

# BIOETHICS, BIOTECHNOLOGY AND CULTURE: A VOICE FROM THE MARGINS<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

*In this paper I argue for the universality of morality as against and in spite of the plurality and inevitable relativity of human cultures. Universalisability is the litmus test of moral authenticity whereas culture tends to impose an egocentric predicament. I argue equally for the equality of cultures qua cultures and of the importance of different cultural perspectives, given the limitations of each and every particular culture, in a balanced and wholesome appreciation of moral issues, particularly issues of cross-cultural relevance. I then try to anchor my reflections on a few topical ethical issues of cross-cultural relevance which have been the subject of controversy in recent times.*

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the most remarkable things about the world in which we all live, localised here on planet Earth, is its biodiversity (the enormous variety of its living forms). Another is its cultural diversity (the enormous variety of its different human cultures). Equally remarkable is the variety of different forms, heights, weights, shapes, sizes and complexions with which individual human beings, even within the same culture and locality, come from the hand of God/Nature. I perceive great positive value – if you would

<sup>1</sup> The first draft of this paper was read at the opening session of the annual conference of the Canadian Bioethics Society, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, October 28, 1999.

permit the emphatic tautology – in this differentiated diversity and variety.

What all human beings have in common, in spite of their rather palpably striking differentiation and differences, is the fact that they are all human beings, equally liable to *being, mutatis mutandis*, rational, self-centred, sociable, fallible, altruistic, equally liable to *experiencing* sadness/joy, pleasure/pain, equally vulnerable and liable to *suffering*, equally mortal in the end, in spite of everything else, life-prolonging technologies included. What all human cultures have in common is that they are all creations of human beings, reflecting, on the one hand, human capabilities, goodness, ingenuity, wisdom etc., and, on the other, human limitations, fallibility, frailty, perversity, foolishness etc.

Morality, of which ethics, law, ethos etc., can be considered as important sub-sets or derivatives, is an essential component of every culture, because no human being, no human society, is perfect, although all are capable of striving towards perfection. No society, no matter how small, can survive and endure, let alone prosper, without morality, without pervasive perennial concern with matters of right and wrong in human conduct and behaviour. No human society or culture, I believe, can completely disregard morality and survive for any length of time. The most palpable thing about cultures may be how different they are, each from the others, just as the most palpable thing about individual human beings, even within the same culture, may be how very different they are each from the other. But, just as the colour of human blood is the same everywhere, in spite of human differences, it can be said that the identical blood of all human cultures is morality, understood in its simplest conception and function, without which any culture would be truly lifeless. Pervasive perennial concern with morality has given rise to and is reflected in human customs and traditions, in mores, laws and taboos, in group ethos and general etiquette, even though some of these are liable to be equated or conflated and confused with morality proper.

## CULTURE AND MORALITY

I am a cultural pluralist. I perceive great value in the remarkable diversity and variety of human cultures, which seems to me remarkably analogous to the biodiversity of the living world, in which I find equal value. I believe that God/Nature had good reasons for not cloning human beings so that each would be an

identical copy of all the others, but rather made each according to a unique and unrepeatable formula. The prospect of a world of identical clones, created or manufactured according to any putative formula of perfection, which, at last, seems within the manipulative reach of human bio-technologists, appears to me a rather boring and undesirable one. I am apprehensive of monocultures: human, faunal, floral or agricultural. Let every culture flourish in its own right on its own terms. Every plant growing in the wild, every creature crawling the earth, flying above or swimming beneath it, may have its own inner 'reasons' for being there, its hidden teleological and ecological purposes, or a value in the overall scheme of nature, unknown to human beings. The same may be true of every human culture.

[But] I am a moral universalist. I believe in the absolute moral equality of all human beings, no matter their particularising and individuating characteristics, no matter their situation or condition in life, no matter what culture they belong to. I do not believe in arbitrary double standards in morality, in spite of not knowing of any extant moral theory that would be universally accepted without question or one that would explain away, to everybody's satisfaction, divergence of moral opinion. Divergence of moral opinion, whether *inter* or *intra* societies and cultures, moreover, seems to me to be connected with human epistemological limitations and intellectual weaknesses and with human egoism and self-centredness. In other words, I do not think that we need to be searching for the reasons for moral divergence within morality itself. There is nothing wrong with morality; but there is something wrong with human beings, with human epistemological capacities and capabilities, with prejudice and human perception, with human feelings and desires, with human motivations, emotions and ambitions. The litmus test of authentic moral judgements, for me, is *universalisability*. I believe that every genuinely valid and uncontaminated particular moral judgement is universalisable, although not every such judgement is necessarily absolutely exceptionless. To assume absolute exceptionlessness for any particular moral judgement is to presume a degree of epistemological comprehensiveness not possible with human knowledge.

### *A dancing masquerade*

Morality may be compared to a dancing masquerade – to borrow an image popularised by the famous African novelist, Chinua

Achebe.<sup>2</sup> There is a single dancing masquerade but different people have slightly different views of it, depending on where each person is positioned, and no one who remains sitting or even standing on the same spot can have a really good and adequate view of it. It is necessary to move around a bit, to change your spectacle position from time to time, to have anything like a near-adequate view of a dancing masquerade. But no matter how hard you try, no one can, from a single chosen position, view the masquerade fully, completely and adequately, because the masquerade itself is not static but dancing all the time. An attempt at a holistic view of reality, culture or morality comes up against an insurmountable egocentric predicament. But, while it would be too much to hope to banish all ambiguity and uncertainty from the realm of moral reflection and discourse, it nevertheless seems possible to be able to narrow the gap of moral divergence through disinterested reflective deliberation, such as, I presume, we are having here, as opposed to engaging in 'winning strategies in the moral language game.'

Such disinterested reflective deliberation can start from non-controversial ethical principles such as the so-called *golden rule* (do unto others as you would have them do unto you) from which the venerable German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, derived his famous doctrine of the categorical imperative, which can be simply stated as '*have a good will*' or the Hippocratic *primum non nocere* (above all, do no harm) – the first cardinal tenet of medicine and non-iatrogenic medical practice.<sup>3</sup> On these two principles, which are, in fact, one single principle stated in two different ways (positively and negatively), any valid system of morality can be erected and no genuine system of morality can dispense with or reject them. The principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, autonomy and justice, which have been much discussed in the Western world as the foundational pillars of bioethics, are directly derivable from this single double-sided principle. In my natal language, *Lamnso*, it is captured in the single idea of *shiliw she jung shi* (literally, a good heart). Human beings may never become perfect or infallible, but human beings can progressively and continuously become more rational and more morally sensitive, because they are infinitely perfectible.

<sup>2</sup> See: Ezenwa-Ohaeto. 1997. *Chinua Achebe: A Biography*. Oxford/Bloomington & Indianapolis. James Currey/Indiana University Press: 269.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia A. Sharpe & Alan I. Faden. 1998. *Medical Harm: Historical, Conceptual, and Ethical Dimensions of Iatrogenic Illness*. Cambridge, UK. Cambridge University Press: 81.

*The quest for certainty*

The *quest for certainty* has played a very important part in the intellectual and philosophical history of the Western world. But since Rene Descartes, the generally acknowledged 'father of modern Western philosophy', perennial preoccupation with certainty had transformed into a veritable obsession. This obsession, when combined with science and technological progress, with power and the will to dominate, with commerce and the profit motive, like an efficient broom, sweeps everything out of its way, including what we may call 'counter-knowledge' (any knowledge contrary to the dominant paradigm), which I consider to be extremely important in the human context. The obsession with certainty, and the illusion that may be induced of having achieved it in many domains of human concern, is what has given the Western world its spirit of epistemological over-confidence, an *over-sabi* bordering on arrogance, its evangelical and proselytising impulse, its high sense of self-righteousness, that could easily result in heedless recklessness at the level of practice. In the 'Federation of World Cultures',<sup>4</sup> the Western world is blessed with a big loud voice, sturdy muscles, has effective monopoly over the discourse in virtually all domains of human concern, and ample skills and facilities for pushing its point of view, thanks to canvassing and promotion, persuasion and lobbying, bullying and coercion. This descriptive assessment, if it has a modicum of validity, calls for great moral circumspection and conscience examination; however, let me not start sounding like an evangelist preacher.

*Switching cultural lenses*

I completely agree with Susan Sherwin<sup>5</sup> when she urges that we should consider conflicting moral theories and differing theoretical perspectives as alternative 'frameworks' or 'templates' through which we attempt to perceive and evaluate problems, through which we may gain complementary and overlapping but necessarily partial perspectives, but certainly not definitive exhaustive truths. We can consider cultures in the same light. Cultures appear to me like overlapping concentric circles, the tiniest of which delimits the smallest community that any particular

<sup>4</sup> Ali Mazrui. 1976. *A World Federation of Cultures*. New York. The Free Press.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Sherwin. Foundations, Frameworks, Lenses: The Role of Theories in Bioethics. *Bioethics* 1999; 13: 202–203.

individual considers himself/herself to belong to, and the widest of which designates human culture in general.<sup>6</sup> The concentric circles of culture are like tinted spectacles through which we view reality, which we thus necessarily perceive as if 'through a glass darkly.' Sherwin<sup>7</sup> also uses the image of 'lenses', which can be readily switched or even layered on top of one another to get a different 'view' of things. I believe that the attempt to 'change', 'switch' or 'superimpose' cultural 'lenses' is very enriching for the individual and salutary for human culture in general. Western culture, because of its sheer material success and global dominance, its proselytising character and evangelical impulse, its spirit of self-righteous justificationism, admittedly and understandably has greater inertia in attempting such thought experiments.

But let me, for a brief moment, attempt to lend you one such cultural 'lens', by proposing one such thought experiment, for which I apologise in advance should it shock rather than edify you. If we compare Western Christianity with African Traditional Religion, alias Paganism, alias Heathenism, it appears evident that the former, on account of being a well organised and systematised religion, based on a 'revelation' and 'sacred' scripture, with a highly well-trained clergy and preachers, with monumental places of worship and millions of adherents all over the world, is superior to the latter. Paganism is not a revealed religion, it is not an organised religion with a coherent and systematic body of doctrines, it has no divine founder, no sacred scriptures, no prophets or preachers, no clergy, and no churches. Now, as a Westerner and, perhaps, a faithful adherent of one of the great theistic Western religions, has it ever occurred to you that African Traditional Religion, alias Paganism, might be, in spite of the two contrastive sets of credentials above, *morally* superior to, say, Christianity or Islam?

I am privileged to have been born and to have grown up within a framework in which I experienced both Paganism and Christianity by equal measures. As a member of both religions, the following facts have often occurred to me: my membership of both religions is usually seriously contested only by fellow Christians, who are fiercely intolerant of the suggestion that any

<sup>6</sup> Godfrey B. Tangwa. African Philosophy: Appraisal of a Recurrent Problematic. Part 2: What is African Philosophy and who is an African Philosopher? *Cogito* 1992; Winter: 142-143.

<sup>7</sup> Sherwin, *op. cit.* note 5, p. 204.

other religion could be 'true'; fellow Pagans see nothing wrong in my dual-membership. There are no 'faithful' in Paganism, since there are no dogmas or a decalogue of dos and do-nots to be faithful to, thereby giving the Paganian the greatest latitude of freedom – the indispensable condition of genuine morality – including the freedom of non-profession of membership, non-attendance of rituals and prayers, and open dalliance or association with 'rival' religions. When the Pagan priest prays, he prays for everybody, present or absent; he prays for universal peace, harmony and prosperity, for fecundity and health for humans, animals and plants. This being the case, and because 'taking a collection' is never part of the prayers, those for whose benefit he prays need not be present, either in body or in spirit. In praying, say, in the face of a human calamity or other distressing happening, the Pagan priest is sometimes heard seriously questioning God, severely chastising and reprimanding the departed ancestors, carefully probing his own conscience for moral infringements willingly or unwittingly committed.

By contrast, Christians in prayer characteristically heap incredible flatteries on God, emphasise their own privileged situation as specially 'chosen' or 'saved', as against 'unrepentant sinners' and the 'eternally damned' and generally pretend a level of personal piety, humility and meekness that is scarcely humanly achievable. Reflecting on all these and many other peculiarities of the two religions, the suggestion that Paganism might, on account of its non-doctrinaire, non-dogmatic, non-proselytising, non-discriminatory, non-commercial, non-property acquisition/ownership status, be morally superior to Christianity, in spite of its weakness, non-visibility and lack of influence, has often occurred to me. But I am not out to convert anyone to Paganism. With Paganism, it is certainly possible to achieve salvation outside of Paganism. It has never occurred to any Pagan to think that '*extra Paganismus nulla salus.*' Nevertheless, African converts to Christianity and Islam, who frequently fail to find a formula for peaceful coexistence (witness the persistent fratricidal religious wars in, say, Nigeria) need to be reminded that Paganism is the authentic religion of their forebears, even if some people look on it with condescending disdain.

### *Equality of cultures*

No single human culture is privileged with a holistic and comprehensive view of reality. Every culture selects from the

overwhelming experience of being human only certain salient particulars<sup>8</sup> according to its contingent situation and motivating agenda of imperatives. There is no culture that possesses the monopoly on disinterested objective thinking, while the others are left with, at best, only the ability to narrate their cultural opinions, prejudices, biases and their folkloric tribal myths and legends. For these reasons, no particular culture, in itself, is superior or inferior to any other, just as no particular individual human being, *qua* human, is superior or inferior to any other, although that is not to say that some may not be better off in some respects than others. Racists and other supremacists cannot, of course, be expected to applaud this argument and it may be difficult for even non-racists and non-supremacists, especially those wearing the coloured spectacles of very dominant or predatory cultures, to fully appreciate or be convinced by it. But there is no human culture that, if approached with an unprejudiced open mind, without any ulterior motives, would not reveal something positively fascinating and rewarding about itself.

There is a European by the name of Ulli Beier, presently living, I believe, in Australia, who approached an African culture – that of the Yoruba of Nigeria – in such an open-minded and unprejudiced manner and ‘got a whole life from it’, got fascinated to the extent of considering it superior to his own natal culture in its radiant luminosity and expansiveness.<sup>9</sup> While in Bayreuth, Germany, between 1995 and 1996, on a fellowship of the *Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung*, I, like many other Africans in Bayreuth, used to spend a lot of time with Ulli Beier and his wife, Georgina (their home at *Iwalewa Haus* served as a sort of sanctuary for homesick Africans in Germany), and it was very evident that they had a deep and authentic appreciation of African culture that some Africans themselves do not even seem to have.

The authenticity of Beier’s appreciation of African (Yoruba) culture stems from the fact that he did not go to Africa, in the first place, with the attitude of the colonialist, the exploiter, the missionary or the researcher. His main reason for going to Africa was to get away from Europe and the traumas of the Second World War. I have come across few non-Africans who, like Ulli Beier, understand so thoroughly the downward trajectory that African cultures and socio-economic systems have taken in the last few

<sup>8</sup> Michael Novak. 1970. *The Experience of Nothingness*. New York. Harper and Row: 16.

<sup>9</sup> See: Godfrey B. Tangwa. Bioethics: An African Perspective. *Bioethics* 1996; 10: 198 (footnote).

decades or who exude such genuine distress over this state of affairs. If some colonialists, missionaries and anthropologists (and some there certainly are) can be bracketed with the likes of Ulli Beier, it is only to the extent that they have been able to transcend the limitations and impediments imposed by their own initial intentions, attitudes and prejudices. Within the domain of culture, the guiding principle should be that captured in the injunction ‘*When in Rome do as the Romans do.*’ But, of course, if you are in Rome as a colonial master, then you would not want to do as the Romans do but rather to get the Romans to do as you do or want.

### SOME TOPICAL EXAMPLES

Let me now briefly try to anchor some of these generalities on a few concrete topical examples. Recently, some of the most widely and hotly debated issues in Western bioethics, with an intercultural dimension, have been so-called Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and placebo-controlled drug trials.<sup>10</sup> In mentioning these issues here, I am not so much trying to join the ethical debate on these particular issues as attempting to draw attention to what I consider to be the possible egocentric limitations and conditions, the cultural prejudices and biases, that have led to the debate and which may have made the debate on each issue seem to be a more serious and more irresolvable controversy than might otherwise be the case. I can best put my point in the proverb that ‘*those who cherish eating turkey may not be aware that, in all essentials, it is no different from chicken.*’ Or, if you prefer a more familiar figure of speech, ‘*the grass across your own fence always appears quite different from that within the fence*’, especially if your fence is a concrete wall. (In my village we often build our fences with *kwarakwara* – made from the soft but tenacious and pliable inner stuff of the raffia bamboo – because, while *kwarakwara* is more resistant than, say, grass mat, it is flexible enough to permit passage, if you really want to insist. African (Nso’) culture, by comparison to other cultures, could figuratively be termed a *kwarakwara* culture, where the others are more or less *cast iron* cultures.)

I don’t know whether or not it is ethically correct to use placebos in clinical drug trials. I have not yet given enough thought to the issue, although, in general, I would tend towards the opinion

<sup>10</sup> See: *Bioethics* 1998; 12. See also: Sandra D. Lane & Robert A. Rubinstein. Judging the Other: Responding to Traditional Female Genital Surgeries. *Hastings Report* 1996; 26: 31–40.

that it is unethical and unnecessary to seek to gain any type of knowledge by exploiting other human beings, with or without their informed consent. But, if any placebo-controlled experiment is correctly considered unethical in the USA, then it cannot be ethically right in Africa or anywhere else, or, if indeed it is ethically right in Africa or anywhere else, then it could not have been ethically wrong in the USA or anywhere else. To argue that the rightness or wrongness of such a case depends on 'context-sensitivity', involving socio-cultural, economic and political conditions, is clearly to abandon the moral rationale of universalisability, to introduce intolerable relativism into morality, to subject morality to prudential conditions/calculations and to try to use sophistry and equivocation in the service of pragmatic ends and objectives. To argue that a drug trial which cannot be carried out in the Western/first/developed world *on ethical grounds* can be carried out in Africa or any other part of the so-called third/underdeveloped world, on the grounds that those on whom the tests are carried out are those facing epidemic scale of infections, are too poor to buy expensive drugs and stand to benefit the most from the result of such trials, is really to abandon all moral sensitivity. It is a remarkable fact that such a pseudo-moral argument is coming from people within a culture whose moral foundations and underpinnings include the idea of the son of God himself voluntarily assuming human form and altruistically accepting an ignominious death on the cross for the salvation of the whole world.

As for female circumcision, which in the Western world has been given the value-laden and morally condemnatory name 'female genital mutilation' (FGM), it certainly is a cultural practice whose abolition should be encouraged in all appropriate ways. However, the attitude of Western campaigners against female circumcision, while it may not be devoid of altruism, is clearly mainly motivated by cultural bias for the following reasons, *inter alia*: (1) Female circumcision is rightly bracketable with male circumcision, but this is not usually done, probably because important segments of Western society practice the latter rather than the former, which is unheard of within Western culture. It should be noted that female circumcision is of many types and degrees of severity as a surgery, some of which are less and others more drastic than male circumcision. (2) Both male and female circumcision share close affinity with some other practices which are prevalent and, more or less, popular within Western culture, such as cosmetic or plastic surgeries, body-piercing, tattooing etc., over which anti-FGM campaigners are usually completely silent.

(3) There is no strictly moral argument against female circumcision, alias FGM, which would not be equally applicable to male circumcision and cosmetic plastic surgery etc.

I am the author of one such attempted argument,<sup>11</sup> the gist of which I can briefly summarise here as follows: except for indisputably curative therapeutic reasons, circumcision (male and female), and other types of body modification surgeries, is clearly ethically wrong, if carried out without the explicit solicitation and fully mature and well-informed consent of the person on whom it is performed, because it violates bodily integrity, autonomy and self-determination. On no account, therefore, should any of these surgeries be carried out on an infant, child or other morally incompetent human being, for non-therapeutic reasons.

## BIOTECHNOLOGY

In the light of the foregoing, it is possible also to take a general but clear position on some contemporary debates related to bioethics and biotechnology. One of the central issues debated during the annual conference of the Canadian Bioethics Society, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 28–31 October 1999, was the question of whether bioethics can be local while biotechnology is evidently global.

Bioethics cannot be a local affair, or, maybe, one should say *can but should not* be local. The mark of a genuine ethical judgement is its universalisability and its appearance of being spatially and timelessly valid. An ethical system that is exclusive or discriminatory in any other way, is, *ipso facto*, morally flawed. As for biotechnology, it is, in fact, not global and is free to be as local as it wants to be. In general, there is nothing wrong with technology, as such. In itself, it is morally neutral, neither right nor wrong. It is an important non-moral value, connected with human ingenuity and achievements. But, the *uses* to which any technology is put, is a moral issue. For example, developing, let's say, an infectious contraceptive is a technological affair, it is a local and localisable affair, even a personal/individual affair (check the patent owner), but the 'exploding population' amongst which such a putative contraceptive is released or unleashed, is an ethical matter.

<sup>11</sup> Godfrey B. Tangwa. 1999. Circumcision: An African Point of View. In *Male and Female Circumcision: Medical, Legal, and Ethical Considerations in Pediatric Practice*. G.C. Denniston, F.M. Hodges & M.F. Milos, eds. New York/ Boston/ Dordrecht/ London/ Moscow. Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers: 183–193.

Again, isolating, say, the Ebola virus, is a biotechnological affair, a local affair, which the locality can even leave to its scientists and technologists, its experts and specialists, and their professional competence and consciences. But, attempting to manufacture a biological weapon out of the Ebola virus, is an ethical matter, a global affair of no mean magnitude, whose rightness or wrongness requires no particular expertise to determine; while using such a weapon anywhere, is an even more serious global ethical issue.

So, given the potential dangers of biotechnology, which are now beginning to be placed side by side with its purported benefits, it may be advisable for a brief moratorium to be placed on certain forms of it while the ethics of their usage are discussed or, at least, for such technologies to be restricted to their places of birth and localities, so that innocent people in other places, who have never developed and never benefited from biotechnology may not run the risks of bearing the brunt of its possible unethical uses or even accidental unintended failures.

## CONCLUSION

The above musings may seem too general and too diffuse to have any practical relevance in an era of fierce bioethical debates and controversies on specific issues. But it appears to me that 'the devil' is not so much in the details as in some general considerations, assumptions and presumptions that are liable to be taken completely for granted. It may be quite hard, for instance, for many contemporary bioethicists to appreciate the fact that the general substitution of the terms 'consumer' and 'provider' for 'patient' and 'doctor', respectively, in Western discourse is liable to be, more or less, profoundly shocking to some people of non-Western cultures for reasons that are fundamentally relevant to some of the debates.

We are in the era of biotechnology. Nowadays we hear increasing talk, *inter alia*, about the sale of eggs. One of the provocative questions in the general theme of the 1999 annual conference of the Canadian Bioethics Society was: 'Who decides if eggs are for sale?' In Ndenshwai-Shisong, where I was born and where I grew up, everybody would confidently answer: 'The owner of the hen!' Until very recently, everyone in my natal village knew not only the compound to which every cock and every hen belonged, but also the actual owner of each one of them. And no matter where a hen chose to lay her egg, it would always be taken to the owner, who then decided to sell it, donate it to the Catholic priests or

Reverend sisters across the river, or fry it for the children playing in the courtyard. But these are not the eggs whose sale is in question here. By some stretch of language and the imagination, we are here talking about human ova! God forbid! The corruptive influence of commerce and the profit motive should not be allowed to invade all facets of human life. In reproduction, humans are privileged to share in one of God's/Nature's highest prerogatives. This function, and allied processes, is so far beyond a price that it should be kept simple and clean and sacred, and protected from the well-known dangers connected with speculative trading and commerce.

Human scientific and technological knowledge has advanced to the point where scientists and technologists are able to play real games with God/Nature, manipulating the building blocks of living things at will. It is a dangerous game, its purported anticipated benefits notwithstanding, in which they are being encouraged, aided and abated, supported and funded by powerful industries and corporations, for motives of profit. Before the combined might of science, technology and international corporate commerce, ordinary people of all cultures, all localities, all over the world, are quite helpless and have only their right of token protest and boycott as a defensive weapon.

The pharmaceutical industry and its global network have put drugs and health out of the reach of ordinary poor people the world over. They are in an unholy alliance with the biotechnologists and big multinational corporations, trying to take monopolistic control of everything in the world. That is why drugs are becoming ever so scarce and unaffordable, in spite of being abundantly available, to the extent that so many people are dying daily from an upsurge of known and unknown diseases. In Ndzenshwai-Shisong, when I was growing up scarcely four decades ago, there were no pharmacies, but no sick person ever went without medicine or treatment. Even enhancing drugs were freely available. The elders would quietly pass around among themselves their own version of, say, *viagra*, in the same manner they passed around snuff and kolanuts, without letting the non-elders into their secrets. I witnessed my very first death from a cause other than old age when I was already well into my teens. Today, in Shisong, it would be hard to find an infant who has never seen a corpse.

Commerce and the maximisation of profit motive constitute, in my well-considered view, the greatest antidote to moral sensibility and sensitivity, generally, and to moral deliberation, discussion and practice (domestic and cross-cultural), particularly. I will,

however, not attempt to prove this conclusion, knowing full well what experts, in the art of disproof, some people are.

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### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Ruth Landau of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and Dr. Virginia A. Sharpe of the Hastings Center, Garrison, New York, for their useful critical comments on an earlier draft of this paper.