



**Rethinking Communitarianism and Personhood: A Critical Review
of the Metaphysical and Moral Commitments**

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Declaration of originality

The author declares that the content of this thesis is his work unless the contrary can be specifically indicated. This thesis has not been submitted in any form for any specific degree to any other university across the world. Citations, references and to a greater extend borrowed ideas are properly acknowledged with the text.

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Abstract

There exists the notion in African philosophy that to be regarded as a person, an individual needs to be morally excellent, and the way to secure this moral excellence is through maintaining good relations with others, meaning that one has duties directed towards others. This is the view which was popularized in philosophy by Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984) and is known as the communitarian normative conception of person. Proponents of this view tend to stress the importance of the community in facilitating the development of the individual. Kwame Gyekye (1997) argues against Menkiti for the latter's over-exaggeration of the role of the community, and calls him a radical communitarian for doing so. However, Gyekye ends up committing to the same error as the radicals. As a result, a debate has ensued regarding the appropriate characterization of the community/individual relationship, with the above-mentioned philosophers, classic communitarians, favouring the community over the individual. However, this paper seeks to argue that this view is unattractive because it faces difficulty in conferring the judgement of who counts as a person. Moreover, I argue that this view is open the incoherency between moral excellence and adherence to communal values. As a result, I seek to defend the limited communitarianism conception of person as it escapes these and other difficulties, by positing that persons consist of a metaphysical identity and a social identity, and as a result of the former identity preceding the latter identity, certain individual rights are inviolable.

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Introduction

For African philosophers, the nature of the concept of a person is just as contentious as it is for their Western counterparts. The biggest difference, however, between the former and the latter is that in African thought, the most vigorous defences of a conception of persons are found in the normative arena than in the metaphysical strata. The communitarian view of persons is the dominant conception of a person in African philosophy. According to Menkiti (1984), a person is an individual who adheres to communal norms and seeks to maintain the continuity of the community, even if it means sacrificing individual rights in the process. This position, which has come to be known as radical or extreme communitarianism, is strongly criticised by proponents of what is known as moderate or restricted communitarians. The moderates, according to Kwame Gyekye (1997), recognise individual autonomy and the value of the individual in the communitarian dispensation. Hence, individual rights are recognised by the moderates as necessary to protect the dignity of people. However, Gyekye's position ultimately leads to the same conclusion as the radicals, that when communal and individual rights are clashing, it is communal interests which should take precedence. As a result, it seems as though there is some philosophical tension in how to account for individual interests in the communitarian dispensation. However, this paper seeks to argue not only that Limited Communitarianism provides the most defensible characterisation of the individual/community relationship, but that it evades some difficulties inherent in the older versions of communitarian conceptions of persons. In the first chapter, this paper will start by articulating the different conceptions of personhood found in African thought. It will then defend the position that any talk of the community metaphysically constituting an individual cannot escape making a category mistake. In the second chapter, it seeks to outline the debate between the radicals and the moderates and display how there is a lack of distinction between the two camps. As a result of this, it seems that the tension regarding the characterisation of the relationship between the community and the individual persists. In the third chapter, this paper seeks to delineate

the normative communitarian conception of persons as found in the literature, and argue that this conception faces serious difficulties like how to accurately judge if an individual truly deserves the status of personhood, as well as the difficulty of trying to account for the possibility of there being a contradiction between moral excellence and communal values. In the final chapter, this essay will explicate the commitments of limited communitarianism and how these allow this theory of persons to escape some of the difficulties the classic communitarians face, and then defend this theory from the objection of what renders it a communitarian account.

With there being numerous articulations in African thought about how persons are viewed, classifying them is not as simple a task as it seems. Didier Kaphagawani (1998) provides the first attempt at elucidating on these conceptions of persons and concludes that there are three prominent views in African philosophy: the Tempelsian Force thesis, Kagame's Shadow thesis, and Mbiti's Communalism thesis. Bernard Matolino (2014) dismisses the threefold taxonomy, and alongside Polycarp Ikuenobe (2006), advocates for a distinction between only two conceptions of persons. Ikuenobe separates between the descriptive metaphysical, and the normative conceptions, while Matolino demarcates the metaphysical from the communitarian conceptions. However, Matolino opposes Ikuenobe's reference to the metaphysical conceptions of persons as descriptive as this misleads the reader into thinking the normative views of persons are more important than the metaphysical views. But in light of this bone of contention, Oritsigbubemi Oyowe (2015) accuses Matolino of the same sleight of hand Ikuenobe is guilty of, when Matolino distinguishes the metaphysical from the communitarian conceptions of persons, as if the latter – Matolino – is charging the communitarian views of persons of not being metaphysical. In fact, what Matolino does is charge communitarians like Placide Tempels (1959), John Mbiti (1970), and Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984) with committing a category mistake when they proffer the community as an ontological constituent of an individual. However, Oyowe does not view communitarians as guilty of this mistake. This is the debate that I seek to delineate in the first chapter of this document. Moreover, in this chapter I seek to defend the position that communitarians are guilty of a category mistake, which means

that talk of the community constituting the individual must be limited to the normative arena.

It is in this arena where Menkiti's view of persons has been argued by philosophers like Polycarp Ikuenu (2006) and Kwasi Wiredu (2008) to have significance. In the second chapter, I explicate Menkiti's account of persons and then show how Kwame Gyekye's (1997) response to it gave rise to the prominent debate in communitarianism: the debate on how to characterise the relationship between the community and the individual. In this chapter, I show how Menkiti (1984) proffers an account which favours the community and abrogates the rights of individuals. I then show how Gyekye argues against this view for exaggerating the role of the community and not recognising individuality. Gyekye (1997) then offers to remedy Menkiti's shortfalls by providing his version of moderate communitarianism. However, in doing so, Gyekye opens himself to a lot of criticism rendering his account not very distinct from Menkiti's radical communitarianism. Mostamai Molefe (2016) argues that Gyekye's charge that Menkiti is a radical communitarian is unfounded. This is because, Molefe argues, Menkiti could be read charitably to be favouring a communitarian account which posits duties to protect the dignity of persons, as opposed to rights. If this is the case, then it is not clear how Menkiti is radical. Furthermore, Olanipekun Famakinwa (2010) argues that mere recognition of individual rights is consistent with the position endorsed by the so-called radicals, thus making the distinction further unclear. Moreover, Oritsigbubemi Oyowe (2013) is of the view that Gyekye's attempted solution to balance the individual/community relation is to restate the problem than resolve it, and Matolino (2009) exposes that Gyekye is ultimately committed to the same position of abrogating individual rights when the community is threatened. As a result of these criticisms, I hope to show in this chapter that both the radicals and moderates are committed to the same side of the debate, leaving open what the best way to characterise the individual/community relation.

Mpho Tshivhase (2013) argues that the nature of personhood in the normative arena is moral excellence, and the means to acquire this personhood is through maintaining good relations. This is a view fervently supported by Ikuenu (2006) and

Wiredu (2008, 2009) such that these two authors view the communitarian conception of persons as one which a person just is a morally excellent individual. They also argue that to achieve this moral excellence is to abide by communal dictates, which Wiredu argues to be the maintenance of good social relations, the reciprocation of duties or rights, or both, and the pursuing of community member interest. However, having showed this, this paper then moves to argue, in this third chapter, that this classic communitarian view of persons faces three serious challenges ranging from the 'inauthentic moralists' difficulty, which poses a challenge of how to accurately judge individuals as qualifying to be persons. The second challenge is how this theory can account for the apparent incoherency of committing to moral excellence and adhering to communal values. The final challenge this paper exposes is the one of balancing individual rights with duties.

Following these challenges, this paper then argues that limited communitarian is the most defensible conception of persons as this view escapes the above-mentioned challenges. Limited communitarianism, as coined by Matolino (2014), argues that a person has a metaphysical and social identity. The metaphysical identity coincided with the African metaphysical conception of persons, and it is all an individual needs to count as a person. However, in order to fully function in a community, it is important that one is a particular type of person, and this specification is captured by one's social identity. As a result of this separation, Matolino's view escapes the first two challenges exposed in chapter three as limited communitarianism does not require individuals to be morally excellent in order to qualify as persons. This defence forms the bulk of the fourth chapter of this document. Moreover, I continue to argue that limited communitarianism's characterisation of the individual/community relation is favourable as it seeks to reciprocate duties an individual has towards others, with certain inviolable individual rights. Finally, I conclude by showing that even though the limited communitarian favours certain individual rights, it is still consistent with communalism. The fifth and final chapter is the conclusion of all these chapters.

Chapter 1

Communitarianism, Personhood, and Metaphysics: An Analysis

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to articulate the different conceptions of persons as found in African thought. Furthermore, I defend the position that to posit that the community constitutes individuals ontologically, is to commit a category mistake. As a result, I argue that the best way to characterize these conceptions is to demarcate between metaphysical and normative conceptions.

1.2 African Conceptions of Personhood

When it comes to how personhood is understood in African Philosophy, Didier Kaphagawani provides the first attempt at clarifying the different ways persons are conceived in African Philosophy. In his article, *African Conceptions of Personhood and Intellectual Identities* (1998), he identifies three notions of persons: the Force thesis, the Shadow thesis, and the Communalism thesis. Kaphagawani attributes the Force thesis to Father Placide Tempels for the latter's postulations that the Bantu people of the Baluba tribe, viewed human beings as ontologically possessing a vital force that plays a definitive role in social interaction, where one's status as a person is reviewed in terms of this force. The second thesis is attributed to Alexis Kagame where he proffers that persons possess a vital principle known as the shadow as well as another vital principle responsible for intelligence. Furthermore, Kagame also introduces the 'heart' as a person's personality which enables one to be distinguishable from another person. The third thesis, communalism, which Kaphagawani attributes to Mbiti, is where persons are thought to be constituted by their community. While it is evident that thinkers like Mbiti and Tempels unequivocally assert the persons/community relation as one of constitution, other authors claim that persons are "defined" by their communities (Menkiti, 1984),

without articulating clearly what “defined” means. That persons are defined by their communities could be a general claim purporting to the idea that in order for individuals to develop their capacities properly, there needs to be an enviroing community to facilitate such development without which the individual cannot thrive. However, the reason why I refer to this claim as general is because it is quite difficult to argue in opposition of it, such that even advocates of the liberal individualistic view of persons accept it. Thus, it seems redundant to even make this claim unless by “defined”, it is meant that persons are constituted by the community. If it is the latter claim which communitarians seek to defend, then further clarity is required as to what this constitution amounts to. If it means that persons are ontologically constituted by the community, then I am of the view that, as this paper will seek to argue below in support of Matolino (2014), such claims amount to a category mistake. From the above, it is evident that the communitarian view is only but one among a number of views. Nevertheless, having provided these distinctions, Kaphagawani does not seem to provide clarity on whether there is or may be a relation among these conceptions, or whether they are so fundamentally distinct that nothing can be philosophised about their relationship.

Polycarp Ikuenobe (2006) attempts to provide clarity regarding any relationship African conceptions of personhood may have by demarcating between the descriptive metaphysical view of personhood on one hand, and a normative perspective on the other. Ikuenobe claims that: “There are two philosophical conceptions of personhood in African thought”, and he notes that the descriptive offers an account of the intrinsic ontological nature of a person; “whether he or she is essentially material or immaterial, or whether he or she has one or two essential natures” (2006: 117). However, in as much as this conception is found in Africa, for Ikuenobe, it is the normative account which closely resembles traditional African thought. The rationale for this kind of thinking, Ikuenobe postulates, is that the normative conception of persons requires individuals to adhere to and meet certain community standards and responsibilities in order to be regarded as persons. Regarding these, Ikuenobe claims that, “Such responsibilities may be defined in

terms of personal achievements that are worthy of social recognition" (*ibid*). In addition, Ikuenobe posits a relation between the two conceptions such that the descriptive view of persons is a necessary feature of the normative view. Moreover, this normative conception of persons seems resonant with Kaphagawani's communalism thesis, raising the question of whether there are any other similarities or differences between the two authors, and which taxonomy should be adopted.

In his book, *Personhood in African Philosophy* (2014), Bernard Matolino attempts to answer these questions, and in the process, makes recourse to a category mistake charge against communitarians in order to justify, among other things, his own taxonomy. Matolino is of the view that the best characterisation of the notion of personhood is denoted by the metaphysical conception, and the communitarian conception. He is of the view that both Kaphagawani and Ikuenobe are guilty of some conceptual errors resulting in their misguided taxonomy. For Matolino, Kaphagawani's force thesis is a misunderstanding of Tempels' assertions as the former "fails to analyse Tempels's theory to its logical conclusion" (2014: 5). Instead, Matolino understands Tempels' emphasis on force, not as singling out a merely static attribute possessed by individuals, but as pointing out a dynamic entity which acquires meaning in how individuals relate with each other in the social arena. Furthermore, Matolino construes Tempels as articulating a notion of force which increases if one has good relations with others in her community, and decreases when communal relations are negative. Thus, one comes to possess more force the better one's communal relations are, and "persons with great force manifest themselves as individuals who have an important part to play in communal affairs while those who have no or little force, will be confined to lesser roles or be deprived from playing any role at all" (Matolino, 2014: 7). Therefore, in light of the above, Matolino characterises Kaphagawani's Tempelsian force thesis as communitarian, making it one and the same as Kaphagawani's communalism thesis.

Matolino then opts to re-categorise the conception which Kaphagawani attributed to Alexis Kagame as the shadow thesis, as falling under the metaphysical category. Matolino(2014) claims that the reason for his reclassification is that for Kagame, what

counts as constitutive of persons is independent of the community and solely relies on ontological features possessed by the individual. The shadow, intelligence, and the heart are all features that Kagame offers as belonging to human beings independent of any relations. One might question this reclassification and assert that Matolino is begging the question by defining metaphysical constituents of a person as independent of the community. This objection might claim that in attempting to define what may count as metaphysical constituents of a person, Matolino assumes that these constituents are those which belong to the individual and not the community without proving this claim, and then proceeds to argue that the metaphysical constituents cannot include communality as a feature of persons, on the basis of this assumption. In other words, it seems as if Matolino has assumed as a premise that which he wants to prove. I lack the space to articulate what metaphysics is or may be, neither do I have space to articulate on the nature of metaphysical constituents of anything. However, I am not entirely convinced in any case by this objection. This is because I am of the view that it is reasonable to assume that the community is distinct from an individual, and as a result, there are some reasons which account to this metaphysical distinctness. Therefore, if one was to investigate and narrate the metaphysical constituents of individuals, it seems they have to account for what makes an individual distinct from a community. Thus, if the above is true, metaphysical constituents of a person ought to be distinct, and therefore, in this regard independent of the community.

Thus, if we take Matolino's analysis seriously, then we have reason to accept that Kaphagawani's conceptions are not threefold but two; the metaphysical (shadow thesis), and communitarian (communal and force thesis). Matolino then moves to provide his views on Ikuenobe's taxonomy. The first issue Matolino has with Ikuenobe's position is the latter's interchanging of the words descriptive and metaphysical, the doing of which "misleads thinkers into the conclusion that the communal is more important than the descriptivist category" (2014: 29). For Matolino, metaphysical accounts are more powerful than descriptivist accounts as the former involves a deeper investigation of existence and the nature of existents, while the latter involves a mere narration of what

is perceived. Moreover, Matolino asserts that metaphysics is “an exclusive concern of the philosopher”, while describing it as “just about everyone’s business”, hence why he is of the view that interchanging the two is misleading.

However, these specific comments by Matolino are not warmly received by all. Oritsigbubemi Oyowe takes issue with Matolino’s contention against the interchangeability of descriptive and metaphysical, and claims that “it is hard to see what is misleading or unserious about the claim that philosophers, who identify certain intrinsic characteristics that distinguish some entity as persons, are doing work in descriptive, rather than revisionary, metaphysics” (2015: 505). However, even from Oyowe’s words quoted above, it seems that Matolino is raising a serious point. To “identify certain intrinsic characteristics” involves, at least, two processes. The first one involves coming up with an account of what it is for something, X, to be of intrinsic feature of another thing, Y. The second process would be to then pick out these intrinsic characteristics using terms available in the lexicon. The first process usually involves an investigation (for those entities whose nature or essence is not directly perceptible) for example, of what it is for something to be intrinsic – maybe it is a necessary condition for the obtainment of Y – as well as what it is for something to be a feature of another thing, or an investigation of when this property instantiates. This process of investigation appears to be more than just picking terms which correlate the subject with the object of my perception – mere description – it involves the positing of a particular stance on what intrinsic means, and backing it with ratiocinative argumentation. This process, is what I, and perhaps Matolino as well, envisage philosophers to be doing when identifying “certain intrinsic characteristics that distinguish some entity as persons”, and this investigative process deserves more the ascription of the category ‘metaphysics’ than ‘descriptive’. It is only once this investigative process is done that the secondary process of narrating it assumes.

For example, if we were to identify what the intrinsic characteristics of water are, we would start by defining what is meant by intrinsic. If we conclude that for some feature, X, to be intrinsic to Y, is for X to be such that without it, Y fails to exist. Thus, for water, physics informs us that it is made up of two hydrogen atoms, and one oxygen atom

(denoted H_2O) without any of which water fails to exist. Therefore, following this investigation, we can then *describe* water's intrinsic characteristics as H_2O . In fact, if serious thought is put in this example of water, perhaps one can sympathise even more with Matolino. It is the case that it has not always been known to people that the intrinsic features of water are H_2O , as such a discovery is due to the wonderful work of the natural sciences, which itself was not been prevalent at one point in time. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to take the view that descriptions of water have existed prior to the methods of natural science such that even before it was known that water is H_2O , people were describing it. Moreover, I posit that those who described water in these ways were understood without much confusion and effort, and I am of the view that these descriptions can still be used today to pick out water without much complication. Yet, in no way does it seem reasonable that these descriptions could have been picking out intrinsic features of water, as the latter were only discovered later. Thus, it seems that a descriptive account is not necessarily an account of intrinsic features, but a metaphysical account of something, by necessity, provides for the intrinsic features of that thing. Hence why metaphysical accounts tend to involve rigorous investigations than mere observations and narrations. Therefore, to denote this conception of persons as descriptive, in my view, is misleading as it opens the possibility that this conception may not be referring to intrinsic features of persons whereas the very idea of this conception is to provide these intrinsic features qua metaphysical ontology. As a result, if African philosophers are to investigate what the intrinsic ontological features of persons amount to, then denoting this process as metaphysical seems more accurate than assigning it mere descriptive connotations.

Irrespective of the above, for Oyowe, there is greater controversy in Matolino's specific demarcation of the conceptions of persons to be between metaphysical conceptions and communal conceptions, as if to imply that the "communitarian proponent of personhood is not engaged in metaphysical inquiry" (2015: 505). This bone of contention requires more background than has been provided. To begin with, for Matolino, the reason why he does not call the metaphysical view communalist is that the

former focuses on individual characteristics of humans as determinants of personhood, than the community (2014: 21). He continues to say that the metaphysical thesis as posited by him delineates that to be a person, one needs “to be in possession of certain complex features” (2014: 23). Moreover, Matolino claims that although he is cognisant of the role the community plays in developing these features, “The metaphysical view starts with certain characteristics and goes on to explain their status in ethnic ontology” such that this view “presupposes that persons are rightful owners of certain characteristics which enable them to be communal beings” (2014: 23-24). In other words, in Matolino’s view, the community is indeed responsible for developing the features individuals have; however, there exists these features on their own before the community can develop them. Thus, it is in reference to these features, the ontological constituents of an individual, that the metaphysical thesis is born.

In summary, even though Kaphagawani identifies three conceptions of persons, Ikuenobe and Matolino agree that there are only two. However, their agreement stops with the number of conceptions because how they refer to these notions differ. While Ikuenobe refers to them as the descriptive and normative views on persons, Matolino refers to them as the metaphysical and communitarian conceptions of person. The reason for this difference is that Matolino is of the view that using the term ‘descriptive’ misleads the reader into thinking that the normative view is more important without defending this stance. I agree with Matolino as sometimes descriptive accounts are not as thorough as metaphysical accounts (see the water example above). Thus, for the rest of this paper, I will refer to the one conception of persons as metaphysical.

1.3 Communitarianism and Metaphysics: Is there a Category Mistake?

Despite the above, there is a bigger reason why Matolino separates his communal view from the metaphysical view of persons; a justification Oyowe does not accept. In his book, Matolino (2014) accuses communitarians of committing a category mistake when they seek to answer the question of what a person is. For Matolino, “one has committed a category mistake when she ascribes, to a certain entity, a property or properties which

that entity could not have” (2014: 142). In light of the above, Matolino is of the view that when it comes to matters of strict ontological identity, the communitarian thesis is not apt to answer such matters and its utility as a theory of persons needs to be limited to the socio-ethical arena. To further illustrate his point, Matolino juxtaposes two categories which enable us to answer questions related to identifying persons: the “what/how” category, and the “why” category. The first category, which includes questions like “what is a person? What do persons do? How do persons understand themselves? How do persons operate? [...] seeks to give certain features about persons as true to all persons. It tells us the composition of persons and fixes the kinds of things that they are” (Matolino, 2014: 143). The second category, inclusive of questions like “why do persons behave the way they do? Why do persons believe in the things they do?” is different from the first category, Matolino asserts, because “it seeks to explain how the characteristics in category one are animated in the lives of persons. We can say the first category asks about the kinds of things that persons are endowed with and the second category shows how those endowments translate into certain activities” (*ibid*). In other words, the first category identifies certain characteristics while the second category seeks to explain why these characteristics function the way they do.

In consideration of the above, Matolino asserts that the error communitarians make arises when they conflate the two above-mentioned categories. He is of the view that communitarians ascribe “descriptive features of sociality to strict issues of identity” (2014: 144). Matolino then continues to clarify the category mistake by postulating that even within the first category, the what/how category, it is only the ‘what’ questions which refer to matters of strict metaphysical identity – not the ‘how’ questions. This is because the latter questions presuppose the prior existence of an entity to which these questions pertain. Thus, in my understanding, the ‘what’ questions pertain to the nature of an entity, and the ‘how’ questions pick out the functionality of that entity in relation to its constituents. It is possible for these questions to be related in such a manner that it may even appear as though the nature of an entity is its very function, for example, a cellphone. However, this still does not mean that the nature and function are the same

thing – they do come apart. On one hand, the question “what is a cellphone?” can be answered along the lines of “a cellphone is an instrument which reproduces sound through satellite connection to facilitate communication at long distances”. On the other hand, once properly scrutinized, it becomes evident that the above definition presupposes something that has not been defined; the instrument. Thus, on this view, a cellphone could just be the assemblage of a glass screen, rubber buttons, a speaker and a microphone, into a single entity. Once these pieces are assembled, then sound can be reproduced; the call (function) comes after there exists a stand-alone instrument. Thus, the instrument and the function come together to form a cellphone. As a result, Matolino’s point is simply that the communitarian is in error when they conflate ‘what’ questions with ‘why/how’ questions, hence the category mistake. To understand the charge of a category mistake, I am of the view that it is imperative to understand what Matolino’s project seems to be. Matolino wants a theory of persons which is acknowledges the role of the community in a person’s development, but one which is also sensitive to the individual and her capacities (2014: 166). As a result, for him, a person is made up of a metaphysical and a social identity. The metaphysical identity includes the ontological constituents of all human beings, while the social identity pertains to how these constituents develop and function within a social atmosphere. Thus, with this demarcation, it becomes understandable how a category mistake arises; if communitarians postulate that the community constitutes a person, then such talk, per Matolino, ought to be limited to the constitution of a person’s social identity and not her metaphysical identity.

Oyowe strongly disagrees with Matolino and proclaims that communitarians are not warranted to be accused of committing a category mistake. Oyowe (2015) is of the view that Matolino is not justified to make this claim as the latter has not clearly shown that the communitarians “ascribe, to a certain entity, a property or properties which that entity could not have”. Instead, Oyowe posits that properties like moral agency and sociality (communality) are not features that “persons *could* not have” (2015: 509). In fact, for him, it is perfectly conceivable for persons to be communal in *nature* (*ibid*, my

emphasis). In other words, Oyowe is arguing that a category mistake has not been committed because moral agency and communality are features any individual *could* have. With the operative word being 'could', Oyowe is postulating that it is, at the very least, imaginable to think of persons as ethical and relational.

If I have understood Oyowe correctly, then my imagination reflects the thought that he has not conceived of Matolino's argument fully. From my perspective, Matolino's argument is simply the conditional that if persons are defined, as Matolino has argued, in a manner which demarcates between that person's metaphysical and social identities, then it is not clear how the community can be a metaphysical ontological constituent of persons. Conceived of in another way, Matolino's claim is that *if*, when talking about persons regarding their metaphysical identity, we are talking about strict ontology, then claims of moral agency and communality do not amount to metaphysical ontological claims. When making metaphysical ontological claims about persons, such claims pertain to the basic features of persons; features without which persons do not exist as corporeal entities; intrinsic features of human beings. If the above makes sense, then it is not clear that being moral and communal can be viewed in this way. This is because, on one level, it is in the nature of these concepts that they refer to behaviour or a way in which something can be done. They are normative concepts which makes them prescriptive. It is possible for us to speak about morality and communality as metaphysical (more meta-ethical) concepts divorced from their practical obtainment, the same way we can talk about water as purely a *concept* which is distinct and separable from the *tangible, colourless, liquid material* which comes out of our taps we all know as water. Even if it can be debatably acceptable that there is a necessary entailment from the one to the other, the *concept* 'water' is still distinguishable from the *liquid material* 'water'. Thus, viewed as purely concepts qua concepts, morality and communality, just like any other concept, are by nature, not the kinds of things which can ontologically constitute any material entity like a human being.

On another level, since the concepts of morality and communality (and water) refer to something out there in the world, it is conceivable, according to Oyowe, that the

referents of these concepts constitute persons. In other words, even if the concept 'morality' does not ontologically constitute persons, what this concept refers to might be a constituent of persons. However, how this can be so, is not vivid. Different concepts refer to different entities in the world, from humans, to object, to animals; and some concepts can refer not to the above entities themselves, but to relationships these entities may have with each other. Thus, when it comes to morality, I posit that it is a concept which refers to the behaviour of humans. Whenever one speaks about morality, they are referring to how humans ought to behave in defined situations. What the concept refers to can only be limited to the behaviour of human beings; how people conduct themselves. If this is the case, then even what these concepts, morality and communality, refer to, behaviour or conduct or orientation, presupposes the existence of a human being who can then *behave* in a certain way. And since, for Matolino, what it is to be a person is to have a metaphysical identity (to be a human being) *and* a social identity, morality and communality are just the kind of referents which cannot be constituents of human beings ontologically; they are only limited to a person's social identity. To put it more crudely, since morality and communality refer to behaviour, they are essentially the kinds of 'things' which need for there to exist humans prior to their instantiation, which means that morality and communality are the kinds of properties the metaphysical ontology of persons could not have. This is probably why morality, in philosophy, belongs under the category of the normative, while ontology belongs to metaphysics. Ontology refers to the constitutive nature of what exists, and morality refers to how this existent operates or ought to operate. Therefore, in light of the above, moral agency and communality are not basic features of persons because there needs to be an ontological entity which has the capacity to behave morally and communally first, before this entity can be referred to as moral and communal. Thus, an ontological person is one who could not have moral agency and communality as constituents because these are not basic features. To make this claim the way Oyowe does appears to be a category mistake itself.

Another way Oyowe attempts to dispute the category mistake charge by Matolino is when the former accuses the latter of meaning, at another time, something different when employing the term category mistake. According to Oyowe, the other meaning Matolino gives when one commits a category mistake, derived from Gilbert Ryle's example of a foreigner touring a university, and after being shown various departments of the university, the foreigner asks the location of the university, is, thus, when "one locates some entity in a category it does not belong" (2015: 509). In my view, however, to locate an entity in a category in which it does not belong is to attribute to that very entity, a property it could not have; these appear to be logically equivalent. To say that water is a solid can be viewed, on one hand, as locating it (water) in a category (solidity) it does not belong. On the other hand, claiming water is a solid is to attribute to a certain entity (water) a property (solidity) it could not have. Thus, it is not obvious why there is a need to separate these articulations of the category mistake. Nevertheless, Matolino's position is still defensible even for the second formulation of the category mistake. According to Oyowe (2015), if the second formulation holds, then the "Afro-communitarian's mistake is that she locates persons in the 'socio-moral' category rather than the metaphysical category" (*ibid*). However, Oyowe is of the view that it is not a mistake like the foreigner's to "locate persons in the 'socio-moral' category". While the foreigner believes the University belongs in the same category as the departments, a wrong category, Afro-communitarians have not "placed persons in the wrong category, by virtue of placing them in the 'socio-moral' category" (*ibid*). This is because, for Oyowe, persons belong in both the metaphysical and socio-moral category, and hence, there is no category mistake committed. From my perspective, Oyowe seems to have slightly underappreciated, and thus misconstrued, Matolino's sentiments. Matolino, if I am correct, would agree with Oyowe that persons belong in both the metaphysical and socio-moral category. Indeed, Matolino's entire book is dedicated to depicting what he views to be the most appropriate way we can talk about persons under the metaphysical category, *and* how we can appropriately talk about persons in the socio-moral category. This is evinced by how Matolino, in Chapter five of his book, proceeds to separate

between the metaphysical and the social identity of a person, further illustrating his commitment that persons belong in both categories. However, Matolino's issue is the *conflating* of the two categories, by communitarians, as if they are fundamentally interchangeable. For Matolino, the communitarian's mistake is not that they have located persons in the wrong category of socio-morality. Instead, I understand Matolino's charge to be subtler than that.

For Matolino, the mistake is that the communitarians locate in the metaphysical category, features of persons which belong in the socio-moral category. Persons belong in the metaphysical category because of their basic features (ontology), and they belong in the socio-moral category because of the capacity of these basic features enabling persons to operate and behave in certain ways. Thus, it is by having a body that I am able to interact with others and socialise – these two categories come apart – and as a result, it is not necessarily the case that when one speaks about the metaphysical constitution of a person, i.e. the ontology of persons, one has to refer to socio-moral categories to make sense of it. Therefore, to claim that communality, a concept referring to behaviour of an entity, and thus, belonging in the socio-moral realm, is an ontological feature of persons is to locate in the metaphysical category, features of persons which belong in the socio-moral category. In other words, to do so is to commit a category mistake.

Oyowe's third attempt to discard the category mistake charge pertains to Matolino's request that communitarians show the community to belong in the same category as ontological features, like the *okra* (the life-giving entity), the *nipadua* (the body), and the *sunsum* (the bearer of one's personality) in the Akan scheme, in the sense that they belong to each individual, and are physical or psycho-spiritual. However, Oyowe claims that to require this of communitarians "begs the question because it already privileges the set of constitutive elements of personhood identified by those who prefer the metaphysical approach" without showing through further arguments that this approach "is the appropriate way to characterise personhood" (2015: 510). Moreover, Oyowe finds it conceivable that the community be mind-dependent, like the *okra* and the *sunsum*, and hence belong in the same category. As a matter of fact, Oyowe is of the view

that if we accept ascribing to the *okra* and the *sunsum* categories like ‘quasi-physicality’ or ‘psycho-spirituality’, then we ought to be accepting of the same properties being ascribed to the community. He says, “The Afro-communitarian who says the ‘community’ is some psycho-spiritual or quasi-physical entity manifested in actual families, clans, and cultural or ethnic groups is no more incoherent and no worse off than one who refers to quasi-physical and psycho-spiritual entities like *okra* or *sunsum* as constitutive of a person” (Oyowe, 2015: 511). Thus, it does not seem like there is a difference in categories between the ontological constituents of a person, at least those in the Akan scheme, and the community.

I am of the view that the first part of this third criticism by Oyowe is misdirected as Matolino argues extensively why the metaphysical thesis should be taken seriously (2014: 162-165), so to claim that Matolino’s request is “tendentious” and “question-begging” requires further clarification. Regarding the second part of Oyowe’s criticism, I am of the view that to claim that the community does not belong in the same category as the ontological features of persons seems to be logically deductible. To object in this manner is to miss the substance of Matolino’s claim. Matolino is not asserting that the metaphysical thesis is not without its weaknesses; he admits that there are still debates around what constitutes persons ontologically, however, what cannot be debated is that there is an entity which *can* exist without the community but without which the community can never exist; and that is the individual human being. Moreover, it is Oyowe himself who argues elsewhere that the individual is metaphysically basic or prior, and the community is derivative (2013). If this is the case, which I also take it to be, then the individual gives rise to the community. This means that deductively, what constitutes an individual is basic, and the community is derived from it. As a result, it seems then that the community, being derivative, belongs to that category which differs from the one the constituents of the individual, being basic, belong. Moreover, since Oyowe admits that he is “opposed to the idea of community as a mind-independent entity” (2015: 510), his charge is largely dependent on how the constituents of the metaphysical person (the *okra* and *sunsum*) are not mind-independent “things”. However, if in the Akan scheme, it is

established that the metaphysical person is only a body, then it is not clear that Oyowe's charge stands since the body is a mind-independent thing. Thus, it seems that Oyowe has not shown conclusively that the community belongs in the same category as the ontological features of persons.

Therefore, it seems like the charge of a category mistake stands. If this is true, then it seems like there are metaphysical conceptions of persons as found in the Akan and Yoruba schemes, as well as normative conceptions under which the communitarians fall. This is why I can accept Matolino's taxonomy regarding one conception of persons in Africa, and that is the metaphysical view. My minor issue with his taxonomy, however, is that it is unclear why he chooses to characterise the views in Africa as metaphysical and *communitarian*, as opposed to the former and the normative conception. It could be because there is no other normative conception of persons other than communitarianism, but he does not state his case so vividly. Nonetheless, this paper will make use of the normative category, working with the understanding that communitarians fall under this category. Thus, having sorted out the taxonomy of the different conceptions of persons in Africa, and in light of the category mistake charge which excludes communitarians from making metaphysical claims regarding the constitution of persons, the next section explores the normative commitments communitarians have about individuals and personhood. Even though I do admit that the communitarian view of person in current literature seems to be dominant in the normative arena, the above considerations are important to provide clarity of past articulations of this view, and to guide future proponents of the communitarian conception to be cognisant of the category mistake charge. This will aid mental resources to provide more philosophically sound theories of persons. Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement that it is the normative commitments of communitarians which are of greater philosophical interest in African thought (Menkiti 1984; see also Ikuenobe 2006; Wiredu, 2009: 13). Hence, the rest of this paper focuses on the normative commitments and their plausibility.

1.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter sought to delineate the different conceptions of personhood found on the African continent and showed that the best taxonomy is one which demarcates between metaphysical conceptions of persons and normative conceptions. Kaphagawani is the first to attempt such an exposition of these conceptions. He is of the view that there are three conceptions or theses regarding what a person amounts to. The first one which he attributes to Placide Tempels is the Force thesis; the second is the Shadow thesis which Kaphagawani ascribes to Alexis Kagame; and the third one is the Communal thesis which Kaphagawani posits as fathered by John Mbiti. Such an exposition is criticised by Matolino (2014) as lacking adequate analysis and hence is in error. Matolino (2014) argues that the force thesis should be treated as the communal thesis since the vital force Tempels speaks about is dynamic, and is realised in the social arena, and hence is more attuned with the communal thesis. Matolino (2014) also argues that the shadow thesis is best referred to as the metaphysical thesis since the constituents Kagame refers to exist independently of the community and belong to the individual, and as argued earlier, this is not equivalent to begging the question. The second attempt to elucidate on the different conceptions is by Ikuenobe (2006) who demarcates between the descriptive metaphysical, and the normative conceptions. According to Ikuenobe, the former conception refers to those features which are intrinsic to individuals ontologically. The latter conception, for Ikuenobe, requires individuals to abide by communal standards in order to be recognised as persons. Matolino (2014) takes issue with Ikuenobe's taxonomy as the former is of the view that to call the metaphysical conception 'descriptive' is misleading as it makes it seem as though this conception is less important than the normative view. As a result of his own concerns, Matolino (2014) provides the third attempt at naming the different conceptions of persons in Africa as the metaphysical conception and the communitarian conception. However, Oyowe (2015) seems not to agree with Matolino's taxonomy as it makes it seem as if the two views are mutually exclusive such that communitarians cannot make metaphysical assertions regarding the constitution of a person. But if read closely, the reason for Matolino's demarcation is that

he charges the communitarians of committing a category mistake when talking about the community being a metaphysical constitution of a person. Matolino argues that when it comes to issues of strict ontological identity regarding persons, any talk of the community, or morality, constituting persons would be to assign to an entity properties it could not have. Oyowe opposes this, and claims that it does not seem that the communitarian is guilty of any category mistake, in any of its formulations. However, I argued that the position advocated for by Matolino is defensible if we take the latter's demarcation between a person's metaphysical and social identities. In doing so, I showed that if Matolino is read as arguing that communality and morality are not metaphysical ontological features of persons qua metaphysical identity, then it becomes apparent how communitarians commit a category mistake. This is because they attempt to locate in the metaphysical category, characteristics of persons which belong in the socio-moral category. Thus, with this in mind, any talk of the community being constitutive of individuals must be outside the metaphysical ontological make-up of a person; but rather in the socio-moral arena.

Chapter 2

The Community and Persons: The Debate Begins

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to give some background (although not exhaustive) as to the origins of the now widespread debate in the communitarian view of persons. I also seek to show that this debate is still wide open and not resolved by Gyekye's moderate communitarianism.

2.2 The Communitarian Conception of Persons

One of the most influential philosophers in African theories of personhood, Ifeanyi Menkiti, in his article, *Person and Community in African Traditional Thought* (1984), proffers personhood as defined in terms of the community. In persons being defined by reference to the community, Menkiti draws the conclusion that "the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories, whatever these may be" (171). This basically means that the individual comes to know herself, and develops all her metaphysical capacities through the help of the community. Polycarp Ikuenobe advocates this interpretation by declaring Menkiti to be meaning that "the attitudes, sentiments, and moral dispositions of individuals are formed by virtue of belonging to a community with requisite norms" (2006: 119). Furthermore, Menkiti claims that personhood is made manifest in the socio-ethical arena and hence is processual such that over time, an individual can become more or less of a person depending on the stage within the process of incorporation the individual locates herself. In other words, there are norms and dictates prescribed by the community to which the individual must adhere in order to be recognised as a full person. Menkiti claims that: "Without incorporation into this or that community, individuals are considered to be mere danglers to whom the description 'person' does not fully apply" (1984: 172), and moreover, because of this constraint, "personhood is something at which individuals

could fail” (1984: 173). Finally, in culmination of all the above, because of the importance of the role the community plays in the development of the individual, Menkiti places duties an individual has towards the community (what I will refer to as communal rights or duties or responsibilities or obligations) prior to the rights individuals may have; in other words, communal rights trump individual rights. He concludes by saying that “priority is given to the duties which individuals owe to the collectivity, and their rights, whatever these may be, are seen as secondary to their exercise of their duties” (Menkiti, 1984: 180). In advocating the primacy of the community, and correlatively, communal rights, Menkiti started a debate around priority in the relationship between individual rights and the community.

Kwame Gyekye strongly criticises Menkiti for the seeming over-exaggeration of the significance of the role the community plays in the individual’s life. Gyekye agrees that the community is indeed important for the internal and external development of individuals. He says that the individual “needs society and all that it makes available for the realisation of the individual’s potential, and for living a life that is most worthwhile” (Gyekye, 1997: 35). Indeed, for Gyekye, the fact that an individual finds herself necessarily within a community implies that persons are communal in nature, and since it is the community which provides the platform around which the individual is to orient herself, the community must be prior to the individual (1997: 39-40). Nevertheless, Gyekye proposes a moderate version of communitarianism which fully recognises the value of the individual as an individual. He says that his version is “the model that acknowledges the intrinsic worth and dignity of the individual human person and recognizes individuality, individual responsibility and effort. The recognition is most appropriate, for, after all, the naturally social human being has will, personal initiative, and an identity that must be exercised, if his or her individuality is to be fully expressed and actualized” (Gyekye, 1997: 40). In as much as the individual can be communal in nature, for Gyekye, her possession of other characteristics intrinsic to her nature diminishes the ‘power’ the community has over the individual (*ibid*). Moreover, Gyekye agrees with Menkiti that a person is an individual who espouses moral character, however, Gyekye questions what

morality has to do with rituals of incorporation. In fact, Gyekye accuses the processual nature of personhood, as elucidated by Menkiti, of being “bizarre” and “incoherent” (1997: 49). For Gyekye, it is not clear exactly when a person becomes more of, or a full person, because if it is understood as referring to age such that an individual becomes more of a person the older she gets, then this will amount to the notion that the elderly are persons, which entails that they exude moral character. However, this is not always the case. Gyekye reminds us that “surely there are many elderly people who are known to be wicked, ungenerous, unsympathetic: whose lives, in short, generally do not reflect any moral maturity or excellence. In terms of a moral conception of personhood, such elderly people may not qualify as persons” (*ibid*).

Furthermore, Gyekye demarcates through usage of the Akan word for persons, between human persons and moral persons. The former is the human being while the latter is a human being who has displayed conduct which is morally praiseworthy such that it is possible to have a human being who is not a person (1997: 49-50). I will comment on this distinction later, but what is significant for now is that for Gyekye, an individual who displays morally reprehensible behaviour may not be recognised as a person but this does not mean she “loses her rights as a human being ... or that she ceases to be an object of moral concern...” (1997: 50). Moreover, Gyekye’s view on individual rights becomes clear when he states that, “Personhood conceived in terms of moral achievement will be most relevant to the communitarian framework that holds the ethic of responsibility in high esteem: the ethic that stresses sensitivity to the interests and well-being of other members of the community, though not necessarily to the detriment of individual rights” (1997: 52). Thus, Gyekye seems to advocate for a communitarian theory which recognises individuals as having rights, and allows for self-assertion since individuals are autonomous. For Gyekye, individual autonomy is the possession of a will; “a rational will of one’s own, that enables one to determine at least some of one’s own goals and to pursue them and to control one’s destiny” (1997: 54), and since one shapes one’s life as directed by one’s rational and moral autonomy, then for Gyekye, autonomy is an intrinsic value. Gyekye’s case for individual autonomy is made stronger when he posits that social

and cultural reform are made manifest because of individuals who are able to distance themselves from the community in order to reflect and then instigate “revolutionary actions” toward their own communities. Moreover, Gyekye asserts that the value of individual autonomy must not be overlooked as it is because of such autonomy that ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were able to come up with ground-breaking ideas even in their confinement in communal structures. Thus, it seems evident that the biggest criticism Gyekye has against Menkiti is the latter’s lack of recognition of the value of individuality and all it comes with (autonomy, rights, moral capacity, rationality, etc.). For example, for Gyekye, to demolish or demote rights to secondary status is too extreme, and to think of rights as antithetical to communitarianism is plainly false. He postulates that “A communitarian denial of rights or reduction of rights to a secondary status does not adequately reflect the claims of individuality mandated in the notion of the moral worth of the individual. Such a position would be extreme and would be at variance with the moderate communitarian view that I think is defensible” (1997: 62).

From the above, it seems that lines have been drawn, and sides have been chosen regarding which is prior, communal duties or individual rights. Both authors agree that the community plays a significant role in the development of the individual in terms of exercising her inherent capacities and providing the opportunity for the individual to pursue life plans and goals. They also agree that in African thought, the status of personhood is conferred upon the individual through the discharge of this individual’s moral actions, , not merely in virtue of being a human being. However, where they differ is in the relationship between the community and the individual in such a way that while Menkiti advocates for the primacy of communal rights over those of the individual, it seems Gyekye takes the position which favours individuality, or at least an apparent balance between the two.

Motsamai Molefe, in a paper titled *Revisiting the Menkiti-Gyekye Debate: Who is a Radical Communitarianism?* (2016), posits that Gyekye’s pronouncement of Menkiti’s theory as radical is philosophically unfounded, and hence, a logical implication of Molefe’s

argument is that the distinction between radicals and the moderates is unjustified. According to Molefe, the reason why Gyekye charges Menkiti with being a radical communitarian is that the latter, as construed by Gyekye, over-emphasises the role played by the community in the life of the individual to a point where individual rights are no longer recognised. Molefe claims that “Menkiti’s analysis is considered [...] ‘radical’, I think, in so far as it exaggerates this role [of the community] to a point where it can undercut or violate human rights for the sake of the community” (2016: 40). However, Molefe does not view Menkiti in this light but proposes that what the latter does is offer an alternative political system based on duties as opposed to rights, an alternative germane to African traditional systems. Molefe claims that “Menkiti submits that African societies function on the basis of what we owe to one another in a community, whereas a Western society tends to emphasise rights. It is crucial to highlight that Menkiti notes that an African system gives priority to duties over rights” (2016: 48). To secure his point, Molefe makes use of Jack Donnelly’s claim that human rights are a Western concept used to secure human dignity. However, Donnelly continues, there are other ways, prevalent in non-Western societies, to secure this dignity (Donnelly in Molefe, 2016: 49). Thus, Molefe submits, that all Menkiti does is to posit duties as primary in securing dignity, and rights secondary; Menkiti does not *fail* to recognise rights. Therefore, to call him a radical communitarian by accusing him of violating rights is unjustified. One may quickly retort and claim that by virtue of ranking duties above rights, means that rights are violated and hence Menkiti is, in fact, radical. However, Molefe responds to this worry and claims that the onus is on Gyekye to provide an account as to why rights must be recognised in the first place. Nevertheless, even if Gyekye does come up with this account, there are those who are of the view that mere recognition of these rights does not render Gyekye’s theory of personhood distinct from radical communitarianism.

Olanipekun Famakinwa provides a conceptual analysis of the term ‘recognise’ and concludes that “Gyekye’s recognition of rights offers a weak support for moderate communitarianism” (2010: 70). According to Famakinwa, recognition can be interpreted to mean either “acceptance”, “being able to identify something or somebody”, or it could

mean “seeing”. The first interpretation is unacceptable as “no communitarian accepts individual rights as the ultimate value”. The second interpretation on its own is insufficient as mere identification of individual rights without further qualification of their ‘special’ status is morally insignificant since such identification does not imply the rank individual rights possess when compared to duties. The last interpretation is also useless because someone can see something in terms of visual experience, but fail to ‘recognise’ it (*ibid*). This means, from my understanding, that even if individual rights exist and to a certain extent, are experienced, such mere existence or experience on its own does not give light to where they stand regarding the attempt to balance them and communal rights. Irrespective of the above, the search for a balance between these things seems, at times, impractical for there can be situations whereby the two clash and the only solution is for one to trump the other (Famakinwa, 2010: 70-71). Moreover, according to Oritsegbubemi Oyowe, to seek equality between the individual and the community is to restate the problem which is engendered by this relationship. Oyowe (2013) argues that Gyekye seeks a balance between the individual and the community in such a way that neither the community nor the individual is basic or prior. For Oyowe, “Ultimately, then, Gyekye’s position is that metaphysical equality between the individual and community is the most appropriate way of characterising that relationship, since it holds better promise in articulating a moral-political philosophy in which individual rights and communal good are equally recognized and upheld” (2013: 120). In other words, equal recognition is afforded to both the individual and the community. However, Oyowe contends that the problem of the individual/community relation in African Personhood stems from “assigning equal weight to the demands of individuality and communality” (*ibid*). Moreover, if this is the case, then it seems like Gyekye restates the problem rather than resolve it. Oyowe asserts that “if the original controversy was a function of equally recognizing the claims of individuality and communality, then how can a metaphysics that proposes equal regard for both, by recoiling from distinguishing which one is basic, take us further beyond the original dilemma?” (2013: 121). Thus, it seems as if the search for

a balance between individual rights and communal duties is neither practicable nor coherent.

Perhaps this is why Gyekye's moderate communitarianism ends up advocating for the primacy of communal rather than individual rights. Bernard Matolino criticises Gyekye for failing to make clear the distinction between radicals and moderates. This is because, for Matolino, in arguing for the importance of individuality, Gyekye does not show, firstly, how the radicals trump on "individual talent and originality", and secondly, how the moderates are to exactly promote this (2009: 167). More critically, Matolino charges Gyekye of offering individual rights the same secondary status that the extreme communitarians do. Of Gyekye, Matolino has this view:

This is a contradiction within his account. He wants to affirm the importance of rights and the fact that moderate communitarianism is equipped with the necessary structure to recognise them. But at the same time he, in a very puzzling manner, claims that the very same moderate communitarian society cannot allow itself to be obsessed with rights. I think it is fair to inquire as to what Gyekye's moderate version will be obsessed with. Gyekye says it will prize harmony, peace, stability and solidarity. If that is the case I suggest that there is no difference between the radical communitarian and Gyekye. They are both not obsessed with rights and they value harmony, peace, stability and solidarity (2009: 168).

This view is evinced by how Gyekye claims that if there is a clash between individual rights and communal responsibilities, "the community will have to take the steps necessary to maintain its integrity and stability. The steps are likely to involve abridging individual rights..." (1997: 65). Thus, Matolino's concern that the distinction between unrestricted and restricted communitarianism, as posited by Gyekye, is not clear, seems to be substantiated by the latter's own words. This is because Gyekye's biggest criticism against radical communitarianism is that it does not afford the individual the status she deserves by ranking rights secondary to duties, but at the same time, Gyekye does exactly this when comparing individual rights against communal duties.

Therefore, from all the above considerations, it seems that the communitarian conception of persons emphasises the rootedness in the community, of the individual,

such that the community is said to constitute the individual. Secondly, this conception appears to claim that personhood is realised in the moral arena where an individual's conduct and character needs to be consonant with the moral values and norms of her community. Finally, it is the community which takes priority over the individual, thus leaving open the debate on how to best resolve the apparent imbalance in the relationship between the community and the individual. Maybe to account for this imbalance, communitarians can claim that individuals are metaphysically constituted by the community, such that an individual's identity is constituted by wholly or partly, by the community (see Molefe, 2016). However, to see if this claim is plausible, it is imperative that one acquaints oneself with other conceptions of person which may view the relationship differently.

2.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter, I sought to show how the debate within the communitarian conception of persons began, and how it still continues. Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984), relying on John Mbiti, articulated a view of a person which posits that a person is defined in terms of the community. He claims that the individual is nothing but a mere dangler without a community, as the latter develops the former's metaphysical capacities. As a result of the role the community plays in the composition of the individual, Menkiti claims that it is the community which takes priority over the individual, meaning that community rights trump individual rights. Gyekye (1997) opposes Menkiti by arguing that the community itself is comprised of individuals who are able to reflect on their own and come up with revolutionary ideas that can benefit the community. Furthermore, the individual is autonomous, and hence should have her rights recognised by the community. As a result of Menkiti's advocacy for the abrogation of individual rights, Gyekye dubs him a radical communitarian while referring to himself as a moderate communitarian; and so, the debate as to how to characterise the relationship between the individual and the community begins. However, Gyekye has not been without his critics. Molefe (2016) argues that Gyekye is not warranted to call Menkiti a radical

communitarian because both these philosophers speak of rights without arguing for their existence in the African context. Molefe (2016) claims that it is plausible for a society to have obligations based on duties as opposed to rights, so if Menkiti had this line of thinking when he ranked rights as secondary to duties, it is not clear why he should be a radical communitarian for advocating a duties-based morality. Famakinwa (2010) also criticises Gyekye and argues that the mere recognition of the individual's rights is consistent with radical communitarianism, making it unclear where the real distinction lies between the so-called radicals and moderates. Oyowe (2013) also brings to light that Gyekye's offering the recognition of the individual as having equal status as the community, as a solution to the debate, merely restates the problem than resolve it. This is because, the existence of the problem is given meaning when there is recognition of the equal status of both the individual and community. In other words, it is because the individual is autonomous, has dignity and rights, that it is problematic for the community to trump her rights in virtue of the community playing a critical role in the development of the individual. Thus, to propose equal recognition of both these constituents of society is to restate the problem. However, Gyekye's biggest weakness in his exposition is exposed by Matolino (2009) when the latter points out that Gyekye ultimately commits to the same side of the debate as the radicals when he picks communal rights over individual rights, when there is a clash between the two. As a result, it seems as though seeking a balance between these is harder than Gyekye once thought, and it leaves open the debate on the appropriate characterisation of the individual/community relation.

Chapter3

Communitarianism, Personhood, and Morality: A critique

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to articulate what the communitarian conception of persons amounts to in the normative area, and then assess whether such a conception is coherent in its claims.

3.2 Communitarianism: Persons as Moral Entities

There exists the idea that to be regarded as a person, two things are needed: an individual needs to be morally excellent; and secondly, the way to secure this moral excellence is through maintaining good relations with others, meaning that one has duties directed towards others. In her recent article, *Personhood: Social Approval or a Unique Identity?*, Mpho Tshivhase argues for a demarcation between the *nature* of personhood and the *means* of acquiring personhood. She is of the view that “personhood is realised when one conducts her life in a way that is morally virtuous and, so, humanly excellent” (2013: 120). As a result, Tshivhase notes that the nature of personhood is the embodiment of moral principles “which are dominated by a concern for the well-being of others or conforming to community’s expectations” and the means of acquiring personhood is belonging to a community “and participating in the socializing process” (2013: 122). What lends support for Tshivhase’s view is how prominent African philosophers articulate the normative communitarian conception of persons. Polycarp Ikuenobe is of the view that although there are two conceptions of personhood in African thought, the descriptive metaphysical and the normative, it is the latter conception which closely resembles the traditional African setup, because “personhood is a *status* earned by meeting certain community standards, including the ability to take on prescribed responsibilities [...] worthy of social recognition” (2006: 117). From this, it is apparent that personhood is a “status” of some sort and this status is brought about by adhering to “community standards”. Furthermore,

for Ikuenobe, it is clear that the entity upon which the status of personhood is conferred can only be a human being, i.e. the metaphysical account is a necessary condition for the normative account. He claims that “An object, X, must satisfy the descriptive metaphysical criteria of personhood before X can be evaluated and recognized as having satisfied the *communal criteria* of personhood” (Ikuenobe, 2006: 118). He goes on to claim that the normative account depends on an individual’s metaphysical capacities like “volition”, “autonomy”, “moral and rational deliberation.” What this means is simply that in order to be judged to have met the “communal requirements or standards”, and thus to be recognised as a person, one needs to have acted freely and voluntarily when acting out their duties (*ibid*).

As a result of such autonomy, Ikuenobe is of the view that the status of personhood can only be conferred upon an individual when she abides by communal requirements through her own choosing; through her own autonomy. Moreover, Ikuenobe continues to say that a “A moral *person* must also appreciate the communal reality and must internalize the requisite attitudes and values of the community” (2006: 120). From this, it means that the nature of personhood, or the status, is one of moral excellence. If personhood is a status, it means that to be a person is to be praised. According to Ikuenobe, in order to receive such status or praise, one needs to autonomously abide by communal norms. Thus, as quoted above, it is the autonomous adherence to communal values that renders an individual a morally excellent entity. Therefore, the status of being a person is moral excellence; to be a person, in such thought, just is, at the very least, to be a morally excellent human being. Moreover, this indicates, as Tshivhase postulates, that the means of acquiring moral excellence or personhood, is through adherence to communal values.

Wiredu is also sympathetic to this normative conception communitarians have of persons. He is of the view that “a person is not just an individual of human parentage with a body and mind and a destiny who walks the earth. Additionally, a person must be an individual who satisfies certain norms (2008: 336). From this, in support of Menkiti, it is clear that for Wiredu, persons are “defined by the community” (*ibid*). However, this claim

alone does not make him an extreme or radical communitarian, but rather, what renders one extreme or radical is “the kinds of conditions that are set up as the criteria of personhood that may, or may not, be authoritarian or in some sense oppressive or unsound” (2008: 336-337). What is more is that not only does Wiredu advocate for the preference of the normative conception of persons over the metaphysical, he views the former conception as dominated by “ethical issues” (2009: 13). Furthermore, he is of the view that the nature of persons in African thought is indeed processual as Menkiti posited. Moreover, for him, “to be called a person is to be commended” (*ibid*). This means that for him, like Ikuenobe, personhood is a status filled with praise. This means, then, that to be called a person is to be evaluated and then praised. If this is true, then it makes sense why both Wiredu (2009) and Ikuenobe (2006) postulate that this kind of evaluation means that there exists a system of values against which the individual is to be judged. Ikuenobe claims that “The recognition of a person implies the existence of (satisfied) group standards for action and achievement. These standards, in turn, indicate a view of personhood that represents the social and moral identity one acquires” (2006: 118). For Wiredu, this system of values is made up of a combination of “strict” moral rules as well “broad” or “loose” moral rules. The former are those moral rules applicable to all human beings, all the time, and they pertain to the welfare of humanity as a whole. In other words, these are immutable (Wiredu, 2008). However, since these strict moral rules do not guide all behaviour and interaction within and between communities, there are other rules which guide, for example, where to take kids to school, and these rules, often referred to as broad moral rules, or customary rules, or communal values, do not apply to all people, but are limited to particular cultural communities. These customary rules are mutable and generally change with times. As a result, Wiredu posits that this “system of values presupposed cannot be anything short of an ethic for a whole society or culture”, however, since strict moral values are “constant, when people speak of an ethic, they usually have in mind the contingent rules of custom current in a given society” (2009: 15). Therefore, for Wiredu, “In Africa [...] the operative ethic is communalism” (*ibid*).

This, in my view, is quite enlightening. What emerges, then, is that to be a person is to be praised or commended. And since we commend only excellencies, then to be a person is to be excellent. Furthermore, since for Wiredu, personhood in Africa is dominated by ethical issues, it means that persons are excellent in ethical issues. In other words, when it comes to issues of ethics or morality, a person is an individual who excels at these. That is to say, a person is a morally excellent individual. Furthermore, Wiredu claims that communalism is a community or a social formation which highly values social relations, and the welfare of others. He is of the view that the emphasis placed in social relations naturally gives rise to obligations and rights, governed by another value; reciprocation. Wiredu claims “The normative meaning of this bonding [social relations], for an individual, is that she has obligations to large groups of kith and kin. This relationship is balanced, in the converse, by rights due to her from a corresponding multitude of relatives. The reciprocity involved was the source of a sense of human connectedness” (2009: 15). From this “sense of human connectedness”, individuals in this setup would concern themselves with pursuing the “interests of the members of the community” (Wiredu, 2009: 15-16). Thus, for Wiredu, a communitarian setup is one premised at least on three communal values: firstly, on the need to maintain good relations, which entails corresponding obligations and rights, and from this, the second value of reciprocity can be derived; thirdly, the final value is the welfare of others. Therefore, it seems that a communitarian person is one who is morally excellent within the context of that community. This is because the commending status of moral excellence conferred upon an individual who achieves personhood presupposes as criteria for the evaluation of individuals, a system of values which, as articulated above, is not strict moral values per se, but are the communal values. Thus, a communitarian person is one who lives according to the communal values of maintaining good social relations, maintaining the reciprocation of rights and obligations, and pursuing the interests of members – pursuing the common good as envisaged by Gyekye (1997).

3.3 Is this a Plausible Conception of Persons?

Now that it has been established that communitarians view the nature of personhood to be moral excellence, such a view of persons becomes unattractive when we consider a number of difficulties it faces. Note that some of these difficulties are not knock down objections to the communitarian view of persons, but rather issues which need to be explained away. This view of the nature of personhood being moral excellence does not exclusively and necessarily belong to communitarians. What I mean is that it is consistent for individualistic societies, thought to be antithetical to communal societies, to view or define persons as individuals or human beings who are morally excellent. This means, then, that the communitarian view of persons is really communitarian in the way it defines what moral excellence is or how to attain moral excellence. In other words, it is conceivable for a liberal society to define persons as morally excellent humans, where a morally excellent human being is an individual who acts according to Kant's categorical imperative. That is to say, in this individualistic community, a person is one who is a deontologist. However, this would not be the case for the communitarian society, because, to be morally excellent in this community, one has to live according to the above-mentioned communal values. Tshivhase puts it in this way: "The moral principle that should ideally guide an individual is aimed at improving and maintaining the welfare of her community [...] Herein an individual's conduct should not only avoid harming others, but should also help others to advance their wellbeing" (2013: 124). In other words, for her, personhood "involves a kind of human excellence that is characterized by the morally virtuous conduct that one displays within her community when interacting with other people" (Tshivhase: 2013: 125). Thus, this particular African view of persons, that is, personhood as moral excellence, becomes the *communitarian* view of persons only when moral excellence is acquired through adherence to communal values.

If the above distinction between African normative conceptions of persons in general, and communitarian conceptions of persons in particular, makes sense, then there are three things to consider about the former notion: the individual moving from human being to a person; the system of values against which to judge the individual; and

finally, the judge. Much has been said about the metaphysical individual, and I shall comment more at a later stage. Regarding the system of values, there are questions which arise like who is responsible for coming up with these values, and how is this process facilitated? However, for now, I shall focus on the judging process, specifically the apparent uncertainty regarding how those who are to confer upon individual the status of personhood, the judges or other members of the community, are to do so. If for example, all it is to be a person is to be a human being, then all those who are judging the person-status of that human have to do is look for the species homo-sapien, and then they would know. It is quite easy to see a human being; this is probably why I have not come across anybody mistaking a human for a lion, or a bird, or any other species. One of the reasons why it is easy is because the criteria used is simple and not easy to fake; it is difficult to imagine a tiger posing in a human being costume. However, once the criteria to judge individuals involves a lot of factors, including value-laden ones, the process of judging, and hence of bestowing the status of personhood, becomes less easy, more tedious, making this conception unattractive. To understand why, it is important to remember that since individuals are judged according to some certain criteria, it means that it is possible for an individual not to meet these criteria and fail at personhood. In other words, one is being judged to be or not to be a person on the grounds of meeting or not meeting these criteria, respectively. This means that these criteria, adherence to communal moral values, are definitive of personhood.

3.4 Inauthentic Moralists

If the above is true, however, it makes it possible for there to be individuals who adhere to these values, and hence judged to be persons, but under closer scrutiny, it seems these individuals do not deserve such praise. Oyowe exposes this gap through his thought experiment called “the devious scientist” where he claims that: “Having recently discovered that personhood is attained by compliance to cultural norms, a very clever, but equally devious, scientist has recently programmed an otherwise non-compliant member of community to exhibit habitual compliance to those norms, thus generating

the appropriate moral and social recognition in terms of which personhood is conferred. His compatriots now regard him as a person” (2017: 3-4). As a result, if this conception of persons does not allow those who judge to “plausibly distinguish between genuine and programmed compliance [to communal norms], then it is less attractive for that reason” (2017: 4). However, Ikuenobe claims that a person must willingly and autonomously choose to adhere to these moral values in order to be regarded as a person (2006: 118). Irrespective of this will and autonomy, even if an individual can willingly choose to act in a certain way and abide by the required moral dictates, it does not follow that this individual *wants* to act this way, neither does it follow that this individual values these moral principles; in fact, the individual may abhor these principles but still abide by them. As Tshivhase notes, “moral conduct and an agent’s attitude are not always aligned, so that if we promote conduct over attitude we create inauthentic moralists” (2013: 127). To depict Tshivhase’s concern, Oyowe gives an instance of what he calls “the Janus-face” where “Obierika is an active member of community. He is widely recognized as exhibiting adequate compliance with respect to cultural norms and practices. But, unbeknownst to others, he is nevertheless sceptical of, and even abhors, these norms and practices. He sometimes expresses veiled criticisms and frequently repeats his aversion to them in the privacy of his hut, although he *publicly* complies” (2017: 4). As a result of the Janus-face, there is still the possibility of an individual who acts autonomously to comply with communal norms but still has a bad attitude towards them.

A proponent of this view may claim that one’s autonomy must coincide with one’s attitude such that what one does autonomously, reflects their attitude. However, and this is my point, this does not make the job of anyone easier. The individual’s compatriots, the judges, are not privy to any internal states such that the assignment of personhood may be a huge mischaracterisation influenced by inauthentic moralists. Thus, for African thought to define persons as morally excellent individuals provides a daunting challenge of characterising authentic persons correctly, and this alone, even without the actualisation of inauthentic moralists, renders this theory unattractive. But as I said

earlier, this concern is not enough to disprove this theory; but the next concern, regarding the communitarian view of persons particularly, might be.

3.5 Communal Values versus Moral Excellence

As I said earlier, there are certain questions which are to be raised regarding the system of values that the communitarian view of persons is likely to have to explain if it is to be more attractive. However, that time has not yet come. As present, there is a conceptual issue regarding this system of values I wish to lay bare. As argued above, if we are to take Wiredu's distinction between strict and loose moral values seriously, then it logically follows that the system of values that the communitarian uses to judge individuals against, refers to the second distinction; the broad moral values or communal norms. If these postulations are indeed plausible, it seems that requiring of individuals, in order to achieve personhood, abidance to communal values in order to secure moral excellence, leaves open the possibility of the communitarian dispensation requiring of individuals behaviour which is contrary to strict, *immutable*, moral values. In other words, it is plausible that a communitarian person be morally excellent with respect to her community, but be morally detestable with respect to humanity in its entirety. For example, if we take equality to be a strict moral value such that it is wrong always for inequalities to exist, then we would have to accept that equality among all genders is a strict moral value. However, there are communities which marginalise women and ill-treat homosexual people. Such maltreatment of these genders is accepted in such communities, and to a certain extent, it is encouraged and an integral part of custom such that when dealing with certain communal issues, like that of familial succession, this maltreatment is practiced. In other words, such a disregard is a norm. In these communities, which were undoubtedly common in many parts of the world and still are in some parts, if we take the commitment of the communitarian seriously, then to be a person would mean abiding by the communal norm of disregarding certain genders solely based on their gender, which conflicts with the strict moral value of equality. Thus, it seems like this gender-discriminating individual is a person in his community as he is

abiding by communal values, however, he is quite distant from being morally excellent. Moreover, to require of individuals to be moral, whether strictly or loosely, is to require them to be other-regarding. For example, utilitarianism asks of individuals to regard the happiness of others in moral deliberations; deontologists, in their formulation of the categorical imperative, are required to consider if others would do the same when facing similar situations. Thus, it seems plausible that to be morally excellent is, on one understanding, to be other-regarding. However, in the gender-discriminating community above, to require, of individuals, to be morally excellent and adhere to communal values is to require persons to be other-regarding and other-disregarding, at the same time. Therefore, such an African conception of personhood appears, once again, quite unattractive. More specifically, however, the communitarian conception of persons, so construed, not only seems unattractive, but if my argument is successful, it also has some internal contradictions.

Apart from these difficulties, there is still the difficulty of properly characterising how the relationship between the individual and the community should be. If we remember correctly from the first chapter, Menkiti (1984) and Gyekye (1997) provided a skeleton of what the communitarian conception of a person amounts to. They are in agreement that such a conception emphasises an individual's rootedness in the community, or, from another perspective, they base their view about who counts as a person on how an individual's metaphysical or ontological capacities are developed by the community. They also agree, at least if interpreted charitably, that their conception is one which is made manifest more in the moral (normative) arena than in the metaphysical arena. However, where they sought to differ is how they characterise the community/individual relationship. Menkiti outright claimed that the community is prior to the individual, and subsequently, duties towards others trump individual rights. Gyekye, on the other hand, criticises Menkiti for not fully recognising individuality, and sought a communitarian conception which attempted to balance this relationship. However, Gyekye himself ends up committing to the same characterisation of this

relationship when he claimed that individual rights will be abrogated if the community needed to, thus rendering him to conceive of personhood the way Menkiti does.

Furthermore, African thinkers have attempted to put some meat on the skeleton by conceiving the communitarian view of persons to be claiming that to be a person, an individual needs to be morally excellent. In other words, to be a person in the normative arena, just is to be morally excellent. Moreover, as I have explicated above, to be morally excellent in the communitarian view is to abide by the community values or standards against which an individual is evaluated and then judged to be a person. Therefore, to be a person is to be an individual who adheres to the communal values of pursuing the interests of all members, maintaining good relations with other, and the latter entails the value of reciprocating either duties alone, or both rights and duties. Where most communitarians differ, from my understanding, is in the communal value of reciprocation. There are those like Menkiti and Gyekye who view the reciprocation principle as pertinent mostly in duties whereby members of the communities have alternating obligations towards each other, and rights either do not exist (see Molefe 2016), or are secondary to obligations. Including Placide Tempels (1959), and John Mbiti (1970), I would like to refer to this way of viewing persons as classic, old, or traditional communitarianism. Now this view, as I argued above, seems unattractive for three reasons: the first is that it allows for inauthentic moralists which makes it difficult to accurately confer the status of personhood on individuals; the second is that it leads to a possible contradiction between moral excellence and adherence to communal values; and the third is that it disregards individual rights. As a result, there are those who attempt to reevaluate the reciprocity principle and either search for a balance relationship between rights and duties (Wiredu, 2008), or they favour individual rights (Matolino, 2014). Let us refer to these as the neo-communitarians, and we shall assess whether these new kinds of communitarians provide plausible alternatives.

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter sought to provide an analysis of what the communitarian conception of persons in the normative arena amounted to, and also sought to show how this conception is unattractive, and is open to some incoherencies. According to Ikuenobe (2006) and Wiredu (2008), it seems as though to be a person in this scheme just is to be morally excellent. The way to achieve this moral excellence is through the adherence to communal precepts of maintaining good social relations; reciprocating duties or rights, or both; and the value of pursuing the interest of others. Thus, as Tshivhase (2013) points out, the nature of personhood is moral excellence, and the means of acquiring this personhood or excellence is through allegiance to communal values. I then argued that if this is true of the communitarian conception of persons, then there are some difficulties in conceiving of persons in this way. Firstly, by requiring individuals to exude moral character in order to earn the status of personhood leaves open the existence of inauthentic moralists. According to Oyowe (2017), these are individuals whose behaviour is in line with the required communal values, but her attitude is in opposition to these values – thus rendering her compliance with them not genuine. As a result of these inauthentic moralists, it then becomes difficult to judge with a large degree of accuracy who counts as a genuine person. A second difficulty for this conception of persons is that requiring moral excellence through adherence to communal values seems to be incoherent. This is because it is possible for communal values to conflict with strict, immutable, moral values, a distinction provided by Wiredu (2008, 2009), such that to be morally excellent, an individual may be required to, on the one hand, abide by the strict moral principle of gender equality while on the other hand, being required to practice the exclusion of females and homosexual people in familial succession, of which the latter may be a communal value. Thus, it seems that the communitarian person viewed in this light has some internal conflicts, which makes this theory unattractive as it is. Finally, an issue with this conception is that it is committed to communal rights being prior to individual rights, thus supporting an imbalance in the individual/community relation. As

a result of the unattractiveness of this theory, there are neo-communitarians who seek for balance, or favour individual rights, as we shall see with the limited communitarians.

Chapter 4

Limited Communitarianism: A Defence

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I seek to provide an analysis of what limited communitarianism is and whether it is plausible enough to withstand the criticisms mentioned in the last chapter, and other ones directed at it specifically.

4.2 What is Limited Communitarianism?

A communitarian view which I think is defensible is one articulated by Bernard Matolino in his book *Personhood in African Philosophy* (2014), which he calls Limited Communitarianism, which falls under the characterisation of neo-communitarianism. As noted earlier, Matolino demarcates between metaphysical and communitarian conceptions of persons in African thought. For him, metaphysical conceptions of persons, like those found in the Yoruba and Akan scheme, seek to articulate the basic elements which constitute individuals. As a result, he is of the view that to qualify as a 'metaphysical' view of persons, a theory "ought to be free from communal considerations as primary constituents of the nature of persons" (Matolino, 2014: 72). Moreover, Matolino claims that, "Although all persons can be said to be social by nature; what makes them persons is the mere possession of these key metaphysical elements as opposed to sociality of any form" (*ibid*). Therefore, it is apparent that for Matolino, when talking of metaphysical views, he is referring to the strict ontological constituents of individuals. From this, it is clear that Matolino advocates for the metaphysical view of persons. He admits this when he says that: "Limited communitarianism is biased towards accepting and taking the metaphysical view seriously" (2014: 165). Moreover, he claims that the classic communitarian view of persons is grossly mistaken and ought to be secondary to the metaphysical view. He claims, "Had he [Gyekye] carried his analysis to its logical conclusion he would have rejected communitarianism as a basis of personal identity, or,

at the very least, he would have argued for the granting the communitarian view a secondary status in the view of persons” (Matolino, 2014: 111).

As a result of the weaknesses of the classic communitarians, which are different to the ones I have expose in the previous chapter, Matolino provides an alternative view which differs from Gyekye’s moderate and Menkiti’s extreme communitarianism because this alternative asserts that certain individual rights are ought not to be violated, and its view of community differs from that of most communitarians (2014: 160). To provide the platform for his limited communitarianism, Matolino offers a few reasons why the metaphysical view of persons should be taken seriously. He claims, firstly, that it is true. According to Matolino, it is a brute fact that there are attributes inherent to individuals but which are independent of the community. These attributes, he continues, are thought to hold for all individuals and are responsible for how individuals operate in the world. This, in my view, is simply our human being-ness. The second reason he gives in support of the metaphysical view is that “it is free of serious incoherencies and alarming contradictions that besiege both radical and moderate communitarianism” (2014: 162-163), and thus, and this is the third reason, the metaphysical view is easy to comprehend as it seeks to explain features whose existence is easily observable. In fact, for Matolino, such simplicity avoids any mystification of African, which then, fourthly, makes this view uncontroversial. That is to say that it does not profess to depict the African difference. The penultimate reason Matolino gives to take the metaphysical view seriously is that it is not dependent on the clarity of other assumptions in order to be complete. He says that, “It does not rely on any account of morality or on social organisation or acceptance of certain [other] factors as necessary to the construal of personhood” (Matolino, 2014: 164). Finally, Matolino notes that the philosophising involved in the articulation of the metaphysical view is in line with philosophical discourse as it “is stated in strict philosophical categories of identity backed up by philosophical speculation and argumentation in support of stated positions. It addresses strict issues of metaphysics of identity” (2014: 165).

From this, it becomes clear that Matolino views or construes persons to be what the metaphysical view construes them to be. Indeed, he asserts that when it comes to personhood, “primacy must be given to the metaphysical view” (2014: 165). Nevertheless, Matolino does attest to the importance of the community in the life of the metaphysical person. He posits that his version of communitarianism “seeks to develop an account of personal identity that is not necessarily hostile to the reality of the community but also one that is not insensitive to the reality of the individual as a separate entity that retains certain distinct and specific characteristics” (Matolino, 2014: 166). As a result, when it comes to persons, Matolino is of the view that there exists two identities relevant to persons: a metaphysical identity as articulated by the metaphysical conception of persons; and a social identity in whose construction the community is involved. The former identity – the metaphysical identity – which Matolino refers to as the governance or possession theory, “holds that if any human being possesses the key attributes of, for example, thought, body, and an entity responsible for life [...] she is a person” (*ibid*). The social or communal identity can be viewed from three conceptions of what a community can be. The first is where the community is construed as a social structure which functions in a way which seeks to preserve itself for as long as possible. Thus, individuals are expected to conform to social norms in order to ensure the maintenance and development of this community, and if she conforms to these expectations, then she is regarded as a person. To quote Matolino at length, he says:

From this view we must understand personhood as a social function that has a certain definition and is restricted to the social expectations, which proceed from social structures, of how persons are supposed to behave [...] If persons want to be social entities they must stick to these social expectations in order to be allowed in the opera of sociality [...] It does not mean that ontologically such good social players count for more than the bad players. It really articulates the social success of these persons as opposed to any fundamental ontological constitution. We would all understand that being a good social actor which is called a good person is quite not the same as ontological count. So this perspective is essentially about how social structures perceive the function of persons to be within the greater view of social function (2014: 168).

This, then, is what would inform a person's social identity. The second way to understand social identity is through the lens of the individual and how she views herself and her role in her community. If she understands her role as being one of obligation towards her community, then she will conform; but she is also free not to take such membership in her society seriously. Matolino claims that "If she chooses to take that membership seriously she will then seek to do those things that put her in a good standing in society [and] in doing all of this we expect that she has fully understood that she is a social player who is abiding by certain rules and those rules have a specific meaning for her" (2014: 169). As a result, she will behave in a manner that would be affirmed by other members of society, which will, in turn, inform how she views herself. This view of herself, her self-identity, is what Matolino argues be limited to a social identity as a role player in society, as opposed to viewing this identity as ontologically constitutive of her as a person. The final sense of social identity, for Matolino, combines the previous two senses of social identity where the community as a social structure imposes certain obligations on the individual, and the individual aligns herself with such expectations. However, Matolino is of the view that such "mutual recognition" between the individual and the community does not amount to the manifestation of the individual's ontology but rather her social identity. He says that, "Limited communitarianism takes social identity as an identity that is born out of one's reflection as a member of a particular group. Recognising that I am a member of this group gives me a sense of sociality, a sense of social orientation, a sense of who I am in as far as sociality is concerned. Limited communitarianism accepts social identity as long as it does not seek to make any pronouncements on ontology" (Matolino, 2014: 170). Thus, it is more evident from the above that Matolino takes one's social identity to be secondary to one's metaphysical identity, as it is the latter identity through which one attains the status of personhood. Nevertheless, Matolino argues for the importance of one's social identity as a tool for functioning in a certain way akin to communal expectations, as well as in political philosophy (2014: 171).

From the above, it is important to note the philosophical moves made by Matolino in articulating his limited communitarian conception of persons. He firstly argued that

there exists a metaphysical view in African thought as illustrated by the Akan and Yoruba schemes. Such a view articulates the ontological constituents of individuals which belong to the individual. As a result, Matolino advocates for such a view of persons to be taken seriously and not be demoted to secondary status. This is why Matolino argues that persons have a metaphysical identity, as articulated by the metaphysical conception of persons, and also possess a social identity. For Matolino, the metaphysical identity takes priority over the social identity. This means, from my understanding, that all an individual needs to be counted as a person is to meet the requirements of the metaphysical view, which basically means that to be a person, all one needs is to be a human being. However, on Matolino's theory, a person's social identity is also important as it informs how one should operate the features delineated by the metaphysical view, in the social arena. As a result, the community constitutes not an individual's metaphysical identity, but one's social identity by providing structures and relations which give a particular meaning to a person's existence and enables an individual to shape her life goals in accordance to the options provided by the community and how she wants to be viewed. Thus, from this, a person's social identity allows the community to understand what *kind* of person one is; is she a good person or a bad person? Is she selfish or altruistic? A coward or brave? etc. Therefore, a person is made up of a metaphysical and social identity in such a way that when the ontological identity is combined with the communal setup, then it gives rise to one's social identity; in other words, this combination of the community and ontological persons give rise to particular kind of persons. Of this, Matolino claims "in limited communitarianism [...] the person as a social being is a role player. Whatever success or failure she registers in that role is not a mark of personhood but a reflection of her effectiveness or lack thereof at playing the particular social role that she is expected to play. To be an effective role player the individual must understand the rules of the game and she must accept these rules as binding on her and seek to advance her status in the game by continually excelling at the things that make her a good player" (2014: 171). In other words, an individual giving to the poor does not qualify them as a person but rather as a certain kind of person, in a particular social setting – a good person, or a kind person,

or a giving person – in other words, such a role she has performed informs her social identity.

Now from this articulation of how Matolino believes persons ought to be construed, it is evident that his view dodges the first two worries faced by classic communitarians; that of inauthentic moralists and the judgement of personhood, as well as the worry of the possible contradiction in attempting to be both morally excellent while adhering to communal values. This is because, since Matolino's construal of persons does not hand on judging the moral character of individuals in order to count them as persons, there is no difficulty in trying to ascertain who is an authentic or genuine person, and who is not. Since all being a person amounts to is being human, it is easier to judge who counts as a person since it is easy to judge what a human being is. Thus, even if there were inauthentic moralists, such vicissitude in character is irrelevant for the limited communitarian, as these individuals are already persons. Regarding the contradiction in the second difficulty, limited communitarians are unaffected by it because they do not require individuals to be morally excellent through abiding by communal norms in order to qualify as persons. For these neo communitarians, all that is required to qualify as a person is to be a human being; there is no moral requirement nor any other socially mediated requirement, hence why Matolino views the metaphysical conception of persons as "simple to understand" (2014: 163). However, even if the limited communitarians escape these two worried, they still face the difficulty of characterising the relationship between the individual and the community, especially in terms of rights and duties.

Matolino takes the stance that individual rights trump or are prior to duties. From my understanding, there are two things which play a crucial role in informing Matolino's stance: the nature of individuality, and the nature of rights. For Matolino, the individual is an entity which comes into existence without the non-trivial aid from the community, and neither does the community force the individual to remain a member; thus, she voluntarily associates herself with that specific community through the exercise of her autonomy. Moreover, Matolino stresses the non-involvement of the community in the

ontological make-up of the individual and asserts that this realisation should count in favour of the metaphysical view. He says, "If my distinction between social and strict identity holds, then we can say the primary determinant of personhood is the metaphysical view as it really seeks to articulate the elements that can be taken as strictly constitutive of persons" (Matolino, 2014: 177). As a result of the distinct nature of the individual metaphysical person, individual rights should carry a level of importance resonant in the metaphysical view of persons. Duties or social rights on the other hand, depend on a number of social factors like culture, the political regime, even geolocation. Moreover, for Matolino, an individual's distinctness can be attributed to how her ontological constituents are bestowed on the individual by God such that they belong only to the individual. Therefore, Matolino adds that, "It is on the basis of this distinctness of the individual person [...] that I suggest that there is reason to think that a person is an entity that has certain inviolable rights that cannot be trumped over in favour of the community [duties]" (2014: 180). Hence Matolino's argument that:

Community rights [duties] are born as a result of the outcome of negotiations between individuals and the community. Limited communitarianism takes it to be the case that the distinct individuals are ones who make the reality of the community. Through their voluntary association at various levels of sociality, they create the rules that govern not only those relations but the reality of everything communitarian. While it is true that every individual comes into a community that already exists and sees herself as embedded in the reality of that community, as I have argued above, her own ontological reality is prior to the communal reality. If we take each individual's reality as prior to that of the community then there is no precedent communal reality to talk of. For communal reality to take root there must have been different accounts of individual reality that converge into a particular convention that is called community (2014: 183-184).

Thus, from my view, it seems Matolino is claiming that duties take a secondary role to the individual's rights because the former, as Wiredu (2008) postulates, are given rise to by the interaction between the individuals and their socio-political conditions. In other words, duties arise because of the conditions created by individuals, whereas individual rights pertain to individuals themselves.

4.3 Is Limited Communitarianism communitarian?

Naturally, for holding such a position regarding the individual/community relation which favours the individual when it comes to a clash between rights and duties, Matolino faces stern criticisms. Oyowe (2015) argues that Matolino's preference of the individual over the community begs the question of what makes limited communitarianism a communitarian theory of persons. Oyowe is of the view that:

The challenge becomes pressing once it is seen that his view appears to be more at home in the liberal, or shall we say individualist, tradition as what is claimed here, and the metaphysical and normative status Matolino assigns to community in relation to the individual is very much consistent with many liberal theorists' stance on the matter. To put it differently, if personhood is, unlike the conceptions Matolino rejects, to be characterised independently of community, and there is a secondary normative status for community in his scheme, perhaps, then, the choice of describing it as a form of communitarianism is misleading. Why cling to the communitarian designation in spite of the obvious liberal commitments about the status of the individual and the secondary normative place of community? (2015: 514)

I am of the view that as it stands, Oyowe's charge is unsubstantiated and hence unwarranted. Firstly, it is not clear what the liberal or individualist tradition to which Oyowe is referring actually amounts to. Moreover, as Gyekye (1997) points out, it is not the case that there exists societies which are completely communitarian or fully individualistic; both kinds of societies share resemblances, and the difference is a matter of degree. Thus, Oyowe needs to provide reasons as to how exactly Matolino's stance leans more towards the liberal traditions as opposed to the communal tradition. To assert the preference of the individual over the community when it comes to *certain* rights is not obviously individualistic, especially if one is fully cognisant of Matolino's tacit claim that these rights are not absolute. Matolino (2014) says that "The rights and freedoms I think due to the individual are only subject to curtailment if they are of a criminal nature seeking to bring unjustified harm to innocent people" (183), which shows that there are instances which make it permissible that the rights of the individual be suspended. As a matter of fact, not only does Oyowe fail to provide his own understanding of the commitments of liberal theories which would warrant his assertion that limited

communitarianism is individualistic, but Oyowe does not provide his own understanding of the communitarian thesis which would be juxtaposed against Matolino's position, thus proving Oyowe's charge. Therefore, it seems as if at present, Oyowe's charge that limited communitarianism is individualistic as opposed to being communitarian is unsubstantiated, and hence unwarranted without further argumentation.

Irrespective of this, even if more arguments are provided, I would still not be convinced of the charge that Matolino's theory is not communitarian. This is because such a charge, from my understanding, hinges mostly on what communitarianism in African thought amounts to. If we take Wiredu (2008; 2009) seriously, then as I argued earlier, African communalism takes the maintenance of good social relations very seriously, as was the case in traditional African societies. For Wiredu, "This [communalism in Africa] is a kind of social formation in which kinship relations are of the last consequence" (2009: 15). Furthermore, Wiredu claims that social relations give rise to rights and obligations which are reciprocal. This is not hard to imagine. For example, the Enlightenment philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, argues in his *Discourse Upon the Origin and the Foundation of the Inequality among Mankind* (1754), that in the state of nature, man would cooperate primarily for the fulfilment of his physical needs; the need to eat gave rise to individuals coming together to work hand-in-hand for the satisfaction of these needs. As a result of the cooperation these needs engendered, there arise duties and rights. For example, when eight people decided to get together to hunt down a wild boar, each was given a responsibility in the hunt; maybe four were given the duty of distracting the beast, while the others had the duty of killing it. In addition to these duties, rights may have also been distributed – for example, of the four in charge of doing the killing, the one who sticks the knife in the heart and deals the animal the final blow, may be given the right to take the first bite, and so forth. Therefore, from needs arise communities (social relations) and from these relations arise rights and duties. Thus, to take seriously the preservation of social relations is to take seriously the reciprocation of the rights and duties which arise from these relations. The final value I take Wiredu to be asserting as a precept of African communalism is the pursuit of the interests of the community (2009:

15-16). This value need not be taken as very complex. For example, in modern day societies, education can be regarded as an interest of the community (this is not to say that in traditional communities, education was of no interest) since communities seek for their members to be educated to such an extent that structures and institutions have been set up to facilitate the provision of education. Thus, someone who acts in a way which seeks to promote education can be seen to be in pursuit of the interests of the community. Therefore, although these are not exhaustive of all communal values, I take them to be the precepts around which all other values communitarians take seriously are conceived. Thus, from my understanding, what it is, at minimum, to be communitarian in African thought is to live according to the values of maintaining good social relations, reciprocating rights and duties, and pursuing the interests of others. Hence why Wiredu claims that from these precepts, “the corresponding conception of a person would be of a morally sound adult who has demonstrated in practice a sense of responsibility to household, lineage and society at large” (2009: 16).

From the above, it is not clear how Matolino’s stance opposes communalism in any way; instead, it seems this is the kind of person Matolino would assert is a limited communitarian, as alignment to these communal precepts is captured by one’s social identity. In as much as Matolino views the metaphysical identity as prior to one’s social identity, Matolino explicitly states that the latter identity is constructed by the community. He claims, “The communitarian view would be the determinant of social identity as it articulates the social and communal views of what a person is. From such a characterisation, then maybe, we could move to a holistic account of what a person is” (Matolino, 2014: 177). This holistic account Matolino urges is, in my view, very important in how persons should be understood. Identifying *what* a person is seems not to be enough; to understand persons fully also involves identifying what *kind* of a person one is, and to conflate the two would be to commit a category mistake. It seems to me that a more attractive and coherent construal of the communitarian thesis, even in the normative arena alone, is to view this theory as providing principles which delineate a specific kind of person; a communitarian person. This understanding gives new meaning

to the phrase “a person is defined by the community”. This phrase can be interpreted as saying that the community provides specifications as to the kind of person one is or can become. This is similar to the claim that a car, a Jeep, is defined by its engine; the latter provides specifications (V6, 3.2 litres, turbo charged) of the Jeep; the engine allows us to know, out of the many Jeeps out there, the kind this specific one belongs to. Therefore, in light of the above, it seems apparent that one’s social identity provides others with knowledge of the kind of person one is. Moreover, limited communitarianism requires one to align one’s social identity with the communal precepts articulated above, thus providing an instance of a specific kind of person, a communitarian person. Therefore, it appears that the charge of limited communitarianism being kindred mostly with the liberal tradition because of simply favouring the metaphysical identity in the distinction between this identity and one’s social identity, is unfounded. In fact, I postulate that this distinction was very much at work in traditional Africa. This is evinced by the fact that Gyekye (1997) and Wiredu (2008) point out that in the Akan language, the word for a person, *Onipa*, refers to both a human being, or one’s metaphysical identity, and it also refers to a specific kind of human being – one “of a certain moral and social standing” (Wiredu, 2008: 16) – in other words, it also refers to one’s social identity.

The opponent of limited communitarianism may insist and claim that it is not clear how the social identity of an individual is meant to capture the above-mentioned precepts on which the communitarian dispensation is built. She might say that it seems as though proffering the metaphysical as prior to one’s social identity means that through one’s metaphysical autonomy, one can choose not to promote the maintenance of good social relations, and also choose not to pursue the interests of other members of the community. While for the classic communitarians, the objective of becoming a person is what ensures individuals are good towards each other, how does the limited communitarian guarantee that she does in fact abide by the “rules of the game?” In other words, how does she ensure that she adheres to communal precepts? A way to answer this concern is by firstly pointing out that one’s metaphysical identity is prior when it comes to issues of personhood – a person is identified through their metaphysical identity

such that in virtue of this identity, or by virtue of being human, one is a person. However, when it comes to how persons relate to each other, then those are matters which rely on the social structure one finds oneself in, hence one's social identity will come into operation. What needs to be understood is that the metaphysical and social identities of a single person work hand-in-hand in order to facilitate how one is to play her role in society; their existence is contemporaneous. To clarify how this contemporaneity works, the limited communitarian understands that through one's metaphysical identity, one possesses dignity. In other words, since a person just is a human being, by virtue of being human, an individual is an entity with dignity. Furthermore, since this dignity rests on one's metaphysical constituents or one's human being-ness, i.e. this possession of dignity has nothing to do with one's social standing, the limited communitarian realises that all members of the community, and humanity, possess dignity. As a result of this realisation, the limited communitarian treats others with dignity since all others are persons. Thus, in as much as the seat of dignity is one's metaphysical identity, it is in the social arena, through one's social identity that an individual realises that she is confined in a social structure where it is a good thing to respect others and treat them with dignity. That is to say, that one confers the status of personhood, and hence of dignity, upon another because of the other's metaphysical identity. Following this recognition of the other, one then aligns her social identity with what she recognises in the other, and then follows to treat the other as deserving of dignity, and hence the limited communitarian maintains good social relations.

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to defend limited communitarianism. In articulating his limited communitarian theory of persons, Matolino (2014) argues that persons are constituted of metaphysical and social identities. The former identity pertains to the metaphysical constituents of individuals which qualify them as persons. The latter identity pertains to how a metaphysical person operates (or ought to operate) in the social arena. For Matolino, since the status of personhood is conferred upon an individual because of

their metaphysical identity, it is this identity which is prior to the social identity of a person. However, as Matolino (2014) argues, this does not render one's social identity any less important. Since this social identity is a function of the social structure and the options it makes available for the individual, it is through this identity that an individual is known as a certain kind of person. If one shapes one's social identity to be aligned with giving to the needy, then one will be reckoned by one's compatriots, as a giving person, or a kind person, or a good person. Thus, for Matolino's limited communitarianism, one is defined as a person by one's metaphysical identity, and the kind of person one is depends on one's social identity. As a result of this demarcation, I have argued that limited communitarianism does not face the 'inauthentic moralist' difficulty as to be a person is not determined by an individual's moral behaviour. Furthermore, this view of persons also escapes the difficulty of being open to incoherencies between committing to moral excellence and communal values, because it does not require individuals to be morally excellent through adherence to communal values in order to be persons. Finally, in order to address the imbalance posited by the classic communitarians in their characterisation of the individual/community relationship, the limited communitarian thesis posits that certain individual rights are not to be violated by the community. This is because individual rights belong to the basic ontological constitutive elements of a person independently of this person's interaction with others, whereas, communal rights are given rights to by this interaction. Thus, for Matolino, the relationship between rights and duties is reciprocal with certain individual rights inviolable unless their possessor has committed a crime against another innocent individual. As a result of Matolino's characterisation, Oyowe (2015) charges Matolino's view as belonging more to the liberal or individualist tradition than in the communitarian tradition. However, I have argued that Oyowe's concerns are not warranted as he has not argued for his charge. Oyowe (2015) has provided neither his understanding of the liberal tradition, nor his view of the communitarian notion, thus his charge seems to have no non-trivial basis. Nevertheless, I have also argued that limited communitarianism is consistent with what Wiredu (2009) views the communitarian ethic to amount to. This is why I am of the view that Oyowe's

charge to be unwarranted. Moreover, from all the above, it seems as though limited communitarianism is a defensible communitarian theory of persons.

Chapter 5

General Conclusion and summary

In conclusion, this paper has sought to defend the limited conception of the communitarian view of persons. The first chapter explicated the different African conceptions of persons and showed that the best taxonomy is one which demarcates between the metaphysical and normative conceptions of persons. Kaphagawani is the first to attempt such an exposition of these conceptions. For him, there are three conceptions regarding personhood. The first one which he attributes to Placide Tempels is the Force thesis; the second is the Shadow thesis which Kaphagawani ascribes to Alexis Kagame; and the third one is the Communal thesis which Kaphagawani posits as fathered by John Mbiti. The second attempt to elucidate on the different conceptions is by Ikuenobe (2006) who demarcates between the descriptive metaphysical, and the normative conceptions. According to Ikuenobe, the former conception refers to those features which are intrinsic to individuals ontologically. The latter conception, for Ikuenobe, requires individuals to abide by communal standards in order to be recognised as persons. All these expositions are criticised by Matolino as lacking adequate analysis, and hence in error. Regarding Kaphagawani, Matolino (2014) argues that the force thesis should be treated as the communal thesis since the vital force Tempels speaks about is dynamic, and is realised in the social arena, and hence is more attuned with the communal thesis. Matolino also argues that the shadow thesis is best referred to as the metaphysical thesis since the constituents Kagame refers to exist independently of the community and belong to the individual. Matolino (2014) then takes issue with Ikuenobe's taxonomy as the former is of the view that to call the metaphysical conception 'descriptive' is misleading as it makes it seem as though this conception is less important than the normative view. As a result of all these concerns, Matolino (2014) provides the third attempt at naming the different conceptions of persons in Africa as the metaphysical conception and the communitarian conception. However, Oyowe (2015) seems not to agree with Matolino's taxonomy as it makes it seem as if the two views are mutually

exclusive such that communitarians cannot make metaphysical assertions regarding the constitution of a person.

But if read closely, as this chapter argued, the reason for Matolino's demarcation is that he charges the communitarians of committing a category mistake when talking about the metaphysical constitution of a person. Matolino (2014) argues that when it comes to issues of strict ontological identity regarding persons, any talk of the community, or morality, constituting persons would be to assign to an entity properties it could not have. Oyowe (2015) opposes this, and claims that it does not seem that the communitarian is guilty of any category mistake, in any of its formulations. Oyowe is of the view that sociality and morality are properties that a person *could* have. Moreover, Oyowe believes that persons belong to both the metaphysical and the socio-moral category, and to locate persons in both categories is not to commit a category mistake. However, I argued that the position advocated for by Matolino is defensible by showing that if Matolino is read as arguing that communality and morality are not *ontological* features of human beings but are features which require the existence of some prior entity, then it becomes apparent how communitarians commit a category mistake. This is because they attempt to locate in the metaphysical category, characteristics of persons which belong in the socio-moral category. Thus, with this in mind, any talk of the community being constitutive of individuals must be outside the metaphysical arena, but rather in the normative arena.

In the second chapter, I sought to show the commencement of the debate within the communitarian conception of persons, and how it is still prevalent in current discussions. Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984) articulated a view which posits that a person is defined in terms of the community. He claims that the individual is nothing but a mere dangler without a community, as the latter develops the former's metaphysical capacities. As a result of the role the community plays in the composition of the individual, Menkiti claims that it is the community which takes priority over the individual, meaning that community rights trump individual rights. Gyekye (1997) confronts Menkiti for over-exaggerating the role of the community, and rendering individuality subaltern to the community. Gyekye

argues that the community itself is comprised of individuals who are autonomous, and hence are able to come up with revolutionary ideas that can benefit the community. As a result of this independence, Gyekye (1997) argues that individuals should have their rights recognised by the community. As a result of Menkiti's advocacy for the abrogation of individual rights, Gyekye dubs him a radical communitarian while referring to himself as a moderate communitarian; and so, the debate as to how to characterise the relationship between the individual and the community begins.

However, Gyekye has not been without his critics. Molefe (2016) argues that Gyekye is not warranted to call Menkiti a radical communitarian since talk of the existence of rights in the African context has not been adequately argued for. Molefe (2016) claims that it is plausible for a society to have obligations based on duties as opposed to rights, so if Menkiti had this line of thinking when he ranked rights as secondary to duties, it is not clear why he should be deemed a radical communitarian for advocating a duties-based morality. Famakinwa (2010) also criticises Gyekye that the mere recognition of the individual's rights is consistent with radical communitarianism, making it unclear where the real distinction lies between the so-called radicals, and moderates. Oyowe (2013) also brings to light that Gyekye's offering the recognition of the individual as having equal status as the community, as a solution to the debate, merely restates the problem than resolve it. The reason is that the problem exists because there is recognition of the equal status of both the individual and community. In other words, it is because the individual is autonomous, has dignity and rights, that the community seems unfair to trump her rights in virtue of the community playing a critical role in the development of this individual. Thus, to propose equal recognition of both these constituents of society is to restate the problem. However, Gyekye's biggest weakness, as exposed by Matolino (2009), is that Gyekye ultimately commits to the same side of the debate as the radicals when he supports the violation of individual rights in order for the community to preserve its integrity, if the need arises. As a result, it seems as though seeking a balance between these is harder than Gyekye once thought, and it leaves open the debate on the appropriate characterisation of the individual/community relation.

The third chapter sought to provide an analysis of what the communitarian conception of persons in the normative arena amounted to, and also sought to show how unattractive this conception is, and how it is open to some incoherencies. For Ikuenobe (2006) and Wiredu (2008), to be a person in the communitarian scheme just is to be morally excellent, and the way to achieve this moral excellence is through the adherence to communal precepts of maintaining good social relations; reciprocating duties or rights, or both; and the value of pursuing the interest of others. Thus, as Tshivhase (2013) points out, the nature of personhood is moral excellence, and the means of acquiring this personhood or excellence is through allegiance to communal values. In this chapter I argued that if this the communitarian conception of persons is as articulated above, then there are some difficulties in conceiving of persons in this way. Firstly, requiring individuals to exude moral character in order to earn the status of personhood leaves open the existence of inauthentic moralists. Oyowe (2017) views these ingenuine moralists as individuals whose behaviour is in line with the required communal values, but their attitude is in opposition to these values – thus rendering their compliance with them not genuine. As a result of these inauthentic moralists, judging with a large degree of accuracy who counts as a genuine person, becomes ever more difficult. A second difficulty for this conception of persons is that requiring moral excellence through adherence to communal values seems to be incoherent. This is because it is possible for communal values to conflict with strict, immutable, moral values, a distinction provided by Wiredu (2008, 2009), such that to be morally excellent, an individual may be required to, on the one hand, abide by the strict moral principle of gender equality while on the other hand, being required to practice the exclusion of females and homosexual people in familial succession, of which the latter may be a communal value. Thus, it seems that the communitarian person viewed in this light has some internal conflicts, which makes this theory unattractive as it is. Finally, an issue with this conception is that it is committed to communal rights being prior to individual rights, thus supporting a skew in the individual/community relation. As a result of the unattractiveness of this theory, there

are neo-communitarians who seek for balance, or favour individual rights, as we shall see with the limited communitarians.

The fourth chapter sought to defend a neo communitarian view of persons called limited communitarianism. In articulating his limited communitarian theory of persons, Matolino (2014) argues that persons are constituted of metaphysical and social identities. The former identity pertains to the metaphysical constituents of individuals which qualify them as persons, while the latter identity pertains to how a metaphysical person operates (or ought to operate) in the social arena. For Matolino, since the status of personhood is conferred upon an individual because of their metaphysical identity, it is this identity which is prior to the social identity of a person. This does not, however, render one's social identity any less important. This is because it is through one's social identity that an individual is known as a certain kind of person. Thus, for Matolino's limited communitarianism, one is defined as a person by one's metaphysical identity, and the kind of person one is depends on one's social identity. As a result of this demarcation, I have argued that limited communitarianism escapes both the 'inauthentic moralist' challenge, as well as the difficulty of being open to incoherencies between committing to moral excellence and communal values. The reason is that limited communitarianism does not require individuals to be morally excellent through adherence to communal values, in order to be persons. Finally, to address the imbalance posited by the classic communitarians in their characterisation of the individual/community relationship, the limited communitarian thesis posits that certain individual rights are not to be violated by the community. This is because individual rights belong to the basic ontological constitutive elements of a person independently of this person's interaction with others, whereas, communal rights are given rise to by this interaction. Thus, for Matolino, the relationship between rights and duties is reciprocal with certain individual rights inviolable. However, Oyowe (2015) charges Matolino's view as belonging more to the liberal or individualist tradition than in the communitarian tradition. In response to this charge, I have argued that Oyowe's concerns are not warranted as he has not argued for his accusation. Oyowe has provided neither his understanding of the liberal tradition, nor

his view of the communitarian notion, thus his charge seems to have no non-trivial basis. Nevertheless, I have also argued that limited communitarianism is consistent with what Wiredu (2009) views the communitarian ethic to amount to, thus showing Oyowe's charge to be unwarranted. Finally, from all the above, it seems as though limited communitarianism is a defensible communitarian theory of persons.

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