

‘African Philosophy and Rights’

Invitation to contribute to the Special issue of *Theoria: The Journal of Social and Political Theory*.

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Motivation

African philosophers have been at pains to give a philosophically robust conception of Afro-communitarianism. One of the central issues that characterize these efforts concerns determining the status of rights in Afro-communitarianism. The current debate on this topic was initiated by Ifeanyi Menkiti (1984: 180) who remarked that rights are secondary in Afro-communitarianism. Though he never clarified or defended this position, and the literature never took him up on this issue, his suggestion implies that rights belong in Afro-communitarianism. Kwame Gyekye (1992) subsequently defended what he considered to be a moderate view, which balances rights and duties as enjoying the same moral status. Gyekye, in his later works, appears to reject a rights-oriented society (Gyekye, 2004). Most debates about rights in African philosophy have been strongly influenced by the respective positions of Menkiti and Gyekye.

Menkiti claims that rights have a secondary status in African philosophy; and, Gyekye has argued that they are as fundamental as duties. Neither of these scholars have explained how they understand rights as ontological and moral properties. Even those scholars who critique Menkiti and Gyekye assume it is obvious what rights are and what their functions are in a political theory informed by African thought, particularly in its decolonial mode (Matolino, 2009; Famanikwa, 2010). Such concerns about rights in African philosophy are especially pressing in Afro-communitarianism for several reasons largely overlooked in the literature.

Firstly, Western communitarians tend to distance themselves from rights (Sandel, 1982). Some communitarians have even gone further to label rights as a ‘fiction’ or as an ‘invention’ of the enlightenment project (MacIntyre, 1982). One immediately wonders why African scholars have not explained, unlike other communitarian traditions elsewhere, their commitments to rights, even if they are of secondary importance. Secondly, Western scholars who espouse the idea of rights differ on how to understand them and their function (Donnelly, 1982; Gerwith, 1984; Sen, 2004; Tasioulas, 2012).

These concerns raise questions about (1) the fundamental nature, (2) the philosophical justification and (3) the function of rights in Afro-communitarianism. There is pressing concern that those who are sceptical about rights in Afro-communitarianism state their case.

This special issue of *Theoria* invites multi-and-interdisciplinary contributions on questions about rights in the light of characteristically African cultural values. Submissions should focus preferably but not exclusively on the status of rights in African philosophy/studies. Submissions should largely be theoretical rather than empirical. Submissions on the following topics, among others, are particularly welcome:

- What is the nature and character of the concept of rights influenced by African axiological resources?
- Do rights feature as part of a plausible conception of Afro-communitarianism?
- What are the implications of the normative idea of personhood for the idea of rights?
- Are rights strictly a Western concept/value?
- Is there an African philosophical paradigm of rights?
- What philosophical foundations could be offered to justify rights from an African perspective? Are rights ‘natural’? Are they ‘cultural’? Or, they just a ‘fiction’?
- Are rights ‘universal’ or ‘relative’?
- What contributions can African philosophy contribute to the global discourse of rights?
- Should African philosophy concern itself with the idea of rights at all?

Submission date for manuscript to undergo the review process is: 15 Feb 2018. For submission: <http://ojs.berghahnjournals.com/index.php/theoria>. For style guide: <http://journals.berghahnbooks.com/theoria/info-for-authors/>.

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