



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Introduction

Müller, L.F.; Bateye, B.; Masaeli, M.; Roothaan, A.

Citation

Müller, L. F. (2024). Introduction. In B. Bateye, M. Masaeli, & A. Roothaan (Eds.), *Well-Being in African Philosophy* (pp. 1-11). Maryland: Lexington Books by Rowman and Littlefield. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3665134>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3665134>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Introduction

Over the past decades, African philosophers have developed their main ideas on well-being in the context of the articulation of a philosophy of personhood. In contrast to many modern Western dualistic metaphysical ideas of the person as a being with attributes, such as the Cartesian material body and spiritual mind, the majority of African philosophers tend to keep a concept of personhood that is holistic and relational.

Philosophers such as John Mbiti, Ifeanyi Menkiti, Segun Gbadegesin, the late Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu have developed their ideas of well-being connected to these communitarian articulations of personhood. A human being is considered to depend greatly on her or his relationship to the community. According to Menkiti and Wiredu, one's personhood is even totally defined by the community, whereas others, such as Gyekye, put more emphasis on the role of the individual in achieving personhood.

In this book, we present the reflections of an established but also a new generation of African philosophers in and outside of the African continent, who give their views on the concept of human well-being in the classical context of personhood and communitarianism but also in the broader field of Intercultural Philosophy and Global Ethics for Development. In the classical communitarian debate in African Philosophy, the main focus is on the question of how the individual African relates to her or his community and the effects of one's relationship with one's community members on one's well-being. The debates within Intercultural Philosophy and Global Development Ethics mainly concentrate on the connection of traditional living communities in contemporary Africa with the outside world.

To connect to Global Ethics, African philosophers have thus shifted their attention from Personhood Studies, which solely focussed on the relationship between the individual and the community, to Intercultural Philosophy. As

we shall see, concepts such as cultural particulars and universals, cosmopolitanism, and anti-centrism have helped to develop African ethics concerning the moral interaction with 'strangers', those outside of one's community or kin group. African philosophers are contemplating new ways to deal with strangers, their ethics and the corresponding development programmes. They believe, however, that it is high time that development workers think about more inclusive ways to connect to all those Africans who live in communities in their rural villages or urban neighbourhoods. African sustainable development can surely become more inclusive, as many of the authors in this book have stressed, when development programmes are more embedded in the *ethos* of African cultures.

With regards to Global Ethics, we would like to remark that instead of measuring development only along lines of justice and economic growth, as is mainstream in this field, the authors have shared their thoughts on how African relational conceptions of well-being rooted in communitarian cultures can be used to build a new critical concept of development that may transform Global Ethics from an African perspective. A genuine Global Ethics can only be developed as the result of two-way traffic. In practice, this means that the developing world should listen to the voices of the new generation of African philosophers as articulated in this book. Development workers, policymakers and ethicists are invited to familiarise themselves with the thought of these African philosophers. Many of them have created a new intercultural understanding of their social and moral realities based on dialogue and exchange with Western philosophers. The insights of these African philosophers are valuable for creating new, more intercultural-oriented development programmes. Hence, for African philosophers, Global Ethics should include local communitarian African norms and values (*ethic*, in Wiredu's terms) to repair their longstanding and current marginalisation in this field of study. Therefore, this book will focus on and aim to gain more insight into how African *ethic* in the plural should be made part of Global Ethics for the development of African communities and the enhancement of the well-being of humanity as a whole.

The book is divided into three parts, comprising twelve chapters by authors from ten different countries, the majority of which are to be found on the African continent: Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Cameroon, Uganda, South Africa, Canada, the United States, The Netherlands and Israel. The authors and editors come from various fields of philosophy and Religious Studies including Applied Ethics, African spirituality and oral wisdom traditions, the Philosophy of Mind and various sub-fields of African Philosophy that span Francophone and Anglophone philosophical traditions. Included are also insights from the fields of African Indigenous Religions and the study of Christianity and Islam.

The editors, who live and work in three different continents, Africa, North America and Europe, are all interdisciplinary scholars. They have facilitated the intercultural dialogue between the authors of this book and the creative exchange of their philosophical ideas. They did so by organising several rounds of feedback and providing editorial suggestions to the authors' written contributions. This book is thus the collaborative result of African Intercultural Philosophy in practice, as the editors centralised the collaboration with and communication between the contributors.

Part I, 'Conceptions of Well-Being in African(a) Intercultural Philosophy', consists of four chapters. In this part, we discuss the philosophical conceptualisation of human well-being by African philosophers in the context of personhood and African(a) Intercultural Philosophy. We also focus on the contribution of these conceptualisations to the construction of a Global Ethics for Development.

In chapter 1, Louise Müller presents all the debates on well-being and global development in this book, such as the Mbiti-Menkiti classical communitarian debate in African Philosophy. She refers to all the other authors in this edited volume for further reading on specific contributions to these debates. She also concentrates on the philosophical contributions of three well-known Akan philosophers to the conceptualisation of human well-being to increase insights into the Global Ethics of Development. These philosophers are the late Kwasi Wiredu (1931–2022), the late Kwame Gyekye (1939–2019) and Kwame Anthony Appiah (1954–). The chapter kicks off with these Akan philosophers' (implied) contributions to the mentioned 'classical communitarian debate', which focuses on the tension between the at times conflicting interests between the individual and her or his community in modern Africa. The debaters have concentrated on the definition of personhood and the extent to which a person is defined by her or his community. They have also argued about either the 'noumenal' or 'processual' notion of African personhood. The chapter then focuses on how these philosophers broadened their horizons and developed an ethics that goes beyond the notion of personhood and the boundaries of their cultural group by borrowing from the field of Intercultural Philosophy. Finally, it concentrates on the conceptualisation of human well-being by the three Akan philosophers in the context of Intercultural Philosophy. Gyekye, Wiredu and Appiah have contributed significantly to African(a) Intercultural Philosophy and have created constructive openings for other scholars to further develop the field and gain insights into Ethics of Global Development for a Global Ethics of Development. By connecting African cultural values to Global Ethics, they developed intercultural African philosophies for more inclusive development of Africa. The chapter is, above all, an introduction to the debates in this edited volume and shows how the authors in the remaining eleven chapters are positioned within them.

In chapter 2, Nimrod Kahn explains why we do not have to be afraid that communitarianism is a totalitarian ethic. By focusing on the Ghanaian Akan people's ethics, he makes the point that communitarianism might seem like totalitarian ethics because of the large impact of community norms and values on the lives of individuals within a community. He then shows how Akan proverbs and maxims, as part of the Akan people's oral tradition, introduce flexibility in speech and how the art of indirect communication prevents their communal ethics to develop as totalitarian. The Akan people's high context culture requires them to be creative with language and to adjust the interpretations of their maxims and proverbs to continuously changing social situations. Their oral art creates space for individual freedom within the boundaries of their communal ethics. Thus, indirectness in Akan communication and the hermeneutics of Akan ethics operate as a protective mechanism against the development of tyrannical or, as Akan philosopher Gyekye put it, 'radical communitarianism'. As a practical philosophy, Akan ethics thus aspires to attain human well-being by creating room for interpretation through the method of indirect communication. Kahn's chapter refers to Gyekye's criticism of Menkiti, whom Gyekye designated as a 'radical communitarian' in the classical communitarian debate.

In chapter 3, the intercultural African philosopher Pius Mosima elaborates on the communitarian debate in African Philosophy after concentrating on the way the philosophers involved connect to the earlier developed ideas of Western intercultural dialogical-oriented philosophers, such as Martin Buber, who focused on the mutuality in the relationship between I and Thou. He then stresses that the concept of well-being is closely linked to that of personhood. His main focus is on *being-in-community* and he explains that among the Bakweri to whom he belongs and among other cultural groups, the idea of personhood is mainly relational. Mosima explains that personhood in traditional African communities is attained by living well together with others. Cultural features and rituals, which celebrate people's togetherness and their participation in community life, are therefore essential to personhood, and being or becoming a person is central to one's well-being. In these social settings, being a person expands the minimum definition of being human and implies *being-with-and-for-others* in the household, family and community. Mosima stresses that in Africa, one cannot achieve personhood without interacting with others and fulfilling one's social obligations towards them. He aims to enhance understanding of the concept of personhood in African Philosophy by researching the contributions of several renowned philosophers, including the forefathers John Mbiti and Ifeanyi Menkiti, but also the contemporary South-African based philosophers Magobe Ramose and Thaddeus Metz. Furthermore, Mosima shows that in African philosophical debates, personhood and well-being are also discussed in the context of African political

philos
based
these
concl
tarian
preser
life, g
alistic
comm
philos
human

Cha
cultur
Igbo,
Ghana
of per
essenc
capac
that s
theory
the co
and C
percep
person
ferent
(the p
others
flouris

Par
this p
the de
ethnic
in trac
the sig
the co
well-b
addres
being

In c
of per
society
tional

philosophy, such as in Nkrumah's 'communalism', Senghor's 'community-based society' and Nyerere's 'Ujamaa'. Considering the contributions of all these of his African predecessors and also some Western scholars, Mosima concludes that, despite these philosophers' criticism of (radical) communitarianism, the community is nevertheless of the utmost importance for the preservation of traditional norms and values, which are associated with long life, good health and happiness. The author, therefore, rejects more individualistic notions of well-being in African Philosophy and proposes that African communal traditional values should become an integral and fair part of the philosophy of Global Ethics for Development to enrich this ethics with more humane, other-related feelings than just economic production and growth.

Chapter 4 examines personhood in the context of the traditional African cultures of various cultural groups in West Africa: those of the Tiv, the Igbo, the Yoruba, the Ebira, the Bini in Nigeria and the Tallensi and Akan in Ghana. The author, Alloy Ihuah, examines four approaches to the concept of personhood: the *inherent theory*, which concentrates on the unique inner essence of the person; the *capacity-based theory*, which posits that the human capacity to *think* and *reason* logically defines personhood; the *somatic theory* that signposts a materialist interpretation of personhood; and the *communal theory*, which holds that personhood is relationship-based. Ihuah believes that the *communal theory*, which is prevalent in Africa, both in Menkiti's radical and Gyekye's moderate communitarian forms, exaggerates the communal perception of personhood in Africa. Ihuah concludes that 'For Africans, a person is a person because of his/her intrinsic values that make him/her different from any other *being*. There cannot be a community without the self (the person), hence it is the goods and skills that the individual brings to the others in the community that contribute to the communal harmony and human flourishing.'

Part II, 'Well-Being in African Contexts', consists of four chapters. In this part, the authors have contextualised the conceptions of well-being and the debates on communitarianism dealt with in the first part. They refer to ethnically diverse cultural contexts, such as the practicalities of well-being in traditional and modern Igbo community and society. They also compare the significance in Africa and the Global North attributed to the well-being of the community over the individual to reassess African values and notions of well-being in Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Ghana and South Africa. Finally, they address present-day issues in religious and state education related to well-being and ethics in past and contemporary Nigeria.

In chapter 5, Jeremiah Chukwuokolo studies human well-being in the context of personhood and social ethics in traditional and modern Igbo community and society. Chukwuokolo emphasises the need to value the Igbo people's traditional ethics and their corresponding web of social relations. In his view, human

well-being is related to the ethics of duty towards one's community members and is based on a sense of belonging and rootedness in one's local culture. The latter manifests itself in Igbo people's veneration of ancestors and the Earth goddess (*Ani*), but not in pursuing the goal of increasing their material wealth as the main purpose in life, as global capitalism erroneously propagates. Chukwuokolo believes in the power of connectedness between people and their ancestors as a solution to the feelings of uprootedness of all those Igbo who currently struggle to find their path in the modern capitalist world. In Chukwuokolo's view, materialism and capitalism are thus merely a threat to the well-being of the Igbo people, while social interactions and respect for one's ancestors and elders are the cure. The author stresses that the harmonious traditional social ethics in the Igbo community have continued to exist despite colonialism in Nigeria and the attempts by the British to oppress their indigenous ethics, and the influence of violent religious fundamentalist forms of Christianity and Islam. The Igbo people's traditional *ethos* is an ethics of duty based on methods of control due to the fear of punishment by the Earth deity, the belief in ancestral spirits (invoked during masquerades), and divination. The author concludes that the modern Igbo adhere to Global Ethics alongside their local Igbo ethic and have succeeded in finding a communitarian lifestyle in modern Africa. The Igbo continue to value their ethnic Africanness and the related sense of belonging to a community, alongside being moral citizens of Nigeria and the world at large.

In chapter 6, Olutoyin Meijuni and Bolaji Bateye concentrate on the role of Islam and Christianity and the threats that they pose to the welfare of Nigerians, thereby providing a religious context to human well-being. In their view, the influence of fundamentalism in Islam and Christianity in Nigeria has increased since colonial times. As a result of this influence, the inequality between men and women has increased, and the number of witchcraft accusations against women and children has risen. Besides, the militant Nigerian jihadi group Boko Haram, which has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, is outright dangerous for population groups in Nigeria and surrounding countries. The authors, therefore, propose to separate education and state affairs from religion, which has never been the case in many African countries, including Nigeria and Ghana. They also advise returning to the values of African Indigenous Religions. Since some of these religions' practices have an emancipatory effect, they can explicitly mitigate the negative impact on women of fundamentalist Islamic and Christian education. The authors thus conclude that, in various spheres of life, the impact of Islam and Christianity and especially their fundamentalist movements, on Nigerians' well-being have generally been negative. For the enhancement of their well-being, especially that of Nigerian women, African political countermeasures will be necessary to decrease the colonial influence of the Middle Eastern and Western world religions on Nigerian society.

In chapter 7, Abdoulaye Ba questions whether the community is the best frame for individual well-being and shares his experience of the current transition in Senegal from a more communitarian-based to a more Western focussed and individualistic society, albeit in comparison with the West, the Senegalese society has remained more communitarian. According to Ba, African societies were never entirely collective, but in comparison with the West, they have long been more collective than individualistic, even now that they are shifting towards individualism. This relatively high degree of communitarianism has brought Africans a strong sense of belonging and methods of sharing the common good that focus mainly on the needs of African societies as a whole rather than on those of their members. Although Africans have benefited from this collectivism in pre-colonial African societies, the implementation of collectivism on a socialist basis after the decolonisation of several African countries has proven to be problematic. Ba mentions Nyerere's *Ujamaa* socialism as a case in point. In many aspects, *Ujamaa* socialism was a failed experiment in providing a modern communitarian basis for Africa's traditional collective, predominantly rural cultures. Drawing from this lesson and as a result of globalisation and urbanisation, Ba has observed that in contemporary Senegal, the public space in the minds of its citizens is growing from that of an awareness of one's community to that of the Senegalese state and the globalised world. Hence, the notions of what is common, what is the common good, and what are the boundaries between what belongs to the community and/or the individual are shifting towards individualism. Only the future can tell, so Ba argues, what this shift, which resonates with that in other African countries, will mean for the well-being of Africans in general and the Senegalese in particular. By all means, the shift implies that African social and political philosophers should contemplate how to implement a communitarian-based better way of living together in a modern urban African and globalised world.

In chapter 8, Beatrice Okyere-Manu, Ovet Nwosimiri and Stephen Nkansah Morgan focus on the traditional African understanding of well-being, which is often understood to be a harmonious interconnectedness of the self with her or his community, the natural environment and spiritual beings. The question of which of these three ought to be given primacy has never been a vexation for the traditional African, who naturally understands that her or his well-being, sustainability and progress rely on all of these three simultaneously. Regardless of what well-being is taken to mean, whether happiness or fulfilment, the traditional African finds it in living a shared social life with members of her or his community, in a good human-nature relatedness and in maintaining a cordial relationship with her or his spiritual beings. This understanding of well-being may not be unique to traditional Africa, but it stands in contrast to some Western conceptions of well-being that place the

individual at the centre of analyses of well-being. The authors' aim is to show what well-being in contemporary Africa should look like. Their position is that contemporary African societies are more and more embracing Western conceptions of well-being, which is perceived as foreign to the one that has guided Africans from time immemorial. Thus, there is a need for contemporary Africans to reassess their values and perception of well-being if they are to properly address their current needs and reach their aspirations.

Part III, 'Contributions to a Global Ethics of Development', has four chapters. In this part, the authors articulate the concept of well-being as an African contribution to an inclusive Global Ethics of Development, digging into the (failed) experiment of *Ujamaa* socialism in African history, the pre-colonial ways of living together, and Africans' re-connection to their roots and ethics. They also address what lessons to be drawn from it by today's generation of African philosophers for the pursuit of a communitarian way of living within an African nation-state and a global ethically oriented political development of Africa. Furthermore, this part will concentrate on the debates around globalisation, racism and global ethics, as well as on the development of more equal forms of social organisation for the enhancement of human well-being in Africa.

Chapter 9 focuses on *Ujamaa* as a model of African socialism. In this chapter, Martin Asiegbu and Simeon Dimonye discuss the positive and negative aspects of this socialist model. They clarify that many of the first leaders of postcolonial African countries, including Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, felt that socialism was a good socio-economic theory to embrace as it connected well to Africa's indigenous religious structures and communitarian ethics. Nevertheless, the *Ujamaa* experiment failed. Just like in Ghana, the economic results of the rural developments were disappointing, and the agricultural revolution failed to materialise. Despite the improvement of the textile industry, Nyerere did not succeed in his goal to improve the living conditions of all Tanzanians. Notwithstanding its economic failure, the authors believe that *Ujamaa* was a valuable experiment in the history of African Development Studies. In terms of ethics, ideas about human well-being and the spiritual connectedness of the living to the past and future generations, the early dimensions of *Ujamaa* in Africa have been a strong inspiration to the modern African. Asiegbu and Dimonye think that these early postcolonial African socialist experiences are of use for the development of communitarianism and communitarian-based ethics in contemporary Africa and the enhancement of Africans' well-being.

In chapter 10, Andrew Akampurira stresses the need for Africans and the world at large to gain a better understanding of Africa's pre-colonial cultures and religions, which have been marginalised by Western colonial education, religion and culture. Departing from a critical development

perspective
they are
indigenou
marriage
ous gene
unborn, a
respect fo
improve
feelings
African t
myths, w
current c
Western
emphasi
but in th
commun
ding de
The cha
well-be
ics whi
globalis

In ch
both th
and Ch
- to ex
ground
of alle
questio
includ
balisat
seems
balisa
South
meeti
their
to the
territo
citize
zensh
Deve
of gl
deve

perspective, he thinks that Modern Africans' well-being will improve if they are re-connected to their African cultural-religious heritage. African indigenous religious rituals and ceremonies that are related to birth, puberty, marriage and death, unite people to one another, their locality and the previous generations. Usually, all generations, including the ancestors and the unborn, are part of the African extended family and kin groups. For Africans, respect for nature and the development of a good character are also ways to improve human well-being, whereas individualism and urbanisation increase feelings of alienation and uprootedness. Akampurira suggests promoting African traditional values, as preserved in oral traditions including legends, myths, wise sayings, songs and proverbs, in academic curricula to battle the current cultural and identity crisis among many modern people caused by Westernisation and global capitalism. In his view, human well-being is not emphasised in Western development discourses, such as Western feminism, but in the African indigenous religious values, African traditional ethics and communitarianism. He aims to make development more inclusive by embedding development theories in African traditional cultures and philosophies. The challenge for today's Africa, he closes, will be to enhance Africans' well-being by reconnecting to the many traditional African cultures and ethics while participating as responsible citizens in modern nation-states in a globalising world.

In chapter 11, Wilfred Lajul researches the link between globalisation and both theological and secular racism. The two major world religions, Islam and Christianity, tend to use their religious scripts – the Bible or the Qur'an – to exclude Africans of other religious convictions on racial and religious grounds. Secular racism in the West has also a long philosophical history of allegedly proving the racial inferiority of Africans. Lajul's main research question is: 'Can globalisation break down all barriers to human togetherness including hurdles by theological and secular racism?' To Lajul's mind, globalisation is not the cause of these types of racism, but in the Global South, it seems to awaken racial sentiments. Lajul concludes that neither resisting globalisation nor destroying nationalism is the solutions to racism in the Global South. On the contrary, it should be in consolidating unity and solidarity and meeting people's socio-economic needs at local and national levels. Thus, their well-being can be improved, and their national values can be brought to the global arena. Globalisation fails to meet human beings' needs at the territorial level. To combat racism and improve the well-being of Africans, citizenship at the national level should, therefore, become the basis for citizenship at the global level, Lajul closes. The challenge in Global Ethics for Development is thus to raise awareness of the economic unequal mechanisms of globalisation based on racist principles, which harm many Africans in the developing world.

In chapter 12, Stanley Anozie synthesises the Canadian development philosopher Paquet's writings on collaborative governance. This type of governance is presented as the result of the transformation of Big-G government to small-g governance and the concomitant more collaborative Ethics of Global Development. Anozie researches how Paquet's collaborative governance guarantees global development. To achieve that aim, he compares Paquet's theory of collaborative governance with Gadamer's intercultural philosophy of the fusion of horizons by the use of dialogue in the context of human development and well-being. He, thereby, stresses that both theories centralise the need for conversation and communication to expand one's horizons and perspectives, which is necessary for the gradual transition from hierarchical to more horizontal organisations and to make the shift from Big-G government, which is dominating the global discourse, to a more dialogical-oriented collaborative governance. In Anozie's view, the idea of human well-being is connected to collaboration in a community of relative equals. The enhancement of well-being, therefore, lies in the transformation of organisations from being exceedingly hierarchical to extra-horizontal. For Anozie, Global Ethics for Development thus lies in the adjustment of organisations in Africa to the need of Africans for more equalitarian sociopolitical relationships in political institutions.