Metz on the Common Good and the Relational Theory[*]

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Abstract: This paper discusses Thaddeus Metz's claims about two of the moral theories he discusses in his book *A Relational Moral Theory*: the morality of common good developed by Kwame Gyekye, and the relational theory Metz himself defends. The paper begins by outlining the central claims Metz makes in comparing these theories. It then raises three questions about the relational theory and suggests a way of using some of Metz's ideas to construct a collective consequentialist form of the morality of common good. It ends by noting that if we understand Metz's contribution as part of a collective search for the correct moral theory, it matters less than he seems to think whether we are now in a position to show that the relational theory is superior to its rivals.

Keywords: Metz, Gyekye, Common Good, Relational Theory, Collective Consequentialism

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1. Introduction

A Relational Moral Theory (Metz 2022) presents a rich and well-developed moral theory with many attractive features. It deserves to be, and surely will be, discussed widely. In this paper I seek to make the following contributions to this wider discussion. First, in section 2 I will provide a brief summary of the main lines of argument Metz presents in favour of the relational theory he favours as compared with just *one* of the rivals he discusses in the book: the morality of common good. This summary is intended to draw attention to the main features of those arguments, rather than to recapitulate them in detail. I will then raise some questions for the relational account, in section 3. The focus of these questions will be on the central theoretical components of the relational theory — the account of the capacity to be part of communal relationships, and of the moral importance of honouring that capacity —

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rather than on the detailed use to which Metz puts these ideas in explaining the intuitions he considers. In section 4, I will suggest that there may be more resources within the broad idea of the common good than Metz's discussion suggests.

If the arguments of this paper are correct, two things seem to follow. The first is that Metz's argument for the superiority of his relational theory to the morality of common good may not be as decisive as he claims. His theory has some questions to answer, and the morality of common good may have additional resources. But the second implication is that this does not undermine the main contribution of Metz's book. Its main contribution, to my mind, is to increase the stock of valuable ideas that are widely appreciated by moral philosophers. It achieves that handsomely by directing attention to the many very interesting and important ideas connected with community that Metz discusses, drawing on his reading of African moral philosophy. The book should help to stimulate significant interest in these ideas, and more broadly it should stimulate renewed attention to concepts of community and the values associated with them. This can only aid the collective search for the correct moral theory, whether or not that turns out to be Metz's relational theory.

2. Metz's main claims about the two theories

Metz's argument is focused on the search for a general theory of the moral rightness and wrongness of actions. Such a theory would tell us what makes any action morally wrong or right (Metz 2022: 48). In comparing different possible theories, we are to use certain criteria that Metz specifies. A satisfactory theory should explain two sets of intuitions that Metz identifies, and it should have 'secular content' (Metz 2022: 48–60). There is then a two-stage contest between theories: a comparison of rival African theories in Part II of the book, in which Metz argues that the relational theory is better than its African rivals; and a subsequent comparison of the relational theory to two widely-discussed Western theories, utilitarianism and Kantianism, in Part III of the book. Here Metz argues that the relational theory deserves to be taken seriously alongside those theories.

As this thumbnail sketch indicates, the division of theories and philosophers into 'African' and 'Western' is important for the central argument of the book. Metz recognises and discusses some possible concerns that these labels might raise, in Chapters 1 and 3 (Metz 2022: 1–16, 60–61). It is important to him that the relational theory both (a) uses ideas drawn from African thought (Metz 2022: chs. 4–6), and (b) explains a set of intuitions that he identifies as widely held in sub-Saharan Africa (Metz 2022: 52–60). Though this is clearly an

important and complex issue, it is not one I have expertise in. So in what follows I will not attempt to reach any view about whether the relational theory is properly described as African, and if so to what degree, or about whether it is helpful to divide theories into 'African' and 'Western' — except that I assume that Metz is correct to say that many moral philosophers across the world have been ignorant of, and have not attended to, moral philosophy as it is practiced in different parts of Africa. I will discuss the significance of this important point briefly in section 5 below.

As mentioned, the main criterion that Metz uses to evaluate rival theories is their ability to explain two sets of moral intuitions. He writes:

> In the context of evaluating principles of right and wrong action, an intuition counts as a judgement that a particular act has some moral feature such as permissibility or a certain degree of wrongness, where that judgement is meant to be less controversial than the principles it is being invoked to evaluate. I do not consider intuitions to be beyond doubt, self-justifying, or anything so strong as a foundationalist epistemology would suggest. Instead, they are beliefs that are firmly and commonly held by most informed interlocutors, and for this reason are sensibly taken as provisional starting points for debate; they are judgements that could be overridden in principle, but only with substantial evidence. (Metz 2022: 50–51)

He then lists two sets of such intuitions, presented as judgements about the pro tanto wrongness of actions of certain kinds. The 'global' intuitions include, for example, the beliefs that 'it is typically *pro tanto* immoral . . . to kill innocent people without their consent for money . . . [or] to have sex with someone against her will so as to feel pleasure or a sense of power' (Metz 2022: 51; italics in original). The 'African' intuitions include the beliefs that 'it is typically *pro tanto* immoral . . . to resolve political conflicts in the face of continued dissent, rather than seeking consensus . . . [or] to fail to do what is likely to make people's lives go better, if one is politically in charge' (Metz 2022: 53; italics in original). We can call all of these intuitions, taken together, the 'target intuitions'.

There are sixteen such intuitions in total, each focused on a claim about the pro tanto wrongness of actions of a certain kind. Some moral philosophers appeal to intuitions about principles, in addition to appealing to intuitions about the rightness or wrongness of actions. For example, they may claim that Act Consequentialism is an intuitive principle or that

Kantian Contractualism is intuitive.[1] Though Metz does not explicitly do this, some background judgements about the intuitive plausibility of principles may guide his judgements about which set of ideas provides the best explanation of the sixteen intuitions about kinds of action.

Having ruled out some African ideas due to their non-secular content, Metz discusses three main views (each in different versions) in Part II of the book. These are the morality of common good, vitalism, and the idea of morality as communality that he develops in a specific way as the relational theory he ultimately defends. In what follows I will focus on Metz's claims about the morality of common good and about the relational view, leaving aside his discussion of vitalism.

In discussing the morality of common good, Metz uses Kwame Gyekye's moderate communitarianism as an exemplar (Gyekye 1995 and 1997). As Metz presents it, this is a form of welfarist teleology that is similar in some important respects, and different in others, to utilitarianism as that is commonly understood (Metz 2022: 66–70). It is welfarist in the sense that it takes the ultimate good to be human well-being, and teleological in the sense that it conceives of rightness of action in terms of promotion of this good. Unlike (some forms of) utilitarianism, it does not conceive of well-being as something subjective, but in terms of needs that people have in common (Metz 2022: 68). Gyekye writes:

> The common good literally and seriously means a good that is common to individual human beings — at least those embraced within a community, a good that can be said to be commonly, universally, shared by all human individuals, a good the possession of which is essential for the ordinary or basic functioning of the individual in a human society. It is linked, I think, to the concept of our common humanity and, thus, cannot consist of, or be derived from, the goods or preferences of particular individuals; thus, the common good is not a surrogate for the sum of the different individual goods. (Gyekye 1997: 45)

Since the common good to be promoted is conceived in this way as something that is good for everyone, rather than as the aggregate of what is good for each individual, Gyekye's view emphasises a harmony of interests much more than is typical in utilitarianism. Furthermore,

[1] Parfit writes: 'as well as having plausible implications, any successful principle or theory must be in itself plausible. Only such a principle or theory could *support* our more particular moral beliefs' (2011: 415; italics in original). Kagan (1989: 11–15) makes a similar point.

on Gyekye's view right action includes appropriate respect for individuals' rights: rightness is to be understood as promotion of the common good within the constraints provided by those rights (Gyekye 1997: ch. 2; Metz 2022: 69).[2]

Metz then claims that, although it can explain several of the target intuitions earlier identified, Gyekye's theory cannot explain several others. In particular, he claims that it cannot explain the beliefs that it is pro tanto wrong to permit large inequalities of wealth, or to create wealth through selfish motivations, or to fail to greet people, or to fail to participate in customs, or to remain single and childless (Metz 2022: 70–74). In contrast, Metz claims, the relational theory can explain all of the target intuitions, and for that reason should be preferred to Gyekye's theory.

Metz develops the relational theory in two stages. First, he explains the idea of communal relationship (Metz 2022: ch. 6). His idea of communal relationship combines two components: identifying with others, and exhibiting solidarity with them. To identify with others, on Metz's account, is (a) to be disposed to think of oneself as part of a 'we', and (b) to enjoy a sense of belonging with them, and (c) to coordinate activity with them (d) for their sake, or for the sake of the relationship (Metz 2022: 94–95). Identification with others is thus a matter of thinking of oneself (not exclusively, but to some extent) as part of a group, and to enjoy that membership and be motivated by it. The second component of communal relationship is solidarity. To exhibit solidarity with someone, on Metz's account, is (a) to attend to him so as to understand him and his goals, and (b) to sympathise with him, and (c) to take action to improve his condition—in a broad sense of 'condition' that includes 'not merely striving to make people better off or to advance their self-interest, but also to make others better people or to advance their self-realization', out of (d) compassion or altruism (Metz 2022: 96). Solidarity is thus a matter of attending to others and supporting them to achieve a better life. Putting these two components together, we get the idea that a communal relationship is one in which people think of themselves as part of a group and enjoy that sense of membership, and act individually and jointly to support each other in living better lives (Metz 2022: 97–101).

Metz then employs this idea of communal relationship in the following way. First, he claims that the *capacity* for this kind of relationship has 'superlative value'. Importantly, it is

[2] The emphasis on harmony of interests provides perhaps the clearest contrast with utilitarianism. The ideas (a) that well-being is not entirely subjective, and (b) that individuals have moral rights are quite prominent within the utilitarian tradition. For example, see the interpretation of Mill in Brink 2013.

the capacity for communal relationships, rather than the communal relationships themselves, that are said to have this value. He writes:

> . . . instead of focusing on an actual relationship 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. (Metz 2022: 109)

Note that there are two important ideas in this passage. The first is the idea that the capacity for communal relationships has superlative value, and the second is that individuals who possess this capacity have moral status in virtue of that capacity, and we owe duties to them because of it. The capacity is the locus of value; individuals possessing it have moral status in virtue of it, and we have duties towards them for that reason.

There are two ways to possess the capacity for communal relationships. An entity can possess the capacity as an object, which requires only that humans could think of it as part of a 'we', with goals or some kind of good. Second, an entity can possess the capacity as a subject, which requires the ability to think of itself as part of a 'we' and to exhibit solidarity. In both cases, the capacity to relate communally is a matter of the entity's 'nature' or 'biological constitution', and not of its contingent properties at any moment. Drunkenness does not remove the capacity to relate as a subject, even when it blocks the actualisation of this capacity for a time; but a shrub cannot relate even as an object (Metz 2022: 107). An entity's moral status depends on the degree to which it has these two capacities. Entities that have the capacity to relate both as subject and as object have full moral status, while entities that have the capacity to relate only as objects have an inferior moral status and are for that reason less morally important (Metz 2022: 107–108).

Finally, a crucial feature of Metz's relational theory is that our duty is not to promote each individual's capacity for communal relationships, but instead to honour it (Metz 2022: 109–113). Obviously, the concept of honouring this capacity will be very important for working out the practical implications of the relational theory. Metz claims that we can derive both negative and positive duties from the idea of honouring the capacity for communal relationship. Negative duties are duties not to stunt or impede this capacity, while positive duties are duties to actualise communal relationships with others and to support them in forming communal relationships with third parties: 'If what makes people special is their

capacity to be party to relationships of identity and solidarity, then one has strong moral reason to identify with others and exhibit solidarity towards them as well as to enable them to do so with still others besides oneself' (Metz 2022: 112).

I will return to this claim about positive duties shortly. For now, note that there are three main building blocks of Metz's relational theory. First there is the conception of communal relationships itself, as consisting of relationships of identity and solidarity. Next there is the account of the capacity to relate communally as having superlative value and bestowing moral status. Finally, there is the idea of honouring this capacity. All three of these ideas are rich, interesting, and deserve the attention of moral philosophers. Note also that it is the second and third ideas — the idea of tying moral status to capacity, and the idea of rightness as honouring rather than promoting — that give Metz's theory its deontological character. The focus on capacity introduces a kind of contingency-insensitivity that is characteristic of deontology: what we ought to do depends on the nature of the entities we interact with, not on contingent facts about their state when we interact with them.[3] The idea of honouring introduces the idea that our duties will be to treat these entities in specific ways (that is, to perform or abstain from some kinds of action, with some motivations) rather than to bring about specific outcomes (Pettit 1989: 117).

3. Three questions for the relational account

In this section I will raise three questions about the relational account. These questions are about the theoretical building blocks of the account, rather than about the ways in which Metz uses the account to explain specific target intuitions. For that reason, I leave aside the discussion of specific intuitions.

The first question is about Metz's account of moral status. As I have just tried to explain, he claims that an entity's moral status depends on whether, by its nature, it could not participate at all in communal relationships, or instead could participate as an object only, or

[3] For example, Rawls writes: 'The utilitarian tends to meet objections by holding that the laws of society and of human nature [which Rawls calls 'general facts'] rule out the cases offensive to our considered judgments. Justice as fairness, by contrast, embeds the ideals of justice, as ordinarily understood, more directly into its first principles. This conception relies less on general facts in reaching a match with our judgments of justice. It insures this fit over a wider range of possible cases' (1999: 138).

instead could participate both as a subject and as an object.[4] Full status goes to those entities that can be subjects and objects, and lesser status goes to those that can be objects only. Moreover, where the interests of those with full status conflict with those of lesser status, the entity with lower status 'should lose out since it is not as important from a moral point of view' (Metz 2022: 108). Now, it is notoriously difficult to give a plausible theory of moral status.[5] Nevertheless, Metz's theory seems to me to be open to significant doubt.

First, note that one of the ways in which one could lack the capacity to participate as a subject in communal relationships is that one lacks the capacity to act, but is instead a mere patient. It seems to follow from Metz's account of moral status that a mere patient would lack full moral status and would have interests that are less morally important than the interests of otherwise similar entities that possess agency. Now, we might wonder why the capacity to act magnifies the moral importance of an entity as compared with the capacity to be benefited, or to have goals promoted or frustrated. Certainly, there are many respects in which the capacity to act matters greatly. Agents can bestow benefits and harms on themselves or others, for example, or interfere with others' choices or respect their autonomy. They can do this individually or in concert with others. This certainly makes the capacity to act important — but it is not so clear why it makes the interests of agents more important than the interests of mere patients.

To set aside the irrelevant ways in which the capacity to act is important we can imagine the following (admittedly far-fetched) case. Suppose that Agent has the capacity to act by her nature, but that throughout the whole of her life she lacks the ability to act, for contingent reasons. In contrast, Patient altogether lacks the capacity to act. Suppose, however, that Agent and Patient can both be benefited or harmed to the same extent, and that we face a choice between benefiting Patient or benefiting Agent by the same amount, but that we cannot benefit both. Metz's theory implies that we should favour Agent here, since she has the capacity to act, and so has a higher moral status than Patient.

[4] Metz writes: 'On my account, roughly, the more a being is capable of relating communally, the greater its moral status, where only large differences of degrees count. In the first instance that means that an entity that can be both the subject and object of a communal relationship has a full moral status or dignity, whereas a being that is capable of being the object but not the subject of such behaviour has a partial moral status' (Metz 2022: 107). Here I discuss the three-way distinction (no status, partial status, full status), rather than the suggestion of more fine-grained distinctions. Metz later discusses degrees of status further (Metz 2022: 152–154), but his remarks there do not affect my discussion in this section.

[5] One useful recent discussion is Jaworska and Tannenbaum 2019.

This example abstracts from the detail and nuance of Metz's account of communal relationships, and the component ideas of identity and solidarity. It presents the sort of bare choice that is common in some kinds of philosophical discussion but not in life. Nevertheless, it seems to me to be an implication of Metz's view that we should favour Agent's interests in this case, because she possesses the capacity to act and so can be a subject in communal relationships. I have imagined that, for contingent reasons, Agent lacks the ability to actualise this capacity throughout her life — for the specific purpose of trying to isolate the moral importance of the capacity to act. Reporting my own intuitions: I cannot see why this capacity makes Agent's interests morally more important than Patient's. Note that this is a separate question from the issue of whether Metz's theory has acceptable implications about humans with psychological deficits, which he goes on to discuss later (Metz 2022: 163–165). My question is why we should accord greater status to any entity on account of a capacity to be a subject in communal relationships, which requires agency among other things.

I now turn to my second question, which is also about the capacity to relate communally. As we have seen, Metz claims that it is the capacity to relate communally, not the communal relationships themselves, that has superlative value. Though it resembles Kant's claims about dignity, this is a puzzling claim. It is plausible to think that relating communally, in the rich sense that Metz elaborates, would be valuable. It is also easy to see why, if we thought that X were valuable, we would think that the capacity to achieve X would be valuable. In that case, the value of the capacity to achieve X would be derivative of the value of X itself. But that is not the picture here. Instead, Metz claims that it is the capacity to relate communally that has superlative value, which seems to imply that its value is not derived in any way from the value that communal relationships themselves may have.

My point is not that it is mysterious why Metz adopts this position. He explains clearly that he believes that an acceptable moral theory has to be deontological, to accord with intuitions about moral constraints (Metz 2022: 101–104). This is the reason he gives for rejecting the idea that communal relationships are the highest good, and the idea that rightness consists in promoting this good, in favour of the idea that the capacity for communal relationships is the highest good, and the idea that rightness consists in honouring it. But though this motivation is clear, it is less clear (to me) whether the component idea that the capacity for communal relationships is the highest good is, taken by itself, a plausible claim. Why should this capacity be valuable, unless its value is derived from the value of communal relationships themselves? Ordinarily, we tend to think that capacities are valuable because of the value they produce when used appropriately.

Perhaps I am wrong to assume that Metz would deny that the value of the capacity is derived from the value of the relationships. Perhaps something can have superlative value even though its value is derived from its relationship to something else that has value. That would be an interesting combination of claims, worthy of further discussion. In any case, my second question about the relational account is whether the claims Metz makes about the superlative value of the capacity for communal relationships are plausible independently of their contribution to the deontological character of his theory.

My third and final question is also about the value of the capacity to relate communally. As I explained, Metz seeks to derive positive duties to support and actualise communal relationships from the idea of honouring the superlative value of the capacity to relate communally. On the face of it, the form of the derivation is as follows: because the capacity has value, we have reason to actualise it (and to support others' use of it). Again, the question is not about why this is a helpful claim to be able to make, but about whether it is plausible independently of its contribution to the character of the theory. If certain ways of using a capacity are valuable, we can understand the claim that there is reason to use them in that way. But the idea here seems to be that, because the capacity is valuable, there is reason to use it in certain ways.

The phrase 'in certain ways' is important. One could use the capacity to relate communally in different ways — including, I assume, in ways that would not actualise valuable relationships. For example, someone could use their capacity to identify and to exhibit solidarity to establish and maintain a toxic relationship that brings nothing but misery for all concerned. This would not be a good use of the capacity, and I assume that Metz does not want to claim that the value of the capacity gives us reasons to use it in this sort of way. But how exactly can we explain why there is not a reason to use the capacity in this way, without appealing to the badness of the toxic relationship? I am assuming that the explanation is not supposed to appeal to the value of the relationship, since that would appear to fall back into the teleology that Metz wishes to avoid.

In discussing the relationship in his theory between the value of the capacity to relate communally and positive duties connected with communal relationships, Metz draws an analogy with Kant's views. He writes:

> . . . consider the Kantian tradition. There, although what has a dignity is the capacity to set ends, it is standardly believed, following Kant himself . . . that one way to respect a being with that capacity is to help it achieve its particular ends. By a

> Kantian ethic, if a person has made a free decision to collect coins, respect for her (in part) means taking care not to prevent her from collecting more as well as giving her some coins she does not already have. (Metz 2022: 119)

Now, note the nature of the specific example here: collecting coins. This is a use of the capacity to set ends that some may view as lacking value, but few if any would view as malign. Of course, in Kant's ethics there is a *mechanism for excluding malign ends*: the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative provides constraints on the ends that may rightly be pursued — roughly, their compatibility with respect for the dignity of rational agency. One way of taking my third question is thus to ask whether there is a functionally similar mechanism in Metz's moral theory. If our reasons to support some uses of the capacity to relate communally rather than others are not to be explained teleologically (in terms of the value of the relationships that result), how are they to be explained?

4. Collective pursuit of the common good

In this section I will discuss some other ways in which some of Metz's ideas could be used, as part of a different form of teleological welfarist theory. The sort of theory I will discuss is 'teleological' in the sense that it seeks to explain the rightness and wrongness of actions in terms of some relationship between actions and good or bad outcomes. It is 'welfarist' in that it seeks to explain the goodness and badness of outcomes exclusively in terms of the well-being they contain. But, unlike the sorts of teleological theory Metz discusses, it conceives of good outcomes as something to be pursued not only individually, but collectively. I am confident that Metz would not accept this way of using his ideas. My purpose in discussing them is to claim, in this section, that they may have some promise in explaining the target intuitions that, he claims, the morality of common good cannot explain — and then to make a point about the larger aims of his project, in section 5.

Start with Metz's novel and very rich account of communal relationships, as involving both identification with others and solidarity in responding to them. This seems to me to be an insightful account of an attractive form of social relationship. One of the things that is attractive about it is that it foregrounds the importance of what Metz sometimes calls 'friendly' relationships, which he characterises as involving 'a sense of togetherness, cooperative interaction, aid, and sympathetic altruism' (Metz 2022: 100). To exist in a society characterised by these relationships would be to be supplied with important social goods.

Second, Metz's emphasis is on the cooperative supply of those social goods, which seems normatively correct. If we consider the duty to supply social goods to any particular adult, it seems to have an important collective aspect. It may be that no one has a duty to befriend that person, but that we fail collectively if none of us befriends him.[6]

Given the important social goods that communal relationships supply, it is plausible to think that at least part of the value of these relationships is instrumental, in their effects on well-being. Indeed, it is hard to deny that they do have this instrumental value, or that this is an ethically significant fact about them. So, one way of employing Metz's idea of communal relationships (not his way, of course) is as a sophisticated account of one important cause of well-being. Now, Metz offers powerful arguments against some forms of welfarist teleology, as I have noted. For example, he argues that Gyekye's morality of common good cannot account for the target intuitions that it is pro tanto morally wrong to tolerate great inequality, or to create wealth out of selfish motives, or fail to greet people, or to fail to participate in existing customs (Metz 2022: 70–72). Yet these things are of course inimical to friendly communal relationships — as his later discussion of honouring the capacity for such relationships presupposes. For example, in discussing how the relational theory can explain the intuition that it is pro tanto morally wrong to create wealth out of selfish motives, he writes: 'Engaging with other economic agents in a self-interested manner infringes, if not flouts, communal values such as enjoying a sense of togetherness, doing what one can to advance others' goals, and acting for the sake of others' (Metz 2022: 133). On the assumption that friendly communal relationships are a powerful means of promoting well-being, we can say that to act with these selfish motives is to undermine that powerful means. Of course, that will not give us an exceptionless prohibition against acting with those selfish motives, since on some occasions acting with selfish motives may do more overall to promote well-being. But the target intuition is the claim that acting with selfish motives is pro tanto morally wrong, not the claim that it is in every case morally wrong.

At this point Metz might reply that this instrumentalist account of the idea that it is usually wrong to act with these motives still falls short of explaining the target intuition. That intuition was the claim that creating wealth through selfish motives is not merely *usually wrong* (which, perhaps, the instrumentalist account can explain), but *pro tanto wrong*. This may be understood as the claim that it is usually wrong in virtue of the kind of action it is, or

[6] Similar themes are discussed in Brownlee 2016. Of course, there may be cases in which individuals do have duties to befriend a particular person or to supply social goods to them.

that there is a significant moral reason not to perform actions of that kind, in virtue of their being of that kind. I agree that the kind of welfarist teleology that Metz discusses cannot account for this idea.

However, perhaps other forms of teleology can do so. In particular, 'indirect' theories such as collective consequentialism or rule consequentialism attempt to explain the idea that we can have reasons to perform or not to perform actions because of the kinds of actions they are.[7] For example, a welfarist rule consequentialist who accepts the idea that friendly communal relationships are a powerful means for promoting well-being may claim that the best set of rules includes rules requiring friendly relationships and altruistic motives. This would be one way to explain the idea that it is pro tanto wrong (not merely usually wrong) to engage in selfishly-motivated relationships with others, even if that is a way to create wealth.

Metz briefly discusses the idea that a morality of common good could be constructed in something like this indirect way. He offers two reasons against such an approach. One of these is the claim that indirect theories could not provide the right sort of explanation of the target intuitions, and the others is that they are not African: 'One will search in vain for any suggestion of two-level or indirect welfarism in the African philosophical literature' (Metz 2022: 74).

As an example of the first point, he writes: 'The reason to greet someone is not exhausted by the idea that, say, everyone would have their needs met (or perhaps simply be happier) if everyone routinely greeted one another, particularly elders. Instead, there is something about respect that plausibly does some of the work' (Metz 2022: 74). This seems to underestimate what can be said on the collective or indirect approach. Such a view could say that there is a valuable practice of respecting each other, one part of which is to greet each other, especially elders. The value of the practice is ultimately to be explained, on this view, by the fact that it promotes well-being; but that does not imply that the reason to greet people is to promote well-being. Rather, the reason to greet is to participate in the practice of respecting people.[8] As for the claim that the justification of this practice lies in its promoting well-being: this is a reasonable and plausible view to take of the practice, it seems to me. If we were to discover (implausibly) that the practice generally decreases rather than increases

[7] On rule consequentialism see Hooker 2000. On collective consequentialism see Woodard 2019.
[8] Similarly, rule consequentialists may claim that your reason to keep your promise is that it is an instance of the kind 'promise-keeping', rather than that it is required by a rule in the ideal code. See Woodard 2022, §3.

well-being, we might well conclude that we have reason to cease participating in it, or at least to reform it.

This is, of course, only a sketch of the sort of explanation that a collective form of the morality of common good might try to offer of one of Metz's target intuitions. My claim is schematic — and, of course, Metz is right to say that indirect consequentialism is thought by many to face severe theoretical problems of its own (Metz 2022: 74). The present point is not that this alternative use of the idea of friendly communal relationships is certain to provide a better explanation of the target intuitions than the relational theory Metz defends; instead, it is only that it is not particularly clear which sort of theory provides the better explanation, all things considered. On both sides there are theoretical problems to be addressed and competing pros and cons to be weighed.

Finally, consider Metz's other reason for not considering in detail a collective form of the morality of common good: that the idea of collective or indirect consequentialism is not African. Here I have to defer to others, since this is outside my area of expertise. However, I would note two things. The first is that at least some of the statements made by Gyekye suggest a kind of collective consequentialism as a possible interpretation. For example, in his discussion of the Akan conception of goodness, Gyekye repeatedly refers to patterns of behaviour, not just actions, as being good or bad.[9] This is not enough to show that he had a form of collective consequentialism in mind, of course — but that seems to be a possible interpretation of the emphasis placed on considering the value of patterns of action. Second, Metz's own development of the idea of identification emphasises the moral importance of thinking of oneself as part of a 'we', of cooperating with others, and of other constituent ideas of collective consequentialism (Metz 2022: 94–95). Thus, his account of friendly communal relationships seems to me already to include ideas that could be developed into a collective version of the morality of common good.

[9] He writes: '. . . in the course of my field research, the response I had to the question, "What do the Akan people mean by 'good' (or, goodness)?" invariably included a list of goods, that is, a list of deeds, habits, and patterns of behavior considered by the society as worthwhile because of their consequences for human well-being . . . the good (*papa*) is explained in terms of the qualities of things (actions, behavioral patterns) . . . Goodness (or the good), then, is considered in Akan moral thinking as a concept comprehending a number of acts, states, and patterns of behavior that exemplify certain characteristics' (Gyekye 1995: 132; italics in original).

5. Conclusion

Metz's discussion of the morality of common good and his development of the relational theory contain tremendously interesting insights and ideas. Though I have focused in this paper on critical points, I have tried to indicate in passing my appreciation for Metz's rich discussion, which certainly deserves careful attention from moral philosophers.

In section 3 I raised some questions about the relational theory, and in section 4 I suggested some ways in which Metz's idea of friendly communal relationships could be used in ways he would not approve of, to develop a collective version of the morality of common good. My claims in these sections may not be correct. But to the extent that they are correct, they go some way to undermining Metz's argument for the conclusion that the relational theory is superior to the morality of common good because it offers a better explanation of the target intuitions.

Does this matter? It matters less, I think, than Metz seems to believe. Early in the book, Metz notes that he agrees with Parfit's view that non-religious ethics is a young field (Metz 2022: 4; Parfit 1987: 453). He also observes that African moral philosophy has been wrongly neglected by many philosophers in the rest of the world (Metz 2022: 1–5). So, we have an enquiry that is in early stages but which has neglected an important source of ideas. How should those of us who are engaged in this enquiry respond to that situation? Perhaps we can think of any attempt to answer a question as having two components: identifying the range of possible answers, and evaluating those possible answers. If so, we may be wise to resist the urge to try to reach conclusions now about which answer is correct. This is the spirit in which I offer this discussion of Metz's contribution: it matters less whether he has shown that the relational theory is the correct moral theory, and more that he has done us all a service in raising the profile of a stock of important ideas that can be combined in different ways to increase the range of candidate theories that we should consider.

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