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Article

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Duties to Oneself in the Light of African Values: Two Theoretical Approaches

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ABSTRACT

I draw on ideas salient in African philosophy to construct two new theoretical ways of capturing the essence of duties to oneself. According to one theory, a person has a basic duty to "relate" to herself in ways similar to how the African field has often thought one should relate to others, viz., harmoniously, while, according to a second, one has such a duty to produce liveliness in oneself. Beyond articulating these two novel attempts to account for what all duties to oneself have in common and showing that each captures several intuitions about them, I offer reasons to favor the harmony theory, meriting consideration by a global audience as a rival to, say, the Kantian-rationalism common in the West and Confucianism in the East.

1. INTRODUCING AFRICAN NORMATIVITY

About the only thing pertaining to the African[1] tradition of moral philosophy that those beyond it know is that it is characteristically communitarian (on which see Wiredu [2008]). While that is true, this statement belies not only the specific and promising conception of communal relation that underlies much philosophical thought in that tradition, but also, of interest here, its nonrelational and more individualist dimensions. For example, there has been recent work by one African scholar advancing an account of agent-centered options, i.e., permissions not to maximize the good of others (Molefe 2019, 93), while another has maintained that the African tradition is best interpreted as including certain self-regarding virtues, respects in which one can be a good person that are not grounded on the way one treats others (Kayange 2018, 131–40; 2020, 259–61, 275–83).

Despite the presence of some intrapersonal approaches advanced in contemporary African ethics, it is nonetheless true that they are grossly overshadowed by, and underdeveloped compared to, interpersonal ones. Indeed, probably a majority of African philosophers would maintain that our basic moral aim is to develop what is often called our "personhood" (or sometimes "humanness"), which is roughly equivalent to virtue and is exhausted by other-regard. As one of the most influential African moral philosophers, the Nigerian Ifeanyi Menkiti, once put it, "The various societies found in traditional Africa routinely accept this fact that personhood is the sort of thing which has to be attained, and is attained in direct proportion as one participates

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in communal life" (1984, 176). Similarly, the Ghanaian Kwame Gyekye holds in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Ethics* entry devoted to African ethics that there is no category of supererogation in respect of others' well-being; according to his interpretation of obligation from a characteristically African perspective, there are in principle no limits to what an individual can be obligated to do for the sake of others (2010, section 9; see also [1997, 70–75]).

In this article I aim to develop thought about a certain dimension of nonrelational morality, namely, duties to oneself, by providing certain (re)interpretations of values salient in the African tradition. Duties to oneself, which are roughly moral obligations a person has to herself, are conceptually distinct from agent-centered options and self-regarding virtues, although certain logical entailments between them might well obtain, e.g., probably if there are duties to oneself, then there are agent-centered options (as per Meiland [1964]). I have not been able to locate any African philosophical literature articulating and defending specifically duties to oneself, but I maintain here that there are theoretical resources in the African tradition that promise to make good sense of them—and not merely to those steeped in this tradition. I argue there are conceptions of what is good prominent in African moral thought that, upon some reformulation, ground comprehensive secular accounts of what one owes oneself that merit consideration by a global audience. In particular, the many drawn toward Immanuel Kant's *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) when thinking about what all duties to oneself have in common (such as Reath [1997]; Denis [2001]; Timmerman [2006]; and Johnson [2011]) should be given pause here, although I do not address them in this article.

According to one theory grounded on characteristically African values, a person has a foundational duty to "relate" to herself in ways similar to how the field has typically thought that a person should relate with others, viz., communally or harmoniously. According to the second, one has a foundational duty to produce liveliness in oneself. In addition to articulating these novel attempts to account for what all duties to oneself have in common and showing that each one captures several intuitions about them, I offer some reasons to think that the harmony theory is somewhat more attractive than the vitality one, even if both merit further reflection.

In drawing on ideas salient in contemporary literate African philosophy to construct and appraise two theoretical ways of understanding the nature of duties to oneself, I suppose for the sake of argument that duties to oneself obtain. I realize that a number of moral philosophers, and indeed many in the African tradition as I have suggested above, deny that there are any duties to oneself, with advocates of them routinely pointing out how neglected, and even rejected, they have been for much of the post-war era (e.g., Cholbi 2015, 852; Schofield 2021, 6–8). However, I do not use space here to argue that philosophers ought to accept that there are duties to oneself, beyond providing some intuitions about which ones there are, and instead focus on answering the question of how to understand the nature of duties to oneself, supposing there are some.[2] Perhaps those who find the values of harmony and vitality of moral interest will, by the end of the article, see how their logic might entail that duties to oneself exist, but it is not the aim of the article to convince anyone of that.

In the following, I begin by providing some background essential for constructing new theories of duties to oneself (section 2). In particular, I say more about the concept of a duty to oneself, provide a list of duties to oneself that will be found uncontroversial (at least by those who accept they exist), and indicate some debates about duties to oneself that I need not address to advance accounts of what they all might have in common and so set aside. Then, I develop the harmony-based account of the nature of duties to oneself (section 3) and the vitality-based account (section 4), after which I consider whether one of them alone is sufficiently attractive and which of them is more promising (section 5). Although I conclude that the harmony-based view is probably the one to weigh up against Kantian, Confucian, and other rival theories, I

do not think the vitality-based view should be dismissed, as perhaps someone will be able to defend it better than I.

2. BASICS ABOUT DUTIES TO ONESELF

A theory of duties to oneself or comprehensive account of their nature is a basic account of what (nearly) all duties to oneself have in common as distinct from other moral categories such as duties to others, permissions not to act for the sake of others, or self-regarding virtues. As a prelude to spelling out and evaluating two such theories, I first say more about what the theories are about and how I will appraise them.

In general, a duty to oneself is a moral obligation an agent has toward herself and not merely because treating herself in a certain way would fulfill some other, more basic obligation to others. The claim that one ought to cultivate one's sympathy merely so that one is in a position to treat others compassionately is not a duty to oneself, or at least not the sort I address here (it might be better labeled a duty "in respect to" or "regarding" oneself, as per Muñoz [2022, section 1]). Instead, a proper duty to oneself would be an obligation to be compassionate toward oneself for one's own sake (and not merely because that, in turn, would enable one to do something for others).

Although I am not out to convince anyone that duties to oneself exist, some evidence in their favor includes a variety of everyday beliefs, emotions, and choices. A graduate student feels guilty because she has not done enough work on her doctoral thesis, not so much because she has let down her supervisor or department, but more because she has let herself down. Another gets cross with himself for having overeaten yet again, where he resolves to eat moderately and hit the gym because he owes it to himself. A member of a minority group who did not stand up to a slurring insinuation at the time of its occurrence regrets not having said something and makes the tough decision to take it up later, not merely to protect others from similar treatment in the future, but also to act out of self-respect.

Duties to oneself are naturally at home in a dignity-based moral theory such as Kant's. If others have a dignity requiring me to treat them in a certain way, then, I, who have the same features grounding dignity, am also required to treat myself in a certain way, so the broad argument goes (various instances of which are mentioned in Muñoz [2022]).

However, a dignity-based ethic is not the only route by which to have duties to oneself feature in one's moral philosophy. For instance, W.D. Ross (1930/2002, 21) includes "duties of self-improvement" among his pluralist list of prima facie obligations, as does Robert Audi among his (2005, 193–94). For another example, John Cottingham advances what he calls an "ethics of self-concern" (1991) or "programme of *askesis*" (2005, 143–49) in the context of a Divine Command Theory of moral obligation (2005, 46–57). In particular, for one longstanding strand of Christian ethics, one unavoidably and even rightly loves oneself, but there are obligations pertaining to how one should do so, viz., not in a "disordered" way (e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1–2, Q 77, A 4). Finally, it appears that duties to oneself could be the object of a unanimous agreement among interlocutors (consider, e.g., how the reasoning in Kane [2010, 27–59] might be broadened, but cf. López de Lizaga [2008]).

Thinkers who accept duties to oneself naturally disagree over which ones we have. However, there are some cases that are less controversial than others, and I rely heavily on such intuitive judgments about which duties to oneself there are in order to evaluate theories of them. In particular, I submit that there are probably at least these twenty duties to oneself (again, if there are any):

1. Not to get addicted to drugs/alcohol
2. Not to be a workaholic

3. Not to spend much time watching sitcoms while drinking beer alone
4. Not to associate with those who humiliate you
5. Not to be overly dependent on others' guidance or approval
6. Not to be impulsive
7. Not to get into massive debt for inessentials
8. Not to engage in wishful thinking or self-deception
9. Not to feel an unreasonable amount of guilt
10. Not to hate yourself
11. Not to cut one's arms or stomach to stave off emotional pain
12. Not to commit suicide to avoid temporary burdens
13. To let others love you or help you
14. To sustain your health
15. To strive to overcome personality disorders or depression
16. To become more aware of unconscious beliefs, desires, emotions
17. To leave an abusive relationship
18. To challenge exploitive treatment
19. To have foresight and be determined
20. To be proud of accomplishments

As per the usual qualifications about moral intuitions, there is no suggestion here that the elements on this list cannot sensibly be doubted, only that these are comparatively uncontested, provisional starting points, such that it would take some substantial argument to get us to remove one. They are less controversial than not only the theories I shall examine, but also some other claims about which duties to oneself there are, such as that it is wrong to sell one's teeth or hair (cf. Kant 1797: Ak. 423) or to have sex with humanlike dolls. In addition, there is no suggestion that these duties, if they indeed exist, cannot be overridden by other duties, only that, if all things considered a given one should be infringed, we can often expect there to be a "remainder" of wrongness. In short, they are intended to be neither certain nor conclusive.[3]

Supposing all elements on this list of twenty duties to oneself are indeed intuitive, in the rest of the article I appeal to characteristically African values to develop two theories of what all duties to oneself have in common that are meant to capture as much as possible of what is on the list. The more intuitions that a theory clearly entails and the better it explains them, the more justified the theory, for the sake of this essay.[4] In the first instance I am keen to see whether just one theory accounts well for all the intuitions, seeking to capture the most amount of data with the fewest properties. Only if each of the theories on its own is incomplete should we then consider a pluralist approach of appealing to more than one basic value.

There are other disputes about duties to oneself that ultimately deserve treatment by moral philosophers, but that I do not address here. These include how weighty duties to oneself are relative to one another, how weighty they are relative to other moral categories, which logical relations there are to other moral categories (e.g., whether one is virtuous because one lives up to duties to oneself or vice versa), and, as per the introduction, whether there in fact are any duties to oneself.

3. GROUNDING DUTIES TO ONESELF ON HARMONY

As noted in the introduction, African philosophy is communitarian, which is to say that ideas pertaining to community or relationality are salient in it (not essential to or exhaustive of it—see note 1). This focus on other-regard is apparent in the two most widely touted maxims meant to sum up morality from a typically African perspective: "I am because we are" (e.g., Mbiti 1970, 141, 152, 166, 189, 279, 293; Menkiti 1984, 171) and "A person is a person through other

persons" (e.g., Mokgoro 1998, 16; Tutu 1999, 35). Although these maxims connote descriptive claims to many African peoples, e.g., to the effect that one's selfhood is constituted by others, they also connote prescriptive claims, especially that one ought to become a real self or complete person, and do so by relating in certain ways with others. Despite the focus on self-realization in the African tradition, self-regarding behavior is normally thought to be neither constitutive of it nor even a reliable cause of it. As Bénézet Bujo, a Congolese elder among African moral philosophers, has put it: "[I]t is exactly the community which enables the self-realization of the individual" (Bujo 1997, 28). While it might be tempting to think of the prescription to develop one's personhood as an ultimate self-regarding duty, insofar as personhood is identical to the way one has treated other people,[5] personhood is not a good candidate for that.

One major divide among African ethicists is precisely how community is thought to enable personhood (self-realization, virtue), whether as an end or a means. According to one camp, it is constituted by relating communally or supporting one's community, with such other-regard being an end (e.g., Menkiti 1984; Mokgoro 1998; Tutu 1999, 34–35). In contrast, according to another camp, personhood is constituted by doing what will enhance others' liveliness (or meet their needs), which community of some kind reliably fosters as a means (Bujo 1997; Magesa 1997). This distinction highlights two distinct candidates for noninstrumental, gradient, personal value that are salient in the African tradition: community and vitality. Although these values invariably have been invoked when thinking about how to treat others, my project in this article is to show how each independently promises to account for a wide array of duties to oneself. In this section, I argue that taking entering into community or harmonizing to be an end, with some reformulation, promises to make sense of the nature of duties to oneself.

To start, consider some remarks from Desmond Tutu, the theologian who chaired South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, about the characteristic moral beliefs of African peoples:

> We say, "A person is a person through other persons." It is not, "I think therefore I am." It says rather: "I am human because I belong." I participate, I share . . . . Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum*—the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague. (1999, 35)

On my reading of Tutu, one is to become a real person or a genuine human being—exhibiting *ubuntu* (which means humanness in the Nguni languages of Southern Africa)—where that is constituted by relating harmoniously or entering into community with other persons. In the quotation, Tutu gives us a taste of what that interaction involves when he mentions two ideas, namely, "I participate, I share."

Others in the African tradition also tend to spell out harmony or community as the combination of participating and sharing, even if they use different words for these ideas. Consider these statements about how to act rightly or live properly from a variety of African intellectuals over the years:

> "Every member is expected to consider him/herself an integral part of the whole and to play an appropriate role towards achieving the good of all," as per the Nigerian philosopher Segun Gbadegesin (1991, 65).

> "Harmony is achieved through close and sympathetic social relations within the group," says the South African former Constitutional Court Justice Yvonne Mokgoro (1998, 17).

> "The fundamental meaning of community is the sharing of an overall way of life, inspired by the notion of the common good," remarks the Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye (2004, 16).

> "The purpose of our life is community-service and community-belongingness," avers Pantaleon Iroegbu (2005, 442), a Nigerian theologian.

> "If you asked *ubuntu* advocates and philosophers: What principles inform and organise your life? . . . the answers would express commitment to the good of the community in which their identities were formed, and a need to experience their lives as bound up in that of their community," says Gessler Muxe Nkondo (2007, 91), a South African policy analyst.

In each of these statements, two distinct ways to relate are mentioned (distinguished and reconstructed in Metz [2022, 90–113]). On the one hand, there is participating, considering oneself part of the whole, being close, sharing a way of life, belonging, and experiencing life as bound up with others. In what follows I will tend to call that cluster a matter of "identifying with others" or "identity" for short. On the other hand, there is sharing, achieving the good of all, being sympathetic, advancing the common good, serving, and being committed to the good of the community. This cluster I label "exhibiting solidarity with others."

Traditionally, the relevant agents with whom to harmonize in these two ways include the "living-dead," that is, those whose human bodies have died but who continue to reside on Earth, including ancestors, as well as the "not-yet-born," also imperceptible agents who have not become human but are meant to (Mbiti 1970, 138–41). Like many contemporary expositors of African philosophy (Wiredu [1996]; Gyekye [1997]; Molefe [2019], for a few examples), in this article I downplay contested metaphysical claims, favoring a secular interpretation of identity and solidarity as relevant for a multicultural audience and also as sufficient to capture duties to oneself.

It will be revealing to be more specific about the nature of these two logically distinct ways to relate harmoniously or communally. I analyze these concepts as each having both a psychological and behavioral component. To identify psychologically with others means enjoying a sense of togetherness, such as thinking of oneself as part of a "we," liking being with others, and taking pride in others' accomplishments. To identify behaviorally in contrast involves coordinating with other people, and hence not avoiding them, interacting on a voluntary and trustworthy basis, enabling others to achieve their goals, engaging in joint projects, and choosing because "This is who we are." To exhibit solidarity behaviorally amounts to aiding them, that is, doing what will make others' lives go objectively well, which includes meeting their needs and enabling them to develop real personhood. Finally, to exhibit solidarity psychologically includes helping others out of sympathy and for their sake, as opposed to one's own long-term self-interest. These ideas are schematized in Figure 1.

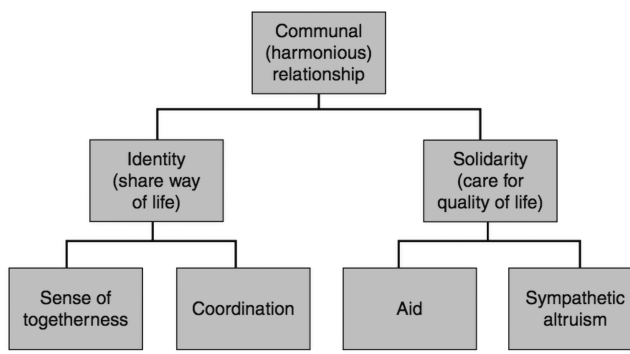

Figure 1: Schema of harmony

One can get quite a lot of mileage out of harmony as the combination of identity and solidarity when aiming to understand the values of indigenous African peoples (Metz 2022, 50–60, 123–36). A number of practices that are recurrently (not universally) found among indigenous sub-Saharan peoples are plausibly captured by a prescription to realize harmony, so construed. Although I cannot make the case here, consider the prima facie plausibility of the idea that identity and solidarity are being sought when people seek to reconcile after crime or other conflict, aim for consensus when resolving disputes, harvest collectively by everyone moving from plot to plot, ascribe some moral significance to participating in rituals and upholding traditions, and prize marriage and procreation.

Those who have not lived in African cultures might not appreciate these practices, but non-African philosophers can at least see the prima facie attractiveness of an underlying value of harmony, as interpreted here. The combination of identity and solidarity is more or less what English-speakers mean by friendliness, which Tutu mentions above, or even a broad sense of "love." To be friendly, or at least much of what is valuable about being friendly, consists of enjoying a sense of togetherness, participating in common activities, aiming to make each other better off and better people (including better friends), and doing so out of sympathy and for one another's sake. Placing friendliness, so construed, at the ground of what we owe to each other merits attention from moral philosophers, ethicists, and the like from around the world.

I now argue that friendliness also plausibly entails and well explains much of what we owe to ourselves (first briefly suggested in Metz [2022, 122]). Consider the theory that one has a duty to oneself if and only if one should prize friendliness toward oneself or harmony with oneself,[6] or perhaps respect oneself as capable of such. Such a principle would normally prescribe enjoying a sense of togetherness with oneself, acting on a voluntary, trustworthy basis that avoids undermining one's ends, meeting one's own needs, and doing so for one's own sake and out of compassion for oneself. It would also usually mean avoiding being unfriendly toward oneself or treating oneself discordantly. So, it would usually violate a duty to oneself if one were alienated from oneself, deceived oneself and were generally unable to depend on oneself, made one's life go worse, and lacked compassion for oneself, if not were cruel to oneself.

I do not show how this theory both entails and explains each one of the twenty intuitive duties to oneself one by one, but do now indicate how it on the face of it captures batches of them. In doing so, I draw on a common, large distinction between duties to oneself that are a function of self-respect, on the one hand, and of self-care, on the other (e.g., Muñoz 2022, section 1). Much of this distinction is plausibly grounded on the distinction between identifying with oneself and exhibiting solidarity with oneself, as I now spell out.

Failures to treat oneself with respect, understood largely as discordant failures to identify with oneself, would include being addicted, incurring large debt, engaging in wishful thinking, being impulsive, and being dependent on others' approval. Such behavior would make it hard to coordinate one's actions so as to realize an array of one's ends and to rely on oneself, as would obviously suicide. In contrast, becoming aware of unconscious mental states, displaying foresight, being determined, and taking pride in one's accomplishments are clear ways of identifying with oneself in ways analogous to identifying with others.

Failures to care for oneself, understood as discordant failures to exhibit solidarity with oneself, would naturally include hating oneself, cutting one's body, not letting others love or even help one, remaining isolated, experiencing disproportionate guilt, failing to stay healthy, not overcoming neurosis, and staying in an abusive relationship. These are all ways to make one's life go poorly and to fail to act compassionately toward oneself.

Two duties to oneself from the list of twenty admittedly remain, which involve avoiding disrespectful treatment by others who are humiliating or exploiting one. Although not neatly correlated with either identity or solidarity, my suggestion is that, if the basic duty is not quite to harmonize

with oneself, but instead to respect oneself as a being with dignity in virtue of the capacity to relate harmoniously with others and oneself, then there would be clear obligations not to put up with disrespectful treatment when it can be avoided without much morally relevant cost.

Another advantage of a respect-based construal of the basic duty to oneself is that it would be consistent with permitting some unfriendly or discordant treatment of oneself, under certain conditions. For example, some degree of guilt, whether for violating duties to others or to oneself, can be appropriate, but a blanket requirement to exhibit solidarity with oneself would seem to forbid ever feeling guilty, except when it would be expected to improve one's character and well-being in the long run. If instead one must respect oneself as capable of identity and solidarity, then there are times when it could be permissible to feel bad as a way to acknowledge the fact of having flouted respect-based norms.

4. GROUNDING DUTIES TO ONESELF ON VITALITY

Although community is the most prominent noninstrumental value for persons in the African tradition, vitality is the runner up. Another large swathe of African philosophers, theologians, and related thinkers maintain that other-regarding morality is a function of promoting what is often called "life-force" or "vital force," with communal or harmonious relation normally viewed as a reliable means by which to do so. In this section, I show that taking vitality of some kind to be an end promises to make sense of the nature of duties to oneself in a way different from the community-based analysis.

There is a worldview salient in African thought according to which all concrete objects in the universe are imbued with "life-force" or "vital force," which has come from God (Bujo 1997; Magesa 1997; Imafidon 2014). God is understood to be a person living in an imperceptible realm who has the greatest life-force and has created the universe by shaping everything in it with some of this energy. We are to think of humans, cats, trees, and even rocks ultimately not as things or substances, but rather as divine energies of varying powers and complexities, ones that constantly interact not only with other visible or more generally perceptible forces, but also with imperceptible ones such as lesser divinities and the "living-dead" (see section 3).

As per the analysis of community, I analyze vitality without appealing to contested metaphysical claims, which, I submit, are unnecessary to make prima facie good sense of morality. Working simply in terms of biology, psychology, and sociology, it is plausible to think that human beings characteristically have the greatest life-force on Earth, where "[l]ife-force varies quantitatively (in terms of growth and strength) and qualitatively (in terms of intelligence and will)" (Anyanwu 1984, 90). A number of African philosophers maintain that "[o]ver all visible beings, in terms of intensity of vital force, stands humanity" (Magesa 1997, 51), such that we have a dignity and we owe it to one another to enhance each other's vital force. As Noah Dzobo, a vitalist philosopher from Ghana, has put his interpretation of African ideals:

> [T]here is an urge or dynamic creative energy in life . . . which works towards wholeness and healing, towards building up and not pulling down . . . . Our people therefore conceive human life as a force or power that continuously recreates itself and so is characterized by continuous change and growth which depends upon its own inner source of power . . . . Since the essence of the ideal life is regarded as power and creativity, growth, creative work and increase have become essential values. Powerlessness or loss of vitality, unproductive living, and growthlessness become ultimate evils in our indigenous culture. (Dzobo 1992, 227)

All this may be plausibly understood in secular terms, which I call "liveliness." Enhancing others' liveliness means doing what would not just create them in the first place and keep them alive,

but also foster their health, strength, growth, creativity, vibrancy, activity, self-motion, courage, and confidence. Conversely, instances of failing to do right by others' capacity for liveliness include doing what is expected to promote death, disease, weakness, decay, disintegration, lethargy, passivity, submission, insecurity, and depression (Metz 2022, 79–81).

Consider now the theory that one has a duty to oneself if and only if one should promote liveliness, so construed, in oneself, or perhaps respect oneself as capable of such. The principle that one must produce liveliness in oneself, and especially avoid reducing it, does a reasonable job of accounting for the intuitions on the list. Note that laboring creatively and feeling buoyant are equally instances of liveliness, illustrating how the concept of liveliness interestingly straddles those of choice (self-respect) and well-being (self-care), which are typically separated in Western ethics.

As before, I apply liveliness to batches of intuitions, instead of plodding through all twenty one by one. Recall that central failures to treat oneself with respect include being addicted, incurring large debt, and being dependent on other's approval, and note how they are far from plausibly described as supporting "self-motion," being moved by one's inner source of power. Behavior such as wishful thinking and being impulsive would make it hard to carry out creative work, as would of course suicide. In contrast, being determined would instantiate productive living, while becoming aware of unconscious mental states and displaying foresight would reliably foster it.

Turning to duties of self-care, start by considering the influential remarks of Placide Tempels, a Belgian missionary who was reportedly the first European to dignify African thought with the term "philosophy":

> Supreme happiness, the only kind of blessing, is, to the Bantu, to possess the greatest vital force . . . . Every illness, wound or disappointment, all suffering, depression, or fatigue, every injustice and every failure: all these are held to be, and are spoken of by the Bantu as, a diminution of vital force. (1959, 32)

By "Bantu" Tempels means indigenous Africans (many, but not all, of whom speak a *bantu* language), and while his remarks overly generalize in the above quotation, they remain true of some peoples in Africa and philosophers informed by them. From the perspective Tempels sketches, behaviors such as not taking pride in one's accomplishments, hating oneself, cutting one's body, not letting others love or even help one, remaining isolated, experiencing disproportionate guilt, failing to stay healthy, and not overcoming neurosis are all well construed as either reductions of liveliness or failures to produce it where one could. They are plausibly instances of weakness, passivity, insecurity, and depression or at the very least obstacles to becoming more strong, active, confident, and the like. By the same token, people cannot be expected to feel, or more generally be, very lively upon staying in an abusive relationship, associating with those who humiliate them, and submitting to exploitation.

5. HARMONY VERSUS VITALITY

So far, I have drawn on two characteristically African values, viz., of harmony (friendliness) and vitality (liveliness), to construct two theories of what all duties to oneself might have in common. Each has independently accounted for the list of twenty intuitive duties to oneself with prima facie plausibility. In this concluding section, I compare the two theories, and, while holding that each deserves more consideration, I also provide some tentative reason to favor the harmony-based approach, where violations of duties to oneself are failures to exhibit friendliness toward oneself.

One respect in which the two theories differ is in terms of the explanations they offer as to why a certain action is required, or alternately forbidden, by a duty to oneself. For instance, consider the obligation not to get addicted to drugs. According to the harmony-based view, one should not do so because it would be discordant for undermining one's abilities to carry out one's projects and meet one's needs, including the need to harmonize with others, while according to the vitality-based view, one should not get addicted because it would inhibit self-motion, make one dependent, and, if the drug were not available, induce lethargy and inhibit creativity (or at least risk doing so). I find it hard to say that one explanation is obviously preferable to the other, and have a similar reaction to many other cases. Consider the duties to have foresight and to be determined. Do they obtain because, if one did not act in these ways, then one would fail to advance one's ends or because failing to so act would mean less growth and creativity? It is not clear to me which is the stronger explanation.

Although I find it hard to choose on explanatory grounds, it turns out that there are some entailment grounds to prefer the harmony approach. While it follows from both theories that one often has duties to oneself of the sort on the list, the harmony-based view appears able to show that one has them more often in the cases where one intuitively does. For example, take the duty not to engage in self-deception. The vitalist must say that deceiving oneself would be wrong when, and only when, doing so would be expected to reduce one's liveliness. However, there are some occasions when deceiving oneself would in fact keep one's spirits high and enable one to go forth and engage in challenging creative pursuits. Although there might be all things considered reason to continue deceiving oneself, many would think that there would still be something pro tanto wrong about doing so, something the vitalist cannot capture in this case.

I believe similar remarks apply to the duty not to get addicted, when one has a reliable source of the drug, and the duty not to let oneself be exploited, when doing so provides benefits. Even if one should all things considered remain addicted and exploited for reasons of overall liveliness, one would still be wronging oneself to some degree, which liveliness could not explain but a lack of friendliness toward oneself could (as above).

There is a second reason to favor harmony/friendliness over vitality/liveliness, which is that the former could be interpreted in such a way as to incorporate the latter, supposing it indeed has some explanatory power as I have suggested above. So far, when interpreting what it means to be friendly toward oneself in respect of exhibiting solidarity, I have focused mainly on meeting one's needs, a *welfarist* good, but have also alluded to exhibiting other-regarding virtue, a *moral* good. However, one might suggest including the *perfectionist* good of liveliness. If being friendly toward another would involve fostering her health, growth, creativity, confidence, and the like, as is plausible, then being friendly toward oneself would involve the same.

The two reasons to favor harmony neatly dovetail. If harmony entails that certain duties to oneself exist in a greater range of cases when they intuitively do than does vitality, and if harmony can incorporate vitality, then the enriched harmony approach should be expected to do a more comprehensive job of accounting for the intuitions on the list.

Note that I have not said the "best" job. Showing that would require engaging with, among others, the large secular traditions of Confucianism in East Asia and Kantian-rationalism in the West. Although I think that the idea that duties to oneself are prescriptions to treat oneself in a friendly manner will probably do a much better job of capturing self-care duties than the idea that they are prescriptions to respect one's agency, that and other dimensions of a fascinating intercultural debate must be explored elsewhere.[7]

NOTES

1. By "African" I mean properties that have been salient in (not essential to) the sub-Saharan region in ways that differentiate it from many other locales. It picks out features that have been prominent over

a wide array of space and for a long amount of time in that part of the continent (features that might be neither everywhere in Africa nor solely there). For more on how to use geographical labels such as "African," see Metz (2022, 7–12).

2. See Singer (1959) for one classic argument against the existence of any duties to oneself, with an overview of major replies to Singer provided by Muñoz (2022).
3. I more or less follow John Rawls's approach to what he calls "considered judgments" (1971, §9).
4. Beyond accounting for the list, a fuller evaluation of a given theory of duties to oneself would include the extent to which it accounts for any other intuitions about what one owes oneself not on the list as well as coheres with other comparatively uncontested facets of morality, especially its other-regarding dimension.
5. For the view that the way one has treated others is instead a cause of, and not constitutive of, one's personhood, see Molefe (2019, 54–63). One trouble with this view is that it is unclear what personhood *is*, if it is something instrumentally brought about by other-regard.
6. Some members of Confucian tradition have sought to account for the nature of self-regard in terms of internal harmony, albeit a conception of that differing from the African one advanced here. See, e.g., Li (2014, 89–100).
7. This draft has benefited from: feedback received at What We Owe to Ourselves: A Conference on Duties to Oneself supported by the Central European University and the German Society for Analytic Philosophy (Gesellschaft für analytische Philosophie e.V.); an anonymous referee's written comments; and input from the advisory editors Yuliya Kanygina, Daniel Muñoz, and Janis Schaab.

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