Personhood and a meaningful life in African philosophy

Motsamai Molefe

Published online: 07 Jul 2020.

Submit your article to this journal 🗗

View related articles 🗗

View Crossmark data 🗗

Personhood and a meaningful life in African philosophy

Motsamai Molefe 🆔
Centre for Leadership in Africa, University of Fort Hare, Alice, South Africa
motsaik@yahoo.com

This article proffers a personhood-based conception of a meaningful life. I look into the ethical structure of the salient idea of personhood in African philosophy to develop an account of a meaningful life. In my view, the ethics of personhood is constituted by three components, namely (1) the fact of being human, which informs (2) a view of moral status qua the capacity for moral virtue, and (3) which specifies the final good of achieving or developing a morally virtuous character. In light of the ethics of personhood, I will propose the view that a meaningful life is a function of achieving moral excellence or perfection. The moral perfection proposed here, to embody a meaningful life, is of a deontological and satisficing kind. The achievement of satisfactory levels of moral excellence, within sociopolitical and moral limits, captures the essence of a meaningful life. I conclude the article by considering objections against the view proposed here.

Introduction

In this article, I explore the question of a meaningful life in light of African moral thought. To construct an African account of a meaningful life, I will employ the ethical concept of personhood salient among African cultures. Roughly, I think of a meaningful life as one that matters or is morally significant. We tend to care about lives that (morally) matter or are (morally) significant because we deem them to be objectively fulfilling. The objective status of meaningful lives being fulfilling renders them as choice-worthy, i.e. the kinds of positive lives that anyone ought to aspire to live. The idea of personhood, in African philosophy, refers to an individual leading a morally flourishing life. I will unfold the three components of the ethics of personhood to account for the meaningfulness of life. The central aim of this article is to construct an African account of a meaningful life by way of a philosophical exposition of the idea of personhood.

This article emerges out of two crucial considerations concerning the idea of personhood in African philosophy. The first, the idea of personhood, occupies an important place in the discourse of African (moral) philosophy. Dismas Masolo (2010, 135) informs us that the idea of personhood embodies "the pinnacle of an African difference in philosophical theory". I understand this to mean that the idea of personhood can contribute some distinctive insights in moral philosophy. Kevin Behrens (2013, 105) augments Masolo's view by noticing "the central place personhood is taken to fill in African philosophy". He continues to remark that personhood is "also foundational and characteristic of African philosophical thought" (ibid.). If the idea of personhood is so crucial in African ethics then it is reasonable to believe that it might offer us under-explored resources to reflect on the question of a meaningful life.

I draw the second consideration from Kwasi Wiredu, one of the leading scholars of African philosophy, who has also extensively contributed to the ethical idea of personhood (see 1992; 2004; 2008; 2009). In one instance, Wiredu (2009, 16) informs us that "[t]he philosophical implications of the normative conception of a person are legion". In this particular essay, Wiredu only had space to explore the linguistic and normative implications of this moral concept. In this article, I join these scholars of African thought in the project of exploring the manifold implications of personhood (see Tshivhase 2013; Matolino 2014; Oyowe 2014; 2018; Ikuenobe 2015; 2016; 2018; Molefe 2018;

2019a). Specifically, I will be considering the implications of personhood for the question of a meaningful life.

I begin by clarifying the nature and aims of this project, which is both exploratory and expository. It is *exploratory* insofar as it will invoke the idea of personhood to investigate whether it might embody a robust account of a meaningful life. The aim, at least at this stage, is to sketch a provisional account of a meaningful life. It is in light of the provisional account I will produce here that scholars can assess its overall viability and promise to contribute on philosophical discourses of the question of a meaningful life. This project is *expository* insofar as it aims to illuminate on the theoretical ideas inherent in the discourse of personhood to capture an account of a meaningful life. In other words, the overall strength of this article will be on its elucidation rather than on its justifying the resultant view of a meaningful life proposed here. Put differently, the aim is to offer a preliminary sketch of an African-inspired account of a meaningful life. The logic of taking such an approach is the simple one of pointing the reader to an idea that may after careful elucidation prove to warrant serious attention in the literature.

The article proceeds as follows: To begin, I clarify how I will be using the idea of a meaningful life. Secondly, I distinguish three concepts of "personhood" in African philosophy, which will be essential for my account of the ethics of personhood, namely: personhood as (1) human nature; (2) moral status; and (3) moral virtue. Next, I articulate a moral account of personhood. The moral view is constituted by (2) moral status – certain capacities of human nature that are essential for morality, and (3) moral virtue – the final good of this ethical system. Both (2) and (3) are based on (1) human nature – the metaphysical fact of being human. I will account for moral status in terms of our capacity for moral virtue. I will observe that we expect human beings to pursue and achieve (3) the final good of moral excellence or perfection because human beings have (2) the *capacity for moral virtue*. I will clarify that the moral perfection anticipated here is not one that we *maximise*, but is of a *satisficing* kind. Next, I will consider the view of a meaningful life entailed by the idea of personhood. I will conclude the article by considering objections against the view advanced here.

The idea of a meaningful life

In what follows, I stipulate the model I use to account for a meaningful life. I construct this model from Christine Korsgaard's essay – "Two Distinctions of Goodness" (1983). In that essay, among other things, she points us to "three kinds of judgments of goodness that we make" in moral philosophy (109). One of these judgements encapsulate the model of a meaningful life that I have in mind, which she expresses in this fashion: "We judge something to be good of its kind when we judge it to have the virtues appropriate to that kind" (109).

On this view, a meaningful life is a function of something being the good of its kind, which is evidenced by it having virtues appropriate to its kind. In other words, on this view, you have something, some entity, whose aim is to attain or manifest the good of its kind, which is a function of reaching a particular state of virtue. We can think "*something* to be good of its kind" to refer to a natural kind, an entity, which has an ontological make-up that is teleologically oriented (Sober 2002). I talk of "an ontological make-up that is teleologically oriented" to refer to an entity that *can* unfold itself to evince virtues characteristic of its kind. In other words, this "something" (entity) has the potential in its nature to express certain kinds of virtues. The development and manifestation of these virtues is important because it indicates a life that is going well insofar as the virtues that attend its existence are those we characterise in terms of "final goods", i.e. goods that we value for their own sake.

In this sense, the goodness of the entity in question is recognised through its evincing virtues appropriate to its kind. We can think of the virtues that it evinces in terms of final goods. The virtues in question are an expression of a final good since it is a function of her nature to manifest them as she unfolds, which we ought to value for their own sake. Thaddeus Metz (2013, n.p.; emphasis added) comments on a meaningful life as "construed as accounts of which *final ends* a person ought to realize in order to have a life that matters" is instructive. In my view, a meaningful life is a function of an entity being the good of its kind insofar as it realises virtues appropriate to its kind. The final good, a moral end, to be realised is a function of the kind of a thing a human being is, on

my part, and I will make sense of this moral end in terms of personhood, which prescribes moral virtue or excellence as the final end.

To exemplify the heuristic value of the approach proposed here, I invite the reader to consider the life of Sisyphus, a character in Greek mythology. The gods punished Sisyphus to push a rock up the mountain and when at the top of the mountain, let it roll down again. He would then have to go down, and roll it up again; and, he is required to do so forever. Philosophers invoke this myth to give us a practical case of a life that is meaningless and absurd. Two facts capture the meaninglessness of Sisyphus' existence.

First, the activity of rolling the stone up the mountain is purposeless. That is, it adds no value to the world and to Sisyphus' existence. The activity of rolling the stone does not improve Sisyphus' life and the world in any significant way. The activity is useless. This activity wastes Sisyphus' existence. Secondly, this activity does not fundamentally relate, connect and nurture some of his distinctive abilities, talents and skills as the kind of an entity he is. His existence as a human being and his distinctive abilities – his rational powers, language and ability to communicate, and cultural and aesthetic abilities and powers – remain unused and uncultivated. His existence as a *human* being is wasted and unattended to. The virtues associated and expected of his kind will never be developed; hence, his life is one that is meaningless.

The approach I propose above to think of a meaningful life does have resources to account for why Sisyphus existence is meaningless. Firstly, Sisyphus' life is not connected to any fundamental value whose pursuit or production makes his existence matter. My approach, primarily, accounts for a life that matters in terms of some final good, be it pleasure, preference satisfaction or whatever else is thought to make a life to go best (Parfit 2002). On my part, I will invoke the idea of personhood that prescribes the value of moral perfection or excellence as the final good to be realised. Secondly, a life goes well for the entity in question if it manifests or develops virtues associated with its kind. That is, it becomes the best of its kind insofar as it develops itself as far as is possible. Sisyphus is engaged in an activity that does not help him to develop virtues associated with his kind. In fact, this activity wastes his existence and subjects him to a life where he neglects what is distinctive about himself as a kind of a thing he is. Hence, his existence is meaningless.

The concepts of personhood in African philosophy

Scholars of the discourse of personhood in African philosophy usually point to the ambiguity and confusion surrounding this term in the literature (see Wiredu 1996; Oyowe 2014; Ikuenobe 2016; Molefe 2019a). Kwasi Wiredu identifies two distinct concepts of personhood: the ontological and normative (1996; 2009). The ontological notion refers to the fact of being human or the idea of human nature. At a philosophical level, this idea involves a search for an account of what constitutes human nature – is it entirely material or a combination of the material and spiritual components (Gyekye 1995; Kaphagwani 2004; Ikuenobe 2016). The normative concept of personhood involves grading a human life in terms of excellence or virtue, relative to the quality of the moral agent's performance (Menkiti 1984; Gyekye 1992; Wiredu 1992). Personhood, in this sense, refers to a status an individual acquires through consistent moral effort (Gyekye 1997). To say of some moral agent that she is a person is to approve of the quality of her character.

For another crucial clarification of the ideas of personhood, consider Kevin Behrens' (2013) distinction of the *patient-centred* and *agent-centred* notions of personhood. I will not say much on the agent-centred notion of personhood since it is the same as what I described above as the normative notion (see Behrens 2013; Molefe 2020a). Behrens accounts for the patient-centred notion of personhood in the following terms. Firstly, he observes that it is normative or moral in nature. Secondly, he accounts for such a value of being a person in terms of certain metaphysical capacities or properties possessed by the individual in question. The patient-centred notion embodies a view of personhood that assigns value to the individual relative to whether she possesses the relevant metaphysical capacities or not. The patient-centred notion is tantamount to the technical idea of *moral status* in moral philosophy that identifies entities (moral patients) that are a part of the moral community as far as they possess the relevant metaphysical capacities (see Behrens 2013).

To have moral status means to be morally significant and, consequent to this fact, to be owed moral respect (DeGrazia 2008). The moral significance arises on grounds directly related to the nature of the entity in question. In other words, this entity is morally significant insofar as it possesses the relevant metaphysical capacities or properties. The possession of these metaphysical capacities or properties makes it a bearer of intrinsic value – a person (Kaufmann 2010). It is in virtue of it being a bearer of intrinsic value that we owe it direct duties of respect (Toscano 2011). Different theories of moral status account for it differently insofar as they invoke different metaphysical properties (see Kant 1996; Singer 2009; Nussbaum 2011).

Above, we detailed three concepts of personhood: personhood as (1) human nature, (2) moral status, and (3) moral virtue. It is crucial to notice that the first notion of personhood, as a reference to a human being with particular ontological features characteristic of its kind, is foundational insofar as it informs the other notions of personhood, moral status and moral virtue – this claim will be clearer later in the article. In other words, we first need a human being in order to predicate the properties of moral status and that of moral virtue. It is crucial to notice that the idea of personhood qua being human is ontological insofar as it is descriptive of the human nature. The second idea of personhood qua moral status, predicated of human nature without regard to performance, is "onto-moral" insofar as the value it assigns to a human being, for example, is a function of possessing those kinds of ontological capacities that are crucial for the entity being the distinctive kind of a thing that it is. The third idea of personhood qua moral virtue, predicated of a moral agent relative to the quality of her moral conduct, is a moral notion approving of her good character.

I am aware that discussions of the concept of personhood commonly single out personhood qua moral virtue as the salient feature of this moral view, which, given varying goals attending these scholars' projects, might be justified. Note, for example, these scholars are wont to claim that the idea of personhood qua moral virtue is "more dominant" (Ikuenobe 2006, 128), "the core of African cultural traditions" (Wiredu 2009, 13), "greater emphasis is placed [on it]" (Kaphagawani 2004, 334) than the ontological one. This kind of emphasis is crucial particularly if the goal is to clarify the final good characteristic of the ethics of personhood. Below, the reader will realise that I develop an account that weaves together the three notions of personhood to proffer a clearer ethical vision of what I call *the ethics of personhood*, which will inform the view of a meaningful life anticipated here.

Personhood as a moral theory
In my view, the ethics of personhood is constituted by three components: (1) the fact of being human; (2) distinctive features of human nature that make moral perfection possible – moral status; and (3) the final good posited by the idea of personhood – moral perfection or excellence. To begin, it is crucial to notice that African scholars usually invoke the idea of human nature as primary in the discourse of personhood. Note, for example, this comment by Ramose (2003, 413; emphasis added) – "*…the concept of a person in African thought takes the fact of being a human being for granted*". It is assumed that one cannot discuss the concept of personhood without in the first place admitting the "human existence" of the human being upon whom personhood is to be conferred.

Here, Ramose distinguishes the fact of being as necessary and presupposed in the discourse of personhood qua moral virtue. This kind of distinction of these two concepts should not be a surprise given the tendency in the literature by scholars to distinguish between the *ontological* and *normative* personhood. For example, consider Wiredu (2009, 16):

> Take, for instance, the Akan word for a person, which is *Onipa*. A little understanding of Akan will reveal that the word is ambiguous. In contexts of normative comment, the word means a human individual of a certain moral and social standing, as we have explained. On the other hand, in narrative contexts, it means simply a human being.

Here, Wiredu points us again to the distinction between the fact of being human and being a person. The former refers to the metaphysical fact of being human, and the latter to a moral judgement that recognises and approves of the quality of the character of the moral agent. The question that emerges is: why is this distinction crucial? It is important for two reasons. The first reason revolves

around the goal of conceptual precision, where we avoid ambiguities and conceptual confusion in our philosophical engagement. The second reason, which is more important in this article, points to the belief that human nature has a distinctive capacity or ability that metaphysically grounds the normative idea of personhood qua moral virtue. In other words, there is a distinctive aspect of human nature that explains our belief that human beings can achieve personhood qua moral perfection.

To point to the distinctive ability of human nature to pursue moral virtue is to anticipate another crucial distinction. We can now distinguish the fact of being human and the idea of moral status. The logic for this second distinction is the recognition that it is not every capacity associated with being human or, their nature, that is crucial for the possibility of morality qua moral virtue. For example, the fact that we are bipedal beings, we can sing and dance, though important human functions in other regards are not essential to the possibility of moral excellence. The fact of being one-legged has nothing to do with a moral agent's ability to pursue moral virtue. The idea of moral status identifies those capacities of human nature that make them morally significant and, in virtue of which, human beings can pursue moral perfection. African scholars keep pointing us to the view that there are human capacities that are relevant for the possibility and pursuit of morality (moral virtue). Note, for example, Sebidi (1988, 84) emphasis added observes that

> [f]or Africans, human nature is capable of increasing or decreasing almost to a point of total extinction. There are actions…that are conducive to the enhancement or growth of a person's nature, just as there are those which are destructive of a person's nature.

I understand Sebidi here to be referring to those capacities of human nature that make the pursuit of personhood possible. He understands these capacities to be capable of increasing (development) or decreasing (deterioration). For another, consider that Wiredu (2009, 15) explains an individual that has achieved personhood qua moral virtue as a "morally sound adult". In the same passage, he continues to explain why it must be an adult; he observes that "[t]he individual will have to be an adult, because otherwise she has not had enough time to *develop her capabilities*" (2009, 15; emphasis added).[1] Still, suggesting those distinctive moral capabilities necessary for moral perfection, Gyekye (1992, 110; emphasis added) espouses a similar view when he observes that "[t]he pursuit or practice of moral virtue is held as *intrinsic* to the conception of a person". I understand Gyekye here to mean that human beings are born with certain capacities that make the pursuit of personhood possible. To say the practice of virtue is *intrinsic* to the conception of personhood points us to the metaphysical capacities of human nature that inform the possibility of the practice of moral virtue.

The idea of moral status that specifies distinctive metaphysical features of human beings in virtue of which they deserve moral attention and recognition is crucial in moral philosophy. Consider, for example, Immanuel Kant's (1996) categorical imperative that forbids the instrumentalisation of other human beings because such treatment degrades their *autonomous* nature (see Kaufman 2010). Peter Singer (2009) rests his case for animal rights on the claim that animals, like human beings, have the capacity for sentience, hence, we owe them equal moral consideration. Nussbaum (2011) offers an account of justice based on (human) basic capabilities. These accounts differ in terms of what they take to be distinctive capacities of human nature. Kant's deontology posits *autonomy*, utilitarianism *sentience* and Nussbaum's capabilities approach *basic capabilities*, and the ethics of personhood, an African moral view of moral status, posits the *capacity for virtue*.

Until now, I have specified two components of the ethics of personhood: the fact of being human, and the specific human capacity that informs the possibility for moral excellence. Below, I specify the account of moral status that informs the final good of moral perfection. I draw the view of moral status embodied in the ethics of personhood in the writings of Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984) and Kwame Gyekye (1992), leading scholars of personhood.

---

1   I am aware that the claim that associates moral achievement with being an adult can be criticised for being ageist (see Manzini 2018). Elsewhere, I propose an interpretation of personhood that responds to this criticism (Molefe 2020a).

To repudiate the view that animals have rights, Menkiti (1984, 177; emphasis added) makes the following argument:

> …the conclusion naturally follows that the possessor of the rights in question cannot be other than a person. *That is so because the basis of such rights ascription has now been made dependent on a possession of a capacity for moral sense*, a capacity, which…need not be realized…

I caution the reader to notice that the idea of a "person" at play here is that of moral status as opposed to that of moral virtue. This is so because "personhood" here is a function solely of possessing some capacity (note, not its use), which in turn entitles one to rights. On Menkiti's view (1984, 177; emphasis added), animals lack the "the *constitutive elements* in the definition of human personhood" captured in terms of the *capacity for moral sense*.[2] Hence, for him, to embrace animal rights is to "undermine…the clearness of our conception of what it means to be a person" (ibid.).

Gyekye defends a similar view of moral status in the discourse of personhood. In his adumbration of personhood as a moral virtue, he argues that "…the human person [human being] is considered to possess an *innate capacity for virtue*, for performing morally right actions and, therefore, should be treated as a morally responsible agent" (Gyekye 1992, 116; emphasis added). Gyekye also talks of the innate capacity for virtue in these terms: "man [a human being] is a being *endowed* with moral sense", which does not mean that "his virtuous character is a settled matter, but that he is *capable of virtue*" (1992, 111; emphasis added). In the light of the above, we can rightly conclude that human beings have moral status insofar as they have the capacity for virtue (see Molefe 2020a). The development and unfolding of the capacity for virtue, moral status, is the objective status of being human that explains why we expect human beings to pursue and achieve moral excellence (moral virtue).

Now that we have a definite sense of the distinctive features of human nature that account for moral status qua the capacity for moral virtue, we can proceed to consider the final good of the ethics of personhood. The idea of personhood as a moral virtue is usually explained as some kind of achievement. Menkiti (1984, 171) opines that "personhood is something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed".

Wiredu (2004, 18) also notes that "[p]ersonhood, on this showing, is something of an achievement". The achievement associated with personhood essentially has to do with the moral agent nurturing or developing "one's distinctively human and valuable nature" qua the capacity for virtue (Metz 2007, 31). Scholars account for the achievement of personhood in terms of nurturing a virtuous character or moral excellence (Ikuenobe 2006; 2016; Molefe 2019a).

Note, for example, that Menkiti (1984) associates the concept of personhood with moral excellence four times in his essay. In one instance, Menkiti speaks of personhood and excellence as "…the word of *muntu* includes an idea of excellence" (1984, 171). The isiZulu word *muntu* literally translates as "person". Ontologically, the word *muntu* simply refers to the fact of being human. There is nothing in the ontological category of *muntu*, the mere fact of being human, that denotes or even connotes excellence.[3] In this light, it must be clear that the idea of *muntu* under consideration is a normative one. When we say, one is a *muntu* (person) in the normative sense, we mean their life is characterised by moral excellence. This view is borne out by this assertion by Menkiti (1984, 172; emphasis added):

> …the African emphasised 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*.

Talk of inbuilt "excellencies" signals the development of the distinctive and valuable features of human nature to be characterised by moral perfection, that is, for the moral agent to develop a

---

2   I caution the reader to note that Menkiti espouses an interpretation of personhood that denies animals rights. Elsewhere, I offer an interpretation of it that accommodates them in the moral community (see Molefe 2020a).

virtuous character which is overflowing with moral virtues or "the practice of virtue" (Gyekye 1992, 113). Menkiti also speaks of personhood in terms "excellencies as truly definitive of a man" (1984, 171). He also associates personhood with "*a widened maturity of ethical sense – an ethical maturity*" (173; emphasis added). In other words, a human being achieves personhood insofar as she develops a good character (Gyekye 1992; Ikuenobe 2018). It is for this reason that Wiredu (2009, 15) speaks of it as referring to "a morally sound" individual.

From the above, we note that the idea of personhood embodies a moral view that espouses the development of a good character as its chief goal. I find Behrens' (2013, 111) comments about this kind of a moral view to be instructive:

> Menkiti's association of the term "excellencies" with personhood also implies that the becoming a person is essentially related to developing virtue. Thus, the African conception of personhood could be thought to propose a theory of ethics that brings to mind what Western philosophy calls "perfectionism": Persons should seek to develop a good or virtuous nature in order to become true or fully moral persons.

The idea of personhood embodies a perfectionist moral view, which imposes on the agent the duty to develop a character exuding moral excellence. To attribute personhood to some individual is to judge her to have successfully engaged in the process and project of character perfection (Menkiti 2018).

Scholars of African moral thought cite a variety of character traits (virtues) that they associate with personhood. Gyekye (1992, 110; 2010), for example, talking of personhood talks of the "excellencies of character", which "include [the virtues of] generosity, kindness, compassion, benevolence, respect and concern for others". Desmond Tutu (1999, 35; emphasis added) speaks of an individual that has attained personhood as "… *generous*, you are *hospitable*, you are *friendly* and *caring* and *compassionate*. You *share* what you have".[4]

Justice Yvonne Mokgoro (1998, 3) notes that personhood is characterised by "[g]roup solidarity, conformity, compassion, respect, human dignity, humanistic orientation and collective unity [which] have, among others been defined as key social values…". From the above, we can conclude that personhood embodies a character-centred moral theory, where the goal of the agent is to perfect her character (see Ramose 1999; Shutte 2001; Van Niekerk 2007). We also note that the kinds of virtues that are associated with personhood are relational insofar as they embody *other-regarding* duties. Hence, we note that an individual that has personhood is one that exudes other-regarding virtues.[5]

To sum up, the ethics of personhood is premised on the fact of being human. Human nature, among others, is characterised by the metaphysical capacity for virtue. This capacity for virtue specifies that property in virtue for which human beings deserve moral respect. It is the development of the capacity for virtue, on the part of the moral agent, that translates into personhood or moral perfection. A moral virtuous or perfect agent is characterised by other-regarding "excellencies" of character like generosity, care, compassion, friendliness, and so on.

An objection could arise concerning a moral view that posits the realisation of moral *perfection* as the chief goal of morality. The problem, precisely, might be that this theory could be too demanding since it requires moral agents to pursue a goal that is impossible to achieve – moral perfection. Think of this objection in terms of Susan Wolf's (1982) criticism of theories that promote a moral model of sainthood, which raises the concern that such a view might entail obnoxious forms of human existence that are single-mindedly obsessed with moral perfection to the exclusion of other non-moral goods that make life beautiful, meaningful and enjoyable. It is typical in non-philosophical discussions to hear people talk disparagingly of (moral) perfection as a dull, boring and even bland.

My suggestion is that we need to conceive of the perfection associated with the idea of personhood in light of cultural, practical and moral considerations associated with it in the *traditional* societies.

---

4   I am aware that Tutu talks of ubuntu and does not specifically use the idea of personhood. The same consideration applies to other scholars cited in this article, like Mokgoro, and Shutte, among others. It is my considered view that the discourse of ubuntu and personhood are the same (see Molefe 2019a; 2020a).

5   Space does not quite allow me to motivate and justify why we should take seriously the moral vision of personhood. In several places, I have proffered justifications of personhood as a moral theory (see Molefe 2018; 2019a; 2020a).

The reason for this is that we want to have a practical and plausible vision of the ideal of moral perfection as much as possible. It is important, therefore, to notice that African cultures in which moral perfection was highly prized as a final good understood it to be contiguous and compatible with the pursuit of non-moral goods, which are a feature of a robust human existence (see Wiredu 1980). In other words, African societies framed and imagined the ideal of moral perfection in ways that recognised the cultural dimensions of human existence. By "cultural dimensions", I am referring to extensive and heterogeneous forms of human existence that find expression through customs, mores, taboos, religions, and economies that characterise African communities in which moral perfection was highly prized as a final good (see Wiredu 1980). The suggestion, then, is that we should not develop a conception of moral *perfection* that has no place for non-moral issues since that approach will not be consistent with the lived experience of the concept in traditional African cultures. Otherwise, one will not be able to make sense of why African cultures are so robust and diverse if all that mattered to them was the goal of moral perfection.

The view emerging from this practical consideration is that the vision of moral sainthood encapsulated in the ethics of personhood is of a moderate kind. It is moderate insofar as it allows the moral agent space to pursue moral perfection in a way that also appreciates the fact that its pursuit does not exhaust the entire scope of human existence. At best, the standard of moral perfection, as the moral goal, dynamically influences, shapes, and is compatible with our sociocultural forms of existence that are non-moral.

The major moral-theoretical challenge occasioned by espousing a moderate perfectionist moral view which balances the pursuit of moral perfection and cultural dimensions of human existence is how to justify it. I will not offer an exhaustive justification of it here, but I want to suggest that in African thought, morality is understood to be of a limited kind, or at least, plausible interpretations of it (see Wiredu 1992; Molefe 2019a). It is the view that morality is of a limited nature, in terms of the scope of the demands that it places on us, in the discourse of personhood qua the pursuit of moral perfection that accommodates the cultural dimensions of human existence. I suggest two reasons to justify the limited nature of morality in the discourse of personhood.

The limited nature of morality can be justified, firstly, by the dignity of human beings that imposes constraints over the means we can use to pursue moral perfection. That is, we cannot pursue the goal of moral perfection in ways that harm, humiliate or degrade the dignity of other human beings (see Wiredu 1996; Ramose 2009; Kaufmann 2010). Our duty to perfect ourselves morally cannot be pursued by all means necessary and to every extent possible. We can only use those means that are respectful of others' dignity.

Secondly, the limits associated with the goal of moral perfection emerge in light of the fact of the prize placed on special relationships in the communitarian ethics characteristic of personhood (see Wiredu 1992; Appiah 1998; Molefe 2016; 2019a). The suggestion here is that one should pursue moral perfection in ways that will foster participation in one's special relationships by faithfully executing one's special obligations to them. The special duties to one's immediate family (spousal relationships), children, extended families and immediate communities impose restrictions on one from solely focusing on gathering as much perfection as possible.

I sum up the immediate implication of the analysis above in this fashion – the moral perfection associated with the idea of personhood is not one that we ought to *maximise* (Pettit 1989). That is, we are not required to make sure that we are as maximally perfect as we can be (see McNaughton and Rawling 1992). Rather, the moral view of personhood, accompanied by moral constraints and special relationships, is much more closely associated with a deontological approach. Remember, David McNaughton and Piers Rawling (2006), leading scholars of deontological ethics, identify plausible forms of it in terms of three features – *constraints*, *special obligations*, and *options*. A careful reader will notice that I have already implicitly alluded to *options* when I suggested that plausible forms of personhood ought to have space for the individual to be able to pursue non-moral issues (see also Molefe 2019a).

Not only is this view of moral perfection closely associated with a deontological account, it might also be more accurately described as characterised by a morally satisficing moral logic. The idea of *satisficing* emerges in economics and ethics literature, among others, to eschew models that aim to

maximise or optimise the good. Consequentialist moral theories tend to *promote* the good insofar as they demand nothing less than the best possible outcomes, i.e. make sure that there is as much moral perfection as is possible (McNaughton and Rawling 1992). The satisficing moral logic is a moderate one insofar as it aims for the "satisfactory" or "good enough" as the goal of morality (Slote and Pettit 1984; Byron 2004). The moral agent is not required to maximise moral perfection, i.e. appreciate that there are limits to the pursuit of moral perfection and that she should be content with doing what is *good enough* given the limits imposed on her by her own and others' dignity and the demands that her special relationships impose on her.

Personhood and a meaningful life

Now that we have a picture of personhood as a moral theory, I believe we can approximate the project of articulating what a meaningful life entails. Remember, we accounted for a meaningful life in terms of some entity being the good of its kind insofar as it manifests virtues appropriate to its kind. The potential of the good of human kind is encapsulated by its capacity for virtue. The development of the capacity for virtue embodies a meaningful life. A human being that develops these capacities is being true to its kind, as a kind of a thing that has the capacity for virtue. Hence, we observe that it is leading a meaningful life. The meaningfulness of life revolves around the conversion of these raw capacities to be bearers of moral excellence. Where the individual becomes the better of its kind.

A meaningful life, according to this theory, is construed in terms of the agent achieving the moral end of moral perfection or excellence. A life that exudes moral perfection to satisfactory levels, given the limits associated with morality, is a meaningful one. Another way to make sense of this account of a meaningful life is by invoking the concept of dignity. We can now fully express the ethics of personhood and its account of a meaningful life in terms of the idea of dignity.[6] I distinguish two senses of the idea of dignity: *intrinsic*, and *inflorescent* dignity (Sulmasy 2008). *Intrinsic dignity*, sometimes called *status dignity*, refers to the dignity one has merely because one possesses the relevant capacities (Miller 2017). In virtue merely of possessing these capacities that ground intrinsic dignity, we owe the moral patient duties of respect. In light of the ethics of personhood, human beings have intrinsic or status dignity insofar as they possess the capacity for moral virtue. Sulmasy (2008, 473; emphasis added) comments as follows regarding *inflorescent dignity*:

> …inflorescent dignity is used to refer to individuals who are flourishing as human beings – living lives that are consistent with and expressive of the intrinsic dignity of the human. *Thus, dignity is sometimes used to refer to a state of virtue – a state of affairs in which a human being habitually acts in ways that expresses the intrinsic value of the human*.

Inflorescent dignity refers to a state of virtue the agent achieves over time. The state of virtue under consideration emerges consequent to the agent developing those capacities that secure her status or intrinsic dignity. Remember, on the ethics of personhood, we have status or intrinsic dignity because we possess the capacity for moral virtue. The agent's development of the capacity for virtue translates to moral perfection, which we can also think of in terms of a dignified existence. This kind of dignity is the one that we achieve relative to our efforts to attain moral perfection – achievement dignity. As such, a meaningful life is a function of a dignified human existence qua the development of the distinctive human capacity for virtue. I also emphasise that the agent is not required to live the *best* possible human life. The requirement is that the agent ought to reach satisfactory levels of moral excellence for her life to count as meaningful. In the next section, I consider some objections against this view of a meaningful life.

---

6   The idea of moral status is tantamount to the idea of dignity (see Toscano 2011). The idea of moral status, at least the way I understand it, admits of degrees, where some entities have none, others have some and others have higher moral status (DeGrazia 2008). Some scholars talk of partial and full moral status (Metz 2012). The idea of full moral status is the same as that of dignity (Toscano 2011).

Concerns and criticisms

Below, I consider two major criticisms against the vision of a meaningful life proposed here. The first concern is that the ideal of perfection or excellence could be the kind of thing that can lead to an unsatisfactory life. There is a sense in which this concern could be true and there is a sense in which it is not. I will start with the latter thought, where it is not true. If the claim is that human beings are endowed with the capacity to pursue moral perfection, then it is beside the point whether individuals will ultimately be satisfied with having led such a life. Objectively, and, morally speaking, they (human beings) are the kinds of things that can and ought to live morally excellent lives, if they so will and exert themselves. It is to live below what it means to be truly human to target any other goal below and beside the ideal of their moral potential. The meaningfulness of life, on this view, is a function of certain ontological facts riveted on the fact of being qua the capacity for virtue. It is to this objective fact of our human nature and human effort of perfecting it that accounts for the meaningfulness of life, in a crucial sense, quite beside the subjective component.

However, holding this view does not negate the possibility that one leading a meaningful life might find it, in some occasions, at least, to be subjectively unsatisfying. Immediately, the case of Mother Teresa's *dark night of the soul* presents itself.[7] This consequence should not be read as an objection against my view because it never promised that a meaningful life is one accompanied by certain psychological states like that of happiness. The project of pursuing personhood could be burdensome and challenging in many ways, and this could very well invite varying dosages of unpleasantness or even misery. What might make matters worse, as practical experience has taught us, is that when we get involved in a process to self-improve – like completing a doctoral degree – it tends to be difficult and almost insurmountable. Eventually one completes it, but one may not find it as pleasant an experience as one anticipated it to be. The psychological reaction of dissatisfaction in itself, all things being equal, does not take away from the fact that one has made a significant achievement that is very fulfilling. Alternatively, the fact that Mother Teresa had moments were she felt empty does not mean her life was not overall meaningful or significant.

Moreover, the central insight of accounting for a meaningful life in terms of personhood is the idea of character development and perfection. An individual with a sound character will be able to navigate the vicissitudes of life and the varying emotional boons and banes that comes with them. The quality of character – personhood – is tested and best manifested as one deals with the ups-and-downs of emotional variations that attend different circumstances of life. The insight captured above is expressed well by a Yoruba proverb that states "good character is a person's guard" (see Gyekye 2010). In other words, an individual with a good character (personhood) is most likely to be safe as she goes through varying feelings and emotional challenges that attend changing circumstances of her existence. The ability to manage our emotions is an important part of what it means to be a person.

Another objection could point out that the idea of personhood often tends to be imagined to essentially require relational contexts, an aspect I did not touch on. Specifically, the objection could be that conceptions of moral perfection like that of personhood that emphasise the importance of communal living might thwart and limit the life of the moral agent, which might undermine my attempt to appeal to it to account for a meaningful life. In several places, in my own work on the idea of personhood, I have reflected on this objection (see Molefe 2018; 2019a). Often, I do not take this objection seriously for two major reasons.

Firstly, in my considered view, the idea of personhood (moral perfection) and the view of a meaningful of life it entails is, in some sense, individualistic. That is, ultimately, it is the individual that acquires moral perfection. The process and project of moral perfection is an individual project realised in light of the provisions of the community. The community, in light of Menkiti's (1984, 172) adumbrations, serves as a "catalyst and prescriber of norms". The analogy of a *catalyst* and *prescriber* points to the *instrumental* role played by the community insofar as it enables the

---

7   It is reported that Mother Teresa in a letter addressed to a friend notes that "[but] as for me, the silence and the emptiness is so great, that I look and do not see – Listen and do not hear – the tongue moves [in prayer] but does not speak…I want you to pray for me" (https://time.com/4126238/motherteresas-crisis-of-faith/).

individual to pursue and achieve personhood (Molefe 2019b). I read Ikuenobe (2016, 146; emphasis added) as attaching an instrumentalist role to the community, when he comments that "[t]he African idea of communalism implies that the community with its values plays a central role in *helping* one to cultivate and then achieve the status of a morally beautiful person".

In this light, I submit that we should not exaggerate the role of the community. We should properly understand that the community plays an instrumental role in the individuals' pursuit of personhood and a meaningful life. A meaningful life, ultimately, is a function of the efforts of the individual or moral agent assisted by the community. In actual fact, the community does not literally confer personhood, at best (1) it provides basic resources required for the moral agent to pursue a meaningful life, and (2) it recognises, note, not confers, lives of individuals that exude moral excellence or meaning, and regards them as objects of praise or admiration. As such, the individual lives a meaningful life by way of manifesting virtues associated with its kind in a communal context.

The second response points to the fact that the ideals of freedom and autonomy, usually invoked to criticise the idea of personhood, often assume the liberal slant (see Tshivhase 2013). In my view, to criticise an African concept by an appeal to a concept interpreted through the lenses of the Western liberal tradition fails to be a serious objection. For example, in the Western liberal tradition emphasis is placed on negative freedom that requires space for non-interference as the agent independently decides how to imagine and implement her own conception of life (see Berlin 1958). The idea of autonomy prevalent in this tradition also emphasises "self-sufficiency" in decision-making, distance and the "in-control-agent" (Walter and Ross 2014, 16). On the other hand, in the African tradition, both freedom and autonomy take a relational form. Note, for example, that Ikuenobe (2015, 1005) associates personhood with a relational autonomy in this fashion when he argues

> that the idea of personhood in African traditions implies a relational and positive sense of autonomy, which involves the community helping or guiding one to use one's ability and knowledge of one's social relations and circumstances to choose freely the requisite goods for achieving one's life plan.

One's freedom and pursuit of a meaningful life cannot be imagined outside and completely independent of the ever-present community that helps and guides the individual in her own development and pursuit of her life plan. In other words, our autonomy develops and functions in the context of relational resources. Hence, it is to attack a straw-man, if one decides to characterise the idea of personhood and the vision of a meaningful life as one that does not regard the freedom and autonomy of individuals. Instead, it offers an alternative vision of autonomy and freedom (see Siame 2000). The objection would stick, if one could prove the plausibility of the liberal view of freedom and autonomy and the implausibility of the relational view of autonomy and freedom. This debate requires its proper place and dialogue between the two traditions of philosophy, which is not the focus of this article.

Conclusion

This article proposed a provisional view of a meaningful life in light of the ethics of personhood. A meaningful life is a function of certain objective facts related to human existence. Specifically the fact that (1) as human beings (2) we have moral status because we possess the capacity for virtue, and (3) a good of human life involves the development and perfection of this capacity, which is the same as achieving personhood (moral perfection). A meaningful life is the achievement of moral excellence. We can also make sense of this life in terms of dignity. Human beings have intrinsic or status dignity because they have the capacity for virtue. Living a life dedicated to developing this capacity for virtue is captured in terms of achievement dignity. The achievement of dignity embodies a meaningful life. We also noted that the perfection imagined here should be understood to be characterised by a deontological and satisficing moral logic. This way of understanding perfection implies that it simply requires human beings to pursue satisfactory levels of perfection, which implies that human beings will have space to pursue non-moral issues.

In future research, those committed to personhood and its possible contributions to the discourse of a meaningful life should consider the following issues: A robust defence of the idea of options

in relation to personhood is important since it will secure the place for non-moral excellence and activities, which in this article was merely motivated rather than defended. One will also need to demonstrate that the perfection associated with moral issues implies that the virtue of perfection should also characterise activities and strivings in non-moral domains. The satisficing moral logic associated with personhood will also require further refinement and its plausibility needs to be tested against other competing interpretations of personhood in the literature. Moreover, I think a comparative approach to the discourse of a meaningful life will reveal the promise of this view more fully.

ORCID

Motsamai Molefe https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5030-6222

References

Appiah, A. 1998. "Ethical Systems, African." In: *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. doi:10.4324/9780415249126-Z008-1

Behrens, K. 2013. "Two 'Normative' Conceptions of Personhood." *Quest* 25: 103–119.

Berlin, I. 1958. *Two Concepts of Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Byron, M. 2004. "Introduction." In: *Satisficing and Maximizing: Moral Theorists on Practical Reason*, edited by M. Byron, 1–13. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511617058.001

DeGrazia, D. 2008. "Moral Status as a Matter of Degree." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46 (2): 181–198. doi:10.1111/j.2041-6962.2008.tb00075.x

Gyekye, K. 1992. "Person and Community in African Thought." In: *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, 1*, edited by K. Wiredu and K. Gyekye, 101–122. Washington DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.

Gyekye, K. 1995. *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Gyekye, K. 1997. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York: Oxford UP. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195112252.001.0001

Gyekye, K. 2010. "African Ethics." In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward. N. Zalta. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/african-ethics

Ikuenobe, P. 2006. *Philosophical Perspectives on Communalism and Morality in African Traditions*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Ikuenobe, P. 2015. "Relational Autonomy, Personhood, and African Traditions." *Philosophy East & West* 65 (4): 1005–1029. doi:10.1353/pew.2015.0101

Ikuenobe, P. 2016. "Good and Beautiful: A Moral-Aesthetic View of Personhood in African Communal Traditions." *Essays in Philosophy* 17 (1): 125–163. doi:10.7710/1526-0569.1546

Ikuenobe, P. 2018. "Human Rights, Personhood, Dignity, and African Communalism." *Journal of Human Rights* 17 (5): 589–604. doi:10.1080/14754835.2018.1533455

Kant, E. 1996. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Trans. M. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kaphagawani, D. 2004. "African Conceptions of a Person: A Critical Survey." In: *Companion to African Philosophy*, edited by K. Wiredu, 332–442. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Kaufmann, P. 2010. "Instrumentalization: What Does It Mean to Use a Person?" In: *Humiliation, Degradation and Dehumanisation: Human Dignity Violated*, edited by P. Kaufmann, H. M. Kuch, C. Neuhauser, and E Webster, 67–84. New York: Springer.

Korsgaard, C. 1983. "Two Distinctions in Goodness." *Philosophical Review* 92 (2): 169–195. doi:10.2307/2184924

Manzini, N. 2018. "Menkiti's Normative Communitarian Conception of Personhood as Gendered, Ableist and Anti-Queer." *South African Journal of Philosophy* 37 (1): 18–33. doi:10.1080/02580136.2017.1405510

Masolo, D. 2010. *Self and Community in a Changing World*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Matolino, B. 2014. *Personhood in African Philosophy*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

McNaughton, D., and P. Rawling. 1992. "Honoring and promoting values." *Ethics* 102 (4): 835–843. doi:10.1086/293451

McNaughton, D. and P. Rawling. 2006. "Deontology." In: *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory,* edited by D. Copp, 425–458. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Menkiti, I. 1984. "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought." In: *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, edited by Richard Wright, 171–181. Lanham: University Press of America.

Menkiti, I. 2018. "Person and Community – A Retrospective Statement." *Filosofia Theoretica* 7: 162–167.

Metz, T. 2007. "Toward an African Moral Theory." *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 15 (3): 321–341. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9760.2007.00280.x

Metz, T. 2012. "An African Theory of Moral Status: A Relational Alternative to Individualism and Holism." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice: An International Forum* 14: 387–402.

Metz, T. 2013. "The Meaning of Life." In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/life-meaning/ doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199599318.001.0001

Miller, S. 2017. "Reconsidering Dignity Relationally." *Ethics & Social Welfare* 11 (2): 108–121. doi:10.1080/17496535.2017.1318411

Mokgoro, Y. 1998. "Ubuntu and the Law in South Africa." *Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal* 1: 1–11.

Molefe, M. 2016. "African Ethics and Partiality." *Phronimon* 17 (1): 104–122. doi:10.25159/2413-3086/1988

Molefe, M. 2018. "Personhood and Rights in an African Tradition." *Politikon* 45 (2): 217–231. doi:10.1080/02589346.2017.1339176

Molefe, M. 2019a. *An African Philosophy of Personhood, Morality and Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-15561-2

Molefe, M. 2019b. "Personhood and Partialism in African Philosophy." *African Studies* 78 (3): 309–323. doi:10.1080/00020184.2018.1519337

Molefe, M. 2020a. *An African Ethics of Personhood and Bioethics: A Reflection on Abortion and Euthanasia*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-46519-3

Molefe, M. 2020b. "Solving the Conundrum of African Philosophy Through Personhood: The Individual or Community?" *Journal of Value Inquiry* 54 (1): 41–57. doi:10.1007/s10790-019-09683-8

Nussbaum, M. 2011. *Creating Capabilities*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. doi:10.4159/harvard.9780674061200

Oyowe, A. 2014. "An African Conception of Human Rights? Comments on the Challenges of Relativism." *Human Rights Review (Piscataway, N.J.)* 15 (3): 329–347. doi:10.1007/s12142-013-0302-2

Oyowe, T. 2018. "Personhood and Strong Normative Constraints." *Philosophy East & West* 68 (3): 783–801. doi:10.1353/pew.2018.0073

Parfit, D. 2002. "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best." In: *Ethical Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, edited by L. Pojman, 134–140. London: Wadsworth.

Pettit, P. 1989. "Consequentialism and Respect for Persons." *Ethics* 100 (1): 116–126. doi:10.1086/293149

Ramose, M. 1999. *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*. Harare: Mond Books.

Ramose, M. 2003. "The Ethics of Ubuntu." In: *The African Philosophy Reader*, edited by P. Coetzee and A. Roux, 324–331. New York: Routledge.

Ramose, M. 2009. "Towards Emancipative Politics in Africa." In: *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, edited by F. Murove, 412–426. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Sebidi, J. 1988. "Towards the Definition of Ubuntu as African Humanism." Private Collection.

Shutte, A. 2001. *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a New South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Siame, N. 2000. "'Two Concepts of Liberty' Through African Eyes." *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8 (1): 53–67. doi:10.1111/1467-9760.00092

Singer, P. 2009. "Speciesism and Moral Status." *Metaphilosophy* 40 (3-4): 567–581. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9973.2009.01608.x

Slote, M. and P. Pettit. 1984. "Satisficing Consequentialism." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supplementary Volume 58: 139–163. doi:10.1093/aristoteliansupp/58.1.139

Sober, E. 2002. *Core questions in philosophy: a text with readings*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson/ Prentice Hall.

Sulmasy, D. 2008. "Dignity and Bioethics: History, Theory, and Selected Applications." In: *The President's Council on Bioethics, Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council*, 465–501. Washington DC: President's Council on Bioethics.

Toscano, M. 2011. "Human Dignity as High Moral Status." *The Ethics Forum* 6: 4–25.

Tshivhase, M. 2013. "Personhood: Social Approval or a Unique Identity?" *Quest: An African Journal of Philosophy* 25: 119–140.

Tutu, D. 1999. *No Future without Forgiveness*. New York: Random House. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5842.1999.tb00012.x

Van Niekerk, J. 2007. "In defence of an autocentric account of Ubuntu." *South African Journal of Philosophy* 26 (4): 364–368. doi:10.4314/sajpem.v26i4.31494

Walter, J., and L. Ross. 2014. "Relational Autonomy: Moving Beyond the Limits of Isolated Individualism." *Pediatrics* 133 (Supplement): 16–23. doi:10.1542/peds.2013-3608D

Wiredu, K. 1980. *Philosophy and African Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wiredu, K. 1992. "Moral Foundations of an African Culture." In: *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies, 1*, edited by K. Wiredu and K. Gyekye, 192–204. Washington DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.

Wiredu, K. 1996. *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Wiredu, K. 2004. *Introduction: African Philosophy in our Time.* In: *Companion to African Philosophy*, edited by K. Wiredu, 1–27. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Wiredu, K. 2008. "Social Philosophy in Postcolonial Africa: Some Preliminaries Concerning Communalism and Communitarianism." *South African Journal of Philosophy* 27 (4): 332–339. doi:10.4314/sajpem.v27i4.31522

Wiredu, K. 2009. "An Oral Philosophy of Personhood: Comments on Philosophy and Orality." *Research in African Literatures* 40 (1): 8–18. doi:10.2979/RAL.2009.40.1.8

Wolf, S. 1982. "Moral Saints." *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (8): 419–439. doi:10.2307/2026228