Moderate Communitarianism: A Conceptual Interpretation

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Abstract

Kwame Gyekye's moderate communitarianism is considered a defence of individual rights and the equal worth of rights and duties in Afro-communitarianism. It concerns the primary status of rights and duties in modern African thought. However, moderate communitarianism has been received with strong reactions, one of which is the supposed serious consideration it gives to duties and community in the final analysis of its argument regarding the conception of personhood and the relationship between the self and its community. Criticism of moderate communitarianism is about its inability to capture the rights of individuals that is bold in its demand for primary status in the Afro-communitarian political thought dominated by the supremacy of communal duties—a stance that triggered its emergence. Nonetheless, I argue that a reading of moderate communitarianism demonstrates that its criticism is mainly due to some unclarity in Gyekye's analysis and that, contrary to existing defence, moderate communitarianism, as an account of moderate persons and moderate communities, is not a description of what exists in Afro-communitarianism but a designed framework for modern Afro-communitarianism in a way that redefines the communitarian nature of African thought. Interpreting moderate communitarianism as suggesting a direction for Afro-communitarianism would be essential for a meaningful engagement with it.

Keywords: Gyekye; moderate communitarianism; individual rights; communal duties; Afro-communitarianism.

Introduction

Moderate communitarianism is an African political theory under intense interrogation for its stance on the equal worth of rights and duties in Afro-communitarianism. It

started by laying the foundation for individual rights in Afro-communitarian thought. As a rights theory, it responds to Ifeanyi Menkiti's (1984) duty-based view of Afro-communitarianism, which promotes the primacy of duties in social relations ahead of the demand for rights by individuals. Kwame Gyekye (1997) worries that Menkiti's presentation would endanger the individual in society. It will deny the advancement of self-actualisation and the expression of rights, especially in modern African societies characterised by the reality of rights demand (Adeate 2023, 59). Gyekye (1997) labels Menkiti's description of African communitarian thought as radical. To avoid this tension and remedy Menkiti's challenge, Gyekye (1997) notes that a better approach to Afro-communitarianism is possible in what he calls moderate communitarianism, which details the nature of the individual that allows for individual rights and seeks to establish the ground for the equal worth of rights and duties. For moderate communitarianism, rights, as well as duties, occupy primary status in the Afro-communitarian equation. However, moderate communitarianism has been criticised for not being well-defined because it cannot provide a coherent argument for the primary status of rights in Afro-communitarian thought, and Gyekye's submission is not different from Menkiti's, which he criticised (Matolino 2009; Famakinwa 2010a). I argue that criticism of moderate communitarianism is a result of the unclarity in Gyekye's treatment of Menkiti's analysis and the Akan communitarian thought and that the underlying assumption of moderate communitarianism is not to defend the communitarian nature of African thought but to design a conceptual framework which accords equal-worth to rights and duties to serve as a model for modern Afro-communitarianism.

I will first examine the concern of moderate communitarianism and its defence of individual rights through an account of personhood that recognises the unique physio-psychological components of the individuals. In the second section, I look at some objections to moderate communitarianism. I also provide some responses to the objections. In the third section, I demonstrate an understanding of moderate communitarianism by noting its underlying assumption to advocate a new operation of Afro-communitarianism as an idea of social ordering for modern Africa. I identify some critical references in Gyekye's discussion that give meaning to this conception of moderate communitarianism.

The Idea of Moderate Communitarianism

In this section, I discuss Gyekye's moderate communitarianism as an account of the kind of relationship that should exist between the community and the individual as well as rights and duties in Afro-communitarianism. It is a relationship where the community and the individual partially influence the constitution of human personhood.

Moderate communitarianism is a reaction to the primacy of duties over rights in the duty-based account of Afro-communitarianism presented by Menkiti (1984). Menkiti presents a notion of society where duties are not only primary social values but second

to nothing in the scheme of the community and the individual (Menkiti 1984). Menkiti (1984; 2004) affirms the significance of duty to the community in African thought by drawing on its relation to the idea of personhood. Menkiti notes that personhood is not intrinsic to individuals, it has to be attained. Firstly, to achieve personhood, individuals must be incorporated into the community through a system of inculturation and rituals (Menkiti, 1984, 174). Personhood continues Menkiti (1984, 176), "is attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one's stations." This is the second dimension of personhood. This dimension holds the norms and obligations available to the individual to pursue and sustain her personhood in society. It sets the role of the person and her place in society. To act contrary to the norms of the community and the terms of the obligations is to have one's personhood denied. If personhood is seen as desirable, and fulfilling communal obligations is a requirement for personhood, then seeking duty to the community is an essential aspect of individual life. Duty to the community must be sought, and whatever may contradict its pursuit must be avoided and justifiably so. This affirms why Menkiti notes that "in the African understanding, priority is given to the duties which individuals owe to the collectively, and their rights, whatever these may be, are secondary to the exercise of their duties" (Menkiti 1984, 180).

Gyekye (1997) describes Menkiti's (1984, 2004) accounts of personhood as radical and promoting an unrestrictive influence of the community over individuals. Menkiti's conception of the person, in Gyekye's assessment, offers a narrow perception and understanding of self—that is, a perception that only gives credit to the role of community in attaining personhood. Such a notion of personhood, Gyekye notes, has consequences for individual autonomy (Gyekye 1997, 52). Gyekye reacts by presenting his unique account of personhood, informed by the idea of moderate communitarianism. Gyekye's normative account of personhood distinguishes between an individual detached from the community and another individual who is a person that is not detached but partially created by the community. Gyekye's alternative account, which he calls moderate communitarianism, aims to give a more appropriate account of the self that describes the self as both a communal and autonomous being (Gyekye 1997, 59).

The individual has a capacity for certain features such as rationality, choices and will, which Gyekye (1997) sums up as mental features. Gyekye believes "the exercise or application or consideration of these other attributes will whittle down or delimit the 'authoritative' role or function that may be ascribed to, or invested in, the community" (Gyekye 1997, 47). These mental features, Gyekye argues, are not created by the community. They are part of the bio-psychological components of the individual. They are important features in the individual's personhood because they play essential roles alongside the community in the individual's actualisation of the self (Majeed 2017, 37–38). Their presence and functions indicate the place of self-expression and individual autonomy. Gyekye grounds human dignity on the autonomous nature of self and posits that the notion of human dignity in the Afro-communitarian theory of personhood

presumes the existence of individual rights. Since the community acknowledges the existence of human dignity, it should approve of individual rights. He argues:

> individual autonomy – which is acknowledged in communitarian conceptual scheme – must involve recognition of the ontology of rights: indeed, individual autonomy and individual rights persistently appear as conceptual allies. 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 (Gyekye 1997, 62).

Gyekye (1997) posits that the individual is, by nature, a social being. This sociality constitutes the identity of the individual as they co-exist with others. The fulfilment of the community's demands on the individual is essential in attaining personhood in communitarian societies. However, moderate communitarianism does not regard the community as exerting full control in determining the outcome of individual existence (and attainment of personhood) (Gyekye 1997, 52). The partial involvement of the community in personhood is Gyekye's ultimate distinction from Menkiti's radical communitarianism. Gyekye, admitting the obligation of individuals to the community and the primary status of duty, insists that individual rights are as fundamental as the duties to the community. This is the making of Gyekye's equal-worth thesis. In what follows, I examine some of the core concerns with moderate communitarianism identified by scholars such as Bernard Matolino (2009) and Joseph Famakinwa (2010a, 2010b).

Debate on Moderate Communitarianism: Criticisms and Responses

Gyekye's contribution to Afro-communitarianism attracted different reactions and interpretations, forming an interesting dialogue among scholars (Famakinwa 2010a, 2010b; Kalumba 2020; Majeed 2018; Matolino 2009; Molefe 2016; 2017). In this section, I engage in this conversation. I identify some of the criticism levelled against Gyekye by Matolino and Famakinwa. The criticism revolves around the lack of difference between radical and moderate communitarianism and the veracity of the rights recognition claim in moderate communitarianism. I also consider the responses of Motsamai Molefe (2016, 2017), Kibujjo Kalumba (2020) and Hasskei Majeed (2018) to the criticism.

Matolino (2009) disagrees with the supremacy of moderate communitarianism over radical communitarianism because of the former's claim to recognise and accommodate individual rights. Matolino faults the recognition argument. He argues that radical communitarianism—like its moderate counterpart—expresses the need for individual self-expression and implicit recognition of the rights of individuals in its political scheme, both of which are monitored by the structure of the community—a move not alien to the moderate communitarian thesis (see also Eze 2018). Because Gyekye fails to distinguish himself from Menkiti's, commitments on the issue of individual rights

within the communitarian scheme, his communitarian view is interpretably radical like Menkiti's, which he claimed to differ (Matolino 2018a, 103).

While Molefe (2016) agrees with a lack of difference between Menkiti and Gyekye's analysis of rights, he contends that none of the accounts is radical. Molefe's position is a response to Gyekye's classification of Menkiti's view as radical and how Gyekye's critics, such as Matolino, considered the classification valid. To argue that rights have a secondary status in Afro-communitarianism or to affirm the priority of duties over rights like Menkiti and Gyekye, according to Molefe, does not justify the radical label. Elsewhere he notes that a radical position would totally reject rights. Rather than being labelled as radical, accounts that consider rights for a secondary status should be referred to as *partial* or *limited* (Molefe 2017, 196). Molefe posits that Gyekye's reference to Menkiti's view as radical amounts to attacking a straw man, and Matolino's interpretation of Gyekye's account as amounting to a radical stance like Menkiti, suffers the same fate since Gyekye's alternative does not count as radical either (Molefe 2017, 195).

In his assessment of Matolino's refutation of Gyekye, Kalumba (2020) reminds us that Gyekye's concern with Menkiti's conception of personhood is not on whether there is recognition of mental features of the individual but the overshadowing of the same with communal features that define personhood (Kalumba 2020, 141). As a result, the Menkitian conception fails to adequately recognise the individual use of such features for creativity, imagination, and other forms of self-expression. Kalumba adds that Gyekye does not implore the notion of recognition to show the point of the supremacy of moderate communitarianism, but rather to emphasise the prominence of mental features. Matolino (2009), Kalumba argues, misinterprets Gyekye (1997). While Kalumba's argument is persuasive, one might wonder if he did not realise that emphasising the mental features of the individual is a background to an essential component of moderate communitarianism that distinguishes it from radical communitarianism, which represents an alternative approach to personhood in Afro-communitarian thought.

For his part, Famakinwa (2010a) notes that the idea of recognition, as used by Gyekye, does not logically defend his moderate response to Menkiti's radical view. He posits that 'recognition' is a matter of interpretation, one of which is 'recognition as seeing (Famakinwa 2010a, 70). To recognise something is different from having the full knowledge of it or utilising it. Implied in Famakinwa is that having rights is different from utilising them; that is, 'rights-as-being-there' is differentiated from 'rights-as-being-exercised'. The possibility that rights would be given expression begins with the knowledge that an individual possesses such rights and that those rights could be expressed unhindered.

Elsewhere, Famakinwa (2010b) agrees with Gyekye's analysis that at the clash of individual rights and community values, the supremacy of the community stands. These

community values that promote common goods sometimes need to be defended. He illustrates this through an example of when the common good may need to be defended if the expression of an individual's civil and political rights jeopardises the choice of a good candidate in an election (Famakinwa 2010b). This implies that the benefits of having a good representative are far more important than the rights of an individual to decide who to vote for. He adds that a community can have the moral obligation to help an individual in need, even if the help is not an exercise of a legal obligation.

Despite Famakinwa's (2010b) agreement with Gyekye, he has concerns with Gyekye's grounding of the priority of community duties expected of individuals on the notion of interpersonal bonds with others, generated in part by a shared community membership—that is, the idea of honouring an obligation for the sake of being a natural member of a cultural community. He argues that it is not enough for an individual to give up certain rights for duties because of natural membership. Instead, Famakinwa continues, these duties are generally moral bonds between people. It is a standard moral duty to help people in need that is not uniquely set by culture. Famakinwa might be mistaken in his interpretation. Even if these moral duties might be universal, their expectations are set by cultures. While a Yoruba person might be considered morally inept for not relieving an older person of her luggage, irrespective of whether the person needs the help, it may not be morally blameworthy for not doing so in other cultures. This social functioning sets the pace for how we interpret moral obligations. By implication, my choice of granting certain obligations to others might be informed by a shared culture and superimposed by the community.

While Matolino and Famakinwa hold that moderate communitarianism and radical communitarianism have the same radicality, and Molefe corrects that none of the accounts is radical in their portrayal of rights, albeit admitting to a lack of difference between Menkiti and Gyekye's analysis of rights, Majeed (2018) notes that taking moderate and radical communitarianism's treatment of rights as the basis for their sameness is inadequate. Such a claim, he argues, neglects other aspects of moderate communitarianism and does not recognise its broadness (Majeed 2018, 6). Among other things, communitarianism is about the principles of social structure and well-being, and both moderate and radical communitarianism differ in their answers to these issues (Majeed 2018, 14–15). For instance, moderate communitarianism identifies with and proposes a social set-up combining communalistic and individualistic features (Majeed 2018, 6). As such, Majeed questions the restriction of Afro-communitarianism to the clash of rights as narrow and reductive. Majeed's worry is justified. A similar concern can be expressed about how the discourse of personhood has mainly dominated how we engage with communitarianism in contemporary African philosophy, making the

discourse of personhood all we know of Afro-communitarianism (see Adeate 2023, 56).[1]

However, it is arguable that individual agency is not only the most significant discourse in Afro-communitarianism but is the central motivation for moderate communitarianism intervention in the debate of Afro-communitarianism, especially Menkiti's account. This justifies why critics are particular about the issue of individual rights in moderate communitarianism and, of course, in communitarianism generally. The question of individual rights is at the heart of different claims of communitarianism. It speaks to the concerns of the individual in thinking about her personhood, her place in morality and the social set-up of the community, and her understanding of politics in the communitarian context. Given that the issue of rights is the primary claim of the individual that is tensioned when the individual interacts with the community, and community is at the heart of every facet of communitarianism, it is safe to declare that the question of rights is a significant difficulty for the philosophy of Afro-communitarianism, one that is recurrent in its various dimensions.

Majeed (2018) notes that despite the reality of the supremacy of community rights in Akan thought, there are certain clashes of rights that do not favour the community. Examples of such include a conflict between a community's insistence to sacrifice an individual for some mystical protection of its existence and the individual's insistence on her right to live, or a refusal to take up the role of a chief even if tradition demands that one becomes a chief (Majeed 2018, 12). Majeed uses this illustration to demonstrate that in Akan culture, as captured in Gyekye's work, individual rights do not always suffer in the clash between the individual and community, even for the promotion of communal good. It also shows that the community does not have absolute supremacy and allows for some individual rights (Majeed 2018, 14; Majeed 2017). Nonetheless, it looks to me that while individuals may have their rights in some instances expressed, the scarcity of expression of individual rights will abound in such culture. While that does not appear contentious, at least for a society that primes communal supremacy, the danger with being guided by such an understanding of society is not only the number of individual interests and values not allowed in the community but the erosion of the very capacity or power even to express those values and wants, which the individuality of

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1   Here are a few definitions of communitarianism that go the way of personhood. Chimakonam and Awugosi (2020, 41–42) define Afro-communitarianism as "roughly a socio-political and normative theory of personhood that also attempts to give an account of the relationship between the individual and his community from an African epistemic perspective." To Molefe, "personhood is at the heart of Afro-communitarian moral axiological system … and to make moral-theoretical progress in articulating Afro-communitarianism, we need to be clear about different notions of personhood" (Molefe 2018, 217–18). For Oelofsen (2018, 306), Afro-communitarianism is simply a concept that provides a theoretical account of the idea of persons. These various definitions justify what theorists have taken Afro-communitarianism to be and the scope of its discourse; however, they differ on how personhood should be conceptualised.

self guarantees. And the weakening of the capacity to give reasons to be excused from duties since being duty-compliant is an essential feature of personhood in this context.

From the preceding conversation, there seems to be a general acceptance that Gyekye did not make a reasonable turn from Menkiti's presentation on the supremacy of duty to rights in personhood and the conception of social arrangement. I note that the moral primacy of the community thesis and reduction of individual rights to a secondary status cannot be said to be the conclusion of moderate communitarianism and that Gyekye is aware of the lack of equality of rights and duties in Afro-communitarianism, which needs to be fixed by moderate communitarianism.

Moderate Persons and Moderate Community: Understanding Moderate Communitarianism

In this section, I show an interpretation of moderate communitarianism. I demonstrate that moderate communitarianism is an oughtness and not what is. I draw attention to the significance of specific terms in Gyekye's analysis, such as accommodation, ascription and mean, and how they contribute to understanding moderate communitarianism as an attempt at proposing what should be the case rather than what is in Afro-communitarianism.

Some instances in the discussions of moderate communitarianism suggest it is a descriptive account of traditional African communitarianism (Gyekye 1997). There is a claim that its analysis is true of the Akan culture (Majeed 2018, 8). Menkiti's label by Gyekye as describing a radical Afro-communitarianism also gives credence to this fact. Since Gyekye's analysis disagrees with Menkiti's analysis of Afro-communitarianism, it is expected that Gyekye presents an accurate account of Afro-communitarianism— which references traditional African practices and captures individual rights to be as primary as duties.

However, a close look at Gyekye's discussion shows he is persuaded by the intention to amend the accurate account of traditional Afro-communitarianism, which Menkiti's work reasonably describes or represents (Gyekye 1997, 59). It reconstructs the community primacy and the assumed docility and insignificance an individual may become under a socio-political structure resting on such theory promoted in traditional Afro-communitarianism. It proceeds from there to account for the ideal relationship we should expect from the community and individual in modern Afro-communitarian thought, a relationship that supports the individual's claims and the community's normative claims. Moderate communitarianism is an account of what relationship ought to exist between community and individual, and duty and rights instead of a description of the equal stance of community and individual, rights and duties in traditional African thought.

There are two important points and ideas to take from Gyekye, arguably deserving exploration. One is 'recognition', and the other is 'accommodation'. The notion of recognition is one of the major points of criticism of Gyekye's moderate communitarianism (Famakinwa 2010a; Matolino 2009). As against critics, the notion of recognition is passive in Gyekye's analysis. If we have clarity on the mood of Gyekye's thesis, it would be seen that the focus is on the accommodation of rights in Afro-communitarian political theory dominated by duty-based ethics. He notes, "Moderate or restricted communitarianism gives accommodation to communal values as well as to values of individuality, to social commitments as well as to responsibilities to oneself" (Gyekye 1997, 76). Gyekye draws attention to the importance of individuality because of the danger the strict defence of community primacy may pose to the individual in African societies. It is the accommodation and allocation of primary importance to the claims of individuality, like communality in African thought, that are the motivation for moderate communitarianism.

The meaning behind the concept of accommodation finds expression in Gyekye's use of the word ascription. While Gyekye (1997, 61) argues that moderate communitarianism reflects the claims of individuality and communality, he believes the most satisfactory way to recognise their claims is to ascribe to them the status of equal moral standing (Gyekye 1997, 41). The word 'ascribe' in the quote suggests an introduction of something that was never part of a scheme. It is an appreciation of a new idea.

Gyekye, realising that the ideal of individuality is silent in how we think about Afro-communitarianism and that its claims do not contend for the place of primary social value, draws attention to why it is essential to give meaning to it for rethinking Afro-communitarianism. Gyekye makes the defence of individuality a significant aspect of the moderate communitarian theory.

Gyekye stresses the ontological nature of the self to defend the nature of the individuality of persons and why individuality and its manifestations must be accorded adequate consideration, just as we prioritised the demands of the community. He does not doubt the role of community and its values in personhood. He, however, seeks a theory of personhood that has the individual participating in the determination of their personhood and identity, not just identifying their biological components as human beings. Gyekye is perturbed by the concealing of the reality and interest of the individual by the communal structure in the communitarian conception of personhood, despite the truth of the metaphysical capacities inheres in the individual and the autonomous nature of the self. This is why Gyekye (1997, 54–56) disagrees with views that see metaphysical capacities such as autonomy as valuable only within the context of cultural structures that provide options for it. And that acting autonomously requires choosing between morally acceptable options or contributing to the moral good of the community (Ikuenobe 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Raz 1986). Gyekye avers that the range of options made

available by the community cannot be said to be exhaustive of all conceivable options (Gyekye 1997, 57).[2]

Individual input is essential since personhood is understood solely as a defining feature of the individual, not a characteristic of the community or a means of classifying communities. We can understand Gyekye's concern to be that while there exists normative structure, general or objective values for whoever wants to be a person to familiarise and act upon, there would be individual subjective values which would vary from person to person that will be considered essential for the attainment of personhood. Without self-input, and an accommodation of it, pursuing personhood will only be seen as satisfying the interest of the community and not what individuals desire for themselves. It will be seen as an external property that may not benefit the individual who does not see herself in that acquisition. Establishing the point of the individuality of persons in Afro-communitarianism, moderate communitarianism posits to define the self as autonomous (individuality) and communal (communality), with both deserving equal moral standing (Gyekye 1997, 41).

However, ascribing equal worth to a thing is not the same as seeking a balance between them—it is simply saying, in the context of individuality and communality, that both have primary status. It is the arriving at a fair judgment between both phenomena, at a clash, that we can discuss or identify a fair balance. To fulfil that function, Gyekye deployed the concept of moderacy (Gyekye 1997). What Gyekye terms 'moderate' in his Afro-communitarianism could be interpreted as the idea of 'mean' —the middle point where two extremes meet. It is the provision made available to account for the aspects of communality and individuality needed for personhood and to resolve the crisis of a possible clash between claims of individuality and the claims of communality. The principle of dual responsibility explicates the idea of mean as a feature of personhood in moderate communitarianism.

The notion of dual responsibility is what Gyekye refers to as a proposal or imperative that reflects an attempt to respond to the problem of the relationship between the individual and society (Gyekye 1997, 70). Dual responsibility connotes an individual's social responsibility to others and responsibilities to herself. This responsibility, however, ought to rest on the grounds of self-attention. It is the attention to the self, argues Gyekye, that will produce the needed capacity, such as intellectual and economic, necessary to help others and oneself. While one may argue that the idea of self-attention gives the impression that Gyekye charges individuals to prioritise obligations to self before communal obligations, as against the common position that Gyekye champions the cause of the community over the individual, Gyekye's reference

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2   Gyekye is, however, neither against prescribing that individuals ought to use their autonomy to pursue the good (Gyekye 1997, 55) nor imply that the autonomy of the individual has no bounds (Gyekye 1997, 57).

to self-attention is to emphasise the reality and place of individuality in how we think about persons in Afro-communitarianism.[3]

As a communitarian, Gyekye seems to have sympathy for a particular mode of analysis that appreciates liberal values. Gyekye shows commitment to valuing community, its harmony and shared common good, and individual features like freedom and autonomy that are arguably alien or 'silenced' in the Afro-communitarian thought (Adeate 2022, 137–138). Gyekye's interest is to retrieve the relevant parts of traditional African values, such as its ethics of care, alongside the relevant parts of foreign values inherently dominant in the evolving modernity in Africa (Gyekye 1997). The thought of the 'mean' must have informed the title of his *magnum opus*— "Tradition and Modernity". The logic behind it, I argue, is to attempt an analysis and appreciation of the different social ideas—tradition, characterised by social responsibilities or duties, and modernity, characterised by rights that have come to inform the current African experience in the journey of creating modernity on the continent, therefore, defending the reception of the equal status these different sides have on modern life in Africa. Regarding personhood in the context of African modernity, a moderate theory could be interpreted as saying that, rather than emphasising the distinction between the African understanding and the Sartrean Existentialist-Western view like Menkiti (1984, 179), modern Afro-communitarianism must seek a mean between the traditional African understanding that sees personhood as entirely defined by the community (communal structure) and the Western-Individualists view where the individual (individuality) defines the self. This explains why Gyekye sees persons in the moderate communitarian view as a combination of individuality and communality.

Gyekye's moderate communitarianism achieved its aim with the communitarian notion of personhood. It offers a framework of personhood that recognises the realities of modern communities, where the person sees the self as the embodiment of the realities of individuality and communality—where both phenomena meet at an intersection. Consequently, this framework of personhood enables the individual, in the context of social relationships, to have equal responsibility to the interest of others and rights; not occupied by the demand of communal duties and rights but shows care driven by a consciousness of others' needs and maintains the same energy to her individuality and its expressions. Persons, by their constitution, in a moderate communitarian context, are expected, as they conduct their lives, to demonstrate expressions of rights and duties to the community to the extent of giving equal attention and allocating the same status to both.

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3   In addition, Gyekye uses the attention to self to defend individual rights. Gyekye notes, "If self-attention makes sense even in a communitarian context, as I maintain it does, so would the notion of individual rights, which, as a reflexive notion, must be conceptually linked to that of self-interest or, as I prefer to say, self-attention" (1997, 70).

In developing the account of a moderate community, references to the community in Akan thought, ridden with the claim of moral primacy of communal duty over rights, seems to be taken as the conclusion of moderate communitarianism. This is part of the unclarity that appears in Gyekye's analysis. This unclarity is due to a gap of clear distinction between the Akan communitarian thought and moderate communitarianism. The unclarity is part of the reasons for the misinterpretation of moderate communitarianism. I note that claims of moderate communitarianism differ from Akan communitarian thought, with the two fighting for space in Gyekye's discussion.

Gyekye (1997) referenced the Akan thought for a notion of community where individuality could be ascribed and be said to be receptive to the equal-worth thesis.[4] However, Gyekye pursued the Akan conception of community without realising the danger it may pose for his project. He sought a flexible, non-radical community that keeps an individual's uniqueness and self-assertiveness and does not dominate the individual. A community or communitarian society that neither exaggerates its importance on individual persons nor sees itself as wholly involved in the affairs of the individual but will acknowledge and accommodate the manifestations of individuality in persons to flourish. This can be captured in the analogy of the forest. Quoting an Akan proverb, Gyekye likens a community (or clan) to a forest. "The clan is like a cluster of trees which, when seen from afar, appear huddled together, but which would be seen to stand *individually* when closely approached" (Gyekye 1997, 40). Individuals represent the various independent trees that make up the forest, with each tree separately rooted and possessing different identities. Even when their branches touch each other, their individuality is not lost to that sense of natural relationality that exists among them. Gyekye submits that the constitution of the forest and its recognition does not presuppose the primacy of the group over the individual tree (person).

While Gyekye's intention is, the non-primacy of the community, his analogy does not appear to be the best one for it. Social complexities that aid the establishment of rules for social interaction and arrangements among humans do not hold the same in a tree-like community, where the interaction system cannot be measured, or its existence guaranteed. Second, the creation of a forest presupposes a plantation owned by an individual or a group. If it is that artificial, it is planted for a purpose known to the planter(s). It holds a different meaning if the creator of this forest is not known; that is if it presupposes a natural habitation. In that case, its purpose can only be naturally inferred. Third, Gyekye does not show us if the trees are products (seeds) of the same tree or if they are of different species (to demonstrate the existence or non-existence of kinship relations among members of the community or demonstrate the reality of cultural traits). What can be inferred from this narrative is that each tree in the forest is

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4   In developing the idea of moderate communitarianism, Gyekye also draws strength from some African (Akan) experiences, which he believes aid the thesis of a moderate communitarian perspective or theory.

planted independently of others, hence, maintaining a unique existence not tied to 'others'.

Let us take it as the case that human relations share the same fact with tree-like non-human relations. The resistant nature of individual trees against destructive winds and storms is guaranteed by their mutual dependence. It, however, has implications for the exercise of autonomy. Apart from the fact that it is a matter of communal obligation to help one another in such a community and not a demand of rights on others during a storm, there exists among the trees a form of unquestioned uniformity and solidarity, one that implies that individuals cannot be excused from social roles. To that extent, if the understanding of this Akan proverb is valid, it could not have been argued that such accounts of the community do not prioritise the claims of the community over the individual.

To my understanding, Gyekye's vision for a moderate community or moderate communitarian society would follow from the notion of a moderate person. A system of community that does not hold a relationship that recognises the constitutions of moderate persons by allocating the same status or a mean at the clash between communal duties and individual rights will be inconsistent with the nature of moderate communitarianism and how it derived its idea of personhood. A relationship between moderate persons and their moderate community is essential for the actualisation of the equal worth of individual rights and communal duties. Gyekye's (1997, 65–66) submission on the rights of the community being prioritised over the individual in the case of an unavoidable clash is an Akan communitarian thesis and a statement on the Akan community, not one that represents a moderate theory, a moderate view would essentially seek a centrist position.

As soon as he referenced when the common good could trump individual rights, Gyekye quickly reiterated that "the moderate communitarian view suggests that the claims of individuality and community ought to be equally morally acknowledged" (Gyekye 1997, 66). He was convinced not to have betrayed the moderate communitarian code by admitting instances of triumph because he thinks it is "conceivable that individuals in the communitarian society that espouses social morality may not be obsessed with insisting on their rights" (Gyekye 1997, 66). The non-insistence here justifies that such rights could be expressly demanded if the individual wants to. It also shows that a communitarian society may appeal to affected individuals and not use force by referencing cultural standards, that individuals cannot exercise the rights in question. Aware of the danger of sacrificing rights for duties, he argues, "the responsibility an individual has toward the community and its members does not-should not-enjoin her to give over her whole life, as it were, to others and be oblivious of her personal well-being" (Gyekye 1997, 70). Mediating the conflict between the individual good and the common good is the reason behind Gyekye's recommendation of the principle of dual responsibility. He knows it is the best way to account for how moderate persons can navigate between communal interest and individual interest.

The idea of the primacy of duties found in Gyekye's analysis gives the impression that he is promoting Akan communitarianism rather than moderate communitarianism. It is in the discussion of the Akan thought that a return to Menkiti's claim on individual rights is spotted in Gyekye's discussion, which has informed interpretations and attracted critics (Famakinwa 2010a, 2010b; Matolino 2009; Molefe 2016, 2017).[5] A moderate theory (communitarianism) is a claim to seek the mean of two opposites. As such, a moderate community or moderate communitarian society would be one that equally combines the ideals of individuality and communality in its social arrangement. It is the one which Gyekye has in mind to advance.

The proposal to deflate the idea of community in Afro-communitarianism to accommodate individuality and individual rights, as sought by Gyekye, has been dominant in recent conversations on Afro-communitarianism, even among Gyekye's critics (Matolino 2018a). As a response to the question of rights and the intention to reconstruct Afro-communitarianism for better reception, Matolino presents an account of persons contained in what he calls limited communitarianism that shuns the primacy of community (Matolino, 2108a). Matolino (2018b) argues that an idea of personhood that strictly emphasises the metaphysical aspects of the individual, that is, the constitutive elements without being encumbered with normative details of the communitarian community, is the starting point for the notion of self that easily bears rights. Like Gyekye, Matolino must have been perturbed by the physio-psychological aspects of the self, not given the credits it deserves in the criteria that make a person in African thought (Adeate 2023, 54).

Matolino defines a community that can fully accommodate the individual's claims as the "result of the histories of contingencies of human interaction" (Matolino 2018a, 115). According to him, the community should be understood as a creation of individuals to serve their shared needs. It is the product of human choices and will (Matolino 2018a, 112). As a result, community norms are creations of the community's individual members.

In order to safeguard individual rights, both moderate and limited communitarianism pursue the need to limit the influence of the community on human personhood by emphasising the physio-psychological components of the individuals that do not require normative principles for validation. However, Gyekye's moderate community is not as

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5   If we take this claim as that of Akan thought and not moderate communitarianism and as the reason behind the sameness of Gyekye's analysis with Menkiti, then we are unclear how Gyekye wants us to treat his criticism of Menkiti and whether it should be taken seriously. Gyekye's response to Menkiti should have been directed at traditional practices of Afro-communitarianism or traditional African culture rather than giving readers the impression that Menkiti is mistaken in his presentation of African culture. This is important against the background that Gyekye's criticism of Menkiti is the point that has drawn the attention of most critics. This is another aspect of the unclarity in Gyekye's work.

flexible as Matolino's idea of community for the claims of the individual to completely fit into it. The reason is not far-fetched. The thesis of moderate communitarianism is equal worth. It would need to create space for communal responsibilities, like individual rights, to achieve that thesis. This affirms why a moderate person is not obsessed with rights (Gyekye 1997, 66) and, by implication, would not be obsessed with duties either since she is, by nature, a product of a mean.

Gyekye's project, guided by the intention to seek what ought, is more interesting if it is read holistically to see that its attempt at the equality of rights and duties is a commitment to seeking a reconstruction of and go beyond the traditional communitarian thought to the point of neutralising its radical claims that accompany its practice. It is a statement on how we should conceive of communitarian thought in African philosophy. As such, Gyekye's communitarianism could not be seen, as some criticism suggests, as a re-invocation of what traditional African communities were, which is hardly true of modern African communities (Matolino 2018c, 178). While Gyekye's project has attracted criticism because of the lack of distinction between a moderate view of community and the Akan notion of community, a view of moderate communitarianism as a recommendation shows it is neither a description of the traditional communitarian thought and, as such, cannot be assumed to bear its burdens. While Gyekye emphasises individuality as an aspect of personhood and an element of social formation, the 'moderate' in his version of communitarianism demonstrates he is after the equilibrium Afro-communitarianism should have to qualify as a political theory in a modern polity, an equilibrium that also has individuality and communality as essential features of personhood.

Conclusion

I conclude by drawing attention to the following emphasis. Suppose it is reasonable, as I maintain it is, that the claim of moderate communitarianism on duty is not the same as Akan communitarianism. In that case, the criticism of the supremacy of duty in moderate communitarianism becomes fragile and easily refutable. Suppose moderate communitarianism is not Akan communitarianism (an account of traditional African communitarianism). In that case, it has a different commitment from Menkiti's account of communitarianism, which is more concerned with an exposition on traditional African communitarianism that primes duty over rights. As such, moderate communitarianism, as an equal-worth thesis, cannot be said to be an account of traditional Afro-communitarianism. It is an intervention to inscribe what was not part of the system of Afro-communitarianism, thereby serving as a way of thinking about Afro-communitarianism that fits the realities of modern societies.

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