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Perspectives on Identity, Decolonial Ethics and Comparative Philosophy

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8 Making sense of survivor's guilt

Why it is justified by an African ethic

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1 Introduction

For a good 200 years, utilitarianism and Kantianism have dominated Western philosophical thought about morality. Although the former has recently been in decline and alternatives to both have arisen over the past 30 years, they continue to influence much ethical reflection, even beyond the sphere of right action where they have been at home. For example, they are the source of the two central approaches that Euro-American-Australasian ethicists and laypeople generally have towards what is commonly called 'survivor's guilt', the negative emotion often experienced by innocent parties who, unlike many of their associates, were lucky enough not to die. On the one hand, many would say, 'It will do no good to feel survivor's guilt', while, on the other hand, many others would say, 'You did nothing wrong, and so have nothing to feel bad about'. Both reactions suggest that one should not experience survivor's guilt, that it would be unreasonable to do so.

In this chapter, I argue that there is in fact some good moral reason to experience survivor's guilt, specifically, because one would be a better person for doing so. I believe that an ethicist from any tradition should be able to feel some pull from my reasoning, the gist of which is that survivor's guilt can be a welcome, virtuous manifestation of one's being tied to those who perished.[1] Herbert Morris briefly suggested this idea about 30 years ago, saying that survivor's guilt can both 'mark one's attachment to principles of fairness and justice and manifest one's solidarity with others' (1987: 237). However, he did not seek to defend this approach thoroughly, let alone by anchoring it in a basic account of virtue, which are my aims here. My main defence of survivor's guilt consists of articulating a theoretical approach to moral virtue salient in the African philosophical tradition, suggesting that it is a prima facie attractive ethic, and then showing that it entails that a person disposed towards survivor's guilt could exhibit good character thereby.

The reason the African[2] conception of moral virtue readily entails and plausibly explains this conclusion is that it is a relational, and specifically communal, ethic. According to it, the more one honours relationships of (roughly) sharing with others, the more human excellence one has, or the more *ubuntu* one displays,

to use the Nguni vernacular of southern Africa. Drawing on this globally under-explored, but nonetheless plausible, theory of moral virtue, one is led to question conventional wisdom in Western ethics about what is good and reasonable and what is not.

In the following section, I explain what I mean by 'survivor's guilt' in more detail, which sort of justification I aim to provide for it, and why utilitarianism, Kantianism and virtue ethical theory in the contemporary Western tradition entail that it is generally unreasonable (or at best provide limited explanations of why it is reasonable) (section 2). Next, I advance my favoured African conception of moral virtue in terms of honouring communion, spelling it out and motivating it as an auspicious theory from which to derive more particular judgments of what makes someone a good person (section 3). I then derive from the Afro-communal ethic the judgment that survivor's guilt is often a kind of virtue (section 4), after which I conclude by briefly extending it to similar kinds of negative emotions (section 5).

2 Survivor's guilt: unreasonable by Western moral theory

In this section, I say more about what survivor's guilt is and why the major theoretical approaches to morality in the contemporary Western tradition do not easily account for the judgment that it is often appropriate. My claim is not that no Western *philosophers* have contended that survivor's guilt can be reasonable, for a few have; it is rather that the main Western *philosophies*, in the sense of comprehensive and basic accounts of morality, cannot easily entail and powerfully explain that contention.

I work with an intuitive sense of the phrase 'survivor's guilt', and do not devote space to the intricacies that now pepper the philosophical literature about its nature and logical conditions. For example, I do not address what guilt in general would have to be in order for survivor's guilt to count as a genuine instance, e.g., whether it is true that 'one can feel guilt only about actions' (as per Hurka 2001: 106; see also Williams 1993: 89–93; Adams 2006: 7) or whether that is much too narrow so that one can in fact logically feel guilty about one's attitudes and even mere states (Greenspan 1992; Teroni and Bruun 2011: 230–233). Similarly, I do not consider whether certain kinds of moral norms must exist in the background for survivor's guilt to be possible (Deigh 1999), or how it might be related to, and perhaps even constituted by, other emotions such as shame (Griffioen 2014). For my purposes, it is enough to define the phrase 'survivor's guilt' in this way: an emotional disposition to feel bad about oneself for one's associates having died, for not having died along with them or for not having saved them, even though one did no culpable wrong in contributing to their deaths.

This definition implies that 'guilt' in the present context picks out an emotion, something subjective, and so is to be distinguished from guilt as something objective, i.e., the fact of having done something culpably wrong. Survivor's guilt includes the *feeling* of guilt (or something similar to guilt if one prefers to construe that in a narrow sense as strictly about actions one has performed) despite

not *being* guilty, at least not for having been responsible for failing to perform a certain duty that led to others dying.

There are emotions similar to survivor's guilt, such as what one might feel consequent to having negligently caused the deaths of others or having failed to rescue them when one could have, but they are not the focus of this chapter; here, I presume that an agent did no wrong, or at least was utterly faultless for having done so. The clearest case of what I have in mind is one in which a survivor neither caused (not even accidentally) the deaths of others with whom he identifies, nor could have done anything to save them, even if he had taken many earlier steps differently.

I am also not interested in cases in which one had (merely) wished that others would die or felt good upon learning of their deaths. Still more, I set aside situations in which one has benefited in certain ways from others' deaths, say, by having received an inheritance when family members died or been given a promotion when co-workers did. Lastly, I do not consider a scenario in which one has failed to perform some duty in respect of the dead, e.g., neglected to look after their children adequately. Although there need not be culpable wrongdoing for having contributed to deaths in these kinds of cases, they involve complications that I bracket here. I do not want to address subjective guilt for having manifested vice, benefited from others' misfortunes or failed to do right by the dead, and I instead focus strictly on the emotion of feeling bad *for having survived* when one's fellows did not.

Guilt upon such a condition appears to have been common among the Japanese who luckily survived a tsunami some years ago. So reports Tatsuya Mori, a filmmaker who decided to make a documentary about its aftermath.

> On the day of the earthquake I was drinking beer with my friends in Roppongi. Thousands of people lost their lives, but I was drinking beer. I didn't know what was happening at the time, but when I realised, I was ashamed. I felt guilty …. 'Why did I survive? Why couldn't I save my mother?' We call it 'survivor's guilt'. I think this time all Japanese people felt survivor's guilt. We were all survivors – we had places to sleep, food to eat.
>
> <div align="right">(quoted in Arpon 2012; see also Osaki 2015)</div>

Note that I do not seek to justify all instances of survivor's guilt, so construed. Obviously, like any negative emotion, it could be disproportionately great relative to its object, or it could overly inhibit someone from moving forward and doing important things for herself or others. It is hardly my intention to suggest that one should undergo years and years of depression that would render one bedridden. My goal is to show that some manifestations of survivor's guilt can be appropriate, not that all of them are.

In claiming that survivor's guilt can be appropriate, I am contending that there is often some moral reason to exhibit it. That is *not* the claim that it would be *unreasonable not to exhibit it*. I am sympathetic to this stronger claim, which would entail that, say, feeling sad about others' demise and missing them would

be morally insufficient responses.[3] However, I do not defend it here, instead aiming to show that survivor's guilt is merely one reasonable response to having survived when one's associates have not.

My strategy for showing that survivor's guilt can be reasonable is to demonstrate that it can be a manifestation of good character. My basic claim is that survivor's guilt is a moral virtue, where I presume that such an attitude grounds normative reasons. Although one could hold the view that virtue is not always reason-giving, I do not, and rather contend that if exhibiting a certain attitude would make one a better person, then one has (some) moral reason to do so.

It is difficult for influential Western theories of morality to account for the judgment that survivor's guilt is a form of good character or otherwise reasonable to exhibit. First off, from a standard utilitarian perspective, one has moral reason to feel bad (or at least to perform actions that bring such a feeling in their wake) insofar as doing so would be expected to produce good, perhaps by preventing one from doing wrong in the future. However, surely few survivors of the present sort (viz., who have done no culpable wrong) need such a heavy emotion to keep them on the straight and narrow.

Utilitarians might suggest that survivor's guilt would prompt one to go out of one's way for others, or to appreciate the life one luckily has to live, and so is morally desirable for these reasons. As one survivor of the Japanese tsunami has remarked, '(H)aving survived the tragedy made me feel like I have to do something for the good of society' (quoted in Osaki 2015). Even though he does not say that it is *feeling bad* that prompted him to contribute to the general welfare, it plausibly could have. In addition, it might be that experiencing survivor's guilt would serve the function of indicating to others that they have no grounds to envy the survivor, 'keeping social frustration from focusing – as it naturally might – on him' (Greenspan 1995: 180; cf. Velleman 2003). These are fair suggestions. However, I trust the reader shares some non-forward-looking intuitions with me, and so is inclined to hold that, if survivor's guilt can be appropriate, it is not *merely* when and because it would make the future better for someone, whether that is the survivor or others in her society. Or at least that is the case I shall make below.

Probably the default position among Kantians, and most ethicists in general (as Morris 1987 pointed out a while back), is that guilt ought to track blame, where the latter, in turn, tracks responsible wrongdoing. If one's basic duty is to treat people with respect in virtue of their capacity to make moral decisions, then it is plausible to think that one ought to respond to them in the light of how they have mis/used it. For most Kantians, that means some kind of retributive outlook, where the amount of blame, including punishment, that is right to dish out towards others should be proportionate to the degree of wrongful action they took in combination with the degree of their responsibility for it (e.g., Nozick 1981: 363–393). It is natural to think that guilt should be based on the same factors, so that the more wrongful one's act, and (roughly) the greater one's control over it and the more central to one's plan it was, the more the offender should feel guilty for having performed it.

This approach entails that, where there has been no wrong done, or at least no responsibility for a wrong, one is factually innocent such that there should be neither punishment nor guilt. Typical is the following: 'Strictly speaking, survivor guilt is not rational guilt, for surviving the Holocaust, or surviving battle … is not typically because a person has deliberately let another take his place in harm' (Sherman 2013: 185).[4] While survivor's guilt might be understandable from a standard Kantian perspective, it is not justified in the sense of there being good moral reason for a person, who is *ex hypothesi* utterly innocent, to exhibit it.

Finally, consider virtue theory in contemporary Western philosophy. Of course, many virtue ethicists favour particularism, denying that any general principle can adequately capture the nature of all the forms of human excellence. As I advance such a principle in this chapter as promising, it is appropriate to contrast it with its closest rivals, namely, salient Western theories about the essence of virtue. One such theoretical approach to virtue is the view shared by Thomas Hurka and Robert Adams, that virtue consists (roughly) of loving or being for the good and hating or being against the bad, where these dis/values can be constituted by one's own actions and attitudes (Hurka 2001; Adams 2006). When it comes to moral virtue, one has it (roughly) insofar as one performs right acts (good) and likes doing so or does so for their own sake. Conversely, if one has acted wrongly (bad), then one exhibits moral virtue insofar as one feels guilty for having done so and perhaps is willing to submit to punishment.

There is no reason, at least within this framework as normally expounded, for a survivor to think of either herself or her survival as bad. Although neither Hurka nor Adams addresses survivor's guilt, Hurka does take up the related case of someone who accidentally strikes another with his car, noting, 'If the driver was driving safely, his action was not wrong and involved no vicious attitude, so he has no ground for guilt' (2001: 204). Similar remarks surely apply to someone who was, say, merely lucky enough to survive a tsunami.

Another prominent virtue ethical theory is Rosalind Hursthouse's view that the virtues are constituted by settled dispositions of human persons that advance individual survival, continuance of the species, characteristic enjoyment and freedom from pain, and the good functioning of the social group (1999: 197–216). Hursthouse contends that charity, justice, honesty and courage plausibly count as virtues insofar as they reliably foster these four ends.

Does survivor's guilt also count as a virtue for doing so? Of these four ends, one might suggest that being disposed towards survivor's guilt would promote the good functioning of the social group. After all, it surely does not reliably foster individual survival, reproduction of the species or enjoyment; if anything, the opposite might be true. However, by 'good functioning of the social group' Hursthouse means merely that the group is such as to promote the other three ends (1999: 201–202), and, so, if survivor's guilt does not do so directly, it is unlikely to do so indirectly, i.e., by enabling the group to do so. Furthermore, note that Hursthouse's own interpretation of her theory entails that survivor's guilt is unreasonable, as she remarks that guilt in general is 'inappropriate when the agent is blameless' (1999: 77; see also 76).

In sum, normative ethical theories prominent in recent Western philosophy have difficulty entailing and explaining the judgment that survivor's guilt is typically reasonable. My claim is that there are theoretical resources in the African tradition that promise to do much better.

3 An African theory of moral virtue

There are three major accounts of virtue in contemporary African philosophy,[5] of which I favour the one that is fundamentally relational. According to this approach, communal or harmonious relationships are not merely instrumental (Gyekye 1997) or epistemic (Bujo 2001) conditions for good character, but rather constitute it (in part). By this view, what it is for one to have *ubuntu*, i.e., humanness or virtue, is roughly for one to live communally or in harmony with others. This appears to be Desmond Tutu's view when he says of indigenous southern Africans,

> When we want to give high praise to someone we say, '*Yu, u nobuntu*'; 'Hey, he or she has *ubuntu*.' This means they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate .... We say, 'a person is a person through other people'. 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.
>
> (1999: 34, 35)

In this section, I spell out a conception of moral virtue that is inspired by the remarks of Tutu and those with similar interpretations of the African tradition.[6] Note that it is a philosophical construction that, while informed by salient sub-Saharan mores, is intended to be of prima facie interest to an ethicist working in any major tradition across the globe, and is not meant to reflect, in detailed anthropological or sociological fashion, the views of any specific traditional sub-Saharan people or group of them.[7]

As alluded to in the quote above from Tutu, many times the African ethic of *ubuntu* is summed up with the maxim, 'A person is a person through other persons'. Although this phrase is sometimes used to express a metaphysical claim, to the effect that one could not have become who one is without living in a certain society, it is also routinely meant to express an evaluative claim. In particular, it is a prescription to become a *real* person or to live a *genuinely* human way of life (see Nkulu-N'Sengha 2009 for a survey of the views of several sub-Saharan peoples).

Such an approach is a *eudaimonist* or self-realization perspective, similar to the foundations of the most influential classical Greek ethics and East Asian Confucianism. The ultimate answer to the question of why one should live one way rather than another is the fact that it would make *oneself a better person*. There is a distinctively human and higher part of our nature, and a lower, animal self, where both can be realized to various degrees. One can be more or less of a human or person, and one's basic aim in life should be to develop one's

humanness or to cultivate one's personhood as much as one can. Indeed, it is common for indigenous Africans to describe those who are wicked as 'non-persons' or even 'animals' (Bhengu 1996: 27; Letseka 2000: 186; Nkulu-N'Sengha 2009).

Turning to the second part of the maxim, one is to become a real person 'through other persons', which I interpret to mean insofar as one prizes communal relationships with others. As Augustine Shutte remarks of an *ubuntu* ethic, 'Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So although the goal is personal fulfilment, selfishness is excluded' (2001: 30). It is common for ethicists working in the African tradition to maintain, or at least to suggest, that the *only* comprehensive respect in which one can exhibit human excellence is by relating to other (innocent) parties communally or harmoniously.

What do such relationships essentially involve? In addition to Tutu's mention of 'I participate, I share', consider these characterizations from some additional southern African thinkers:

> (H)armony is achieved through close and sympathetic social relations within the group, thus the notion *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through other persons—ed.).
>
> (Mokgoro 1998: 17)

> Individuals consider themselves integral parts of the whole community. A person is socialised to think of himself, or herself, as inextricably bound to others …. *Ubuntu* ethics can be termed anti-egoistic as it discourages people from seeking their own good without regard for, or to the detriment of, others and the community. *Ubuntu* promotes the spirit that one should live for others.
>
> (Mnyaka and Motlhabi 2005: 222, 224)

> If you asked *ubuntu* advocates and philosophers: What principles inform and organise your life? What do you live for? What motive force or basic attitude gives your life meaning? …. 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.
>
> (Nkondo 2007: 91)

> (P)ersonhood is defined in relation to the community …. A sense of community exists if people are mutually responsive to one another's needs … (O)ne attains the complements associated with full or mature selfhood through participation in a community of similarly constituted selves …. To be is to belong and to participate.
>
> (Mkhize 2008: 39, 40)

Such construals of *ubuntu*, of how to realize oneself by relating to other persons, suggest two logically distinct elements of communion (harmony). On the one hand, there is participating, being close, considering oneself part of the whole, experiencing oneself as bound up with others, and belonging, which I label

'identifying' with others or 'sharing a way of life' with them. On the other hand, there is sharing (one's resources), being sympathetic, living for the sake of others, being committed to others' good, and responding to one another's needs, which I call 'exhibiting solidarity' with others or 'caring for' them.

I have worked to distinguish and reconstruct these two facets of a communal (or harmonious) relationship with some precision (see, e.g., Metz 2015b). It is revealing to understand identifying with another (or being close, belonging, etc.) to be the combination of exhibiting certain psychological attitudes of cohesion and cooperative behaviour consequent to them. The attitudes include a tendency to think of oneself as a member of a group with the other and to refer to oneself as a 'we' (rather than an 'I'), a disposition to feel pride or shame in what the other or one's group does, and, at a higher level of intensity, an emotional appreciation of the other's nature and value. The cooperative behaviours include being transparent about the terms of interaction, allowing others to make voluntary choices, adopting goals that cohere with those of others, acting on the basis of trust, and, at the extreme end, choosing for the reason that 'this is who we are'.

Exhibiting solidarity with another (or acting for others' good, etc.) is similarly aptly construed as the combination of exhibiting certain psychological attitudes and engaging in helpful behaviour. Here, the attitudes are ones positively oriented towards the other's good and include an empathetic awareness of the other's condition and a sympathetic emotional reaction to this awareness. The actions are not merely those likely to be beneficial, that is, to improve the other's state, but also are ones done consequent to certain motives, say, for the sake of making the other better off or even a better person.

This specification of what it is to commune (or harmonize) with others grounds a fairly rich, attractive and useable African virtue ethic. Bringing things together, here are some concrete and revealing principled interpretations of 'A person is a person through other persons': one should become a real person, which is matter of prizing identity and solidarity with others; or, an agent ought to live a genuinely human way of life (exhibit *ubuntu*), which she can do if and only if she honours relationships of sharing a way of life with others and caring for their quality of life.[8]

Conceiving of moral virtue in this comprehensive and basic way makes good sense of the particular instances of it that have often been extolled by African thinkers and that many in other traditions will find intuitive. Recall Tutu's remark that one with *ubuntu* is 'generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate'. Similarly, Mluleki Mnyaka and Mokgethi Motlhabi, two South African theologians, maintain that the following traits are best associated with *ubuntu*: 'kindness, compassion, caring, sharing, solidarity and sacrifice' (2005: 227). And in a survey of the African tradition, Peter Paris highlights the virtues of beneficence, forbearance (i.e., patience and tolerance), practical wisdom, forgiveness and justice (1995: 130–154). Most of these cited virtues are well captured by the solidarity dimension of communion, although friendliness, forbearance and sacrifice plausibly amount to ways of identifying with others, in which one enjoys a sense of togetherness and does what one can to support cooperative projects.

In addition, greeting others, keeping promises and upholding customs, which are also characteristically African virtues (e.g., Mbiti 1990: 208–209), appear to be manifestations of shared identity.

I do not have the space to argue that prizing communion captures the nature of moral virtue in its entirety, or better than rival theoretical accounts. At the core my claims are that, at least insofar as moral virtues are other-regarding, a great many of them are well accounted for by a basic conception of human excellence as constituted by attitudes (and actions consequent to them) that prize communal relationship, and, as I now argue, that an implication of this conception is that a person could be virtuous for exhibiting survivor's guilt.

4 Survivor's guilt as prizing communion

In previous sections I argued that salient theoretical accounts of morality in the contemporary West cannot easily account for the idea that survivor's guilt is reasonable, and sketched an alternative conception of moral virtue grounded on ideals of communion and harmony prominent in the African tradition. In this section, I show that this Afro-communal theory of virtue plausibly entails that and explains why one would often be a better person for experiencing survivor's guilt. Roughly, feeling bad upon the dumb luck of survival when one's associates have perished is a virtuous instance of honouring one's ties with them.

First, part of communing with another person means exhibiting emotions proportionately to her condition. Emotions characteristically have either a positive or negative valence (perhaps constituted by a wish that their object obtain or not, as per Gordon 1987) that comes in degrees. Emotional communion means experiencing positive emotions in respect of another's valuable states and negative emotions in respect of her disvaluable ones, and then either sort to an extent comparable to the amount of dis/value she is undergoing. Most often this is cashed out in terms of sympathy, whereby one feels good for others to the degree they are judged to flourish, and one feels bad for them to the extent they are deemed to founder. In addition, recall that identifying with others can mean taking pride in them when they do well, and feeling ashamed when they do poorly. Now, survivor's guilt is analogous to these emotional states; it is another way in which one's emotions can track the condition of others. Specifically, one feels very bad because one's associates have undergone what is presumably the great harm of death. It is therefore not merely an epistemic sign (or a 'mark', to use Morris' term) of one's communal attachment, but also a form of the attachment itself.

One might object by pointing to a difference between negative sympathy and survivor's guilt, namely that, while in the former case one feels bad for the other, in the latter one feels bad about oneself. However, both still have in common a negative emotional state in response to the disvalue of an other's condition, which is, I submit, enough similarity for the analogy to work. Furthermore, notice that the full parallel is encountered in the case of shame. Suppose your adult brother has a racist outburst. When one feels ashamed about what he has done, the object of shame is in part oneself, even though one did not manifest shameful character.

Survivor's guilt appears similar, as the object of guilt is oneself, even though one did not perform a wrongful act for which one was responsible.

Another query is why guilt might be appropriate upon others having died in ways for which one is not culpable, as opposed to some other negative emotions such as embarrassment, loneliness, bewilderment or disgust. Part of the answer to this question involves reminding the reader that my claim is neither that guilt is the only proper attitude to have, nor that it is a necessary one. Guilt is merely one form that communal virtue can take; perhaps, in addition, it would be good of one to feel embarrassed at having survived, or to feel lonely in the face of so many others having perished, or to feel bewildered at the absence of an explanation as to why one lived and others did not. Another part of the answer involves reminding ourselves that the appropriateness of an emotion is a function of not merely its valence and degree, but also its kind. So, for example, disgust is normally considered to be a proper response to what threatens contamination or pollution, which is not essentially present in cases of the sort that I submit reasonably occasion survivor's guilt.

There is a second emotional respect in which survivor's guilt is plausibly a form of communion. A characteristic part of survivor's guilt is feeling bad for having survived, but another is blaming oneself for others having died. That is, in addition to being negatively affected in a certain way, one experiencing survivor's guilt sometimes makes a disapproving judgment; one treats oneself as responsible for another's fate, indeed fatality, even though one had not been causally, or at least not morally, responsible for it. I submit that such an appraisal is to 'think of oneself as inextricably bound to others' and a manifestation of 'the spirit that one should live for others', to echo Mnyaka and Motlhabi's remarks above.

Readers will be tempted to object that it is incorrect to blame oneself when one's associates have perished, supposing that one could not have rescued them or otherwise was not responsible for their death. However, one might be making a similarly factually incorrect imputation of responsibility when one takes pride in the accomplishments of one's adult relatives, and yet that is rarely viewed as inappropriate.

More deeply, the responsibility need not be interpreted as about the failure to have performed a certain action or fulfilled a particular duty, but rather the failure to have *been* a specific sort of person, namely, one who in fact met the needs of one's intimates. Any plausible interpretation of African morality will include a partial dimension, according a principled priority to those to whom one is related, where, traditionally speaking, that meant going out of one's way to aid those with whom one shares blood ties (Appiah 1998). However, a philosophically attractive reconstruction of 'family first' and 'charity begins at home' is the idea that one is a better person insofar as one does a lot for those with whom one has already exhibited identity or solidarity (on which see Metz 2017c). From this perspective, not merely is it bad for one's family or compatriots to die, but also *one is not good* if one was unable to save them from that, even supposing it was not one's fault. Insofar as human excellence is centrally constituted by meeting the urgent interests of one's family, one is lacking it upon having been unable to do so for

whatever reason, and that arguably makes the blame element of guilt apt to some degree. The disapproval need not be about having performed a culpable wrong, or even having failed to uphold an imperfect duty to others (as per the interesting suggestion in Sherman 2011), but rather for not having been one who helped one's intimates in a time of great need and for now being one who can never help them again. In short, one is less of a person than one might have been (due to bad moral luck).

A third respect in which survivor's guilt is a way of prizing communion concerns the idea that one has not shared the same fate as one's intimates. That is, the disapproval involved in survivor's guilt might not merely be about not having been a person who met their needs, but also about not having been in the same boat with them, where the latter is a distinct facet of communion.

Recall that by the interpretation of *ubuntu* above, one is a good person, in part, insofar as one cooperatively participates with one's fellows. Salient forms of participation in the African philosophical tradition are residing with a family and engaging in the rituals and customs of one's society. For an additional respect in which one should live with others and do as they do, return to the case of sympathy. In emotionally attuning oneself to the other's state, one is sharing in the latter to some degree. If, to realize their humanness, individuals ought to experience psychological pain upon awareness of another's suffering, then virtue means feeling another's pain with her, com-miserating. When one suffers, so do her friends and family to some degree – ideally! 'Ubuntu calls on us to believe and feel that: Your pain is My pain, My wealth is Your wealth' (Nussbaum 2003: 21).

Consider, too, the resistance to great inequalities among traditional African peoples and in the philosophies inspired by their worldviews and practices (on which see Metz 2015b). If there were a choice of distributing two units of a burden on ten people or ten units on one person, friends of *ubuntu* would characteristically opt for the former, despite the fact that there would be double the overall amount of harm. As Kwame Gyekye says of one strand of African ethics, 'Communitarian moral and political theory, which considers the community as a fundamental human good, advocates a life lived in harmony and cooperation with others, a life of mutual consideration and aid and of interdependence, a life in which one shares in the fate of the other' (1997: 75–76). I submit that undergoing survivor's guilt similarly honours the value of participation, both by including the judgment that one should have shared the same fate and by feeling bad, thereby in fact coming to share a bit of it.

Patricia Greenspan has addressed something like this rationale (albeit not in the context of African virtue ethics), and she has objected to it as follows: 'Part of showing that one identifies with others in a way that makes inequalities unwelcome involves the willingness to make up for inequalities by way of self-inflicted emotional distress. But this is an unachievable aim in many cases; and according to the account I have offered it is based on an illusory feeling of responsibility' (1992: 302; see also 301). In reply, the aim need not be construed as fully 'levelling down' to what one's associates have undergone, but instead as undergoing a taste of what they have. Furthermore, the judgment that it would have been, or

would still be, good to experience something of the burden of one's fellows need not be grounded on the false belief that one is responsible for their burden. Again, the view that one would have exhibited more *ubuntu* in one respect to have shared the same fate as others, or would exhibit more now to do so to some degree, does not imply that one is objectively guilty for their fate.

The first three rationales for the appropriateness of survivor's guilt have drawn on an Afro-communal conception of moral virtue to flesh out Morris' intuition, mentioned in the introduction, that survivor's guilt is a way to 'manifest one's solidarity with others'.[9] The fourth rationale instead aims to underwrite his comment that it is also a way to 'mark one's attachment to principles of fairness and justice'.

It is a standard part of a sub-Saharan ethic to maintain that elders, i.e., those who have displayed much virtue by having communed with others substantially over time, should be accorded greater respect than non-elders. Not only is their testimony to be given more weight, but they are thought to deserve more from life, for instance by being served first at mealtimes and being greeted in a particular way.

Now, when those without as much *ubuntu*, say, those who have been distant or selfish, are instead the ones to get more by surviving, it would be apt for them to feel guilty. And even when some with a lot of *ubuntu* are the ones to have survived, it would arguably be sensible for them to feel guilty, as they were no more special than others with much *ubuntu* who did not survive. In sum, it can be apt to feel bad for enjoying an unjust distribution of a benefit, even if its allocation was not the result of an unjust action, but rather a tsunami or something similar.

5 Conclusion

My aim has been to provide a moral-theoretic grounding for the judgment that it can be reasonable to exhibit survivor's guilt. Prominent Western ethical philosophies entail that it would typically be unreasonable, and so I have explored resources in a non-Western tradition that promise to make better sense of it. In particular, I have advanced a conception of moral virtue with a sub-Saharan pedigree according to which one is a better person, the more one honours communion with others, relationships of sharing a life with others and caring for their quality of life. And I have argued that feeling bad upon the dumb luck of surviving where others were not so fortunate is one way of honouring communion, so construed.

I conclude by noting that the arguments for deeming survivor's guilt to be an expression of moral virtue can be extended to a wide range of other cases in which others experience less-than-fatal burdens and one does not. It is common for those reared in an impoverished neighbourhood to feel guilt upon 'making it' when many others from it have not, and for those who did not experience sexual or physical abuse to feel guilt when others with whom they identify have.

All four arguments for the aptness of survivor's guilt apply with comparable force to these and similar cases. Guilt would be a way to experience feelings attuned to the condition of others, to judge that one has not exhibited the excellence of helping them, to acknowledge that one has not shared a particular fate with them and to impart something of that fate, and to recognize that one has received benefits that one deserves no more than those with comparable or even greater excellence who did not receive them. In short, to feel bad in these situations is reasonable insofar as it is an emotional expression of a person being bound up with, and committed to, other persons.[10]

Notes

1 For other attempts to capture why survivor's guilt can be reasonable, see Velleman (2003), Sherman (2011) and Christensen (2013). I provide some criticism of them in Metz (2018).
2 I use geographical labels to signify properties that have been salient in much of a certain region for a long while (see Metz 2015a). To call something 'African', then, means that it is characteristic of that continent (and especially the sub-Saharan region), and is not meant to suggest that it is present only there or in every part of it.
3 Cf. Morris' remark that not feeling guilt 'may signal insensitivity, a lack of humility, a failure to grasp emotionally how much of the good one possesses cannot be tallied on the credit side of our personal moral ledger sheet' (1987: 237).
4 However, there are other places in Sherman's work where she contends that survivor's guilt can be reasonable, in particular, for having violated an imperfect duty (e.g., 2011, 2013: 182).
5 On which see Metz (2017a).
6 I initially advanced this account of virtue in Metz (2012, 2013, 2014, 2017b), and crib from these works when recounting it here.
7 Probably most indigenous African peoples believe in life after the death of the body, but this and other highly contested metaphysical claims are not essential to the account of moral virtue I advance.
8 Sometimes prizing or honouring these relationships will mean acting in the opposite, or discordant, ways, e.g., when necessary to prevent a greater discord.
9 Note that Morris' use of the word 'solidarity' is broader than mine in this chapter.
10 Some paragraphs in this chapter have been borrowed from Metz (2018). For written comments that have improved this chapter, I thank George Hull and Frans Svensson, and for oral comments I thank Samantha Vice and the audience at a colloquium organized by the University of Cape Town Department of Philosophy. Special thanks to Neil Horne for a particularly penetrating point.

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