

The Asia Pacific Issue: Richness in Diversity

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Since its establishment in 2004 the key aspiration of the *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* has been to reflect the diversity of the bioethics community by promoting dialogues across the boundaries separating the multiplicity of disciplines it encompasses. To realise this goal we have sought to provide a forum for discussion and critical reflection concerning both conventional topics of bioethical inquiry and questions of pressing contemporary relevance.

Our basic premise has been that the world is irrevocably multicentered and multicultural, and infinitely diverse. This heterogeneity has generated a rich variety of ways of understanding the world. Where it was once assumed that there is only one

correct ethical point of view it is necessary now to recognise a proliferation of value systems, including different visions of the good, freedom and happiness. Cultural differences can create extraordinary richness and provide real opportunities for learning – and re-learning – about health care and the social world [1].

A commitment to openness and dialogue, of course, does not mean that conflicts are thereby extinguished, and respect for diverse cultural perspectives does not mean a relativistic avoidance of judgments. On the contrary, openness and respect actively extend the scope for constructive disagreement and engagement, and in any case the old sources of disputation and controversy remain. The debates about how to address the wide discrepancies in access to wealth and power are as intense as ever. In all the area covered by bioethics much work remains to be done: to name just a few, in health care, there are the issues of justice, the distribution of resources and the perplexities raised in the clinical encounter; in research, there are issues relating to the implications of new technologies and the cultural sources and consequences of knowledge; in law, there are the problems of how to reconcile differing community traditions and obligations; and in education, there are the issues of how to develop curricula and educational practices that both deepen understanding and facilitate informed moral action. In all these cases, the perspective of multiculturalism provides an opportunity to utilise resources from diverse theoretical

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systems in innovative ways to enhance the basis for new insights in knowledge and practice.

We are happy with the progress the Journal has made in the last 4 years. During this time we have established an expanding editorial infrastructure, which now includes specialists in clinical ethics, research, law, nursing, feminism, public health and animal ethics. We also have an international advisory board which provides a resource of great depth and insight. The quality and the quantity of the material we receive have increased steadily, to the point where from 2008 we will be able to move to four issues a year.

Our emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of bioethics and the need to promote dialogues across disciplines has, however, not been completely straightforward. Quite simply, the realisation of such dialogues is often difficult to achieve. Divisions created by disciplinary, methodological, cultural, genre and political differences are often profound and may seem impossible to bridge. The complexity and diversity of different value systems can lead to difficulty in finding paths of mutual recognition and intelligibility. This has presented an ethical challenge at the purely academic level. Because communication and dialogue require generosity and openness on both sides, there is a need for authors to take the trouble to find ways of expressing themselves that are accessible to readers outside their disciplines, and for readers to make the effort to make sense of discourses and ideas that seem foreign to them and lie outside their familiar fields of work. This has not always been easy to achieve.

Sometimes the task has seemed intractable. It cannot be assumed that full intelligibility is always possible across discursive systems or theoretical problematics, although it is of the nature of language that some degree of mutual understanding is always possible. What is more, the criteria of success are often uncertain and what, if anything, has been achieved may remain obscure [2: 76, 3: 107]. Sometimes all that is possible is to offer the materials and hope for the best.

This Special Issue of the *JB* seeks to advance our interdisciplinary project one step further. It is of particular significance for us for two reasons: it further supports our fundamental commitment to promoting dialogue across disciplinary and cultural boundaries, and it is an explicit expression of the responsibility we have openly assumed to assist in

providing access to bioethical discussion from different linguistic and cultural groups to a wide, informed international readership.

We are honoured to be able to offer readers a sense of the great diversity and richness of bioethical thinking in the Asia Pacific region and to assist in fostering exchanges among practitioners in both the region itself and the wider bioethical community. We feel that this provides a forum for deepening and extending the discourses surrounding ethical issues globally.

The papers reflect the great richness and diversity of work in bioethics in the Asia Pacific region. They offer perspectives from sociology, philosophy, theology and law. The methods range from qualitative and quantitative empirical research to philosophical critique. The issues addressed range from conventional topics in bioethics, such as predictive genetic testing, to major social concerns, such as HIV in Asia, to the concept of motherhood in Indian culture, to the very nature of persons. The authors include established and eminent scholars and some newer investigators whose works will no doubt produce a significant impact over time. We have at times struggled with the problem of how to preserve difference and to respect the cultural origins of different papers while maintaining our commitment to facilitating access to scholars practising in distinct fields and cultures. Although the task has not always been easy we are pleased with the result.

We feel that this Special Issue vindicates the conviction that culture is a toolbox, not a prison house, for knowledge [4]. While different cultures may ask different questions about similar or related problems they also offer fecund resources for the development of systematic knowledge and innovative reflection about ethical issues.

We would like to express our thanks to each of the authors for assisting us in meeting strict deadlines and for their willingness to engage with the complex issues relating to the translation of ideas across linguistic and material cultures in the production of an academic journal. We hope that all contributors are satisfied with the finished product. We also thank Margaret Sleeborn-Faulkner for her work in assembling the symposium on ethical issues in genetics.

As members of the Editorial Board and Executive Committee of the *JB* we would particularly like to express our gratitude to Dr. Chris Jordens, the

outgoing Editor in Chief of the Journal. We have enormous admiration for the work that Chris has undertaken over the past 4 years to make the *JBI* into a truly international bioethics journal. His scholarship, integrity and attention to detail has ensured that each contribution has represented both authors and the Journal in the best possible light and has facilitated communication in the manner we envisaged through the pages of the Journal and beyond.

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