Higher Education, Knowledge for Its Own Sake, and an African Moral Theory

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Abstract I seek to answer the question of whether publicly funded higher education ought to aim intrinsically to promote certain kinds of "blue-sky" knowledge, knowledge that is unlikely to result in "tangible" or "concrete" social benefits such as health, wealth and liberty. I approach this question in light of an African moral theory, which contrasts with dominant Western philosophies and has not yet been applied to pedagogical issues. According to this communitarian theory, grounded on salient sub-Saharan beliefs and practices, actions are right insofar as they respect relationships in which people both share a way of life, or identify with one another, and care for others' quality of life, or are in solidarity with each other. I argue that while considerations of identity and solidarity each provide some reason for a state university to pursue blue-sky knowledge as a final end, they do not provide conclusive reason for it to do so. I abstain from drawing any further conclusion about whether this provides reason to reject the Afro-communitarian moral theory or the intuition that blue-sky knowledge is a proper final end of public higher education. I do point out, however, that the dominant Western moral theories on the face of it do no better than the African one at accounting for this intuition.

Keywords Higher education · Final ends · Knowledge for its own sake ·
Research · African morality · Sub-Saharan ethics

Introduction

The question I seek to answer concerns a narrow but important issue in debate about the proper final ends for a publicly funded institution of higher education. The question is whether such an institution ought to seek out any knowledge 'for its own sake', i.e., whether it is morally justified in promoting as a final end knowledge that is unlikely to foster socio-economic development. There has been a good amount of discussion in the English-speaking literature about whether a state university ought to pursue 'blue-sky'

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knowledge in itself, which discussion sometimes appeals to Western moral theories. So, one readily finds debate, often in the context of the liberal arts or humanities,[1] about whether public higher education ought to pursue knowledge with little or no expected pay-off in terms of health, wealth, liberty or other tangible goods, in order to realize a certain kind of well-being (utilitarianism), develop human excellence *qua* rational (*eudaimonism*), or accord with norms that persons would freely and reasonably agree to live by (Kantian contractualism). However, in this article, I am interested in what a different, African moral theory would entail for whether a state university ought to pursue such knowledge as a final end.

In undertaking such an enquiry, I do not mean to suggest that an African ethic is the sole or best possible justification for blue-sky knowledge. Instead, I appeal to a certain sub-Saharan moral perspective because it is different from the dominant ones in Western philosophy, is unfamiliar to many international readers, and is philosophically promising. The strain of African thinking that I discuss places at the foundation of morality a certain conception of community, as opposed to one of welfare, rationality or autonomy. It should be revealing to consider whether pursuing knowledge for its own sake is ever constitutive of the proper valuation of communal relationships. Such an Afro-communitarian moral perspective has been neglected in globally influential literature in the philosophy of education, and the field ought to broaden its horizons by becoming more aware of an approach that would be taken seriously in another, major part of the world. Furthermore, as I provide evidence for below, this approach is philosophically attractive; it is just as worth applying an Afro-communitarian principle of right action to resolve a controversial, practical debate in education as it is the other, more Western principles.

There has been little discussion by African theorists about whether higher education ought to seek out blue-sky knowledge as a final end.[2] However, when this question has arisen, friends of Africanizing higher education have invariably answered with a fairly quick 'no'. This is true not only of statesmen such as Julius Nyerere inaugurating universities in newly liberated sub-Saharan states in the 1960s, but also of several contemporary advocates of imparting an African identity to higher education.[3] Note that in the literature advocating that public universities be structured according to African norms there is not merely the claim that the needs of socio-economic development *outweigh* the intrinsic interest in blue-sky knowledge, but also the stronger intimation that *no* moral reason whatsoever exists for the latter. However, few actual arguments have been made for either claim, and these arguments are weak, or so I demonstrate.

In this article, I aim to be more systematic and rigorous in evaluating what an African ethic entails for blue-sky knowledge-seeking in higher education. Drawing on an Afro-communitarian moral theory, I critically discuss a variety of rationales for thinking that a state university should pursue knowledge for its own sake. I do find grounds in sub-Saharan morality for publicly funded higher education to pursue blue-sky knowledge as a final end, much more than has been recognized up to now. However, these rationales include various

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[1] See, for example, Stanley Fish's (2008a, b) recent reflection on the value of the humanities. As I point out below, however, there is much natural scientific reflection that appears to be equally 'useless'.

[2] In other work I cite more than 50 books, chapters and articles that address the final ends of Africanist higher education (Metz 2009a); only the handful of authors discussed below take up the issue of knowledge for its own sake.

[3] Touré (1963), Nyerere (1964), Yesufu (1973), Makgoba (1998), Dowling and Seepe (2003), Mthembu (2004), Adams (2005, p. 144), Nabudere (2006). Although the following do not explicitly reject knowledge for its own sake, their heavy emphasis on the need for knowledge to be relevant suggests that they would: Mazrui (1978), Lumumba-Kasongo (2000), Lebakeng (2004).

conditions and limitations that fail to underwrite the practices of most state universities, which robustly pursue certain kinds of knowledge for its own sake. I leave open the question of whether this means that there is a problem with my favoured understanding of African morality or with these universities. In other words, my only aim in this article is to determine what a plausible conception of African morality entails for whether public higher education ought to aim intrinsically at promoting blue-sky knowledge, not ultimately whether the African ethic ought to be believed or what a state university should aim for, all things considered.

I begin by clarifying the nature of the question I seek to answer, e.g., by analyzing more carefully what it means to pursue knowledge for its own sake and defending the usefulness of this concept from several criticisms that have been made of it in the Africanist literature. I then spell out an African moral theory and note why appealing to it would be fruitful. In the next section, I articulate and evaluate rationales for thinking that the African ethic entails the propriety of a state university intrinsically aiming to realize blue-sky knowledge. I contend that while these arguments do show that a state university has *some* reason to pursue knowledge for its own sake, this reason is outweighed by other considerations, so that there is no *conclusive* reason for a state university to pursue knowledge for its own sake. I bring the article to a close by summarizing and by briefly comparing the ability of the favoured Afro-centred ethic to underwrite the final end of non-developmental knowledge with that of more Western perspectives. I note that the latter seem to do no better at accounting for the intuition—likely shared by many readers of this article—that one proper basic aim of publicly funded higher education is to support philosophy and other enquiries that are unlikely to have any social–economic benefit beyond the enquiry itself. That intuition remains at large, as yet evading theoretical capture.

Knowledge for Its Own Sake and Its Possibility

The question I am seeking to answer is whether, in light of a certain, principled interpretation of Afro-communitarian morality, publicly funded higher education ought to pursue blue-sky knowledge as a final end. In this section, I clarify key aspects of this question. I leave aside analysis of the African ethic until the next section, focusing on the rest of the question here, defining terms and forestalling misinterpretations. In particular, there are several suggestions in the literature that there is not, and even cannot be, such a thing as the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Many of these points are made by Malegapuru Mokgoba, a prominent Africanist and the current Vice-Chancellor of a South African university. Here, I argue that Mokgoba's and others' criticisms do not rest on the most useful interpretations of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake.

In addressing the 'final ends' of a state university, I discuss goals that it ought to strive to achieve 'in themselves', that is, apart from any results they might have. Hence, the question of this article is *not* simply whether a state university ought to seek out any knowledge that is unlikely to foster development; it is rather whether it should seek it out for a non-instrumental purpose or 'for its own sake'. Even if the answer to this question turned out to be 'no', it could be the case that a state university ought to seek out such knowledge *as a means* to some other end. In this article, I am asking whether blue-sky knowledge is itself a proper final end, and am not ultimately interested in what the proper means to any final ends are.

'Knowledge' means in the first instance organized true and warranted propositional information, or systematic 'knowledge that' as it is often called. The well-supported facts

that the sun is about 93 million miles away from the earth, that theism is logically compatible with evolutionary theory, and that humans cannot stay alive without oxygen are instances of propositional knowledge. They contrast with knowing a person or an artwork in the sense of being acquainted with it, and with 'knowing how', a matter of having obtained a skill. I do not mean to utterly exclude the latter types of knowledge from the discussion, but my examples will concern propositional knowledge.

Above I noted that to speak of 'blue-sky' knowledge connotes knowledge that is not expected to be instrumental for socio-economic development. It is knowledge that is unlikely to be of any 'concrete' or 'tangible' use for society with respect to goods such as health, wealth and liberty. Examples of such knowledge are readily obtained from the humanities and liberal arts, and include answers to questions such as: What is it to be a cause? Can you be certain that you are not dreaming right now? Do numbers have a real existence independent of our minds? What is the meaning of this poem? What were the earliest artworks done by human beings? However, the natural sciences also offer several examples of searches for blue-sky knowledge: Will the universe expand forever? Is there a black hole at the centre of every galaxy? How did fish evolve into land-based creatures? What killed the dinosaurs?

Of course, it could, as a matter of luck, turn out that correct answers to the above questions result in some substantial social benefits. Makgoba has suggested that since every piece of knowledge 'may lead to....unexpected findings', it does not make sense to speak of knowledge 'for its own sake' (1998, p. 47). However, it is not useful to conceive of pursuing knowledge for its own sake as behaviour that is downright *unable* to make any practical difference to human life. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that literally every piece of knowledge could have some positive influence on socio-economic development. Even so, there would be a massive range in probability and desirability across different instances of knowledge. The expected value of the above examples of knowledge in philosophy, literary criticism, cosmology and the like is low, at least relative to other sorts, e.g., in medicine, economics, engineering and chemistry. At any given time, a public institution of higher education must decide where to put its limited resources, and the issue of controversy is whether it is justified in pursuing as a final end knowledge that has a comparatively low expected value of making a tangible difference to people's lives. To pose this important question is just to ask, more briefly, whether a state university ought to pursue any knowledge for its own sake.

A second reason Makgoba offers for denying the existence of knowledge for its own sake is that knowledge often ends up resulting in other knowledge (1998, p. 47). Suppose he were correct, such that literally every piece of knowledge turned out to lead to more knowledge. Again, this would not be a reason to deny the existence of knowledge 'for its own sake' in the relevant sense, for this brief phrase is useful for posing the following more long-winded question: is publicly funded higher education morally justified in promoting as a final end some instances of knowledge that, for all the evidence suggests, will not foster socio-economic development to any substantial degree in the long run, or at least is not nearly as likely to as other kinds of knowledge?

A third suggestion from Makgoba for denying the reality of knowledge for its own sake is that knowledge is always sought with a purpose in mind. Consider the following remarks:

> The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake has been one of the cornerstones of university education; but, is there such a thing as knowledge for its own sake today? Knowledge is a human construct, and that by definition has a *human purpose*.

> Knowledge cannot be sterile or neutral in its conception, formulation and development….Understanding is a critical purpose in human existence….So knowledge for understanding….is just as vital as knowledge with tangible applications. This in my mind does not constitute knowledge for its own sake but knowledge for understanding. In this way knowledge has always got a purpose or use even if not tangible or measurable immediately (Makgoba 1998, p. 47).

This reasoning does not give one reason to doubt the existence of knowledge 'for its own sake', as the phrase is understood in this article and in wider debate about the role of a state university. It is true that knowledge is invariably sought with some purpose in mind, but to advocate knowledge 'for its own sake' is not plausibly meant to imply that knowledge can or should be sought for no end whatsoever. The question at hand is whether there is knowledge that is not likely to have any socio-economic results that a state university should nonetheless seek out as a final end. As understanding something, i.e., having insight into it, is constituted by knowing it (and is not *caused* by knowing it), understanding is a candidate for such a purpose. However, the question then arises as to whether a state university ought to aim intrinsically to realize understanding that is unlikely to have any concrete benefits for society, something this article aims to answer by appealing to an Afro-communitarian moral theory.

Fourth, and finally, one finds the suggestion in the literature that there is no such thing as knowledge for its own sake, since knowledge is invariably used for some purpose beyond itself, even if it was not constructed with that or any other purpose in mind. Awareness of this point is occasioned by some remarks of Dani Nabudere, who leads the Afrika Study Centre in Uganda:

> There cannot be such a thing as the advancement of science for its own sake. Those who pursue 'science for its own sake' find that their knowledge is used for purposes for which they may never have intended it. Eurocentric knowledge is not produced purely for its own sake. Its purpose throughout the ages has been to enable them to 'know the natives' in order to take control of their territories…. (2006, pp. 7–8).

This rationale gives one reason to deny the existence of knowledge 'for its own sake' in a very limited sense of knowledge that is either put to no use or put only to uses intended by its creator. But this is not the best way to understand the phrase, which is invoked in order to structure debate about the proper purposes of higher education. The central issue is not whether a state university ought to pursue knowledge that is never put to any use or never put to some use other than what its creator intended. The relevant question is instead whether a state university ought to pursue as a final end knowledge that is unlikely to be used for specifically developmental purposes. Doing so is what I and many others mean by seeking knowledge 'for its own sake'.

In sum, I hope that I have clarified the meaning of pursuing knowledge 'for its own sake', so that it will be useful to invoke the phrase. Although I will continue to do so, I recognize that there is some good reason not to use it since it appears to invite misunderstanding. Nothing would be lost if the reader elected to replace all further mention of 'knowledge for its own sake' with talk of 'seeking blue-sky knowledge as a final end', or of 'intrinsically promoting knowledge that is unlikely to have much, if any, positive impact on socio-economic development'. The words used are not important; essential are only the concepts at hand.

As for remaining unclarities with regard to my question, note that by 'publicly funded higher education' I mean imparting knowledge 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, which will be my focus. One might wonder which state universities I am interested in, viz., whether I restrict myself to addressing those in sub-Saharan Africa alone. I do not, or not necessarily. Whether the African moral theory that I spell out in the next section applies to non-African institutions depends on how the debate about relativism is resolved, i.e., on whether moral claims can be binding on societies that do not already by and large believe them. I think that there is no sufficient reason to hold relativism, and I provide an argument against it below; however, I lack the space to provide a definitive refutation of it, and so largely bracket the issue.

Finally, a state university could 'promote' or 'pursue' blue-sky knowledge as a final end in two ways that are worth distinguishing. For one, it could transmit such knowledge that already exists, and, for another, it could seek to discover such knowledge that does not yet exist. John Newman (1852) famously maintains that a university has reason to transmit knowledge for its own sake, but not to try to discover it. However, these days nearly everyone who believes that such knowledge should be taught also believes that it ought to be advanced, and I seek to ascertain whether both forms of promotion might be justified. The next issue to address is what a certain African conception of morality entails for such a robust view.

An African Moral Theory and Its Importance

I have encountered no Africanists who have claimed that a state university should promote any knowledge for its own sake, and I have found several who have asserted that it should not. The clearly dominant theme is that higher education should invariably be 'relevant' or 'responsive' to the needs of the society in which it is embedded. Representative is the following statement from two pedagogical theorists influential in South African higher education, Dolina Dowling and Sipho Seepe:

> If we are to be truly South African universities, however, we cannot be disconnected from the issues and problems that are to be found in our communities, in our country and in the continent. We need then to place a strong emphasis on undertaking research that is relevant to the communities that we serve. As far back as 1972, Yesufu (Wandira 1977, p. 22) suggested that the African university must not pursue knowledge for its own sake, 'but for the sake of, and the amelioration of the conditions of life and work of, the ordinary man and woman'. It must be fully committed to active participation in the social transformation, economic modernisation, and the training and upgrading of the total human resources of the nation…. (2003, pp. 46–47).

Why should a state university imbued with African norms *fully* adjure the search for knowledge for its own sake? Dowling and Seepe mention two major considerations (and I find no others in the literature[4]), but I submit that neither one, as it stands, supports their strong conclusion.

For one, Dowling and Seepe point to the urgency of socio-economic development for a poor country (2003, pp. 45–48). However, one can both grant that a public university must do what is good for the community, e.g., in the way of fighting poverty, and deny that

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[4] Beyond the rejections of the very concept of knowledge for its own sake, rebutted in the previous section.

doing so *utterly* eclipses all other purposes. Some additional argument is needed for that strong claim.

For another, Dowling and Seepe note that principles of a democracy entail that a publicly funded institution of higher education must be accountable to the preferences of the majority of the community, and they implicitly suggest that a majority would, as a matter of fact, prefer it not to pursue knowledge for its own sake (2003, pp. 44–45; see also Lumumba-Kasongo 2000; Lebakeng 2004). One might quibble with the latter, empirical claim, but I instead question the normative assumption that majority rule is definitive of what a public institution ought to do.[5] As Nyerere (1964) pointed out long ago, sometimes a majority wants something that is utterly imprudent or immoral, which neither the minority nor the state that represents the public is obligated to respect. Surely a public university in 1950s America was not obligated to help promote racial segregation, even though that is what most of the population firmly preferred at the time. For another example, suppose a majority of people wanted a public hospital to dispense a 'treatment' for HIV that was ineffective and even counterproductive. A state should not do so, and minorities who wanted genuine treatment should be able to sue if it were not distributed. The state would owe at least minorities (if not the majority itself) better than that. Perhaps something similar would be true of publicly funded higher education that did not intrinsically aim to promote blue-sky knowledge. Argument is needed to ascertain which proper final ends with regard to higher education there are *in light of which the majority ought to choose*; for the proper final ends of higher education are *not simply those that the majority has chosen*. Indeed, Dowling and Seepe's first argument against knowledge for its own sake, which appeals to the need for socio-economic development, suggests that there are independent standards that should guide a majority's decision about how to orient public institutions, standards that might justify countermanding a majority's decision that failed to accord with them.

I have shown that the two major arguments in the Africanist literature against the propriety of a state university seeking knowledge for its own sake are weak. However, the lone *prima facie* defence of it that one finds is also unconvincing. One might think there is substantial support for the pursuit of blue-sky knowledge in the academy in that many who prescribe an Africanized public university and have addressed the issue of academic freedom are in favour of the latter. It is common for friends of African norms to believe that having the right sort of academic community means that scholars ought not be interfered with when it comes to the choices of materials to instruct and research to conduct. Since abiding by a principle of academic freedom would allow academics to pursue blue-sky knowledge, it might seem that there is a robust justification for it.

However, this is in fact not a rationale for thinking that African morality entails that a state university may or must pursue blue-sky knowledge as a final end. Even if it were true that, in light of African norms, a university administration should *permit* academics to develop blue-sky knowledge, it would not follow that it would be *permissible* for the academics to do so, which is what is involved in deeming it to be a final end for university actors. It is coherent to think that the final *ends* of a public university do not include the pursuit of blue-sky knowledge, but that the administration must observe a *constraint* of respecting academic freedom and hence allow its academics to pursue such knowledge, even though they ought not. Imagine, for instance, that without respecting academic freedom, a university could not attract quality instructors in the professions. In that case, even if academics should shun the pursuit of blue-sky knowledge, a university would be

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[5] The rest of this paragraph invokes some statements from Metz (2009a, p. 191).

constrained not to forbid them from doing so[6] as a *means* to realizing its strictly practical and tangible final ends. Pointing out that managers should not interfere with scholars when it comes to the content of their research is not yet to show that knowledge for its own sake is what may be sought out without wrongdoing.

In order to see whether an African-inspired, sound argument exists for university actors to pursue knowledge for its own sake, it will be useful to draw out the implications of an attractive moral theory.[7] By a 'moral theory' I mean a philosophical principle that promises to capture with as few properties as possible what all wrong actions at bottom have in common as distinct from right ones. The Kantian principle of respect, according to which wrong acts simply are those degrading of autonomy, and the principle of utility, according to which acts are wrong just insofar as they fail to maximize the long-term general welfare, are familiar moral theories from the Western tradition. Professional ethicists and moral philosophers routinely appeal to moral theories in order to resolve controversies in part because they purport to indicate what is of fundamental importance.

By an 'African' moral theory I mean one grounded on the salient beliefs and practices of many sub-Saharan peoples. An ethical principle counts as 'African' if it has its source in prominent features of the cultures of a wide variety of largely black and Bantu-speaking societies, spanning from South Africa to Senegal and Kenya with regard to space, and from pre-colonial peoples to contemporary literati with regard to time. Hence to call something 'African' implies neither that one will find it everywhere on the African continent, nor that one will find it nowhere else on the globe.[8] Even though I do not claim that there is something utterly geographically distinctive about the moral theory I articulate, it does differ in striking ways from Kantianism, utilitarianism and *eudaimonism*, which dominate Western normative theoretical discussion in education.

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'.[9] 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 (Wiredu 1992b; Gyekye 1997, pp. 49–52). In much African reflection, talk of 'personhood' (as in the second instance of 'person' in the quote above) is inherently moralized, 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

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[6] And perhaps even to support them in doing so. If the final end of a state university did not include blue-sky knowledge, then an individual academic would do wrong if she pursued it with university resources. However, it would not follow that an administrator would be doing wrong if he actively supported this researcher's blue-sky projects, so long as it were known to be a necessary part of a plan to do what is likely to realize the university's final ends in the long run. To think otherwise is to neglect the tricky, but definitive, role that institutional factors can play in moral choice.

[7] The next several paragraphs borrow from Metz (2009a, pp. 182–184, 2009b, pp. 339–342).

[8] This conception of what makes something African also implies that there could be accounts of morality besides the one I propose below that are also worthy of the title (for two rivals, see Wiredu 1992a; Gyekye 1997, pp. 35–76).

[9] For classic statements of these ubiquitous phrases, see Mbiti (1969, pp. 108–109), Menkiti (1979).

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 (1971, p. 46).

Finally, here is a summary of one major strand 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' (1999, p. 35). Note that apparently for Mbiti, Biko, Tutu and several others who have reflected on African ethics,[10] 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 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 moral theory: *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, i.e., to conceive of themselves as a 'we', as well as for them to engage in joint projects, coordinating their behaviour to realize shared ends. For people to fail to identify with each other could involve outright division between them, i.e., people thinking of themselves as an 'I' in opposition to a 'you' or a 'they' and undermining 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 such as emotions and affections being invested in others, e.g., by feeling good when they flourish and bad when they flounder. For people to fail to exhibit solidarity would be for them to be either indifferent to one another's good or downright hostile and cruel toward each other.

A logically 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 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.*

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[10] 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).

   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 characterized 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 her; the actor is failing to help the other, but rather is benefiting himself or someone else; or the actor lacks pro-attitudes toward the other's well-being, 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 claim that they less than maximally promote the general welfare, and the *eudaimonist* view that they fail to realize 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.[11] 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 pre-scription 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 all or even a majority of Africans; my point is rather that it captures in a theory several salient aspects of a com-munal way of life that has been widespread below the Sahara, and hence that it qualifies as 'African'. And while many people in Western societies like friendship and experiencing a sense of community, the dominant moral philosophies in the West do not place these concepts at the heart of theorizing about the nature of right action—unlike those beneath the Sahara.

   The principle that one must honour harmonious relationships, ones of identity and solidarity, is abstract, and my next task is to ascertain whether a state university would act in accordance with it by promoting knowledge for its own sake. Is seeking blue-sky knowledge as a final end a way to respect community, understood as sharing a way of life and caring for others' quality of life?

An African Moral Theory Applied to Knowledge for Its Own Sake

In this section, I critically discuss the extent to which the favoured theoretical interpre-tation of African morality entails that a state university ought to promote knowledge for its own sake. The two facets of a harmonious relationship that I have distinguished, namely,

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[11] Elsewhere I have spelled out many of the following recurrent facets of sub-Saharan thought and practice, and argued that the present moral principle captures them best (Metz 2007a, b).

solidarity and identity, ground two different strategies by which to draw out what the African moral theory entails for blue-sky knowledge as a final end. I first examine the respects in which such knowledge might be constitutive of the academy caring for others' quality of life, and then how it could be part of the academy sharing a way of life with others.

Solidarity

The solidarity element of a friendly or harmonious relationship instructs a moral agent to respect relationships of concerned mutual aid, which partially involve her acting for another's sake. To act for another's sake is mainly to act in a way that is helpful or likely to be for his good. Prominent African ethical reflection suggests that there are two distinct sorts of good. It is routine to recognize what is good for a person, what will make him better off, or what is in his self-interest as something different from what a good person is, what will make him better, or what will constitute his self-realization. The latter category of excellence or virtue is often known in African discourses simply as 'personhood' *simpliciter*, while the former is typically referred to in terms of 'welfare'. Both sorts of good appear relevant to a relationship that includes solidarity, for reflection on the normativity of friendship suggests that being in solidarity with a friend involves doing what is likely to make one's friend not merely happier, but also a better friend. So, the question at hand is, supposing a state university must respect solidarity, and hence act for the sake of people's welfare and virtue, is promoting knowledge for its own sake a way to do this?

Consider, first, people's welfare. Although blue-sky knowledge, by definition, is unlikely to foster socio-economic development, might it constitute well-being in some other, important sense? It appears not. Well-being or happiness is standardly understood to be a matter of either pleasant experiences, satisfied desires or fulfilled needs. Reflecting on whether the universe will expand forever, and even discovering that it in fact will, has been pleasing, satisfying or fulfilling to some. However, preventing serious illness or enabling inexpensive communications would satisfy much stronger desires or fulfil much more urgent needs. The well-being of blue-sky knowledge seems definitively overshadowed by that resulting from socio-economic development.

What, then, about the virtue element? One implication of the African moral theory is that one becomes virtuous (a person) in part for helping others to become virtuous (persons) themselves. Helping others to become virtuous means helping them to respect relationships of identity and solidarity, or, roughly, to become better friends. And part of becoming a better friend is doing more to help others when it comes to their welfare and virtue. Now, while this analysis shows that it is not empty to say that one is more virtuous for improving others' virtue, it does not provide any reason to think that blue-sky knowledge is a part of doing so.

One theoretical move to make at this point would be to posit an Aristotelian conception of virtue, according to which it is partly constituted by certain intellectual achievements. Suppose that understanding the fate of the universe in itself partly were what it is to be an excellent person. In that case, a relationship of solidarity, in which an agent must act to improve others' virtue, would mean that a state university could sensibly aim to promote such understanding among its staff, students and the general population.

Setting aside the need for a theory of which forms of awareness in themselves confer excellence on a life, there are two problems with this idea. First, this conception of human excellence that would underwrite the virtue of knowing the fate of the universe is not

salient in sub-Saharan reflection, which, as I discussed above, is characteristically *relational* in content. When Africans claim that a person is a (moral) person through other persons, or that I am (a genuine human) because you are, they mean that virtue is utterly a function of relating to others in a communal way and is not something that can be achieved on one's own. The present suggestion about what virtue might include is, in contrast, non-relational; it is the claim that part of what it is to be virtuous is to have certain mental states that are intrinsic to a given individual. It would probably compromise the respect in which the present moral theory counts as 'African' to take the present, particularly Greek suggestion on board.

More deeply, the Aristotelian manoeuvre, in fact, fails to underwrite much blue-sky knowledge, when set in the context of the additional facets of the favoured African moral theory. Even if enabling others to know the fate of the universe counted as a way to act for their sake, it appears neither an essential nor even particularly fruitful way to do so. First, few human beings are particularly interested in whether the universe will expand forever, what it is to be a cause, whether numbers are mind-independent entities, whether one can be certain that one is not dreaming, how fish evolved onto land, and so on. Second, among those who are interested, even fewer can firmly grasp claims of this sort, or, at the very least, the evidence that would support one answer rather than another. Much of this is a function of IQ, the average of level of which, even in developed countries, is at least a couple dozen points lower than that of a decent full professor. Supposing that *understanding* is what is good, not many people can obtain the relevant good when it comes to the blue-sky knowledge that is characterstically prized by various disciplines. And on top of that, third, to the extent that the general public can understand, it would not need any *new* blue-sky knowledge; there is already plenty of organized true and warranted propositional claims around for the layperson to have something to think about for its own sake.

The straightforward reply to make to all three points is that the highest form of epistemic achievement is the *discovery* of certain kinds of truths, something that only a handful of intellectuals might well be capable of doing. However, if one asks what the priority should be when choosing whom to help, the many and the worst-off would seem to be the most plausible answers, at least from an African perspective. Those who are hungry, sick, in pain, homeless and unemployed, or even merely depressed and isolated, have a greater claim when it comes to being a recipient of (ideally, mutual) aid than do a handful of highly talented academics who would like to discover something new about the structure of the universe, the essence of causation or the meaning of an obscure poem. If a state university had to make a choice between these two groups of people, favouring the scholarly few would hardly be the way to value solidarity properly.

Identity

Perhaps it is not the solidarity element of a harmonious relationship that most promises to make it reasonable for publicly funded higher education to promote knowledge for its own sake. A harmonious, communal or friendly relationship, as construed here, is not merely one of helping others, but also a matter of identifying with them. I now consider whether pursuing blue-sky knowledge as a final end is a way to respect the latter facet of the relevant relationship. Recall that for one to identify with others is to think of oneself as a member of a common group (a part of a 'we') and to coordinate activity to realize shared ends. Where solidarity is a matter of caring for others' quality of life, identity consists of sharing a way of life with others. Hence, the question is whether there is a common culture respect for which would involve a state university promoting knowledge for its own sake.

One might think so, for there exists the culture of a university itself. Many public universities already exhibit an ethos according to which scholars are allowed and indeed expected to develop blue-sky knowledge. Researchers think of themselves as joint members of a group, whether as employees of a university, members of a professional organization, or those who fall under the heading of 'researchers'. In addition, researchers coordinate activity with themselves and their universities in order to realize shared ends, quite often ones of blue-sky knowledge. They read one another's work, share findings, evaluate grant proposals, etc. It might therefore be thought that the existence of a pure or basic research culture that should be respected is enough for a state university to pursue knowledge for its own sake.

One problem with this suggestion is that the broader the scope of identification, the better. The more bonds there are, the more respect that is warranted, but a research culture is tiny. For instance, there are no more than about 100 members of the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa, and only around 5,000 in the American Philosophical Association. If a state university must choose between promoting these identity-based relationships and much larger ones between, say, it and the rest of a society with tens of millions of people, the latter option seems morally preferable.

In reply, one might suggest that a research culture also has a diachronic dimension that is a vector of value distinct from the bare fact of numbers of people involved. Present-day scholars identify with both previous and future ones; they are embarked on a project carried largely on the shoulders of giants and also hope to influence the next generation of scholars. Furthermore, beyond considerations of numbers and time, the quality of a relationship makes a moral difference. The more tight-knit the bond, the more respect that is warranted, and ties are particularly intimate in a research culture, perhaps especially those in a small one. Finally, in an African ethic, location relative to the agent matters, such that 'charity begins at home', or, more abstractly, relationships of which one is already a part have a greater moral weight than relationships that one is not a member of but that one is in a position to influence. Taking all four of the intuitively relevant factors into account—the numbers of people involved, the length of time a bond has lasted, the intensity of its quality, and the proximity of its location—one might fairly suggest that a state university has strong reason to support a research culture within it that is already oriented toward knowledge for its own sake.

However, there are other relationships that a state university has that would do even better along all four dimensions. Most pertinently, consider the applied research community. These days, many universities have established ties with the private sector and engage in research projects that it sponsors. Those involved in business/university 'partnerships', as they are often called, could well have intimate bonds that have lasted for a while and that include much greater numbers of people than are part of a pure or basic research culture. It appears that such relationships on balance warrant greater attention from a state university than, say, ones with cosmologists seeking to ascertain what happened nanoseconds after the big bang.

What the friend of blue-sky knowledge needs to show is that the project of advancing it as a final end would be a way for a state university to respect a shared a way of life not merely among its academics, but the populace at large. And perhaps it is the case that society beyond the ivory tower identifies in some way with universities that pursue knowledge for its own sake. Even if a majority of those in a given society were to question whether public resources ought to be spent on blue-sky knowledge (as per Dowling and Seepe, e.g.), they would probably be glad that someone is pursuing it with his own time and money. Most societies have cultures that seek to interpret the world in light of

knowledge for its own sake. If so, then a state university that sought such knowledge would support a bond that is substantial in terms of numbers, time, quality and location.

Such a consideration provides some reason to think that a state university ought to aim to transmit blue-sky knowledge, but it does not yet provide any reason to think that it should strive to discover it. Even if some knowledge for its own sake were a part of the general culture of a society, such that a state university would respect a large, long-standing, intense and local shared way of life by virtue of imparting this knowledge, that would provide no mandate for a state university to in effect seek to change the culture by finding *new* knowledge for its own sake.

Therefore, to take full advantage of the present theoretical move, the friend of blue-sky knowledge needs to suggest that, for many societies, a fundamental part of their culture is *revising other parts of their culture in light of blue-sky discoveries*. If that condition obtained, then the moral requirement to respect relationships of identity would mean that a state university should seek out new blue-sky findings intrinsically.

One major problem with this suggestion is that this kind of culture does not exist universally, and is probably more typical of Western societies than others. In societies where the culture is less dynamic and more tradition-bound, the present rationale fails to entail that publicly supported higher education ought to make substantial blue-sky discoveries as a final end. A second problem is that, even when a state university is set in the context of a reflexive and innovative culture, it appears that the African moral theory fails to provide all things considered reason for it to pursue knowledge for its own sake, as I now argue.

Solidarity versus Identity

In the best-case scenario with regard to identity, solidarity might nonetheless win out. That is, suppose that a fundamental part of a given culture were to revise itself in light of the most up-to-date blue-sky discoveries, meaning that, considering only its shared way of life with the broader society, a state university should robustly promote knowledge for its own sake. The problem is that the African moral theory favoured in this article does not instruct an agent merely to respect shared ways of life, but also prescribes respecting relationships in which others' quality of life is improved. And the prescription to care for others' quality of life often appears to take priority when it conflicts with the demand to support a shared way of life, meaning that, on balance, a state university ought not robustly promote knowledge for its own sake.

Consider an analogy to illustrate the point. Hypothetically, imagine that it were part of a pre-modern society's tradition for many of its members to spend large amounts of time each year obtaining an extremely accurate count of how many blades of grass there are in the 'Sacred Patch', which is about a kilometre in diameter.[12] Given the enormous waste of time, which could be better spent developing agriculture or medically experimenting with indigenous herbs, care for others' quality of life would, by the favoured African moral theory, provide all things considered reason to change this shared way of life, perhaps incrementally. Similar remarks might go for the existence of a culture that prizes blue-sky knowledge. Even if a society and its higher education institutions were devoted to the transmission and discovery of knowledge for its own sake, it might seem to be doing something akin to counting blades of grass, from the standpoint of the present moral theory. Respect for the identity facet of a harmonious relationship would give a state

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[12] This sort of case is normally attributed to John Rawls (1971, p. 432).

university some (*pro tanto*) reason to uphold the blue-sky tradition, but respect for its solidarity element seems to provide stronger, conclusive reason to change this tradition to one that would do more good for people.

The only way to avoid this implication would be to ascribe quite a bit of moral weight to the identity facet of a harmonious relationship relative to the solidarity part, which I call a 'traditionalist' reading of the African moral theory. A traditionalist emphasis, which tends to prize sharing a way of life more than caring for its quality, is worth taking seriously, despite the appearance that it threatens to slide into a relativism according to which norms have weight simply because the community widely accepts them. Relativism is counter-intuitive in that it cannot entail that there is moral reason for a community to overturn practices such as colonialism, tribalism, slavery and clitoridectomy, when most of its members support them. However, a traditionalist version of the African moral theory need not be relativist and can avoid such counterexamples by drawing a distinction between involuntary and voluntary practices. In order to genuinely *share* a way of life, the traditionalist can point out, common ends must be adopted on the basis of free and informed decisions, meaning that coercive traditions would lack moral weight. If a practice, in contrast, has been *willingly* adopted by a large number of people for a long span of time and is central to their self-conception as members of a group, then it has such a moral significance that it is worth protecting despite a failure to improve the quality of life. So the traditionalist argument would go for maintaining a blue-sky culture—and even the Sacred Patch.

I do not address the empirical issue of which societies have voluntarily decided to pursue the discovery of blue-sky knowledge as a final end in such a way that it is at the core of their identities. Several Western societies probably fit the bill, for it would be a massive cultural shift if enquiry into the expectedly 'useless' parts of cosmological physics, literary criticism and evolutionary biology ended overnight in Europe, North America and Australasia. However, this is less likely to be the case for many non-Western societies. In any event, I focus on the normative issue of whether, morally speaking, sustaining a voluntary practice that is central to a people's sense of who they are can be morally worth allowing the loss of life, limb, liberty and the like. While there is a clear trend in African moral thinking to give some weight to tradition,[13] I am unaware of any general accord about to what degree. Furthermore, I am interested in drawing on African moral thought in a plausible way, and so the more precise question is: supposing one is inclined to ascribe moral importance to sharing a way of life, how much should one reasonably ascribe relative to caring for others' quality of life?

I believe that, upon reflection, the answer is: relatively little. Here is why. In order to avoid relativism, as I have suggested, the friend of a traditionalist interpretation of African morality should accept something like this principle: a common way of life has moral value (partly) insofar as it is genuinely shared, i.e., is chosen on a free and informed basis. Groups whose members think of themselves as a 'we' and that engage in projects that are based on coordination rather than subordination are the right sort of candidates for moral worthiness, neatly avoiding the above objections to relativism, while capturing many people's intuition that there is something morally important about sharing a sense of self. After all, togetherness—and not merely mutual aid—is part of what makes friendship or

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[13] Mbiti, the influential scholar of African thought, makes this point (1969), and is echoed by others (e.g., Menkiti 1979; Dzobo 1992, p. 229). Indeed, the standard objection to African ethics is that it grants too much weight to tradition and not enough to individual liberty, on which see Louw (2001, pp. 19–26).

love attractive. Friendship is a weighty value in part because it involves two people coming together and staying together of their own accord.

Now, if a common way of life has moral significance insofar as it is voluntarily endorsed, then not only is nothing gained from a common culture that is forced on others, but also nothing is lost by a change in culture that a collective freely seeks for itself, so long as people continue to think of themselves as a 'we' and cooperate in order to realize newly shared ends. The latter claim, in turn, means that a society and its public institutions of higher education would lose nothing of moral importance if they, through consultation and consensus-building, made a free and informed decision to change their blue-sky culture to one that is more developmentally oriented. And if nothing of moral importance with regard to identity would be lost in voluntarily deciding to give up the discovery of knowledge for its own sake, and if something of moral importance with regard to solidarity would be gained in doing so, namely, fostering socio-economic development, then it appears that agents who have a blue-sky culture, but who are obligated to respect relationships of identity and solidarity, would have most moral reason to change that culture.

Note that this rationale blocks another tempting avenue for defending blue-sky knowledge as constitutive of identity. One might think that since relationships of identity are (partly) made up by free and informed decisions, and since blue-sky knowledge is information that is often relevant for making such decisions, blue-sky knowledge is (partly) constitutive of relationships of identity. For instance, if people tended the Sacred Patch because they believed in a certain deity, and if philosophical reflection had a bearing on whether the deity in fact existed, then philosophical knowledge could be partly constitutive of an informed relationship. However, there is a lot of blue-sky knowledge that is simply not relevant to making informed decisions about social practices, e.g., knowledge of why the universe will expand forever or of whether numbers exist independently of our minds. And, still more, even if all blue-sky knowledge were essential to social practices being based on informed decisions, the present rationale indicates that groups would have the most reason to change their identity to one that is more oriented toward benefiting others. It therefore appears that not even considerations of identity mean that a state university that is set in the context of a society with a long-standing and prized blue-sky research culture should continue to pursue blue-sky knowledge as a final end, in the face of considerations of solidarity.

Before concluding, I respond to an important objection to this reasoning. A critic might suggest that I have made the mistake of putting a consequentialist spin on a fundamentally deontological principle. The African moral theory I have articulated instructs an agent to respect relationships of identity and solidarity, not to promote their occurrence as much as possible, but it appears that I am appealing to an overly demanding, maximizing function when I argue that this theory entails that a society should drop its blue-sky culture so as to promote socio-economic development. Most deontological theories include some kind of 'agent-centred prerogative'[14] not to do everything that one could to fulfil moral goals, which suggests that a society with a blue-sky culture would not do wrong in retaining it.

In reply, consider, first, that it is common cause in the literature on African morality that the duties to help others, particularly members of one's kin or existing relationships, are stringent. There are African moral philosophers who in fact favour a maximizing function with regard to the duty to aid, claiming that sub-Saharan moral intuitions are best captured theoretically in a way that does not admit the category of supererogation, i.e., that eschews

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[14] The field of analytical ethics has by and large followed Samuel Scheffler's (1982) terminology here.

the notion of it being possible to go beyond the call of duty with regard to aiding others.[15] Even if one does not accept a full-blown maximizing function with regard to the solidarity component of the African moral theory, for it to count as 'African' it should include a weighty duty to help others, one that probably gives groups reason to forsake self-regarding or rarefied pursuits in favour of practices that are expected to promote socio-economic development.

Second, and more deeply, even if one interpreted the African moral theory in a way that admitted a substantial agent-centred prerogative not to help others so as to maintain an existing blue-sky culture, then a society and its public universities would, at best, be *permitted* to adopt the final end of pursuing blue-sky knowledge. There would be no theoretical grounds for saying that they *should*, let alone that they *must*. However, a genuine justification for seeking knowledge for its own sake should provide an explanation of what makes it a morally appropriate aim for publicly funded higher education. Saying that it just happens to be part of a culture that a state university has a prerogative not to forsake will fail to account for the intuitions of those who believe in the aptness of pursuing blue-sky knowledge as a final end. For the logic of this argument would just as well 'justify' a state university in routinely distributing ice cream to its students; that, too, could happen to be part of the existing culture that a state university need not sacrifice in order to help others. But, blue-sky knowledge and ice-cream are presumably not on a par with regard to their aptness as final ends for an institution of higher education.

Conclusion

I have sought to answer the question of whether the proper valuation of community provides reason for public higher education to teach and advance knowledge that is unlikely to have much, if any, positive impact on socio-economic development. More specifically, I have ascertained the implications of an appealing, Afro-communitarian moral theory for whether a state university ought to pursue blue-sky knowledge as a final end. I noted that friends of African norms, such as Dowling and Seepe, have invariably rejected the propriety of promoting knowledge for its own sake in favour of developmental concerns, but without systematic moral argumentation for such a view. My conclusions have turned out to be largely in line with theirs; my favoured African moral theory, which prescribes respect for communal relationships of identity and solidarity, does not ground conclusive reason for a state university to transmit or, especially, discover knowledge for its own sake. However, this implication was not obvious, and along the way I have indicated several points at which the theory does provide *pro tanto* reason for publicly funded higher education to adopt non-developmental knowledge as an ultimate purpose.

Specifically, I have shown that respect for relationships of solidarity or caring for others gives a state university *some* reason to help its academic staff make blue-sky discoveries, particularly if part of an academic's good is constituted by intellectual accomplishment and if part of the public's good is constituted by understanding it. And respect for relationships of identity or sharing a way of life provides *some* reason for a state university to promote knowledge for its own sake, when it is set in a society whose culture involves revising itself

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[15] For the most explicit and thorough discussion, see Gyekye (1997, pp. 69–75). An inability to go beyond the call of duty with regard to aiding others is probably implicit in Wiredu's (1992a) suggestion that the golden rule is central to sub-Saharan morality; treating others the way you would like to be treated entails helping them an awful lot, supposing you would like to be helped an awful lot.

in light of blue-sky discoveries; for then the way of life would be shared by many, long-standing, central to people's self-conception and a part of the university's tradition. Nevertheless, all things considered reflection has indicated that these factors do not outweigh the obligation of a state university to help meet the urgent needs of the many and the worst-off. With regard to solidarity, meeting these needs outweighs helping a small group of academics to make blue-sky discoveries and laypeople capable of learning about them. And with respect to identity, a society that has a well-established blue-sky culture has most reason to make a free and informed decision to change that culture to one more developmentally oriented. One might suggest at this point that at least a state university in a Western society without much poverty could be permitted to retain its blue-sky orientation, but not even this appears to be true, as there is plenty of poverty around the globe to keep Western academia busy.

Even if the African moral theory does not entail that blue-sky knowledge is an apt *final end* for a publicly higher institution of higher education, it could be that this theory entails that a state university ought to allow it and perhaps even to encourage it. Maybe academic administrators are *morally forbidden from preventing* academics from seeking knowledge for its own sake even though the academics ought not, or maybe administrators should support knowledge for its own sake *as a means* to a final end that is proper, e.g., it might be that the better blue-sky researchers are also the better instructors.

It is also worth noting that, if one has the intuition that blue-sky knowledge is an appropriate final end for a public university, that is not yet reason to reject the African moral theory relative to its major competitors; they, too, have difficulty accounting well for this intuition.[16] On any plausible account of well-being, it is unlikely that resources spent on blue-sky enquiry would be part of a policy that would maximize its expected value, as utilitarianism would recommend (*contra* Pelikan 1992, p. 34; Makgoba 1998, p. 47). The Kantian prizes autonomy, but knowledge for its own sake is not constitutive of any widely attractive conception of autonomy, and pursuing such knowledge does not appear essential to express respect for it. Finally, it might seem that a *eudaimonist* theory could easily underwrite knowledge for its own sake, insofar as it constitutes a human excellence (e.g., Newman 1852, chap. 5). However, it is not obvious that the ability to reflect on knowledge for its own sake is, *as such*, a valuable part of human nature, as opposed to the capacity for abstract knowledge more generally. Furthermore, even if the capacity for blue-sky knowledge were a distinct human excellence, it would take much argument to show that it is something that is proper for a public university to support as a final end. Is discovering blue-sky knowledge one of the higher human excellences? Even if it were, might it be most rational to focus on promoting other human excellences, since more of them could be realized with the available resources? And even if it were most efficient to pursue knowledge for its own sake, would the *eudiamonist* ethic objectionably permit a university to inflict harm on people when necessary and sufficient to foster the development of its talented blue-sky scholars?[17]

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[16] Quite often, the intuition is not thoroughly defended by its most ardent supporters in the West. For example, one encounters little argument for (and virtually no moral theoretic defence of) the claim that a public university ought to pursue knowledge for its own sake in Husserl (1935), Oakeshott (1950), Wolff (1969, pp. 7–8) and Pelikan (1992, pp. 32–43).

[17] Suppose a morally upright, theoretical genius needed a new liver to survive, and the only one available were housed in the body of a malevolent, not-so-bright undergraduate student. Would the ethical imperative to promote human excellence permit the scholar's university to forcibly extract the liver? Of course, doing so might well constitute a vice, but might that, on a *eudaimonist* ethic, be outweighed by the imperative to realize superlative intellectual virtue?

Of course, it might be that the intuition should be rejected. However, I confess that I have a hard time accepting the idea that I, someone employed by a public university, should not have written this very article, presumably an instance of pursuing knowledge for its own sake. If readers are glad that I wrote this essay, then they have reason to continue the quest for a theory that would explain why I was justified in writing it and they were justified in reading it.

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