

Rumi and Confucius on Meaning of Life by Ibrahim Özdemir
(Istanbul: No Publisher, 2020). pp. xi+90. ISBN 979-8-563363-267.

The work we are introducing is an expanded and edited version of the paper presented at the International Congress on “The Life of Asian Community and the New Dialogue Between Past and Future of the World” organized by the Asian Philosophical Association in Korea on October 26-29, 2006. It can be said that the work has two main aims. The first of these is the quest for a proposal for problems such as the environment, identity, and the secular cognition of existence in the contemporary world. Accordingly, as our world is turning into a small village in an increasingly globalized environment, there is a question of assimilation and alienation of identities as well as environmental destruction. The second is to contribute to building a bridge between Islam, the last of the Abrahamic religions, and the East, symbolized as the home of ancient wisdom, through the teachings of Rumi (1209-1271) and the wisdom of Confucius (551-479 BCE). The effort to syncretize and interpret the teachings of both thinkers in the context of the problems of our time is considered an attempt to open the spirit and mind of man and humanity.

The first part of the work, which was compiled with the aforementioned aims and expectations, is devoted to the doctrine of Confucius. The first chapter focuses on Confucius’ life (pp. 13-19), his teaching in outline (pp. 20-32), and his understanding of family (p. 33) and music (p. 34). Although Confucius, as is known, did not construct a system/tradition of thought, his views were transformed into a system/tradition by his students and predecessors. In this way, the Confucian doctrine has a long historical legacy in East Asia, from China to Korea and Japan to Vietnam. There, it has influenced, transformed and shaped people’s philosophies of life and living, and provided the background for social value principles, institutions and political theories. In addition, Confucianism is a very important component in the interpretation of social relations, social rituals, educational mentality, moral philosophy, and cultural attitudes. (p. 6).

While the author briefly dwells on Confucius’ life, his views on family and music, he concentrates on his understanding of the cosmos and nature, value and morality, which constitute the main skeleton of his teaching. It is interesting to note here that Confucius, a highly representative figure in the history of thought, never went to school or took regular classes under the supervision of a teacher; was largely self-taught, self-taught and eventually became China’s most famous teacher, philosopher and political theorist. Like Socrates, he

did not compose works directly. His views were later compiled by his students and preserved under the title “The Analects”.

The basic principle of Confucius’s moral philosophy, which is included in his conception of life and living, is the motto statement “do not desire for others what you do not desire for yourself”, which is also the basic problem of ancient and contemporary moral philosophies. While educating students around this moral principle, it teaches them to be moral and truthful regardless of their social status, and teaches them the arts of governance and refinement (ritual, music, archery, chariot driving, calligraphy and calculation). In this model of teaching, students are expected to think deeply and study the physical world. About his students and followers of the reasonable and acceptable model of thinking and research, Confucius said: if thinking is divorced from reality and no due attention is paid to reading, one will continue to feel puzzled by many things. One should constantly review what he has learned and combine reading with thinking (p. 18). Thus, in the dependent relationship established between nature/reality, reading and thinking, the real knowledge acquired is not primarily about whether this knowledge corresponds to something or not, but rather about knowing the extent of one’s ignorance (p. 20).

The true knowledge that Confucius problematizes is essentially knowledge about nature. So much so that his understanding of nature is also the basis of his teaching. In the Confucian worldview, nature is not only intrinsically valuable in its own right, but also contains enormous potential for the source of both the vital and moral integrity of the survival of the human family. For Confucius, nature is the source of all things and the site of the organic unity of the continuity of existence. It is also the source of everything that sustains life, from basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter to countless sources of employment. For these reasons, nature must be studied and understood with attention, care and sensitivity. Only in this way can people be enlightened and gain the wisdom to guide them on the path to a moral life.

As for the answer to the question of what is the fundamental principle in the structure and functioning of nature, it can be stated as follows. Nature exists for its own sake, without any double or hidden causes. Such a nature is not limited and lifeless, but vast, deep, high, intelligent, alive, infinite and eternal. It is man’s duty to observe the structure, order and functioning of nature with care and attention and to discover the moral order in the universe, where everything is alive, dynamic and meaningful. In other words, in examining the moral order in nature with reverence and investigating how man is a microcopy of this nature, one should expect to discover how both realms are governed by the moral principle. Thus, Confucius’ design of nature is built around ethics rather than metaphysics, and around moral values rather than assigning intellectual content.

There is a meaningful and dependent unity or unities between morality and the design of nature. The possibility of universal moral order is raised in the Confucian teaching in relation to virtue. Accordingly, a meaningful and moral life that is intertwined and interdependent with the universal order in nature is the highest human achievement. The highest human achievement is possible primarily by establishing the best society and ably governing the best state. A hierarchical social system is recommended here, where loyalty to elders and teachers is of critical importance. The best administration of the state first requires the ordering and continuity of families. The continuity of the family, which includes past, present and future generations, is necessary for the well-being of society and thus the state; a strong ethic of indebtedness to past generations and obligations to grandchildren is emphasized. In order to put families in order, the individual person's own personality must first be developed. In order to correct personalities, minds must be restored. The restoration of minds is related to sincerity of thought, and sincerity of thought is related to the breadth of knowledge. Knowledge is the process of investigating things in nature. In the broadest sense, this knowledge is about the universal moral order that is encompassed by nature and morality. Thus, when knowledge increases, thoughts evolve with sincerity and the world moves towards peace and beauty.

On the other hand, the second part of the work is devoted to Rumi. In this section, after briefly discussing Mevlana's life (pp. 37-44), the focus is on his teaching. While composing Mevlana's teaching, subheadings such as his views on God and creation (pp. 48-52), nature as a mirror (pp. 53-56), love as a dynamic force (pp. 57-59), animals as brothers and sisters (pp. 60-61), human understanding (pp. 62-63), family (pp. 64-68) and music (pp. 69-71) are given.

Mevlana develops his design of nature within the anthropocosmic worldview shaped in a theocentric framework. Accordingly, after creating nature out of nothing, God is always in the state of creating new things. This is because God wants to be known and for this purpose He manifests Himself in nature through His eternal qualities. Nothing in nature was or is created haphazardly; on the contrary, everything was created with a certain order, duty, purpose and meaning, and continues to exist in this way. In other words, everything in nature takes place according to a grand plan formulated by the Divine Will and Wisdom. In this cosmic system, everything is interrelated and interconnected on the one hand, and on the other hand, everything has its own specific place, meaning, mission and significance.

In Mevlana's system of thought, God is the Lord of all worlds and beings. In this narrative, every single being in nature, from the mote to the sphere, not only shows the greatness of God, but also remembers and glorifies God in its own language. This is supported by the following quote from Rumi: They [the mountain, the wind, the moon, the sun] all cry, "we are hearing and seeing and responsive, though to you, the uninitiated, we are mute." We hear, see and

react, but for you who do not know, we are dumb." Thus, each manifestation in nature is also read as a mirror of divine grandeur and beauty (pp. 53-56).

God does not mechanically create and operate the structures of nature, but rather out of love. In fact, love is a dynamic power of God in nature, and without love, nothing can be subject to movement. Therefore, the structure and functioning of nature cannot continue to exist, nor can it be said to come into being. Love is a hidden power underlying the physical and spiritual world. Moving towards God, love is the positive energy that, according to Mevlana, is responsible for the interaction between the particles (atoms) in nature and thus connects everything in nature to everything else. Therefore, due to love, everything in nature is interconnected and interconnected in the cosmic interpretation, not in a mechanical and automaton form as emphasized in the secular conception. It can be said, then, that the goodness of everything depends on everything else (pp. 57-59).

Thus, in Mevlana's teaching, love functions as a key concept that is fundamental and necessary not only for a religious and ethical life, but also for the sustainability of the cosmic order in nature. In one of Mevlana's couplets (poetry) highlighted in the work, the bundle of meaning he attributes to love is depicted as follows:

My Mother is Love

My Father is Love

My Prophet is Love

My God is Love

I am a child of Love

I have come only to speak of Love

In this narrative, it is emphasized that love constitutes the spirit of nature, in a way, its archetype and that it can transcend borders and therefore embraces all people, all countries and all religions. In the same way, based on the love-centered design of nature, according to Özdemir, humans can develop a holistic environmental ethics in which they can translate their inner peace and harmony to the whole creation. Because this design is not utilitarian and instrumental, it assigns a position to man as a humble member of the cosmos. Accordingly, humans do not own nature, nor does nature exist only to serve humans. Nature is perceived as a gift from God and a sign of His creative power. Therefore, humans should respect nature, use natural resources with care, and develop a relationship with nature based on love and compassion, which is the essence of all reality (pp. 62-63). One reason for the necessity of this relationship stems from the idea of the world and its inhabitants as a family. Accordingly,

we are members of the family of God, the Lord, Owner and Sustainer of the universe. We are all dependent on His provision and care. Our duty, then, is to be stewards to the rest of the members of the family. In this context, the author analyzes the necessity of human-environment relations within the framework of love and respect by interpreting the world as our home and nature as our mother in Mevlana's thought system. In the analogy of mother and nature, we are suckling babies. While feeding on nature, we should not harm it, on the contrary, we should respect it. Otherwise, nature will push us away and may even punish us. Therefore, ecological disasters and problems may arise due to Mother Earth's anger at our selfish and utilitarian mentality and attitude towards her (pp. 64-68).

In terms of conclusion and evaluation, a brief summary of the aforementioned work can be made as follows: First of all, the work can be considered as an introduction to the research on Confucius and Rumi. Based on the teachings of Confucius and Rumi, the work seeks answers to the ancient questions of who man is, where he comes from, where he is going, and what is the meaning of nature and the cosmos. The search for answers to these questions also imposes responsibility on man in his relationship with himself, his environment and nature. This narrative emphasizes nature's intrinsic value and necessity for life, as well as its immense potential as a source of vitality and moral integrity. Based on such a bundle of meanings attributed to nature, it is often emphasized in the work that both thinkers have an anthropo-cosmic worldview, thus drawing attention to their common axes. On the other hand, the issues on which they differ are not emphasized much.

Both thinkers' ideas about the universe, nature and human beings, which constitute one of the main purposes of the work, can play a role in overcoming the problems faced by the contemporary world. Thus, by bringing these ideas back to the agenda, modern man can be enabled to enrich his perception of nature and himself; a starting point for ethical awareness of the problems in the ecosystem and the overconsumption of natural resources can be created; it can be a source of inspiration to overcome all kinds of contemporary problems and challenges such as environmental, political, social; bridges of understanding and dialogues can be established between cultures and civilizations, which are currently becoming increasingly geographically close to each other, but at the risk of losing their differences. In this respect, the study can be said to be a stimulus for new researchers.

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