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REVIEW ARTICLE

A defence of identity for persons with disability: Reflections from religion and philosophy versus ancient African culture






Patrick Ojok; Junior B. Musenze

Department of Community and Disability Studies, Kyambogo University, Kampala, Uganda


[Correspondence](#)

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Religion and philosophy follow the Hegelian dialectic, man as thesis, evil as antithesis and ideal man or God the final synthesis, locking out persons with disability stating that they don't meet the criteria of being human persons. In contrast, persons with disability were accepted in ancient Africa and their disorder was not shown as a physical handicap.

OBJECTIVES: The objective of this article was to critically examine how disability is constructed in philosophy and religion in comparison with African culture, in the shaping of disability identity as a form of humanity.

METHOD: This article undertook a document review of both grey and peer reviewed literature. The papers reviewed were identified and screened for relevance, then analysed with the aim of comparing the portrayal of disability in philosophy, religion and ancient Africa.

RESULTS: Our analysis revealed that African cultures revered the disability identity, as opposed to philosophy and religion that portrayed it as abnormal. A person with disability was accepted in ancient Africa and given a visible role in society suggesting their integration in daily life activities while their disability was believed to be a blessing from the gods.

CONCLUSION: Religion and philosophy have incredibly alienated persons with disabilities with linguistic and derogative identities. Whereas African spiritualism inherently glorified and/or approved disability, in today's Africa, persons with disability are increasingly objectified and abused because of ignorance and harsh economic conditions. Nevertheless, the contemporary mistreatment of people with disabilities (PWDs) does not reflect a true African culture but is a symptom and a consequence of the material and economic injustice that PWDs encounter.

Keywords: disability; identity; philosophy; African; religion.