

Exploring William Kamleika and Kwame Gyeke's Concept of Communitarianism

Murtala Sa'asd PhD

Head of Department, Islamic and Arabic Studies,
Kogi State University, Anyigba, Kogi State, Nigeria

Email: murtalasaad@yahoo.com

Phone: +2348068430759

Okala Yunusa Yusufu

Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies,
Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Email: yunusyusuf4@gmail.com

+2348087802487

Amodu Salisu Ameh

Department of Philosophy,
Kogi State University, Anyigba, Kogi State, Nigeria
Email: sampsonzeed@gmail.com; amodu.a.a@ksu.edu.ng

Phone: +2348100262890; +2348127962025

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9897-8247>

Abstract

Communitarianism, as a political and ethical theory, has gained prominence in recent decades as an alternative to individualism and utilitarianism in the realm of political philosophy. Adopting an analytical method, this paper critically analyzes the nuanced perspective of communitarianism put forth by two notable scholars, William Kamleika and Kwame Gyeke. Kamleika and Gyeke's interpretations of communitarianism offer a unique lens through which to understand the theory's principles and practical implications. This paper examines the concept of communitarianism as articulated by William Kamleika and Kwame Gyeke, two influential scholars in the field of social and political philosophy. Communitarianism, as conceptualized by Kamleika and Gyeke, offers a compelling framework for understanding the intricate dynamics of community life, collective well-being, and shared responsibility within societies. Central to their perspective is the recognition of the importance of balancing individual rights with communal obligations, emphasizing the significance of solidarity, reciprocity, and mutual support in fostering harmonious social relations. Through a critical analysis of their writings, this paper explores the key principles of communitarianism, including the primacy of the common good, the value of social cohesion, and the role of cultural identity in shaping community bonds. Moreover, it examines the implications of Kamleika and Gyeke's communitarian framework for contemporary social and political discourse, particularly in addressing issues such as social justice, multiculturalism, and participatory governance. By scrolling down into their conceptualization of communitarianism, this paper seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of community life and the potential of collective action in fostering a more just and equitable society and also invites further exploration of their ideas and their potential to inform contemporary ethical and political discourse.

Keywords: William Kamleika concept, Gyeke's Concept, Communitarianism

1. Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of political philosophy, the concept of communitarianism has emerged as a compelling alternative to prevailing individualistic and utilitarian ideologies. Communitarianism, at its core of human existence, emphasizes the importance of community and shared values in shaping ethical and political ideology and lifestyle. Thus, among the myriad contemporary voices contributing to the discourse on the subject matter, two of the finest distinguished scholars, William Kamleika and Kwame Gyeke, stand out as illuminating interpretations of this theory.

Communitarianism challenges the notion that individual rights and interests should always take precedence over collective concerns. Instead, it posits that the well-being of individuals is deeply intertwined with the health and vitality of the communities to which they belong. It calls for a reevaluation of the balance between individual autonomy and communal responsibilities, seeking to establish a moral framework that can guide individuals in their interactions within a society. In this regard, William Kamleika and Kwame Gyeke on communitarianism bring distinct cultural and philosophical backgrounds to the table, enriching the discourse on this multifaceted theory.

Their interpretations not only shed light on the foundational principles of communitarianism but also extend their applicability to diverse cultural and societal contexts. William Kamleika's vision of communitarianism centers on the idea of harmonizing individual autonomy with collective obligations. He argues that a flourishing community is one in which individuals willingly participate in the pursuit of shared goals without sacrificing their identities. Kamleika's work underscores the necessity of a shared moral compass to guide the actions of individuals within a community, fostering cohesion and mutual respect. Thus, conversely, Kwame Gyeke expands the communitarian conversation beyond the Western philosophical tradition, drawing inspiration from African and indigenous worldviews. Gyeke's perspective emphasizes the importance of cultural diversity, historical legacies, and communal decision-making processes in shaping ethical and political norms.

His approach offers a holistic understanding of community that incorporates the wisdom of ancestors, oral traditions, and the rich tapestry of diverse cultures. Finally, one can conclude that they provide valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of communitarianism. Their interpretations enrich the ongoing dialogue about the role of communities in shaping ethical and political landscapes, offering a nuanced understanding that accommodates both individual autonomy and collective well-being. This exploration invites further scrutiny of their ideas and their potential to inform contemporary ethical and political discourse.

2. The General Understanding of Communitarianism

Contemporary society is marked by an ever-evolving tapestry of social, political, and ethical dilemmas. Amid these complex challenges, the philosophy of communitarianism has emerged as a lens through which we scrutinize the intricate relationship between individuals and their communities. As we navigate the 21st

century, communitarianism remains at the heart of profound debates that shape the way we perceive and interact with our world. These contemporary discussions not only dissect the philosophical tenets of communitarianism but also test its applicability in a globalized, interconnected, and rapidly changing landscape. In this exploration of contemporary debates on communitarianism, Norman thinks that from multiculturalism to social justice, privacy to technology, and beyond, these discussions illuminate the enduring relevance of communitarian thought in our quest to forge just and harmonious societies (82).

For Norman, the idea of communitarianism is a political and moral philosophy that contrasts with individualism, which prioritizes the rights and autonomy of individuals. Instead, communitarians argue that individuals are deeply embedded in their communities and that these communities play a crucial role in shaping their identities, values, and well-being. Communitarianism emphasizes the interdependence of individuals and the significance of shared values and traditions.

2.1 Willam Kamleika's Contribution

Willam Kamleika, a notable scholar of communitarianism, focused on the idea that the community serves as a source of moral guidance and responsibility. He argued that individuals have a moral duty to their communities and that this duty should guide their actions and decisions. Kamleika emphasized the importance of social bonds, norms, and values in maintaining a cohesive and just society.

2.2 Kwame Gyekye's Perspective

Kwame Gyekye, another influential thinker in the field of communitarianism, expanded upon the cultural aspect of communitarianism. Gyekye argued that culture plays a vital role in shaping the identity of a community and its members. He emphasized the significance of cultural values, traditions, and practices in fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity. Gyekye's concept of "cultural communitarianism" highlights the idea that communities are not just defined by geographical or political boundaries but also by their unique cultural heritage. He believed that preserving and celebrating cultural diversity is essential for the well-being of communities and that efforts should be made to protect cultural identities from erosion in the face of globalization.

2.3 Communitarianism in Practice

The concept of communitarianism has found practical applications in various areas of public policy and governance. Communitarian ideas have influenced discussions on issues such as social welfare, education, and healthcare. For example, policies that promote community-based healthcare centers or prioritize the well-being of vulnerable populations align with the communitarian emphasis on the common good and social responsibility.

2.4 The Idea of Multiculturalism as a Theory

The goal of both Gyekye and Kamleika's effort is to provide a theoretical justification for renegotiating fairer terms of integration for ethnocultural minorities in multinational states. In this theory of multiculturalism, he operates with two main

concepts, citizenship and cultural membership. they recognize the value of community as a context of choice. Each person resides in communities of two types, political and cultural. As Kamleika argues that all liberals have recognized the relevance of individual membership in a political community, i.e. citizenship, although their interpretations of the concept of citizenship rights vary. But membership in a cultural community holds Kamleika, has been widely ignored in liberal theory. Liberalism most often dealt with cases when the two types of communities coincided, as in the example of the majority cultures of the nation-states (152). For him, minority cultures were in effect marginalized and could not claim legitimacy on any liberal grounds. This has been the case in history, because it has been "important to the political legitimacy, and the very stability, of many multicultural countries." The concept of cultural membership for minorities was often seen as inconsistent with liberal principles of justice. But for Gyeke, Kamleika argues on the contrary that such principles do require recognition and equality for minority cultures. The task of Kamleika's theory is to justify the need for cultural recognition and to reconcile the concepts of citizenship and cultural membership in the liberal theory of minority rights. In LCC Kamleika outlines the liberal approach to the minority rights debate with the main purpose of reconciling citizenship with cultural diversity. For him, "there are both political and philosophical reasons for trying to defend minority rights within liberalism, not against liberalism" (156).

3. Identity and Cultural Community

Kamleika's appropriation of John Rawls' view is evidently reflected in his discussions of human identity. Like Rawls, Kamleika shares the assumption that our beliefs about the good life are only valid if they are from inside; and that our beliefs are fallible and thus should be revisable. In LCC, Kamleika discusses human identity vis-à-vis the liberal-communitarian debate, responding to Michael Sandel (*Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*), Charles Taylor (*Sources of the Self*), and Marxism. He develops his theory of identity around five main claims formulated in response to the following allegations: 1) the liberal view of self is empty; 2) it violates 'self-perceptions'; 3) it ignores the value of community practices, 4) it ignores the necessity for social confirmation; 5) it claims universality (74).

Kamleika defends his first claim by insisting that the liberal self is not empty, but pregnant with solid values. It is the value of the life and practices we choose that matters, not the freedom itself. The concept of freedom plays an instrumental not a primary role.¹⁷ Kamleika's second claim against the communitarian charge of the liberal violation of self-perception (or better self-understanding) is an interesting one. He objects to Sandel who thinks that on the liberal view the self is prior to its ends, and therefore 'unencumbered' (Taylor 111).

For Taylor, liberal position, avers Kamleika, is more flexible than communitarians perceive it to be. Thus, just like Taylor has argued, Kamleika stress that the question is not whether the self is indeed before its ends, but rather whether 'we understand ourselves to be before our ends, *in the sense that no end or goal is exempt from possible re-examination*' (35). This connects us to the third claim that in liberalism the self is unencumbered by social and communal practices. Since the second argument about the priority of the self over its ends does not stand for Kamleika, he also denies

Sandel's position that liberalism ignores the self's embeddedness in a community. Just because we are able to re-examine our ends independent of community, at least hypnotically, and without necessarily prioritizing our ends, says Kamleika, does not mean that we are not informed by our embeddedness in a social and cultural context.

The opposing approaches between communitarians and liberals differ, for Kamleika, in the way they philosophize about the concept of self-determination. Kamleika's liberal position states that our self-determination is expressed in practical reasoning based on rational judgment, while communitarians see it as self-discovery. The latter view, by Sandel, asserts that we do not make new independent judgments about ourselves and about our ends, but discover them. The self has to uncover its ends as constitutive of its nature: 'it does not really choose the ends, but discover them, and appropriates them as its own' (179).

In Sandel's opinion, the ends that we discover do not just constitute our goals but also define our identity. Not recognizing our ends as constitutive of ourselves is to not adequately understand the self as such. Self-perception without understanding what our ends are and what the constitution of those ends is impossible, communitarian hold.

Kamleika, however, finds an inconsistency in Sandel's account of the self. He finds Sandel stating that a person does, after all, participate in the constitution of her identity, and this includes the possibility of re-examining her ends. Kamleika takes this recognition the possibility to re-examine one's ends, even ends constitutive of one's self to undermine Sandel's attempts to justify communitarian politics. The difference between communitarian and liberal visions of the self, for Kamleika, is then purely semantic. Kamleika as well refutes the fourth and the fifth claims against liberalism as lacking argumentative force and cogency.

4. Cultural Membership and Minority Rights

In the discourse surrounding cultural diversity and minority rights, the works of William Kamleika and Kwame Gyeke stand out as seminal contributions. Central to their framework is the concept of "Cultural Membership," which offers a profound lens through which to understand the dynamics of cultural identity, belonging, and the preservation of minority rights within pluralistic societies. Kamleika and Gyeke's scholarship delves into the complexities of navigating the tension between preserving cultural heritage and ensuring the rights of minority groups within broader social contexts.

Here we will present the idea of what cultural community means for Kamleika and Gyeke. They are one of the first among contemporary liberals to acknowledge the high value of culture in a person's life. He claims that A person's belonging to a community, both political and cultural, has an inherent value, a value in itself. Why is cultural context important? Culture as a context of choice provides members with a variety of meaningful choices. Culture is a source of emotional security and personal strength crucial to personal agency and development (78).

Thus, Kamleika starts his discussion of cultural membership by connecting the question of cultural belonging with the liberal conception of the relationship between

self and community. Because community is important as a context of individual choice, cultural membership, says Kymlicka, is not inconsistent with the liberal principles of justice; in fact it is the requirement of justice to accord an equal treatment to minority cultural groups. As argued by Kymlicka an individual must have a secure and valuable context of choice to exercise her rights and freedoms and be able to rightly choose the most valuable way of according to her conception of the good. However, over the course of history, liberals tended to prioritize the interests of political community order to the interests of cultural community.

The interests of the majority culture were, whether deliberately or by default, the only legitimate interests defended in the name of the stability in the state. The interests of minority cultures were seen as disintegrating by nation states, and therefore as undermining political legitimacy of the state, because cultural rights were seen as collective rights. And according to the theory of nation state, there is only one national community that can claim political legitimacy, other collectives are marginalized.

Thus, at its core, Kamleika and Gyeke's notion of Cultural Membership emphasizes the multifaceted nature of cultural identity and belonging. According to Walzer Unlike traditional conceptions that often essentialize cultures or narrowly define membership criteria, their framework recognizes the fluidity and diversity inherent in cultural affiliations. Cultural Membership, as conceptualized by Kamleika and Gyeke, transcends simplistic categorizations and instead acknowledges the dynamic interactions and hybridity that characterize modern societies (62).

Thus, for Walzer, central to the discourse on Cultural Membership is the recognition of minority rights within culturally diverse contexts. Kamleika and Gyeke underscore the importance of safeguarding the rights of marginalized communities while simultaneously acknowledging the need to preserve cultural traditions and practices. Their framework offers a nuanced approach to addressing the complexities of cultural pluralism, advocating for policies and practices that uphold both individual liberties and collective cultural rights.

Furthermore, Kamleika and Gyeke's scholarship highlights the interconnectedness between cultural membership and broader societal structures. They argue that the recognition of minority rights is not merely a matter of legal or political accommodation but requires a deeper societal commitment to inclusivity and social justice. By foregrounding the significance of cultural membership, their framework challenges prevailing narratives that prioritize homogeneity or assimilation over diversity and pluralism. In contemporary discourse, Kamleika and Gyeke's conceptualization of Cultural Membership has profound implications for addressing pressing issues such as cultural preservation, social cohesion, and minority empowerment. As societies grapple with the challenges of globalization, migration, and cultural hybridization, their framework offers valuable insights into fostering inclusive societies that respect and celebrate cultural diversity. Furthermore, it can be summarized here that William Kamleika and Kwame Gyeke's conception of cultural membership and minority rights provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in cultural pluralism. Their conceptual framework offers a compelling vision for navigating the tensions between preserving cultural heritage and

upholding the rights of minority groups within diverse societies. As we embark on this exploration, we are invited to critically engage with their ideas and consider their implications for fostering more inclusive and equitable communities.

5. Kamleika and Gyeke on the Value of Culture and Cultural Diversity

William Kamleika and Kwame Gyeke's perspectives on the value of culture and cultural diversity offer profound insights into the intrinsic worth of cultural heritage and the dynamic interplay between different cultural traditions within society. Central to their framework is the recognition that culture serves as a cornerstone of human identity, shaping individuals' beliefs, values, and ways of life. In their view, cultural diversity enriches the fabric of society, fostering creativity, resilience, and mutual understanding among diverse communities. Just like Kamleika, Gyeke emphasizes that Culture is not static but rather evolves through interactions with other cultures, historical developments, and changing social contexts. They argue that embracing cultural diversity allows societies to harness the richness of different perspectives, knowledge systems, and artistic expressions (251).

For him, by valuing cultural diversity, societies can unlock the full potential of human creativity and innovation, contributing to greater social cohesion and collective well-being.

Moreover, Kamleika and Gyeke highlight the importance of preserving and promoting cultural heritage as a means of safeguarding the unique identities and traditions of diverse communities. They advocate for policies and practices that support cultural preservation, linguistic revitalization, and the protection of intangible cultural heritage. By empowering communities to maintain and transmit their cultural practices across generations, societies can foster a sense of pride, belonging, and continuity. Furthermore, Kamleika and Gyeke's perspectives underscore the role of cultural exchange and dialogue in promoting intercultural understanding and peacebuilding. Kamleika argue that:

Fostering respectful engagement and mutual learning among different cultural groups is essential for overcoming prejudice, stereotypes, and intergroup tensions. Through initiatives such as cultural exchanges, collaborative projects, and intercultural education, societies can bridge divides and build bridges of empathy and solidarity (75).

In summary, William Kamleika and Kwame Gyeke's perspectives on the value of culture and cultural diversity offer a compelling vision for building inclusive and harmonious societies. By recognizing the intrinsic worth of cultural heritage and embracing the richness of cultural diversity, societies can nurture thriving communities where individuals are empowered to express their identities and contribute to the collective flourishing of humanity. As we navigate the complexities of our interconnected world, their insights remind us of the transformative power of culture in shaping a more just, equitable, and culturally vibrant future.

5.1 On the Concept of Societal Culture

The concept of societal culture, as articulated by scholars like William Kamleika and Kwame Gyeke, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex web of beliefs, values, norms, and practices that shape the collective identity of a society.

At its core, societal culture encompasses the shared patterns of behavior, symbols, and meanings that are transmitted across generations and manifest in various aspects of social life. Macintyre, emphasize that

For Kamleika and Gyeke, the central idea of societal culture serves as a lens through which individuals interpret their world and navigate their social interactions. It provides a common framework for understanding social roles, relationships, and expectations, thereby facilitating social cohesion and coordination within communities (75).

Thus, central to the concept of societal culture is the notion of cultural continuity and change. While cultural traditions provide a sense of continuity and belonging, societies are also dynamic entities that evolve over time in response to internal and external pressures. Kamleika and Gyeke highlight the importance of understanding the mechanisms through which cultural change occurs, including processes of adaptation, diffusion, and innovation.

Moreover, it can be argued that the concept of societal culture encompasses the diversity of cultural expressions and practices within a given society. According to: It is only Kamleika and Gyeke who bring to limelight the fact that societies are composed of multiple cultural groups with distinct histories, languages, and customs. Recognizing and respecting this diversity is essential for fostering social inclusion, cultural pluralism, and intercultural dialogue (82).

Furthermore, for him, Kamleika and Gyeke's conceptualization of societal culture underscores the interconnectedness between culture and other social phenomena, such as politics, economics, and religion. They argue that cultural beliefs and values influence social institutions and systems of governance, shaping patterns of power, inequality, and social change, which implies summary that, the concept of societal culture provides a holistic framework for understanding the complex interplay between individuals, communities, and broader social structures. By exploring the dynamics of cultural continuity and change, embracing cultural diversity, and recognizing the multifaceted influences of culture on society, scholars like Kamleika and Gyeke offer valuable insights into the complexities of human social life and the transformative potential of cultural understanding.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, delving into William Kamleika and Kwame Gyeke's concept of communitarianism offers profound insights into the intricate fabric of human society and the dynamics of communal living. Their framework emphasizes the significance of collective wellbeing, solidarity, and shared responsibility within a community. Through this lens, we come to appreciate the intricate interplay between individual rights and communal obligations, highlighting the importance of striking a delicate balance to foster harmony and cohesion. Kamleika and Gyeke's communitarian perspective challenges us to reevaluate our understanding of social relationships and rethink the prevailing emphasis on individualism. By foregrounding the communal dimension, their philosophy underscores the intrinsic value of interconnectedness and mutual support in shaping a thriving society. Moreover, their insights prompt us to

reflect on the implications of communitarian principles for contemporary social and political discourse.

In an era marked by increasing polarization and fragmentation, embracing a communitarian ethos offers a compelling alternative, one that prioritizes solidarity, inclusivity, and the common good. However, as we contemplate the implications of communitarianism, we must also acknowledge its complexities and potential challenges. Balancing the interests of the collective with the rights of individuals requires nuanced deliberation and careful consideration of diverse perspectives. Moreover, implementing communitarian ideals necessitates fostering a culture of trust, cooperation, and genuine dialogue within communities. In essence, the exploration of Kamleika and Gyeke's concept of communitarianism invites us to envision a society founded on principles of reciprocity, empathy, and shared responsibility. By embracing the collective ethos embedded within their framework, we can aspire to cultivate communities that are not only resilient and cohesive but also compassionate and inclusive.

References

- Alasin Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study In Moral Theory: A Study In Moral Theory* 2d., : Gerald Duckworth and Co. Limited, 1985.
- Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*: Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Gyekye Kwame, *Tradition and Modernity Philosophical Reflections on the African*, Loyola University Press, 1985.
- John Stuart Mill, *The Basic Writings: On Liberty, The Subjugation Of Women and Utilitarianism*, Trans. J. S. Schneewind: Modern Library Paper Edition, 2002.
- Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contribution to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, William Rehg trans. : MIT Press, 1993, 86 and 88.
- Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Consideration On Representative Government* edited by Geraint Williams, New Edition Everyman Library, 1972.
- Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Richard Norman, *The Moral Philosopher: An Introduction to Ethics*: Clarendon Press, 1983.
- Taylor, "Politics of Equal Dignity," *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 38, no. 4-5, (2012).
- Walzer, *Thick, and Thin*: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.
- W. Kymlicka and W. Norman, eds. *Citizenship in Diverse Societies* : Oxford University Press, 2000.