# Africanity of Thaddeus Metz's Relational Moral Theory

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## Abstract

African metaphysics and religion significantly influence African ethics or moral theory. African moral life is deeply connected with beliefs in the afterlife, healing, causality, sickness, death, hierarchical existence (hierarchical conception of being), and supernatural powers. Yet, Thaddeus Metz, a contemporary African moralist, excluded the concepts of metaphysics and religion in his Relational Moral Theory (RMT). This exclusion has prompted debates on the Africanity or the authenticity of RMT as an African theory. While scholars agree on RMT's African roots, some argue that it is more African even without these elements, while others believe it is less African due to its exclusion. This article seeks to examine the discourse on the Africanity of Metz's Relational Moral Theory, ultimately concluding that Metz's exclusion of African metaphysics and religion does not render them irrelevant to African moral thought but was rather a deliberate move to develop a defensible moral theory both within and beyond Africa.

**Keywords:** Africanity, (RMT), Ubuntu, Exclusion, African Metaphysics, Religion, Relationality.

## Introduction

Thaddeus Metz, an African philosopher with American roots, has made substantial contributions to the study of African philosophy, particularly ethics. He adopts an analytical approach to the discourse on African morality. In his prominent work A Relational Moral Theory: African Ethics in and Beyond the Continent, published in 2022, Metz seeks to develop an African ethical framework that is applicable both within and outside Africa [Metz 2022]. This framework, known as the Relational Moral Theory (RMT), posits that morality involves fostering communal relationships and respecting the beings or entities that possess the capacity to form such connections [Mofolo 2024]. In essence, the core of ethics lies in honouring individuals who can relate to others, rather than merely promoting communal relationships. Respecting a being entails identifying oneself with others, showing solidarity, and providing mutual support [Metz 2022]. However, RMT has generated diverse reactions within the academic community of African ethics.

On one hand, scholars commend Metz for his methodical and analytical approach to African ethics. His integration of traditional African values into modern ethical discourse highlights the depth and relevance of RMT. Additionally, RMT has spurred further exploration and development of African ethics, inspiring academic research and discussions. On the other hand, RMT has also prompted debates, particularly regarding the interpretation and application of African moral concepts. Some scholars argue that RMT may not fully capture the nuances of traditional African thought. For instance, Metz [2022] deliberately excludes metaphysical and religious claims from RMT due to their controversial and impractical nature. Such exclusions could potentially limit the universality of RMT in societies that downplay metaphysical or religious claims.
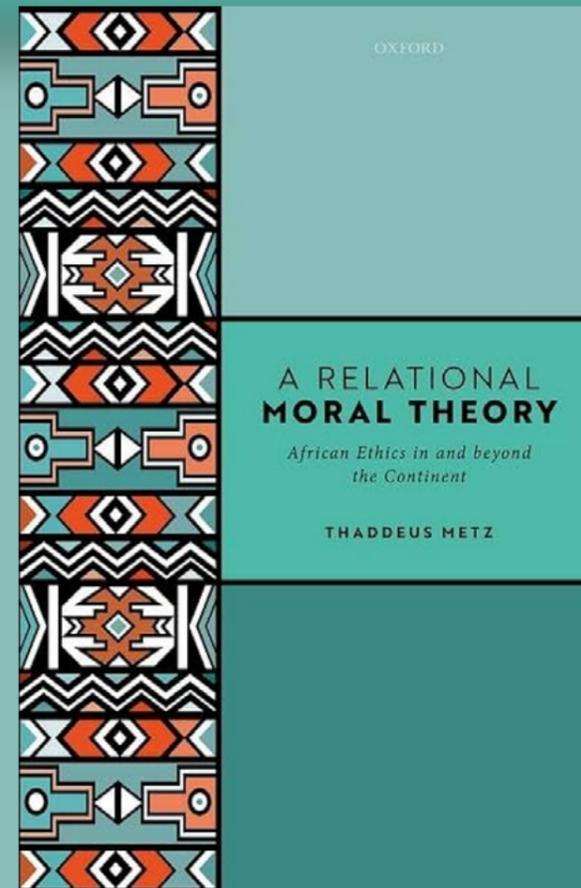
Therefore, this paper examines whether Metz's exclusion of metaphysical and religious claims lessens or diminishes RMT's Africanity. To achieve this goal, the article begins by defining some key terminologies that cut across the work. Secondly, the work explores the debate on an authentic African moral theory and offers a response grounded in Ubuntu philosophy and RMT. Then, the section presents the author's perspective on what constitutes an African moral theory. Later, the paper addresses the question of whether RMT is more African than Ubuntu. The article concludes with the author's final thoughts on the matter.

## Understanding Key Terms

This work discusses Metz's RMT while emphasising its African roots. To begin with, it is essential to define morality which cuts across this article. Morality originates from the Latin word moralis, which refers to guiding a person's behaviour within society [etymonline.com]. Essentially, morality serves as a mechanism to regulate or direct individuals' actions within a community. Metz [2022] interprets morality as relational, meaning it involves respecting or honouring a being's[1] capacity to relate or commune with others. Thus, morality entails valuing a being for its own sake, rather than as a tool for achieving another purpose [Metz 2022]. Having understood the concept of morality, let us discuss the concept of a moral theory.

Metz [2009: 339] contends that a 'moral theory is a fundamental principle that accounts for what right actions, as distinct from wrong, have in common'. This implies that moral theory is prescriptive, offering guidelines for rationally determining what is good or bad and what is right or wrong. For Metz's account, moral actions or morality promote friendliness, whereas immoral actions

1 In this work, the term being is synonymous with entity, meaning both living and non-living, including humans, animals, plants, and lifeless entities (stones, corpses, etc).

or immorality extend to unfriendliness [Metz 2022]. Friendliness involves respecting an entity's capacity to commune or relate with others. Metz [2022: 110] articulates the principle of friendliness by stating that;

**"[a]n act is right if and only if it respects individuals in virtue of their capacity to be a party to harmonious ways of relating … An action is permissible if it treats beings as special in accordance with their ability to be friendly or to be befriended."**

Moreover, let us discuss how Metz conceptualises an African Moral Theory. Metz [2009: 339] defines an African Moral Theory[2] (AMT) as 'a philosophical construction unifying a wide array of the moral judgments and practices found among many of the black and Bantu-speaking peoples of the sub-Saharan region'. Metz [2015b: 186] further explains that AMT is considered African because it refers to;

**"ideas about what the good life is for human beings and which choices they should make that have been salient in the world views of black peoples indigenous to the sub-Saharan region and, especially, in contemporary philosophical writings grounded on them. "**

This entails that a moral theory is African if it is grounded in the enduring or recurrent lifestyles, ideas, customs, and traditions commonly found in Africa. It is not deemed African merely by referencing the dominant views and teachings of African philosophers and ethicists throughout history [Metz 2022]. Additionally, even if similar properties are found in other places, such as China, a moral theory is African if these properties have been long-standing in Africa.

Finally, a Relational Moral Theory (RMT) states that morality or rightness is 'a function of communal relationship, a way that individuals can and should interact'

[Metz 2022: 2]. RMT serves both descriptive and prescriptive functions. It is descriptive when it outlines what various African cultures value or consider right, and prescriptive when it dictates what should be valued. RMT would position that the right act 'is a matter of honouring individuals in virtue of their capacity for communal relationships, where one (but not the only) facet of these relationships involves helping others and being helped by others' [Metz 2022: 75]. This means that RMT values friendliness and people ought to honour friendliness. Thus, the foundation of RMT is not the actual relationship as the ultimate end or highest good, but the capacity to execute and maintain such relationships. In essence, moral agents[3] respect a being's capacity to relate by sharing identity and showing solidarity with others. So, let us venture into the debate on the authenticity of a moral theory to be African.

## Debate on an Authentic African Moral Theory

There is an ongoing debate about what constitutes an authentic African moral theory, with significant disagreement among scholars due to their diverse political, social, economic, philosophical, and technological backgrounds. This diversity leads to biased interpretations of what is truly African. Proponents of Ubuntu philosophy argue that humanness, or Ubuntu, forms the foundation of African ethics. Ifeanyi Menkiti [2017] asserts that Ubuntu, which translates to humanness, entails living a genuine life and avoiding behaviours that dehumanises oneself or others, for example, committing suicide, theft, and voluntary or intentional abortion. That's, for Africans, Ubuntu emphasises living communally and seeking help from fellow community members. In other words, Ubuntu recommends us not to kill ourselves or others voluntarily or intentionally as it cuts sacred human life[4].

Yvonne Mokgoro [1998: 17] describes Ubuntu as 'harmony achieved through close and sympathetic social relationships within the group'. This indicates that African morality revolves around caring for others and not existing in isolation. This emphasis on relationships is encapsulated in the African (Nguni) aphorism umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu which can be translated as a person is a person through other persons [Tutu 1999]. This aphorism or maxim entails that Africans should be genuine, true, and morally virtuous [Ramose 2005]. Despite various

interpretations, Ubuntu is broadly recognised as a central concept in African moral theory.

Another interpretation of an African moral theory is modal relationalism, also known as a Relational Moral Theory (RMT), as developed by an African moralist, Thaddeus Metz. Metz [2015: 186] argues that RMT is genuinely African, because,

**"ideas about what the good life is for human beings and which choices they should make that have been salient in the world views of black peoples indigenous to the sub-Saharan region and, especially, in contemporary philosophical writings grounded on them."**

RMT is rooted in the enduring or recurrent lifestyles, ideas, customs, and traditions prevalent in Africa. It would also entail that; the theory is African not just by referencing the views of African philosophers and ethicists but by being grounded in these long-standing African elements [Metz 2022]. Even if similar concepts are found elsewhere, like in China, a moral theory is considered African if these elements have been historically significant or long-standing in African soil.

Furthermore, RMT is African because it addresses issues pertinent to African societies and beyond. In environmental ethics[5], RMT states that it is wrong to prioritise trivial interests over the urgent

needs of the environment, and playing with animals for fun is considered morally wrong [Metz 2023]. Additionally, RMT extends moral status to non-human agents, such as aliens or Martians, due to their capability to form communal relationships [Metz 2023]. In business ethics, RMT generally promotes partiality but also supports impartiality in certain crucial or necessary circumstances [Metz 2022].

Lastly, RMT is African because it draws on the insights of African moral philosophers. Metz has emphasised the value of learning from the wisdom of indigenous scholars. He learned the concept of friendliness or social harmony, an African summum bonum (greatest good), from Desmond Tutu [Tutu 199]. Metz also interpreted friendliness as sharing identity and demonstrating solidarity as influenced by Kenneth Kaunda and Nelson Mandela [Mofolo 2024]. Thus, by building on the work of existing scholars, Metz firmly believes that RMT is African. Despite Metz's conviction, the question of what constitutes an African moral theory remains outstanding. Therefore, the next section of the paper will explore a comprehensive understanding of African ethics.

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**2** In this article, the term African Moral Theory will be used interchangeably with African ethics.

**3** According to Gichure Wanjiru Christine [2008:60], moral agents 'are persons who can reason and be responsible for their actions'. It means that moral agents have the capacity to hold moral responsibility for their actions such as adult human persons. Other beings such as children below the age of reason, mentally incapacitated people or animals are moral subjects. They are moral subjects because they cannot hold a moral responsibility for their acts but, their actions can be questioned on moral grounds for instance, if a child's act inflicts pain and pollutes the air.

**4** In Africa, human life which is the principle of movement in human beings is sacred. The term sacred or sanctity is 'that which makes something to be treated with a great respect' [Mofolo 2018:15]. Sanctity also entails intrinsic goodness and value that offers a condition for respect and protection of human life. So, the sanctity of human life entails the great respectability of human life.

**5** Environmental ethics emphasises the promotion, conservation and respect of animals, plants, and other entities. Environmental ethics stresses the importance of respecting the dignity and value of nature.

# Understanding of an African Moral Theory

The term Africanity will entail criteria or requirements of a moral principle or theory to be considered truly from the African soil. Scholars agree that an African moral theory should encompass several features including metaphysics, religion, the principle of humanity, professionalism, ethics, contextuality, complementarity, and relationality.

In the first place, metaphysics, which addresses fundamental questions of existence, reality, and the universe, is particularly significant in Africa. People in Africa often contemplate the meaning of life, suffering, healing, death, witchcraft, and the afterlife. In African thought, for example, life is seen as infinite, and continuous without a clear distinction between life and death. That is a reason Kwasi Wiredu [1980] views life as a preparation for the next life or existence. Death is considered a rite of passage to another realm, where one joins the ancestors or the Supreme Being, referred to by names such as Mulungu in Chichewa or Chinyanja, Mungu in Kiswahili, Mwari in Shona, and Nkosi Nkulunkulu in Ndebele. No wonder John Mbiti [1975] refers to deceased relatives as the living-dead stressing their enduring presence and positive influence on their living descendants.

Ancestors also play a crucial role in caring for, supporting, and protecting the living, serving as sources of wisdom, knowledge, lifestyle, and morality. Disobedience to the ancestors' guidance can lead to sickness, death, calamities, and natural disasters. The remedy often involves repentance and appeasement through sacrifices [Mazama 2002].

Now, the question is, why metaphysics is significant in African morality? African metaphysics mostly emphasises the interconnectedness of all beings (living and non-living, finite and infinite, alive or dead). This interconnectedness has the potential to promote responsibility and respect towards others, hence, leading to moral behaviours that foster community well-being and harmony. It also promotes communalism or cooperation, solidarity, and mutual support which identifies African ethics as opposed to Western individualism. These traditions and norms are transmitted through oral traditions, rituals, and cultural practices. Hence, instilling moral values and guiding individuals in making ethical decisions. Thus, excluding the significance of African metaphysics from a moral theory renders incompleteness.

Secondly, an African moral theory should incorporate elements of religion[6]. Most Africans adhere to a hierarchical concept of being, with natural elements at the bottom, followed by animals, humans, ancestors[7], deities[8], and God [Mazama 2002]. Africans believe that God has supreme authority over all. However, there is no direct interaction with lower, corporeal or material beings, such as humans, unless mediated through deities and ancestors, owing to their spiritual nature. Deities, who never existed as material beings on earth, act as messengers of God, while ancestors continue to influence and support or care for living human beings. Both deities and ancestors can convey God's messages through dreams and natural disasters and serve as sources of morality, which can be interpreted through divination[9] by fortune tellers, priests, traditional healers, and sorcerers.

In Zimbabwe, among the Shona people, Fainos Mangena notes the concept of totemism (mitupo), which contributes positively to environmental protection [Mangena 2013]. Totemism postulates that humans have a spiritual kinship with particular animals, plants, or natural objects, which serve as symbols or emblems for specific clans, families, or tribes. Mange-

na [2013] argues that totemism encourages humans to treat these animals with reverence to maintain the cosmic balance and avoid problems such as droughts, famine, and diseases. For example, if one's totem is a goat, it is considered immoral or abominable to eat or ridicule a goat. In this way, totemism impacts environmental protection.

Thirdly, an African moral theory ought to promote humanness. In Africa, humanness embodies qualities like selflessness and commitment to one's community, which are valued more than the celebration of individual achievements and disposition [Dolamo 2013]. Humanness is demonstrated through compassion, kindness, and benevolence. Thus, what is morally good respects the dignity or existence of others. Going further, African moralists also believe that morality is inherently philosophical.

Fourthly, Jonathan Chimakonam and Luís Cordeiro-Rodrigues [2023] define philosophy as the systematic and analytical study of questions deemed philosophical by the relevant community. This definition implies that African ethics emphasises thorough and logical investigations into societal questions, highlighting the collaborative nature of philosophical inquiry where the community collectively identifies key questions to be explored and examined. Regardless of whether it uses metaphysical or religious terms, African ethics should be open to testing against new realities and experiences in a dynamic world. Peter Hountondji, one of the African moral scholars, supports this central theme of African ethics. Additionally, an African moral theory should be fundamentally ethical.

Fifthly, an African moral theory should be ethical [Chimakonam and Rodrigues 2023]. Chimakonam and Rodrigues [2023: 4] describe ethics as 'a systematic and analytical study of normative problems'. The goal of ethics is to understand and guide how individuals and societies should act by employing reasoned analysis and systematic inquiry into moral principles and values. Hence, African ethics involves a rigorous and methodological approach to exploring ethical and value-based questions, emphasising the importance of logical reasoning and structured methods to address issues related to norms and values. As well, an African moral theory should be contextual.

Moreover, the principle of contextuality posits that 'the moral values of behaviours or actions can only be determined within contexts' [Chimakonam and Rodrigues 2023: 11]. This implies that moral judgments in African ethics are influenced by various situational and cultural factors, and are not absolute. Not all circumstances are judged equally; the needs, intentions, consequences, culture, background, and situations of others are vital. For instance, while no culture promotes abortion due to the sanctity of human life, a pregnancy that endangers a woman's life may be terminated. However, this termination does not validate the rightness or legality of abortion but underscores the importance of the woman's life. It means morals or norms may be interpreted and understood differently according to a situation, context, or circumstance. Moreover, African morality should also consider the role of complementarity.

Furthermore, the principle of complementarity asserts that conflicting moral values are not merely contradictory but rather complementary [Chimakonam and Rodrigues 2023]. This means that African moral values, even when appearing opposed, can work together to form a more balanced and nuanced ethical framework. The principle of complementarity is also evident in the RMT's dichotomy of subject and object. This dichotomy shows that moral actions are not solely about individual subjects acting in isolation, but also about how subjects relate to objects and how objects directly or indirectly affect other entities. This could be a reason Metz refutes the criticism that RMT does not protect aliens and he holds that immoral actions by aliens or animals can be accounted for in a moral framework [Metz 2023]. Furthermore, an African moral theory should be relational.

Finally, an African moral theory includes the principle of relationality. In this work, relationality entails that, ethical behaviours should focus on fostering positive relationships, communal bonds, interpersonal connections, and mutual respect. This principle postulates that 'social behaviours or values are necessarily relational' [Chimakonam and Rodrigues 2023: 11]. It suggests that behaviours and values are fundamentally about how individuals relate to and interact with one another and cannot be fully understood or practised in isolation from their social context. Thus, the essence of African moral theory is grounded in relationships with others, transcending constraints such as gender, ethnicity, religion, culture, or historical background.

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6 Religion can be described as a collection of beliefs, practices, and systems that connect humanity to spiritual and moral values. It generally includes the worship of deities, rituals, moral codes, and worldviews that aim to explain existence, the universe, and humanity's role within it. Religion often involves sacred texts, traditions, and institutions that are crucial in shaping a culture's identity and societal norms. Therefore, to be religious would mean to hold a deep belief in a deity or deities and engage in the rituals and customs linked to that belief [Cambridge Online Dictionary].

7 In Africa, ancestors refer to spirits or elders or deceased family members who are venerated and honoured by their descendants. They can be also referred to as saints in a Christian set-up. Ancestors are believed to give guidelines and protection to the living.

8 Deities are beings of higher power often worshipped or revered in various African religions and cultures. They can also be identified as angels in a Christian set-up. They are believed to possess supernatural abilities and often play pivotal roles in myths, creation stories, and spiritual practices.

9 Divination in Africa refers to the practice of seeking knowledge or guidance from the spiritual realm to understand events, situations, or the future. It is a significant aspect of many African cultures and often involves various rituals and techniques to communicate with deities, ancestors, or other spiritual entities. Divination is often performed by specialised practitioners such as priests (ansembe), traditional healers (asing'anga), or diviners (oombeza ula), who are believed to have a deep connection to the spiritual world. This practice is not only used to predict the future but also to find solutions to problems, heal illnesses, and maintain harmony within the community. Different methods of divination are used across the continent, including: throwing bones: this involves casting bones, shells, or other objects and interpreting the patterns they form; consulting oracles: some cultures have specific individuals who serve as oracles and are believed to have the ability to receive messages from the divine; dream interpretation: dreams are often seen as messages from the spiritual world and are analysed for their symbolic meanings.

The principle of relationality is a core aspect of RMT. The Relational Moral Theory asserts that 'right action is a matter of honouring individuals in virtue of their capacity for communal relationships, where one (but not the only) facet of these relationships involves helping others and being helped by others' [Metz and Miller 2016: 2; Metz 2022: 121]. This principle invites moral agents to be friendly towards themselves and others, especially those capable of friendliness. It promotes moral values based on their impact on relationships and friendliness between individuals. Therefore, RMT emphasises the importance of relationships, interconnecte- dness, mutual care, community support, and friendliness. A moral principle that encompasses the above eight factors qualifies as an authentic African moral theory. So, the next section will analyse whether RMT is more African than other moral principles, such as Ubuntu.

## Africanity of the Relational Moral Theory vis-as-vis Ubuntu

Considering both Thaddeus Metz's views and those of other scholars on what constitutes an authentic African moral principle, RMT can be seen as more and less African. Firstly, RMT is more African because it embodies the core of Africanity or morality, which is relationality. For Metz, relationality involves respecting or honouring beings that have a capability to foster communal relationships. He categorically asserts that, for Africans, morality means recognising others as fellow Africans or humans with their own goals, interests, needs, likes, and dislikes. Regardless of any situation or circumstance, one should have a sense of belonging. Additionally, uplifting each other through mutual support, love, care, or help is essential. Consequently, being African should not only be about theoretically recognising dignity, humanity, or identity but also practically being of service to one another.

Moreover, relating involves allowing oneself to be assimilated, incorporated, recognised, and benefited by others capable of doing so. In simple terms, morality is about welcoming others into one's life and providing space to achieve mutual goals and visions. Chielozona Eze [2016] argues that a true African acknowledges the humanity and dignity of others as part of one's own. Morality fosters empathetic imagination, which means seeing the world from another person's perspective without any sense of superiority or power (Eze 2016). However, this does not mean that morality requires self-sacrifice. Morality requires mutual sacrifice, where both parties feel, think, and are passionate about associating and engaging with one another. These scholars further assert that skin colour, birthplace, or soil do not define Africanity as a moral concept or theory.
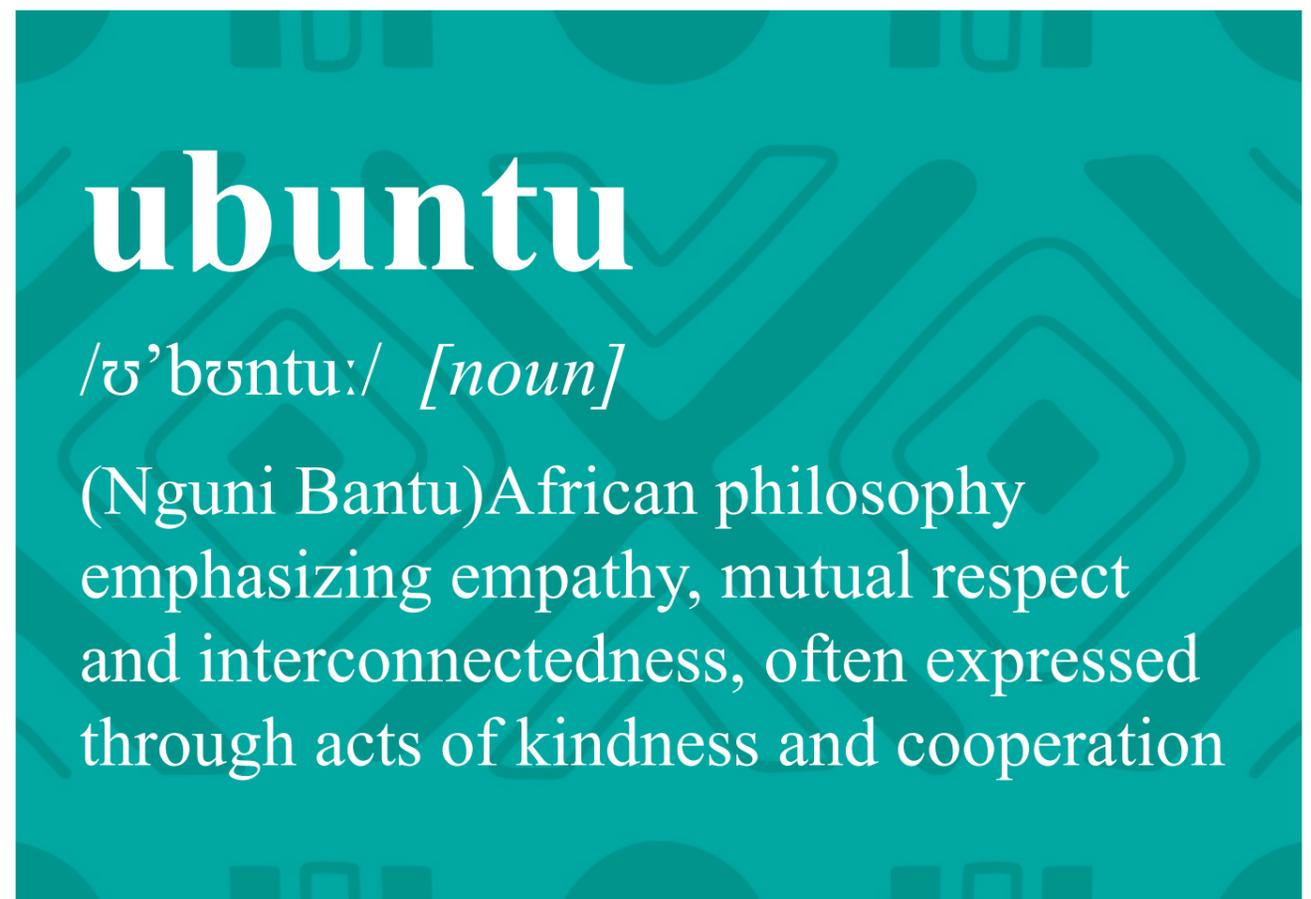
Furthermore, RMT is considered more African because it is prescriptive, providing normative guidance [Metz 2015a]. Unlike merely describing existing moral practices, RMT offers principles on how individuals should decide and act, emphasising the importance of harmonious relationships and the capacity to commune. Being prescriptive also involves communal obligations, as Metz argues that everyone has a moral duty to promote the well-being of their partners in relationships.

In addition, RMT is prescriptive as it emphasises active participation [Metz 2015b]. It rejects passive observation and calls for intentional efforts to foster understanding, empathy, and shared values [Metz 2022]. Moreover, RMT prescribes a universal principle [Metz 2015b]. It implies that, although rooted in an African thought system, this principle transcends local contexts to address global moral dilemmas such as abortion and environmental degradation.

Conversely, RMT is seen as less African because it lacks features like metaphysics and religion. Thaddeus Metz deliberately excluded metaphysical and religious claims from RMT, as he believed that, they do not provide practical evidence or moral guidance [Metz 2022]. For Metz, incorporating metaphysics would not be ideal for explaining everyday moral decision-making, as metaphysical claims are more descriptive than prescriptive. Additionally, Metz did not define his moral theory using religious beliefs or beliefs in the spiritual world, which are often seen as legitimising moral concepts.

However, it is evident that, in traditional African societies, a good life is achieved through strong connections with fellow humans, religion, ancestors, and the Supreme Being [Magesa 1997]. Jacob Olupona [2014: 39-40] supports this view that 'diviners act as intermediaries between the supernatural and human worlds. They decipher hidden meanings to ad-

# ubuntu

/ʊˈbʊntuː/ *[noun]*

(Nguni Bantu)African philosophy emphasizing empathy, mutual respect and interconnectedness, often expressed through acts of kindness and cooperation

dress misfortune, sickness, death, and calamity, or to forecast good tidings or future occurrences. Nevertheless, Metz does not adhere to these prevalent narratives in African moral philosophy. He argues that metaphysical claims 'are highly contestable and so inappropriate for a particular purpose, which is to construct an ethic with a broad scope, one that could be appreciated by a multicultural audience' [Metz 2022: 17]. This implies that religious claims may restrict the universal applicability of a moral theory, making it more pertinent only to a specific community that holds religious or metaphysical claims. Moreover, invoking divine revelation does not offer rationally justifiable arguments that are accessible and defensible to outsiders or non-Africans [Metz 2022]. Appealing to religious claims may limit a moral theory's defensibility in global ethics, particularly to atheistic or agnostic[10] communities.

In many African philosophies, there is no clear separation between the spiritual and the moral perspectives. Morality, metaphysics, and religion are intertwined aspects of a holistic worldview. Moral values are often derived from metaphysical beliefs and religious practices, and separating them would fragment this perspective. Metaphysical beliefs and religious traditions provide a foundation for moral values in many African societies, influencing moral judgements and behaviours. For instance, beliefs about the nature of existence, the role of ancestors, and the relationship between humans and the divine influence moral judgements and behaviours. Removing this foundation would leave African morality unanchored.

African morality is deeply embedded in cultural traditions and religious practices, which include rites, rituals, and stories that convey moral lessons and ethical guidelines. Disregarding metaphysics and religion would strip African morality of its cultural context and integrity. Additionally, metaphysical and religious beliefs play a crucial role in shaping community identity and social cohesion. African moral values often emphasise communal well-being, reciprocity, and interconnectedness, reinforced through religious and metaphysical frameworks. Separating these elements would weaken the communal aspect of African morality.

Lastly, many African moral systems recognise a spiritual dimension to existence that influences ethical behaviours. Concepts such as Ubuntu underscore the importance of acknowledging the humanity and spirituality in others. Disassociating morality from metaphysics and religion would disregard this essential spiritual aspect. Overall, African morali-

ty, metaphysics, and religion are deeply interconnected, creating a cohesive and culturally significant worldview. Disentangling these elements would diminish the richness and complexity of African moral systems. In other terms, the relegation of these core concepts, which define key African values, norms, and beliefs, was implausible. Rather than seeking an authentic African Moral Theory (AMT) with the discussed features, Metz created a metaphorical moral theory that appears African but lacks sufficient African characteristics. It also implies that Metz was judging an African concept by non-African standards.

Nevertheless, Thaddeus Metz's exclusion of metaphysical and religious claims did not suggest that such claims and beliefs are irrelevant. Neither did he deny the existence of African metaphysics or African ways of practicing religion nor did he imply that those who believe in such metaphysical and religious principles are less Africans. Similarly, he did not suggest that those who subscribe to RMT, which excludes these claims, are more Africans. It was simply a deliberate move to develop an African theory that could be well-defended in non-African contexts. In seeking to universalise RMT, it was necessary to remove these elements in African societies that do not hold such beliefs. That is to

say, the intended audience included not only non-African societies but also some parts of Africa influenced by atheistic, agnostic and pragmatic ideologies.

The subsequent inquiry could be: How would Thaddeus Metz integrate African metaphysics and religion into Relational Moral Theory (RMT) while simultaneously enhancing its defensibility within and outside Africa? This prompts moralists or scholars to pursue a more robust[11] and defensible[12] RMT that applies to various African and non-African contexts. The upcoming section will endeavour to address this fundamental question.

## Seeking a More Robust and Defensible RMT within and Beyond Africa

Formulating a genuinely African theory that incorporates metaphysics and religion and withstands scrutiny both within and outside of Africa is a challenging endeavour for African moralists, including Thaddeus Metz. Metz could highlight the significant roles of community, relationships, interconnectedness, ancestors, and the balance between individual and collective interests. For instance, Metz could explore the equilibrium between personal and communal interests, drawing on African metaphysical concepts that stress harmony between indi-

vidual and collective well-being. Additionally, he could examine how metaphysics and religion influence ethical behaviour, social justice, and community welfare. By illustrating the tangible impact of these beliefs, he can strengthen the case for RMT's relevance and defensibility.

However, the inclusion of African metaphysics and religion, adds little to the defensibility of RMT. Instead of making it more robust beyond Africa, their incorporation makes RMT more distinctly African, aligning with the prominent

beliefs in African metaphysics and religious practices prevalent in many parts of Africa. RMT would not serve as an ideal philosophy for global morality, especially in societies that do not adhere to concepts of metaphysics and religion. Thus, considering RMT's intended audience, which includes both Africans and non-Africans, it seems more reasonable to omit these concepts or beliefs. However, if the audience were limited to Africans, irrespective of the implications for global ethics, their inclusion could be plausible.

## Conclusion

To crown it all, the paper has examined the authenticity of the Relational Moral Theory. It strongly argues that RMT is more African because it includes relationality, the essence of an African moral theory. However, it also contends that RMT is less African than other theories because it lacks essential features of African moral theories, such as metaphysics and religion. The paper clarifies Metz's likely reasons for excluding African metaphysics and religion, concluding that their exclusion did not significantly harm the theory's authenticity. On one hand, Metz's relegation of African metaphysics and religion permits African philosophy to engage more profoundly with worldwide philosophical dialogue. In other words, by focusing on moral and ethical dimensions, his work can appeal to a wider

audience and promote cross-cultural comprehension. On the other hand, the sidelining of metaphysics and religion disregards the rich, traditional African ontological and religious views. This could result in a loss of cultural identity and a lesser appreciation for the distinctive contributions of African thought. Nevertheless, Metz's work signifies a notable transition in African philosophy, fostering a more inclusive and globally pertinent approach, while also rendering provoking questions that would preserve indigenous African philosophical aspects. Finally, future studies should aim to develop a moral theory that integrates African views on metaphysics and religion. This theory should be applicable and justifiable both within and beyond the African continent.



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**10** Agnostics are individuals who are uncertain or open-minded about the existence of higher powers or the supernatural entities. They typically hold that our human mind or knowledge or understanding are limited to comprehend metaphysical questions such as existence of the Supreme Being.

**11** According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, robust signifies having the capacity to perform well under various conditions.

**12** To be defensible in this context means that an idea, theory, or belief can be supported with logical reasoning, evidence, and sound arguments. It's about being able to justify the position taken and respond effectively to criticism or challenges. In the case of Relational Moral Theory (RMT) incorporating African metaphysics and religion, a defensible theory would be one that can withstand scrutiny from both within and outside of African philosophical traditions, showing that it is coherent, consistent, and applicable across different contexts. So, for Metz, making RMT more defensible would involve ensuring that his integration of African metaphysics and religion is well-founded, clear, and robust enough to address potential objections and to be appreciated by a global audience. Does that make sense?

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