all cultures considered as evil, while those that promote it are regarded as good” (RLML, 447); and the Ghanaian Dzobo expresses this view as well: “behavior is right in humanistic morality not because it conforms to a code of conduct which has been laid-down, but because it builds up instead of pulling down—in short, because it is syntropic” (VCS, 228).

Second, instead of a consequentialist approach to vitality as a good, one might suggest a *eudaimonist* one, according to which one should *realize oneself by exhibiting the most liveliness that one can in oneself*. This view is roughly what South African philosopher Augustine Shutte proposes in his interpretation of *ubuntu* (U, 22–25, 30–31).

Or, third, instead of a teleological ethic prescribing promotion of the good of liveliness, either in oneself or in everyone, one could propose a deontological ethic of dignity, according to which *beings must be treated with respect just insofar as they are capable of (human) liveliness*. Wrong actions, on this view, would be ones that degrade people's capacity for creative power (*cf. RLML*, 448–49).

I save for another occasion the fascinating project of determining which moral theory grounded on vitality is the most attractive. Instead, consider at this point how this general type of ethic contrasts with Gyekye's. If one takes liveliness to be one's basic moral value, then other concepts must be defined in relation to it. For instance, with regard to utility, Gyekye thinks of the value of human life in terms of the most basic good of well-being, whereas friends of the vitality approach to morality will tend to reverse the relationship between these concepts, instead conceiving of well-being as the presence of life-force and of woe as its absence. As Tempels remarks, "Supreme happiness, the only kind of blessing, is, to the Bantu, to possess the greatest vital force" (*BP*, 30), and, correspondingly, "Every illness, wound or disappointment, all suffering, depression, or fatigue, every injustice and every failure: all these are held to be, and are spoken of by the Bantu as, a diminution of vital force" (*BP*, 32).

Community, too, will play a secondary, albeit potentially prominent, role in a vitality-based ethic. For example, Bujo is well-known for maintaining that community is a reliable epistemic means by which *to know how* to behave; for him, dialogue among fellows is a particularly useful way to reveal what it most likely to foster life-force (*EDC*, 24–42; *FAE*, 45–71). Others, such as Magesa (*AR*) and Godfrey Onah (*MP*), believe that community is a particularly fruitful means by which *to foster life-force itself*. The more communal relationships of a certain kind, the greater the vitality of those in them; if discord were to arise and community were to break down, then people's liveliness would be threatened, so they contend.

I lack the space to critically explore the vitality approach in detail and must rest content with indicating some of its implications for important issues in political philosophy. These are often appealing and will provide *pro tanto* reason to consider in future work whether liveliness can indeed ground a viable moral theory.

## Community as the Ground of Morality

In contrast to the views that right acts are those that improve human well-being or that foster human liveliness, there is a third major swathe of African-based moral thought worth noting, roughly according to which acts are right insofar as they prize communal relationships among human beings. I specify with some care how to understand "community" in a way that would plausibly make for a basic moral value.

Elsewhere, I have argued that the idea of community in characteristic African thought is well construed as the combination of two logically distinct kinds of relationship, "identity" and "solidarity."<sup>8</sup> To identify with each other is largely for people to think of themselves as members of the same group—that is, to conceive of themselves as a "we", to engage in joint projects, coordinating their behavior to

realize common ends, and to be emotionally invested in the group's doings, e.g., with regard to pride and shame. Identity is a matter of people sharing a way of life, with the opposite of it being instantiated by people defining themselves in opposition to one another and seeking to undermine one another's ends. To exhibit solidarity with one another is for people to care about each other's quality of life, in two senses. First, it means that they engage in mutual aid, acting in ways that are expected to benefit each other (ideally, repeatedly over time). Second, caring is a matter of people's attitudes such as emotions and motives being positively oriented toward others, say, by sympathizing with them and helping them for their sake. For people to fail to exhibit solidarity could be for them to be indifferent to each other's flourishing or to exhibit ill will in the form of hostility and cruelty.

Identity and solidarity are different sorts of relationship. One could identify with others but not exhibit solidarity with them—probably workers in relation to management in a capitalist firm. One could also exhibit solidarity with others but not identify with them, e.g., by making anonymous donations to a charity. My proposal, following the intimations of several African thinkers, is that a promising conception of community includes both kinds of relationship. Consider how both elements are found in these ethical perspectives: “Every member is expected to consider him/herself an integral part of the whole and to play an appropriate role towards achieving the good of all” (which the Yoruba philosopher Segun Gbadegesin writes in *AP*, 65); “[T]he purpose of our life is community-service and community-belongingness” (as per the Ibgo theologian Pantaleon Iroegbu in *BPEL*, 442); “Harmony is achieved through close and sympathetic social relations within the group” (so says the former South African Constitutional Court justice Yvonne Mokgoro in *ULSA*, 3).

Now, the combination of identity, or sharing a way of life, and solidarity, or caring for others' quality of life, is more or less what English speakers mean by “friendship” or a broad sense of “love.” It is the way that nearly everyone thinks that family members should relate to one other. A friendly or loving relationship, or a desirable familial one, is one in which the parties think of themselves as a “we,” engage in common activities, act to benefit one another, and do so consequent to sympathy and for the other's sake. Perhaps, then, what stealing, promise-breaking, deception, raping, and the like have in common is that they are unfriendly, and maybe what generosity, honesty, faithfulness, truthfulness, compassion, and so on have in common is that they are ways of being friendly. Hence, it is *prima facie* attractive to propose that actions are wrong *insofar as they fail to express friendliness* or that right actions are those that *treat beings capable of community with respect*.

Note that in contrast to utility- and vitality-based theories, which are normally interpreted teleologically, a community-based ethic is more at home in a deontological framework. To properly value a communal or friendly relationship would not permit ending one existent friendship so as to create two new ones for oneself. Nor would it permit being very unfriendly to one person so as to promote friendliness among others. Instead, the value of community or amity is best understood as calling for honoring or, alternately, acknowledging that people warrant respectful treatment in light of their capacity for such a relationship.

Consider some additional ways in which the community-based moral theory differs from the vitality-based theory and from Gyekye's utility-based one. If one takes liveliness to be basic, then communal relationships are merely a means to it (as per Magesa: "remember to keep . . . ancestral relationships alive and harmonious, for to strain these relationships is to threaten life at its very core," *AR*, 81), but if one deems community to be basic, then one will tend to think that one way to prize communal relationships is to value people's lives and liveliness, which Christopher Ejizu clearly suggests (*ATR*). Similarly, whereas for Gyekye solidarity is morally right because it improves people's well-being (*TM*, 72), the adherent to the community-based theory will say that improving people's well-being is morally right to the extent that it is part of a relationship that includes solidarity; aiding, or even merely attempting to aid (and failing), another is right insofar as it is an expression of friendliness.

In this section I have drawn on values salient in the sub-Saharan tradition to construct two kinds of moral theory that differ from the one Gyekye has used to ground his political philosophy. It would be interesting to know which of these three rival ethical perspectives is the most *African*, on the one hand, and the most *plausible* in light of contemporary philosophical reflection, on the other. That task must be undertaken elsewhere. Instead, what I do in the rest of this article is illustrate and motivate the alternatives to Gyekye by applying them to some central topics in political philosophy. My aim is to indicate some fresh ways, beyond Gyekye, to apply fundamental ethical principles to issues of justice and law.

#### 4. Toward New African Political Philosophies

What do liveliness and friendliness as basic moral values entail for political power, civil liberties, and economic goods? In what respects is it revealing to apply moral values other than utility and dignity to these central controversies about how to legally organize public life?

##### Political Power

Here, I provide reason to think that of the three moral perspectives, the community-based one most promises to underwrite a consensus-based democracy and to account for firm intuitions about some other aspects of the form that democracy should take. I begin by casting doubt on Gyekye's rationale for consensus.

Recall that, for Gyekye, the common good is that state of affairs that benefits every individual in a society, and the common good is most likely to be promoted consequent to consensus among legislators. If majority rule were deemed sufficient to render legislation just, then the interests of those in a minority would be more likely to be neglected and they would tend to feel left out. Here are three serious problems with this rationale.

I begin by noting that it is implausible to think that there always *is* a common good, a state of affairs in which literally everyone's well-being is fostered. Gyekye, along with some other African philosophers,<sup>9</sup> supposes that there need not be radi-

cal conflicts of interest between the individual and others in his society (e.g., *TM*, 76, 130). He presumes that there is *always* a way to benefit everyone, or at least to benefit some without harming others, that one *never* has to choose between people's basic needs. This view, however, springs from wishful thinking. Suppose, as is the case in my country, that about only one in four people receives the organs she needs to survive, and that killing an innocent person and distributing her organs would be the only thing that would keep those four alive. Or suppose that there are not enough resources to provide life-saving drugs to those suffering from HIV/AIDS as well as to those facing other life-threatening illnesses.

These kinds of cases suggest that sometimes there is no common good to be found by legislators and bureaucrats. Instead, the government sometimes must make trade-offs between people's urgent interests. This point upsets the logic of Gyekye's rationale for consensus in democratic decisionmaking in two ways. First, if there are many cases where there is no common good, then the need for consensus is less obvious; majority rule would likely do just as well at doing what is necessary to make society better off. Second, if there are many cases in which some can benefit only at the expense of others, then there is reason to think that a requirement of consensus would in fact hinder the state's ability to make the necessary "hard choice;" after all, if everyone must consent, but if only some can benefit, then indeterminacy, that is, no choice at all, is the expected outcome.

A third major problem with Gyekye's rationale for democracy is that its consequentialist rationale is unlikely to make sense of egalitarian intuitions. To see the problem, recall that Mill also defended democracy on consequentialist grounds, maintaining that society would be best off if people generally, and not merely a dictator or group of elites, had the final authority to make political decisions.<sup>10</sup> However, Mill also favored what is known as "plural" voting, the idea that some people, particularly the well educated, should have more votes to cast than others. He did so because he thought that giving more votes to the knowledgeable would lead to better decisions on average than not doing so. If that plausible assumption is indeed true, then, even if Gyekye were correct that there always is a common good to be promoted, it would probably be promoted best if the better informed had a greater ability than the less informed to influence political decisions. However, plural voting and related schemes no doubt appear unjust to Gyekye, and to most readers.

Considerations of vitality, too, do a poor job of making sense of the characteristically African demand for consensus combined with a requirement of equal voting power. Bujo contends that consensus among informed representatives, an ideal springing from the way in which traditional chiefs would consult with popularly appointed elders before making a decision, is most likely to reveal the truth about how to promote liveliness. The "palaver," as he calls it, "shows that norms can be and have to be found in a communal manner, hence free of domination and in dialogue" (*EDC*, 37). There are two deep problems with this rationale. For the first one, compare a requirement of consensus on the one hand with one of a significant majority on the other. Whatever extra insight might be obtained as a result of consensus, 100 percent agreement among representatives, is likely to be small relative

to that resulting from a supermajority, say, 75 percent agreement, with the extra time required to obtain unanimity being inefficient with regard to decisionmaking and hence responding to needs in ways likely to foster liveliness.

The second problem is plural voting and related forms of elitism. Bujo is at pains to show that the African palaver is plausibly interpreted as requiring the input of all who wish to participate in it, and in that respect is more egalitarian than, and superior to, the logic of German discourse ethics (*EDC*, 37–56). However, if one's view is that "every action must be considered evil which prevents the fulfilment of the common, and also of the individual life" (*EDC*, 37), then seeking consensus in an egalitarian way would be wrong, supposing, as is plausible, that giving the same number of votes to the less bright and poorly educated would prevent liveliness relative to what would be obtained by giving them fewer votes than the more bright and better educated.

I suspect, in contrast, that a community-based ethic best promises to justify a consensus-based democracy that accords everyone an equal vote. The reason is that such an ethic is naturally interpreted in deontological terms and does not give ethical pride of place to consequences for society's utility or vitality. If what confers dignity on us is our capability to exhibit identity and solidarity with others, and if we have an equal dignity by virtue of exhibiting this capacity to a certain threshold, then an egalitarian-unanimity rights-oriented model of democracy follows fairly easily. First, if what is special about us is, in large part, our capacity to share a way of life with others, then that is going to require sharing political power, namely, to forbid authoritarian government. Majoritarian democracy is a sharing of power, but only in a weak sense, giving to minorities the amount of power they are owed in accordance with the number of votes they have acquired, and giving them the opportunity to become majorities in elections scheduled every four or five years or so. A more intense sharing of power would accord every citizen not merely the equal ability to become the ones who determine law and policy, but also "the right of representation with respect to every particular decision" (in Wiredu's influential terms in *CUP*, 173), i.e., the right not to be utterly marginalized when major laws and policies are actually formulated and adopted. Second, if we are *equally* special by virtue of having the requisite capacity to share a way of life, that means according people the equal ability to influence collective decisionmaking, which, in turn, means having an equal vote, even if the results would be less favorable for the promotion of utility or vitality.

### Civil Liberties

Above I pointed out that Gyekye's discussion of which individual rights we have and which the state may enforce is not thorough and explicit, though I did draw out some sense of what he likely believes. In this section, I indicate ways in which the liveliness and friendliness ethical perspectives can make sense—and usually better sense—of according people civil liberties they intuitively ought to have.

Gyekye maintains that many civil liberties are just because they either enable people to live good lives, ones that bring out their potentially unique talents, or are

ways to respect people's dignity. Consider some *prima facie* difficulties with this position. First, recall that Gyekye does not commit himself to a particular view of wherein our dignity consists, which means that he cannot maintain with much justification that any particular right to freedom is essential for respecting our dignity. What we have rights to must be a function of why we have dignity. If we have a dignity by virtue of an ability to commune with God, then our rights will be a function of what enables that. Alternately, if we have a dignity because we are capable of autonomy of a certain kind, then our rights will be entitlements facilitating its exercise. In the absence of any specification of the nature of our dignity, Gyekye cannot clearly defend any particular civil liberty; his philosophy has a hole in it, albeit one that can in principle be filled.

Second, it is well known that there is a serious tension between an ethic that aims to promote the good on the one hand and a political philosophy that requires enforcement of individual rights on the other. Of course, many utilitarians such as Mill appeal to empirical contingencies in support of the claim that observing rights will often enough serve the long-term function of maximizing the general welfare.<sup>11</sup> However, the empirical claims are questionable; consider the "organs case" mentioned above, after all. In reply, one might note that Gyekye's ethic differs from standard utilitarianism in that it requires actions to promote the common good, that is, the well-being of each and every member of society. The trouble with this reply, I have contended above, is that it simply is not realistic; sometimes there are unavoidable clashes of urgent interests, and Gyekye's theory either gives no guidance about what to do in those cases or is to be read as urging us to satisfy as many interests as possible in them, which bodes ill for the organs case.

For a third criticism, consider whether my and the reader's pursuit of philosophical knowledge can be justified by Gyekye's appeal to the common good; it would seem that, by his view, the state may justly forbid us from engaging in this kind of inquiry since we could be doing other things that would satisfy people's basic needs to a much greater extent. The logic of his view appears to exclude the idea of a right to pursue knowledge for its own sake or other projects, such as cosmology, that are unlikely to promote the common good. On the face of it, the other ethical theories have more resources to avoid this problem; for engaging in intellectual inquiry is surely a kind of creative power, and it might be that the idea of identifying with others, forming a "we" in the context of joint projects and becoming emotionally invested in the group's doings, would underwrite the existence of a blue-sky scientific *community*. At least relative to other plausible views, Gyekye's so-called "moderate" communitarianism still has some elements one might fairly call "extreme."

Let us consider, now, what probably follows from a vitality ethic with respect to the civil liberties that a state should protect. One readily sees how an instruction to promote liveliness would support an enforceable right to life as well as rights to other liberties necessary for the broader notion of liveliness, such as those to be free from slavery, rape, and similar violence. Such actions are grave impairments of an immediate victim's creative power and would foreseeably instill intense fear and other negative emotions in the victim's relatives and neighbors. Furthermore,

it is reasonable to suggest that rights to privacy and to freedom of expression are essential to protect and to develop people's liveliness. An individual's creativity and vitality more generally are contingent on having a space that is not monitored and regulated and instead permits the individual to become aware of core aspects of her personality. Such implications suggest that a vitality ethic is worth exploring further as a ground of human rights.<sup>12</sup>

However, liveliness does not appear the moral value essential to capture certain freedoms that many readers will deem essential for a state to protect. I discuss two examples before indicating that a community-based ethic is more auspicious with regard to grounding key civil liberties.

Consider, first, whether an ethic of liveliness can capture the respect in which individuals ought to have certain rights in the contexts of the beginning of life and the end of life. Many will agree that individuals ought to have the ability to acquire contraception if they so desire and the ability to end their lives by refusing medical treatment and nourishment, at least if they are terminally ill and in unavoidable agony. However, if what is to be promoted is liveliness, then it would appear difficult to make sense of a state permitting one to engage in actions that would prevent reproduction. Indeed, friends of a vitality ethic tend to maintain that there is a strong obligation for people to procreate; consider the writings of Dzobo (*VCS*, 227, 233), Magesa (*AR*, 77–159), and Bujo (*FAE*, 6–7, 34–54). In addition, although living in extreme pain does not translate into exhibiting much liveliness, it is of course more than one would exhibit upon death, again making it difficult to account for a right to refuse life-saving medical treatment, even in the unusual conditions mentioned above.

I realize that these cases are contested and acknowledge that some conservative readers might “bite the bullet,” i.e., deem these implications for civil liberties to be just (perhaps Magesa in *AR*). One will find in the literature many African ethicists invoking the value of life in order to rule out actions such as abortion and euthanasia as immoral,<sup>13</sup> but my point is that prizing vitality probably has more extreme implications with regard to life and death matters than is usually recognized. Rights to take “the pill” and to end one's life a few weeks earlier so as to avoid a torturous existence might be vulnerable to an ethic that prizes vitality above all. Setting aside the issue of whether one can accept that there are no such rights, it is interesting that an ethic of vitality appears to exclude them, whereas Gyekye's appeal to utility probably can include them, as the common good would plausibly be impaired neither upon failing to reproduce nor upon ending a terminal, agonizing illness.

For a second sort of right that an ethic of liveliness appears unable to accommodate, consider the right to marry a person of any race, ethnicity, nationality, and so on.<sup>14</sup> Blocking interracial and related forms of marriage would be an unjust violation of a right, but it does not appear that such a prohibition would tend to lead to anyone's death, to prevent anyone from reproducing, or otherwise to inhibit anyone's liveliness.

One might of course suggest on behalf of a vitality ethic that punishing people for marrying “outsiders” would infringe on liveliness and that being unable to wed

a person one loves or otherwise wants to share a life with would do the same. However, consider a racist state that did not punish people for interracial marriage but simply defined a valid marriage as one incapable of obtaining between members of different races. And imagine this state generally were effective in segregating the races so that they tended not to become intimate in the first place. Under these conditions, there would be little impairment of people's liveliness, but the human rights violations would be severe. Surely, the state must facilitate the ability to marry a person of one's choice and not work to keep people apart to such a degree that they do not know what they are missing from one another's company.

In sum, it appears that a vitality ethic probably gives too much weight to life in moral-political deliberation, resulting in a situation where it would be permissible for the state to nearly categorically forbid both taking contraception and refusing medical treatment, and that such an ethic likely cannot make enough good sense of why discriminatory, or at least segregationist, state policies would be unjust. Elsewhere, I have also argued that an ethic of liveliness has difficulty accounting for the role of fault in the distribution of legal punishment and other forms of state coercion (*ACHD*, 31-32); an ethic that prizes creative power cannot straightforwardly account for the moral relevance of the fact that someone has acted wrongly in the past, at least without appealing to highly contested metaphysical claims about the wrathful responses of ancestors.

I turn now to a community-based ethic, indicating how it would entail central civil liberties and suggesting that it can account with relative ease for ones that the utility- and vitality-based theories have difficulty capturing. I noted above that communal or friendly relationships are something to honor, not merely to promote as much as one can, wherever one can. I suggest that honoring the value of community, or treating people capable of community with respect, means, among other things, not treating others in an unfriendly way. More carefully, it means not being unfriendly toward a person unless doing so is necessary to counteract a comparable unfriendliness on his part. One does not disrespect the value of friendship, or the person capable of it, if one responds in an unfriendly way to someone being unfriendly, at least on the supposition that doing so is the only way to stop his initial misbehavior.

This principle turns out to provide a reasonable ground for a wide array of rights to civil liberties. Actions such as ethnic cleansing, torturing, human trafficking, raping, and the like are well understood to be unfriendly, to amount to treating others as separate and inferior instead of enjoying a sense of togetherness; to undermining others' ends, as opposed to engaging in joint projects with them; to harming others for one's own sake or for an ideology, as opposed to engaging in mutual aid; and to evincing negative attitudes toward others' good, rather than acting consequent to a sympathetic reaction to it.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to entailing and explaining the most weighty human rights, a community-based ethic appears able to account for additional civil liberties that are typical of a bill of rights. Of particular relevance here is the capacity to identify with others where genuinely *sharing* a way of life requires interaction that is co-

ordinated, rather than subordinated. Part of what is valuable about friendship or communal relationships is that people come together, and stay together, of their own accord. When one's body is controlled by others, when one is stopped from thinking or expressing certain ideas, or when one is mandated by law to live in some parts of a state's territory rather than others, then one's ability to decide for oneself with whom to commune and how is impaired or otherwise degraded.

This rationale promises to tie up the frayed ends of the utility- and vitality-based moral theories. Recall that Gyekye's view, when his empty category of dignity is set aside, has difficulty showing that it is wrong to kill one person, say, for his organs, when necessary to save the lives of others who would die without them. His ethic instructs us to perform actions that will be good for literally everyone, but sometimes there are difficult choices to be made between people's basic needs. We need an ethic clearly entailing that and plausibly explaining why, in such cases, it would be wrong to kill one innocent in order to save the lives of others. The appeal to community can do that, for killing one innocent to benefit others would be to perform an extraordinarily unfriendly act toward someone who has not been unfriendly.

It would also fail to honor the value of friendship or community for a state to forbid contraception. Again, what is valuable, in part, about close relationships is that they are *chosen*, freely shared, and so forcing a woman to have a child is not to prize familial relationships (even if it is a way to prize the value of human life). Similar remarks go for a state that segregated races by, among other things, failing to enable interracial marriage. Properly valuing the good of family means, at the very least, not hindering people's ability to decide with whom to commune. Finally, with regard to suicide, it would not prize the values of identity and solidarity to force someone to stay alive against her will, at least when she is in unavoidable pain and will die soon anyway. To do so would in fact be a matter of subordinating the other, rather than coordinating with her, as well as a matter of harming her, rather than helping.

## **Economic Goods**

The last major topic in political philosophy that I analyze concerns the right way for the state to allocate opportunities such as jobs and education and also wealth, which includes not only money but also resources such as land, minerals, technology, and the like. Recall that Gyekye believes that the moral principle of promoting the common good without violating individual rights supports a redistributive capitalist system. A large part of why Gyekye favors this system is that he fails to see any viable alternative, any system that would produce and distribute goods as efficiently. In the absence of such, one would expect other moral theories to converge on the same conclusion. It would require more space than I have here to explore variations of socialism and whether a given moral theory might favor one of them.<sup>16</sup> Instead, for the sake of focus, with Gyekye, I take redistributive capitalism for granted. However, I articulate a detailed version of it that many readers will find attractive, and consider the extent to which a given ethic can support it.

Suppose that an instance of redistributive capitalism that conforms to the following principles would be worth defending relative to one that does not:

- (a) Progressive Taxation. Every firm by law should make some kind of resource contribution that would enable the state to realize its proper goals, where the more profitable the firm, the greater the contribution that should be made. Normally this would mean paying tax according to a progressive rate, but this principle conceivably could be satisfied in terms of, say, providing a scarce commodity to consumers, say, a life-saving drug.
- (b) No Large Inequalities. It is *pro tanto* unjust for there to be large inequalities of wealth among citizens, and firms should do what they can, ideally on a collective level, to avoid enormous gaps between the typical worker's pay and that of senior executives. Note that these principles permit inequalities, and even potentially large ones, but imply that there is something morally problematic with them, even when they are all things considered justified.
- (c) Equal Pay. All firms should provide equal pay for equal work. That is, if two people have the same job description, then there usually should not be some large discrepancy with regard to the amount of money or other compensation they receive, and it should be illegal for there to be such on a gendered or racial basis. The amount of pay need be merely comparable and does not have to be exactly identical in order to allow room for a firm to respond to market forces.
- (d) Equal Opportunity. No (large) firm should have the legal right not to hire someone because of, say, her religious background or race, unless these considerations have some clear bearing on her ability to perform the job. Similarly, it would be wrong to dismiss an employee because she refuses to take, or fails upon taking, a test indicating the presence of nicotine or alcohol, if such considerations are not job-related.
- (e) No Consumer Exploitation. It would be wrong, and perhaps should be illegal, for a given firm to exploit consumers by taking advantage of ignorance for which it would be difficult for them to avoid or assumptions that it would be reasonable for them to make.

Presuming these principles are familiar to the reader, I now inquire into which moral theory can make the best sense of them. I again argue that the community-based theory fits the bill.

In a nutshell, Gyekye's appeal to well-being as the "master value" would aim to account for the above in the following ways: progressive taxation is just because of diminishing marginal utility; large inequalities are wrong because of the same and because of envy; equal pay is required because of employee dissatisfaction and consequent instability in the workplace; equal opportunity is required because it would be less efficient to base employment on considerations other than qualifications; consumer exploitation is wrong because the loss of well-being to the many

who get a “raw deal” would be a greater setback to the common good than the reduction in profits to the firm.

Some of these rationales are based on the idea that people would find out about a certain practice and react in ways that tend to reduce well-being. The logic of such arguments is vulnerable to the objection that there would be something morally wrong with a practice even in the absence of people finding out about it. For example, suppose that a firm paid black people less than white people for the same job, or paid its executives 100 times more than the average employee, but was able to keep such policies under wraps. The firm would be wrong, despite the lack of grievance on the part of those on the low end of the totem pole.

In addition, there can be realistic situations in which violating certain rights in the workplace is expected to have the best outcome, e.g., if a firm forbade its workers to smoke cigarettes or to be alcoholics, then, given how harmful these practices are, it might well be that such a policy would promote the common good more than its absence. And there can also be cases in which free-riding is expected not to detract from the best outcome, e.g., it could be that no social program would be affected if a given firm found a way to cheat on its taxes; doing so would be unfair to other taxpayers, but not necessarily detrimental to the common good.

It might be that an appeal to dignity could help Gyekye avoid such objections, but in the absence of a specific conception of what our dignity consists in, his theory as it stands is lacking. Similar problems face the standard form of the vitality ethic, as it, too, is naturally consequentialist.

Vitality-based rationales for principles (a) through (e) will be similar to those of a broadly utilitarian ethic, e.g., one can expect more liveliness upon redistributive taxation and reducing inequalities of wealth, as distributing goods to the poor can be expected to increase their creative power much more than giving them to those who already have a substantial amount, and losses in self-esteem resulting from racist, intrusive, or exploitive practices would be salient for an ethic that requires all agents to foster liveliness. These are plausible rationales, but they are, upon reflection, vulnerable to thought experiments in which the relevant consequences do not obtain or, indeed, in which the opposite ones do.

For example, it might be that a firm’s liveliness would be incredibly enhanced by exploiting ignorant consumers. Suppose that customers as individuals would gain nothing in liveliness from the pennies they would save from a firm going out of its way to provide them more information, but that a firm would make enormous profits and see an expansion of creative power once all the pennies were added up by making more sales on the basis of consumer mistake. For another case, the liveliness of workers and their families could well be fostered by making their employment contingent on “clean living,” i.e., on passing drug and health tests. And if the friend of the vitality ethic sought to avoid consequentialist contingencies by appealing to the idea that our dignity is grounded in our vitality, it is not clear how people’s capacity for *vitality* would be degraded by these kinds of practices. Liveliness appears to be the incorrect explanatory value.

In contrast, I believe that the community-based ethic promises to do a fine job of underwriting (a) through (e), in part because of its deontological form and

in part because of its communal content. Consider the intuitively appealing way that an ethic requiring one to honor communal relationships or to respect beings capable of friendliness can account for the justice of a capitalism regulated by principles (a)–(e) relative to one that cannot. By this view, progressive taxation is just and large inequalities of wealth are unjust not only because of considerations of solidarity, i.e., a need to relate to the poor so as to improve their quality of life, but also because of those of identity. A society in which some are very poor and some are very rich is likely to be alienated—to amount to one in which people do not share a sense of “we,” do not participate in joint projects, and are not emotionally invested in one another’s endeavors (points that Magesa has made in *AR*, 277–78). Equal pay is required in part because of the divisiveness that unequal pay would cause, but also because, even if workers were unaware of the policy, it would be disrespectful; to pay one group of people less for the same work because of their race or gender would fail to treat them as the equals they are because of their common capacity for a relationship of mutual aid. With regard to equal opportunity, it would again fail to treat people respectfully as beings capable of community, particularly of solidarity, to refuse to hire people of a particular religion, and it would not respect the value of identity, or people as capable of sharing a way of life, to threaten them into maintaining a certain lifestyle. Finally, taking advantage of consumers’ ignorance would fail to prize a relationship in which the firm shares a way of life with them; it does not express friendliness to act in ways that are not trustworthy or that consumers would respond to differently if things were more transparent.

## 5. Conclusion: Expanding the Field

In this article, I have sought to articulate and to begin to appraise two new African political philosophies that could serve as systematic rivals to Gyekye’s moderate communitarianism. Gyekye’s politics, I have noted, are based on a certain moral theory with a sub-Saharan pedigree, according to which people are, at bottom, obligated to promote the common good as much as they can, albeit without violating individual rights. To develop fresh political perspectives, I spelled out two moral theories different from Gyekye’s, but that also have sound African credentials, namely, the vitality- and community-based ethics, and I applied them to three central issues in political philosophy. With regard to political power, civil liberties, and economic goods, I have drawn out the implications of the moral theories grounded on the values of liveliness and friendliness and argued that, in all three cases, the latter one is the most promising. An ethic instructing us to prize friendly or communal relationships, namely, ones of identity and solidarity, or to respect persons as capable of them, entails intuitively correct conclusions and usually provides more attractive justifications of them.

That is not to say that the liveliness ethic does not merit exploration in future work. Even though I favor community over vitality (and utility) as the main African moral value, I acknowledge that vitality is under-explored and that it is worth considering whether responses can be made to the criticisms I have made of it.

Above I have sought to expand the field by introducing under-appreciated foundational principles that one might use to address political topics. I close, however, by noting that the field could be usefully developed if theorists also were to take up some neglected topics. For example, I am aware of no major work from an African perspective on the following: when residents are obligated to obey the state's laws, particularly if some of them are unjust; when war is permissible to begin and how rightly to conduct it; which particular form of compensation for wrongful harm is just; how to balance partialist considerations in benevolence, i.e., duties to aid compatriots, with cosmopolitan ones; whether, and, if so, how African values can be reconciled with "rationalized" political and economic systems, i.e., bureaucracies and markets.

I, of course, think that a community-based ethic would be the most promising one to invoke to answer these questions but submit that colleagues ought to appeal to some moral rationale or other to do so. African political philosophy would flourish all the more were there to be systematic reflection on these and related topics.<sup>17</sup>

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## Notes

1. The *locus classicus* is Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), henceforth cited as *TM*.
2. Thaddeus Metz, "Toward an African Moral Theory," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 15 (2007): 321–41, henceforth cited as *TAMT*; Metz, "African Conceptions of Human Dignity: Vitality and Community as the Ground of Human Rights," *Human Rights Review* 13 (2012): 19–37, henceforth cited as *ACHD*; Metz, "African Ethics," in *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, ed. Hugh LaFollette (Malden, MA: Wiley Publishers, 2012), henceforth cited as *IEE*.
3. Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), henceforth cited as *APT*.
4. Kwame Gyekye, "African Ethics," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Zalta (2010), *available at*: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/african-ethics/>, henceforth cited as *AE*. For similar statements made between the time of Gyekye's first book and his most recently published work, see *PCAT*, 109; *TM*, 50; *BC*, 40–41, 90–93.
5. For related views in the Anglo-American tradition, see Peter Vallentyne, "Rights Based Parentianism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 18 (1988): 527–44; and Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (New York: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1989).
6. Though a close runner up would be the concept of group rights, advocated legally by the founders of the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* (*available at*: <http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/Documents/Treaties/Text/Banjul%20Charter.pdf>), and moral-theoretically by Claude Ake, "The African Context of Human Rights," *Africa Today* 34 (1987): 5–12.
7. For key texts, see N. K. Dzobo, "Values in a Changing Society: Man, Ancestors, and God," in *Person and Community; Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, I*, eds. Kwasi

Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 223–40, henceforth cited as VCS; Peter Kasenene, “Ethics in African Theology,” in *Doing Ethics in Context: South African Perspectives*, eds. C. Villavicencio and John de Gruchy (Cape Town: David Philip, 1994), 138–47; Bénédet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community*, tr. C. N. Nganda (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1997), henceforth cited as EDC; Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), henceforth cited as AR; Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*, tr. Brian McNeil (New York: Crossroad Publishers, 2001), henceforth cited as FAE; Pantaleon Iroegbu, “Beginning, Purpose and End of Life,” in *Kpim of Morality Ethics*, eds. Pantaleon Iroegbu and Anthony Echekwube (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 2005), 440–45, henceforth cited as BPEL; Iroegbu, “Right to Life and the Means to Life: Human Dignity,” in *Kpim of Morality Ethics*, eds. Pantaleon Iroegbu and Anthony Echekwube (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 2005), 446–49, henceforth cited as RLML; Christopher Ejizu, “African Traditional Religions and the Promotion of Community-Living in Africa,” available at: <http://www.afrika-world.net/afrel/community.htm>, henceforth cited as ATR.

8. The next few paragraphs borrow from Metz, *TAMT*.
9. For one clear example, see Polycarp Ikuenobe, *Philosophical Perspectives on Communalism and Morality in African Traditions* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2006), 65–83; cf. Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 185.
10. John Stuart Mill, *Considerations of Representative Government*, repr. in *John Stuart Mill: Three Essays*, ed. Richard Wollheim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
11. John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, repr. in *John Stuart Mill: Three Essays*, ed. Richard Wollheim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).
12. Something I have done in *ACHD*.
13. On which see, for example, a number of the chapters in eds. Pantaleon Iroegbu and Anthony Echekwube, *Kpim of Morality Ethics* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 2005).
14. I first made the following argument in *ACHD*, 29–30.
15. For this point and more intricate discussion of human rights in an Afro-communitarian framework, see Thaddeus Metz, “Human Dignity, Capital Punishment, and an African Moral Theory: Toward a New Philosophy of Human Rights,” *Journal of Human Rights* 9 (2010): 81–99; Metz, “Ubuntu as a Moral Theory and Human Rights in South Africa,” *African Human Rights Law Journal* 11 (2011): 532–59.
16. In particular, market socialism is well worth considering. See, e.g., Louis Manyeli, “A Re-Reading of Gyekye’s Moderate Communitarianism,” *Lwati: A Journal of Contemporary Research* 7 (2010).
17. I would like to thank the editors of *Philosophia Africana* for sharing comments on an earlier draft of this article.

