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Relations, Communing, and Intuitions: A Response to Metz's Relational Moral Theory

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Abstract: I respond to Metz's *A Relational Moral Theory* by raising some concerns with his account of 'rightness as friendliness' both as a moral theory and in relation to its supposed Africanness, as well as by suggesting some places where it could be clarified. I argue that his account of moral status as based on the capacity for friendship is more individualist than the accounts with which he compares it. Distinguishing between an account of what grounds value and an account of how we ought to act, I question whether a capacity-based ground of moral status can be equated with an account of rightness as friendliness. I argue further, that Metz builds values into his account of true friendliness, rather than showing that they are grounded in it. I then question the role of the sixteen intuitions he appeals to both in supporting his theory and in establishing its Africanness, and argue that it is based on simplified, homogenized and romanticized accounts of both Africa and the so-called west, as well as not treating like with like in the comparison.

Keywords: Ubuntu, communalism, individualism, African ethics, rightness as friendliness

I. Introduction

Thad Metz's book *A Relational Moral Theory: African Ethics in and Beyond the Continent* is an extremely ambitious book. Synthesizing and developing from over a decade of his work on the topic, he presents a theory he labels 'rightness as friendliness': an account of right action which holds that 'a moral agent ought to respect individuals in virtue of their dignified capacity to befriend or be befriended' (Metz 2022: 166). In addition, although, in a change from some of his previous work, he no longer presents his account as primarily a theory based on *Ubuntu*,[1] he continues to present it as an *African* theory. Engaging with a variety of thinkers from the continent, he outlines what makes

1. *Ubuntu* is an Nguni Bantu term usually translated as *humanness*, and with respect to which there are cognate terms and expressions in multiple languages and societies in sub-Saharan Africa. It is frequently explained in relation to the isiZulu and isiXhosa expression *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, translated as 'a person is a person through other persons,' and cognate expressions in other languages. It is usually understood as expressing a relational account of personhood, explained by John Mbiti who says, 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am' (Mbiti 1990: 141).

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his theory distinct from some others at the level of metaethics (for example, his includes no supernaturalism, which many do, most obviously in relation to ancestors) as well as with respect to normative ethics, where he contrasts his favoured value of friendliness with competitors such as welfare and vitality, as developed by thinkers such as Nkrumah and Gyekye. He presents a distinct methodology that is supposed to defend both what he takes to be the Africanness of his theory, as well as the theory's plausibility. And he ends by comparing his theory to a couple of so-called Western theories in relation to central topics in applied ethics. Any of these issues could be a book in their own right, so the scope of this book is impressive.

I have followed Metz's work on this topic with great interest since his first publication on the topic (Metz 2007). It is interesting to see how the work has developed over fifteen years: how it has all come together, which parts of the initial work have changed, and which have stayed the same. The biggest change from his earliest work on the topic is that while Metz originally presented *communal harmony*, understood as an analytic interpretation of *Ubuntu*, as the fundamental value that grounds the rightness and wrongness of actions, his account is now centred on *the moral status of individuals* who have the *capacity for 'communing'* with others in friendly and loving ways. It is this that he calls 'rightness as friendliness'; I will discuss it in section 2. Then, in section 3, I will look at one of the features of Metz's account that has been constant from the early work: the methodological suggestion of developing a theory by accounting for some moral 'intuitions' that, he claims, are common in the so-called West, as well as some moral 'intuitions' that he claims to be characteristic of sub-Saharan African moral thought. Given the large scope of the book, there are details that remain undeveloped, so some of my comments can be taken as suggestions for ways the account could be clarified in further work. While I have followed the development of the project with interest there are a number of parts of the view and the methodology that I had been sceptical of from the beginning, and I remain so; my aim here is respectful critical engagement.

II. Friendliness, Communing and Respect

The development of Metz's presentation of his moral theory has seen a major shift in his account of fundamental moral value. He retains from his early work the idea of communal relations that involve a combination of identity and solidarity, which I found a helpful part of his early analysis of *Ubuntu* as a value. In contrast to seeing welfare and or vital spirit as fundamental goods, Metz says that 'I advance harmony or communality' as a more promising candidate for the highest good,' 'harmonious or communal relationship of a certain kind

is ultimately what should be pursued as an end' (Metz 2022: 143). But rather than communal harmony (understood as solidarity together with identity), as the foundational explanation of the rightness and wrongness of actions, he now emphasizes the *capacity* for a certain sort of relationship, understood as a capacity had by individuals. He says: '[i]nstead of deeming relationships of identity and solidarity themselves to be a highest good to be promoted, I take the *capacity* to be party to them to have a superlative non-instrumental value and to warrant *respectful* treatment' (Metz 2022: 164). Thus, he presents an account of moral status based on the capacity for a certain kind of relationship, where what makes actions right or wrong is whether they respect this capacity. In this section, I first look at the sense in which Metz's account is *relational*, and then at the sense in which it is grounded in *friendliness*.

II.i. Relationality versus Individualism

Metz presents his theory of rightness as friendliness in contrast with two theories from European and Anglo-American thought (what he calls 'Western' moral theories): utilitarianism and a broadly Kantian moral theory. Metz says that both are individualist, while, in contrast he says that his account of rightness as friendliness is relational.[2] The central feature that he thinks makes utilitarianism and Kant's moral theory individualist is that, he says, their accounts are based on intrinsic and not relational features of individuals. The emphasis on relationality in his account is central to what is supposed to make it African, and he says that 'a number of indigenous sub-Saharan philosophers have fastened onto relational facets of moral thought that many other traditions around the world, particularly those in Anglo-America, Europe, and Australasia, have insufficiently understood and appreciated' (Metz 2022: 9). This comparison seems to me much more complicated than Metz presents it as being. One complication, which I mention but do not discuss further, is that utilitarianism in fact famously has problems with *not* acknowledging or accounting for the distinctness of individuals. A further point is that Metz's account is based on a characteristic that is understood relationally—but it is still a characteristic *of individuals*. This is very different to those in the African philosophical tradition who are concerned with community, communitarian politics and social harmony. In addition, Kant's moral philosophy is also based on a relational

2. Metz says that 'the major moral theories of the past 200 years in the Western tradition' are individualist (Metz 2022 19). This seems to me an unhelpful simplification: consider such theorists as, for example, Hegel and Marx and such theories as twentieth-century and contemporary European and Anglo-American communitarianism.

characteristic of individuals, so the supposed contrast between Metz's account and Kant's is not as stark as Metz sometimes suggests.[3]

Metz says that

> instead of focusing on actual relationships as the highest or greatest good that is foundational to morality, I deem the capacity for it to be what is superlatively good for its own sake and bestows a moral status. It is not a communal relationship itself towards which we fundamentally have duties; instead, we have them towards individuals capable of it. Furthermore, individuals have a full moral status or a dignity, not because they are in fact members of a communal relationship—say, are part of a family; instead, they have it because they by their nature are able to be subjects and objects of such a relationship. By my account, individual entities are what are ultimately owed moral treatment for their own sake, but they are so in virtue of a modal-relational property, their ability to commune with others, which contrasts with intrinsic properties such as the capacity to feel pleasure or act autonomously. (Metz 2022: 172)

> Instead of deeming relationships of identity and solidarity themselves to be a highest good to be promoted, I take the *capacity* to be party to them to have a superlative non-instrumental value and to warrant *respectful* treatment. (Metz 2022: 164)

Note that the capacity Metz is concerned with is a capacity had by *individuals*; the moral status that he takes the capacity to ground and explain is *the moral status of individuals*; and what he takes the capacity to lead to is an account that warrants *acting towards individuals* in certain ways—with respect. There are clearly many respects in which this *is* an individualist account. In my understanding of the communitarian moral and political philosophy developed by African philosophers (as well as communitarian thought of European and Anglo-American philosophers), it is commonly thought that, to various degrees, the fundamental good is that of the *community*, for example, communal harmony, which is clearly some distance from respecting individuals who have a capacity to commune.

Metz says that while he is concerned with individuals, his account is based on *a relational feature* of individuals. Interestingly, the relational feature of individuals he is concerned with is not primarily a relation to community, or intrinsically connected to being part of a community. While they are similar words, *communal* and *communing* are quite different. The capacity for *communing* need not have anything necessarily to do with society, and Metz not infrequently gives the idea of a romantic relationship as his central example of communing.[4] For example, he says that romantic love is "[t]he most intense

3. We could add to this the extent to which African thought contains more individualism than Metz suggests. For a nuanced discussion, see Jackson 2021.
4. He does not discuss any anthropological work on marriage in African contexts, and the extent to which romantic love rather than, for example, social bonding between families, features centrally in it, another way in which his account is individualist.

kind of harmonious or communal relationship possible" (Metz 2022: 196) and that '[m]arriage is one of the most extreme ways to relate harmoniously or communally, and is within the reach of most people' (Metz 2022: 208). But a loving relationship, whether romantic or friendship, between two people has no necessary relation to the community, or to communal harmony. And the capacity for romantic love with an other or a small number of other individuals might be different from the capacity for harmonious relating with a community; Metz does not give reasons for thinking otherwise.[5] Much literature concerns ways in which two people's romantic love can be at odds with their society, and can be something inward-focused, which takes them out of and away from society. If the highest form of communing is that between two or some other small number of individuals, this might not be individualist in the sense of being about individuals in isolation (what moral theory is?), but it is not *social* or *communal*. So not only is Metz's account of moral status based on a capacity had by *individuals*, the extent to which it is relational is based in a capacity individuals have for relating to some specific others, and relation to a community is not fundamental. Communality is not the same as relationality, though Metz often speaks as if they are (for example, (Metz 2022: 193)). This is not, of course, an objection to the account, so much as a clarification of the relational capacity he is appealing to, the extent to which it contrasts with individualism, and the difference between it and communitarian theories.

Metz presents his account of the capacity in virtue of which he thinks individuals have value (the capacity to commune) as relational in contrast with Kantian moral theories, which he says are individualist. But it is not at all clear that Metz's account is more relational than Kant's. Metz says that he is dealing with Kant's principle of autonomy, but he mostly explains Kant's account as fundamentally based on the idea of honouring individuals' capacity for *rationality* (which is not the same as autonomy).[6] For example, he says that Kantianism is the view that moral status is constituted by a being's capacity for rationality, and that contemporary Kantian accounts usually ground moral status on a being's more general capacity for reasoned deliberation (Metz 2022: 243). While contemporary thought might understand autonomy as a matter of choosing for yourself, or choosing authentically, for Kant, autonomy is a matter of being governed by a principle which comes from reason, and which, he argues, can only be a principle that is a law for everyone. This means that what autonomy is, for Kant, is not a feature of rational agents that can be understood

5. He does not provide reasons to think 'friendliness' in a marriage and 'friendliness' as a characteristic of social being and as a characteristic of citizenship are the same thing.
6. Metz says that he does not aim to strengthen the alternative theories he discusses, leaving that to their proponents; unfortunately though, he does present highly simplified accounts of the alternative theories he discusses.

in an individualized way.[7] Kant's principle of autonomy says: 'choose only in such a way that the maxims of your choice are also included as universal law in the same volition' (Kant 1996: 430). This does not say 'respect people's capacity to choose,' or 'respect their rational abilities or capacity for reasoned deliberation,' but rather requires you to choose in such a way that the principles you act on take the account of everyone else in a specific way. In saying that the principle you act on must consider *everyone*, or be such that *everyone* can act on it, Kant includes a broader moral community than Metz's account of communing, which has its peak version in something that can take place between two people.[8]

The relationality of Kant's moral principle is even more obvious in his other formulations. Kant's formula of humanity says: 'so act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means' (Kant 1996: 430). This too does not say 'respect people's capacity for rationality,' and, interestingly, is quite close to one way in which *Ubuntu* is understood, to the extent that it is understood as humanness, or the value of humanity.[9] Kant's third formulation of the moral law, the formula of the kingdom of ends, says: "all maxims ought, by their own legislation, to *harmonize* with a possible kingdom of ends as with a kingdom of nature" (Kant 1996: 436; my emphasis). Thus, all Kant's formulations are relational insofar as they tell you to take into account in your acting whether your reasons for your actions could be acceptable to or sharable by all other moral agents. On a Kantian account, morality requires thinking about reasons that are sharable by other humans; acting on reasons that are shareable by other humans respects the value of humanity, and thinking about the value of humanity and about shareable reasons requires thinking of a harmonious community of people interacting in ways that respect each other (a kingdom of ends). This is a thoroughly relational, interpersonal account, based on the value of humanity, and while there is clearly a sense in which it is individualist, it is hard to see that it is more individualist than Metz's appeal to the capacity individuals have to have loving relationships with some others.

7. Arguably, Kant's accounts of *reason* is also relational, in requiring us to think from the point of view of everyone.
8. In comparing Kant's account with communitarian moral concerns of some African philosophers, Oyowe and Etieyibo argue that there are similarities to Kant in the idea of making the ends of others your own (Oyowe and Etieyibo 2018: 347–48), and to Rawls in the idea of society as a cooperative venture for mutual advantage (Oyowe and Etieyibo 2018: 351), as well as the idea of political justifiability as a reciprocal, interpersonal notion. On these readings, too, Metz's account might turn out to be *more* individualist than Kant. See also Eze's defence of public reason (Eze 2008).
9. See Letseka 2012 and Murove 2014: 37 for this kind of account of Ubuntu, and see Allais 2022 and Oyowe and Etieyibo 2018 for discussion.

Questioning whether Metz's account is more or less individualist than other accounts is of course not an objection to his account as a normative theory. However, it suggests to me a way of taking the work forward, which is that instead of trying to contrast it with simplified versions of other theories, it might be interesting to see commonalities, and to see what the theories can learn from each other. It is arguable that both Kant's account and Metz's base moral status on the capacity for morality; this seems to me worth further exploration.

II.ii. Friendliness and Respect

I have questioned whether Metz's account is more relational than one of the two theories he contrasts it with, Kant's, in terms of the fact that his account is grounded in the moral status of *individuals*, and because the relational capacity of individuals he focusses on seems to involve a possibly smaller community than that appealed to both by Kant's account and by the accounts of the African philosophers he engages with. A further question raised by his account of moral status is whether his moral theory really is, as he initially presents it, an account of *rightness as friendliness*. As noted, while he presents the slogan of his account as 'rightness as friendliness,' he unpacks the account more specifically as an account of right action which holds that 'a moral agent ought to respect individuals in virtue of their dignified capacity to befriend or be befriended' (Metz 2022: 166). Three things seem to me in danger of being run together here: being friendly towards individuals; respecting individuals; and respecting individuals in virtue of a specified capacity. In pulling these apart, I raise a few ways in which his account can be clarified.

A potential ambiguity in Metz's account is that the claim that 'a moral agent ought to respect individuals in virtue of their dignified capacity to befriend or be befriended' can be read as telling us about what grounds dignity or as about what is required for moral motivation. In other words, it is not clear to me whether Metz simply holds that the basic moral principle is that one should honour those individuals that are in fact capable of communing (Metz 2022: 44), or whether, in addition, he takes it to be necessary for moral action that these individuals are being honoured for the reason that they have the capacity to commune, or on the basis of their capacity for communing. He states his principles in both ways at various times. Thus, Metz's account can be clarified in terms of whether he takes recognizing an individual as capable of communing and acting in response to this recognition as central to what makes actions moral, or whether he thinks that someone who in fact communes with and is friendly to others but does not take themself to be communing with others in virtue of their capacity to befriend or be befriended is acting morally.

A further point about the claim that 'a moral agent ought to respect individuals in virtue of their dignified capacity to befriend or be befriended' is that giving an account of what dignity or the requirement for respect is *grounded on*—an account of moral status—is not the same as giving an account of how we ought to *treat* individuals who have moral status—how we ought to respond to dignity. That the capacity for friendliness grounds moral status need not entail that the way we have to treat individuals who have moral status is by being friendly to them. One way to understand Metz's account is as saying that the capacity for *communing* or *friendliness* ground moral status or dignity, but what follows from this for action is that we should act in *respectful* ways. If this is the case, then his account of rightness is respectfulness, not friendliness. Respecting those who have the dignified capacity for friendliness and being friendly are not obviously the same, and this seems important to Metz's account, since as with his earlier account of communal harmony, Metz wants to show that his account can explain and justify acting in ostensibly unfriendly ways to wrongdoers and aggressors. Metz says that 'when it comes to guilty parties, it need not be degrading of their capacity for friendliness to act towards them in very unfriendly ways' (Metz 2022: 180). In defending his justification of unfriendly treatment of wrongdoers and aggressors, Metz says that 'Kantians standardly prize the capacity for autonomy while holding that reducing the autonomy of those who have misused that capacity need not be disrespectful of it' (Metz 2022: 180);[10] 'I similarly maintain that very unfriendly ways of acting towards those who have themselves been very unfriendly (towards innocents) can be respectful of their capacity for friendliness. More carefully, I submit that it is not disrespectful to act in a very unfriendly way towards someone, if that is the only way to counteract someone's comparable unfriendliness towards an innocent party' (Metz 2022: 180). While Metz does not say much to *explain* why it is not disrespectful to act in a very unfriendly way to someone who is being unfriendly (the parallel question is one that, in contrast, Kantians have spilt a lot of ink over), it is clearly important for his account. He says that '[w[hen someone misuses his special ability to harmonize with others, there is no disrespect in using a comparable discord if necessary to get him to stop' (Metz 2022: 181).[11] Since Metz says that respecting certain people (aggressors and wrongdoers) is compatible with being *unfriendly* to them, this

10. I set aside the way in which this seems to me a misreading of Kant; autonomy, as Kant understands it (as acting under a law you give to yourself) is not something that is reduced when someone is, for example, imprisoned. The latter would be a reduction of what Kant calls external freedom, rather than having practical rational abilities, or the capacity to act under a law that comes from reason.

11. The idea that unfriendliness is a misuse of the capacity for friendliness is intriguing; it would be interesting to hear more about what the capacity is, such that unfriendliness involves using it or misusing it.

does not seem to be an account of *rightness as friendliness*, rather *rightness as respect for dignity*, with a particular account of what dignity is grounded on.

One way Metz might defend the idea that he has a theory of rightness as friendliness, rather than a theory of rightness as respect, might be to argue that ostensibly hostile treatment of aggressors and wrongdoers is not truly unfriendly when we understand unfriendliness in the right way, and that true friendliness is always respectful, and true respect is always friendly. But there would be a number of concerns with this. First, it would need to be argued for, and until this is done, it seems misleading to call his account rightness as friendliness. Second, the response would seem to build other values into an account of true friendliness, in order to then find all the values we want in true friendliness, so that we can say that all rightness and wrongness is grounded in true friendliness. We see something like this move a number of times in Metz's work. For example, the idea of sharing a way of life features centrally in Metz's account of communing. But Metz builds his own understanding of desirable, *respectful egalitarian* sharing into his account of what it is to share a way of life. This would not be a problem if, for example, the goal was to develop a specific account of *respectful sharing* as opposed to other ways of sharing a life. But it is a problem if the aim of the account is to ground all features of morality in sharing or communing themselves, since it introduces values other than sharing or communing, and uses these to inform an account of desirable forms of sharing or communing, in order to then subsequently find that sharing supposedly grounds all other values. If the aim is truly to see friendly sharing as grounding all other values, calling respectful egalitarian sharing 'true' sharing, or unfriendly treatment of aggressors 'true friendliness,' would be tendentious.

Another example of Metz being in danger of showing that the values we want a moral theory to explain are grounded in friendliness only because he builds them into his account of true friendliness is his claim that the political theory which follows from his account of rightness would give equal voice to all competent adults. He says that: '[o]ur ability to enjoy a sense of togetherness and cooperate with each other is best honoured when what happens in a state's territory has been ratified by each competent adult who lives there (or at least by her representative)' (Metz 2022: 200). This example is supposed to illustrate the idea that rightness as friendliness gives the right—egalitarian—political results, as well as that this is in some sense African. The connection between individuals having the right to participate in the election of representatives and their capacity to participate in a kind of communing that has its epitome in romantic relationships seems quite tenuous. Equal participation also does not fall out of the idea of sharing a life. Members of a harmonious patriarchal religious community, arguably, share a way of life. But if they do

share a way of life, it is not obvious that sharing a way of life has any necessary connection to the egalitarianism Metz develops in his account. Just to be clear—this is not an objection to the egalitarianism in Metz's account, or to the idea that it is an attractive form of relationship. The point is rather that it does not fall out of the idea of sharing a way of life or communing without supplementation by other values, which undermines the idea Metz has presented a moral theory based entirely on (the capacity for) communing or sharing.[12] The supposed Africanness of Metz's political account goes via his claim that seeking consensus as a way of political decision-making is something typically African, which I discuss in the next section; here it is worth noting that not only does the appeal to friendliness, sharing a way of life, and cooperating with each other not ground an account of egalitarian political participation without the addition of other values, further, it is not taken to do so in many of the African societies Metz appeals to, in which the consensus seen as desirable was often that between elite men.[13]

III. Metz's Methodology: The Sixteen Intuitions

Since his earliest work on the topic, Metz has developed and presented both his defence of the plausibility of his theory, as well as his defence of its Africanness, through an appeal to the claim that it explains a specific list of moral 'intuitions,' one group of which are said to be shared between sub-Saharan Africa and the so-called West and one group of which are said to be characteristic of sub-Saharan Africa but not the so-called West.[14] The book discusses sixteen such intuitions, eight from each group. Metz describes moral intuitions as 'beliefs that are firmly and commonly held by most informed interlocutors (Metz 2022: 90), or 'a judgement that a particular act has some moral feature such as permissibility or a certain degree of wrongness, where that judgment is meant to be less controversial than the principles it is being used to evaluate' (Metz 2022: 90). Such moral judgments can be appealed to in the construction and

12. We also see this kind of move in Metz's earlier work, with respect to the value of communal harmony: in order to show that all the values we want to find in a moral theory are grounded in communal harmony, Metz builds other values, such as autonomy and equality, into his account of true communal harmony—and then argues that communal harmony grounds all the values we want to find in a moral theory. He does not show that equality and autonomy are grounded in communal harmony, but rather builds them into his account of desirable communal harmony; but this undermines the idea that the account is grounded only on the value of communal harmony. See Allais 2022.
13. For a nuanced and careful discussion of the complexity of a particular version of *Ubuntu* or *Hinhuism* (its Shona equivalent), including in terms of how it does not assume egalitarianism but rather some kind of status relations, see Jackson 2021: 90–96.
14. Note that 'sub-Saharan Africa' is itself a modern term, and arguably one rooted in colonialism.

evaluation of moral theories, since, as Metz says, 'strong evidence in favour of a moral theory is that it clearly entails and powerfully explains a wide array of less controversial claims about what is right and wrong' (Metz 2022 85). In addition to evaluating a principle in terms of how well it grounds and explains less controversial judgments, intuitions can provide evidence against a moral theory, if 'it has a counterintuitive implication, for instance that it entails that an act is wrong that is for all we can tell right, or that it entails that an act is right that is incontestably wrong' (Metz 2022 85).

While the role of intuitions in philosophy in general and moral philosophy in particular is controversial, Metz's view that we cannot do moral philosophy without appealing to intuitions seems plausible. Without some clear commitments about what is right and wrong as a starting point, it is not clear that we have a subject matter to theorize. However, I have concerns about the use to which Metz puts the intuitions he appeals to, two of which I will discuss here.[15] One worry is with the role of the intuitions in showing the supposed plausibility of the theory as explaining all right and wrong action. The second is with the idea that the intuitions explain the *Africanness* of the theory. I discuss each in turn.

The idea that it counts in favour of a theory if it powerfully grounds and explains a wide array of moral concerns, and that it counts against a theory if it has counter-intuitive implications is plausible, but is some distance from thinking that the fact that a principle or a value explains some sixteen particular intuitions gives reason to think it explains right and wrong in general. Metz says that it would be very interesting if there were something that all wrong actions had in common (Metz 2022: 82). This surely would be interesting. But even if Metz were to succeed in showing that a particular value grounds and explains some sixteen particular moral intuitions, this does not establish that this value grounds and explains *all* judgments about the rightness and wrongness of actions. And this is granting something which is questionable—that Metz can succeed in making the case for the claim that *friendliness* best grounds and explains all of the sixteen moral intuitions he discusses.

Suppose that value pluralism is true, and there are a number of fundamental values that ground and explain different moral judgements. If this were the case we would expect still to find a lot of moral intuitions that are grounded in each value. It would not be particularly surprising to find sixteen intuitions grounded in one value—and another sixteen intuitions grounded in some other value. Without being given substantial reasons to believe that these sixteen intuitions comprehensively represent all fundamental areas of moral concern, there being some group of moral intuitions that a particular value explains does not show that this value explains all moral claims, nor even, I think,

15. See Allais 2022 for further discussion.

provide much reason for thinking that it does. And Metz in fact acknowledges that at least some of the intuitions he discusses can also be explained by other values; he does not even attempt to show that friendliness provides the best or most fundamental grounding of all the intuitions. He might be right that the value he is discussing provides a better explanation of *some* of the intuitions, but with some he simply shows it is compatible with them. And he does not give us reasons to think that the sixteen intuitions exhaustively represent significant areas of moral concern. He also has almost no discussion of why he previously thought that the same sixteen intuitions were grounded in the value of communal harmony, but now takes them to be grounded in friendliness—did he previously go wrong, or can some of the intuitions still be grounded in communal harmony? He also has almost no discussion of the difference between grounding the intuitions in friendliness and grounding them in respect for individuals who have the capacity for friendliness.

Most moral theories hold that human welfare, human needs, and human dignity have value, and that hostility to other humans is wrong. Any theory which holds this (i.e., most moral theories) will take friendliness to other humans to be often right, and unfriendliness to be often wrong. It therefore is highly likely that friendliness will be *compatible* with a range of intuitions about rightness. But showing that some action is friendly is very far from showing that this is the most fundamental explanation of why it is right, and showing that an action is unfriendly is very far from showing that this is the most fundamental explanation of why it is wrong. The idea that torture, genocide, murder and rape are unfriendly seems trivially true, but very far from giving an informative or explanatory account of what makes them wrong, as well as an account of what makes distinct atrocities distinct. As I have argued elsewhere (Allais 2022), while it is true that they are unfriendly, this is not the same as unfriendliness being the most fundamental thing about them that explains the wrongs that they are, and it seems to me only marginally more explanatory than saying that they are not very nice.

My second main set of concerns is with the alleged Africanness of Metz's second group of intuitions; with the way he sets up the contrast between Africa and the so-called West; and the lack of parallel in the way African and so-called Western thought are treated in his account. As he has throughout his work on this topic, Metz aims to avoid essentialism and simplification by stressing that the way he uses the word 'African' is to refer to properties that have been 'recurrent' in at least the sub-Saharan region for a long time. He says that 'I am using the word 'African' neither to describe the way those on the continent have lived in comprehensive detail nor to capture how a contemporary person who calls himself an 'African' conceives of himself' (Metz 2022: 30). Rather, he says that there are ideas and values that are 'recurrent'

in a long span of time 'from pre-colonial societies to contemporary African intellectuals inspired by them' (Metz 2022: 93), and that such 'recurrence' is what makes ideas count as African in the sense he is concerned with. He says: '[b]y 'African' I am referring to features recurrent in much of the sub-Saharan region of the continent over several hundred years' (Metz 2022: 93).

An idea could be recurrent without being representative, dominant, or even typical, and, as I have argued elsewhere (Allais 2022), Metz's representation of sub-Saharan African society is in danger of being simplified, homogenized and romanticized. We know what an enormous and varied region sub-Saharan Africa is. Metz claims to 'tightly summarize' anthropological and sociological findings from many sources, but in support of this claim he references (in addition to three philosophers and one book on African religion) four anthropological or sociological sources, the most recent of which is more than fifty years old.[16] This is a very thin basis on which to judge that certain moral views are recurrently represented in an area as large, complex and varied as sub-Saharan Africa. It is hard to imagine anyone making a claim about what typifies European values over many hundreds of years on a comparable basis.

Metz says that people indigenous to Africa characteristically have small scale societies in which everyone knows each other, had an emphasis on ritual and custom, held land in common, and responded to infraction not mainly with retribution but rather reconciliation (Metz 2022: 29–30). But the death penalty was not just common but possibly ubiquitous in the African past[17] and there have of course been numerous large, centralized societies in Sub-Saharan Africa—of which the centralized, bureaucratized Ashanti theocratic monarchy, the medieval empires of Ghana, Mali, Songhai and others, the 800 year Benin kingdom, with its organized military, large cities, expansive trade are just a few examples, as well as being different from each other. As Olufemi Taiwo asks, expressing scepticism about communalism being an African value,

> [h]ow communalistic could the medieval Mali Empire have been? Once Islam became the principle of legitimacy when it came to governance, how much communalism and how "traditional" could such polities be? The Ọyọ́ Empire was a multinational polity that had within its borders different national and ethnic groups. . . . 17th century Ọyọ́ with its hierarchies— including an aristocracy and

16. He says: "Here, I tightly summarize anthropological and sociological findings from many sources, amongst them Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940; Forde 1954; Abraham 1962; Carlston 1968; Wiredu 1980, 1992, and 2008; Mbiti 1990; Gyekye 1995: 191–210; Magesa 1997; and Metz 2022: 28n7." He has no discussion of how anthropologists today view these past works, nor of African discussions of the older, 'western' anthropological accounts. His summaries do not mention Evans-Pritchard's work on witchcraft accusations as a way of ensuring adherence to community values, or his work on highly centralized and hierarchical African societies.

17. This is claimed by a report for the African commission on human and people's rights (Working Group on the Death Penalty in Africa, n.d.).

> monarchy that lived off the surplus labor of others—and a complex division of labor? (Taiwo 2016: 85)

Because he seems to ignore the social and political thought of centralized kingdoms, empires, city states, urban centres and trading regions in sub-Saharan Africa, it is likely that if the ideas Metz finds saliently African are really distinctive of any societies, it is of small-scale pre-modern societies, including those in Africa. If we look at Europe prior to the colonial period, we will also find many people living in small groups in which people mostly know each other. Along these lines, Taiwo argues that

> communalism's pedigree is not traced to geography or history; rather, it is to be sourced in the modes of production of material life. If this is so, communalism is distributed across cultures and peoples who are otherwise distinct and different in their cultural productions would share communalism insofar as their modes of production are the same or very similar. And this, indeed, is what we find in the literature. Communalism is widely diffused across the globe from Europe to Asia and the Americas at specific historical conjunctures. (Taiwo 2016: 92)

Metz talks about the sub-Saharan African past over many hundreds of years, but he says he is dealing with 'Western' ideas of the past two hundred years. It is unclear why this should be an illuminating contrast. Why not compare small-scale pre-modern societies in African with small-scale pre-modern societies in Europe? At the beginning of the colonial period, many people in both Europe and Africa were living in small villages in which most people knew each other; why not compare the values 'recurrent' in these groups? Alternatively, why not compare centralized states in Africa with centralized states in Europe, both, perhaps, at the time at the beginning of the colonial period? We would find many commonalities, such as forms of aristocracy and hereditary monarchy. Another alternative would be to compare European and African societies in the post-colonial period, where both have modern states. Taking as saliently 'Western' ideas supposedly found in contemporary liberal democracies in the so-called West, but as saliently African ideas found in some small-scale African societies of the past does not seem the basis for an illuminating contrast with respect to moral thinking. As Wiredu has argued, 'African traditional thought should in the first place only be compared with Western folk thought' (Wiredu 1997: 327).

I have suggested that Metz homogenizes and simplifies[18] African moral thought, and also that his comparison between Africa and the so-called West is unilluminating in the way it does not treat like with like. In addition, I think he homogenizes, simplifies and sanitizes the so-called West. He says he is talking about so-called Western societies for the past two hundred years, and claims as

18. And also, as I have argued elsewhere, romanticizes moral thinking from Africa (Allais 2022).

characteristically Western the ideas of markets, science and constitutionalism. But for at least half of that period it is very far from obvious that constitutionalism was a particularly salient European idea—colonialism, white supremacy and monarchy seem at least as salient—and for much of the twentieth century, a lot of European countries were fascist or communist, so markets are not obviously particularly salient. What is meant by 'markets' is of course also complex—almost all societies have trade (and Africa has had large centralized trading societies and complex trade routes), and contemporary European and north American markets involve significant protectionism, and always have.

Metz discusses his contrast between 'Africa' and the 'West,' and his account of ideas supposedly 'recurrent' in each, under the heading 'How Geographical Labels Are Used' (Metz 2022: 27). It is worth noting what different kinds of geographical labels 'Africa' and 'the West' are. 'Africa' picks out a continent, so an actual geographical region (if a very large and complex one); in contrast, 'the West' picks something out only by way of contrast, and we do not know what it is referring to until we know what the contrast is—west of what? As Appiah points out, the term 'West' and its contrast case have been used in a variety of changing ways, including 'West' versus east understood as Asia, the 'West' understood as Europe in contrast to the Muslim world, and western Europe plus north America in contrast to eastern Europe and Russia (countries behind the 'iron curtain') (Appiah 2016).

It might be responded that while we cannot easily define the term 'Western,' we know what we are referring to when we talk about it, or about 'Western' philosophy or 'Western' ideas. But this seems to me false, whether we are talking about the 2000 year philosophical tradition that is claimed as 'Western,' or ideas that are now claimed by contemporary liberal democracies as their official ideology.[19] What do we mean when we say that Tolstoy is a 'Western' writer (despite the contrast between the 'west' and the countries behind the iron curtain) and that Australia is a 'Western' country? Tolstoy comes from a region currently poised in opposition to supposedly 'Western' values, and Australia is geographically east of the geographical regions usually thought of as 'Western.' They have in common connections to European history, but if this makes something Western, then medieval Islamic philosophy is 'Western,' which is highly problematic, since one of the main ways 'Western' is used is in contrast to the Islamic world. Modern Australia was shaped by European colonialism, but so was modern Africa, the obvious difference being the domination of white settlers in modern Australia, which supports Appiah's claim that when 'the west' is used in the sense that includes Australia, it not much more than a thinly veiled reference to whiteness (Appiah 2016).

19. For more detailed discussion, see Allais 2016.

While Metz is not trying to characterize a 'Western' tradition, but rather to claim some ideas as saliently 'Western' in the past 200 years, it does not seem to me that there is any innocent way of doing this. Appiah argues that the so-called West's idea of itself as 'west' really take off in the 1890s, in the middle of European imperialism, which means that the very idea that there is such a thing as the 'West' can be understood as a product of white supremacy. And the European and North American self-understanding of democracy and liberalism as so-called 'Western' values is even more recent, and one, arguably, honoured by them more often in the breach than in the observance, meaning that accepting ideas like constitutionalism as 'Western,' despite prevalence of fascism, colonial domination, monarchy, imperialism, white supremacy, in Europe in the past 200 years looks like buying into false triumphalist narratives of contemporary European and Anglo-American nations, and ones in fact rooted in white supremacy. This is not of course Metz's intention, and I do not imply that his book buys into this narrative, but I do think he accepts and uses these terms too uncritically.

Metz does not explain how he understands the 'West' and I have argued that his examples of saliently western ideas are implausible; further, I have argued that his description of supposedly characteristic African societies as well as the way he draws the contrast between these and the so-called West is problematic. However, despite appealing to science, constitutionalism and markets as supposedly characteristic 'Western' ideas, when he comes to discuss 'Western' moral theories, Metz does not attempt to show that they are grounded in and powerfully explain valuing science, constitutionalism and markets, but rather simply engages with philosophers, primarily, contemporary Kantian and utilitarian moral theorising. And relatedly, he qualifies his anthropological, historical and sociological claims about sub-Saharan Africa by saying that: 'For those sceptical of the accuracy of this body of literature, I can hedge to say that at least post-independence professional philosophers from Africa have often ascribed these features to their respective peoples, where I am addressing myself principally to these philosophers. For the purposes of this book I do not question their ascriptions, leaving that for historians and anthropologists' (Metz 2022: 30). That these values have been ascribed to African societies by some post-independence African philosophers seems much more plausible than his claims about intuitions, and is a claim Metz is in a better position to establish. And there are also places where Metz describes his aim as to develop a theory based on interaction with philosophy developed by African philosophers. He says: '[w]hat I have sought to do here is to provide a definitive and comprehensive analysis, application, and defence of my favoured principle of right action that has been heavily influenced by African philosophy' (Metz 2022: 10). Developing an account of rightness as respect for the capacity for

friendliness in dialogue with philosophers from Africa is and bringing their ideas into dialogue with philosophers from Europe is surely a worthwhile project. As the current culmination of his long commitment to this project, Metz's relational moral theory is an important contribution.

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