



# Indo-Chinese Knowledge and Wisdom: A Cross-Cultural Dialogue Between Confucius and Tiruvalluvar

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## INTRODUCTION

Ancient Indian tradition and ancient Chinese culture are based on moral and spiritual values. Both countries have ancient histories that appreciate the role of man in the upliftment of the self. Both countries have synthesized tradition and modernity. Against a background of ancient culture and wisdom, one can understand social progress and justice. There is a treasure of wisdom deeply embedded in Indian and Chinese culture that should be taken into account when developing the values required to make economic progress more beneficial to the public. Values such as fairness, freedom, honesty, humanity, responsibility, solidarity, sustainable development, tolerance, and transparency are those stressed by both Indian and Chinese wisdom. The major stream in Chinese philosophy, Confucianism, argues that the good example of the refined and morally outstanding person (*quanzi*) will have more beneficial effects than merely observance of the law. Mozi, the head of the legalist school who lived during the time of Confucius, argued in favour of the importance of the

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law as the ultimate guarantee that the basic rights of all citizens will be represented and as the ideal of “the love of all” (*qianai*). *The Art of War* by Sun Tsu (770–476 BC) is a repository of wisdom and inspiration, and discusses their practical application in strategic management, organization, and leadership. The book emphasizes five principles that represent the ancient wisdom of the Chinese: wisdom, integrity, courage, benevolence, and strength. In Indian tradition the concept of *lokasangraha*, or world sustenance, is that which takes into account the essential values. The twelfth-century Chinese philosopher Zhu Xi emphasized the importance of the recognition of the Other. In post-modern philosophy the concept of the Other has been elaborately discussed by Levinas, Derrida, Deleuze, and many others. This is in opposition to the subjectivity modernism stood for. Modernity dominated over nature and this has caused an ecological crisis and environmental problems. The existence of the “other” played a dominant role in the collected writings and recorded conversations of Zhu Xi. Realizations and interpretations of Confucian values in a world of multiplicity and difference are essential for understanding the contemporary society. Confucius as a philosopher has a contemporary relevance. In him, we find a blend of tradition and modernity. It is not possible to ignore the contributions of Chinese thought and culture for the main reason that it has paved the way for world culture and civilization. In the Confucian tradition we understand the importance of self-realization in overcoming the ego-self and its fixed perspective. This perspective gives rise to the distracting “ego-advantages,” which the ego-self seeks to appropriate from what it constructs as “other.” The process of becoming moral in Confucian thought entails both a dissolution and transcending the distinction between “self” and “other.” The process of dissolving the unnatural barrier between the self and its social and natural environments—the process of overcoming the ego-self and becoming a person-in-context—can alternatively be described as the “objectification” of self, in that it recognizes the correlative and coexistence relationship between self-realization and cosmic realization.

Herbert Fingarette, a contemporary interpreter of Confucius, shows how the central character of custom and tradition in Confucian thought is important in the contemporary world. In the *Analects*, for example, the concept of tradition plays a dynamic role. It is approached from a moral or human perspective: “It is man that can make the Way great and not the Way that can make man great.” What kind of man can enlarge the Way or *Tao*? It is the “superior man” who serves as the moral idea in the *Analects*.

As in Indian tradition, in Chinese tradition we find a synthesis of the spiritual and the moral. Charles A. Moore is right when he says that the ethical and the spiritual are one in China. This unity of ethics and spirituality is crucial to an understanding of the role of tradition in the *Analects*. Tradition is a source of knowledge for Confucius. This knowledge, mediated by tradition, has a sacred foundation for it is rooted in the notion of Heaven's ordinance. This knowledge also calls for moral cultivation. Thus tradition relates a sacred history. It opens up the sense of transcendence, which otherwise would be reduced to merely being in the service of "spiritual beings." Tradition forms the ultimate horizon that shapes and nourishes our being and understanding. Both cultures have moral and ethical values that are emphasized in the great writings of thinkers belonging to both traditions.

The plurality of culture is real whereas the unity of cultures is unreal. Cultural sustainability, as the sustainability of economic activities, must concentrate on both individual and community. The individual's values and the values of the community or the cultural group must be safeguarded. Though community integrates its values with the individual, it should be understood that an individual's values cannot be sacrificed. Moreover, the culture carries its values to future generations and hence those values must be preserved. Individual and social values constitute the culture. Commenting on the individuality as well as the universality of human nature Professor G.C. Pande says:

The individuality of Indian culture must be so interpreted as not to militate against the universality of human nature and value-seeking. At the same time, the unity of Indian culture has to be interpreted with sufficient catholicity to include numerous communities, regions and epochs, which have historically entered into its making. This search for the cultural identity of India, individual but inspiring after universality, one but inclusive of differences, continuous but developing, arises from the awareness of India's historic traditions.

Culture is the guardian of the people. Human society always comes across different conceptions of culture. A people's culture embraces its language, ideas, customs, taboos, and other related components. One must always consider the following aspects with regard to culture: (1) culture unifies men into one cultural group; and (2) the development of many cultures is due to various external causes, such as physical habitats

and resources, and inner causes, the range of possibilities inherent in various areas of activity. If conflict among cultures follows from the very concept of culture, then a theory emerges of a relation between culture and rationality. The difference between them is that a culture unifies all those who belong to it, whereas all men are united in rationality by sharing this essential feature. Culture thus gives people an identity.

India lives in two or more conceptual worlds at the same time: (1) the world of the Great tradition in which the mythological past lies in the present, time exists in a mosaic of different periods, matter and mind appear on the same continuum, and the dominant conceptions are of groups, clusters, and patterns; and (2) the modern world of science and technology in which mathematics plays a major role in describing the world, matter and mind though related are discrete entities, and conceptions are deductive, linear and of individual events. But which one satisfies the requirements of the hour? We need to develop alternative worldviews, alternative metaphysics, as the basis for reflection on technology vis-à-vis society and civilization. The way towards understanding the metaphysical roots of technology must lead through the creation of an alternative worldview that will enable us to grasp clearly the ramifications and consequences of present technology for a future human society. It is here that people from non-Western cultures have much to contribute. But how to start? We must re-examine our intellectual heritage and tradition in light of our present situation. Tradition is always hermeneutical and accommodates new interpretations and understanding and means reconstructing the present categories of knowledge. Man's mode of being-in-the world helps a person to evaluate tradition. It is not possible for a person simply to follow tradition, but he has the right to evaluate it. The world of historicity will have an impact on tradition and it accepts evaluation and reinterpretation. This does not mean that we are revolting against tradition, but that we are interpreting it in the context of present historicity. The cultural world to which we belong allows for a radical interpretation of tradition. This sort of interpretation teaches a way of looking at tradition from a new perspective, which will suit our present situation.

### CULTURE AS THE CRITIQUE OF REASON

In science, as well as in post-metaphysical thinking, the role of reason is unique. It is said that progress and reason always go together. But the role and definition of reason differs among those who talk about this

relation between them. Some, such as Rorty, consider it a social phenomenon. "We have to resist the urge to see social practices of justification as more than just such practices." Foucault attempts to disempower the ideas of reason by totally objectivizing them and asking, "What is this reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers?" Derrida attempts a totalized critique of reason. He believes that reason is built into thought and gives rise to illusions and therefore he wants to renounce the idea of reason by interrogating, disrupting, and displacing it. Similarly, Habermas reconstructs the Kantian notion of reason to explain the importance of comprehensive reason. As a critic of scientific-technological rationality, he constructs a social rationality. He has rejected, for example, both Adorno and Horkheimer who considered that developments in Western rationality such as the totalization of reification, domination, and repression. Against this background, Habermas defended the positive aspects of enlightenment, modernity, and Western rationality. He wanted to emphasize the role of rationality in the economy, culture, and morality. This means that for him social rationality has implications in social life, which cannot be neglected. In his comprehensive concept of rationality, different dimensions of social life, such as values, norms, and interests, are studied and preserved.

We need an alternative view of knowledge. For example, philosophers, futurists, and others who are interested in the future of technology and thus in the future of culture would benefit from a dialogue with the alternative world views of Indian culture, which admits an alternative basis for knowledge and life. Western, or technological, society is based to a great extent on qualitative instrumental values, on the basis of which social and political assessments are made. As long as the quantitative instrumental basis remains unchanged and channels its imperative via descriptive science, through industrial profit-efficiency oriented technology, the order of things will remain the same. The West is now in search of quality of life. It has understood the emptiness of the quantitative approach. Modes of life governed by quantity are simply not sufficient. Quality of life is hard to define, although its absence is readily apparent. We know what is within the structure of our experience of it. Quality of life adds to our stature as human beings. Quality of life cannot be understood without a purpose in life. A purpose in life cannot be secured unless we ascribe some meaning to the world or at least some meaning to human life—beyond the immediate gratification of our sensual desires. This means that quality of life

requires a transcendental dimension of life. Traditional cultures and religions can contribute to our experience of the quality of life by providing these transcendental dimensions.

In the contemporary age, we talk about the “universality of science” and the “diversity of cultures.” We often think that science is reliable whereas culture is ephemeral. But in fact it is other way round. It is culture that is enduring and universal, whereas it is science that is transient and ephemeral. The only viable framework for development is culture and not economics fused with technology, as at present. Development must mean the fulfillment within a culture that nourishes and sustains. It is argued that scientific method is infallible. This reliability condition is used by scientists to claim the superiority of science over culture. Can this be a proper criterion? In the scientific model, there is only one kind of value, measured in monetary terms. In such a model, culture is a dis-value. It is outside the model. It is one of the externalities. It is of secondary importance whether we regard religion as part of culture or as a phenomenon more important than culture and, in fact, one that determines the nature of culture. We must adopt the cultural model as the basis for future development. As long as our model of development remains scientific and economic, culture will inevitably be a casualty, and indirectly we shall be its victims, as repositories of culture. The cultural model recognizes a plurality of values and science is one of the positive values. We must adopt the cultural model as the basis for future development. Science will become a stimulus to cultural growth rather than a universal solution reducing culture to a meaningless homogeneous world of uniform practices. India alone can give a direction and serve as a model for the West and other developing countries of how science and culture can interact for the good of mankind.

The increasing awareness that Western culture may be breaking down has made us search for causes and examine facets of modern society which we have hitherto ignored, neglected, and overlooked. In technology there is a focal point at which conceptual and ideological paths meet. To understand these converging paths is to understand the main configurations of the network within which our civilization operates. For example, notions like progress, nature, invention, rationality, efficiency, and so on have a link with culture. To put it in simple terms, the philosophy of culture is the philosophy of society, a philosophy of man in a civilization that has found itself at an impasse, threatened by excessive specialization, fragmentation,

and atomization, and which is becoming aware that it has chosen a mistaken idiom for its interaction with nature. All these problems, to some extent, are due to our wrong approach to science and technology.

D.P. Chattopadhyaya emphasizes interaction between science, technology, and culture, which, according to him, can be approached in many ways. First, it can be shown from the commonsensical or pre-theoretical point of view that every man combines in his worldview the basic aspects of his life, scientific, technological, geographical, historical, and economic. Second, one may try to redo the same thing in a more systematic and refined way at the theoretical plane. Third, we may focus on the differences as well as the relations between civilization and culture, between the material and the spiritual aspects of human life. Fourth, one may explain the importance of the relationship between man and the environment and, in the process, show that even higher forms of culture are not free from environmental conditions. Fifth, one may argue that even disciplines such as mathematics are influenced by practical and social considerations. Sixth, comments may be offered to show that there is a close relationship between the environment, human nature, medicine, ethics, language, technology, and philosophy. Lastly, one may try to say that philosophy, science, technology, and culture are, in fact, an interwoven fabric of human civilization and that their specializations, differentiations and so on, are mainly due to theoretical needs for distinctions. According to Chattopadhyaya, man has a past behind him and a tradition to support and regulate him. His very being is embedded, or, one might even say, he is born in a culture, marked among other things by its tradition and modernity, language and culture. Since man is sustained by tradition and culture, he questions them both. His sense of values can never be completely dominated and determined by his tradition and culture. He cannot transcend the challenge of modernization. Because of this, he questions his own tradition and cultural past. Chattopadhyaya very rightly says: "Continuous growth of knowledge, particularly of its scientific form, and advancement of technology often make us question our own traditional heritage and cultural past." In his interesting paper, "Rationality, Culture, and Values," he deals with the correct relation between rationality and culture. He rejects the claim that there is a unique and universal relation between culture and rationality. He believes that culture-bound rationality is a sort of relativism. He examines the three different concepts of rationality developed in the three branches of human knowledge, namely, economics, evolutionary biology, and psychological behaviorism. By examining all three

concepts Chattopadhyaya comes to the conclusion that all these concepts of rationality are limited and that they underestimate the diversity of human nature born out of freedom and cultural circumstances. They are outer and inner aspects of human nature. Since all the theories of rationality are derived from human experience, their validity and correctness must be tested only through human experience.

### CULTURE, TRADITION AND PROGRESS

Life-world is a critique of functionalist reason. It allows for an evaluation of tradition. Man's mode of being-in-the-world helps a person to evaluate tradition. It is not possible for me to simply follow a tradition, but I have the right to evaluate my tradition, which those who are outside of the tradition cannot do. Moreover, it is for the good of my tradition that it grow and adopt change whenever necessary. The surrounding world or the world of historicity will have an impact on the tradition and it accepts evaluation and reinterpretation. This means that when I try to understand my religious tradition I may have to reject some dogmas, which are not necessary. This means I have the capacity or right to transcend some of those dogmas that are not acceptable at present. This does not mean that I am revolting against my religious tradition, but interpreting it in the context of present historicity. The life-world, which I belong to, allows a radical interpretation of the tradition. This sort of interpretation teaches a way of looking at tradition afresh from a new perspective that suits our present situation. Every man is placed in a tradition, which cannot be avoided. Tradition and historicity play a significant role in the understanding of the myths and symbols of a religion that is expressed by language. It is language that carries tradition from one to the other. In the life-world it is language that ultimately interprets things and passes the message from one generation to the other. It is the hermeneutics of facticity that interprets factual life afresh. The tradition I belong to shapes my life-world and this is common to all traditions. All the time the myths, legends, and stories connected with a particular religious tradition need interpretation, which is inevitable because the life-world demands it and hence there is a connection between a particular religious tradition and a particular life-world. For example, a hermeneutical understanding of the study of myths would suggest that it is used as a form of discourse. The role of myths in human experience and reality cannot be easily rejected because, to some extent they shape our life-world. Myths have relevance to the social con-



text. They transcend time and also first order reference. They are always used as a form of symbolism and ordinary language. They suggest something invisible. Mircea Eliade says: "Images, symbols and myths are not irresponsible creations of the psyche; they fulfill a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being." Life-world is concerned with the phenomenology of religion, with sharing a religious life-world with others. There can be friction but not collision. It can be explained in this way. Religion contains certain mythical modes of experience. The relation between them is so implicit that one cannot be isolated from the other. The myths are taken away from their religious content and the world tries to give them a new meaning. Individuals and collectives interact with each other; thus there is a dialectical movement. It is the philosophy of participation. It is the transformation of meaning. In a philosophy of participation, criticisms are inevitable. Criticizability is the essence of free and rational creativity, of "what is objective" and of "what is subjective."

It should be remembered that there may be different approaches to a tradition but its inner meaning should not be lost. For example, take a text like *Bhagavad Gita*; according to Gandhi *Gita* is a step in *dharma* (i.e., in religion and morality); but for Bankim, *Gita* is a step in history. In other words, Gandhi had never placed *Gita* in history, but Bankim had. For Bankim, Krishna was a historical person, and the *Mahabharat* was a real war. But Gandhi believed that this sort of understanding would deprive the *Gita* of its status as a Hindu religious text. Whether the text is historical or religious is not a very important question in this context. What is important is the truth conveyed by the text. Bankim tries to emphasize that his historical interpretation would substantiate the truth, namely the text was written for a purpose. This means that whether it is historical or religious, a text which has some sacredness in it, it must be understood by the role it plays in the life-world situation. Similarly, mythologies must be interpreted in a life-world situation. The stories mentioned in it need not be true, but the inner meaning that is conveyed must be understood to preserve the tradition.

Two great traditions of the world, the Chinese and the Indian, have many commonalities. The life-world of both traditions are based on the ethical principles and values and their role in the development of the individual and the social. I would like to present their two great thinkers, namely, Confucius and Tiruvalluvar, and their relevance in the present age. Let us see how Confucius proceeds.

Confucius in the *Lun Yu* says: “I will not teach a man who is not anxious to learn, and will not explain to one who is not trying to make things clear to himself. And if I explain one-fourth and the man does not go back and reflect and think out the implications in the remaining three-fourths for himself, I will not bother to teach him again.” The Chinese refer to their Confucian literature as the *Ssu Shu*, *Wu Ching*, or *Four Books and Five Classics*, although chronologically the Five Classics came first. Western scholars sometimes refer to the Five Classics as “The Old Testament of Confucianism” and to the Four Books as “The New Testament of Confucianism.” The Five Classics are as ancient as the Vedas in India and consist of:

1. *The Book of Poetry (Shih Ching)*
2. *The Book of History (Shu Ching)*
3. *The Book of Changes (I or Yi-Chin)*
4. *The Book of Rites (Li Chi)*
5. *The Spring and Autumn (Ch'un Ch'iu)*

The *Four Books* or *Commentaries on the Classics* are:

1. *The Analects of Confucius (Lun Yu)*, discourses of the sage with his disciples
2. *Great Learning (Ta Hsueh)*, sayings of Confucius, political and moral philosophy for a ruler
3. *Doctrine of the Mean (Chung Yung)*, how to conduct your life
4. *Book of Mencius (The Meng-tzu)*, containing rules of righteous government and the qualities of a good ruler, human nature, duty, and so on.

Confucius aimed to establish a new order in society by straightening out the ideas and habits of leaders and common people on the fundamentals of character building, social obligations, and sound government. One of the significant contributions of Confucius was his insistence on virtues. If good qualities are to be practiced by everybody, there must be a code of good manners, or *li*, to include not only the rules of personal courtesy but all the best social and governmental usages. In his own personal life he sought to exemplify those qualities that he so persistently built into his teachings, and show an ethical character as the foundation

of all true living. Some of the great virtues he insisted on were: uprightness (*Chih*), benevolence (*Jen*), conscientiousness (*Chung*), altruism (*Shu*), righteousness (*I* or *Yi*), and filial piety (*Hsiao*).

Lucius C. Porter, among others, identified *jen* with the human heart. Other translations into English of the word *jen* are: morality, virtue, love, and true manhood. "The firm of spirit, the resolute in character, and the slow of speech are not far from *jen*." Similarly, righteousness (*I* or *Yi*) is very much emphasized by Confucius. He believed in doing a thing because it was right, regardless of the consequences. It is here the distinction between superior man and the inferior man is made. Superior man is informed by what is right; inferior man is informed by what is profitable to himself. Similarly, filial piety was very much emphasized by Confucius as the root of all other virtues and expressed in the five relationships as:

1. Subject to Emperor or citizen to magistrate
2. Son to father, or daughter to mother
3. Younger to elder brother, or sister to sister
4. Younger to older friend
5. Wife to husband

In Confucian philosophy there are four important themes:

1. Human nature and the cosmic order
2. True manhood and the social order
3. Government by moral example
4. Education the prime necessity

### *Human Nature and the Cosmic Order*

In the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Chung Yung*) human nature is discussed in detail. Confucius found that a basic moral law was operating from which no man can escape. He discovered the same moral order controlling the universe and made the natural deduction that when there is harmony within the central self then human beings can move in the orbit of cosmic or universal harmony. This law of harmony he tried to express in the words peace, truth, and integrity, as the essence of the law of man's moral being. It is susceptible of cultivation but never fully realized. While explaining human nature, Confucius said:

What is God-given is what we call human nature ... The cultivation of the moral law is what we call culture ... Wherefore, the moral man watches diligently over his secret thoughts ... When the passions have not awakened, that is our central self, or moral being ... When these passions awaken and each and all attain due measure and degree, that is harmony or the moral order. To find the central clue to our moral being which unites us to the Universal order that indeed is the highest human attainment.

Confucius explains that truth does not depart from human nature. When a man carries out the principles of conscientiousness and reciprocity, he is not far from the moral law. It is clear from the above passage that within the human spirit could be established a “golden mean” a “central harmony,” which is cosmic quality and therefore worthy of achievement.

### *True Manhood and the Social Order*

Having established the cosmic quality of human nature Confucian philosophy develops the notion of social order. The *Chung Yung* says: “Truth means the fulfillment of our self; and moral law means following the law of our being ... Only those who are absolutely their true selves in this world can have a pervading influence.” The ideal man who follows the golden mean will show no pride and work for the upliftment of society.

The Indian ethical text *Tirukkural* (written by Tiruvalluvar) examines human life to show how there can be all-around progress in life and how man can live a better life. Thus it could be viewed as a critique of life. It examines the present conditions of human life and guides to the betterment of life. Further, in the text, we see a move from “what is” to “what ought to be.” The values which are prescribed in the text clearly prove the need for possessing them. The text does not accept life as it is available to us, but gives a direction for improving it so that life would be more meaningful. As a critique of life, the *Tirukkural* prescribes some norms for life. It is possible to prescribe them only after examining the life which man leads; and Tiruvalluvar, as well as Confucius, saw society as vitiated by some basic evils that have to be eradicated. Thus in the text we find an inseparable relation between value and action. The value-oriented text is also an action-oriented one. Commenting on the importance of value and action, R. Balasubramanian says: “When a person accepts something as a value, he cannot but be engaged in activities conducive to the attainment of the value in question; to accept something as a value is not just for the purpose of talking, but for

the purpose of doing.” R.M. Hare in *The Language of Morals* says that the logic of value-words should finally result in action. He avers:

The remedy for moral stagnation and decay is to learn to use our value-language for the purpose for which it is designed; and this involves not merely a lesson in talking, but a lesson in doing that which we commend; for unless we are prepared to do this, we are doing no more than lip-service to a conventional standard.

The ethical texts clearly support the relation between value and action. The values he prescribes as norms are for the purpose of practicing them. Indeed, Confucius and Tiruvalluvar represent the life-world of the people. In the Western philosophical tradition, two aspects of human existence are considered important, system and the life-world. In Schutz and Goffman, we see these twofold aspects of human existence. Schutz shows that all the modes of intersubjectivity presuppose the life-world. This means that intersubjectivity presupposes the framework of the natural world in which we give meaning to the experience of others. The life-world shows different dimensions of life. David Carr deals with two senses of the life-world, the anthropological and the philosophical. Aron Gurwitsch makes a distinction between culture-sensitive and culture-relative. Goffman talks about the pluralization of life-worlds. In order to define the process of evolution, we have to make use of the concept of the life-worlds, comprising social, cultural, historical, and linguistic aspects. Explaining the life-world of the people ethical works in China and India encompass a wide spectrum of the cultural, ethical, social, linguistic, political, and emotional aspects of life.

Ethical works available in Chinese and Indian tradition are well-known and world-renowned. They prescribe certain norms for the well-being of both individual and society. Their ethical principles are applicable to the ruler and the ruled, the rich and the poor, men and women. The norms are always applicable to the whole of human society. The individual represents the society, and the society reflects the individual. The harmony between these two shows a healthy society. Whether it is knowledge, wealth, or happiness, it should be shared by all. This is depicted in Confucius and Tiruvalluvar.

Philosophy in India is value-centred. Indian philosophy is the philosophy of values. It is a transvaluation of all values. Philosophy, in the words of Hiriyanna, is a criticism of values. He says: “Philosophy, as understood

in India, was essentially concerned with values.” The concept of *purusartha* in recent philosophical debates has attained a special significance. Scholars such as M. Hiriyanna, Daya Krishna, Rajendra Prasad, R. Balasubramanian, and others have expanded on this issue. Some Indian scholars discuss how *dharma* in the sense of morality can be well conceived on an independent footing and do not at all require a justification from the perspective of *moksa*. The debate whether *moksa* as the fourth *purusartha* is realizable in this life itself is a question for philosophers’ debate. There are scholars who argue that it is transcendental in nature.

In Confucian philosophy we see the importance of “universal man.” Since the universal man is the common man who has no caste or creed, he is the universal representative of the concept of man. He works for the upliftment of all of humanity. He thinks beyond his family, his town, and his country. He thinks for the whole of humanity. He has no narrow-mindedness; he thinks globally and acts locally. It means that the principle enunciated by Confucius is intended for all. In view of its universal application and secular approach, Confucius has attained universal appreciation.

There are two ethical teachers in the world who have stressed the power of virtue, one representing Indian tradition, Tiruvalluvar, and one Chinese tradition, Confucius. There is no greater virtue than this value, namely, virtue, and no greater loss than to ignore it. One may ask: Where does true virtue lie? It lies in the purity of mind, avers the Tamil text. It is the bed-rock of all virtues. The text says: “Let no sin be thought in mind. That is sufficient. Then there is no need to practice virtue.” Purity of mind, from which only love flows, is the foundation of life. The principle of *yi* shows how righteousness is the supreme virtue. Righteousness for righteousness’ sake was emphasized by Confucius and Mencius.

## KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

Epistemologists make a distinction between belief and knowledge. While the former lacks certainty, the latter is certain as well as valid. What claims our attention for epistemological discussion is knowledge vis-à-vis other mental states. A distinction is made between cognition and knowledge. While the former may be true, or false, or doubtful, the latter is true, certain, and valid. The Indian *pramana* theorists convey this distinction by using two different words, *jnana* and *prama*. The term knowledge (*prama*) cannot be qualified by any adjective such as true, or false, or

doubtful. The expression false knowledge is a contradiction in terms; that is to say, what is false cannot be knowledge and what is knowledge cannot be false; also, we cannot, for the same reason, use the expression doubtful knowledge. Since knowledge is necessarily true, there is no need to qualify it by the adjective true. In epistemology, we are concerned with issues such as the nature of knowledge, the means of knowledge, and the validity of knowledge. Knowledge which is generated by a *pramana* reveals the object as it is, where it is. For Socrates, virtue was knowledge. Knowledge in modern discourse is associated with the techniques of control. For Foucault and many others, it is never free from the power relations from which it springs and which are constantly transformed by it. Knowledge, according to him, is always part of a cultural matrix of power relations. Foucault believes that every production of knowledge serves the interest of power. Thus knowledge produced in economics, medicine, psychiatry, and other human sciences is nothing but a part of the power of the social institutions that have grown up around these disciplines.

For Tiruvalluvar, knowledge is that which saves a person from evil and the question is: Why should one gain knowledge? Since knowledge is that which helps us to distinguish truth from falsity, it is necessary for us to gain knowledge. The wise will fear what ought to be feared, because they know the distinction between truth and falsity, real and unreal, right and wrong. It is because they are men of foresight, whereas the ignorant are not. The Tamil text establishes the importance of knowledge, for he believes that knowledge of one person can guide others in the same way as a lamp that is lit can light other lamps. Knowledge of the children, he says, is conducive to the happiness of the parents and also to the delight of the whole world. The whole world is a beneficiary of this knowledge, and hence it is necessary for us to acquire true knowledge. The distinction which he makes between unstable and stable (permanent) knowledge, is intended to convey that false knowledge is only temporary, whereas true knowledge is always permanent and real. Since knowledge, which alone is true, can remove ignorance, he points out that knowledge is essential for all and is even more important for a king. Knowledge is that which always grows. Like a sand-spring that gives a greater flow of water as we dig further down, knowledge also grows. It is a weapon that saves one from evil. Since it is obtained through learning, he proclaims the importance of learning. He says that learning alone is undecaying wealth, whereas all other riches, strictly speaking, are not wealth at all. To show the relevance of learning, he stresses the importance of both number and letters. He

speaks of knowledge explicating two major components: numbers (i.e., mathematics) and letters (i.e., words). Establishing the role of mathematics as well as language, he declares that these two are the eyes of all living beings, and for the unlettered, the eyes are nothing but two sores in their face. What is the use, one may ask, of such learning or knowledge? The answer is that knowledge stands everyone in good stead for seven generations. No country is alien to the versatile person. After giving the merits of learning, Tiruvalluvar points out the demerits of non-learning.

Now let us see how Confucius explains the significance of education. He saw the urgent necessity of education and set himself the task of providing it. The first requirement according to him is to have a quiet place in which to study. The true man, he felt, must have a definite purpose, calmness of mind, and peaceful repose. "Only after having peaceful repose, can one begin to think," says Confucius. "Only after one has learned to think, can one achieve knowledge." The need for education and its general principles are expounded in the *Book of Rites (Li Chi)*. The text says: "The only way for the superior man to civilize the people and establish good social customs is through education. A piece of jade cannot become an object of art without chiseling, and man cannot come to know the moral law without education." Further it says: "Reading without thinking gives one a disorderly mind, and thinking without reading makes one flighty (or unbalanced). ...Therefore, in the education of the superior man ... one is given time to digest things, to cultivate things, to rest and to play." In other words, a student must learn to think things out for himself. "To know what you know and know what you don't know is the characteristic of one who knows." But the learning process will depend very much on the spirit and method of the teaching. It is all important then that pupils have a wise teacher and that a harmonious personal relationship be established between them. The Confucian conviction is that "to be kept stable, society must have leaders who can be trusted; that the only leaders to be trusted are men of character; that character is to be developed through education acquired both from others and through self-discipline."

### THE IDEAL MAN

Who is a man? Is he a mere psycho-physical organism or is he just a physical entity? A distinction between a "person" and a "biological human being" is maintained in philosophical discourse. John Locke, for example,



defined a person as “a thinking, intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places.” The idea of personhood is also important in ethical discourse. The moralists hold the view that persons have a special value and that they deserve moral respect. Since a person is different from a biological being, “being human,” that is, being a member of *homo sapiens*, does not automatically qualify one for the special kind of moral respect due to persons. According to Kant, persons are primarily characterized by their rationality, and so they have dignity, an intrinsic value, which makes them valuable.

Tiruvalluvar uses the term *sanror* to signify a person who possesses great virtues. He is not concerned with a man endowed with mind and body alone; his concept of a person is different from an ordinary human being. The person whom he recognizes as an ideal man is endowed with the five noble qualities of love, sensitivity, altruism, compassion, and truthfulness. These are the five pillars of excellence. It is said that if the great fail in nobility, the earth will bear us no more. The question here is: Would men of character fail in their nobility? This is not possible for they cannot lack the five noble qualities. Thus, Tiruvalluvar is sure this will not happen under any circumstances. When he raises the rhetorical question, “If the great fail in their nobility?” the implication is that they will not fail. This could be understood from his answer to the question, “What is the touchstone of nobility?” He says that accepting one’s defeat, even by inferiors, is an expression of nobility. Even though nobles possess the capacity to win over their inferiors, they accept defeat by not fighting with their inferiors. By doing so, their nobility increases. Elaborating further, the author contends that, even when everything is lopsided, nobles will not deviate from their nature; even if the sea erodes the shore and encroaches on the land, the nobles will not deviate from their nobility.

While discussing the qualities of an ideal man, Confucius talks about the qualities of an ideal teacher. The worthy teacher is one “who goes over what he has already learned and gains some new understanding from it.” He is ever a learner dissatisfied with his own knowledge. Through teaching he comes to realize his inadequacy and then feels stimulated to improve himself. Therefore “The process of teaching and learning stimulate each other.... Teaching is the half of learning.” The ideal teacher uses four good methods: “prevention” of bad habits; timely presentation; orderly sequence; “mutual stimulation ... [by] ... letting students admire the excellence of other students.” “A good questioner proceeds like a man

chopping wood: he begins at the easier end, attacking the knots last, and after a time the teacher and student come to understand the point with a sense of pleasure.”

According to Confucius, education begins with poetry, is strengthened through proper conduct (*li*), and consummated through music. *Li* is the expression in personal attitudes and behaviour of the same harmony that flows through all Nature (Heaven and Earth). Confucius once said: “This *li* is the principle by which the ancient kings embodied nature. Therefore, he who has attained *li* lives, and he who has lost it dies.” He stated in detail how the sage kings taught men how to live, and made them more civilized with *li*. Its inner working could be seen not only in people as individuals but also in the various social groups. “*Li*, the principle of social order, is to a country what scales are to weight and what the carpenter’s guideline is to straightness, and what the square and the compass are to squares and circles.” *Li* accounts for affection in the home, piety in public worship, and order in all official circles from village council to imperial court. Therefore Confucius says: “There is nothing better than *li* for the maintaining of authority and the governing of the people.” *Li* includes religion, social order, army discipline, historical scholarship, and all etiquette in life. Perhaps we can equate the term with good. A thing is generally said to be good when it is valuable for some end. For example, a particular medicine is the cure for a disease. The term good does not signify something that is a means to an end, but something that is itself an end. This means that the supreme good or the *summum bonum* implies the supreme end. Confucius insists on the importance of the supreme good, because the good is not only beneficial to one individual, but also for the entire society. MacIver says that a society is nothing but the web of social relationships. A social relationship is meaningful if the individual performs his duty. Modern social theorists like Antony Giddens and Habermas talk about “social emancipation,” which is meaningful in the context of social good. Tiruvalluvar goes a step further and explains how only the individual who is moral and perfect can guide society in achieving its goals. Thus, the individual good should be in conformity with the social good. This includes responsibility, good character, custom, charity, good speaking, and the common good.

Emphasizing the relation between ethics and politics, the Indian tradition maintains the view that there cannot be any polity without the practice of virtue. In the ancient Chinese tradition, it was Confucius who, in *Doctrine of the Mean*, explains the relation between virtue and politics. He talks about

the responsibilities (1) between the king and the ministers, (2) between parents and children, and (3) teacher and students, keeping the common good as the backdrop. Moral rules are forever universal in character according to both traditions. The categorical imperative of Kant also supports the view that all moral rules are universalizable. "So act as if the maxim of your action were to become a law universal," declares Kant. For him, an act is said to be immoral if it cannot be brought under a rule for all human beings. Further, he says that no human being should be thought of or used merely as a means for someone else's end, but also as an end in himself. But Kant failed to make a distinction between an exception to a rule and a qualifying rule, thus permitting no exception to his moral imperative.

In the text *Tirukkural* Tiruvalluvar prescribes the values that are necessary for both the common man and the ruler. Chapters dealing with good action, purity in action, resoluteness, action, true friendship, old friendship, avoiding bad company, and so on show how these values are necessary both for a king and for the common man. The ideal man portrayed by him is free from certain negative qualities and also possesses qualities that are positive in nature. A perfect man should be free from jealousy, evil action, ignorance, backbiting, and vices, and should possess positive qualities such as humility, compassion, being learned and wise, love, pleasant speaking, possessing good conduct, tolerance, and so on. It is easy to proclaim that the entire human race is one community. But to put it into practice is difficult. To do this we need a strong will and determination. The instrument for this, according to Tiruvalluvar, lies in the principle of love (*anbu*) which is the seed that makes the world meaningful. Out of this seed, the tree of humanity grows. The seat of life is in love. A person who lacks love is only a mass of skin-encased bone. Love is that which should flow in one's heart, and the life of an ideal man is always guided by the love for humanity. Tagore, in his *Gitanjali*, says that everyone needs to transcend the narrow walls. This is essential, because out of love, Tiruvalluvar says, springs kindness. Love in turn grows into an inestimable prize for friendship, for he avers: "The ignorant say that kindness is an ally of virtue; but it is a defense against evil too."

Truth and non-violence are the two important virtues that have influenced the entire globe. We could achieve our independence from the British, because Gandhi could apply these two virtues in the political sphere. Tiruvalluvar shows that if we practice truth no other virtue is needed, because all other virtues simply follow it. His emphasis on non-violence has to be taken seriously in the modern world wherein violence

and terrorism are threatening the entire globe. "The path of rectitude is the path of non-violence," declares Tiruvalluvar. A philosophical approach to the problem of violence and terrorism is necessary at the present juncture. Exhorting us to abhor violence, he says: "Do not commit any act of violence though your life is in peril." In the name of fulfilling our vows, sometimes we sacrifice animals and birds apprehending that, if these vows are not fulfilled, we will not have a peaceful life. But Tiruvalluvar says that even when one's life is in danger, one should avoid killing other living beings. Commenting on the importance of virtue it is said that among the three human values (virtue, wealth, and love), virtue alone brings immanent as well as transcendent happiness, and so it is the supreme value. It is virtue which is free from the four evils of envy, greed, wrath, and harsh words. In contemporary debate, the issue becomes significant when F.H. Bradley discusses the question, "Why should I be moral?" in his *Ethical Studies*. He says that the question is not legitimate for it may suggest that there is some ulterior purpose behind the exercise of virtue, or the performance of duty. He says: "To take virtue as a mere means to an ulterior end is in direct antagonism to the voice of moral consciousness." Though he rejects this question, he also answers it as: "A man is moral because he likes being moral; and he likes it partly because he was brought up to the habit of liking it, and partly because he finds it gives him what he wants while its opposite does not do so." Tiruvalluvar discusses this issue in detail and says: "One has to be moral because there is nothing higher than it and it exalts one." He speaks of the power of virtue at length in the text. He declares that there is no greater wealth than virtue, and if one forgets it, then there is no greater evil than this. Purity of mind is the basis for all other virtues; any other activity is merely pompous show.

Thus we see common ground between these great thinkers. There may not be universal agreement in all aspects between them, but the great originality of their thinking and the significance of their impact are not in doubt.