

TRADITIONAL AFRICAN VIEW OF THE HUMAN PERSON

1. **First**—be sure to read the article—it is on-line at my web site (under African Reading link) and at the Canvas site for the course—under Traditional African Reading.
2. If you can explain the diagram at the end—on page 170—then you will have a basic understanding of the article.
3. **SLIDE #1**—African View—HB vs. HP; Person & Community; Individual & Group
4. We need to distinguish Traditional Indigenous African Thought from African Philosophy that is influenced by Western Colonial philosophy
5. The article is concerned with comparing and contrasting the Traditional African conception of the Person with other "Western" conceptions of the Person
6. Western conceptions tend to focus on an abstracted feature of the individual as their defining characteristic (i.e., a soul, memory, rationality, or will)
7. And this Western way of thinking is captured in Rene DesCartes' famous argument:

P1—If I think, then I am
P2—I think
C—I am
8. Traditional African thinking denies this move and focuses on the enviroing community.
9. The argument for this view is captured in the quotation from John Mbiti:

P1—If we are, then I am
P2—We are
C—I am
10. Notice that the conclusion of each argument is the same—but the reasons offered in support of each conclusion are different!
11. According to Traditional African Philosophy, the **COMMUNITY** comes before the **INDIVIDUAL**—it is both metaphysically prior to it and the individual depends

on the community in order to exist and receive its PERSONHOOD from the community.

12. The Smallest community—2 people—is what is biologically required for a Human Being to come into existence—but HUMAN BEING (a biological entity) is NOT a HUMAN PERSON (a communally recognized entity)

13. Other Communal facts: language is community property; the gene pool from which we come is communal; even our navel points to the fact that we depend on others in order to exist; and we end up playing social roles that are defined (at least in part) by the community into which we are born and recognized

14. So the focus is on the process nature of becoming HP through rites of initiation and acceptance and recognition by the community

15. A HUMAN BEING (HB) is a biological organism vs. A HUMAN PERSON (HP) which results from a social and ritual transformation

16. So, one basic question to ask your self is: Is being a human person like hot/warm/cold water which admits of degrees or is it like being alive or being dead or being pregnant—which do not admit of degrees?

17. The evidence for the Traditional African view includes: 1. Our tendency to use "it" for new borns; 2. Little or no grief over the death of a child vs the death of an elder (Traditional African Proverb: An old person dying is like a library burning.); 3. the rites of initiation that help one be incorporated into and recognized by the community; 4. Personhood is connected with moral function and playing a role within the community; 5. Persons are due justice (John Rawls agrees)

18. The author also compares the Traditional African view with Western Existentialism in five areas—find them in the reading!

19. So, Traditional African view agrees with Existentialism about the dynamic view of the person—as constantly changing and lacking a fixed essence

20. But there are some basic differences between them as well

21. Near the end of the article the author distinguishes three senses of human groupings: 1. Collectivities; 2. Constituted Groups; and 3. Random Collections. Which one is closest to the Traditional African understanding of the tribe?

22. And, more generally, what is the basic thing? The whole/team? Or the individual? Which has priority in being? Which is prior logically?

23. Is the TEAM more important than the individuals who make it up? "More important" in what sense—group survival? If yes, why? IF no, why?

24. How are we to understand the diagram at the end of the reading?