The Final Ends of Higher Education in Light of an African Moral Theory

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From the perspective of an African ethic, analytically interpreted as a philosophical principle of right action, what are the proper final ends of a publicly funded university and how should they be ranked? To answer this question, I first provide a brief but inclusive review of the literature on Africanising higher education from the past 50 years, and contend that the prominent final ends suggested in it can be reduced to five major categories. Then, I spell out an intuitively attractive African moral theory and apply it to these five final ends, arguing that three of them are appropriate but that two of them are not. After that, I maintain that the African moral theory prescribes two additional final ends for a public university that are not salient in the literature. Next, I argue that employing the African moral theory as I do enables one to rebut several criticisms of Africanising higher education that have recently been made from a liberal perspective. I conclude by posing questions suitable for future research.

1 INTRODUCTION

At the heart of the philosophy of education lies the question of what the final ends of publicly funded higher education should be. What ought a university be aiming to achieve that is worth supporting for its own sake with tax revenue? The field has well developed answers from the moral perspectives that dominate English-speaking philosophy. Friends of the Kantian principle of respect have articulated the way that a state university should develop its students' abilities to think critically about possible ways of life, to create wealth that would enable citizens to achieve goals, and to participate in democratic self-governance.[1] Those inclined toward utilitarianism have spelled out how higher education can be greatly instrumental for improving people's quality of life, often understood in socio-economic terms when it comes to the sciences, but also construed in terms of realising ideals or enhancing meaningfulness in the context of the humanities.[2] And those who like an Aristotelian, or more generally self-realisation or perfectionist standpoint, have specified which valuable

human capabilities they believe a state university ideally exists to foster, often ones such as the ability to reason about issues of justice and to reflect critically on oneself.[3] But what would a contrasting, African moral standpoint entail for the proper final ends of a state university?

There is actually a fair amount of literature that has sought to answer this question, or at least has provided implicit answers to it, far more than will come to the minds of most international readers. However, a recurrent feature of this literature is its piecemeal nature, by which I mean that it has not provided a resolutely theoretical account of the ramifications of African morality for the point of publicly funded higher education. Up to now, African morality has only rarely been interpreted in a systematic way—that is, there has been little attempt to develop a principle of right action grounded in the mores of sub-Saharan peoples that is akin to the Western moral theories of Kantianism, utilitarianism or perfectionism. In addition, discussions of what an African ethic entails for the final ends of a state university have not been comprehensive—for example, have not thoroughly attempted to indicate all of its proper final ends, to differentiate between kinds of final ends, and to rank them.

This article aims to be more theoretical, in these senses, about the bearing of African morality on the non-instrumental purposes of higher education. In it I indicate one attractive way to understand African ethics in a principled form that is on a par with dominant Western theories of morality, and I appeal to this African moral theory to develop a general account of what a state university ultimately ought to be striving to achieve. Note that this project is definitively normative and not fundamentally descriptive. Rather than seeking to recount ways that some traditional African societies have in fact approached education, I will be appealing to certain ideas about morality that are recurrent in these societies and admit of unification in the form of a basic principle, and arguing that this principle entails certain proper ends for higher education that may or may not have been adopted by them. This is a work of moral philosophy, not moral anthropology, and so it will be abstract and prescriptive in its orientation and will not aim to mirror the intricacies of a particular people's way of life.

I begin by clarifying the nature of the question about higher education that I seek to answer, as well as the moral principle that I shall use to answer it and the sense in which it is 'African' (§2). Next, I provide what is intended to be a complete list of the final ends of higher education that several dozen Africanists have most often proposed in the (English-speaking) literature, reducing them to five basic perspectives (§3). After that, I apply my favoured understanding of African morality to them, arguing that two of the final ends that are prominent in this literature should not be and explaining why the remaining three indeed should be (§4). Then, I maintain that, in light of the African moral theory, two final ends that are not salient in the literature should be (§5). In the next section, I point out how the argumentation in this article facilitates responses to several criticisms of Africanist higher education that have recently been made in the literature by friends of a more liberal

perspective (§6). I conclude by summarising and by noting some topics for future research (§7).

2 CLARIFICATION OF THE QUESTION

My question is this: what are the proper final ends of publicly funded higher education and how should they be organised, in light of an African moral theory? My aim in this section is to define key terms in this question, so that the nature of my project is clear.

By 'publicly funded higher education' I mean instruction that presupposes a background of primary and secondary instruction, that is not merely vocational in nature, and that is supported by tax revenue. Typically, this takes the form of a state university, and I focus on such in this article.

In addressing the 'final ends' of a state university, I discuss goals that it ought to strive to achieve for their own sake or 'in themselves', that is, apart from any results they might have. Note that in focusing on final ends, I set aside all issues of the right means to adopt when pursuing them—for example, I do not address debates about which languages to use, what styles of instruction to employ, or who ought to have the authority to decide these issues.

In seeking 'proper' final ends, I mean those prescribed by morality, and I presume that any plausible account of morality would entail that it is unjustified for a state university to try to realise any end that is impossible or extremely unlikely to be achieved. By 'organising' the proper final ends of publicly funded higher education, I have in mind two things: differentiating between types of final ends, and indicating some order of importance among them. First, there are two types of final ends that are not often distinguished in the philosophy of education, but that are discussed in other moral debates[4] and that are worth applying to a pedagogical context. On the one hand, there are *justifying* aims, final ends that would make it reasonable to set up and maintain a state university, while, on the other hand, there are *attendant* aims, final ends that would not make it reasonable to set up and maintain a state university, but that a state university ought to pursue once it exists. To avoid begging any questions, consider an example outside of an educational setting. It would make relatively little sense to create a child for the basic aim of there being a morally upright person; there are plenty of those on the planet already. A more sensible justifying aim of creating a child is for one to have another loving relationship in one's life, while an attendant aim of creating a child is for one to ensure that she is a morally upright person. Again, one must adopt the end of making sure that one's child is virtuous once one has had a child, but virtue is not a good reason to have a child in the first place. Similarly, there might be basic reasons for a state university to adopt certain policies, even though the adoption of these policies is not a basic reason to create or maintain it.

Second, I am concerned to suggest some kind of rank among the proper final ends of a state university. To rank an end is to appraise its

worth relative to other ends. It is to make a judgment of comparative importance in terms of value. Often, but not always, a highly ranked end will be one that a state university ought to prioritise—that is, ought to pursue before other ends. If, when comparing only two competing ends, both are equally likely to be realised but one end is more important than the other, then the more important one ought to be prioritised when formulating policy. However, it is not necessarily the case that highly ranked ends should be prioritised, even if they are likely to be realised. For instance, if one had to choose between realising the highest final end alone or several highly ranked ends below it, it could be most rational to do the latter.

In order to determine what the proper final ends of a state university are and how they should be organised, I draw upon a moral standpoint that has been neglected in the international literature in the philosophy of education—and unjustly so, I submit. I appeal to an African moral theory in order to determine what the ultimate purposes of a state university should be, not only because it is worth seeing what a non-Western perspective entails about an issue central to pedagogical reflection, but also because, as I now suggest, it is philosophically attractive.

By a 'moral theory' I mean a principle that promises to capture what all wrong actions at bottom have in common as distinct from right ones. The Kantian principle of respect, according to which wrong acts are degrading of autonomy, and the principle of utility, according to which wrong acts fail to maximise the long-term general welfare, are familiar moral theories from the Western tradition. By an 'African' moral theory I mean one grounded on the beliefs and practices of many sub-Saharan peoples. An ethical principle counts as 'African' if it has its source in the cultures of a wide variety of largely black and Bantu-speaking societies, spanning from South Africa to Ghana with respect to space, and from pre-colonial peoples to contemporary literati with respect to time.[5]

One recurrent feature of moral thought in sub-Saharan Africa is the widespread phrase, 'A person is a person through other persons' or 'I am because we are'.[6] To most non-African readers, these phrases will indicate nothing normative and instead will bring to mind merely some empirical banalities about the causal dependence of a child on her parents or society more generally. However, such statements express a controversial moral claim.[7] In much African reflection, talk of 'personhood' (as in the second instance of 'person' in the quote above) is inherently moralised, such that to be a person is to be virtuous or to exhibit good character. The phrases say that being a *mensch*, or living a genuinely human way of life, is entirely constituted by relating to others in certain ways.

Exactly which sort of relationship is key to acting rightly? The uncontroversial answer is, roughly, a communal one, as can be seen from this brief survey of the views of some prominent African intellectuals. First off, note the following summary of the moral aspects of John Mbiti's famous post-war analysis of African worldviews: 'What is right is what connects people together; what separates people is wrong' (Verhoef and Michel, 1997, p. 397). Next, consider these remarks from black

consciousness leader Steve Biko, in an essay that explores facets of culture that are widely shared by Africans:

> We regard our living together not as an unfortunate mishap warranting endless competition among us but as a deliberate act of God to make us a community of brothers and sisters jointly involved in the quest for a composite answer to the varied problems of life. Hence in all we do we always place Man first and hence all our action is usually joint community oriented action rather than the individualism which is the hallmark of the capitalist approach (Biko, 2004, p. 46).

Finally, here is a summary of African ethical thinking from Desmond Tutu, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize and renowned chair of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: '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' (Tutu, 1999, p. 35). Note that apparently for Mbiti, Biko, Tutu and several others who have reflected on African ethics,[8] harmonious or communal relationships are valued for their own sake, not merely as a means to some other basic moral value such as pleasure. Or at least that is one philosophically interesting way to interpret them.

These remarks about the moral fundamentality of harmony and community are suggestive but imprecise. What is the morally most attractive sense of 'harmony' or 'community', and exactly how must one engage with these relationships in order to act rightly? I answer these questions by proffering the following normative theory[9]: *an action is right just insofar as it is a way of living harmoniously or prizing communal relationships, ones in which people identify with each other and exhibit solidarity with one another; otherwise, an action is wrong*. To identify with each other is largely for people to think of themselves as members of the same group—that is, to conceive of themselves as a 'we', as well as for them to engage in joint projects, coordinating their behaviour to realise shared ends. For people to fail to identify with each other could involve outright division between them—that is, people not only thinking of themselves as an 'I' in opposition to a 'you' or a 'they', but also aiming to undermine one another's ends. To exhibit solidarity with one another is for people to engage in mutual aid, to act for the sake of one another (ideally, repeatedly over time). Solidarity is also a matter of people's attitudes (e.g. affections, emotions) being invested in others—for example, by sympathising with them. For people to fail to exhibit solidarity would be for them to be either indifferent to one another's flourishing or downright hostile and cruel toward each other.

An equivalent way of phrasing my favoured principle is to say that *an action is wrong insofar as it fails to honour relationships in which people share a way of life and care for one another's quality of life, and especially to the extent that it esteems division and ill-will*. Note that the combination of sharing a way of life and caring for others' quality of life,

or, what is the same, of identifying with and exhibiting solidarity toward others, is basically a relationship that English-speakers call 'friendship' (or a broad sense of 'love'). So, it also follows that the present theory can be understood to instruct a moral agent to *respect friendly relationships, and especially to avoid prizing ones of enmity*.

Such a principle is fairly specific about the kind of relationship that makes one a 'person' in an African ethic, and it does a reasonable job of philosophically explaining what makes an action wrong. Acts such as breaking promises, stealing, deceiving, cheating, raping and the like are well characterised as being *unfriendly*, or as failing to respect the value of friendship. They involve discord in the following senses: the actor is distancing himself from the person acted upon, instead of enjoying a sense of togetherness; the actor is subordinating the other, as opposed to coordinating behaviour with him; the actor is failing to act for the good of the other, but rather for his own or someone else's interest or the actor lacks pro-attitudes toward the other's wellbeing, and is instead unconcerned or malevolent. And note that this explanation of what makes these actions wrong differs from the Kantian suggestion that they are degrading of autonomy, the utilitarian suggestion that they less than maximally promote the general welfare in the long run and the Aristotelian suggestion that they fail to realise one's valuable human nature *qua* rational.

Construing morally sound practices in terms of honouring relationships of identity and solidarity on the face of it well captures several common (not universal) facets of behaviour and thought below the Sahara.[10] For example, sub-Saharans often think that society should be akin to family; they tend to believe in the importance of greetings, even to strangers; they typically refer to people outside the nuclear family with titles such as 'sister' and 'mama'; they frequently believe that ritual and tradition have a certain degree of moral significance; they tend to think that there is some obligation to wed and procreate; they usually do not believe that retribution is a proper aim of criminal justice, inclining toward reconciliation; they commonly think that there is a strong duty for the rich to aid the poor; and they often value consensus in decision-making, seeking unanimous agreement and not resting content with majority rule. I have the space merely to suggest that these recurrent (not invariant) practices are plausibly entailed and well explained by the prescription to respect relationships in which people both share a way of life and care for one another's quality of life. I am not suggesting that this principle has been believed by even a majority of Africans; my point is rather that it promises to capture in a theory several salient aspects of a communal way of life that has been widespread south of the Sahara, and hence that it qualifies as 'African'.

Having spelled out one appealing, theoretical interpretation of African morality, my aim in the rest of this article is to bring out some of its ramifications for higher education.[11] A moral theory that provides a plausible account of wrongness and purports to capture a wide array of ethical intuitions common below the Sahara desert should be revealing when applied to a fresh context, the proper final ends of a state university.

3 FINAL ENDS PROMINENT IN THE LITERATURE

As a first step to ascertaining what the African moral theory from the previous section prescribes, in this section I lay out the final ends that have been salient in sub-Saharan reflection on higher education. What follows is a list of five logically distinct purposes most often proposed by self-described friends of Africanising higher education or of applying African norms to it. The ends are ordered roughly according to popularity in the English-language literature, which ranges from classic speeches by post-colonial statesmen to recent articles by academics.

Foster Development. One of the most common suggestions about what a state university *qua* African ought ultimately to be striving for is to improve socio-economic conditions.[12] I include under this heading the idea that higher education ought to impart scarce skills, as well as vaguer appeals one finds in the literature to 'national objectives', 'social relevance', 'pressing issues', etc.

Support Culture. About equally recurrent in the literature is the suggestion that orienting a public university in light of African norms would involve the protection, interpretation and transmission of culture.[13] Which culture? The invariable answer, for a university in sub-Saharan Africa, is an African one, the general principle presumably being that the cultures in a university's locale are those warranting support in the first instance. I include under this heading calls for higher education to maintain or develop a sense of (African) 'belonging' or 'identity.'

One might wonder what the difference is between fostering development and supporting culture, for is not the latter one way of doing the former? As construed here, and as the literature is best interpreted, fostering development has less to do with facilitating the 'intangible' heritage of language, tradition and aesthetic expression, and more to do with 'concrete' goods such as nutrition, education, healthcare, shelter, communications, transportation and electricity.

Rectify Injustice. A third suggestion from friends of Africanising higher education is that one final end of a state university should be to right historical wrongs.[14] A central part of rectifying injustice is effecting compensatory justice, where one can identify three distinct kinds of goods that were unjustly taken during the colonial era and that a university seems to be in a position to help return.

One sort of good is cultural. In many sub-Saharan (and, of course, other) societies, universities not merely ignored indigenous peoples' ways of interpreting themselves and the world, but often denigrated them relative to European ones. Hence, one often finds in the literature calls for higher education outside of Europe to serve the purpose of reversing 'epistemicide' and obtaining 'epistemological redress', principally by means of studying local, non-European cultures.

A second kind of good that colonialism and other forms of inter-national injustice are said to have 'robbed' concerns mental wellbeing. Conquered peoples often suffer from reduced self-esteem and a heightened sense of inferiority, especially relative to white people. Hence, another suggestion

in the literature is that a university ought to help facilitate 'psychological rehabilitation' and enable people to 'reclaim' a sense of pride and confidence in themselves, again, largely by focusing on the cultures with which they identify.

A third type of good, not mentioned as often in the relevant literature but also important, is the competitive disadvantage that victims of colonialism and their offspring have suffered. As a result of historical injustice, many people grow up in areas that offer poor primary and secondary education, which means that they are not able to compete on the job market as effectively as others. A university could help to reduce this kind of burden by means of affirmative action, admitting sufficiently (albeit perhaps not best) qualified students from disadvantaged backgrounds, so that they can acquire the knowledge needed to obtain employment.

A natural question to ask at this point is whether there is not repetition between the final end of supporting culture and that of rectifying injustice, as the latter has been partially cashed out in terms of a need to support indigenous culture. There is some overlap, but the norms behind each final end differ, which will have different implications about which cultures should be supported and perhaps how. The final end of supporting culture is a function of what is widely known among analytic ethicists as 'ideal theory', or distributive justice in particular, whereas that of rectifying injustice is a matter of 'non-ideal theory', and specifically compensatory justice. Non-ideal theory is that branch of moral philosophy dealing with the issue of which 'secondary' moral norms there are to govern responses to violations of other, 'primary' moral norms. It has to do with issues of civil disobedience, punishment, self-defence and, in the present case, rectifying injustice in a restitutive sense. In contrast, ideal theory is that branch of moral philosophy that includes the articulation and defence of a conception of those primary moral norms that ought not be violated in the first place, and, in the present context, it concerns what a state university ought to be doing as a matter of justice apart from righting wrongs. Now, for one way to see the difference between distributive and compensatory justice in the context of culture, consider a situation in which a minority's culture was oppressed by a previous government. The injunction to rectify injustice would push a state university to pay particular attention to the culture of that minority whose culture was suppressed in the past. In contrast, the prescription to support culture, as a function of ideal theory, would pull a state university to focus on the culture of the nation as a whole or that of a very large majority (or perhaps a patchwork of cultures, where the society is extremely diverse).

Promote Personhood. The fourth most common final end that Africanists have proposed for publicly funded higher education is the realisation of virtue.[15] The idea is that a state university ought to help develop good character in others or what, as we saw above, Africans often call 'personhood.' I include here reference to teaching people their 'duties' and moral excellence beyond the performance of duty, which concerns an individual's motives, feelings and emotions.

Realise the Majority's Aspirations. Fifth, and finally in order of popularity, there are Africanists who suggest that one aim that a state university should pursue for its own sake is to help fulfil the majority's desires.[16] Construed as essential to the value of democracy, some say that a university supported by tax money ought to do whatever would help to realise the ambitions of most of those in society.

Of course, many of those in society will want more socio-economic development, or for injustice to be rectified, and so there will be overlap between this category and the others. However, the principle of realising the majority's aspirations differs from these other principles, as can be seen in the case of a majority that strongly wishes to be the first society to fly a person to the moon, as opposed to right the wrong done to its black minority.

My goal in this section has been a fairly inclusive review of English-speaking literature from the past fifty years or so on the topic of Africanising higher education or of applying African norms to it. Specifically, I have read this literature with an eye to determining the most basic and common suggestions about the final ends that are proper for a state university. I have suggested that what one finds can be reduced to five logically distinct and fundamental proposals. My next task is to evaluate these proposals in light of the favoured African moral theory.

4 AN AFRICAN MORAL THEORY APPLIED TO THE FINAL ENDS PROMINENT IN THE LITERATURE

In this section, I apply the African moral theory sketched in section 2 to the final ends from the literature adumbrated in section 3. I argue that, given this moral theory, the three most popular suggestions about which final ends a state university ought to adopt are correct, while the other two are not. Along the way, I also indicate which sort the final end is (viz., either justifying or attendant) as well as begin to provide some sense of rank among the final ends.

Foster Development. By the principled interpretation of African ethics that I favour, the field has been quite correct to highlight development as an important final end of publicly funded higher education. Recall that the principle prescribes respecting relationships of identity and solidarity, where solidarity is roughly a matter of people helping one another for each other's sake. If a state university, or the government funding it, is required to act for the sake of people in the state's territory,[17] then a major part of doing so will be a matter of seeking to improve their socio-economic conditions. State universities are in a good position to do that by supporting scientific knowledge and thereby facilitating predictions of natural events and technological spin-offs. Fostering development is a justifying aim of a state university—that is, it is a good reason to set one up and keep it, in light of the nature of a university and the costs of maintaining it.

Support Culture. Africanists have also been correct, in light of the given African moral theory, to claim that a state university ought to support the culture(s) prominent in its locale. If the solidarity element of the theory instructs a state university to care for the quality of life in the form of socio-economic development, then the identity part of it requires publicly funded higher education to assist people in sharing a way of life. Those lacking a common culture tend neither to think of themselves as a 'we' nor to coordinate their action in pursuit of shared ends. Interpreting the world in similar ways, something a university would be in a key position to enable, would mean having a strong sense of togetherness and common values. In practice, this might mean that a university should favour the culture of a large majority, but the ideal would be to foster ways of interpreting with which nearly everyone in the state's territory could identify (Nkondo, 2007). And if solidarity grounds a justifying aim for a state university, it is plausible to think that identity does, too.

Suppose that a state university had to choose between identity and solidarity, or, between promoting a shared way of life, on the one hand, and improving the quality of life, on the other. Often it will be a matter of contextual judgment to determine how to reconcile such tensions. However, in the situation where one must choose between failing to recognise (or risk losing) a central element of culture and causing (or failing to prevent) substantial harm, an agent ought not do or allow the harm. After all, slavery of a despised minority or clitoridectomy of young girls could be ingrained parts of a culture, but they would be unjustified on balance by the moral theory, at least by virtue of its solidarity element. The normativity of friendship suggests that one should not seriously harm people, or let them be very hurt, even if doing so would bring them closer together, and that one may and should refuse to share a practice (say, end the 'ritual' of daily cocaine use) if it would bring great benefit to one's friend. Hence, raising the quality of life, which solidarity requires, is among the highest final ends of a university, if not at the top.

In an educational context, consider a medical school having to decide what to teach its students about how to treat HIV/AIDS. Suppose that the school is set in a rural, sub-Saharan setting, where more than 80% of the population consults traditional healers when they are ill, and where traditional healers treat patients by using indigenous herbs or concoctions that have been dreamt and by appealing to a spiritual realm—for example, calling on the help of ancestors. Imagine as well that, when it comes to traditional healing practices with regard to HIV, there is no scientific evidence that they are successful, and in fact what empirical knowledge there is suggests that they could actually speed up the progression to full-blown AIDS. In this situation, a medical school has to choose between fostering an indigenous culture by teaching students traditional healing practices, on the one hand, and doing what is likely to protect people's health by imparting 'Western' treatments such as highly active antiretroviral therapy, on the other. It could teach both, of course, but suppose that doing so would lead to pharmaceutical drugs eclipsing ancestral rites. In this case, the medical school cannot fulfil both of the

demands placed on it, and I interpret the demand to honour friendly relationships to entail that, in this case, caring for the quality of life should win out over the sharing of a way of life.[18]

Rectify Injustice. The rectification of injustice is unlikely to be the *sole* justifying aim of a university, for that would oddly entail that a university should be closed down once compensation for cultural, psychological and economic losses had been made. However, if a state's assault on a people's culture, self-esteem and ability to compete had been extreme, then, as an essential part of properly valuing friendship, one (contributory) justifying aim of a state university would be to effect redress and more generally do what is likely to repair the broken relationship. And if such assault had not been extreme, then doing so would be a proper attendant aim of a state university, something that it would be obligated to do once it had been set up for other reasons.

Even if the final end of rectifying injustice were attendant, it could still have a very high rank, one higher than some justifying aims. To see this, again reflect on the normativity of friendship on an individual level. Generally speaking, ensuring one's *own* relationships are healthy is more important than helping *others* have healthy relationships. Furthermore, with regard to one's own relationships, *mending the broken, existent ones* is more important than *starting new, healthy relationships* with others; if one had to choose between making things right with a friend one has wronged, or going out and making two new friends, the proper valuation of friendship would require the former. Analogously, the state has a weighty interest in ending its own unfriendliness, expressing remorse for it and making amends, if at the necessary opportunity cost of promoting new friendliness among citizens in society. Hence, even if the rectification of injustice were an attendant aim of a university, this aim could take priority over some justifying aims. For example, the demand to foster culture in a way that would *generally* bring people in a state's territory together could be outweighed by the demand to foster the *specific* culture of those dispossessed of it by the state in the past.[19]

Promote Personhood. If one adopts the ethic I have spelled out, then, in principle, one can and should become a person in part by helping others to become persons—that is, to develop their virtue. The solidarity element instructs a moral agent to act for the sake of others, and, while part of acting for another person's sake is making the *person better off* (e.g. in terms of raising her quality of life or, at a social level, fostering development), another part is making her a *better person*. Part of honouring friendship is enabling other people to be good friends, and so it seems that part of what a state university ought to be intrinsically striving for is helping others to improve their character.

However, in light of some reasonable empirical claims, I am sceptical that a university should adopt the final end of developing virtue, where this is conceived as doing the right thing for the right sort of reason—for example, helping others fundamentally for their sake—and as exhibiting the right kind of emotions—for example, being glad when others flourish. One reason for scepticism is that a university is not in a position to affect

many people when it comes to these propositional attitudes. A university is unlikely to improve people's virtue unless they are students, and, in most of the world (and especially Africa), it is rare that anyone can become one. So, if only because so few ever pass through a university, let alone absorb enough to obtain a degree, the fostering of virtue cannot be a reason to create or maintain a university.

But what about other parts of the world such as the US, and what about the possibility that, even in Africa, the promotion of virtue could be an attendant aim? I suggested above that it makes little sense to have a child in order to develop a virtuous person, but that, once one has a child, a parent must adopt the final end of developing her virtue. Could not similar remarks apply to the present case—that is, might it not be sensible to deem a university to be obligated to help make its students morally upright, even if that is not a reason to create or maintain a university?

I doubt that the promotion of virtue should even be considered an attendant aim of a state university, in light of its inherent nature as providing specialised instruction. There probably is not the time and other resources available to make students better people, if one is going to be likely to realise the aim of teaching them intricate knowledge and refined skills in fields such as chemistry, medicine, economics, metaphysics, sociology and engineering. In theory, a government could tack an additional six or twelve months onto the bachelor's degree, but most students—and governments—already find higher education expensive and something to streamline on the road to economic productivity. Of course, a university ought not try to make its students any morally worse, but that is a *constraint* on a university's aims, and not an *aim* itself.

Although I am open to empirical counterevidence, at this point I conclude that a state university, by definition a provider of specialised knowledge, is unlikely to be effective at developing its students into moral beings. Any time, money or other goods put into this aim are likely to be wasted. And since, for something to count as a proper final end, it must at least be likely to be achieved, developing students into moral beings is not a proper final end of a state university. It is rather more likely to be a proper final end of primary and secondary education and, of course, of parents.

Realise the Majority's Aspirations. Like the promotion of moral personhood, I tend not to think that the realisation of the majority's aspirations is a proper final end of a state university. From the standpoint of my favoured African moral theory, it is neither a sufficient reason to create a university with tax money, nor is it something that a university ought basically to strive for once it has been set up for other reasons. There are several reasons for this.

First, the African moral theory entails a kind of democratic decision-making oriented toward unanimity, not majority. The most intense form of shared identity would be one in which everybody has come to an agreement about what to do. Furthermore, the most promising way to avoid the creation of disaffected minorities over time, and hence a split between 'us' and 'them', would be for decision-makers to share political power in the search for consensus on at least major policies. It is these

kinds of rationales, along with awareness of the use of consensus to resolve political disputes in many traditional African societies, that have led a variety of contemporary African intellectuals to propose consensus-based democratic systems for a modern society, which are fascinating and underexplored alternatives to the Parliamentary systems in Europe and the winner-take-all system in the US.[20] Second, even supposing majority rule were necessary in light of the practical difficulties facing attempts to forge unanimous agreement, it would hardly be definitive of what an institution ought to do. Sometimes majorities want things that are utterly imprudent or immoral, which minorities are not obligated to respect (Nyerere, 1964b, pp. 311–13). For example, no African ethic of any attractiveness would entail that a state university in 1950s America was obligated to help promote racial segregation, even though that is what a majority wanted at the time. The bare fact that a majority wants something is not in itself a morally good reason to do anything; the content of what the majority wants, the procedure by which these wants were formulated and expressed, and the ability of a dissenting minority to avoid majoritarian intrusion, are also crucially relevant to whether it is binding or not. Consider an analogy. Suppose a majority of people wanted a state hospital to dispense a 'treatment' for HIV that was utterly ineffective and even counterproductive. I submit that, at least in light of the solidarity element of the African ethic I am advocating, a state should not do so and minorities who want genuine treatment should be able to sue if it is not distributed. Similarly, if a majority of people wanted a publicly funded higher education institution to teach students that the earth was created 10,000 years ago or that the moon is made of green cheese, the state would be wrong to fulfil the majority's aspirations. The state would owe at least minorities (if not the majority itself) better than that, meaning that there are certain proper final ends with regard to higher education *in light of which the majority ought to choose*, and that the proper final ends of higher education are *not simply those that the majority has chosen*.

I submit that an appeal to majoritarianism has its place elsewhere in African reflection about the proper final ends of a state university. Instead of constituting a final end itself, a concern for majority interest will often, contingently, factor into the realisation of other final ends. For example, if a state university must support culture, and if the overwhelming majority of people in a territory share a culture, then that is the culture that the university ought to support. For another example, if the culture of a majority was oppressed in the past by a colonising minority, then the requirement to rectify injustice entails that a state university ought to pay special attention to the culture of this majority. In these cases, it is the demand to support culture or to rectify injustice that does the basic moral work, not the bare appeal to majority wish.

That concludes my critical discussion of the literature, as it stands, in light of one appealing, principled interpretation of African morality. If one finds attractive the idea that right acts are those that respect relationships of identity and solidarity, then one should think that a state university ultimately ought to aim to foster development, support culture and rectify

injustice, and one ought to think that it should fundamentally strive neither to promote personhood nor to realise the majority's aspirations. The African moral theory I have advocated does a nice job of providing a philosophical underpinning for the three most popular suggestions in the literature about what a state university *qua* African should strive for.

5 FINAL ENDS NOT PROMINENT IN THE LITERATURE THAT AN AFRICAN MORAL THEORY PRESCRIBES

In addition to providing a way to make a comprehensive judgment about the suitability of the final ends one finds most often suggested in the existing literature, the African moral theory enables one to ascertain whether any proper final ends are missing from it. In this section I argue that the theory clearly entails two final ends that have not been salient in discussion about Africanising higher education. Friends of an African university have failed to recognise two of its proper justifying aims.[21]

Realise Equal Opportunity. First, I submit that, given the favoured African moral theory, a state university ought to be striving to help students from lower economic classes acquire the qualifications needed to compete for jobs and other positions. This differs from affirmative action as a form of redress for past injustice such as colonialism. To see this, imagine that there had been no such past injustice, and that the demand to foster development were being met by virtue of only those from middle- and upper-classes filling the professions. In that case, there would still be a present injustice in people from poor backgrounds not having a chance to acquire the education and skills essential for engaging in interesting work that is well paid. If a state university did not yet exist, then the government would be failing to exhibit solidarity with the poor and would probably alienate them from itself. And if a state university did exist but did not accommodate those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, then it would be doing the same. To avoid these moral problems, a state university must be created or maintained in order to ensure that citizens have an equal opportunity to become qualified for jobs, which in practice will mean providing financial aid of various sorts.[22]

How important is the final end of realising equal opportunity relative to the other three established above? Here are some rough suggestions. First, the need to rectify past injustice, perhaps via affirmative action, is probably more important than facilitating equal opportunity; properly valuing friendship means that one must first right one's wrongs, even if it means having to do less for those one has not wronged. Furthermore, the demand to foster socio-economic development and thereby enrich people's life in general, including the unemployed, the young and the retired, seems stronger than the demand to give prospective job candidates the knowledge and abilities required to compete effectively for a cushy post. However, equal opportunity plausibly often outweighs the require-ment to support culture, as can be seen if the extant culture is sexist or racist and would, say, forbid women from acquiring an education or

competing for a job. While the African moral theory I have articulated gives some weight to tradition, even a conservative one, that can be and often is overridden by the strength of need to act in ways that are cooperative, rather than subordinative, and that are beneficial, rather than harmful.

Facilitate Cooperation. One part of sharing a way of life others is psychological, viz., the respect in which people think of themselves as a 'we', but another part is volitional, namely, the coordination of behaviour and sharing of ends, or at least not undermining others' ends. There are certain policies that, when routinely enforced by the state or otherwise adhered to, would enable people to avoid interfering with one another and would facilitate joint projects. Key examples would be Constitutional laws, good governance policies, principles for resolving conflict, and rules to regulate debate, all of which a state university is well positioned to impart to its students, making this a second final end for it that needs recognition.[23] Note that cooperation is probably more important than culture, or is rather a precondition for the moral worth of culture; there would not be a genuine *sharing* of a way of life if a culture were foisted on a people without their having freely chosen it for themselves. The African moral theory gives some principled weight to a common lifestyle, but not one forced on others à la colonialism and patriarchy.

At this point it is worth summarising results of this enquiry into what the proper final ends of a state university are and how to organise them. Here is a rough, ranked list of the justifying aims[24] of publicly funded higher education, according to the above African moral theory: (1) foster development; (2) rectify injustice; (3) facilitate cooperation; (4) realise equal opportunity; (5) support culture. In the ideal case, an Africanist state university would strive to adopt policies that realise all five of these aims, and which policies those are is something to discuss elsewhere. Instead, what I now do is bring out how the present discussion constitutes a defence of African philosophy of higher education against some important objections that have been made to it.

6 RESPONDING TO CRITICISMS OF AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

A lack of theory is one major weakness of the existing literature on Africanist higher education, and it has been the primary aim of this article to help overcome it. There are additional problems with this literature, however, which I believe the present discussion can also help to resolve. In this section, I address criticisms by the two most prominent and trenchant critics of Africanising higher education, Penny Enslin and Kai Horsthemke. While I do not have space to address all of the many objections they have launched, largely from a liberal base, I will take up five important ones that I believe can now be responded to with some degree of force.

First, Horsthemke and Enslin (2008) have noted a strain of 'immunity from criticism' in the works of major African philosophers of education. Sometimes this takes the form of suggesting that non-Africans are poorly

placed, epistemically or politically, to appraise African ideas and practices, while other times it is implied by a relativist approach to truth. Now, the African moral theory I have articulated does not share this feature. The principle itself need not be understood relativistically, and is instead read in the first instance as being comparable to the principles of utility and of respect, which are not usually construed as binding on a society merely because it believes them. Furthermore, to defend the African moral theory, I use the methods standardly employed by English-speaking philosophers of trying to establish controversial claims by appealing to less controversial ones, often in the form of specific cases ('intuitions'). If the African moral theory is counterintuitive to readers in some way, I invite them to indicate in what respects, as this would count as *prima facie* evidence against it.

Second, Horsthemke and Enslin (2005) suggest that there is nothing unique about so-called 'African' conceptions of morality and of education. Horsthemke and Enslin doubt the recurrent suggestion among friends of Africanising higher education that there is something distinctive about it. I have two replies to this point. First, in order to count as 'African' something need not be utterly unique to the geographical space of the African continent. I have suggested that, for something to be African is, roughly, for it to be prominent in the ways of life of sub-Saharan peoples. This conception of Africanness is consistent with the idea that something can be African and yet also prominent somewhere (though not everywhere) else on the globe. Second, the moral theory I have articulated as a matter of fact *does* differ from the most influential moral theories in at least Western philosophy. As I have pointed out, it differs in interesting ways from Kantianism and utilitarianism, which place basic moral value solely in autonomy and happiness, respectively. And the African moral theory goes far beyond the mere call for the academy on the African continent to transform and effect redress in the face of colonialism, to which Horsthemke and Enslin (2008) are inclined to reduce an African philosophy of education. I have worked to show that there are much more rich, substantial and serious ideas in the field.

Third, Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) have contended that African ideas have not been 'action-guiding'—that is, have been too vague or abstract to be of much practical use in making judgments about how to structure higher education. This might well be true of prior African-inspired reflection, but I hope it is not true of the present discussion. One of my primary aims has been to spell out an ethical principle grounded in the beliefs and practices of many sub-Saharan peoples and to apply it with some precision to issues in higher education. One will often need a lot of empirical data and further normative reflection in order to draw a firm conclusion about what should be done in a very specific case—but that is the nature of moral philosophy in general, and is not a problem with African morality *per se*.

Fourth, Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) point out that often African ideas about morality are conservative in the sense of accepting traditional ways of life that are sexist, homophobic and the like. In their view, a proper

conception of morality would entail that these and other discriminatory 'isms' are unjustified. That is a view I also share, and it is to a large degree built into the African moral theory discussed here. Based on my understanding of recurrent African beliefs about morality, *some* moral weight is to be given to tradition and more generally existing culture—a view that even liberals have been trying to account for.[25] The bare fact that a certain way of life is shared means that it cannot be utterly disregarded when ascertaining what to do on moral grounds. However, as I have indicated, there are additional facets of African moral reflection that, at least as theoretically expressed here, will often provide reason to adopt policies that run counter to tradition. When tradition undermines both cooperation and solidarity, or either one significantly, the moral theory I have advocated will typically entail that tradition ought to be what is undermined, which constitutes a reasonable balance between the moral considerations at stake.

Fifth, and finally, Horsthemke and Enslin (2008) claim that structuring higher education in light of the aim of protecting and cultivating African identity would do an injustice to those students who do not wish to share this way of life. They ask, 'What about those African parents who may not want their children to be constituted as "Africans" by the schooling system, preferring a more cosmopolitan identity?' (Horsthemke and Enslin, 2008). But the natural reply to make is, 'What about those African parents who may not want their children to be constituted as "cosmo-politans" by the schooling system, preferring a more African identity?' It is true that the African moral theory I have articulated does not prescribe a 'neutral' educational system with regard to culture, favouring the culture of an overwhelming majority when there is such. However, it begs the question merely to assert that a minority in a given society would be done wrong under such a system. Horsthemke and Enslin need to make an argument for thinking that publicly funded higher education should not 'take sides' with regard to different cultures, and not solely pose a rhetorical question, at least in light of the existence of a plausible moral theory entailing that a state university ought to take sides.

There is real debate to be had about the proper role of culture in higher education, and philosophical liberals will indeed find something to question about the implications of the African moral theory invoked in this article. However, to resolve this dispute, one should, among other things, compare the African moral theory articulated here with the Kantian one that normally underwrites a liberal perspective. I submit that it is obvious neither that Kantianism is the stronger moral theory,[26] nor even that Kantianism invariably requires state neutrality.[27] In any event, I hope that promising strategies for resolving the disagreement are clear.

7 CONCLUSION

In this article, I have sought to contribute theoretically to African reflection on the proper final ends of publicly funded higher education.

I spelled out one attractive way to capture sub-Saharan values in the form of a principle of right action that is on a par with Kantianism, utilitarianism and perfectionism, which principle is that a moral agent ought to live harmoniously or communally, which, in turn, amounts to respecting relationships in which people identify with each other and exhibit solidarity with one another. I then invoked this moral theory to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the proper final ends of a state university than one finds in the literature as it stands. I contended that, in light of this moral theory, three of the final ends for a state university prominently advocated in the English-language writings of Africanist philosophers of education are clearly entailed (foster development; support culture; rectify injustice), and that two of them are probably not (promote personhood; realise the majority's aspirations). In addition, I argued that the African moral theory prescribes two additional final ends that are not salient in this literature (realise equal opportunity; facilitate cooperation), and pointed out ways that the argumentation in this article constitutes a defence of African philosophy of higher education from several arguments that have been made against it.

I close the discussion by noting the following questions that are worth seeking to answer in future work, beyond the question from the previous section of whether, and, if so, how a state university ought to support a particular culture: What does the African moral theory invoked here entail for the intuition that publicly funded higher education ought to cultivate students' ability to think critically? Can this theory account for the idea that a state university ought to pursue some 'knowledge for its own sake'—that is, knowledge that is unlikely to have any benefit beyond itself, such as facets of cosmology and metaphysics?[28] In particular, what should count as 'improving the quality of life' on an African ethic, and might obtaining certain knowledge for its own sake constitute an improvement in people's quality of life? Is there evidence that a university could morally educate its students while realising its other important aims such as fostering development? What does the present account of the proper final ends of a state university imply about the kinds of means that should be adopted—with regard, for example, to language policy, curriculum content and instructional technique?[29]

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NOTES

1. For just one example, see Brighouse, 2005.
2. For a classic source, see the work of William James. More recently, see, for instance, Kronman, 2007.
3. For example, Nussbaum, 1997; and Walker and Unterhalter, 2007.
4. Cf. contemporary just war theory and the philosophy of punishment.
5. This conception of what makes something African implies that there could be accounts of morality besides the one I propose below that are also worthy of the title (e.g. Bujo, 1997; Gyekye, 1997). Furthermore, this account implies that some idea could count as 'African'

without being unique to the African continent. I am therefore not saying that there is anything utterly geographically distinctive about the moral theory I articulate, though it does differ in striking ways from Kantianism, utilitarianism and perfectionism, which dominate English-speaking normative theoretical discussion in education, among other fields.

6. For classic statements of these ubiquitous sayings, see Mbiti, 1969, pp. 108–9; and Menkiti, 1979.

7. As is made particularly clear in Wiredu, 1992; Gyekye, 1997, pp. 49–52; and Ramose, 1998b, pp. 52–53.

8. For yet another, representative comment, consider these remarks about the practices of the G/wi people of Botswana: '(T)here was another value being pursued, namely the establishing and maintaining of harmonious relationships. Again and again in discussion and in general conversation this stood out as a desired and enjoyed end in itself, often as the ultimate rationale for action' (Silberbauer, 1991, p. 20).

9. I have thoroughly articulated and defended this principle elsewhere in Metz, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; what follows is a compressed statement of it.

10. As I have argued in detail in Metz, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c.

11. The reader might wonder whether this involves higher education merely in Africa or more globally. That depends on the correct meta-ethical view about the status of a moral theory. Relativists will contend that the African moral theory would be true for only those societies that believe it, while universalists will claim that it applies to all societies, if it is true or most justified. I set aside this major debate about the scope of a moral theory's application.

12. Nkrumah, 1963; Touré, 1963; Nyerere, 1964a, 1964b, 1970; Ajayi, 1973; Yesufu, 1973; Mazrui, 1978; Kgaphola and Mthembu, 1998; Makgoba, 1998; Nkondo, 1998b; Vilakazi, 1998, 2000; Hountondji, 2000; Letseka, 2000; Lumumba-Kasongo, 2000; Shutte, 2001; Makgoba and Seepe, 2004; Mthembu, 2004; Wiredu, 2004; Gutto, 2006.

13. Selassie, 1961; Touré, 1963; Ajayi, 1973; Ki-Zerbo, 1973; Mazrui, 1978; Kgaphola and Mthembu, 1998; Makgoba, 1998; Nkondo, 1998b; Seepe, 1998b; Vilakazi, 1998; Diop, 2000; Goduka, 2000; Teffo, 2000; Lebakeng, 2004; Makgoba and Seepe, 2004; van Wyk and Higgs, 2004; Bhengu, 2006; Nkondo, 2007.

14. Nyerere, 1974; Mazrui, 1978; Kgaphola and Mthembu, 1998; Nkondo, 1998a, 1998b; Ramose, 1998a, 2004; Vilakazi, 1998; Goduka, 2000; Lumumba-Kasongo, 2000; Seepe, 2000; Higgs, 2003; Lebakeng, 2004; Makgoba and Seepe, 2004; van Wyk and Higgs, 2004; Bhengu, 2006; Gutto, 2006; Nabudere, 2006.

15. Selassie, 1961; Touré, 1963; Mkabela and Luthuli, 1997; Vilakazi, 1998; Letseka, 2000; Shutte, 2001; Higgs, 2003; van Wyk and Higgs, 2004; Venter, 2004; Wiredu, 2004; Bhengu, 2006; Nkondo, 2007.

16. Makgoba, 1998; Seepe, 1998a, 1998b; Lumumba-Kasongo, 2000; Dowling and Seepe, 2003; Lebakeng, 2004; Makgoba and Seepe, 2004; cf. Vilakazi, 1998.

17. Following much recent work in collective action theory, I presume that universities, governments and other institutions count as moral agents apart from the individuals who compose them at a given time. If the reader finds this objectionably anthropomorphic, then she may read my references to 'duties of organisations' to be shorthand for duties of those individuals leading organisations.

18. Many Africans believe in an afterlife, and so would argue that death of one's body is not necessarily an impairment of one's quality of life. If one would survive the death of one's body and become an ancestor in a spiritual realm (perhaps partly because of participation in traditional healing practices), then it would not be the case that the medical school would have to choose between supporting culture and fostering development. However, I draw on African traditional beliefs about morality analytically; that is, I pick and choose with the aim of creating a principle of right action that is recognisably African but not necessarily grounded on supernatural views that contemporary philosophers by and large find rationally indefensible. I reiterate that I am not claiming to invoke the only moral philosophy worthy of the title of 'African', only one that is attractive and on a par with dominant Western theories.

19. For a more thorough discussion of the African moral theory's implications for how a public institution morally ought to deal with past injustice it has committed, see Metz, forthcoming.

20. The most careful and influential discussion is Wiredu, 1996, pp. 157–90.

21. See the conclusion for additional final ends that require separate, in-depth treatment in order to determine whether they are entailed by the present African moral theory.

22. See Ngqakayi-Motaung, 2006. It might be that a concern for equal opportunity is implicit in calls for higher education to realise more ambiguous concepts such as 'justice', 'national objectives', etc. I think it is important to be explicit about it, as something logically distinct from the ends of fostering development, supporting culture and rectifying (past) injustice.

23. For the few I can find in the literature who mention the related (but more narrow) issue of 'citizenship', see Nyerere, 1968, p. 274; and Mkabela and Luthuli, 1997.

24. There have turned out to be no attendant aims, but if I am incorrect about the empirical claim that a state university is unlikely to be able to improve moral personhood when it comes to emotional and motivational states, then that would be a proper attendant aim.

25. The classic text that started the (Kantian) liberal quest to accommodate the moral value of culture is Kymlicka, 1989.

26. In work in progress, I have sought to argue that one can well understand not only moral status in terms of a capacity for harmonious relationship, as opposed to a capacity for autonomy ('An African Theory of Moral Status'), but also rights violations as unfriendly or discordant behaviour, as opposed to a degradation of autonomy ('An African Theory of Human Rights').

27. Elsewhere I have argued that, under certain conditions, the Kantian principle of respect for persons allows public institutions to act for the sake of particular ways of life. See Metz, 2001.

28. I have tackled this issue in an as yet unpublished manuscript ('Higher Education, Knowledge For Its Own Sake and African Morality').

29. This article has benefited most from discussion with Pedro Tabensky. In addition, it has been improved as a result of feedback received from: students in Tabenksy's African philosophy class at Rhodes University; members of the African Moral Education Network at their inaugural meeting in Cape Town; and participants in a staff seminar sponsored by the University of the Witwatersrand School of Education.

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