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Disruptive Emotions and Affective Injustice Within an African-Inspired Relational Ethics

What Has to Give?

Mary Carman

Abstract: Forms of African relational ethics that prioritise the value of harmony struggle to accommodate arguably valuable disharmony, such as disruptive emotions like anger. A wider literature on political emotions has defended the value of such emotions and even proposed that a particular form of injustice, affective injustice, can arise if we fail to create space for them. While it has recently been proposed that Thaddeus Metz's African-inspired relational moral theory can accommodate disruptive emotions and address affective injustice, in this philosophical article I argue that any success that Metz's account has in this regard is superficial. This critique has important implications: either we need to engage further with disruptive emotions and affective injustice within an African relational ethics, or it may be the case that we instead need to return to how we conceptualise affective injustice to ensure that it does the justice-promoting work that we want it to do.

Keywords: affective injustice, African communitarianism, disruptive emotions, harmony, relational ethics, Thaddeus Metz

Disharmony in various forms has been a subject of discussion within the philosophical literature on African moral thinking, where some argue that disharmony, including emotions like anger and resentment that can disrupt harmony – henceforth 'disruptive

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emotions' – have no place within an African-inspired relational ethics that values communal harmony (see Tutu 1999).[1] Others, however, argue that disharmony, even violence, can have a place. In fact, calling for harmony in the face of injustice can amount to further injustice (see Chasi 2021). With respect to disruptive emotions, such a call can amount to affective injustice, which is a form of injustice that someone may face in virtue of their capacity as an affective being (Carman 2023). If disharmony is to have a role within an African-inspired relational ethics that avoids setting up conditions for such injustices to arise, the challenge is to flesh out how this can be so even while centralising harmony. Focusing on disruptive emotions and the notion of affective injustice, in this article I argue that a previous attempt I have made to meet the challenge (see Carman 2023), on further reflection, fails. If I am correct, this has important implications, implications that vary depending on our background theoretical commitments. If we accept that affective injustice as currently analysed is something that we ought to take seriously, one possible implication is that we need to address questions about whether and how an African-inspired relational ethics could incorporate disruptive emotions in a way that recognises the possibility of affective injustice. But another implication could instead be that we should rather question whether current analyses of affective injustice are sufficient to do the kind of justice-promoting work that we want.

Drawing on my earlier work, I begin by introducing the challenge of disruptive emotions to an African-inspired relational ethics and the relevance of affective injustice. I then give a brief overview of Thaddeus Metz's African-inspired moral theory that he presents in his 2022 book, *A Relational Moral Theory,* and my earlier argument that Metz's relational moral theory can accommodate disruptive emotions and thereby affective injustice. I next argue, however, that any success Metz's account has in this respect is ultimately superficial. This is because the feature that enables his theory to accommodate disruptive emotions – that we ought to respect and honour the capacity of individuals to be party to harmonious relationship – is the same feature that undermines his theory as an African-inspired relational moral theory that is true to key communitarian values. If we are looking for an African-inspired relational moral theory that can give place to *prima facie* valuable

but disruptive emotions and avoid setting up conditions for affective injustice to arise, then we must go back to the drawing board. I close, however, by exploring what implications this conclusion really has: perhaps the conclusion is not that we ought to return to the drawing board to accommodate disruptive emotions, but rather that we ought to think critically about how to conceptualise something like affective injustice in the first place.

The Challenge of Disruptive Emotions

African communitarianism in its various forms shares a common feature: it prioritises the good of the community, where as a form of relational ethics it recognises our embeddedness within interpersonal relationships in the promotion of communal harmony. Two key tenets of African communitarianism that are widely accepted are that the individual moral agent is 'necessarily embedded in a network of relationships' and that communal harmony is a non-instrumental good (Oyowe 2013: 105). For instance, Kwame Gyekye (1995: 65) identifies 'peace, harmony, stability, solidarity and mutual reciprocity and sympathy' as central communitarian values and Kwasi Wiredu (2005: 347) writes that 'a communalistic orientation will naturally prize social harmony'.[2]

A common form of African communitarian ethics can be interpreted as being teleological in nature, in that a particular kind of good is put forward as a telos towards which we ought to strive and which we ought to maximise (for an example of this interpretation, see Metz 2022). In this case, the good that is pursued is communal harmony. For instance, a prominent figure advancing a form of African communitarian ethics is former Archbishop of South Africa, Desmond Tutu, who famously wrote that the sub-Saharan ethic of ubuntu promotes 'harmony, friendliness, community', where 'anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague' (1999: 35). This is reasonably interpreted as a teleological claim, as Metz interprets it, because Tutu can be read as proposing that harmony, friendliness, community are final goods, where it is directly relevant that these goods are achieved and not subverted.[3] Tutu includes anger and resentment as examples of things that are 'corrosive of this good'.

But there is also a strong tradition that defends the complexity of how community and harmony can be promoted, where even violence can play a role. Colin Chasi (2021), for instance, defends the claim that violence can in fact be justified in contexts where it serves a purpose of achieving more just social orders, such as in the fights against colonialism or apartheid. Part of Chasi's project is to develop an ethical theory that is 'non-ideal' in that it recognises and reflects the ways in which people really do live by the values that they espouse. As such, his methodology is to engage with the life-stories and thinking of actual people who espouse the values of ubuntu as means of granting 'recognition to Africans as moral agents who are situated amidst often wicked problems' (2021: 92). Two of his examples are Shaka Zulu and Nelson Mandela, figure-heads who plausibly 'use violence well' in the effort to achieve more just and harmonious societies.

In doing so, Chasi, successfully I believe, argues for the instrumental role that violence can play in communitarian ethics. But he also makes a stronger point: harking on about the value of harmony can risk compounding existing injustices. He quotes Kwame Nkrumah:

> Africans are constantly being reminded that they are a peace-loving, tolerant and communalist-minded people. The African is projected as an individual who has always been loath to shed blood. The corollary of this argument is that it would be immoral and against our nature to engage in revolutionary warfare. (Nkrumah 1969: 18–19; quoted in Chasi 2021: 7)

In the hands of the powerful, such a message can constitute further oppression.

Closely related to violence in the way that it can disrupt harmony are disruptive emotions, like anger and resentment. Especially since the late 1980s and 1990s, theorists across a range of disciplines, including feminist theory, critical theory and philosophy, have drawn attention to the complex interactions between embodiment, emotion and affect, and social, political and cultural forces (Clough and Halley 2007). This focus on emotion and affect, as central to embodiment, has led to deeper understandings of the complicity of emotion and affect in perpetuating systems of injustice and subordination (see for instance Ahmed 2014), with the development of concepts such as

Sara Ahmed's 'affect alien' representing alienation as a structure of feeling that leads to estrangement (Ahmed 2010) or Alison Jaggar's 'outlaw emotions' as emotions seen as incompatible with dominant values (Jaggar 1989). At the same time as potentially being complicit in injustice, emotion and affect – including disruptive emotions – can play important roles in tackling injustice. As has been argued in this wider literature on political emotions, even 'outlaw' and disruptive emotions like anger and resentment can play important, instrumental, roles in the pursuit of more just societies (as examples see Bell 2009; Cherry 2021; Jaggar 1989; Tessman 2005).

Another insight of the focus on emotion has been to counter what Elizabeth Spelman (1989) calls a 'Dumb View' of emotion. Specifically, emotions are widely accepted as being intentional attitudes, in that they are about something other than themselves (De Sousa 1987), where something like anger can be interpreted not just as an affective response but as a way of viewing the world. As such, emotions can play epistemic roles in drawing our attention to evaluative features of the world, such as the presence of wrongdoing or injustice. As a result, the value of certain disruptive emotions may not be limited to purely instrumental roles, an insight that is well-illustrated in discussions of affective injustice.

Affective injustice can be understood generally as a kind of injustice whereby 'individuals or groups are deprived of "affective goods" which are owed to them', where an example of such a good is emotional aptness (Gallegos 2022: 186). Aptness refers to how emotions, including an emotion like anger, can be representationally correct – or apt – if what they represent as being the case really is the case. Anger about injustice can be apt, for instance, if it responds to and represents genuine injustice, and it has an epistemic value in and of itself that is independent of whether it also helps to bring about certain outcomes. In a scenario of apt anger, a demand for someone to moderate their anger – because it is unproductive, seen as irrational, and so on – can constitute a form of affective injustice whereby that person is denied an emotional response that is justified in terms of its aptness, and where moderating that apt anger can even be tantamount to accepting the injustice as it is (Archer and Mills 2019; Carman 2022b; Gallegos 2022; Srinivasan 2018; Whitney 2018). This is plausibly a harm in itself, independent of whatever broader social impact it may have.

Now, just as harking on about the value of harmony can compound existing injustices in the ways that Nkrumah and Chasi describe, so too can calling for the avoidance of disruptive emotions like anger and resentment in the way that Tutu does. As I have argued (Carman 2023), if anger and resentment or other disruptive emotions ought to be avoided because they subvert harmony, then we risk both overlooking their positive connections to justice as well as setting up conditions for affective injustice to arise. On a teleological approach, the leeway given to disruption is tied directly to whether that disruption will be instrumental in achieving communal harmony, overlooking that affective goods may have value that is not tied to harmony. In other words, we risk setting up conditions where people are denied their affective goods. For instance, victims of oppression (e.g., under colonial or apartheid systems) are faced with an unfair choice between getting aptly angry about the genuine injustices that they face or acting morally, understood as acting harmoniously.

We thus see how disruptive emotions pose an important challenge to teleological interpretations of African communitarianism as a form of relational ethics whereby harmony ought to be promoted as the only end. Can we reconcile the promotion of a value like communal harmony in a way that recognises our embeddedness within interpersonal relationships while also recognising the positive role that disruption can play in our non-ideal world?

Metz's Relational Moral Theory and Disruptive Emotions

A recent proposal for an African-inspired relational moral theory looks like it can offer such a reconciliation. This is Metz's (2022) account. Metz himself is concerned with dissolving a tension between the value of communal harmony, which he focused on in earlier work, and the promotion of human rights, such as a right to life. In his (2022) account, Metz centres on communal harmony but argues that what ought to be respected is the *capacity* to be party to harmonious relationship. He dubs 'friendliness' as the key way of relating, whereby we share a way of life and care about others' quality of life. Our capacity for friendliness, our capacity for

harmonious relationship, is what we ought to respect and promote, for Metz.

Harmonious relationship, for Metz, is constituted by two important ways of interacting with others. The first is through identity, which is identifying and sharing a way of life with others. What is critical to this way of interacting is that we view ourselves 'as a common member of a relationship or group' (Metz 2022: 94), and it can be expressed in ways such as taking pride out of the collective achievements or pursuing joint projects through a sense of an 'us'. The second way of interacting is through solidarity, which is 'achieving the good of all, being sympathetic, sharing, promoting the common good, engaging in service, and being committed to others' good' (2022: 93). Solidarity can be expressed in ways like having an empathetic awareness of those with whom we stand in solidarity, acting to improve the conditions of others, and being moved to respond emotionally and in action to the well-being of others.

Metz's account is similar to the teleological approach, like the interpretation of Tutu's approach discussed above, in that Metz also identifies harmony as a single key value. However, his account differs in two important ways. First, Metz proposes a deontological rather than teleological theory, according to which we ought to promote and respect the key value rather than maximise it. The second important difference is what, exactly, that key value is taken to be. What has final value on Metz's account is not communal harmony per se but instead an individual's capacity for harmonious relationship. Note that Metz does maintain that 'harmonious or communal relationship of a certain kind is ultimately what should be pursued as an end', but he qualifies this in a footnote: 'albeit as a way to express respect for individuals capable of it' (2022: 90). Later, he clarifies this position and qualification by writing that 'the capacity for relationship is at bottom what determines the rightness or wrongness of an action by my account' where he does not 'ascribe a superlative final value to communal ways of relating (and instead do so to the capacity for them) and do not otherwise treat them as goods to be promoted' (2022: 119). Nevertheless, 'it does follow from my ethic that we often have reason to pursue communal ways of relating as ends' in that 'a moral agent is to respect actual relationships as a way of ultimately respecting the beings capable of them' (2022: 119).

This detail enables Metz to present a theory that looks, superficially at least, like it will be able to handle disruptive emotions, as I have previously argued (Carman 2023). This is because respecting someone's capacity for harmonious relationship – either as someone already part of the community, a subject of harmonious relationship, or as someone who could nevertheless be the object of community – means that we will sometimes respond negatively, disruptively, when they have failed to exhibit friendliness in the first place. As Metz writes: 'Failing to base our treatment of others in light of how they have exercised their capacity for friendliness would fail to honour that capacity' (2022: 132).

Crucially, Metz allows that part of both identifying and standing in solidarity with others includes having emotional responses to how those others, and the community, are affected. If someone or our community succeeds in an endeavour, it is appropriate to experience emotions like elation and pride, as part of identifying with the success. Similarly, if someone is suffering it is appropriate as part of standing in solidarity with them that we respond with empathetic, perhaps painful or otherwise negative, emotions, such as regret.

In this way, I previously argued, we can incorporate disruptive emotions. Sometimes respecting another's capacity for harmonious relationship will require anger, in a similar line of thought to Peter Strawson's reactive attitudes (see Strawson 2008). If someone has committed an offence against another or the community at large, part of standing in solidarity is responding in a way that recognises the offence for what it is: an offence. One such way of recognising the offence is through emotions like anger or resentment, which in part involve an appraisal response to something perceived as offensive. Likewise, if someone in our community has committed an offence, part of recognising that they have failed to exercise friendliness towards myself or others is to appreciate their actions as offensive or harmful against the standards of communal harmony, where again anger or resentment involve appraisal responses to something perceived as offensive. Strawson, in his original proposal of reactive attitudes, is concerned with how reactive attitudes can be legitimate responses to the expressions of another's attitudes through their actions and behaviour, where he is working within a primarily Kantian framework that prioritises humans' rational

capacities. As such, reactive attitudes as per Strawson and as they have largely been treated in subsequent literature are understood as attitudes in response to the exercising of someone's rational capacity. On the interpretation that I have put forward, however, we should understand reactive attitudes not as responses to the exercising of someone's rational capacity but instead as a response to their exercising a capacity for harmonious relationship. Getting angry in response to someone's unfriendly actions can be part of respecting that person's capacity for harmonious relationship, and part of identifying and standing in solidarity with them (see also Carman 2022a).

An advantage of Metz's theory, then, is that it allows us to cash out a specific kind of affective good for a relational ethics, namely the range of responses we can have to someone's capacity to be party to harmonious relationship. If we fail to recognise that responding with disruptive emotions can be a central part of identifying and standing in solidarity with others – in other words, a central part of friendliness and having harmonious relationships – then we fail to recognise an important form of response that constitutes part of the very value that we are trying to promote. Requiring that people set aside or ignore their otherwise justified emotions, justified within the very set of values that we are aiming to promote, risks presenting a particular form of affective injustice, where the affective good that is being wrongfully denied is cashed out in terms of emotion's role in our capacity for harmonious relationship. A teleological account that seeks to maximise communal harmony is unable to capture this nuance.

The Challenge Facing Metz's Account

Metz's account, however, faces a challenge. Metz aims to present a novel relational moral theory that draws on African philosophical moral thinking. His book is subtitled *African Ethics in and beyond the Continent* and his research programme is driven by seeking to capture insights from African communitarian relational ethics. A genuine question, then, is whether he is successful in staying true to his theory's philosophical commitments as a relational moral theory with an African heritage. I also set up the

challenge at the beginning of this article as reconciling distinct traditions within African moral thinking. So, for current purposes, I am interested in assessing whether Metz is successful in presenting a relational theory that is true to the primacy of a value like harmony within an African communitarian-inspired framework. The challenge facing Metz, then, is this: the feature that makes Metz's account successful in accommodating disruptive emotions at the same time undermines his account as meaningfully relational, whereby the primacy of harmony for an African-inspired ethics is not adequately captured.

This form of challenge is nothing new for Metz. In assessing how Metz handled human rights in earlier work, for instance, Anthony O. Oyowe (2013) argues that Metz's theory fails to adequately capture key tenets of communitarianism, such as the primacy and non-instrumental value of harmonious community. Oyowe has repeated the charge against Metz's (2022) formulation as the charge that the theory is not genuinely relational[4], and Lucy Allais also picks up on it to argue that that Metz's theory is not African 'in any significant sense' (Allais 2022: 203). These versions of the charge are concerned with the communitarian, relational, or African natures of Metz's theory. These terms could be taken to be describing the same defining feature of the theory: a communitarian form of relational ethics where the relational property at hand is communal harmony can be seen as a defining feature of an African moral theory. I will draw on these existing critiques, as well as Metz's response in earlier work, in presenting the form of the challenge as it applies to the way in which I have argued that Metz's theory is able to accommodate disruptive emotions.

What will be crucial in setting up the challenge is that, if Metz's and my earlier work is correct, disruptive emotions can be a form of responding to and holding to account how someone exercises their capacity for friendliness. The capacity plays the key role and is what allows that sometimes promoting communal harmony may result in disruption. Metz, remember, does maintain that 'harmonious or communal relationship of a certain kind is ultimately what should be pursued as an end'. In this way, his theory seeks to prioritise communal harmony and capture the insight that he draws out of much African moral thinking. If this is the case, his theory would be relational in that harmonious relationship is what grounds our moral

worth. But remember that he also qualifies this claim: 'albeit as a way to express respect for individuals capable of it' (Metz 2022: 90), where he does not 'ascribe a superlative final value to communal ways of relating (and do so to the capacity for them)' (2022: 119). Here, we can see that the value of harmonious relationship, communal harmony, is in fact derived from an individual's capacity for such relationship, not the relationship or harmony itself. Metz is quite clear that it is the capacity that matters, where subjects can have a capacity without being in relationship with others and where 'merely having the capacity to commune is sufficient for a full moral status' regardless of whether one has ever actually stood in relationship with others (2022: 108–109).

If the value of harmonious relationship is derived from an individual's capacity for such relationship, the important question to ask is whether this capacity really is relational such that Metz's theory can be accurately described as a relational moral theory. This is because the grounding of our moral worth, and so what defines the theory as relational, is that capacity.

Let's begin by granting that Metz's theory is accurately described as a relational moral theory. If so, then it would be a relational moral theory because the primary value is in a meaningful sense a relational property. Here, Metz defines a relational property in contrast to intrinsic properties as 'features that do make essential reference to something beyond the individual' (2022: 232).[5] Following this definition along with the primacy afforded to the capacity for harmonious relationship in Metz's theory, an individual's capacity for harmonious relationship must make essential reference to something beyond the individual. For instance, when we are describing what the capacity is a capacity *for,* we must refer to standing in friendly community with others – things that lie beyond the individual. It is not a capacity for, say, rationality, where we can unpack what rationality is without essentially referring to something beyond the individual.

This seems to be how Metz intends for us to interpret his moral theory as relational, at least on my reading. But there is an important challenge to the plausibility of this reading. As noted already, communal harmony is what ought to be pursued, albeit with the qualification that it ought to be pursued as a way to express respect for those with the capacity for harmonious relationship. This is why

the primary value is the capacity for harmonious relationship, not the value of communal harmony itself.

But if we grant that the capacity for harmonious relationship is in a meaningful sense relational as Metz defines it and as we granted earlier, then we risk obscuring the difference between relational and non-relational properties.[6] While it may be the case that a full description of the capacity makes reference to standing in friendly community with others, it remains the capacity itself that has to be promoted, not harmony. Indeed, Metz emphasises that it is the capacity that matters to allow that there are instances where someone may not stand in communal relations but still have moral worth (2022: 109). Yet, the capacity could plausibly be promoted in ways that do not necessarily involve something beyond the individual such as if, for instance, one relates to oneself. Someone living in isolation and not part of a community may still have the relevant capacity and may even exercise that capacity through the ways in which the person relates to themself – in a friendly, harmonious way. Metz does define identity and solidarity in terms of relating to others, however, and in earlier work, Metz describes communal relationship as 'the combination of relationships of identity and solidarity, which can be realised at a dyadic level, between two people alone' (2014: 315). If this is how we ought to understand the relevant capacity, then it would have to make essential reference to others. Relating to oneself, by definition, would be excluded from the activities of a capacity that can only be realised between two people.

But it is unclear whether the requirement that identity and solidarity can only be held between two people is anything more than a stipulative definition or at best a description of success conditions rather than an accurate description of the capacity at play.

Going back to Platonic theories of the soul, it is certainly conceptually possible to think of oneself as consisting of parts that ought to stand in a form of communal harmony of parts. This need not be in a merely metaphoric sense, either, as we can identify and stand in solidarity with aspects of oneself and not identify or stand in solidarity with other aspects. Think of Frankfurt-style second-order desires (Frankfurt 1982) or the way in which there are aspects of oneself that one may not identify with, such as when uncovering one's implicit biases (Carman 2018).

Someone might respond that such self-identification and solidarity is a means to the end of other-identification and -solidarity, where the latter should be understood as the proper functioning of the capacity. As such, the proper functioning of a capacity for communal harmony involves other-identification and -solidarity, where self-identification and -harmony are derivative.

Even so, this does not entail that the capacity at heart of both self- and other-identification and -solidarity is substantially different in essence.[7] Crucially, if the self-form is a means to enable the proper functioning of the capacity, there would be nothing deficient if the capacity were exercised in this means-end way as there would be if, say, the capacity is misused in instances of deliberate unfriendliness. At baseline, then, the capacity that ought to be promoted need not make essential reference to something beyond the individual. We can draw on reference to something beyond the individual when describing a particular use or when identifying success conditions for the proper functioning of the capacity, but if the capacity itself can be legitimately exercised in a way that does not require others, then a description of that capacity need not make essential reference to something beyond the individual.[8]

If we nevertheless go with Metz and accept that a full interpretation of the capacity does essentially make reference to something other than the individual, then other properties that we might typically think of as non-relational also turn out to be relational. Take a capacity for language, for instance. If we define language as being essentially a mode by which we communicate with others, then a capacity for language becomes a relational property, too. But having a capacity for language is a property of the individual alone, regardless of how that capacity is developed, described or best used. If we allow that the capacity of an individual is relational like this, then it becomes unclear what the metaphysical distinction is between relational and non-relational properties. At the very least, the explanatory force of distinguishing between the nature of a property – versus its development or its use – becomes moot. In contrast, something like communal harmony is clearly relational: it refers to the nature of relationship between items that make up the social grouping.

So, on one hand accepting Metz's understanding of a relational property does not obviously show how the capacity for communal

harmony is essentially relational at heart and, on the other hand, if we grant that the capacity for communal harmony is relational, we quickly lose the explanatory and metaphysical difference between having relational and non-relational properties. Perhaps we should work with an alternative definition of relational property, for instance as 'the property of bearing a relation to something' (MacBride 2020).[9] But such a definition does not show that the relevant capacity is relational as having a capacity is not the bearing of a relation to something, even if an instance of exercising that capacity is.

Further, a capacity to relate is distinct to actually relating or being in communal harmony. Let us go back to the possibility of someone in isolation who, as Metz allows, could have the relevant capacity. This person could still respect their own capacity by seeking ways to cultivate and promote it such that once that person is in contact with others, they will be able to relate.[10] But this loses the primacy of communal harmony, the key feature of communitarianism that Metz aims to capture. As Oyowe points out, a core tenet of African communitarianism is that the individual is 'necessarily embedded in a network of relationships', which he interprets as 'the foundational claim about the causal dependence of the individual on the community' (2013: 105). As such, the value of community is non-instrumental. Yet, on Metz's view, it looks like the value of community is practically instrumental to the extent that it enables an agent to exercise a capacity for harmonious relationship. As Oyowe writes regarding earlier Metz's concern with grounding dignity in a capacity for harmonious relationship with others in a community:

> It seems to me that grounding dignity in a yet-to-be-realised capacity for community represents the individual as existing in principle outside the network of relationships that constitutes community. The mere possession of that capacity sets the individual apart from the community, insofar as having that capacity expresses the promise of the individual's subsequent entry into community. (Oyowe 2013: 108–109)[11]

In our terms and as should be familiar from the discussion so far, perhaps a capacity for harmonious relationship does, in a full description, refer to something beyond the individual, namely the community and communal harmony. But having that capacity does not depend on its being realised, and it may be possible to promote

and exercise the capacity in ways that do not depend on a wider community, as with relating to oneself in a friendly way. If so, then having that capacity sets the individual apart from the community in a way the subverts the role and importance of community.

Metz (2014), however, rejects this claim that Oyowe makes regarding the grounding of human dignity and, presumably, for the form that I have articulated here. As he suggests, 'To contend that what makes individuals special is their capacity for communal relationships, regardless of whether that capacity has been exercised to a certain degree' implies nothing about the causal dependence, or not, of the individual on the community: 'It simply points to what gives them a dignity' (Metz 2014: 316). 'When I consider an individual's ability, apart from how it has been exercised in relation to others', Metz continues, 'I am not asserting that he could live apart from them or have that ability without being supported by them; I am merely focusing, for the philosophical moment, on what I take to be a morally valuable facet of her' (2014: 316).

I doubt that this is sufficient as a response, however. We can agree with Metz that we are looking at what is morally relevant, where we may not need to make claims about whether the individual could exist without the community or vice versa. We can even agree that the capacity of the individual is only valuable because of communal harmony. That is, the morally valuable facet of the individual is that they have a capacity for friendliness, which is in turn only valuable because of the inherent value of communal harmony. But still, as Allais puts it, 'There is a significant difference between seeing the fundamental value . . . as harmonious community and seeing the fundamental value as being the individual human beings who have the capacity for harmonious community' (2022: 228). Metz's understanding promotes the latter where the individual with the capacity comes prior in a ranking of values to actual harmonious community, whereas the key feature of communitarianism is the former, where harmonious community would come prior in a ranking of values to the individual with the capacity (see also Etieyibo 2016). While illustrating how communal harmony may nevertheless inform and play a central role in Metz's position, he does not show how the shift to a capacity still centres communal harmony in the morally defining way that is characteristic of communitarianism.

Why Should We Care?

Where does this leave us? I have argued that the capacity for harmonious relationship is not obviously a relational property, even if what it is a capacity for is a relation. This puts pressure on whether Metz's theory is, in a substantive sense that is sufficient for its also being communitarian, 'relational'. I agree that in a weaker sense the theory is relational in that it does centrally involve reference to the kinds of relations we stand in with others, contrasting it with theories that involve no such reference at all. What I take issue with is whether this means that the good-defining property is properly conceived of as relational itself. In other words, I do not take issue with the claim that 'what is special about a person . . . is her ability to relate to others communally' (Metz 2014: 318) but rather with the claim that this makes the theory genuinely relational. And this is relevant because, drawing on those like Oyowe, Allais and Edwin Etieyibo, I also argued that the prioritising of a capacity for harmonious relationship, a non-relational property, loses the characteristic feature of African communitarianism that Metz is striving to capture.

Going back to my original focus on accommodating disruptive emotions, we therefore see that the very feature of Metz's account that enabled us to accommodate disruptive emotions, the capacity, casts doubt on the heritage and nature of his theory. Without finding alternative ways of understanding what a relational property is that can reconcile Metz's position with core African communitarian commitments, and which by drawing on Oyowe I have suggested will be difficult, it is unlikely that his theory offers a way in which to reconcile competing traditions within African philosophical thought that disagree over a positive role for disruption and, even, violence. I have therefore not yet achieved my own opening aims of the article to find such a reconciliation.

But why does this matter, more generally? After all, if we want a novel normative theory, we have one – barring other critiques of the success of Metz's approach (and here see Allais 2022). Metz undoubtedly offers a distinctive theory because of the way in which it draws in the relevance of communal harmony and his theory still centralises the importance of something like communal harmony while being able to accommodate valuable disharmony. If

his theory has these features, perhaps we do not need to worry if it is genuinely relational, in what sense it is relational, or whether it sufficiently captures communitarian commitments.

But I do think that we should care because of lessons we can draw from this discussion that have a bearing on wider debates. For instance, we might need to go back to questioning how best to interpret something like harmony or emotion within an African communitarian framework. If, for instance, we interpret harmony as a virtue rather than a value, as Allais (2022) suggests we should interpret Tutu's writings, we might have a means of promoting the cultivation of certain capacities without thereby shifting the focus from actual harmony. Alternatively, perhaps we can unpack further the notion of 'communitarian emotions' that Bernard Matolino (2015) espouses. The critique of Metz illustrates that understanding communitarian emotions with reference to reactive attitudes that inhere necessarily in the individual (Carman 2022a) may not be a satisfactory route to go if our aim is to reconcile how an African philosophical framework could incorporate disruptive emotions.

These are both exercises in interpretation and raise questions that would be of particular interest to those working within African philosophical frameworks. However, there are potential implications that extend beyond this subset of interests.

I wish, in particular, to draw attention to ways of conceptualising something like affective injustice. While critical attention to affect and emotion has a rich history across a range of disciplines in the social sciences and humanities, the concept of affective injustice, if not the phenomena itself, is relatively new to philosophical discussion and the literature is still developing (Gallegos 2022). As Francisco Gallegos discusses, it is a concept that refers to a particular kind of injustice that those already suffering a variety of oppressions face. The attention it is receiving is part of recognising the import of the experiences of the oppressed where discussions of affective injustice have been spurred on by the productivity of a related identification of a specific form of injustice, epistemic injustice. This is to the extent that even how the terms are defined can mirror each other: epistemic injustice, in the classic definition, is injustice faced by someone in their capacity as a knower (see Fricker 2007), while affective injustice has been defined as an injustice faced by someone in their capacity as an affective being (Archer and Mills 2019). Yet, as Gallegos

again points out, comparing epistemic and affective injustice uncovers complexities 'that make inquiry into affective injustice particularly challenging' (2022: 186). One such challenge is that, while we can clarify what might help a knower to do well or poorly, 'there is no philosophical consensus regarding what it would mean to do well or poorly as an affective being' (Gallegos 2021: 186).

Aiming to address this lack of consensus, Gallegos proposes looking at the broader literature on justice and injustice where we find the idea that 'justice exists when each person has the goods – for example, freedoms, resources, opportunities, and forms of recognition – they are owed' and where injustice is thus 'the morally objectionable deprivation of such affective goods' (Gallegos 2022: 189). With this in mind, Gallegos proposes understanding affective injustice in terms of affective goods that are owed to a person, with examples such as '*affective freedoms, affective resources, affective opportunities,* and *forms of affective recognition*' (2022: 189). Affective injustice is then the morally objectionable deprivation of such goods. Working with this general definition of affective injustice, I previously suggested that Metz's account can help us to understand what an affective good might look like within an African communitarian-inspired ethics (see Carman 2023).

However, the foregoing critique casts doubt on at least one way of trying to understand what an affective good might be in such a framework. Indeed, a core part of creating space for affective injustice is identifying and defining what those affective goods would be. Only once we can identify such an affective good can we argue that people are being deprived it, and being deprived in a way that is morally objectionable. Yet, if a communitarian framework that prioritises harmony is unable to accommodate disruptive emotions as having a *prima facie* value, then it becomes unclear whether such emotions could constitute affective goods – despite the general sentiment that they do in the wider literature on negative emotions. And if we can make conceptual space for there being affective goods, such as the subjective well-being or emotional aptness that Gallegos focuses on, we might still run into trouble at the level of assessing whether the deprivation of such goods is, in fact, morally objectionable if, say, the deprivation is in the morally required pursuit of a final value of communal harmony. As such, can we genuinely make sense of affective injustice as an applicable and relevant concept within such a moral framework?

Of course, we might respond by saying that it is all the worse for African communitarianism prioritising harmony in this way. It is a long-standing debate whether communitarianism is compatible with widely held liberal leanings that value other notions like human rights or the value of the individual (as samples see Gyekye 1997; Matolino 2018; Menkiti 1984; Metz 2014; Molefe 2017; Oyowe 2013). If what is at stake is a choice between giving up commitment to certain liberal values including affective injustice or giving up commitment to communitarian values, then we might take the incompatibility with making sense of affective injustice to favour the latter.

Yet, this risks being an easy way out. If part of the driving motivation for drawing attention to the diverse ways in which injustice can operate, where specifically we are concerned with the matrices of injustice that those subject to oppression face, then we need to be wary of judging how value systems, especially of those who have been or are oppressed, hold up against a particular set of other values. This is especially pertinent in the field of African philosophy. Much of the recent history of academic African philosophy has been couched in terms of being a postcolonial endeavour, one that has grown out of a project of defining and redefining the contributions of persons that have historically been suppressed and oppressed. As Jonathan J. Chimakonam (n.d.) describes in an entry of the history of African philosophy since the 1920s in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* a way of understanding the development of African philosophy in the twentieth century is by way of the concept of *'ọnụma*', or frustration, where African scholars, '"Frustrated" by colonialism and racialism as well as the legacies of slavery . . . were jolted onto the path of philosophy'. As Chimakonam continues, 'the frustration was borne out of colonial caricature of Africa as culturally naïve, intellectually docile and rationally inept'. One of the major themes within African philosophical research has been identifying and formalising common African values such as ubuntu and developing them into robust philosophical theories such as communitarianism. If we recognise African communitarianism, in general form at least, as a substantive ethical approach while also recognising it as part of a project of promoting African experiences and thought in the face of centuries of oppression, then we are taking seriously the proposed value systems of persons who have been

Theoria Vol 71 Issue 179 June 2024.indb 46 9/3/2024 7:57:41 AM

subjects of various injustices. As such, we cannot simply assume that liberal values take precedence, especially in a context where we are considering the harms – social, political, epistemic, affective and intellectual – of oppression.

Indeed, Etieyibo has argued that Metz's approach to doing African philosophy is culturally imperialistic. This is because, according to Etieyibo (2016: 15), 'the ideal driving the motivation to avoid the charge of collectivism', which is the charge of sacrificing the individual for the community and of not being able to sufficiently accommodate individual rights and freedoms (see also Oyowe 2013):

> is one that is biased towards the Western liberal paradigm of prioritising the right over the good, namely, one that takes individual freedom and human rights as espoused by the liberal tradition in the West as better and desirable to the communitarian paradigm (that may be found in communities across sub-Saharan Africa) and espoused by Ubuntu sensitive values. (Etieyibo 2016: 15)

There is certainly something attractive and plausible to the idea of affective injustice. And, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, there are traditions within African philosophical thought that seek to understand communitarian values like ubuntu or harmony in ways that give scope for violence and disruption, which suggests that there might be ways of incorporating disruptive emotions and affective injustice into an African philosophical framework. But we must also take caution to impose concepts like affective injustice at risk of overlooking how doing so can count against efforts to recognise the experiences and ways of being and knowing of the very persons whose past or continued oppression we are aiming to address when drawing on affective injustice. The critique of Metz throws this into the spotlight as a genuine theoretical challenge.

It is a challenge, however, and not an insurmountable problem. While, on one hand, we could use existing understandings of affective injustice to assess the viability of a moral theory, on the other hand, we could explore alternative ways of conceptualising affective injustice that could be compatible with divergent theoretical background commitments. Here, building on existing literature addressing the complex interactions between affect and emotion, and social, cultural and political forces, such as that mentioned earlier in this article, can potentially offer a contextually sensitive lens through

which to theorise about affective injustice.[12] Further, drawing on the work of African feminist theorists that addresses emotion and injustice or critiques African communitarianism from feminist embodied perspectives, such as the work of Pumla Dineo Gqola (2021), Nompumelelo Zinhle Manzini (2018), Rianna Oelefson (2018) or Louise du Toit (Chimakonam and du Toit 2018), can problematise both communitarianism and what affective goods might look like.

The critique of Metz presented here illustrates the complexity of navigating a pluralistic world, where it is up to us to decide how best now to navigate those complexities.

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Notes

1. When I refer to 'harmony' of 'disharmony', I am referring to communal harmony or communal disharmony.
2. When I talk of 'relational' ethics in what follows, I am referring to a form of African communitarianism that centres on the good of the community, specifically, as there are other forms of relational ethics, such as feminist care ethics, that are not my focus. For differences between African communitarianism and feminist care ethics, see another of Metz's articles, (Metz 2013).
3. I am following Metz's characterisation of Tutu as advancing a teleological theory according to which harmony is a value. Tutu may be alternatively interpreted as proposing a virtue theory with ubuntu understood as a virtue, where we ought to cultivate certain character traits (Allais 2022: 207–208). As I am engaging

with Metz's account in this article, I will not engage in this broader interpretative debate, but I note it as a path for further exploration in the final section.

4. In the talk 'Why Metz's Moral Theory Is Not All That Relational' at *A Book Symposium with Thad Metz: African Ethics in and beyond the Continent,* 19 August 2022, hosted by the African Centre for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science, University of Johannesburg.
5. Metz's definition of relational as 'making essential reference to something beyond the individual' (2022: 232) is in keeping with the wider African communitarian literature with which Metz seeks to engage, where the relational aspect is typically understood along communal lines by requiring a relation with another being (Cordeiro-Rodrigues 2022; Metz 2012).
6. Oyowe makes this point in the aforementioned talk. Here, I expand on the point in terms of my own understanding as I have not found Oyowe's version in print.
7. This would, presumably, be settled empirically.
8. We ought not to understand 'essential reference' as laying down necessary conditions for the capacity to develop, either. Metz allows that the capacity could spontaneously develop without being embedded in a community, in a version of a 'swamp person' scenario where someone instantaneously appears and has no history of communal relationship (Metz 2022: 109). The existence of others for the development of the capacity, then, is not what makes the capacity essentially relational.
9. As mentioned in note 5, Metz's definition of 'relational property' is in keeping with how it can be understood in an African communitarian context. Nevertheless, a further line of inquiry may be to explore alternative conceptions of 'relational property' sensitive to African communitarianism to see if they can be incorporated into Metz's account and the role given to a capacity.
10. A description of Beatriz Flamini who aimed 'to neither see nor speak to another human being for five hundred days' while isolated in a cave comes to mind (Max 2024). While it is unlikely that Flamini has come out of the experience in mint condition, she nevertheless was encouraged to verbalise her thoughts while in the cave and also to record 'confessionals' on camera for researchers. In one recording, she comments: 'Every day I'm happier with myself, and every day the conversations between me and me are more and more friendly'. Even if this is a positive gloss on a difficult experience, Flamini's case illustrates how someone could cultivate a capacity of friendliness without others, and Flamini did emerge from the cave able to relate with others.
11. Oyowe presents this as a stronger argument that Metz's account gets the *metaphysical* relationship between individual and community the wrong way round for an African moral theory, whereby he and others tie moral theory inextricably to a metaphysical worldview.
12. This is not to say that those working on affective injustice are not already drawing on this background – they are.

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