

# Reason and Culture: Debating the Foundations of Morals in a Pluralist World

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*'Mila ndiyo misingi ya utu'* [culture is the foundation of being human]  
*'Asiyekua na mila ni mtumwa'* [only a slave gets deprived of her own culture]

(Kiswahili sayings)

Recently I listened to an interesting dinner-table debate between my teenage children about an issue that, to my mind, clearly raised questions closely related to the theme of encounter of rationalities. In a conversation about indigenous Kenyan hair-styles, my son had wanted to know why the Maasai 'made' their women folk shave their heads bald while young men stylishly braided their hair into what has become a popular and fashionable African hairstyle, not for men, but for women. My daughter, who is quite a gifted debater, responded that it was just tradition, and tradition never answers to anyone's 'why' question, especially when the questioner is an insider who is expected to just practice the norm. My son, in obviously frustrated wonder, then sought to know whether they could ever answer the question if it were asked by an outsider (of the tradition) like himself, to which his sister responded: 'what makes you ask? I guess every tradition sets its own ways.' The boy: 'why can't everyone be left free to do what they feel they like at different times, just like I dress differently for different occasions?' The girl: 'You see, you are always reading and shifting your dressing according to the norms you want to conform to. You may not be aware, but you change from one set of norms to another, one when you are at College, and the other when you come home, can't you see?' The rest of us sat there, choking with the temptation to join in, and suffering the frustration of being denied the chance. I in particular struggled to stay neutral, but I succeeded not only by not joining in, but also by not revealing that I was working on this paper, all the while thinking to myself: 'this is all about the encounter of rationalities, and the arguments' turns, back and forth, are all about the relative rationality of ends'. In many respects, and to my amazement, my daughter and son got immersed in debating the merits of

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DOI: 10.1177/0392192104044271

the idea of autonomous reason. My amazement was not only about the depth of the cosmopolitan multiculturalism that these teenagers revealed in their debate, it also was about the revealed transient nature of the communities from which people source the points of view on the basis of which they question the rationality of opposing points of view. The topic of encounter of rationalities seemed, at least in the context of this dinnertime debate by teenagers, to be such a natural occurrence to anyone who consciously moves between different social and cultural locations. In this paper, I apply and expand the theoretical concerns raised by the two young people to the assessment of Kant's culture-free moral principles against a communitarian view of the resources of reason.

Questions of ethical universalism or cultural prescription of ethical theory address matters at the heart of the nature of the relationship between universal moral principles and practical moral reasoning, and bring to the moral domain the kind of question of (in)commensurability once suggested by Thomas Kuhn in his philosophy of science. Exponents of value commensurability, whom I loosely call cosmopolitan ethicists, uphold the view or thesis that it is possible to compare the considerations bearing on choices involving value, goods, ends or actions worth doing. Their principle states that all human beings, everywhere in the world, have the same moral stature, and that individual human beings have greater moral importance than human associations. Some of the implications of such principles of cosmopolitan ethics are that people have moral claims on and obligation toward each other across national and cultural boundaries. As is quickly evident, cosmopolitan ethics argues that claims to national, cultural, religious, ethnic or any other restrictive claim of belonging, when made in such a way that it puts the value of such bounded identity before that of universal human worth, falls short of the ideal expectations for the fundamental rights of the individual. In the view of cosmopolitan ethicists, multiculturalism amounts to endorsing the sufferings inflicted upon millions of people in the world by those who claim to defend their cultures. By contrast, their position recognizes universal human rights as superior to any claims of sovereignty, whether they are cultural or political. In a weak sense, adherents of cosmopolitan ethics argue that because loyalty to specific faiths, traditions, or nationalities is likely to foster intolerance for those who are different, such loyalties and affiliations should be discouraged or scrapped altogether, and that morality should be based on nothing less than the binding dictates of reason *à la* Kant. Supposedly, Kant had no culture, and the moral rules he talked about were only discovered, not made, by him. In a strong sense, cosmopolitan ethics is employed to endorse unimpeded emigration and immigration, the formation and deployment of human rights enforcement mechanisms and the global redistribution of economic resources. Thus, not only does the position endorse the work of humanitarian organizations, it claims that such work is not charity but rather should be regarded as an obligation. In his posthumously published work, *Practical Philosophy: In Search of an Ethical Minimum* (1997), the Kenyan philosopher Odera Oruka argued that wealth accruing from natural resources was the right of all humans, as these resources belonged to no person or groups of persons or nations in particular. Furthermore, the cosmopolitan ethical position endorses the idea of international interventions by able nations to stop repressive and oppressive regimes abroad because, in its view, national sovereignties are not

inviolable. In this paper I argue both in support of the general cosmopolitan ethical thesis and in rejection of the untempered Kantian principle from which it is partly derived, that is, the belief, propounded by Kant's defense of the autonomy of reason, that a single, universal moral order exists which is accessible to the unaided reason of all human beings, and is composed of principles, duties and obligations to which all human beings are subject.

If we can agree on the two claims I have made above – that is, that there is an affinity between the call for a universal ethics and the cosmopolitan argument, and that the way I frame the cosmopolitan argument above is fair and correct although simple – then there may be pertinent questions to deal with as we cogitate over both the ends of cosmopolitan ethics and the nature of the resources on which it is built. My aim in this paper is to probe the relationship between the ideal of universal values and the reality of their specific cultural resources.

There is no doubt that the cosmopolitan goal is noble, and its argument premised on a very pertinent observation: that privileging a specific value, such as a cultural or religious belief or practice, or a political one like patriotism, makes it hard for anyone who does so to engage in fair and impersonal moral judgements of others; that they are unlikely to accord those who do not belong or share their value(s) fair treatment. Indeed, catastrophic events of various forms of ethnic and religious clashes in the world over just the past decade, child labor exploitations and other forms of injustice, all justify these concerns, as does the long list from past history which is replete with records of similar episodes of human weaknesses. Their impact is to instill a fear of recurrence, and a desire to forestall it. But that is hardly a problem, since rationally safe paths to human conduct are often paved out of fear. Appeals to proaction usually appear to suggest that in those situations which may require intervention, preventive actions are morally superior to corrective ones.<sup>1</sup> What is problematic about the cosmopolitan position is the argument that moral laws require all human beings to regard their particular identities as insignificant. This argument, again, could be framed as follows: that because those who regard their belonging to specific cultural or political groupings as primary to what they have in common with other people, they are likely to discriminate against outsiders and probably to treat them unfairly; such considerations of identity are therefore wrong and should be abandoned in favor of universal humanity which is the basis of impersonal moral reason. In the tradition of Kant, cosmopolitan ethics considers impersonal moral reason to be ultimately superior to any other source of moral knowledge and judgement. Like their predecessors,<sup>2</sup> recent defenders of cosmopolitan ethics express hope in a just and integrated world, and they marshal Kant in defense of that thesis.

The fears and examples cited by the cosmopolitan argument suggest one other thing, but which it does not take seriously into consideration: that ethics pertains to the practical world, as was recognized long ago by Aristotle. In the practical world moral considerations arise out of life situations in which straight and impersonal moral judgements are only a variety of moral situations. Some of the situations frequently cited in defense of cosmopolitan morality present real moral dilemmas. For instance, a person may be unable to uphold both the moral principle against unjust killing and also a moral duty to defend her family from unjust and prevent-

able harm. In such a situation the person would have really conflicting moral obligations, the concurrence of which create for her a real moral dilemma because she cannot fulfill both. Let us suppose there is an ethnic conflict, and that *p*, a member of one of the groups involved, is commanded by the leaders of her ethnic group to take her machete and finish off her friendly neighbors who belong to an ethnic group targeted by her own, and that the penalty for disobeying the order will be death for her and her own family. But, the head of the targeted family, aware of the likely action of their otherwise friendly neighbors, also prepares to defend her own family. How should they act? Or, put another way, what will constitute rational action for either of them? Given that contestation is about the terrain of rationality, can there be a non-controversial solution to this dilemma, especially since what might be considered rational by one is unlikely to be shared by the other? How they should actually act cannot be morally judged in advance, even if compassion and pre-existing friendship and good neighborliness should make them arrive at a conclusion which is concordant with what would have resulted or could also result from Kant's law. A situation like this – and many of them have played themselves out in different parts of the world recently – can indeed put two or more people into direct confrontation over incompatible recommendations of moral obligations.

The true function of reason, Kant argues, 'must be to produce a will which is not merely good as a means to some other end, but is good in itself'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, for Kant, doing our *duty*, following the demands of reason and doing as we *ought*, doing what is *right*, stands in direct opposition to the directions of desire or feelings, like compassion or pity, or what pleases us, and to the demands of our sensuous nature generally. Thus, to have *moral worth*, our actions must be the direct function of our sense of *duty* with regard to the act. Inclination alone is not enough to bestow moral worth on our actions, not even when the inclination is to do our duty. Only the motive of duty bestows moral worth on an action. Moral worth has no specific object, like 'I need to be good to my neighbor because she is innocent and is my friend'; rather, it depends, according to Kant, 'merely on the principle of volition according to which, without regard to any objects of the faculty of desire, the action has been done'.<sup>4</sup> It is not the purpose or goal of the action, but the *principle* or *maxim*, on the basis of which the action is performed, that bestows moral worth on an action. For Kant, then, reason finds fulfillment within itself; it becomes the only bearer of our identity, our responsibility, our cognitive competence and capacity for moral choice. As inquirers and moral agents, we had to think of ourselves as standing outside nature (where real situations influence our deliberation of the moral ends of our actions). Certainly Kant had not been confronted with and did not envision situations like those which arise out of ethnic conflict.

How, then, should people lay the ground for moral conduct? Because moral judgements are driven by a variety of factors pertaining to conditions at hand, most of the time each moral agent will rely on their best judgement, taking into consideration all the relevant factors one encounters. This has been called moral perception in moral theory, or situational ethics as it was called in olden days. Epistemologically, moral perception requires that one develops an accurate assessment of the moral status of a situation. At the practical level, moral perception requires that one commits to acting according to their accurate perception of the moral demand in

every case rather than acting on the impulse of prejudice or from indulgence in mere culture understood as a set of ideas that is contingent and bound to specific communities and periods. It is not enough to have an accurate moral perception and not be willing to act in accordance with such perception. I certainly do not intend to extend my view of moral perception to cover the brand of liberalism widely in vogue, and which anchors democratic integrity in ethical activism. The latter, sometimes referred to as 'strong political morality', is a sub-brand of cosmopolitanism. Those who espouse it from some specific points of view argue that only individuals are crucial to the sustenance of a truly democratic world, and that cultures do not matter any more. But there are liberals in Africa too, and often they are those who may not be committed to principles identical with those of western liberals. African liberals may not support the subservient role of the individual within traditional settings, but they may still appreciate the role of community, its everyday language and social interactions as the origin of moral rules and discourse. From this communitarian perspective, rules of moral discourse emerge from interactive situations, an assumption that differs markedly from, say, Kant's duty-driven theory and from those of most western liberals who follow in his tradition. Kant, as do most of the contractarian liberals before and after him, emphasizes the bargaining rationale of socially detached individuals who aim not so much at consensus but at accommodation. Each person acts rationally to best further her interests in a competitive environment. In the original position, each participant elbows and pushes for the best position from which to realize her limited but personal interests. To ensure agreement on basic moral and political principles, the Kantian model strips them of personal knowledge, and participants remain atomized and isolated actors. The process of moral inquiry for the enlightened individual is monological and introspective, a socially sterile procedure conducted largely in private. In other words, rules rather than social consequences guide moral action and judgement. The lead to such a position has been and remains a strong one among philosophers who claim that for any end (of moral action) to be valid, that is, to be rational, it must be one endorsed by the rationality of all agents. According to Henry S. Richardson, such an approach is 'working to establish that we can deliberate rationally about ends gets hitched to trying to say in advance what the outcome of that deliberation will be for all rational agents – namely to endorse a particular conception of the ultimate end favored by the philosopher'.<sup>5</sup> According to Richardson (1994: 24), the universalist's argument often goes like this: 'We can deliberate rationally about ends because look: rationality endorses X as the ultimate end valid for all agents'. It needs to be made clear that the problem here, as Richardson sees it too, is not that ends cannot be rationally attained. The problem, it turns out, is with 'endorsement by all' as the criterion of rationality in the deliberation about ends. In other words, the claim that people can deliberate rationally about ends need not be confused with the claim that there are objective ends valid for all agents, let alone to impose these.

But I maintain that communities matter, and that deliberative processes about ends are made within relational or communitarian contexts by people who already are rational by virtue of their social being. In support of this view, communitarians argue,<sup>6</sup> it is difficult to remove individuals from their social environment. African theologians argued that while the metaphysical links that tied individuals to the

trunks and branches of their ancestral trees worked similarly for all individuals in all societies, the social and moral sources for constructing individual identity are as rich as the society in which one lives. The individuals' participation in this network of affective performance through which their belonging is defined often reinforces their ethnic, religious, or political affiliations. Each of these spheres has its own *Lebenswelt* characterized by patterns of interaction, norms, values, and attitudes.<sup>7</sup> To be sure, we all are aware of these elements of the social location of individuals, but moral philosophers regard these dynamics to be so tainting on the individual that they disable her from drawing responsible and objective moral principles. They argue that in social settings (as described by communitarians) individuals' knowledge of what is right is all too often influenced by self-interest and parochial norms and loyalties, and that, at the very least, the plethora of contingent values and norms that impinge on one's everyday life, and the inability to rise above these local norms and values make it impossible to arrive at any consensus on universally valid norms either in theory or in fact. Yet this fear is true only to the extent that it is predicated on the absolute autonomy of the individual working as an irreducible metaphysical state. Assuming that social relations were indeed metaphysically determinable, it would be hard, and almost impossible, to imagine a situation where an individual, bred and constituted in the awareness of their autonomy, would ever yield such make-up. But the social world is hardly a metaphysical one. It is one that is systematically inculcated through a sustained combination of method and content to yield general desired results.

Let us compare two possible scenarios, only imaginarily incompatible, by which a metaphysics of self can become a means or a hindrance to moral pluralism. If, on the one hand, one were brought up to learn that the good of others comes second after one's own, such a person learns to emphasize self and to cultivate a concept of self that rises above others, one that can indeed predicate existence, of self and in general, on the very attributes observable of the self in isolation from the rest of the world. And if this were to be doubted, then its own concretization would have to be built on something much superior not just to the doubting self, but to all similar selves anywhere. But if, on the other hand, one were brought up through a system that made them put others on a par with self, making the social world not one of atomic individuals but of interdependent individuals, it perhaps would not be impossible for them to regard, say, general communication as a means for the emergence of self, the thinking self, and to value consensus as a special ingredient of communication, that is as a practical and valuable means by which to arrive at moral knowledge. In the first-case scenario, consensus would be hard to attain, although not impossible unless we imagined the nature of humans in a stone-like fashion. When such individualism is practiced over a long time, especially with the support and fortification of major social and political institutions of society, the attitudes formed as a result of it sink their roots so deep it resembles a metaphysical attribute rather than a social preference. For this socio-cultural framework or model, the moral value of ends ultimately depends on whether it favors or injures the interests (such as autonomy and freedom) of the individual. Generosity and other altruistic virtues may be encouraged, but they remain goods that are practicable only in lesser proportion to the interests of the individual.<sup>8</sup>

In the second scenario, the sociality of the individual can easily become an irreducible quasi-metaphysical attribute. Either scenario idealizes its basic premises (about the primacy of the individual or the collective, respectively) by making them the axioms for judging cognitive and moral performance. Thus, the liberal stand suggested by the proponents of cosmopolitan ethics appears to contrast sharply with communitarian ethics with respect to the rational path to individual worth and growth.

One may now ask whether what the world needs as a foundation for a more humane cosmopolitan community is indeed a system of universal ethics – in which the ultimate ends are identical for all rational agents – and not a greater tolerance among the world's communities. In other words, are liberal values incompatible with those of communitarianism?<sup>9</sup> And can we love our communities, of whatever kind, while also supporting the universal application of human rights? The latter two questions should address the nature of the content and expression of these universal ethical codes: how shall we draw the correlation between the universality of conceptual grids of human values and the particularisms of the diverse and practical worlds of cultural and political regimes?

Some of the dangers which the above questions expose are captured at least in part by the epigraph at the start of this essay. The sayings were quoted by the late president Julius Nyerere of Tanzania in a speech delivered in Rome in 1978 to the United Nations' World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development. While his reference was specifically to the impact of a purportedly universal concept of development on Africa's rural societies in the practice of agricultural economy, his interrogation of the imbalance in the production and consumption of economic goods can be metaphorically applied to nearly all the domains of designing, processing, producing, distributing and consuming of culture in the much wider sense of the term.<sup>10</sup> In the traditional economic order addressed by Nyerere, raw materials were collected from our backyards, with our collaboration and, from them, finished goods were modeled and produced in the metropolitan industries. They were then brought back to us for consumption, without our participation in their making or selection at the critical times of the process. Hountondji argues that this scenario has been re-played in the area of academic production and consumption, resulting in reducing African researchers to 'junior collaborators' or, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls her, the 'native informant'.<sup>11</sup> Nyerere, and to some measure perhaps Hountondji too, viewed knowledge as capital from which the local community had the rights to reap interests. Interestingly, this position – of knowledge as capital – is markedly different from how Paulo Freire, the famous Brazilian anti-colonial writer and educator, viewed education from the standpoint of the postcolonial script.

But let us get back to the question of value pluralism to which there have been several approaches. Among the notable voices mediating between the universal sphere of principles and the particular domains of practice is Kwasi Wiredu with his theory of communication as the basis of cultural universality. In epistemology and ethics, he argues, communication lifts us from the domain of particulars, as subjects within a species, and also from referents in epistemology, and specific behaviors in morals, to the level of meanings in the epistemic field and of general rules in morality. Wiredu argues that while contingent norms of life, that is, customs, may differ

from place to place or from culture to culture, morality as 'conformity to ideals of right human conduct' remains universal. While epistemic universality is grounded in the presence in all humans of the basic organistic (i.e. a priori-biological) elements which make thinking possible, namely 'reflective perception, abstraction, deduction, and induction',<sup>12</sup> moral universality is built, in addition to the general a priori elements of general reasoning, also on a principle without which decent survival would be unimaginable, namely the 'principle of sympathetic impartiality'.<sup>13</sup> It is clear that although Wiredu considers the recognition of his principle of sympathetic impartiality to be crucial to human survival, for which it resembles Kant's categorical imperative, he does not consider it invariably observable. He also thinks that the subtle difference between the principle of sympathetic impartiality and Kant's categorical imperative is that the latter lacked compassion. 'Let your conduct at all times manifest a due concern for the interests of others' is clearly different from 'Thou shalt tell the truth at all times regardless of the circumstance' because it (concern for others) allows for dialogue and for the evaluation of every moral case. Regardless of how people may philosophically regard the principle (of sympathetic impartiality) as the basis of all morals, he says, 'as a fact of ethical life, it is essential to the harmonization of human interests in society'.<sup>14</sup>

Not only does Wiredu's principle of sympathetic impartiality harmonize human interests in society, it also harmonizes universal moral rules with contingent custom and provides room for dialogue between varying customary systems or specifications of general moral rules. How, then, does the principle prevent such moral limitations like group-specific interests which the cosmopolitans are so weary about? In the cognitive domain Wiredu appeals to a number of basic elements (such as reflective perception, abstraction, deduction, and induction) of correct rational operation. Similarly, in the moral domain, he argues that another set of basic operational elements or values guide universal morality, namely 'truthfulness, honesty, justice, chastity, etc.'<sup>15</sup> Perhaps one could add equality and consensus to the list. The fact that these values are among the most abused is no indication that they guide our everyday moral concerns any less. Wiredu is close to Habermas in this proposal. Like Habermas, he argues that the absence of these values would lead to a kind of contradiction in our moral lives, what Habermas calls 'performative contradiction' or the nonsensical use of (moral) language.<sup>16</sup> Such principles are akin, in their moral role, to the principles of epistemic communication without which there would be a breakdown in communication which could result, for example, from disregard for the principle of non-contradiction. The principles guard against such obstacles to the conduct of human nature. To some extent, then, Wiredu is critically Kantian by, so to speak, grounding Kant's hanging of the metaphysics of morals in human sociality.

Like Habermas, Wiredu relies heavily on cognitive developmental psychology to provide support for his communitarian foundation of values, especially of cognitive and moral capacities of individuals. Basing himself on Akan traditions – Habermas bases himself on Marxist materialism – Wiredu uses cognitive developmental psychology to explain the nature of the mind with awareness, as the Akan traditions indicate, of the symbiotic interaction between the individual and society. He explains individual cognitive development on social processes.<sup>17</sup> An ardent physicalist monist, and avowed universalist, Wiredu argues that the mind is not a sepa-

rate substance from the body but comes into existence as part of the biological constitution which deals with the making of meaning. The latter, a peculiarity of the human species, is the essence of communication. Thus the mind neither precedes nor outlives communication; it develops as one begins to participate in the social world. It is not identical with the body, but it is a function of the body's responsiveness to the essentially social environment peculiar to its organic type. It is easy to see that one cannot put a definite point in time as to when mind begins to develop since we are surrounded by other communicating humans all the time. The mind's capacity, epistemic and moral, grows with time as the individual grows, socially and physically, in their capability to handle the increasingly complex world of communication around them. Communication is thus to be understood in a broader sense than mere 'exchange of information'. As the principles indicate, it comprises all the functions we attribute to the mind such as the ability to reflect and analyze, compare, calculate, remember, or anything else humans do with their 'minds', successfully or otherwise.

For Wiredu, then, moral theory cannot be filled with substantive content, as these are likely to be specific, that is, contingent on specific customary or historical traditions. Rather, armed with the basic elements of moral competence (the desire for truthfulness, honesty, justice, chastity, equality and consensus) we gradually become practically morally competent. He writes: 'Morality has been construed, now as a set of rules, now as a pattern of conduct cognizant of those rules. Sympathetic impartiality represents a fusion of the two conceptions: the impartiality is what the moral rules embody, and the sympathy is what the moral motivation evinces.'<sup>18</sup> At the same time, however, Wiredu is firmly opposed to relativism of any kind or shade. As rational beings, humans not only already possess the capacity to create a social world based on rationally deliberated ends, they already practice and live by those universally rational standards in the large part.

The communitaristic view which we uphold here is one which maintains that because the ideal of rationality in some sense applies to all alike, it lies in the commitment to find working principles which mediate between diverse opinions and views, one that encourages dialogue between people across cultures or whatever their contingent customary positions may be. As two other prominent African scholars have put it, 'accommodating conflicting theoretical views is part of the general process of accommodation necessary for those who are bound to each other as neighbors for life. And this accommodating approach to daily interactions is part of the same range of attitudes that leads to theoretical accommodations.'<sup>19</sup> Such a view avoids the totalitarian tendency and propensity for branding as irrational any behavior that is not to one's taste. It implies, among other things, that, in the moral domain, the specifics of moral performance cannot be determined ahead of the moral situations or historical experience in which competent moral performance is called on. How does this happen? Because morality is a relational category, the moral potentialities we bear enable us to imaginatively project ourselves into the situation of others, making it possible for us to make judgements about others' cases as if they were our own. This makes others, and me, not the rule, the basis of the emergent awareness of duty. In other words, while Kant's Golden Rule was in the right direction, and its continued influence remains a useful source of rights, it is not sufficient. The fundamental reason for this difference lies in Kant's having conceived the

human individual, the subject of liberty, as a self-sufficient absolute, while, for the communitarian view we present here, the individual as liberty exists in the full sense of the word only in the community of finite reasonable beings. In a sense, communitarian morality, unlike Kant's, makes sense of the body, the category by which humans relate to each other in the practical world. It is this idea of the crucial significance of the body which is the basis of Kwasi Wiredu's idea of biology as a unifying factor of our similarity to others in our relations. By focusing on the significance of the body as a relational category, communitarian morality translates spiritual liberty into practical action in the world and thus stresses community as an inter-subjective body in a way that works toward a reconciliation of libertarianism and communitarianism; it (communitarian morality) unifies the subjective and the objective orders in the practice-oriented efforts and converging goals of communities. It then becomes possible, on the basis of the often-cited Akan saying that 'more heads are [always] better than one', to see how the pluralism of community, while taking note of the undeniable bodily autonomy of individuals, need not lead to oppositional relativism. Rather, through their unrelenting focus on and search for the common, that is, for the fine points upon which to commune, individuals commit to a dialogical path, or, as Wiredu (1996: 172-90) calls it, the consensual process. In response to similar sentiments, Judith Butler asks and then tries to answer the following question:

What kind of cultural imposition [would it become] to claim that a Kantian may be found in every culture? For whereas there may be something like a world reference in moral thinking or even a recourse to a version of universality, it would sidestep the specific cultural work to be done to claim that we have in Kant everything we might want to know about how moral reasoning works in various cultural contexts. (Butler, 1996: 52)

Put in another interrogative way, must one renounce specific cultural and community affiliation as a condition to become a moral world citizen, or in order to cultivate humanity? Why would it be insufficient to be morally competent world travelers who are citizens and patriots of specific places?

According to Martha Nussbaum, for example:

The ideal of the 'world citizen' can be understood in two ways, and 'cultivation of humanity' along with it. The sterner, more exigent version is the idea of a citizen whose *primary* loyalty is to human beings the world over, and whose national, local, and varied group loyalties are considered distinctly secondary. Its more relaxed version allows a variety of different views about what our priorities should be but says that, however we order our varied loyalties, we should still be sure that we recognize the worth of human life wherever it occurs and see ourselves as bound by common human abilities and problems to people who lie at a great distance from us. (Nussbaum, 1997: 9)

It is with the first version of moral world citizenship, which she prefers, that there could be a problem. It demands that for people to attain the desired level ground upon which to regard each other purely as humans rather than as members of specific communities, they must shed loyalties to specific, localized and bounded groups like ethnic communities, castes, and even nationalities. In this view, patriotism would be incompatible with the cosmopolitanism which the cultivation of uni-

versal humanity requires. Also, one could point out that while there appears to be no direct evidence for the opposition between patriotism and good moral reasoning, the suggestion that Kant, for example, speaks for all cultures, or that there may be Kants in every cultural situation, threatens the superimposition of a specific substantive moral rule on other cultural settings. It would be pertinent then to ask whether the relation between culture and the universal is appropriately construed as that between an example and a moral dictum it is said to support. In such a case the examples become subordinate to the universal as they all would have to indicate it in the same way. The futural articulation of the universal, however, can happen only if we find ways to effect cultural translations between those various cultural examples in order to see which versions of the universal are proposed, on what exclusions they are based, and how the entry of the excluded into the domain of the universal requires a radical transformation in our thinking of universality. The danger is that a specific translation of the universal is preferred and imposed as the standard for all the others, precisely what Henry Richardson fears happens frequently with moral universals. But also, we cannot take the other shortcut of sheer enumeration of the cultural specifics as examples of the universal. Thus, while we ground ourselves in our various cultures, we also should strive to learn to think and feel beyond the communities and nations that contextualize our specific deliberations. To do that, there will be a need to shed the misconception of community that comes with the brand of cosmopolitan ethics that we have addressed here, namely that communities are fixed and exclusionary entities to which individuals can belong only one at any given time, to the exclusion of all others. I have argued elsewhere that although it is terribly faulty, this view leads to the oppositional notion of community such as the one which propels the cosmopolitan rebellion.

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### Notes

1. Proaction, or pre-emptive action, describes sorts of action taken to effect desirable conditions aimed at regulating relations between people in a variety of situations, in contrast to reactive or corrective action which is usually taken post-factum in response to disasters. However, all proactive measures do not have equal moral value. In the international political arena, proaction could become a pretext for aggression by more powerful nations against weaker ones for unjustifiable motives. In this context, the principle of proaction was being used by the government of the United States to justify its impending attack on Iraq as a measure to prevent possible future use of weapons of mass destruction. In a similar manner, governments of both the United States and the now defunct Soviet Union intimidated other nations across the globe to prevent each other's ideologies from spreading. In all these cases, the world faces the threat of a new form of imperialism which is best describable as a Moral International, an heir to the once powerful Communist International, a factional machinery, among others, for the international advancement of what was regarded under socialism as workers' inalienable moral, social and political rights.
2. The archival resource for the cosmopolitan argument goes as far back as the origin of the idea of natural law among the Stoics, notably Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, and grew through stages which included visions from the early Christian Church, the extension of Roman laws to embrace citizens

across the globe, as then known, and during the Enlightenment period, through the views that war and strife could be eliminated through the formation of an association of nations. Of particular importance in the history of the idea of a global community during the Enlightenment period is Kant's work, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay*, of 1795. Although Kant's idea that the autonomous reason (i.e. freed from all sorts of interest) is the basis of moral law is scattered all over his other works on moral theory, *Perpetual Peace* is considered one of the fundamental documents of the cosmopolitan movement.

3. *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant (1785/1981: 9: 396).
4. *Ibid.*, p.13: 400.
5. Henry S. Richardson, *Practical Reasoning about Final Ends* (1994: 24).
6. Unfortunately, in the literature of the 1960s and earlier, largely dominated at the time by African theologians and political writers, the communitarian tendencies or impressions in African societies were presented as matters of fact rather than argued as an alternative and, perhaps, a better foundation of moral and political principles and values. Senghor, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Ratsiraka, and others among the notable political writers of the time, and Bahoken, Mbiti, Lufuluabo, Makarakiza, and Mulago among the theologians, expounded the communitarian premise as a key difference between African and other social orientations in the articulation of public ethics. Although that literature predates the current communitarian-libertarian debate, it is clear from its content that already at that time African scholars were presenting communitarian foundations of consensus as the place to look for the future of a world civilization. This idea was clearly expressed in the volume *Les Religions africaines comme source de valeurs de civilisation, Colloque de Cotonou, 16-22 August 1970*, Paris, Présence Africaine, 1972. Similar views had emerged in an earlier meeting held at the University of Ghana in 1965, also by African theologians. Yet a substantive philosophical expression of communitarianism as a basic premise in African experience of the world did not take place until recently in the works of the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu. His theoretical discussions of the epistemological and metaphysical concepts of truth and personhood respectively, or his political theory of partyless consensus-based democracy, are all built on a communitarian framework in sharp contrast to the privilege the individual enjoys in liberal approaches to the cogitation of similar issues. His *Philosophy and an African Culture* (1980), and the more recent *Cultural Universals and Particulars* (1996) speak unequivocally to these issues.
7. This is what Pierre Bourdieu discusses in his works under the lead concept of 'habitus', especially in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, and *The Logic of Practice*. But an even more exciting work on the production of identity through the practice of culture is *Affecting Performance*, a work by the anthropologist Corrine A. Kratz.
8. Kwame Gyekye has a good and concise discussion of the variances between individualist and communitarian virtues. See his *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (1997: Ch. 2).
9. In the original presentation I refer to here, the focus was 'debating the limits of patriotism', see *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism, Martha Nussbaum with Respondents*, Joshua Cohen, ed. (1996).
10. Paulin Hountondji has done this quite well in his 1995 essay, 'Producing Knowledge in Africa Today'.
11. See Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999). She argues indirectly that Hountondji's idea of the junior collaborator is applicable to the general methodology of the colonial scholar as a fraudulent impostor because he uses the local (native) expert without recognition as if she were only part of the collected field data.
12. See Wiredu's *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (1996: 22).
13. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
16. Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1990: 89-90).
17. Wiredu's *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, Part I (chapters 1 to 4) (1996).

18. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
19. V. Y. Mudimbe and K. Anthony Appiah's 'The Impact of African Studies on Philosophy', in *Africa and the Disciplines* (1993: 132).

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