

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-65029-9 - The Ideals of East and West
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THE IDEALS OF EAST & WEST

by

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Buddhist History,' etc.*

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1934

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107650299

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First published 1934
First paperback edition 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-65029-9 Paperback

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TO
H.H. THE MAHARAJA GAEKWAR
THIS ESSAY IS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
AND TO
MY STUDENTS
EASTERN AND WESTERN

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to make the following acknowledgments for permission to quote from works in copyright. In a few cases, careful inquiry has failed to discover the translator of a passage, and in those cases the author offers his apology if he has omitted to make due acknowledgment. Many short extracts in verse or prose have been translated from the originals by the author and his students.

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To the Delegates of the Clarendon Press, the Jowett Copyright Trustees and the Master of Balliol for extracts from Benjamin Jowett's *Plato* and from the Oxford translation of *Aristotle*.

To the Oxford University Press for extracts from the *Sacred Books of the East*, V. A. Smith's *Asoka* (*Rulers of India* series), H. A. Popley's *Sacred Kurral*, A. W. Mair's *Hesiod*, and C. E. Robinson's *Genius of the Greek Drama*.

To the Oxford University Press and the Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, Calcutta, for extracts from the *Heritage of India* Series.

To Mr John Murray for extracts from the *Wisdom of the East* Series.

To Luzac & Co. for extracts from *Indian Wisdom*, by Monier Williams.

To the University of Chicago Press for extracts from A. W. Ryder's *Panchatantra*.

To the Open Court Publishing Co. for extracts from Henke's *Philosophy of Wang Yang Ming* and from Creel's *Sinism*.

To Messrs Probsthain & Co. for extracts from the *Works of Mo-Tse*, by Y. P. Mei.

To Messrs Heinemann for extracts from *Chinese Literature*, by H. A. Giles, and from *Japanese Literature*, by W. G. Aston.

To Messrs George Routledge and Sons, Ltd. for extracts from Dr Hu Shih's *Development of Logical Method in China*.

To the Cresset Press for extracts from Sansom's *Japan*.

To Messrs Macmillan & Co. for an extract from *Oedipus Rex*, by E. D. A. Morshead.

To Messrs G. Bell & Sons for extracts from B. Rogers' translation of *Aristophanes* and from J. S. Watson's translation of *Xenophon*.

To Messrs Longmans Green & Co. Ltd. for an extract from *Things New and Old*, by Dean Inge, and for extracts from W. G. Aston's *Shinto*.

PREFACE

“Men are alike in nature—sundered by custom.”

This little book does not aim at completeness or claim originality. Undertaken at the suggestion of His Highness the Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda its aim is to be useful in an age of transition, when ethical ideals, like everything else which has come down to us, are being tried and tested. “What is likely to elevate conduct should be perpetuated”, said the great Chinese altruist Mo-tse in the sixth century before Christ, and there are things in the traditional ethical systems which cannot be shaken, for they are rooted in the nature of man, and come like that from the hand of God.

Not only in the parallels and similarities between these great systems but in the contrasts which emerge from a comparative study is there useful matter for thought and conduct. For while human nature may develop along similar lines, and the truth which each nation finds come closer to that of other nations as each comes closer to the centre of truth, yet we shall find a marked difference between these ideals, each of which has been moulded and shaped by its environment.

I have therefore given some account of the context of each developing system as well as a brief anthology. And in these I have sought to bring out not only the high peaks reached by each people but the lower levels through which they have struggled, and at which the masses have often remained. “Not only from the garden of the cultivated but from the common fields of the people”, not only from their great classic teachers but from proverbial wisdom and songs. For a double process is always at work. Not only do the fertilizing rivers pour down from the great mountain peaks; these mountains themselves draw their snows from the mists of the plains. So great classical teachers have returned to the people their own popular ideals sub-

limited and purified. In our own time we have seen a Tagore giving back in songs for the people what he has himself culled from the people's songs. The great founders of religion, even those supreme and sublime figures Jesus of Nazareth and Gotama-Buddha, were heard by the people gladly, because they gave back in new and perfect form common ideals, such as loyalty and courage and kindliness, changed, it is true, by a new relation to the Eternal, yet familiar and lovable. To put this in another way we must seek the roots of Socratic wisdom in the confused ideals of Homeric bards, and the high intuitions of Upanishad and Sutta are to be found in germ in the parallel anthology of Vedic times. So in China Confucius is ever drawing upon the Odes, the ancient bardic wisdom of his people, which he makes a source book for his principles.

It is very interesting to see how the ideals of these teachers differ from one another. The Christian ideal of the Suffering Servant, drawn as it is from Hebrew vision and experience, is very different from that of the Superior Man of Aristotle and from the Chun-tse of Confucius: yet how closely at times it approaches the Mahatma and the *bodhi-sattva* of India. The Buddha again has affinities with Jesus as well as with Confucius and Socrates, and in the long succession of the torch-bearers of each race certain types of ethical ideal recur.

If East and West are to enter into real partnership these great teachers must be understood by all men of goodwill to-day. "Men cannot work together", says Confucius, "until they have similar principles": or, we might add, until they understand where their principles differ.

What does each people mean by the ideal it has evolved? Where can one supplement the other? In the history of civilization what matters most is the spiritual and moral core, and we must seek to understand this central strand in the life of the great peoples. By choosing characteristic figures and ideals I hope I do not give a false emphasis, or suggest that these are exclusive of one another. The process of mutual

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give and take began long since, and the great peoples themselves are too complex for any one ideal type to satisfy them. China, of whom Confucius is the Norm, has also produced the great mystic anarchist Lao-tse and for two thousand years has revered Sākyamuni, India's greatest son. Japan has learnt almost everything from these three, as she is now learning from Jesus: but all have adapted as well as adopted the ideal built up on another soil. The *samurai* of Japan is a new type rooted in Confucian ideals of loyalty and good-form, but also learning much from Buddhist quietism, and is to-day being transformed from the servant of the overlord to the servant of the people. It is by such adaptation and modification that old ideals continue to be of value, and it is fascinating to watch the twofold process by which a nation at once expresses its natural genius in such ideals, and corrects and ennobles that genius by importing new teachings from outside. The warlike northern peoples of Europe have produced their own ideal of romantic courage and hospitality and loyalty, but they have also turned wistfully to the Sermon on the Mount with its corrective ideals of meekness and forbearance and its passion for righteousness. The "mild Hindu", who finds this man of the Beatitudes akin to his own ideal of the saint, has turned with equal enthusiasm to the Gītā with its emphasis upon the duty of the warrior and the claims of the nation. So pacifism and civic duty, nationalism and internationalism are seen with their rival claims to loyalty; and this conflict is another interesting aspect of our study. Out of it emerge certain great contrasted leaders in India: an Asoka is seen face to face with a Kautilya with his somewhat Macchiavellian *Realpolitik*; so in China the rationalist is confronted with the mystic, the orthodox teacher of Confucian morals with the cynic and the sceptic, the teacher of other-worldly wisdom with the utilitarian; and in Japan the wise and gentle Shotoku who is her Asoka, and from whose activities has sprung so much of the true and beautiful in her life, finds his pietism confronted with a whole school of Confucian humanists. Nowhere to-day is

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the conflict more acute between nationalism and internationalism, militarism and pacifism, the rights of the common people and the power of the privileged.

It is very significant to see in China how the people are demanding intellectual leadership, and are asking “What is philosophy?” and “Which teacher shall we follow?” This scene is to be contrasted with that of Indian peasants adoring, and often obeying, their Mahatma; while Japanese crowds are looking to the Christian Kagawa for leadership in social reform and in peaceful revolution.

The ideal type, in other words, is still the sage teacher in China, the other-worldly saint in India, and the practical reformer in Japan.

In the western world, which draws its ideals so largely from Greece and Palestine, there is a curious fusion taking place of the ideal of the seeker after scientific truth and of the religious teacher. The walls between religion and science are wearing thin, and there are many who are finding religious and moral inspiration in the man of science detached and seeking no rewards other than those of his quest for truth. This is the Greek Ideal. Yet the Jewish type of Saint, suffering for a great cause and identifying himself with the common people, has still an immense appeal, and it is perhaps in these two types that the western world is making its greatest contribution to Asia, whose contemplative ideal has turned its eyes too much from this world to the unseen, but whose mysticism will undoubtedly reinforce that of Europe.

In making a selection from the rich material at hand I have chosen, then, passages which reveal a conflict of ideals as well as those which may be said to resolve this conflict, and I have attempted to suggest that from the great age of the Bards with their intuitive guesses at truth and their half-formulated ideals of conduct there emerge the philosophical and religious Masters who become classic and formative for subsequent ages: and following selections from these great seers and teachers I have set proverbs and aphorisms in which their peoples embodied the impression which they made upon

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them, and the ideals which have emerged at later periods from the impact of their lofty idealism upon the more pagan ideals of the masses. Thus the *Gītā* is quoted, but also the equally popular *Panchatāntra*, the dialogues of Plato but also the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon and the satires of Aristophanes, the prophets but also the sages and psalmists of Israel. Nor have I hesitated to note the weakness as well as the strength of these peoples and of their ideals.

“It is by observing man’s faults that we come to realize his virtues”, says Confucius, and only if we realize the vice of Greeks, the vindictiveness of Jews, the fatalism of Hindus, and the caprice of Chinese can we realize what a Socrates, an Isaiah, a Gotama, or a Confucius accomplished in their immense task of correction and sublimation.

These are great and creative teachers of ethics whom all must know. They belong to us all: and East and West must cease from provincialism in a world now made one.

As in the West it is from Greek and Hebrew that we derive our ethics so Asia derives hers from Indian and Chinese teachers. With these four gifted peoples this book deals, and with the derivative systems—Christian on the one hand, Japanese on the other.

That both these show profound and creative originality in choosing and in remoulding is clear: and that these ideals are now in the process of cross-fertilization and conflict.

As in the West Christianity marks a great new era so in the East Buddhism. I have paid therefore special attention to them and to the notes of originality in them.

To my students I am indebted for help with translations—and to others acknowledged in the text, especially to Dr Hu Shih of China and Dr M. Anesaki of Japan. Given as Earl Lectures at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California, and at the University of London, these short chapters on great themes depend much upon these illustrative readings.

K. J. S.

London School of Economics
 Easter, 1933

O Thou great Sculptor of the Soul of man,
In fear of whom the Jew grew wise and meek,
Thine are the Beauty and the Truth Divine
Which lured the eager footsteps of the Greek:
Thine is the Gentleness of India: Thine
Are China's Reason and her ordered plan
Of human life: the Courage of Japan
And her high Loyalty Thou canst refine
To serve mankind. May Christians also seek
To reach that lofty Way of which they speak,
That Love which transmutes pagan attitudes
To something nearer the Beatitudes.
Give us the single eye, the loving heart
To see Thy light, and in it do our part.

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AN EVENING AT EPHESUS

(first century A.D.)

I

In the City of Ephesus there lived a Jewish merchant Mor-decai, given to hospitality, and living at peace with his Greek neighbours. Himself partly Hellenized, he was yet a devout member of the Synagogue, and much interested in religious discussion. Towards the close of the first century of our era we find him developing a great trade in silk, as a middle-man between the Chinese caravans and the Greek-Roman world.

To his house there gathered one evening Li-Fêng, a Chinese, his associate the Hindu Ramananda, and the Greek Sosthenes. They began to talk of Alexander's dream of uniting East and West, and Ramananda showed them a coin on which the Macedonian posed as Zeus, thunderbolt in hand. "To me", said his host, "that is enough to explain his failure; but as one of our rabbis has said, 'Let thy house be a meeting place for the wise, and drink their words with thirst'; let me hear from you how God is thought of in your lands, and what is the meaning of man's life. Another of our rabbis has said, 'Upon three things the world stands, Truth, Judgment, and Peace', and we hold that these are the gift of God." "I suggest", said the Greek, "that our friend from China who has travelled farthest, and whose people are the most ancient should speak first. I have long desired to hear of Truth and Beauty as that gifted nation see them."

"Your courtesy is as great as your hospitality, and my poor words must be unworthy of this occasion", said Li-Fêng, "for I am but a humble follower of Truth, and much occupied in business. Yet I concede that in our trade we have many opportunities of learning Truth, not only in just

dealings, but in seeing with our own eyes something of other nations. I have been travelling through the Uplands into India, and I go on to Rome with gifts from the Emperor of Han. Him we call the Son of Heaven, which we conceive to be just but inscrutable. We seek to order society in accordance with its will, and in accordance with reason. I understand that the Emperor of the Romans claims, like Alexander, to be a god; but we in China hold that the Emperor is a Son of Heaven so long as he behaves in a heavenly way. He should be as the Pole Star to his people; our loyalty is to him as it is to our ancestors and to our parents, so long as he is a father to us."

"Our great Emperor Asoka claimed that he was the father of his subjects, but he sought worship of no man; and indeed our Indian theory is that the King is elected to do service to the people. We have, however, another theory expressed in the legend that the gods created and appointed kings, and our *dharma* assigns to each man his sphere and his duties. Can you give us in a sentence the whole duty of man?"

"One of the disciples of Confucius said that in duty to others and in loyalty to self lies man's happiness, and in India a monk of the Middle Path of the Buddha gave me as his ideal of life this saying of his Master—"To cease from evil, to do good, to purify the innermost heart" This ideal and those of peace and harmlessness are not unlike the teachings of our great sage Lao-tse, who said that man must follow nature's law, and that gentleness and non-resistance are the way of wisdom and happiness. My friend and I, as we have travelled together, have indeed found much in common. Shall we not hear from him?"

"As I have said we too conceive of a way, the *dharma*, which means Nature, but also Custom. Our life is regulated by custom, and by *varna*. This is the law which divides our society into four great groups, each having its special duties. According to the *sāstras*, the Creator made the merchants from his thighs, the ruling group from his arms and chest,

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the Brahmins from his head, and the *sūdras* from his feet.”

“Like our free men and slaves?” asked Sosthenes.

“Or rather like our philosophers, merchants, farmers and soldiers”, said Li-Fêng.

“Yes and no; for we place the soldier high; and our lower class, the *sūdras*, while their duty is service, are not slaves. But there is a deeper difference, for we believe that each is born into the group which he has merited by his former deeds. I, who am a trader and indeed outcasted by my travels, may at some distant date be reborn as a warrior, or even as a brahmin. Our view of the Unseen is that it is the One reality, unlike all that we know, yet best described as Truth, Consciousness and Bliss. Man reaches true happiness when he knows that he is it, and not separate from it. ‘Then evil falls away from him, and sorrow.’ The Buddhists teach that the great enemy is Thirst or Evil Desire; and we accept this, but our ways of overcoming it differ. They reject all ritual and offerings to the gods, and especially animal sacrifices. Life is sacrosanct to them: and I, as a silk merchant, have to take the life of countless creatures, and so I should not be accepted as a Buddhist; nor will they acknowledge the duty of soldiers to fight, and we maintain that no nation can live according to these gentle ideals. Yet our religious teachers also insist on the meditative life, and on detachment from desire, and one of our sages, when the Macedonian invited him to return, told him that he was too much occupied with things of this world to understand Truth.”

“Ah”, said their host, “that was well spoken. One is the wisdom of this world, another is the heavenly wisdom. We Hebrews conceive this world to be but a corridor to the next. We are but fragments of the Divine, whose Wisdom has taught us through great tribulation that our people are to be glorified in suffering, and are to spread His light among the nations, until the earth is full of His righteousness as the waters cover the sea.”

“We Greeks also believe that it is our mission to spread the light of Truth and Beauty. Was not Socrates guided by his daemon; and was not Alexander, the pupil of Aristotle, inspired by a great vision of making humanity one?”

“Asoka too sought to spread the Buddha’s *dharma* as a bond binding all peoples. They say that his ambassadors reached the courts of Antiochus and of Ptolemy, inviting them to accept this way.”

At these names the Jew could hardly restrain a shudder, as he remembered the “abominations” of the Egyptians, and the revolt of the Maccabees against the House of Antiochus. “It is easy”, he said, “to speak of friendship between the peoples, and of the spread of civilization from one to another, but for us Hebrews there has sounded down the ages the Word of Yahweh, ‘Come ye out from among them’. While we live at peace with our neighbours in this city, there are many things in its worship and its practices which are anathema to us....”

The Chinese at this point tactfully interposed, “The people of Han believe that as to the Chinese, ‘all within the Four Seas are brothers’; but they also have another teaching of Confucius that there is a *tatung*, or a Great Brotherhood, where men are guided by the principle of *shu*, or Sympathy. And Mo-tse went further, and taught Universal Love. He opposed war and saw its futility as well as its unreasonableness. For this he was bitterly attacked: and I am not convinced. If each of the peoples is to spread its ideas and ideals it can only be by war, as Alexander believed, or by the slow spread of the better overcoming the good. Is there a third way?”

“Nay”, said the Hebrew, “unless it be the way of a people carried off into captivity, to be at once the leaven and the atonement for all nations. As the Prophet saith of the suffering nation, ‘Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our iniquities’. But come, I have allowed my spirit to become bitter within me, and there is in this city an aged Saint, by

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birth a Hebrew, who as a young man joined the Sect of the Nazarenes, and to him many are resorting; for he loves men, and they say he is a Daniel for wisdom."

"Another Socrates", said the Greek.

"Another Confucius?" asked the Chinese.

"Well", said the Indian, "let us by all means go and ask him concerning the Way of Life."

II

After a visit to the Gymnasium the four friends crossed the great square of Ephesus, and watched the crowds going up to the Temple of Artemis, and coming down from the Stadium. "How restless they are", said Mordecai, "they come seeking Oracles, or looking for salvation in the mysteries, or consulting wizards in the Temple. Well do I remember the riot in this city when the makers of images, enraged by the preaching of Paul the Christian, kept shouting 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' It was then that the aged John attached himself as a learner to the Sect of the Nazarenes. Men say that he is filled with the madness of his teacher, Saul, whom may Yahweh forgive, that in this Joshua whom the Romans killed the Eternal Himself dwelt among men."

"We have the teaching of Avatara, that God, who cannot be seen or named, appears from age to age when the world has most need of him. And indeed I have with me a copy of our Gītā, which I must show you. 'I am the eternal: I incarnate myself': says Krishna, 'Whoso loveth me, him I love'. This is the way of salvation for us who are busy and cannot spend long hours in meditation."

"It is not strange to us either", said Sosthenes, "for we have in the mysteries a way of salvation in ecstatic devotion to the gods, and we have conceived Hermes as the Divine Logos."

"What is *logos*?" asked Li-Fêng.

"It means Word or Reason."

"We call it *tao*, the Way of Nature, I think", said Li-Fêng, "it is in listening to this voice that man attains wisdom. 'Let the *tao* speak through thee, as the wind speaks through a flute', says the poet."

"We too", said the Hebrew, "live by the Divine Wisdom, and indeed Philo calls it *logos*. I often use his prayer, 'Hasten my soul to become the abiding-place of God, pure and holy; strong where thou art weak, wise where thou art foolish, guided by reason where thou art wandering'."

"And I", said the Greek, "use one which is not unlike it. It is the prayer of Socrates: 'Beloved Pan, and all ye gods who haunt this place, grant me beauty of the inward soul, and make the outward and the inward man to be but one'. It is by such prayers, I think, that men become good; well has Seneca said, 'No man is good apart from God'. On this we all seem agreed, that human goodness must be patterned upon the Divine."

By this time they had reached the house of the Elder John, and in the courtyard they found a company of men and women seated about a venerable figure who seemed blind, yet whose face was full of light. "My little children, love one another: if ye love not one another whom ye have seen, how can ye love God whom ye have not seen?"

"We are answered", thought the Chinese. "Here is a sage indeed like our Mo-tse."

The Saint went on to speak of one who had dwelt among men, full of Grace and Truth, who was the image of the unseen beauty, in whom men can see Light and find Life.

"He has the mind of a good and true disciple of Plato", said the Greek to himself: and the Hindu seemed to understand clearly, as his face lit up, the great terms Light and Life: "*jyoti*", he murmured, "*amritam*".

"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me", continued the Saint, and he spoke to them of the great sacrifice of the Cross, and of love revealed in self-forgetfulness.

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As they went out into the starlight the four friends felt that a solemn and sacred influence was with them. The Indian was the first to break the silence.

"Love truly is the way of life", he said, "but how hard to practise."

"Without the grace of God", said the Jew, "it is impossible."

"Yet we four have found that in the quest for Truth race is no barrier", said Sosthenes.

"If man would only live by reason", pondered the Chinese; "yet our scholars have rejected the universal love of Mo-tse, and we are continually at war, until our people perish for lack of peace and leisure to till their fields."

"And ours", said Sosthenes, "are perishing of lust. It was Hubris and Evil Desire which laid Athens low, and within the Empire to-day slaves are the victims of lust, and prostitutes haunt these very temple courts. Evil is the corruption of the good, and in vain did Socrates seek to transmute lust into love."

III

Before they left Ephesus the three travellers paid a farewell visit to Mordecai. "We have been discussing the saintly John", said Sosthenes, "and seeking to discover the ideal for Man."

"Our friend from China has told me of the Princely Man of K'ung: will you not repeat what you said last night?"

"Willingly", said the Chinese, "for our Master has given us full details of the qualities of the Chun-tse. He is truly benevolent and free from care: truly wise and free from delusion: truly brave and free from fear."

"These are the Master's own qualities: he lived a life of princely goodness, as a teacher who appealed to reason, yet transmitted ancient wisdom; harmonious and sincere, he was ever firm, but never contentious."

"What in a word were his guiding principles?" asked the

Hindu. “*Li* or good form was his inner rule: without this courtesy becomes ceremonious, prudence becomes timid, valour violent, and candour rude.”

“Your teacher reminds one of the Superior Man of Aristotle”, said Sosthenes, “he too followed a golden mean, and taught men to live according to reason.”

“Yet it is better to be meek than proud, better to humble oneself before the wisdom of God. In His fear is the beginning of wisdom”, said Mordecai.

“Our Lao-tse would agree”, said the Chinese, “he also spoke of three great qualities or jewels—gentleness, frugality, and humility: and his words and spirit remind me of the Elder John, who says that his Master taught saying, ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth’.”

“It is a saying from our Wisdom books”, said Mordecai, “John is a true son of Israel”. “And worthy to be called a Hindu”, said Ramananda, “for we too make much of *ahimsā*, gentleness, and of the strength of the meek.”

“He that bends himself shall be made straight, he that humbles himself shall be saved”, says Lao-tse.... “Is man by nature a being of reason or of emotion? Is his nature good or evil?” asked Li-Fêng.

“Man is a shadow and vanity”, said the Jew. “Yet God has made him a little lower than the angels.”

“He is by nature good”, says Meng-tse; “what says the Indian wisdom?” “‘Man is part of the universal Soul, and must awake to his true nature.’ This is Salvation—the true man is the *yogi*—awake to reality.”

“Our Scriptures”, said Mordecai, “hold that the greatest is the servant of all, and here too the Elder John is an Israelite indeed.”

“Let me be a very sweeper for humility, a doctor to the sick, a guide to the blind, a friend to all”, quoted Ramananda. “So saith Job and we are all agreed that to serve man is to obey God.”

“Yet I dislike this emphasis on humility”, said the Greek.

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“That is for slaves, not for freemen. While we seek to avoid insolence we believe in a proper pride of station and of attainments.”

“I think I am with K’ung rather than with Lao-tse—with Aristotle rather than with the Buddha”, said the Chinese.

“Yet Yahweh exalteth the meek and bringeth to nought the pride of man. We Jews are like the Indians—more interested in the Divine Will than in human wisdom.”

“For that reason it may be”, said Sosthenes, “that Greeks and Chinese have looked to Israel and to India for light complementary to our own.”

“And we of India have need of such light on man and his work. We have lost sight of the human in our quest for the Divine. Maybe in such brotherhood as we have enjoyed the peoples will see new light.”