

A PLURALISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF MORALITY AND GLOBAL COEXISTENCE

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Abstract: To deal with the problems of the disquieting biases between cultures in our times, the author analyzed the multiple horizon character of morality, proposed a four level model of morality. By using this alternative model of ethics, the author exposes the frailties of cultural stereotypes in both the East and the West, arguing that the moral efforts of all nations should be appreciated. The reason that people do not often see this fact comes mainly from their preoccupations with different moral horizons. The dialogue between different moral horizons and hence different cultures will help each side to develop a more adequate value system which can better solve problems decisive for the coexistence in global context.

Key words: globalization, culture, morality, liberalism, China

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INTRODUCTION

Ours is an increasingly global era. Now it is becoming common sense that we all have to live in a worldwide, multicultural society. But to live well together is never an easy thing, and to face the challenges of globalization may bring us well beyond common sense. In writing this essay, I have two intentions in mind. One is to point out the threat of cultural stereotypes to international communication and to call for a fruitful dialogue between the East and the West. The other is to trace the cultural misunderstandings to their deeper philosophical inadequacies. I shall argue that a sound ethical understanding of the multiple-horizon nature of morality is crucial to meaningful cultural interaction and comparative study. To illustrate this point, I shall try to present a four-horizon model of my own ethical synthesis. Then, I shall discuss its implications to our rethinking of some important issues of cultural coexistence in our times.

The mutual misunderstandings between the East and the West often result in moral contempt or even harsh attack on other cultures. An American scholar commented: we are sometimes less than astute observers, when it comes to facing an ideology so different from our own. The moment we hear the terms of other value system, we close our eyes and ears and observe what we want to see and hear and ignore what we want to

avoid. We are also poor observers because we often compare the best of our society with the worst of theirs (Bertsch, 1982). As a matter of fact, from a Liberal or a wholesale westernizer's view, the value system of Confucianism is at its best conventional or pre-principled and hence pre-moral, because it lacks rights discourse and formalist thinking. This judgement can be found both in liberal theorists like Kohlberg (1981) (see his descriptions of stages of moral development) and western politicians as they combine human rights charge with international trade. On the other hand, similar things also happen in China, though more subtly. While the traditional picture of the West as a cartoon show of a dark hell of crimes is still present in some "text-books," popular opinion has developed another equally misleading image of the West; namely, a "golden paradise" in terms of material affluence, albeit immoral. It is a neo-Confucian's dream that in the 21th century the resurrected Chinese culture will help save the West from the sins of drug, violence, sex, and moral indifference.

The problem of cultural-moral superiority and misunderstanding is never just a matter of culture, especially in the global era we are facing. It can be very serious. In recent years, Professor Huntington of Harvard University predicted that the next international clash or war would occur along the fault lines between major cultures. The

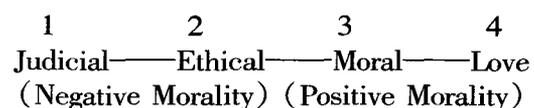
strategic suggestion for the West is to unite all nations of Western culture and to explore the opportunity of suppressing the nations of Confucian and Islam cultures. His talking has stirred fierce debates around the world. Many people and nations feel offended. However, it is not my intention here to engage in yet another apologetic which seeks to vent cultural indignation, for I feel that, as a scholar of realistic mind, Huntington has identified some important facts in the new international scene. The iron curtain has gone, but there is still a velvet curtain of cultures. The latter will persist much longer than the wall of ideology, because it is more difficult for cultures to understand and appreciate each other. It is no exaggeration if we say that between the East and the West there is a deep disparity about what "morality" consists of. The disparity is so serious that it seems to deserve the name of "paradigm difference." From the perspective of one paradigm, the other may seem to be "abnormal" or pre-normal. Though they are both talking about "morality," they refer to different concepts and facts. The two discourses are almost incommensurable.

From a philosophical point of view, I think the common root of these misunderstandings comes from the so-called "essentialist" understanding of morality, the truth of which is highly doubtful. A careful inquiry into the complexity of morality will show us that there is not one "morality," but different moralities or moral horizons which share "family resemblance."

MODEL

The scheme I shall lay out consists of four levels: juridical, ethical, moral, and religious. These levels are differentiated from each other by ten indexes: content, essence, requirement, social evaluation, way of execution, language, emotion, direction of attacks, demand (cost) to agent, and number of practitioners. What kinds of facts fall into the category of morality depends on these indexes and these indexes usually change regularly. For instance, the index "essence" has shown that morality is essentially the regulation of social life. When different levels of regulation disappear, a society will experience increasingly the pressure of disruption. The in-

dex "emotion" has been discussed by many theorists of ethics, including the famous paragraphs on "admiration" in Kant's Critique of Practical Reason, and "God's Wrath" in theology. Here what I intend to say is that different horizons of morality have their different, specific moral emotions. The index of "moral language" is a favorite topic of modern meta-ethic discourse. Among the modern linguistic meta-ethic theories, Wittgenstein's analysis of the multiple-game nature of language is an illuminating one. This approach, together with the insights from Marx, Habermas, Walzer and Kant, is one inspiration for my major themes in this essay. Life has not one but many realms. How can morality, which helps to define life, be a homogeneous, one-dimensional thing? Stevenson argues that moral language is persuasive, while Hare opposes it with the prescriptive view. However, in our diagram of moral horizons, we see both descriptions are right at one level and wrong at the other. At different levels of life, moral language will not be uniform but will exhibit qualitative differences. Finally, "demand or cost to the moral agent" also serves as an important indicator of moral levels. As a matter of fact, Kant seems to use it as the only measure to judge if the moral good is emerging. According to the pattern of the changes of these indexes, morality seems to move through two realms which can be further divided into four horizons:



Two major moral realms can be identified in this scheme. First, the more a set of action is on the left hand side (1 and 2), the more it is required of, or even enforced on, everyone. In other words, the more it is socialized or institutionalized, the easier it is for people to accomplish. As H. L. Hart points out, rights or obligation are social phenomena. I call this realm Negative Morality. Its principle is:

N. 1 Not harming is not regarded as "moral," while harming is regarded as "immoral."

N. 2 Helping is not regarded as "moral," while not helping is regarded as "immoral."

On the other hand, the more a set of action is on the right hand side (3 and 4), the less it is required as obligations or "ought" for everyone,

and the less is it a social rule, but instead is an individual's personal free choice—also the harder it is for the agent to accomplish (the higher is its cost). I call this realm Positive Morality. Its principle is:

P. To do the job is deemed as "moral," while not to do it is not deemed as "immoral."

Over history there is a constant sinking of horizons at the right hand side (positive or higher) into the left-hand side (negative or basic). Sometimes it is unnatural, as we will discuss. In other cases, it implies progress. For instance, because of the struggle of people and the growth of economic prosperity, a once highly individual and heroic moral act—to fight for the rights of minority—has transformed into civil rights legally protected by the law and commonly accepted as social convention. Besides, one can raise the duty line for himself or herself, taking high moral act as his or her own "obligation". Thus he or she transcends the ordinary existence and becomes a moral hero. In the following, I shall discuss each horizon in detail.

Juridical (justice): This is the basic level of morality. The basic meaning of "justice" is not harming others. Its content features many "Thou shall not" or negative injunctions, because it is to protect the foundation of a society. The concrete content of this horizon varies from culture to culture and from class to class. Aristotle (1954) already observed that in Greece "all men agree that what is just in distribution must be according to merit in some sense, but democrats identify it (merit) with the status of freemen, supporters of oligarchy with wealth or with noble birth, and supporters of aristocracy with excellence." What we affirm here is only that whatever a society deems to be fundamental (usually security, property, stableness and justice), namely, that without which a community is threatened and the society may cease to be viable, the society will protect them with "juridical" morality. It is obligatory for everyone to do and does not cost the agent very much. The index of "practitioner" says "all" for this horizon. This of course does not mean that all men have abided by juridical morality. There are breaches and so exceptions. But as Durkheim argued, the existence of exception only betokens the original intention of non-exception. Therefore, this is the level of rights and obligations. Following one's

obligations will generally incur no praise, but failure to follow them incites society to anger (or "righteous indication") and to punish the offender with legal, institutionalized force and religious punishment (The "Furies" or the gods of anger in Greece were meant to be the protection of justice in that society). In turn, the protection of this horizon of morality will legitimate a state (a judicial institution). "Rights," "obligation," "contracts" and "justice" are terms of the typical discourse or "moral language" of this level.

I can imagine an objection: law is law, and morality is morality, so they should not be confused. My answer is: in one sense this is true; but in another, this is a narrow understanding. Why should we obey the law at all? The reason must be moral concern if it is not from brute coercion. The whole "natural law" tradition presumes that morality is the measure of "civic law." Underlying the Old Testament there is a whole system of morality which focuses on rights, contract (testament), law (decatalogue), and God's rage at those who violate the contract and the law. These kinds of moralities possess all the features of "juridical level" morality. One may still hesitate, and I think the hesitation arises from the bad reputation of "legal-authority" in critical thinkers' mind. But we have to distinguish in my definition of juridical horizon morality two separate aspects. One is the actual, concrete, often abused use of legal power; the other is merely a schematic, formal description without specifying any specific content. In defining juridical morality I am asserting no simple "from Is to Ought" statement or "what exists, is rational," for I have not legitimized any particular law, but only meant to say that every kind of society will define certain moral requirements as "minimum," "necessary," or "indispensable." Finally, this horizon is also the one most closely related to revolution or radical political reform: when people are extremely indignant in seeing that their basic interests are violated by the existent institutions, they will rise to change them.

Ethical: I follow Hegel in distinguishing Ethical from Moral, *Sittlichkeit* from *Moralität*. By "ethical" I mean the moral norms relating to family, kinship, and other kinds of intimate relationships. This horizon was the dominant, if not the only, form of morality in the clan tribe period (in China, even up to the modern era).

Marx and Engels maintained that family was the only social relationship in primitive society. Later, its importance was diminished and this moral horizon became a subordinate one. However, though it has lost its former importance and withdrawn into the background (especially in the West), it is still the basic "social cell" in all nations, including the West. This level is also the basic one because, without the stableness of "social cells," a society will be unstable. As Aristotle (1950) put it, all offenses (assault, homicide, fighting, and slander), when they are committed against father or mother or a near relative, differ from offenses against persons who are not so related, in breaches of natural piety.⁴ Therefore, the virtues at this level are obligatory and by obeying them one does not get praise. But if one fails to fulfil his or her obligation, accusations arise. For instance, people do not praise parents for nurturing their children, but if one abandons his child on the street, he would be blamed as "morally bad." As regards its execution, things are complex and interesting. First, though society cares much about this level of morality, it usually uses "opinion pressure" force instead of state power to execute it—"the rule of convention." The propriety in this domain is determined to a great extent by the threat of accusation exercised by gossip among neighbors. Secondly, more often, it resorts not to external social force, but to the natural affections. A mother feels happy in loving rather than in being loved, satisfied in seeing her children prospering. To put it in Gilligan's (1982) language, "obligation" here becomes "responsibility." Chinese culture tends to believe that "responsibility" comes from natural kinship relation. Its line of thinking is that our affection of love and care comes from natural blood relation. From affection comes obligation. The obligation of a father is care, the son's, serving, the elder brother's, love, the younger brother's, amiability, and so on, including that between husband and wife, and among friends. There are natural obligations between all kinds of relations.

Because of this "natural," and so solid, interrelation of affection and obligation, Chinese culture likes to put other kinds of human interactions into this domain. For instance, master and disciples, teacher and students are seen as father and children. Friendship is formally vowed, so

that by the vow the duties of brothers or sisters are mutually incurred. In fact, friendship itself is at this level, due to its intimate relation of affection and duty. Friendship has played an important role in morality and in moral philosophy in the Greek-Roman world, and in China. It is only in Kantian type liberalism in general that it is lost sight of (Blum, 1980).

Because of its basic horizon and particular morality character, ethical level morality is often accused of as being "convention" or "conservative." "Zhong," and "Xiao," or loyalty to the state and to one's parent, are the two cardinal obligations in Confucian China. Modern Chinese intellectuals have castigated them for a long time, because they can be very evil and may kill in the name of morality. On the other hand, communitarians favor this horizon. Hegel even believes that morality reaches its completion only at this level (Taylor, 1983).

Moral: This is the moral action which comes from the clearly thought out principles and self-determination of individuals. To compare it with the "ethical," two philosophers serve as the typical protagonists: Hegel—ethical, Kant—moral. Historically speaking, this level emerged quite a bit later than the other horizons. As for its content, it denotes active help to others instead of negative non-invasion. It is more self-sacrificing than other-fending. It demands considerable cost from the agent, because the one to be helped is not the relative or friend of the agent. It is not obligatory, and not all of us can reach this level (Both Kant and Hegel pointed out that the characteristic of "moral" is "ought," instead of "is"). Though this horizon can denote a social-community virtue such as Kant's Kingdom of Aims, without this kind of action, a minimum social life normally can go on (of course with it, life will go on better). Therefore, if one fails to do it, he usually incurs no blame. Doing it, however, will be praised as "good." I find a paragraph in Rawls's (1971) work which has delineated the traits of this horizon quite well. In his description of "a good act" (in the sense of a beneficent act), our main indexes of "moral horizon" are all enveloped. He defines "a good act" as one which we are at liberty to do or not to do; that is, no requirements of natural duty or obligation constrains us either to do or not to do it. It is intended to advance other people's good.

Moreover, it is undertaken at considerable loss or risk to the agent as estimated by his more narrowly construed interests. Thus, the action is supererogatory (Rawls, 1971).

Love: There is another "supererogatory" horizon morality which is even higher than the "moral." This is the horizon of love (agapism). In his *Ethics*, after talking about the morality of duty, Frankena (1963) wrote that in addition, "there is one moral theory which has been and still is widely accepted, especially in Judaic-Christian circles, namely, the ethics of love... We may call this view agapism. In spite of its prevalence, it is generally neglected in philosophical introductions to ethics like this (duty theory)..." I shall try to avoid the possible muddled connotations by providing a clear definition for this horizon. To be at the "Love" (agapism) moral horizon means: a) to totally sacrifice oneself in working for the good of other human beings; and b) to be often supported by faith in being in pursuing a great cause. This horizon is reached by very few people, such as Lei Feng, Martin Luther King, Jesus (in one understanding), and Buddha. Because of its high demand on the agent (it is complete self-sacrifice instead of other-fending oriented:), and because without this kind of moral activity a society can still exist, it is not obligatory. Failing to do it will never incur blame, but doing it will evoke high moral sentiment such as admiration.

How to group moral content is not easy. Philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Rawls and Habermas have all tried out some arrangements. The above delineation of four horizons of morality is admittedly a stipulative, preliminary sketch which, although I think has captured the main components and structure of moral content, omits some aspects and highlights others. Some explanation of my scheme is needed. First, this scheme is open-ended, which means many other indexes can be added to display the differentiation of levels. Second, the distinction and transition between horizons are often not clear cut, but are gradual, fuzzy, and with much overlapping. Sometimes I stress this fact by defining the two extremes of an index while leaving the whole gamut in between blank, to show the gradual lessening or increasing along the continuum between the extremes.

IMPLICATIONS

Now, with this pluralistic view of morality, we can readdress the issues we have raised in the beginning of this paper. Is it right for some culture to criticize another one as "immoral"? No, because all nations are living in some moral horizons. Then why do cultures tend to depreciate the moral efforts of other cultures? From the above map of moralities, it can be accounted for by interpreting them as living in a certain horizon exclusively. While the West focuses on the "juridical" level, the Chinese culture is preoccupied with the "moral." This makes their disparity so fundamental that it is proper to call it a "paradigm discrepancy." Questions within one horizon will be deemed as legitimate (as "a moral problem"), while those beyond one's horizon, will be deemed illegitimate (not a moral question at all). Let us examine this one-dimensional orientation of the two paradigms at some length. Chinese culture is basically at "moral" horizon. Within this framework, moral problems are raised more about the constraint of selfish, anti-social instinct and the reasonable solution of non-antagonistic conflicts in the "large family." Chinese culture takes society ("the whole") as the primary entity, while the individual is, far from what simple observation might suggest, the secondary being or a "construction" by the society. To Chinese culture, the independent, isolated "in-itself" individual emerged as an ideological myth only in the modern world, somewhat a product of the capitalist mode of production. The real truth is: individuals attain their essence and their being only in their membership within some social group. Society is the "subject," the substance, or the primary ontic level, while individuals are secondary beings who can actualize their essence only in the collective.

With this kind of ontology in the background, morality is no longer construed as "protection" for individual rights, but a tool for the consolidation and prosperity of the whole. Finally, the contents of morality centers on "self-attacking" instead of "other-attacking." Therefore, the standard answer to moral problems is not "to calculate to see if it is fair" or "my right!" but rather, to do as high moral norms require, sacri-

ficing oneself, always considering the collective before any selfish concern. Since people in the large family are like family members to each other, the embarrassed judicial, basic level morality is often neglected. "Rights" talking and other legal language (contracts, law, etc.) are "transcended." What has filled this vacuum? In China, the higher morality was pulled down to do the job of the missed basic morality. To restore political order and to revive the lost great harmony is the ultimate moral-political goal of Confucius. He believes that this goal is achievable only in restoring the ideal man ruling system. To rule is not simply to incur legal punishment, but is to moralize political institutions. Once the ruler becomes "Moral King," the people will follow his model naturally, then the state violence is no longer needed. If the ruler behaves like a beast, his people will also follow his fashion. In this case, the rage of the ruler is absurd and his punishment of the people is obviously unfair and ineffective:

The Master said, "If a man manages to make himself correct, what difficulty will there be for him to rule? If he cannot make himself correct, what business has he with making others correct? (Confucius, 1980)"

Tseng Tsu said: a gentleman cannot but have to be strong and resolute, for his duty-burden is heavy and the his roadway is long. He takes benevolence (Ren) as his duty burden. Is that not heavy? Only with death does the road come to an end. Is that not long (Confucius, 1980)?

In this horizon, morality will not be the "principle arguing" type, but the "real man" formation type. To be moral is to be a good citizen in a good state. All "Confucian Curriculum" should be understood within this background. There are moral teachings, but there are more, from literature, music, to communication, rituals, and even to everyday behaviors. They are all "moral education" because the overarching aim is to teach people how to become a person, an authentic human being ("Ren"), who has transcended or "stand above" ("Li") their animal level.

By contrast, the liberal value paradigm in the West has always paid special attention to the basic, protective, other fending horizon of moral content and talks exclusively of "justice." Many scholars have pointed out that the liberal's theory

presents a narrow picture of morality. Our four-horizon scheme of morality enables us to locate this narrowness in its exclusive focus on the basic-judicial horizon morality. In this paradigm, only problems of justice, defined as reversibility and universality, are the moral problems. This horizon is a critical or protest-orientated horizon. Other forms of morality are deemed either premature ("at low stages") or not a moral problem at all. What then, is the post-conventional and so the morality? According to the liberals, it is justice as fairness, a kind of act chosen in a situation where people are individuals facing each other without considering family ties or any other relationships. What is the core of this fairness? It is the respect of others as men. Hegel in his *Principles of Philosophy of Rights* has identified three kinds of moralities: abstract law, ethical realm, and moral domain. "Abstract law" type morality features the discourse of "individual freedom," "rights," and "contract." The imperative of this level, according to Hegel (1961), is "be a man and respect others as men." This is exactly what all liberalism intends to say.

The social background of liberalism is the deep abhorrence to religious war and a firm assertion of the liberty of the individual (especially the liberty to think—tolerance), market economy, and popular democracy which came into being with the modern bourgeois revolution. Compared to the classical times, in this ontology, "primary entity" level is regarded not at the "whole" but at the level of atomistic individuals. Society consists of heterogeneous individuals. The individual is depicted as existing independently by nature ("in a natural state"), already entitled to many "rights" such as the right to one's own life, liberty, and property. The "whole" is not seen as a primary being, but only as a construction made (by "contract") from the primary being; or to put in a more vivid metaphor, it is "a joint-stock company whose shareholders were the men of property." Therefore, the "whole" is not to be regarded as the aim of the individual, rather, individuals are set up as the aims for which the "whole" was constructed as protection. Finally, this ontology perceives the most insidious threat to the individual as the one coming exactly from the "whole," or from the state, because it is the tendency of the ontological "secondary" to alienate into the "primary"

which infringes upon individuals. Consequently, various kinds of mechanisms to check state power are established. In this kind of understanding, morality, if possible, has to be:

1. mainly a "protective mechanism." In fact, the "rights talking" such as the individual is an end in himself and individual liberty and private conscience are inviolable rights, is constructed as a moral bulwark defending individuals from encroachment by the state.

2. of minimum contents and non-indoctrinative way of teaching, because any "thick" contents and their passionate transmission may breach the line of "tolerance" and the separation of religion from public school. Many people wonder why the first expression of the Kantian categorical imperative is so loose that many things are permitted (MacIntyre, 1984). A simple answer, I believe, is that "permissiveness" is the characteristic trait of any basic horizon;

3. "against other" instead of "against oneself." If the primary entity is the whole, then it is rational and proper for moral education to teach people to constrain themselves and to suppress their selfish drives. However, it would sound rude and irrational for an atomistic primary entity philosophy to advocate this kind of morality, because now the foremost moral evil comes from the "other," the other's invasion of the self.

"The other" could be many. State is, of course, the most notorious one and has been criticized as a threat to individual's rights ever since the time of Locke. Other persons are also one potential source of violation of justice and the invasion of individual's rights. At the extreme end of this line of thought which fashioned modern and post-modern thinking, we find Freud and Foucault who claimed that it is exactly rationality and morality—collective super-ego, the final support of the liberal-enlightenment movement—that posed lethal threat to the authentic, emotive self. Of course, Liberalism has undergone much change during its three hundred years' development. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of liberalism now. One is the Lockian-Nozick's libertarianism. And the other is the new liberalism that may be traced to Rousseau, Kant, Dewey, and Rawls. What we have described here are only general principles of liberalism.

Since morality is heterogeneous and different

nations tend to stay in particular horizon of morality, it will be parochial and shallow for any nation to attack another's value system as "abnormal" or "unauthentic." Then, shall we stay where we are? My thesis will further be: let us learn how to coexist in "essential tensions" among all moral horizons. It would seem in each side's best interests to open its mind to the other side and to try to incorporate the missed essentials so as to reach a higher equilibrium. Since human beings live at various levels, they understandably have various moralities instead of one single morality. It is only absurdity and injustice to conflate multi-level human lives into one dimension. To be alert to the pluralistic nature of life is particularly important in our times. Two disruptive phenomena have paralleled the development of modernity. One is the multiplication of moral problems as the traditional moral problems from the alienated political and economic institution are still prevalent, while the new threat from the liberated individuals is becoming influential with the emerging of high technology. The other is, unfortunately, the decline of all major moral resources in all nations. Together the two facts demand all nations to make every effort to build a more comprehensive value paradigm that is capable of dealing with various moral problems in a much more complex and differentiated world.

How to creatively meet the demand of recovering moral integrity in a global community is a challenging question. Here we can only suggest some general principles of keeping balance. On the one hand, person (or virtue) education without concerning justice will prove to be inadequate. In the post-liberal West, teleology is resuming its power, attacking modernity as antimoral. However, one danger of communitarian nostalgia about "family" or "natural community" morality (ethical horizon) is its blindness to the potential cruelty of the "large family" to "outsiders." Besides, the awakening of human critical thinking is a historical fact and generally speaking represents progress. The "homesickness" for direct identity in the "golden classic time" is understandable; but as Marx says (and Habermas restates this belief today), to try to become a child again is unnatural and impossible. On the other hand, after giving considerable concern to the basic moral horizon, we should insist that the major form of moral education should be charac-

ter cultivation in the sense of building a whole person. Theorists like K. Marx, M. Weber, M. Scheler and D. Bell have all observed that one of the insidious feature of modernity is its strong tendency to swallow entire humanity into its huge "rationalistic-utilitarian" mechanism. We should do our best to prevent the loss of humanity from disappearing in the waves of modernity. That is why I agree with the insights of Frankena and Max Scheler that principles or morality is for man, not man for principles or morality.

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