

**Report of the UNESCO Asia-Arab Interregional Philosophical Dialogues on Philosophy facing the challenges of modern technology**

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**Held on 17-18 November 2006 in Rabat, on the occasion of the Celebrations of World Philosophy Day, at the Conference: Encounters of Asia and the Arab Region With Modernity**

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**1. Recommendations for future work**

The group acknowledged the breadth of the topic of philosophy approaching modern technology, and suggested a number of themes that would be fruitful for attention and dialogue in the future about the nature of technology, as well as suggesting projects that would utilize advanced technology to assist dialogue. The members were willing to commit time and energy to all of these projects and will also call upon colleagues to assist in the execution of these projects.

**a) Book(s) chapters**

Specific themes for research papers were suggested, and a possible Table of Contents for the publication from this theme that could provide a basic text for education would include some of the papers gathered in the appendix (from this dialogue meeting) as well as:

Products of enlightenment

Philosophy and metaphysics.

The exchanges in the field of science and technology between the Islamic medieval civilisation and China - Abattouy

The Silk Road and Commodity exchange: Cultural exchanges and consumer technology exports - Abattouy  
Common ethical frameworks that can be applied to dilemmas of technology  
Document examples of value debates over technology  
Future of biotechnology  
Changing the nature of humans through modern technology (genetics, cyborgs) - Macer  
Comparisons of transsexuality and gender modification - Giang  
Views of nature and the environment  
Dialogues with nature  
Ethics of energy dialogues – Benmaissa, Macer

The process of production will include asking persons to write papers and commentaries, groups working on joint papers after dialogue. In addition to email and Internet (e.g. skype video for dialogues), a meeting in 2007 would be useful. Language preferences were first English and second Arabic, so translation services will be needed.

#### b) Youth forums using technology

Meetings and exchange would stimulate interest in the subjects. Currently students in Morocco were not familiar with the philosophy of technology, but environmental issues or ethics were easier. Most students used skype, and UNESCO should set up a method for exchange (UNESCO Bangkok investigating this practically). Technology is a tool for dialogue, for not only Youth. There are also links to current projects such as iEARN ([www.learn.org](http://www.learn.org)).

#### c) Digital library

A steering committee was established to investigate the current availability of Arab and Asian philosophical texts on the Internet and to make a report of what exists, the gaps, and proposals of how to fill these gaps. The committee includes Abattouy, Benmaissa, Macer plus others. There are a range of questions that need to be identified to make the UNESCO digital library of philosophy, including translations, editorial policy, and technical aspects, and funding. A proposal for funding is expected to be made by end of January 2007.

#### d) Asia-Arab Open University of Philosophical Dialogue

That a virtual open university with offices in Asian and Arab universities be established. There would be two Deans, one from each of Asia and Arab regions, and Deans changing every two years. Its function would be to organize dialogue events, and be a virtual site for exchange of information. It could be linked to the digital library. A steering committee was established to make a report on the concept and details of the purposes and functions of such an open university (including Cha, Hadadi, Benabdelali, Benmaissa, plus others).

## **2. Summary**

This summary includes a summary of the interventions (for formal summaries and full texts where available, see the appendix), followed by a summary of the working group sessions.

## Interventions

Professor In-Suk Cha read his paper noting that while major new industrial countries are rationalizing their productivity, their political leadership are resisting to modernity in a form of counter-modernization.. Many governments simply encourage their people to become consumers when their societies require self-conscious independent citizens to mature. Consumerism has become totalitarian, and this raises fundamental questions. Society should educate people to adopt the humanistic use of science and technology.

Professor Ricardo Salas Astrain illustrated some examples of how science and technology works in Latin America. In the age of technology, it is raising many issues. There is a strong consumption of technology in all layers of society and this is creating new images of society. Cell phones are changing the relationships between persons. With TV people can see the wealth. The politicians that exist on TV exist and those not shown do not exist. He gave a case example of Indian chiefs, who asked for money to buy video cameras to record their religious leaders, so they can record the old religious leaders and keep their proposals. It will change the approach to traditional culture. They want to keep part of memory. No longer simply oral tradition will be recorded but there are new icons. We must understand the induction processes in different cultures. We need to understand the value of modern science without losing the values of the old traditions.

Professor Aziz el Hadadi read his paper on modernity. Technology does not think, but philosophy is the only possibility to think. People are turning their back on what they think in the past. People should have their courage to use their own understandings. The Arab world has not really started to enjoy modernity. Modernity is born by enlightenment which thinks of the modern world. Enlightenment is what forces us to have doubts, and criticise. In the Arab world criticism is not a strong point and it has become impossible to criticise because of the religious element. Politics has turned into religion and religion into politics. So philosophy is our only hope to build hope. He said Arab culture needs to share with Asia the love of modernity and then we can see if love of high tech is also human.

Dr. Tran Han Giang discussed how modern biology was challenging some basics of gender science. After reviewing gender science, and asking what were the Arab and Asian perspectives on gender, she posed the question of how the cultures will view the emergence of a third gender and transsexuality. New reproductive technology is also challenging concepts of gender and relationships. Artificial sex will change gender identities.

Professor Mohammed Abattouy read his paper proposing the establishment of a digital library. He considered that this would be a basic document for all subjects of dialogue, after consulting the past reports of the Asia-Arab dialogues. To facilitate communication between the world we should have open access resources. We can implement electronic editions of great philosophical texts and their translations. Persons could retranslate original texts to evade copyright. He would also like to expand the semantics and include commentaries, and he cited online dictionaries. In response Pierre Sane noted that UNESCO in the philosophy strategy document said that they would like to implement this project.

Professor Andessalam Bennaissa read his text noting that in the course of the middle ages Muslims translated thousands of Western texts and several attempts were made to modernize Islam. Borse tried this, and then it was also seen with modern colonisers in Napoleon and the British. For radical muslims modernity is not just a

threat but can be blasphemy. Some elements of Western modernity should be removed, such as nudity. Islam is religion of submission not freedom. Also modernity cannot break with past, as past is Islam. We also need to reduce Islam to its spiritual dimension, rather than a political ideology.

Professor Ayoub Abu Dayyeh commented on the different views mentioned by some Asian philosophers. He noted that there is diversity in each country. A society needs to take technology as well as the accompanying values. Capitalism introduces many inventions that challenge us. The more we grow the less freedom we have. We have to believe that we are not yet right and can dialogue about the truth.

Dr. Hasnah Gasim suggested that modern technology should be used to connect teachers and students to have access to philosophy. This can be done through online methods, such as the iEARN project. In this way we can connect to modern life.

Professor Abdesamad Tamouro observed that we have had thinking systems for over 2000 years. Every field has its own discipline. Moral principles and religion are important. He mentioned the need for theorization, management and revelation, codification and communication. Many ICTs are important but they have led us to virtualization. Children are virtual all day. He suggested we can propose an intercultural ethics, and make comparisons on some cases so we can avoid the pitfalls Arab nations made earlier in our relations with the West.

Professor Abdeslam Benabdelali read his paper noting he was not distrustful to techniques. Technology transfer was essential, as some MNCs prohibit access to technology. This is based on the fundamental idea of the separation of science as neutral and technology which is applied. We cannot be afraid of technology but have to be able to tap it. He also said that to explain what is “natural” and “artificial” is important but has not been widely explored. A machine is not simply the application of science but rather is a new product. Knowledge has made us masters of power, so that science is being compromised. Nature is now viewed as a major reservoir of knowledge. Modern physics only sees nature as the result of atomic forces. It is result of mathematically defined forces. Thus knowledge is being treated the same way, as an energy source.

Professor Darryl Macer read his paper on how love may help guide the use of technology, and given the long heritage of love in ethics in both Asia and Arab regions, it may be a useful language for dialogue. Love also stressed relationships between living beings more, which are being challenged by some new technologies.

Professor Mohamed Mesbahi read his text noting that many former Marxist philosophers in the Arab world have been returning to fundamentalism. Philosophy may be able to get us out of the antagonistic position towards enlightenment and philosophy. Many philosophers challenge what society wants. Rationalism has given some negative results. Philosophy in the Arab world did not allow discussion of the unthinkable, so that philosophy did not get into the public sphere. Philosophy took a view where it did not want to spread its view among people, and that heritage made it very difficult. Philosophers should be part of the public sphere regardless of the price, so they can open dialogue.

## Discussion

UNESCO should have a digital library site. In the discussion of the **digital library** it was noted that it is not easy to have a set of texts transcribed. A logical structure is needed, with tagging of the content, special symbols. Some technical experience was needed, but existing software would be used to lower costs. Open

source projects to prepare the texts are a collective task open to all the world with texts in several languages. We can request researchers give rights to UNESCO as not for profit.

Regarding **publications** it was noted that Internet access is increasingly common so we can have virtual publications. This opens up huge perspectives for publications. Often books are printed with only have 1000 copies, so we need books on the Internet. Internet newspapers are replacing physical newspapers. This will reduce the need for physical books.

Feasibility studies are needed for the **digital library** and for the **open university**. There was a need for intellectuals to revisit the questions over the future of the world. We should create a permanent forum for Asia and Arab reflection on modernity. A call should be made for partner and affiliated institutions. There was discussion of potential names including Avicenna, Al-Biruni, Alfarabi, as names for the university. While the digital library and university can be combined, the digital library can be initiated quickly and is urgently needed. It could later be at the virtual site.

The text would be needed to increase the ability of people to understand, at early ages. It is important to increase the conception of people, and raise the ability of the mind in all the countries. Many Arab countries do not teach philosophy in schools. Studies in Australia showed that this raised the ability of all students, so we need to study teaching of philosophy at schools.

In the smaller thematic working group there were also more than 20 observers, including many students who were interested in the topic and proposed the Youth dialogues. The internet can create a bridge for exchanges of ideas by students. An existing example of exchange also between high school students in iEARN network and with 200 projects in 30 languages (including Arabic, French and English) at schools is a useful example.

There is a difference between merely promoting exchange of students and research. While the teaching of Japanese is present in faculty of literature in Rabat scholars do not know how to understand Japanese philosophy. We need to have chairs of oriental civilisation, library and translations. There followed a discussion of philosophical dialogue and some ideas on it.

The concept of “West” is not based on natural geography but concepts. The intervention of West is cultural not geographic. The so-called Occidental represents nature. However currently all the technology is coming from Asia. These are not from the West, and even some medications are from Asia. While some may suggest defining philosophy and dialogue, such definitions already exist in dictionaries, it will be more fruitful to discuss the impact of modernity in two regions, and whether the impact is negative or positive. Values are shared, and Islam is shared with Asia but not with the West.

At a certain time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Asian and Arab countries were at the same stage. Studies of Japan, Egypt and Turkey have shown that they were at similar stages. The results were positive in Asia but not in Arab regions. Now we are looking

at the middle of 21<sup>st</sup> century where Asia will be the main world power, so no longer history but geopolitics. This strategic element will be taken into account, and Arab countries are also developing contacts with India and China. We are trying to find a common ground. Despite the closeness we do not know each other, as there has been little exchange. Despite the amazing presence of Asian products people from the two regions do not know each other. Even most of Arabia does not know Asian countries with a Muslim majority, and Indonesia, which is the world's most populous Muslim country. Also Asia does not know itself, with technical hegemony.

Historically a fruitful case of dialogue is the Silk Road, and examining the technological exchange during the Silk Road. Fundamental exchanges of humans occurred, for example Chinese prisoners brought paper to the Islamic world, whereas Islamic astronomical manuscripts were transmitted to China.

Themes of modern technology as well as both history of science, and contemporary science like ethics of energy are absent from university. There needs to be an exchange how do people look at metaphysics. Those outside each other's world are very interested in what thinkers are thinking about topics such as bioethics and environmental ethics.

The Arab region does not need a negative stance towards technology, as they have to benefit from technology as Asia is doing, before having a negative vision of technology. The philosophical dialogues will be a background for Arab countries develop common strategies with Asia. This will also have a significant impact on education. Cooperation between researchers is starting and educational scholarships have been started, for example, Japan has been giving scholarships to 40 students from Morocco every year. Five years ago an Asian review on Islamic sciences has been produced by Japanese scholars as research. There was agreement that the thematic groups should develop shared working structures. Research groups composed of Arab and Asian students were also one possibility.

### **3. Appendix with Interventions**

[\*\*\(Summaries or full papers where available\)\*\*](#)

#### ***Heritage in an age of Electronic Technology: For a Digital Library of Classical Arab Sciences and Philosophy***

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The digital library is a recent means of access to resources in classical philosophy and sciences. A digital library is composed of numeric texts accessible by distance (and mostly via the Internet). The data there is codified according to norms related to format, compression and encoding. The types of digitalization can include the text or the image, or combine both. This new way of diffusion and conservation has numerous advantages related to the length and quality of conservation, the facility of access and the sharing of resources, and it disposes of tools for research, indexation

and classification that facilitate content analysis. The presentation was organized according to three principle themes: 1. summary explanation of the concept of “digital library”; 2. description of the state-of-the-art of electronic resources on classical Arab heritage available on the Web, by using a few examples; and 3. outlining of the technical and practical conditions necessary to develop the digitalization and free access to Arabic texts in the fields of science and philosophy.

***Le titre sera le suivant: Sciences modernes et pensée islamique.***

Mohamed Aballagh  
Professor of Philosophy, Faculty of Letters, Kenitra, Morocco

Quant à mon approche, il sera de nature historique et philosophique, c'est-à-dire, que l'approche historique, va nous permettre de voir,quelles étaient les efforts des penseurs musulmans à faire des sciences exactes une composante essentielle de la pensée islamique elle-même, tandis que l'approche philosophique nous permettra de répondre à la question suivante: Est-il possible que la science soit une composante essentielle de la pensée arabo-islamique moderne, ou bien elle n'est pour les musulmans qu'un instrument qu'on utilise pour des fins pratiques, sans intégration de ses dimensions rationnelles, spirituelles, comme il a été prétendu au 19<sup>ème</sup> siècle, par des orientalistes. Quant au but de cet exposé, c'est d'expliquer le droit des peuples arabes et musulmans de disposer de la science et de ses applications technologique, car l'histoire nous montre clairement que l'assimilation dans notre patrimoine, n'était pas seulement pratique et utilitaire, elle est aussi intellectuelle, spirituelle et théorique.

*[current no English summary is available]*

***The Malaises of Modernity and the Arab World: Charles Taylor as an Example***

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Director of the Encyclopaedia of Modern and Contemporary Arab Thought;  
Jordan

This paper critically analysed Charles's Taylor's "The Ethics of Authenticity" and shed some light on his social democratic stance from the point of view of an observer of a different culture who belongs to the underdeveloped Arab World. Charles Taylor considers Modernity in its humanistic dimension reaching its peak in the seventeenth century, ever since humanity has been on the decline, particularly after the Second World War. We shall argue his three malaises of modernity and try to answer Taylor's question which he utters in chapter eight: What is the manner and content of our action required to improve our world?

It seems necessary, methodologically, to start by defining his concepts of "Modernity" and "Authenticity" first and then discuss the purpose of his book. Then we shall quickly review the philosophical progress of humanity since the seventeenth century until the appearance of the three malaises of modernity and consequently discuss the suggested ethical actions required to improve the world, as he puts it.

One main issue in the analysis and discussion was how we, in the Arab world, perceive these malaises of modernity and hence the consequent suggested ethical actions, in conjunction with our prevailing culture dominated by uneven North South

relations. We hope that these relations will reveal the background of the contemporary tension resulting from the encounter of the Arab World with Modernity.

We need philosophy to teach the Truth as a relative concept. There is no divine or eternal truth, thus we need not fight to defend it, as Truth is an ever changing problematic, much like the stance of Heraclitus to the world: Only change is real in the world. If we agree on this, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other faiths and philosophies are mere guidance to people. An eclectic religion is closer to the truth than anyone of them isolated from the others.

The Arab World has had little touch with philosophies of the Far East. We need to learn more about it in order to establish a cultural understanding strong enough to embark on a dialogue. Since the early 8<sup>th</sup> century Arab invasion of Europe and since the Crusades in the 11<sup>th</sup> century up till Napoleon's expedition in Egypt in 1798 the Arabs have been preoccupied with European history and philosophies and very little attention has been paid to the Far Eastern culture.

Unfortunately Modernity has reached an impasse to many people. As a response to my lecture in the World Philosophy Day Congress in Rabat, in the activities of roundtable 9, many Moroccan philosophy students expressed their disappointment of the Enlightenment and its post modern philosophy which ended up in narcissistic attitudes. Further reasons for this attitude are sliding towards nihilism, expressed by post modern writers like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. They carried this nihilism to the degree of annihilation of the self.

The Moroccan students were actually talking about going back to Islamic heritage instead. They thought fundamentalism has answers to their needs.

My response was that we cannot go back to the Middle Ages. The Enlightenment is a multi cultural product and is directed towards respecting the human being regardless of race or gender. Life is a continuous progressive process and what worked years ago can never work now! We must modernize religion as it has always been modernizing itself ever since the time of the second caliph of Islam, Omer, he has changed some of the rules that the prophet Mohamed himself has taught (Sunnah), particularly issues such as paying tribute to some tribes to guarantee their loyalty when Islam was still weak. He decided that this rule has become out of date since Islam has become stronger. Caliph Omer Bin Khattab also stopped the act of amputating the hand of thieves at the time of famine, which is a Koranic teaching and a divine law in Islam. Thus Islam must modernize itself or it will either perish or will be at perpetual war with almost every body, including Moslems of different sects.

It is Ironic to see how the descendants of the Enlightenment have been engaged in World Wars. Aggression is naturally defended as we have a genetic defense system which reflexes not only the defense of dignity and life, but defends property, heritage, etc. This is no defense only in war, as Professor Chahal suggests, every defense needs a counter attack to halt further attacks. Every action triggers a reaction: It is a natural law in physics. Therefore we must seek the causes of conflicts and look for solutions. That is how wars are stopped.

Philosophers who talked about peace in the past have lived during vicious wars. Cicero, the Roman philosopher, lived in the expanding Roman Empire. Thomas Hobbes was born in 1588, on the day of the Armada, the great battle with Spain, and had a mission to establish a state, where people will have to drop their arms and surrender their fate to the king. Kant's "perpetual peace" was a response to turmoil and wars in Europe. As for religion and secularism, neither has had a peaceful history. So, the world history is that of wars and conflicts. Philosophy alone, as Professor

Dallmayr have suggested, is not enough! If teaching philosophy alone can solve the issue of war, what can we say about Aristotle's student, Alexander the Great, who conquered much of the World?

What we need is some sort of a system, maybe a mixture of religions, materialism and secularism, which we all must work together to set its foundations. Philosophers cannot work alone, they need a political and powerful entity or institution to support them. May be a more free and democratic United Nations is essential in order for Love to flourish as a remedy to cultural diversity, wars and Environmental Issues, which professor Macer suggests, an robust and neutral umbrella is badly needed so that Love can prosper exponentially to overshadow hatred, greed and violence.

### ***Arabic Thought Facing Technology***

Abdeslam Benabdelali (Maroc/Morocco)

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When we import machines or when we adopt models of development, do we do it in a neutral fashion, or do we import, at the same time, other forms of relations between humans and their alike, and between them and being?

### ***Islam and Modernity***

Abdessalam Benmaissa

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In this paper, as it is mentioned in the title, I will deal with a topic passionately debated nowadays not only in the Arab world and Asia, but also in Europe and North America, namely the relationship between Islam as a religion and modernity as a western style of life. I will raise questions such as: Do Muslims need to be modern? Are Islam and modernity compatible? Is modernity a good thing in general and for Muslims in particular? Some basic elements of suggested answers will be given.

Modernity as a social phenomenon in the Arab world goes back to the advent of the Prophet Mohamed himself since Islam was a modern event when it was revealed in the seventh century AD. In the course of the middle ages, Muslims made several attempts to modernize Islam starting from translating and commenting thousands and thousands of western texts in different branches of human knowledge. However, no one of these attempts has succeeded.

The question of the possibility of modernizing Islam was raised again on the occasion of the first contacts of Muslims with the modern European colonizers especially with Napoleon in Egypt, the British in the Middle East and Asia, and French in North Africa. The same question has been reexamined more recently by the Iranian Jamal al-Dine al-Afghani (died in 1897), the Egyptians Mohammed 'Abduh (died in 1905), Hassan al-Banna' (died in 1949), and Said Qutb (executed in 1966) and the Indians Ahmed Khan (died in 1896), and Mohamed Iqbal (died in 1938). But, unfortunately, almost all the works of these Scholars were in vain.

In contemporary times, the issue of modernity in Islam takes different dimensions. Most Muslims, especially Fundamentalists, reject modernity on the

pretext of being a western product. They want, on the contrary, to go back to the *Salaf* period, which is the one of the first four Rightly-Guided Caliphs of Islam.

In this paper, I will use, as a standard meaning of modernity, the one offered by western references. Modernity, from a western point of view, is the cultural and social style of life founded notably on the concept of freedom of individuals, especially freedom of reasoning, freedom of speech, freedom of worship, secular democracy and liberal economics.

Roughly speaking, in the contemporary Islamic world, there are three main attitudes towards modernity as it is defined above:

**The first attitude** consists in saying that there is no need to modernize Islam, because the Qur'an contains everything we may need. Moreover, Islam is a religion that has been founded on a Holy text, so we do not have the right to change it in order to make it fit to what is now called Modernity. This defensive attitude is generally adopted by fundamentalists or radical Muslims, namely those who usually call themselves *Salafists*. According to them, modernity, as it is understood in the West is not only a threat against Muslims, but also a blasphemy. To defend this attitude, radical Muslims put forward several arguments from which we have chosen the following:

*Modernity as it is understood in the West is founded on rational analysis, which is not methodologically a good means to deal with religious affairs in Islam.*

Many Muslim scholars during the middle ages, such as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Salah, and others, were definitely against Greek philosophy and logic, because they considered these disciplines as parasitic elements within the Muslim culture.

**The second attitude** accepts modernity on one condition: it should be Islamized. Hassan al-Turabi from Sudan, Abdessalam Yassine from Morocco, Tariq Ramadan from Switzerland, Hassan Hanafi from Egypt, are all good advocates of this attitude. According to them, two main aspects of the western modernity should be removed from the definition suggested in western dictionaries: (1) the absolute freedom that sacrifices moral values; (2) If modernity means break with the past, Muslims cannot be modern; because the past for them is nothing but Islam. Hassan al-Turabi, the founder of the Sudani National Islamic Front, goes even further in Islamizing modernity and says that his political party intends to aim at Islamizing America and arabizing Africa. That would facilitate, according to him, the task of Islamizing modernity.

**The third attitude** accepts modernity as it is understood in the West and tries to modernize Islam instead of Islamizing modernity. According to this category, we should find a bridge that could help to link these two different outlooks of life, namely Modernity and Islam. Islam, argue the advocates of this approach, must be adjusted to modernity as it was the case for Christianity during the period of enlightenment in the West.

In order to achieve this task, we have first to distinguish between "Islam" and "Islamic thought" (or "Islamic thinking").

Islam consists of the Qur'an and the Hadith while the "Islamic thought" is made up of all the different types of comments based on the interpretation of both the Qur'an and the Hadith. When we say "we have to modernize Islam", it is not understood that we have to change the Holy text. On the other hand, we could freely change the Islamic thought in order to make Islamic culture fit to modern universal values. As to the Holy text, since we cannot change it, we can, at least, freeze some

verses that conflict directly with the main values of modernity as they are accepted in the west. For example, “theft” (Arabic “*sariqa*”) is punished by cutting off the hand, according to verse:

*"5.38": And (as for) the man who steals and the woman who steals, cut off their hands as a punishment for what they have earned, an exemplary punishment from Allah; and Allah is Mighty, Wise. [Yusuf Ali's translation]*

This verse is a good example of frozen verses in Islam. It has been forgotten, for social reasons, since the time of the second Muslim Caliph Umar Ibn al-Khattab (634-644). It is no longer applied in contemporary Muslim countries, except in Saudi Arabia some times, because it violates human rights. Moreover, almost no body protests now against the non application of this verse, and no body can prove that those who do not apply it are not Muslims. Consequently, why we do not generalize this methodological principle and deal in the same manner with all the verses that seem to be in contradiction with modernity? For example, the following verse allows men to beat their wives in order to make them more obedient:

*"4.34": Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property; the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded; and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the sleeping-places and **beat** them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; surely Allah is High, Great. [Yusuf Ali's translation]*

This verse should be frozen because it goes against modern human rights.

Besides the methodological principle mentioned above, the third category stress the need to reducing Islam, in order to adjust it to modernity, to its original dimension, that is the spiritual one; because Islam is a religion not a political ideology. In this case, it is necessary to adopt one of the most important values of modernity as it is understood in the West, namely secularism. Moreover, argue scholars belonging to this category, Modernity is not really a pure western product contrary to what is supposed by those who reject it on this basis. Modernity is a set of values that are now considered as universal, exactly in the same sense in which we consider the invention of the wheel or fire as universal. We can even show that, historically, some of the western values that constitute modernity may find their origin in some Averroistic ideas that have been transferred from the medieval Muslim Spain to the medieval Christian Europe in the course of the thirteenth century AD before they got reformulated by the medieval group of scholars known under the name of “Latin Averroists” (see for example Marsilius of Padua (1270-1342), Alighieri Dante (1265-1321) and Siger of Brabant (1240-1280)).

By way of conclusion, there's a lot still to be done in order to modernize the Islamic culture. It is notably urgent to begin by reforming educational systems in Muslim countries and to teach young people a soft and open Islam. We especially need to take advantage of philosophy by promoting its methodological tools and use them to teach Young Muslims how to argue not how to handle weapons.

### ***Philosophy facing the challenges of modern technology***

In-Suk Cha,

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Many major new industrial societies in East Asia have now achieved a rapid progress in scientific-technological renovations of the forces of production as a means

to enhance the quality of life in their respective societies by way of creating material abundance. The role of science and technology in the rationalization of productivity advances steadily, but changes in traditional ways of thinking and perceiving proceed at a lower pace, and unsettling discrepancy between modernity and tradition widens proportionally. As the renovations of productive forces move forward, so also does the patrimonial value system continue to impact on the political and social realm of society. When traditional authoritarianism becomes combined with modern technology, the end product is usually an undemocratic technocracy that does not allow civil society to mature.

### *Can love guide the use of new technology?*

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Confucius said that “to love a thing means wanting it to live”. Prophets, scribes and persons of all corners of society have taught that love is the basis of life ethics. I would like to examine whether love can guide the use of new technology, and whether love in different expressions, this common element in our biological, social and spiritual heritage, can be fruitfully used to critically examine the use of technology.

We live in a fluid society and form our views by an ongoing process of interaction with others. A person's life view is developed based on their own and other people's opinions that grows as we face various dilemmas through our life. Both Asian and Arab communities have intrinsic traditions of dialogue and consensus. To have a balanced opinion from the community, it is important to hear from persons in a range of positions with different occupations.

Modern technology has been a catalyst to reawaken social interest in ethics, but do we need a new ethics to cope with the challenges of modernity? One catch phrase to emerge from the 1980s was the term "Genethics". Advocates from the West suggested that the problems raised by genetic technology cannot be dealt with ethically by existing ethical principles, or by Western morals, and we must turn to Eastern religion. Paradoxically among Asian scholars however most see new technology such as genetic engineering as extensions of past interactions with nature, or at least as problems that just demand application of ethics and values existing already in their societies. The term “genethics” in fact bases its conclusions on a reductionist view that genes determine what organisms are, and that we have not been substantially altering ourselves through agriculture, culture, environment and education in the past.

If we look at the way that societies in Asia have faced ethical dilemmas arising in medicine and technology we can see several important elements in their evolution. When many Asian countries opened their doors to Western society in the 19th century, it led to the introduction of a newly emerging science and scientific paradigm, only part of the fabric of Western society. Meanwhile, Western society has

continued to evolve, and bioethics has emerged. Part of the societal development seen in Asia includes importing and developing ethical approaches that can be debated, as well as the involvement of the public in discussion and development of the indigenous diversity of ethical traditions. As cultures evolve, it becomes impossible to separate which aspects were introduced from the different sources at what time.

Many Asian countries have been successful by merging a range of influences to create their modern society. The Silk Road was an early point of the interchange between Asia and Arabia, allow which much more than trade was passed. Ideas, philosophies, religious diversity, and culture spread. In recent years however the pursuit of economic wealth has become a dominant influence, and now there is a major trade from Asia to Arabia of electronic products, vehicles and many processed products, with a reverse trade of energy. There continues to be associated economic trade as well. The blind consumerism or market forces has been spurred on by technology. An important dialogue that is occurring between Asia and Arabs is the export of consumer goods based on technology, as new idols of both societies. These idols such as TV, DVDs, cars, and others have become global material goods challenging the values in both regions.

One of the keys to Asian ways of thinking of the world is embedded in relationships between members of the living world. A love of nature suggests not just a hierarchical domination of humankind over non-humans, but love between partners. The principle of stewardship is not limited to one region of the world or one religion. Stewardship can be balanced with support for the creativity of humanity to find new technology. While the use of genes may be seen as novel, we have had a very long history of genetic manipulation using conventional techniques of plant and animal breeding, but only recently do we understand the details of why they worked. We should consider our knowledge when implementing any new variety of organism, however it was made, there is no barrier to love based on method of creation.

Although some have said that industrialization was a force that led to the destruction of nature in Asia, historical studies suggest that despite the animism and Buddhist views of the oneness of nature, forests were converted into farmland over the past hundreds of years. In South Asia, however, we do find sacred groves where nature was preserved over human needs, and the trees and plants in these groves were not cut down and destroyed despite human need. Research into these areas of the philosophy of nature would be very opportune given our common environmental crisis.

Although for some there is a feeling that we should not explore all the secrets of life, that the mystery of life will be gone if we discover too much, it does not feature much in modern thinking in Asia. One area however that we do see this is in the lack of dialogue between religion and science in some countries, such as Japan. While the conflict metaphor between science and religion was imported to some Asian communities during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as we know scientific questions and questions of religion are both important but different domains. Thus there is still much hesitation for science-centred people to apply their spiritual faith to the same realm. This may be different from the traditions in the Arab world, but that could be a topic for dialogue.

However, as many scientists will say, the more we know, the more appreciative of the workings of life we become. The fact that we have practical requirements, such as to feed, house and heal people of the world, are major justifications for the pursuit of practical knowledge in any system of religion or philosophy that places a high value on life, it is the principle of love.

We need to consider different life views each of us can have when confronted with moral dilemmas. Some believe that there is a right and a wrong choice to be made for a person's action in each moral dilemma, and that they can also tell others what is morally right or wrong. Prescriptive ethics is to tell others what is ethically good or bad, or what principles are most important in making such decisions. While policy making may at times demand prescriptive decisions, policy also demands respect for moral diversity. Asia tends to be relativistic, and tolerant to moral diversity in the decisions that people make, leaving moral decisions to the realm of private affairs. However, Asia is still communitarian in nature so shame upon those that are judged to have morally "erred" may be just as strong as the more rigid moral laws found in Islam.

Descriptive ethics is to describe the way people view life, their moral interactions and responsibilities. If we attempt to understand the way we as human beings think, then we must look at the views of all in a society – not just an elite of the "philosophers" or "politicians", to have ethics for the people by the people. The evolution of considerations of ethics has witnessed increasing importance being placed on descriptive ethics approaches, as societies become more democratic. As persons realize that ethical concepts have ancient roots in all cultures of the world, and that many persons have interesting views on the questions, the field has become richer, and there is still a lot of human knowledge that can be applied to assist in discussing modern technology.

Interactive ethics is discussion and debate between people about descriptive and prescriptive ethics. Consensus is possible after recognition of the relationships between different persons, to try to preserve social harmony. This consensus building is seen even in countries that have structured paternalism affecting relationships between persons. Public discussion of the ethics of science and technology in many societies aided by the media. Participation of the public in the societal decision-making process regarding new technology is essential. Community engagement is not only a question of knowing what is going on, but for a new technology to be accepted by the public, it is crucial to perceive the choice and influence. Can ethics around a common understanding of love be central in a dialogue between cultures of technophiles and technophobes?

A person's ethic is developed based on their own and other people's opinions that grows as we face various dilemmas through our life. To have a balanced opinion from the community, it is important to hear from persons in a range of positions with different occupations. This common social goal has developed hand in hand with the emergence of increased media attention in pluralistic democracies to display the divergent views on science and technology.

While "love" is ambiguous, we can apply ethical imperatives or principles of self-love, loving others, loving good and loving life with reference to new technology. From the past years of research across many countries I think "love" can be a fruitful language for debate in ethics, despite its ambiguity. We can consider the four principles of love bioethics, as self-love (autonomy), love of others (justice), loving life (non-maleficence) and loving good (beneficence). It has been argued that love is not only a universally recognised goal of ethical action, but is also the foundation of normative principles of ethics. These fundamental principles of ethics may not have changed over time, but the emphasis placed on them has shifted. There was more beneficence a century ago but now there has been more precedence given to autonomy. As for the importance of justice and non-maleficence the trends in

different localities are more difficult to determine. While ethical principles may be pre-human in biological, social and spiritual heritage, and thus almost universal, the balancing of them varies between individuals.

The ethical principle of loving good, beneficence, supports the development of science and technology that might cure sick persons or feed hungry people. It is found in all religions and demands us to work for a culture of peace together with all others, helpfully and generously.

Respect for the ethical principle of self-love, autonomy, supports empowerment of people so they can make choices, live their lives, access technology according to their values. We respect families and communities.

The ethical principle of loving life, do no harm, warns us to avoid conflict. We must assess all options, current and new, to provide the best alternative for the local situation now. New options may do less harm to environment or to people's health, and thus need to be considered if they will promote the future peace and solidarity of the world.

The ethical principle of loving others, justice, makes us consider the risks for future generations, and for all to share in the fruits of our endeavour and good fortune. There is an existing basis for developing ethics in all regions of the world to overcome conflict, and UNESCO will work with those in every culture to help achieve these goals.

Can love also be a way for inter-regional dialogues as we rediscover the ancient philosophical traditions of Asia and Arabia that placed love at the core of individuals, families, communities and the world? While human rights is a common minimum standard used in numerous United Nations declarations, there are still cultural variations in how individual rights and social solidarity are balanced inside different communities. These dialogues will increase our mutual understanding, as we look to rediscover values in every culture in their philosophical traditions.

### ***Towards A New Intercultural Civilization***

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The Arab-Asia dialogue is a great challenge for the two regions and has to be the mental link of a "possible virtuality". Thanks to their historic and civilizational basis, these two worlds can move on to a complex-free transcultural dialogue. To arrive to a positive outcome, it is necessary to:

- a. Avoid the failings of the encounter between the West and the East (colonialism, ethnocentrism...);
  - b. Promote development based on solidarity (exchange of competences, resources...);
  - c. Open up our minds to a successful conciliation between spirituality, national identity, territorial claims, etc., and pragmatism needed by the world today;
- Create active and efficient authorities and structures. For our dialogues, one can imagine a magazine, an institution, a Web site, an exchange of competencies on a large scale (students, researchers, civil servants...).