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Ethics, East and West: The Importance of English Language and Cross-Cultural Philosophical Dialogue

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Abstract

Our environment is saturated in the English language due to globalisation; yet the accompanying western philosophical concepts can be contested, even resisted, in different cultural contexts. The philosophical ideas associated with the Anglosphere are rooted in the cultural, economic, religious and social traditions of broader Anglo-European, or "western" culture and are decontested ideologically within that culture. The contestation of western ideology is beneficial for global culture, but this aspect of cross-cultural dialogue is often neglected in South Asia where English language learning occurs in a post-colonial context and is often accompanied by the attempted internalisation of Anglo-European culture and norms. This paper contrasts the philosophical underpinnings of ethics in South Asia and contemporary Anglo-

European culturet. The metaphysical and cultural frameworks underlying these systems can result conceptual misunderstandings which can only be resolved by dialogue. The aim of this theoretical paper is to examine ethical theories and show how English language can be instrumental in creating a cross-cultural philosophical dialogue.

Key Words: Philosophy, Ethics, Post-colonial theory, Ideology, English Language Teaching (ELT), Cross-cultural dialogue.

Language and culture

While culture encompasses all aspects of our lives, it is nowhere more evident than in the area of language. Language played a massive role in post-colonial South Asia as the newly independent states sought to follow the western model and make themselves into "nation-states". While the "nation-state" ideal has yet to be realised, even in the west, the South Asian attempts to achieve such an aspiration through the mechanism of language, particularly the privileging of mother tongues in newly independent countries, demonstrate how powerful language is politically and culturally (Oommen, 1994; Fazal, 1999). In fact, when we examine closely the very concept of a "nation-state", we see that it is simply a linguistic construct created in the unique historical context of Western Europe.

Oommen (1994) states, "Language has provided the basis for state formation in Europe" (p. 164). These linguistic conceptions of nationhood and statehood and

the accompanying colonial narratives have power in South Asia to this day. Therefore, it is important that we do not underestimate the impact of language on culture.

According to Boroditsky (2001), "Languages force us to attend to certain aspects of our experience by making them grammatically obligatory. Therefore, speakers of different languages may be biased to attend to and encode different aspects of their experience while speaking" (p. 2). Some linguists argue for linguistic determinism, claiming that there can be no complex thought, or any thought at all, without language (Hirtle, 2013). This conception of linguistic determinism makes it clear in any study of linguistics that language is intertwined with meaning. In the very act of naming a referent, persons are creating an image of that referent both in their own mind as well as in the minds of other speakers of the language in which they communicate. The words and their referents are necessarily interpreted within the larger social sphere of culture, or as Wittgenstein (1953) claims, "For a large class of cases -though not for all- in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (p.20).

An example of this is the *Pirahã* people in the Amazon. According to John Colapinto in *The New Yorker*, linguist Dan Everett studies the language and culture of the *Pirahã* people and he believes that the *Pirahã* language is a challenge to Noam Chomsky's theory of universal grammar as it shows no evidence of recursion. The latter claim is still disputed in the field of linguistics, but more interesting for the purposes of this research are the effects of *Pirahã*

language on their culture. The *Pirahã* are monolingual and consider other languages as inferior to their own. The *Pirahã* do not farm, nor do they wish to learn farming from outsiders and they insist on maintaining a subsistence existence. They have no creation myths and no collective memory stretching back beyond the 2nd generation.

> They have no numbers, no fixed colour terms, no perfect tense, no deep memory, no tradition of art or drawing, and no words for "all," "each," "every," "most," or "few"—terms of quantification believed by some linguists to be among the common building blocks of human cognition. (Colapinto, 2007, p. 125)

While the *Pirahã* are an unusual example, we can begin to see that language is not simply a tool to communicate with others about objects in the world. A language also carries within it the aspirations, idealisations, interpretations and revelations of a particular culture. It is the basis of what we refer to as cultural metaphysics: the foundational ideological assumptions, whether "factual", historical, legendary or mythical, upon which an entire cultural worldview is constructed. In this sense, language is an important building block of culture, although possibly not as influential as the strong version of linguistic relativity theory advanced by Whorf (1950) or the example of the *Pirahã* suggests. However, it is safe to conclude that along with having a significant impact on cultural metaphysics; language also serves as a medium for the transmission and communication of a particular cultural metaphysic to others.

It is clear that language and culture are intertwined. What is expressed through language is not merely expression for the purpose of communication, but cultural embodiment as well. Therefore, language is considered to be an instrument of culture, in addition to the other instrumentalities of language such as working as a tool of knowledge and as a political instrument. In terms of today's reality, it is difficult to discuss a culture that is limited to one language or a language that restricts the embodiment of other cultures. It is true that there may be a dominant culture or a main language in any particular context, but the world has become so close-knit that blended cultures are increasingly represented in a single language. With regard to the focus of this paper, the importance of English language and cross-cultural philosophical dialogue, it is futile to engage in a discussion where culture is viewed in a hypothetical pure form or where language is thought of in an unadulterated version. English language has penetrated regions like South Asia not only as a language but with its cultural artefacts as well.

Our contention in this paper is to show how the spread of English Language is inevitably accompanied by presuppositions derived from an Anglo-American cultural metaphysic and that this necessitates the development of English language skills for people from a different cultural metaphysics to contest the decontested aspects of Anglophone or "western" ideology. Accompanying the march of globalisation and spread of the English language today is a marked westernisation of South Asian culture. This is unsurprising as knowledge of English language

is essential to success in today's globalised environment. The pressure to learn English, often accompanied by a pressure to dress, act and think in a "western" manner (to the point of emphasis on elocution and speaking a "posh" variety of English in South Asian schools), often prompts resistance to learning English as well as lack of confidence among English language learners. However, it is important to counter this problem of resistance and the lack of confidence, because the problems arising from the spread of the English language can only be countered effectively by means of the same language. The contestation of the decontested aspects of western ideology requires a type of "crossing over" and returning to one's own cultural metaphysic, along the lines of proposed by theologians like Father Aloysius Pieris (1988) in the context of inter-religious dialogue. This "crossing over" among South Asians is best accomplished through the use of English language.

The effects of English language and globalisation on South Asian culture

The English language has spread throughout the globe becoming the *lingua franca* of commerce and politics with the post-World War II ascendancy of the United States as the world's hegemonic power and the subsequent spread of globalisation. It is not coincidental that the spread of western, particularly Anglophone, political power has resulted in a corresponding spread of western culture throughout the world. Accordingly, there is an increasing demand to learn English in the developing world.

The people of South Asia have experienced this phenomenon during the period of British colonial rule. Unsurprisingly, along with English medium education and the creation of a class of native Anglophone administrators, South Asia was inundated with the structures of parliamentary governance, English literature, (Kariyawasm, 2010) the British-inspired Buddhist, Hindu and Islamic revivals and other, possibly more benign, signs of imperial culture such as cricket and high tea. Many of these borrowings have been positive; while others like the "colonial mentality" (David & Okazaki, 2010), an internalised view of the superiority of all things perceived as western, are negative. Along with the political dimensions and power dynamics of colonialism, the introduction of a foreign language also tends to change a society and culture. In the case of the imposed language of a colonial power, it even changes the way people think about their own languages, and by extension, their culture. The effects of these changes can be seen today in the prestige given to Anglophones in the region, as well as in the corresponding decrease in prestige given to mother tongues. These social issues concerning language can have devastating effects on the confidence of young South Asians wishing to learn English in order to enhance their future economic and educational opportunities (Attanayake, 2017).

Western philosophical concepts and cultural metaphysics have seeped into South Asian culture along with the spread of the English language. These elements may be viewed positively or negatively on their own merits, but they must be recognised as being tied to globalisation and the ascendancy of the west. In this sense,

the English language becomes a frontier for cross-cultural communication in South Asia.

In her forthcoming book "Post-colonial Curriculum Practices in South Asia: Building Confidence to Speak English", to be published by Routledge in July, 2019, Attanayake observes this phenomenon in the "pickling" of mother tongues with the English language, which is both a form of code mixing and code switching for the purpose of "showing off", as a manifestation of superiority, in addition to embracing other related western cultural artefacts such as dress, food, ways of spending leisure time, etc. This may be due to the desire to get closer to the "developed other" and everything that this developed other represents and symbolises as opposed to things that are South Asian and local. She lists the following reasons for South Asian efforts to try and (symbolically) "cross-over" to the west:

a) the appealing nature of consumerism and capitalism as opposed to simplicity in living
b) individualism as opposed to communalism
c) individual rights-based vs. communal duty-bound native cultures
d) freedom as opposed to family bonds, communal accountability and collective responsibility
e) easy access to pop culture
f) weak local counter forces
g) a lack of visionaries and role models in local cultures
h) human nature, to invariably see the other side of the fence as greener

Presumably, this is why scholars like Kramsch (1993) have "searched for a common universal ground of basic physical and emotional needs to make the foreign culture less threatening and more accessible to the language learner" (p. 224).

One reaction to this perceived encroachment on indigenous culture is to actively resist the spread of the English language. This can be seen in the effects of the Official Language Act of 1956 in Sri Lanka, often referred to as the "Sinhala-only act", which set the stage for conflict with the Tamil-speaking minority while attempting to marginalise the English-speaking minority in Sri Lanka (Kearney, 1978). This measure also dealt a heavy blow to English medium education in Sri Lanka that continues to be felt today. This type of resistance to English language education also serves to create a privileged class of Anglophones who are often set against the learners who are educated in their mother tongues. This often causes bright students who were educated in their mother tongue to shy away from speaking English for fear of being ridiculed by others. In so doing, they create a resistance to the English language that extends into developing ambitions that do not require English in their futures. This aversion is reinforced in situations like those found in the university sub-culture of Sri Lanka, where senior students who are unable to speak English will ban juniors from using it for communication, or even for practice purposes, as part of hazing. However, the irony Attanayake points out is that the whole manipulation of resistance to the English language accompanied by a

desire to get close to the Anglophone world via cultural artefacts such as dress code, food habits, leisure, etc., is not an imposition of Anglophone nations. Instead, it is the locals themselves who create and manipulate the imposition of western cultural artefacts and resistance to the English language when they are unable to use it. This exacerbates divisions within society and reinforces negative social attitudes towards English language and Anglophones in terms of the prestige of English and its use as an indicator of social class in what is often referred to as "linguistic imperialism" (Phillipson, 1992).

In fact, the societal attitudes which contribute to a lack of confidence among many South Asian English language learners are mainly caused by a combination of domestic educational and language policies thar are poorly designed and implemented, rather than any linguistic hegemony or imperialism *per se*. The presence of this dynamic influences the language attitudes in society towards low-proficiency English language learners in South Asia, especially learners from rural and semi-rural areas. These language attitudes create what Attanayake (2019) calls, Language Attitudes Anxiety (LAA), a specific form of anxiety that goes beyond Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) (Horwitz, Horowitz, & Cope 1986) and gives rise to lack of confidence to speak English among South Asian learners. This lack of confidence often extends towards the learning of English in general and results in poor performance in English, even among students who are quite motivated to learn English.

In order to remedy this, English language educationalists must divorce the English language, as much as possible, from its post-colonial status in South Asia and teach it instead as an individual part of the larger phenomenon of globalisation. Only then can English language be used as a tool to avoid cultural assimilation by using it to contest certain decontested areas of the ideology and cultural metaphysics of the Anglo-European world. As Mandal (2000) points out, the "flows of culture" do not have to be one-way, but the deciding factor in whether or not the flows of culture will flow in one direction or many ultimately depends on the mindset of the teachers and learners of English. If English is seen as merely an instrument of economic / social advancement, not only will engagement with the language be hindered, it is also representative of a tacit acceptance of a pragmatic, instrumental and materialist view of education and language that is itself derived from the ideology of global capitalism. This is a prime example of how learning the English language is often accompanied by an acceptance of the dominant ideology of the Anglophone nations.

As Freeden (1996) observes, all ideologies seek to place their core concepts beyond dispute among their constituents via a process of "decontestation". Western culture is informed by an ideological worldview stemming from a particular cultural metaphysic as the basis of that ideology. This cultural metaphysics is essentially a secularised version of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant religion pointed to by Max Weber in his work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. It is an i deology that has

decontested notions of industrialisation, imperialism, materialism, militarism, racism and a concept of the west as a guiding force in the "inexorable progress of humanity". Fortunately, the western cultural metaphysics has, at least overtly, disavowed many of these concepts today, but it has continued to hold as decontested the concept of progress itself and vestiges of a messianic view in regard to its mission in the world, the latter exemplified by what is often referred to as human rights imperialism.

An opening for contestation of the decontested in Anglo-European cultural metaphysics is provided because of an illusion that we are inhabiting a "post-metaphysical world" (Norval, 2000); a world of capitalism, science, technology and a homogenising secular liberalism that ironically acts as a new, but equally metaphysical, even theological, form of cultural metaphysics in cultures that claim to have discarded such notions. This fundamental aspect of Anglo-European culture is evidenced by the relativistic, even nihilistic, forms of materialism and consumerism pervading Anglo-European societies. Secular liberalism and global capitalism have been accompanied by great material benefits and this is one reason why it is emulated throughout the world. However, in its emphasis on efficiency, commoditisation, homogeneity and materialism, the western world has experienced a crisis of meaning in how to live in the world (as exemplified by the influence of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and the rise of existentialism) due to the tension found in trying to hold on to ethical ideals that are based in the metaphysics of the Christian religion in the face of a new suspicion that

there is no objective, naturalistic or non-metaphysical foundation to hold up this edifice of ethical thought.

As mentioned before, language is intertwined with meaning and meaning is an essential ingredient of any cultural metaphysic. This is of utmost importance to remember for South Asians interested in maintaining their own culture while making a significant contribution to a broader global culture. Many South Asians want the material prosperity of the Anglo-Europeans while recognising that a homogeneous global culture is neither a possible nor a desired outcome. In the next section of this paper, we shall examine the differences between South Asian and Anglo-European cultural metaphysics and their application to ethical theory before returning to the role of English language.

The Great Divergence

Although there are common values across many cultures, the South Asian approach to ethics differs from the Anglo-European approach in a few key areas of importance, principally in the areas where the development of South Asian culture diverges significantly from the western experience. A main difference is found in the history of South Asian and European civilisations is based in the religious traditions of both.

In *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation*, Hobson (2004) challenges what he calls the ethnocentric narrative of western civilisation by detailing western interaction with the eastern cultures that he contends were more advanced than the west between the years 500

and 1800 CE. This concept of more or less "advanced" cultures is itself problematic, but that dispute is best set aside here. However, it is clear that although the advance of the west did not begin in isolation from the east, there occurred what Samuel Huntington (1996) termed a "great divergence" between east and west sometime in the 15th century.

This historical event provides a starting point for discussing the differences between South Asian and Anglo-European cultural metaphysics without falling into debates about the relative levels of advancement within the competing cultures. A striking feature of western civilisation was its religion, Christianity. In fact, "Christendom" was the preferred description of what is now usually referred to as "the west" at one time and the term is apt. The role of religion in the great divergence cannot be underestimated. Christianity, particularly the hierarchical structures of Roman Catholicism, provided a unified cultural metaphysic to act as a framework for creating a broader "European" culture among competing kingdoms, as well as an orthodox set of presuppositions for the exploration, interpretation and incorporation of foreign ideas and philosophical concepts into the dominant Christian culture This is exemplified by the hermeneutical incorporation of Greek philosophers such as Aristotle into Roman Catholic scholastic theology. In a validation of Hobson's thesis, we must remember that many of these concepts and philosophies were preserved and expanded upon in the east via Islamic scholarship, but the incorporation of these philosophical principles into the cultural metaphysics of Europe was a distinctly Roman Catholic enterprise.

In contrast, South Asia was a far more religiously heterogeneous society and lacked an overriding hierarchical structure to provide for the ascendency of any singular philosophical or religious orthodoxy. Indeed, South Asia was home to a Vedic tradition that had already existed for over 3000 years and had already given birth to Brahmanism, Jainism and Buddhism. The pre-colonisation period prior to the great divergence was marked by the existence of the great Islamic Sultanates and the Mughal Empire. Sikhism also arose prior to colonisation, and even small minority religions such as Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Judaism thrived in South Asia. In contrast to the west, South Asian cultural metaphysics were formed in an atmosphere of religious diversity with high levels of tolerance for different types of cultural, philosophical and religious thought. This is perhaps due to less emphasis being placed on the rationalisation and moralisation of the cultural rituals of worship that are now known as "religions" in South Asia. Rather than an emphasis on *orthodoxy* in belief, South Asian culture emphasised *orthopraxis* in communal ritual and an ethics centred in hypothetical imperatives and the development of religiously defined virtues.

The hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church also endowed the enterprise of European colonisation with a divine sanction that broadly transcended the rivalries of the European monarchs. The expansionist and universalist worldview derived from Catholic Christianity laid the foundations for the rationalisation of imperial expansion as well as the role of Christian religion in a "civilising

mission" to convert the heathen. It was this totalising philosophical, rationalist and religious ethos of the west and the accompanying expansion of imperial power that helped bring it to the pre-eminent position it maintains today.

The wealth brought into Europe from its colonies had a great impact on Anglo-European civilisation. This changing economic landscape was a driver behind the Protestant Reformation, which was simply an adaptation of the Catholic cultural metaphysic to a new socio-political and economic reality. In this sense, although the contemporary ethical schools of the modern west have a distinctly Protestant flavour, they often rely, implicitly or explicitly, on metaphysical presuppositions found in the earlier Catholic cultural metaphysic. The Reformation was also partially responsible for the wars of the 17th century in Europe, which led to the development of the aforementioned nation-state ideal after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The idea of the state as the building block of international relations is still foundational to today's international system and the idealised conception of the nation-state is particularly important, to the point of becoming a fetish in many new, post-colonial states like those found in South Asia. The rise of Protestantism also coincided with and informed the scientific revolution, the industrial revolution and the beginnings of mercantilism and capitalism that also occurred in this same time period. This great divergence is what set the stage for the imperialism that followed and the legacy with which South Asia wrestles today.

Anglo-European and South Asian ethical thought

The area I have chosen to focus on as an example of where English language can be used to decontest western cultural metaphysics is in the field of ethics. Anglo-European ethics claim a universality that is not readily apparent, let alone self-evident, in their postulations. In fact, these ethical theories are usually a simple logical outgrowth of Anglo-European cultural metaphysics. They are distinctly rooted in the particular cultural, economic, religious and social traditions of the western world and are decontested ideologically within the broader culture. They are not objectively universal, nor are they necessarily an ideal for South Asians to emulate.

Of course, many areas of Anglo-European ethics are compatible with South Asian culture, but it is important that cross-cultural dialogue delineate the boundaries that are to be used to investigate ethical theories within the context of South Asian cultural metaphysics. The goal cannot be to synthesise eastern and western ethical theories in order to find a greater ethical "truth", but instead to situate each ethical tradition firmly within their own respective cultural metaphysics to facilitate "crossing over", by way of inter-cultural communication and mutual understanding to provide a fresh perspective from which to address particular ethical issues. This critique and dialogue can be accomplished via the English language in order to address the westerners directly, contesting their decontested dogmas in the dominant global language.

Unsurprisingly, considering the historical impact of the aforementioned great divergence, the greatest differences between South Asian and Anglo-European ethics are products of the differing religious doctrines that inform their respective cultural metaphysics, as well as the influence of mechanistic science in forming the modern ethical schools of deontology and utilitarianism.

One of the most glaring examples of the difference between South Asian and Anglo-European cultural metaphysics has been the acceptance of what Obeyesekere (2002) refers to as "rebirth eschatology" in the ancient Indic religious traditions as compared to the Anglo-European, Judeo-Christian tradition of a single earthly life followed by an eternal life, usually of reward or punishment, which is to follow the last judgement and / or the resurrection of the dead that occurs at the end of time. However, even the modern concept of eternal oblivion put forth by contemporary atheists has more of a basis in this cultural metaphysic of eternalism than one of annihilationism as taught by the ancient Indian materialists.

The ancient Indic religions developed a "karmic eschatology", which posits that man is ultimately the heir to his deeds in a cyclical process of existence and that this cycle of existence is fundamentally incomplete or unsatisfactory. This leads to a soteriology that involves obtaining release from this eternal cycle of existence. Western eschatology on the other hand, stressed a belief in an eternal soul that renders the possibility of escape from existence impossible and leads to a soteriology in which one aims at obtaining an eternal reward. The concept of an

end of time is also a fundamental difference, pointing to a linear, historical conception of time in the Judeo-Christian eschatology and a teleological goal to be achieved *communally* in the linear unfolding of time, while the Indic eschatology emphasises an *individual* meandering towards the ultimate end of individual liberation from conditioned existence itself through the realisation of no-self (Skt. *anātman*) and / or realisation of the self (Skt. *ātman*) as identical with the non-individuated and non-dual reality (Skt. *Brahman*). Brahman serves the same purpose as God in Anglo-European cultural metaphysics as the ontological basis of being *qua* being, however, *Brahman* as a non-individuated, impersonal and transcendent reality permeating all existence stands in sharp contrast to the concept of God as an individual, personal creator actively engaged in the world while also transcending his creation.

It should be recognised that these differences in conceptions of the purpose of life, the nature of time, reality and the basis of self are fundamentally different and in some senses irreconcilable. Both of these worldviews are necessarily metaphysical, but also equally rational and meaningful in the lives of human beings. These powerful metaphysical conceptions of reality are what are referred to when using the term cultural metaphysics for the fundamental assumptions that undergird any culture and upon which any ideological "cultural hegemony" is ultimately built.

However, philosophers may object that Anglo-European culture has moved away from the metaphysical notions found in the Christian religion. This does not

seem to be the case in many important respects. While belief in a personal creator God has declined and where belief in God persists, the role of God in culture appears to be ever more constrained, the fundamental propositions of the Christian cultural metaphysics are still present in Anglo-European culture. Complex philosophical doctrines are still abstracted from foundations in Anglo-European cultural metaphysics and from the presuppositions found in Christian religion.

An example of this is the physicalist assertion that the end of an individual life is followed by eternal oblivion. At first this belief appears to be wholly logical, rational, in accord with scientific views and divorced from metaphysical considerations. However, one can still find the implicit assumptions of the Christian metaphysic underlying this assertion.

Firstly, it assumes the existence of a self that emerges from matter while its perceptions are immaterial, and this is for all practical purposes simply a metaphysical soul. Critiques of this doctrine of self / soul are found in Buddhist philosophy and articulated by David Hume, and they illustrate the metaphysical nature of the idea. Belief in a unique and individual emergent "self" that stands in a subject-object relation to the external world discounts the possibility of any relation between the continual phenomenological aspects of human perception and "consciousness". This is usually asserted without recognising that if the self is not demonstrable as an ontologically real entity, then there is no phenomenological difference between this life, arisen without awareness,

intention and volition on the part of a "self" and any possible future life of an emergent "self" defined as continual subjective perception and consciousness, which may arise in exactly the same manner as the present "self" emerged.

The idea of eternal oblivion following death also presupposes a notion of an individual human life (again raising an issue of personal identity) as a uniquely individual creation / emergent phenomenon that cannot be replicated in any manner throughout eternity, with "eternity" itself existing only as an abstraction from a linear conception of time in a single unique universe that progresses to its "end" in a similar fashion to that found in Christian metaphysics.

This discussion of the self / soul leads to another noted difference between South Asian and Anglo-European cultural metaphysics, the question of egalitarianism. It is often noted that South Asian culture is less concerned with the individual than in Anglo-European culture where the individual is given primacy of place. This is often thought to be an example of South Asian culture as being more "holistic" than Anglo-European culture. This classification is overly simplistic, as the Anglo-European ethical tradition tends to "give value to the general over the particular" (Dhand, 2002, p. 348) due to its universalism, and is in this sense, quite holistic in its approach. However, it is clear that Anglo-European ethics privilege the individual more than the South Asian approach, which places greater emphasis on community, hierarchy and duties meant to create a harmonious social order.

The emphasis on individuals in Anglo-European ethics is unsurprising when placed in the context of the conception of the individual self / soul as a moral agent. In contrast, the ethical reasoning of South Asians was traditionally derived from a conception of all existence and phenomena as interrelated. This may have its roots in the relative prosperity of the South Asian landscape, which even today supports a quarter of the world's population. In fact, India was estimated to account for nearly one-quarter of the world's wealth prior to colonisation. It can also be theorised that this bounty is one reason why neither South Asian nor East Asian societies pursued imperial expansion with the zeal of the Europeans.

What is indisputable though, is that ethics in South Asia are generally communitarian. For example, Buddhist ethics are often compared with Aristotelian and neo-Thomist virtue ethics that emphasise cultivation of habit and character in order to make correct moral decisions from a position of "right view" in the absence of existential moral ignorance, rather than concentrating on rationalist speculations derived from principles and rules that are unable to account for unforeseen consequences and the actions of other agents. However, in spite of the similarities between certain particularly South Asian ethical doctrines and virtue ethics or consequentialism, there remain important differences in the cultural metaphysics of South Asia. These are most apparent in the highly developed ideas of interdependence, the rejection of hedonism as a basis for happiness, the rejection of happiness as an absence of suffering and in different categorisations of what "virtue" is, especially in regard to innate differences in the individual's ability to attain higher spiritual status and greater consistency in regard to ethical behaviour.

The latter difference is often cited in regard to the hierarchical nature of South Asian society when compared to the western egalitarian view. The latter is based on a presupposition of inherent equality among human beings (with other creatures being relegated to an instrumental role given the primacy of rationality in Anglo-European cultural metaphysics). However, this doctrine of inherent equality and of natural rights emerging from this equality can be traced directly to Christian thought, in which humans are created in the image of God as brothers and sisters in a natural setting explicitly given to them to be used in an instrumental fashion. Human rights doctrine, closely related to deontological ethics, also stems from the very same root and is itself an outgrowth of the Roman Catholic scholastic doctrine of natural law as refined by English Protestant philosophers and culturally shaped by political liberalism and global capitalism.

In contrast, South Asian cultural metaphysics emphasise the interdependent nature of existence over the primacy of the individual and do not recognise an inherent equality of individuals. Instead, individuals are judged by the manifestations of their efforts in the cultivation of "ethical" conduct, in a broad sense of the term ethical, especially through ritual and the observance of religious vows in order to promote right living in a harmonious society. As in the west, these concepts are found in the

metaphysical realm, but they remain grounded realities in the concrete orders of South Asian societies where these particulat cultural metaphysics thrive.

The caste system is an example of a system that found its basis in cultural metaphysics that view society as an organic, interdependent whole with its historical form existing concretely as a political instrument that has been described as an efficient division of labour, a system of checks and balances among the *varnas* and an instrument of social and political stability by Nadkarni (2003). While Nadkarni takes great pains to show that the caste system is not intrinsic to Hindu traditions, indeed it is found throughout South Asia among all religious traditions, it is clear that the preoccupation with an orderly, harmonious and hierarchical society is found in a broader South Asian cultural metaphysic, and this is why many diverse religious traditions in South Asia integrated notions of caste into their social reality. The interdependent approach to ethical thought in South Asian culture is also attested to in Ayurvedic medicine with its explicit exhortations that the maintenance of bodily health is deeply entwined with religious practices. Likewise, emotion, sentiments, compassion and passions are all considered to be as important as reason in ethical thought due to the interdependent nature of existence. Outside of Spinoza, this is an oft-neglected area of concern in modern and contemporary Anglo-European ethics.

The caste system and Ayurvedic medicine are sometimes interpreted as evidence of how South Asian cultural metaphysics are more pragmatic and "practical"

than their "idealistic" Anglo-European counterparts, with a greater emphasis on the world as it is rather than how it ought to be. This is also a simplistic interpretation as both types of cultural metaphysics inform their concrete social realities in pragmatic ways. However, it does further emphasise the importance of interdependence in the South Asian context. The notion of interdependence, rather than a dependence on the abstraction of independent essences through reason, is the basis of South Asian ethical thought and its emphasis on tradition and social order. In contrast, the Anglo-European tradition tended to emphasise rationalism, and later rationalism coupled with materialism. Failure to recognise this difference usually accounts for the misconception that Asian thought is more practically oriented.

In some sense, most modern and contemporary Anglo-European ethical theory arose from, or counter to, the Divine Command Theory of moral obligation. The Divine Command Theory is itself a branch of deontological ethics and proposes that right conduct is right because God commands it. This theory of moral obligation is based on the rightness of knowing and following one's obligations to God. Deontological ethics of the type exemplified by Immanuel Kant are simply an expansion of one's moral obligation to God to a moral obligation to other rational beings. This emphasis on rationality as the criteria for moral obligation and duty owes much to the approach of the scholastics. Even Kant's development of the Categorical Imperative (CI) states that right action must be capable of being universalised without contradiction,

mirroring the claim that commands from God must be universal in order to be considered moral obligations rather than merely religious obligations (Graber, 1975).

Utilitarianism, the dominant form of Anglo-European consequentialist ethics, was developed in England near the beginning of the industrial revolution and sought to wed its rationalism with materialism. Unsurprisingly, given the socio-economic and political climate of the time, it sought a more objective and "scientific" manner of evaluating moral action than that found in deontological ethics or religious ethics. It relies on the presuppositions of mechanistic science that were ascendant in Anglo-American Protestant cultures at that time. What was good was defined as what was pleasurable and the determination of action was to be determined by applying a hedonic calculus to determine what would bring the greatest pleasure to the greatest number of people.

Utilitarianism consequentialism avoids many difficulties found in deontological ethics by providing a less ambiguous goal and more objective means of measuring progress towards that goal. In fact, it can be said that non-consequentialist ethics are not even viable moral theories due to their disregard of the consequentialist approach (Upton, 1993). However, the acts of quantifying pleasure and pain, or good and bad consequences are necessarily subjective. Furthermore, the time taken to calculate the ethical outcome of action is time spent not acting and there is also a problem of unforeseen consequences. Much like Kant's CI, utilitarianism is a product of the prevailing cultural metaphysics of the time. This becomes

clear when viewed in the language of economics, industrialisation, management and markets. Utilitarianism seeks to quantify the good, produce the good efficiently and distribute the good as if it were a commodity. The similarities between materialist economic philosophy and consequentialism are not coincidental.

The presuppositions in both South Asian and Anglo-European cultural metaphysics are equally coherent and their conclusions logically follow from their premises. However, it is equally clear that the premises are founded in the differences between pluralistic South Asian cultural metaphysics and the more unitary and hegemonic Christian cultural metaphysics of the Anglo-European world. This means that any cross-cultural philosophical dialogue must take place with a goal of acquiring a deeper understanding of the cultural metaphysics that inform different ethical approaches.

One common factor to all traditions of South Asia is the importance given to communal ritual. Rituals have been of great importance across all of South Asia from the time of the Vedas and this continuing elevation of ritual stands in distinct contrast to contemporary Anglo-European context. Communal ritual is vital in South Asian cultural metaphysics for both ethical development and as an instrument of social stability. This is pointed out by Kariyawasm (2010) and Munshi (2010) in their articles regarding the efficacy of ritual as a manifestation of ethics in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Four streams of ritual forces alone that have been absorbed in Bangladesh and can be extrapolated to the rest of South Asia are "Ethnic anthropomorphism, Buddhist nihilism, Hindu Vaishnavism and Muslim Sufism" (Munshi, 2010, p. 46). Forms of ritualism are found throughout South Asia and serve to help communities determine their fundamental beliefs (i.e. create a cultural metaphysics), interpret past experiences and celebrate life events. They provide continuity as well as stability and are the most visible manifestation of South Asian culture as overt symbolic acts. It should also be pointed out that many secular arts including dance, music and theatre in South Asia have emerged from the rituals and *poojas* of ancient South Indian religions and philosophies (Kottagoda, 2010).

To remain viable, rituals must stay rooted in the structure of society and continue to be reinforced by South Asian ethical traditions of cultivated virtue and contemplation of the divine in whatever form it may take. Otherwise, the ritual acts will lose their efficacy in the face of a hedonistic and consumer-driven capitalist value system. The effects of capitalist ideology are apparent in the west and this is one reason why contemporary Anglo-European cultural metaphysics are increasingly disdainful of ritual, often defining it linguistically in terms of primitivism and superstition. This cultural divide concerning the value of ritual between South Asians and Anglo-Europeans is another ethical issue that can only be dealt with when superficial definitions are confronted directly through cross-cultural dialogue in English language forums. It is not enough to simply learn English; students

must be taught how to use English to further the narrative of their own cultural metaphysic rather than complacently internalising the negative and trivialising judgements of their practices and rituals that are manifested in contemporary Anglo-European cultural metaphysics.

Human rights doctrine is another problematic ethical theory that advances many common values already found in South Asia, while being essentially rooted in contemporary Anglo-European cultural metaphysics as a foundational doctrine of political duties and obligations. However, due to its pretensions of universality and its foundations in Anglo-American Protestant culture, it is often used in a neo-colonial manner and with an undercurrent of patronising orientalism when applied to South Asia. In practical terms, it has taken over from religious imperatives the function of justifying interventionism in the developing world. This is the main reason why human rights-based ethics are often seen as insincere posturing on the part of the western world and as a threat to indigenous cultures throughout the developing world.

This is not to say that individual South Asians should accept of violations of their rights in the name of culture, only that it should be the community of South Asians operating in the context of their own cultural metaphysics who should decide what constitutes a fundamental, legal right. South Asia has a long history of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and enlightened government to draw upon in making these determinations. Unfortunately, it also has negative examples of corruption and mismanagement in its post-colonial history. It should be acknowledged

that some of these negative aspects were products of the imposition of alien structures on the region by imperial powers and are unlikely to be "repaired" by the same coloniser nations who caused the problem. Yet again, this is an area in which the South Asian experience with western political systems and the English language puts them in an excellent position to contest the dogmas underlying liberal internationalism and human rights imperialism while also working to develop indigenous systems that suit the local cultural context.

The final area in which there is great potential for a particularly South Asian contestation of ethical theory is in the area of ethical construction. Modern Anglo-European ethical theories are grounded in premises derived from the increasingly outdated paradigm of mechanistic science. Western ethicists have recognised this problem and there has been an increasing turn toward the development of a virtue ethics based in pre-modern thought as exemplified by the work of Alasdair MacIntyre (2007). As we mentioned before, there are substantial similarities between virtue ethics and South Asian approaches to ethical theory, but the current environment provides an ideal opportunity to contest the Anglo-European foundations of virtue ethics from the perspective of distinctly South Asian cultural metaphysics and contribute to building a more robust theory of virtue ethics. However, given that 96% of the editorial board members of the top 15 philosophical journals are from Anglophone countries (Schwitzgebel, 2017) and 97% of the citations in the most prestigious English language journals are from works originally written

in English (Schwitzgebel, 2016), it is imperative that South Asians develop the ability to publish their contributions in English to reach an international audience and add a valuable perspective to the construction of ethical theory by engaging in cross-cultural philosophical dialogue.

Conclusion

The purpose of ethics is to secure the well-being, happiness, freedom and development of a society, not just to provide a basis for material transactions. Language, including the symbolic language of rituals, is the outward expression of a culture and the underlying ethics that regulate a particular society. For this reason, English language can either be a threat to South Asian culture or a tool to protect and further develop that culture. The outcome will be decided by how English language is taught and utilised within South Asia. The examples given here in the field of ethics demonstrate that South Asian culture is vibrant enough and its traditions strong enough to both borrow from and challenge the dominant Anglo-European paradigms.

South Asians of all nationalities share similar values, regulative principles of life and a heritage of struggle for liberation. The example of Bangladeshi liberation provides a template as a "great historical achievement of people with different ethical and social values forming a democratic and exploitation-free state that is generally regarded as a place where moderate Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists live together peacefully" (Munshi, 2010, p. 44). The broader, regional, absorption and assimilation

of Islam is a prime example of how South Asian cultural metaphysics can incorporate and assimilate a significantly different cultural metaphysics over time with mutual understanding leading to mutual enrichment. Like Anglo-European cultural metaphysics, Islamic cultural metaphysics differed in fundamental ways from the Indic traditions, but it was better able to coexist with these older traditions partly because Islam has never had an overarching hierarchical authority to enforce a rigorous orthodoxy in areas where it was spread. This is also the root of the history of Islamic toleration of different faiths, the actual levels of which varied throughout history, but have been consistently good (Eickelman, 2002).

Bangladesh is not a lone example in South Asia; instead, it is an example of how well the broader South Asian culture has acted as a metaphorical melting pot of diverse cultural metaphysics. However, it must be remembered that this diversity occurred within a framework of geographical and linguistic proximity. This has changed in today's globalised environment, necessitating engagement with English. The western world has to date had great difficulty in understanding or assimilating the cultural metaphysics of South Asia, likely due to the fact that the Anglo-European cultural metaphysics is based on a very different historical context heavily influenced by hegemonic Christianity. This may be why western societies, particularly in Europe, have struggled to integrate South Asian and non-Christian minorities today. This is a fundamental difference between the Anglo-European world and South Asia. The latter has

been a multi-religious society since ancient times. In fact, the problem of how to integrate religious pluralism into society through tolerance and assimilation is a promising field for South Asians to address in their own societies as modernism makes further inroads and in their engagements with the western world.

The concept of Inter-cultural Competence (ICC) means that one should "encourage the development of both culture-specific knowledge and skills, and culture-general knowledge and skills for learning about, becoming involved in, and successfully negotiating inter-cultural communicative interaction" (Hall, 2002, p.110). This can be made use of in English language education as there is very little left to be done in terms of cultural blending insofar as Anglo-European culture in South Asia is concerned. Instead, it is a reverse journey that has to be made, taking our young South Asian learners through the paths of their native cultures by making use of the English language where English can be made use of as an instrument of indigenous cultural knowledge. Few people are better suited than South Asians to demonstrate that modernity does not have to entail a negation of one's traditional culture or the cultural metaphysics underlying that culture in the contemporary world. The vibrancy of South Asian culture has been at its greatest when is able to engage with other cultures on its own terms. However, a fundamental requirement for engagement at the international level today is a mastery of the English language. This requires a system of English-language teaching that is not focused merely on the economic

and social advantages of learning English, but one that is sensitive to and supportive of the indigenous cultural metaphysics and traditions of South Asia. Devising and developing such a system of English-language education in philosophy should be a national priority in South Asian countries as they pursue development strategies in the global environment.

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Gender (Construct) from Social and Individual Lenses

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Abstract

Gender and sexuality are always seen as a 'singular' concept by the lenses of a normative society. Moreover, a normative society does not allow or permit the construction of gender from any other perspective or lenses. According to Butler, "we understand "sex" and "gender" as citational repetitions". Thus, "under the watchful eyes of powerful social forces" the ideas of masculinity and femininity are constructed. "আরেকটি প্রেমের গল্প" (Just Another Love Story) through the characters of Chapal Bhadhuri and Abhiroop Sen portrays how gender is sometimes constructed from the lenses of individuals disregarding the biological and social construction of gender. Furthermore, the primary text also deals with the idea of third gender category as well. In this film, Kaushik Ganguly has successfully pointed out that, psychological construction of gender sometimes has no connection with physical construction of gender of an individual. Unfortunately, a normative