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## The Four Cultures: Hybridizing Science and Humanities, East and West

Michel PUECH

The purpose of this paper is to elaborate hypotheses and to indicate research tracks. It leads to a research program and not to final conclusions. It tries to inspire and comfort philosophers who do not feel at ease in a compartmentalized culture.

### 1. Four Cultures, One Predicament

C.P. Snow's seminal article on the "two cultures" (Snow 1998) is well known in the anglophone world but surprisingly not in other cultural areas, according to my experience and investigations at least. The whole affair started with a famous Cambridge (U.K.) lecture in 1959, pleading against the divorce between *classical literary-artistic culture* (humanities) and *scientific culture* (technoscience). Our culture is split in two parts, lectured Snow, two parts ignoring each other and despising each other. This divorce is not just "another English social peculiarity", he said, but "this is a problem for the entire West" (Snow 1998, 3). In the worldwide discussion that followed the printing of Snow's *Two cultures*, it was made clear that importing Western science, everywhere in the world, meant importing the cultural divorce between science and humanities.

This "tragedy of the two cultures" has been approved as a brilliant analysis, bringing to light a real and deep problem in modern culture. It is read and explained as such in text books and school classes. But fifty years after, the anniversary of the Snow's initial talk invites to ask: What have we done? Why are we still in this cultural tragedy? How could we have an impact on this divide?

Today, we can address the issue of cultural fragmentation and its drawbacks in a new perspective. A globalized communication network and a globalizing way of life blur the boundaries of human activities. This provides reasons to hope in a *global ethics*. Its relationship to applied ethics belongs to the concerns of this paper. My hypothesis is that in the present state of affluence, material and informational, the problems we are facing in applied ethics, philosophy of technology, and sustainability are consequences of our thinking in a determined and closed cultural system.

In our globalized world, there is not just one line of fragmentation and isolation, there are two: *Science/Humanities* and *East/West*. Even in the West, there is now a need for cultural pluralism and a rejection of one-way regimented world-visions. In the East, adopting techno-science should not imply a massive loss of cultural diversity. This double fragmentation, *Science/Humanities* and *East/West* is an impediment for a possible new cultural form. I will call it *wisdom* and construe it as a resource for applied ethics. It starts with the attempt to take the double divide as a single issue: let

us try again to bridge the *Science/Humanities* gap and the *East/West* gap at once.

*Wisdom* means neither science nor humanities, neither Eastern nor Western, but inhabiting the world with an *ethos* that would be at the same time rational, humanistic, caring, and efficient. To imagine and to implement this *ethos*, thinking “out of the box” is required. The reward of this philosophical risk will be great and I have a feeling that philosophers are the ones to initiate this cultural *salto vitale*.

Our current fragmentation of disciplines, professional skills, cultures, methods, and credibility is no match for the globalization of issues: climate change, world trade, nuclear weapons, development, bioethics, nanotechnologies, etc. Hybridizing cultures, therefore, is not only a politically correct option, a sort of folklore-synthesis sub-discipline. It is the overall and new fundamental need of thought, ‘what deserves to be thought’, as Heidegger would have put it.

It turns out that we do not have two problems, bridging *the Science/Humanities gap* and bridging *the East/West gap*, we have one: hybridizing four cultures. We are responding poorly to the Science/Humanities challenge and poorly again to the East/West challenge because we take them as separate questions. My point is to look for a *global gap-crossing* point of view. It is not a *technical* issue (bridge building, cultural crossroads and information highways), it is a *lifestyle* and *think-style* issue (wisdom). Thus, applied ethics is at a crossroad: academic literature production on one way, risk taking in cultural renewal on the other. Here is one step on this second way.

Approaches like Nakamura's classic book (Nakamura 1964) or Nisbett's experimental research (Nisbett 2003) can help and speed up the existing but slow and partial evolution that mixes cultures in our globalized world. Relying on this previous type of research, the grids of the Science/Humanities and East/West cultural differences can be sketched, for the purpose of this exploring paper, as follows:

Science/Humanities divide:

- abstract-model building and controlling material processes / narratives of human experience
- “*erklären*” (explain by analysis and causal mechanisms) / “*verstehen*” (understand), using the concepts of German hermeneutics (Wilhelm Dilthey)

East/West divide:

- controlling by parts (focus on objects or individuals, and on the rules of their behavior) / apprehending the whole and inserting in it somehow
- unidirectional lines, growth / cycles, looping backward and onward in evolutionary circles.

Instead of a combination calculus, I will elaborate on these grids firstly by looking for a set of sources—the genes for the hybrids, which can be called *memes* by the adepts of *memetics*—and secondly by looking for a set of domains—cultural ecosystems where they can live and develop. The upshot is not exactly a *catalogue* but a *program*.

## 2. Resources

The American philosophers R.W. Emerson and H.D. Thoreau opened a new world of thought in the XIXth century. Far enough from Europe, and aware of the radical change implied by modernity, they invented a new form of wisdom, an ethics of self-reliance in an authentic bond with nature. They considered the place of man in the modern world, an environment of pervasive technology, where man has an enormous transforming power on matter. They were philosophers of the railroad and the telegraph, as well as of woods and solitude. But they did *not* oppose inner authenticity and worldly engagement in the industrial era. They tried to delineate a “life with principle”, or an “examined life”: inwardly authentic and outwardly open to a civilized form of techno-science. This is a resource for applied ethics, on the Science/Humanities issue.

Both Emerson and Thoreau were strongly influenced by Asian culture (Richardson 1986, Richardson 1995), essentially via German text editions, and the whole romantic rediscovery of the East. Emerson is closer to India's philosophical and religious culture, Thoreau to Zen Buddhism.

Both received inspirations from the Chinese Tao. The link between this innovation on the East/West issue and their breakthrough in the ethics of modernity deserves to be investigated. Emerson and Thoreau's "come back" in the culture of the electronic era and now in the culture of sustainability hints that embracing the four cultures has something to do with our philosophical needs.

In the background of Emerson and Thoreau's original "transcendentalism" and in the more or less "new age" forms of spiritual quest, Buddhism and Zen play an important role. Here again, this inspiration has a link with the four cultures issue. Buddhism adapts to modernity and technoscience without face-to-face confrontation, and this is noteworthy because it is not the stance of major Western religions, even today. The favor of Buddhism in contemporary Western societies, in the elite in particular, reveals and expands *the non-religious potentiality of Buddhism*, as a philosophy of life, and a form of wisdom. Stress on the predicament of suffering and on renouncement ethics is an inspiration to Westerners looking for a way out of the obsession of material power and dominance.

Because of its simplification trend, Western appreciations of Buddhism focus on Japanese Zen. Even more, Zen interpretation of Buddhism envisions life and world so differently from technoscience (its facts, evidence-based argumentations, utilitarianism), that it stands for a real alternative to unified techno-scientific rationalization of life and world. Messengers to the West, like Suzuki Daisetsu Teitaro (鈴木大拙) and Deshimaru Taisen (弟子丸泰仙) give us the flavor of Zen thought, crossing over language barriers. Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* epitomizes the new cultural icons of the technological generation. Jiddu Krishnamurti, widely read all over the world, is by his books a covert master for a lot of Westerners.

These readings mean for us at the same time reconciliation with the East (East/West problem) and a possible distanced view on our techno-scientific mastering of the world (Science/Humanities problem). Academic philosophy seizes but shyly this opportunity, most of the time in a specialized "comparative studies" approach, whereas its influence on major fields in philosophy would be energizing.

Gandhi is the best instance of cultural hybridization as an inspiration and empowerment. In his case, cultural hybridization was involved in a nationalistic endeavor, which tends to confirm that there is not necessarily a menace to cultural diversity: local and particular cultures are not necessarily at risk to be wiped out by cultural hybridization, on the contrary they can take advantage of it. Gandhi is *not* a pure product of India, he is not exactly *only* a native from Gujarat who stood up for his rights under the British rule. He went to London (England) to become a lawyer. He was an Hindu and a vegetarian, but he met in England a self-conscious vegetarian movement and found in it a sort of renewal of his own values, in a typical East-West-East circulation. Finding no job in India, when back home, he went to South Africa, and started his famous non-violent civil rights campaigns there, for the sake of the Indian workers community. The very idea and the method of these campaigns he found in Thoreau, the American philosopher. The inspiration towards a simpler life, and authentic communities, he found in Tolstoy, the Russian writer. The East/West blend is at the same time a modernity/tradition blend, on the Science/Humanities boundary, because Gandhi understood how the media and modern economics (all of them globalized... in the British Empire) were a new frame for the existence of self-reliant communities. The myth of "progress" as westernization-through-submission has been broken by Gandhi's idea of a different way to evolve self-reliant communities.

Gandhi's tremendous success, not only with the British, but in Hindu / Muslim conflicts, is a fact. In a time of severe doubts on the efficiency or even the mere possibility of collective action, we have much to learn from his capacity to *apply* values and ethics, in ends as well as means. Westerners like Martin Luther King kept this East-West-East... circulation functioning, but the potential energy of the method is certainly underemployed.

Gandhi's basic concepts mean to me a potential rebirth of applied ethics in the West. The three more important are so original that the words can remain untranslated, to avoid oversimplification: *satyagraha*, *ahimsa*, *swadeshi*. *Satyagraha* is *self-reliance*, building the self as a person, in terms of responsibility and capabilities. This self-reliance is not a state but an effort, the resolution to strive

for authenticity and integrity. Individual ethics following this inspiration concentrates on caring about small things, micro-actions, in the concrete and local sphere of influence of the person. *Ahimsa* is not only non-violence, but *humility of strength*, as opposed to the arrogance of power. Our techno-scientific state of mind is partial not to power but to the arrogance of power. If we blast the hill to have our road running a straight line, it is not because we have the power to, but because we have the arrogance to. Alternative routes would require a different strength, taking into consideration the landscape, the use of energy, the capacity to spend time for travel, and much more. This hill blasting image is an analogy for a lot of issues in applied ethics, especially bioethics and sustainability. *Swadeshi* is self-reliance in building sustainable communities. “Think global and act local” can be the base line for Gandhian *swadeshi*. It does not mean we must leave our corporations and employments to join ashrams and meditate, it just means we can reconsider, where we are, the sustainability of our occupation in the communities we belong to, from the smallest (home community) to the largest (planet community), and take into account the interactions between these communities. Gandhi’s works are online on the Web and free ([www.gandhiserve.org](http://www.gandhiserve.org), exemplary cultural e-commons).

Cultural hybridization is not only a concern for scholars and is not only an intellectual matter. In my country, France, we have had a long story with judo and karate-do. Judo is with soccer the most popular sport for young people. Almost everywhere in the country you can find not only judo but aikido, kendo, jujitsu clubs, and more: kung-fu, kenpō, tae-kwon-do, việt võ đạo ... Of course, yoga and taishi are well-known and a lot of people consider these mind-body exercises as a sort of cure for the stress of modern life. This enduring presence of an Eastern way of life in Westerners lifestyles is a sign of the process I am trying to evoke in this paper. For a lot of people in the West, a lifelong immersion in an Asian martial art grows a different self, a hybridized interiority. Fundamental values and lifestyle attitudes are necessarily conveyed by martial arts, in every detail of the ceremonial, in the dojo-spirit, and in each and every technique. “Technique” here does not mean “technology”, but body techniques. In the martial arts, people can have a direct experience of Eastern conceptions and uses of energy, an experience of Eastern ways to achieve efficiency.

Last but not least, in the purest philosophical tradition, Heidegger’s Asian hidden sources is a very classical topic in Heidegger studies, and one of the most fascinating one. Heidegger’s “come back” on environmental issues and in philosophy of technology can be seen as a covert influence of non-Western philosophical metaphysics.

At the beginning of his philosophical career, Heidegger had such a passion for Asian thought that he was collaborating on a translation of Laozi’s Taoist texts (May 1996, 6). His whole life, he met Japanese visitors and talked with them about Buddhism and the Japanese *ethos*. His famous “conversation” with a Japanese philosopher about language is only the visible part of the iceberg.

Heidegger’s fundamental doctrine of Being is in many aspects so close to the Tao or Zen that a direct inspiration is the best explanation. But Heidegger did not want to raise new quarrels, he has had enough because of his nazi political engagement and of his presumptuous manners. Therefore, he has always been reluctant to mention Asian thought, in particular because he was an old style European scholar and he knew there is not much you can say when you do not know the language.

Heidegger’s attempt to overthrow Western metaphysics is an attempt to overthrow the monomaniac techno-scientific worldview of the West. The originality of this endeavor is that it initiates from inside Western metaphysics itself instead of denying it. This explains, according to me, Heidegger’s success in the East and particularly in Japan: he suggests how to inherit Western metaphysics without dogmatically submitting to it. Totally unwillingly, of course, Heidegger dispatched philosophical tools (“memes”) highly suitable for cultural recombination.

Of course, to go from *knowledge* (cognition in a search for power) to *wisdom*, not only this pure Heideggerian but other ways are being opened (Maxwell 2007, Puech 2008).

### 3. Domains



In several domains of applied ethics, each of them still in the process of building a paradigm of its own, a significant advantage can be obtained by intertwining the current issues and methods and some of the Science/Humanities and East/West threads of analysis and re-conceptualization.

In medicine and bioethics the state of the art is split in a superposition and coexistence of two traditions: techno-scientific medicine coming from the West and adopted in the East, and traditional medical science coming from the East and adopted in the West (acupuncture, shiatsu...). The coexistence of these two cultures takes a specific form in each country, with different levels of academic acceptance and of popular use. A philosophical analysis of this pluralist culture in medicine is a real challenge. This philosophical challenge can be taken as mainly epistemological and in this sense it will help shape a new image of epistemic pluralism and tolerance. But I think applied ethics is best qualified to address this cultural pluralism. What we learn from different sources in medicine refers to the ethos of self-care. To take care of ourselves (and not of our “body” only) we need more than a techno-scientific biology applied to the human. We need a notion of *care*, as a whole, insisting on lifestyle, preventing dysfunctions. This wisdom of self-care is to be *added* to technological medicine, not to replace it—because once you have the heart attack you could not prevent, you do need some technology to survive and recover.

More widely, Westerners have a lot to learn from *technology and culture* in Japan. A specific cultural alliance and hybridization made the Japanese ‘success’ and still characterizes the Japanese ethos in modernity (Morishima 1982). The most striking and important feature is the capacity of Japanese culture to maintain its distinctive world, while adopting Western ways in so many compartments of social life. Firstly, this capacity demonstrates an *anti-sakoku* theorem (“sakoku”, 鎖国 is the Japanese word for the policy of national isolation in Japan, from mid-XVIIth to mid-XIXth century). Secondly it suggests a possibility of growing cultural pluralism in the world through non-destructive cultural exchange, for which strong existing cultures only seem to be prepared.

Japanese culture obviously has had, since the beginning, a high hybridization potential. Western cultural elements come after the integration of Chinese, Korean and Indian cultural elements. In techno-ethics, in the West, we are too often facing a single choice to accept or reject technology, while the real question is one of *coevolution* with technology. As Heidegger has shown we construe the question of technology as a technical question, because we are *always-already* in the technological mode of thought. To leave this cultural bias, we have to fully accept that the applied ethics of technology is not an engineer issue, not even a “Western” issue. Therefore, it must be globalized not only in its applications, but first in its inspirations. Arnold Pacey, a British expert and philosophy of intercultural technology concerns, remains an isolated voice (Pacey 1990) but gives exemplary methods for techno-ethics, in his research on “technological practices”.

In business ethics as well as the ethics of economics in general, different voices become more and more audible, because of the debate on sustainability, now at the forefront of the media and the academy. The four cultures predicament is one the major methodological hurdles on the way to thinking a sustainable future. For this reason, many of the references I mention in this paper are creating momentum. A convergence of business ethics and environmental ethics could even be the future of the sustainability debate, to give birth to a global *eco-ethics*, embracing applied ethics in economy and ecology. But this evolution requires a blurring of academic boundaries and cultural divides—which is according to me the core challenge of sustainability in its philosophical construct.

In the “deep” sustainability trend, voluntary simplicity, Gandhi style or otherwise, is considered to be the only way out of the absurd infinite growth we are in. Sustainability, along this line, requires a radical revolution, where hybridized concepts like satiety, frugality, serenity, compassion, looping back one’s cycles, and so on, are necessary. Illich again, E.F. Schumacher (*Small is beautiful*), are among the needed references, reminding us that in the 1970s, a hybrid philosophy of economy was born. The strategic move here is the capacity to address the four dimensions of the *four culture predicament* at the same time, as it was the case with Illich and Schumacher.

## 4. Concluding Remarks: Applied Ethics, Wisdom Ethics

One of the concern of applied ethics is the “applied” side of ethics. What does it mean and how distinctive is this denomination? If the stress is on “applied”, then the branch stems from *applied philosophy*, whose mission statement is “philosophical study and research that has a direct bearing on areas of practical concern “ according to the British Society for Applied Philosophy (<http://www.appliedphil.org>). If the stress is on “ethics”, then the branch stems from meta-ethics, which seems to be largely the case for the moment in applied ethics. My purpose is to put the stress on *applied* for the following reasons.

In a striking paper on “the sources of hypocrisy” in ethics, N. A. Davis addressed a somewhat taboo flaw in human ethics: “the lack of fit between our everyday moral pronouncements and beliefs (on the one hand) and our practices (on the other)” (Davis 1993, 165). She mentions the fact, from a 1985 poll in the U.S., that 84% of obstetricians were believing that abortion should be legal and widely available, while 28% only were willing to perform abortions themselves. This is not just a reminder of “the gap between word and deed” (Davis 1993, 178), but may induce a motto for applied ethics: *apply* ethics! Whatever cogent and subtle the “supply chain” in academic ethics is, if no “delivery” reaches the final consumer, I am afraid the brand “applied” is abusive.

Therefore, applied ethics should not be conceived, or not only, as the specification of theoretical ethics to multifarious (theoretical) “fields” (medicine, business, environment, professions...), as it is currently defined (Frey and Wellman (ed.) 2003 for instance). What is at stake is the expected upshot of this philosophical practice: deeds or words? If applied ethics is defined by its objects, by a range of questions and fields, it will be words, knowledge, rules and principles. We need them, but this is ethics-as-usual. Ethics-as-usual is different from meta-ethics, which addresses meta-questions such as the nature and possibility of ethics in its various interpretations (deontological, utilitarian, virtue ethics, and so on). Ethics-as-usual is different too from applied ethics, which addresses *applying ethics* questions. Without these differences applied ethics is at risk to be reduced to “localized” bits and chunks of meta-ethics (in medicine, business, environment...). What we need might not be the meta-ethics of specialized fields. My hypothesis is that the temptation to be a “specialized meta-ethics” comes from choosing the easy way: importing “analytical philosophy” scientism into ethics to restore a rational credibility. I am afraid that this scenario would leave open the gap that applied ethics was supposed to bridge.

If applied ethics endorses the project of being an applied philosophy, the focus is on cases and not on principles. What is required is not a global and top-down conceptual synthesis but working tools, and appropriate field issue analysis. This is the opportunity, I think, to make philosophy a global commons, by a pragmatist turn. To be a clincher in the building of global ethics, applied ethics needs not require an agreement about fundamental values, but have a strong concern for agreement about methods, methodological prejudices, cultural biases.... It should aim at *tools* and not systems, *harmony in action* and not dominant discourse.

For this *wisdom ethics*, the four cultures concern is central. Its program rejects the separation of techno-science and humanities and rejects the separation of Eastern and Western cultures. Its methods borrows working concepts to all these domains.

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