

# MYSTIQUES DE LA CHINE

## *Chine*

CONFUCIUS ~ 551 — ~479

LAO-TSEU ~300 AC

TCHOANG-TSEU ~ 200 AC

HUAINAN ZI

Tao poétique

WANG-YANG-MING ~ 1550

IZUTSU

Dream Trippers

Série « Mystiques du Monde »

- I. Antiquité judéo-chrétienne et grecque  
Des origines au troisième siècle
- II. Antiquité chrétienne  
Du cinquième au dixième siècle
- III. Moyen Âge chrétien  
Du douzième au quatorzième siècle
- IV. Chrétiens à la Renaissance  
Quinzième et seizièmes siècles
- V. Chrétiens à l'âge classique  
Dix-septième siècle
- VI. Figures européennes  
Du dix-huitième au vingtième siècle
  
- VII. Sufis en terres d'Islam  
Du neuvième au treizième siècle
- VIII. Sufis en terres d'Islam  
Du quatorzième au vingtième siècle
  
- IX. Figures mystiques de l'Inde traditionnelle
- X. Mystiques bouddhistes de l'Inde et du Tibet
- XI. Mystiques bouddhistes de la Chine et du Japon
- XII. Mystiques taoïstes et confucianistes de Chine
  
- XIII. Poèmes de Chine, Corée, Japon
- XIV-XVI Poèmes d'Occident

Après des florilèges chronologiques, je propose dans cette série  
une dizaine de figures mystiques par tome en livrant des textes  
majeurs non coupés.

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# Chine

Un tome intitulé « Chine » porte ici sur des figures mystiques reconnues par une moitié des humains, celle où la culture immémoriale chinoise ensemença les civilisations coréenne, japonaise, du sud-est asiatique. C'est peu en volume, même en y associant les figures bouddhistes sino-japonaises regroupées dans un tome compagnon<sup>1</sup>. Mais comment éclairer sérieusement et donc intimement des textes si différents des nôtres de par leurs modes d'approches ? Incompétence linguistique et culture dualisante semble demeurer deux obstacles insurmontables, si l'on ne sort pas des particularités culturelles.

L'entreprise n'est devenue « raisonnable » qu'en se limitant au seul champ mystique au-delà de diversités traditionnelles religieuses. Mais avant tout elle a bénéficié d'une chance tout à fait imprévisible :

Kenzo Yamamoto partage notre appréciation mystique. Ainsi il « exporte » Madame Guyon (-1717) en la présentant comme telle et en la traduisant directement du français en japonais<sup>2</sup>.

Notre rencontre s'est traduite par un « échange » bien imprévisible opéré entre mystiques : d'un côté Madame Guyon, de l'autre deux japonais, le philosophe linguiste Toshihiko Izutsu (-1985) et le moine mystique Dôgên qui vécut sept cent cinquante ans plus tôt (-1253). Les trois figures disparues que l'on vient de dater sont fort éloignées par l'espace ou dans le temps, mais elles abordèrent avec justesse ce qui constitue un Réel inconnaissable. L'intelligence

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1 Scission discutable. Se combinant au taoïsme, le bouddhisme devient autre après sa pénétration en Chine. Nous avons fait prévaloir la continuité de la tradition bouddhique, encore attestée dans les îles lointaines par Dôgên. Elle s'impose pour préserver une dimension comparable entre douze tomes (huit marqués par des traditions dualisantes, quatre pour les « orientales »).

2 Chance également improbable, l'anglais s'étant imposé dans « l'exportation » du quiétisme toléré en milieu protestant, comme auparavant l'allemand s'imposa au Japon comme possible modèle étatique, technique, militaire.

explicite du Moderne ou le vécu de l'Ancien éclairent les autres textes des tomes cités.

Vivant au sein de cultures du bassin méditerranéen traversé par trois religions du livre, outre les influences ce celles propres à l'Inde dont est issue la bouddhique, une mutation est due. Il s'agit d'élargir ce que l'on caractérise souvent comme « vécu mystique en Dieu ».

Après une ouverture qui pose le contexte confucianiste, nous proposons des extraits taoïstes. Il s'agit des deux grands mystiques anciens les plus largement reconnus — Maîtres Lao et Tchoang, qui vivaient avant l'ère dite commune. Ils sont suivis d'un « chant » ou chapitre tiré du *Huainan zi* ; de poèmes choisis traitant « du Vide » et l'on approche l'an mil. Apparaîtra Wang-Yang-Ming, mystique néo-confucéen actif vers 1500.

Cinq siècles de nouveau et Izutsu prend place digne de son génie même s'il ne se présente pas comme mystique. Le penseur est libre de dépendances philosophiques européennes. Envers la mystique musulmane cela lui assure une approche libérée de la chrétienne sur Massignon ou de l'allemande sur Corbin : un « vent nouveau venu de l'est » change ainsi la perception habituelle offerte par des érudits célèbres.

Tout n'a pas totalement disparu de nos jours, et même en Chine, mais demeure caché ou interdit : en témoignent des « voyageurs du rêve » occidental qui rencontrent autour de l'an 2000 quelques rares moines taoïstes<sup>3</sup>.

Nul doute que les cultures anciennes taoïstes et bouddhiques puissent infléchir ce qui est arrivé en moins de deux siècles par irruption brutale d'outils matériels souvent militaires puis conceptuels souvent idéologiques.

Un retour multiforme des traditions non européennes serait en cours tandis qu'une Europe affaiblie n'exporte plus, mais importe (difficilement) des hommes. Cette inversion de sens peut-elle rétablir l'équilibre disparu entre peuples dès le « siècle des Lumières » tout en préservant l'acquis du même siècle, mal exporté, vers plus de liberté ?

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<sup>3</sup> Ce qui n'exclut pas la survivance de quelques moines bouddhistes ; je suis resté marqué par une brève rencontre à Xian en 1995.

# CONFUCIUS

Pour poser la base culturelle au sein de laquelle taoïsme et bouddhisme prirent place, les « Entretiens » de Confucius (*Lunyu*) sont incontournables. Ils ouvrent à la fois chronologiquement et de par leur influence ce recueil de textes mystiques chinois et japonais.

Les « Entretiens » ne sont pas réductibles à une morale, ils s'ouvrent au grand souffle (*qi*) qui anime l'univers.

Je propose quatre chapitres (sur vingt) : I *De l'Etude*, IV *Habiter l'Humanité*, VII *De la Transmission*, XI *Les Premiers [disciples] venus*. Ils ont précédés de deux fragments empruntés à la Préface des traducteurs : *Le fil rouge : un Humanisme pragmatique*.

Je les fait suivre par un extrait du premier des disciples, Meng Zi. Il est introduit par des fragments des traducteurs qui éclairent la notion de souffle (*qi*), aordent l'inégalité des hommes, le mal, le cœur...

*Philosophes confucianistes*/textes traduits, présentés et annotés par Charles Le Blanc et Rémi Mathieu, Gallimard, « Pléiade », 2009.

## TEXTES

[X] Préface [...]

### LE FIL ROUGE : UN HUMANISME PRAGMATIQUE

#### *Un devoir d'humanité.*

Avant de fonder une morale, Confucius vise, lors d'entretiens avec ses disciples, à définir la relation à autrui dont celle-ci va découler. Dans une société aussi hiérarchisée que celle de la [XI] Chine antique, il conçoit que les hommes sont semblables les uns aux autres, de nature unique. L'un des disciples aura cette formule demeurée immortelle : « À l'intérieur des Quatre Mers, tous [les hommes] sont ses frères 1. » À ce titre, ils n'ont que des devoirs à remplir, sans réclamer jamais aucun droit. Il entend aussi que chacun soit socialement (selon son rang, son âge, sa compétence) a sa place et que celle-ci soit définie par un terme clair, d'où son exigence du respect strict de la correction des noms. Ce qu'il qualifiera de vertu d'« humanité » (*ren*), dans un monde où elle faisait si cruellement défaut, contient et implique toutes les autres attitudes et pensées à l'égard des hommes : l'amour d'autrui, le respect, la piété, la sincérité, l'observance des rites... qui sont autant de vertus, parce

qu'elles sont l'expression de sentiments aussi bien que de devoirs. Confucius, et moins encore ses successeurs, ne nie point les différenciations sociales, nécessaires à la structuration des groupes humains, mais il affirme que son prochain est comme un autre soi-même (« il » est « je » et réciproquement) et qu'il en découle, fort naturellement, une attention constante à traiter l'autre comme un sujet que l'on est, d'ailleurs, par effet de réciprocité, soi-même à son égard. L'illustre bien la formule, connue sous diverses expressions : « Ce que tu ne désires pas pour toi-même, ne l'impose pas aux autres ». C'est que les hommes ont donc même nature ; ils ne se distinguent que par leurs pratiques, les catégories sociales auxquelles ils appartiennent et leur rang dans la hiérarchie des âges ou des familles. De ce point de vue, Confucius est un pragmatique ; il réussit la synthèse entre ses hautes aspirations et la réalité sociale chinoise établie sur une hiérarchisation des êtres vivants. La pratique de l'humanité, cœur du dispositif confucéen, est difficile à observer et pourtant fondée sur l'amour inconditionnel des hommes 5. Cette humanité, dit

1. *Луньшю*, XII-5, 264. En fait, le propos du disciple Zi Xia est plus restrictif : « Si l'homme de bien respecte les autres [...], alors, à l'intérieur des Quatre Mers [c'est-à-dire dans le monde entier], tous sont ses frères aînés et cadets ». Notons le « tous » qui implique l'absence de distinction théorique entre princes et sujets.

5. [...] Cet amour inclut d'autres attitudes affectueuses et généreuses à la fois : la mansuétude, la bienveillance, la tolérance... Ces vertus vont de pair avec une attitude de modestie, de mise en retrait et d'absence de conflit vis-à-vis d'autrui.

## [XII]

[...]

### ***Vers un perfectionnement de soi.***

S'il est une passion de Confucius, c'est la quête de la perfection ; s'il est une crainte, c'est de se heurter à la médiocrité des hommes (ce fut souvent le cas dans son enseignement comme dans ses fonctions à la cour). Car, pour disposer de cette aptitude à aimer les autres, il ne faut point se contenter de cette tendance native à aller vers eux, mais cultiver la propension vers le bien qui habite censément chacun de nous. C'est ce que les confucianistes nomment « le perfectionnement de soi [de sa personne] », c'est-à-dire la recherche de ce qui exprime au mieux les aptitudes propres à tendre vers le bien pour soi et pour les autres. L'homme dispose spontanément de cette faculté, encore lui faut-il tendre volontairement vers son épanouissement. À cet égard, cette philosophie est un pur volontarisme : elle ne fait pas confiance à la nature pour



réaliser ses ambitions, elle s'applique constamment, chaque jour, à en observer le développement programmé. Nul système de pensée ne valorise autant la libre volonté que le confucianisme ; c'est à ce titre qu'il est synonyme d'une resson — [XIII] sabilisation neuve du sujet qui n'est plus considéré comme un simple objet du destin forgé par le Ciel — tout en reconnaissant la part de destinée que ce dernier lui impose. Ces hommes qui aspirent, par choix, à cette perfection sont des « hommes de bien » (*junzi*), héritiers des sages idéalisés des temps anciens ; ils se distinguent ainsi de ceux qui se contentent de leurs seules compétences innées. Pour ce faire, ils vont disposer des instruments que confère à tout homme l'étude. Celle-ci s'entend alors au sens large : elle est apprentissage des savoirs avant d'être assimilation et recherche des significations. Elle est une acquisition des techniques, comme une étude des livres référentiels.

[...] [32]

## « Les Entretiens » de Confucius (*Lunyu*)

### I. DE L'ÉTUDE (*Xue er*)

#### NOTICE

Ce chapitre examine divers asiles de l'étude, qui n'est pas d'abord une recherche théorique de la vérité, mais l'union inséparable de la connaissance et de la pratique, chacune stimulant l'autre. L'étude est le principe du perfectionnement intégral de l'individu et, en particulier, de son perfectionnement moral. Ainsi, la pratique de la piété filiale au sein de la famille (servir ses parents et ses aînés) mène tout naturellement à transposer cette vertu dans la sphère publique et politique où l'enfant, devenu adulte, se consacre au bien commun et vise à devenir un *junzi* (homme de bien), l'idéal confucéen. L'esprit de l'étude confucéenne se reflète bien dans la conduite de Zi Lu : « Zi Lu craignait seulement d'entendre un [nouvel] enseignement avant d'avoir mis en pratique le précédent » (v-15, 100).

Le premier paragraphe (I-I, 1 à 3) comporte un aspect synthétique indéniable, mais son interprétation varie beaucoup chez les commentateurs. Aucune interprétation n'épuise le sens du texte. Ici, l'étude est source de joie parce qu'elle donne naissance à la vertu et à l'homme de bien ; la vertu attire des voisins et des amis qui partagent l'idéal de l'homme de bien et permet à celui-ci de garder l'équanimité même quand son mérite est méconnu des autres. Ainsi, l'objet ultime de l'étude n'est pas l'accumulation des connaissances, mais l'instauration de la vertu intégrale de l'homme de bien. Le fondement de l'étude et de la vertu est dévoilé dans le paragraphe suivant, où un disciple de Confucius

définit la piété filiale et l'amour fraternel comme le fondement de la vertu d'humanité (I-2, 3 à 4).

Dans la mesure où les rites sont une forme d'apprentissage, ils relèvent aussi de l'étude. Les rites reposent sur l'harmonie, mais [34] l'harmonie doit être encadrée par les rites (1-12, 16). Les rites permettent d'exprimer ses sentiments les plus profonds, par exemple, lors du décès de ses parents, dans des formes socialement acceptables et transformatrices (1-9, 13).

#### TEXTE

**I-I. [1] Le Maître 1 dit : « N'est-ce pas tout de même un plaisir d'étudier 2 et, au moment voulu, de mettre en pratique ce que l'on a appris ? [2] N'est-ce pas tout de même une joie d'avoir des amis venus de loin nous visiter ? [3] N'est-ce pas tout de même le fait de l'homme de bien de garder sa bonne humeur même lorsqu'il est méconnu ?**

**I-2 You zi 5 dit : « Un homme imprégné de piété filiale et d'amour fraternel sera rarement porté à défier ses supérieurs. Combien moins un tel homme sera-t-il enclin à fomenter des troubles ! [4] L'homme de bien consacre tous ses soins au fondement 6. Une fois le fondement bien établi, la Voie naît 7. Or, la piété filiale et l'amour fraternel ne sont-ils pas le fondement de l'humanité 8 ? »**

1. Sauf indication contraire, la formule « le Maître » désigne Confucius.

2. *Étudier* : acquérir de nouvelles connaissances, les mettre en pratique et, par là, se perfectionner soi-même.

5. *You Zi* : nom personnel You Ruo et titre You zi ; disciple de Confucius né vers ~516 ; conseiller du duc Ai (r. ~494 — ~468) de Lu ; appelé *xi* (maître).

6. Littéralement : « la racine ».

7. La Voie naît de la connaissance jointe à la pratique, dont l'apprentissage

8. « La vertu d'humanité ».

**[36] I—3. Le Maître dit : « Propos ingénieux et airs séduisants sont rarement empreints d'humanité. »**

**I—4. Zeng zi 10 dit : « Chaque jour je m'examine à trois reprises. Ai-je été déloyal dans mes engagements à l'égard d'autrui ? Ai-je été infidèle dans mes rapports avec mes amis ? Ai-je enseigné des choses que je n'avais pas mises en pratique ? »**

I—5. [7] Le Maître dit : “Un souverain à la tête d’un pays de mille chars 12 [9] manifeste sa bonne foi dans les affaires par son respect des officiers et son amour de ses pairs par la modération de ses dépenses. Il ne sollicite le peuple qu’au moment propice 13.”

I—6. [10] Le Maître dit : « À domicile, le disciple est filial, en public, fraternel. En tout temps, il est de bonne foi. Il aime tout le monde, mais chérit ceux-là seuls qui font preuve d’humanité. Si ses activités n’épuisent pas ses forces, il les consacre à l’étude des écrits 14. »

I—7. [11] Zi Xia 15 dit : « Si l’estime des sages et l’indifférence à la beauté physique te rendent capable de consacrer toutes tes forces au service de tes parents, de te dévouer corps et âme au service de ton souverain et d’être digne de confiance dans tes rapports avec tes amis, on aura beau dire que tu n’as pas encore étudié, à mes yeux tu as vraiment étudié. »

10. *Zeng zi* : nom personnel Zeng Shen (~505 — ~436) et nom social Zi Yu ; il fut un important disciple de Confucius et fut aussi appelé « maître ».

12. C’est-à-dire une puissance moyenne au temps de Confucius.

13. Allusion aux corvées. L’interlocuteur de Confucius serait le duc Jing (r. 547-~490) de Qi. Confucius séjourna à sa cour en ~517.

14. Entre autres, le Shi, « Les Poèmes », le *Shu*, « Les Documents », et le *Li*, « Les Rites ».

15. *Zi Xia* : nom social de Bu Shang, un disciple de Confucius né à Wèi vers ~507 ; il eut ses propres disciples ; il est connu pour sa connaissance des anciens écrits.

I—8. [12] Le Maître dit : “Sans gravité, l’homme de bien ne saurait ni imposer son autorité ni affermir son étude. Comme il accorde la plus grande importance à la loyauté et à la fidélité et n’a pas d’amis qui ne soient ses égaux, [13] commet-il une faute, il n’hésite pas à se corriger.”

I—9. Zeng zi dit : « La vertu du peuple 17 atteint sa plénitude lorsqu’on donne tous ses soins à l’accomplissement des rites funéraires pour ses parents et qu’on étend sa vénération aux ancêtres les plus éloignés 18. »

I—10 [14] Zi Qin 19 s’enquit auprès de Zi Gong 20 : « Quand notre Maître se rend dans un pays 21, il se renseigne toujours sur son gouvernement ; sollicite-t-il ces renseignements ou les lui fournit-on spontanément ? »

Zi Gong répondit : « C'est par son naturel doux, avenant, respectueux, modeste et conciliant que notre Maître les obtient. La manière de les solliciter de notre Maître ne diffère-t-elle pas en tout point de celle des autres ? »

I—11. [15] Le Maître dit : « Observe les intentions du fils tant que son père est vivant 22. Observe sa conduite quand son père n'est plus. Si, après trois ans 23, il n'a rien changé à la voie de son père, il mérite bien qu'on le dise pieux. »

I—12. [16] You zi dit : « Dans l'usage des rites, l'harmonie vient en premier. Grâce à elle, la voie des Anciens trouva sa beauté et les affaires mineures et majeures, leur principe. [38]

Mais, lorsque la pratique comporte des aspects répréhensibles et qu'on s'en remet uniquement à l'harmonie, sans l'encadrer par des dispositions rituelles, la pratique n'en demeurera pas moins défectueuse. »

17. Il convient de comprendre : « la vigueur morale du peuple. »

18. Si l'enfant honore même ses parents éloignés, combien plus ses parents proches.

19. *Zi Qin* : nom social de Chen Kang, dont on ne connaît rien.

20. *Zi Gong* : nom social de Duanmu Si, un disciple de Confucius né à Wèi vers ~520. Chef du mouvement confucéen après la mort du Maître.

21. Allusion aux nombreux voyages de Confucius.

22. Avant la mort du père, le fils n'est pas autonome ; d'où l'opposition entre « intentions » et « conduite ».

23. Trois ans : la durée du deuil rituel (vingt-sept mois).

I—13. [17] You zi dit : « Si ta bonne foi tend vers la justice, tes paroles seront fiables. Si ton respect tend vers les rites, tu tiendras honte et disgrâce à distance.

*Une épouse innocente de toute négligence*

*À l'endroit de sa propre famille*

*digne du temple ancestral 25.»*

1-14. [18] Le Maître dit : « L'homme de bien ne cherche point la satiété dans la nourriture ni le confort dans le logement. Il est expéditif dans les affaires, mais circonspect dans ses paroles. Fréquentant ceux qui possèdent la Voie, il se corrige grâce à eux. D'un tel homme, on peut dire qu'il aime véritablement étudier. »

I—15. Zi Gong demanda : « Que penser de l'adage :

*Pauvre sans complaisance,  
Riche sans arrogance ? »*

Le Maître répondit : « C'est acceptable ; mais mieux vaudrait :

*Pauvre joyeux dans la Voie,  
Riche imprégné des rites. »*

I—16. [19] Zi Gong dit :

*Comme si on coupait, comme si on limait,  
Comme si on taillait, comme si on polissait* 29. [39]

« Serait-ce ce que vous voulez dire ? »

Le Maître dit : “Si [Zi Gong], je peux enfin commencer à te parler du *Shi*, “Les Poèmes”! Je t’entretiens des antécédents et tu comprends les aboutissants.”

I—17. Le Maître dit : « Ne t'afflige pas d'être inconnu parmi les hommes ; afflige-toi plutôt de les méconnaître. »

25. Adage d'origine inconnue. L'épouse intègre dans sa propre famille est digne d'être présentée aux parents défunts de son mari.

29. Citation du *Shijing*, « Le Classique des Poèmes », 321 A, poème. Le *Shijing* est une anthologie de 305 poèmes (du ~Xe au ~VIIe siècle), dont la compilation est attribuée à Confucius.

## IV. HABITER L'HUMANITÉ (Li ten)

### NOTICE

Plusieurs spécialistes considèrent ce chapitre comme le plus important du *Lunyu*, « Les Entretiens ». Selon E. Bruce Brooks et A. Taeko Brooks, ce fut le premier chapitre rédigé par les disciples de Confucius, pour souligner la primauté de la vertu d'humanité (*ren*) dans l'enseignement du Maître. C'est le seul chapitre du *Lunyu* où tous les paragraphes didactiques (sauf un) sont mis dans la bouche de Confucius, le Maître.

Le mot *ren* signifie que l'être humain se définit par son rapport à autrui et que ce rapport, établi sur la nature humaine, en est un de bonté, de bienveillance et de douceur — et non d'agressivité, de haine et de violence. Le mot exprime le destin de l'être humain, polarisé par le bien ; c'est pourquoi nous le traduisons par « humanité » dans le sens de vertu. Comprise en ce sens, l'humanité sous-tend deux valeurs fondamentales : exigence de perfection par-devers soi-même (*zhong*) et mansuétude à l'égard d'autrui (*shu*), concept souvent comparé à la règle d'or. Ainsi, à la question du disciple Zi Gong :

« Existe-t-il une seule maxime qu'on pourrait mettre en pratique toute sa vie ? »

le Maître répondit : [60]

« Il pourrait seulement s'agir de la mansuétude, n'est-ce pas ? Ne pas imposer aux autres ce qu'on ne désire pas pour soi-même. »

À une autre question de Zi Gong, Confucius répondit :

« L'humanité, c'est, tout en voulant s'établir soi-même, établir les autres ; et tout en voulant se perfectionner soi-même, perfectionner les autres. Être capable de saisir l'analogie à partir de ce qui est près (soi-même) peut être considéré comme la méthode de l'humanité.

[...]

### TEXTE

**IV—1 [74] Le Maître dit : « Quel bonheur d'avoir des voisins imprégnés d'humanité. Si l'on choisit de ne pas habiter parmi eux, comment pourra-t-on atteindre la sagesse ? »**

**IV—2.[75] Le Maître dit : « Un homme sans humanité ne peut ni supporter longtemps l'austérité ni connaître la joie perpétuelle. Les gens pénétrés du sens de l'humain y trouvent le contentement, mais les gens qui prisent le savoir cherchent dans l'humanité leur profit. »**

IV—3. Le Maître dit : « Seul l'homme pénétré du sens de l'humain sait aimer les uns et haïr les autres 3. »

IV—4. Le Maître dit : « Si la volonté tend tout entière vers l'humanité, elle sera sans malice. »

IV— 5. [76] Le Maître dit : 'Les gens désirent les richesses et les honneurs plus que tout, mais l'homme de bien ne se les approprie pas aux dépens de la Voie. Les gens abhorrent la pauvreté et le mépris plus que tout, mais [62] l'homme de bien ne les fuit pas au détriment de la Voie. Si l'homme de bien rejette l'humanité, comment pourra-t-il en porter le nom ? L'homme de bien ne s'oppose jamais à l'humanité même le temps d'un repas. Ni désarroi ni détresse ne sauraient l'en détourner.'

IV—6. [77] Le Maître dit : 'Je n'ai encore vu personne qui aimât l'humanité et haït l'inhumanité. Or, rien ne saurait dépasser l'amour de l'humanité. Haïr l'inhumanité, c'est faire preuve d'humanité sans pour autant devenir le jouet des gens sans humanité.

« N'y a-t-il donc personne à pouvoir consacrer toute sa force à l'humanité même l'espace d'un jour ? Je n'ai jamais rencontré une personne qui en fut incapable ; si une telle personne existe, je ne l'ai jamais rencontrée. »

IV—7 [78] Le Maître dit : « Les fautes révèlent quel homme on est. En examinant les fautes d'un homme, on connaît son humanité. »

IV—8. Le Maître dit : « Si à l'aube la Voie était reconnue dans le monde, je mourrais content au crépuscule. »

IV—9. Le Maître dit : « Un gentilhomme voué à la Voie, mais honteux d'être mal nourri et mal vêtu ne mérite point qu'on discute avec lui. »

IV—10 [79] Le Maître dit : « En tout lieu et en tout temps, l'homme de bien est libre de préjugés favorables ou défavorables. Son unique critère est la justice. »

3. Selon la glose, l'homme pénétré du sens de l'humain aime chez l'homme ce qu'il y a de bon et hait ce qu'il y a de mauvais.

4. Allusion à la correction des noms. Le texte classique sur le sujet est xii-1, 271. Il s'agit d'une phrase de quatre caractères redoublés : *Jun jun, chen chen, fu fu, z'i z'i*. On peut la paraphraser comme suit, pour la rendre plus explicite : « Celui qui porte le nom de souverain doit se conduire en véritable souverain ; celui qui porte le nom de ministre doit se conduire en véritable ministre ; celui qui porte le nom de père doit se conduire en véritable père ; celui qui porte le nom de fils doit se conduire en véritable

fil. » La correction des noms comporte deux volets : d'une part, l'attribution à chaque être d'un nom qui en définit la nature (par consensus social) ; et, d'autre part, la vérification de la correspondance entre le comportement des êtres et leur nature, révélée par leur nom.

**IV—11. Le Maître dit : « L'homme de bien prise la vertu ; l'homme de peu prise la terre 6. L'homme de bien prise la loi ; l'homme de peu prise les faveurs. »**

**IV—12. [80] Le Maître dit : « Agir en vue du profit, c'est susciter beaucoup de mécontentement. »**

**IV—13. Le Maître dit : « Quel empêchement y a-t-il à gouverner un pays par la déférence propre aux rites ? Si l'on ne peut gouverner un pays par la déférence propre aux rites, à quoi donc servent les rites ? »**

**IV—14. Le Maître dit : « Ne te fais pas de souci d'être sans position, mais soucie-toi plutôt d'être digne d'une position. Ne te fais pas de souci de n'être reconnu de personne, soucie-toi plutôt de mériter d'être reconnu. »**

**IV—15. [si] Le Maître dit : “Shen 8 [Zeng zi], ma voie est traversée par l'un comme par un fil.”**

**Zeng zi dit : « En effet. »**

**[82] Le Maître sortit. Les disciples demandèrent : « Qu'a-t-il voulu dire ? »**

**Zeng zi répondit : « La voie de notre Maître consiste en une seule chose, l'exigence envers soi-même et la mansuétude envers les autres 9. »**

**IV—16. Le Maître dit : « L'homme de bien comprend tout sous l'angle de la justice. L'homme de peu comprend tout sous l'angle du profit 10. »**

6. C'est-à-dire, les avantages que l'on peut tirer de la propriété terrienne : produits agricoles, rentes, location, etc.

8. Shen : nom personnel de Zeng Shen, habituellement appelé Zeng zi.

9. Le « fil » qui traverse l'enseignement de Confucius n'est pas une notion abstraite, mais un principe moral qui unit la pensée et l'action, soit l'exigence envers soi-même et la mansuétude envers les autres qui sont à la base de l'humanité.



[64] IV—17. [83] Le Maître dit : « Rencontres-tu un sage, pense à l'égaliser. Rencontres-tu un homme dépourvu de sagesse, examine-toi. »

IV—18. Le Maître dit : « En servant ses parents, on peut avec délicatesse leur adresser des remontrances. Si l'on constate qu'ils ne sont pas disposés à les suivre, on n'en demeure pas moins respectueux, sans les contrarier, et on se dévoue à leur service sans nourrir de ressentiment. »

IV—19 [84] Le Maître dit : « Du vivant de ses parents, on ne voyage pas au loin. Si l'on doit voyager, on s'assure de leur faire connaître sa destination. »

IV—20. Le Maître dit : « On peut certainement reconnaître comme filial un fils qui pendant trois ans n'apporte aucun changement à la voie suivie par son père 12. »

IV—21. Le Maître dit : « On se doit de connaître l'âge de ses parents, d'un côté pour s'en réjouir, de l'autre, pour s'en inquiéter. »

IV—22. [85] Le Maître dit : « Si les Anciens ne donnaient pas libre cours à leurs paroles, c'est qu'ils avaient honte de ne pas être à leur hauteur [dans leur conduite]. »

IV—23. Le Maître dit : « Il est rare qu'on pèche par modération. »

IV—24. Le Maître dit : « L'homme de bien se veut lent dans ses paroles et vif dans ses actions. »

IV—25. Le Maître dit : « La vertu n'est jamais seule, elle peut toujours compter sur des voisins 14. »

IV—26. [86] Zi Yôu [You zi] 15 dit : « Critiquer les autres auprès de son souverain, c'est s'attirer la disgrâce. Critiquer les autres auprès de ses amis, c'est se les aliéner. »

14. L'homme vertueux attire spontanément les autres.

15. *Zi Yôu* : nom social de Yan Yan, dont le titre était *You zi*.

## VII. DE LA TRANSMISSION (*Shu er*)

### NOTICE

Ce chapitre est entièrement centré sur Confucius — sur la manière dont il se percevait lui-même et dont il était perçu par les disciples. Le chapitre X, également consacré à la personne de Confucius, met l'accent, pour sa part, sur son observance des rites à la cour et sur ses relations protocolaires avec les dignitaires et même le souverain ; ce chapitre présente un aspect formaliste qui voile en bonne partie la personnalité de Confucius et qui est absent du chapitre VII. Ici, on saisit Confucius sur le vif, dans la spontanéité de ses réactions aux personnes, aux situations et aux enjeux de son temps.

Le point de départ de sa mission dans la vie fut sa prise de conscience aiguë de la dégénérescence morale et culturelle de son époque, un leitmotiv du Lunyu exprimé avec force ici :

« Ce qui me trouble, c'est de voir la vertu non pratiquée et l'étude non approfondie ; c'est de savoir où est la justice sans pouvoir se tourner vers elle et d'être incapable de corriger ce qui est mauvais » (VII-3, 136).

Quand il sentit sa fin prochaine, son chagrin ne vint pas de l'imminence de la mort, mais de la non-pratique de la Voie.

Toute sa vie fut polarisée par ce problème. Pour le résoudre, il se consacra à deux tâches fondamentales : l'étude et l'enseignement. Ces deux tâches complémentaires étaient pour lui l'essentiel de sa vie. Les divers postes qu'il occupa dans le gouvernement étaient ponctuels et secondaires, sauf s'ils lui permettaient de promouvoir les valeurs qui gravitaient autour de l'étude et de l'enseignement. Dans cette perspective, il chercha à servir les princes, dans le but de les conseiller, de les influencer et de leur inculquer les valeurs nécessaires pour réformer le monde.

[...]

### TEXTE

**VII—1 [134] Le Maître dit : « Je transmets, mais ne crée point. Je mets ma confiance dans l'Antiquité et l'aime. En cela Peng l'Ancien 1 pourrait se comparer à moi. »**

**VII—2 [136] Le Maître dit : « Apprendre en silence, étudier sans impatience, enseigner inlassablement, qu'est-ce qu'il m'en coûte ! »**

**VII—3. Le Maître dit : « Ce qui me trouble, c'est de voir la vertu non pratiquée et l'étude non approfondie ; c'est de savoir où est la**

justice sans pouvoir se tourner vers elle et d'être incapable de corriger ce qui est mauvaise. »

VII—4 [137] Dans ses moments de loisir, le Maître était tout à la fois digne et affable.

VII—5. Le Maître dit : « Comme j'ai décliné ! Depuis ô [90] combien de temps n'ai-je plus revu le duc de Zhou 3 en rêve ! »

VII—6. Le Maître dit : « Tends vers la Voie, prends la vertu comme norme, appuie-toi sur l'humanité, sois familier avec les arts. »

VII—7 [138] Le Maître dit : « À quiconque m'apporte ne serait-ce qu'un paquet de viande séchée, jamais je n'ai refusé mon enseignement. »

VII—8. [139] Le Maître dit : « J'ouvre seulement la porte à ceux qui trépigment d'apprendre et je m'engage seulement auprès de ceux qui ont des choses à dire. Si, ayant proposé un angle, on ne me revient pas avec les trois autres, je ne poursuis pas la leçon. »

VII—9. Si le Maître prenait son repas à côté d'une personne endeuillée, il ne mangeait jamais à satiété.

VII—10. Un jour où le Maître avait pleuré, il ne chantait pas 7.

VII—11. [140] Le Maître s'adressa à Yan Yuan [Yan Hui] : « Agir quand on est en poste, demeurer en attente quand on est remercié, seuls toi et moi le faisons. »

Zi Lu 9 dit : « Si vous, Maître, receviez le commandement des Trois Armées, avec qui le partageriez-vous ? Le Maître répondit : « Je ne saurais le partager avec une personne “qui s'attaque à un tigre les mains nues, traverse le He, “fleuve Jaune”, sans esquif, et meurt sans regret. Il me faudrait plutôt une personne qui aborde les affaires avec crainte et tremblement et les met en œuvre après mûre réflexion. »

VII—12. Le Maître dit : « S'il était acceptable de chercher à acquérir les richesses, je me ferais volontiers conducteur de char 11. Mais comme il est inacceptable de chercher à les acquérir, je me tourne vers ce que j'aime. »

VII—13.[141] Le jeûne, la guerre et la maladie préoccupaient particulièrement le Maître.

1. Peng l'Ancien : personnage mal connu du début de la dynastie Shang.

3. *Le duc de Zhou* : fils (nom personnel Dan) du roi Wen (mort en ~1122) et frère cadet du roi Wu (r. ~ 1121 — ~1116). Au décès de celui-ci, il assumait la régence (de ~1115 à ~1110) jusqu'à la majorité du roi Cheng (r. ~1115/1110-1078). Il fut inféodé comme premier prince de

Lu. Parangon de vertu, de fidélité et de noblesse, il fut le modèle de Confucius.

7. À mettre en rapport avec le passage précédent.

9. *Zi Lu* : nom social de Zhong You. La question de Zi Lu laisse deviner une pointe d'envie à l'endroit de Yan Yuan.

11. Littéralement : « celui qui tient le fouet ».

**VII—14.** Durant son séjour à Qi 13, le Maître entendit le Shao 14, l'air « La Continuation ». Pendant trois mois il ne connut plus le goût de la viande.

Il dit : « Que la musique puisse atteindre une telle perfection ne m'était jamais venu à l'idée. »

**VII—15.** [142] Ran You [Zi You] demanda : « Notre Maître est-il partisan du souverain de Weil 15 ? »

Zi Gong lui répondit : « Ça alors ! J'étais sur le point de le lui demander. »

Il entra et demanda : « Quelle sorte d'hommes étaient Boyi et Shuqi 16 ? »

Il répondit : « Ils étaient des sages de l'Antiquité. »

Il demanda : « Éprouvaient-ils du ressentiment [du fait de ne pas occuper le trône] ? »

10. On peut y voir une rebuffade de Zi Lu, reconnu pour son intrépidité.

13. *Qi* : principauté voisine de Lu, dans le Shandong. Confucius y séjourna de -517 à -515.

14. Pièce musicale célébrant l'accession de Shun (r. -2257 --2208) ; À *Qi*, il étudia la musique avec le grand maître de musique du pays.

15. *Ran You* : il avait pour nom personnel Ran Qiu et j.our nom social Zi You - *Souverain de Weil* : sans doute le duc Chu (r. ~492 — ~480).

[92] Il répondit : « Ils cherchèrent à acquérir l'humanité et ils l'obtinrent. Pourquoi auraient-ils éprouvé du ressentiment ? »

Il sortit et dit : « Le Maître n'est pas partisan [du duc de Wèi] 17. »

**VII—16.** [143] Le Maître dit : « Des légumes amers comme nourriture, de l'eau claire comme boisson, un coude replié comme oreiller — on y trouve malgré tout de la joie. Richesses et honneurs mal acquis sont pour moi comme des nuages évanescents. »

VII—17. [144] Le Maître dit : “Qu’on me prête encore plusieurs années : j’en prendrai cinq ou dix pour étudier le *Yi*, « Les Changements » 20, et je pourrai alors éviter toute faute grave.”

VII—18. Les écrits que le Maître prononçait à la manière ancienne comprenaient le *Shi*, « Les Poèmes », le *Shu*, « Les Documents », et le *Li*, « Les Rites ». Ils étaient entièrement prononcés à l’ancienne.

VII—19. [145] Le duc de She 22 interrogea Zi Lu au sujet de Confucius. Zi Lu ne répondit pas.

Le Maître dit : “Pourquoi ne lui as-tu pas répondu :

17. En louant le désintéressement et l’humanité de Boyi et Shuqi, Confucius condamne implicitement l’usurpation du pouvoir par le souverain de Wèi.

20. Une œuvre philosophique basée sur la pratique divinatoire, plus tard appelée *Yijing*, « Le Classique des Changements ». Une importante variante dans les anciennes éditions du *Lunyu* change le sens ; il faudrait alors traduire : “Qu’on me/prête encore plusieurs années : j’en prendrai cinq ou dix pour continuer à étudier et je pourrai alors éviter toute faute grave.” Les savants occidentaux suivent majoritairement cette dernière leçon, alors que leurs collègues chinois et japonais adoptent plutôt celle retenue ici dans la traduction. Le paragraphe suivant parle de trois autres œuvres anciennes. — Cinq ou dix : certains lisent “cinquante”, ce qui paraît invraisemblable.

22. *Duc de She* : titre de Shen Zhuliang. Gouverneur du district de She dans le royaume de Chu (au Hunan), il s’arrogea le titre de “duc”.

‘C’est un homme tel que dans son enthousiasme [pour l’étude] il en oublie de manger, dans sa joie oublie son chagrin et ne se rend même pas compte de la vieillesse qui approche’ ?”

VII—20. [146] Le Maître dit : « Je ne suis pas né avec la connaissance. J’aime l’Antiquité et cherche à la connaître avec diligence. »

VII—21. Le Maître ne discutait pas des phénomènes étranges, des faits de force, des désordres ni des esprits.

VII—22. Le Maître dit : « Si nous sommes trois à cheminer, les deux autres pourront être mes maîtres : le meilleur pour l’imiter, le moins bon pour me corriger. »

VII—23. [147] Le Maître dit : “Le Ciel a fait naître en moi la vertu. Que pourrait Huan Tui à mon endroit 27 ?

VII—24. Le Maître dit : « Quelques-uns parmi vous pensent que je vous cache quelque chose, n’est-ce pas ? Je ne vous cache rien. Il

n'est aucune de mes activités que je ne partage avec vous. Voilà le genre de personne que je suis, moi, Qiu. »

VII—25. L'enseignement du Maître portait sur quatre choses : les écrits, la conduite, la loyauté et la fidélité.

VII—26. [148] Le Maître dit : « Il ne m'a pas été donné de rencontrer un homme saint ; s'il m'était donné de rencontrer un homme de bien, ce serait déjà beaucoup. »

[94] Le Maître dit : « Il ne m'a pas été donné de rencontrer un homme bon ; s'il m'était donné de rencontrer un homme constant, ce serait déjà beaucoup. Mais comme le rien se fait passer pour réel, le vide pour plein, l'infime pour immense, il est bien difficile d'être constant ! »

27. De passage dans la principauté de Song, voisine de Lu, en ~492, Confucius et ses disciples furent encerclés et menacés par Huan Tui, ministre des Armées et de la Sûreté de Song. Confucius croyait être investi d'une mission céleste.

VII—27. Le Maître pêchait à la ligne, non au filet ; chassant avec des flèches à fil, il ne tirait pas sur l'oiseau perché 29.

VII—28. [149] Le Maître dit : « Certains créent sans avoir eu à acquérir de connaissances 30 ; je n'en suis pas. J'écoute beaucoup, triant les bons points et les mettant en pratique. J'observe beaucoup et use de discernement. C'est un niveau inférieur de connaissance. »

VII—29. Il était difficile d'échanger avec [les gens de] Huxiang. Un jeune garçon se présenta. Les disciples étaient suspicieux.

[150] Le Maître dit : « Laissez-le entrer et ne permettez pas qu'il s'en aille. Pourquoi être si rigoureux ? Si un homme s'est purifié pour venir nous voir, nous acceptons sa purification sans pour autant cautionner ce qu'il fera plus tard. »

VII—30. Le Maître dit : « L'humanité est-elle lointaine ? Je la désire et voilà ! elle est là ! »

VII—31. Le ministre de la Justice de Chen 34 demanda si le duc Zhao 35 avait observé les rites.

Confucius répondit : « Il les a observés. »

29. La glose présente deux explications plausibles : Confucius suit simplement le code de conduite des gentilshommes de son temps ; ou

bien il témoigne de son profond respect pour les animaux, « en donnant la chance au coureur ».

30. Ceux-là naissent avec la connaissance innée.

34. Chen : principauté au sud de Lu où Confucius séjourna.

35. Zhao, duc (~541 — ~510) de la principauté de Lu.

### **Confucius se retira.**

[Le ministre] rencontra Wuma Qi 36 [Zi Qi], l'invita à entrer et lui dit : « J'ai entendu que l'homme de bien ne saurait, quelles que soient les circonstances, être partisan. Votre souverain a choisi une épouse de Wu portant le même nom de famille que lui et l'a appelée Dame Meng de Wu 37. Si votre souverain a observé les rites, qui donc ne les observe pas ? »

Wuma Qi rapporta ces propos à Confucius.

Le Maître dit : « Moi, Qiu, j'ai de la chance. Si par hasard je commets une faute, les gens vont certainement le savoir. »

VII—3 2. [151] Quand le Maître entonnait un chant avec d'autres, si ceux-ci chantaient bien, il leur demandait toujours de recommencer ; seulement après les accompagnait-il à l'unisson.

VII—3 3. [152] Le Maître dit : 'Dans mes efforts pour acquérir [la vertu], je me compare aux autres. Mais je ne suis pas encore parvenu à me conduire en homme de bien.'

VII—34. Le Maître dit : « Comment pourrais-je prétendre posséder la sainteté et l'humanité ? Du moins peut-on affirmer que j'étudie sans impatience et enseigne inlassablement. »

Gongxi Hua 41 [Zi Hua] dit : « C'est justement cela que vos disciples sont incapables d'étudier. »

36. *Wuma Qi* : disciple tardif de Confucius ; nom social Zi Qi ; nom personnel Wuma Shi.

37. *Dame Meng de Wu* : son nom de famille était Ji, comme le duc Zhao ; leur mariage était donc en principe interdit. Le duc Zhao contourna l'interdit en changeant Ji en Meng. La principauté semi-sinisée de Wu couvrait le Zhejiang et l'Anhui.

41. *Gongxi Hua* : Gongxi Chi.

[96] VII—3 5. Le Maître était gravement malade. Zi Lu demanda d'offrir une prière de supplication.

Le Maître demanda : « Disposez-vous d'une telle prière ? »

Zi Lu répondit : 'Nous en disposons. Dans le *Lei*, "Le Livre des Éloges funèbres '43, il est dit :

*Nous offrons une prière de supplication  
Aux esprits supérieurs et inférieurs  
[Du ciel et de la terre.]'*

Le Maître dit : « Ma prière est faite depuis longtemps 44. »

VII—36. [113] Le Maître dit : « La prodigalité mène à l'imprévoyance ; la frugalité mène à l'opiniâtreté. Mieux vaut opiniâtreté qu'imprévoyance. »

VII—37. Le Maître dit : « L'homme de bien est posé et magnanime ; l'homme de peu est toujours agité et perplexé. »

VII—38. Le Maître était affable, mais austère, imposant, mais inoffensif, déférent et accommodant.

42. Voir *tx-t z*, 184. Dans les deux passages, Zi La est maître des cérémonies.

43. Ouvrage perdu dont on ne sait rien.

44. Un nouvel exemple de la démythologisation du rite par Confucius : la vraie prière n'est pas l'invocation des esprits par-delà les étoiles, comme le lui propose Zi La, mais le perfectionnement de l'être humain tout au long de son existence.



## XI. LES PREMIERS VENUS (Xian Jin)

### NOTICE

Ce chapitre tout entier porte sur les jugements de blâme et d'éloge de Confucius à l'endroit d'un certain nombre (dix-sept) de ses disciples. Les jugements ont une fonction pédagogique : mettre en lumière les conduites à imiter ou à éviter dans le processus de perfectionnement. Le perfectionnement ne vise pas seulement le caractère moral, mais aussi les savoir-faire, les arts et la culture.

[...]

La conclusion représente le plus long paragraphe de l'œuvre. Il s'agit d'un entretien informel entre Confucius et quatre disciples. Confucius demande à chacun d'exprimer ce qu'il désirerait le plus réaliser si son mérite était reconnu. Les trois premiers (Zi Lu, Zi You et Zi Hua) répondent tour à tour, chacun ambitionnant de devenir chef d'État et de se dépenser sans compter pour rendre leur pays le plus prospère, puissant et vertueux possible. Seul Zi Xi ne formule aucune ambition politique, mais choisit plutôt une sortie avec des amis et des enfants dans le lieu paisible et agréable d'un sanctuaire au dieu de la Pluie, avec baignade et chants rituels. Confucius s'associe à Zi Xi, car lui seul a compris que la vraie politique se moque de la politique et repose sur des principes plus simples et plus profonds.

[...]

**XI—24. [252] Zi Lu, Zeng) G48, Ran You [Zi You] et Gongxi Hua [Zi Hua] assuraient le service auprès du Maître.**

Le Maître dit : “Comme je suis un peu plus âgé que vous, je ne trouve pas d'emploi. Vous-mêmes, quand vous êtes à la maison sans emploi, vous dites : “On ne [132] reconnaît pas mon mérite.” Mais si l'on reconnaissait votre mérite, que feriez-vous ?”

Zi Lu prit les devants et répondit : « Si l'on me donnait un pays de mille chars, enserré par des États puissants, occupé par une armée et réduit à la famine, en trois ans, moi, You, j'en ferais un pays où les gens sont courageux et savent se gouverner. »

Notre Maître sourit.

[2/4] “Toi, Qiu [Zi You], que dirais-tu ?”

Il répondit : « Dans un pays de soixante ou soixante-dix ou même de cinquante ou soixante lis de côté, moi, Qiu, en trois ans je réussis à contenter le peuple ; mais pour la maîtrise des rites et de la musique, il me faudrait attendre un homme de bien. »

“Toi, Chi [Zi Hua], que dirais-tu ?”

Il répondit : « Jusqu'au jour où je pourrai gouverner un pays, je veux en étudier le fonctionnement. Je voudrais être un officier subalterne portant la coiffe et l'habit cérémoniels et participer aux rites du temple ancestral lors des rencontres entre deux chefs d'État. »

[257] « Et toi, Dian [Zi Xi] ? »

Il laissa le son de sa cithare s'évanouir, se leva et répondit : « Mon choix diffère de celui de mes amis. »

Le Maître dit : « Il n'y a pas d'offense. Il s'agit simplement pour chacun de faire connaître sa préférence. »

Il dit : « Vêtu des habits légers de la fin du printemps, j'aimerais aller me baigner dans la Yi 49 avec cinq ou six jeunes hommes portant le bonnet et six ou sept enfants, nous laisser sécher près de l'Autel des danses pour la pluie, puis revenir à la maison en chantant. »

Notre Maître poussa un profond soupir et dit : « Je m'associe à Dian. »

[261] Les trois disciples sortirent. Zeng Xi s'attarda. Zeng Xi dit : « Que pensez-vous des propos des trois disciples ? » [133]

Le Maître répondit : « Il s'agissait simplement pour chacun d'exprimer son choix, rien de plus. »

Il dit : « Pourquoi, Maître, avez-vous souri aux paroles de You ? »

Il répondit : « Le gouvernement d'un État repose sur les rites, mais ses propos omettaient de mentionner la déférence. C'est pourquoi j'ai souri à ses paroles. »

Il dit : « Mais Qiu, lui, ne parlait pas du gouvernement d'un État, n'est-ce pas ? »

Il répondit : « Où avez-vous vu un pays de soixante ou soixante-dix ou même de cinquante ou soixante lis de côté qui ne fût pas un État ? »

Il dit : « Chi, lui ne parlait pas du gouvernement d'un État, n'est-ce pas ? »

Il répondit : « La rencontre de deux chefs d'État dans le temple ancestral est-elle autre chose qu'une réunion de grands seigneurs feudataires ? Si le choix de Chi est considéré négligeable, quel choix pourrait donc être considéré important ? »

48. Zeng Xi : nom alternatif de Zeng Dian ; nom social Zi Xi ; il était le père de Zeng Shen (Zeng zi).

49. La rivière Yi coule à l'est de Qufu, au centre de Lu, et se jette dans la rivière Si plus au sud.

# MENG ZI

## Introduction

### ***3. Explications supplémentaires sur des notions importantes Nature et vertu.***

Les quatre germes du cœur et les vertus.

La vertu est une partie essentielle de la nature humaine ; celle-ci possède donc une bonté innée. Les vertus sont présentes dès la naissance, de manière potentielle et inchoative, dans les quatre germes ou sentiments du cœur. Leur plein développement, un processus long et exigeant, doit continuer toute la vie, humanisant les composantes animales de l'individu — les instincts, les désirs, les passions. Les quatre germes continuent de nourrir les vertus jusqu'à la mort, c'est pourquoi l'homme de bien « est celui qui n'a jamais perdu son cœur d'enfant ». Bien des obstacles intérieurs et extérieurs peuvent empêcher les germes de se développer en vertus, Ce non-développement des germes innés est l'origine de l'inégalité morale des hommes et du mal dans le monde. Meng zi s'y arrête longuement, car même si la nature humaine est fondamentalement bonne, la majorité des hommes sont moralement médiocres (hommes de peu). L'originalité de Meng zi fut de concevoir la nature comme tendant d'elle-même vers la morale et la morale comme émergeant spontanément de la nature, tout en reconnaissant que la société est formée d'une légion de « Mozart assassiné ».

*Le cœur imperturbable et les souffles (qi).*

Meng zi affirme avoir atteint un cœur imperturbable, comme d'autres de son temps, dans sa quarantième année. Dans la mesure où chaque vertu est une disposition stable visant à réaliser le bien dans un domaine particulier (par exemple, le courage face à l'adversité), le cœur imperturbable est une disposition stable du cœur lui-même comme source et siège de toutes les vertus. Meng zi introduit ici la notion inédite, centrale et difficile de *qi* (souffles) 3. [251]

La notion de souffles.

Les *qi* sont une notion cosmologique, physiologique et psychologique qui devint courante au ~IVe siècle. À l'origine, *qi* se référait aux effluves et vapeurs qui s'élèvent des rizières par temps chaud, puis aux halos

vaporeux que l'on peut parfois apercevoir autour du soleil et de la lune et que l'on considèrerait comme des émanations. Plus tard, on étendit la notion au souffle humain dans son alternance d'inspiration et d'expiration — le mouvement rythmé de la force vitale. Tous les êtres baignent dans les souffles et sont animés, chacun selon son espèce, par eux. Les souffles sont conçus comme des éléments distincts, mais invisibles, les essences (*jing*), ou bien comme des mouvements ondulatoires, comme la respiration, oscillant entre le *yin* et le *yang* 1. Hétérogène, leur éventail continu s'étend, par degrés infimes, du grossier au subtil. Les premiers s'apparentent au terrestre et au yin, les seconds, au céleste et au yang. L'homme comporte, dès sa naissance, un mélange de souffles grossiers et subtils, qui emplissent son être tout entier. Les quatre germes (*si duan*) de la vie morale chez l'homme sont des configurations de souffles célestes, alors que son corps, ses organes et ses membres sont des configurations de souffles terrestres. Les souffles ne sont jamais à l'état pur : les célestes contiennent du terrestre et les terrestres du céleste — comme le *yin* et le *yang*.

En plus des souffles qui sont propres à chaque catégorie d'êtres, il y a un souffle fondamental, le plus subtil, le plus puissant et le plus universel, qui pénètre tous les êtres et assure l'unité du cosmos. Meng zi l'appelle « le souffle vaste et sublime » (*haoran Zhi qi*). Les organes des sens opèrent par le truchement des souffles. Ici, nous nous limitons à l'aspect psychique des souffles, inséparable de l'aspect physique. Certains interprètes parlent de psychophysical energy (« énergie psychophysique »).

Le cœur, les souffles et les cinq sens.

Les cinq sens sont des orifices qui permettent l'interaction (entrée-sortie) entre le corps humain et son environnement et, tout particulièrement, avec les souffles cosmiques. Ceux-ci pénètrent l'organisme humain par les sens, mais peuvent aussi le quitter par les [252] sens. Chaque sens a son objet propre : l'œil, les formes et les couleurs ; l'oreille, les sons et les notes, etc. L'objet de chaque sens n'est pas neutre, mais exerce une puissante attraction sur lui. Or, les sens, activés par les souffles, doivent demeurer sous le contrôle de la volonté. Si par distraction, inadvertance, négligence, faiblesse ou dysfonction, les sens échappent au contrôle de la volonté, ils sont comme happés par leur objet, et, dans leur surexcitation, ils drainent les souffles vers l'extérieur. Cette déperdition entraîne un déséquilibre des souffles qui rend le corps et le cœur malades et empêche le développement normal des quatre germes et de leurs vertus correspondantes.

Le monde des sens et des souffles est aussi celui des désirs et des passions. Car «les sens ne pensent pas»; laissés à eux-mêmes, ils sont dominés et épuisés par leur objet propre, au détriment du bien commun de l'organisme : l'œil ne voit pas les sons, l'oreille n'entend pas les couleurs... Seul «le cœur pense» et peut rassembler les diverses parties et activités de l'organisme humain en assurant l'harmonie et le bien de l'ensemble. Car penser, c'est prendre en compte le tout et ses parties. Si le cœur, pris de vitesse par les sens, est emporté dans la tourmente des désirs et des passions, il ne parvient plus à retenir les souffles. Lorsque ce dévidement se répète jour après jour, les souffles intérieurs s'étiolent et ne peuvent retrouver leur vigueur, tout comme la verdure et la luxuriance du mont du Bœuf ne peuvent plus se régénérer suite aux assauts répétés de la cognée et du pâturage.

Le cœur exerce son ascendant sur les souffles par la volonté, toujours disposée à réaliser la justice comme un devoir, une sorte d'impératif catégorique à faire le bien en toutes circonstances 2. Or c'est par la pratique constante et répétée d'actes justes que le cœur nourrit les souffles et affermit leur orientation vers le bien. Difficile, cette pratique exige un grand courage, mais c'est le prix à payer pour acquérir un cœur imperturbable, c'est-à-dire, un cœur qui n'est plus assujéti aux aléas des sens et des souffles insoumis, des désirs et des passions, mais qui est résolument axé sur la réalisation de son juste devoir. La fidélité à la justice peut même exiger le sacrifice de sa vie — le courage ultime.

### L'inégalité des hommes et le mal dans le monde.

Ces deux constats ont même origine : le développement inégal des quatre germes présents en tout homme à la naissance. Meng zi, tout en reconnaissant l'existence répandue du mal dans les individus, dans la société et dans le gouvernement, maintient cependant la bonté foncière de l'être humain. Le mal ne vient pas d'une [253] substance viciée ou d'une tendance mauvaise qui lui serait inhérente, mais d'un rapport entre le cœur, les souffles et les sens. Le cœur, comme on l'a vu, constitue la nature humaine spécifique (céleste), les sens et les souffles étant communs aux hommes et aux animaux (terrestres).

La nature humaine spécifique est dite bonne en raison du cœur et de ses quatre germes de la vie morale. Les sens et leurs souffles sont également bons dans leur sphère propre, dans la mesure où ils suivent leurs tendances naturelles. Mais le rapport fonctionnel entre le cœur, d'une part, et les sens et les souffles, d'autre part, peut être défectueux en raison non pas d'un défaut inhérent à ces éléments, mais de la complexité de l'organisme humain ; celui-ci semble comporter une double nature : le

cœur, qui « pense » au bien commun de l'organisme humain et de ses prolongements dans la société et même dans le cosmos ; et les sens, qui « ne pensent pas » au bien commun de l'organisme humain, mais cherchent uniquement leur bien particulier, momentané et immédiat. Les sens créent de ce fait un grave déséquilibre dans l'organisme humain, obstruant le développement du cœur, détruisant les quatre germes de la vie morale et s'abîmant par degrés dans la passion, l'obsession, la violence et la criminalité<sup>1</sup>. L'homme perd ainsi sa nature céleste et retourne à l'animalité. Telle semble être, dans la pensée de Meng zi, l'origine du mal moral et physique dans l'être humain et dans le monde. Il se situe précisément dans le raccordement difficile des deux composantes différentes de la nature humaine, le cœur, d'une part, et les sens ainsi que les souffles qui les animent, d'autre part.

Le cœur est bon en soi, mais il doit, au prix d'efforts incessants, être cultivé, nourri, entouré de soins et affermi, comme une plante fragile ; les sens sont bons en eux-mêmes, mais ils doivent, au prix d'efforts encore plus grands, être contrôlés et orientés par la volonté, pour qu'ils puissent être graduellement intégrés dans les lignes de force du développement du cœur, comme on le voit chez Confucius et chez Meng zi lui-même. Mais ceci est le fait d'un petit nombre, jamais de la multitude. De plus, si les causes du non-développement du cœur sont souvent externes (milieu familial, éducation, contexte socioculturel, fréquentations, divertissements...), une cause plus profonde est interne, comme nous venons de le voir. Il y a donc lieu de nuancer toute présentation simpliste de Meng zi, comme par exemple : « Pour Meng zi, la nature humaine est essentiellement bonne, ce qu'elle a de mauvais lui vient de l'extérieur. » Cette phrase a souvent pour parallèle : « Pour Xun zi, la nature humaine est essentiellement mauvaise, ce qu'elle a de bon lui vient de l'extérieur. » Ces deux énoncés ne respectent pas la complexité de la position de nos deux penseurs.

1. Ainsi, on lit dans le *Yijing*, « Le Classique des Changements » « Un *yin*, un *yang*, c'est le *dao* ! »

2. Pour Meng zi, l'idée de justice, découlant du sentiment de respect, est le pivot de la vie morale, parce que la justice connote l'idée d'obligation et l'étend aux autres vertus.

1. Meng zi rejoint ici l'analyse de Xun zi. [320]

[Je cite un seul passage de Meng zi en témoignage des disciples qui entouraient Confucius. Il porte sur le cœur et sur les souffles.]

## II. Le Disciple Gongsun Chou (Gongsun Chou)

Gongsun Chou demanda : « Peut-on connaître, vénéré maître, votre méthode pour rendre le cœur imperturbable en comparaison de celle de Gao zi ? »

[...]

Meng zi répondit : « D'après Gao zi, inutile de chercher dans le cœur ce qu'on ne peut recevoir par l'enseignement 39 ; inutile de chercher dans les souffles ce qu'on n'a pu concevoir dans le cœur. Cette dernière proposition est acceptable, mais non la première. [115] Car la volonté est [116] le régulateur des souffles et ceux-ci remplissent le corps tout entier. Or, la volonté est suprême et les souffles lui sont subordonnés. C'est pourquoi il est dit :

*« Appuyez-vous sur la volonté,  
Mais n'opprimez pas les souffles. »*

Gongsun Chou demanda : « Puisque vous dites, “La volonté est suprême, mais n'opprimez pas les souffles”, que signifie donc “n'opprimez pas les souffles” ? »

Meng zi répondit : « Si la volonté se concentre sur une seule chose, elle dirige les souffles ; si les souffles se concentrent sur une seule chose, ils perturbent la volonté. Alors les souffles font qu'on trébuche et qu'on se précipite, perturbant le cœur. » [117]

Gongsun Chou dit : « Puis-je vous demander, vénéré maître, en quoi votre méthode est supérieure ? » Meng zi répondit : « Je sais pénétrer le sens des enseignements et j'excelle à nourrir le souffle vaste et sublime qui m'habite 41. »

[118] Gongsun Chou dit : « Puis-je demander ce que signifie l'expression “souffle vaste et sublime” ? »

Meng zi répondit : « Il est bien difficile d'en parler ; c'est le souffle le plus puissant et le plus ferme ; nourri par la droiture et protégé contre toute blessure, il remplit tout l'espace entre ciel et terre. Il a de par sa nature des affinités avec le sens moral et la Voie et, sans eux, il dépérit ; [119] car il se développe par l'accumulation des actes de justice et l'on ne peut se l'approprier au hasard d'une seule action juste. Si la conduite indispose le cœur, alors il dépérit. Aussi j'affirme que Gao zi n'a jamais rien compris à la justice, car il la considère comme extérieure 42. [120] On doit se soucier constamment des souffles, mais non les contraindre ; on ne doit ni



les négliger ni forcer leur croissance [121] évitant ainsi d'agir comme cet homme de Song 43.

« Il y avait, en effet, à Song un paysan qui s'attristait que ses pousses ne croissent pas plus vite et il les tira par en haut. Il revint chez lui épuisé et dit aux gens de sa maisonnée : "Je suis fourbu, car j'ai aidé les pousses de céréales à croître." Son fils s'empressa d'aller vérifier et voilà que toutes les pousses de céréales s'étaient flétries ». Peu nombreux sont les gens dans le monde qui n'aident pas leurs pousses de céréales à croître. Par ailleurs, ceux qui ne croient pas dans cette méthode et qui la récuse négligent de sarcler leurs pousses de céréales, tandis que ceux qui veulent en hâter la croissance les tirent par en haut, ce qui non seulement ne leur apporte aucun avantage, mais les blesse. »

39. Meng zi rejette cette proposition de Gao zi, car elle n'est qu'une autre façon pour Gao zi d'affirmer le caractère extrinsèque, c'est-à-dire, acquis, des vertus ; pour Meng zi, au contraire, les vertus sont présentes, inchoativement, dans le cœur dès la naissance.

41. L'expression chinoise *baoran khi qi* (littéralement : « le souffle vaste et sublime ») a reçu des explications très différentes dans la tradition exégétique chinoise. Il s'agit du souffle le plus puissant et le plus subtil qui pénètre les diverses catégories d'êtres et unifie l'univers. Plus tard, on en fera la contrepartie du *dao*, en tant que principe d'ordre et de créativité de l'univers. Seul l'homme peut l'atteindre.

42. [...] la preuve que la justice est intérieure et non extérieure, c'est qu'elle nourrit et développe le souffle vaste et sublime, qui anime tous les êtres de l'intérieur.

43. *Song* ; principauté au sud de *Lu*, dans le Henan.



# LAO-TSEU

Je présente ce maître caché sous deux traductions, l'une érudite, partielle mais commentée, l'autre œuvre d'un jésuite devenu presque chinois.

## Lao-Tseu et le Taoïsme (traductions partielles et présentation par Mark Kaltenmark)

Mark Kaltenmark *LAO-TSEU et le Taoïsme*

« Maîtres spirituels », éditions du Seuil, 1965.

Introduit et éclaire de nombreux extraits du *Tao Te King* ce qui est préférable à l'exposition « brute » au texte intégral (largement disponible sous de multiples « traductions »).

La pensée philosophique chinoise naquit et se développa durant une longue période de guerres qui vit de profonds changements s'opérer dans la structure politique et sociale du pays. La Chine était encore, au V<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C., divisée en un grand nombre de principautés féodales ; en 221 avant J.-C., celle de Ts'in était victorieuse de ses rivales et son chef devenait le premier empereur de la Chine unifiée avec le titre de Ts'in Che houang-ti. Ces trois siècles (V<sup>e</sup>-III<sup>e</sup> s.) sont appelés période des *Royaumes Combattants* par les historiens ; ils méritent aussi bien le nom de période des Philosophes, car jamais la pensée spéculative ne fut aussi cultivée, et avec autant de liberté, qu'en ces temps troublés. On vit la philosophie se détacher progressivement de la religion et de la morale traditionnelles ; une métaphysique s'élabora qui ne devait guère être modifiée par la suite sinon, dans une mesure restreinte, par l'apport du Bouddhisme.

Au début du V<sup>e</sup> siècle, K'ong K'ieou (Confucius) avait fondé la première école de sagesse dans le petit État de Lou, situé dans l'actuelle province du Chantong. Événement considérable, puisque la doctrine de ce philosophe, développée par son école, était destinée à façonner profondément l'esprit des Chinois, fournissant les bases quasi immuables de l'éthique et de la politique pour une durée de plus de deux millénaires.

La vie de Confucius (551-479) se situe à la fin de la période qui précéda celle des Royaumes Combattants. À ce moment, des signes de décadence apparaissaient déjà dans l'édifice social ; l'ordre traditionnel et les idéaux qui le justifiaient étaient menacés. Sauver cet ordre et ces idéaux légués par les anciens, telle était la mission que s'était assignée Confucius. Celui-ci avait en fait une conception utopique de l'histoire et de la société ; l'ordre qu'il imaginait était celui d'une société de type féodal où des règles coutumières et religieuses imposaient un équilibre assez stable entre les seigneuries. Par féodalité, il ne faut pas entendre ici seulement un système de rapports juridiques ou économiques, mais une structure qui commandait la société tout entière, dans son être spirituel et dans son être matériel ; bien plus, les conceptions des anciens Chinois relativement à la nature et à l'univers n'étaient, dans une large mesure, que la transposition de leurs valeurs sociales : leur monde était un corps hiérarchisé sur le modèle de la société humaine. Bien entendu, c'était cette dernière qui, dans leur esprit, devait se conformer à l'ordre céleste et, comme les deux ordres étaient solidaires, étroitement reliés par des correspondances et des participations magico-religieuses, les comportements humains influençaient la nature, tout désordre social compromettait l'univers. On conçoit l'angoisse de ces « intellectuels » dépositaires d'une antique tradition lorsque celle-ci commença à être ébranlée, alors que personne ne pouvait encore concevoir d'autres rapports entre les hommes que celui qui existait, croyait-on, depuis les origines de la civilisation. Celle-ci était un ensemble harmonieux d'institutions parfaites et immuables, œuvre de ceux qu'on appelait les Saints Rois de l'antiquité, c'est-à-dire des grands fondateurs de dynastie, et particulièrement ceux de la dynastie régnante des Tcheou.

Rappelons que la dynastie Tcheou avait succédé, au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle, à celle des Chang (aussi appelée dynastie Yin). La capitale de cette dernière était située non loin de l'actuelle Anyang, dans le nord du Honan ; des fouilles effectuées à l'emplacement où elle s'élevait jusqu'en 1111 avant J.-C. ont mis à jour des fondations d'édifices, des tombes et de nombreux objets, parmi lesquels figurent les plus anciens documents écrits de la Chine.

Nous restons cependant très mal renseignés sur l'histoire des Chang ainsi que sur celle des premiers rois Tcheou. Le domaine de ceux-ci ne semble pas avoir jamais été très étendu et, dès le VIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, leur pouvoir était très réduit. Néanmoins, le roi, qui portait le titre de Fils du Ciel, jouissait encore d'un prestige

religieux, son rôle traditionnel de suzerain et d'arbitre des seigneurs était respecté. Mais peu à peu, à mesure que les ambitions des grands féodaux se faisaient plus âpres, les vieilles règles perdirent leur autorité. Au contact du monde des Barbares, les États chinois périphériques durent s'organiser sur de nouveaux principes, réformer leur administration, leur agriculture, leurs armées. L'accroissement des populations, l'invention du fer, celle de la charrue sont d'autres facteurs qui contribuèrent au bouleversement de l'ordre établi. Confucius chercha donc à sauver la civilisation traditionnelle en lui donnant des assises morales plus profondes. S'il échoua dans cette entreprise, de nombreux disciples diffusèrent son enseignement à travers le pays avec tant d'efficacité que le Confucianisme s'imposa peu à peu comme l'authentique dépositaire de la civilisation. Ces disciples ne furent malheureusement pas tous fidèles à la pensée du Maître. Alors qu'il avait prêché une éthique fondée sur le perfectionnement individuel, sur une culture en profondeur qui était dans son esprit la première condition d'un bon gouvernement, ses successeurs dévièrent souvent vers un ritualisme formel. Outre l'étude des livres classiques (*king*), la pratique des rites, le respect des hiérarchies seront les principaux devoirs de l'honnête homme dans la société confucéenne.

Si l'école de Confucius fut la première en date, elle ne tarda pas à avoir ses émules qui furent bientôt si nombreuses qu'on les appelle en chinois les « cent écoles ». Il y eut celle que fonda Mo Ti dans la seconde moitié du V<sup>e</sup> siècle : violemment anticonfucianiste, ce philosophe condamnait les rites et la musique (celle-ci était très prisée par Confucius), prêchait l'amour universel, l'héroïsme, la justice. Malheureusement, sa doctrine est gâtée par un utilitarisme simpliste et un ascétisme plus mesquin que spirituel. Il y eut l'école des Légistes, bien typique de l'époque : ces penseurs, résolument novateurs et réalistes, visaient à assurer l'efficacité du gouvernement par la promulgation de lois pénales valables pour tous et aussi en organisant rationnellement (et brutalement) la puissance militaire et l'économie de l'État. Il y eut aussi des sophistes, des politiciens, des diplomates et des stratégestes. Il y eut surtout ceux qu'on appelle les taoïstes et dont Lao tseu passe pour avoir été le patron.

Cette richesse en écoles philosophiques ne devait pas survivre à l'unification politique. À partir de la dynastie Han, seuls demeurent vivants le Confucianisme et le Taoïsme. Le premier devint la doctrine officielle de la monarchie non sans s'être assimilé des éléments empruntés à d'autres courants, en

particulier au Légisme. Mais si le Confucianisme marqua de son empreinte la morale officielle et la vie publique, l'influence du Taoïsme devait rester vivante, et souvent prépondérante, dans la vie spirituelle des individus.

## Lao tseu

Avec Confucius, Lao tseu est probablement le personnage le plus illustre de l'antiquité chinoise, un de ceux dont les noms sont les plus familiers au public occidental. Le livre qui porte son nom, et qui est connu aussi sous le titre de *Tao-tö-king*, est de loin l'ouvrage le plus souvent traduit de la littérature extrême-orientale. Bien que ces traductions ne soient trop souvent que des interprétations plus ou moins fantaisistes d'un texte difficile, la popularité de Lao tseu n'en est pas diminuée pour autant. Or que sait-on de ce philosophe ? Bien peu de chose, si peu que les spécialistes, qu'ils soient Chinois, Japonais ou Occidentaux, sont très divisés sur la question de son historicité, les uns soutenant qu'il n'est qu'un personnage fabuleux, les autres admettant son existence, mais défendant des opinions divergentes sur l'époque où il vécut et sur certains épisodes de sa biographie. Ces discussions n'ont finalement pas une très grande portée. Plus importantes sont celles qui concernent le *Tao-tö-king*. Ne pouvant entrer ici dans le détail du problème, nous nous bornerons à évoquer les principales questions posées par l'auteur et par le livre.

Statue de Lao tseu dans le T'ai-ts'ing kong, près du lieu de sa naissance.

## LAO TAN SELON L'HISTOIRE

Vers l'an 100 av. J.-C., Sseu-ma Ts'ien écrivait la première histoire de la Chine, le *Che-ki (Mémoires historiques)*. Dans cet ouvrage capital, une de nos principales sources d'information sur la Chine antique, figure une biographie de Lao tseu. Malheureusement, ce qu'elle nous apprend de plus sûr, c'est que Sseu-ma Ts'ien ne possédait déjà plus que des renseignements incertains et contradictoires sur ce personnage. L'historien ne cache pas en effet sa perplexité et donne pêle-mêle des opinions qu'il a pu recueillir, avouant qu'en fin de compte personne ne sait rien de certain.

L'état civil que Sseu-ma Ts'ien donne au début de la biographie est lui-même sujet à caution :

« Lao tseu était un homme du village de Hou hien, district de Lai, de la préfecture de Hou dans le pays de Tch'ou. Son nom de famille était Li, son prénom Eul, son appellation Tan. »

Le lieu de naissance indiqué par Sseu-ma Ts'ien correspond à l'actuelle ville de Lou-yi (ville des Cerfs), dans la province du Honan, à environ 40 *li* de Po tcheou, localité située, elle, dans le Ngan-houei. Dès l'époque des Han, il y avait là un sanctuaire, et aujourd'hui un temple, le T'ai-ts'ing kong (le palais de la Grande Pureté), s'élève encore à l'endroit même où la tradition place la naissance du philosophe ; on y voit une très grande statue de Lao tseu, haute de près de 4 mètres/1. Non loin de là se trouve, dit-on, le tombeau de Lao tseu et celui de sa mère, ce qui peut paraître surprenant, attendu que, pour les taoïstes, l'un et l'autre sont des êtres exceptionnels qui n'ont pu mourir comme de simples mortels. D'autre part, aucune source n'indique que Lao tseu soit mort ou ait été enterré au lieu de sa naissance. Ces deux tombes (si tombes il y a) n'ont évidemment rien d'authentique. D'ailleurs, il est dit plus loin que Lao tseu disparut vers l'ouest, dans le pays de Ts'in, et que certains affirmaient qu'il y était mort. Les traditions locales situent son tombeau à Houai-li (village des Sophoras), dans le Chen-si, un peu à l'ouest de Sian (Si-ngan fou).

Quant aux noms de Lao tseu, ils ne sont pas sans poser des problèmes presque insolubles. Selon notre passage du Che-ki, le nom véritable de Lao tseu serait Li Eul (nom de famille et prénom) ou Li Tan (nom de famille et appellation). Or les textes antérieurs n'appellent jamais notre philosophe de l'une ou l'autre de ces façons, mais toujours Lao tseu (Maître Lao) ou Lao Tan. Si Sseu-ma Ts'ien lui attribue le nom de Li, c'est sans doute à cause de la généalogie, donnée à la fin de la biographie, d'une famille Li du Chantong qui affirmait descendre de Lao tseu, prétention à laquelle on ne saurait accorder de valeur historique. Néanmoins, le nom de famille Li lui est resté, ce qui aura pour conséquence importante de le faire considérer comme leur ancêtre par les empereurs de la dynastie T'ang (618-907).

Mais quel était son vrai nom de famille ? Nous l'ignorons : ce ne peut guère être Lao, ce mot dont le sens est vieux, vénérable, est vraisemblablement une sorte de surnom qu'on semble avoir souvent donné à de vieux sages plus ou moins légendaires. La vieillesse passait pour être la marque d'une grande puissance vitale et d'une grande sagesse. Or Lao tseu est, on pourrait dire par essence, un vieillard : Sseu-ma Ts'ien rapporte les opinions selon lesquelles il aurait atteint un âge de 160 ou même de plus de 200

ans. Ses deux autres noms Eul (oreilles) et Tan (longues oreilles) sont également en rapport avec l'idée de longévité et de sagesse, les vieux sages étant souvent représentés avec de longues oreilles.

Quant à la carrière de Lao tseu, ce que l'historien nous en dit se réduit à trois données qui auraient un grand intérêt si l'on pouvait les considérer comme authentiques : 1° Lao Tan fut archiviste à la cour royale des Tcheou. 2° Il reçut une visite de Confucius. 3° Il finit par s'en aller vers l'ouest et, en chemin, dicta son livre, avant de disparaître sans laisser de traces.

La rencontre de Lao tseu et de Confucius est très célèbre ; elle permettrait de situer approximativement l'époque où vécut Lao tseu. Voici comment elle est contée dans la biographie :

Lorsque Confucius se rendit chez les Tcheou, il alla s'informer sur les rites auprès de Lao tseu. Celui-ci répondit :

*Ceux dont tu parles, même leurs ossements sont tombés en poussière, il ne reste d'eux que leurs propos. De plus, lorsque l'honnête homme vit à une époque favorable, il se hâte vers la cour en char ; quand il vit à une époque défavorable, il erre à l'aventure. j'ai entendu dire que le bon marchand cache ses richesses et semble démuné ; s'il a une plénitude de vertu intérieure, l'homme supérieur a l'apparence extérieure d'un sot. Élimine ton humeur arrogante, et tous ces désirs, cet air suffisant et ce zèle débordant : tout cela n'est d'aucun profit pour ta personne. C'est tout ce que je puis te dire.* Confucius se retira et dit à ses disciples : « De l'oiseau, je sais qu'il peut voler ; du poisson, je sais qu'il peut nager ; des quadrupèdes, je sais qu'ils peuvent courir. Les bêtes qui courent peuvent être prises au filet ; celles qui nagent peuvent être prises à la nasse ; celles qui volent peuvent être atteintes par la flèche ; mais le dragon, je ne puis le connaître : il s'élève au ciel sur la nuée et sur le vent. J'ai vu aujourd'hui Lao tseu, il est comme le dragon ! »

Cette entrevue est aussi racontée dans un autre chapitre du *Che-ki*, mais les propos tenus par Lao tseu ne sont pas les mêmes :

Quand il prit congé pour s'en aller, Lao tseu le reconduisit en lui disant : *J'ai entendu dire que l'homme riche et puissant reconduit les gens en leur donnant des richesses, que l'homme bon reconduit les gens en leur donnant des paroles. je ne saurais être riche et puissant, mais je prends furtivement le titre d'homme bon ; je vous reconduirai donc en vous donnant des paroles, et voici ce que je vous dirai : Celui qui est intelligent et qui est profond observateur est près de mourir, car il critique les hommes avec justesse ; celui dont l'esprit est très savant, grandement*



*pénétrant, met en péril sa personne, car il dévoile les défauts des hommes. Celui qui est fils ne peut plus se posséder ; celui qui est sujet ne peut plus se posséder.*» Comme le note Édouard Chavannes, le traducteur des *Mémoires historiques*, c'est là une condamnation de l'intelligence, de la piété filiale et du loyalisme qui sont les principes essentiels de la doctrine de Confucius.

Cette scène était si populaire au temps des Han qu'on la voit représentée sur plusieurs pierres funéraires sculptées du Chantong (datant du II<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C.). Elle est souvent racontée dans des ouvrages tant confucianistes que taoïstes ; malheureusement ces textes ne sont d'accord ni sur le lieu, ni sur la date exacte, ni sur le nombre des entrevues, ni sur les propos que Lao tseu aurait tenus en cette occasion, de sorte que l'on peut difficilement tenir pour assuré que les deux grands philosophes se sont vraiment rencontrés.

Lao tseu résida donc un certain temps à la cour des Tcheou, mais quand il constata la décadence de cette maison, il s'en alla : il se dirigea vers l'ouest, vers le pays de Ts'in. Pour cela, il dut franchir la passe de Hien-kou, et c'est alors, à la demande de Yin Hi ou Kouan Yin, le gardien de la passe, qu'il rédigea « un ouvrage en deux sections dans lequel il exposait ses idées sur le Tao et sur le P'ô et qui comprenait plus de 5 000 mots ; puis il partit et personne ne sait ce qu'il advint de lui. » Le gardien de la passe (Kouan-ling) Yin Hi est devenu un personnage important du Taoïsme ; on lui a même attribué un ouvrage, le Kouan Yin tseu, mais c'est sans doute une figure purement légendaire.

Sseu-ma Ts'ien mentionne plus loin deux personnages que certains identifiaient à Lao tseu : Lao Lai tseu, un contemporain de Confucius, et le grand astrologue-archiviste Tan qui vécut bien plus tard et fit, en 376 av. J.-C., une prédiction obscure sur la destinée des Tcheou et sur leur élimination par Ts'in. Finalement, l'historien conclut : « Personne au monde ne saurait dire si tout cela est vrai ou non : Lao tseu était un sage caché. »

Ainsi, Sseu-ma Ts'ien ne dissimule pas l'incertitude à laquelle le condamnent les sources dont il disposait : tout ce qu'il a pu recueillir sur le personnage est si vague et si contradictoire qu'il n'en peut rien tirer de sûr ; il explique ce manque de renseignements en disant qu'il s'agissait d'un sage caché dont il résume ainsi la doctrine : « Lao tseu cultivait le Tao et le T'ô ; selon sa doctrine, il faut s'appliquer à vivre caché et de façon anonyme. » Qualifier le philosophe de sage caché, c'était suggérer qu'après

avoir quitté sa fonction à la cour royale, il vécut dans l'obscurité. Durant toute l'histoire de la Chine, on trouve des hommes qui, bien qu'appartenant à la classe intellectuelle, choisissaient de vivre à l'écart de la vie publique, fuyant les tracasseries et les honneurs du monde qu'ils qualifiaient volontiers de borborygme.

Confucius eut l'occasion de rencontrer quelques-uns de ces personnages qui lui tinrent des propos dans le style taoïste. Un d'eux fut Lao Lai tseu (celui-là même qu'on identifiait parfois à Lao Tan) qui, d'après Tchouang tseu, lui reprocha, en termes très durs, l'étroitesse de son esprit et son orgueil, défauts qui étaient sans doute fréquents chez certains professeurs de morale et que les taoïstes reportaient volontiers sur Confucius lui-même.

Un autre « sage caché », surnommé le fou de Tch'ou, chanta en passant devant la porte de Confucius : « O Phénix ! O Phénix ! Comme ta vertu est dégénérée ! Ton passé, je ne saurais le corriger, mais pour l'avenir, il est encore temps de te sauver. Cesse ! Cesse ! Aujourd'hui, les hommes qui prennent part au gouvernement sont en péril ! »

Ces personnages adoptaient souvent le genre de vie rustique des paysans ou, dans les régions riches en rivières et en lacs du pays de Tch'ou, celui de simples pêcheurs. D'autres, plus radicaux, choisissaient de se réfugier dans les montagnes sauvages, hors d'atteinte de la civilisation et de l'influence princière. L'existence de ces purs, surtout des seconds, était un grave défi pour le prince, une condamnation vivante et permanente de son règne. Mais il n'avait pas de prise sur eux : leur sainteté supérieure à la sienne était inviolable. La seule ressource, pour se débarrasser d'un de ces sages encombrants, était de lui céder le trône dans l'espoir que, devant cet affront, il se jetterait à l'eau en tenant une pierre comme Tchouang tseu le raconte de quelques-uns d'entre eux.

Dans l'histoire du Taoïsme, ces sages reclus ont joué un rôle important : la plupart des anciens penseurs taoïstes vivaient ainsi cachés, refusant de participer à la vie publique. Tels étaient Tchouang Tcheou, l'auteur du *Tchouang-tseu*, Lie Yu-k'ou, auteur supposé du *Lie-tseu*, et sans doute bien d'autres qui nous sont inconnus. Sseu-ma Ts'ien a donc quelque raison de classer Lao Tan dans cette catégorie de personnages.

Toutefois, il ne faudrait pas croire que tous les reclus aient été des taoïstes : certains d'entre eux sont même sérieusement critiqués par ces derniers pour leur fanatisme et pour leur zèle puritain qui les qualifie plutôt comme des confucianistes aigris que comme des disciples de Lao tseu. Ceux-ci choisissaient de vivre dans

l'obscurité par principe et non par dépit. Ce qui distinguait en outre des sages comme Lao Tan ou Tchouang tseu des autres reclus, c'est qu'ils eurent des écoles, probablement de très petites chapelles où pendant longtemps un enseignement essentiellement oral se transmettait de maîtres à disciples, ceux-ci prenant quelquefois des notes. La plupart des livres de la Chine antique ont d'ailleurs été rédigés de cette façon ; il semble que ce ne soit qu'assez tard que les maîtres aient commencé à rédiger eux-mêmes les ouvrages. Qu'en est-il donc du *Tao-tö-king*? Là est en définitive la question qui nous intéresse, l'homme Lao tseu restant pour nous décidément voilé dans une impénétrable obscurité.

## LE TAO-TÖ-KING

Le livre attribué à Lao tseu avait pour titre *Lao-tseu* conformément à l'habitude qui prévaut pour presque tous les anciens philosophes : ainsi l'ouvrage de Mong K'o est le *Mong-tseu*, celui de Siun K'ing le *Siun-tseu*, celui de Tchouang Tcheou le *Tchouang-tseu*. Le titre de *Tao-tö-king* (*livre sacré du Tao et du Tö*) lui a été donné sous les Han : c'était le placer au même rang que les classiques confucianistes, lesquels depuis longtemps étaient des *king*. Le caractère *king*, dont le sens propre est « chaîne d'un tissu », a ici le sens de « règle directrice ». Les *king* contiennent un enseignement particulièrement éminent, ce sont des textes sacrés, révélés par des saints ou par des dieux. Les bouddhistes emprunteront ce terme pour traduire « sùtra ».

Le *Tao-tö-king* est souvent aussi désigné comme « le texte aux 5 000 caractères ». En réalité, le texte actuel en comprend un peu plus et le nombre varie selon les versions. Le livre est divisé en 81 courts chapitres et en deux parties, la première allant jusqu'au chapitre 37. La division en deux parties, supérieure et inférieure, est ancienne, mais la division en chapitres varie dans les versions anciennes, et quant au nombre de 81, il est dû à la valeur mystique de 9 et de 3. La partie supérieure est quelquefois désignée comme *Tao-king* (Livre du Tao), la partie inférieure *Tö-king* (Livre du Tö), mais dans la version actuelle cette distinction n'est justifiée que par le fait que le chapitre I traite du Tao et le chapitre 38 du Tö.

Si Lao Tan, contemporain de Confucius, est l'auteur, comme le veut la tradition, l'ouvrage daterait du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C. La plupart des érudits estiment cependant que le Lao-tseu ne peut avoir été écrit à une époque aussi haute, mais ils ne sont pas d'accord pour lui assigner une date. Les savants occidentaux penchent

généralement pour la fin du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle, ou le début du III<sup>e</sup> siècle, mais les raisons qu'ils donnent sont assez vagues. Des travaux récents chinois et japonais, ces derniers surtout poussant l'analyse d'une façon très minutieuse, prouvent de façon certaine : 1<sup>o</sup> que le texte tel qu'il se présente aujourd'hui ne peut avoir pour auteur Lao Tan, contemporain de Confucius ; 2<sup>o</sup> qu'un texte assez proche du nôtre existait à la fin des Royaumes Combattants ; 3<sup>o</sup> que de nombreux aphorismes figurant dans le *Tao-tö-king* circulaient depuis très longtemps dans les milieux philosophiques, mais sans être toujours attribués à Lao Tan.

En outre, on remarque que le livre n'est pas homogène, ni au point de vue du style, ni même au point de vue de la pensée. Au point de vue du style, il y a des passages rimés et d'autres qui ne le sont pas ; et parmi les premiers, on peut distinguer plusieurs rythmes très différents. L'étude des rimes permet de déceler des anomalies qui ne s'expliquent que par des rédactions d'époques ou de lieux différents. Au point de vue du contenu, d'assez nombreux passages refléteraient mieux la pensée d'autres mouvements (légistes, politiciens, stratèges) que celle de Lao Tan, telle du moins que les anciens l'avaient comprise et qui est d'ailleurs celle qui domine dans le livre. Leur présence n'est cependant pas due à des interpolations maladroites, mais s'explique sans doute par la façon dont le Lao-tseu s'est constitué.

Il ne faut pas se représenter les écoles philosophiques de la Chine ancienne comme des sectes très exclusives. Même les deux écoles qui paraissent les plus tranchées, celles de Confucius et de Mo ti, étaient loin de constituer des groupes fermés. Mais surtout il n'existait point, avant les Han, d'école taoïste proprement dite. Ce sont les historiens et les bibliographes des Han qui ont établi une classification des anciens penseurs en écoles dont l'une est l'école (*kia*) du Tao (*Tao kia*). Mais durant la période des philosophes, ceux-ci n'étaient généralement pas intégrés dans des mouvements bien définis, d'où souvent des hésitations quand il s'agit de leur mettre une étiquette. Dans ces conditions, on conçoit que différents courants de pensée ont pu se référer à des sources et à des autorités communes, que les philosophes aient aimé citer des apophtegmes prêtés à d'anciens sages universellement vénérés tels que Lao Tan, le vénérable aux longues oreilles, ou encore le Souverain Jaune (Houang-ti). Ce dernier personnage, figure purement mythique, était également considéré par les taoïstes comme un de leurs patrons. De nombreux ouvrages lui étaient attribués et, sous les Han, le Taoïsme était appelé la doctrine de

Houang (— ti) et de Lao (tseu). Il subsiste des citations anciennes des écrits de Houang-ti ; certaines se rapprochent beaucoup du style du *Tao-tō-king*, dans un cas ; le texte est le même (ch. 6).

Le *Lao-tseu* apparaît en fin de compte comme un recueil de sentences empruntées les unes à la sagesse commune, d'autres à diverses écoles prototaoïstes. Le recueil s'est constitué progressivement et ce n'est qu'au III<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C. qu'il reçut sa forme à peu près définitive. Antérieurement, il dut circuler des exemplaires très différents les uns des autres, ce qui explique les variantes extrêmement nombreuses que l'on relève tant dans les diverses recensions du texte actuel que dans les citations anciennes. Il est possible, enfin, que dès le vie siècle av. J.-C., un fonds d'aphorismes en vers servît de base à un enseignement oral dans les petites chapelles « taoïstes ». Celles-ci se distinguaient des autres écoles philosophiques par l'idéal quiétiste et mystique qui y régnait. C'est là que s'élabora pour la première fois une pensée philosophique. Ainsi, le Taoïsme, d'une façon assez surprenante, se trouve avoir influencé le Légisme dont l'esprit est à l'opposé du Quiétisme. Une des raisons en est qu'il offrait seul une ontologie dont la théorie des Lois avait besoin.

Il est certain que le *Tao-tō-king* ne peut avoir été écrit par Lao Tan au VI<sup>e</sup> siècle av. notre ère ; d'autre part l'attribution au grand astrologue Tan du IV<sup>e</sup> s. av. J.-C. ne repose sur aucune base sérieuse. Il faut nous résigner et reconnaître que nous ignorons par qui, où, et quand a été rédigé l'ouvrage tel qu'il nous est parvenu ; reconnaître aussi que le recueil est dans une large mesure composite. Néanmoins, il est également manifeste qu'il reflète une pensée élaborée et dans l'ensemble cohérente. Il faut donc admettre l'existence d'un philosophe qui doit être sinon l'auteur direct, du moins le maître dont l'influence a été déterminante à l'origine. Il n'y a aucun inconvénient à continuer à l'appeler Lao Tan ou Lao tseu. C'est ce que nous ferons, ne serait-ce que pour une raison de commodité, en exposant la pensée du *Tao-tō-king*, mais il ne nous paraît nullement exclu que ce nom recouvre en réalité plusieurs penseurs, et, en particulier, que la personnalité d'un dernier rédacteur, sans doute dans la première moitié du III<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C., ait pu jouer un rôle déterminant.

## LES COMMENTAIRES

Si le *Tao-tō-king* a été souvent traduit en Occident, en Chine même il est sans doute le texte qui a été le plus glosé : la liste de

ses commentaires du III<sup>e</sup> siècle avant notre ère à nos jours dépasse largement 200 titres.

Les plus anciens sont conservés dans deux chapitres du *Han-Fei-tseu*, le plus célèbre des livres de l'école légiste. Si Han Fei (269-233) en est bien l'auteur, ces notes dateraient du milieu du III<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C. Bien que ne provenant pas d'un Taoïste, ce commentaire (qui ne concerne d'ailleurs qu'une partie du Lao-tseu) est fort intéressant, car il montre comment les Légistes, dont Sseu-ma Ts'ien affirme qu'ils se rattachaient doctrinalement à Houang-ti et à Lao tseu, interprétaient le *Tao-tö-king*.

Bien que le Taoïsme fût très en faveur au début des Han, les commentaires du Lao-tseu de cette époque ne nous sont pas parvenus. Le célèbre commentaire dit de Ho-chang-kong (le vénérable du bord du fleuve), qui prétend dater de l'empereur Wen (180-157), est certainement postérieur, mais il n'est pas possible de déterminer avec certitude la date où il fut écrit. Toutefois, alors qu'il a été longtemps considéré comme un produit tardif du Taoïsme des Six Dynasties, on a maintenant des raisons de placer sa rédaction vers la fin des Han, au II<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère. De l'auteur, on ne connaît qu'une légende célèbre. La voici telle qu'elle figure dans la préface du commentaire :

« L'empereur Wen aimait les paroles de Lao tseu, mais il y avait de nombreux passages qu'il ne comprenait pas et il ne trouvait personne qui pût les lui expliquer. Aussi, quand il apprit l'existence d'un vénérable Taoïste qui habitait une hutte de chaume au bord du fleuve et qui se livrait constamment à la lecture du *Tao-tö-king*, il envoya un émissaire l'interroger sur les passages difficiles ; mais Ho-chang-kong exigea que l'empereur se dérangeât lui-même. Wen ti se déplaça donc personnellement, mais commença par reprocher au sage son arrogance : « Il n'est de lieu sous le ciel qui ne soit terre du Roi ; il n'est d'habitant sur cette terre qui ne soit vassal du Roi... Bien que vous possédiez le Tao, vous n'en êtes pas moins l'un de mes sujets. N'est-ce pas surestimer votre hauteur que de ne pas savoir vous plier ? Mais sachez que je puis faire de quiconque un riche ou un pauvre, un puissant ou un misérable. » Aussitôt Ho-chang-kong s'élève au-dessus de son siège et reste suspendu très haut comme en plein ciel. Alors, s'adressant à l'empereur, il lui dit : « N'étant ni dans le ciel, ni parmi les hommes, ni sur terre, suis-je encore votre sujet ? » Wen ti comprit qu'il avait affaire à un personnage surnaturel, il s'excusa humblement et reçut alors de Ho-chang-kong le *Tao-tö-king* avec son commentaire.

Un autre grand commentaire ancien est dû en revanche à un personnage bien connu, Wang Pi (226-249). Ce jeune homme exceptionnellement doué eut le temps d'écrire plusieurs ouvrages dont les plus connus sont ses commentaires du Yi-king et du Lao-tseu, avant de mourir à l'âge de 23 ans. Il est le représentant le plus marquant d'un renouveau de la spéculation philosophique disparue depuis le début des Han. Son commentaire se distingue de celui de Ho-chang-kong par son caractère métaphysique alors que celui-ci est plus orienté vers la pratique.

Il ne peut être question ici de faire une revue même succincte des commentaires qui se sont accumulés au cours des siècles. Ils mériteraient cependant qu'on les étudiât pour eux-mêmes. Il est remarquable de trouver parmi ces glossateurs des représentants des trois grandes spiritualités chinoises : des taoïstes naturellement, mais aussi des confucianistes et des bouddhistes. On y rencontre aussi plusieurs empereurs (le commentaire de l'empereur Hiuan-tsong des T'ang est un des plus estimés), des littérateurs et des hommes d'État célèbres. Ce fait illustre la place importante que le Lao-tseu a toujours occupée dans la vie intellectuelle, débordant largement les seuls milieux taoïstes.

## La Doctrine

### LES IDÉES DE LAO TSEU SELON LES ANCIENS PHILOSOPHES

Lao Tan faisait figure, vers la fin de l'époque des Royaumes Combattants, de vieux sage dont on aimait citer les propos, et cela, à peu près dans toutes les écoles philosophiques. C'est naturellement chez les auteurs taoïstes, et en premier lieu dans le Tchouang-tseu, que Lao tseu intervient le plus fréquemment. Mais les personnages réels ou inventés que Tchouang Tcheou et les autres auteurs du recueil mettent en scène ne tiennent guère que des discours fictifs, de sorte qu'à part quelques exceptions, ces textes ne peuvent contribuer à notre compréhension de l'hypothétique Lao Tan. Toutefois, le dernier chapitre du Tchouang-tseu, dû à un disciple inconnu, présente un caractère particulier : c'est un exposé objectif des principaux courants philosophiques de la Chine ancienne et il constitue à ce titre un document précieux.

D'autres ouvrages contiennent des citations plus ou moins proches du texte actuel du Lao-tseu ; deux d'entre eux le critiquent en termes brefs et généraux. Il nous paraît intéressant de citer ces jugements avant le texte du Tchouang-tseu. On lit ainsi dans le

Lu-che-tch' ouen-ts' ieou/2 : «Lao Tan prisait la souplesse» (ch. 17). — “Le Saint entend ce qui est sans bruit et voit ce qui est sans forme : tel était (entre autres) Lao Tan” (ch. 18).

Pour Siun tseu/3, «Lao tseu comprenait le repliement, mais ignorait le déploiement» et le philosophe confucianiste ajoute plus loin : «S'il n'y a que repliement et jamais déploiement, il ne saurait y avoir de distinction entre ce qui a de la valeur et ce qui n'en a pas, entre le précieux et le vil, entre le noble et le vulgaire» (ch. 17). Souplesse et repliement sur soi-même, tel aurait donc été l'idéal de conduite de Lao tseu, ce qui l'aurait conduit à ne pas tenir compte des hiérarchies et des valeurs, fondements de la société confucianiste. Il faut remarquer toutefois que l'éthique de Siun tseu, qui écrivait à la veille de la fondation de l'empire Ts'in, n'était plus celle du Confucianisme ancien dans lequel une certaine souplesse accommodante n'était nullement condamnée. Savoir céder était un art qu'enseignaient les rites. Il ne semble donc point que la souplesse et l'humilité aient été vertus spécialement taoïstes. Mais chez Lao tseu, ces attitudes n'ont rien de rituel et c'est pourquoi Siun tseu, qui préconisait une éducation et un gouvernement fondés sur les rites, les condamne comme dangereuses.

Le deuxième passage du *Lu-che-tch'ouen-ts'ieou* cité ci-dessus suggère, chez Lao tseu, des dons d'intuition mystique qui lui sont aussi attribués par le paragraphe qui le concerne dans le chapitre 33 (*T'ien-hia-p'ien*) du T'houang-tseu et dont voici maintenant la traduction :

« Considérer la racine des choses comme une pure essence et les êtres qui nous entourent comme grossiers ; voir dans la richesse un manque ; se tenir sereinement et tout seul auprès des puissances sacrées : c'est en quoi consistait une des doctrines de l'antiquité. Kouan Yin et Lao Tan entendirent parler de ce courant spirituel et le trouvèrent bon. Ils lui donnèrent pour fondement l'Invisible permanent et pour recteur l'Un suprême. Extérieurement, ils se montraient doux et accommodants ; intérieurement, ils étaient parfaite vacuité et complète innocuité à l'égard des êtres vivants. »

Ce texte, qui reflète le point de vue des taoïstes, évoque lui aussi l'humilité de Lao Tan, mais elle n'est plus essentielle, elle n'est qu'extérieure, superficielle, alors que l'attitude profonde de ces sages était le *Vide* : nous verrons qu'il faut entendre par là l'absence non seulement de connaissances, mais encore de désirs et de volition ; d'où aussi l'absence de toute agressivité qui pourrait



nuire à autrui. On remarque que Kouan Yin et Lao tseu sont rattachés ici à une tradition ancienne qui semble avoir appartenu à des milieux mystiques et qu'ils auraient enrichi cette tradition de concepts métaphysiques nouveaux.

Un autre résumé de la pensée de Lao tseu nous est fourni par Sseu-ma Ts'ien, l'auteur des *Mémoires historiques*. Selon cet historien, la doctrine du philosophe est centrée sur les idées de *Vide* et d'*Invisible* ; il ajoute le *non-agir* (*wou-wei*) grâce auquel le sage peut s'adapter harmonieusement aux changements qui interviennent dans le monde. Dans sa postface, Sseu-ma Ts'ien cite un texte de son père Sseu-ma Tan dans lequel celui-ci expose les systèmes philosophiques en insistant sur le Taoïsme qu'il mettait au-dessus des autres doctrines : là encore, les points principaux sont le non-agir, l'adaptation aux évolutions naturelles et le vide.

On peut être surpris de ne pas voir ces résumés mettre l'accent sur le Tao et sur le Tö : ne sont-ce pas là pourtant des notions fondamentales de notre philosophe ? Sa doctrine n'est-elle pas par excellence la « doctrine du Tao » ? À vrai dire, l'omission est plus apparente que réelle, car ces notions sont désignées ici par d'autres termes qui, nous le verrons, connotent des modalités du Tao : *Invisible*, *Unité suprême*, *Wou-wei*, etc. Si ces termes sont préférés à Tao et à Tö, c'est parce que ces derniers ne sont pas propres au Taoïsme, mais qu'ils appartenaient à la langue philosophique et religieuse commune, de sorte qu'ils ne pouvaient guère caractériser la pensée de Lao tseu. Il n'en reste pas moins qu'ils prennent dans le *Tao-tö-king* une valeur nouvelle qui justifie le titre donné (tardivement) à l'ouvrage et le nom de l'école.

## LE TAO ET LE TÖ DANS LA PENSÉE COMMUNE

Le sens propre du mot Tao est : *chemin*, *voie*. Verbalement, le même mot (avec parfois une légère variante d'écriture) signifie tracer un chemin, conduire, mettre en communication. La personne qui montre à une autre la voie à suivre la renseigne par la parole Tao a aussi le sens de dire, c'est la parole qui renseigne et enseigne, d'où le sens de doctrine.

Tao évoque donc avant tout l'image d'une voie à suivre et, dans un sens dérivé, l'idée de direction de conduite, de règle morale. C'est ce dernier sens qu'il a le plus souvent dans les textes proprement confucianistes. Mais le mot Tao est aussi et a d'abord été un terme religieux ou magique ; il désigne l'art de mettre en communication le Ciel et la Terre, les puissances sacrées et les hommes, de réaliser

une œuvre (magique ou technique) ; c'est tout à la fois un art, une méthode et un pouvoir. C'est le pouvoir mystérieux du devin, du magicien et aussi celui du roi. Il fut, en Chine comme en bien d'autres contrées, un temps où les chefs politiques ne se distinguaient guère des magiciens. Aux époques historiques, les rois et les empereurs chinois ont conservé quelque chose de ce caractère. On leur prêtait en effet une « vertu », Tao ou Tao-tö, capable de faire régner l'ordre non seulement parmi leurs sujets, mais encore dans la nature tout entière. Un vieux mythe peut nous aider à comprendre comment la notion de Voie et celle d'Ordre étaient liées dans la pensée religieuse des anciens Chinois. Un des héros les plus célèbres de l'époque légendaire est Yu le Grand. Ce fondateur de la dynastie Hia (qui jusqu'à preuve du contraire reste purement fabuleuse) est une sorte de démiurge qui mit fin à une grande inondation : il ménagea des exutoires aux eaux qui menaçaient de s'élever jusqu'au Ciel, il leur ouvrit la voie (tao) en perçant les montagnes. Après quoi, le héros "parcourut et mit en ordre (tao)" les neuf [nombre mystique symbolisant le total] provinces du monde. Il aménagea la terre des hommes, la rendit habitable, la civilisa, d'une part en faisant circuler les eaux, d'autre part en mettant en communication les différentes parties du monde. Dans tous ces travaux, Yu fut d'ailleurs aidé par des êtres fantastiques que sa vertu attirait.

On voit comment le mot Tao a pu désigner le pouvoir civilisateur des souverains exemplaires, puis celui des rois qui devaient restaurer périodiquement l'ordre de la nature à l'aide de rites dont le plus important était sans doute une circulation : le roi faisait le tour de l'empire dans le sens du soleil ; ou bien il circulait à temps réglé, tout au long de l'année, à l'intérieur d'un temple dont la structure reproduisait l'architecture de l'univers. Mais à vrai dire toute la vie d'un Fils du Ciel devait être réglée sur l'ordre naturel, et c'est ce qu'on appelait la Voie ou l'Ordre royal (*Wang Tao*) imitant la Voie ou l'Ordre céleste (*T'ien Tao*). Cet ordre céleste ou naturel, souvent appelé Tao tout court, était, selon la pensée classique, surtout manifeste dans l'alternance régulière des saisons et dans celle des jours et des nuits. Ce cycle du chaud et du froid, de la lumière et de l'ombre, on l'expliquait par le jeu alterné de deux principes sexués, le Yin et le Yang, dont les influences, dominantes à tour de rôle, commandaient les comportements de tous les êtres : le Yin, principe de l'ombre, du froid et de la féminité, les invitait au repli, au repos, à la passivité ; le Yang, principe de la lumière, de la chaleur, de la masculinité, les incitait au déploiement des énergies, à l'activité, voire à l'agressivité.

Le Tao est ainsi pour la pensée philosophique et religieuse commune l'*Ordre*, ou plutôt le *Principe d'ordre* qui peut d'ailleurs se manifester dans différents domaines du réel. C'est ainsi que l'on parle non seulement de Tao céleste, de Tao royal, mais aussi de Tao de la Terre et de Tao de l'Homme. Le Tao de la Terre s'oppose au Tao du Ciel un peu comme le Yin au Yang ; dans ce cas, « Tao du Ciel » prend un sens plus restreint, ce n'est plus la Nature tout entière, mais l'action du ciel sidéral qui est une activité purement Yang, tandis que celle de la terre est Yin. On imagine alors l'alternance du Yin et du Yang comme étant celle des influences de la Terre et du Ciel. Au reste, tous les êtres, et particulièrement l'homme, sont faits d'éléments célestes et terrestres mélangés, c'est pourquoi le monde est constitué de « trois puissances » : le Ciel, la Terre et l'Homme. Ce dernier est l'intermédiaire religieux entre le Ciel et la Terre, mais, à vrai dire, seul le Fils du Ciel joue pleinement ce rôle, car il est seul habilité à faire des sacrifices au Ciel où résident ses ancêtres. Le Tao de l'Homme, ce sont tous les principes de conduite qui permettent à l'homme, au Roi, de jouer ce rôle d'intermédiaire ; c'est ce Tao-là qui représente l'idéal de Confucius, lequel proclamait : « Qui le matin a entendu parler du Tao peut mourir tranquille le soir. » Cet idéal, on s'en approchait par l'étude et la pratique sincère des vertus confucianistes. Quant au Tao céleste, c'était un sujet dont le Maître ne parlait pas, soit par agnosticisme, soit par scrupule religieux. Toutefois, l'école des Lettrés ne pouvait se passer complètement de métaphysique, et les successeurs de Confucius incorporèrent à la liste des Classiques ou livres canoniques (*king*) qui servaient à l'enseignement et à l'étude, un recueil de traités philosophiques, le *Yi-king* (*Livre des Mutations*). Cet ouvrage fort curieux et obscur était à l'origine un manuel de divination. Il consistait essentiellement en une série de symboles, de diagrammes formés par la combinaison de lignes pleines et de lignes brisées. Si l'on superpose ces lignes par trois, on obtient huit trigrammes : ces huit figures furent dessinées, selon la légende, par Fou Hi, le premier des trois souverains mythiques, qui était un être divin à corps de serpent. Dans la terminologie du Yi-king, les lignes pleines sont dites fortes ou dures (*kang*) et les brisées faibles ou molles (*jeou*) ; dans la terminologie générale, on dit aussi que les lignes fortes représentent le Yang et les lignes faibles le Yin.

En superposant les trigrammes deux à deux, on obtient soixante-quatre hexagrammes. Les trigrammes et les hexagrammes symbolisent l'ensemble des réalités, les premiers de façon plus

synthétique, les seconds de façon plus analytique. Cette symbolisation est particulièrement évocatrice si l'on dispose trigrammes ou hexagrammes sur un cercle qui représente l'espace-temps : on voit aussitôt comment le Yin et le Yang alternent, comment on passe d'une réalité qui est représentée par un symbole (appelé *K'ien*) formé uniquement de Yang et représentant le Ciel, à une réalité représentée par un symbole (*K'ouen*) formé de lignes Yin et représentant la Terre. Entre ces deux cas extrêmes, les autres diagrammes symbolisent des réalités, des êtres, des situations ou des temps intermédiaires, avec des dosages variés de Yin et de Yang.

La technique divinatoire consistait à tirer au sort successivement deux des soixante-quatre hexagrammes et à observer les mutations de lignes qui s'étaient opérées de l'un à l'autre : on en tirait des conclusions sur le cours des choses en s'aidant d'un texte fort hermétique qui accompagne chacun des hexagrammes.

Les symboles du *Yi-king* ont sans doute très Tôt stimulé la réflexion philosophique comme en témoignent les Appendices qui ont été ajoutés, à un moment indéterminé de l'époque des Royaumes Combattants, au manuel de divination. Le plus important de ces petits traités est le *Hi-ts'eu*. Il contient la plus ancienne définition savante du Tao : « Un aspect Yin, un aspect Yang, c'est là le Tao. » Et dans un autre appendice (*Chouo-koua*), il est précisé : « Le Tao du Ciel est Yin et Yang ; le Tao de la Terre est constitué par les lignes pleines et brisées (dures ou molles) ; le Tao de l'Homme consiste dans les vertus cardinales *Jen* (humanité) et *Yi* (justice). » Bien entendu, ces trois sphères, agencées de la même façon, sont solidaires, s'influencent les unes les autres. Surtout, elles sont soumises au même rythme. Les anciens Chinois ne concevaient pas un univers statique, pour eux tout dans le monde était animé et changeant ; ces changements ne s'opéraient pas de façon linéaire, mais cyclique. On devine un fond d'expérience paysanne derrière ces conceptions cosmologiques, mais ce sont plus directement les observations et réflexions des « savants » astronomes ou astrologues, médecins ou devins qui ont permis de systématiser les croyances populaires. Cette pensée érudite a élaboré les grandes catégories de la pensée chinoise : *Tao*, *Yin* et *Yang*, *Cinq Éléments*. Ces derniers sont eux-mêmes des catégories spatio-temporelles plutôt que des « matières ». Ils sont orientés ainsi dans l'espace-temps : BOIS : EST. FEU : SUD. TERRE : CENTRE. MÉTAL : OUEST. EAU : NORD

Après le Tao, il nous reste à dire quelques mots du Tō dans la langue philosophique commune. On traduit généralement Tō par Vertu, et l'expression double Tao-tō désigne la morale dans la langue moderne. Pour Confucius, le Tō était une qualité acquise par celui qui vivait noblement, en compagnie d'hommes éduqués et policés. En possédant du Tō, le sage incarne un idéal de civilisation et devient un modèle pour son entourage : sa vertu est donc contagieuse, efficace. La notion de Tō implique toujours, en effet, une notion d'efficacité et de spécificité. Tout être qui possède un pouvoir quelconque, naturel ou acquis, est dit avoir du Tō. Tao et Tō ont donc des sens assez proches, mais le premier est l'ordre universel, indéterminé, le second est une vertu qui permet des réalisations particulières, c'est « l'Efficace qui se singularise en se réalisant/4 ». Ainsi Tō possède des sens variés allant de la vertu magique à la vertu morale. Mais ce dernier sens est dérivé, car originellement un Tō n'était pas nécessairement bon : celui qui possède un Tō néfaste attire le malheur sur lui-même et sur autrui. Néanmoins, Tō est généralement pris en bonne part, c'est une force intérieure qui influence favorablement l'entourage de celui qui la possède, c'est une vertu bienfaisante, vivifiante. Selon le *Hits'eu*, le Tō du Ciel et de la Terre n'est autre que leur pouvoir de susciter la vie universelle.

## L'INEFFABILITÉ DU TAO

La grande variété des sens que le mot Tao est susceptible de revêtir ne facilite pas l'interprétation des textes où il figure. Il en est ainsi du *Tao-tō-king* où ce terme apparaît soixante-seize fois, mais avec des connotations différentes. Souvent le mot est pris dans un de ses sens habituels : Loi naturelle (Tao du Ciel), doctrine, idéal de conduite... Mais d'autre part, il possède une signification nouvelle qu'il n'a pas chez les anciens philosophes non taoïstes. Le Tao n'est plus seulement un principe d'ordre, c'est une réalité qui est à l'origine de l'univers ; ou plutôt Lao tseu emploie ce mot Tao à défaut de mieux pour désigner cette réalité :

*Il est un être indifférencié et parfait, né avant le Ciel et la Terre... Nous pouvons le considérer comme la Mère de ce monde, mais j'ignore son nom (ming) ; je l'appellerai (tseu) Tao et s'il faut lui donner un nom (ming) ce sera : l'Immense (ta) (25).*

Tao, ni aucun autre mot du langage humain, ne saurait être le nom (*ming*) du Principe suprême. Car *ming*, c'est le nom personnel, intime de l'individu, nom dont l'usage était interdit aux inférieurs, qui était donc tabou parce que le connaître et surtout le prononcer

donnait prise sur la personne nommée. Le vrai nom du Tao doit donc rester inconnu, Tao n'est qu'une appellation (*tseu*), c'est-à-dire une sorte de prénom public non tabou. *Ming* a bien, outre le sens précis que nous venons de dire, le sens plus général de mot, de désignation quelconque, mais pour les anciens Chinois un *ming* n'était jamais tout à fait dépourvu d'une certaine valorisation : car tout ce qui a nom a sa place dans un univers hiérarchisé. C'est pourquoi un des problèmes qui préoccupa longtemps les anciens philosophes, à commencer par Confucius lui-même, était celui du rapport des noms et des réalités. Les uns remarquaient le caractère arbitraire de toute dénomination, justifiée seulement par l'usage social, d'autres montraient que les noms, surtout ceux qui désignent les rangs et les statuts, ont une valeur coercitive, qu'ils tendent à circonscrire des pouvoirs, à classer et délimiter les êtres. À ce titre aussi, aucun nom ne pouvait convenir à l'absolu. Quand néanmoins Lao tseu déclare que, s'il lui fallait absolument choisir un nom pour le Tao, ce serait *Grand* (*Ta*), il est clair qu'il prend ce dernier mot dans un sens absolu : l'*Immense*, l'*Incommensurable*. Cet emploi étant d'ailleurs exceptionnel, certains taoïstes, reprenant le texte de Lao tseu, préféreront plus tard le corriger légèrement et au lieu de *Ta*, écriront : *Ta -yi*, ou *T'ai-yi*, la *Grande Unité*, l'*Unité suprême*, expression qui est ainsi définie par le sophiste Houei Che : « L'infiniment grand n'a rien qui lui soit extérieur ; on l'appelle *Ta-yi*. »

Le caractère ineffable du Tao est affirmé dès le premier chapitre du *Tao-tō-king*. Ce chapitre très important est malheureusement un des plus embarrassants du livre, car la possibilité de ponctuer le texte de plusieurs façons, les variantes de caractères et l'incertitude du sens de certains mots autorisent plusieurs traductions assez différentes. Nous adopterons ici une première traduction conforme à la ponctuation suivie par les plus anciens commentateurs :

1 *Un tao dont on peut parler (tao) n'est pas le Tao permanent (tch'ang tao).*

2 *Un nom qui peut servir à nommer n'est pas le Nom permanent (tch'ang ming).*

3 *Ce qui est sans nom est origine du Ciel et de la Terre.*

4 *Ce qui a nom est Mère des dix mille êtres.*

5 *Aussi, à l'état permanent de non-désir, nous contemplons ses mystères ;*

6 À l'état permanent de désir, nous contemplons ses abords [ou : sa surface].

7 Ces deux (modes) ont même principe, mais leurs noms diffèrent.

8 Ensemble, je les appelle l'Obscur (Hivan) ;

9 Le plus obscur dans cette obscurité est Porte de tous les mystères.

Sseu-ma Ts'ien écrit du *Tao-tö-king* que c'est une œuvre difficile à comprendre en raison de son obscure profondeur.

Certains chapitres de ce livre sont assurément d'une obscurité et d'une ambiguïté telles qu'elles n'autorisent aucune interprétation définitive. Peut-être sont-elles volontaires et il n'est pas exclu que ces textes aient été lus et commentés de façons différentes selon le niveau d'initiation des disciples. Malheureusement, nous n'avons que des commentaires taoïstes bien postérieurs à l'époque où le texte a pu être rédigé. Néanmoins, outre leur intérêt propre, ces commentaires représentent certainement une vieille tradition, et, à ce titre, ne peuvent être complètement négligés. Pour la première phrase du texte ci-dessus, nous aurons recours au commentaire du *Han-Fei-tseu* qui, bien que non taoïste, est intéressant en raison de son ancienneté et parce qu'il authentifie en quelque sorte l'interprétation du mot *tch'ang* dans son sens de « permanent » contrairement à certains autres glossateurs :

« Par *qualité sensible (li)*, nous entendons les différences entre carré et rond, court et long, gros et fin, solide et fragile. Quand ces qualités sont déterminées (chez un être quelconque), on peut parler (tao) de celui-ci. Tout être qui a des qualités déterminées est soumis aux alternances de l'existence et de la disparition, de la vie et de la mort, de la jeunesse et de la vieillesse. De tout être qui est soumis à de telles alternances, on ne peut dire qu'il soit permanent. Seul un être qui, né dès la formation de l'univers, subsiste jusqu'à la dissolution de celui-ci sans dépérir ni vieillir peut être dit permanent. Or, cet être permanent n'est pas sujet aux mutations et n'a pas de qualités déterminées ; n'ayant pas de qualités déterminées et n'étant pas localisable dans l'espace, on ne peut en parler. Le Saint, contemplant d'une part sa vacuité obscure et considérant d'autre part l'efficacité de sa démarche universelle, lui donne, à défaut de mieux, l'appellation (*tseu*) de Tao, et c'est ainsi qu'il peut néanmoins en discourir. C'est pourquoi il est écrit : *Un tao dont on peut parler n'est pas le Tao permanent.* »

On remarquera que, pour Han Fei tseu, la permanence du Tao signifie qu'il est coéternel avec l'univers (proprement le Ciel et la

Terre), mais il ne semble pas imaginer que le Principe puisse être antérieur à cet univers. Or, nous l'avons vu, pour Lao tseu, le Tao est né avant le Ciel et la Terre. Il y a là une différence significative entre le Tao des taoïstes et celui des autres écoles, même celle des Légistes qui pourtant sont influencés par la métaphysique de Lao tseu.

Les deux premières phrases opposent ainsi d'une part les tao, c'est-à-dire les doctrines, recettes, etc., que l'on peut communiquer (*tao*) à autrui, que l'on peut exprimer par la parole, au Tao permanent (*tch'ang Tao*), c'est-à-dire au Principe suprême qui n'est pas sujet aux changements du monde phénoménal ; d'autre part les noms qui servent à dénommer, c'est-à-dire ceux qui donnent prise sur les êtres (y compris les esprits et les dieux), au Nom permanent, c'est-à-dire au Nom qui représenterait adéquatement l'éternité transcendante du Tao.

Ho-chang-kong explique ce que sont « les tao dont on peut parler » : ce sont les enseignements des classiques confucianistes, les doctrines politiques et morales ; et les « noms qui servent à nommer », ce sont les titres et les dénominations qui désignent la richesse, la gloire, etc., autrement dit les valeurs sociales qui, pour les taoïstes, sont arbitraires et artificielles. Le vrai Tao, selon lui, est tout à la fois le Principe sans forme et sans nom de l'univers, et la Voie, l'art de vie qui consiste à laisser faire la nature, à ne pas intervenir dans le cours des choses, art qui a ses applications tant dans la vie personnelle (longue vie, spiritualité) que dans la politique (laisser le peuple vivre librement en paix). Quant au vrai Nom, Ho-chang-kong en donne une interprétation curieuse et qui montre combien un nom était loin d'être une simple étiquette : le nom « spontané » et permanent que le Tao a naturellement et par essence « est comme l'enfant qui ne parle pas encore, comme l'œuf non éclos, la perle brillante dans l'huître, le beau jade dans la roche : bien qu'à l'intérieur ce soit une lumière éclatante, au dehors, il apparaît sans attrait ». Il faut comprendre que celui qui vit en union avec le vrai Tao possède une lumière intérieure qu'il dissimule soigneusement de sorte qu'il a l'extérieur d'un sot ; un tao ordinaire lui procurerait une renommée (*ming* a aussi ce sens) que le vrai Tao ne lui procure pas ; mais il possède en revanche une force virtuelle (le vrai Tō) qui lui vient de son union permanente avec le Principe suprême. Les gloses de Ho-chang-kong sont une bonne illustration de la mentalité taoïste pour qui les problèmes métaphysiques et l'art de vivre sont intimement liés.



Dans les lignes 3 et 4, selon la ponctuation adoptée qui est d'ailleurs syntaxiquement la plus naturelle, deux modes du Principe sont opposés : sans-nom, avec-nom ; origine, mère ; et sont opposées aussi deux phases de la genèse de l'univers : Ciel et Terre — dix mille êtres (tous les êtres visibles, y compris l'homme).

Selon une autre ponctuation adoptée teurs non taoïstes de la dynastie deux lignes :

*3 Invisible (Wou) est le nom que je donne à l'origine du Ciel et de la Terre ;*

*4 Visible (Yeou) est le nom que je donne à la Mère des dix mille êtres.*

De même pour les lignes 5 et 6, on oppose, selon la ponctuation adoptée, les états de désir et de non-désir. Mais de qui s'agit-il ? Les exégètes n'hésitent pas : naturellement de l'âme humaine. Pourtant le mot permanent (*tch'ang*) qui reparaît ici suggère plutôt qu'il est encore question du Tao. Il faudrait donc comprendre que le Tao a deux modes d'être : à l'état de non-désir, il est en repos et indifférencié ; à l'état de désir, il donne naissance à des êtres différenciés, accessibles aux sens. Mais cette interprétation ne semble pas possible dans le Taoïsme ancien où le Tao ne peut être désirant ; aussi, pour ces deux phrases, une autre ponctuation me paraît-elle s'imposer ; comme dans les phrases 3 et 4, elle oppose le *Wou* et le *Yeou*, deux « aspects » permanents du Tao :

*5 C'est pourquoi, (dans son mode) Invisible, nous contemplerons ses mystères ;*

*6 (Dans le monde) Visible, nous contemplerons ses abords.*

L'opposition du *Wou* et du *Yeou* est fondamentale dans la métaphysique de Lao tseu, elle est impliquée même si l'on adopte la première interprétation, car *Wou*, souvent traduit « non-être », signifie proprement « ne pas avoir » ou « ne pas y avoir » et *Yeou*, généralement traduit par « être », signifie « avoir ». Dans leur emploi philosophique, ces deux termes évoquent la présence ou l'absence de qualités sensibles dans l'Être. La philosophie comparée pourrait trouver là matière à réflexion sur le problème ontologique, ou sur celui de l'être et de l'avoir. Nous noterons quant à nous que *Wou* ne saurait désigner le néant qui impliquerait d'ailleurs une conception créationniste étrangère à la pensée chinoise. C'est au contraire un mode supérieur de l'être ; c'est aussi le Vide, mais nous verrons que, pour Lao tseu, le Vide

recèle toutes les virtualités. Le Wou est-il donc identique au Tao, comme l'admettent généralement les exégètes ? Certainement non, si l'on entend par Tao le « Tao permanent » de la première phrase qui est appelée plus loin *Hiuan*, l'Obscur. Mais ce pourrait être le Tao tout court, c'est-à-dire le Tao du Ciel (de la Nature) qui serait alors un « Tao dont on peut parler ». N'est-ce pas ce que Han Fei veut dire dans son commentaire cité plus haut ? Le Saint considérant le Principe du point de vue de son efficacité universelle — sans oublier pour autant son obscure vacuité — lui donne une appellation pour pouvoir en discourir. Mais Han Fei identifie apparemment le *Wou* et le *Tao permanent* alors que Lao tseu (ch. I) les distingue.

Le Wou est donc un des modes exprimables du Tao suprême : ce dernier est une essence ineffable, mais rien n'interdit de donner conventionnellement le nom de Tao à un de ces modes et d'en parler. Toutefois ce dont on peut parler, c'est surtout de son opération, du Tō qui se manifeste dans le monde sensible. C'est ici que l'on peut faire intervenir les notions de désir et de non-désir, même si l'on adopte la deuxième traduction. L'homme vivant dans le monde des choses sensibles, celles-ci excitent ses sens, son imagination, sa volonté de puissance ; elles le poussent à agir, à dépenser ses énergies vitales, elles s'imposent si fort à lui qu'il en oublie l'autre aspect de la réalité, le monde invisible. À ceux qui vivent dans le domaine des désirs et des choses nommées, classées, le maître taoïste rappelle l'existence d'une forme d'être supérieur où il n'y a rien à désirer et rien à cataloguer. Mais sans doute faut-il admettre ici une hiérarchie ou une progression dans l'initiation spirituelle de l'adepte : celui-ci semble être invité, après avoir appris que toute efficace réside dans l'Invisible qui est Origine, à saisir la permanence du Principe, après la genèse il lui faut expérimenter une transcendance. C'est ce qui est appelé ici non le *Tao*, mais le *Tch'ang Tao* (*Tao permanent ou suprême*), ou mieux l'Obscur, le Mystérieux (*Hiuan*), ou mieux encore l'Obscur plus profond que l'obscurité même, car il n'est point de terme à l'approfondissement du mystère.

Il est donc une réalité supérieure qui transcende les modalités sensibles et insensibles de l'être : cette réalité-là est réellement ineffable, on ne peut donc en parler, elle ne peut s'enseigner. Ce n'est certes pas par hasard que cette affirmation se trouve en tête du *Tao-tō-king*. L'auteur nous prévient que les multiples doctrines et méthodes de sagesse ou de gouvernement qui courent le monde sont des tao contingents ; qu'à vrai dire notre langage ne peut

exprimer que des vérités relatives et non l'absolu pour lequel il n'existe même pas de dénomination adéquate. Lao tseu laisse donc entendre qu'il ne saurait être question, dans son livre, de cette réalité suprême, mais seulement de mystères, de révélations concernant le monde visible et le monde invisible. Toutefois, ces mystères, ces révélations sortent des profondeurs de l'inconnaissable ; celui-ci n'est pas, en effet, sans avoir une Porte mystique, il est donc accessible de quelque manière, ou plutôt c'est l'absolu qui se révèle de façons multiples et par paliers à l'intuition de l'homme. Celui-ci, selon le niveau de sagesse ou de sainteté qu'il a su atteindre, obtient une vision plus ou moins pénétrante de la réalité. Sans prétendre l'amener jusqu'au terme, le *Tao-tö-king* pourra le faire progresser dans cette voie en lui offrant des formules souvent paradoxales ou énigmatiques propres à stimuler sa méditation. Car ce livre n'est point un traité philosophique, on y chercherait en vain une démonstration quelconque, il ne donne que les conclusions et non la démarche, laissant à chacun le soin de la faire pour son compte.

Le Tao est parfois désigné comme un « être », (ainsi dans le ch. 25 cité ci-dessus), mais c'est un être mystérieux, dès que nous essayons de le saisir sensiblement, il nous échappe :

*Je scrute du regard et ne vois rien : j'appelle cela l'Indistinct (Yi).*

*J'écoute et n'entends rien : j'appelle cela le Silencieux (Hi).*

*Je tâte et ne trouve rien : j'appelle cela le Subtil (Wei).*

*Aucune de ces trois expériences n'apporte de réponse, je ne trouve qu'une Unité indifférenciée.*

*Elle n'est point lumineuse en haut, ténébreuse en bas.*

*Indiscernable, on ne saurait la nommer, car déjà elle est rentrée dans le domaine où il n'est pas d'objet sensible (14).*

N'avons-nous pas ici l'indication d'une des phases de l'expérience du mystique qui, pour rencontrer l'absolu, doit auparavant éprouver l'absence ? Il lui faut radicalement renoncer à l'usage des sens et, s'il essaie de conceptualiser le Tao, celui-ci s'évanouit, car il n'est autre que l'Unité primordiale du chaos antérieure à la formation du monde. C'est pourquoi il est riche de virtualités, de Tö :

*Le Tao est un être imperceptible, indiscernable.*

*Imperceptible, indiscernable ! il recèle dans son sein les Images.*

*Indiscernable, imperceptible ! il recèle dans son sein les Êtres.*

*Obscur, ténébreux ! il recèle dans son sein les Essences fécondes.*

*Ces essences sont parfaitement pures. Il recèle dans son sein les Essences spirituelles.*

*Depuis toujours son Nom ne l'a quitté, car de lui sont sortis les Pères (21).*

*Le nom qui n'a jamais quitté le Tao est sans doute le Nom permanent du premier chapitre ; les Pères sont vraisemblablement les ancêtres des grandes familles ; ou peut-être, de façon plus générale, les ancêtres de chaque espèce d'êtres ici-bas.*

Au chapitre 62, le Tao est *le magasin des dix mille êtres* ; au chapitre 4, il est leur ancêtre et plus ancien que les dieux supérieurs, que les Souverains (Ti) des cieux.

À vrai dire, nous avons peut-être tort de parler du Tao de Lao tseu au masculin, car nous allons voir qu'il apparaît comme une entité essentiellement féminine.

## LE THÈME DE LA MÈRE

Le Tao est fréquemment désigné comme la Mère : mère génitrice et mère nourricière des êtres. Au chapitre premier, c'est sous son mode nommé ou sensible que le Tao est *Mère des dix mille êtres*, ce que Wang Pi explique au moyen du chapitre 51 où il est dit que le Tao fait naître les êtres et que le Tö les nourrit, les fait grandir. Pour Wang Pi, cette opération du Tao (son Tö) intervient quand le Principe a forme et nom. Mais aux chapitres 25 et 52, c'est bien en tant qu'origine première que le Tao est appelé la *Mère du monde*. Au chapitre 20, Lao tseu (le saint taoïste) se compare au vulgaire, lequel jouit des biens de ce monde, alors que lui-même vit dans le dénuement, se contentant de « têter sa mère », ce qui signifie qu'il puise ses énergies vitales et spirituelles (pour les anciens Chinois, c'était tout un) auprès du Tao, et nous verrons que cette « nourriture » procure sinon l'immortalité, du moins la longue vie.

Si le Tao fait naître les êtres, cette production n'est pas toujours présentée comme une procréation directe : le premier chapitre implique que du *Tao suprême (Tch' ang Tao)* procèdent le *Wou* et le *Yeou* (Invisible et Visible), puis les dix mille êtres ; ou encore, du *Hiuan* (Tao suprême) procèdent successivement le *Wou* (le Tao « nature naturante »), le *Yeou* (Ciel et Terre) et les dix mille êtres. Dans le chapitre 42, cette genèse du monde est présentée comme suit :

*Tao donna naissance à Un ; Un donna naissance à Deux ; Deux donna naissance à Trois ; Trois donna naissance aux dix mille êtres.*

Dans ce texte où est résumée la cosmogonie depuis le Tao jusqu'aux êtres formés, les chiffres symbolisent des sous-principes et des étapes de la genèse. On sait combien les Chinois aimaient se servir des nombres pour évoquer, non pas des quantités, mais des qualités. Or ici, il est à première vue surprenant que le Tao donne naissance à l'Un, car l'Un, symbole de l'unité-totalité, ne représente-t-il pas le Tao lui-même, comme il ressort d'autres passages du *Lao-tseu* et aussi de toute la tradition taoïste ? C'est pourquoi certains interprètes n'hésitent pas à rejeter la phrase « Tao donna naissance à Un » comme interpolée et ils se réfèrent au *Houai-nan-tseu/5* qui donne le texte de Lao tseu sans ce début.

Le passage en question du *Houai-nan-tseu* peut effectivement servir de glose à notre texte, mais il ne justifie pas une correction du chapitre 42. Il y est expliqué que l'action du Tao commence par l'Unité, mais comme l'Unité ne peut donner la vie, elle s'est divisée en Yin et Yang ; grâce à l'union du Yin et du Yang, les dix mille êtres naissent. « C'est pourquoi il est dit : Un donna naissance à Deux, etc. » La suppression du début de la citation n'est peut-être qu'apparente, car elle semble implicitement contenue dans l'explication qui la précède ; or il résulte de celle-ci que l'auteur interprète « Tao donna naissance à Un » comme signifiant que l'expansion du Tao s'effectue à partir de l'état d'unité indifférenciée, les états ou étapes Deux et Trois ne sont que des modes du principe en action. Deux sont le Yin et le Yang, mais aussi le Ciel et la Terre ; Trois, l'union harmonieuse des précédents, mais aussi la mesure du rythme de cette union, car, explique le texte, trois lunaisons font une saison. Il reste que, pour l'auteur du *Houai-nan-tseu*, le texte du *Lao-tseu*, tel qu'il est, pouvait prêter à confusion, et c'est sans doute pourquoi il l'a modifié dans le chapitre 3 et aussi dans le chapitre 7. Pourtant, il me paraît certain que la version actuelle est la bonne, elle est confirmée par le passage suivant du *Tchouang-tseu*, chapitre 12 : « Au commencement absolu, il y avait l'Invisible (*Wou*) ; il n'y avait aucune chose sensible, il n'y avait aucun nom. À partir de là surgit l'Un. Il y eut une unité, mais sans forme. » Ainsi, antérieurement au Chaos (l'Un), on imagine une sorte de vide absolu que Tchouang tseu appelle le *Wou* et Lao tseu le *Tao*. Ce Tao est donc ici le *Tch'ang Tao* du premier chapitre et l'Un, ce serait déjà un « Tao qu'on peut nommer ».

Quel que soit l'intérêt de ces spéculations et subtilités théologiques sur les modes d'être du Tao, elles ne doivent pas nous faire perdre de vue l'idée centrale : le Tao est une source de vie, il y a un rapport vital entre les diverses étapes de la formation du monde, du principe émane un courant de vie qui se répand d'échelon en échelon à travers toute la « création ». C'est pourquoi le Tao est l'Ancêtre ou la Mère, sans que ces termes impliquent une idée anthropomorphique. Aussi bien le Tao est-il symbolisé par une femelle d'animal :

*La divinité du Val ne meurt pas : c'est la Femelle Obscure.*

*La porte de la Femelle Obscure, voilà l'origine du Ciel et de la Terre.*

*Indiscernable, mais toujours présente, qui en use jamais ne l'épuise (6).*

Ce texte, un des plus ésotériques du Livre, sera utilisé par le Taoïsme religieux pour justifier diverses pratiques qui n'ont probablement rien à voir avec son sens originel, mais il n'est pas exclu non plus qu'il ait été très Tôt interprété de plusieurs façons selon les différentes traditions d'écoles. Le symbolisme est cependant assez facile à déchiffrer, même si la réalité qui se dissimule derrière les images employées nous échappe.

Il se pourrait que la divinité du Val (*kou chen*) ait été quelque figure mythologique du genre de celles qui abondent dans le *Livre des Monts et des Mers (Chan-hai-king)*, cette précieuse géographie légendaire de la Chine antique. On rencontre ainsi, au chapitre 9 de ce livre, une divinité du Val du Soleil levant qui est un dieu de l'eau, sans doute de la rivière qui coule normalement au fond d'une vallée. La divinité du Val de Lao tseu est-elle aussi en rapport avec l'eau ? C'est probable, car cet élément joue un grand rôle dans la symbolique taoïste, et Lao tseu emploie plusieurs fois l'image de la vallée, tout à la fois vacuité et point de convergence des eaux, comme symbole du Tao ou du Tō, ou, ce qui revient au même, de l'attitude du Taoïste. Mais le mot *kou* désigne plus précisément une source dans la montagne, de sorte que la divinité d'un kou pourrait bien avoir été surtout l'esprit d'une source.

Quant à l'expression *Femelle Obscure (Hiuan p'in)*, elle évoque la fécondité mystérieuse du Tao tout en étant aussi en rapport avec l'idée de vallée ou de cavité dans la montagne, car « mâle » et « femelle » (d'animaux) étaient des termes qui désignaient (peut-être dans la langue des géomanciens) les éminences ou les creux d'un site.

Le texte de ce chapitre 6 est cité dans le premier chapitre du *Lie-tseu* (où il est attribué non au *Lao-tseu*, mais à un *Écrit de Houang-ti*, le Souverain Jaune) pour illustrer un développement où sont opposés le principe permanent, unique, de la vie et des transformations, et les êtres multiples qui subissent la vie et les mutations de formes : le premier n'a pas de géniteur, ne vit pas par lui-même et ne subit pas de transformations ; les seconds sont assujettis au cycle de la naissance et de la mort. Et l'auteur du *Lie-tseu* ne manque pas de rappeler que le processus de la vie et des transformations est déterminé par les alternances et les imbrications du Yin et du Yang ainsi que par le rythme des saisons : le Tao, même symbolisé par une femelle, n'est pas un être yin, lequel aurait une contrepartie yang, c'est une entité « solitaire » (*tou*), une et autonome. Aussi bien, cette femelle est-elle qualifiée de *hiuan*, obscure, mystique ; c'est l'esprit (*chen*) du Vide symbolisé par la vallée. Chen est défini dans le *Yi-king* : ce dont la nature yin ou yang est indéterminée ; en ce sens tout être qualifié de *chen* (divin, spirituel) participe de la nature indifférenciée du Tao. D'autre part, tout comme la vallée ou la source (*kou*), le mot *chen* évoquait une idée de fécondité, car il est lié étymologiquement à une racine signifiant « tirer, étirer » ; on croyait que les esprits des ancêtres aidaient le travail des femmes en couchant en tirant et sans doute aidaient-ils aussi de la même façon la végétation à sortir de terre. En outre, *chen* est encore apparenté à des mots qui désignent la foudre et le tonnerre : or ceux-ci étaient par excellence des stimulants de la fécondité universelle et des accouchements.

Le sens du chapitre 6 est en définitive moins hermétique qu'il ne paraît au premier abord : il suggère l'idée que le Tao est une puissance maternelle, une matrice d'où est issu le monde visible. De façon significative, le *Houai-nan-tseu* cite le chapitre 42 du *Lao-tseu* (« Le Tao donna naissance à Un », etc.) pour introduire une description des dix lunaisons du développement embryonnaire, suggérant que celui-ci est un processus identique à la formation du monde, quoique sur un autre rythme, un autre « nombre ». Nous sommes là en présence d'une idée fondamentale du Taoïsme : le réel, un et multiple, n'est autre chose qu'un principe vital tantôt ramassé en un point, tantôt dispensé à travers l'infinie variété des êtres chez qui il se diversifie en fonctions vitales particulières. Il est normal que, dans une telle conception de l'univers, la catégorie de sexe joue un rôle prédominant. Mais chez Lao tseu et les anciens auteurs, la notion de sexe reste

purement philosophique et symbolique, rien ne laisse supposer que, dans leur milieu mystique, les techniques sexuelles aient joué un rôle particulier comme ce sera le cas dans certaines sectes taoïstes postérieures.

## LE VIDE

Chez Lao tseu, l'idée de mère, de femelle, de matrice mystique est étroitement associée à celle de Vide. Le Vide, qui restera un des grands thèmes de la pensée taoïste, est évoqué de façon poétique et symbolique dans les chapitres 5 et 11 :

*L'espace entre Ciel et Terre, c'est comme un soufflet de forge ! Il est vide, mais ne tarit pas ; en mouvement, il ne cesse de produire (5).*

*Les trente rais d'une roue ont en commun un seul moyeu : or c'est là où il n'y a rien [dans le creux] que réside l'efficacité du char. On façonne l'argile en forme de vase : or c'est là où il n'y a rien que réside l'efficacité du vase.*

*On perce des portes et des fenêtres pour se faire une maison : or c'est là où il n'y a rien que réside l'efficacité de la maison.*

*Ainsi, nous croyons bénéficier des choses sensibles (le visible et le palpable : yeou), mais c'est là où nous n'apercevons rien (dans le vide : wou) que réside l'efficacité véritable (11).*

Ainsi le Vide n'est autre chose que le Wou, l'absence de qualités sensibles qui caractérise le Tao : ce Vide est efficace parce qu'il est, comme le soufflet, capable de produire du souffle à volonté, ce qui exprime la même idée que nous avons déjà rencontrée à propos du symbole du Val. Le vide est efficace aussi parce que, comme le moyeu, le vase ou la maison, il est un réceptacle. L'image des trente rayons qui convergent vers le vide du moyeu est souvent utilisée pour symboliser la vertu du chef qui attire à lui tous les êtres, de l'Unité souveraine qui ordonne autour d'elle la multiplicité, mais l'image peut également évoquer l'être du Taoïste qui, lorsqu'il est vide, c'est-à-dire purifié des passions et des désirs, est pleinement habité par le Tao ou, comme préfère s'exprimer Ho-chang-kong, par les esprits vitaux qui animent le corps :

« Dans le vide qui règne entre Ciel et Terre, le Souffle harmonieux (mélange équilibré de Yin et de Yang) circule librement et les dix mille êtres naissent d'eux-mêmes. Ainsi quand l'homme est capable de se départir de ses passions, de renoncer au plaisir, de rendre purs ses viscères, alors les puissances spirituelles (*chen*



*ming* : esprits et âmes provenant du Ciel et de la Terre) peuvent l'habiter paisiblement. » (Commentaire au chapitre 5.)

## LA LOI DU RETOUR

Les êtres sortent du Tao, ils sont ses enfants (ch. 52) ; mais ils doivent inéluctablement retourner dans son sein. C'est là une autre idée centrale du Tao-tö-king, exprimée en particulier dans le chapitre 16 :

*Parvenu à la vacuité parfaite, gardant le calme avec constance, des dix mille êtres qui s'agitent je puis contempler le retour.*

*Ces êtres qui foisonnent, chacun fait retour à sa racine. De retour à sa racine, il est calme ; calme, il est revenu à sa condition originelle. Revenir à sa condition originelle est la loi commune. Connaître la loi commune est être éclairé ; la méconnaissance, c'est s'agiter vainement et s'attirer le malheur.*

*Connaissance de la loi commune est compréhension. Compréhension conduit à l'impartiale universalité ; l'impartiale universalité est perfection. Qui est parfait est semblable au Ciel. Semblable au Ciel, il peut s'identifier au Tao. Identifié au Tao, il peut durer et, jusqu'à la fin de ses jours, ne craint pas les périls.*

Comme les feuilles, à l'automne, tombent à la racine de l'arbre d'où, transformées en humus, puis en sève, elles rentrent dans le cycle vital, de même les êtres vivants entraînés par le rythme cosmique surgissent dans le monde sensible, puis rentrent dans le domaine de l'invisible. Mais le Saint se place d'emblée en dehors de ce circuit, car, parfaitement vide et calme, il possède une lumière spirituelle qui le distingue des autres êtres ; dépourvu de particularisme, il regarde d'un œil égal toutes les réalités, il s'identifie au Ciel et au Tao. Il peut alors, le texte ne dit pas ici vivre éternellement, du moins vivre sans crainte.

Le retour de toute chose à son point de départ est une loi universelle parce que c'est la loi même du Tao-nature :

*Le retour est le mouvement du Tao ; dans la faiblesse est l'efficacité du Tao.*

*Tous les êtres de ce monde naissent du Visible (Yeou) ; le Visible naît de l'Invisible (Wou). (40)*

Dans un de ses modes, le Tao est donc essentiellement mouvement. C'est grâce à ce mouvement qu'il y a des êtres et de la vie ; sans lui, il n'y aurait jamais qu'une Unité indifférenciée. Celle-ci, par ce mouvement qui est transformation, peut devenir multiplicité tout en gardant son unité foncière, principe de toute

efficacité, de toute vie (ch. 39). Aussi le mouvement du Tao, c'est-à-dire son opération, est-il décrit comme une sorte de circulation qui n'est pas sans rappeler les antiques circulations rituelles que nous avons évoquées :

*Il est un être indifférencié... (v. supra.)*

*Il circule partout dans l'univers sans jamais être arrêté ; on peut le considérer comme la Mère de ce monde... S'il faut lui donner un nom ce sera l'Immense. Immense, il s'éloigne ; il atteint son apogée ; il revient... (25)*

Dans le *Yi-king*, l'hexagramme *Fou*, le *Retour* (une ligne Yang --- sous cinq lignes Yin - -) est le symbole de la renaissance du Yang : celui-ci, au solstice d'hiver, semble avoir disparu, alors que le Yin est au maximum de son expansion, mais c'est le moment où le Yang renaît, amorce son retour. Symétriquement, au solstice d'été, le Yang est à l'apogée de sa puissance, et le Yin s'apprête à revenir : l'alternance du Yin et du Yang est un aller et un retour.

Le phénomène de la vie et de la mort des êtres est conçu de la même façon, c'est aussi une alternance de Yin et de Yang, aussi naturelle et aussi inéluctable que la succession des jours et des nuits. Le Yang stimule la vitalité des êtres, mais le Yin les reconduit à l'état de repos, dans la paix de l'Invisible. Seulement ce Tao-là n'est évidemment pas le Tao suprême, c'est le Taonature, ou plutôt son action (Tō) immanente, qui est ainsi décrite.

Se conformer au rythme universel est, pour tout Chinois, le fondement de la sagesse. Mais le Taoïste mystique a plus d'ambition que la moyenne de ses compatriotes : il ne s'agit pas seulement, pour lui, de s'adapter rituellement ou hygiéniquement à l'alternance des saisons, il entend échapper au déterminisme de la vie et de la mort en le transcendant. C'est ce que lui permet le vide qu'il réalise en lui : non seulement il contemple le retour des êtres à leur origine, mais il les y précède :

*La Vertu obscure, combien elle est profonde, comme elle est lointaine ! (Celui qui la possède) fait retour avec les êtres (à l'Origine) ; et c'est alors qu'il parvient à la Grande Conformité (avec le Tao suprême). (65)*

La Vertu (le Tō) parfaite est qualifiée d'obscur (hiuan) comme le principe suprême lui-même ; celui qui la possède participe à l'efficacité vivifiante du Tao. C'est celui-là que Lao tseu qualifie de *Cheng-jen*, de Saint.

## Le Saint

Faire retour à l'origine : telle est la loi permanente, commune à tous les êtres. La connaître, c'est posséder une intelligence supérieure que Lao tseu appelle *Lumière (Ming)* ; mais le Saint ne se contente pas de connaître cette loi intellectuellement, il la réalise intimement en faisant lui-même un retour au Tao. Or ce retour a une signification spirituelle, il s'agit de s'identifier au Tao en réalisant en soi son unité, sa simplicité, sa vacuité.

### CRITIQUE DE LA CONNAISSANCE ET DE LA MORALE

La connaissance du Tao n'est pas une connaissance ordinaire. Les taoïstes condamnent la science comme dangereuse, car elle est source de dispersion, elle introduit la multiplicité dans l'être. Pour maintenir ou restaurer l'unité, pour lutter contre les attraites de la science discursive, une purification intellectuelle est nécessaire. Celle-ci commence par une discipline des organes des sens et des passions, car :

*Les cinq couleurs font que les yeux ne voient plus.*

*Les cinq notes font que les oreilles n'entendent plus.*

*Les cinq saveurs rendent la bouche percluse.*

*Les courses et la chasse affolent l'esprit de l'homme.*

*Les denrées rares entravent ses travaux (12).*

Une certaine ascèse est donc exigée du Taoïste : non qu'il lui faille renoncer à l'usage normal des sens, mais cet usage doit rester modéré. Selon la physiologie chinoise, les organes des sens sont aussi des « ouvertures » par où un fluide vital ne manque pas de s'échapper s'ils ne sont étroitement surveillés. Les passions sont cause d'une déperdition de vie qui est aussi perte d'âme : car, comme le dit Ho-chang-kong commentant le passage ci-dessus, on perd alors sa lumière spirituelle ainsi que la faculté d'entendre les voix du silence et l'on ne goûte plus « la saveur du Tao ».

Contrairement aux confucianistes qui font de l'étude un des fondements de leur morale, Lao tseu condamne le savoir et, en premier lieu, cette fausse science des valeurs qu'enseignent les moralistes et les ritualistes. Ceux-ci présentent comme absolues des valeurs qui sont aussi relatives que les notions de court et de long. Bien plus, toute affirmation de cet ordre suscite l'affirmation contraire :

*Dans ce monde, chacun affirme que ce qui est beau est beau,  
par là est instituée la laideur ;*

*et chacun affirme que ce qui est bien est bien, par là est institué le « pas bien ».*

*« Il y a » et « il n'y a pas » se produisent réciproquement ;*

*« facile » et « difficile » se suscitent l'un l'autre ;*

*« long » et « court » n'existent que comparativement ;*

*« haut » et « bas » sont solidaires ;*

*il n'y a de notes musicales que par consonance ;*

*il n'y a un « avant » que si un « après » suit.*

*C'est pourquoi le Saint se cantonne dans l'inaction (wou-wei)*

*et prodigue un enseignement sans parole (2).*

Cette attitude relativiste n'est pas un scepticisme et nous verrons que le *wou-wei* n'est pas purement négatif. Les valeurs sociales sont, aux yeux des taoïstes, des préjugés néfastes parce qu'elles voilent la réalité et qu'elles nous entraînent dans le cercle vicieux des contradictions. Il s'agit de sortir de ce cercle en le surmontant. Il suffit pour cela de se placer au point de vue du Tao au sein duquel les contradictions se réconcilient en s'annulant, car, dit Lao tseu, le Principe est le refuge commun de toute chose et de toute notion :

Le Tao est l'obscur reposoir des dix mille êtres. Il est le trésor sacré de l'homme de bien et le refuge du vilain (62).

Tous les êtres émanent du Tao et y retournent, c'est pourquoi il est leur commun reposoir ou « grenier » : le texte emploie ici un mot (*ngao*) qui désignait le coin sud-ouest de la maison, lieu obscur où l'on conservait les grains et où dormait aussi la maîtresse de maison. C'était donc un endroit particulièrement saint de la demeure des paysans, en étroite liaison avec la vie et la fécondité de la famille. Ce que le *ngao* était pour les gens du peuple, le Trésor (*pao*) l'était pour les nobles : chaque famille princière avait un trésor constitué par des objets sacrés et qui avaient une valeur protectrice, c'étaient de véritables talismans assurant le bonheur et la pérennité de la famille. Le Tao est donc tout cela : source de vie, de bonheur, de salut, même pour les méchants. Car le Tao (et le Taoïste) ne rejette personne, parce que, pour lui, il n'est point véritablement de bons et de méchants :

*Le Saint étant bon sauveur d'hommes ne rejette aucun homme ; étant bon sauveur d'êtres, il ne rejette aucun être (27).*

La Vertu est, pour le vilain, un pôle d'attraction et un refuge, elle le convertit au bien sans d'ailleurs qu'il s'en rende compte. Telle n'est

pas l'attitude des tenants des autres courants philosophiques, lesquels, sûrs de posséder la vérité, rejettent tout ce qui les contredit. C'est pourquoi les vertus que préconisent les confucianistes, par exemple, ne représentent que des dégradations du Tao.

*Quand le grand Tao est délaissé alors interviennent les vertus de Bienfaisance et de justice.*

*Quand surgissent les intellectuels alors interviennent les grands artifices.*

*Quand l'harmonie ne règne plus dans les familles apparaissent les fils pieux.*

*Quand l'État sombre dans l'anarchie apparaissent les sujets loyaux.*

*Renonçons à la sagesse, rejetons le savoir, le peuple s'en trouvera cent fois mieux.*

*Renonçons à la Bienfaisance, rejetons la Justice, le peuple retrouvera les vraies vertus familiales. 63*

*Renonçons à l'astuce, rejetons l'amour du gain, il n'y aura plus de voleurs et de brigands.*

*Il manque quelque chose à ces trois conseils, aussi proposerai-je d'ajouter ce qui suit : Soyons sans apprêts, maintenons notre simplicité native. Diminuons nos égoïsmes et nos désirs. Renonçons à la science pour vivre sans soucis (18 et 19).*

La Bienfaisance (*Jen*), la Justice (*Yi*) sont les grandes vertus confucianistes qui chez Mencius deviendront les fondements de l'éthique noble, tout au moins ceux de la noblesse conservatrice. La bienfaisance active, la justice (c'est-à-dire le respect des convenances, des droits et des devoirs), l'intelligence (des valeurs morales et rituelles), la piété filiale (y compris les devoirs du culte ancestral), la loyauté (à l'égard du prince), ce sont là des attitudes et des notions qui seraient inutiles si les hommes savaient conformer leur comportement à l'ordre naturel. En s'écartant du Tao, ils suivent une pente qui, par degrés, mène à l'anarchie morale et politique.

*L'homme de Vertu supérieure n'est pas vertueux, c'est pourquoi il a de la vertu.*

*L'homme de Vertu inférieure ne manque jamais à la vertu, c'est pourquoi il n'a pas de vertu.*

*L'homme de Vertu supérieure n'agit pas et cependant il n'y a rien qu'il n'accomplisse.*

*L'homme de Vertu inférieure veut agir, mais il lui arrive de ne pas accomplir.*

*L'homme de Bienfaisance supérieure veut agir, mais ne trouve pas d'occasion particulière d'agir.*

*L'homme de justice supérieure veut agir et trouve des raisons d'agir.*

*L'homme des Rites veut agir et, comme il ne rencontre pas d'écho, il retrouse ses manches et va chercher les gens.*

*Quand on abandonne le Tao, on a recours au Tö ; quand on abandonne le Tö on a recours à la Bienfaisance ; quand on abandonne la Bienfaisance, on a recours à la justice ; quand on abandonne la justice, on a recours aux Rites. Les Rites ne sont qu'une mince couche de loyauté et de foi et le début de l'anarchie. La prescience n'est du Tao que le brillant et de la sottise le commencement. Aussi l'homme digne de ce nom choisit le solide et non le mince, l'authentique et non le brillant (38).*

Lao tseu joue ici sur différentes valeurs du mot Tö : le Tö supérieur ne se distingue guère en réalité du Tao dont il est la vertu efficace. Aussi le Saint n'a-t-il d'autre vertu que ce Tö supérieur, il n'a pas de vertu, donc, de mérite, qui lui soit propre. L'homme de « Vertu inférieure », au contraire, comme l'explique Wang Pi, se prévaut des vertus, de ces vertus confucianistes qui, aux yeux du vulgaire, représentent le Bien. Mais nous savons que la notion du bien implique et suscite celle de « pas bien » : en « ne manquant jamais à la vertu », il s'éloigne ainsi du Tao. Or, si le Tao est la perfection absolue, l'indifférenciation primordiale, même le Tö supérieur est déjà un peu moins parfait, car il est l'amorce d'une descente dans les vertus, c'est-à-dire dans la multiplicité. La plus haute de ces vertus, le *Jen*, la Bienfaisance, qui dans sa qualité supérieure est proche du Tö supérieur, est déjà une activité, mais c'est encore une activité indéterminée, sans raison de se manifester, c'est-à-dire non dirigée sur des objets particuliers. Mais le *Jen*, explique encore Wang Pi, se dégrade à son tour quand il devient une activité consciente, limitée à des objets particuliers ; alors surgit une vertu encore inférieure, la générosité calculée, la Justice, et, plus bas encore, l'esprit rituel quand les actes ne sont dictés que par le souci de la beauté du geste, par le décorum et l'étiquette. Les rites sont en effet à l'opposé de l'idéal taoïste, ils ont été institués pour établir des distinctions, pour séparer les êtres

et les cantonner chacun à sa place respective ; ils concrétisent, dans les rapports des humains entre eux et dans leurs rapports avec le monde, ces valeurs artificiellement hiérarchisées que la doctrine officielle présente comme saintes et intangibles.

C'est pourquoi il faut répudier, en premier lieu, la fausse sagesse et les faux savoirs qui ne sont que connaissance des autres et par conséquent prétention à les dominer, alors que la vraie sainteté consiste à se connaître soi-même (33). C'est alors que le Taoïste peut

*Sans franchir sa porte connaître le monde entier !*

*Sans regarder par la fenêtre voir le Tao céleste !*

*Plus on va loin, moins on connaît.*

*C'est pourquoi le Saint connaît sans bouger,  
identifie sans voir, accomplit sans faire (47).*

On comprend dès lors que le Taoïste, répudiant pour lui-même les faux savoirs, ne soit pas favorable à leur diffusion par l'enseignement. Au chapitre 3, Lao tseu affirme que le gouvernement du Saint consiste à *vider les cœurs (les intelligences), remplir les ventres, affaiblir les volontés, consolider les os et faire en sorte que le peuple reste ignorant et sans désir*. La formule est certes un peu rude, mais s'explique par l'aversion qu'inspirait aux quiétistes la prolifération de doctrines de toutes sortes qui divisait les esprits et attisait les conflits. Le peuple, ici, ne peut guère désigner la masse paysanne, mais plutôt les nobles et les philosophes, car c'est chez eux et non chez les plébéiens que proliféraient les idées et les ambitions. *Remplir les ventres... consolider les os* ne doit pas s'entendre comme un programme d'économie sociale, mais comme une allusion aux pratiques de longue vie. L'expression *remplir les ventres* n'est en chinois nullement péjoratif. Il appartenait à l'aristocratie d'être richement nourrie, et l'embonpoint a toujours été considéré en Chine avec respect. Quant aux os, c'était en eux que résidaient, selon d'antiques croyances, les principes de vie les plus subtils et les plus précieux. Aussi Ho-chang-kong rappelle-t-il que la chasteté permet d'avoir abondance de moelle dans des os solides.

Le chapitre 3 ne fait ainsi que proclamer la nécessité de renoncer aux attraits dangereux d'une société trop policée pour retrouver la saine simplicité originelle : au cœur, siège centrifuge de l'intelligence, de la volonté, des désirs, on oppose le ventre, réceptacle centripète des organes de la nutrition et des principes vitaux.

## LE WOU-WEI

Nous avons déjà plusieurs fois rencontré l'expression *wou-wei* : « sans faire », « absence d'action ». Pas plus que *wou* n'est le néant, *wou-wei* ne désigne un idéal de non-action absolue, c'est au contraire une attitude particulièrement efficace, puisqu'elle permet toutes les réalisations.

*Qui s'applique à l'étude accroît chaque jour (ses efforts, ses ambitions).*

*Qui s'applique au Tao diminue chaque jour (son activité, ses désirs).*

*De diminution en diminution, il arrive à ne plus agir ;  
n'agissant plus, il n'est rien qu'il ne fasse (48).*

En se cantonnant dans le *wou-wei*, le Taoïste ne fait qu'imiter le Tao dont l'efficacité est universelle justement parce qu'il est « inactif ».

*Le Tao reste toujours sans action et il n'est rien qu'il ne fasse (37).*

Il n'est rien que le Tao ne réalise, parce qu'il n'est autre chose que l'universelle spontanéité. Tout, dans la nature, s'accomplit sans intervention particulière telle que pourrait l'être celle d'une divinité ou d'une providence. De même le Saint se garde d'intervenir dans le cours des choses, il laisse à chaque être la possibilité de se développer conformément à sa nature propre et c'est ainsi qu'il obtient les meilleurs résultats. Il est important que le Prince se conduise en Taoïste et c'est bien à lui que Lao tseu pense : la majorité des aphorismes du *Tao-tö-king* sont des recettes de gouvernement. Le chapitre 37, après la phrase ci-dessus, continue en affirmant :

*Si les seigneurs et les rois étaient capables de s'en tenir, en imitation du Tao, à cette attitude de non-intervention, les dix mille êtres ne tarderaient pas à suivre d'eux-mêmes son exemple ; si alors des passions se manifestaient, je les dompterais au moyen de la Simplicité du sans-nom, et alors ils seraient sans passion. Étant sans passion, ils seraient calmes et la paix serait naturellement assurée (37).*

Aussi le prince devrait-il se faire oublier :

*Le meilleur (des princes) est celui dont on ignore l'existence ;  
moins bon est celui qu'on aime et loue ;  
moins bon encore celui qui se fait craindre  
et encore moins celui qui attire le mépris.*



*Qui prétend être au-dessus du peuple doit se soumettre à lui en parole ;*

*qui prétend le guider doit le suivre.*

*C'est ainsi que le Saint domine sans que le peuple fléchisse sous son poids, il guide sans que le peuple en éprouve des dommages*  
7).

Il n'est de réussite véritable que par le *wou-wei* : toute intervention délibérée dans le cours des choses ne manque pas, à plus ou moins longue échéance, de périlcliter. *Qui aspire au pouvoir et pense l'obtenir par l'action, je prévois son échec* (29). Et Lao tseu met en garde les ambitieux : l'empire qu'ils veulent conquérir est comparable à un vase précieux qu'on ne manipule pas sans risquer de le briser, et *gouverner un grand pays, c'est comme cuire une platée de petits poissons* qu'il faut se garder de trop remuer (60). Il ne manque pas d'observer que c'est la loi qui fait le brigand (57).

En évitant d'intervenir activement, le Saint ne fait que se conformer à la loi naturelle, au *Tao céleste qui triomphe sans lutter* (73). Car Lao tseu veut persuader le prince que le *wou-wei* et la non-violence sont les moyens les plus efficaces pour obtenir le pouvoir et pour le conserver. Toute action suscitant une réaction, la contrepartie normale d'une entreprise en apparence bienfaisante sera nuisance. Seule l'action naturelle du Tao céleste n'entraîne pas une telle conséquence :

*Le Tao du Ciel enlève à ce qui a trop et ajoute à ce qui manque. Il n'en est pas de même du Tao de l'homme ordinaire : celui-ci enlève à ce qui manque pour l'offrir à ce qui a déjà trop. Qui est capable d'offrir au monde ce qu'il a en trop ? Seul le peut qui possède le Tao* (77).

On voit que le *wou-wei* n'est pas pure passivité : d'ailleurs le texte ci-dessus, qui exprime un idéal de justice sociale assez exceptionnel dans l'antiquité chinoise, ajoute :

*C'est pourquoi le Saint, s'il agit, n'attend aucune récompense de son action ; une fois l'œuvre accomplie, il ne jouit pas de son mérite ; il ne fait pas montre de ses talents.*

Rien n'est d'ailleurs plus dangereux que la vanité, au point que le meilleur moyen de causer la perte de quelqu'un serait d'exalter son orgueil (36).

Les militaires doivent eux aussi faire leur profit de ces principes :

*Le bon chef de guerre n'est pas belliqueux ; le bon combattant n'est pas impétueux.*

*Celui qui l'emporte le mieux sur l'ennemi est celui qui ne prend jamais l'offensive.*

*Celui qui obtient le meilleur rendement des hommes est celui qui les traite avec humilité.*

*C'est ce que j'appelle la vertu de non-violence, c'est la force de celui qui sait utiliser les hommes.*

*C'est ce que j'appelle s'égaliser au Ciel. S'égaliser au Ciel était le plus haut idéal des anciens (68).*

Assez curieusement, l'usage des armes, s'il est condamné, ne l'est que de façon relative : le Sage ne s'en sert qu'à son corps défendant, mais il s'en sert, ce qui n'est pas très conforme à l'idée que l'on peut se faire d'un quiétiste. Mais il ne faut pas oublier le caractère composite du *Tao-tô-king*, ni que, destiné au prince, il ne saurait pousser jusqu'au bout l'idéal du *wou-wei*. Du moins le chef de guerre doit-il être modéré.

*Celui qui est à la tête des hommes en s'appuyant sur le Tao se garde de faire violence au monde par l'usage des armes, ce genre d'entreprise a toujours ses contrecoups.*

*Là où ont passé les armées, il ne pousse plus qu'épines et chardons. Le bon chef de guerre s'arrête dès qu'il a atteint son but, la victoire. Il n'en profite pas pour imposer sa force. S'il est victorieux, il n'est ni orgueilleux, ni vaniteux, ni vantard ; il obtient la victoire parce qu'il ne peut faire autrement, c'est pourquoi il le fait sans faire montre de sa force (30).*

*Les armes sont des outils néfastes, ce ne sont pas des outils du sage ; il ne s'en sert que s'il ne peut faire autrement (31).*

Si la guerre est parfois une triste nécessité, le chef utilisera du moins le *wou-wei* comme une technique qui lui donnera une victoire dont il ne se targuera pas. Il en sera de même en politique générale où l'on appliquera la règle qu'il faut intervenir le moins possible ; mais une certaine intervention est sans doute nécessaire, ne serait-ce que pour empêcher celle des actifs, des intelligents qui suscitent les querelles, des marchands dont les intérêts exigent que soient recherchées les « denrées difficiles à obtenir ».

*C'est en n'exaltant pas les hommes de talent que l'on évite les rivalités dans le peuple, en ne prisant pas les biens rares qu'on évite les vols ; en ne montrant pas ce qui excite les désirs, on évite que les esprits ne soient troublés. C'est pourquoi, lorsque le Saint*

*gouverne, il vide les cœurs et remplit les ventres, il affaiblit les volontés et fortifie les os, faisant toujours en sorte que le peuple soit sans savoir et sans désir. Et il veille à ce que ceux qui savent n'osent intervenir. Il pratique le non-agir et toutes choses sont bien ordonnées (3).*

Les cas où il faut intervenir sont ainsi des exceptions qui confirment la règle générale : le Saint refuse toujours la lutte, de sorte que personne ne peut entrer en conflit avec lui (22, 66).

Le *wou-wei* est une attitude, difficile à observer, certes, mais qui confère à celui qui l'adopte avec constance une force véritable, car, dit Lao tseu qui utilise volontiers le paradoxe, *le souple et le faible l'emportent sur le dur et le fort, parce que la faiblesse, la non-résistance, est l'efficacité du Tao (36, 40).*

Divers symboles servent à illustrer cette idée : l'eau, la vallée, l'enfançon :

*La plus grande perfection est semblable à l'eau laquelle est la meilleure bienfaitrice des dix mille êtres, mais ne lutte jamais, car elle se cantonne dans les lieux bas détestés des hommes ; et c'est pourquoi elle est si proche du Tao ; c'est parce qu'elle ne lutte jamais qu'elle ne se trompe pas (8).*

*Rien ici-bas n'est plus souple, moins résistant que l'eau, pourtant il n'est rien qui vienne mieux à bout du dur et du fort (78).*

D'autres fois, ce sont les bas-fonds eux-mêmes qui sont l'image du Tao parce que c'est là que convergent les eaux :

*Si les fleuves et les mers peuvent être les rois des vallées, c'est qu'ils savent si bien se placer plus bas qu'elles (66).*

On expliquait en effet le mot roi (*wang*) par un mot homophone qui signifie « aller vers » le roi, c'est celui vers qui l'on va, sa vertu Tö est attirante, il est essentiellement un rassembleur d'hommes et de choses. Le Saint taoïste possède cette vertu royale, il attire les êtres à lui et il n'en rejette aucun : C'est ce que j'appelle sa Lumière voilée, dit Lao tseu (27). Car ce Tö, cette influence qu'il exerce autour de lui, nous avons vu qu'elle doit rester cachée et à vrai dire inconsciente. Elle sauve les hommes et les êtres en les influençant de telle sorte qu'ils retrouvent leur nature originelle, c'est pourquoi :

*Les hommes parfaits sont les maîtres des hommes imparfaits ; les hommes imparfaits sont le capital des hommes parfaits (27).*

Comme on ne devient pas taoïste par l'étude, le maître, ici, n'agit que par son Tö et par son exemple. C'est avec le Tö qu'il répondra

à l'inimitié (63), contrairement à ce que voulait Confucius qui (interprétant Tō dans le sens de bienfaisance) jugeait peu équitable de répondre indifféremment par des bienfaits à ceux qui vous font du bien et à ceux qui vous font du mal « Répondez au mal avec justice, et au bien par le bien. » Mais le propos de Lao tseu n'est qu'une application de son principe de *wou-wei* et de non-résistance.

### PRIMAUTÉ DU FÉMININ

Si donc le Saint exerce une attirance sur les êtres, c'est qu'il est semblable à une vallée, humble et vide : c'est là la féminine passivité qu'il doit préserver au sein de son être viril :

*Connais la masculinité, mais préfère la féminité : tu seras le ravin du monde.*

*Sois le ravin du monde et le Tō suprême ne te manquera pas, et tu pourras retourner à l'état d'enfance.*

*Connais la blancheur, mais préfère le noir : tu seras le modèle du monde.*

*Sois le modèle du monde, le suprême ne te fera pas défaut et tu pourras retourner à l'absolu de l'Invisible.*

*Connais la gloire, préfère l'opprobre : tu seras la vallée du monde.*

*Sois la vallée du monde, et du Tō suprême tu auras ton content et tu pourras retourner à la simplicité du bois brut.*

*Le bois brut une fois découpé forme des ustensiles : si le Saint s'en servait de cette façon, il serait bon pour être chef des fonctionnaires. C'est pourquoi le grand artisan ne découpe pas (28).*

Préserver en soi la simplicité et l'unité du Tao ; comme lui, ressembler à une vallée ; se savoir comme lui mâle et femelle, yang et yin, c'est-à-dire être universel, mais choisir dans cette double virtualité la féminine, car en dépit des apparences, elle est la plus efficace : ces conseils devaient surprendre comme des paradoxes outrepassés. En exaltant la féminité, Lao tseu prenait en effet le contrepied des idées reçues. Dans la hiérarchie des valeurs féodales, les masculines étaient les plus honorables, alors que les féminines étaient tenues pour inférieures. Il n'en avait sans doute pas toujours été ainsi, les mythes et les coutumes paysannes montrent qu'il fut un temps où le groupe féminin jouait un rôle au moins égal à celui des hommes, égalité dont il est resté quelque chose dans la religion classique : le culte des Ancêtres exigeait la collaboration de l'épouse du chef du culte. Bien plus, les notions

de couple et de hiérogamie occupaient une place très importante dans les idées religieuses des anciens Chinois. Toute puissance sacrée était double, mâle et femelle, mais comme généralement le sanctuaire ne renfermait que la moitié du couple, le culte visait à le reconstituer dans son intégrité. Or il valait parfois mieux détenir la partie féminine du couple hiérogamique, car la femelle attire le mâle.

On retrouve le même schéma à la base de certains cultes de type chamanistique où l'on voyait des prêtresses provoquer par des danses rituelles la descente d'une divinité mâle qui venait les posséder. Il ne paraît pas douteux qu'en préconisant la féminité Lao tseu n'ait été plus ou moins consciemment influencé par ces vieilles représentations. Il les a certes conceptualisées, mais il reste l'idée essentielle : l'être complet est mâle et femelle ; comme la plupart des hommes négligent ou répriment leur nature féminine, il y a déséquilibre ; l'agressivité mâle dominant, toute la vitalité en pâtit. La Sainteté véritable exige une revalorisation de la féminité.

On voit dès lors pourquoi le *wou-wei* du Saint est une méthode supérieure de gouvernement : il consiste à laisser les hommes et tous les êtres et toutes choses s'ordonner spontanément selon l'harmonie naturelle, à ne pas perturber l'ordre du Tao en intervenant artificiellement. Mais le rôle du Saint, s'il est passif, n'est pas négatif. Il est ici-bas un pôle, un centre tout à la fois de rayonnement et de convergence : dans la mesure où il a su s'identifier au Tao, et dans la mesure où celui-ci est féminité, puissance maternelle, il est comme lui vie et source de vie. D'où l'importance chez Lao tseu, et dans tout le Taoïsme, de la notion de « principe vital », lequel doit être soigneusement entretenu, nourri, concentré : car c'est finalement lui qui est le Tao présent dans le Saint et qui procure à celui-ci son efficacité, son Tö.

### LA LONGUE VIE

La quête de la longue vie, voire de l'immortalité physique, caractérise le Taoïsme religieux depuis l'époque des Han. Diverses techniques seront employées visant à nourrir les énergies de vie et à expulser les principes de mort. Ces techniques, ou tout au moins certaines d'entre elles, étaient-elles déjà connues et employées plus anciennement dans les milieux prototaoïstes ? La réponse n'est pas douteuse, car les philosophes font nettement allusion à des pratiques de longue vie et, pour eux, sainteté et longévité étaient étroitement liées.

Il est certain que, pour l'auteur du Tao-tö-king, la sainteté n'est pas séparable d'une puissante vitalité, mais bien entendu, celle-ci

doit rester virtuelle, concentrée : toute activité excessive serait occasion de perte d'énergie : *Le Saint rejette ce qui est excessif, ce qui est enflé, ce qui est extrême (29)*. Il évite la réplétion et, grâce à sa vacuité, il est assuré, à mesure que ses forces s'usent, de les voir se renouveler (15).

Tels le Ciel et la Terre, il n'a d'autre vie que celle du Tao, laquelle est inépuisable, nous l'avons vu.

*Si le Ciel et la Terre sont perdurables, c'est qu'ils n'ont pas de vie propre et c'est ainsi qu'ils peuvent vivre longtemps. C'est pourquoi le Saint, en se plaçant en arrière, se trouve au premier rang ; en expulsant son moi, il demeure présent. N'est-ce pas parce qu'il est désintéressé ? Et c'est pourquoi il peut réaliser ce qui l'intéresse (7).*

Il est plus sage de ne pas avoir d'activité vitale (c'est-à-dire de ne pas dépenser ses énergies) que d'attacher un grand prix à la vie et d'agir pour essayer de l'augmenter ou de la préserver (75).

Comme dans les sectes taoïstes des âges postérieurs où l'on croira à la possibilité de devenir invulnérable grâce à des procédés magiques, Lao tseu affirme qu'il n'y a pas chez le Saint de place *pour la mort* :

*Celui qui est pourvu d'une plénitude de Tö est comparable au nouveau-né : les insectes venimeux ne le piquent pas, les fauves ne le saisissent pas de leurs griffes, les rapaces ne l'emportent pas dans leurs serres ; ses os sont faibles, ses tendons sont souples, mais ses mains tiennent ferme ; il ne sait rien de l'union des sexes, mais sa petite verge se dresse : quelle concentration parfaite d'énergie spermatique ! Il peut crier toute la journée sans s'enrouer : quelle perfection dans l'eurythmie ! Qui connaît l'eurythmie est permanent ; qui sait être permanent est illuminé (ming). Tout excès de vie est néfaste ; quand la volonté veut contrôler le souffle, elle le fige (55).*

*Nous sortons (de l'invisible) pour naître et nous y rentrons pour mourir. Or d'entre nous, un sur dix est compagnon de vie, un sur dix compagnons de mort. Et les hommes qui, bien que pourvus de vie, se précipitent vers la mort, ils sont aussi un sur dix. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'ils vivent trop intensément. Or il m'est venu aux oreilles que ceux qui savent entretenir leur principe de vie, en voyage ne craignent pas les rhinocéros et les tigres, dans l'armée ils ne portent ni cuirasse ni arme quelconque : le rhinocéros ne trouverait chez lui nul endroit où enfoncer sa corne, le tigre ne trouverait où l'atteindre de sa griffe, le guerrier ne trouverait où le*

*frapper de sa lame. Pourquoi ? Parce qu'il n'y a en lui pas de place pour la mort (50).*

Les « compagnons de vie », ce sont ceux qui ont la souplesse et la non-résistance du nouveau-né, alors que les compagnons de mort » sont ceux qui, tout ankylosés, sont déjà raides comme des cadavres (76). N'est-ce pas là d'ailleurs une loi générale qui vaut pour les végétaux ? Trop de rigidité ou de confiance dans sa force est toujours présage de perte ; les violents ne meurent pas de mort naturelle (42).

Ainsi, la souplesse, la non-résistance que Lao-tseu préconise en politique, trouve leur application chez l'individu. Celui-ci, pour vivre longtemps, doit vivre sagement, c'est-à-dire selon l'idéal de wou-wei qui lui permettra d'une part de ne pas se dépenser, d'autre part d'entretenir en lui la tendre élasticité qu'il possédait à sa naissance. Malheureusement Lao tseu ne donne que peu d'indications sur les méthodes positives de longues vies ; il fait du moins allusion à l'une des plus importantes, à savoir le contrôle de la respiration. Cette méthode (qu'évoquait également Tchouang tseu) a toujours été une des techniques de longue vie les plus pratiquées, elle comprenait de nombreux exercices plus ou moins compliqués. Voici donc le chapitre 10 qui fait allusion à une technique du souffle.

*Que ton âme corporelle et ton âme spirituelle embrassent l'Unité, et tu pourras éviter leur séparation !*

*Concentre ton souffle et l'assouplis, et tu seras comme l'enfant ! Polis ton miroir spirituel et tu le rendras sans défaut ! Ménage le peuple en le gouvernant et tu pourras ne pas intervenir ! Ouvre et ferme (à temps voulu) tes portes célestes (les yeux, les oreilles et autres ouvertures), tu préserveras ta féminité ! Que ton esprit lumineux pénètre toutes les régions de l'espace et tu pourras renoncer au savoir ! (10)*

Les Chinois croyaient à deux âmes, ou plutôt à deux groupes d'âmes ou d'esprits vitaux, les uns Yang (*Houen*), les autres Yin (*P'o*), les premiers commandant le souffle et les fonctions supérieures, les seconds attachés au sang, aux os, et d'une façon générale à la vie organique. Pour qu'il y eût vie et santé, il fallait que ces deux sortes d'âmes fussent unies de façon harmonieuse ; si elles se séparaient, il en résultait la maladie et la mort. « Embrasser l'unité », c'est obtenir cette intégrité de la personne, mais l'expression doit aussi s'entendre dans un sens mystique, c'est aussi embrasser le Tao qui est un et principe d'unité. C'est

pourquoi la quête de la longue vie ne se distingue pas de la quête du Tao, l'hygiène physique et morale est une méthode de sainteté. Dans le texte ci-dessus, nous ne savons au juste en quoi consistait *la concentration du souffle*. Il s'agissait sans doute de quelque méthode respiratoire visant à retenir les énergies contenues dans l'air de la respiration (*K'i*) et à rendre celle-ci parfaitement aisée et silencieuse, mais cela sans intervention de la volonté qui risque, au contraire, de figer le souffle<sup>4</sup> (55). Quant au miroir spirituel, c'est une métaphore souvent utilisée dans la littérature taoïste pour illustrer l'esprit du Saint qui, à l'état de quiétude, reflète fidèlement toute chose, idée qui est exprimée aussi dans la dernière phrase : ce miroir, cet esprit parfaitement lumineux, éclaire, tout en le reflétant, le monde entier. La Sainteté ne peut être qu'une illumination tout intérieure.

### MYSTICISME

Dans la mesure où elle rejette la connaissance discursive au profit de l'intuition, où elle affirme la possibilité d'atteindre une réalité supérieure par le quiétisme, la pensée du Tao-tô-king est bien un mysticisme. Et comme tous les mystiques, Lao tseu n'essaie pas de démontrer rationnellement sa doctrine ; ses propos sont délibérément obscurs, ambigus, et peuvent souvent s'interpréter à plusieurs niveaux. C'est ainsi que la mise en garde contre l'usage des sens et contre les sports affolants (12) peut s'entendre comme une simple recommandation morale ; mais elle signifie aussi qu'une ascèse est nécessaire pour vivre longtemps ; elle peut enfin désigner une des étapes qui conduisent à l'extase. Celle-ci doit être préparée, en effet, par une purification de l'âme qu'il faut vider de tout ce qui n'est pas le Tao. La même idée complexe semble être exprimée aussi par le chapitre 10 cité ci-dessus et par le chapitre 52 qui commande de *boucher les ouvertures, fermer les portes et après s'être servi de sa brillance extérieure, de revenir à sa lumière intérieure*. Lao tseu emploie à plusieurs reprises le mot *Ming* (Lumière) pour désigner l'intelligence des mystères qui caractérise le Saint, mais ces mystères sont, pour employer l'expression remarquable d'une mystique occidentale, des « obscurités lumineuses qui surpassent toutes nos vues et nos intelligences ».

Lao tseu est donc un mystique, mais jusqu'à quel point ? Car il y a de nombreux degrés dans cette voie, depuis la simple méditation jusqu'à la transe extatique. Or il n'est pas aisé de se faire une opinion sûre à ce sujet et il faut avouer que la mystique taoïste

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<sup>4</sup>Sans méthode, la plongée mystique.



serait bien mal connue si nous n'avions d'autre source que le Lao-tseu, si nous n'avions en particulier le Tchouang-tseu dont nous donnerons dans un prochain chapitre quelques textes significatifs. Grâce à ce dernier livre, nous savons que les extatiques n'étaient pas rares dans les milieux taoïstes de l'ère des philosophes. Il met en scène plusieurs personnages en état de transe et l'un d'eux n'est autre que Lao Tan lui-même :

Confucius, un jour qu'il allait visiter le Saint taoïste, le trouva « complètement inerte et n'ayant plus l'apparence d'un être vivant ». Confucius dut attendre un certain temps avant de pouvoir adresser la parole à son hôte : « Mes yeux m'ont-ils trompé, dit-il, ou était-ce réel ? À l'instant, Maître, votre corps ressemblait à un morceau de bois sec, vous paraissiez avoir quitté le monde et les hommes et vous être installé dans une solitude inaccessible. » — *Oui*, répondit Lao Tan, *je suis allé m'ébattre à l'Origine de toutes choses.* (*Tchouang-tseu*, 21.)

Cette anecdote, qui n'a certes rien d'historique, montre que, pour l'auteur de ce passage, Lao Tan connut des expériences extatiques et nous admettons sans difficulté que de semblables expériences peuvent être à l'origine de certains propos du *Tao-tö-king*. Bien que ce livre n'apporte aucune indication sur les phénomènes physiques (catalepsie, etc.) qui accompagnent souvent, mais non toujours, l'extase, il contient cependant de nombreuses allusions et des expressions qui impliquent une certaine expérience des états extatiques : connaissance intuitive et globale des choses indépendamment de l'usage des sens, quiétisme, obscurité du Tao, Unité qu'il s'agit d'embrasser, ce qui pourrait être une allusion à l'union... Tout au moins, nous admettons que l'auteur appartenait à un milieu spirituel dont certains membres avaient pu relater leurs expériences mystiques.

Dans le passage que nous venons de citer, la réponse de Lao Tan qui déclare s'être rendu à l'Origine des choses est remarquable, car elle résume l'essentiel du mysticisme taoïste. On voit qu'il s'agit d'un voyage de l'âme, mais ce voyage s'effectue plutôt dans le temps que dans l'espace<sup>5</sup>. Le mystique fait retour au commencement de toutes choses, à la Mère, à ce principe qui existait avant les dieux, à la source invisible de la vie. En réalité, il ne voyage évidemment pas dans le temps, il l'abolit en s'identifiant à un éternel présent. Et c'est ainsi que, n'étant pas dans le temps, il peut espérer échapper à la mort.

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<sup>5</sup>Ou bien « hors du temps et de l'espace », plongée mystique.

Mais Lao tseu ne croit pas à une immortalité physique : l'union avec le Tao permet seulement de durer, de ne pas mourir prématurément (cf. ch. 16, cité p. 55). Il ne croit pas davantage à la survie d'une âme personnelle. Il est vrai que le *Tao-tô-king* n'est pas très explicite sur ce point, mais le fait même qu'il n'avance pas d'autre opinion indique qu'il partage celle des autres taoïstes : les êtres visibles ne sont que les innombrables formes transitoires que prend la Vie issue du Chaos primordial. Ces monades de vie apparaissent en ce monde comme plante, animal ou être humain, disparaissent dans l'informe pour réapparaître sous une autre apparence. Il y a donc quelque chose qui survit à la mort, mais c'est quelque chose d'aussi impersonnel que possible. C'est encore à Tchouang tseu que nous aurons recours pour mieux connaître la doctrine de l'école sur cette question ; nous verrons que, pour lui, la vie et la mort sont deux aspects d'un même phénomène. Lao tseu les décrit comme une sortie et une rentrée, loi commune à tous les êtres. Mais il semble que le Saint puisse, mystiquement, se placer en dehors de ce procès en réalisant dans son esprit le vide parfait qui l'identifie à la vacuité, à l'ultime simplicité du Tao. Autrement dit, en surmontant la multiplicité de notre nature et en embrassant l'Unité. À ce moment, la question de la vie et de la mort, celle de la destinée outre-tombe ne se pose plus. Les principes vitaux et spirituels du Saint, rassemblés en une unité indivisible, échappent à toute vicissitude et à toute détermination, ils n'appartiennent plus à ce monde. Nous dirions que le Saint s'est constitué une âme immortelle, mais les taoïstes ne s'expriment pas de cette façon : pour eux, ce principe immortel qui habite le cœur du Saint n'est autre que le Tao. Il n'y a donc d'autre immortalité que celle du Tao lui-même.

Mais, encore une fois, Lao tseu n'est pas explicite sur les expériences de la vie mystique. Sa doctrine concerne plus l'art de s'accommoder de notre existence en ce monde que les fins dernières. C'est pourquoi, préconisant un ascétisme modéré, il indique, ou plutôt suggère, les avantages que procure, à des niveaux variés, l'attitude quiétiste. Au prince, il montre que le laisser-faire est la meilleure méthode de gouvernement ; mais le souverain doit en outre posséder la Vertu des Saints. Car le Tö est une force qui n'est jamais en défaut (28) et qui est toute-puissante (59). Le prince qui la posséderait, qui serait réellement un Saint taoïste, aurait un pouvoir occulte dont ses sujets n'auraient même pas conscience. S'il pouvait, à l'image du Tao, garder quiétude et simplicité, il verrait non seulement les peuples, mais tous les êtres se régler spontanément sur l'harmonie naturelle ; par sa parfaite

absence de désir et sa tranquille vacuité, le Saint, s'il régnait, instaurerait la paix dans le monde. On voit comment recherche de la longue vie, mysticisme et politique forment un ensemble de disciplines solidaires, car tout se tient dans une vue moniste de l'univers.

### INSIPIDITÉ DU TAO

Le mysticisme de Lao tseu ne fait point appel aux émotions violentes, c'est un mysticisme calme et réfléchi. Rien, dans le *Tao-tô-king*, ne permet de supposer le recours à des danses extatiques ou à quelque autre moyen propre à favoriser la transe ; aucun emprunt non plus, pour décrire les expériences vécues, au langage amoureux. L'extase ne semble être obtenue que par une longue méditation cathartique. Aussi Lao tseu a-t-il conscience du peu d'attrait que sa doctrine offre au premier abord.

*Musique et bonne chère font s'arrêter le passant.*

*Mais ce que la bouche profère sur le Tao*

*Comme cela est fade, comme cela manque de saveur !*

*Car si vous le regardez, vous ne pouvez rien voir ; si vous l'écoutez, vous ne trouvez rien à entendre ; si vous en usez, vous ne sauriez l'épuiser (35).*

*Quand l'homme supérieur a entendu parler du Tao, il s'empresse de le suivre.*

*Quand l'homme moyen a entendu parler du Tao, tantôt il y pense, tantôt il l'oublie.*

*Quand l'homme inférieur entend parler du Tao, il éclate de rire : s'il n'en riait pas, ce ne serait pas vraiment le Tao.*

*C'est pourquoi l'adage dit bien :*

*Le Tao lumineux semble obscur ;*

*Le Tao qui progresse semble reculer ;*

*Le Tao uni semble raboteux.*

*Le Tō supérieur semble creux comme une vallée.*

*La blancheur la plus pure semble souillée.*

*Le Tō le plus large semble indigent ;*

*Le Tō le plus ferme semble fragile ;*

*La vérité la plus solide semble vide.*

*Le plus grand carré n'a pas d'angle,*

*Le plus grand vase est le dernier achevé,*

*La plus grande musique ne s'entend point,*

*La plus grande image ne se voit point.*

*Le Tao est caché et sans nom.*

*Seul le Tao sait bien commencer et sait bien achever (41).*

*Mes propos sont très faciles à comprendre et faciles à pratiquer, mais personne dans le monde n'est capable de les comprendre, de les pratiquer... c'est pourquoi le Saint se vêt de bure et cache un jade dans son sein (70).*

Si le Tao est insipide, le Taoïste qui l'incarne en quelque sorte ne l'est pas moins, car la lumière qu'il porte en lui reste cachée ; si elle est authentique, elle ne doit pas être perçue extérieurement par le vulgaire. Non seulement la sainteté du vrai Taoïste ne doit pas être reconnue, mais sa parfaite simplicité lui donne l'apparence d'un sot :

*Alors que la foule est en fête, soit qu'elle assiste à un grand sacrifice, soit qu'au printemps elle monte s'amuser sur les terrasses, je reste seul, dans une immobilité impassible, tel l'enfant qui ne sait pas encore sourire.*

*Je suis comme un misérable sans refuge. Alors que les autres ont plus qu'il ne faut, seul je semble avoir tout perdu.*

*Comme j'ai l'air stupide ! Combien inculte !*

*Comme les gens sont brillants ! Seul je suis obscur.*

*Comme ils sont sûrs d'eux ! Seul je suis hésitant.*

*Tous ont quelque talent, et seul je suis aussi ignorant qu'un rustre.*

*Différent des autres, seul je préfère têter ma mère (20).*

## Tchouang tseu

Les œuvres de la plupart des anciens philosophes quiétistes ne nous sont pas parvenues : outre le *Lao-tseu*, il ne nous reste guère que le *Tchouang-tseu*. On peut cependant ajouter le *Lie-tseu*, bien que l'authenticité de ce livre soit contestée, car s'il est vrai que, dans son état présent, il se révèle être une compilation du III<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère (alors que son auteur supposé, Lie Yu-k'eu, aurait vécu au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle ou au V<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C.), il n'en contient pas moins des éléments fort anciens et conserve, à ce titre, un intérêt non négligeable. Quelques ouvrages nous ont conservé des fragments plus ou moins longs provenant d'œuvres perdues, mais ce sont là des sources secondaires par rapport aux trois ouvrages dont les auteurs supposés furent baptisés jadis les Pères du

ystème taoïste. Or si le *Tao-Tö-king* est de beaucoup le plus célèbre, le *Tchouang-tseu* est sans conteste le plus important ; c'est surtout lui qui nous rend accessibles la pensée et la position existentielle des taoïstes anciens.

[J'omets la suite]

# Le Livre de la Voie et de la Vertu (Tao Te King) traduit intégralement par Claude Larre

LAO TSEU Tao Te King Le livre de la Voie et de la Vertu  
Texte traduit et présenté par Claude Larre « Les Carnets DDB »  
DESCLÉE DE BROUWER, 1994.

1

La voie qu'on peut énoncer  
N'est déjà plus la Voie  
Et les noms qu'on peut nommer  
Ne sont déjà plus le Nom

Sans Nom  
Commence le Ciel Terre  
Les noms  
Donnent leur Mère aux Dix mille êtres

Ainsi le toujours sans attrait  
Invite à contempler le mystère  
Et le toujours plein d'attraits  
À considérer ses aspects manifestes

Ces deux-là nés ensemble  
Sous des noms différents  
Sont en fait ensemble l'Origine  
Et d'origines en Origine  
La porte du mystère merveilleux

2

Sous le Ciel  
Chacun prétend savoir comment le Beau est beau  
Et voici venir le Laid  
Sous le Ciel  
Chacun prétend savoir comment le Bon est bon

Et voici venir le Mauvais

Mais en réalité

Ayant et n'ayant pas naissent l'un de l'autre  
Compact et subtil se forment l'un de l'autre  
Long et court se disent l'un par rapport à l'autre  
Haut et bas se tournent l'un vers l'autre  
Notes et sons s'accordent les uns avec les autres  
Avant et après se suivent l'un l'autre

Aussi les Saints œuvraient selon le non agir  
Et s'adonnaient à l'enseignement sans parole

Dix mille êtres éclosent-ils ne les rejetaient pas  
Fournissant à leurs besoins sans les accaparer  
Entretien sans assujettir  
S'acquittant de leur tâche sans s'y attarder

Parce qu'ils ont choisi de ne pas s'attarder  
Ils demeurent à jamais

3

Quand les dignités ne vont plus au talent  
Les gens cessent de s'affronter  
Quand les objets rares ne sont plus appréciés  
Les gens cessent de dérober  
Quand ce qui excite les désirs n'est plus étalé  
Les gens ne sont plus troublés dans leur cœur

Les Saints eux

Vidaient les cœurs  
Emplissaient les ventres  
Pliaient les vouloirs

Endurcissaient les os

Le peuple maintenu sans science et sans désir  
Les habiles se gardaient de s'agiter  
Œuvrant par le non agir  
Rien n'échappait à leur conduite

4

La Voie vide médian s'écoule  
À tout usage  
Sans déborder

Source d'abîme  
On dirait un ancêtre  
Qui préside aux Dix mille êtres

Elle en émousse les pointes  
En débrouille l'écheveau  
Harmonisant leurs lumières  
Rassemblant leur poussière

Profondeur d'abîme  
On dirait une présence  
Nous ignorons de qui elle procède  
Presentant qu'elle précède  
Le Souverain lui-même.

5

Ciel Terre ignore la Bienveillance  
Traitant les Dix mille êtres comme chiens de paille  
Le Saint ignore la Bienveillance  
Les Cent familles il les traite comme chiens de paille

L'intervalle Ciel Terre



Est comme le soufflet  
Il se vide sans se lasser  
Actionné il veut souffler encore

On parle, on parle, on suppute à l'infini  
Mieux vaut garder le Centre

6

« L'Esprit du Val ne meurt point »  
Évoque la Femelle originelle.  
« La Porte de la Femelle originelle »  
Évoque la Racine du Ciel Terre.  
Qui coule filet sans fin  
Dont on use sans qu'il s'épuise

7

« Le Ciel dure et la Terre demeure  
Oui le Ciel Terre dure et demeure  
Mais c'est parce qu'il ne vit pas pour lui-même  
Qu'il peut jouir d'une vie qui ne finit pas

Le Saint lui  
En se mettant à la dernière place  
Se retrouve au premier rang  
Insoucieux de sa vie  
Il se maintient vivant  
N'est-ce pas que désintéressement  
Qui réalise en lui son accomplissement

8

Un homme haut placé  
Faisant le Bien  
Agira comme l'eau

L'eau sert les Dix mille êtres  
Sans rien disputer  
Faisant ce que personne n'aime faire

Les plus proches de la Voie  
Préfèrent s'établir à même le sol  
Et placer leur cœur dans l'abîme  
Donner simplement par humanité  
Cultiver la sincérité des propos  
Gouverner en respectant la nature  
Confier les charges aux gens capables  
N'agir qu'au moment favorable

C'est en ne disputant rien à personne  
Qu'ils sont alors irréprochables

9  
Mais qui veut tout retenir  
Sans pouvoir maintenir  
Il ferait mieux de s'abstenir

Qui martèle sa lame  
Et l'aiguise sans cesse  
Ne la conserve pas longtemps

Une salle pleine d'or  
p de pierres précieuses  
Ne trouve pas de gardien

Qui riche et honoré  
Se fait encore arrogant  
Est lui-même l'artisan de sa perte

L'œuvre accomplie

Se retirer  
C'est cela la Voie du Ciel

10

Vos âmes spirituelles et charnelles  
S'embrassant dans l'Unité  
Saurez-vous empêcher leur séparation  
Concentrant vos souffles  
Atteignant au souple  
Saurez-vous produire l'Enfançon  
Pur de toute souillure  
Contemplant l'Originel  
Saurez-vous y voir les êtres comme ils sont  
Épargnant votre peuple  
En conduisant l'État  
Saurez-vous le garder éloigné du savoir  
Devant la Porte du Ciel  
Qui s'ouvre et se referme  
Saurez-vous éloigner la femelle  
Candeur illumination  
À l'efficace universelle  
Saurez-vous vous tenir au non agir

Laisser être  
Laisser croître  
Laisser être ne pas accaparer  
Entretenir ne pas assujettir  
Présider à la vie ne pas faire mourir  
C'est cela la Vertu originelle

11

Trente rayons se joignent en un moyeu unique,  
Ce vide dans le char en permet l'usage

D'une motte de glaise on façonne un vase  
Ce vide dans le vase en permet l'usage

On ménage des portes et des fenêtres pour une pièce  
Ce vide dans la pièce en permet l'usage

L'avoir fait l'avantage  
Et le non avoir l'usage

12

Les Cinq couleurs aveuglent l'œil  
Les Cinq notes assourdissent l'oreille  
Les Cinq saveurs gâtent la bouche  
Courses et chasses affolent le cœur  
L'amour des objets rares égare la conduite

Les Saints eux  
Étaient pour le ventre pas pour l'œil  
Ils rejetaient l'extérieur  
Et s'en tenaient à soi

13

Faveur Défaveur sont des surprises  
Honneur Catastrophe sont corporels

Que veut dire  
Faveur Défaveur sont des surprises  
Sinon que la Faveur tombe sur les inférieurs  
Elle surprend quand on l'obtient  
Elle surprend quand on la perd  
Voilà ce que veut dire  
Faveur Défaveur sont des surprises

Que veut dire

Honneurs Catastrophes sont corporels  
Sinon que la Catastrophe atteint en nous le corps  
Hors de ce corps  
Quelle catastrophe pourrait nous atteindre

Ainsi

À qui estime l'Empire au prix de son corps  
On peut remettre l'Empire  
À qui épargne l'Empire comme son propre corps  
On peut confier l'Empire

14

On regarde, mais sans voir on l'appelle Invisible  
On écoute sans entendre on l'appelle Inaudible  
On cherche à le toucher on l'appelle Impalpable  
Voilà trois choses ineffables  
Qui confondues font l'Unité

Son haut n'est pas lumineux  
Son bas n'est pas ténébreux  
Cela serpente indéfiniment indistinctement  
Jusqu'au retour au Sans choses  
On le dira  
Forme de ce qui n'a pas de forme  
Image de ce qui n'est pas chose  
On le dira  
Obscure clarté  
Allant à sa rencontre on ne voit pas sa tête  
Marchant à sa suite on ne voit pas son train

Cependant

Qui aura dans la main la Voie antique  
Pourra conduire le présent  
Ce savoir de l'antique genèse

On l'appelle

Déroulement de la Voie

15

Les grands adeptes de l'Antiquité

Étaient de subtils initiés au mystère originel

Ces hommes impossible de les comprendre

Contentons-nous d'en évoquer la manière

Hésitants comme qui en hiver passe à gué une rivière

Et craintifs comme qui de quatre côtés flaire le danger

Circonspects comme il sied de l'être à un invité

Mais prêts à changer comme la glace qui va fondre

Honnêtes comme un bois pas encore dégrossi

Et ouverts comme l'entrée d'une vallée

Indiscernables comme des eaux mêlées

Mais eux savaient mieux que personne

Par leur quiétude

Faire passer lentement ce qui est mêlé à la clarté

Mieux que personne ce qui est en repos

Ils savaient par une endurente activité

L'amener à la vitalité

Observants de la Voie

Ils ne s'emplissaient pas de désir

Ainsi n'étant jamais emplis

Pouvaient-ils se flétrir

Et échapper au renouveau

16

Parvenus à l'extrême du Vide

Fermement ancrés dans la Quiétude

Tandis que Dix mille êtres d'un seul élan éclosent  
Nous contemplons le Retour

Les êtres prospèrent à l'envi  
Mais chacun fait retour à sa racine  
Revenir à sa racine c'est la Quiétude  
C'est accomplir son destin  
Accomplir son destin c'est cela le Constant  
Atteindre le Constant c'est l'Illumination  
Ne pas le connaître c'est courir follement au désastre

Atteindre le Constant donne accès à l'Infini  
Par l'Infini à l'Universel  
Par l'Universel au pouvoir royal  
Par la Royauté au Ciel  
Et par le Ciel à la Voie  
La Voie à la vie qui demeure  
Et la fin de votre vie ne sera pas la destruction

17

Dans la haute Antiquité les souverains  
À peine leurs sujets s'avisait-ils de leur existence  
Puis on se mit à chérir et à flagorner  
Après quoi à trembler et à maudire

Où manque la sincérité  
Manque la fidélité

Ah qu'ils se faisaient lointains et avarés de paroles  
Les travaux s'exécutaient  
Les affaires suivaient leur cours  
Et le peuple des Cent familles s'écriait  
Nous faisons tout par nous-mêmes

18

Mais la Grande Voie périclita  
Alors régnèrent Bienveillance et Justice  
Intelligence et Savoir-faire apparurent  
Ce fut la Grande Hypocrisie

Les Six relations se désaccordèrent  
On ne vit plus que piété filiale et amour paternel  
Les pays connurent l'anarchie  
Ce fut le temps des ministres fidèles

19

Rompez donc avec la Sagesse renvoyez le Savoir-faire  
Le peuple s'en portera cent fois mieux  
Rompez avec la Bienveillance renvoyez la Justice  
Le peuple retrouvera piété filiale et amour paternel  
Rompez avec l'habileté renoncez au profit  
Voleurs et brigands ne se manifesteront plus

Voilà trois points  
Difficiles à exprimer  
Ils se rattachent au précepte  
Regardez le Simple  
Embrassez le Brut  
Soyez désintéressés  
Soyez sans désirs

20

Rompez avec l'étude vivez sans souci  
WEI n'est pas A montrez la différence  
Le Bien n'est pas le Mal montrez comment  
Craindre est le sentiment normal du peuple  
Et tant d'autres questions qui ne veulent rien dire  
Les gens sont tous hilares



Comme s'ils festoyaient au sacrifice du bœuf  
Comme s'ils montaient aux belvédères du printemps  
Et moi je me tiens là l'esprit vacant  
Comme le nouveau-né encore sans expression  
Laissé dans mon coin, n'ayant où aller

Les gens ont tous le superflu  
Et moi je suis de tout démuné  
J'ai tous les traits de l'idiot  
Je suis l'abruti le parfait abruti

Les autres sont resplendissants  
Et moi je suis crépusculaire  
Les autres s'affairent fébrilement  
Et moi je traîne mon oisiveté  
Abandonné au mouvement de la mer  
Tourbillonnant au gré du vent

Les gens savent ce qu'ils veulent  
Je préfère être un imbécile heureux  
Moi qui ne suis pas comme eux  
Moi qui ai choisi de téter ma Mère

21

Vaste Vertu a contenance  
D'une suivante de la Voie

La Voie chose vague indistincte  
Si indistincte et si vague  
En elle sont les symboles  
Si vagues et si indistincts  
En elle sont les êtres  
Si secrets si dérochés

En elle sont les essences  
Des essences très pures  
En elle est la fidélité

De l'Antiquité à ce jour elle maintient son Nom  
Présidant à la succession de tous les êtres

Comment comprendre  
Les manifestations de tous les êtres  
Sinon par cela

22

Plier pour se garder intègre  
Ployer pour se retrouver droit  
S'approfondir pour être rempli  
Se faner pour reverdir  
Moins permet de trouver  
Trop fait qu'on s'égaré

Les Saints  
Embrassant l'Un  
Étaient la règle du monde  
Ne se donnant pas à voir ils illuminaient  
Ne se faisant pas valoir ils resplendissaient  
N'agitant pas leurs succès ils avaient leur mérite  
Ne vantant pas leurs exploits ils restaient au commandement  
Voilà que ne disputant rien à personne  
Personne non plus ne leur disputait rien

L'ancien adage  
« Plier pour se garder intègre »  
Ce n'était pas un vain mot

L'homme vrai et intègre attire tout à lui

23

Par le Silence

L'agir naturel

Une bourrasque ne dure pas la matinée entière

Une averse ne dure pas jusqu'à la fin du jour

Et qui en est l'auteur

Le Ciel Terre

Le Ciel Terre n'est pas indéfiniment endurent

Que dire alors de l'homme

Pour cette raison qui œuvre selon la Voie

Au niveau de la Voie se conformera à la Voie

Au niveau de la Vertu se conformera à la Vertu

Au niveau de la Perte se conformera à la Perte

Conforme à la Voie la Voie le reçoit volontiers

Conforme à la Vertu la Vertu le reçoit volontiers

Conforme à la Perte la Perte le reçoit volontiers

Mais où manque la sincérité

Manque aussi la fidélité

24

Dressé sur la pointe des pieds on perd l'équilibre

Les jambes trop écartées on n'avance pas

Qui se donne à voir n'illumine pas

Qui se fait valoir ne resplendit pas

Qui agite ses succès est sans mérite

Qui vante ses exploits n'occupe pas longtemps le pouvoir

Pour la Voie c'est

« Excès de nourriture et tumeurs »

Pratique qui à tous les êtres répugne  
L'homme qui possède la Voie s'y refuse

25

Une Chose faite d'un mélange  
Est là avant le Ciel Terre  
Silencieuse ah oui illimitée assurément  
Reposant sur soi inaltérable  
Tournant sans faute et sans usure  
On peut y voir la Mère de ce qui est sous le Ciel

Nous ne connaissons pas son Nom  
Son appellation est la Voie  
À défaut de son véritable nom  
On la dénommera Grande

Grande pour dire qu'elle s'écoule  
Qu'elle s'écoule poussant toujours plus loin  
Qu'au loin en allée elle s'en retourne

Aussi Grande la Voie  
Grand le Ciel grande la Terre et grand aussi le Roi  
Dans l'Univers sont quatre grands  
Et le Roi est l'Un d'eux

L'homme prendra donc modèle sur la Terre  
La Terre elle prend modèle sur le Ciel  
Le Ciel prend modèle sur la Voie  
La Voie elle se modèle sur le naturel

26

Lourd racine du léger  
Quiet seigneur de l'agité

Ainsi les Saints voyageaient des jours entiers  
Sans quitter leurs lourdes voitures

Sans un regard pour de fascinantes splendeurs  
Chez eux ils se tenaient perdus hors de ce monde

Comment le maître de Dix mille chariots  
Serait-il léger au point de se préférer à l'Empire  
Sa légèreté lui ferait perdre sa racine  
Son agitation son empire sur lui-même

27

Bien aller ne laisse pas de traces  
Bien parler est net et sans défaut  
Bien compter ne se sert pas de marques  
Bien fermer ne pose ni verrou ni barre  
Sans qu'on puisse ouvrir  
Bien lier ne noue pas de corde  
Sans qu'on puisse délier

Pour cette raison les Saints  
S'appliquaient à secourir les humains  
Sans rejeter personne  
S'appliquaient à secourir les êtres  
Sans en rejeter aucun

C'est ce qu'on appelle  
Répandre à son tour la Lumière

L'homme bon est le maître du méchant  
Le méchant sert de matière à l'homme bon

Si l'un ne révère pas son maître  
Et l'autre n'aime pas sa matière

Nul savoir-faire ne préviendra l'égarement

C'est cela

La Merveille essentielle

28

Conscience de coq contenance de poule

Ils étaient la Ravine du monde

La Ravine du monde

Ils ne quittaient pas la Vertu Constante

Ayant fait le retour à l'Enfançon

Conscience de blanc contenance de noir

Ils étaient la Norme du monde

La Norme du monde

Ils étaient sans tache en la Vertu Constante

Ayant fait le retour au Sans limites

Conscience de gloire contenance d'humiliation

Ils étaient le Réceptacle du monde

Le Réceptacle du monde

Ils se satisfaisaient de la Vertu Constante

Ayant fait le retour au Brut

Le Brut on le détaille en ustensiles divers

Les Saints par le Brut présidaient aux diverses charges

C'est le sens de

« À grand Talleur pas de chutes »

29

Vouloir saisir l'Empire et le manier à son gré

On ne voit pas qu'on puisse y parvenir  
L'Empire est un vase sacré  
On ne le manie pas à son gré  
Qui le manie court à l'échec  
Qui s'en empare le perdra

La vérité des choses c'est que les êtres  
S'avancent allègrement puis se mettent à suivre  
Respirent légèrement puis se mettent à souffler  
Deviennent puissants puis se mettent à faiblir  
On commence à s'élever puis on se met à descendre  
Et c'est pourquoi les Saints rejettent  
L'excès  
L'extrême  
L'extravagant

30

Conseillant un prince selon la Voie  
On ne lui fera pas conquérir l'Empire par les armes  
Politique qui se retourne souvent contre son auteur

Là où la troupe a campé croissent épines et ronces  
Les grandes armées annoncent des années de disette

Contentez-vous d'être résolu  
Sans prétendre à conquérir de force

Résolu sans ostentation  
Résolu sans présomption  
Résolu sans provocation  
Résolu vous battant à contrecœur  
Résolu sans volonté de conquête

La puissance fait vieillir

Cela c'est s'opposer à la Voie  
S'opposer à la Voie c'est bientôt périr

31

« Des armes même belles sont de mauvais augure »  
Elles suscitent en tous la même horreur  
Un homme qui suit la Voie s'en détournera

On honore un gentilhomme en le plaçant à gauche  
Un homme de guerre en le plaçant à droite  
« Les armes sont de mauvais augure »  
Elles ne siéent pas à un gentilhomme  
C'est à contrecœur qu'il y recourt  
Ayant fait du détachement et du repos son idéal  
Vainqueur il ne voit pas de bien à la victoire  
Y voir un bien serait se réjouir d'une tuerie  
Quand un homme se réjouit d'une tuerie  
Il ne faut pas le laisser arriver à l'Empire

« Dans les cérémonies de fête la gauche est honorable  
Dans les cérémonies de deuil la droite est honorable »  
Un commandant en second occupe la gauche  
Le commandant en chef occupera la droite  
La préséance est donc celle du deuil  
Des hommes ont été tués en grand nombre  
On les pleure dans le deuil et l'affliction  
Le cérémonial de la victoire est donc celui du deuil

32

La Voie  
Toujours sans nom et nature  
Malgré son insignifiance  
Nul au monde ne peut l'asservir  
Si seulement barons et princes savaient la tenir



Les Dix mille êtres viendraient à l'hommage  
Ciel et Terre uniraient leurs influx  
Et descendrait la douce rosée  
Le peuple sans qu'on le lui commande  
S'ordonnerait de lui-même

Mais a commencé la taille  
On a eu des noms  
Et les noms se sont multipliés  
Il faudrait arrêter le savoir  
Savoir s'arrêter  
Ce serait le salut

La Voie dans le monde  
Se compare au Fleuve et à l'Océan  
Pour les rivières et les ruisseaux

33

Connaître autrui est un savoir-faire  
Se connaître soi c'est l'illumination  
L'emporter sur autrui est la force  
L'emporter sur soi c'est la puissance

Se contenter de peu c'est la richesse  
Agir puissamment c'est s'accomplir  
Conserver ses moyens est dur  
Mourir sans périr c'est la Longévité

34

La Grande Voie c'est l'inondation  
Droite ou gauche peu lui importe

Les Dix mille êtres en dépendent pour vivre  
Elle ne se refuse pas

Elle fait son œuvre  
Sans y chercher sa gloire

Elle vêt et nourrit les Dix mille êtres  
Elle ne se comporte pas en maître  
Constante sans attrait  
On peut la dire infime  
Les Dix mille êtres lui reviennent  
Elle ne se comporte pas en maître  
On peut la dire grande  
Finalement en ne se faisant pas grande  
Elle peut réaliser sa grandeur

35

Qui tient le Grand Symbole  
Fait accourir les êtres sous le Ciel  
Ils accourent et n'éprouvent aucun mal  
Ils trouvent la sécurité d'une paix immense

Musique et mets choisis  
Arrêtent en chemin un quelconque passant  
Mais la Voie qui sort d'une bouche humaine  
Comme elle paraît fade et sans goût

On a beau regarder elle n'offre pas à voir  
On a beau écouter elle n'offre pas à entendre

Oui, mais à qui en use elle s'offre inépuisable

36

Pour resserrer amener à s'étendre  
Pour affaiblir amener à se fortifier  
Pour détruire amener à se déployer  
Pour dépouiller amener à s'enrichir

Cela on l'appelle  
Illumination de l'insaisissable  
« Souple et faible triomphent de dur et de fort »

Le poisson ne doit pas quitter l'eau profonde  
Les armes d'un pays doivent demeurer secrètes

37

La Voie constante est Sans agir  
Et rien pourtant qui ne soit fait

Si seulement barons et rois  
Savaient s'y tenir  
Les Dix mille êtres assumeraient la vie  
Ils vivraient  
S'agitant en proie au désir  
Mais nous avons pour les assagir  
Le Brut Sans nom  
Brut Sans nom qui ramène au Sans désir  
Le Sans désir à la Tranquillité  
Et le monde entier entre de lui-même dans le repos

38

La Vertu supérieure ignore la vertu  
Pour autant la Vertu est prospère  
La vertu inférieure ne manque pas de vertus  
Pour autant la Vertu disparaît  
La Vertu supérieure est Sans agir et Sans but  
La vertu inférieure agit et poursuit ses fins  
La Bienveillance supérieure agit, mais sans but  
La Justice supérieure agit et poursuit ses fins  
Le Bel usage entre en action  
À défaut de réponse

On retrousse ses manches et on l'impose  
Ainsi la Voie perdue on eut la vertu  
La vertu perdue la Bienveillance  
La Bienveillance perdue la Justice  
La Justice perdue le Bel usage

Bel usage est sincérité et fidélité en surface  
Et l'instigateur du désordre  
Où calcul et prévision sont fleur de la Voie  
Et commencement de la sottise

L'homme de caractère choisit la substance  
Et ne se fie pas à ce qui est superficiel  
Il est pour le fruit  
Ne se fie pas à la fleur  
Il rejetait l'extérieur  
Et s'en tenait à soi

39

Dès le temps ancien possèdent l'Un

Le Ciel par sa clarté  
La Terre par sa tranquillité  
Les Esprits par leur pouvoir merveilleux  
Les Vallées par l'abondance de leur plénitude  
Les Dix mille êtres par leur vitalité  
Barons et Rois en étant la noblesse du monde  
Là est leur perfection

Sans clarté le Ciel s'effondrerait  
Sans tranquillité la Terre éclaterait  
Sans pouvoir merveilleux les Esprits s'épuiseraient  
Sans abondance de plénitude les Vallées s'assécheraient  
Sans vitalité les Dix mille êtres s'éteindraient

Sans noblesse Barons et Rois trébucheraient

L'humilité est la racine de la noblesse  
L'abaissement est le fondement de l'élévation  
Sur quoi Barons et Rois se donnent ces titres  
L'orphelin l'abandonné le malheureux  
N'est-ce pas adopter l'humilité comme racine  
Assurément  
Honneurs sur honneurs ne rend pas honorable  
Il ne faut pas vouloir scintiller comme jade  
Non plus que résonner comme pierre musicale

40

Retournement  
Mouvement de la Voie  
Faiblesse  
Son usage

Les Dix mille êtres du monde  
Sont le produit de ce qui a,  
Mais ce qui a  
Est produit de ce qui n'a pas

41

L'homme supérieur initié de la Voie  
La pratique de tout son cœur  
L'homme ordinaire instruit de la Voie  
En prend et en laisse  
L'homme inférieur informé de la Voie  
Éclate de rire  
Sans ce rieur la Voie ne serait pas la Voie

Sur quoi l'adage déclare

La Voie lumineuse paraît obscure  
La Voie de progrès paraît rétrograde  
La Voie immense paraît si resserrée

La Vertu supérieure paraît encaissée  
L'Éclatante candeur paraît souillée  
La Vertu si généreuse paraît indigente  
La Vertu établie paraît furtive  
La Substance pure paraît troublée  
Le grand carré n'a pas d'angles  
Le grand vase tarde à s'achever  
La Grande musique n'a pas de sonorités  
Le grand symbole ignore les figures

Mais la Voie retirée et Sans nom  
Est celle qui aide et qui achève

42

La Voie donne vie en Un  
Un donne vie en Deux  
Deux donne vie en Trois  
Trois donne vie aux Dix mille êtres  
Les Dix mille êtres adossés au Yin  
Embrassant le Yang  
Les souffles qui s'y ruent composent en Harmonie

On n'aime pas les appellations  
« L'orphelin l'abandonné le malheureux »  
Rois et ducs se les approprient pourtant

En fait les êtres gagnent à se diminuer  
Comme ils perdent à vouloir s'augmenter

Après un autre je dis ceci

« Mourir de leur belle mort  
N'est pas pour les violents »

Cet autre j'en fais le Père de ma doctrine

43

Ce qu'il y a de plus tendre au monde  
Gagne à la longue sur le plus solide  
Ce qui n'a pas  
Pénètre ce qui n'a pas d'interstices

Par là nous apprenons  
L'avantageux du non agir  
L'enseignement sans parole  
L'avantageux du non agir  
Peu au monde y atteignent

44

Le renom ou la vie  
À quoi tient-on d'abord

La bourse ou la vie  
À quoi tient-on le plus

S'attacher à la vie ou accepter de la perdre  
Lequel fait le plus mal

Qui aime avec excès s'épuise  
Qui amasse gros perdra gros  
Content de peu n'a pas à craindre  
Qui saura s'arrêter se préservera  
Il pourra s'assurer la Longévité

45

La Grande perfection a comme un défaut  
Mais elle est indéfectible  
La Grande plénitude s'écoule sans fin  
Mais elle est inépuisable  
La Grande droiture paraît se courber  
La Grande habileté paraît malhabile  
La Grande éloquence un bredouillis

Le trépignement surmonte le froid  
La tranquillité la chaleur  
Mais sérénité et quiétude sont la norme du monde

46

Le monde suit-il la Voie  
Dételés les coursiers  
Sont aux champs pour les fumer  
Le monde a-t-il quitté la Voie  
Harnachés les chevaux  
Sont aux faubourgs pour pâturer

Il n'y a pire malheur que l'insatiabilité  
Pire malédiction que le désir de posséder

Mais il y aura toujours suffisance  
Pour qui se suffit de ce qui suffit

47

Sans avoir franchi sa porte  
Connaître tout sous le Ciel  
Sans regarder par la fenêtre  
Contempler la Voie du Ciel

Plus on va loin



Moins on saura

Les Saints  
Sans se déplacer  
Connaissaient tout  
Sans avoir regardé  
Comprenaient tout  
Sans rien faire  
Ils avaient tout réalisé

48

Pour l'étude  
Tous les jours un peu plus  
Pour la Voie  
Tous les jours un peu moins

De moins en moins jusqu'au non agir  
Au non agir et rien qui ne se fasse  
L'Empire échoit toujours aux hommes de loisir  
Un homme qui s'affaire est impropre à l'Empire

49

Les Saints libres de leur esprit  
Suivaient l'esprit des Cent familles

Bons avec les bons  
Et bons avec les méchants  
Car la Vertu est bonne  
Loyaux aux fidèles  
Et loyaux aux infidèles  
Car la Vertu est loyale

Les Saints dans l'Empire vivant ignorés et cachés  
Offraient un esprit disposé à tout accueillir

Là où les Cent familles  
Écarquillaient les yeux et tendaient l'oreille  
Les Saints souriaient comme l'enfant nouveau-né

50

On sort c'est la vie on rentre c'est la mort  
Compagnons de la vie ils sont Treize  
Compagnons de la mort ils sont Treize  
Mouvant les vivants aux sites de mort Treize encore

Et pourquoi  
Sinon qu'on est mené par l'avidité de vivre

On dit que ceux qui connurent l'art de vivre  
Quand ils voyageaient par les routes  
Ne rencontraient ni le rhinocéros ni le tigre  
Quand ils étaient à l'armée  
Ne portaient ni armes ni cuirasse  
Le rhinocéros n'aurait pas eu où planter sa corne  
Le tigre n'aurait pas eu où jeter sa griffe L'arme où placer sa lame

Et pourquoi  
Sinon qu'ils n'offraient pas de prise à la mort

51

Produits par la Voie  
Nourris par la Vertu  
Figurés par l'Espèce  
Achevés par l'Entour  
Les Dix mille êtres

Et pas un  
Qui ne révère la Voie

Qui ne vénère la Vertu  
Nul n'en donne l'ordre  
C'est l'Ordre naturel

Ainsi La Voie produit  
La Vertu nourrit  
Elle fait croître et elle nourrit  
Elle abrite et elle soigne  
Elle soutient et couvre de ses ailes

Laisser être et ne pas accaparer  
Entretenir et ne pas assujettir  
Présider à la vie et ne pas la sacrifier  
C'est là la Vertu originelle

52

Une genèse sous le Ciel s'opère  
Qui nous fait évoquer la Mère  
Des êtres sous le Ciel

Par la mère connue se révèlent les enfants  
Les enfants connus rendent à la Mère et on s'y tient  
Jusqu'au terme de cette vie sans souffrir aucun mal

Bouchez les orifices  
Fermez les portes  
Au terme de vos jours  
Vous ne serez pas épuisé  
Ouvrez les orifices  
Noyez-vous aux affaires  
À votre dernier jour  
Vous serez sans secours

Concentrer le regard sur l'infime

C'est cela l'Illumination  
S'attacher à ce qui est tendre  
C'est là la Force  
Se servir de ses lumières  
Et revenir à l'Illumination  
Sans s'exposer soi-même au danger  
Voilà la pratique du Constant

53

Seulement une lueur de connaissance  
Me serait-elle donnée  
Que je m'avancerais sur la Grande Voie  
 Craignant rien tant que d'en dévier

Grande Voie immensément étendue  
À laquelle on préfère les sentiers tortueux

Les cours sont parfaitement nettes  
Mais les champs remplis de ronces  
Et les greniers parfaitement vides

Les habits sont richement parés  
On porte à la ceinture une épée acérée  
On crève d'alcool et de bonne chère  
On regorge de richesses et de biens

Voleurs de grand chemin et forts en gueule  
Rien à voir avec la Voie

54

Bien plantée on ne l'arrachera pas  
Bien enserrée on ne l'enlèvera pas  
Fils et petit-fils sans interruption  
Se relaieront au culte des ancêtres

Cultivée en soi-même  
La Vertu rend authentique  
Cultivée dans la famille  
La Vertu donne l'abondance  
Cultivée dans le canton  
La Vertu élève à la présidence  
Cultivée dans le pays  
La Vertu apporte la prospérité  
Cultivée dans l'Empire  
La Vertu atteint l'Universel

Une vertu  
Individuelle pour soi-même  
Familiale pour une famille  
Cantonale pour un canton  
Nationale pour un pays  
Impériale pour l'Empire

**Et comment savoir ce qu'il en est de l'Empire Sinon par cela\***

\* Ou bien sinon par soi-même, car aucun « cela » n'est compréhensible que rapporté à une conscience de soi qui est le moyen de la connaissance du réel.

55

Car qui contient en soi la Vertu plénière  
Se compare à un nouveau-né  
L'insecte le reptile ne le piquent pas  
Les fauves prédateurs ne l'emportent pas  
Les oiseaux rapaces ne l'enlèvent pas  
Malgré la faiblesse des os et des muscles sans force  
Sa main serre avec puissance  
Ignorant l'union du mâle et de la femelle  
Son énergie sexuelle excitée se contient  
Ses essences sont à leur comble

Criant tout le jour sans s'enrouer  
Son Harmonie des souffles est à son comble

Ainsi connaître l'Harmonie des souffles  
C'est le Constant  
Atteindre au Constant  
C'est l'Illumination

Si la vitalité déborde  
C'est le malheur  
Quand le cœur active les souffles  
C'est la violence

La puissance fait vieillir  
Cela c'est s'opposer à la Voie  
S'opposer à la Voie c'est bientôt périr

56

Qui sait  
Ne parle pas  
Qui parle  
Ne sait pas

Bouchez les orifices  
Fermez les portes  
Émoussez les pointes  
Débrouillez l'écheveau  
Harmonisez les lumières  
Rassemblez la poussière

On évoque ainsi  
La Communion qui est à l'Origine

Avec Elle c'est

Ni proche  
Ni étranger  
Ni avantage  
Ni défavorisé  
Ni honorable  
Ni méprisable

Mais Elle-même  
Le monde entier la tenait en honneur

57  
Si par la normale on conduit un État  
Si une conduite anormale entraîne la guerre  
L'Empire ne s'acquiert que par l'art de ne rien faire

Et comment le savons-nous  
Sinon par ceci

Quand défenses et tabous envahissent l'Empire  
Les gens en proportion deviennent misérables  
Quand s'accumulent les armes offensives  
Dans le pays se multiplient les troubles  
Si les gens sont gagnés par l'art et l'artifice  
Des phénomènes inquiétants surgissent  
Plus on voit fleurir les lois et les règlements  
Plus il y a de voleurs et de brigands

Voyant cela les Saints disaient  
Je n'interviens pas  
Le peuple de lui-même mène sa vie  
Je me tiens coi  
Le peuple de lui-même se conduit  
Je n'entreprends pas  
Le peuple de lui-même prospère

Je me tiens sans désir  
Le peuple de lui-même retourne au Simple

58

Quand un pouvoir sait se faire léger  
Le peuple se montre simple et facile  
Mais un pouvoir autoritaire  
Fait le peuple rusé et difficile

Le malheur  
Marche au bras du bonheur  
Le bonheur  
Couche au pied du malheur

C'est incompréhensible  
À cela pas de règle  
La règle se dérègle  
Le bon se corrompt  
L'humanité se dévoie  
Et ce n'est pas d'hier

Les Saints donc  
Répartissaient sans trancher  
Économisaient sans retrancher  
Rectifiaient sans contraindre  
Éclairaient sans éblouir

59

Pour gouverner les gens et qu'ils servent le Ciel  
Il n'y faut rien moins que la frugalité

La frugalité fait prompte la soumission  
La prompte soumission redouble la Vertu  
Redoublée la Vertu devient irrésistible



Une irrésistible Vertu est sans limites  
Qui ne se laisse pas enfermer dans des limites  
Peut avoir l'État  
Et qui possède la Mère de l'État  
Se maintiendra durablement

Cela c'est  
La Voie  
Dont la racine profonde et solidement plantée  
Donne la Longue vie et la durable Vision

60

On gouverne un grand pays  
Comme on cuit de petits poissons

Quand le souverain de l'Empire  
Règne en observant la Voie  
Les démons ne jouent pas aux esprits  
Les démons ne jouant pas aux esprits  
Les esprits ne font pas de mal au peuple  
Les esprits ne faisant pas de mal au peuple  
Le Saint non plus ne fait pas de mal au peuple  
Peuple et souverain ne se nuisant pas  
La vertu descendue peut ainsi retourner

61

Un grand pays est  
Un bassin d'affluence  
La Réunion de tous les êtres  
La Femelle universelle

En se tenant passive la femelle conquiert le mâle  
Elle s'abaisse en se faisant passive  
Un grand pays gagnera un petit pays

S'il s'abaisse devant lui  
Un petit pays gagnera un grand pays  
S'il s'abaisse devant lui

L'un s'abaisse pour acquérir  
L'autre s'abaisse pour se faire accepter  
Que veut un grand pays  
Accroître sa clientèle  
Que veut un petit pays  
Entrer au service d'un patron  
L'un et l'autre ont satisfaction  
Mais le plus grand doit s'abaisser

62

La Voie  
Resserre des Dix mille êtres  
Trésor des bons  
Refuge des méchants

De belles paroles font bien à l'étalage  
De bonnes actions font belle réputation  
Mais le mal de l'homme qui l'en délivrera

Devant le Fils du Ciel qu'on intronise  
Devant les Trois Ducs qu'on installe  
Vont les disques de jade tenus à deux mains  
Suivis des attelages à quatre chevaux  
Pourquoi ne pas plutôt assis sur les talons  
Offrir la Voie

Jadis on tenait la Voie en honneur Pourquoi sinon que par elle  
Qui demande est exaucé  
Qui a fauté est absous

Voilà pourquoi l'Empire la tenait en honneur

63

Agir sans agir

Faire sans affaire

Savourer l'insipide

Magnifier l'infime

Valoriser le moindre

Rendre en vertu le tort reçu

Appréhender le difficile par son biais aisé

Traiter le grand par un détail minime

Les grandes difficultés dans l'Empire

Sont à aborder par leur biais aisé

Ce qui devient une affaire d'État

Se règle quand ce n'est encore rien

Les Saints

Qui ne cherchaient pas à se grandir

Parvenaient finalement à la grandeur

Qui légèrement promet

Trouvera peu de crédit

Qui trouve tout aisé

N'aura que des ennuis

Les Saints

Alors qu'ils rencontraient des difficultés

Parvenaient à être sans ennuis

64

Ce qui est en repos est aisément tenu

Ce qui est latent est aisé à prévenir

Ce qui est frêle est aisé à rompre

Ce qui est tenu se dissipe aisément  
Agissez sur ce qui n'est pas encore  
Gouvernez en obviant au désordre

L'arbre qu'on enserre à deux bras  
Vient d'une imperceptible pousse  
La tour aux neuf étages  
Monte d'un simple tertre  
Le voyage de mille lis  
Débute au premier pas

L'intervention c'est l'échec  
La possession c'est la perte  
Les Saints n'intervenant pas évitaient l'échec  
Ne possédant pas évitaient la perte

On s'affaire et on échoue toujours près du but  
La vigilance du début à la fin eut évité l'échec

Les Saints  
Par le désir de non désir  
Rendaient sans valeur les objets rares  
En apprenant à désapprendre  
Ils ramenaient les gens de leurs erreurs  
En aidant la spontanéité des Dix mille êtres  
Ils décourageaient les fauteurs de troubles

65

Les grands taoïstes de l'Antiquité  
Ne cherchaient pas à éclairer le peuple  
Mais à le rendre simple en esprit  
Un peuple est difficile à conduire  
S'il compte trop de gens habiles

Qui gouverne un pays en usant d'hommes habiles  
Multiplie dans ce pays les malfaiteurs  
Qui gouverne un pays sans appeler les gens habiles  
Multiplie dans ce pays les bonheurs

Tenir cette double vérité c'est la norme  
S'en tenir constamment à cette norme  
Voilà la Vertu originelle

Ah la Vertu de l'Origine comme elle va profond  
Et comme elle va loin  
Comme elle va jusqu'au retournement des êtres  
Et les range finalement à la grande Obéissance

66

Le Fleuve et l'Océan sont rois des Cent rivières  
Parce qu'ils affectionnent les bas-fonds  
Ainsi peuvent-ils être rois des Cent rivières

Qui donc voudra commander au peuple  
Qu'il s'abaisse en s'adressant à lui  
Qui voudra prendre la tête du peuple  
Qu'il se mette à la dernière place

Ainsi les Saints occupaient le faite  
Sans peser sur le peuple  
Ils occupaient le premier rang  
Sans faire de tort au peuple

Tous alors les secondaient joyeusement  
Sans rechigner

Voilà que ne disputant rien à personne  
Personne non plus ne leur disputait rien

67

Tous sous le Ciel déclarent ma Voie grande  
Mais quasiment bonne à rien  
Eh oui grande  
Et quasiment bonne à rien  
Aurait-elle quelque chose pour elle  
Elle ne serait bientôt plus rien

Moi j'ai un triple trésor  
Que je garde jalousement  
Un la Compassion  
Deux la Frugalité  
Trois le Refus d'être le premier

La Compassion permet d'être intrépide  
La Frugalité d'être généreux  
Le Refus d'être premier de présider aux charges

L'intrépide sans Compassion  
Le généreux sans Frugalité  
Le premier qui n'a pas été le dernier  
Vont à la mort

La Compassion au combat rend victorieux  
Dans la défense elle sauvegarde  
Ceux-là que le Ciel veut sauver  
Il les garde par la Compassion

68

Un vrai chef ne paraît pas martial  
Qui sait se battre ne s'emporte pas  
Qui saura vaincre évitera d'affronter  
Qui saura manier les hommes s'abaissera

La voilà  
La Vertu qui ne dispute pas  
L'art de se servir des hommes  
Et l'union au Faîte du Ciel antique

69

D'un stratège  
« Je n'ose m'avancer en maître  
Je me tiens plutôt comme l'invité  
Je n'ose avancer d'un pouce  
Je recule plutôt d'un pied »

Pour dire  
Progresser sans exécuter de marches  
Retrousser ses manches sans montrer le bras  
Frapper sans affronter  
Prendre sans coup férir

Rien de pire que le mépris de l'adversaire  
Qui méprise l'adversaire perdra son trésor  
Si l'on en vient à l'affrontement armé  
Celui dont le cœur se serre l'emportera

70

Mes paroles si faciles à comprendre  
Si faciles à mettre en pratique  
Personne ne les comprend  
Personne ne les pratique

Ces paroles ont un Ancêtre  
Cette pratique a un Seigneur  
On ignore l'un comme l'autre  
Alors moi aussi on m'ignore

Si peu me connaissent  
Qui me suit en devient estimable

C'est ainsi que les Saints  
Vêtus de grosse toile  
Cachaient en eux un jade

71  
Connaissant l'inanité de la connaissance  
On est parfait  
L'ignorant on souffre d'un mal

Mais qui atteint souffre d'être atteint  
Cesse d'être atteint

Les Saints cessaient d'être atteints  
Parce qu'ils souffraient d'en être atteints

72  
Si le peuple ne craint pas votre pouvoir  
C'est qu'un pouvoir plus redoutable s'approche

Ne troublez pas leurs foyers  
Ne pillez pas leur subsistance  
Ne soyez pas lassant  
Ils ne se laisseront pas de vous

Les Saints s'occupaient à se connaître  
Pas à se faire remarquer  
S'occupaient à s'économiser  
Pas à se faire apprécier  
Ils rejetaient l'extérieur  
Et s'en tenaient à soi



73

Brave et même téméraire périt  
Brave et pas téméraire survit  
Deux attitudes  
L'une avantage et l'autre nuit  
Les aversions du Ciel  
Qui donc les comprendra  
Les Saints eux-mêmes  
Souffraient ces difficultés

La Voie du Ciel vainc sans s'affronter  
On lui obéit sans qu'elle ait à parler  
On vient à elle sans qu'elle ait convoqué  
Sans effort elle dispose tout avec sagesse

Vaste est le filet du Ciel  
Ses larges mailles n'échappent rien

74

Un peuple qui ne craint plus la mort  
L'effrayerez-vous par la peine de mort  
Rendez-lui plutôt la peur de la mort  
Les factieux s'il s'en trouve  
Prenez-les et mettez-les à mort  
Qui alors se permettra de bouger

Le constant\* met à mort  
Par son Grand Exécuteur  
Jouer au grand exécuteur  
Et mettre à mort  
C'est jouer au maître charpentier  
Qui joue au maître charpentier  
Il est rare qu'il ne s'entaille pas la main

\* La Voie du Ciel.

75

Le peuple crève de faim

Et ceux qui lui commandent s'engraissent d'impôts

Voilà pourquoi le peuple crève de faim

Le peuple est ombrageux

Et ceux qui le commandent le harcèlent sans cesse

Voilà pourquoi le peuple est ombrageux

Le peuple brave la mort

Et ceux qui le commandent mènent joyeuse vie

Voilà pourquoi le peuple brave la mort

Seuls ceux qui ne vivent pas pour vivre

Sont assez sage pour apprécier la vie

76

L'homme vivant est tendre et souple

Mort le voici dur et rigide

Les plantes sont tendres et délicates

Mortes les voici flétries et sèches

Dureté et rigidité sont compagnes de la mort

Tendreté souplesse compagnes de la vie

La force des armes ne donne pas la victoire

Un bel arbre attire la cognée

Puissance et grandeur se tiennent en bas

Faible et souple se maintiennent en haut

77

Ah la Voie du Ciel

Comme un arc tendu

Le haut est abaissé

Et le bas se relève

L'excès est diminué  
Et le manque comblé

La Voie du Ciel  
Ôte au riche donne au pauvre  
La voie de l'homme au contraire  
Ôte au pauvre donne au riche

Qui donc savait  
Prélever sur son abondance  
Et donner au monde  
Sinon les fidèles de la Voie

C'était la manière des Saints  
Ils agissaient sans s'imposer  
L'œuvre faite ils se retiraient  
Ne voulant pas passer pour sages

78  
Rien au monde comme l'eau  
De plus souple de plus faible  
Pour attaquer le solide et le fort  
Qui sera comme l'eau  
Le Non avoir en elle  
La fait changeante

Faible elle vainc le fort  
Souple elle vainc le dur  
Nul ne l'ignore  
Qui le pratique

Le Saint a pourtant ce mot

Recevant la boue du sol du pays

Vous êtes fait seigneur des autels des esprits  
Acceptant les malheurs des pays  
Vous serez fait souverain du monde

La parole véridique sonne comme paradoxe

79

L'apaisement d'une grande querelle  
Laisse nécessairement des griefs  
Alors comment faire le Bien

Les Saints pour cette raison  
Retenant leur marque de créance  
N'exigeaient rien d'un débiteur

Un homme de vertu  
Exécutera ses obligations  
Un homme sans vertu  
Taxera les gens abusivement  
La Voie du Ciel  
Qui ne favorise personne  
Est toujours avec l'homme de Bien

80

Des pays petits  
Et guère de gens

Des engins à décupler le rapport  
On n'en avait pas alors l'usage  
Mais au peuple on apprenait  
À craindre de mourir lors de voyages au loin  
Bateaux et chars on n'y montait pas  
Cuirasses et armes on ne les étalait pas  
Mais au peuple on apprenait

À faire usage de la cordelette à nœuds

Manger alors avait du goût  
L'habit seyait au corps  
Il faisait bon être chez soi  
On appréciait une vie simple  
D'un pays on voyait le pays voisin  
Coqs et chiens échangeaient leurs appels  
Et les gens mouraient à l'extrême de l'âge  
Sans avoir eu l'occasion de se fréquenter

81

La parole authentique  
N'est pas séduisante  
La parole séduisante  
N'est pas authentique

Le Bien n'argumente pas  
L'argument ne fait pas le Bien  
La connaissance n'est pas le vaste savoir  
Le vaste savoir ignore la connaissance

Le Saint n'accumule pas  
Plus il fait pour les autres  
Plus il a pour lui-même  
Plus il donne aux autres  
Plus il s'enrichit

La Voie du Ciel  
Avantage et ne nuit pas  
La Voie du Saint  
Agit et ne conteste pas



# TCHOANG-TSEU

Léon Wieger, *Les Pères du système Taoïste*, « Cathasia », Paris, 1950, « L'œuvre de Tchoang-tzeu », 201-511 : édition utile bilingue.

Malgré son ancienneté et « certaines boutades qui étaient caractéristiques de sa manière » (« Avertissement », 1950), je préfère cette traduction à celle de Liou Kia-hway, *L'œuvre complète de Tchouang-tseu*, Gallimard, 1969, utile pour ses notes incluant *Explications du traducteur, citations, références...*

Chez Wieger : « Des notes éclaircissent les passages difficiles, ou dans le texte même [elles figurent alors en *italiques* au fil du texte courant] ou au pied de la page [en notes] [...] Je me suis efforcé de rendre ma traduction d'aussi facile lecture qu'il m'a été possible, sans nuire à la fidélité de l'interprétation. Car mon but est de mettre à la portée de tous les penseurs, ces vieilles pensées, qui ont été depuis tant de fois repensées par d'autres, et prises par eux pour nouvelles. /Hien-hien (Ho -kien-fou) le 2 avril 1913, Dr Léon Wieger S.J. », qui conclut ainsi sa « Préface » aux trois *Pères* (Lao-tzeu, Lie-tzeu, Tchoang-tzeu).

On se reportera *infra* à la section IZUTSU livrant Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, Part II Lao-Tzû & Chuang-Tzû. Il ouvre sur le vécu mystique des *Pères* après la présentation du *Taoïsme* par Kaltenmark, *supra*, section LAO-TSEU.

Je reproduit les « *Interiors Chapters* [which] represent Chuang-tzû's own thought and ideas, and are probably from its own pen » (Izutsu, p. 297). Chez Wieger, il s'agit des chapitres 1 à 7 pp. 209-269 — le chapitre 33 achève p.511 « mostly later developments, interpretations and elucidations... » (*Ibid.*).

## Sept premiers chapitres

### Chap. I. Vers l'idéal.

**A. S'il faut en croire d'anciennes légendes, dans l'océan septentrional vit un poisson immense, qui peut prendre la forme d'un oiseau. Quand cet oiseau s'enlève, ses ailes s'étendent dans le ciel comme des nuages. Rasant les flots, dans la direction du Sud, il prend son élan sur une longueur de trois mille stades, puis s'élève sur le vent à la hauteur de quatre-vingt-dix mille stades, dans l'espace de six mois 4. — Ce qu'on voit là-haut, dans l'azur, sont-ce des troupes de chevaux sauvages qui courent ? Est-ce de la matière pulvérulente qui voltige ? Sont-ce les souffles 2 qui donnent naissance aux êtres?.. Et l'azur, est-il le Ciel lui-même ?**

Ou n'est-ce que la couleur du lointain infini, *dans lequel le Ciel, l'être personnel des Annales et des Odes, se cache ?*. Et, de là-haut, voit-on cette terre ? Et sous quel aspect ?.. Mystères ! — Quoi qu'il en soit, s'élevant du vaste océan, et porté par la grande masse de l'air, seuls supports capables de soutenir son immensité, le grand oiseau plane à une altitude prodigieuse. — — Une cigale à peine éclos, et un tout jeune pigeon, l'ayant vu, rirent du grand oiseau et dirent : À quoi bon s'élever si haut ? Pourquoi s'exposer ainsi ? Nous qui nous contentons de voler de branche en branche, sans sortir de la banlieue ; quand nous tombons par terre, nous ne nous faisons pas de mal ; chaque jour, sans fatigue, nous trouvons notre nécessaire : *Pourquoi aller si loin ? Pourquoi monter si haut ?* Les soucis n'augmentent-ils pas, en proportion de la distance *et de l'élévation ?* — — Propos de deux petites bêtes, sur un sujet dépassant leur compétence. Un petit esprit ne comprend pas ce qu'un grand esprit embrasse. Une courte expérience ne s'étend pas aux faits éloignés. Le champignon qui ne dure qu'un matin, ne sait pas ce que c'est qu'une lunaison. L'insecte qui ne vit qu'un été, n'entend rien à la succession des saisons. Ne demandez pas, à des êtres éphémères, des renseignements sur la grande tortue dont la période est de cinq siècles, sur le grand arbre dont le cycle est de huit mille années 3. Même le vieux P'en-g-tsou ne vous dira rien, de ce qui dépasse les huit siècles que la tradition lui prête. *À chaque être, sa formule de développement propre.* 4

1. Allégorie analogue à celle de l'ascension et de la descente annuelle du dragon. Nuages du Nord, condensés en pluie au Sud. Vapeurs rendues par le Sud au Nord. Cycle annuel de deux fois six mois.

2. Souffles du grand soufflet de la nature. Lao-tzeu chap. 5 C, page 21.

3. Légendes. P'eng-tsou aurait eu 767 ans, en 1123 avant J.C.

4. Ici, tout ce qui précède A, est répété une seconde fois B. Même fond, autre forme. Fragment ajouté au premier, dans la rédaction définitive, probablement.

**C. Il est des hommes presque aussi bornés que les deux petites bêtes susdites. Ne comprenant que la routine de la vie vulgaire, ceux-là ne sont bons qu'à être mandarins d'un district, ou seigneur d'un fief, tout au plus. — Maître Joung de Song fut supérieur à cette espèce, et plus semblable au grand oiseau. Il vécut, également indifférent à la louange et au blâme. S'en tenant à son propre jugement, il ne se laissa pas influencer par l'opinion des autres. Il ne distingua jamais entre la gloire et la défaveur. Il fut**



*libre des liens des préjugés humains.* — Maître Lie de *Tcheng* fut supérieur à Maître *Joung*, et encore plus semblable au grand oiseau. Son âme s'envolait, sur l'alle de la contemplation, parfois pour quinze jours, laissant son corps inerte et insensible. *Il fut presque libre des liens terrestres. Pas tout à fait, pourtant ;* car il lui fallait attendre le rapt extatique ; un reste de dépendance. — Supposons maintenant un homme entièrement absorbé par l'immense giration cosmique, et se mouvant en elle dans l'infini, Celui-là ne dépendra plus de rien. *Il sera parfaitement libre, dans ce sens que, sa personne et son action, seront unies à la personne et à l'action du grand Tout.* Aussi dit-on très justement : le surhomme n'a plus de soi propre ; l'homme transcendant n'a plus d'action propre ; le Sage n'a plus même un nom propre. *Car il est un avec le Tout.*

D. Jadis l'empereur Yao voulut céder l'empire à son ministre *Hu-you*.

Il lui dit : quand le soleil ou la lune rayonnent, on éteint le flambeau. Quand la pluie tombe, on met de côté l'arrosoir. C'est grâce à vous que l'empire prospère. Pourquoi resterais-je sur le trône ? Veuillez y monter!.. Merci, dit *Hu-you* ; veuillez y rester ! C'est, vous régnant, que l'empire a prospéré. Que m'importe, à moi, mon renom personnel ? Une branche, dans la forêt, suffit à l'oiseau pour se loger. Un petit peu d'eau, bu à la rivière, désaltère le rat. *Je n'ai pas plus de besoins que ces petits êtres.* Restons à nos places respectives, vous et moi. — *Ces deux hommes atteignirent à peu près le niveau de Maître Joung de Song. L'idéal taoïste est plus élevé que cela.* — Un jour *Kien-ou* dit à *Lien-chou* : J'ai ouï dire à *Tsie-u* des choses exagérées, extravagantes... Qu'a-t-il dit ? demanda *Lien-chou*... Il a dit que, dans la lointaine île *Kou-chee*, habitent des hommes transcendants, blancs comme la neige, frais comme des enfants, lesquels ne prennent aucune sorte d'aliments, mais aspirent le vent et boivent la rosée. Ils se promènent dans l'espace, les nuages leur servant de chars et les dragons de montures. Par l'influx de leur transcendance, ils préservent les hommes des maladies, et procurent la maturation des moissons. Ce sont là évidemment des folies. Aussi n'en ai-je rien cru... *Lien-chou* répondit : L'aveugle ne voit pas, parce qu'il n'a pas d'yeux. Le sourd n'entend pas, parce qu'il n'a, pas d'oreilles. Vous n'avez pas compris *Tsie-u*, parce que vous n'avez pas d'esprit. *Les surhommes dont il a parlé, existent. Ils possèdent même des vertus bien plus merveilleuses, que celles que vous venez d'énumérer. Mais, pour ce qui est des maladies et des*

*moissons, ils s'en occupent si peu, que, l'empire tombât-il en ruines et tout le monde leur demandât-il secours, ils ne s'en mettraient pas en peine, tant ils sont indifférents à tout..* Le surhomme n'est atteint par rien. Un déluge universel ne le submergerait pas.

Une conflagration universelle ne le consumerait pas 1. *Tant il est élevé au-dessus de tout.* De ses rognures et de ses déchets, on ferait des Yao et des Chounn 2. Et cet homme-là s'occuperait de choses menues, comme sont les moissons, le gouvernement d'un état ? Allons donc ! — *Chacun se figure l'idéal à sa manière.* Pour le peuple de Song, l'idéal, c'est d'être bien vêtu et bien coiffé ; pour le peuple de Ue, l'idéal, c'est d'être tondu ras et habillé d'un tatouage. L'empereur Yao se donna beaucoup de peine, et s'imagina avoir régné idéalement bien. Après qu'il eut visité les quatre Maîtres, dans la lointaine île de Kou-chee, il reconnut qu'il avait tout gâté. *L'idéal, c'est l'indifférence du sur-homme, qui laisse tourner la roue cosmique.*

E. *Les princes vulgaires ne savent pas employer les hommes de cette envergure, qui ne donnent rien dans les petites charges, leur génie y étant à l'étroit.* -- Maître Hoeï 3 ayant obtenu, dans son jardin, des gourdes énormes, les coupa en deux moitiés qu'il employa comme bassins. Trouvant ces bassins trop grands, il les coupa, chacun en deux quarts. Ces quarts ne se tinrent plus debout, et ne purent plus rien contenir. Il les brisa... Vous n'êtes qu'un sot, lui dit Tchoang-tzeu. Vous n'avez pas su tirer parti de ces gourdes rares. Il fallait en faire des bouées, sur lesquelles vous auriez pu franchir les fleuves et les lacs. En voulant les rapetisser, vous les avez mises hors d'usage. — *Il en est des hommes comme des choses ; tout dépend de l'usage qu'on en fait.* — Une famille de magnaniers de Song possédait la recette d'une pommade, grâce à laquelle les mains de ceux qui dévidaient les cocons dans l'eau chaude ne se gerçaient jamais. Ils vendirent leur recette à un étranger, pour cent tels, et jugèrent que c'était là en avoir tiré un beau profit. Or l'étranger, devenu amiral du roi de Ou, commanda une expédition navale contre ceux de Ue. C'était en hiver. Ayant, grâce à sa pommade, préservé les mains de ses matelots de toute engelure, il remporta une grande victoire, qui lui procura un vaste fief. Ainsi deux emplois d'une même pommade, produisirent une petite somme et une immense fortune. — *Qui sait employer le sur-homme, en tire beaucoup. Qui ne sait pas, n'en tire rien.*

F. Vos théories, dit maître Hoeï à maître Tchoang, ont de l'ampleur, mais n'ont aucune valeur pratique ; aussi personne n'en

veut. Tel un grand ailante, dont le bois fibreux ne peut se débiter en planches, dont les branches noueuses ne sont propres à rien. — *Tant mieux pour moi, dit maître Tchoang. Car tout ce qui a un usage pratique, périt pour ce motif.* La martre a beau user de mille stratagèmes ; elle finit par périr, sa fourrure étant recherchée. Le yak, pourtant si puissant, finit par être tué, sa queue servant à faire des étendards. Tandis que l'ailante *auquel vous me faites l'honneur de me comparer*, poussé dans un terrain stérile, grandira tant qu'il voudra, ombragera le voyageur et le dormeur, sans crainte aucune de

1. Phrases allégoriques, qui furent prises au sens propre, plus tard.

2. Coup de patte aux parangons confucéistes, qui sont pour les taoïstes, des êtres inférieurs.

3. *Hoei-chou*, ministre de *Leang*, sophiste, contradicteur perpétuel de Tchoang-tzeu, et l'un de ses plastrons préférés.

la hache et de la doloire, précisément parce que, comme vous dites, il n'est propre à aucun usage. N'être bon à rien, n'est-ce pas un état dont il faudrait plutôt se réjouir ?

## Chap. 2. Harmonie universelle.

A. Maître *K'i* 1 était assis sur un escabeau, les yeux levés au ciel, respirant faiblement. Son âme devait être absente 2. — Étonné, le disciple *You* 3 qui le servait, se dit : Qu'est ceci ? Se peut-il que, sans être mort, un être vivant devienne ainsi, insensible comme un arbre desséché, inerte comme la cendre éteinte ? Ce n'est plus mon maître. — Si, dit *K'i*, revenant de son extase, c'est encore lui. J'avais seulement, pour un temps, perdu mon moi 4. Mais que peux-tu comprendre à cela, toi qui ne connais que les accords humains, pas même les terrestres, encore moins les célestes ? — Veuillez essayer de me faire comprendre par quelque comparaison, dit *You*. — Soit, dit maître *K'i*. Le grand souffle indéterminé de la nature s'appelle vent. Par lui-même, le vent n'a pas de son. Mais, quand il les émeut, tous les êtres deviennent pour lui comme un jeu d'anches. Les monts, les bois, les rochers, les arbres, toutes les aspérités, toutes les anfractuosités résonnent comme autant de bouches, doucement quand le vent est doux, fortement quand le vent est fort. Ce sont des mugissements, des grondements, des sifflements, des commandements, des plaintes, des éclats, des cris, des pleurs. L'appel répond à l'appel. C'est un ensemble, une harmonie. Puis, quand le vent cesse, tous ces accents se taisent. N'as-tu pas observé cela, en un jour de tempête ? — Je comprends,

dit You. Les accords humains sont ceux des instruments à musique faits par les hommes. Les accords terrestres sont ceux des voix de la nature. Mais les accords célestes, maître, qu'est-ce ? — B. C'est, dit maître *K'i*, l'harmonie de tous les êtres, dans leur commune nature, dans leur commun devenir. Là, pas de contraste, parce que pas de distinction. Embrasser, voilà la grande science, la grande parole. Distinguer, c'est science et parler d'ordre inférieur. — *Tout est un*. Durant le sommeil, l'âme *non distraite* s'absorbe dans cette unité ; durant la veille, distraite, elle distingue des êtres divers. — *Et quelle est l'occasion de ces distinctions?..* Ce qui les occasionne, ce sont l'activité, les relations, les conflits de la vie. De là les théories, les erreurs. Du tir à l'arbalète fut dérivée la notion du bien et du mal. Des contrats fut tirée la notion du droit et du tort 5. On ajouta foi à ces

1. *K'i*, le maître de la banlieue du Sud, où il logeait.

2. Glose : son corps paraissait avoir perdu sa compagne l'âme. Comparez, chap. 24 II.

3. Maître *Yen-you*, ou *Yen-tch'eng*, ou *Yen-neou*.

4. Glose : L'état de celui, qui est absorbé dans l'être universel, dans l'unité. Il perd la notion des êtres distincts.

5. Touché ou raté la cible. Conformité ou non-conformité avec la souche.

notions imaginaires ; on a été jusqu'à les attribuer au Ciel. Impossible désormais d'en faire revenir les humains. Et cependant, oui, complaisance et ressentiment, peine et joie, projets et regrets, passion et raison, indolence et fermeté, action et paresse, tous les contrastes, autant de sons sortis d'un même instrument, autant de champignons nés d'une même humidité, *modalités fugaces de l'être universel*. Dans le cours du temps, tout cela se présente. D'où est-ce venu ? C'est devenu ! C'est né, entre un matin et un soir, de soi-même, *non comme un être réel, mais comme une apparence. Il n'y a pas d'êtres réels distincts*. Il n'y a un moi, que par contraste avec un lui. Lui et moi n'étant que des êtres de raison, il n'y a pas non plus, en réalité, ce quelque chose de plus rapproché qu'on appelle le mien, et *ce quelque chose de plus éloigné qu'on appelle le tien*. — Mais, qui est l'agent de cet état de choses, *le moteur du grand Tout?..* Tout se passe comme s'il y avait un vrai gouverneur, mais dont la personnalité ne peut être constatée. L'hypothèse expliquant les phénomènes, est acceptable, à condition qu'on ne fasse pas, de ce gouverneur universel, un être matériel distinct 1. Il est une tendance sans

forme palpable, *la norme inhérente à l'univers, sa formule évolutive immanente*. Les normes *de toute sorte*, comme celle qui fait un corps de plusieurs organes 2, une famille de plusieurs personnes, un état de nombreux sujets, sont autant de participations du recteur universel *ainsi entendu*. Ces participations ne l'augmentent ni ne le diminuent, *car elles sont communiquées par lui, non détachées de lui. Prolongement de la norme universelle*, la norme de tel être, qui est son être, ne cesse pas d'être quand il finit. Elle fut avant lui, elle est après lui, inaltérable, indestructible. *Le reste de lui, ne fut qu'apparence*. —

C'est de l'ignorance de ce principe, que dérivent toutes les peines et tous les chagrins des hommes, lutte pour l'existence, crainte de la mort, appréhension du mystérieux au-delà. L'aveuglement est presque général, pas universel toutefois. Il est encore des hommes, peu nombreux, que le traditionalisme conventionnel n'a pas séduits, qui ne reconnaissent de maître que leur raison, et qui, par l'effort de cette raison, ont déduit la doctrine exposée ci-dessus, de leurs méditations sur l'univers. *Ceux-là savent qu'il n'y a de réel que la norme universelle*. Le vulgaire irréfléchi croit à l'existence réelle de tout. L'erreur moderne a noyé la vérité antique. Elle est si ancrée, si invétérée, que les plus grands sages au sens du monde, *U le Grand* y compris 3, en ont été les dupes. *Pour soutenir la vérité*, je me trouve presque seul.

C. Mais, me dira-t-on, *si tout est un, si tout se réduit à une norme unique*, cette norme comprendra simultanément la vérité et l'erreur, *tous les contraires* ; et si les faits dont les hommes parlent sont irréels, la parole humaine n'est donc qu'un vain son, pas plus qu'un caquetage de poule. Je réponds, non, il n'y a d'erreur dans la norme, que pour les esprits bornés ; oui, les distinctions des disciples de *Confucius* et de *Mei-tzeu*, ne sont que de vains caquets. — *Il n'y a, en réalité, ni vérité ni erreur, ni oui ni non, ni autre distinction quelconque, tout étant un, jusqu'aux contraires*. Il n'y a que des aspects divers, lesquels dépendent du point de vue.

1. Négation du Souverain d'en haut des Annales et des Odes. Comparez Lao-tzeu, chap 4 E.

2. L'âme humaine rentre dans cette catégorie.

3. Coup de patte à un parangon confucéiste.

De mon point de vue, je vois ainsi ; d'un autre point de vue, je verrais autrement. *Moi et autrui* sont deux positions différentes, qui font juger et parler différemment de ce qui est un. Ainsi parle-t-on, de vie et de mort, de possible et d'impossible, de licite et

d'illécite. On discute, les uns disant oui, et les autres non. *Erreurs d'appréhension subjectives, dues au point de vue.* Le Sage, au contraire, commence par éclairer l'objet avec la lumière de sa raison. Il constate d'abord que ceci est cela, que cela est ceci, que tout est un. Il constate ensuite, qu'il y a pourtant oui et non, opposition, contraste. Il conclut à la réalité de l'unité, à la non-réalité de la diversité. Son point de vue à lui, c'est un point, d'où ceci et cela, oui et non, paraissent encore non distingué. Ce point est le pivot de la norme. C'est le centre immobile d'une circonférence, sur le contour de laquelle roulent toutes les contingences, les distinctions et les individualités ; d'où l'on ne voit qu'un infini, qui n'est ni ceci ni cela, ni oui ni non. *Tout voir, dans l'unité primordiale non encore différenciée, ou d'une distance* telle que tout se fond en un, voilà la vraie intelligence. — Les sophistes se trompent, en cherchant à y arriver, par des arguments positifs et négatifs, par voie d'analyse ou de synthèse. Ils n'aboutissent qu'à des manières de voir subjectives, lesquelles, additionnées, forment l'opinion, passent pour des principes. Comme un sentier est formé par les pas multipliés des passants, ainsi les choses finissent par être qualifiées d'après ce que beaucoup en ont dit. C'est ainsi, dit-on, parce que c'est ainsi ; c'est un principe. Ce n'est pas ainsi, dit-on, parce que ce n'est pas ainsi ; c'est un principe. En est-il vraiment ainsi, dans la réalité ? Pas du tout. Envisagés dans la norme, une paille et une poutre, un laideron et une beauté, tous les contraires sont un. La prospérité et la ruine, les états successifs, ne sont que des phases ; tout est un. Mais ceci, les grands esprits seuls sont aptes à le comprendre. Ne nous occupons pas de distinguer, mais voyons tout dans l'unité de la norme. Ne discutons pas pour l'emporter, mais employons, avec autrui, le procédé de l'éleveur de singes. Cet homme dit aux singes qu'il élevait : Je vous donnerai trois taros le matin, et quatre le soir. Les singes furent tous mécontents 1. Alors, dit-il, je vous donnerai quatre taros le matin, et trois le soir. Les singes furent tous contents. Avec l'avantage de les avoir contentés, cet homme ne leur donna en définitive, par jour, que les sept taros qu'il leur avait primitivement destinés. Ainsi fait le Sage. Il dit oui ou non, pour le bien de la paix, et reste tranquille au centre de la roue universelle, indifférent au sens dans lequel elle tourne.

D. Parmi les anciens, les uns pensaient que, à l'origine, il n'y eut rien *de préexistant*. C'est là une position extrême. — D'autres pensèrent qu'il y eut quelque chose *de préexistant*. C'est là la position extrême opposée. -- D'autres enfin pensèrent qu'il y eut quelque chose d'indistinct, de non-différencié. C'est là la position

moyenne, la vraie. — Cet être primordial non-différencié, c'est la norme. Quand on imagine les distinctions, on ruine sa notion. Après les distinctions, vinrent les arts et les goûts, impressions et préférences subjectives qui ne peuvent ni se définir ni s'enseigner. Ainsi les

1. Mécontents de devoir attendre, jusqu'au soir, la forte moitié de leur pitance. Comparez Lie-tzeu chap. 2 Q.

trois artistes, *Tchao-wenn*, *Cheu-k'oang*, *Hoei-tzeu*, aimaient leur musique, puisque c'était leur musique, qu'ils trouvaient différente de celle des autres, et supérieure, bien entendu. Eh bien, ils ne purent jamais définir en quoi consistaient cette différence et cette supériorité ; ils ne purent jamais enseigner à leurs propres fils à jouer comme eux. *Car le subjectif ne se définit ni ne s'enseigne.* Le Sage dédaigne ces vanités, se tient dans la demi-obscurité de la vision synthétique, se contente du bon sens pratique.

E. Vous dites, m'objecte-t-on, qu'il n'y a pas de distinctions. Passe pour les termes assez semblables ; mettons que la distinction. entre ceux-là n'est qu'apparente. Mais les termes absolument opposés, ceux-là comment pouvez-vous les réduire à la simple unité ? Ainsi, comment concilier ces termes : origine de l'être, être sans origine, origine de l'être sans origine ; et ceux-ci : être et néant, être avant le néant, néant avant l'être. Ces termes s'excluent ; c'est oui ou non. — Je réponds : ces termes ne s'excluent, que si on les envisage comme existants. Antérieurement au devenir, *dans l'unité du principe primordial*, il n'y a pas d'opposition. Envisagés dans cette position, un poil n'est pas petit, une montagne n'est pas grande ; un mort-né n'est pas, jeune ; un centenaire n'est pas âgé. Le ciel, la terre, et moi, sommes du même âge. Tous les êtres, et moi, sommes un dans l'origine, Puisque tout est un *objectivement et en réalité*, pourquoi distinguer des entités par des mots, *lesquels n'expriment que des appréhensions subjectives et imaginaires ?* Si vous commencez à nommer et à compter, vous ne vous arrêterez plus, la série des vues subjectives étant infinie. — Avant le temps, tout était un, dans le principe fermé comme un pli scellé. Il n'y avait alors, en fait de termes, qu'un verbe général. Tout ce qui fut ajouté depuis, est subjectif, imaginaire. Telles, la différence entre la droite et la gauche, les distinctions, les oppositions, les devoirs. Autant d'êtres de raison, qu'on désigne par des mots, auxquels rien ne répond dans la réalité. Aussi le Sage étudie-t-il tout, dans le monde matériel et dans le monde des idées, mais sans se prononcer sur rien, *pour ne pas ajouter une vue subjective de plus, à celles qui*

ont déjà été formulées. Il se tait recueilli, tandis que le vulgaire péroré, non pour la vérité, mais pour la montre, dit l'adage. — Que peut-on dire de l'être universel, sinon qu'il est ? Est-ce affirmer quelque chose, que de dire, l'être est ? Est-ce affirmer quelque chose, que de dire, l'humanité est humaine, la modestie est modeste, la bravoure est brave ? Ne sont-ce pas là des phrases vides qui ne signifient rien?.. Si l'on pouvait distinguer dans le principe, et lui appliquer des attributs, il ne serait pas le principe universel. Savoir s'arrêter là où l'intelligence et la parole font défaut, voilà la sagesse. À quoi bon chercher des termes impossibles pour exprimer un être ineffable ? Celui qui comprend qu'il a tout en un, a conquis le trésor céleste, inépuisable, mais aussi inscrutable. Il a l'illumination compréhensive, qui éclaire l'ensemble sans faire paraître de détails. C'est cette lumière, supérieure à celle de dix soleils, que jadis *Chounn* vantait au vieux *Yao* 1.

F. Tout, dans le monde, est personnel, est subjectif, dit *Wang-i* à *Nie-k'ue*. Un homme couché dans la boue, y gagnera un lumbago, tandis qu'une anguille ne se portera nulle part mieux que là. Un homme juché sur un arbre, s'y sentira mal à l'aise, tandis qu'un singe trouvera la position parfaite. Les uns mangent ceci, les autres cela. Les uns recherchent telle chose, les autres telle autre. Tous les hommes couraient après les deux fameuses beautés *Mao-ts'iang* et *Li-ki*; tandis que, à leur vue, les poissons plongeaient épouvantés, les oiseaux se réfugiaient au haut des airs, les antilopes fuyaient au galop. Vous ne savez pas quel effet me fait telle chose, et moi je ne sais pas quelle impression elle produit sur vous. Cette question des sentiments et des goûts, étant toute subjective, est principiellement insoluble. Il n'y a qu'à la laisser. Jamais les hommes ne s'entendront sur ce chapitre. — Les hommes vulgaires, soit, dit *Nie-k'ue*; mais le sur-homme ? — Le sur-homme, dit *Wang-i*, est au-dessus de ces vétilles. Dans sa haute transcendance, il est au-dessus de toute impression et émotion.. Dans un lac bouillant, il ne sent pas la chaleur ; dans un fleuve gelé, il ne sent pas le froid 2. Que la foudre fende les montagnes, que l'ouragan bouleverse l'océan, il ne s'inquiète pas. Il monte les nuées, enfourche le soleil et la lune, court à travers l'univers. Quel intérêt peut porter, à des distinctions moindres, celui à qui la vie et la mort sont tout un ? 3

G. Maître *K'iu-ts'iao* dit à maître *K'iou* de *Tch'ang-ou* : On affirme du Sage, qu'il ne s'embarrasse pas des choses de ce monde ; qu'il ne cherche



1. Anecdote imaginaire. Coup de patte à deux parangons confucéistes.

2. Métaphores qui furent prises au sens propre plus tard.

3. Deux phases alternatives de l'existence.

pas son avantage et ne recule pas devant le danger ; qu'il ne tient à rien ; qu'il ne cherche pas à se faire agréer ; qu'il se tient loin de la poussière et de la boue ... Je le définirai mieux, en moins de mots, dit maître K'iou. Le Sage abstrait du temps, et voit tout en un. Il se tait, gardant pour lui ses impressions personnelles, s'abstenant de dissertar sur les questions obscures et insolubles. Ce recueillement, cette concentration, lui donnent, au milieu de l'affairage passionné des hommes vulgaires, un air apathique, presque bête. En réalité, intérieurement, il est appliqué à l'occupation la plus haute, la synthèse de tous les âges, la réduction de tous les êtres à l'unité.

H. Et pour ce qui est de la distinction qui tourmente le plus les hommes, celle de la vie et de la mort, — l'amour de la vie n'est-il pas une illusion ? la crainte de la mort n'est-elle pas une erreur ? Ce départ est-il réellement un malheur ? Ne conduit-il pas, comme celui de la fiancée qui quitte la maison paternelle, à un autre bonheur?.. Jadis, quand la belle *Ki* de *Li* fut enlevée, elle pleura à mouiller sa robe. Quand elle fut devenue la favorite du roi de *Tsinn*, elle constata qu'elle avait eu tort de pleurer. N'en est-il pas ainsi de bien des morts ? Partis à regret jadis, ne pensent-ils pas maintenant, que c'est bien à tort qu'ils aimaient la vie?.. La vie ne serait-elle pas un rêve ? Certains, tirés par le réveil, d'un rêve gai, se désolent ; d'autres, délivrés par le réveil d'un rêve triste, se réjouissent. Les uns et les autres, tandis qu'ils rêvaient, ont cru à la réalité de leur rêve. Après le réveil, ils se sont dit, ce n'était qu'un vain rêve. Ainsi en est-il du grand réveil, la mort, après lequel on dit de la vie, ce ne fut qu'un long rêve. Mais, parmi les vivants, peu comprennent ceci. Presque tous croient être bien éveillés. Ils se croient vraiment, les uns rois, les autres valets. Nous rêvons tous, vous et moi. Moi qui vous dis que vous rêvez, je rêve aussi mon rêve. — L'identité de la vie et de la mort, paraît incroyable à bien des gens. La leur persuade-t-on jamais ? C'est peu probable. Car, en cette matière, pas de démonstration évidente, aucune autorité décisive, une foule de sentiments subjectifs. Seule la règle céleste résoudra cette question. Et qu'est-ce que cette règle céleste ? C'est se placer, pour juger, à l'infini... Impossible de résoudre le conflit ses contradictoires, de décider laquelle est vraie laquelle est fausse.

Alors plaçons-nous en dehors du temps, au-delà des raisonnements. Envisageons la question à l'infini, distance à laquelle tout se fond en un tout indéterminé.

I. *Tous les êtres appartenant au Tout, leurs actions ne sont pas libres, mais nécessitées par ses lois...* Un jour la pénombre demanda à l'ombre : pourquoi vous mouvez-vous dans tel sens?.. Je ne me meus pas, dit l'ombre. Je suis projetée par un corps quelconque, lequel me produit et m'oriente, d'après les lois de l'opacité et du mouvement... Ainsi en est-il de tous les actes.

J. *Il n'y a pas d'individus réellement tels, mais seulement des prolongements de la norme...* Jadis, raconte Tchoang-tzeu, une nuit, je fus un papillon, voltigeant content de son sort. Puis je m'éveillai, étant Tchoang — tcheou. Qui suis-je, en réalité ? Un papillon qui rêve qu'il est Tchoang — tcheou, ou Tchoang-tcheou qui s'imagine qu'il fut papillon ? Dans mon cas, y a-t-il deux individus réels ? Y a-t-il eu transformation réelle d'un individu en un autre ? — *Ni l'un, ni l'autre, dit la Glose. Il y a eu deux modifications irréelles, de l'être unique, de la norme universelle, dans laquelle tous les êtres dans tous leurs états sont un.*

### Chap. 3. Entretien du principe vital.

A. L'énergie vitale est limitée. L'esprit est insatiable. Mettre un instrument limité à la discrétion d'un maître insatiable, c'est toujours périlleux, c'est souvent funeste. Le maître usera l'instrument. *L'effort intellectuel prolongé, exagéré, épuisera la vie.* — Se tuer à bien faire pour l'amour de la gloire, ou périr pour un crime de la main du bourreau, cela revient au même ; c'est la mort, *pour cause d'excès, dans les deux cas.* — Qui veut durer, doit se modérer, *n'aller jusqu'au bout de rien, toujours rester à mi-chemin.* Ainsi pourra-t-il conserver son corps intact, entretenir sa vie jusqu'au bout, nourrir ses parents jusqu'à leur mort, durer lui-même jusqu'au terme de son lot.

B. Le boucher du prince *Hoei* de *Leang* dépeçait un bœuf. Sans effort, méthodiquement, comme en mesure, son couteau détachait la peau, tranchait les chairs, disjoignait les articulations. — Vous êtes vraiment habile, lui dit le prince, qui le regardait faire. — Tout mon art, répondit le boucher, consiste à n'envisager que le principe *du découpage*. Quand je débutai, je pensais au bœuf. Après trois ans d'exercice, je commençai à oublier l'objet. Maintenant quand je découpe, je n'ai plus en esprit que le principe. Mes sens n'agissent plus ; seule ma volonté est active. Suivant les lignes naturelles du bœuf, mon couteau pénètre et

divise, tranchant les chairs molles, contournant les os, faisant sa besogne comme naturellement et sans effort. Et cela, sans s'user, *parce qu'il ne s'attaque pas aux parties dures*. Un débutant use un couteau par mois. Un boucher médiocre, use un couteau par an. Le même couteau me sert depuis dix-neuf ans. Il a dépecé plusieurs milliers de bœufs, sans éprouver aucune usure. Parce que je ne le fais passer, que là où il peut passer. — Merci, dit le prince Hœi au boucher ; vous venez de m'enseigner comment on fait durer la vie, *en ne la faisant servir qu'à ce qui ne l'use pas*.

C. *L'affliction est une autre cause d'usure du principe vital. Omettant les sujets d'affliction moindres, Tchoang-tzeu en indique trois graves, communs en son temps de luttes féodales, les mutilations légales, l'exil, la mort. — Se résigner à la mutilation, comme le secrétaire du prince de Leang, auquel on avait coupé un pied, et qui ne reprochait pas sa mutilation à son maître, mais se consolait en pensant qu'elle avait été voulue par le ciel. — Se résigner à l'exil, comme le faisan des marais, qui vit content dans son existence besogneuse et inquiète, sans désirer l'aisance d'une volière. — Se résigner à la mort, parce qu'elle n'est qu'un changement, souvent en mieux. Quand Lao-tan fut mort, Ts'inn-cheu étant allé le pleurer, ne poussa, devant son cercueil, que les trois lamentations exigées de tout le monde par le rituel. Quand il fut sorti : n'étiez-vous pas l'ami de Lao-tan ? lui demandèrent les disciples... Je le fus, dit Ts'inn-cheu... Alors, dirent les disciples, pourquoi n'avez-vous pas pleuré davantage?.. Parce que, dit Ts'inn-cheu, ce cadavre n'est plus mon ami. Tous ces pleureurs qui remplissent la maison, hurlant à qui mieux mieux, agissent par pure sentimentalité, d'une manière déraisonnable, presque damnable. La loi, *oubliée du vulgaire*, mais dont le Sage se souvient, c'est que chacun vient en ce monde à son heure, et le quitte en son temps. Le Sage ne se réjouit donc pas des naissances, et ne s'afflige pas des décès. Les anciens ont comparé l'homme à un fagot que le Seigneur fait (naissance) et défait (mort) 4. Quand la flamme a consumé un fagot, elle passe à un autre, et ne s'éteint pas 2.*

1. Quels anciens ? Chinois ou indiens ? — Quel Seigneur ? Le Souverain chinois des Annales et des Odes, ou le Prajapati védique maître de la vie et de la mort ? Le fagot fait penser aux skandha.

2. Concept taoïste de la survivance, de l'immortalité de l'âme. Glose : état de vie, état de mort ; fagot lié, fagot délié. La mort et la vie, succession d'aller et de venir. — L'être reste le même ; celui qui est un avec l'être universel, où qu'il aille, il garde son moi. Le feu est au fagot ce

que l'âme est au corps ; elle passe à un corps nouveau, comme le feu passe à un autre fagot. Le feu se propage sans s'éteindre, la vie se continue sans cesser. [*caractères chinois omis*].

#### Chap. 4. Le monde des hommes.

A. *Yen-hoei*, le disciple préféré, demanda un congé à son maître *K'oung-ni* (Confucius)... Pour aller où ? demanda celui-ci. — À *Wei*, dit le disciple. Le prince de ce pays est jeune et volontaire. Il gouverne mal, n'accepte aucune observation, et fait mourir ses sujets pour peu de chose. Sa principauté est jonchée de cadavres. Son peuple est plongé dans le désespoir... Or je vous ai entendu dire bien des fois, qu'il faut quitter le pays bien ordonné, pour aller donner ses soins à celui qui est mal gouverné. C'est aux malades que le médecin va. Je voudrais consacrer ce que j'ai appris de vous, au salut de la principauté de *Wei*. — N'y va pas ! dit *K'oung-ni*. Tu irais à ta perte. Le grand principe est qu'on ne s'embarrasse pas de soucis multiples. Les surhommes de l'antiquité ne s'embarrassaient jamais d'autrui au point de se troubler eux-mêmes. Ils ne perdaient pas leur temps à vouloir amender un brutal tyran... Rien de plus dangereux, que de parler avec insistance, de justice et de charité, à un homme violent, qui se complaît dans le mal. Ses conseillers feront cause commune avec lui, et s'uniront pour t'intimider. Si tu hésites ou faiblis, ils triompheront, et le mal sera pire. Si tu les attaques avec force, le tyran te fera mettre à mort. C'est ainsi que périrent jadis, le ministre *Koan-loung-p'eng* mis à mort par le tyran *Kie*, et le prince *Pi-kan* mis à mort par le tyran *Tcheou*. Tous deux, pour avoir pris le parti du peuple opprimé, contre des princes oppresseurs. Jadis les grands empereurs *Yao* et *U*, ne réussirent pas à persuader des vassaux avides de gloires et de richesses ; ils durent en venir à les réduire par les armes... Or le prince actuel de *Wei*, est un homme de la même espèce. Sur quel ton lui parleras-tu, pour le toucher ? — Je lui parlerai, dit *Yen-hoei*, avec modestie et franchise. — Tu perdras ta peine, dit *K'oung-ni*. Cet homme est plein de lui-même. C'est de plus un fourbe consommé. Le mal ne lui répugne pas, la vertu ne lui fait aucun effet. Ou il te contredira ouvertement ; ou il feindra de t'écouter, mais sans te croire. — Alors, dit *Yen-hoei*, conservant ma droiture intérieure, je m'accommoderai à lui extérieurement. Je lui exposerai la raison céleste, qui le touchera peut-être, puisqu'il est, comme moi, un fils du ciel. Sans chercher à lui plaire, je lui parlerai avec la simplicité d'un enfant, en disciple du ciel.

Si respectueux que personne ne puisse m'accuser de lui avoir manqué le moins du monde, je lui exposerai doucement la doctrine des Anciens. Que cette doctrine condamne sa conduite, il ne pourra pas m'en vouloir, puisqu'elle n'est pas de moi. Ne pensez-vous pas, maître, que je puisse corriger ainsi le prince de *Wei*? — Tu ne le corrigeras pas, dit *K'oung-ni*. Cela, c'est le procédé didactique, connu de tous les maîtres, et qui ne convertit personne. En parlant ainsi, tu n'encourras peut-être pas de représailles, mais c'est là tout ce que tu obtiendras. — Alors, demanda *Yen-hoei*, comment arriver à convertir? — En s'y préparant, dit *K'oung-ni*, par l'abstinence. — Oh! dit *Yen-hoei*, je connais cela. Ma famille est pauvre. Nous passons des mois, sans boire de vin, sans manger de viande. — C'est là, dit *K'oung-ni*, l'abstinence préparatoire aux sacrifices. Ce n'est pas de celle-là qu'il s'agit, mais bien de l'abstinence du cœur. — Qu'est-ce que cela? demanda *Yen-hoei*. — Voici, dit *K'oung-ni*: Concentrer toute son énergie intellectuelle comme en une masse. Ne pas écouter par les oreilles, ni par le cœur, mais seulement par l'esprit. Intercepter la voie des sens, tenir pur le miroir du cœur; ne laisser l'esprit s'occuper, dans le vide intérieur, que d'objets abstraits seulement. La vision du principe exige le vide. Se tenir vide, voilà l'abstinence du cœur. — Ah! dit *Yen-hoei*, je ne savais pas cela, c'est pourquoi je ne suis qu'un *Yen-hoei*. Si j'atteignais là, je ne serais plus *Yen-hoei*; je deviendrais un homme supérieur. Mais, pratiquement, peut-on se vider à ce point? — On le peut, dit *K'oung-ni*, et je vais t'apprendre comment. Il faut, pour cela, ne laisser entrer du dehors, dans le domaine du cœur, que des êtres qui n'aient plus de nom; des idées abstraites, pas des cas concrets. Le cœur ne doit vibrer qu'à leur contact (notions objectives); jamais spontanément (émotions subjectives). Il faut se tenir fermé, simple, dans le pur naturel, sans mélange d'artificiel. On peut arriver ainsi à se conserver sans émotion, tandis qu'il est difficile de se calmer après s'être laissé émouvoir; tout comme il est plus facile de ne pas marcher, que d'effacer les traces de ses pas après avoir marché. Tout ce qui est artificiel est faux et inefficace. Seul le naturel est vrai et efficace. Attendre un effet des procédés humains, c'est vouloir voler sans ailes ou comprendre sans intelligence... Vois comme la lumière qui entre du dehors par ce trou du mur, s'étend dans le vide de cet appartement, et s'y éteint paisiblement, sans produire d'images. Ainsi les connaissances abstraites, doivent s'étendre dans la paix, sans la troubler. Si les connaissances restées concrètes, créent des images ou sont réfléchies, l'homme aura beau s'asseoir immobile, son cœur

divaguera follement. Le cœur vidé attire les mânes, qui viennent y faire leur demeure. Il exerce sur les vivants une action toute-puissante. Lui seul est l'instrument des transformations morales, étant une pure parcelle du Principe, le transformateur universel. C'est ainsi qu'il faut expliquer l'action qu'exercèrent sur les hommes Yao et Chounn, après Fou-hi Ki-kiu et beaucoup d'autres.<sup>1</sup>

B. *Autre discours de Confucius sur l'apathie taoïste...* Envoyé comme ambassadeur par son maître le roi de Tch'ou au prince de Ts'i, Tzeu-kaou demanda conseil à Koung-ni. Mon roi, lui dit-il, m'a confié une mission très importante. Ce sera fatigant ; et puis, réussirai-je ? Je crains pour ma santé, et pour ma tête. En vérité, je suis très inquiet... J'ai toujours vécu sobrement, le corps sain et le cœur tranquille. Or, dès le jour de ma nomination comme ambassadeur, j'ai eu tellement le feu aux entrailles, que le soir j'ai dû boire de l'eau glacée, pour calmer cet embrasement intérieur. Si j'en suis là avant de partir pour ma mission, que sera-ce après ? Pour réussir, il me faudra passer par des inquiétudes sans nombre. Et si je ne réussis pas, comment sauverai-je ma tête ? Maître, quel conseil pouvez-vous me donner ? — Voici, dit Koung-ni. La piété envers les parents, et la fidélité à son prince, sont les deux devoirs naturels fondamentaux, dont rien ne peut jamais dispenser. Obéir à ses parents, servir son prince, voilà les devoirs de l'enfant et du ministre. Et cela, en toute chose, et quoi qu'il arrive. Il faut donc, en cette matière, bannir toute considération de peine ou de plaisir, pour n'envisager que le devoir en lui-même, non comme une chose facultative ; mais comme une chose fatale, pour laquelle il faut se dévouer, au besoin jusqu'au sacrifice de la vie et à l'acceptation de la mort. Ceci posé, vous êtes tenu d'accepter votre mission, et de vous dévouer à son accomplissement... Il est vrai que le rôle d'un ambassadeur, d'un entremetteur diplomatique, est un rôle difficile et périlleux. Mais cela, le plus souvent, parce que le personnage y met du sien. Si le message est agréable, y ajouter des paroles agréables indiscrettes ; si le message est-désagréable, y ajouter des paroles désagréables blessantes ; poser, hâbler ; exagérer, outrepasser son mandat ; voilà ce qui cause d'ordinaire le malheur des ambassadeurs. Tout excès est funeste. Aussi est-il dit, dans les *Règles du parler* : Transmettez le sens de ce que vous êtes chargé de dire, mais non les termes, si ces termes sont durs. *A fortiori, n'ajoutez pas gratuitement des termes blessants.* Si vous faites ainsi, votre vie sera probablement sauvée... *Généralement, c'est la passion, qui gâte les choses.* Les lutteurs commencent par lutter

d'après les règles ; puis, quand ils sont emballés, ils se portent de mauvais coups. Les buveurs commencent par boire modérément ; puis, échauffés, ils se soûlent. Le vulgaire commence par être poli ; puis, avec la familiarité, viennent les incivilités. Beaucoup d'affaires, d'abord mises au point, sont ensuite exagérées. *Tout cela, parce que la passion s'en est mêlée. Il peut en arriver de même aux porteurs de messages. Malheur ! s'ils s'échauffent pour leur sujet. Ils ajouteront du leur, et il leur en cuira.* Il en est de l'orateur qui s'émeut, comme de l'eau et du vent ; les vagues s'élèvent aisément, les discours s'enflent facilement.

1. Dans ce morceau, Yen-hoei professe le confuciasme ; Confucius lui enseigne le taoïsme.

Rien n'est dangereux, comme les paroles produites par la passion. Elles peuvent en venir à ressembler aux fureurs de la bête aux abois. Elles provoquent la rupture des négociations, la haine et la vengeance. Aussi les Règles du parler disent-elles : N'outrepassez pas votre mandat. N'insistez pas trop fort, par désir de réussir. Ne tâchez pas d'obtenir plus que vous ne devez demander. Sans cela, vous ne ferez rien de bon, et vous vous mettez en danger. Mais, toute passion étant évitée, faites votre devoir, le cœur dégagé. Advienne que pourra ! Aiguillonnez-vous sans cesse, en vous demandant : comment ferai-je pour répondre aux bontés de mon prince ? Enfin, soyez prêt à faire le sacrifice le plus difficile, celui de la vie, s'il le faut. Voilà mon conseil.

C. *Autre leçon de modération taoïste.* — Le philosophe Yen-ho de Lou ayant été désigné pour être le précepteur du fils aîné du duc Ling de Wei, demanda conseil à Kiu-pai u. Mon élève, lui dit-il, est aussi mauvais que possible. Si je le laisse faire, il ruinera son pays. Si j'essaye de le brider, il m'en coûtera peut-être la vie. Il voit les torts d'autrui, mais pas les siens. Que faire d'un pareil disciple ? -- Kiu — pai u dit : D'abord soyez circonspect, soyez correct, ne prêtez en rien à la critique. Ensuite vous chercherez à le gagner. Accommodez-vous à lui, sans condescendre à mal agir avec lui sans doute, mais aussi sans le prendre avec lui de trop haut. S'il a un caractère jeune, faites-vous jeune avec lui. S'il n'aime pas la contrainte, ne l'ennuyez pas. S'il n'aime pas la domination, ne cherchez pas à lui en imposer. Surtout, ne le prenez pas à rebrousse-poil, ne l'indisposez pas contre vous... Ne tentez pas de lutter avec lui de vive force. Ce serait là imiter la sottie mante, qui voulut arrêter un char et qui fut écrasée... Ne traitez avec lui, que quand il est bien disposé. Vous savez comme font les éleveurs de tigres, avec leurs dangereux élèves. Ils ne leur donnent jamais de

proie vivante, car la satisfaction de là tuer exalterait leur brutale cruauté. Ils ne leur donnent même pas un gros morceau de viande, car l'acte de le déchirer surexciterait leurs instincts sanguinaires. Ils leur donnent leur nourriture par petites portions, et n'approchent d'eux, que quand, repus et calmes, ils sont d'aussi bonne humeur qu'un tigre peut l'être. Ainsi ont-ils plus de chances de ne pas être dévorés... Cependant, ne rendez pas votre disciple intraitable, en le gâtant. Tels éleveurs de chevaux maniaques aiment leurs bêtes jusqu'à conserver leurs excréments. Qu'arrive-t-il alors ? Il arrive que, devenus capricieux jusqu'à la frénésie, ces chevaux s'emporent et cassent tout, quand on les approche même gentiment et dans les meilleures intentions. Plus on les gâte, moins ils sont reconnaissants.

Les principes taoïstes du maniement des hommes et des affaires, exposés ci-dessus, reviennent à ceci : Tout traiter de loin et de haut, en général pas en détail, sans trop s'appliquer, sans se préoccuper. Prudence, condescendance, patience, un certain laisser-aller ; mais pas de lâcheté ; et, au besoin, ne pas craindre la mort, laquelle n'a rien de redoutable pour le Taoïste. — La suite (comparez chap. I F), est consacrée à l'abstention, à la retraite, que les taoïstes mirent toujours au-dessus de l'action ; parce que l'inaction conserve, tandis que l'action use.

D. Le maître charpentier Cheu, se rendant dans le pays de Ts'i, passa près du chêne fameux, qui ombrageait le tertre du génie du sol à K'iu-yuan. Le tronc de cet arbre célèbre pouvait cacher un bœuf. Il s'élevait droit, à quatre-vingts pieds de hauteur, puis étalait une dizaine de maîtresses branches, dans chacune desquelles ou aurait pu creuser un canot. On venait en foule pour l'admirer. — Le charpentier passa auprès, sans lui donner un regard. — Mais voyez donc, lui dit son apprenti. Depuis que je manie la hache, je n'ai pas vu une aussi belle pièce de bois. Et vous ne la regardez même pas ! — J'ai vu, dit le maître. Impropre à faire une barque, un cercueil, un meuble, une porte, une colonne. Bois sans usage pratique. Il vivra longtemps. — Quand le maître charpentier Cheu revint de Ts'i, il passa la nuit à K'iu-yuan. L'arbre lui apparut en songe, et lui dit : Oui, les arbres dont le bois est beau, sont coupés jeunes. Aux arbres fruitiers, on casse les branches, dans l'ardeur de leur ravir leurs fruits. A tous leur utilité est fatale. Aussi suis-je heureux d'être inutile. Il en est d'ailleurs de vous hommes, comme de nous arbres. Si tu es un homme utile, tu ne vivras pas vieux. — Le lendemain matin, l'apprenti demanda au maître : Si ce grand arbre est heureux d'être inutile, pourquoi s'est-



il laissé faire génie du lieu ? — On l'a mis en place, dit le maître, sans lui demander son avis, et il s'en moque. Ce n'est pas la vénération populaire qui protège son existence, c'est son incapacité pour les usages communs. Son action tutélaire se réduit d'ailleurs à ne rien faire. *Tel le sage taoïste, mis en place malgré lui, et se gardant d'agir.*

*Suit E une autre variation sur le même thème, presque identique, fragment semblable ajouté au précédent, qui se termine ainsi : Cet arbre étant impropre aux usages communs, a pu se développer jusqu'à ces dimensions. La même incapacité donne à certains hommes le loisir d'atteindre à la transcendance parfaite.*

F. Dans le pays de Song, à King-cheu, les arbres poussent en masse. Les tout petits sont coupés, pour en faire des cages aux singes. Les moyens sont coupés, pour faire des maisons aux hommes. Les gros sont coupés, pour faire des cercueils aux morts. Tous périssent, par la hache, avant le temps, parce qu'ils peuvent servir. S'ils étaient sans usage, ils vieilliraient à l'aise. — Le traité sur les victimes, déclare que les bœufs à tête blanche, les porcs au groin retroussé, les hommes atteints de fistules, ne peuvent pas être sacrifiés au Génie du Fleuve ; car, disent les aruspices, ces êtres-là sont néfastes. Les hommes transcendants pensent que c'est faste pour eux, puisque cela leur sauve la vie.

G. Le cul-de-jatte Chou, un véritable monstre, gagnait sa vie et entretenait une famille de dix personnes, en ravaudant, vannant, etc. Quand son pays mobilisait, il restait bien tranquille. Aux jours de grande corvée, on ne lui demandait rien. Quand il y avait distribution de secours aux pauvres, il recevait du grain et du bois. Son incapacité pour les offices ordinaires lui valut de vivre jusqu'au bout de ses jours. De même son incapacité pour les charges vulgaires, fera vivre l'homme transcendant jusqu'au terme de son lot.

H. Alors que Confucius visitait le pays de Tch'ou, le fou Tsie-u 1 lui cria : Phénix ! phénix ! Sans doute, le monde est décadent ; mais qu'y pourras-tu ? L'avenir n'est pas encore venu, le passé est déjà bien loin. En temps de bon ordre, le Sage travaille pour l'état ; en temps de désordre, il s'occupe de son propre salut. Actuellement les temps sont tels, qu'échapper à la mort est difficile. Il n'y a plus de bonheur pour personne ; le malheur écrase tout le monde. Ce n'est pas le moment de te montrer. Tu parleras en vain de vertu, et montreras en pure perte ta tenue compassée. Il me plaît de courir comme un fou ; ne te mets pas dans mon chemin. Il me plaît de

marcher de travers ; ne gêne pas mes pieds. *C'est le moment de laisser faire.*

I. En produisant des forêts, la montagne attire ceux qui la dépouilleront. Eu laissant dégoutter sa graisse, le rôti active le feu qui le grille. Le cannelier est abattu, parce que son écorce est un condiment recherché. On incise l'arbre à vernis, pour lui ravir sa sève précieuse. La presque totalité des hommes s'imagine que, être jugé apte à quelque chose est un bien. En réalité, c'est être jugé inapte à tout, qui est un avantage.

1. C'était un sage taoïste, qui passait pour fou. Comparer : Entretiens de Confucius, livre IX, chapitre XVIII, 5.

## Chap. 5. Action parfaite.

A. Dans la principauté de Lou, un certain Wang-t'ai, qui avait subi l'amputation des deux pieds (*supplice commun alors*), groupait autour de lui plus de disciples que Confucius. Tch'ang-ki s'en étonna, et dit au Maître : Ce Wang-t'ai ne péroré pas, ne discute pas ; et cependant, ceux qui sont allés à lui vides, reviennent de chez lui pleins. Y aurait-il une manière d'enseigner sans paroles, un procédé impalpable de former les cœurs ? D'où provient l'influence de cet homme ? — De sa transcendance, répondit Confucius. Je l'ai connu trop tard. Je devrais me mettre à son école. Tout le monde devrait le prendre pour maître. — En quoi, au juste, vous est-il supérieur ? demanda Tch'ang-ki. — En ce que, répondit Confucius, il a atteint l'impassibilité parfaite. La vie et la mort lui étant également indifférentes, l'effondrement de l'univers ne lui causerait aucune émotion. À force de scruter, il est arrivé à la vérité abstraite immobile, la connaissance du principe universel unique. Il laisse évoluer tous les êtres selon leurs destinées, et se tient, lui, au centre immobile de toutes les destinées 4 — Je ne comprends pas, dit Tch'ang-ki. — Confucius reprit : Il y a deux manières d'envisager les êtres ; ou comme des entités distinctes, ou comme étant tous un dans le grand tout. Pour ceux qui se sont élevés à cette dernière sorte de considération, peu importe ce que leurs sens perçoivent. Leur esprit plane, toute son action étant concentrée. Dans cette vue abstraite globale, le détail des déficits disparaît. C'est en elle que consiste la transcendance de ce Wang-t'ai, que la mutilation de son corps ne saurait diminuer. — Ah ! dit Tch'ang-ki, je comprends. Ses réflexions l'ont rendu maître de ses sens, et il est ainsi parvenu à l'impassibilité. Mais y a-t-il là de quoi faire ainsi courir après lui ? — Oui, répartit Confucius : la fixité mentale attire ceux qui cherchent la sagesse, comme l'eau

immobile attire ceux qui désirent se mirer. Personne ne va se mirer dans l'eau courante. Personne ne demande à apprendre d'un esprit instable. C'est l'immutabilité qui caractérise le Sage au milieu de la foule. Tels, parmi les arbres à feuilles caduques, les pins et les cyprès toujours verts. Tels, parmi les hommes vulgaires, l'empereur Chounn, toujours droit et rectifiant les autres... Le signe extérieur de cet état intérieur, c'est l'imperturbabilité. Non pas celle du brave, qui fonce seul, pour l'amour de la gloire, sur une armée rangée en bataille. Mais celle de l'esprit qui, supérieur au ciel, à la terre, à tous les êtres, habite dans un corps auquel il ne tient pas, ne fait aucun cas des images que ses sens lui fournissent, connaît tout par connaissance globale dans son unité immobile. Cet esprit-là, absolument indépendant, est maître des hommes. S'il lui plaisait de les convoquer en masse, au jour fixé tous accourraient. Mais il ne veut pas se faire servir.

B. Chennt'ou-kia avait aussi subi l'amputation des pieds, pour une faute vraie ou supposée. Dans la principauté de Tcheng, il suivait, avec Tzeu-tch'an, les leçons de Pai-hounn-ou-jenn. Tzeu-tch'an méprisait

4. Comparez chap. 2 C.

ce mutilé, exigea qu'il lui cédât le pas... Il n'y a pas de rangs, dans l'école de notre maître, dit Chennt'ou-kia. Si vous tenez à l'étiquette, allez ailleurs. À un miroir parfaitement net, la poussière n'adhère pas ; si elle adhère, c'est que le miroir est humide ou gras. Votre exigence en matière rituelle, prouve que vous n'êtes pas encore sans défauts. — Vous, un mutilé, dit Tzeu-tch'an, vous me faites l'effet de vouloir poser en Yao. Si vous vous examiniez, vous trouveriez peut-être des raisons de vous taire. — Vous faites allusion, dit Chennt'ou-kia, à la peine que j'ai subie, et pensez que je l'ai méritée pour quelque faute grave. La plupart de ceux qui sont dans mon cas, disent très haut que cela n'aurait pas dû leur arriver. Plus sage qu'eux, je ne dis rien, et me résigne en paix à mon destin. Quiconque passait dans le champ visuel du fameux archer *I*, devait être percé d'une flèche ; s'il ne l'était pas, c'est que le destin ne le voulait pas. Le destin voulut que moi le perdisse mes pieds, et que d'autres gardassent les leurs. Les hommes qui ont leurs pieds, se moquent de moi qui ai perdu les miens. Jadis cela m'affectait. Maintenant je suis corrigé de cette faiblesse. Voilà dix-neuf années que j'étudie sous notre maître, lequel très attentif sur mon intérieur, n'a jamais fait aucune allusion à mon extérieur. Vous, son disciple, faites tout le contraire. N'auriez-vous pas tort ?

— Tzeu-tch'an 1 sentit la réprimande, changea de visage et dit : Qu'il n'en soit plus question.

C. Dans la principauté de Lou, un certain Chou-chan qui avait subi l'amputation des orteils alla demander à Confucius de l'instruire. — À quoi bon ? lui dit celui-ci, puisque vous n'avez pas su conserver votre intégrité corporelle. — Je voulais, pour compenser cette perte, apprendre de vous à préserver mon intégrité mentale, dit Chou-chan. Le ciel et la terre se prodiguent à tous les êtres, quels qu'ils soient, sans distinction. Je croyais que vous leur ressembliez. Je ne m'attendais pas à être rebuté par vous. — Pardonnez mon incivilité, veuillez entrer, dit Confucius ; je vous dirai ce que je sais. — Après l'entrevue, Chou-chan s'en étant retourné, Confucius dit à ses disciples : que cet exemple vous anime au bien, enfants ! Voyez, ce mutilé cherche à réparer ses fautes passées. Vous, ne commettez pas de fautes. — Cependant Chou-chan, malcontent de Confucius, s'était adressé à Lao-tan. Ce K'oung-ni, lui dit-il, n'est pas un sur-homme. Il s'attire des disciples, pose en maître, et cherche visiblement la réputation. Or le surhomme considère les préoccupations comme des menottes et des entraves. — Pourquoi, dit Lao-tan, n'avez-vous pas profité de votre entrevue avec lui, pour lui dire sans ambages, que la vie et la mort sont une seule et même chose, qu'il n'y a aucune distinction entre oui et non ? vous l'auriez peut-être délivré de ses menottes et de ses entraves. — Impossible, dit Chou-chan. Cet homme est trop plein de lui-même. Le Ciel l'a puni en l'aveuglant. Personne ne le fera plus voir clair.

1. Le Tzeu—tch'an mis ici en mauvaise posture, est un paragon confucéiste. Prince de Tcheng, du sixième siècle, célèbre à divers titres, surtout comme administrateur. Confucius pleura amèrement sa mort.

D. Le duc Nai de Lou dit à Confucius : Dans le pays de Wei vivait un homme nommé T'ouo le laid. Il était de fait la laideur même, un véritable épouvantail. Et cependant ses femmes, ses concitoyens, tous ceux qui le connaissaient, raffolaient de lui. Pourquoi cela ? Pas pour son génie, car il était toujours de l'avis des autres. Pas pour sa noblesse, car il était du commun. Pas pour sa richesse, car il était pauvre. Pas pour son savoir, car il ne connaissait du monde que son village... Je voulus le voir. Certes il était laid à faire peur. Malgré cela il me charma, car il charmait tout le monde. Après quelques mois, j'étais son ami. Avant un an, il eut toute ma confiance. Je lui offris d'être mon ministre. Il accepta avec répugnance et me quitta bientôt. Je ne puis me consoler de l'avoir perdu. À quoi attribuer la fascination que cet

homme exerce ? — Jadis, dit Confucius, dans le pays de Tch'ou, je vis la scène suivante. Une truie venait de mourir. Ses petits suçaient encore ses mamelles. Tout à coup ils se débandèrent effrayés. Ils s'étaient aperçus que leur mère ne les regardait plus, que ce n'était plus leur mère. Ce qu'ils avaient aimé en elle d'amour filial, ce n'était pas son corps, c'est ce qui animait son corps *et qui venait de disparaître*, la vertu maternelle résidant en elle... Dans le corps de T'ouo le laid, habitait une vertu latente parfaite. C'est cette vertu qui attirait à lui, malgré la forme répugnante de son corps. — Et qu'est-ce, demanda le duc Nai, que la vertu parfaite ? — C'est, répondit Confucius, l'impassibilité affable. La mort et la vie, la prospérité et la décadence, le succès et l'insuccès, la pauvreté et la richesse, la supériorité et l'infériorité, le blâme et l'éloge, la faim et la soif, le froid et le chaud, voilà les vicissitudes alternantes dont est fait le destin. Elles se succèdent, imprévisibles, sans cause connue ! Il faut négliger ces choses ; ne pas les laisser pénétrer dans le palais de l'esprit, dont elles troubleraient la calme paix. Conserver cette paix d'une manière stable, sans la laisser troubler même par la joie ; faire à tout bon visage, s'accommoder de tout ; voilà, dit Confucius, la vertu parfaite. — Pourquoi, demanda le duc Nai, l'appellez-vous latente ? — Parce que, dit Confucius, elle est impalpable, comme le calme qui attire dans l'eau d'un étang. Ainsi la calme paix du caractère, non autrement définissable, attire tout à soi. — À quelques jours de là, le duc Nai *converti au taoïsme par Confucius*, confia à Maître Minn l'impression que lui avait faite cette conversation. Jusqu'ici, dit-il, j'avais cru que gouverner, contrôler les statistiques et protéger la vie de mes sujets était mon devoir d'état.

Mais depuis que j'ai entendu parler un sur-homme (Confucius), je crois bien que je me suis trompé. Je me suis nuï à moi-même en m'agitant trop, et à ma principauté en m'occupant trop d'elle. Désormais K'oung-k'iou n'est plus mon sujet, mais mon ami, pour le service qu'il m'a rendu de m'ouvrir les yeux.

E. Un cul-de-jatte gagna tellement la confiance du duc Ling de Wei, que celui-ci le préféra aux hommes les mieux faits. Un autre affligé d'un goitre énorme fut le conseiller préféré du duc Hoan de Ts'i. Le nimbe d'une capacité supérieure éclipse les formes corporelles auxquelles elle adhère. Faire cas du corps et ne pas faire cas de la vertu, c'est la pire des erreurs. — Se tenant dans son champ de la science globale, le Sage méprise la connaissance des détails, toute convention, toute affection, tout art. Libre de ces choses *artificielles et distrayantes*, il nourrit son être de l'aliment

céleste (pure raison, dit la glose), indifférent aux affaires humaines. Dans le corps d'un homme, il n'est plus un homme. Il vit avec les hommes ; mais absolument indifférent à leur approbation et à leur désapprobation, parce qu'il n'a plus leurs sentiments. Infiniment petit est-ce par quoi, il est encore un homme (son corps) ; infiniment grand est ce par quoi il est un avec le ciel (sa raison).

F. Hœi-tzeu (musicien et sophiste) objecta : Un homme ne peut pas arriver à être, comme vous dites, sans affections. — Il le peut, répliqua Tchoang-tzeu. — Alors, dit Hœi-tzeu, ce n'est plus un homme. — C'est encore un homme, dit Tchoang-tzeu ; car le Principe et le ciel lui ont donné ce qui fait l'homme. — S'il a perdu le sentiment, repartit Hœi-tzeu, il a cessé d'être un homme. — S'il en avait perdu jusqu'à la puissance, peut-être, dit Tchmang-tzeu, (*car cette puissance se confond avec la nature*) ; mais il n'en est pas ainsi. La puissance lui reste, mais il n'en use pas pour distinguer, pour prendre parti, pour aimer ou haïr. Et par suite il n'use pas en vain le corps, que le Principe et le ciel lui ont donné. Ce n'est pas votre cas, à vous qui vous tuez à faire de la musique et à inventer des sophismes.

## Chap. 6. Le Principe, premier maître.

A. Savoir faire la part de l'action du ciel et de l'action de l'homme, voilà l'apogée de l'enseignement et de la science. — Savoir ce qu'on a reçu du ciel, et ce qu'on doit y ajouter de soi, voilà l'apogée. — Le don du ciel, c'est la nature reçue à la naissance. Le rôle de l'homme, c'est de chercher, en partant de ce qu'il sait, à apprendre ce qu'il ne sait pas ; c'est d'entretenir sa vie jusqu'au bout des années assignées par le ciel, sans l'abréger par sa faute. Savoir cela, voilà l'apogée. — Et quel sera le critère de ces assertions, dont la vérité n'est pas évidente ? Sur quoi repose la certitude de cette distinction du céleste et de l'humain dans l'homme?.. Sur l'enseignement des Hommes Vrais. D'eux provient le *Vrai Savoir*.

B. Qu'est-ce que ces Hommes Vrais?.. Les Hommes Vrais de l'antiquité se laissaient conseiller même par des minorités. Ils ne recherchaient aucune gloire, ni militaire, ni politique. Leurs insuccès ne les chagrinaient pas, leurs succès ne les enflaient pas. Aucune hauteur ne leur donnait le vertige. L'eau ne les mouillait pas, le feu ne les brûlait pas ; parce qu'ils s'étaient élevés jusqu'aux régions sublimes du Principe 1. — Les Hommes Vrais anciens, n'étaient troublés par aucun rêve durant leur sommeil, par aucune

tristesse durant leur veille. Le raffinement dans les aliments leur était inconnu. Leur respiration calme et profonde pénétrait leur organisme jusqu'aux talons ; tandis que le vulgaire respire du gosier seulement, comme le prouvent les spasmes de la glotte de ceux qui se disputent ; plus un homme est passionné, plus sa respiration est superficielle 2. — Les Hommes vrais anciens ignoraient l'amour de la vie et l'horreur de la mort. Leur entrée *en scène, dans la vie*, ne leur causait aucune joie ; leur rentrée *dans les coulisses, à la mort*, ne leur causait aucune horreur. Calmes ils venaient, calmes ils partaient, doucement, sans secousse, comme en planant. Se souvenant seulement de leur dernier commencement (naissance), ils ne se préoccupaient pas de leur prochaine fin (mort). Ils aimaient cette vie tant qu'elle durait, et l'oubliaient au départ *pour une autre vie, à la mort*. Ainsi leurs sentiments humains ne contrecarraient pas le Principe en eux ; l'humain en eux ne gênait pas le céleste. Tels étaient les Hommes Vrais. — Par suite, leur cœur était ferme, leur attitude était recueillie, leur mine était simple, leur conduite était tempérée, leurs sentiments étaient réglés. Ils faisaient, en toute occasion, ce qu'il fallait faire, sans confier à personne leurs motifs intérieurs. Ils faisaient la guerre sans haïr, et du bien sans aimer. Celui-là n'est pas un Sage, qui aime à se communiquer, qui se fait des amis, qui calcule les temps et les circonstances, qui n'est pas indifférent au succès et à l'insuccès, qui

1. Parce qu'ils étaient un, dans ce principe, avec les forces naturelles, lesquelles ne mouillent, ne brûlent, ne blessent, ne détruisent, que leurs contraires. Quiconque est un avec le Principe universel, est un avec le feu et l'eau, n'est ni brûlé ni mouillé, etc.

2. Illusions, passions, goûts, tout cela est contraire à la vérité. L'air pur est, pour les taoïstes, l'aliment par excellence des forces vitales.

expose sa personne pour la gloire ou pour la faveur. Hou-pou-hie, Ou-koang, Chou-ts'i, Ki-tzeu, Su-u, Ki-t'ouo, Chenn-t'ou-ti, servirent tout le monde et firent du bien à tout le monde, sans qu'aucune émotion de leur cœur viciât leurs actes de bienfaisance. — Les Hommes Vrais anciens, étaient toujours équitables, jamais aimables ; toujours modestes, jamais flatteurs. Ils tenaient à leur sens, mais sans dureté. Leur mépris pour tout était manifeste, mais non affecté. Leur extérieur était paisiblement joyeux. Tous leurs actes paraissaient naturels et spontanés. Ils inspiraient l'affection par leurs manières, et le respect par leurs vertus. Sous un air de condescendance apparente, ils se tenaient fièrement à distance du

vulgaire. Ils affectionnaient la retraite, et ne préparaient jamais leurs discours. — Pour eux, les supplices étaient l'essentiel dans le gouvernement, mais ils les appliquaient sans colère. Ils tenaient les rites pour un accessoire, dont ils s'acquittaient autant qu'il fallait pour ne pas choquer le vulgaire. Ils tenaient pour science de laisser agir le temps, et pour vertu de suivre le flot. Ceux qui jugèrent qu'ils se mouvaient activement, se sont trompés. *En réalité ils se laissaient aller au fil du temps et des événements.* Pour eux, aimer et haïr, c'était tout un ; ou plutôt, ils n'aimaient ni ne haïssaient. Ils considéraient tout comme essentiellement un, à la manière du ciel, et distinguaient artificiellement des cas particuliers, à la manière des hommes. Ainsi, en eux, pas de conflit entre le céleste et l'humain. Et voilà justement ce qui fait l'Homme Vrai.

C. L'alternance de la vie et de la mort, est prédéterminée, comme celle du jour et de la nuit, par le Ciel. *Que l'homme se soumette stoïquement à la fatalité, et rien n'arrivera plus contre son gré.* S'il arrive quelque chose qui le blesse, c'est qu'il avait conçu de l'affection pour quelque être. Qu'il n'aime rien, et il sera invulnérable. *Il y a des sentiments plus élevés, que les amours réputés nobles.* Qu'au lieu d'aimer le Ciel comme un père, il le vénère comme le faîte universel. Qu'au lieu d'aimer son prince jusqu'à mourir pour lui, il se sacrifie pour le seul motif abstrait du dévouement absolu. Quand les ruisseaux se dessèchent, les poissons se rassemblent dans les trous, et cherchent à se tenir humides en se serrant les uns contre les autres. *Et l'on admire cette charité mutuelle !* N'eût-il pas mieux valu, que, de bonne heure, ils eussent cherché, chacun pour soi, le salut dans les eaux profondes ?.. Au lieu de toujours citer comme exemple la bonté de Yao, et comme épouvantail la malice de Kie, les hommes ne feraient-ils pas mieux d'oublier ces deux personnages, et d'orienter la morale uniquement sur la perfection abstraite du Principe ? — Mon corps fait partie de la grande masse (du cosmos, de la nature, du tout). En elle, le soutien de mon enfance, l'activité durant mon âge mûr, la paix dans ma vieillesse, le repos à ma mort. Bonne elle m'a été durant l'état de vie, bonne elle me sera durant l'état de mort. De tout lieu particulier, un objet déposé peut être dérobé ; mais un objet confié au tout lui-même, ne sera pas enlevé. Identifiez-vous avec la grande masse ; en elle est la permanence. *Permanence pas immobile. Chaîne de transformations. Moi persistant à travers des mutations sans fin.* Cette fois je suis content d'être dans une forme humaine 1. J'ai déjà éprouvé antérieurement et j'éprouverai postérieurement le même contentement d'être,



1. Glose : Être actuellement un homme, c'est un épisode dans la chaîne de dix mille transformations successives.

dans une succession illimitée de formes diverses, suite infinie de contentements. Alors pourquoi haïrais-je la mort, le commencement de mon prochain contentement ? Le Sage s'attache au tout dont il fait partie, qui le contient, dans lequel il évolue. S'abandonnant au fil de cette évolution, il sourit à la mort prématurée, il sourit à l'âge suranné, il sourit au commencement, il sourit à la fin ; il sourit et veut qu'on sourie à toutes les vicissitudes. Car il sait que tous les êtres font partie du tout qui évolue.

D. Or ce tout est le Principe, volonté, réalité, non-agissant, non-apparent. Il peut être transmis, mais non saisi, appréhendé, mais pas vu. Il a en lui-même, son essence et sa racine. Avant que le ciel et la terre ne fussent, toujours il existait immuable. Il est la source de la transcendance des Mânes et du Souverain des Annales et des Odes. Il engendra le ciel et la terre des Annales et des Odes. Il fut avant la matière informe, avant l'espace, avant le monde, avant le temps ; sans qu'on puisse l'appeler pour cela haut, profond, durable, ancien 1. Hi-wei le connut, et dérivait de cette connaissance les lois astronomiques. Fou-hi le connut, et tira de cette connaissance les lois physiques. C'est à lui que l'Ourse (le pôle) doit sa fixité imperturbable. C'est à lui que le soleil et la lune doivent leur cours régulier. Par lui K'an-p'ei s'établit sur les monts K'ounn-lung, Fong-i suivit le cours du Fleuve jaune, Kien-ou s'établit au mont T'ai-chan, Hoang-ti monta au ciel, Tchoan — hu habita le palais azuré, U-k'iang devint le génie du pôle nord, Si-tvang-mou s'établit à Chao-koang 2. Personne ne sait rien, ni de son commencement, ni de sa fin. Par lui P'eng-tsou vécut, depuis les temps de l'empereur Chounn, jusqu'à celui des cinq hégémons. Par lui Fou-ye gouverna l'empire de son maître l'empereur Ou-ting, et devint après sa mort une étoile (dans la constellation du Sagittaire).

E. Maître K'oei dit Nan-pai, demanda à Niu-y : comment se fait-il que, malgré votre grand âge, vous ayez la fraîcheur d'un enfant » ? — C'est, dit Niu-y, qu'ayant vécu conformément à la doctrine du Principe, je ne me suis pas usé. — Pourrais-je apprendre cette doctrine ? demanda Maître. K'oei. — Vous n'avez pas ce qu'il faut, répondit Niu-y. Pouo-leang-i, lui, avait les dispositions requises. Je

l'enseignai. <sup>6a</sup> Après trois jours, il eut oublié le monde extérieur. Sept jours de plus, et il perdit la notion des objets qui l'entouraient. Neuf jours de plus, et il eut perdu la notion de sa propre existence. Il acquit alors la claire pénétration, et par elle la science de l'existence momentanée dans la chaîne ininterrompue. Ayant acquis cette connaissance, il cessa de distinguer le passé du présent et du futur, la vie de la mort <sup>3</sup>. Il comprit que, en réalité, tuer ne fait pas mourir, engendrer ne fait pas naître, le Principe soutenant l'être à travers ses finir et ses devenir. Aussi l'appelle-t-on justement le fixateur permanent. C'est de lui, du fixe, que dérivent toutes les mutations. — Est-ce vous qui avez inventé cette doctrine ? demanda Maître le, oui. — Non, dit Niu-y ; je l'ai apprise du fils de Fou-mei, disciple

1. L'absolu n'admettant pas d'épithètes relatives. Glose.

2. Réminiscences ou fiction ? Rien à tirer des gloses. Je renvoie la question aux savants.

3. Phases, périodes, de l'évolution une.

du petit-fils de Lao-song, disciple de Tchan — ming, disciple de Nie-hu, disciple de Su-i, disciple de U-neou, disciple de Huan — ming, disciple de San-leao, disciple de I-cheu <sup>1</sup>.

F. Tzeu — seu, Tzeu-u, Tzeu-li, Tzeu-lai, causaient ensemble. L'un d'entre eux dit : celui qui penserait comme moi, que tout être est éternel, que la vie et la mort se succèdent, qu'être vivant ou mort sont deux phases du même être, celui-là j'en ferais mon ami... Or, les trois autres pensant de même, les quatre hommes rirent tous ensemble et devinrent amis intimes. — Or il advint que Tzeu-u tomba gravement malade. Il était affreusement bossu et contrefait. Tzeu — seu alla le visiter. Respirant péniblement, mais le cœur calme, le mourant lui dit : Bon est l'auteur des êtres (le Principe, la Nature), qui m'a fait pour cette fois comme je suis. Je ne me plains pas de lui. Si, quand j'aurai quitté cette forme, il fait de mon bras gauche un coq, je chanterai pour annoncer l'aube. S'il fait de mon bras droit une arbalète, j'abattrai des hiboux. S'il fait de mon tronc une voiture, et y attelle mon esprit transformé en cheval, j'en serai encore satisfait. Chaque être reçoit sa forme en son temps, et la quitte à son heure. Cela étant, pourquoi concevoir de la joie ou de la tristesse, dans ces vicissitudes ? Il n'y a pas lieu. Comme disaient les anciens, le fagot est successivement lié et délié <sup>2</sup>. L'être ne se délie, ni ne se lie, lui-même. Il dépend du ciel, pour la mort et la vie. Moi qui suis un être parmi les êtres, pourquoi me

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<sup>6a</sup> NDE transmission ?

plaindrais-je de mourir? — Ensuite Tzeu-lai tomba lui aussi malade. La respiration haletante, il était près d'expirer. Sa femme et ses enfants l'entouraient en pleurant. Tzeu-li étant allé le visiter, dit à ces importuns : Taisez-vous ! sortez ! ne troublez pas son passage, 3 !.. Puis, appuyé contre le montant de la porte, il dit au malade : Bonne est la transformation. Que va-t-elle faire de toi ? Où vas-tu passer ? Deviendras-tu organe d'un rat, ou patte d'un insecte?.. Peu m'importe, dit le mourant.. Dans quelque direction que ses parents l'envoient, l'enfant doit aller. Or le yin et le yang sont à l'homme plus que ses parents 4. Quand leur révolution aura amené ma mort, si je ne me soumettais pas volontiers, je serais un rebelle... La grande masse (cosmos) m'a porté durant cette existence, m'a servi pour me faire vivre, m'a consolé dans ma vieillesse, me donne la paix dans le trépas. Bonne elle m'a été dans la vie, bonne elle m'est dans la mort... Supposons un fondeur occupé à brasser son métal en fusion. Si une partie de ce métal, sautant dans le creuset, lui disait : moi je veux devenir un glaive, pas autre chose ! le fondeur trouverait certainement ce métal inconvenant. De même, si, au moment de sa transformation, un mourant criait : je veux redevenir un homme, pas autre chose ! bien sûr lue le transformateur le trouverait inconvenant. Le ciel et la terre (le cosmos) sont la grande

1. Sont-ce là des surnoms d'hommes? C'est possible, mais pas probable. Ces mots signifient, et peuvent s'interpréter ainsi : de *n'ai pas tiré cette doctrine de mon imagination*. de *l'ai découverte, à force de méditer sur le mystère de l'origine*.

2. Comparez chapitre 3 C note.

3. Lequel exige plutôt le calmé, comme l'entrée dans le sommeil.

4. Les deux alternances de la révolution cosmique, agents supérieurs du Principe, donnant la vie ou la mort tandis que les parents, agents inférieurs, déterminent la vie seulement.

fournaise, la transformation est le grand fondeur ; tout ce qu'il fera de nous, doit nous agréer : Abandonnons-nous à lui avec paix. La vie se termine par un sommeil, que suit un nouvel éveil.

G. Maître Sang-hou, Mong-tzeu-fan, Maître K'inn-tchang, étaient amis. L'un d'entre eux demanda : Qui est parfaitement indifférent à toute influence, à toute action ? Qui peut s'élever dans les cieus par l'abstraction, flâner dans les nuages par la spéculation, se jouer dans l'éther, oublier sa vie présente et la mort à venir?.. Les trois hommes se regardèrent et rirent, car tous en étaient là, et ils furent plus amis que devant. — Or l'un des trois, Maître Sang-hou, étant

mort, Confucius envoya son disciple Tzeu-koung à la maison mortuaire, pour s'informer s'il ne faudrait pas aider aux funérailles. Quand Tzeu-koung arriva, les deux amis survivants chantaient devant le cadavre, avec accompagnement de cithare, le refrain suivant : O Sang-hou ! O Sang-hou !.. Te voilà uni à la transcendance, tandis que nous sommes encore des hommes, hélas !.. Tzeu-koung les ayant abordés, leur demanda : est-il conforme aux rites, de chanter ainsi, en présence d'un cadavre ? Les deux hommes s'entre-regardèrent, éclatèrent de rire, et se dirent : Qu'est-ce que celui-ci peut comprendre à nos rites à nous ? — Tzeu-koung retourna vers Confucius, lui dit ce qu'il avait vu, puis demanda : qu'est-ce que ces gens-là, sans manières, sans tenue, qui chantent devant un cadavre, sans trace de douleur ? Je n'y comprends rien. — Ces gens-là, dit Confucius, se meuvent en dehors du monde, tandis que moi je me meus dans le monde. Il ne peut y avoir rien de commun entre eux et moi. J'ai eu tort de t'envoyer là. D'après eux, l'homme doit vivre en communion avec l'auteur des êtres (le Principe cosmique), en se reportant au temps où le ciel et la terre n'étaient pas encore séparés. Pour eux, la forme qu'ils portent durant cette existence, est un accessoire, un appendice, dont la mort les délivrera, en attendant qu'ils renaissent dans une autre. Par suite, pour eux, pas de mort et de vie, de passé et de futur, dans le sens usuel de ces mots. Selon eux, la matière de leur corps a servi, et servira successivement, à quantité d'êtres différents. Peu importent leurs viscères et leurs organes, à des gens qui croient à une succession continue de commencements et de fins. Ils se promènent en esprit hors de ce monde poussiéreux, et s'abstiennent de toute immixtion dans ses affaires. Pourquoi se donneraient-ils le mal d'accomplir les rites vulgaires, ou seulement l'air de les accomplir ? — Mais vous, Maître, demanda Tzeu-koung gagné au taoïsme, pourquoi faites-vous de ces rites la base de votre morale ? — Parce que le Ciel m'a condamné à cette besogne massacrante (sic), dit Confucius. Je dis ainsi, mais au fond, comme toi, je n'y crois plus. Les poissons naissent dans l'eau, les hommes dans le Principe. Les poissons vivent de l'eau, les hommes du non-agir. Chacun pour, soi dans les eaux ; chacun pour soi dans le Principe. Le vrai sur-homme est celui qui a rompu avec tout le reste, pour adhérer uniquement au ciel. Celui-là seul devrait être appelé Sage par les hommes. Trop souvent, qui est appelé Sage par les hommes, n'est qu'un être vulgaire quant au Ciel.

H. Yen-hoei demanda à Tchoung-ni (Confucius) : Quand la mère de Mongsoung-ts'ai fut morte, lors de ses funérailles, son fils poussa les lamentations d'usage sans verser une larme, et fit toutes les cérémonies sans le moindre chagrin. Néanmoins, dans le pays de Lou, il passe pour avoir satisfait à la piété filiale. Je n'y comprends rien. — Il a en effet satisfait, répondit Confucius, en illuminé qu'il est. Il ne pouvait pas s'abstenir des cérémonies extérieures, *cela aurait trop choqué le vulgaire* ; mais il s'abstint des sentiments intérieurs du vulgaire, que lui ne partage pas. Pour lui, l'état de vie et l'état de mort, sont une même chose ; et il ne distingue, entre ces états, ni antériorité ni postériorité, car il ne tient pour chaînons d'une chaîne infinie. Il croit que les êtres subissent fatalement des transformations successives, qu'ils n'ont qu'à subir en paix, sans s'en préoccuper. Immergé dans le courant de ces transformations, l'être n'a qu'une connaissance confuse de ce qui lui arrive. *Toute vie est comme un rêve*. Toi et moi qui causons à cette heure, nous sommes deux rêveurs non-réveillés... Donc, la mort n'étant pour Mongsoung-ts'ai qu'un changement de forme, elle ne vaut pas que l'on s'en afflige ; pas plus que de quitter une demeure, qu'on n'a habitée qu'un seul jour. Cela étant, il se borna strictement au rit extérieur. Ainsi il ne choqua, ni le public, ni ses convictions. — Personne ne sait au juste ce par quoi il est lui, la nature intime de son moi. Le même homme qui vient de rêver qu'il est oiseau planant dans les cieux, rêve ensuite qu'il est poisson plongeant dans les abîmes. Ce qu'il dit, il ne peut pas se rendre compte, s'il le dit éveillé ou endormi. Rien de ce qui arrive, ne vaut qu'on s'en émeuve. La paix consiste à attendre soumis les dispositions du Principe. À l'heure de son départ *de la vie présente*, l'être rentre dans le courant des transformations. C'est là le sens de la formule « entrer dans l'union avec l'infini céleste » 1.

I. I-eull-tzeu ayant visité Hu-you 2, celui-ci lui demanda ce que Yao lui avait appris. — Il m'a dit, dit I-eull-tzeu, de cultiver la bonté et l'équité, de bien distinguer le bien et le mal. — Alors, demanda Hu-you, pourquoi venez-vous à moi maintenant ? Après que Yao vous a imbu de ses principes terre à terre, vous n'êtes plus capable d'être élevé à des idées plus hautes. — C'est pourtant mon désir, dit I-eull-tzeu. — Désir irréalisable, dit Hu-you. Un homme dont les yeux sont crevés, ne peut rien apprendre des couleurs. — Vous en avez, dit I-eull-tzeu, réformé d'autres qui étaient déformés ; pourquoi ne réussiriez-vous pas à me réformer aussi ? — Il y a peu d'espoir, dit Ha-you. Cependant, voici le sommaire de

ma doctrine : O Principe ! Toi qui donnes à tous les êtres ce qui leur convient, tu n'as jamais prétendu être appelé équitable. Toi dont les bienfaits s'étendent à tous les temps, tu n'as jamais prétendu être appelé charitable. Toi qui fus avant l'origine, et qui ne prétends pas être appelé vénérable ; toi qui enveloppes et supportes l'univers, produisant toutes les formes, sans prétendre être appelé habile ; c'est en toi que je me meus.

1. Avec le Ciel, la Nature, le Principe, ajoute la Glose.

2. Comparez chapitre 1 D.

J. Yen-hoei le disciple chéri, dit à son maître Confucius : J'avance... Comment le sais-tu ? demanda Confucius... Je perds, dit Yen-hoei, la notion de la bonté et de l'équité... C'est bien, dit Confucius, mais ce n'est pas tout. — Une autre fois, Yen-hoei dit à Confucius : Je profite... À quoi le reconnais-tu ? demanda Confucius... J'oublie les rites et la musique, dit Yen-hoei... C'est bien, dit Confucius, mais ce n'est pas tout. — Une autre fois, Yen-hoei dit à Confucius : Je progresse... Quel signe en as-tu ? demanda Confucius... Maintenant, dit Yen-hoei, quand je m'assieds pour méditer, j'oublie absolument tout 1. — Très ému, Confucius demanda : qu'est-ce à dire ? — Yen-hoei répondit : dépouillant mon corps, oblitérant mon intelligence, quittant toute forme, chassant toute science, je m'unis à celui qui pénètre tout. Voilà ce que j'entends par m'asseoir et oublier tout. -- Confucius dit : c'est là l'union, dans laquelle le désir cesse ; c'est là la transformation, dans laquelle l'individualité se perd. Tu as atteint la vraie sagesse. Sois mon maître désormais !

K. Tzeu-u et Tzeu-sang étaient amis. Une fois la pluie tomba à verse durant dix jours de suite. Craignant que Tzeu-sang, qui était très pauvre, empêché de sortir, ne se trouvât sans provisions, Tzeu-u fit un paquet de vivres, et alla le lui porter. Comme il approchait de sa porte, il entendit sa voix, moitié chantante, moitié pleurante, qui disait, en s'accompagnant sur la cithare : O père, O mère ! O ciel, O humanité !.. La voix était défaillante, et le chant saccadé. Tzeu-y étant entré, trouva Tzeu-sang mourant de faim. Que chantiez-vous là ? lui demanda-t-il. — Je songeais, dit Tzeu-sang, aux causes possibles de mon extrême détresse. Elle ne vient pas certes, de la volonté de mes père et mère. Ni, non plus, de celle du ciel et de la terre, qui couvrent et sustentent tous les êtres. Aucune cause logique de ma misère. Donc c'était mon destin 2 !

## Chap. 7. Gouvernement des princes.

A. Nie-k'ue posa à Wang-i quatre questions, auxquelles celui-ci ne sut pas répondre. Sautant de joie, Nie-k'ue informa P'ou-i-tzeu de son triomphe. — Lui êtes-vous vraiment supérieur ? dit P'ou-i-tzeu. L'empereur Chounn ne valut pas l'antique souverain T'ai-cheu. Entiché des vertus qu'il croyait posséder, Chounn critiqua toujours les autres.. Le vieux T'ai-cheu ne fut pas si malin. Il dormait tranquille et veillait sans soucis. Il ne s'estimait pas plus qu'un cheval ou qu'un bœuf. Simple et paisible, il ne critiquait personne. Vous ressemblez plutôt à Chounn.

1. Dès qu'il s'est délivré de ce qui constitue essentiellement le Confucéisme, bonté, équité, rites, musique, Yen-hoei atteint à la contemplation taoïste, et Confucius est obligé de l'approuver !

2. Voilà le dernier cri ; l'acquiescement aveugle au tour de la roue universelle, qui l'emporte toujours et qui le broie parfois ; le fatalisme taoïste.

B. Kien-ou alla voir le fou Tsie-u 1, qui lui demanda : qu'avez-vous appris de Jeu-tchoung-cheu ? — J'ai appris de lui, dit Kien-ou, que quand les princes font des règlements, et obligent les gens à les observer, tout va bien. — Tout paraît aller bien, dit Tsie-u. Fausse apparence ! l'extérieur seul étant réglé, non l'intérieur. Vouloir gouverner avec ce procédé,.. autant vaudrait vouloir traverser la mer à gué, contenir le Fleuve Jaune dans un lit, faire emporter une montagne par un moustique, choses absolument impossibles. Le Sage ne régleme pas l'extérieur. Il donne l'exemple de la rectitude, que les hommes suivront, s'il leur plaît. Il est trop prudent pour en faire davantage. Tel l'oiseau qui vole haut pour éviter la flèche, le rat qui creuse un trou si profond qu'il ne puisse être ni enfumé ni déterré. Légiférer est inutile et dangereux.

C. T'ien-kenn errant au sud du mont Yinn, vers la rivière Leao, rencontra Ou-ming-jenn et lui demanda à brûle-pourpoint : comment faire pour gouverner l'empire ? — Ou-ming-jeun lui dit : tu es un malappris, de poser pareille question d'une pareille manière. D'ailleurs pourquoi me soucierais-je du gouvernement de l'empire, moi qui, dégoûté du monde, vis dans la contemplation du Principe, me promène dans l'espace comme les oiseaux, et m'élève jusqu'au vide par delà l'espace. T'ien-kenn insista. — Alors Ou-ming-jenn lui dit : Reste dans la simplicité, tiens-toi dans le vague, laisse aller toutes choses, ne désire rien pour toi, et l'empire sera bien gouverné, car tout suivra son cours naturel.

D. Yang-tzeu-kiu étant allé voir Lao-tan, lui demanda : Un homme intelligent courageux zélé, ne serait-il pas l'égal des sages rois de l'antiquité ? — Non, dit Lao-tan. Son sort serait celui des petits officiers, accablés de travail et rongés de soucis. Ses qualités causeraient sa perte. Le tigre et le léopard sont tués, parce que leur peau est belle. Le singe et le chien sont réduits en esclavage, à cause de leur habileté. — Interdit, Yang-tzeu-kiu demanda : mais alors, que faisaient les sages rois ? — Les sages rois, dit Lao-tan, couvraient l'empire de leurs bienfaits, sans faire sentir qu'ils en étaient les auteurs. Ils bonifiaient tous les êtres, non par des actions sensibles, mais par une influence imperceptible. Sans être connus de personne, ils rendaient tout le monde heureux, Ils se tenaient sur l'abîme, et se promenaient dans le néant ; (c'est-à-dire, ils ne faisaient rien de déterminé, mais laissaient faire l'évolution universelle).

E. Il y avait à Tcheng un sorcier transcendant nommé Ki — hien 2. Cet homme savait tout ce qui concernait la mort et la vie, la prospérité et l'infortune des individus, jusqu'à prédire le jour précis de la mort d'un chacun, aussi exactement qu'aurait pu le faire un génie. Aussi les gens de Tcheng, qui ne tenaient pas à en savoir si long, s'enfuyaient-ils du plus loin qu'ils le voyaient venir. — Lie-tzeu étant allé le voir, fut fasciné par cet homme. À son retour, il dit à son maître Hou-tzeu : jusqu'ici je tenais votre enseignement pour le plus parfait, mais voici que j'ai trouvé mieux. — En êtes-vous bien sûr ? dit Hou-tzeu ; alors que vous avez reçu seulement mon enseignement

1. Comparez chapitre 4 h.

2. Cette pièce importante n'est pas à sa place ici. Elle a été déplacée, probablement. Comparez Lie-tzeu chapitre 2 L.

exotérique, et non encore l'ésotérique, qui en est le germe fécond, le principe de vie. Il en est de votre savoir, comme des œufs inféconds que pondent les poules privées de coq ; il y manque l'essentiel... Et pour ce qui est du pouvoir divinatoire de ce sorcier, ne l'auriez-vous pas laissé lire dans votre intérieur ? Amenez-le-moi, et je vous montrerai qu'il ne voit que ce qu'on lui laisse voir. — Le lendemain Lie-tzeu amena le sorcier, qui vit Hou-tzeu comme un médecin voit un malade. Après la visite, le sorcier dit à Lie-tzeu : votre maître est un homme mort ; avant dix jours c'en sera fait de lui ; j'ai eu, à son aspect, la vision de cendres humides. — Lie-tzeu rentra, tout en larmes, et rapporta à Hou-tzeu les paroles du sorcier. C'est, dit Hou-tzeu, que je me suis manifesté à lui, sous la figure d'une terre hivernale, toutes mes énergies étant



immobilisées. Ce phénomène ne se produisant, chez le vulgaire, qu'aux approches de la mort, il en a conclu à ma fin prochaine. Amène-le une autre fois, et tu verras la suite de l'expérience. — Le lendemain Lie-tzeu ramena le sorcier. Après la visite, celui-ci dit : Il est heureux que votre maître se soit adressé à moi. Il va déjà mieux. Aujourd'hui je n'ai vu en lui que des signes de vie ; ce que j'ai vu hier, n'était donc qu'un épisode, pas la fin. — Quand Lie-tzeu eut rapporté ces paroles à Hou-tzeu, celui-ci dit : C'est que je me suis manifesté à lui, sous la figure d'une terre ensoleillée, tous les ressorts de mes énergies agissant. Amène-le une autre fois. — Le lendemain, Lie-tzeu ramena le sorcier. Après la visite, celui-ci dit : État trop indéterminé. Je ne puis tirer aucun pronostic. Après détermination, je prononcerai. — Lie-tzeu ayant rapporté ces paroles à Hou-tzeu, celui-ci dit : C'est que je me suis manifesté à lui, sous la figure du grand chaos, toutes mes énergies étant tenues en balance. Il ne pouvait rien distinguer. Un remous, un tourbillon, peut être causé par un monstre marin, ou par un écueil, ou par un courant, ou par six autres causes encore ; c'est chose indéterminée, susceptible de neuf explications diverses. A fortiori le grand chaos. Amène-le une fois encore. — Le lendemain, Lie-tzeu ramena le devin. Au premier coup d'œil, celui-ci s'enfuit éperdu. Lie-tzeu courut après lui, mais ne put le rejoindre. — Il ne reviendra plus, dit Hou-tzeu. Je me suis manifesté à lui, dans l'état de mon émanation du Principe. Il a vu, dans un vide immense, comme un serpent se défilant ; une projection, un jaillissement. Ce spectacle inintelligible pour lui, l'a terrifié et mis en fuite. — Convaincu alors qu'il n'était encore qu'un ignorant, Lie-tzeu se confina dans sa maison durant trois années consécutives. Il fit les travaux du ménage pour sa femme, et servit les porcs avec respect, afin de détruire en lui-même la vanité qui avait failli lui faire désertir son maître. Il se défit de tout intérêt, se délivra de toute culture artificielle, tendit de toutes ses forces à la simplicité originelle. Il devint enfin fruste comme une motte de terre, fermé et insensible à tout ce qui se passait autour de lui, et persévéra dans cet état jusqu'à sa fin.

F. Faites du non-agir votre gloire, votre ambition, votre métier, votre science. Le non-agir n'use pas. Il est impersonnel. Il rend ce qu'il a reçu du ciel, sans rien garder pour lui. Il est essentiellement un vide. — Le surhomme n'exerce son intelligence qu'à la manière d'un miroir. Il sait et connaît, sans qu'il s'ensuive ni attraction ni répulsion, sans qu'aucune empreinte persiste. Cela étant, il est supérieur à toutes choses, et neutre à leur égard.

G. *Emporté* le roi de la mer du Sud, et *Etourdi* le roi de la mer du Nord, étaient au mieux avec *Chaos* le roi du Centre. Ils se demandèrent quel service ils pourraient bien lui rendre. — Les hommes, se dirent-ils, ont sept orifices, (organes des sens, deux yeux, deux oreilles, deux narines, une bouche). Ce pauvre Chaos n'en a aucun. Nous allons lui en faire. — S'étant donc mis à l'œuvre, ils lui firent un orifice par jour. Au septième jour, Chaos mourut (cessa d'être *Chaos*, puisqu'il distinguait). — Il faut laisser tous les êtres dans leur état fruste naturel, sans chercher à les perfectionner artificiellement, autrement ils cessent d'être ce qu'ils étaient et devaient rester.

# HUAINAN ZI

## Chapitre VII « Les Esprits légers et subtils »

Traduction par Claude Larre du septième chapitre « Les Esprits légers et subtils »

*Les grands traités du Huainan zi*, Cerf, 1993.

## Introduction

Le Traité 7 du Huainan zi présente une division naturelle en deux parties :

Une première partie expose l'origine de l'homme, à partir de la constitution du monde. Cette anthropocosmologie n'est pas sans parallèles dans d'autres cultures humaines, mais elle est profondément chinoise, en ceci qu'elle est rigoureusement fidèle à la doctrine Yin Yang *wu xing* : Yin/Yang et les Cinq Éléments.

Après avoir rapidement et noblement dévidé le Principe Cosmique, en se référant très évidemment aux six traités précédents (notamment aux traités 1 et 2), nous sommes confrontés à une embryologie, dans l'intention évidente de nous faire ressentir profondément que les lois qui président au gouvernement du Ciel s'appliquent encore plus étroitement à la vie humaine. Le respect de ces lois conduit tout homme à l'exaltation de tout son être, aux niveaux élevés de l'illumination sensorielle et de la spiritualité. Le type même de la réussite est illustré par la description des aptitudes merveilleuses de cette catégorie d'hommes qui dépassent encore le simple degré de sainteté : les Hommes Authentiques (*zhen ren*) Lorsque la Perfection est devenue consubstantielle à l'être d'un individu humain, il se transforme en une reproduction vivante du Tao et participe pleinement à sa Vertu. Alors l'Esprit vital (*jing shen*) exerce tout son pouvoir dans de tels hommes : leur esprit comme leur cœur, leur volonté comme leurs sens sont libérés de ce qui retient l'homme vulgaire ; telle est la véritable et unique voie de salut.

La deuxième partie, sensiblement égale en étendue à la première, montre, par de nombreux exemples tirés parfois de l'histoire et parfois de l'hagiographie taoïste, combien est vérifiée dans les faits la doctrine précédemment exposée. Tout se termine par la condamnation impitoyable de la moralité suivant les confucéens qui se révèle inefficace pour maîtriser dans l'homme le déchaînement des passions et le faire accéder à la Joie parfaite. [77]

### PLAN

#### Première partie

1. L'homme, à la différence des animaux, est formé à partir de souffles purs. Sa double appartenance au Ciel et à la Terre détermine les lois de sa vie. Mais il faut donner la préférence au monde intérieur car c'est l'intérieur qui mène la vie (1a-1b).

2. Embryologie humaine selon le Yin/Yang en Dix étapes sur Neuf mois. Évolution du Souffle. Description corporelle et psychique avec ses analogies cosmiques : la loi générale de l'ordre et de l'économie s'applique à lui ; la respectant, il parvient à l'Illumination (2a-3b).

3. La vie illuminée est intérieure. Là, se tient le Tao avec sa Vertu. La perte est débauche des sens, aveuglement, perte des essences et finalement des esprits. Alors que la triple perfection mène à la longue vie, la quadruple perversion cause la ruine de l'homme. La morale est vitaliste et ses bases physiologiques sont indiquées (3b-4b).

4. La longue vie est pour ceux qui ne cherchent pas à vivre pour vivre. Durant la vie sensible, dans la distinction du moi et du monde, elle s'acquiert par la soumission aux volontés inscrutables du Producteur. La mort détruit le moi, mais exalte la pure relation avec un au-delà du Ciel même (4b-5b).

5. L'homme est ce vase qui sort des mains du Potier, cette eau dont le Jardinier arrose ses cultures. Ainsi le Saint, content de soi comme de l'Univers, demeure impassible et serein, tenant le joyau de son esprit dans le coffret de son cœur, et s'élève, par une vie parfaite, à l'état spirituel (6a-7a).

6. L'homme authentique ne fait qu'un avec le Tao ; compagnon de l'Être pur, il se montre apathique, inerte et inconscient. Il n'en est pas moins efficace, dans le repos et, s'il le faut, dans le mouvement. Invulnérable, incorruptible, il va à travers l'ombre et la lumière et pénètre dans le Sans forme (7a-8b).

7. Ce n'est pas le corps qu'il faut « nourrir », mais l'esprit par le cœur. L'esprit est indépendant du corps et indestructible. Immortalité et immuabilité du principe de la vie qui est pour chacun la somme des mutations qui l'affectent (9a-10a).

## Deuxième partie

Une série d'exemples, comme annoncé.

1. Yao était heureux avec peu. Il ne se laissait pas encombrer.

Yu n'était pas impressionné par les êtres.

Huzilin s'occupait peu de paraître vivant ou mort.

Ziqiu se souciait peu de sa conformité physique.

L'homme parfait est au-dessus de tous ces accidents (10a-12a).

2. Si, comme le montrent les exemples de Cui Zhu ou de Yan zi, des hommes peuvent mourir par fidélité aux vertus d'Humanité ou de Respect des devoirs, celui qui a dépassé ces vertus délaissera des intérêts

purement humains. Car ce qui est noble ou précieux ne vient pas de l'humain (12a-13a).

3. Qui trop embrasse mal étroit ; à trop convoiter on perd son essentiel sans même s'en apercevoir. Rejeter l'excitation des sens et tout le superflu enrichit la vie et dessille les yeux (13a-14b).

4. La vie, la mort alors ne font qu'un. C'est cela qui donne leur vraie valeur aux choses et aux êtres (14b-15a).

5. Tout le contraire de ceux qui poursuivent la perfection par l'étude ou la contrainte. Ils ne connaissent pas le bien-être naturel à ceux qui sont dans le Tao (15b-16b).

6. Ce n'est pas en violentant sa propre nature que l'on peut amener les autres à se bien conduire, ni en s'abandonnant à un naturel perverti que l'on assure, pour soi ou son peuple, paix et prospérité. Enlevez ce qui entrave le retour à soi et tout ira pour le mieux (16b-17b).

## LES ESPRITS LÉGERS ET SUBTILS

Jadis, dans le « temps » qui fut avant le Ciel/Terre1,

Il n'y avait que l'Image invisible :

Trouée d'abîmes, manteau de ténèbres ;

Steppe mélancolique, silence désolé ;

Tourbillons effervescents, immense compénétration.

Qui pourrait connaître tes portes !

Là, dans l'emmêlement d'une commune génération,

Les deux Esprits président à l'ordonnance du Ciel

Et à l'établissement de la Terre2.

O Immensité, qui saura jusqu'où vont tes limites?

Ô déferlement, qui saura quand ton mouvement s'apaise ?

Mais voici que s'opère la distinction du Yin et du Yang,

Que s'effectue l'écartement des Huit pôles,

Que se constitue le couple Dur et Mou

Et que les Dix mille êtres apparaissent3 :

Les souffles grossiers forment les animaux,

Les souffles légers et subtils4, les hommes. [1 b]

**Ainsi, les Esprits légers et subtils<sup>5</sup> sont propriété du Ciel  
Et l'ossature corporelle, propriété de la Terre.  
Les Esprits légers et subtils repasseront leur porte,  
Les ossements retourneront à leur racine.**

1. L'expression « Dans le temps qui fut avant le Ciel/Terre », qui se trouve déjà en Zhuang zi 6 : 40, apparaît dans d'autres chapitres du *Huainan* ㄨㄞ 16 : 10 a ; 17 : 1 a. Ces divers emplois montrent que « Dans le temps qui fut avant le Ciel/Terre » est moins une indication temporelle : « avant que ne se soient constitués le Ciel et la Terre », qu'une représentation du Tao lui-même ou de l'Un, avant qu'aucune division ne s'opère.

2. Il s'agit ici de l'esprit Yin et de l'esprit Yang. « Ordonnement et établissement » est une expression du *Shi jing* (2e partie, livre VIII, ode X) : il s'agit d'organiser le terrain et d'établir des cantonnements.

3. On n'apparaît qu'en prenant forme ; la forme est l'apparence.

4. *jing qi* : essences/souffles.

5. *jing Shen* : essences/esprits. Nous avons également traduit, plus rapidement, par Esprits vitaux.

[80]

**Mais alors comment « moi » subsisterai-je à jamais ?  
Voilà pourquoi les Saints prennent le Ciel pour modèle  
Et suivent leurs dispositions individuelles,  
Ne se laissant pas retenir par ce qui est vulgaire  
Ne se laissant pas séduire par ce qui n'est que de l'homme.  
Ils font du Ciel leur père,  
De la Terre leur mère,  
Du Yin et du Yang leur corde maîtresse  
Et des Quatre saisons leur fil conducteur.  
Serein est le Ciel en raison de sa pureté,  
Stable est la Terre parce qu'elle est paisible<sup>6</sup>.  
Les Dix mille êtres, perdant ces qualités, meurent  
Mais se maintiennent vivants en y étant fidèles.**

**La Quiétude du silence est la demeure du Shen ming<sup>7</sup>  
Et le Vide absolu, c'est là que réside le Tao<sup>8</sup>.**

**Pour cette raison :**

**Quand on recherche dans l'extériorité,**

**On perd ce qui touche à l'intériorité ;**

**Quand on se garde à l'intérieur,**

**On s'oblige à perdre ce qui est extérieur<sup>9</sup>.**

**Il en va comme de la racine avec l'extrémité de la tige :**

**En tirant par la racine,**

**Les Mille branches et les Dix mille feuilles viennent à la suite.**

**Or, les Esprits vitaux <sup>10</sup> sont un don du Ciel**

**Tandis que la forme corporelle est fournie par la Terre.**

**Ce que dit bien l'adage :**

**Le Un produit le Deux,**

**Le Deux produit le Trois ;**

**Trois produit les Dix mille êtres.**

**6. Voir *Lao zi* 39.**

7. Nous avons écrit indifféremment « le » *Shen ming* ou « les » *Shenming* afin qu'il soit clair que nous ne pouvons pas nous laisser enfermer dans l'option singulier/pluriel propre au français et aux langues européennes. Il s'agit toujours de la radiance lumineuse qui émane d'Esprits rendus présents.

8. Le Vide qui ne contient aucun être figuré. Le vide est la condition même de l'existence figurée et l'absence totale d'êtres ayant une forme visible, d'êtres sensibles, donne au Vide son caractère absolu.

9. Perdre ce qui est en nous extérieur, comme le serpent et la cigale muant perdent leur dépouille. — La langue classique n'exprime pas toujours explicitement les attitudes du vouloir et du pouvoir. Le traducteur est obligé de suppléer. Quand peut-il le faire sans se tromper ? Quand un parallélisme soutenu et un contexte indicatif de cette nécessité lui suggèrent une traduction qui met en cause les individus. Aussi écrira-t-il « il faut », « on doit », « on peut », alors que le texte chinois ne contient pas les caractères correspondants.

10. *jing shen* : l'esprit par opposition au corps ; littéralement, les Esprits légers et subtils.

81

**Les Dix mille êtres s'adossent au Yin,**

**Serrant sur leur poitrine le Yang ;**

**L'Harmonie naît au vide du souffle médian 11.**



De sorte que :

Au premier mois, c'est une pâte ;

Au deuxième mois, c'est une poche ;

Au troisième mois, c'est un fœtus ; [2a]

Au quatrième mois, il y a des chairs ;

Au cinquième mois, il y a l'animation musculaire ;

Au sixième mois, il y a des os ;

Au septième mois, l'organisme est achevé ;

Au huitième mois, il remue ;

Au neuvième mois, il trépigne ;

Au dixième mois, il voit le jour 12.

À mesure que s'organise la forme corporelle,

Les Cinq viscères prennent forme.

Pour cette raison, les poumons commandent aux yeux,

Les reins au nez,

La vésicule biliaire à la bouche,

Le foie aux oreilles<sup>13</sup>.

On voit que l'extérieur est pour la manifestation,

L'interne, pour la structure intime ;

Ouverture et fermeture, extension et contraction,

Tous et chacun fonctionnent selon un système régulier.

La tête, qui est ronde, figure le Ciel ;

Le pied, qui est carré, configure la Terre.

Au Ciel, il y a Quatre saisons, Cinq phases 14,

11. Voir *Lao zj* 42. L'harmonie, c'est le souffle médian qui opère dans les Dix mille êtres et en crée la communauté vivante. — Un contient virtuellement l'initiative du Ciel et la réceptivité de la Terre. L'articulation de l'initiative et de la réceptivité est d'autant plus naturelle que le Ciel institue pour la Terre et que la Terre construit pour le Ciel. Le « vide »

(voir n. 8) qui existe entre eux est, identiquement, le souffle médian mobile ou immobile.

12. Trois mois attribués au premier développement en insistant sur le progrès de la consistance ; les trois mois suivants complètent les précédents, introduisant les chairs, leur animation et leur appui ; les trois suivants achèvent l'embryon : organisation interne, autonomie progressive jusqu'à la sortie au jour.

13. D'autres systèmes de corrélations — ceux que l'on trouve dans les classiques de la médecine de la même époque et ceux dont on est en droit de supposer l'existence — sont bien préférables.

14. Les *wu xing* (Cinq phases, Cinq éléments ) du Ciel sont la « valeur céleste » des Cinq éléments plutôt que les mêmes Cinq éléments. Ils peuvent être ici les Cinq signes : Nuées, Souffle, Vent, Pluie, Tonnerre.

82

**Neuf échappées 15, Trois cent soixante-six jours 16. [2 b]**

**En l'homme, semblablement, Quatre membres, Cinq viscères,**

**Neuf orifices, Trois cent soixante-six relais d'animation.**

**Au Ciel, il y a Vent et Pluie, Froidure et Chaleur.**

**En l'homme, de même, Prendre et Donner,**

**Allégresse Colère 17.**

**Par la correspondance de la vésicule aux Nuées,**

**Des poumons aux Souffles,**

**Du foie au Vent,**

**Des reins à la Pluie**

**Et de la rate au Tonnerre,**

**L'homme est en symbiose intime avec le Ciel/Terre. [3a]**

**Mais c'est au cœur que tout est soumis comme à un souverain.**

**L'oreille et l'œil sont le soleil et la lune,**

**Comme Sang-et-Souffles sont vent-et-pluie.**

**Dans le soleil se tient le corbeau à trois griffes**

**Et dans la lune, le crapaud tacheté.**

**Lorsque le soleil et la lune font une erreur de parcours,**

**L'un attrape l'autre, dévore de sa substance**

**Et la lumière disparaît 18.**

**Vent et pluie surviennent-ils hors saisons,**

15. L'expression n'est pas sans ambiguïté. Le commentaire ne propose pas moins de trois explications : neuf divisions valant chacune quatre-vingt-dix unités pouvant probablement s'appliquer aussi bien à l'espace qu'au temps célestes et formés de la multiplication de neuf et de dix, nombres du Ciel et du soleil, par neuf nombres du Ciel. Les six lignes pleines des hexagrammes considérées comme représentant le Ciel (si c'est bien ce que signifie le *liu yi* du commentaire). — Plus probablement, les huit directions et le centre. En traduisant par échappées, nous avons voulu signifier que les espaces qui sont sur Terre au nombre de neuf, sont aussi neuf dans le Ciel, mais l'espace céleste n'est pas circonscrit comme le terrestre ; ce sont donc des « échappées » où disparaissent toutes les limites.

16.  $4 \times 5 = 20$ ,  $20 \times 9 = 180$ ,  $180 \times 2 = 360$ . — Il s'agit moins de pièces anatomiques que d'un système énergétique comportant trois cent soixante-six (ou trois cent soixante) relais (trois cent soixante dans le *Liishi chunqiu*). De même que l'énergie solaire est distribuée par l'engin des Jours tout au long de l'année, de même l'énergie circule dans le corps par les trois cent soixante-six relais d'animation.

17. À partir du moment où les grandes fonctions universelles sont particularisées dans l'homme, on pourrait le signaler en mettant une majuscule à chacune de ces fonctions : Prendre, Colère, Œil... Mais les signes diacritiques ne résolvent pas le problème. Il faut plutôt que le lecteur se souvienne que les systématiques veulent dire plus que les éléments qui les composent.

18. L'oiseau à trois griffes. Pour une reproduction de la peinture du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle ap. J.-C. (dans le style de Gu Kaishi) détail de paysage des *Conseils de la monitrice aux dames du palais*, conservé au British Museum. — Le corbeau et le crapaud. On trouvera sur la bannière funéraire de Mawangdui une extraordinaire illustration de ces deux animaux célestes. Le fait d'être tacheté ou non n'est pas insignifiant. On observe, sur cette bannière, que la représentation du Dragon Yin, des chevaux, des renards est toujours accompagnée de taches et Qu Yuan, dans les Neuf Chants (*Shan gui* W 44), oppose les « renards mouchetés » au léopard écarlate.

83

**Ils détruisent et brisent tout, causant de grandes calamités.**

**Les Cinq planètes quittent-elles leurs parcours,**

**Les Régions et les Pays 19 sont cruellement éprouvés.**

**Grande est la Voie du Ciel/Terre par son ordre majestueux ;**



**Parfait l'accomplissement :**

Les tristesses et les soucis ne peuvent plus nous assaillir,  
Les souffles pernicieux fondre sur nous à l'improviste.  
S'affairer à rechercher [le Tao] au-delà des Quatre mers

19. Les Neuf régions et les Trente-six pays.

20. *Shen ming*

84

Ne fera pas qu'on le rencontre ;  
Pas plus que de le garder jalousement à l'intérieur du corps  
Ne permettra de le voir.  
Qui trop embrasse mal étreint,  
Qui pense voir grand ne saura guère.

**Pores et orifices corporels**

Sont les portes et les fenêtres des Esprits vitaux ;  
Souffles et vouloirs  
Sont les messagers et les huissiers des Cinq viscères<sup>21</sup>. [4a]  
Quand les yeux et les oreilles se laissent débaucher  
Par les plaisirs des sons et des couleurs,  
Les Cinq viscères, fortement secoués, perdent leur stabilité.  
Ces viscères, secoués et déstabilisés,  
Sang-et-souffles s'agitent et débordent sans demeurer en repos.  
Sang-et-souffles agités, débordants, sans repos,  
Les Esprits vitaux galopent éperdument à l'extérieur,  
Abandonnant leur garde.  
Et c'est parce que les Esprits vitaux se sont échappés  
Pour galoper éperdument à l'extérieur,  
Que la bonne ou la mauvaise fortune survenant,  
Fussent-elles grosses comme des montagnes,  
Il n'y a pas le moyen de les reconnaître<sup>22</sup>.

Au contraire, un œil et une oreille clairs et subtils,  
Capables de discerner et de comprendre,

Parce qu'on n'a pas cédé à la séduction de l'appétit des sens ;  
Des souffles et un vouloir vides et sereins,  
Calmes et indifférents,  
Parce que convoitises et passions sont sans force ;  
Cinq viscères stables et paisibles,  
Gonflés et pleins à capacité,  
Car rien ne se dissipe ;  
Enfin l'Esprit vital qui se garde dans la structure corporelle,  
Puisqu'il ne vagabonde pas à l'extérieur,  
Voilà ce qui permet à la vision de remonter au-delà du passé  
Et au regard de s'étendre plus loin que l'avenir.  
Comment s'occuper alors de bonne ou de mauvaise fortune ?  
La formule : « Plus il s'éloigne, moins il connaît »  
S'applique aux Esprits vitaux

21. Les deux aspects de la vie sont ici indiqués : c'est une réalité qui se construit en se protégeant.

22. Il ne faut pas moins que l'art (*shu*) du Vieux de la frontière pour discerner le bonheur et le malheur (voir *Huainan xǐ* 18 : 9 b, p. 209).

85

Qu'on ne peut laisser se débaucher dans l'extériorité.  
Voici ce qui se passe :  
Les Cinq couleurs troublent l'œil  
Et obscurcissent son discernement ;  
Les Cinq notes assourdissent l'oreille  
Et l'empêchent d'entendre distinctement ;  
Les Cinq saveurs gâtent la bouche  
Et altèrent le goût ; [4 b]  
Emballlements et dégoûts pervertissent le cœur  
Et rendent la conduite licencieuse.  
Voilà quatre manières d'entretenir sa vie, mais selon le monde ;  
En fait, c'est cela précisément qui entrave l'homme.

Ne dit-on pas :  
Convoitises et désirs emportent les souffles,

Tandis qu'attraits et aversions fatiguent son cœur ;  
Avec pour résultat, si on ne les chasse pas impitoyablement,  
Que le vouloir et les souffles sont progressivement  
réduits à rien.

Certains n'atteignent pas la Longévité inscrite  
dans leur destinée

Et meurent prématurément au milieu de leur course,  
Frappés de male mort. Pourquoi ?  
Parce qu'ils sont menés par l'appétit de vivre.  
Seuls ceux qui ne vivent pas pour vivre  
Obtiennent la Longue Vie<sup>23</sup>. [5a]

Le mouvement régulier du Ciel/Terre compénètre ses influx ;  
Les Dix mille êtres sont produits et constituent l'Un.  
À qui parvient à la connaissance de l'Un,  
pas un être n'échappe ;  
Mais à qui n'y parvient pas, pas un seul être n'est connu.

Pensons à la place que nous occupons sous le Ciel,  
C'est celle d'un être entre Dix mille.  
Je ne puis savoir si le monde sous le Ciel a besoin de moi  
Pour que soit complète sa collection des êtres,  
Encore moins de savoir si, sans moi, elle ne le serait pas.  
C'est entendu, moi, je suis un être,  
Un être parmi les êtres,  
Un être en relation avec eux.  
Oui, mais alors comment m'en distinguer ?

De toute manière, pour qui me produit, quel avantage ?  
Pour qui me détruit, quelle perte ?

23. Voir Lao zi 50 et 75.

Ai-je le moyen de m'y opposer ?  
Et d'ailleurs savons-nous si cet homme,  
Qui se cramponne à la vie par l'acupuncture et les moxas,  
Ne s'abuse pas lui-même ;  
Et si cet autre, qui,  
Pour se donner la mort, se passe un lacet autour du cou,  
Ne trouvera pas le bonheur ?  
Après tout, la vie c'est peut-être les travaux forcés  
Et la mort, le repos.

Vaste est le monde sous le Ciel ! Et qui pourrait le connaître ?  
On me donne de vivre, je ne refuse pas ;  
On m'ôte la vie, je ne résiste pas ;  
J'aime la vie, mais je n'en fais pas une affaire ; [5 b]  
Je n'aime pas la mort, mais je ne la récusé pas ;  
Né vilain, je ne déteste pas mon sort ;  
Né noble, je ne m'exalte pas ;  
Je suis la disposition du Ciel  
Et, serein, je m'en contente.  
L'homme, vivant, est un corps de Sept pieds ;  
Mort, il fait la valeur d'un cercueil de poussière ;  
Vivant, il se range parmi les espèces ayant une forme visible ;  
Mort, il se fond au sein du Sans forme.  
Quoi qu'il en soit,  
Vivant, un individu n'ajoute guère à la foule des êtres,  
Mort, il n'augmente pas tellement l'épaisseur de la terre.  
Dans ces conditions, comment pourrions-nous  
Nous y reconnaître dans les attraites et les aversions,  
Dans ce qui est avantageux ou nuisible.

On verra plutôt le Producteur/Transformateur créant les êtres  
Comme le potier lorsqu'il façonne l'argile :  
La terre qu'il sépare de la masse pour en faire un vase  
Ne diffère en rien de celle qu'il ne prend pas.



Devenue ustensile, elle sera un jour brisée  
Et, ses morceaux éparpillés,  
Elle retournera à sa condition première [64  
Et sera toujours semblable à ce qu'elle fut  
Quand elle était un vase.

Dans les villages qui bordent le Fleuve,  
Les gens puisent l'eau pour arroser leurs jardins.  
L'eau du Fleuve n'en éprouve aucun ressentiment.  
Quand ils sont incommodés par les eaux stagnantes,  
Ils drainent les mares et reconduisent leurs eaux au Fleuve,  
Mais lui n'en éprouve aucun contentement.  
C'est qu'il n'y a aucune différence entre l'eau qui sert à irriguer  
Et celle du Fleuve,  
Entre l'eau de drainage et les eaux du Fleuve.

Voilà pourquoi le Saint se plie aux circonstances  
Et jouit paisiblement de sa position,  
Prend le siècle comme il est, content de son activité.  
Tristesse et joie sont des perversions de la Vertu,  
Allégresse et colère sont des excès contraire au Tao,  
Attraites et aversions sont une violence faite au cœur.  
Tandis que l'adage déclare :  
Sa naissance est une œuvre du Ciel,  
Sa mort, la transformation d'un être ; [6 b]  
Quiescent, il se ferme avec le Yin,  
Actif, il s'ouvre avec le Yang ;  
Ses Esprits vitaux sont infiniment calmes.  
Il ne se laisse pas dissiper par les êtres,  
Et tout ce qui vit sous le Ciel se soumet à lui.

Or le cœur est le souverain du corps  
Et l'Esprit, le joyau du cœur :  
Le corps qui peine sans s'arrêter s'effondre ;

L'essence qui se dépense sans trêve s'épuise.  
Le Saint en connaît le prix et les respecte profondément :  
Il prend soin de ne jamais passer les bornes.  
Si le jade semi-circulaire de Xia Hou,  
Serré en lieu sûr, dans une cassette,  
Est tenu pour ce qu'il y a de plus précieux,  
Que dire des Esprits vitaux  
Qui surpassent infiniment en valeur l'anneau de Xia Hou !

Au déterminé, le Saint répond par le non-déterminé<sup>24</sup>,  
Ainsi parvient-il à la raison même des êtres ;  
Par le vide, il accueille les réalités,  
Ainsi remplit-il parfaitement sa charge.  
Libre et joyeux, vide et paisible,  
Ainsi accomplit-il sa destinée.  
Il en résulte que rien ne lui sera tout à fait étranger ;  
Rien non plus ne lui tiendra absolument à cœur.  
Il couve les êtres par sa vertu,  
Leur communique une douce chaleur  
24. Le déterminé *you* et le non-de terminé *wu*.

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Et les rend obéissants au Ciel.  
Il est auprès du Tao ; il est le voisin de la Vertu.  
Il n'invite pas la bonne fortune et ne prévient pas la mauvaise.  
Ses âmes Hun et Po demeurent au logis  
Et ses Esprits vitaux gardent la racine.  
Vie et mort ne sont pas un changement pour lui. [7a]  
C'est pourquoi on l'appelle Pur Esprit.

Par Homme authentique<sup>25</sup>, on entend un homme  
Dont la nature se confond avec le Tao.  
Aussi, pour lui le déterminé est comme le non-déterminé,  
Le substantiel comme le vide.  
Placé dans son Un, il ignore son Deux,

Absorbé dans le soin de son intérieur,  
Il ignore ce qui lui est extérieur.  
Candeur illuminée et Simplicité première,  
Il pratique le non-agir  
Et revient au Brut primordial.  
Incorporé à sa racine,  
Embrassant étroitement l'Esprit  
Pour randonner aux limites du Ciel/Terre,  
Comme absent, il vogue à son gré par-delà  
ce monde de poussière  
Et s'ébat librement, occupé de son seul loisir.  
Immensité sans rivage, débordement infini !  
L'habileté artificieuse et pleine de ressources,  
Il ne la porte pas dans son cœur.

Si mort et vie ont, pour lui, la même importance,  
C'est qu'elles ne lui sont pas un changement.  
Le Ciel peut bien couvrir et la Terre nourrir,  
Lui ne se raccroche ni à l'un, ni à l'autre.  
Il plonge son regard dans ce qui est sans défaut  
Et ne se laisse pas contaminer par les êtres.  
Devant le spectacle de désordre qu'offre le monde,  
Il maintient son origine ancestrale.  
De tels hommes ont oublié leur foie et leur vésicule<sup>26</sup>,  
Ont délaissé l'oreille et l'œil ;  
Le cœur et le vouloir concentrés à l'interne,  
Par leur pénétration et leur accomplissement parfaits  
Ils se font le partenaire du Un.  
Au repos, ils ne savent ce qu'ils font ;  
En mouvement, ils ne savent où ils vont ;  
Ils vont et viennent imprévisibles et soudains. [7 b]

25. Un homme authentique (*zhen ren*)

26. En corrigeant *zheng* en *wang* .



**Pour cette raison, leur sommeil est sans rêve,  
Leur veille ne s'encombre pas de cogitations ;  
Leurs âmes Po ne fléchissent pas**

27. Le parallélisme probable avec *Lao xi* 64 permet de prendre l'expression au sens fort : « C'est parce qu'ils se refusent à apprendre qu'ils ont la connaissance. »

28. Voir *Lao xi* 42.

29. « Les grands marais » et non « les lacs et les plans d'eau », comme on traduit parfois. Ce sont les étendues basses et humides par opposition aux plateaux et aux montagnes. On y met le feu quand on chasse le gibier qui les hante.

30. Concubines favorites du roi de Yue.

31. *Hu* : Empereur céleste de la région de l'Océan septentrional, où tout est indistinct.

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**Et leurs âmes Hun ne se cabrent pas<sup>32</sup> :  
Virevolte incessante de commencements et de fins enchaînés  
Et on ne sait par quel bout la prendre.  
Leur œil se ferme doucement dans la maison de la grande nuit  
Et, quand ils s'éveillent,  
Ils l'ouvrent dans la demeure de la clarté radieuse.  
Ils s'arrêtent et se reposent dans un coin tranquille »  
Ou s'ébattent à loisir aux plages du Sans forme.**

**Au repos, ils nous échappent ;  
Ils ne s'abritent nulle part.  
De leurs mouvements, on ne peut rien saisir  
Et leur tranquillité est incorporelle.  
Ils subsistent comme absents et vivent comme morts.  
Ils sortent, ils rentrent dans l'Indistinct ;  
Les âmes Gui font leurs corvées  
Et les Esprits Shen sont à leur service<sup>34</sup>.  
Ils s'évanouissent dans l'Insondable et réintègrent l'Indistinct.**

**Ils s'associent aux êtres de toutes formes  
Dans un anneau de commencements et de fins insaisissables.  
C'est de cette manière que les Esprits vitaux  
Peuvent s'élever jusqu'au Tao. [9a]**

**Quant aux prétendus ébats des Hommes authentiques :  
Respirations normales, respirations profondes,  
Rejet des souffles viciés, inhalation de souffles frais,  
Balancement à la manière des ours,  
Extensions à la manière des oiseaux,  
Ablutions à la manière des canards sauvages,  
Marche fléchie à la manière des gibbons,  
Œil fixe à la manière des chouettes,  
Regard soutenu à la manière des tigres,  
C'est la pratique de ceux qui ne s'occupent que du corps.  
Il n'y a pas à s'en émouvoir.**

32. La représentation des âmes Hun sous la forme d'un cheval céleste, monté par un esprit, figure dans la partie supérieure (niveau du Ciel) de la Bannière funéraire de Mawangdui (soie peinte, découverte en avril 1972, à Changsha, et reproduite dans l'album *Xiban bobua*, Pékin, 1972).

33. « S'arrêter et se reposer » c'est, comme en *Lao zi* 32 et 44, pouvoir échapper aux renaissances successives.

34. Les gens simples (ignorants et stupides), les sots ont une foi naïve dans les esprits, mais les gens éclairés les mettent à leur service.

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**Mais que les Esprits, dans l'agitation violente et désordonnée,  
Puisse ne rien perdre de leur plénitude et demeurer indemnes  
Dans l'alternance du jour et de la nuit<sup>35</sup>,  
Étant un Printemps pour les êtres du monde<sup>36</sup>,  
Alors cela, oui, c'est l'Harmonie  
Celle qui, par l'union,  
Produit les différentes Saisons à l'intérieur du cœur <sup>37</sup>.  
L'homme peut être atteint dans son corps**

Sans que son cœur soit éprouvé ;  
Il passe d'une habitation à une autre  
Sans que ses essences soient diminuées. [9 b]

Tandis qu'un lépreux se déplace d'une manière normale,  
Un homme dont le corps est sain, mais dont l'esprit ne l'est pas,  
Quand ses Esprits se mettent à extravaguer,  
Qui peut savoir ce qu'il pourra bien entreprendre ?  
Le corps est sujet à l'usure,  
Mais les Esprits échappent aux transformations ;  
Parce que l'Esprit échappe aux transformations,  
Ainsi peut-il y correspondre.  
Mille changements et Dix mille détours n'en verront pas la fin.  
Ce qui est transformé retourne au Sans forme ;  
Ce qui n'est pas transformé vit avec le Ciel/Terre.  
L'arbre meurt quand ce qui le fait verdoyer l'a quitté.  
Comment croire alors que ce qui a produit l'arbre  
C'est l'arbre lui-même ?  
De même ce qui emplit le corps n'est pas, lui-même, corporel.

Ainsi donc, ce qui fait vivre ne mourra jamais,  
C'est ce qu'il aura produit qui mourra.  
Celui qui transforme les êtres ne sera jamais transformé,  
C'est ce qu'il aura transformé qui sera de nouveau transformé.  
Méprisons le monde, notre Esprit sera libéré.  
Faisons peu de cas des êtres, notre cœur ne sera pas égaré.  
Regardons d'un même œil la mort et la vie,  
Notre vouloir ne sera pas ébranlé. [10a]  
Voyons le Même sous les changements et les transformations  
Et notre Clarté ne sera pas ternie.  
Peut-être ne verra-t-on dans nos propos  
Qu'un vain bavardage.  
Permettez qu'on en montre, par quelques exemples, la solidité.

35. Comme plus haut, par « jour et nuit », il faut entendre « vie et mort ».

36. Par « Printemps », il faut évidemment comprendre l'élan vital ; de même, sur la Bannière de Mawangdui, les fruits et les fleurs du pêcher qui éclatent partout à travers les branches sont l'explosion du Yang.

37. Le cœur vide et quiet accueille toutes les phases du mouvement Yin/Yang et s'unit ainsi vitalement à ce qui s'effectue dans l'univers.

92

Si les gens aimeraient tant à être le Prince,  
C'est pour combler les désirs de leurs sens  
Et procurer toute l'aise à leur corps.  
Hauts belvédères et bois plantés  
Voilà ce qu'aujourd'hui on trouve beau ;  
Mais Yao se logeait dans le bois brut,  
Sous des chevrons non dégrossis.  
Une chère délicate et des mets rares  
Voilà ce dont les gens raffolent ; [10 b]  
Mais Yao avait un brouet noir pour potage  
Et un plat de chénopodes<sup>38</sup> cuits à l'eau.  
Des habits brodés et du renard blanc,  
C'est ce que les gens aiment porter ;  
Yao se couvrait d'un habit de toile  
Et, contre le froid, d'une peau de cerf.  
Pour son entretien, aucun superflu,  
Il peinait, accablé de pesants soucis.

Quand après avoir eu l'Empire, il le transmet à Shun,  
On eût dit qu'il déposait un fardeau.  
Ce n'était pas : « Je me retire en votre faveur »,  
Mais la pratique sincère du non-agir,  
Par qui fait peu de cas du faste impérial.

Yu était en tournée d'inspection au Sud ;  
Comme il se trouvait à traverser le Fleuve,  
Voici que, sur son dos, un dragon jaune



Se met à soulever l'embarcation.  
 Ses gens, dans le bateau, perdent contenance,  
 Et passent par toutes les couleurs.  
 Alors Yu, dans un grand éclat de rire,  
 S'exclame :  
 « C'est à moi qu'a été remis le mandat du Ciel ;  
 J'use mes forces au service des Dix mille nations.  
 La vie est envoi en mission ; et la mort, le retour.  
 Y a-t-il là de quoi troubler ma paix intérieure ? »  
 Le dragon, il l'assimilait à un simple caméléon,  
 Son visage demeurait impassible. [11 a]  
 Le dragon alors, abaissant ses oreilles,  
 En frétilant de la queue, s'éclipsa.

38. On n'a pas hésité à laisser le nom scientifique, quand il n'y avait pas d'autre traduction exacte en français.

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Les êtres, Yu les regardait tous et chacun  
 Comme quantité également négligeable.

Une shaman du pays de Zheng dévisageait Huzilin<sup>39</sup>,  
 Lisant sur lui les signes.  
 Elle informe Lie zi qui, tout en pleurs, rapporte  
ses dires à Hu zi ;
 Mais Hu zi avait conquis la maîtrise sur le Ciel et sur la Terre ;  
 Insensible à la gloire et aux biens terrestres,  
 Il recevait l'animation par les talons ».

Vie et mort étaient vues par Hu zi comme une même chose.

Ziqui<sup>41</sup>, à l'âge de cinquante-quatre ans,  
 Fut atteint d'une déformation de la colonne vertébrale.  
 Le coccyx plus haut que le vertex,  
 Le bas du sternum rejoignant le menton,  
 Les deux hanches tout en haut,

Le trou annulaire pointant vers le ciel, [11 b]  
Se traînant à terre, il se mira dans le puits,  
Pour s'exclamer :  
« Prodigieux ! Le Producteur-transformateur avec moi  
A réussi un chef-d'œuvre ! »  
Au regard de Ziqiu,  
Tous les changements et transformations se valent.

Ainsi donc, considérant les choses comme Yao  
On saura ne pas faire grand cas de l'Empire ;  
Observant l'attitude de Yu,  
On saura l'insignifiance de l'Empire ;  
Remontant à la source de la doctrine de Hu zi,  
On saura que mort et vie reviennent au même ;  
À la vue du comportement de Ziqiu,  
On saura que changements et transformations se valent.

L'homme parfait,  
S'appuie au pilier inébranlable,  
Va par des chemins sans barrières,

39. Voir *Zhuang zǐ* 7 : 134 (L'tou KIA-HWAY, p. 78) et *Lie zǐ* 2 : 22-23, où la même anecdote se retrouve, plus détaillée. Hu zi, le maître de Lie zi, se montre à la shaman successivement sous l'aspect céleste, puis terrestre, sous celui du médian entre Ciel et Terre et, finalement, sous l'aspect du Chaos primordial. À chaque fois, la devineresse se laisse prendre.

40. Sa respiration, les souffles qui entretenaient sa vie, ne lui venaient pas simplement du Ciel par sa gorge, mais aussi de la Terre par ses talons. Sa vie se déroule puissamment entre Ciel et Terre.

41. Taoïste du pays de Chu.

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Puise au grenier inépuisable,  
Apprends du maître d'Immortalité ;  
Où qu'il aille, parvient au terme,  
Où qu'il parvienne, trouve un accès ;

Il vit l'esprit sans inquiétude,  
Sa mort ne désole pas les Esprits<sup>42</sup>.  
Il ploie et se redresse, baisse et relève la tête ;  
Sur sa poitrine serrant sa destinée,  
Il s'accommode inlassablement. [12a]  
Quel heur, quel malheur, quels profits, quels dommages,  
Quel hasard en mille changements, en dix mille avatars,  
Pourraient faire du mal à son cœur ?

Un tel homme embrasse le Simple et garde ses essences.  
Cigale après la mue, serpent libéré de sa peau,  
Il vogue dans la Grande Pureté, il s'élève léger,  
Il se tient solitaire ; soudain il s'évanouit en haut  
Là où même le couple des phénix ne peut le rejoindre<sup>43</sup>,  
À plus forte raison la caille chicanière<sup>44</sup>.  
Croit-on que puissance et position, titres et émoluments  
Seraient de nature à l'influencer ?

Zhi et Hua choisirent de mourir au combat<sup>45</sup>  
La forte somme du Prince Ju pour les en détourner  
N'a pu rien changer à leur conduite.  
Yan zi qu'on pouvait contraindre par la vertu d'Humanité, <sup>46</sup>  
Ne pouvait pas être réduit par les armes.  
Zhi et Hua que pouvait arrêter le Sens du devoir  
Ne s'arrêtaient pas à la considération d'intérêt personnel. [12 b]  
Car l'homme de bien mourra pour le Devoir,  
Et ne conservera pas non plus sa vie pour des biens et dignités ;  
Il n'agit que par Devoir,  
La peur du trépas n'a pas prise sur lui.  
Il y a donc des hommes qui ne connaissent que le Devoir,  
Mieux, il y en a que rien ne retiendrait.

42. La constitution de l'homme fait apparaître des essences qui lui sont propres et qui le spécifient. C'est la base, toujours renouvelée, de son animation. Les Esprits viennent à l'homme comme attirés par les

essences et font son animation au niveau de la vie céleste. Le maître de maison, l'homme, reçoit des invités, les Esprits, qui ne sont à lui que comme les hôtes de sa demeure. On voit que la vie de chaque individu se constitue par l'association intime d'essences et d'Esprits et ne lui survit pas. Voir *Huainan si* (début du chap. 7, p. 79).

43. Le couple de phénix, symbole de la Vertu et du vol libre dans les hauteurs.

44. Voir *Zhuang zi*, chap. 1 (« Le Vol de l'oiseau Peng »).

45. Voir *Chunqiu zuozhuan*, vingt-troisième année du duc Xiang (COUVREUR, 11 : 405).

46. Voir *Shi ji* 32 : 1502 (CHAVANES, IV : 72).

**Que croyez-vous alors que fera l'adepte du non agir !**

**Yao ne voit rien de noble dans la possession de l'Empire,**

**Pour cette raison, il le remet à Shun.**

**Gongzi Zha<sup>47</sup>, rien d'honorable à régner,**

**C'est pourquoi il cède son trône.**

**Pour Zi Han, le jade n'est pas une richesse,**

**Il n'accepte donc pas le joyau<sup>48</sup>**

**Wu Guang, même au prix de sa vie, ne fallit pas au Devoir<sup>49</sup>,**

**Et préfère se jeter dans le gouffre.**

**Ces exemples le montrent :**

**La suprême noblesse ne dépend pas d'un titre,**

**La suprême richesse ne dépend pas des biens ;**

**L'Empire n'est la grande affaire que si l'on se donne à tous ;**

**Et le corps enfin, notre ami le plus cher,**

**On le jette au gouffre !**

**Alors tout le reste devient sans intérêt !**

**Ces personnages, je les dis des hommes libérés.**

**Libres de toute attache,**

**Ils n'attachent aucune valeur à la possession de l'Empire. [13a]**

**Ayant contemplé en haut la vérité des Parfaits,**

**Entés sur le sens originel de la Voie et de la Vertu,**

Lorsqu'ils examinent la pratique du siècle,  
 Ils ne peuvent que la trouver dégradante.  
 Un esprit familier des pensées du Xu You 50  
 N'a que mépris pour le Jindeng ou le Baotao 51.  
 Quand Yanling Jizi refuse le trône de Wu 52  
 Des paysans en procès à propos d'une terre  
 En sont pour leur courte honte.  
 Quand Zi Han trouve mauvais d'accepter un jade précieux  
 Deux qui se disputaient au sujet d'un contrat  
 Se sentent tout confus.  
 Et quand Wu Guang refuse net la souillure du siècle,  
 Profiteurs et jouisseurs ne se sentent pas à l'aise.

47. Gongzi Zha refusa le trône de Wu. Voir *Chunqiu zuozhuan*, trente et unième année du duc Xiang (COUVREUR II : 575).

48. Voir *Chunqiu zuozhuan*, quinzième année du duc Xiang (COUVREUR, II : 319).

49. Wu Guang refusa l'offre de l'Empire que lui faisait Tang le Victorieux, fondateur de la dynastie Shang. Se sentant offensé de cette offre, il se précipita dans un gouffre.

50. Xu You : un des Quatre sages du Mont Miaogushe, célèbre pour avoir refusé l'Empire que Yao lui offrit.

51. Chapitres du Livre de l'Histoire : le *Jindeng* s'y trouve encore ; le *Baotao* est perdu.

52. Yanling Jizi est un autre nom de Gongzi Zha.

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Celui qui ne voit pas la grandeur du Devoir  
 Ne sait pas que la vie n'est pas la chose à vouloir à tout prix  
 Et qui n'est pas instruit de la grande Parole  
 Ne sait pas que l'Empire n'est pas la chose avantageuse.

J'évoquerai maintenant un hameau pauvre, misérable,  
 Où l'on tape sur les pots et tambourine sur les jarres  
 Pour s'accompagner en chantant ;  
 On est persuadé qu'on fait de la musique.

Par contre, qui connaît la percussion du tambour sur pied  
Et la vibration de la grosse cloche<sup>53</sup>,  
Serait à tout coup désappointé  
Trouvant très vulgaires ces pots et ces jarres. [13 b]  
Bien. Mais collectionner les Odes, les Annales, etc.  
S'adonner aux travaux littéraires  
Et méconnaître ce qu'enseigne la Vérité suprême,  
C'est se faire apprenti batteur et tambourineur de pots et jarres ;  
Tandis qu'être au service de l'Empire sous le Ciel,  
C'est apprendre à jouer du tambour sur pied.

Respectabilité et gros profits  
Voilà ce qui excite la convoitise.  
La main gauche agrippe la carte de l'Empire,  
Tandis que la droite appuie une lame sur sa gorge<sup>54</sup>,  
Le plus sot ne le ferait pas.  
On voit par là qu'on préfère la vie à l'Empire. [14a]

Le Saint mange ce qu'il faut pour maintenir ses souffles,  
S'habille simplement pour couvrir son corps,  
Gouverne ses émotions  
Et n'en demande pas toujours plus.  
Ne pas avoir l'Empire ne le détruit pas en profondeur,  
Posséder l'Empire n'affole pas sa paix intérieure.  
Posséder ou ne pas posséder l'Empire, c'est tout un<sup>55</sup>.

53. Instruments solennels des musiques de cérémonies.

54. On ne peut se saisir de l'Empire sans s'exposer à l'assassinat politique. Ainsi, Jing Ke qui tenta de tuer le roi de Qin, s'introduisant près de lui, un poignard dissimulé dans une carte.

55. Les besoins essentiels de la vie d'un homme : manger, se vêtir, ressentir sont par eux-mêmes éducatifs : on mange (et l'on boit), on se vêt, on parle, on agit pour développer la racine vitale. Ce que l'on fait pour soi, on le fera pour l'Empire, pour la collectivité étendue aussi loin qu'il y a des hommes pour la porter. Les conseillers d'un prince l'apercevront comme un individu qui résume en lui le peuple et la nation,

l'Empire. C'est la même réalité qui, nature d'un homme, atteint la totalité de ce qui existe. Mais ce sont toujours les mêmes règles de modération qui doivent présider à toute l'activité. L'ambiguïté du *Huainan zi* n'est pas du côté de la représentation chinoise de la vie, mais plutôt dans nos représentations, car chacun d'entre nous s'occupe peu de posséder ou de ne pas posséder l'Empire ; mais chacun est naturellement obsédé par la recherche de principes qui orienteront indéfiniment son parcours vital. On comprendrait mal la portée universelle du *Huainan zi* si on ne suivait pas du regard l'ampleur de son développement ou si l'on se laissait arrêter par les circonstances historiques de sa composition et de sa rédaction. Si le prince Liu An cherchait un Tao pour son usage propre, il cherchait aussi une doctrine pour appuyer ses prétentions au trône. Ayant l'avantage d'appartenir à la famille Liu, il n'avait pas besoin de renverser la dynastie ; il lui suffisait de renverser son parent.

97

**Vous offrez à un homme tout le grenier d'Ao 56**  
**Vous lui donnez toute l'eau du Fleuve ;**  
**Il apaisera sa faim, éteindra sa soif ;**  
**N'entrera dans son ventre**  
**Que la valeur d'une corbeille et d'une gourde.**  
**Son corps aura son content**  
**Et le grenier d'Ao ne baissera pas,**  
**Son ventre sera rempli sans que s'assèche le Fleuve.**  
**La possession n'ajoute rien à la satiété**  
**Et le fait de ne pas posséder, rien à la faim.**  
**Il en est de même avec les corbeilles de la maison**  
**Et pour le puits qu'on a chez soi pareillement.**

**En l'homme, la colère violente fait éclater le Yin,**  
**Une joie trop vive fait s'effondrer le Yang 57 ;**  
**L'affliction profonde fait s'écrouler l'interne,**  
**La peur panique mène à la folie.**  
**S'il faut encore éviter l'ordure et défendre sa tranquillité**  
**Mieux aurait valu n'avoir jamais quitté l'Ancestral**  
**Et jouir encore de la communion universelle.**  
**Ayant l'œil clair, mais ne regardant pas,**  
**L'oreille fine, mais n'écoutant pas,**

La bouche close, mais ne parlant pas,  
Le cœur inerte, mais demeurant sans pensée 58,  
Il rejette l'excitation des sens  
Pour faire retour au Simple ;  
Il repose ses Esprits vitaux 59  
Rejetant savoirs et spéculations.  
Éveillé, mais comme endormi,  
Vivant, mais comme mort, [14 b]  
Pour finir par retourner à la racine.  
Le temps qui précède ma naissance  
Et celui du déroulement de ma vie,  
En substance, ne font qu'un.  
Mort et vie, en substance, sont Un.

56. Il y avait, sur le mont Ao, une grande réserve de grains.

57. Voir *Huainan zi* 1, p. 63.

58. Le sens pourrait être « le cœur dispos », mais le sens est aussi bien « le cœur inerte ».

59. *Jing shen* : les Esprits subtils et légers animateurs de l'essence.

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Voyez les hommes requis pour la corvée,  
Maniant la grande houe et la petite bêche,  
Portant à dos la terre dans un panier,  
Ruisselants de leur sueur salée,  
Le souffle haletant et la gorge sèche.  
Si, dans un pareil moment,  
Ils trouvent un cercle d'ombre au pied d'un arbre,  
Ils sont tout contents de cette détente.  
Mais l'abri d'une grotte ou d'une anfractuosité  
C'est incomparablement mieux que l'ombre reposante.

Un homme souffre d'une tumeur intestinale :  
Il étreint son cœur, il écrase son ventre,  
Il remonte ses genoux, il cogne de la tête ;



Le corps tout recroquevillé, restant là, jusqu'à l'aube,  
À geindre sans pouvoir trouver le sommeil. [15a]  
Si, par bonheur, il s'assoupit rien qu'un instant,  
Ses proches et tous ses parents sont transportés de joie.  
Cependant la paix d'une longue nuit  
Ne vaut-elle pas mieux qu'un bref instant de joie!

On en conclura ceci :  
Qui a compris la grandeur des espaces et des temps  
Ne se laisse plus obséder par la mort et la vie  
Et celui qui sait entretenir le principe vital,  
Connaissant aussi l'Harmonie,  
N'a plus d'intérêt pour l'Empire.  
Qui a connu la joie d'avant la vie  
Ne peut plus craindre la mort.  
Quand on sait que Xu You l'emporte sur Shun 60  
On cesse de convoiter les êtres.  
Le rempart qui se dresse vertical  
Ne vaut pas le rempart qui penche vers la terre ;  
Mais mieux vaut encore n'en pas faire du tout.  
L'eau prise en glace ne vaut pas l'eau du dégel,  
Mais mieux vaut l'eau qui n'a pas gelé.  
De l'absence de traces visibles à leur présence  
Et de la présence de traces visibles à leur absence,  
C'est un anneau sans fin du commencement et du terme.  
On ignore tout de ce qui fait germer.  
Qui ? Sinon Ce qui communique librement  
Avec l'extérieur comme avec l'intérieur,  
Et qui est capable d'être sans attrait et sans aversion ?  
L'au-delà de tout extérieur est suprêmement grand  
L'intérieur du plus interne est suprêmement Précieux.  
À celui qui est parvenu au plus Précieux  
Où qu'il aille, s'offre un chemin.

Vient l'époque de la décadence,  
Les gens se pressent aux études,  
Ne remontent pas à leur cœur,  
Ne retournent pas à la racine, [15 b]  
Ils sculptent et polissent leur nature,  
Par affectation, ils nuisent à leurs dispositions naturelles  
Pour frayer avec le monde :  
Le désir naturel à l'œil est strictement censuré  
Et la joie qui vient du cœur est réprimée par les rites ;  
D'un pas rapide, on s'avance, les coudes près du corps,  
On pivote sur soi, on fait mille grâces,  
Et, pour finir, l'on salue d'une profonde inclinaison.  
En attendant, la viande qui se fige dans son jus  
Deviend immangeable  
Et le vin qui dépose, imbuvable.  
Extérieurement on entrave le corps,  
À l'intérieur, la Vertu est étouffée.  
On étrangle l'harmonieux écoulement Yin/Yang,  
On violente sa nature et sa destinée  
Et l'on fabrique des gens tristes  
À longueur de vie.

Pour qui atteint au Tao Suprême  
Il n'en va pas ainsi :  
Il agence heureusement les dispositions de sa nature,  
Pratique l'Art du cœur  
Et s'entretient par l'Harmonie ;  
Conduit tout de la manière convenable.  
Il met sa joie dans le Tao, il a oublié la futilité,  
Se repose dans la Vertu, il a oublié son dénuement.  
En sa nature sans désir, il a tout ce qu'il désire ;  
Parce que son cœur refuse la joie, tout lui est joie.  
Modérant le débordement du sensible,  
Il libère sa Vertu.

Favorisant sa nature,  
Il protège son Harmonie.  
Le corps dispos, l'esprit détendu, l'agir mesuré,  
Il peut apparaître la norme de l'Empire sous le Ciel. [16a]

Parlons maintenant des Lettrés 61 :

60. Pour ce qui est de l'élévation et de la profondeur de la pensée, ainsi que de la pureté de la conduite : Shun accepta l'Empire alors que Xu You s'était bien gardé de l'accepter.

61. Il s'agit des Lettrés confucéens (*ru*).

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N'allant pas à ce qui produit le désir,  
Ils interdisent nos désirs ;  
Incapables de remonter à l'origine de la joie,  
Ils ferment la porte à ce qui produit la joie.  
C'est vouloir faire s'écouler les sources des fleuves et rivières,  
Tandis qu'on les barre déjà avec la main.  
Mener les peuples,  
C'est comme dresser des bêtes sauvages.  
Si l'on ne les enferme pas solidement dans un enclos,  
Leur permettant de conserver leur caractère sauvage,  
Et qu'on se contente de leur mettre des entraves aux pieds  
Pour contrôler leurs mouvements,  
Dans ces conditions,  
Croît-on qu'on puisse les élever et assurer leur longévité ?

Yan Hui, Ji Lu, Zi Xia, Ran Boniu  
Furent les disciples les plus accomplis de Confucius.  
Yan Hui mourut prématurément,  
Ji Lu fut dépecé et salé à Wei,  
Zi Xia perdit la vue,  
Ran Boniu devint lépreux.  
Tous violentèrent leur nature,  
Lésant leurs dispositions intimes,

Sans pouvoir obtenir l'Harmonie.

Zi Xia était allé consulter Zengzi :

« Je maigris, puis je grossis et ainsi de suite.

Zengzi lui en demanda la raison 62.

« Quand je suis hors de moi, richesses et honneurs

me font envie ;

Sitôt rentré en moi, je songe avec délice au Tao

des anciens rois.

Quand les deux se disputent en mon cœur,

Je me mets à maigrir,

Mais quand le Tao des anciens rois l'emporte,

Alors, je grossis. »

Si on regarde plus au fond les dispositions de Zi Xia,

Ce n'était pas qu'il ne pût convoiter

Une position de richesses et d'honneurs

Ou qu'il ne fût pas tout prêt

À s'adonner sans retenue à tous les plaisirs. [16 b]

C'est plutôt qu'il violentait sa nature propre,

Qu'il fermait la porte sur ses désirs

62. On assiste à un échange entre deux disciples de Confucius. Pour Zi Xia, voir *Huainan zǐ* 1 : 20 b, p. 65.

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Et que par son Respect des devoirs il se protégerait lui-même.

Ce qui se passe c'est que

Le cœur s'abîme dans une tristesse mortelle,

La nature et l'être corporel sombrent, épuisés.

Incapable de retrouver ses forces,

On ne peut pas parvenir au terme des jours

alloués par le ciel 63.

L'homme parfait dont nous parlons 64

Ne mange qu'à la mesure de son ventre,

Ne s'habille qu'à la mesure de son corps ;  
Il est parfaitement à l'aise dans tout ce qu'il fait,  
Il agit en fonction des circonstances,  
Il fait largement le bien au monde sous le Ciel,  
Il ne pille pas les Dix mille êtres à son profit,  
Il est aussi bien à sa place dans un magnifique palais  
Qu'errant dans la campagne déserte de l'Illimité ;  
Il monte jusqu'au Suprême Auguste,  
Il s'appuie avec confiance au Grand Un,  
Il joue avec le Ciel/Terre qu'il tient dans le creux de sa main.  
Qu'aurait-il à faire de pauvreté ou de richesse,  
De maigrir ou de grossir ?

Les Lettrés sont incapables  
De débarrasser les gens de leurs désirs ;  
Ils ne savent que les brider.  
Ils sont incapables  
De les détacher des plaisirs ;  
Ils ne savent qu'interdire 65.  
On peut bien faire en sorte dans l'Empire  
Que les gens par peur des châtiments n'osent brigander ;  
Ne serait-il pas mieux de faire  
Qu'ils n'aient pas des âmes de brigands !

Les gens de Yue qui attrapent un python  
Considèrent qu'ils ont là un mets de choix ;  
En Chine, celui qu'on a pris, on le rejette  
Parce qu'on ne sait qu'en faire. [17a]  
Ainsi donc, quand on sait qu'une chose  
Ne vaut pas la peine qu'on la recherche,  
Même un être cupide peut l'abandonner ;  
Quand on ne sait pas qu'une chose

63. C'est ce que les spirituels appellent le danger de la contention.

64. L'homme parfait (*zhi ren*) est au stade suprême (*zhi*).

65. Voir *Huainan zi xi*, p. 145-146.

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Ne présente pas d'utilité,  
Même l'homme frugal n'a pas le moyen d'y renoncer.

Ce qui fait qu'un prince souverain  
Cause la ruine et la perte de sa principauté,  
Amène la disparition de ses dieux du sol et des céréales,  
Tombe lui-même entre les mains des meurtriers  
Et devient la risée de l'Empire sous le Ciel,  
C'est toujours parce qu'il n'est pas capable d'être sans désirs.

Les Qiu You, par cupidité,  
Se laissèrent prendre à l'offre de la grande cloche  
Et perdirent leur pays 66.  
Le prince de Yu, fasciné par les jades bi de Chuiji,  
Y perdit la liberté 67.  
Le duc Xian, ensorcelé par la beauté de Dame Li,  
Créa un désordre qui s'étendit à Quatre générations 68.  
Le duc Huan qui goûtait fort la cuisine de Yiya,  
Ne fut pas enseveli au temps convenable 69.  
Le roi des Hu aimait trop la musique lascive des chanteuses,  
Il en perdit ses meilleures terres 70.  
Voilà donc Cinq seigneurs  
S'ils avaient gouverné au plus près leurs émotions, [17 b]  
Évités l'excès, su se tenir et se conduire  
Sans se laisser mener par les choses,  
Comment y aurait-il eu de telles calamités !  
Au tir à l'arc,  
Ce n'est pas la flèche qui manque le centre de la cible,  
C'est l'apprenti tireur qui ne guide pas bien la flèche.  
À la conduite des chars,  
Ce ne sont pas les rênes qui ne vont pas,

**C'est l'apprenti conducteur qui ne sait pas les tenir.  
L'éventail en hiver, des vêtements fourrés en été,  
Si vous savez qu'ils ne vous serviraient à rien,  
Alors les changements au sein des Dix mille êtres  
Ne vous seront plus que poussière emportée par le vent.  
Sur ce qui bout déjà, si vous versez de l'eau très chaude  
Pensant l'empêcher de bouillir, vous n'empêcherez rien.  
Si vous connaissiez réellement la nature des choses,  
Vous vous contenteriez de l'ôter du feu.**

66. Barbares du Nord. Pour les réduire, Zhibo leur envoya une grande cloche ; afin de la faire entrer chez eux, ils ménagèrent un chemin qui servit à Zhi Bo de voie d'invasion. C'est, dit-on, la version chinoise du cheval de Troie.

67. Le prince de Yu se laissa acheter par des pierreries de Chuiji le droit de passage, à travers sa principauté, vers celle de Guo. Mais il fut, lui aussi, anéanti lors de cette conquête par le puissant État de Jin. Voir *Chunqiu zuozhuan*, COUVREUR, I : 234 et 257.

68. Le duc Xian de Jin mit à mort son héritier pour le remplacer par le fils qu'il avait eu de la belle barbare Li Ji. Les luttes pour la légitimité du pouvoir durèrent quatre générations.

69. Amoureux de la bonne chère, le duc Huan de Qi donna tant de faveurs à son chef cuisinier, Yiya, que ce dernier, à la mort du duc, voulut prendre le pouvoir et lutta contre ses héritiers. Le résultat fut que, pendant plusieurs mois, personne ne s'occupa d'enterrer le duc. Voir *Shi ji* 32 : 1493 et CHAVANNES, IV : 59-60.

70. Le roi des Hu, Barbares de l'Ouest, oublia la conduite et la défense de son territoire en s'abandonnant aux charmes de danseuses et chanteuses que le duc Mu de Qin, qui convoitait son territoire, lui avait envoyées.





# TAO POÉTIQUE

## ***TAO POÉTIQUE, Vrais poèmes du Vide parfait***<sup>7</sup>

Pour le Ch'an, seul compte l'éveil à notre nature véritable, originelle, spontanée, identique à celle de l'univers. Cet éveil est accompagné d'une sensation intense de liberté et de compassion envers le monde. À travers nous, l'univers se contemple, se réfléchit (réfléchir, c'est refléter le monde). Expérience de l'éternité de l'instant présent, et de l'universalité de l'endroit où l'on se trouve (le temple). Le vide parfait, tel que l'a merveilleusement décrit Hui neng dans un sermon :

« Vénérable auditoire, le vide contient le soleil, la lune, les étoiles, la grande terre, les montagnes, les rivières, les arbres, les herbes, les hommes bons, les hommes mauvais, les bonnes choses, les mauvaises choses, le paradis, l'enfer. Tous sont dans le vide. Le vide de la nature de l'homme est de la même sorte. »

L'instant signifie étymologiquement se tenir dans, être debout dans (racine *sta* —, être debout). C'est là, au cœur des circonstances telles qu'elles sont, que s'épanouit l'ex-stase, où individu et univers se réfléchissent. Debout dans le chemin où l'on marche, pas à pas, s'arrêtant pour contempler, repartant. C'est ce chemin, le plus souvent en montagne, que des mandarins, des moines et des ermites qui vécurent en Chine aux 8<sup>ème</sup> et 9<sup>ème</sup> siècles, ont décrit dans les poèmes qui suivent. Ils nous convient à suivre leurs pas et à partager leur extase.

Moundarren, printemps 1986

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*TAO POÉTIQUE/ vrais poèmes du vide parfait/*

*poèmes traduits du chinois par/*

*CHENG Wing fun & Hervé COLLET,/*

*calligraphie de CHENG Winf fun/*

*Moundarren/*

*chemin des bois Millemont 78940 France*



*de nuit, retournant à la Porte du cerf*

du temple de la montagne sonne la cloche, il fait déjà sombre  
au Pont des pêcheurs, à l'embarcadère on s'agite

pour traverser,

clameurs

des gens longent le sable au bord, vers le village de la rivière

je monte aussi sur ma barque, retourne à la Porte du cerf

à la Porte du cerf, la lune claire perce la fumée des arbres

bientôt j'arrive là où maître P'ang s'est retiré

un rocher comme porte, le sentier dans les pins,

toujours le silence

seul un ermite, solitaire, va, vient

\*

Meng Hao jan convalescent, en visite au monastère de la Source du dragon, dédié aux maîtres Yi et Yip

midi, j'entends la cloche dans la montagne

je me lève marcher, que tristesse se dissipe

je vais dans la forêt, ramasse des champignons magiques

le val tourne, les lianes sont épaisses

sur un côté j'aperçois le monastère, il est ouvert

sous la longue véranda, les moines terminent leur repas

dans un ravin rocheux coule l'eau de neige

or scintillant, les mandarines sont givrées

le bâtiment dans les bambous, je pense à mes deux vieux amis

j'entre, m'y reposer, passer la journée

je pénètre dans une grotte, admire les stalactites

au bord de la falaise, on récolte du miel

au soleil du crépuscule je dis adieu aux maîtres

jusqu'au Torrent du tigre ils me raccompagnent

\*

**Wang Wei**

Wang Wei (701-761) mena la vie d'un disciple laïc du ch'an, ermite tant au milieu du monde de poussière (il exerça diverses fonctions

officielles), que dans sa retraite de la rivière Wang. Dans sa demeure, une bouilloire pour le thé, un mortier pour piler le grain, une table pour les sutras, un lit de corde. Son expérience du ch'an s'exprima tant dans la musique, la peinture que la poésie.

*ma villa dans la montagne Chung nan*

au milieu de ma vie, je me suis épris du tao  
sur mes vieux jours, j'habite dans la montagne du sud  
l'envie me prend, je pars seul  
choses merveilleuses, je suis seul pour en jouir  
je marche jusque là où l'eau s'arrête  
assis, je regarde les nuages s'élever  
par hasard je rencontre un vieillard de la forêt  
nous parlons, nous rions, oubliant le retour

\*

*réponse à Chang le magistrat*

sur mes vieux jours, je n'aime que la quiétude  
les dix mille choses ne m'encombrent plus le cœur  
je me retrouve sans projet durable,  
je sais seulement que je retourne dans la forêt ancienne  
le vent souffle dans les pins, dénoue ma ceinture  
la lune de la montagne m'éclaire, je joue du ch'in  
tu me demandes la vérité ultime  
le chant du pêcheur s'éloigne, le long de la rive

\*

Tao Yuan Ming<sup>8</sup>

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8

*l'homme, la terre, le ciel*, Moundarren, 2004.



c'est un processus naturel, la naissance conduit à la mort  
depuis les temps anciens il en est ainsi

[...]

[16] enfin je m'en retourne

les champs et le jardin doivent déjà être en friche,

pourquoi ne m'en suis-je pas retourné plus tôt ?

j'ai laissé mon cœur être l'esclave de mon corps

inutile pourtant de rester accablé, de m'attrister sur mon sort

je réalise que si au passé on ne peut remédier,

l'avenir par contre on peut l'infléchir

mon chemin finalement ne s'est peut-être pas trop égaré

aujourd'hui j'ai raison, hier j'avais tort

la jonque vogue allègrement,

le vent souffle, souffle dans mon vêtement

j'interroge des voyageurs pour trouver le bon chemin,

regrettant qu'à l'aube la lumière soit encore indécise

dès que j'aperçois mon humble hutte,

ravi aussitôt je me mets à courir

le jeune serviteur vient à ma rencontre,

mes jeunes enfants m'attendent sur le seuil de la porte

les trois sentiers sont déjà envahis par les herbes folles,

pins et chrysanthèmes sont toujours vivaces

tenant les enfants par la main j'entre dans la maison

il y a un pot rempli de vin







jours et nuits alternent, le temps file  
l'année commence à peine,  
que soudain elle en est déjà à la moitié  
la fenêtre au sud regorge des choses de la saison,  
la forêt au nord est vivace et luxuriante  
de la mer des nuages célestes se déverse la pluie propice,  
la couleur du matin annonce comment sera le vent  
ce qui est venu doit repartir,  
la vie d'homme observe le même principe  
vivre humblement en attendant sa fin,  
la tête reposée sur son bras replié, n'est pas contraire à la voie  
que le cours des choses soit paisible ou périlleux,  
je laisse mon cœur aller, sans souci des hauts et des bas  
si la compréhension des choses qu'on a devant  
les yeux est élevée,  
nul besoin de grimper sur les montagnes sacrées Hua et Song

\*

[77] *en buvant du vin*

la vertu a décliné depuis presque mille années  
tout le monde est devenu avare sur le sentiment  
il y a du vin, mais plus personne ne veut boire,  
on se préoccupe seulement de laisser un nom  
ce qu'il y a de plus précieux en nous,  
n'est-ce pas de notre vivant ?

la vie, combien de temps dure-t-elle ?

rapide comme l'éclair elle passe

être affairé pendant cent années,

si l'on s'en tient à ça, comment s'accomplir ?

\*

[120] *La Source des fleurs de pêcheurs*

Lors du règne de la dynastie Chin, durant l'ère Tai yuan (376-396), un homme de Wu ling, pêcheur de son état, remontait une rivière, sans se soucier de la longueur du chemin parcouru. Soudain il arrive dans une forêt de pêcheurs qui borde les deux rives sur plusieurs centaines de pas. À l'intérieur nul autre arbre. Sur les herbes odorantes, fraîches et belles, les pétales de fleurs tombent profusément, confusément. Le pêcheur, fort intrigué, continue d'avancer et décide d'explorer cette forêt jusqu'au bout. Là où la forêt se termine, à la source de la rivière, il découvre une montagne. Au flanc de la montagne, il y a une petite ouverture, on dirait qu'il en sort de la lumière. Il abandonne là sa barque et se glisse dans l'ouverture. Au début c'est très étroit, juste la place pour que passe un homme. Il fait ainsi quelques dizaines de pas quand brusquement ça s'élargit. Il débouche bientôt sur un vaste plateau. Il y a là des maisons bien disposées, de beaux champs, un bel étang, des mûriers, des bambous et d'autres arbres du même genre. Les sentiers se croisent, on entend des coqs et des chiens. Des gens vont et viennent, vaquant à leurs occupations. Hommes et femmes sont vêtus comme tout le monde. Les vieux et les enfants ont tous l'air contents et joyeux. Les premiers à rencontrer le pêcheur sont très surpris. Ils lui demandent d'où il vient. À toutes leurs questions il répond. Puis ils l'invitent chez eux, préparent du vin et tuent un poulet pour le repas. Quand au village on entend parler de cet homme, tous viennent lui demander des nouvelles. Ils lui racontent que leurs ancêtres, fuyant le chaos de l'époque Ch'in, partirent avec leurs femmes et leurs enfants. Ils aboutirent ici dans ce territoire retiré. Ils ne sont plus jamais repartis, vivant ainsi définitivement coupés des gens à l'extérieur. Ils lui demandent quelle dynastie règne aujourd'hui, ils ne connaissent pas les Han, encore moins les Wei et les Chin. Le

pêcheur raconte en détail tout ce qu'il sait, tous en sont bouleversés et soupirent. Les uns après les autres ils l'invitent dans leurs maisons, lui offrent du vin et de quoi manger. Il séjourne là plusieurs jours. Avant de repartir, les gens d'ici lui demandent de ne pas parler d'eux aux gens de l'extérieur. Une fois ressorti, il retrouve sa barque, suit le chemin par lequel il est venu, prenant soin de laisser des repères derrière lui. Quand il arrive à la ville, il se rend aussitôt chez le chef de district et lui raconte son aventure. Immédiatement le chef du district charge des hommes de retourner là-bas avec lui. Il recherche ses anciennes marques, mais s'égaré et ne parvient pas à retrouver le chemin. Liu Tzu chi, de Nan yang, un homme au caractère noble, entendant parler de cette histoire, se réjouit au projet de rechercher cet endroit, mais ne put finalement le réaliser. Peu de temps après, il tomba malade et mourut. Depuis, plus personne n'a demandé le chemin.

\*

Lu Yu

*Le vieil homme qui n'en fait qu'à sa guise, Moundarren.*

[162] *la nuit à la fenêtre*

notre nature propre possède naturellement la lumière  
quand voiles et obstacles se lèvent le tao spontanément s'accomplit  
mes mains fauchent les roseaux pour le chaume  
de ma maison à plusieurs solives  
je déracine des légumes pour préparer un bol de potage  
le ciel et l'homme vainquent en alternance, qui peut prédire ?  
malheur et bonheur ne durent pas, inutile de s'y arrêter  
à mon cœur seul je puis sans réserve me fier  
la nuit à la fenêtre, les mains dans les manches,  
j'écoute le bruit des pins

\*

## Wang Chang ling

*chanson du vieillard sur la rivière*

sur la rivière un vieillard, assis sur un vieux radeau  
pour préparer son élixir, il n'utilise que des fleurs de lotus bleu  
aujourd'hui quatre-vingts ans, comme quarante  
il dit « la mer immense est ma maison »

\*

## Li Po

*visite à un moine de la montagne sans le rencontrer*

le sentier de pierres pénètre dans un val rouge  
une porte en sapin, obstruée par de la mousse verte  
sur les marches désertes, des traces d'oiseaux  
la salle de méditation, personne pour ouvrir  
je regarde par la fenêtre, une brosse blanche,  
accrochée au mur, couverte de poussière  
vaine visite, je soupire  
je musarde un moment, sur le point de partir  
des nuages parfumés s'élèvent des montagnes  
une pluie de fleurs tombe du ciel  
joie de la musique du ciel !  
plus encore, le cri des singes, clair  
illuminé, coupé des affaires du monde,

ici, à mon aise

\*

## Han Yu

Han Yu (768-824) mena une brillante carrière officielle. Il fut gouverneur de Chlang an, la capitale impériale, et ministre de la Justice. Il connut cependant deux fois l'exil. Son deuxième exil fut causé par le célèbre mémorandum contre la vénération impériale d'une relique du Buddha (un prétendu os du doigt) qu'il adressa à l'empereur.

### *rochers dans la montagne*

rochers dans la montagne, rugueux, le sentier est étroit  
au crépuscule j'arrive au temple, volent des chauves-souris  
j'entre dans le hall, vais m'asseoir sur le perron,  
la nouvelle pluie est abondante,  
les feuilles des bananiers larges,  
les fleurs des gardénias opulentes  
un moine me vante une belle fresque bouddhiste  
sur un mur ancien  
il l'éclaire avec une torche, on ne distingue pas grand chose  
il installe mon lit, essuie la natte, me sert un repas  
du riz grossier, qui suffit pourtant à me rassasier  
nuit profonde, en paix je m'allonge, les cent insectes se taisent  
la lune claire émerge de la crête, sa lumière pénètre par la porte  
à l'aube seul je pars, il n'y a pas de chemin  
j'avance, monte, descends, dans les fumées et la brume  
montagne rouge, torrent émeraude, les couleurs chatoient



\*

Hsu Hun

*au pavillon de Hsieh, adieu*

chanson d'adieu terminée, le voyageur défait la barque  
feuilles rouges sur la montagne verte, la rivière coule fougueuse  
soleil couchant, réveil après l'ivresse, tu es déjà loin  
plein le ciel vent et pluie, je descends du pavillon de l'ouest

\*

*Hsu Hun est célèbre pour avoir écrit*

la pluie de la montagne est sur le point d'arriver le vent remplit le pavillon

Les Chinois prononcent ces vers lorsqu'ils sentent poindre un grand changement.

\*

Tu Tsun ho

*dédié au moine éminent Chi*

assis à méditer ou bien pérégrinant, hors du monde de poussière  
sans gourde ni bol pour t'accompagner  
rencontres tu quelqu'un, tu ne lui parles pas des affaires de ce monde  
tu vas ainsi, dans le monde des hommes un homme sans affaire

\*



## Tu Fu

Tu Fu (712-770) est souvent associé à Li Po par contraste de tempérament, de destin, de style. Quand ils se rencontrèrent, leur amitié fut immédiate. Li Po avait quarante-quatre ans, venait de quitter les fastes de Ch'ang an, Tu Fu avait trente-trois ans, était à la fin de sa période « fourrure, cheval et fougue », comme on dit en Chine. Tu Fu écrit alors à propos de Li Po

son pinceau se pose, provoque vent et pluie  
son poème achevé, dieux et diables pleurent

Tu Fu, qui descend d'une famille de lettrés, décide alors de se rendre à Chang an, obtenir un poste. À partir de là, sa vie va rencontrer des circonstances difficiles. Il n'eut jamais de poste important, connut l'exil et la misère. Son fils cadet mourut de faim en 755. Il n'eut de répit et de tranquillité que durant trois ans, de 759 à 762, au pays de Shu, dans l'ouest de l'empire. Jamais il ne réussit à retourner chez lui, à Lo yang. Malade, il mourut pendant le voyage, sur le Long fleuve, sur sa barque. Les poèmes qui suivent datent tous de la période où il vécut au pays de Shu.

### *improvisation*

la lune dans la rivière, à quelques pieds seulement de moi  
la lanterne de vent éclaire la nuit, bientôt la troisième veille  
sur le sable, endormis, un groupe de hérons, roulés en boule,  
calmes  
à l'arrière de la barque un poisson saute, « po la » dans l'eau

### *quatrain composé selon mon humeur*

elles savent bien que ma chaumière est très basse,  
pourtant les hirondelles de la rivière viennent exprès, sans cesse  
elles apportent de la terre dans leur bec, salissent mon ch'in et  
mes livres  
en plus, les insectes volants sans arrêt me rentrent dedans  
\*

### Ch'iu Wei (694-789)

*visite à un ermite de la montagne de l'ouest sans le rencontrer*

au sommet, une chaumière  
ascension en ligne droite, trente li  
je frappe à la porte, personne pour ouvrir  
je regarde à l'intérieur, rien qu'une table  
il a dû sortir dans sa charrette en branches,  
ou bien partir pêcher dans l'eau d'automne  
nous nous sommes croisés sans nous voir  
vain enthousiasme, je contemple alentour  
couleur de l'herbe, sous la dernière pluie  
bruit des pins, ce soir près de la fenêtre  
à ces merveilles je m'accorde,  
elles me lavent le cœur et les oreilles  
pourtant, sans plaisir de l'hôte et du maître  
je comprends alors la claire et pure loi  
joie épuisée, je redescends la montagne  
pourquoi t'attendre ?

\*

### Ch'ien Ch'i

*de mon studio à la bouche de la vallée, envoyé à Yang le censeur*

eaux et montagnes ceinturent ma chaumière  
nuages et brumes s'élèvent des rideaux de lianes  
les bambous, je les aime après la dernière pluie  
la montagne, je la chéris au crépuscule  
les hérons oisifs tôt viennent se percher  
les fleurs d'automne tombent, saison tardive  
le garçon balaie le sentier de lierres  
hier vieil ami, nous avons fixé rendez vous

\*

### Lang Chih yuan

*au temple dans la forêt de cyprès,  
contemplant le sud*

sur la rivière, j'entends au loin la cloche du monastère  
j'amarre la barque, le sentier sinueux traverse les pins denses  
éclaircie sur la montagne verte, encore quelques nuages  
nets contours, au sud ouest quatre ou cinq pics

\*

## Chiao jan

Chiao jan (chiao immaculé, jan spontané) était un ami de Lu Hung chien, plus connu sous le nom de Lu Yu, célèbre auteur du Classique du thé.

*visite à Lu Hung chien sans le rencontrer*

tu as déménagé près du rempart de la ville, pourtant,  
le sentier est sauvage, entre dans mûriers et chanvre  
récemment tu as planté, le long de la haie, des chrysanthèmes  
l'automne arrive, ils n'ont pas encore fleuri  
je frappe à la porte, pas de chien pour aboyer  
sur le point de partir, j'interroge le voisin à l'ouest  
il répond « il est parti dans la montagne,  
il revient toujours quand le soleil décline »

\*

## Yu Liang che (756 — ?)

*printemps dans la montagne, nuit de lune*

au printemps la montagne regorge de choses merveilleuses  
j'en jouis jusqu'au soir, oubliant le retour  
j'écope de l'eau, la lune dans mes mains  
je joue avec les fleurs, leur parfum embaume mon vêtement  
quand la joie monte, nulle attention à la distance  
sur le point de partir, déjà je regrette la senteur des fleurs  
je contemple vers le sud, où sonne une cloche  
pavillons et terrasses sombrent dans

l'émeraude de la montagne

\*

## Tsui Hu

*inscrit dans un hameau au sud de la capitale*

il y a un an aujourd'hui, devant cette porte,  
son visage et les fleurs du pêcher se répondaient, rouges  
ce visage, où est il maintenant ?  
les fleurs du pêcher, comme hier, rient dans le vent printanier

\*

## Liu Tsung yuan

Liu Tsung yuan (773-819), poète, penseur, politicien, érudit. Le groupe des rénovateurs politiques dont il faisait partie ayant perdu le pouvoir, à trente-trois ans il fut exilé à Yong chow, dans le sud de l'empire. Il ne sera rappelé que dix ans plus tard. Un mois après son retour à Ch'ang an, la capitale, on l'exile à nouveau, encore plus loin, dans le Kuang si, où vivaient des minorités barbares. C'est là qu'il mourut.

*au milieu de la nuit, me levant contempler le jardin de l'ouest, au moment où la lune se lève*

je me réveille, entends goutter la rosée dense  
j'ouvre la porte, face au jardin de l'ouest  
la lune froide monte sur la crête à l'est  
son clair au pied des bambous épars  
la source dans les rochers, au loin encore plus bruyante  
dans la montagne, de temps à autre un oiseau crie  
je m'adosse à un pilier, ainsi jusqu'à l'aube  
solitude, comment en parler ?

\*

*le matin, arrivant au monastère du maître*

*Chao, lisant les sutras*

je puise de l'eau, me rince les dents, glaciales  
me purifier le cœur, je secoue la poussière de mon habit  
serein, je prends un livre en feuilles de pattra  
je sors de la salle de l'est, lire

la source originelle, jamais on ne l'embrasse  
des traces illusoires, ce que suivent les hommes de ce monde  
cet enseignement j'aimerais m'y accorder  
cultiver sa nature, comment s'y familiariser ?  
homme du tao, la cour est silencieuse  
la couleur de la mousse se mélange aux bambous denses  
le soleil sort, brume et rosée demeurent  
les pins verts sont comme lubrifiés  
libre, par delà la parole  
compréhension joyeuse, cœur de lui même comblé  
\*

### ermite Tai shang

réponse  
par hasard je suis venu au pied de ce pin  
à l'aise, posant la tête sur une pierre, je me suis endormi  
dans la montagne, pas de calendrier  
le froid passe, on ne sait quelle année



# WANG-YANG-MING

*Instructions for practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings by Wang-Yang-Ming, [www.forgottenbooks.com](http://www.forgottenbooks.com) [Il s'agit du « Number LXVIII of the Records of Civilization : Sources and Studies [...] Columbia College Program of Translations from the Oriental Classics, Wm. Theodore de Bary, Editor »].*

***Je propose des \* extraits \* introduisant à la vie puis illustrant ce qui anima ce mystique néo-confucianiste. Il évite une main-mise totale taoïste sur le présent tome<sup>9</sup>.***

## Introduction

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[...] But its doctrine of the Principle of Nature, aimed at promoting good and removing evil, was overcome by selfish human desires. Its doctrine of humanity, advocating love for all, gave way to mutual jealousy and rivalry. And its doctrine of the investigation of things, intended as a means to a clear and penetrating understanding of the things investigated, was now replaced by memorization, recitation, philological and textual studies, and the writing of flowery compositions. The civil service examination system...

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...losing the moral strength it originally had possessed, became pure scholasticism.

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What was worse, he left the government to eight eunuchs, one of whom, Liu Chin (d. 1510), was particularly powerful and wicked.

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The number of brave souls who were willing to suffer beating and imprisonment, or even death for protesting against the evil-doing of the eunuchs and the emperor was impressive.

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<sup>9</sup> *Le bouddhisme en Chine serait-il oublié ? Il est représenté par Chen-Houei (époque Tang) détaché dans le tome voisin des « Mystiques bouddhistes ». Ceci fait suite au choix éditorial où l'Extrême Orient est couvert en trois tomes : l'Inde en propre, le Bouddhisme à cheval sur le continent, la Chine en propre (le Japon y est associé par la profonde étude d'Izutsu).*

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He was born on the thirtieth day of the ninth month in the eighth year of Ch'eng-hua (1472) in Yüeh, a place in the Yü-yao district southeast of Hangchow in modern Chekiang. His ancestry has been traced to the famous calligrapher Wang Hsi-chih (321-79). His father, Wang Hua, a "presented scholar" of 1481, was minister of civil personnel in Nanking. It is said that Wang Yang-ming could not talk until he was five.

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On the evening of the wedding day, when he passed by a Taoist temple and saw a Taoist priest sitting cross-legged, he sat down with him to talk about nourishing everlasting life, and was so absorbed that he neglected to go home until he was fetched the next morning.

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at nineteen, he became much interested in military tactics and archery. However, two years later (in 1492), after having received the "recommended person" degree in his native provincial examination, he studied Chu Hsi's doctrine of the investigation of things in real earnestness, searching widely for Chu Hsi's writings. One day while Wang was with his father in Peking he decided to investigate the principles of bamboos. Since Chu Hsi had taught that principles are inherent in things, Wang and a friend sat in front of bamboos and tried hard to investigate their principles. His friend gave up after three days and he after seven, both having become ill. 6 Thoroughly disillusioned in the search, he devoted himself to the writing of flowery compositions, which, however, did not enable him to pass the national civil service examinations either in 1493 or in 1496. Now he turned his attention back, first to military crafts and not long afterwards to the Taoist techniques of nourishing everlasting life. He actually contemplated entering a Taoist retreat in some mountain to search for immortality.

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These must have been years of intense spiritual and intellectual struggle, for he was not able to make a definite choice between Taoism and Confucianism, or between flowery compositions and military arts. If anything, he was still traveling on the traditional path by taking civil service examinations leading to government service. In 1499, when he was twenty-eight, he passed the examinations for the "presented scholar" degree, ranking second.

Immediately after that Wang was appointed a member of the department of public works. At that time China was invaded in the northwest by semi-nomadic tribes. He presented a memorial to the



throne recommending eight measures for national defense and security. 7 Although his recommendations were not accepted, his fame grew because of his brilliant ideas on strategy, finance, and morale, and in the following year he was made divisional executive assistant in the Yunnan division of the department of justice, quite a responsible position for a young man of twenty-nine

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Without doubt an active life and public responsibility helped him to realize the errors of Taoism and Buddhism. He also came to frown upon flowery compositions.

\*

Fortunately, an extremely significant although painful event now took place. The eunuch Liu Chin had usurped the power of the emperor. In 1506, when Policy Review Adviser Tai Hsien and others protested, Liu put them in prison.

Wang immediately presented a memorial in their defense. 11 This angered the eunuch and Wang was ordered to be beaten forty strokes before the emperor. In addition, he was banished to Lung-ch'ang in modern Kuei-chou, which was then inhabited by the barbarian Miao tribes, to become an insignificant executive in a dispatch station, whose duty it was to provide horses for rapid transportation. He started the journey in the spring of 1507 and arrived a year later, stopping over on the way to visit his father.

Liu's agents pursued him and he escaped assassination only by throwing his clothing away by the Ch'ien-t'ang River near Hang-chow, thus suggesting suicide. Some accounts, to make the event more dramatic, have him escape by sea from Hangchow to Fukien and thence to Kuei-chou. More reliable chronicles, however, have recorded his trip overland from Hangchow to Kuei-chou

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But the trying situation turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Having to face in isolation all sorts of hardship—political, natural, and cultural—he was driven back to search within his own mind. One night in 1508, when he was thirty-seven, he suddenly understood the Confucian doctrines of the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge. After another year of thought he began in 1509 to pronounce the doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action. Wang had now come into his own.

When his term at Kuei-chou was up in 1510 he was promoted to be the magistrate of Lu-ling in modern Kiangsi, where he built up a

remarkable record in seven months of service. After an audience with the emperor later in the year he was raised to be divisional executive assistant in the Szechuan division of the department of justice at Nanking. A number of promotions followed—to divisional executive assistant in the inspections division of the department of civil personnel, to assistant chief of the civil personnel division (both in 1511), and to chief of the merits division, all in Peking, then to junior lord of the bureau of imperial stables (1512) and to senior lord of the bureau of state ceremonies (1514), both in Nanking. Before he assumed his new duties in Nanking he went home to Yuch for a visit. His disciple Hsu Ai (1487–1517) rode in the same boat with him. It was here that the conversations which are recorded in Part I of the *Instructions for Practical Living* took place. In these Nanking days (15 14–16), his fame spread and

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governor of an area bordering Kwangtung, Kiangsi, and Fukien, charged with the pacification of that area. He arrived in Kan-chou in southern Kiangsi early in 1517 and immediately proceeded to recruit able-bodied fighters, reorganize the armed forces, institute the ten-family joint registration system, 13 and restore social order. 14 The situation in Chang-chou, Fukien, suddenly became critical. He directed his forces there and succeeded in subduing the rebellion in two months. He took measures to rehabilitate “new citizens” or former bandits 15 and petitioned for the establishment of a magistracy for better security and the reorganization of the salt gabelle for better economy. At the end of the year rebels in Heng-shui, T’ung-kang, Ta-mao, and Li-t’ou in southern Kiangsi were rampant. In five months’ time Wang suppressed all of them, so that by the fourth month of 1518 he was able to start reconstruction measures, such as establishing primary schools, 16 and to petition for the establishment of a new county. 17 Two months later, in recognition of his spectacular success, he was promoted to be the right assistant censor, and his son was appointed an imperial guard with the income of one hundred families which was to be hereditary. 18 In the tenth month of the year he instituted the famous Community Compact. 19

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he captured the prince after ten days of fighting.

Toward the end of the year Wang was made governor of Kiangsi.

In the following year, 1520, he carried out the various reforms once more.

By all precedents Wang's brilliant success should have been an occasion for extensive celebration and generous rewards. Unfortunately several things prevented this. The emperor had been urged by his favorites to lead the expedition himself, obviously so that he could claim credit for himself and his close subordinates. Wang, however, had bluntly advised him not to come

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Angered and jealous, Wang's political enemies now charged that he and the prince had conspired together and that he had turned against the prince only because circumstances had become unfavorable to him. Chi was tortured and imprisoned, and died only five days after he was cleared and released. In his defense of Chi

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From 1521 to 1527, when Wang was in virtual retirement in his native place Yiieh, hostility toward him became more and more intense. He was ridiculed and attacked. His teachings were sometimes prohibited. Ironically, it was in this period that his following grew in numbers and in enthusiasm.

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His coughing had bothered him for years, and now he was very ill. Part of the time during this campaign he had to handle military affairs while going about in carriages. 27 On his way home he died in Nan-an in modern Kiangsi on the twenty-ninth day of the eleventh month in the seventh year of Chia-ching (January 10, 1529).

\*

According to Huang Tsung-hsi (1610-95), in his learning Wang went through three stages. First he indulged in flowery compositions. Then, after reading Chu Hsi's works and attempting to investigate the principles of bamboos according to Chu Hsi's formula, which he found wanting, he went in and out of the Buddhist and Taoist schools for a long time. 29 Finally, as the difficult life in Kuei-chou during banishment hardened his character and stimulated his mind, he suddenly awoke to the Confucian doctrines of the investigation of things and the extension of knowledge (1508).

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before 1517 (when Wang was forty-six), he aimed at acquiring a foundation through sitting in meditation and calming the mind in order to attain the equilibrium before the feelings are aroused which is prerequisite for the harmony after the feelings are aroused. After his Kiangsi days he concentrated on teaching the doctrine of the extension

of innate knowledge (*liang-chih*), in which neither sitting in meditation nor calming the mind is necessary because, as innate knowledge is extended, there is neither a distinction between the equilibrium before the feelings are aroused and the harmony after the feelings are aroused nor a distinction between action and knowledge. Finally, after he returned to Hueh in 1522 when he was fifty-one, at all times he knew the right to be right and the wrong to be wrong and whatever he said was dictated by the original nature of his mind.

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Chu Hsi put the investigation of things ahead of the sincerity of the will. Wang, however, claimed that the sincerity of the will was the necessary foundation on which investigation and extension must be based

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the first step in the education of the adult is to instruct the learner, in regard to all things in the world, to proceed from what knowledge he has of their principles, and investigate further until he reaches the limit. After exerting himself in this way for a long time, he will one day achieve a wide and farreaching penetration.”

For more than two centuries this was accepted as an unalterable formula in the process of learning. Wang, however, rejected the investigation of all things as a hopeless task. 34 Moreover, Chu Hsi's theory was that the mind should go to things to investigate principles. This is to consider principles as external, an idea entirely unacceptable to Wang. 35 He stated that it is absurd to say that the principle of filial piety, for example, exists in the parents for, if that were true, that principle would cease to be as soon as the parents die. 36 This doctrine is all the more objectionable because it separates the mind from principles.

As Wang said, “To investigate the principles in things to the utmost as we come into contact with them means to look in each individual thing for its so-called definite principles. This means to apply one's mind to each individual thing and look for principles in it. This is to divide the mind and principle into two.”

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Moreover, as there is no principle outside the mind, there is no thing outside it.

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To Chu Hsi the investigation of things requires an objective method, including both induction and deduction, whereas Wang takes the

investigation of things to mean moral awakening. This is the reason why he interpreted the word ko in the phrase ko-wu (the investigation of things) not as study and inquiry as Chu Hsi understood it but as “rectification,” that is, “to eliminate what is incorrect in the mind and to preserve the correctness of the original substance.” 42 In short, to investigate things is to do good and to remove evil. 43

Philosophically Wang’s position is weak because it entirely neglects objective study and confuses reality with value. Readers of the *Instructions for Practical Living* will realize that Wang’s idealism is very naive indeed. When he was asked, if nothing is external to the mind, what blossoming trees on the high mountains have to do with it, he merely said, “Before you look at these flowers, they and your mind are in the state of silent vacancy. As you come to look at them, their colors at once show up clearly.”

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To him the separation of the mind and the principle of things was not only a fallacy in theory but a moral calamity, because it led to “the devotion to external things and the neglect of the internal.”

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In fact, he once remarked that “the way of learning . . . is the task of creating something from nothing.” 51 In a large measure he did just that, notably in his doctrines of the unity of knowledge and action and of the extension of innate knowledge.

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Knowledge and action always require each other. It is like a person who cannot walk without legs although he has eyes, and who cannot see without eyes although he has legs.”

\*

The type of knowledge he referred to is clearly limited to personal experience and does not exhaust the whole realm of knowledge.

\*

This doctrine is Wang’s supreme philosophical achievement. It was attained at the age of fifty after several years of fighting the rebels and facing his political enemies. It was a product of painful experience and thorough soul-searching.

\*

Wang describes innate knowledge in various terms. It is “the original substance of the mind,” “the Principle of Nature,” “the pure intelligence and clear consciousness of the mind,” and the mind that is “always

shining” and reflects things as things come without being stirred. 65 It is “the equilibrium before the feelings are aroused,” “the substance that is absolutely quiet and inactive,” and “the state of being broad and extremely impartial.”

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It depends on nothing outside 71 and it “does not come from hearing and seeing.”

\*

the Principle of Nature, from the Sung Neo-Confucians down, simply means the principle of right and wrong.

\*

When you direct your thought your innate knowledge knows that it is right if it is right and wrong if it is wrong. You cannot keep anything from it. Just don't try to deceive it but sincerely and truly follow it in whatever you do

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Forty or more Buddhist expressions and stories appear in the Instructions for Practical Living. Moreover, at one stage in his teaching Wang advocated sitting in meditation, and later some of his followers drifted into Zen Buddhism. For these reasons Wang has been accused of being a Buddhist in Confucian disguise. Actually, although his attitude toward Buddhism was not as hostile as that of other Neo-Confucians, his criticism of it is nonetheless severe. He not only attacked the Buddhists for their escape from social responsi—

Taoist talk about vacuity is motivated by a desire for nourishing everlasting life, and the Buddhist talk about non-being is motivated by the desire to escape from the sorrowful sea of life and death. In both cases certain selfish ideas have been added to the original substance [of the mind], which thereby loses the true character of vacuity and is obstructed.” 78 Thus he attacked the very foundation

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a quietistic process. In fact, most Sung and Ming Neo-Confucians practiced sitting in meditation along with efforts at seriousness and righteousness. Quite aside from the separation of the internal and the external, 80 a separation which Wang would never tolerate, its quietistic character makes the Sung Neo-Confucian effort quite different from Wang's His extension of knowledge not only requires absolute sincerity of the will, which may be equated with seriousness, and the sense of right and wrong, which may be equated with righteousness; it also calls for vigorous and active effort. It requires self-mastery and self-

examination. It requires making up the mind. Most important of all, it requires “polishing and training in the actual affairs of life.” One must be alert and vigilant all the time, and there must be a sense of urgency and earnest exertion of effort at every instant.

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The great man regards Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person. As to those who make a cleavage between objects and distinguish between the self and others, they are small men. That the great man can regard Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body is not because he deliberately wants to do so, but because it is natural to the humane nature of his mind that he does so.”

\*

Wang’s followers spread over all parts of China and his system dominated China for some 150 years, to the end of Ming.

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certain elements of weakness. There was never any unity among his followers

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Take the interpretation of innate knowledge, for example. Each follower understood it in his own way,

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toward the end of the movement there were some who justified their irresponsibility as the extension of their innate knowledge

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Its emphasis on sincere purpose and concrete action never ceased to inspire the Chinese, and in the twentieth century it has exerted considerable influence on such leaders as Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) and such thinkers as Liang Ch’i-ch’ao (1873–1929) and Hsiung Shih-li (1885-).

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it had a special attraction for the Japanese, who admired these qualities because of their Zen Buddhist and military traditions.

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All of Wang’s fundamental doctrines are contained in the Instructions for Practical Living. This is a collection of conversations

and letters in three parts compiled by Wang's disciples, Nan Ta-chi and Ch'ien Te-hung.

## Instructions for Practical Living

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The highest good is the original substance of the mind. It is no other than manifesting one's clear character to the point of refinement and singleness of mind. And yet it is not separated from events and things.

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For instance, in the matter of serving one's parents, one cannot seek for the principle of filial piety in the parent. In serving one's ruler, one cannot seek for the principle of loyalty in the ruler.

In the intercourse with friends and in governing the people, one cannot seek for the principles of faithfulness and humanity in friends and the people. They are all in the mind, that is all, for the mind and principle are identical. When the mind is free from the obscuration of selfish desires, it is the embodiment of the Principle of Nature, which requires not an iota added from the outside. When this mind, which has become completely identical with the Principle of Nature, is applied and arises to serve parents, there is filial piety; when it arises to serve the ruler, there is loyalty; when it arises to deal with friends or to govern the people, there are faithfulness and humanity. The main thing is for the mind to make an effort to get rid of selfish human desires and preserve the Principle of Nature."

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4. Cheng Chao-shuo 14 said, "In some cases the highest good must be sought in events and things."

The Teacher said, "The highest good is none other than the mind which has completely identified with the Principle of Nature in its fullest extent. What is the need for seeking it in things and events?"

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"But people today distinguish between knowledge and action and pursue them separately, believing that one must know before he can act. They will discuss and learn the business of knowledge first, they say, and wait till they truly know before they put their knowledge into practice. Consequently, to the last day of life, they will never act and also will never know. This doctrine of knowledge first and action later is not a minor disease and it did



not come about only yesterday. My present advocacy of the unity of knowledge and action is precisely the medicine for that disease.

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It is good to have strong faith, of course, but it is not as real and concrete as seeking in oneself.

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Preserving the mind, nourishing one's nature, and serving Heaven are the acts of those who learn them through study and practice them for their advantage. To maintain one's single-mindedness regardless of longevity or brevity of life, and to cultivate one's personal life while waiting for fate to take its own course, are the acts of those who learn through hard work and practice them with effort and difficulty. 23 But Chu Hsi wrongly interpreted the doctrine of the investigation of things. Because he reversed the above order, and thought that the higher attainments of exerting one's mind to the utmost and knowing one's nature are equivalent to the investigation of things

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“Our nature is the substance of the mind and Heaven is the source of our nature. To exert one's mind to the utmost is the same as fully developing one's nature. Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature and ‘know the transforming and nourishing process of Heaven and Earth.’

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And when it perceives a child fall into a well, it naturally knows that one should be commiserative. 27 This is innate knowledge of good (liang-chih) and need not be sought outside. If what emanates from innate knowledge is not obstructed by selfish ideas, the result will be like the saying ‘If a man gives full development to his feeling of commiseration, his humanity will be more than he can ever put into practice.’ 28 However, the ordinary man is not free from the obstruction of selfish ideas. He therefore requires the effort of the extension of knowledge and the investigation of things in order to overcome selfish ideas and restore principle.

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In order to become completely identified with the Principle of Nature, one must direct one's effort to wherever principle is manifested.

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But to say that the moral mind is the master and the human mind obeys it is to say that there are two minds. The Principle of Nature and selfish human desires cannot coexist. How can there be the Principle of Nature as the master and at the same time selfish human desires to obey it?”

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“By illuminating the doctrine, do you mean returning to simplicity and purity and revealing them in concrete practice, or writing flowery speeches aimed at making noise and creating argument? The great disorder of the world is due to the popularity of conventional, meaningless literature and the decline of actual practice of moral values. If the doctrine had been illuminated throughout the world, there would have been no need to transmit the Six Classics.

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When Confucius transmitted the Six Classics, he feared that superfluous writing was creating a chaos in the world, and he lost no time in making the Classics simple so that people might avoid the superfluous words and find out the real meaning; he did not intend to teach through mere words.

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“The reason the world is not in order is because superficial writing is growing and concrete practice is declining. People advance their own opinions, valuing what is novel and strange, in order to mislead the common folks and gain fame. They merely confuse people’s intelligence and dull people’s senses, so that people devote much of their time and energy to competing in conventional writing and flowery compositions in order to achieve fame; they no longer remember that there are such deeds as honoring the fundamental, valuing truth, and returning to simplicity and purity.

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Sometimes when people asked him, he would talk to them according to their capacity to understand. But even then he would not talk much, for he was afraid that people would try to seek truth in words only

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The Five Classics are also history, and no more.

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I gradually realized that his teachings are to be applied to one's life and to be concretely demonstrated, and then I came to believe that they represent the direct heritage of the Confucian school, and that all the rest is but byways, small paths, and dead ends. His theories that the investigation of things is the effort to make the will sincere, that manifesting goodness is the effort to make one's personal life sincere

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that the pursuit of study and inquiry is the effort to honor the moral nature, that to study literature extensively is the effort to restrain oneself with rules of propriety, and that to be refined in mind is the effort to achieve single-mindedness

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“Suppose in loving sex one's mind is concentrated on loving sex and in loving money one's mind is concentrated on loving money. Can these be regarded as concentrating on one thing? These are not concentrating on one thing; they are chasing after material things. Concentrating on one thing means the absolute concentration of the mind on the Principle of Nature.”

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The human mind and the Principle of Nature are undifferentiated

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“How can he study everything? The mind of the sage is like a clear mirror. Since it is all clarity, it responds to all stimuli as they come and reflects everything. There is no such case as a previous image still remaining in the present reflection or a yet-to-be-reflected image already existing there. Scholars of later generations propagate such a doctrine, and therefore they have greatly violated the teachings of the Sage.

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From these we know that a sage does a thing when the time comes. The only fear is that the mirror is not clear, not that it is incapable of reflecting a thing as it comes. The study of changing conditions and events is to be done at the time of response. However, a student must be engaged in brightening up the mirror. He should worry only about his mind's not being clear, and not about the inability to respond to all changing conditions.”

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“Moral principles exist in no fixed place and are not exhaustible. Please do not think that, when you have gotten something from

conversations with me, that is all there is to it. There will be no end if we talk for ten, twenty, or fifty more years.”

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Consequently when something happens one turns topsy-turvy. One must be trained and polished in the actual affairs of life. Only then can one stand firm and remain calm whether in activity or in tranquillity

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“In their way of teaching people, as soon as they get to anything refined or subtle, scholars of later generations say that it belongs to penetrating on the higher level and should not be pursued, and that it is better to turn to studies on the lower [empirical] level. This is to separate the two levels.

Now what the eye can see, what the ear can hear, what the mouth can say, and what the mind can think of are all matters of learning on the lower level, whereas what the eye cannot see, what the ear cannot hear, what the mouth cannot say, and what the mind cannot think of are matters of penetration on the higher level. For example, providing a tree with care and water is learning on the lower level, whereas the activity of the vegetative life day and night and the tree’s smooth and luxuriant growth are penetration on the higher level. How can human efforts have any part of it? Therefore whatever human effort can do and whatever can be talked about represent learning on the lower level. But penetration on the higher level is implicit in learning on the lower level. All that the Sage said, although absolutely refined and subtle, is a matter of lower learning. A student should direct his effort to this, and penetration on the higher level will naturally follow. There is no need to seek a separate and distinct way of higher penetration.”

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“The only way is to get rid of selfish human desires and preserve the Principle of Nature. When tranquil, direct every thought to removing selfish human desires and preserving the Principle of Nature, and when active, direct every thought to doing the same. One should never mind whether or not one is at peace and tranquil. If he depends on that peace and tranquillity, not only will there be the fault of gradually becoming fond of quietness and tired of activity, but there will be many defects latent in that state of mind.

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they understand the text perfectly, however, to the end of their lives they achieve nothing. One's effort must be directed to the substance of the mind. Whenever one does not understand a thing or cannot put it into practice, one must return to oneself and in his own mind try to realize it personally.

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'The original mind is vacuous [devoid of selfish desires], intelligent, and not beclouded. All principles are contained therein and all events proceed from it. 20 There is no principle outside the mind; there is no event outside the mind.'

\*

'The mind is the nature of man and things, and nature is principle. I am afraid the use of the word "and" makes inevitable the interpretation of mind and principle as two different things.

\*

Nature is one. As physical form or body it is called nature. As master of the creative process it is called the Lord. In its universal operation it is called destiny. As endowment in man it is called man's nature. As master of man's body it is called the mind. When it emanates from the mind we have filial piety when it is applied to the father, loyalty when it is applied to the ruler, and so on to infinity. All this is only one nature. Similarly, man is only one. He is called the son with respect to the father, or the father with respect to the son, and so on to infinity.

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"Can an evil spirit delude an upright man? This fear itself shows that the mind is not upright. Therefore if anyone is deluded it is not any spirit that deludes him. He is deluded by his own mind. For example, if a man is fond of sex, it means that the spirit of lust has deluded him. If he is fond of money, it means that the spirit of money has deluded him. When he is angry at something at which he should not be angry, it means that the spirit of anger has deluded him. And when he is afraid of something of which he should not be afraid, it means the spirit of fear has deluded him. Calmness is the original substance of the mind. It is the Principle of Nature. It is the state in which activity and tranquillity are united.'

\*

I unexpectedly received a letter saying that my son was seriously ill. My sorrow was unbearable. The Teacher said, 'This is the time

for you to exert effort. If you allow this occasion to go by, what is the use of studying when nothing is happening? People should train and polish themselves at just such a time as this. A father's love for his son is of course the noblest feeling. Nevertheless, in the operation of the Principle of Nature there is the proper degree of equilibrium and harmony. To be excessive means to give rein to selfish thoughts. On such an occasion most people feel that according to the Principle of Nature they should be sorrowful. Thus they keep on with sorrow and distress. They do not realize that they are already "affected by worries and anxieties and their minds will not be correct." 34

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Reduced to fundamentals, the Buddhists and Taoists are somewhat similar to the Confucians. However, they have only the upper section and neglect the lower section, 44 and in the end are not as perfect as the Sage. Nevertheless we cannot deny that they are similar in the upper section.

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the Way. . . The man of humanity sees it and calls it humanity. The man of wisdom sees it and calls it wisdom. And the common people act according to it dally without knowing it.

\*

"When a good thought is retained, there is the Principle of Nature. The thought itself is goodness. Is there another goodness to be thought about? Since the thought is not evil, what evil is there to be removed? This thought is comparable to the root of a tree. To make up one's mind means always to build up this good thought, that is all. To be able to follow what one's heart desires without transgressing moral principles 51 merely means that one's mind has reached full maturity."

\*

The Principle of Nature never reveals itself. Nor do selfish desires. It is like walking on the road to go somewhere. As one walks one section of the road, he recognizes the next section. When he comes to a fork, and is in doubt, he will ask and then go on. Only then can he gradually reach his destination. People today are not willing to preserve as much of the Principle of Nature as they already know, nor to get rid of the selfish human desires they already know, but merely worry about not knowing all of them. They just talk idly. What good is this? Let one wait till he has mastered himself to the point of having no more selfish desires to

overcome and then worry about not knowing all. It will still not be too late.’

\*

Take those people today who talk about Heaven. Do they actually understand it? It is incorrect to say that the sun, the moon, wind, and thunder constitute Heaven. It is also incorrect to say that man, animals, and plants do not constitute it. Heaven is the Way. If we realize this, where is the Way not to be found? People merely look at it from one corner and conclude that the Way is nothing but this or that. Consequently they disagree. If one knows how to search for the Way inside the mind and to see the substance of one’s own mind, then there is no place nor time where the Way is not to be found. It pervades the past and present and is without beginning or end. Where do similarity and difference come in? The mind is the Way, and the Way is Heaven. If one knows the mind, he knows both the Way and Heaven.”

\*

“Should names, varieties, and systems of things be investigated first of all?” The Teacher said, “It is necessary only for a person fully to realize the substance of his own mind, and then its functions will be found right in its midst.

\*

“It is better to be a small body of water in a well which comes from a spring than a large body of water in a pond which comes from no source. The water in the well has the spirit of life that is inexhaustible.” It is said that when the Teacher said so, he was sitting by a well next to a pond. Therefore he used this analogy to enlighten his students.

\*

The sage is comparable to Heaven. It is everywhere. Up where the sun, moon, and stars are, it is Heaven, and deep down under ground it is also Heaven. When has Heaven descended to a lower position? A sage is one who is great and is completely transformed [to be goodness itself].

\*

“What is the Principle of Nature?”

“One recognizes it when he has gotten rid of selfish human desires.”

“Why is the Principle of Nature called equilibrium?”

“Because it is balanced and impartial.”

“What is the condition of that?”

“It is like a bright mirror. It is entirely clear, without a speck of dust attached to it.”

\*

“To preserve one’s mind and see to it that it is always present is itself learning. What is the use of thinking of past and future events? In doing so one merely loses his mind.”

\*

“Merely to talk about manifesting the clear character and not to talk about loving the people would be to behave like the Taoists and Buddhists.”

\*

“The highest good is the nature. Originally the nature has not the least evil. Therefore it is called the highest good. To abide by it is simply to recover the nature’s original state.”

\*

Mo Tzu’s universal love makes no distinction in human relations and regards one’s own father, son, elder brother, or younger brother as being the same as a passer-by.

That means that Mo Tzu’s universal love has no starting point. It does not sprout. We therefore know that it has no root and that it is not a process of unceasing production and reproduction.

\*

“In learning to become a sage, the student needs only to get rid of selfish human desires and preserve the Principle of Nature, which is like refining gold and achieving perfection in quality. If the deficiency in purity is not substantial, the work of refining is simple and success is easily attained. The lower the proportion of purity is, the more difficult the work becomes.

\*

Later generations do not realize that the foundation for becoming a sage is to be completely identified with the Principle of Nature, but instead seek sagehood only in knowledge and ability. They regard the sage as knowing all and being able to do all, and they feel they have to understand all the knowledge and ability of the sage before they can succeed. Consequently they do not direct their efforts toward the Principle of Nature but merely cripple their spirit and exhaust their energy in scrutinizing books,



investigating the names and varieties of things, and imitating the forms and traces [of the acts of the ancients]. As their knowledge becomes more extensive, their selfish desires become more numerous as their abilities become greater and greater, the Principle of Nature becomes increasingly obscured from them. Their case is just like that of a person who, seeing someone else with a piece of pure gold of 10,000 pounds, does not take steps to refine his own so that in the quality of purity his will not yield to that of the other person, but foolishly hopes to match the 10,000 pound piece in quantity. He throws in mixed elements of pewter, lead, brass, and iron with the result that the greater the quantity, the lower the degree of purity. In the end it is no longer gold at all.”

\*

“In making effort, we want to diminish every day rather than to increase every day. If we reduce our selfish human desire a little bit, to that extent we have restored the Principle of Nature. How enjoyable and how free! How simple and how easy!”

\*

“Not making a special effort to like or to dislike does not mean not to like or dislike at all. A person behaving so would be devoid of consciousness. To say ‘not to make a special effort’ merely means that one’s likes and dislikes completely follow the Principle of Nature and that one does not go on to attach to that situation a bit of selfish thought. This amounts to having neither likes nor dislikes.”

\*

“How can the love of beautiful color and the hatred of bad odor not be regarded as one’s own will?”

“The will in this case is sincere, not selfish. A sincere will is in accord with the Principle of Nature. However, while it is in accord with the Principle of Nature, at the same time it is not attached in the least to selfish thought. Therefore when one is affected to any extent by wrath or fondness, the mind will not be correct. 18 It must be broad and impartial.

\*

“In the dynamic operation of the material force of the universe there is from the beginning not a moment of rest. But there is the master. Consequently the operation has its regular order and it goes on neither too fast nor too slowly. The master [that is, the

wonderful functioning of creation] is always calm in spite of hundreds of changes and thousands of transformations

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“Quite right. Name [fame] and actuality are opposed to each other. When devotion to actuality increases a little, to that extent the devotion to name decreases.

\*

As long as people are equal in their complete identification with the Principle of Nature, they are equally sages. As to ability, power, and spiritual energy in handling affairs, how can all people be equal in them? Later scholars have confined their comparison to quantity and have therefore drifted into the doctrine of success and profit.

\*

Later scholars do not understand the doctrines of the Sage, they do not know how to realize their innate knowledge and innate ability directly through personal experience and extend them in their own minds, but instead seek to know what they cannot know and do what they cannot do.

\*

‘It is not that they cannot be changed. It is merely that they are unwilling to change.’

\*

The human mind by nature delights in moral principles very much as the eye delights in beauty and the ear in music. If they do not, it is only because they are blinded and spoiled by selfish human desires. Now as selfish human desires are gradually removed, the mind will be increasingly harmonious with moral principles. How can it help being delighted?”

\*

“As he who grows a tree must nourish the roots, so he who cultivates virtue must nourish his mind. If the tree is to grow, the many branches must be trimmed when it is young. Likewise, if virtue is to become eminent, the love of external things must be eliminated when the student first begins to learn. If one loves such external things as poetry and flowery essays, his mental energy will gradually be dissipated in poetry and literary essays. The same is true of all love of external things.”

He further said, “The way of learning I am now talking about is the task of creating something from nothing. You gentlemen must

believe me. All depends on making up the mind. If the student makes up his mind to have one thought to do good, his mind will be like the seed of a tree.

\*

“Those who concentrate on self-cultivation increasingly realize their insufficiency, while those who concentrate on knowledge increasingly believe that they have a superabundance.

\*

“Are the principles of filial piety and loyalty to be found in the person of the parents and the ruler or in one’s own mind? If they are to be found in one’s own mind, it will also be no more than the investigation of the principles of the mind to the utmost. Please tell me what dwelling in seriousness is.”

“It is merely concentration on one thing.”

“What do you mean by concentration on one thing?”

“It means, for example, to concentrate the mind on reading when one is reading, and to concentrate the mind on handling affairs when one is handling affairs.”

“In that case it would mean to concentrate on drinking when one is drinking and to concentrate on enjoying sex when one is enjoying sex. That would be chasing after material things. How can it amount to any effort to dwell in seriousness?”

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If one only knows how to concentrate on one thing and does not know that the one thing is the same as the Principle of Nature, he will be chasing after material things

\*

“The nature of man is the substance of his mind. It is the same as principle. In investigating the principle of humanity to the utmost, one must really extend the humanity [in one’s action] to the ultimate of humanity, and in investigating the principle of righteousness to the utmost, one must really extend the righteousness [in one’s action] to the ultimate of righteousness. Humanity and righteousness are inherent in one’s nature. Therefore to investigate principle to the utmost is fully to develop one’s nature.

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“It is difficult to overcome one’s selfish desires. What can be done about them?”

The Teacher said, "Give me your selfish desires. I shall overcome them for you."

\*

Hsiao Hui said, "To a certain extent, I, too, have the determination to do something for myself, but I don't know why I cannot master myself."

The Teacher said, "Please tell me what you mean by having the determination to do something for yourself."

After a long while, Hui said, "Having made up my mind to be a good man, I thought I had the determination to do something for myself. As I think of it, I realize that I merely wanted to do something for my bodily self, not for my true self."

The Teacher said, "Has the true self ever been separated from the bodily self? I am afraid you have not even done anything for your bodily self. Tell me, is not what you call the bodily self ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and the four limbs?"

\*

Hsiao Hui was fond of Buddhism and the Taoist search for immortality. The Teacher warned him and said, "From youth I was also earnestly devoted to the two systems. I thought I had learned something and thought the Confucian system was not worth studying. Later while I lived in barbarous territory for [nearly] three years, I realized how simple, easy, extensive, and great the doctrines of the Sage are, and then I sighed and regretted having wasted my energy for thirty years. In general, the excellence of the two systems differs from that of the Sage only in an infinitesimal amount.

\*

If you want to know the bitterness, you have to eat a bitter melon yourself."

\*

All the friends present attained a certain enlightenment all at once.

\*

The Way is nature and is also destiny. It is complete in itself. Nothing can be added to or subtracted from it, and it requires no touching up. What need is there for the Sage to regulate and restrict? To do so would imply that nature is not perfect.

\*

Is there anyone who knows the taste to be good or bad before the food enters his mouth? A man must have the desire to travel before he knows the road. This desire to travel is the will; it is already the beginning of action.

\*

The substance of the mind is the nature and the source of the nature is Heaven. This means that one who can exert his mind to the utmost can fully develop his nature.

\*

Heaven is the same as “to know the district” or “to know the county,” which is what those titles for a prefect and a magistrate mean

\*

To investigate the principles in things to the utmost as we come in contact with them means to look in each individual thing for its so-called definite principles. This means to apply one’s mind to each individual thing and look for principle in it. This is to divide the mind and principle into two.

\*

If the principle of filial piety is to be sought in parents, then is it actually in my own mind or is it in the person of my parents? If it is actually in the person of my parents, is it true that as soon as the parents pass away the mind will lack the principle of filial piety? When I see a child fall into a well [and have a feeling of commiseration], there must be the principle of commiseration. Is this principle of commiseration actually in the person of the child or is it in the innate knowledge of my mind? Perhaps one cannot follow the child into the well to rescue it. Perhaps one can rescue it by seizing it with the hand. All this involves principle. Is it really in the person of the child or does it emanate from the innate knowledge of my mind? What is true here is true of all things and events. From this we know the mistake of dividing the mind and principle into two.

Such division is the doctrine of Kao Tzu who taught that righteousness is external to the mind, a fallacy which Mencius strongly attacked.

\*

To learn archery, one must hold out the bow, fix the arrow to the string, draw the bow, and take aim. To learn writing, one must lay out the paper, take the brush, hold the inkwell, and dip the brush

into the ink. In all the world, nothing can be considered learning that does not involve action. Thus the very beginning of learning is already action. To be earnest in practice means to be genuine and sincere. That is already action.

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The mind is the master of the body, and the pure intelligence and clear consciousness of the mind are the innate or original knowledge.

\*

fall to grasp the meaning of the investigation of the principles of things to the utmost. This is the reason why later scholars have separated knowledge and action into two sections and have been daily involved in fragmentary and isolated details and broken pieces, and this is really why the doctrine of the Sage has been gradually declining and fading away. After all you are not free from following stereotyped views.

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students of later generations neglect what is easy to understand and do not follow it but seek what is difficult to understand and make it their object of study. This is why “truth lies in what is near and men seek for it in what is remote and the work lies in what is easy and men seek for it in what is difficult.”

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Can moral nature be sought outside the mind?

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envisages a “great unity” or universal state in which all distinctions disappear

\*

The mind of a sage regards Heaven, Earth, and all things as one body. He looks upon all people of the world, whether inside or outside his family, or whether far or near, but all with blood and breath, as his brothers and children. He wants to secure, preserve, educate, and nourish all of them, so as to fulfill his desire of forming one body with all things. Now the mind of everybody is at first not different from that of the sage. Only because it is obstructed by selfishness and blocked by material desires, what was originally great becomes small and what was originally penetrating becomes obstructed.

\*

The Principle of Nature is single and indivisible. How can it be brought about by thinking or deliberation? In its own nature, it is in the state of absolute quiet and inactivity, and when acted on it immediately penetrates all things.

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to think about? In its substance innate knowledge is in the state of peaceful tranquillity, and now you want to add the effort to seek peaceful tranquillity. Innate knowledge naturally brings forth thoughts, and now you want to add the wish that thoughts will not arise.

\*

Innate knowledge is identical with the Way. That it is present in the mind is true not only in the cases of the sages and worthies but even in that of the common man. When one is free from the driving force and obscurations of material desires, and just follows innate knowledge and leaves it to continue to function and operate, everything will be in accord with the Way. In the case of ordinary men, most of them are driven and obscured by material desires and cannot follow innate knowledge

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As soon as a single thought is enlightened, and one examines himself and becomes sincere, the joy is present right there.

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The idea that one should rather leave the work undone than neglect cultivating and nourishing the mind is not without merit when told to the beginner. But if [things and the mind] are regarded as two things, it is a defect.

\*

The important thing in learning is to acquire learning through the exercise of the mind. If words are examined in the mind and found to be wrong, although they have come from the mouth of Confucius, I dare not accept them as correct.

\*

Principle is one and no more. In terms of its condensation and concentration in the individual it is called the nature. In terms of the master of this accumulation it is called mind. In terms of its emanation and operation under the master, it is called the will. In is called knowledge. And in terms of the stimuli and responses of this clear consciousness, it is called things. Therefore when it pertains to things it is called investigation, when it pertains to

knowledge it is called extension, when it pertains to the will it is called sincerity, and when it pertains to the mind it is called rectification. To rectify is to rectify this [principle], to be sincere is to be sincere about this, to extend is to extend this, and to investigate is to investigate this. These are all means of investigating the principle of things to the utmost so as to develop the nature fully. There is no principle in the world outside nature, and there is no thing outside nature. The reason why the Confucian doctrine is not made clear and does not prevail is because scholars of today consider principle as external and things as external.

\*

The Way is public and belongs to the whole world, and the doctrine is also public and belongs to the whole world. They are not the private properties of Master Chu or even Confucius. They are open to all and the only proper way to discuss them is to do so openly.

\*

Man is the mind of the universe. At bottom Heaven and Earth and all things are my body. Is there any suffering or bitterness of the great masses that is not disease or pain in my own body? Those who are not aware of the disease and pain in their own body are people without the sense of right and wrong. The sense of right and wrong is knowledge possessed by men without deliberation and ability possessed by them without their having acquired it by learning. 6 It is what we call innate knowledge. This knowledge is inherent in the human mind whether that of the sage or of the stupid person, for it is the same for the whole world and for all ages. If gentlemen of the world merely devote their effort to extending their innate knowledge they will naturally share with all a universal sense of right and wrong, share their likes and dislikes, regard other people as their own persons, regard the people of other countries as their own family, and look upon Heaven, Earth, and all things as one body. When this is done, even if we wanted the world to be without order, it would not be possible.

\*

Having received your letter, I know of the recent rapid progress in your study. I am happy and gratified beyond words. I have carefully read your letter several times. That there are nevertheless one or two points not crystal clear to you is because you are not yet completely at home with the task of extending innate knowledge. When you have become familiar with it, the lack of clarity will



vanish of itself. It may be compared to driving a vehicle. You are driving it on a broad highway. But sometimes it goes obliquely or zigzags, because the horse is not yet well trained and the bit and bridle are not even. However, you are already on the broad highway itself and will certainly not mistakenly go into sidetracks or crooked paths. Of late, only a few of our like-minded friends in the country have reached this stage of progress. I am happy and gratified beyond words that you have. This is good fortune for the Confucian doctrine.

Previously my humble body was afflicted with a cough and the fear of heat. Since my recent arrival in this hot region, these have suddenly reoccurred to a high degree. His Majesty, possessing sagely intelligence and great understanding, has given me great responsibility which I dare not abruptly decline. Local military affairs have been heavy and busy. I have handled all of them while going about in carriages in spite of illness. Fortunately the region is now pacified. I have presented a memorial seeking permission to return home for treatment of my disease. If I can rest in a grove and enjoy to some extent the clear and cool air, perhaps I can recover. As your messenger is about to return, I have hastily written while resting on my pillow, but I cannot fully express my regard for you.

\*

In discussing learning, sages and worthies mostly do so in accordance with the times and with events. They seem to differ from one another in what they say, but essentially they are in complete harmony on the basis of the task. The reason for this is that in the universe there is only this one nature, this one principle, this one innate knowledge, and this one endeavor.

\*

There is only one innate knowledge. In its manifestation and universal operation, it is then and there self-sufficient. It comes from nowhere and goes nowhere. It depends on nothing. However, in its manifestation and universal operation, there are degrees of importance and intensity to and from which not the slightest amount can be added or subtracted.

\*

This is why the wonderful functioning of innate knowledge has neither spatial restriction nor physical form and is unlimited. If one speaks of its greatness, nothing in the world can contain it,

and if one speaks of its smallness, nothing in the world can split it.

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Mind, the nature, and Heaven are one. Therefore when people finally come to know this, their success is the same.

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However, I have spoken too frankly and have bored you with too many details. Counting on your trust and affection for me, I hope you will excuse me.

\*

Generally speaking, it is the nature of young boys to love to play and to dislike restriction. Like plants beginning to sprout, if they are allowed to grow freely, they will develop smoothly. If twisted and interfered with, they will wither and decline. In teaching young boys today, we must make them lean toward rousing themselves so that they will be happy and cheerful at heart, and then nothing can check their development. As in the case of plants, if nourished by timely rain and spring wind, they will all sprout, shoot up, and nourish, and will naturally grow by sunlight and develop under the moon. If ice and frost strip them of leaves, their spirit of life will be dissipated and they will gradually dry up.

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They emphasize intelligence instead of nourishing goodness. They beat the pupils with a whip and tie them with ropes, treating them like prisoners.

\*

In reading, the value does not lie in the amount but in learning the material well. Reckoning the pupils' natural endowments, if one can handle two hundred words, teach him only one hundred so that he always has surplus energy and strength and then he will not suffer or feel tired but will have the beauty of being at ease with himself.

While reciting the pupils must be concentrated in mind and united in purpose. As they recite with their mouths, let them ponder with their minds. Every word and every phrase should be investigated and gone over again and again.

\*

The important thing to know is that the personal life, the mind, the will, knowledge, and things are one.”

I was doubtful and said, “A thing is external. How can it be the same as the personal life, the mind, the will, and knowledge?”

The Teacher said, “The ears, the eyes, the mouth, the nose, and the four limbs are parts of the body. But how can they see, hear, speak, or act without the mind? On the other hand, without the ears, the eyes, the mouth, the nose, and the four limbs, the mind cannot see, hear, speak, or act when it wants to. Therefore if there is no mind, there will be no body, and if there is no body, there will be no mind. As something occupying space, it is called the body. As the master, it is called the mind. As the operation of the mind, it is called the will. As the intelligence and clear consciousness of the will, it is called knowledge. And as the object to which the will is attached, it is called a thing. They are all one piece. The will never exists in a vacuum. It is always connected with some thing or event.

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‘One is tranquil because one has no desires. 17 The wording is the same one used in Ch’eng Hao’s saying that “the nature is calm whether it is in a state of activity or in a state of tranquillity.” 18

To regard it as fundamental means to regard one’s original substance as fundamental.

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The mind has neither internal nor external aspects.

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The task should never depart from the original substance, and the original substance from the beginning makes no distinction between the internal and the external.

\*

“Your innate knowledge is your own standard. When you direct your thought your innate knowledge knows that it is right if it is right and wrong if it is wrong. You cannot keep anything from it. Just don’t try to deceive it but sincerely and truly follow it in whatever you do. Then the good will be preserved and evil will be removed. What security and joy there is in this! This is the true secret of the investigation of things and the real effort of the extension of knowledge. If you do not rely on this true secret, how can you proceed to investigate things? I have only in recent years realized this through personal experience and become so clear about it. At first I was still suspicious that relying on it alone would

not be sufficient. But after I had examined it carefully I found nothing wanting in it.”

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Formerly when I tried to practice moral principles, I was never able to do just as I wanted. Now I can do so.’

The Teacher said, ‘From this we can know that knowledge acquired through personal realization is different from that acquired through listening to discussions. When I first lectured on the subject, I knew you took it lightly and were not interested. However, when one goes further and realizes this essential and wonderful thing personally to its very depth, he will see that it becomes different every day and is inexhaustible.’

\*

Why speak of divulging any secret? This [innate knowledge] is everybody’s natural possession. When one realizes it it seems to be nothing extraordinary. If one talks about it with those who do not exert any real and genuine effort, they will take it most lightly, and, to our regret, it will do neither party any good. But to talk to those who have made real and genuine effort but have not found the essentials, and to help them bring themselves forward, is vastly effective.”

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“In reality knowledge and realization come without our knowing or realizing. However, if we don’t know this, we will be lost.”

\*

“In general, among friends there should be little admonishing and fault-finding, but much directing and encouraging.”

\*

I was sick in bed in Ch’ien-chou. The Teacher said, “This thing, sickness, is also difficult to rectify (ko). How do you feel?”

I replied, “The task is very difficult.”

The Teacher said, “Always be cheerful. That is the task.”

\*

The Teacher said, “It is only necessary for it to make sense to the mind. If the mind understands it, books will surely come along. If it does not make sense to the mind but only does so according to a literal interpretation of books, then one will have all kinds of subjective ideas.”

\*

“This learning is very good. Unfortunately, my duties of keeping records and presiding over litigations are so heavy that I cannot pursue it.”

When the Teacher heard this he said, “When did I teach you to drop your work of keeping records and presiding over litigations and then to pursue learning in a vacuum? Since you have your official duties, you should pursue learning right in those official duties. Only then will you be truly investigating things.

For instance, when you interrogate a litigant, do not become angry because his replies are impolite or become glad because his words are smooth; do not purposely punish him because you hate his effort to solicit help from your superiors; do not bend your will and yield to him because of his pleading; do not decide the case carelessly on the spur of the moment because you are too busy with your own trifling affairs; and do not settle it according to the opinions of others

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You need only follow what you know yourself.

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Ordinary people are also born with knowledge.”

I asked, “How is that?”

He said, “All people have this innate knowledge. Only the sage preserves it completely and keeps it free from the least obscuration. He is cautious, careful, tirelessly diligent, and of course never stops in these efforts. This is already study. Only because with him the product of inborn knowledge is greater, he is therefore said to be born with knowledge and to practice it naturally and easily. Ordinary people possess this innate knowledge in total from infancy, except that it is much obscured. But the knowledge of the original substance [of the mind] cannot be obliterated. Even study and self-control depend on it

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‘The human mind is heaven and it is the abyss.

The original substance of the mind contains everything. In reality it is the whole heaven. Only because it is hidden by selfish desires is the original substance of heaven lost. The principle of the mind is infinite. In reality it is the whole abyss. Only because it is obstructed by selfish desires is the original substance of the abyss lost. Now if one extends the innate knowledge in every thought

and removes all these hindrances and obstacles, its original substance will be recovered and right then it will become both heaven and abyss.' Thereupon he pointed to heaven, saying, 'For instance, we see heaven in front of us. It is bright and clear heaven. If we see heaven outside the house, it is the same bright and clear heaven. Only because it is obscured by these many walls of the building do we not see heaven in its entirety. If we tear down the walls, we will see only one heaven.

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"Sages and worthies are not without achievements or moral integrity. But since they are in accord with the Principle of Nature, they represent the Way itself. Therefore their fame does not rest merely in achievements or moral integrity."

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I advocate the unity of knowledge and action precisely because I want people to understand that when a thought is aroused it is already action. If there is anything evil when the thought is aroused, one must overcome the evil thought. One must go to the root and go to the bottom and not allow that evil thought to lie latent in his mind. This is the basic purpose of my doctrine.'

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'That the sage is omniscient merely means that he knows the Principle of Nature and that he is omnipotent merely means that he is able to practice the Principle of Nature. The original substance of the mind of the sage is clear and therefore in all things he knows where the Principle of Nature lies and forthwith carries it out to the utmost. It is not that after the original substance of his mind becomes clear he then knows all the things in the world and is able to carry all of them out. Things in the world, such as the names, varieties, and systems, and plants and animals, are innumerable. Although the original substance of the sage is very clear, how can he know everything? 5 What is not necessary to know, he does not have to seek to know

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I asked, "When midnight comes and a Confucian wipes out all thoughts and deliberations from his mind, there will be only emptiness and tranquillity, which is no different from the tranquillity of the Buddhists. If at this moment he entertains neither thoughts and deliberations nor emptiness and tranquillity, what is the difference between the Confucian and the Buddhist?"

The Teacher said, "Activity and tranquillity are one. If it is in accord with the Principle of Nature, the mind that is empty and tranquil at midnight will be the same mind that responds to events and deals with affairs now. If it is in accord with the Principle of Nature, the mind that responds to events and deals with affairs now is the same mind that is empty and tranquil at midnight. Therefore activity and tranquillity are one and cannot be separated. If we know that activity and tranquillity form a unity, the fact that the Buddhist's infinitesimal mistake at the beginning leads to an infinite error in the end cannot be concealed."

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"The Buddhists are afraid of the burden in the relationship between father and son and therefore escape from it. They are afraid of the burden in the relationship between ruler and minister and therefore escape from it. They are afraid of the burden in the relationship between husband and wife and therefore escape from it. In all cases, because the relationships between ruler and minister, father and son, and husband and wife involve attachment to phenomena, they have to escape from them. We Confucians accept the relationship—ship between father and son and fulfill it with the humanity it deserves. We accept the relationship between ruler and minister and fulfill it with the righteousness it deserves. We accept the relationship between husband and wife and fulfill it with the attention to their separate functions it deserves. When have we been attached to these relations?"

Who has no roots? Innate knowledge is man's root which is intelligent and is grown by nature. It naturally grows and grows without cease. It is only because some people are afflicted by the trouble of selfishness and injure and obstruct it that it cannot grow.'

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The important thing is for a man to cultivate his own virtue. If one is truly and definitely a sage or a worthy, even if people slander him, it will not affect him. It is like floating clouds obscuring the sun. How can they hurt its brilliance? If one is respectful only on the surface, is serious only in appearance, and is neither firm nor resolute, even though no one speaks unfavorably of him, his concealed wickedness will inevitably be exposed one day

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'If you seek tranquillity because you feel disgusted with external things, you will only build up an air of arrogance and laziness. But

if you are not disgusted with external things, it will be good for you to cultivate yourself in a quiet place.’

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Innate knowledge is the spirit of creation. This spirit produces heaven and earth, spiritual beings, and the Lord. They all come from it.

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Teacher said, ‘Formerly, when I stayed in Ch’u-chou, 28 seeing that students were mostly occupied with intellectual explanations and debates on similarities and differences, which did them no good, I therefore taught them sitting in meditation. For a time they realized the situation a little bit [they saw the true Way] and achieved some immediate results. In time, however, they gradually developed the defect of fondness for tranquillity and disgust with activity and degenerated into lifelessness like dry wood. Others purposely advocated abstruse and subtle theories to startle people. For this reason I have recently expounded only the doctrine of the extension of innate knowledge. If one’s innate knowledge is clear, it will be all right either to try to obtain truth through personal realization in a quiet place or to discover it through training and polishing in the actual affairs of life. The original substance of innate knowledge is neither tranquil nor active.

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This is simply because your recognition of innate knowledge is not yet genuine, and you still separate the internal and the external. In this task of mine, impatience won’t do. If you realize that innate knowledge is the foundation and is correct, and go ahead to make a real and concrete effort, you will understand it thoroughly. When this point is reached, the separation of the internal and the external will be forgotten.

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You must transform all the impurities in the mind so that not the slightest selfish attachment will be retained.’

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‘To think far ahead does not mean to think and deliberate vaguely and recklessly. It means only to preserve this Principle of Nature. The Principle of Nature is present in the human mind at all times, past and present, and has neither beginning nor end. It is identical with innate knowledge. In our thousands of thoughts and tens of thousands of deliberations, we must only extend innate knowledge. The more innate knowledge thinks, the more refined



and clear it becomes. If it does not think carefully but vaguely responds to things as they come, it will become crude.

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Innate knowledge is the same as Heaven.’

Innate knowledge is nothing but the sense of right and wrong, and the sense of right and wrong is nothing but to love [the right] and to hate [the wrong]. To love [the right] and to hate [the wrong] cover all senses of right and wrong and the sense of right and wrong covers all affairs and their variations.”

He further said, “The two words ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are general standards. How to deal with them skillfully depends on the man.” “The knowledge of the sage is comparable to the sun in the clear sky, that of the worthy to the sun in the sky with floating clouds, and that of the stupid person to the sun on a dark, dismal day. Although the three kinds of knowledge differ in darkness or clearness, they are the same in the fact that they can distinguish between black and white. Even in a dark night one can tell black and white in a hazy way, which shows that sunlight has not entirely disappeared. The task of learning through study or hard work is nothing other than examining things carefully with this trace of light as the starting point.”

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Joy means that in spite of crying, one’s mind is at peace. The original substance of the mind has not been perturbed.”

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“How could these sages be confined to a rigid pattern? So long as they all sincerely proceeded from innate knowledge, what harm is there in each one’s explaining in his own way? Take for example a garden of bamboos. So long as they all have branches and joints, they are similar in general. If it were rigidly insisted upon that each and every branch or joint had to be of the same size or height, that would not be the wonderful handiwork of creation. You people should just go ahead and cultivate innate knowledge. If all have the same innate knowledge, there is no harm in their being different here and there. But if you are not willing to exert effort, you don’t even sprout. What branches or joints are there to talk about?”

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“In your view the people filling the street are all sages, but in their view, you are a sage.”

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The substance of the mind is the nature endowed in us by Heaven, and is originally neither good nor evil. But because we have a mind dominated by habits, we see in our thoughts a distinction between good and evil.

The work of the investigation of things, the extension of knowledge, the sincerity of the will, the rectification of the mind, and the cultivation of the personal life is aimed precisely at recovering that original nature and substance.

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“I am going to leave now. I wanted to have you come and talk this matter through. You two gentlemen complement each other very well, and should not hold on to one side. Here I deal with two types of people. The man of sharp intelligence apprehends straight from the source. The original substance of the human mind is in fact crystal-clear without any impediment and is the equilibrium before the feelings are aroused. The man of sharp intelligence has accomplished his task as soon as he has apprehended the original substance, penetrating the self, other people, and things internal and things external all at the same time. On the other hand, there are inevitably those whose minds are dominated by habits so that the original substance of the mind is obstructed. I therefore teach them definitely and sincerely to do good and remove evil in their will and thoughts. When they become expert at the task and the impurities of the mind are completely eliminated, the original substance of the mind will become wholly clear. Ju-chung’s view is the one I use in dealing with the man of sharp intelligence. Te-hung’s view is for the second type. If you two gentlemen use your views interchangeably, you will be able to lead all people—of the highest, average, and lowest intelligence—to the truth. If each of you holds on to one side, right here you will err in handling properly the different types of man and each in his own way will fall to understand fully the substance of the Way.” In the original substance of the mind there is no distinction of good and evil. When the will becomes active, however, such distinction exists. The faculty of innate knowledge is to know good and evil. The investigation of things is to do good and remove evil.

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People's minds are dominated by habits. If we do not teach them concretely and sincerely to devote themselves to the task of doing good and removing evil right in their innate knowledge rather than merely imagining an original substance in a vacuum, all that they do will not be genuine and they will do no more than cultivate a mind of vacuity and quietness. 113 This defect is not a small matter and must be exposed as early as possible." On that day both Ju-chung and I attained some enlightenment.

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From the second year of Chia-ching [1523] the people who surrounded him were so many that they sat shoulder to shoulder.

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The point was reached when there were some who attended the Teacher for over a year and yet their names were not known. Whenever some left, the Teacher always sighed and said, "Although you gentlemen are leaving, you do not go outside heaven and earth. So long as you share this feeling of mine I can forget my own seeming physical existence." When the students left the room after listening to his lectures, all leaped for joy.

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the subtlety of his influence and attraction was like ever-changing spirit that cannot be localized in any particular place or direction.

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Actually thinking is no different from learning. When doubt arises in one's learning, he must think it over. There are, of course, the kind of people who think but do not learn. They only think in a vacuum, hoping to evolve truth through imagination.

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Even if we could succeed in investigating every blade of grass and every tree, how can we return to ourselves and make the will sincere?

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to cultivate the personal life lies in realizing through personal experience the true substance of one's mind and always making it broad and extremely impartial without the slightest incorrectness.

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Now that we want to rectify the mind, where in this original substance must we direct our effort? We must direct it where the mind operates and then the effort can be earnest and concrete. In

the mind's operation, it is impossible for it to be entirely free from evil. Therefore it must be here that we make earnest and concrete effort. This means to make the will sincere.

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After I had lived among the barbarians for [almost] three years, 15 I understood what all this meant and realized that there is really nothing in the things in the world to investigate, that the effort to investigate things is only to be carried out

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Wang's situation must have been very desperate.

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When his disciples requested him to write down his ideas, he refused, for he distrusted the written word and preferred oral transmission, and, furthermore, he did not want to aggravate with his unorthodox ideas the already bitter controversy between his school and its opponents. It was not until 1527, a little over a year before he died, when he was about to leave on a campaign to suppress a rebellion in South China, that he finally wrote this down.

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that the man of humanity forms one body with all things and extends his love to all, that the mind is principle, that the highest good is inherent in the mind, that to investigate things is to rectify the mind, and that the extension of the innate knowledge of the good is the beginning and end of a moral life.

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The great man regards Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body. He regards the world as one family and the country as one person. As to those who make a cleavage between objects and distinguish between the self and others, they are small men. That the great man can regard Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body is not because he deliberately wants to do so, but because it is natural to the humane nature of his mind that he do so.

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nothing to do with the work of the family, the state, and the world. Such are the followers of Buddhism and Taoism. There have, of course, been those who wanted to love their people. Yet simply because they did not know how to abide in the highest good, but instead sank their own minds in base and trifling things, they

thereby lost them in scheming strategy and cunning techniques, having neither the sincerity of humanity nor that of commiseration.

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People fail to realize that the highest good is in their minds and seek it outside. As they believe that everything or every event has its own definite principle, they search for the highest good in individual things. Consequently, the mind becomes fragmentary, isolated, broken into pieces; mixed and confused

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root and branches should not be distinguished as two different things.

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Although each has its own name, they are really one affair. What is it that is called the person? It is the physical functioning of the mind. What is it that is called the mind? It is the clear and intelligent master of the person. What is meant by cultivating the personal life? It means to do good and get rid of evil.

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Now, when one sets out to extend his innate knowledge to the utmost, does this mean something illusory, hazy, in a vacuum, and unreal? No, it means something real. Therefore, the extension of knowledge must consist in the investigation of things. A thing is an event.

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Because after my personal supervision of the attacks on the bandit strongholds in Hsiang-hu, K'o-t'ang, 16 and other places, the bandits have been totally wiped out through capture or killing, my troops are now stationed here. At this time of spring farming, I want very much to come personally to the villages where you live, and inquire face to face about your suffering. However, I am afraid my many attendants may disturb you. I am therefore sending this instruction. The best studies in English are: Fung Yu-lan, A History of Chinese Philosophy; Chan's A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy



# IZUTSU

Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism, A comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts of Ibn 'Arabi and Lao-Tzu and Chuang-Tzu*, 1983, 2005.

*Je livre toute la seconde partie de l'ouvrage d'Izutsu, même si elle s'avère longue, car elle éclaire singulièrement les deux « Pères du système taoïste » en assurant une lecture mystique.*

## Part II Lao-Tzû & Chuang-Tzû

### I Lao-Tzû and Chuang-Tzû

The book called *Tao Tê Ching* is now world-famous, and is being widely read in the West in various translations as one of the most important basic texts of Oriental Wisdom. It is generally — or popularly, we should say — thought to be a philosophico-mystical treatise written by an ancient Chinese sage called Lao-tzû, a senior contemporary of Confucius. In more scholarly circles no one today takes such a view.

In fact, since the Ch'ing Dynasty when the question of the authorship of the book was first raised in China,<sup>1</sup> it has been discussed by so many people, it has provoked such an animated controversy not only in China but in Japan, and even in the West, and so divergent are the hypotheses which have been put forward, that we are left in utter darkness as to whether the *Tao Tê Ching* is a work of an individual thinker, or even whether a man called Lao-tzû ever existed in reality. We are no longer in a position to assign a proper chronological place to the book with full confidence.

For our particular purposes, the problem of authorship and the authenticity of the work is merely of peripheral importance. Whether or not there once existed as a historical person a sage called Lao-tzû in the state of Ch'u, who lived more than one hundred and sixty years,<sup>2</sup> whether or not this sage really wrote the *Tao Tê Ching* — these and similar questions, whether answered affirmatively or negatively, do not affect at all the main contention of the present work. What is of fundamental importance is the fact that the thought is there, and that it has a very peculiar inner structure which, if analyzed and understood in a proper way, will provide an exceedingly interesting Chinese counterpart to the

'Unity of Existence' (*wahdah al-wujûd*) type of philosophy as represented by Ibn 'Arabi in Islam.

Lao-tzû is a legendary, or at the very most, semi-legendary figure, of whom it is an obvious understatement to say that nothing certain is known to us. For, even on the assumption that there is an historical core in his so-called biography, we must admit that the popular [288] imagination has woven round it such a fantastic tapestry of impossible events and unbelievable incidents that no one can ever hope to disentangle the intricate web of legends, myths and facts.

Even the most sober and most dependable of all Chinese historians in ancient times, and the earliest to attempt a description of Lao-tzû's life and adventures in his Book of History,<sup>3</sup> Ssû Ma Ch'ien of the Han Dynasty (the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.), had to be content with giving a very inconsistent and unsystematic narrative made up of a number of stories stemming from heterogeneous origins.

According to one of those legends, Lao-tzû was a native of the state of Ch'u.<sup>4</sup> He was an official of the royal Treasury of Chou, when Confucius came to visit him. After the interview, Confucius is related to have made the following remark to his disciples about Lao-tzû. 'Birds fly, fishes swim, and animals run — this much I know for certain. Moreover, the runner can be snared, the swimmer can be hooked, and the flyer can be shot down by the arrow. But what can we do with a dragon? We cannot even see how he mounts on winds and clouds and rises to heaven. That Lao-tzû whom I met today may probably be compared only to a dragon!'

The story makes Lao-tzû a senior contemporary of Confucius (551-479 B.C.). This would naturally mean that Lao-tzû was a man who lived in the 6th century B.C., which cannot possibly be a historical fact.

Many arguments have been brought forward against the historicity of the narrative which we have just quoted. One of them is of particular importance to us; it is concerned with examining this and similar narratives philologically and in terms of the historical development of philosophical thinking in ancient China. I shall give here a typical example of this kind of philological argument.

Sôkichi Tsuda in his well-known work, *The Thought of the Taoist School and its Development*,<sup>5</sup> subjects to a careful philological examination the peculiar usage of some of the key technical terms in the *Tao Tê Ching*, and arrives at the conclusion that the book must be a product of a period after Mencius (372-289 B.C.). This



would imply of course that Lao-tzû — supposing that he did exist as a historical person — was a man who came after Mencius.

Tsuda chooses as the yardstick of his judgment the expression *jèn-i* which is found in Chap. XVIII of the *Tao Tê Ching*,<sup>6</sup> and which is a compound of two words *jèn* and *i*. These two words, *jèn* ('humaneness' with particular emphasis on 'benevolence') and *i* ('righteousness'), properly speaking, do not belong to the vocabulary of Lao-tzû; they are key-terms of Confucianism. As representing two of the most basic human virtues, they play an exceedingly important rôle in the ethical thought of Confucius himself. But in Lao-Tzû and Chuang Tzû [289] the mouth of Confucius, they remain two independent words; they are not compounded into a semantic unit in the form of *jèn-i* corresponding almost to a single complex concept. The latter phenomenon is observed only in post-Confucian times.

Tsuda points out that the thinker who first emphasized the concept of *jèn-i* is Mencius. This fact, together with the fact that in the above-mentioned passage Lao-tzû uses the terms *jèn* and *i* in this compound form, would seem to suggest that the *Tao Tê Ching*, is a product of a period in which the Confucian key-term *jèn-i* has already been firmly established, for the passage in question is most evidently intended to be a conscious criticism of Confucian ethics. Lao-tzû, in other words, could use the expression with such an intention only because he had before his eyes Mencius and his ethical theory.

Moreover, Tsuda goes on to remark, Mencius vehemently attacks and denounces, everything incompatible with Confucianism, but nowhere does he show any conscious endeavour to criticize Lao-tzû or *Tao Tê Ching* in spite of the fact that the teaching of the latter is diametrically opposed to his own doctrine; he does not even mention the name Lao-Tzû. This is irrefutable evidence for the thesis that the *Tao Tê Ching* belongs to a period posterior to Mencius. Since, on the other hand, its doctrines are explicitly criticized by Hsün-tzû (c. 315-236 B.C.), it cannot be posterior to the latter. Thus, in conclusion, Tsuda assigns to the *Tao Tê Ching* a period between Mencius and Hsün-tzû.

Although there are some problematic points in Tsuda's argument, he is, I think, on the whole right. In fact, there are a number of passages in the *Tao Tê Ching* which cannot be properly understood unless we place them against the background of a Confucian philosophy standing already on a very firm basis. And this, indeed, is the crux of the whole problem, at least for those to

whom the thought itself of Lao-tzû is the major concern. The very famous opening lines of the *Tao Tê Ching*, for instance, in which the real Way and the real Name are mentioned in sharp contrast to an ordinary way' and ordinary names',<sup>7</sup> do not yield their true meaning except when we realize that what is meant by this ordinary 'way' is nothing but the proper ethical way of living as understood and taught by the school of Confucius, and that what is referred to by these ordinary 'names' are but the Confucian i.e., the highest ethical categories stabilized by means of definite 'names' i.e., key-terms.

The *Tao Tê Ching* contains, furthermore, a number of words and phrases that are — seemingly at least — derived from various other sources, like Mo-tzû, Yang Chu, Shang Yang, and even Chuang-tzû, Shên Tao, and others. And there are some scholars who, basing [290] themselves on this observation, go farther than Tsuda and assert that the *Tao Tê Ching* belongs to a period after Chuang-tzû and Shên Tao. Yang Jung Kuo, a contemporary scholar of Peking, to give one example, takes such a position in his *History of Thought in Ancien: China*.<sup>8</sup>

Some of these alleged 'references' to thinkers who have traditionally been considered later than Lao-tzû may very well be explained as due to the influence exercised by the *Tao Tê Ching* itself upon those thinkers who, in writing their books, may have 'borrowed' ideas and expressions from this book. Besides, we have to remember that the text of this book as we have it to-day has evidently passed through a repeated process of editing, re-editing, and re-arranging in the Han Dynasty. Many of the 'references' may simply be later additions and interpolations.

Be this as it may, it has to be admitted that the *Tao Tê Ching* is a controversial work. And at least it is definitely certain that the formation of its thought presupposes the existence of the Confucian school of thought.

Turning now to another aspect of Lao-tzû, which is more important for the purposes of the present work than chronology, we may begin by observing that the Biography of Lao-tzû as given by Ssü Ma Ch'ien in his *Book of History* makes Lao-tzû a man of Ch'u.<sup>9</sup> Thus he writes in one passage, 'Lao-tzû was a native of the village Ch'ü Jên, in Li Hsiang, in the province of K'u, in the state of Ch'u'. In another passage he gaies that according to a different tradition, there was a man called Lao Lai Tzû in the time of Confucius; that he was a man of Ch'u, and produced fifteen books

in which he talked about the Way. Ssü Ma Ch'ien adds that this man may have been the same as Lao-tzû.

All this may very well be a mere legend. And yet it is, in my view, highly significant that the 'legend' connects the author of the *Tao Tê Ching* with the state of Ch'u. This connection of Lao-tzû with the southern state of Ch'u cannot be a mere coincidence. For there is something of the spirit of Ch'u running through the entire book. By the 'spirit of Ch'u' I mean what may properly be called the shamanic tendency of the mind or shamanic mode of thinking. Ch'u was a large state lying on the southern periphery of the civilized Middle Kingdom, a land of wild marches, rivers, forests and mountains, rich in terms of nature but poor in terms of culture, inhabited by many people of a non-Chinese origin with variegated, strange customs. There all kinds of superstitious beliefs in supernatural beings and spirits were rampant, and shamanic practices thrived.

But this apparently primitive and 'uncivilized' atmosphere could provide an ideal fostering ground for an extraordinary visionary [291] power of poetic imagination, as amply attested by the elegies written by the greatest shaman-poet the state of Ch'u has ever produced, Ch'ü Yüan.<sup>10</sup> The same atmosphere could also produce a very peculiar kind of metaphysical thinking. This is very probable because the shamanic experience of reality is of such a nature that it can be refined and elaborated into a high level of metaphysical experience. In any case, the metaphysical depth of Lao-tzû's thought can, I believe, be accounted for to a great extent by relating it to the shamanic mentality of the ancient Chinese which can be traced back to the oldest historic times and even beyond, and which has flourished particularly in the southern part of China throughout the long history of Chinese culture.

In this respect Henri Maspero<sup>11</sup> is, I think, basically right when he takes exception to the traditional view that Taoism abruptly started in the beginning of the fourth century B.C. as a mystical metaphysics with Lao-tzû, was very much developed philosophically by Chuang-tzû toward the end of that century and vulgarized to a considerable degree by Lieh-tzû and thenceforward went on the way of corruption and degeneration until in the Later Han Dynasty it was completely transformed into a jumble of superstition, animism, magic and sorcery. Against such a view, Maspero takes the position that Taoism was a 'personal' religion — as contrasted with the agricultural communal type of State religion which has nothing to do with personal salvation — going

back to immemorial antiquity. The school of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû, he maintains, was a particular branch or section within this wide religious movement, a particular branch characterized by a marked mystical-philosophical tendency.

These observations would seem to lead us back once again to the problem of the authorship of *Tao Tê Ching* and the historicity of Lao-tzû. Is it at all imaginable that such a metaphysical refinement of crude mysticism should have been achieved as a result of a process of natural development, without active participation of an individual thinker endowed with an unusual philosophical genius? I do not think so. Primitive shamanism in ancient China would have remained in its original crudity as a phenomenon of popular religion characterized by ecstatic orgy and frantic 'possession', if it were not for a tremendous work of elaboration done in the course of its history by men of unusual genius. Thus, in order to produce the Elegies of Ch'u the primitive shamanic vision of the world had to pass through the mind of a Ch'ü Yüan. Likewise, the same shamanic world-vision could be elevated into the profound metaphysics of the Way only by an individual philosophical genius.

When we read the *Tao Tê Ching* with the preceding observation [292] in mind, we cannot but feel the breath, so to speak, of an extraordinary man pervading the whole volume, the spirit of an unusual philosopher pulsating throughout the book. With all the possible later additions and interpolations, which I readily admit, I cannot agree with the view that the *Tao Tê Ching* is a work of compilation consisting of fragments of thought taken from various heterogeneous sources. For there is a certain fundamental unity which strikes us everywhere in the book. And the unity is a personal one. In fact, the *Tao Tê Ching* as a whole is a unique piece of work distinctly colored by the personality of one unusual man, a shaman-philosopher. Does he not give us a self-portrait in part XX of the book?

The multitude of men are blithe and cheerful as though they were invited to a luxurious banquet, or as though they were going up a high tower to enjoy the spring scenery.

I alone remain silent and stil], showing no sign of activity. Like a new-born baby I am, that has not yet learnt to smile. Forlorn and aimless I look, as if I had no place to return.

All men have more than enough. I alone seem to be vacant and blank. Mine indeed is the mind of a stupid man! Dull and confused it is! The vulgar people are all clever and bright, I alone am dark and obtuse. The vulgar people are all quick and

alert, I alone am blunt and tardy. Like a deep ocean that undulates constantly I am, like a wind that blows never to rest.

All others have some work to do, while I alone remain impractical and boorish. I alone am different from all others because I value being fed by the Mother.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly in another passage (LXVII), he says of himself:

Everybody under Heaven says that I <sup>13</sup> am big, but look stupid. Yea, I look stupid because I am big. If I were clever I would have diminished long ago.

And again in LXX, we read:

My words are very easy to understand and very easy to practise. Yet no one under Heaven understands them; no one puts them into practice.

My words come out of a profound source, and my actions come out of a high principle. But people do not understand it. Therefore they do not understand me.

Those who understand me are rare. That precisely is the proof that I am precious. The sage, indeed, wears clothes of coarse cloth, but carries within precious jade.

The passages just quoted give a picture of a very original mind, an image of a man who looks gloomy, stupid and clumsy, standing aloof from the 'clever' people who spend their time in the petty [293] pleasures of life. He takes such an attitude because he is conscious of himself as utterly different from ordinary men. The important question we have to raise about this is: Whence does this difference come? The *Tao Tê Ching* itself and the Chuang-tzû seem to give a definite answer to this question. The man feels himself different from others because he is conscious that he alone knows the real meaning of existence. And this he knows due to his metaphysical insight which is based on what Chuang-tzû calls tso wang 'sitting in oblivion', that is, the experience of ecstatic union with the Absolute, the Way. The man who stands behind the utterances which we have quoted above is a philosopher-mystic, or a visionary shaman turned into a philosopher.

It is highly significant for our specified purpose to note that the spirit of a philosophically developed shamanism pervades the whole of the *Tao Tê Ching*. It is, so to speak, a living personal 'center' round which are co-ordinated all the basic ideas that we find in the book, whether the thought concerns the metaphysical structure of the universe, the nature of man, the art of governing people, or the practical ideal of life. And such an organic unity cannot be explained except on the assumption that the book, far from being a compilation made of fragmentary and disparate

pieces of thought picked up at random from here and there, is in the main the work of a single author.

In studying a book like the *Tao Tê Ching* it is more important than anything else to grasp this personal unity underlying it as a whole, and to pinpoint it as the center of co-ordination for all its basic ideas. For, otherwise, we would not be in a position to penetrate the subtle structure of the symbolism of the *Tao Tê Ching* and analyze with precision the basic ideas of its metaphysics.

Turning from Lao-tzû to Chuang-tzû, we feel ourselves standing on a far more solid ground. For, although we are no better informed about his real life and identity, at least we know that we are dealing with an historical person, who did exist in about the middle of the fourth century B.C., as a contemporary of Mencius, the great shaman-poet Ch'ü Yüan of Ch'u to whom reference has been made, and the brilliant dialectician Hui Shih or Hui-tzû<sup>14</sup> with whom he himself was a good match in the mastery of the art of manipulating logical concepts.

According to the account given by Ssü Ma Ch'ien in the above-mentioned *Book of History*, Chuang-tzû or Chuang Chou<sup>15</sup> was a native of Mêng<sup>6</sup> he was once an official at Ch'i-Yüan in Mêng; he had tremendous erudition, but his doctrine was essentially based on the teachings of Lao-tzû; and his writing, which counted more than 100,000 words, was for the most part symbolic or allegorical. [294]

It is significant that Mêng, which is mentioned by Ssü Ma Ch'ien as Chuang-tzû's birthplace, is in present-day Ho Nan and was a place in the ancient state of Sung.<sup>17</sup> I regard this as significant because Sung was a country where the descendants of the ancient Yin<sup>18</sup> people were allowed to live after having been conquered by the Chou people.<sup>19</sup> There these descendants of the once-illustrious people, despised by the conquerors as the 'conquered' and constantly threatened and invaded by their neighbors, succeeded in preserving the religious beliefs and legends of their ancestors. The significance of this fact with regard to the thesis of the present study will at once be realized if one but remembers the animistic-shamanic spirit of Yin culture as manifested in its sacrificial ceremonies and rites of divination as well as in the myths connected with this dynasty. The people of Yin were traditionally famous for their cult of spirits and worship of the 'God-above'. From of old the distinction between Yin and Chou was made by such a dictum as: 'Yin worships spirits while Chou places the highest value on human culture.'<sup>20</sup>

Quite independently of the observation of this historical relation between the Yin Dynasty and the Sung people, Fung Yu Lang in his *History of Chinese Philosophy*<sup>21</sup> points out — quite rightly, to my mind — that the form of Chuang-tzû's thought is close to that of the Ch'u people. 'We should keep in mind', he writes, 'the fact that the state of Sung bordered Ch'u, making it quite possible that Chuang-tzû was influenced on the one hand by Ch'u, and at the same time was under the influence of the ideas of the Dialecticians. (Hui Shih, it will be remembered, was a native of Sung.) Thus by using the dialectics of the latter, he was able to put his soaring thoughts into order, and formulate a unified philosophical system.'

Of the 'spirit of Ch'u' we have talked in an earlier passage in connection with the basic structure of Lao-tzû's thought. Fung Yu Lang compares the *Elegies of Ch'u* (Ch'u Tz'û)<sup>22</sup> with the Chuang-tzû and observes a remarkable resemblance between the two in the display of 'a richness of imagination and freeness of spirit'. But he neglects to trace this resemblance down to its shamanic origin, so that the 'richness of imagination and freeness of spirit' is left unexplained. However it may be, we shall refrain from going any further into the details of this problem at this point, for much more will be said in the following chapter.

The problem of the relationship between Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû has been discussed at length by philologists. As we have already observed the major doctrines of Chuang-tzû have traditionally been regarded as being based upon the teachings of Lao-tzû. On this view, Lao-tzû of course was a predecessor of Chuang-tzû in Taoist Lao-Tzû and Chuang Tzû [295] philosophy; the main lines of thought had been laid down by the former, and the latter simply took them over from him and developed them in his own way into a grand-scale allegorical system according to the dictates of his philosophical and literary ability. This view seems to be a natural conclusion drawn from the observation of the following two facts: (1) the existence of an undeniable inner connection between the two in the very structure of their world-view and their mystical way of thinking; (2) Chuang-tzû himself often mentioning Lao-tzû as one of the earlier Taoist sages, and the expressions used being in some places almost the same.

The matter, however, is not as simple as it looks at the first glance. In fact serious questions have been raised in modern times about this problem. The *Tao Tê Ching* itself, to begin with, is nowhere referred to in the Chuang-tzû, although Lao-tzû, as a legendary

figure, appears in its pages, and his ideas are mentioned. But this latter fact proves almost nothing conclusively, for we know that many of the persons who are made to play important rôles in the Chuang-tzû are simply fictitious. Similarities in language may easily be explained away as the result either of later interpolations in the *Tao Tê Ching* itself, or as going back to common sources.

Yang Jung Kuo, to whom reference has been made earlier, may be mentioned as a representative present-day scholar who not only doubts Lao-tzû's having been a predecessor of Chuang-tzû, but goes a step further and completely reverses the chronological order. In an interesting chapter of his above-mentioned book, *History of Thought in Ancient China*,<sup>23</sup> he decidedly takes the position that Chuang-tzû was not a disciple of Lao-tzû; that, on the contrary, the latter — or, to be more exact, the *Tao Tê Ching* — was nothing other than a continuation and further development of the Chuang-tzû. And the way he defends his position is strictly philological; he tries to prove his position through an examination of some of the key-concepts common to Lao-tzi and Chuang-tzû. And he concludes that the *Tao Tê Ching* presupposes the prior existence of the Chuang-tzû. For instance, the most important of all key-concepts of Taoism, *tao* (Wag) as the cosmic principle of natural growth, or Nature, is in the Chuang-tzû not yet fully developed in its inner structure. The concept is already there, he says, but it is as yet a mere beginning. The *Tao Tê Ching* takes over this concept at this precise point and elaborates it into an absolute principle, the absolutely unknowable Source, which is pre-eternal<sup>24</sup> and from which emanate all things.<sup>25</sup> And Yang Jung Kuo thinks that this historical relation between the two — Chuang-tzû being the initial point and Lao-tzû representing the culmination — is observable throughout the whole structure of Taoist philosophy.

This argument, highly interesting though it is, is not conclusive. [296] For the key-concepts in question allow of an equally justifiable explanation in terms of a process of development running from Lao-tzû to Chuang-tzû. As regards the metaphysics of *tao*, for instance, we have to keep in mind that Lao-tzû gives only the result, a definitely established monistic system of archetypal imagery whose center is constituted by the absolute Absolute, *tao*, which develops stage after stage by its own nature creative activity down to the world of multiplicity. This ontology, as I have pointed out before, is understandable only on the assumption that it stands on the basis of an ecstatic or mystical experience of Existence. Lao-tzû, however, does not disclose this



experiential aspect of his world-view except through vague, symbolic hints and suggestions. This is the reason why the *Tao Tê Ching* tends to produce an impression of being a philosophical elaboration of something which precedes it. That 'something which precedes it', however, may not necessarily be something taken over from others.

Chuang-tzû, on the other hand, is interested precisely in this experiential aspect of Taoist mysticism which Lao-tzû leaves untouched. He is not mainly concerned with constructing a metaphysics of a cosmic scale ranging from the ultimate Unknowable down to the concrete world of variegated colons and forms. His chief concern is with the peculiar kind of 'experience' itself by which one penetrates the mystery of Existence. He tries to depict in detail, sometimes allegorically, sometimes theoretically, the very psychological or spiritual process through which one becomes more and more 'illuminated' and goes on approaching the real structure of reality hidden behind the veil of sensible experience.

His attitude is, in comparison with Lao-tzû, epistemological, rather than metaphysical. And this difference separates these two thinkers most fundamentally, although they share a common interest in the practical effects that come out of the supra-sensible experience of the Way. The same difference may also be formulated in terms of upward movement and downward movement. Lao-tzû tries to describe metaphysically how the absolute Absolute develops naturally into One, and how the One develops into Two, and the Two into Three, and the Three into 'ten thousand things'.<sup>26</sup> It is mainly a description of an ontological — or emanational — movement downward, though he emphasizes also the importance of the concept of Return, i.e., the returning process of all things back to their origin. Chuang-tzû is interested in describing epistemologically the rising movement of the human mind from the world of multiplicity and diversity up to the ontological plane where all distinctions become merged into One.

Because of this particular emphasis on the epistemological aspect of the experience of the tao, Chuang-tz'û does not take the trouble of [297] developing the concept itself of *tao* as a philosophical system. This is why his metaphysics of tao appears imperfect, or imperfectly developed. This, however, does not necessarily mean that he rep-resents chronologically an earlier stage than Lao-tzû.

For, as we have just seen, the difference between them may very well be only the difference of emphasis.

I shall now bring this chapter to a close by giving a brief explanation of the book itself known by the name *Chuang-tzû*.

The important Bibliography contained in the *Chronicle of the Han Dynasty*<sup>27</sup> notes that the *Chuang-tzû* consists of fifty-two chapters. But the basic text of the book which we actually have in our hands has only thirty-three chapters. This is the result of editorial work done by Kuo Hsiang.<sup>28</sup> In fact all the later editions of the *Chuang-tzû* ultimately go back to this Kuo Hsiang recension. This eminent thinker of the Taoist school critically examined the traditional text, left out a number of passages which he regarded as definitely spurious and worthless, and divided what survived this examination into three main groups. The first group is called Interior Chapters (*nei p'ien*) consisting of seven chapters. The second is called Exterior Chapters (*wai p'ien*) and consists of fifteen chapters. And the third is called Miscellaneous Chapters (*tza pi'en*) and contains eleven chapters.

Setting aside the problem of possible additions and interpolations we might say generally that the Interior Chapters represent *Chuang-tzû's* own thought and ideas, and are probably from his own pen. As to the two other groups, scholars are agreed to-day that they are mostly later developments, interpretations and elucidations added to the main text by followers of *Chuang-tzû*. Whether the *Interior Chapters* come from *Chuang-tzû's* own pen or not, it is definite that they represent the oldest layer of the book and are philosophically as well as literarily the most essential part, while the *Exterior* and *Miscellaneous Chapters* are of but secondary importance.

In the present study, I shall depend exclusively on the *Interior Chapters*. This I shall do for the reason just mentioned and also out of a desire to give consistency to my analytic description of *Chuang-tzû's* thought.<sup>29</sup>

Notes [sans les caractères chinois : présence signalée par '(0)']

1. Tsui Shu may here be mentioned as one of the most eminent writers of the Ch'ing Dynasty who raised serious doubts about the reliability of the so-called biography of *Lao-tzû*. Of the *Tao Tê Ching* he says: 'As for the [298] five-thousand-words-about-the-Tao-and-Virtue, no one knows who wrote it. There is no doubt, in any case, that it is a forgery by some of the followers of Yang Chu.'

2. The name *Lao-tzû*, incidentally, simply means Old Master, the word 'old' in this context meaning almost the same as 'immortal'.

3. Shih Chi, LX111, III

4. For my reason for translating ( ) as 'an official of the royal Treasury of Chou', see Shigeta Koyanagi: *The Thought of Lao-tzû, Chuang-tzû and Taoism*, Tokyo, 1942, pp. 26-27.

5. ( ), Complete Works of S. Tsuda, XIII, Tokyo, 1964. The work was published earlier in 1927 as a volume of the series of publications of Tôyô Bunko.

6. ( ) 'Only when the great Way declines, does the virtue of benevolence-righteousness arise.'

7. This passage will be translated and explained later.

8. ( ) Peking, 1954, 3rd ed. 1955, Chap. VII, 4, pp. 245-247. At the outset (p. 245), the author states: The Book of Lao-tzû is, in my opinion, a product of an age subsequent to the flourishing of the school of Chuang-tzû in the Warring States period.

9. ( )

10. ( ). We may note as quite a significant fact that this great poet of Ch'u was a contemporary of Chuang-tzû. According to a very detailed and excellent study done by Kuo Mo Jo ( ), Yüan was born in 340 B.C. and died in 278 B.C., at the age of sixty-two. As for Chuang-tzû, an equally excellent study by Ma Hsü Lun ( ) has established that he lived c. 370 B.C.-300 B.C.

11. Henri Maspero: *Le Taoism (mélanges posthumes sur les religions et l'histoire de la Chine)*, II) Paris, 1950, III.

12. 'Mother' here symbolizes the Way (*tao*). Just as a child in the womb feeds on the mother without its doing anything active on its part, the Taoist sage lives in the bosom of the Way, free and careless, away from all artificial activity on his part<sup>10</sup>.

13. The text usually reads ( ) ( . . . making 'my Way' the subject of the sentence.

14. ( ) known as one of the representatives of the 'school of dialecticians (*p'ien ché*), or 'sophists', in the Warring States period. The Chuang-tzû records several anecdotes in which Chuang-tzû is challenged by this logician, disputes with him, and scores a victory over him. The anecdotes may very well be fictitious - as almost all the anecdotes of the Chuang-tzû are - but they are very interesting in that they disclose the basic characteristics of the one as well as of the other.

15. ( ) *Chou* being his personal name.

16. ( )

17. ( )

18. ( )

19. ( )

20. ( ) (Cf. ( ) Hong Kong, 1957, pp. 1-2).

21. Trans. by D. Bodde, 2 vols., Princeton, 1952-53; vol. I, pp. 221-222.

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10 Intéressant !

22. ( ) some of which are by the poet Ch'ü 't'ibn himself, *Li Sao* ( ) being his representative work, while some others are by his followers. But, whether by Ch'ü Yüan or by others, all the *Elegies* are through and through shamanic. Some of them describe in a typical way the spiritual, visionary journeys of a shaman in an ecstatic state.

23. pp. 252-257.

24. () lit. «The Tao precedes Heaven and Earth». The concept of tao in this respect may rightly be compared with the Islamic concept *qadīm*.

25. (), lit. «The Tao produces, or makes grow, the ten thousand things».

26. See, *Tao T'í Ching*, XLII. The process of 'emanation' will be dealt with later in full detail.

27. ( ), which was compiled in the 1st century B.C.

28. ( ), a scholar of the 4th century A.D.

29. In quoting from the *Chuang-tzû* I shall give page numbers according to the Peking edition of *Chuang-tzû Chi Shih* ( ) by Kuo Ch'ing Fan ( ), Peking,

1961, vol. 1. The editor was one of the outstanding philologists of the Ch'ing dynasty, and his edition is a very useful one, because it gives the commentary by Kuo Hsiang himself ( ) and two other equally famous glosses by Ch'éng Hsüang Yíng ( ) and Lu Té Míng ( ) ( ), supplemented by some of the results of modern scholarship. As for *Lao-tzû*, I shall quote from the edition of Kao H'éng: *Lao-tzû Ch'eng Ku* ( ), Shanghai, 1943, giving, as is usually done, chapter numbers instead of page numbers.

## II From Mythopoiesis to Metaphysics

In the preceding chapter I indicated in a preliminary way the possibility of there being a very strong connection between Taoist philosophy and shamanism<sup>11</sup>. I suggested that the thought or worldview of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû may perhaps be best studied against the background of the age-old tradition of the shamanic spirit in ancient China. The present chapter will be devoted to a more detailed discussion of this. problem, namely, the shamanic background of Taoist philosophy as represented by the *Tao Tê Ching* and Chuang-tzû.

In fact, throughout the long history of Chinese thought there runs what might properly be called a 'shamanic mode of thinking'. We observe this specific mode of thinking manifesting itself in diverse forms and on various levels in accordance with the particular circumstances of time and place, sometimes in a popular, fantastic form, often going to the limit of superstition and obscenity, and sometimes in an intellectually refined and logically elaborated form. We observe also that this mode of thinking stands in sharp contrast to the realistic and rationalistic mode of thinking as represented by the austere ethical world-view of Confucius and his followers.

Briefly stated, I consider the Taoist world-view of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû as a philosophical elaboration or culmination of this shamanic mode of thinking; as, in other words, a particular form of philosophy which grew out of the personal existential experience peculiar to persons endowed with the capacity of seeing things on a supra-sensible plane of consciousness through an ecstatic encounter with the Absolute and through the archetypal images emerging out of it

The Taoist philosophers who produced works like the *Tao Tê Ching* and Chuang-tzû were 'shamans' on the one hand, as far as concerns the experiential basis of their world-vision, but they were on the other, intellectual thinkers who, not content to remain on the primitive level of popular shamanism, exercised their intellect in order to elevate and elaborate their original vision into a system of metaphysical concepts designed to explain the very structure of Being. [301]

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11 [NDE DT : la référence au chamanisme est historiquement intéressante. C'est une source possible menant à la vie mystique, rien de plus.

Lao-tzû talks about *shêng-jên* 1 or the 'sacred man'. It is one of the key-concepts of his philosophical world-view, and as such plays an exceedingly important rôle in his thought. The 'sacred man' is a man who has attained to the highest stage of the intuition of the Way, to the extent of being completely unified with it, and who behaves accordingly in this world following the dictates of the Way that he feels active in himself. He is, in brief, a human embodiment of the Way. In exactly the same sense, Chuang-tzû speaks of *chên-jên* 2 or the 'true man', *chih-jên* 3 or the 'ultimate man', *shên-jên* 4 or the 'divine (or super-human) man'. The man designated by these various words is in reality nothing other than a philosophical shaman, or a shaman whose visionary intuition of the world has been refined and elaborated into a philosophical vision of Being.

That the underlying concept has historically a close connection with shamanism is revealed by the etymological meaning of the word *shêng* here translated as 'sacred'. The *Shuo Wên Chieh Tzû*, the oldest etymological dictionary (compiled in 100 A.D.), in its explanation of the etymological structure of this word states: '*Shêng* designates a man whose orifices of the ears are extraordinarily receptive.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the term designates a man, endowed with an unusually keen ear, who is capable of hearing the voice of a super-natural being, god or spirit, and understands directly the will or intention of the latter. In the concrete historical circumstances of the ancient Yin Dynasty, such a man can be no other than a divine priest professionally engaged in divination.

It is interesting to remark in this connection that in the *Tao Tê Ching* the 'sacred man' is spoken of as the supreme ruler of a state, or 'king', and that this equation (Saint = King) is made as if it were a matter of common sense, something to be taken for granted. We must keep in mind that in the Yin Dynasty<sup>6</sup> shamanism was deeply related to politics. In that dynasty, the civil officials of the higher ranks who possessed and exercised a tremendous power over the administration of the state were all originally shamans. And in the earliest periods of the same dynasty, the Grand Shaman was the high priest-vizier, or even the king himself.<sup>7</sup>

This would seem to indicate that behind the 'sacred man' as the Taoist ideal of the Perfect Man there is hidden the image of a shaman, and that under the surface of the metaphysical world-

view of Taoism there is perceivable a shamanic cosmology going back to the most ancient times of Chinese history.

For the immediate purposes of the present study, we do not have to go into a detailed theoretical discussion of the concept of shamanism.<sup>8</sup> We may be content with defining it in a provisional way by saying that it is a phenomenon in which an inspired seer in a state of [302] ecstasy communes with supernatural beings, gods or spirits. As is well known, a man who has a natural capacity of this kind tends to serve in a primitive society as an intermediary between his tribes-men and the unseen world.

As one of the most typical features of the shamanic mentality we shall consider first of all the phenomenon of mythopoiesis. Shamans are by definition men who, in their ecstatic-archetypal visions perceive things which are totally different from what ordinary people see in their normal states through their sensible experiences, and this naturally tends to induce the shamans to interpret and structuralize the world itself quite differently from ordinary people. That which characterizes their reality experience in the most remarkable way is that things appear to their 'imaginal' consciousness in symbolic and mythical forms. The world which a shaman sees in the state of trance is a world of 'creative imagination', as Henry Corbin has aptly named it, however crude it may still be. On this level of consciousness, the things we perceive around us leave their natural, common-sense mode of existence and transform themselves into images and symbols. And those images, when they become systematized and ordered according to the patterns of development which are inherent in them, tend to produce a mythical cosmology.

The shamanic tradition in ancient China did produce such a cosmology. In the *Elegies of Ch'u* to which reference was made in the preceding chapter, we can trace almost step by step and in a very concrete form the actual process by which the shamanic experience of reality produces a peculiar, 'imaginal' cosmology. And by comparing, further, the *Elegies of Ch'u* with a book like *Huai Nan Tzû*,<sup>9</sup> we can observe the most intimate relationship that exists between the shamanic cosmology and Taoist metaphysics. There one sees *sur le vif* how the mythical worldview represented by the former develops and is transformed into the ontology of the Way.

Another fact which seems to confirm the existence of a close relationship, both essential and historical, between the Taoist

metaphysics and the shamanic vision of the world is found in the history of Taoism after the Warring States period. In fact, the development of Taoism, after having reached its philosophical zenith with Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû, goes on steadily describing a curve of 'degeneration' — as it is generally called — even under a strong influence of the *Tao Tê Ching* and *Chuang-tzû*, and returns to its original mythopoeic form, revealing thereby its shamanic basis, until it reaches in the Later Han Dynasty a stage at which Taoism becomes almost synonymous with superstition, magic and witchcraft. The outward structure of Taoist metaphysics itself discloses almost no palpable trace of its shamanic background, but in the From Mythopoeisis to Metaphysics [303] philosophical description of the tao by Lao-tzû, for instance, there is undeniably something uncanny and uncouth that would seem to be indicative of its original connection with shamanism.

Lao-tzû depicts, as we shall see later in more detail, the Way (*tao*) as Something shadowy and dark, prior to the existence of Heaven and Earth, unknown and unknowable, impenetrable and intangible to the degree of only being properly described as Non-Being, and yet pregnant with forms, images and things, which lie latent in the midst of its primordial obscurity. The metaphysical Way thus depicted has an interesting counterpart in the popular mythopoeic imagination as represented by *Shan Hai Ching*,<sup>10</sup> in which it appears in a fantastic form.

Three hundred and fifty miles further to the West there is a mountain called Heaven Mountain. The mountain produces much gold and jade. It produces also blue sulphide. And the River Ying takes its rise therefrom and wanders southwestward until it runs into the Valley of Boiling Water. Now in this mountain there lives a Divine Bird whose body is like a yellow sack, red as burning fire, who has six legs and four wings. It is strangely amorphous, having no face, no eyes, but it is very good at singing and dancing. In reality, this Bird is no other than the god Chiang.

In the passage here quoted, two things attract our attention. One is the fact that the monster-bird is described as being good at singing and dancing. The relevance of this point to the particular problem we are now discussing will immediately be understood if one remembers that 'singing and dancing', i.e., ritual dance, invariably accompanies the phenomenon of shamanism. Dancing in ancient China was a powerful means of seeking for the divine Will, of inducing the state of ecstasy in men, and of 'calling down' spirits from the invisible world. The above-mentioned dictionary, *Shuo Wên*, defines the word *wu* (shaman) as 'a woman who is



naturally fit for serving the formless (i.e., invisible beings) and who, by means of dancing call down spirits'.<sup>11</sup> It is interesting that the same dictionary explains the character itself which represents this word, ( ), by saying that it pictures a woman dancing with two long sleeves hanging down on the right and the left. In the still earlier stage of its development,<sup>12</sup> it represents the figure of a shaman holding up jade with two hands in front of a spirit or god.

It is also significant that the monster is said to be a bird, which is most probably an indication that the shamanic dancing here in question was some kind of feather-dance in which the shaman was ritually ornamented with a feathered headdress.

The second point to be noticed in the above-given passage from the *Shan Hai Ching* — and this point is of far greater relevance to the [304] present study than the first — is the particular expression used in the description of the monster's visage, *hun tun*,<sup>13</sup> which I have provisionally translated above as 'strangely amorphous'. It means a chaotic state of things, an amorphous state where nothing is clearly delineated, nothing is clearly distinguishable, but which is far from being sheer non-being; it is, on the contrary, an extremely obscure 'presence' in which the existence of something — or some things, still undifferentiated — is vaguely and dimly sensed.

The relation between this word as used in this passage and Chuang-tzû's allegory of the divine Emperor *Hun Tun* has been noticed long ago by philologists of the Ch'ing dynasty. The commentator of the *Shan Hai Ching*, Pi Yüan, for instance, explicitly connects this description of the monster with the featureless face of the Emperor Hun Tun.

The allegory given by Chuang-tzû reads as follows:<sup>14</sup>

The Emperor of the South Sea was called Shu, the Emperor of the North Sea was called Hu,<sup>15</sup> and the Emperor of the central domain was called Hun Tun.<sup>16</sup> Once, Shu and Hu met in the domain of Hun Tun, who treated both of them very well. Thereupon, Shu and Hu deliberated together over the way in which they might possibly repay his goodness.

'All men', they said, 'are possessed of seven orifices for seeing, hearing, eating, and breathing. But this one (i.e., Hun Tun) alone does not possess any (orifice). Come, let us bore some for him.' They went on boring one orifice every day, until on the seventh day Hun Tun died.

This story describes in symbolic terms the destructive effect exercised by the essentialist type of philosophy on the Reality. It is a merciless denunciation of this type of philosophy on behalf of a

peculiar form of existentialist philosophy which, as we shall see later, Chuang-tzû was eager to uphold. Shu and Hu, symbolizing the precariousness of human existence, met in the central domain of Hun Tun; they were very kindly treated and they became happy for a brief period of time as their names themselves indicate. This event would seem to symbolize the human intellect stepping into the domain of the supra-sensible world of 'un-differentiation', the Absolute, and finding a momentary felicity there — the ecstasy of a mystical intuition of Being, which, regrettably, lasts but for a short time. Encouraged by this experience, the human intellect, or Reason, tries to bore holes in the Absolute, that is to say, tries to mark distinctions and bring out to actuality all the forms that have remained latent in the original undifferentiation. The result of 'boring' is nothing but the philosophy of Names (*ming*) as represented by Confucius and his school, an essentialist philosophy, where all things are clearly marked, delineated, and sharply distinguished from one another on the ontological level of essences. But the moment orifices were bored in Hun Tun's face, he died. This means that the Absolute can be brought into the grasp of Reason by 'essential' distinctions being made in the reality of the Absolute, and becomes thereby something understandable; but the moment it becomes understandable to Reason, the Absolute dies.

It is not time yet for us to go into the details of the existentialist position taken by Chuang-tzû. I simply wanted to show by this example how closely the shamanic mythopoeic imagination was originally related with the birth of Taoist philosophy, and yet, at the same time, how far removed the latter was in its philosophical import from the former.

This sense of distance between shamanism and philosophy may be alleviated to a considerable extent if we place between the two terms of the relation the cosmogonical story — a product of the same mythopoeic mentality — which purports to explain how Heaven and Earth came into being. It is not exactly a 'story'; it is a 'theory' and is meant to be one. It is a result of a serious attempt to describe and explain theoretically the very origin of the world of Being and the process by which all things in the world have come to acquire the forms with which we are now familiar. The cosmogony constitutes in this sense the middle term — structurally, if not historically — between the crude shamanic myth and the highly developed metaphysics of the Way.

Here we give in translation the cosmogony as formulated in the above-mentioned *Huai Nan Tzû*:<sup>17</sup>

Heaven and Earth had no form yet. It was a state of formless fluidity; nothing stable, nothing definite. This state is called the Great Beginning. The Great Beginning produced<sup>18</sup> a spotless void. The spotless void produced the Cosmos. The Cosmos produced (the all-pervading) vital energy.<sup>19</sup> The vital energy had in itself distinctions. That which was limpid and light went up hovering in thin layers to form Heaven, while that which was heavy and turbid coagulated and became Earth. The coming together of limpid and fine elements is naturally easy, while the coagulation of heavy and turbid elements is difficult to occur. For this reason, Heaven was the first to be formed, then Earth became established.

Heaven and Earth gathered together the finer elements of their vital energy to form the principles of Negative (*Yin*) and Positive (*Yang*), and the Negative and Positive gathered together the finer elements of their vital energy to constitute the four seasons. The four seasons scattered their vital energy to bring into being the ten thousand things. The calorific energy of the Positive principle, having been accumulated, gave birth to fire, and the essence of the energy of fire became the sun. The energy of coldness peculiar to the Negative principle, having been accumulated became water, and the essence of [306] the energy of water became the moon. The overflow of the sun and the moon, having become refined, turned into stars and planets. Heaven received the sun, moon, stars, and planets. Earth received water, puddles, dust, and soil.

In the passage here quoted we encounter again that undifferentiated, featureless Something, the primordial Chaos, this time as a cosmogonic principle or the Great Beginning, representing the state of affairs before the creation of the world. The Great Beginning is certainly different from the mythical monster of the *Shan Hai Ching* and the metaphysical principle of the *Tao Tê Ching*. But it is evident at the same time that these three are but different 'phenomena' of one and the same thing.

Similarly in a different passage<sup>20</sup> in the same book we read:

Long long ago, when Heaven and Earth were still non-existent, there were no definite figures, no definite forms. Mysteriously profound, opaque and dark: nothing was distinguishable, nothing was fathomable; limitlessly remote, vast and void; nobody would have discerned its gate.

Then there were born together two divinities, and they began to rule Heaven and to govern Earth. Infinitely deep (was Heaven), and no one knew where it came to a limit. Vastly extensive (was Earth), and no one knew where it ceased.

Thereupon (Being) divided itself into the Negative and the Positive, which, then, separated into the eight cardinal directions.

The hard and the soft complemented each other, and as a result the ten thousand things acquired their definite forms. The gross and confused elements of the vital energy produced animals (including beasts, birds, reptiles and fish). The finer vital energy produced man. This is the reason why the spiritual properly belongs to Heaven, while the bodily belongs to Earth.

Historically speaking, his and similar cosmogonical theories seem to have been considerably influenced by Taoism and its metaphysics. Structurally, however, they furnish a connecting link between myth and philosophy, pertaining as they do to both of them and yet differing from them in spirit and structure. The cosmogony discloses to our eyes in this sense the mythopoeic background of the metaphysics of the Way as formulated by Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû.

In a similar fashion, we can bring to light the subjective — i.e., epistemological — aspect of the relationship between shamanism and Taoist philosophy by comparing the above-mentioned *Elegies of Ch'u* and the books of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû. The possibility of obtaining an interesting result from a comparative study of Ch'ü Yüan, the great shaman-poet of the state of Ch'u, and the [307] philosophers of Taoism was noted long ago by Henri Maspero,<sup>21</sup> although death prevented him from fully developing his ideas.

In the *Li Sao*,<sup>22</sup> and the *Yüan Yu*,<sup>23</sup> the shaman-poet describes in detail the process of visionary states through which a soul in an ecstatic state, helped and assisted by various gods and spirits, ascends to the heavenly city where the 'eternal beings' live. This is in reality nothing but a description of a shamanic *unio mystica*. And the shamanic ascension is paralleled by a visionary ascension of a similar structure in the *Chuang-tzû*, the only essential difference between the two being that in the latter case the experience of the spiritual journey is refined and elaborated into the form of a metaphysical contemplation. Just as the shaman-poet experiences in his ecstatic oblivion of the ego a kind of immortality and eternity, so the Taoist philosopher experiences immortality and 'long life' in the midst of the eternal Way, by being unified with it. It is interesting to notice in this respect that the poet says in the final stage of his spiritual experience that he transcends the Non-Doing,<sup>24</sup> reaches the primordial Purity, and stands side by side with the Great Beginning'.<sup>25</sup> In Taoist

terminology, we would say that the poet at this stage 'stands side by side with the Way', that is, 'is completely unified with the Way', there being no discrepancy between them.

In the *Li Sao* the poet does not ascend to such a height. Standing on the basic assumption that both the *Li Sao* and *Yüan Yu* are authentic works of Ch'ü Yüan, Maspero remarks that the *Li Sao* represents an earlier stage in the spiritual development of the poet, at which he, as a shaman, has not yet attained to the final goal, whereas the *Yüan Yu* represents a later stage at which the poet 'has already reached the extremity of mysticism'.

Such an interpretation is of course untenable if we know for certain that the *Yüan Yu* is a work composed by a later poet and surreptitiously attributed to Ch'ü Yüan. In any case, the poem in its actual form is markedly Taoistic, and some of the ideas are undeniably borrowings from Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû. Here again, however, the problem of authenticity is by no means a matter of primary importance to us. For even if we admit that the poem — or some parts of — it is a Han Dynasty forgery, it remains true that the very fact that Taoist metaphysics could be so naturally transformed — or brought back — into a shamanic world-vision is itself a proof of a real congeniality that existed between shamanism and Taoism.

A detailed analytic comparison between the *Elegies of Ch'u* and the books of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû is sure to make an extremely fruitful and rewarding work. But to do so will take us too far afield beyond the main topic of the present study. Besides, we are going to describe in detail in the first chapters of this book the philosophical [308] version of the spiritual journey which has just been mentioned. And this must suffice us for our present purposes.

Let us now leave the problem of the shamanic origin of Taoism, and turn to the purely philosophical aspects of the latter. Our main concern will henceforward be exclusively with the actual structure of Taoist metaphysics and its key-concepts.

Notes

1. ()

2. ()

3. (), i.e., a man who has attained to the furthest limit (of perfection).

4. (). We may note that this and the preceding words all refer to one and the same concept which is the Taoist counterpart of the concept of *insân kâmil* or the Perfect Man, which we discussed in the first part of this study.

5. ()

6. Reference has been made in the preceding chapter to the possible historical connection between the Yin dynasty and the spirit of the state of Ch'u.
7. For more details about the problem of the shaman (()) *wu* representing the highest administrative power in the non-secularized state in ancient China, see for example Liang Ch'i Chao: *A History of Political Thought in the Periods Prior to Me Ch'in Dynasty* (), 1923, Shanghai, Ch. II.
8. I would refer the reader to Mircea Eliade's basic work: Shamanism, *Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, English tr., London, 1964.
9. (), an eclectic work compiled by thinkers of various schools who were gathered by the king of Huai Nan, Liu An (), at his court, in the second century B.C. The book is of an eclectic nature, but its basic thought is that of the Taoist school.
10. (), one of the most important source-books for Chinese mythology, giving a detailed description of all kinds of mythological monsters living in mountains and seas. The following quotation is taken from a new edition of the book, (), with a commentary by Pi Yüan of the Ch'ing dynasty, Tai Pei, 1945, p. 57.
11. ()
12. The character () as it appears in the oracle-bones is: () or ().
13. aie. The word is written in the Chuang-tzû ().
14. Chapter VII entitled 'Fit to be Emperors and Kings', p. 309.
15. Both shu () and hu () literally mean a brief span of time, symbolizing in this allegory the precariousness of existence.
16. Important to note is the fact that *hun tun*, the 'undifferentiation' is placed in the center. It means that *hun tun* represents the true 'reality' of Being, bordering on both sides on 'precariousness'. The philosophical implication of all this will be elucidated in a later chapter.
17. () III, Tien Wên ()
18. The received text as it stands is apparently unintelligible. Following the emendation suggested by Wang Yin Chih ( ) I read: ().
19. The 'all-pervading vital energy' is a clumsy translation of the Chinese word () which plays an exceedingly important rôle in the history of Chinese thought. It is a 'reality', proto-material and formless, which cannot be grasped by the senses. It is a kind of vital force, a creative principle of all things; it pervades the whole world, and being immanent in everything, molds it and makes it grow into what it really is. Everything that has a 'form', whether animale or inanimate, has a share in the ch'i. The concept of ch'i has been studied by many scholars. As one of the most detailed analytic studies of it we may mention Teikichi Hiraoka: *A Study of Ch'i in Huai Nan Tzû* (), Tokyo 1969.
20. *ibid.*, VII, ()
21. *ibid.*, III.
22. ()
23. () Many scholars entertain serious doubts - with reason, I think - as to the authenticity of this important and interesting work. Most probably it is a product of the Han Dynasty (see ()), composed in the very atmosphere of a fully developed philosophy of Taoism.
24. *wu — wei* (), one of the key-terms of Taoist philosophy, which we shall analyze in a later passage. 'Non-Doing' means, in short, man's abandoning all artificial, unnatural effort to do something, and identifying himself completely with the activity of Nature which is nothing other than the spontaneous self-manifestation of the Way itself. Here the poet claims that at the final stage of his spiritual development he goes even beyond the level of 'non-activity' and of being one with Nature, and steps further into the very core of the

Way. In his consciousness - or in his 'non-consciousness', we should rather say - his is no longer a human being; he is deified.

25. ()

### III Dream and Reality

In the foregoing chapter we talked about the myth of Chaos, the primordial undifferentiation which preceded the beginning of the cosmos. In its original shamanic form, the figure of Chaos as a featureless monster looks very bizarre, primitive and grotesque. Symbolically, however, it is of profound importance, for the philosophical idea symbolized by it directly touches the core of the reality of Being.

In the view of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû, the reality of Being is Chaos. And therein lies the very gist of their ontology. But this proposition does not mean that the world we live in is simply chaotic and disorderly as an empirical fact. For the empirical world, as we daily observe it, is far from being as 'featureless' and 'amorphous' as the face of the bird-monster of the *Shan Hal Ching*. On the contrary, it is a world where we observe many things that are clearly distinguishable from one another, each having its peculiar 'name', and each being definitely delineated and determined. Everything therein has its own place; the things are neatly ordered in a hierarchy. We live in such a world, and do perceive our world in such a light. According to the Taoist philosophers, that precisely is the malady of our Reason. And it is difficult for an ordinary mind not to see the distinctions in the world. The world, in brief, is not chaotic.

It will be the first task of a Chuang-tzû to shatter to pieces these seemingly watertight compartments of Being, allowing us to have a glimpse into the fathomless depth of primeval Chaos. But this is not in any way an easy task. Chuang-tzi actually tries many different approaches. Probably the easiest of them all for us to understand is his attempt at the 'chaotification' — if we are allowed to coin such a word — of 'dream' and 'reality'. By a seemingly very simple descriptive and narrative language, he tries to raise us immediately to an ontological level where 'dream' and 'reality' cease to be distinguishable from each other, and merge together into something 'amorphous'.

The following is a very famous passage in the *Chuang-tzû*, in [311] which the sage tries to give us a glimpse of the 'chaotification' of things:<sup>2</sup>

Once, I, Chuang Chou,<sup>3</sup> dreamt that I was a butterfly. Flitting about at ease and to my heart's content, I was indeed a butterfly. Happy and cheerful, I had no consciousness of being Chou.



All of a sudden I awoke, and lo, I was Chou.

Did Chou dream that he was a butterfly? Or did the butterfly dream that it was Chou? How do I know? There is, however, undeniably a difference between Chou and a butterfly. This situation is what I would call the Transmutation of things.

The latter half of this passage touches upon the central theme of Chuang-tzû. In the kind of situation here described, he himself and the butterfly have become undistinguishable, each having lost his or its essential self-identity. And yet, he says, 'there is undeniably a difference between Chou and a butterfly'. This last statement refers to the situation of things in the phenomenal world, which man ordinarily calls 'reality'. On this level of existence, 'man' cannot be 'butterfly', and 'butterfly' cannot be 'man'. These two things which are thus definitely different and distinguishable from each other do lose their distinction on a certain level of human consciousness, and go into the state of undifferentiation — Chaos.

This ontological situation is called by Chuang-tzû the Transmutation of things, *wu hua*.<sup>4</sup> The *wu hua* is one of the most important key-terms of Chuang-tzû's philosophy. It will be dealt with in detail presently. Here I shall give in translation another passage in which the same concept is explained through similar images.<sup>5</sup>

A man drinks wine in a dream, and weeps and wails in the morning (when he awakes). A man weeps in a (sad) dream, but in the morning he goes joyously hunting. While he is dreaming he is not aware that he is dreaming; he even tries (in his dream) to interpret his dream. Only after he awakes from sleep does he realize that it was a dream. Likewise, only when one experiences a Great Awakening does one realize that all this<sup>6</sup> is but a Big Dream. But the stupid imagine that they are actually awake. Deceived by their petty intelligence,<sup>7</sup> they consider themselves smart enough to differentiate between what is noble and what is ignoble. How deep-rooted and irremediable their stupidity is!

In reality, however, both I and you are a dream. Nay, the very fact that I am telling you that you are dreaming is itself a dream!

This kind of statement is liable to be labeled bizarre sophistry. (But it looks so precisely because it reveals the Truth), and a great sage capable of penetrating its mystery is barely to be expected to appear in the world in ten thousand years.

The same idea is repeated in the following passage:<sup>8</sup> [312]

Suppose you dream that you are a bird. (In that state) you do soar up into the sky. Suppose you dream that you are a fish. You do go down deep into the pool. (While you are experiencing all this in your dream, what you experience is your 'reality'.) Judging by this, nobody can be sure whether we — you and I, who are actually engaged in conversation in this way — are awake or just dreaming.<sup>9</sup>

Such a view reduces the distinction between Me and Thee to a mere semblance, or at least it renders the distinction very doubtful and groundless.

Each one of us is convinced that 'this' is I (and consequently 'other than this' is You or He). On reflexion, however, how do I know for sure that this 'I' which I consider as 'I' is really my 'I'?<sup>10</sup>

Thus even my own 'ego' which I regard as the most solid and reliable core of existence, — and the only absolutely indubitable entity even when I doubt the existence of everything else, in the Cartesian sense — becomes transformed all of a sudden into something dreamlike and unreal.

Thus by what might seem 'bizarre sophistry' Chuang-tzû reduces everything to a Big Dream. This abrupt negation of 'reality' is but a first step into his philosophy, for his philosophy does have a positive side. But before disclosing the positive side — which our 'petty intelligence' can never hope to understand — he deals a mortal blow to this 'intelligence' and Reason by depriving them of the very ground on which they stand.

The world is a dream; that which we ordinarily consider solid 'reality' is a dream. Furthermore, the man who tells others that everything is a dream, and those who are listening to his teaching, are all part of a dream.

What does Chuang-tzû want to suggest by this? He wants to suggest that Reality in the real sense of the word is something totally different from what Reason regards as 'reality'. In order to grasp the true meaning of this, our normal consciousness must first lose its self-identity. And together with the 'ego', all the objects of its perception and intellection must also lose their self-identities and be brought into a state of confusion which we called above the primordial Chaos<sup>12</sup>. This latter is an ontological level at which 'dream' and 'reality' lose the essential distinction between them, at which the significance itself of such distinctions is lost.

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12 [NDE DT: confirmation scientifique, mais pas du » chaos », simplement de nos limites.]

On its subjective side, it is a state of consciousness in which nothing any longer remains 'itself', and anything can be anything else. It is an entirely new order of Being, where all beings, liberated from the shackles of their semantic determinations freely transform themselves into one another. This is what Chuang-tzi calls the Transmutation of things.

The Transmutation of things, as conceived by Chuang-tzû, must be understood in terms of two different points of reference. On the one hand, it designates a metaphysical situation in which all things are found to be 'transmutable' to one another, so much so that ultimately they become merged together into an absolute Unity. In this sense it transcends 'time »; it is a supra-temporal order of things. In the eye of one who has experienced the Great Awakening, all things are One; all things are the Reality itself. At the same time, however, this unique Reality discloses to his eye a kaleidoscopic view of infinitely various and variegated things which are 'essentially' different one from another, and the world of Being, in this aspect, is manifold and multiple. Those two aspects are to be reconciled with each other by our considering these 'things' as so many phenomenal forms of the absolute One. The 'unity of existence', thus understood, constitutes the very core of the philosophy of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû.

The same Transmutation can, on the other hand, be understood as a temporal process. And this is also actually done by Chuang-tzû. A thing, *a*, continues to subsist as *a* for some time; then, when the limit which has been naturally assigned to it comes,<sup>11</sup> it ceases to be *a* and becomes transmuted or transformed into another thing, *b*. From the viewpoint of supra-temporality, *a* and *b* are metaphysically one and the same thing, the difference between them being merely a matter of phenomenon. In this sense, even before *a* ceases to be *a* — that is, from the beginning — *a* is *b*, and *b* is *a*. There is, then, no question of a 'becoming' *b*, because *a*, by the very fact that it is *a*, is already *b*.<sup>13</sup>

From the second viewpoint, however, *a* is *a* and nothing else. And this *a* 'becomes', in a temporal process, something else, *b*. The former 'changes' into the latter. But here again we run into the same metaphysical Unity, by, so to speak, a roundabout way. For *a*, by 'becoming' and 'changing into' *b*, refers itself back to its own origin and source. The whole process constitutes an ontological circle, because through the very act of becoming *b*, *a* simply 'becomes' itself — only in a different form.

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13 [NDE DT vérifié mystiquement.]

Applied to the concepts of 'life' and 'death', such an idea naturally produces a peculiar Philosophy of Life, a basically optimistic view of human existence. It is 'optimistic' because it completely obliterates the very distinction between Life and Death. Viewed in this light, the so-called problem of Death turns out to be but a pseudo-problem.

Although it is thus a pseudo-problem from the point of view of those who have seen the Truth, Chuang-tzû often takes up this theme and develops his thought around it. Indeed, it is one of his most favorite topics. This is so because actually it is a problem, or the problem. Death, in particular, happens to be the most disquieting [314] problem for the ordinary mind. And a man's having overcome the existential *angoisse* of being faced constantly and at every moment with the horror of his own annihilation is the sign of his being at the stage of a 'true man'. Besides, since it happens to be such a vital problem, its solution is sure to bring home to the mind the significance of the concept of Transmutation. Otherwise, everything else is exactly in the same ontological situation as Life and Death.

Now to go back to the point at which Chuang-tzû has reduced everything to a dreamlike mode of existence. Nothing in the world of Being is solidly self-subsistent. In scholastic terminology we might describe the situation by saying that nothing has — except in semblance and appearance — an unchangeable 'quiddity' or 'essence'. And in this fluid state of things, we are no longer sure of the self-identity of anything whatsoever. We never know whether a is really a itself.

And this essential dreamlike uncertainty of indetermination naturally holds true of Life and Death. The conceptual structure of this statement will easily be seen if one replaces the terms Life and Death by *a* and *b*, and tries to represent the whole situation in terms of the *a - b* pattern which has been given above.

Speaking of a 'true man' from the state of Lu, Chuang-tzû says:

He does not care to know why he lives. Nor does he care to know why he dies. He does not even know which comes first and which comes last. (i.e., Life and Death are in his mind undifferentiated from each other, the distinction between them being insignificant). Following the natural course of Transmutation he has become a certain thing; now he is simply awaiting further Transmutation.

Besides, when a man is undergoing Transmutation, how can he be sure that he is (in reality) not being transmuted? And when

he is not undergoing Transmutation, how can he be sure that he has (in reality) not already been transmuted?<sup>12</sup>

In a similar passage concerned with the problem of Death and the proper attitude of 'true men' toward it, Chuang-tzû lets Confucius make the following statement.<sup>13</sup> Confucius here, needless to say, is a fictitious figure having nothing to do with the historical person, but there is of course a touch of irony in the very fact that Confucius is made to make such a remark.

They (i.e., the 'true men') are those who freely wander beyond the boundaries (i.e., the ordinary norms of proper behavior), while men like myself are those who wander freely only within the boundaries. 'Beyond the boundaries' and 'within the boundaries' are poles asunder from one another. [315]

They are those who, being completely unified with the Creator Himself, take delight in being in the realm of the original Unity of the vital energy<sup>14</sup> before it is divided into Heaven and Earth.

To their minds Life (or Birth) is just the growth of an excrescence, a wart, and Death is the breaking of a boil, the bursting of a tumor. Such being the case, how should we expect them to care about the question as to which is better and which is worse — Life or Death? They simply borrow different elements, and put them together in the common form of a body.<sup>15</sup> Hence they are conscious neither of their liver nor of their gall, and they leave aside their ears and eyes.<sup>16</sup> Abandoning themselves to infinitely recurrent waves of Ending and Beginning, they go on revolving in a circle, of which they know neither the beginning-point nor the ending-point.

For Chuang-tzû Death is nothing but one of the endlessly variegated phenomenal forms of one eternal Reality. To our mind's eye this metaphysical Reality actualizes itself and develops itself as a process evolving in time. But even when conceived in such a temporal form, the process depicts only an eternally revolving circle, of which no one knows the real beginning and the real end. Death is but a stage in this circle. When it occurs, one particular phenomenal form is effaced from the circle and disappears only to reappear as an entirely different phenomenal form. Nature continuously makes and unmakes. But the circle itself, that is, Reality itself is always there unchanged and unperturbed. Being one with Reality, the mind of a 'true man' never becomes perturbed.

A 'true man', Chuang-tzû related,<sup>17</sup> saw his own body hideously deformed in the last days of his Life. He hobbled to a well, looked at his image reflected in the water and said, 'Alas! That the Creator

has made me so crooked and deformed!' Thereupon a friend of his asked him, 'Do you resent your condition?' Here is the answer that the dying 'true man' gave to this question:

No, why should I resent it? It may be that the process of Transmutation will change my left arm into a rooster. I would, then, simply use it to crow to tell the coming of the morning. It may be that the process goes on and might change my right arm into a crossbow. I would, then, simply use it to shoot down a bird for roasting. It may be that the process will change my buttocks into a wheel and my spirit into a horse. I would, then, simply ride in the carnage. I would not have even to put another horse to it.

Whatever we obtain (i.e., being born into this world in a particular form) is due to the coming of the time. Whatever we lose (i.e., death) is also due to the arrival of the turn. We must be content with the 'time' and accept the 'turn'. Then neither sorrow nor joy will ever creep in. Such an attitude used to be called among the Ancients 'loosing the tie'.<sup>18</sup> If man cannot loose himself from the tie, it is because 'things' bind him fast.

[316]

Another 'true man' had a visit in his last moments from one of his friends, who was also a 'true man'. The conversation between them as related by Chuang-tzû<sup>19</sup> is interesting. The visitor seeing the wife and children who stood around the man on the deathbed weeping and wailing, said to them, 'Hush! Get away! Do not disturb him as he is passing through the process of Transmutation!'

Then turning to the dying man, he said:

How great the Creator is! What is he going to make of you now? Whither is he going to take you? Is he going to make of you a rat's liver? Or is he going to make of you an insect's arm?'

To this the dying man replies:

(No matter what the Creator makes of me, I accept the situation and follow his command.) Don't you see? In the relationship between a son and his parents, the son goes wherever they command him to go, east, west, south, or north. But the relation between the Yin-Yang (i.e., the Law regulating the cosmic process of Becoming) and a man is incomparably closer than the relation between him and his parents. Now they (the Yin and Yang) have brought me to the verge of death. Should I refuse to submit to them, it would simply be an act of obstinacy on my part .

Suppose here is a great master smith, casting metal. If the metal should jump up and begin to shout, 'I must be made into

a sword like Mo Yeh,<sup>20</sup> nothing else!' The smith would surely regard the metal as something very evil. (The same would be true of) a man who, on the ground that he has by chance assumed a human form, should insist and say: 'I want to be a man, only man! Nothing else!' The Creator would surely regard him as of a very evil nature.

Just imagine the whole world as a big furnace, and the Creator as a master smith. Wherever we may go, everything will be all right. Calmly we will go to sleep (i.e., die), and suddenly we will find ourselves awake (in a new form of existence).

The concept of the Transmutation of things as conceived by Chuang-tzû. might seem to resemble the doctrine of 'transmigration'. But the resemblance is only superficial. Chuang-tzû does not say that the soul goes on transmigrating from one body to another. The gist of his thought on this point is that everything is a phenomenal form of one unique Reality which goes on assuming successively different forms of self-manifestation<sup>14</sup>. Besides, as we have seen before, his temporal process itself is but a phenomenon. Properly speaking, all this is something taking place on an eternal, a-temporal level of Being. All things are one eternally, beyond Time and Space. [317]

1. We may do well to recall at this stage a chapter in the first part of the present study, where we took the undifferentiation or indistinction between 'dream' and 'reality' as our starting-point for going into the metaphysical world of Ibn 'Arabi. There Ibn 'Arabi speaks of the ontological level of 'images' and 'similitudes'. Chuang-tzû, as we shall see presently, uses a different set of concepts for interpreting his basic vision. But the visions themselves of these two thinkers are surprisingly similar to each other.

2. II p. 112. The heading itself of this Chapter, ch'i wu ( ), is quite significant in this respect, meaning as it does 'equalization of things'.

3. ( ), the real name of Chuang-tzû.

4. ( ), meaning literally: 'things-transform'

5. II., pp. 104-105.

6. i.e., everything that one experiences in this world of so-called 'reality'. 'Great Awakening': *ta chieh* ( )

7. i.e., being unaware of the fact that 'life' itself, the 'reality' itself is but a dream.

8. VI., p. 275.

9. i.e., it may very well be that somebody — or something — is dreaming that he (or it) is a man, and thinks in the dream that he is talking with somebody else.

10. *ibid.*

11. This problem will be dealt with in detail in a later chapter which will be devoted to the problem of determinism and freedom in the world-view of Taoism.

12. The meaning of this sentence can, I think, be paraphrased as follows. It may well be that 'being transmuted' (for example, from Life to Death, i.e., 'to die') is in reality 'not to be transmuted' (i.e., » not to die). Likewise nobody knows for sure whether by 'not being

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14 [NDE : la différence +]

transmuted' (i.e., remaining alive without dying) he has already been transmuted (i.e., is already dead). The original sentence runs: (). Kuo Hsiang in his commentary — which happens to be the oldest commentary now in existence — explains it by saying: (), meaning; 'Once transmuted into a living being, how can a man know the state of affairs which preceded his birth? And while he is not yet transmuted and is not yet dead, how can he know the state of affairs that will come after death?' I mention this point because many people follow Kuo Hsiang's interpretation in understanding the present passage. (VI, p. 274).

13. VI, pp. 267-268.

14. i.e., the primordial cosmic energy which, as we saw in the last chapter, is thought to have existed before the creation of the world. It refers to the cosmogonic state in which neither Heaven and Earth nor the Negative and the Positive were yet divided. Philosophically it means the metaphysical One in its pure state of Unity.

15. According to their view, human existence is nothing but a provisional phenomenal form composed by different elements (i.e., four basic elements: earth, air, water and fire) which by chance have been united in the physical form of a body.

16. They do not pay any attention to their physical existence.

17. VI, pp. 259-260.

18. Hsien chieh (), 'loosing the tie', i.e., an absolute freedom.

19. *ibid.* p. 261-262.

20. A noted sword made in the state of Wu () in the sixth century B.C.

## IV Beyond This and That

We have seen in the last pages of the preceding chapter how Chuang-tzû obliterates the distinction or opposition between Life and Death and brings them back to the original state of 'undifferentiation' We have spent some time on the subject because it is one of Chuang-tzû's favorite topics, and also because it discloses to our eyes an important aspect of his philosophy.

Properly speaking, however, and from an ontological point of view, Life and Death should not occupy such a privileged place. For all so-called 'opposites' are not, in Chuang-tzû's philosophy, really opposed to each other. In fact, nothing, in his view, is opposed to anything else, because nothing has a firmly established 'essence' in its ontological core. In the eye of a man who has ever experienced the 'chaotification' of things, everything loses its solid contour, being deprived of its 'essential' foundation. All ontological distinctions between things become dim, obscure, and confused, if not completely destroyed. The distinctions are certainly still there. but they are no longer significant, 'essential'. And 'opposites' are no longer 'opposites' except conceptually. 'Beautiful and 'ugly', 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and wrong', 'pious' and 'impious' —all these and other conceptual pairs which are



sharply distinguished, at the level of Reason, and which actually play a leading rôle in human life, are found to be far from being absolute.

This attitude of Chuang-tzû toward the 'opposites' and 'distinctions' which are generally accepted as cultural, esthetic, or ethical 'values', would appear to be neither more nor less Chan so-called relativism. The same is true of Lao-tzû's attitude. And, in fact, it is a relativist view of values. It is of the utmost importance, however, to keep in mind that it is not an ordinary sort of relativism as understood on the empirical or pragmatic level of social life. It is a peculiar kind of relativism based on a very peculiar kind of mystical intuition: a mystical intuition of the Unity and Multiplicity of existence. It is a philosophy of 'undifferentiation' which is a natural product of a metaphysical experience of Reality, an experience in [320] which Reality is directly witnessed as it unfolds and diversifies itself into myriads of things and then goes back again to the original Unity.

This 'metaphysical' basis of Taoist relativism will be dealt with in detail in the following chapter. Here we shall confine ourselves to the 'relativist' side of this philosophy, and try to pursue Chuang-tzû and Lao-tzû as closely as possible as they go on developing their ideas on this particular aspect of the problem.

As I have just pointed out, the attitude of both Chuang-tzû and Lao-tzû toward the so-called cultural values would on its surface appear to be nothing other than 'relativism' in the commonly accepted sense of the term. Let us first examine this point by quoting a few appropriate passages from the two books. Even at this pre-liminary stage of analysis, we shall clearly observe that this relativism is directed against the 'essentialise position of the school of Confucius. In the last sentence of the following passage<sup>1</sup> there is an explicit reference to the Confucian standpoint.

If a human being sleeps in a damp place, he will begin to suffer from backache, and finally will become half paralyzed. But is this true of a mudfish? If (a human being) lives in a tree, he will have to be constantly trembling from fear and be frightened. But is this true of a monkey? Now which of these three (i.e., man, mudfish and monkey) knows the (absolutely) right place to live?<sup>2</sup>

Men eat beef and pork; deer eat grass; centipedes find snakes delicious; kites and crows enjoy mice. Of these four which one knows the (absolutely) good caste?

A monkey finds its mate in a monkey; a deer mates with a deer. And mudfishes enjoy living with other fishes. Mao Ch'iang and

Li Chi<sup>3</sup> are regarded as ideally beautiful women by all men. And yet, if fish happen to see a beauty like them, they will dive deep in the water; birds will fly aloft; and deer will run away in all directions. Of these four, which one knows the (absolute) ideal of beauty?

These considerations lead me to conclude that the boundaries be-tween 'benevolence' (*jèn*) and 'righteousness' (*i*),<sup>4</sup> and the limits between 'right' and 'wrong' are (also) extremely uncertain and con-fused, so utterly and inextricably confused that we can never know how to discriminate (between what is absolutely right and what is absolutely wrong, etc.).

This kind of relativism is also found in the book of Lao-tzû. The underlying conception is exactly the same as in the book of Chuang-tzû; so also the reason for which he upholds such a view. As we shall see later, Lao-tzû, too, looks at the apparent distinctions, oppositions and contradictions from the point of view of the metaphysical One in which all things lose their sharp edges of conceptual discrimination and become blended and harmonized. [321] The only difference between Chuang-tzû and Lao-tzû in this respect is that the latter expresses himself in a very terse, concise, and apothegmatic form, while the former likes to develop his thought in exuberant imagery. Otherwise, the idea itself is common to both of them. In the first of the following quotations from the Tao Tê Ching, for instance, Lao-tzû implicitly criticizes the cultural essentialism of the Confucian school.<sup>5</sup>

Cast off Learning,<sup>6</sup> and there will be no worries. How much in fact, difference is there between 'yes, sir' and 'hum !'? Between 'good' and 'bad' what distinction is there? Whatever others respect I also must respect', (they say).

Oh, how far away I am from the common people (who adhere to such an idea). For (on such a principle) there will be abSolutely no limit to the vast field (of petty distinctions).

People tend to imagine, Lao-tzû says, that things are essentially distinguishable from one another, and the Confucians have built up an elaborate system of moral values precisely on the notion that everything is marked off from others by its own 'essence'. They seem to be convinced that these 'distinctions' are all permanent and unalterable. In reality, however, they are simply being deceived by the external and phenomenal aspects of Being. A man whose eyes are not veiled by this kind of deception sees the world of Being as a vast and limitless space where things merge into one another. This ontological state of things is nothing other than what Chuang-tzû calls Chaos. On the cultural level, such a view

naturally leads to relativism. Lao-tzû describes the latter in the following way:<sup>7</sup>

By the very fact that everybody in the world recognizes 'beautiful' as 'beautiful', the idea of 'ugly' comes into being. By the very fact that all men recognize 'good' as 'good', the idea of 'bad' comes into being. Exactly in the same way 'existence' and 'non-existence' give birth to one another; 'difficult' and 'easy' complement one another; 'long' and 'short' appear in contrast to one another; 'high' and 'low' incline toward each other; 'tone' and 'voice' keep harmony with one another; 'before' and 'behind' follow one another.

Everything, in short, is relative; nothing is absolute. We live in a world of relative distinctions and relative antitheses. But the majority of men do not realize that these are relative. They tend to think that a thing which they - or social convention - regard as 'beautiful' is by essence 'beautiful', thus regarding all those things that do not conform to a certain norm as 'ugly' by essence. By taking such an attitude they simply ignore the fact that the distinction between the two is merely a matter of viewpoint.

As I remarked earlier, such equalization of opposites surely is 'relativism', but it is a relativism based on, or stemming from, a very [322] remarkable intuition of the ontological structure of the world. The original intuition is common both to Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû. But with the latter, it leads to the 'chaotic' view of things, the essential 'undifferentiation' of things, which in its dynamic aspect is conceived as the Transmutation of things. In the case of Lao-tzû, the same intuition leads, in its dynamic aspect, to an ontology of evolvment and involvement, the static aspect of which is the relativism we have just discussed.

As Transmutation (*hua*) is the key-word of Chuang-tzû in this section of his philosophy, Return (*fan*<sup>8</sup> or *fu*<sup>9</sup>) is the key-term which Lao-tzû chooses as an appropriate expression for his idea.

On the cosmic significance of the Return as understood by Lao-tzû we shall have occasion to talk in a later context. Here we shall confine ourselves to considering this concept in so far as it has direct relevance to the problem of relativism.

The Return is a dynamic concept. It refers, in other words, to the dynamic aspect of the above-mentioned relativism of Lao-tzû, or the dynamic ontological basis on which it stands. He explicates this concept in a terse form in the following passage, which may in fact be considered an epitome of the whole of his ontology.<sup>10</sup>

Returning is how the Way moves, and being weak is how the Way works. The ten thousand things under heaven are born from Being, and Being is born from Non-Being.

It is to be remarked that there is in this passage a covert reference to two different meanings or aspects of 'returning' which Lao-tzû seems to recognize in the ontological structure of all things. The first meaning (or aspect) is suggested by the first sentence and the second meaning by the second sentence. The first sentence means that everything (*a*) that exists contains in itself a possibility or natural tendency to 'return', i.e., to be transformed into its opposite (*b*), which, of course, again contains the same possibility of 'returning' to its opposite, namely the original state from which it has come (*a*). Thus all things are constantly in the process of a circular movement, from *a* to *b*, and then from *b* to *a*. This is, Lao-tzû says, the rule of the ontological 'movement' (*tung*),<sup>11</sup> or the dynamic aspect of Reality. And he adds that 'weakness' is the way this movement is made by Reality.

The next sentence considers the dynamic structure of Reality as a vertical, metaphysical movement from the phenomenal Many to the pre-phenomenal One. Starting from the state of multiplicity in which all things are actualized and realized, it traces them back to their ultimate origin. The 'ten thousand things under heaven', i.e., all things in the world, come into actual being from the Way at its stage of 'existence'. But the stage of 'existence', which is nothing [323] other than a stage in the process of self-manifestation of the Way, comes into being from the stage of 'non-existence', which is the abysmal depth of the absolutely unknown-unknowable Way itself. It is to be observed that this 'tracing-back' of the myriad things to 'existence' and then to 'non-existence' is not only a conceptual process; it is, for Lao-tzû, primarily a cosmic process. All things ontologically 'return' to their ultimate source, undergoing on their way 'circular' transformations among themselves such as have been suggested by the first sentence. This cosmic return of all things to the ultimate origin will be a subject of discussion in a later chapter. Here we are concerned with the 'horizontal' Return of things as referred to in the first sentence, i.e., the process of reciprocal 'returning' between *a* and *b*. Lao-tzû has a peculiar way of expressing this idea as exemplified by the two following passages.

Misfortune is what good fortune rests upon and good fortune is what misfortune lurks in. (The two thus turn into one another indefinitely, so that) nobody knows the point where the process comes to an end. There seems to be no absolute norm. For

what is (considered) just 're-turns' to un just, and what is (considered) good 're-turns' to evil. Indeed man has long been in perplexity about this.<sup>12</sup>

The nature of things is such that he who goes in front ends by falling behind, and he who follows others ultimately finds himself in front of others. He who blows upon a thing to make it warm ends by making it cold, and he who blows upon a thing to make it cold finally makes it warm. He who tries to become strong becomes weak, and he who wants to remain weak turns strong. He who is safe falls into danger, while he who is in danger ends by becoming safe.<sup>13</sup>

Thus in the view of both Chuang-tzû and Lao-tzû, everything in the world is relative; nothing is absolutely reliable or stable in this sense. As I have indicated before, this 'relativism', in the case of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû, must be understood in a peculiar sense, namely, in the sense that nothing has what is called 'essence' or 'quiddity'.

All things, on the deeper level of Reality, are 'essence-less'. The world itself is 'chaotic'. This is not only true of the external world in which we exist, but is equally true of the world within us, the internal world of concepts and judgments. This is not hard to understand, because whatever judgment we may make on whatever thing we choose to talk about in this 'chaotic' world, our judgment is bound to be relative, one-sided, ambiguous, and unreliable, for the object of the judgment is itself ontologically relative.

The argument which Chuang-tzû puts forward on this point is logically very interesting and important. The Warring States period [324] witnessed a remarkable development of logico-semantic theories in China. In the days of Chuang-tzû, Confucians and Mohists<sup>4</sup> stood sharply opposed to each other, and these two schools were together opposed to the Dialecticians's (or Sophists) otherwise known as the school of Names<sup>16</sup>. Heated debates were being held among them about the foundation of human culture, its various phenomena, the basis of ethics, the logical structure of thought, etc., etc.. And it was a fashion to conduct discussions of this kind in a dialectical form. 'This is right' – « this is wrong » or « this is good » – this is bad', was the general formula by which these people discussed their problems.

Such a situation is simply ridiculous and all these discussions are futile from the point of view of a Chuang-tzû for whom Reality itself is 'chaotic'. The objects themselves about which these

people exchange heated words are essentially unstable and ambiguous. The Dialecticians 'are talking about the distinction between "hard" and "white", for example, as if these could be hung on different pegs.<sup>17</sup>

Not only that. Those who like to discuss in this way usually commit a fatal mistake by confusing 'having the best of an argument' with 'being objectively right', and 'being cornered in an argument' with 'being objectively wrong'. In reality, however, victory and defeat in a logical dispute in no way determines the 'right' and 'wrong' of an objective fact.

Suppose you and I enter into discussion. And suppose you beat me, and I cannot beat you. Does this mean that you are 'right' and that I am 'wrong'?

Suppose I beat you, instead, and you cannot beat me. Does this mean that I am 'right' and you are 'wrong'? Is it the case that when I am 'right' you are 'wrong', and when you are 'right' I am 'wrong'? Or are we both 'right' or both wrong'? It is not for me and you to decide. (What about asking some other person to judge?) But other people are in the same darkness. Whom shall we ask to give a fair judgment? Suppose we let someone who agrees with you judge. How could such a man give a fair judgment seeing that he shared from the beginning the same opinion with you? Suppose we let someone who agrees with me judge. How could he give a fair judgment, seeing that he shares from the beginning the same opinion with me?

What if we let someone judge who differs from both you and me? But he is from the beginning at variance with both of us. How could such a man give a fair judgment? (He would simply give a third opinion.) What if we let someone judge who agrees with both of us? But from the beginning he shares the same opinion with both of us. How could such a man give a fair judgment? (He would simply say that I am 'right', but you also are 'right' .)

From these considerations we must conclude that neither you nor I [325] nor the third person can know (where the truth lies). Shall we expect a fourth person to appear?<sup>18</sup>

How is this situation to be accounted for? Chuang-tzû answers that all this confusion originates in the natural tendency of the Reason to think everything in terms of the opposition of 'right' and 'wrong'. And this natural tendency of our Reason is based on, or a product of, an essentialist view of Being. The natural Reason is liable to think that a thing which is conventionally or subjectively 'right' is 'right' essentially, and that a thing which is 'wrong' is 'wrong' essentially. In truth, however, nothing is

essentially 'right' or 'wrong'. So-called 'right' and 'wrong' are all relative matters.

In accordance with this non-essentialist position, Chuang-tzû asserts that the only justifiable attitude for us to take is to know, first of all, the relativity of 'right' and 'wrong', and then to transcend this relativism itself into the stage of the 'equalization' of all things, a stage at which all things are essentially undifferentiated from one another, although they are, at a lower stage of reality, relatively different and distinct from each other. Such an attitude which is peculiar to the 'true man' is called by Chuang-tzû *t'ien ni* 19 (Heavenly Levelling), *t'ien chün* 20 (Heavenly Equalization), or *man yen* 21 (No-Limits).

'Right' is not 'right', and 'so' is not 'so'. If (what someone considers) 'right' were (absolutely) 'right', it would be (absolutely) different from what is not 'right' and there could be no place for discussion. And if 'so' were (absolutely) 'so', it would be (absolutely) different from 'not-so' and there could be no place for discussion.

Thus (in the endless chain of 'shifting theses'<sup>22</sup> (i.e., « right » --) 'not-right' --) 'right' --) 'not-right' . . . ), (theses and antitheses) depend upon one another. And (since this dependence makes the whole chain of mutually opposing theses and antitheses relative), we might as well regard them as not mutually opposing each other.

(In the presence of such a situation, the only attitude we can reasonably take) is to harmonize all these (theses and antitheses) in the Heavenly Levelling, and to bring (the endless oppositions among the existents) back to the state of No-Limits.<sup>23</sup>

'To bring back the myriad oppositions of things to the state of No-Limits' means to reduce all things that are 'essentially' distinguishable from each other to the original state of 'chaotic' Unity where there are no definite 'limits' or boundaries set among the things. On its subjective side, it is the position of abandoning all discriminatory judgments that one can make on the level of everyday Reason. Forgetting about passing judgments, whether implicit or explicit, on any thing, one should, Chuang-tzû emphasizes, put oneself in a mental state prior to all judgments, prior to all activity of Reason, in [326] which one would see things in their original — or 'Heavenly' as he says — 'essence-less' state.

But to achieve this is by no means an easy task. It requires the active functioning of a particular kind of metaphysical intuition, which Chuang-tzû calls *ming*,<sup>24</sup> 'illumination'. And this kind of illuminative intuition is not for everybody to enjoy. For just as there

are men who are physically blind and deaf, so there are also men who are spiritually blind and deaf. And unfortunately, in the world of Spirit the number of blind and deaf is far greater than that of those who are capable of seeing and hearing.

The blind cannot enjoy the sight of beautiful colors and patterns. The deaf cannot enjoy the sound of bells and drums. But do you think that blindness and deafness are confined to the bodily organs? No, they are found also in the domain of knowing.<sup>25</sup>

The structure of the *ming*, 'intuition', will be studied more closely in due course. Before we proceed to this problem, we shall quote one more passage in which Chuang-tzû develops his idea regarding the relative and conventional nature of ontological 'distinctions'. The passage will help to prepare the way for our discussion of the 'existentialist' position Chuang-tzû takes against the 'essentialist' view of Being.<sup>26</sup>

The nature of the things is such that nothing is unable to be 'that' (i.e., everything can be 'that') and nothing is unable to be 'this' (i.e., everything can be 'this').

We usually distinguish between 'this' and 'that' and think and talk about the things around us in terms of this basic opposition. What is 'this' is not 'that', and what is 'that' is not 'this'. The relation is basically that of 'I' and 'others', for the term 'this' refers to the former and the term 'that' is used in reference to the latter.

From the viewpoint of 'I', 'I' am 'this', and everything other than 'I' is 'that'. But from the viewpoint of 'others', the 'others' are 'this', and 'I' am 'that'. In this sense, everything can be said to be both 'this' and 'that'. Otherwise expressed, the distinction between 'this' and 'that' is purely relative.

From the standpoint of 'that' (alone) 'that' cannot appear (as « that »). It is only when I (i.e., 'this') know myself (as « this ») that it (i.e., « that ») comes to be known (as « that »).

'That' establishes itself as 'that' only when 'this' establishes itself and looks upon the former as its object, or as something other than 'this'. Only when we realize the fundamental relativity of 'this' and 'that' can we hope to have a real understanding of the structure of things. [327]

Of course the most important point is that this relativity should be understood through 'illumination'. The understanding of this ontological relativity by Reason — which is by no means a difficult thing to achieve — is useless except as a preparatory stage for an 'illuminative' grasp of the matter. It will be made clear in the



following chapter that 'relativity' does not exhaust the whole of, the ontological structure of things. 'Relativity' is but one aspect of it. For, in the view of Chuang-tzû, the ontological structure of things in its reality is that 'chaotic undifferentiation' to which reference has often been made in the foregoing. The 'chaotic undifferentiation' is something which stands far beyond the grasp of Reason. If, in spite of that, Reason persists in trying to understand it in its own way, the 'undifferentiation' comes into its grasp only in the form of 'relativity'. The 'relativity' of things represents, in other words, the original ontological 'undifferentiation' as brought down to the level of logical thinking. In the present chapter we are still on that level.

Hence it is held:<sup>27</sup> 'that' comes out of 'this', and 'this' depends upon 'that'. This doctrine is called the *Fang Shêng* theory,<sup>28</sup> the theory of 'mutual dependence'.

However (this reciprocal relation between 'this' and 'that' must be understood as a basic principle applicable to all things). Thus, since there is 'birth' there is 'death', and since there is 'cleath' there is 'birth'. Likewise, since there is 'Sood' there is 'not-good', and since there is 'not-good' there is 'good'.

Chuang-tzû means to say that the real Reality is the One which comprehends all these opposites in itself; that the division of this original One into 'life' and 'death', 'good' and 'bad', or 'right' and 'wrong' etc., is due to various points of view taken by men. In truth, everything in the world is 'good' from the point of view of a man who takes such a position. And there is nothing that cannot be regarded as 'not-good' from the point of view of a man who chooses to take such a position. The real Reality is something prior to this and similar divisions. It is something which is 'good' and 'not-good', and which is neither 'good' *nor* 'not-good'.

Thus it comes about that the 'sacred man'<sup>29</sup> does not base himself (upon any of these oppositions), but illuminates (everything) in the light of Heaven.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly, this (attitude of the 'sacred man') is also an attitude of a man who bases himself upon (what he considers) 'right'. But (since it is not the kind of 'right' which is opposed to 'wrong', but is an absolute, transcendental Right which comprises in itself all oppositions and contradictions as they are), 'this' is here the same as 'that', and 'that' is the same as 'this'. (It is a position which comprehends and transcends both 'right' and 'wrong', so that here) 'that' unifies 'right' and 'wrong', but 'this' also unifies 'right' and 'wrong'. [328]

(Viewed from such a standpoint) is there still a distinction between 'that' and 'this'? Or is there neither 'that' nor 'this' any

longer?<sup>31</sup> This stage at which each 'that' and 'this' has lost its companion to stand opposed to — this stage is to be considered the Hinge of the Way.

The hinge of a door can begin to function infinitely only when it is fitted into the middle of the socket. (In the same way, the Hinge of the Way can respond infinitely and freely to endlessly changing situations of the phenomenal world only when it is placed properly in the middle of the absolute One which transcends all phenomenal oppositions.) (In such a state) the 'right' is one uniform endlessness; the 'wrong' too is one uniform endlessness.

This is why I assert that nothing can be better than 'illumination'.

The absolute One is of course the Way which pervades the whole world of Being; rather it is the whole world of Being. As such it transcends all distinctions and oppositions. Thus from the point of view of the Way, there can be no distinction between 'true' and 'false'. But can human language properly cope with such a situation? No, at least not as long as language is used in the way it is actually used. 'Language', Chuang-tzù says, 'is different from the blowing of wind, for he who speaks is supposed to have a meaning to convey.'<sup>32</sup> However, language as it is actually used does not seem to convey any real meaning, for those people, particularly the Dialecticians, who are engaged in discussing 'this' being right and 'that' being wrong, or 'this' being good and 'that' being bad etc., are 'simply talking about objects which have no definitely fixed contents'.

Are they really saying something (meaningful)? Are they rather saying nothing?<sup>33</sup> They think that their speech is different from the chirpings of fledglings. But is there any difference? Or is there not any difference at all?

Where, indeed, is the Way hidden (for those people) that there should be 'true' and 'false'? Where is Language (in the true sense) hidden that there should be 'right' and 'wrong'? . . .

(The fact is that) the Way is concealed by petty virtues,<sup>34</sup> and Language is concealed by vainglories.<sup>35</sup> This is why we have the 'right' — 'wrong' discussions of the Confucians and the Mohists, the one party regarding as 'right' what the other party regards as 'wrong', and the one regarding as 'wrong' what the other regards as 'right'.

If we want to affirm (on a higher level) what both parties regard as 'wrong', and to deny what they regard as 'right', we have no better means than 'illumination'.<sup>36</sup>

Thus we see ourselves brought back again to the problem of 'illumination'. The passages here quoted have made it already

clear that the 'illumination' represents an 'absolute' standpoint which transcends all 'relative' standpoints. It is a state of mind which is above [329] and Beyond This and That

and beyond the distinctions between 'this' and 'that', 'I' and 'you'. But how can one attain to such a spiritual height, if in fact it really exists? What is the content and structure of this experience? These are the main problems that will occupy us in the following two chapters.

Notes

1. Chuang-tzû, 11, p. 93.

2. i.e. there is no 'absolutely' proper place; for each being, the place in which it lives customarily *is* the right place, but the latter is 'right' only in a relative sense.

3. Two women famous for their supreme beauty.

4. That these concepts, ( ) *jen* and ( ) *i* represented two of the most typical moral values for Confucius and his school was pointed out in Chap. I.

5. *Tao Tê Ching*, XX.

6. By Learning (hsüeh ( )) is meant the study of the meticulous rules of conduct and behavior - concerning, for instance, on what occasions and to whom one should use the formal and polite expression 'yes, sir' and when and to whom one should use the informal expression 'hum!' - the kind of learning which was so strongly advocated by the Confucian school under the name of Ceremonies (*li* ( )).

7. *op. cit.*, II.

8. ( )

9. ( ) *fu* (— *kuai*), lit. 'returning' - 'going-back'.

10. *op. cit.*, XL.

11. ( )

12. *op. cit.*, LVIII.

13. *ibid.*, XXIX. This part of Chap. XXIX is regarded by Kao Hêng (*op. cit.*) as an independent chapter. He remarks in addition that the passage is typical of 'Lao-tzû's relativism' ( ) p. 69. The last sentence of the passage quoted in its original form is ( ), which may be translated as 'a thing which one wants to crush (is not crushed), and a thing which one wants to destroy (is not destroyed).' But in the Ho Shang edition we find ( ) instead of ( ), which, as Yi Yûeh ( ) remarks, is probably the right reading.

14. The followers of Mo-tzû ( ).

15. *pien ché* ( )

16. *ming chia* ( )

17. Chuang-tzû, XII, p. 427, quote by Fung Yu Lang, *op. cit.*, I, p. 192. The reference is to the famous thesis put forward by the Dialectician Kung Sung Lung ( ), that a 'hard white stone' is in reality two things: a hard stone and a white stone, because 'hard' and 'white' are two entirely different attributes. The quoted sentence may also be translated: The distinction between 'hard' and 'white' is clearly visible as if they were hung on the celestial sphere.

18. II, p. 107.

19. ( ), *ní*, means usually 'boundary', 'division'. But here I follow the interpretation of Lu Shu Chih ( ) and Pan Ku ( ) (quoted by Lu Tê Ming in ( )) who makes it synonymous with ( )
20. ( )
21. ( ). The lexical meaning of this expression is difficult to ascertain. In translating it as 'without limits' I am simply following an old commentator ( ) quoted by ( ) in his ( ) who says ( ) (p. 109). The same word is used in Bk. XXVII. And in Bk. XVII it appears in the form of ( ) *fan yen* which obviously is the same as ( ) (a commentator spells it ( )) because the passage reads: 'From the point of view of the Way, what should we consider "precious" and what should we consider "despicable"?'
22. ( ) Cf. Kuo Hsiang's *Commentary* (p. 109): ( ) and Chia Shih Fu ( ).
23. Chuang-tzû, II, p. 108.
24. ( ). The term literally means 'bright' or 'luminous'. We may compare it with the Islamic notion of *ma'rifah* 'gnosis' as opposed to, and technically distinguished from, '*ilm*' (rational) knowledge'.
25. I, p. 30.
26. The passage is taken from II, p. 66. I shall divide it into a number of smaller sections and quote them one by one, each followed by a brief examination.
27. by the Dialectician ( ) Hui Shih.
28. ( ), more exactly the 'theory of *fang shêng fang ssî*' ( ), held by Hui Shih, meaning literally: the theory of 'life' giving birth to 'death' and 'death' giving birth to 'life'. See Chuang-tzû, XXXIII. For this particular meaning of the word *fang* ( ), see the *Shuo Wen* ( ): ( ) *fang* means (originally) two ships placed side by side with each other'.
29. *shêng jên* ( ), which is synonymous with 'true man' or 'divine man', i.e., the Perfect Man. The real meaning of the important word *shêng* has been elucidated earlier in its shamanic context; see Chapter II. The expression *shêng jên* is more often used by Lao-tzû than by Chuang-tzû.
30. *t'ien* ( ), meaning the great Way of Nature, the absolute standpoint of Being itself, which is, so to speak, a viewpoint transcending all viewpoints.
31. This is a peculiar expression which Chuang-tzû uses very often when he wants to deny something emphatically
32. ( ), II, p. 63.
33. See above, Note (31).
34. The 'petty virtues', ( ) - or more literally, 'small acquirements' - refer to the five cardinal virtues of the Confucians - Ch'êng Hsüan Yüing ( ).
35. i.e., the natural tendency of the human mind toward showing-off, which manifests itself typically in the form of discussions and debates.
36. *op. cit.*, II, p. 63.

## V The Birth of a New Ego

We have seen in what precedes how futile and absurd, in the view of Chuang-tzû, is the ordinary pattern of thinking typified by the this-is-'right'-and-that-is-'wrong' kind of discussion<sup>15</sup>. What is the source of all these futile verbalizations? Chuang-tzû thinks that it is to be found in the mistaken conviction of man about himself, namely, that he himself has (or is) an 'ego', a self-subsistent entity endowed with an absolute ontological independence. Man tends to forget that the 'ego' which he believes to be so independent and absolute is in reality something essentially relative and dependent. Relative to what? Relative to 'you' and 'them' and all other things that exist around himself. Dependent upon what? Dependent upon Something absolutely superior to himself, Something which Chuang-tzû calls the Creator, or more literally, the Maker-of-things.<sup>1</sup> Chuang-tzû describes this situation through a parable of Shadow and Penumbra'.<sup>2</sup>

Penumbra<sup>3</sup> once said to Shadow: 'I notice you sometimes walking, but next moment you are standing still. Sometimes I notice you sitting, but next moment you are standing up. Why are you so fickle and unstable?

Shadow replied: It seems to me that (in acting like this) I am simply dependent upon something (i.e., the body). But that upon which I depend seems to be acting as it does in dependency upon something else (i.e., the Creator). So all my activities in their dependency seem to be the same as the movements of the scales of a snake or the wings of a cicada.<sup>4</sup>

How should I know, then, why I act in this way, and why I do not act in that way?

Chuang-tzû deprives the 'ego' at a stroke of its seeming self-subsistence and self-sufficiency. But such a view goes naturally against the everyday belief and conviction of man about himself. For according to the everyday view of things the 'ego' is the very basis and the core of man's existence, without which he would lose his personality, his personal unity, and be nothing. The 'ego' is the point of co-ordination, the point of synthesis, at which all the disparate elements of his personality, whether physical or

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<sup>15</sup> [NDE la « mauvaise » théologie qui pour Chuang-tzû provient du dualisme.]

mental,

[333] become united. The 'ego' thus understood is called by Chuang-tzû the mind'.<sup>5</sup>

I think it proper to introduce at this point a pair of key terms which seem to have played a decisive rôle in the formation of the main lines of thought of Chuang-tzû concerning the nature of the mind: *tso ch' ih6* lit. 'sitting-galloping' and *tso wang7* lit. 'sitting-forgetting'.

The first of them, *tso ch'ih*, refers to the situation in which the mind of an ordinary person finds itself, in constant movement, going this way at this moment and that way at the next, in response to myriad impressions coming from outside to attract its attention and to rouse its curiosity, never ceasing, to stop and rest for a moment, even when the body is quietly seated. The body may be sitting still but the mind is running around. It is the human mind in such a state that the word *hsin* (Mind) designates in this context. It is the exact opposite of the mind in a state of calm peaceful concentration.

It is easy to understand conceptually this opposition of the two states of the mind, one 'galloping around' and the other 'sitting still and void'. But it is extremely difficult for ordinary men to free themselves actually from the dominance of the former and to realize in themselves the latter. But in truth, Chuang-tzû teaches, man himself is responsible for allowing the Mind to exercise such a tyrannical sway over him, for the tyranny of the Mind is nothing else than the tyranny of the 'ego' — that false 'ego' which, as we have seen above, he creates for himself as the ontological center of his personality. Chuang-tzû uses a characteristic expression for this basic situation of man: *shih hsin* or 'making the Mind one's own teacher'.<sup>8</sup>

The 'ego', thus understood, is man's own creation. But man clings to it, as if it were something objective, even absolute. He can never imagine himself existing without it, and so he cannot abandon it for a moment; thus he makes out of his Mind his venerated 'teacher'.

This Mind, on a more intellectual level, appears as Reason, the faculty of discursive thinking and reasoning. Sometimes Chuang-tzû calls it *ch'êng hsin* or 'finished mind'.<sup>9</sup> The 'finished mind' means the mind which has taken on a definitely fixed form, the

mind in a state of coagulation, so to speak. It is the Reason by whose guidance — here again we come across the expression: 'making the Mind the teacher' — man discriminates between things and passes judgments on them, saying this is 'right' and 'that is wrong', etc., and goes on falling ever deeper into the limitless swamp of absurdities.

Everybody follows his own 'finished mind' and venerates it as his own teacher. In this respect we might say no one lacks a teacher. Those who know the reality of the unceasingly changing phenomena and accept (this cosmic law of Transmutation) as their standard (of [334] judgment) are not the only people who have their teachers. (In the above-mentioned sense) even an idiot has his own teacher. It is impossible for a man to insist on the distinction between 'right' and 'wrong' without having a 'finished mind'. This is as impossible as a man departing (from a northern country) today and arriving in the country of Yüeh (in the southern limit of China) yesterday!<sup>10</sup>

Thus we see that all the pseudo-problems concerning the 'right' and 'wrong' or 'good' and 'bad', whose real nature was disclosed in the preceding chapter, arise from man's exercising his own 'finished mind'. The Mind, according to Chuang-tzû, is the source and origin of all human follies.

This idea of the Mind is shared by Lao-tzû, although his approach is a little different from Chuang-tzû's. That the idea itself is basically the same will immediately be perceived if one reads carefully, for example, Ch. XLIX of the *Tao Tê Ching*. Interestingly enough, Lao-tzû in this passage uses the term *ch'ang* i.e., 'constant or unchangeable mind'. The term reminds us of Chuang-tzû's *ch'êng hsín* 'finished mind'. By *ch'ang hsín* Lao-tzû designates a rigidly fixed state of mind deprived of all natural flexibility, or as he likes to say, the state of the mind that has lost the natural 'softness' of an infant. As the passage quoted shows, this unnatural rigidity of the mind is typically manifested in the distinguishing and discriminating activity of the mind which perceives everywhere 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong' and regards these categories as something objective and absolute.

For Lao-tzû, it is not simply a matter of one's becoming partial, prejudiced, and bigoted. In his view the exercise of this function of the mind affects the very core of human existence. It is a question of the existential crisis of man. Man stands in a woeful predicament because he is — almost by nature, one would say — so made that he directs the activity of his mind toward distinguishing and discriminating things from one another.

The 'sacred man' has no rigidly fixed mind of his own. He makes the minds of all people his mind.<sup>12</sup> (His principle is represented by the dictum): 'Those who are good I treat as good. But even those who are not good I also treat as good. (Such an attitude I take) because the original nature of man is goodness. Those who are faithful I treat as faithful. But even those who are not faithful I also treat as faithful. (Such an attitude I take) because the original nature of man is faithfulness.'

Thus the 'sacred man', while he lives in this world, keeps his mind wide open and 'chaotifies'<sup>13</sup> his own mind toward all.

The ordinary men strain their eyes and ears (in order to distinguish between things). The 'sacred man', on the contrary, keeps his eyes and ears (free) like an infant.<sup>14</sup>

[335] Lao-tzû sometimes uses the word *chih*<sup>5</sup>, 'knowing', to designate the discriminating activity of the mind here in question. But caution is needed in understanding this word, because for Lao-tzû it is not the 'act of knowing' itself that is blameful; its blamefulness is conditioned by the particular way in which 'knowing' is exercised and by the particular objects toward which it is directed.

The kind of 'knowing' which is wrong in the eyes of Lao-tzû is the same distinguishing and discriminating activity of intelligence as the one which we have seen is so bitterly denounced by Chuang-tzû. Unlike Chuang-tzû, however, who develops this idea on a logical level as a problem of dialectics, taking his examples from the discussions on 'right' and 'wrong' as he observes them among the Dialecticians of his day, Lao-tzû is prone to consider the disastrous effects of this type of 'knowing' on a more practical level. He draws attention to the evaluational attitude which is the most immediate result of the 'distinguishing' activity of the mind. Here the 'this-is-right-and-that-is-' wrong' is not a logical problem. It is a matter of practical evaluation. And as such it is directly connected with the concrete facts of life. 'Knowing' understood in this sense, is denounced because it disturbs the minds of the people in an unnecessary and wrong way. And the disturbance of the mind by the perception of values, positive and negative, is regarded by Lao-tzû as wrong and detrimental to human existence because it tempts it away from its real nature, and ultimately from the Way itself. In the following passage,<sup>16</sup> the word *chih* 'knowing', is evidently used in this sense.

If (the ruler) does not hold the (so-called) wise men in high esteem, the people will (naturally) be kept away from vain emulation. If (the ruler) does not value goods that are hard to



obtain, the people will be kept away from committing theft. If (the ruler) does not display things which are liable to excite desires, the minds of the people will be kept undisturbed.

Therefore, the 'sacred man' in governing the people empties their minds,<sup>17</sup> while making their bellies full; weakens their ambitions<sup>18</sup> while rendering their bones strong.

In this way, he keeps his people always in the state of no-knowledge<sup>19</sup> and no-desire, so that the so-called 'knowers'<sup>20</sup> might find no occasion to interfere.

The baneful influence of the discriminating activity of the Mind is so powerful that even a modicum of it is liable at any moment to make man deviate from the Way.

If I happen to have even a modicum of 'knowing', I would be in grave danger of going astray even if I am actually walking on the main road (i.e., the Way). The main road is level and safe, but men tend to choose narrow by-ways.<sup>21</sup>

336 However, it is not knowing' itself that is so baneful; the quality of 'knowing' depends upon the particular objects on which it is exercised. The knowing', when its usual tendency of turning toward the outside and seeking after external objects is curbed and brought back toward the inside, transforms itself into the highest form of intuition, 'illumination' (*ming*).

He who knows others (i.e., external objects) is a 'clever' man, but he who knows himself is an 'illumined' man.<sup>22</sup>

It is significant that here we come across exactly the same word, *ming* 'illumination', which we encountered in the Chuang-tzû. It is also very significant that in the passage just quoted the 'illumination' is directly connected with man's knowledge of himself.<sup>23</sup> It evidently refers to the immediate and intuitive knowledge of the Way. It is described as man's 'self-knowledge' or 'self-knowing', because the immediate intuitive grasp of the Way is only obtainable through man's turning into himself'.

Certainly, according to the view of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû, the Way is all pervading. It is everywhere in the world; the world itself is a self-manifestation of the Way. In this sense, even 'external' things are actually manifesting the Way, each in its own way and own form. But man alone in the whole world of Being is self-conscious. That is to say, man alone is in a position to grasp the Way from inside. He can be conscious of himself as a manifestation of the Way. He can feel and touch within himself the palpitating life of the Absolute as it is actively working there. He can *in*-tuit the Way. But he is unable to *in*-tuit it in external objects, because he cannot go into the 'inside' of the things and

experience their manifestation of the Way as his own subjective state. At least the first subjective persona) encounter with the Way must be made within himself.

For this purpose the centrifugal tendency of the mind must be checked and turned to the opposite direction; it must be made centripetal. This drastic turning of direction is described by Lao-tzû as 'closing' up all the openings and doors' of the body. By obstructing all the possible outlets for the centrifugal activity of the mind, man goes down deep into his own mind until he reaches the very existential core of himself.

This existential core of himself which he finds in the depth of his mind may not be the Way *per se*, because after all it is an individualized form of the Way. But, on the other hand, there is no real distinction or discrepancy between the two. Lao-tzû expresses this state of affairs symbolically by calling the Way *per se* the Mother, and the Way in its individualized form the Child. He who knows the Child, knows by that very knowledge the Mother herself.

In the passage which I am going to quote,<sup>24</sup> the importance of the [337] 'closing up of all the openings and doors' is emphasized as the sole means by which man can come to know the Child, and through the Child, the Mother. And the ultimate state thus attained is referred to by the term 'illumination'. It may be pointed out that the Child (*tzû*),<sup>25</sup> which in this understanding represents an individualized duplicate of the Mother (*mu*),<sup>26</sup> is nothing other than what Lao-tzû calls elsewhere Virtue (*tê*) — or perhaps more strictly, an individual embodiment of the Way having as its existential core the creative and vital force, which is the Way itself as distributed among the 'ten thousand things'. As we shall see later, this creative and vital force of each individual, existent as an individual determination of the Way, is called by Lao-tzû Virtue'.<sup>27</sup>

All things under Heaven have a Beginning which is to be regarded as the Mother of all things.<sup>28</sup>

If you know the 'mother', you thereby know her 'child'. And if, after having known the 'child', you go back to the Mother and hold fast to Her, you will never fall into a mistake till the very end of your life.

Block the openings, shut the doors (i.e., stop the normal functioning of the sense organs and the usual centrifugal activity of the Mind), and all through your life you (i.e., your spiritual energy) will not be exhausted.

If, on the contrary, you keep the openings wide open, and go on increasing their activities till the end of your life, you will not be saved. To be able to perceive the minutest thing (i.e., the supra-sensible thing, which is the Child of the Way within yourself) is properly to be called Illumination. To hold on to what is soft and flexible (i.e., abandoning the rigidity of the Mind enslaved by the 'essential distinctions among things and accepting 'softly' all things in their real state of mutual transformations) is properly to be called strength. If, using your external light, you go back to your internal Illumination, you will never bring misfortune upon yourself. Such an (ultimate) state is what is to be called 'stepping into the eternally real.<sup>29</sup>

The 'closing up all openings and doors' means, as I have indicated above, stopping the functioning of all the organs of sense perception in the first place, and then purifying the Mind of physical and material desires. This is made clear by our comparing the passage just quoted with XII which reads:

The five colors (i.e., the primary colors: white, black, blue, red and yellow) make man's eyes blind. The five musical notes make man's ears deaf. The five flavors (i.e., sweet, salty, sour, pungent, bitter) make man's taste dull. (Games like) racing and hunting make man's mind run mad. Goods that are hard to obtain impede man's right conduct.

Therefore the 'sacred man' concentrates on the belly (i.e., endeavors to develop his inner core of existence) and does not tare for the eye [338] (i.e., does not follow the dictates of his senses). Verily he abandons the latter and chooses the former.<sup>16</sup>

The 'sacred man' cares for the belly and does not care for the eye, because he is aware that the centrifugal activity of the Mind does nothing other than lead him away from the Way. The Way is there in his own 'inside' in the most concrete and palpable form. The further one goes toward 'outside', the less he is in touch with the Absolute. What one should try to do is to 'stay at home' and not to go outdoors.

Without going out of the door, one can know everything under Heaven (i.e., the reality of all things). Even without peeping out of the window, one can see the working of Heaven. The further one goes out, the less one knows.

Therefore the 'sacred man' knows without going out. He has a clear view of everything<sup>30</sup> without looking. He accomplishes everything without acting.<sup>31</sup>

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16 [NDE mystique commence bien après les appels ou signaux de sa réalité reçus les yeux fermés.]

The passages which have now been quoted from the *Tao Tê Ching* concern the epistemological aspect of the problem of the Way; the problem, namely, of how and in what way man can 'intuit' the Absolute. The answer given by Lao-tzû is, as we have seen, that the only possible way for man to take in order to achieve this aim is to obstruct totally the centrifugal tendency of his own mind and to replace it by a centripetal activity leading ultimately to 'illumination'.

Lao-tzû, however, is not so much concerned with the epistemological process itself by which man cultivates such an 'inner eye' as with the result and effect of this kind of intuition. Indeed, he usually starts his argument precisely from the point at which such a process reached completion. Two things are his main concern. One is the practical and visible effect produced by the illuminative intuition on the basic attitude and behavior of man. How does the 'sacred man' act in the ordinary situations of social life? That is one of his primary problems. This problem will be dealt with in a later chapter devoted to a discussion of the concept of the Perfect Man.

The second of Lao-tzû's main problems is the metaphysical structure of the world of Being, with the Way as the very source and basis of all things. Here again the epistemological aspect of the problem is either almost totally discarded or simply hinted at in an extremely vague way. Lao-tzû is more interested to describe the ontological process by which the Way as the absolutely Unknown-Unknowable goes on making itself gradually visible and determined until finally it reaches the stage of the infinite Multiplicity of the phenomenal world. He also refers to the backward movement of all things, by which they 'return' to the original state of absolute Unity. [339]

What is remarkable about this is that all this description of the ontological process is made from the standpoint of a man who has already experienced 'illumination', with the eye of a man who knows perfectly the secret of Being. Chuang-tzû is different from Lao-tzû in this respect. He is vitally interested in the process which itself precedes the final stage of 'illumination' and by which the latter is reached. Chuang-tzû even tries to describe, or at least to indicate by means of symbolic descriptions, the experiential content of 'illumination' which he knows is by its very nature ineffable. The rest of the present chapter and the next will be concerned specifically with this aspect of the problem, which

we might call the epistemological or subjective side of the Way-experience.

At the outset of this chapter, I drew attention to two cardinal concepts relating to the subjective side of the Way-experience, which stand diametrically opposed to each other: *tso ch'ih* 'sitting-galloping' and *tso wang* 'sitting-forgetting'. In the preceding pages we have been examining mainly the structure of the former concept. Now it is time we turned to the latter concept.

A man in the state of 'sitting-forgetting' looks so strange and so different from ordinary men that he is easily recognizable as such by an outsider-observer. In Bk II of his Book, Chuang-tzû gives a typical description of such a man. The man here described is Nan Kuo Tzû Ch'i, or Tzû Ch'i of the Southern Quarter. He is said to have been a great Sage of Ch'u,<sup>32</sup> living in hermitic seclusion in the 'southern quarter'. For Chuang-tzû he was surely a personification of the very concept of the Perfect Man.

Once Tzû Ch'i of the Southern Quarter sat leaning against a tabouret. Gazing upward at the sky, he was breathing deeply and gently. Completely oblivious of his bodily existence, he seemed to have lost all consciousness of 'associates' (i.e., oppositions of 'I' and 'things', or 'ego' and the 'others').

Yen Ch'eng Tzû Yu (one of his disciples), who was standing in his presence in attendance, asked him, 'What has happened to you, Master? Is it at all possible that the body should be made like a withered tree and the mind should be made like dead ashes? The Master who is now leaning against the tabouret is no longer the Master whom I used to see leaning against the tabouret in the past!' Tzû Ch'i replied, 'It is good indeed that you ask that question,<sup>33</sup> Yen! (I look different from what I have been) because I have now lost myself.<sup>34</sup> But are you able to understand (the real meaning of) this?

Following this introductory remark, the great Master goes on to describe for the bewildered disciple the state of 'having lost the ego', telling him what is actually experienced in that state. As a result, we have the very famous vision of the Cosmic Wind, one of the most [340] beautiful and forceful passages in the whole book of Chuang-tzû. The passage will be given in translation in the following chapter. Here we have only to note that the Master's words: 'I have now lost myself', refer to nothing other than the state of 'sitting-forgetting' or 'sitting in oblivion' as opposed to the 'sitting-galloping'.

But what exactly is 'sitting in oblivion'? How can one experience it at all? This is something extremely difficult — or more properly

we should say, almost absolutely impossible — to explain in words. Chuang-tzû, however, tries to do so.

In Bk VI he gives his own definition of 'sitting in oblivion'. The passage reads as follows.

What is the meaning of 'sitting in oblivion'?

It means that all the members of the body become dissolved, and the activities of the ears and eyes (i.e., the activities of all the sense organs) become abolished, so that the man makes himself free from both form and mind (i.e., both bodily and mental 'self-identity'), and becomes united and unified with the All-Pervader (i.e., the Way which 'pervades' all). This is what call 'sitting in oblivion'.<sup>35</sup>

Externally, or physically, all the parts of the body become 'dissolved' and forgotten. That is to say, the consciousness of the bodily 'ego' is made to disappear. Internally, all mental activities are 'abolished'. That is to say, there no longer remains the consciousness of the inner 'ego' as the center and all-unifying principle of man's mental activity. The result of this total 'forgetting' of the inside and outside of the 'I' is called by Chuang-tzû *hsü*,<sup>36</sup> the Void, or a spiritual-metaphysical state in which there is nothing whatsoever to obstruct the all-pervading activity of the Way.

The word 'Void' must not be understood in this context in a purely negative sense. It does have a positive meaning. And in its positive aspect, the Void must be connected with the concept of the All-Pervader which appears in the passage just quoted.

I have translated the Chinese expression *ta t'ung*, lit. 'great pervasion', as the All-Pervader following the interpretation given by Ch'êng Hsüan Ying, who identifies *ta t'ung* with *ta tao*, the 'great Way', and says: '*ta t'ung* is the same as *ta tao*; since the Way pervades all things and enlivens them, it is in this sense entitled to be called All-Pervader'.<sup>37</sup> This interpretation seems to be right, but it must be supplemented<sup>17</sup> by an understanding of another aspect of the matter, namely, that in the experience of the spiritual state here in question, all things in their infinite multiplicity interpenetrate each other freely, without any obstruction, and that the man who has lost his 'ego' rediscovers in this experience his 'ego' in a totally different form, reborn as what we might call the Universal, Cosmic, or Transcendental Ego which transforms itself

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17 [NDE Pas sûr. Il y a divers états dont seul le plus élevé et rarement vécu etc.]

freely into all things that are transforming themselves into each other. [341]

Such must be the real implication of the use of the particular expression *ta t'ung* in place of the more usual word *tao*, the Way. The point is brought to light very clearly by Kuo Hsiang who explains this passage by saying: 'in the "inside" the man has no consciousness of his own bodily existence; in the "outside" he has no awareness of the existence of Heaven and Earth. It is only in such a state that he becomes completely identified with the (cosmic) process of Change (i.e., «transformations») itself without there being any obstruction at all. Once in such a state, there can be nothing he does not freely pervade.'<sup>38</sup>

Chuang-tzû himself expresses the same idea in a far more laconic way:

Being unified, you have no liking. Being transmuted, you have no fixity.<sup>39</sup>

In the light of the explanation that has been given in the preceding, the meaning of this laconic expression can easily be clarified as follows. Being completely unified and identified with the Way itself, the man can have no likes and dislikes. The man in such a spiritual state transcends the ordinary distinctions between 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' and 'bad'. And since he is now identical with the Way, and since the Way is constantly manifesting itself in myriad forms of Being, the man himself is 'being transmuted' from one thing to another, without there being any obstruction, as if he were moving around in the great Void. He is not actually in the 'void', because there are things throbbing with all-pervading Life, appearing and disappearing in infinitely variegated forms. The point is, however, that in this metaphysical Void these things no longer present any obstacles to his absolute freedom. For he himself is, in this state, completely identical with every one of these things, participating from within in the cosmic flux of Transmutation; or rather he is the cosmic Transmutation itself. This is what is meant by the expression: 'you have no fixity'<sup>40</sup> 'No fixity' means boundless flexibility and absolute freedom.

It will be clear from what has preceded that the *hsü* is both the metaphysical Void and the spiritual Void. In truth, this very distinction between 'metaphysical' and 'spiritual' is in this context something artificial, because the state in question refers to a total and complete identification of man with the All-Pervader. Theoretically, however, there is some point in making such a distinction. For when the question is raised on a more practical

level as to what concretely one should do<sup>18</sup> in order to become so completely identified with the Way, we have to have recourse to the idea of making the mind 'void'. Only when one has succeeded in making [342] the mind completely 'void', does one find oneself in the very midst of the metaphysical Void. This part of Chuang-tzû's teaching takes on the form of practical instruction regarding the proper method by which man can hope to attain to such a state. This method is called by him 'fasting' or the purification of the Mind.

The purification of the Mind constitutes the pivotal point in the development of man from the state of an 'ordinary' man to that of the Perfect Man. An 'ordinary' man can never become a Perfect Man unless he passes through this turning point. The significance of this experience will be clear if one remembers what we have seen above concerning Chuang-tzû's characteristic expression: making the Mind one's own teacher'.<sup>41</sup> Man naturally tends to cling to his Mind — and Reason — and thinks and acts according to its dictates. Whatever the Mind tells him to believe is absolutely true, and whatever it commands him to do is absolutely good. In other words, man venerates his own 'ego' as his 'teacher'.

In the light of this observation, the 'purification of the Mind' means precisely that man should abolish this habit of the 'veneration' of the Mind, that he should cast away his own 'ego'. And that will mark the first step toward his being transformed into a Perfect Man.

In an imaginary conversation which Chuang-tzû fabricates with a view to endorsing his thesis, Confucius — who is here ironically made into a Taoist sage — teaches his disciple Yen Hui how to proceed in order to succeed in purifying the Mind.

In this dialogue, Yen Hui is represented as a zealous disciple who has desperately struggled to know the right way to become a Perfect Man, but in vain. As the final resort, he turns to Confucius and humbly asks for instruction. The following is the passage.<sup>42</sup>

Yen Hui: I cannot proceed any further. May I venture to ask you to tell me the proper way?

Confucius: Fast, first. Then I will teach you. Do you think it easy (to see the Truth) while maintaining your Mind? If

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18 [NDE non, c'est le rôle de la « grâce ». *Infra*, no « making the mind 'void' ». Quel équivalent trouver à la « grâce » ? Izutsu ne peut répondre : malgré sa profonde intuition du problème, il n'a pas l'expérience du toucher. Et *infra*, rien de métaphysique, pas de « metaphysical 'void' ».]



anybody does think it easy, the vast and bright Heaven will not approve of him.

The word translated here as 'fast', *ch'ia*<sup>43</sup>, means the act of 'fasting' which man practises in the period immediately preceding sacrificial ceremonies in order to put himself into the state of religious 'purity'. In the present context, Confucius uses the word not in this original religious sense, but figuratively in the sense of the 'fasting of the Mind', that is, the 'purification of the Mind'. Yen Hui, however, does not understand this, and takes the word in its usual sense. He imagines that Confucius means by the word the observance of the [343] ritual fasting which concerns eating and drinking. Hence the following ridiculous reply he gives to the Master:

Yen Hui: My family is poor, so much so that I have neither drunk liquor nor eaten garlic and onions for the part several months. Cannot this be considered fasting?

Confucius: What you are talking about is the fasting as a ritual proceeding. That is not the fasting of the Mind.

Yen Hui: May I ask what you mean by the fasting of the Mind?

Confucius: Bring all the activity of the Mind to a point of union. Do not listen with your ears, but listen with the Mind (thus concentrated).

(Then proceed further and) stop listening with the Mind; listen with the Spirit (*ch'ü*).<sup>44</sup>

The ear (or more generally, sense perception) is confined to listening<sup>45</sup> (i.e., each sense grasps only its proper objects in a physical way).

The Mind is confined to (forming concepts) corresponding to their external objects.<sup>46</sup> The Spirit, however, is itself 'void' (having no definite proper objects of its own), and goes on transforming limitlessly in accordance with the (Transmutation of) things (as they come and go). The Way in its entirety comes only into the void' (i.e., the 'ego-less' Mind). Making the Mind 'void' (in this way) is what I mean by the 'fasting of the Mind'.

As I pointed out before, *hsü*, 'void' is a key term of the philosophy of Chuang-tzû. It represents in this context the subjective attitude of man corresponding to the very structure of the Way which is itself a Void. This latter point is very much emphasized by Lao-tzû, as we shall see in detail in a later chapter which will be devoted to a discussion of the metaphysics of the Way<sup>19</sup>. Here we

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<sup>19</sup> [NDE danger de quitter l'expérience — « et c'est tout » dans les deux sens de l'expression « Tout » ou bien « rien

are still mainly concerned with the subjective aspect of the matter. The main idea is that when a man 'sits in oblivion' with his mind completely 'void', into this ego-less 'void' all things come exactly as they are, as they come and go in the cosmic process of Transmutation. In such a state, his mind is comparable to a clear mirror which reflects everything without the slightest distortion or disfigurement.

All this is of course a matter which must be directly experienced; a mere conceptual understanding is of little help. Yen Hui whose mind has already been fully ripened — in the anecdote we are now reading — for this kind of personal transformation, becomes suddenly 'illuminated' by the teaching of his Master, and makes the following observation about himself.

Yen Hui:            Before Hui (i.e., 'I') received this instruction, Hui was really nothing but Hui (i.e., 'I' have been my small 'ego', nothing else). However, I have received this instruction, I have now that realized that from the very beginning there never was (an 'ego' called) Hui. Is this state worthy to be considered the 'void' (which you have just spoken of)?

Confucius:        So it is, indeed!

Then Confucius contrasts this state with the state of 'sitting-galloping', and goes on to describe the former by comparing it to a firmly closed empty room which mysteriously and calmly illumines itself with a white light of its own.<sup>47</sup>

Look into that closed room and see how its empty 'interior' produces bright whiteness. All blessings of the world come in to reside in that stillness."

If, on the contrary, (your Mind) does not stand still, you are in the state of what I would call 'sitting-galloping'.

But if a man turns his ears and eyes toward the 'interior', and puts his Mind and Reason in the 'exterior' (i.e., nullifies the normal functioning of the Mind and Reason), even gods and spirits come to reside freely (in his ego-less 'interior') not to speak of men. This is the Transmutation of ten thousand things."

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d'autre » — en se tournant vers une métaphysique. *Infra*, explication ou plutôt car il n'y a pas d'explication ou prolongation possible, « pas de perche », une analogie claire : « the mirror »]

The last sentence represents one of the cardinal points of Chuang-tzû's metaphysics. The peculiar meaning of the key term *hua* has been explained above. What is important here to note is that in the passage just quoted, the *hua*, 'Transmutation', is evidently described as a subjective state of man, as something that occurs in his Interior. Rather, his 'interior' is the Transmutation of the ten thousand things, that is, of all the phenomenal things and events of the world. The man in the state of perfect 'sitting in oblivion' does experience subjectively, as his personal experience, the Transmutation of all things.

The whole matter may be reformulated more theoretically in terms of the process of the spiritual development of man toward illumination.

In ordinary human experience, the constant flux and reflux of infinitely changing phenomena are in the position of the Lord. They positively act upon man, influence him, push him around, and bind him up. In such a situation man is a servant or slave. His mind becomes torn asunder and runs in all directions in pursuit of chameleonic forms of things and events.

Once man frees himself from this bondage and transcends the common pattern of experience, the scene before his eyes takes on a completely different appearance. The kaleidoscopic view is still there. The things and events still continue their changes and transformations as before. The only essential difference between the two [345] stages is that in the second all these things and events that go on appearing and disappearing are calmly reflected in the polished mirror of the man's interior'. The man himself is no longer involved in the hustle and bustle of incessantly changing phenomena.

The man at this stage is a calm observer of things, and his mind is like a polished mirror. He accepts everything as it comes into his 'interior', and sees it off, unperturbed, as it goes out of sight. There is for him nothing to be rejected, but there is nothing wilfully to be pursued either. He is, in short, beyond 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong'.<sup>20</sup>

A step further, and he reaches the stage of 'undifferentiation', where, as we saw earlier, all things become 'chaotified'. On this level there still are things. But these things show no limits and borderlines separating them 'essentially' from one another. This is

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20[NDE Vécu avant d'être compris et l'on continue à chercher ce qui est déjà trouvé !]

the stage of the cosmic Transmutation. It goes without saying that in its subjective aspect, the Transmutation represents a spiritual stage of the man himself.

As a result of the fasting of the Mind', the man is now completely 'ego-less'. And since he is 'ego-less' he is one with the 'ten thousand things'; he becomes the ten thousand things'. And he himself goes on changing with the infinite change of all things. He is no longer a calm 'observer' of the changing things. He is the subject of the Transmutation. A complete and perfect harmony is here realized between the 'interior' and the 'exterior' ; there is no distinction between them.

Borrowing the terminology of Ibn 'Arabi we might say that the man on this high level of spiritual development is subjectively placed in the position of the Unity of Existence (*wahdah al-wujūd*), and personally experiences the whole world of Being in that position. The situation is described by Chuang-tzū in the following way:<sup>51</sup>

Dying and being alive, being subsistent and perishing, getting into a predicament and being in the ascendant, being poor and being rich, being clever and being incompetent, being disgraced and being honored, being hungry and thirsty, suffering from cold and heat - all these are but constant changes of (phenomenal) things, and results of the incessant working of Fate.

All these things go on replacing one another before our own eyes, but no one by his Intellect can trace them back to their real origin. However, these changes are not powerful enough to disturb (the man who 'sits in oblivion' because he is completely one with the Transmutation itself), nor can they intrude into the 'innermost treasury'<sup>52</sup> (of such a man).

On the contrary, he maintains (his 'innermost treasury') in a peaceful harmony with (all these changes) so that he becomes one with them without obstruction, and never loses his spiritual delight. [346]

Day and night, without ceasing, he enjoys being in spring-tide with all things. Mingling with (the infinitely changing things on a suprasensible level of existence) he goes on producing within his 'interior' the 'times' (of the world).

Such a state I would call the perfection (i.e., perfect actualization) of the human potentiality.<sup>54</sup>

When a man attains to this height of spiritual development, he fully deserves the title of Perfect Man. This, however, is not the last and ultimate stage of 'sitting in oblivion'. There is a still higher stage beyond. That is the stage of 'no more Death, no more

Life'. Chuang-tzû sometimes calls it the 'extreme limit (*chih*)'<sup>55</sup> of know-ledge (*chih*).<sup>56</sup> At this last stage, the man is completely unified not with the ever changing 'ten thousand things' - as was the case when he was in the previous stage - but with the 'Mystery of Mysteries',<sup>57</sup> the ultimate metaphysical state of the Absolute, at which the latter has not yet come down to the sphere of universal Transmutation. The man is here so completely one with the Way that he has not even the consciousness of being one with the Way.<sup>21</sup> The Way at this stage is not present as the Way in the consciousness of the man. And this is the case because there is no 'consciousness' at all anywhere, not even a trace of it. The 'oblivion' is complete. And the actualization of such a perfect 'oblivion' is to be accounted for in reference to the metaphysical fact that the ultimate Absolute, the Way, is in its absolute absoluteness Something which one cannot call even 'something'. Hence the usual custom in oriental philosophies of referring to the Absolute as Nothing.

The stages of the above-described spiritual development of 'sitting in oblivion' are variously discussed by Chuang-tzû in several places of his book. Sometimes he takes an ascending course, and sometimes a descending course. The former corresponds to the real process by which the mind of a man gradually proceeds toward spiritual perfection. A typical example of this type of description is found in a passage<sup>58</sup> which claims to reproduce a conversation between a certain Nan Po Tzû K'uei and a Perfect Man (or Woman?) called Nü Yü. In this passage, Chuang-tzû gives a description of the stages which are traversed by a man who is born with a special potentiality to be a Perfect Man until he really reaches the last stage. The description is very interesting when it is considered as a Taoist counterpart to the Islamic *fanà'* or self-annihilation'.

The conversation starts from Nan Po Tzû K'uei's astonishment at the complexion of old Nü Yü, which, as he observes, is like that of a child.

Nan Po Tzû K'uei:

You are old in years, Master, and yet your complexion is like that of a child. Why?

Nü Yü: (This is because) I have come to know the Way

Nan Po: Is it possible for me to learn the Way?

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21 [NDE l'achèvement mystique. À citer comme expression équivalente à celle des mystiques des cultures du Livre.]

Nü Yü: No. How could it be possible? You are not the right kind of man to do so.

You know Pu Liang I. He had (from the beginning) the natural potentiality to be a 'sacred man', but he had not yet acquired the Way, whereas I had the Way but lacked the 'potentiality'.<sup>59</sup> I wanted to give him guidance to see if, by any chance, he could become a 'sacred man'. Even if I should fall to achieve my goal, it was, (I thought), easy for a man in possession of the Way to communicate it to a man in possession of the potentiality of a 'sacred man'.

Thus I persistently taught him. After three days, he learnt how to put the world outside his Mind.

The 'putting the world outside the Mind' i.e., forgetting the existence of the world, marks the first stage. The 'world' being some-thing objective - and therefore relatively far from the Mind - is the easiest thing for man to erase from his consciousness.

After he had put the world outside himself, I continued persistently to instruct him. And in seven days he learnt how to put the things outside his Mind.

The 'putting the things outside the Mind' represents the second stage. Forgetting the existence of the world was not so difficult, but 'things' which are more intimately related with man resist being erased from the consciousness. As Kuo Hsiang remarks: 'The things are needed in daily life. So they are extremely close to the ego. This is why they are so difficult to put outside the Mind'.<sup>60</sup> And Ch'êng Hsüan Ying:<sup>61</sup> 'The states of the whole world are foreign and far removed from us; so it is easy for us to forget them. The things and utensils that actually serve us in our everyday life are familiar to us; so it is difficult for us to forget them'.

By forgetting the familiar things that surround us and are connected with us in various ways in daily life, the external world completely disappears from our consciousness.

After he had put things outside his Mind, I still continued to instruct him. And in nine days he learnt how to put Life outside the Mind.

This is the third stage. It consists in the man's forgetting Life, that is to say, erasing from his consciousness the fact of his own Life, i.e., his own personal existence. This is the stage of dropping the 'ego'. As a result, the world, both in its external and internal aspects, [348] disappears from the consciousness. This stage is immediately followed by the next which is the sudden coming of the dawn of 'illumination'.

After he had put Life outside his Mind, (his inner eye was opened just as) the first light of dawn breaks through (the darkness of night).

Once this 'illumination' is achieved, there are no more stages to come. Or should we say, there are stages to come, but they do not come successively; all of them become actualized simultaneously. If they are to be considered 'stages', they must be described as horizontal stages which occur at once and all together the moment the inner eye is opened by the penetrating ray of spiritual daybreak. The first of such stages is 'perceiving the absolute Oneness'.

The moment the day dawned, he saw the Oneness.

This is the moment when all things and 'I' become absolutely one. There is no more opposition of subject and object — the subject that 'sees' and the object 'seen' being completely unified — nor is there any distinction between this' and 'that', 'existence' and 'non-existence'. 'I' and the world are brought back to their absolute original unity.

And after having seen the Oneness, there was (in his consciousness) neither past nor present.

At the stage of the absolute Oneness, there is no more consciousness of the distinction between 'past' and 'present'. There is no more consciousness of 'time'. We may describe this situation in a different way by saying that the man is now in the Eternal Now. And since there is no more consciousness of ever-flowing 'time', the man is in the state of 'no Death and no Life'.

After having nullified past and present, he was able to enter the state of 'no Death and no Life'.

The state of 'no Death and no Life' can be nothing other than the state of the Absolute itself. The man at this stage is situated in the very midst of the Way, being identified and unified with it. He is beyond Life and Death, because the Way with which he is one is beyond Life and Death.<sup>22</sup>

The state of the Way or the Absolute, however, is not simply being beyond Life and Death. As is clearly shown by the very epistemological process by which man finally attains to it, this state is not sheer 'nothing-ness' in the purely negative sense. It is

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22 [NDT Topujours risque de « chosification » de l'expérience en versant dans la « métaphysique » au risque de laisser croire « qu'il y a "au-delà de l'horizon" « quelque chose » qui a échappé (à quoi ? À qui ?). Bien sûr il est utile de ne pas prendre le Vide pour un vide, voire "un vertige du vide" !]

rather the ultimate metaphysical state, the absolute Unity, to which the dispersion of the ontological Multiplicity is brought back. It is a [349] Unity formed by the unification of 'ten thousand things', a Unity in which all the things are existent, reduced to the state of Nothing-ness.

There is 'no Death and no Life' here. That is to say, it is a state of complete Tranquillity and Stillness. There is no more even a trace of the noise and fuss of the world of sensible existence. And yet the Stillness is not the stillness of Death. There is no more movement observable. But it is not a state of non-movement in a purely negative sense. It is rather a dynamic non-movement, full of internal ontological tensions, and concealing within itself infinite possibilities of movement and action.

Thus it is, in both of the aspects just mentioned, a *coincidentia oppositorum*. The Absolute, in this view, is Something which goes on realizing and actualizing 'ten thousand things' in their myriad forms and transforming them in a limitless process of Transmutation, and yet at the same time keeping all these things in their supra-temporal and supra-spatial Unity. It is a Unity which is itself a Multiplicity. It is Stillness which is itself Ebullition.

In the end of the passage Chuang-tzû refers to this aspect of the Way in the following words.

That which kills Life does not die.<sup>62</sup> That which brings to Life everything that lives does not live.<sup>63</sup> By its very nature it sends off everything, and welcomes everything. There is nothing that it does not destroy. There is nothing that it does not perfect. It is, in this aspect, called Commotion-Tranquillity.<sup>64</sup> The name Commotion-Tranquillity refers to the fact that it (i.e., the Way) sets (all things) in turmoil and agitation and then leads them to Tranquillity.

We must keep in mind that at this highest stage of spirituality, the man is completely unified and identified with the Way. Since, however, the Way is nothing other than Commotion-Tranquillity, the man who is in complete union with the Way, goes through this cosmic process of the absolute Unity being diversified in turmoil and agitation into 'ten thousand things', and the latter going back again to the original state of Tranquillity. The ontology of Taoism is an ontology which is based upon such an experience<sup>23</sup>. It would be natural for us to imagine that the view of Being in the spiritual eyes of a Taoist sage will be of an essentially different nature and

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23[NDE encore ! l'expérience ne permet pas d'établir une ontologie. *Nada, nada !*]



structure from that of an Aristotle, for example, who founds his philosophical edifice upon the ordinary ontological experience of an average man looking at the world around him at the level of sound and solid common sense. The most natural standpoint of philosophers of the latter kind is essentialism. In ancient China, the essentialist standpoint is represented by Confucius and his school. Both Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû take a determined position against it. [350] The next chapter will be devoted to an elucidation of this particular point.

Notes

1. *tsao wu ché* ( ) (see VII, p. 280). The name designates the Way in its 'personal' aspect. This aspect of the Way is referred to also by the name Great Lord, *ta shih* ( ). The word Heaven, *t'ien* ( ) is also sometimes used with the same meaning. More details will be given later when we discuss the concept of 'determinism' (Chap. IX).

2. II, pp. 110-111.

3. ( ) is explained by Kuo Hsiang as ( ) 'faint darkness surrounding the shadow'.

4. The scales of a snake and the wings of a cicada have no independence in their movements. On the contrary all their movements are dictated by the snake and the cicada respectively.

5. *hsin*. ( )

6. ( ). The word appears in an important passage (IV, p. 150) which will be given in translation presently.

7. ( )

8. ( ), IV, p. 145.

9. ( ), 11, p. 56. My interpretation of this word is based on that given by Kuo Hsiang and Ch'êng Hsüan Ying. The latter says: ( ) p. (61). Some commentators (like Lin Hsi ( ), for instance, in his famous ( )) interpret the word in the opposite sense, as the inborn, naturally given mind, which is the mind in its celestial purity. But this latter interpretation does not, I think, do justice to the basic thought of Chuang-tzû on this problem.

10. *ibid.*

11. ( ). The word *ch'ang* is an ambiguous term in the *Tao Tê Ching*, because Lao-tzû uses it in two diametrically opposed meanings. Sometimes - as is the case with the usage of the word in this passage - it means 'unflexible', 'rigidly fixed', which is the worst possible state of things in the philosophy of Lao-tzû. Sometimes - particularly in many of the passages of primary importance, as we shall see later - it is used in the sense of 'never-changing', 'eternal', and 'absolute'.

12. Having no 'fixed mind' of his own, he accepts everything, whether 'good' or 'bad'; rather, he does not distinguish between 'good' and 'bad'.

13. *hun* ( ), a characteristic word, whose meaning has been explained in an earlier passage in connection with Chuang-tzû concept of the 'chaotification' of things.

14. XLIX.

15. ( ).

16. *Tao Tê Ching*, III.

17. *hsin* ( ), the discriminating activity of the intellect, the natural tendency of the Mind toward gaining 'knowledge'.

18. *chih ché* ( ), that aspect of the Mind, which manifests itself in insatiably desiring more and more.
19. *nu chih* ( )
20. *chih ché*, 417. lit. 'knowing men', those men who claim to know the reality of things; who, therefore, are convinced that they are capable of giving the best advice on every important matter of human life.
21. LIII.
22. XXXIII.
23. We are reminded of the Islamic adage: Man '*arafa nafsá-hu 'arafa rabba-hu*' 'He who knows himself knows his Lord', which, as we saw in the first Part of this study, plays an important rôle in the philosophy of Ibn 'Arabi.<sup>24</sup>
24. LII.
25. ( )
26. ( )
27. That the word *té* ( ), here translated as Virtue, is one of the most important of all the key terms of Lao-tzú will be seen from the very fact that the Book itself is known by the title *Tao Té Ching*, i.e., the 'Canonical Book of the Way and the Virtue'.
28. 'All things under Heaven' represent the Multiplicity of the phenomenal world, while the Beginning is the Unity as their ultimate ontological origin and source.
29. *hsi ch'ang* ( ). For the meaning of the word *ch'ang*, see above, note (11). The word *hsi* means 'step into', 'enter', here in the mystical sense of the 'inner' grasp of a thing. *intuition*. The word is used in XXVII in a very characteristic combination: *hsi ming*, ( ), 'stepping into illumination'.
30. ( ). The word is here the same as ( ) - both having the same pronunciation. As quoted by Han Fei Tsú ( ) we see actually used in this passage ( )
31. XLVII.
32. ( ). On the relevance of his being a man of Ch'u to the whole topic of the present study, see above, Chap. I.
33. i.e., I am glad that you are keen enough to notice the difference.
34. i.e., I have lost my 'ego' and have stepped into the state in which there is no more distinction between 'ego' and 'things'. Lin Hsi I ( ) says in his commentary: As long as there is 'ego' there are 'things'. But when I lose my 'ego', there is no 'I'. And since there is no 'I' », there are no 'objects'. (( *ad loc.* )
35. VI, p. 284.
36. ( ) cf. Ch'èng Hsúan Yíng: ( ), p. 285.
37. ( )
38. ( ), p. 285
39. *ibid.*
40. The word used here for 'fixity' is *ch'ang* ( ), whose double meaning has been explained above; see notes 11 and 29.
41. See above, Chap. IV.
42. IV, pp. 146-148.
43. ( )

44. (). The word has already been explained before, Ch. II, Note 19. It is a proto-material and formless cosmic 'reality' which pervades the whole world of Being and which constitutes the ontological core of every single thing, whether animate or in-animate. Man is, of course, no exception to this. Thus man, on the level of the *ch'i* is homogeneous with all things as well as with the universe itself. Man cannot 'listen with the ch'i,' unless he has been completely unified with the universe. The 'ego' which listens, i.e., perceives, with the *ch'i* is no longer an ordinary epistemological 'subject'; it is the Cosmic Ego.
45. The text reads: () 'listening stops with the ears', which gives but a poor meaning. Following Yü Yüeh () I read () (cf. [], ad loc.).
46. i.e., the Mind is confined to elaborating the images received from the sense organs and fabricating out of them concepts that correspond to external objects which are fixed once for all in terms of essences. It cannot identify itself, with infinite flexibility, with each of the infinitely varying phenomenal forms of 'reality'.
47. IV, p. 150.
48. The repetition of the word () is a little difficult to account for. Yü Yüeh simply disposes of the second as a scribal error on the ground that the sentence as quoted in other books does not have it. (). However, the second () can very well be understood also in the sense of 'stillness' or 'no-motion' as I have done following Ch'eng Hsüan Ying who says: (), p. 151.
49. (), 'The hua of ten thousand things.
50. In doing this, I shall strictly follow Chuang-tzu's own description which he gives in Bk. II, p. 74. The passage itself will be given in translation at the outset of the following chapter.
51. V, p. 212.
52. ling fu, () the most secret part of the heart which is the central locus of all spiritual activity.
53. i.e. he goes on experiencing within himself, without being perturbed, the alternation of the four seasons, which is the 'time' of all phenomenal things. That is to say he is completely one with all things which are in the incessant process of transformation.
54. ts'ai ch'üan (), one of the key terms of Chuang-tzu. It means the natural human ability brought to the highest degree of perfection.
55. ().
56. () II, p. 74, 7().
57. Hsüan chih yu hsüan (), the expression is from the *Tao Tè Ching*. It denotes the Way, but with a peculiar connotation which will be explained in the chapter concerning the concept of Way.
58. VI, pp. 252-253.
59. i.e., I had not the 'ability' or 'potentiality' to become a Perfect Man; I had 'actually' the Way from the very beginning.
60. () p. 253.
61. () p. 254.
62. The Way brings everything existent to naught. But if it brings everything to naught and death, it must itself be something beyond Death.
63. Since the Way brings into existence everything that exists, it must itself be something that transcends Life, i.e. Becoming.
64. *Ying ning* (). It is one of the key terms of Chuang-tzu. According to Ch'eng Hsüan Ying, *ying* means 'commotion', 'agitation', and *ning* 'tranquillity', 'stillness' ()



## VI Against Essentialism<sup>25</sup>

Toward the end of the preceding chapter I pointed out the fact that in the *Chuang-tzû*, the stages of the 'sitting in oblivion' are traced in two opposite directions: ascending and descending. The first consists in starting from the lowest stage and going up stage by stage toward the ultimate and highest one. A typical example of this kind of description has just been given.

The second, the descending course, is the reverse of the first. It starts from the highest stage and comes down to the lowest. As a proper introduction to the main topic of the present chapter, we shall begin by giving in translation a passage<sup>1</sup> from the *Chuang-tzû* in which the stages are described in this way. In this passage, *Chuang-tzû*, instead of speaking of 'sitting in oblivion', divides human knowledge of Reality into four classes which constitute among themselves a chain of successive degrees. These degrees are the epistemological stages corresponding to the ontological stages which *Lao-tzû* in his *Tao Tê Ching* distinguishes in the process by which all things in the world of Being issue forth continuously from the absolute Unity of the Way.

What is the ultimate limit of Knowledge? It is the stage represented by the view that nothing has ever existed from the very beginning. This is the furthest limit (of Knowledge), to which nothing more can be added.

As we saw in the previous chapter, this is the ultimate stage to which man attains at the end of 'sitting in oblivion'. Here the man is so completely unified with the Way and so perfectly identified with the absolute Reality, that the Way or the Reality is not even felt to be such. This is the stage of Void and Nothing-ness in the sense that has been explained above.

About this stage Kuo Hsiang says:<sup>2</sup> 'The man at this stage has completely forgotten Heaven and Earth, has put all existent things out of his mind. In the outside, he does not perceive the existence of the whole universe; in the inside, he has lost all consciousness of his own existence. Being limitlessly "void", he is obstructed by nothing. [355] He goes on changing as the things themselves go on changing, and there is nothing to which he does not correspond.'

Next is the stage at which there is the consciousness of 'things' being existent. But (in this consciousness) 'boundaries' between them have never existed from the very beginning.

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<sup>25</sup> Chapitre à garder ?

At this second stage, the man becomes conscious of the Way which contains all things in a state of pure potentiality. The Way will diversify itself at the following stage into 'ten thousand things'. But here there are no 'boundaries' yet between them. The 'things' are still an undivided Whole composed of a limitless number of potentially heterogeneous elements. They are still an even plane, a Chaos, where things have not yet received 'essential' distinctions.

Next (i.e., the third) is the stage at which 'boundaries' are recognized (among the things). However, there is as yet absolutely no distinction made between 'right' and 'wrong'.

Here the Chaos begins to disclose the definite forms of the things which it contains within itself. All things show their own demarcations, and each thing clearly marks its own 'boundary' by which it distinguishes itself from others. This is the stage of pure 'essences'. The original Unity divides itself, and is diversified into Multiplicity, and the Absolute manifests itself as numberless 'relative' existents. As a result, the Reality which has previously been beyond the ken of human cognition comes for the first time into the limits of its grasp.

And yet, even at this stage, the distinction is not made between 'right' and 'wrong'. This indicates that at this third stage we are still in touch with the Way in its original integrity, although, to be sure, the contact with the Way is already indirect, because it is made through the veil of the 'essences'. We may recall the myth of the Emperor Chaos (*Hun Tun*), which we read in Chapter II, who died as soon as his friends bored holes in his 'featureless' visage. In the light of the present passage, there is in this myth an oversimplification. For Chaos does not 'die' simply by 'holes' (i.e., 'essential' distinctions) being made in it. The true death of the Chaos occurs at the next stage.

As soon as, however, 'right' and 'wrong' make their clear appearance, the Way becomes damaged. And as soon as the Way is thus damaged, Love is born.

With the appearance of 'right' and 'wrong', Chaos loses its natural vitality and becomes fossilized as 'essential forms' stiff and inflexible as corpses. As Wang Hsien Ch'ien says: 'When "right" and "wrong" are recognized, the "chaotic" integrity of the Way is immediately injured'.<sup>3</sup> [346]

And no sooner this happens than Love is born. The birth of Love symbolizes the activity of such human emotions as love and hate, like and dislike. This is the last and lowest stage of Knowledge.

Of course there is another aspect to the problem. The Way is here said to die with the appearance of human emotions like love and hate. But this is so only when one considers the situation in reference to the original 'chaotic' integrity, i.e., the original 'undifferentiation' of the Absolute. Otherwise, everything is a particular manifestation of the Way itself. And as such even a fossilized 'essence' is nothing other than a self-determination' of the Absolute. This aspect of the matter, however, is irrelevant to our present topic.

As I remarked before several times — and it is particularly important to recall it once again for the right understanding of the philosophical position Chuang-tzû takes against 'essentialism' — the description just given of the four stages is not an abstract theory; it is a description of an experiential fact. It is a phenomenological description of the experience of ekstasis. In the passage which has just been quoted, the process of ekstasis is described in a descending order. That is to say, Chuang-tzû describes the 'return' of consciousness. He starts from the highest stage of contemplation at which the 'oblivion' has been completed, and goes down step by step until he reaches the stage of normal consciousness.

What is to be kept in mind in connection with this problem is that the whole process of ekstasis, whether considered in a descending or ascending order, is composed of two aspects which exactly correspond to each other. One is the subjective aspect, which we might call 'epistemological' , and the other is the objective, or metaphysical' aspect.

Take, for example, the highest stage. On its subjective side, it is, as I have just said, a stage at which the contemplative in actual contemplation has consummated the ekstasis. He is now in complete 'oblivion' of everything, the world and himself included. This would naturally mean that he is in the state of Nothing-ness, because he is conscious of nothing, because there is no 'conscious-ness' . And this subjective Nothing-ness corresponds to the objective Nothing-ness of the Way. For the Way, too, is in its original absolute purity Nothing-ness, a state 'where nothing has ever existed from the very beginning', that is, a metaphysical state where nothing whatsoever is distinguishable as an existent.

From such a state of perfect Void, subjective and objective, the contemplative starts coming back toward the daily state of mind. There begins to stir something in himself. Consciousness awakes in him to find 'things' existent. The consciousness, however, is still

at this stage a dim and subdued light. It is not yet the glaring brilliance Against Essentialism [357] of full daylight. It is the crepuscule of consciousness, a twilight in which all things are only indistinctly and confusedly observable.

Such a description of the situation might strike one as a *négative* evaluation. The state of consciousness at this stage is described as being a dim light merely because the description is made from the point of view of the 'normal' consciousness of an ordinary mind. For the latter, the light of the ecstatic consciousness looks dim and indistinct because it does not distinguish and discriminate things from each other. In reality, however, such indistinctiveness is, for a Chuang-tzû, Reality as it really is.

And since the real state of Reality is itself 'dim' and 'indistinct', the consciousness must of necessity be correspondingly 'dim', and 'indistinct'. Only with such a dim light can Reality in its integrity be illumined. The glaring and dazzling light of normal consciousness does cast a strong spotlight on this or that particular object. But by concentrating the light on the particular object, it makes all the rest of the world sink into darkness. Referring to this point Chuang-tzû remarks:<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the diffused and indistinct Light is what is aimed at by the 'sacred man'. He does not, however, use this Light (in order to illumine particular things), but lends it to all things universally. This is what is called 'illumination'.

The phrase here translated as 'diffused and indistinct Light'<sup>5</sup> means a kind of light of which one cannot be certain as to whether it exists or not; a light which, instead of being concentrated upon this or that particular object, is 'diffused' and pervades all. It is not a glaring, dazzling light. It is a dim, indistinct light, neither bright nor dark. In reality, however, it is the Universal Light which illumines everything as it really is.

Chuang-tzû calls this kind of spiritual Light also the 'shaded Light' (*pao kuang*).<sup>6</sup> The word *pao* means 'to cover', 'to conceal within'. As Ch'êng Hsüan Ying explains: '(The mind of the "sacred man") forgets (to distinguish between things) and yet illumines all. And as it illumines them, it forgets them. That is why it shades and obscures its light, yet becomes ever more brilliant.'

The corresponding 'objective' side of this stage is ontologically the most important of all stages for Chuang-tzû. For this precisely is the stage of 'chaotification'. In the subdued and diffused Light of the consciousness of the contemplative, the 'ten thousand



things' loom up as if through the mist. They appear dim and indistinct because there are no 'boundaries', i.e., definite 'essences' or 'quiddities', to differentiate them one from the other.

I say that this is ontologically the most important stage for [358] Chuang-tzû, because the higher stage, that of the Absolute in its absoluteness, is properly speaking beyond all thinking and reasoning,<sup>7</sup> while the lower one is the stage of 'essences' or 'quiddities', where all things appear to the consciousness distinctly separated from each other through their 'boundaries'. And Chuang-tzû fights against the view that this latter stage does represent Reality as it really is.

Thus we see that the stage of 'chaotification', at which all things are observed in their original 'undifferentiation', that is, beyond and apart from their 'essences', constitutes the pivotal point of Chuang-tzû's metaphysics. We might call this metaphysics 'existentialism', taking the word 'existence' (existencia) in the same sense as wujûd in the metaphysical system of Ibn 'Arabi.<sup>26</sup>

From the very outset I have been emphasizing implicitly as well as explicitly the 'existentialist' attitude of Chuang-tzû. I think I have made it sufficiently clear by now that its real meaning becomes understandable only when we relate it to the second stage (from above) of the 'sitting in oblivion'. It is a philosophical position based on the vision of Chaos. In this respect it stands opposed to the position taken by 'essentialism' which is based on a vision of Reality peculiar to, and typical of the epistemological-ontological stage where the 'ten thousand things' appear, each with a clearly marked 'boundary' of its own. In terms of the process of 'sitting in oblivion' —the Return process from the complete ekstasis back toward the 'normal' world of common sense — the 'essentialist' position belongs to the third stage explained above.

Thus in the framework of such an experience, 'existentialism' represents a vision of Reality which is a stage higher than 'essentialism'. It is important to note that the latter is regarded as the third stage in the Return process of the ecstatic contemplation only as long as it is considered within this particular framework. In reality, however, the contemplative, when he comes down to this stage and becomes conscious of the things with clear 'boundaries', he is actually already on a par with any ordinary man who knows nothing about the experience of ekstasis. His view of Being at this particular level is nothing unusual from the

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26 [NDE : ? glissement vers le discours théorique]

standpoint of common sense. On the contrary, it is a view of Being common to, and shared by, all men who are at all endowed with a 'sound' and 'normal' mind. 'Essentialism', in other words, is the typical ontology of common sense.

This statement, however, should not be understood as implying that, for a Chuang-tzû or a Lao-tzû, 'essentialism' is a wrong and mistaken view of Being, and that it distorts and disfigures the real structure of things. For 'essentialism' does represent and correspond to a certain definite stage in the evolving process of the [359] Absolute itself. Besides, on its subjective side, 'essentialism' constitutes, as we have just seen, the third stage of the 'sitting in oblivion' in the Return process of the contemplation. And as such, there is nothing wrong about it.

The serious problem arises only when the common sense refuses to see any difference in terms of ontological 'levels' between 'existentialism' and 'essentialism' and begins to assert that the latter is the right view of Being. It is only then that a Chuang-tzû rises in an open revolt against 'essentialism'. Since, however, it is of the very nature of common sense to view the things in an 'essentialist' way, Chuang-tzû and Lao-tzû constantly find themselves forced to manifest the attitude of revolt against such a view. Their philosophy, in this respect, may properly be characterized as a revolt against the tyranny' of Reason.<sup>27</sup>

Chuang-tzû sees a typical exemplification of the 'essentialist' position in the moral philosophy of Confucius. Confucian philosophy is, in Chuang-tzû's view, nothing but an ethical élaboration of ontological 'essentialism'. The so-called cardinal virtues of Confucius like 'humaneness', 'justice', etc., are but so many products of the normal activity of the Mind which naturally tends to see everywhere things rigidly determined by their own 'essences'. The Reality in its absoluteness has no such 'boundaries'. But a Confucius establishes distinctions where there are none, and fabricates out of them rigid, inflexible ethical categories by which he intends to regulate human behavior.

Stop! Stop approaching men with (your teaching of) virtues!  
Dangerous, dangerous, indeed, is (what you are doing),  
marking off the ground and running within the boundaries!<sup>8</sup>

Ontological 'essentialism' is dangerous because as soon as we take up such an attitude, we are doomed to lose our natural flexibility of mind and consequently lose sight of the absolute 'undifferentiation' which is the real source and basis of all existent

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27 [NDE évident.]

things. 'Essential-ism' will not remain in the sphere of ontology; it naturally grows into a categorization of values which, once established, begins to dominate our entire behavioral system.

Chuang-tzû in the following passage<sup>9</sup> gives with keen sarcasm a symbolic picture of those people who are vainly engaged in animated discussions over the 'values' of things, considering them as something absolute, something unalterably determined.

The spring has dried up, and the fish are all on the ground. (In the agonies of death) they are spewing each other with moist breath and trying to moisten each other with froth and foam. It would be far better for them if they could forget each other in a wide river or sea. Likewise, the people praise a 'great man' and condemn a 'bad man'. [360] But it would be much better if they could forget both ('good' and 'bad') together and be freely 'transmuted' with the Way itself.

'Essentialism' would seem to be a philosophical position which is most suitable to the human mind. At any rate the Reason and the common sense which is but a vulgarized form of Reason naturally tend to take an 'essentialist' position. And the latter is that upon which our ordinary thinking depends.

The gist of the 'essentialist' view may be concisely presented as a thesis that all things are endowed with 'essences' or 'quiddities', each thing being clearly marked off by its 'essence' from all others. A table is a table, for example, and it can never be a chair. The book which is upon the table is 'essentially' a book, and it is 'essentially' different from, or other than the table. There are 'ten thousand', i.e., innumerable, things in the world. But there is no confusion among them, for they are separated from one another by clear-cut lines of demarcation or 'boundaries' which are supplied by their 'essences'.

As I have said before, this 'essentialist' ontology in itself is nothing to be rejected. It gives a true picture of things, if it is put in the right place, that is to say, as long as one understands it to be the picture of things at a certain ontological level. Chuang-tzû takes no exception to this. The point he wants to make is that 'essentialism' should not be regarded as the one and ultimate view of things. And he does rise in revolt against it the moment one begins to make such a claim. For he is convinced that it is not the ultimate view of things.

From the standpoint of a man who has seen things in a different light in his ecstatic vision, there is ontologically a stage at which the 'essences' become annihilated. This would simply mean for a Chuang-tzû that there are 'from the very beginning' — as he says

— no such things as 'essences' in the sense of hard and solid ontological cores of things. In any event, the so-called 'essences' lose, in this view, their solidity, and become liquefied. 'Dream' and 'reality' become confused in the vast, limitless world of 'undifferentiation'. There is no longer here any marked distinction to be drawn between a table and a chair, between a table and a book. Everything is itself, and yet, at the same time, all other things. There being no 'essences', all things interpenetrate each other and transform themselves into one another endlessly. All things are 'one' — in a dynamic way. We might properly compare this view with Ibn 'Arabi's concept of the Unity of Existence, *wabdh al-wujūd*. And we know already that this is what Chuang-tzū calls Chaos.

Ibn «Arabi could speak of the Unity of Existence because he looked at the world of Multiplicity, the illimitable existents, as so many self-determinations or self-manifestations of the Absolute [361] which is itself the absolute Unity. In a similar way, Chuang-tzū came to the idea of the 'chaotification' of things because he looked at them from the point of view of the Way, which is also the absolute metaphysical Unity.

In contemporary Western philosophy, special emphasis has often been laid upon the 'tyrannical' power of language, the great formative influence exercised by linguistic patterns on the molding of our thought. The influence of language is particularly visible in the formation of the 'essentialist' view of things.

From the point of view of an absolute 'existentialism', there are no watertight compartments in the world of Being. Man, however, 'articulates', that is, cuts up — arbitrarily, in most cases — this originally undivided whole into a pumber of segments. Then he gives a particular name to each of these segments. A segment of Reality, thus given a name, becomes crystallized into a 'thing'. The name gives it an 'essential' fixity, and thus ensures it from disintegration. For better or for worse, such is in fact the power of language. Language, in other words, positively supports 'essentialism'.

Once a 'thing' is established with a definite name, man is easily led into thinking that the thing is essentially that and nothing else. If a thing is named A, it acquires A -ness, that is, the 'essence' of being A. And since it is A 'by essence », it can never be other than A. One could hardly imagine under such conditions the thing's being B, C or D. The thing thus becomes something unalterably fixed and determined.

This fundamental relation between 'essentialism' and language is noticed by Chuang-tzû. He notices it because he looks at the matter from the point of view of the absolute Way in which, as we have repeatedly pointed out, there is not even a trace of 'essential' determinations.

The Way has absolutely no 'boundaries'. Nor has language (which produces and expresses such 'boundaries') absolutely any permanency.<sup>10</sup>

But (when the correspondence becomes established between the two) there arise real (essential) 'boundaries'.<sup>11</sup>

Referring to the sophistic logic of the school of Kung Sun Lung, Chuang-tzû points out that this kind of logic is a product of linguistic 'essentialism'.<sup>12</sup>

Rather than trying to prove by means of 'finger' that a 'finger' is not a 'finger', why not prove by means of 'non-finger' that a 'finger' is not a 'finger'?

The meaning of this passage will become clear only when we understand it against the background of the sophistic logic which was [362] prevalent in Chuang-tzû's time.

The argument of the Sophists of the school of Kung Sun Lung may be summarized as follows. The concept of 'finger' comprises within itself the concepts of the thumb, the index, the middle, the third, and the little fingers. Actually there is no 'finger' other than these five. That is to say, the 'finger' must necessarily be one of these five. And yet, if we take up any one of them, the 'index finger' for example, we find it negating and excluding all the rest, because the 'index finger' is not any of the other four fingers. Thus it comes about that the 'index finger' which is a real 'finger', is not a 'finger', because its concept applies exclusively to itself, not to the others.

Against this Chuang-tzû remarks that such an argument is simply a shallow and superficial piece of sophistry. We do not gain anything even if we prove in this manner that a 'finger' is not a 'finger'. However, there is a certain respect in which a 'finger' is properly to be considered a 'non-finger'. And this latter view — although superficially it gives the same conclusion; namely, that a 'finger' is not a 'finger' — is not a piece of sophistry. It is a view standing on the 'chaotification' of things, and it goes to the very heart of the structure of Reality.

The term 'non-finger' which appears in the second half of the above-quoted statement is not intended to be the logical contradic-

tory of 'finger'. It means something like a 'super-finger', or an ontological state in which a 'finger' is no longer a 'finger'. Why not prove by means of "non-finger"?, Chuang-tzû asks. He means to say: instead of wasting time in trying to prove by logical tricks — as Kung Sun Lung and his followers are doing — that 'a finger is not a finger' on the very level of 'a finger is a finger', we had better transcend at a stroke the ontological level of 'essential' distinctions and see with the eye of 'illumination' the reality of the situation. For, in fact, on the level of 'chaotification', a 'finger' is no longer necessarily a 'finger', it is no longer so solidly fixed that it can never be anything other than itself. All things are one, and we have no reason to stick obstinately to the idea that since A is A, it cannot be anything other than A. Thus the statement: 'a "finger" is not a "finger"' is found to be true; but, this time, on a higher level than the one on which the Sophists are trying hard to establish the same statement.

Chuang-tzû gives one more example, that of a 'horse' not being a 'horse', which was also a notorious topic of the Sophists of his time.

Rather than trying to prove by means of 'horse' that a 'horse' is not a 'horse', why not prove by means of 'non-horse' that a 'horse' is not a 'horse'? [363]

The structure of the argument is exactly the same as the previous one. The Sophists claim that a 'horse' is not a 'horse' on the basis of the following observation. The concept of 'horse', they say, must be applicable to horses of different colors like 'white horse', 'yellow horse', 'black horse' etc., and no 'horse' which is actually existent is colorless. Every actually existent horse is either white, or black, or yellow, etc. And there can be no exception. Let us take a 'white horse' as an example. The 'white horse', being white, naturally excludes all horses of other colors. The concept cannot apply to a 'black horse', for instance, or a 'yellow horse'. And the same is true of any horse of any color. Since, however, the concept of 'horse' must be such that it applies to all horses of all colors, we must conclude that no actually existent horse is a 'horse'.

The Sophists in this way establish, or claim to establish, that a 'horse' is not a 'horse'. Against this, Chuang-tzû takes the position that, even admitting that they are right in this argument, the conclusion which they reach thereby is devoid of real significance. As in the case of the preceding argument about 'finger', Chuang-tzû points out that there is a respect in which exactly the same conclusion can be maintained, but with an entirely new meaning.

Here again the term 'non-horse' refers to the metaphysical level at which all 'essential' distinctions are eliminated through 'chaotification'.

Once we put ourselves on such a level, we perceive that a 'finger' is a 'finger' and yet, at the same time, is not a 'finger', that a 'horse' is a 'horse' and yet is not a 'horse'. And the same holds true of everything else. We can even go to the extreme of asserting that the whole world is a 'finger', and the whole world is a 'horse'.

Heaven and Earth (i.e., the whole universe) are a 'finger'. All things are a 'horse'.

Heaven and Earth with 'ten thousand things' that exist therein are but an 'undifferentiated' whole, in which all things ontologically interpenetrate one another. In such a state, a 'horse' is not unalterably a 'horse'; it can be anything else. Looking at this particular situation from the reverse side we could say that all things are entitled to be regarded as a 'horse' or 'finger', or indeed, anything else.

From such a standpoint, Chuang-tzû goes on to criticize the 'essentialise position in the following manner.<sup>13</sup>

(Instead of looking at the matter from the viewpoint of 'non-finger' and 'non-horse', people divide up the originally undifferentiated whole of Seing into various categories which, again, they classify into 'right' and 'not-right') and insist on the 'right' being unalterably 'right' and the not-right' being unalterably 'not-right'. (The distinction, however, between 'right' and 'not-right', far from being [364] something 'essential, i.e., something based on the very nature of Being, is but a matter of custom and habit, just as) a road is formed (where there was none before) merely by people walking constantly upon it. Likewise, the 'things' are formed by their being designated by this or that particular name (simply by virtue of a social custom or convention)."

(And once the 'things' are thus crystallized, they are considered as either 'right' or 'not-right', 'so' or 'not-so'). On what ground does man judge a thing to be 'so'? He judges to be 'so' whatever (other people or 'society' by custom) judge to be 'so'. On what ground does man judge a thing to be 'not-so'? He is merely judging it to be 'not-so' because (other people) judge it (by custom) to be 'not-so'.

(However, from the viewpoint of 'illumination', the reality of things can only be grasped when one puts oneself on a higher level of non-discriminating acceptance which transcends all such relative distinctions. And viewed from such a place) there is a certain respect in which everything without exception is to be regarded as being 'so' (i.e., affirmable and acceptable), and

everything without exception is to be regarded as 'right'. There is nothing that is not 'so'. There is nothing that is not 'right'. Whether a stalk of grain or a great pillar, whether a leper or a (beautiful lady like) Hsi Shih, however strange, bizarre, ugly and grotesque things may be, the Way makes them all one.

The Reality perceived on such a level is called by Chuang-tzû Heavenly-Equalization,<sup>15</sup> or Walking-Two-Ways (at the same time).<sup>16</sup> The former term means a 'natural' metaphysical state in which all things, without being disturbed by the distinctions between 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong', etc., repose in their original harmony or equality. And since, as Ch'êng Hsüan Ying observes, the 'sacred man' always sees things in such a state of Equality, his mind too reposes in an eternal peace, being never disturbed by the distinctions and differences among things. The second term, literally meaning 'going both ways', refers to the same metaphysical state in which 'good' and 'bad', or 'right' and 'wrong', are both equally acceptable; a state, in other words, in which all opposites and contradictories become acceptable in the ultimate Unity of *coincidentia oppositorum*.

It is highly significant that the second chapter of the Chuang-tzû is entitled Ch'i Wu Lun,<sup>17</sup> i.e., 'Discourse on Equalizing (all) Things'. The chapter is so entitled because it is mainly concerned with the view according to which all things are 'equal', that is, ultimately One. And since, according to this view, such 'equalization' of things is justifiable only at the level of 'existence', not at that of 'essences', I consider this theory rightly comparable with Ibn Arabi's Unity of Existence. [365]

'Essentialism', if it is to be a philosophical view of existents, must be able to explain the whole of the world of Being. And it does intend — and does claim, implicitly at least — to be comprehensive enough to cover all things. But how, in actual fact, could it be so when its very nature consists in isolating single ontological units, making them 'essentially' independent of one another? If one makes such an approach to things, and yet wants to comprehend all of them, one is forced to have recourse to the method of enumeration and addition. But, however far one may go in this direction, one will never reach the ultimate end. For no matter how many independent units one may pile up one upon another, one will be left with an infinite number of things still untouched and uncomprehended.

Thus 'essentialism' is by its very nature utterly incapable of grasping the reality of the world of Being in its infinite complexity and in its limitless development and transformation. In order to



comprehend the whole of the world of Being as it really is and as it really works, we must, Chuang-tzû maintains, abandon the level of 'essential' distinctions, and, by unifying ourselves with 'existence' itself which pervades all things, look at all things in their original state of 'chaotification' and 'undifferentiation'. Instead of formulating this thesis in such a theoretical form, Chuang-tzû explains his point through the concrete example of Chao Wên, a famous lute player.

That a thing can become 'perfect' and 'defective' (at the same time) may aptly be exemplified by what happens when Chao Wên plays the lute. That a thing can remain 'not-perfect' and 'not-defective' may aptly be exemplified by what happens when Chao Wên does not play the lute.<sup>18</sup>

The meaning of the passage may be explicated as follows. Chao Wên is a musician of genius. When he plays the lute, the particular piece of music which he plays becomes actualized in a perfect form. This is what is referred to by the expression: 'that a thing can become perfect' .

However, by the very fact that Chao Wên plays a particular piece of music and actualizes it in a perfect form, the infinite number of other pieces which are left behind become darkened and nullified. This is what is meant by the thing being 'defective' at the same time. Thus a perfect actualization of one single piece of music is at the same time the negation and nullification of all other possibilities. Only when Chao Wên does not actually play, are we in a position to enjoy all the pieces of music which he is capable of actualizing. And only in such a form is his music 'perfect' in an absolute sense, that is, in a sense in which it transcends the very distinction between 'perfection' and 'imperfection' (or « defectiveness »). [366]

The 'equalization' of all things thus brings us into the very core of the reality of Being. If, however, one sticks to this idea and discards completely the phenomenal aspect of things, one falls into an equally inexcusable error. For, after all, the infinitely various and variegated phenomena are also an aspect of Reality. Certainly, the music of Chao Wên is 'perfect' in an absolute sense, only when he does not play his lute. But it is also true that the possibilities that lie hidden in his ability are destined to be 'perfected' in a relative sense and will never cease to work up their way from possibility to actuality even to the detriment of one another. Both forms of 'perfection', absolute and relative, fundamental and phenomenal, are essential to the reality of his music.

Likewise, in the ontological structure of things, both the original undifferentiation' and the phenomenal 'differentiation', or Unity and Multiplicity, are real. If Chuang-tzû emphasizes so much the former aspect, it is chiefly because at the common sense level of human experience the phenomenal aspect is so prominent and so dominant that it is commonly considered the reality.

The root of Being is absolutely one. But it does not repose forever in its original Unity. On the contrary, it belongs to the very nature of Being that it never ceases to manifest itself in infinite forms. It goes on diversifying itself into 'ten thousand things' which, again, go on endlessly transforming themselves into one another. This is the phenomenal aspect of Being. But by going through this very process of ontological 'diversification' and differentiation' all things are returning to their ultimate metaphysical source. The process of 'descent' and the process of 'ascent' are paradoxically one and the same thing. The relation between Unity and Multiplicity must be understood in this way. Just as Unity is not a static 'oneness' of death and rigidity, but is a never-ceasing dynamic process of a *coincidentia oppositorum*, Multiplicity is not a static differentiation' of things that are rigidly fixed once for all, but is a constant life process which contains within itself the ontological tension of Unity in Multiplicity.

If looked at from the viewpoint of 'differentiation', (nothing is the same as anything else), and even liver and gall (a typical example of two things closely resembling each other), are as different and as far apart as the country of Ch'u and the country of Yüeh.

However, looked at from the viewpoint of 'sameness', all things are one and the same.<sup>19</sup>

Unfortunately, the eyes of ordinary men are dazzled by the phenomenal scintillations of Multiplicity and cannot perceive the profound Unity that underlies the whole. They cannot, as Chuang-tzû says, unify the objects of their knowledge'.<sup>20</sup> [367]

The only right attitude we can take in such a situation is to 'let our minds be at ease in the harmony of spiritual perfection'.<sup>21</sup> The word 'harmony' (*ho*) here refers, as Ch'êng Hsüan Ying remarks, to the fact that when we unify the objects of our knowledge' and 'chaotify' all things, our mind enjoys a perfect peace, being no longer disturbed by what our ears and eyes approve' ; it refers also to the fact that all things at this level are peacefully together, there being no 'essential' oppositions between them. We must not be blind to the phenomenal aspect of Being, Chuang-tzû says; but it is wrong for us to remain confined in the same phenomenal world

and observe the Multiplicity of things exclusively from the phenomenal point of view. We must transcend such a stage, go up to a higher level, and looking down from that height observe the kaleidoscope of the ever-shifting Multiplicity of things. Only when we do this, are we in a position to know the reality of Being.

The dynamic relation between the original absolute Unity and the phenomenal Multiplicity, that is to say, the process by which the Absolute, stepping out of its metaphysical darkness, diversifies itself into a myriad of things of the phenomenal world is something which, as I have repeatedly pointed out discloses its reality only to a mind in the state of ekstasis, or as Chuang-tzû calls it, 'sitting in oblivion'. Particularly difficult to understand for a non-ecstatic mind is the ontological status of 'essences'.

As the Absolute divides itself through a process of ontological evolvment into 'ten thousand things', each one of the latter does seem to acquire a particular 'essence'. For, after all, what is the meaning of talking about 'ten thousand things', if they are not distinguishable from each other? How could they be distinguishable from each other if they were devoid of 'essences'? When we recognize A as being different and distinguishable from B, are we not at the same time recognizing A as being endowed with an 'essence' which is different from that of B?

From the viewpoint of Chuang-tzû, however, the things being endowed with 'essences' and their being 'essentially' distinguishable from one another is simply a matter of appearance. Each of the ten thousand things' appears to have its own 'essence' unalterably fixed once for all. In fact, it merely appears or seems to have such an 'essence'.

But our picture inevitably becomes complicated by the fact that those seeming 'essences' are not sheer nothing, either. They are not mere products of hallucination. They do have an ontological status peculiar to them. They are not ontologically groundless. The absolute all-pervading 'existence' can take on an infinite variety of forms because there is a kind of ontological basis for them. We cannot [368] certainly say that the 'essences' exist in the ordinary sense of the world. But we cannot say either that they are absolutely non-existent.

It is at this point that Ibn 'Arabi, as we remember, introduced the concept of 'permanent archetypes' (*a'yân thâbitah*) into his metaphysical system. And the concept did work admirably well. For Ibn 'Arabi succeeded thereby in philosophically settling the difficulty raised by this paradoxical situation. The 'permanent

archetypes' are those metaphysical principles which can 'be said neither to exist nor not to exist', and through which the all-pervading divine Existence becomes inflected into a myriad of things'. But for him, too, it was not basically a philosophical question; it was rather a matter of an ecstatic vision.

Chuang-tzû has no such philosophical device. Instead, he resorts directly, as he often does, to a symbolic presentation of the content of his metaphysical vision. As a result, we now have what is unanimously acknowledged to be one of the most masterly descriptions of Wind in Chinese literature. It is not, of course, a mere literary piece of work. It is a philosophical symbol which Chuang-tzû uses for the purpose of expressing verbally what is verbally inexpressible. Furthermore, the whole passage is philosophically of supreme importance, because, as we shall see immediately, it constitutes what we might call a Taoist 'proof of the existence of God'.

The beginning part of the passage is purely symbolic. Its real philosophical meaning may best be understood if, in reading it, one keeps in mind that the Cosmic Wind symbolizes 'existence', or the Absolute in its all-pervading *actus*, and that the hollow 'openings' of the trees symbolize 'essences'.

The Great Earth eructates; and the eructation is called Wind.<sup>22</sup> As long as the eructation does not actually occur, nothing is observable. But once it does occur, all the hollows of the trees raise ringing shouts.

Listen! Do you not hear the tralling sound of the wind as it comes blowing from afar? The trees in the mountain forests begin to rustle, stir, and sway, and then all the hollows and holes of huge trees measuring a hundred arms' lengths around begin to give forth different sounds.

There are holes like noses, like mouths, like ears; some are (square) like crosspieces upon pillars; some are (round) as cups, some are like mortars. Some are like deep ponds; some are like shallow basins. (The sounds they emit are accordingly various): some roar like torrents dashing against the rocks; some hiss like flying arrows; some growl, some gasp, some shout, some moan. Some sounds are deep and muffled, some sounds are sad and mournful.

As the first wind goes away with the light tralling sound, there comes the following one with a deep rumbling sound. To a gentle wind the [369] hollows answer with faint sounds. To a stormy wind they answer with loud sounds.

However, once the raging gale has passed on, all these hollows and holes are empty and soundless. You see only the boughs swaying silently, and the tender twigs gently moving.<sup>23</sup>

As I said before, this is not intended to be a mere literary description of wind. Chuang-tzû's real intention is disclosed by what follows this passage. The philosophical intention of Chuang-tzû may be formulated in the following way. The 'hollows' and 'holes' of the trees imagine that they are independently existent, that they emit these sounds. They fail to notice that they emit these sounds only by the active working of the Wind upon them. It is, in reality, the Wind that makes the 'hollows' resound:

Not that the 'hollows' do not exist at all. They are surely there. But they are actualized only by the positive activity of the Wind. As is evident, this is a very apt description of the ontological status of 'essences', which was mentioned earlier.

It is also evident that the Wind here is not an ordinary physical wind. It is the Cosmic Wind corresponding exactly to Ibn 'Arabi's concept of *sarayàn al-wujûd*, lit. the 'spreading of Existence'. It is interesting and, indeed, extremely significant, that both Ibn 'Arabi and Chuang-tzû conceive of 'existence' as something moving - 'blowing', 'flowing', or 'spreading'. For both of them, 'existence' is *actus*.

(One and the same Wind) blows on ten thousand things in different ways, and makes each hollow produce its own peculiar sound, so that each imagines that its own self produces that particular sound. But who, in reality, is the one who makes (the hollows) produce various sounds?<sup>24</sup>

Who is it? In order to give the right answer to this crucial question, we must remark first of all that the Cosmic Wind has no sound of its own. The 'sound of Heaven' (*t'ien lai*) is soundless. What is audible to our physical ears are only the ten thousand sounds produced by the hollows of the trees. They are not the sound of Heaven; they are but the 'sound of Earth' (*ti lai*). But, Chuang-tzû insists, we must hear the soundless sound of Heaven behind each of the ten thousand sounds of Earth. Rather, we must realize that in hearing the sound of Earth we are really hearing nothing other than the sound of Heaven. The infinitely various sounds which the hollows emit are no other than the one, absolute sound of Heaven.

It is to be remarked that exactly the same question: 'Who is it?' can and must be asked of what actually is observable in the 'interior' region of our own being. Just as the 'hollows' of the trees emit all [370] kinds of sounds as the Wind blows upon them, the 'interior' of man is in a state of constant turmoil. Who causes all

this commotion? That is the central question. Are the minds of men themselves responsible for it? Or are the stimuli coming from external things its causes? No, Chuang-tzû answers. But let us first see how he describes the inner 'hollows' interminably producing noises and sounds.

Even while asleep, the souls of men are (tormented) by coming into touch with various things (in dreams). When they wake up, the bodily functions begin to be active; they get entangled with external things, and all kinds of thoughts and emotions are aroused in them. And this induces them to use their mind every day in quarreling with others. Some minds are idle and vacant. Some minds are abstruse. Some are scrupulous. Those who have petty fears are nervous; those who are assailed by great fears are simply stupefied.

The way they argue about the rightness and wrongness of matters reminds us of those who shoot arrows and missiles (i.e., they are extremely quick and active). They endeavor to secure a victory (in disputes) as if they had sworn before the gods. The way they go on consuming (their mental energy) day by day reminds us of (the leaves of trees) fading away in autumn and winter.

They have gone so far into delusion and perplexity that it is no longer possible for them to be brought back. The way they fall deeper and deeper into infatuation as they grow older reminds us of minds firmly sealed with seals (of cupidity). Thus, when their minds draw near to death, there is no means of bringing them back to youthful bright-ness.

Indeed (the movements of human minds are infinitely various as are the sounds produced by the hollows of the trees): joy, anger, sadness, and delight! Sometimes they worry about the future; sometimes they vainly bewail the irretrievable past. Sometimes fickle, sometimes obstinate. Sometimes flattering, sometimes self-conceited. Some-times candid, sometimes affected.

They remind us of all kinds of sounds emerging from the empty holes (of a flute), or mushrooms coming up out of warm dampness. Day and night, these changes never cease to replace one another before our eyes.

Where do these (incessant changes) sprout from? No one knows their origin. It is impossible to know, absolutely impossible! It is an undeniable fact, however, that morning and evening these things are actually happening (in ourselves). Yea, precisely the fact that they are happening (in ourselves) means that we are alive!<sup>25</sup>

After describing in this way the endless psychological events which are actually taking place in our minds day and night, Chuang-tzû

proceeds to an interpretation of this bewildering phenomenon. What is the real and ultimate cause of all this? He asks himself whether the ultimate cause of this psychological turmoil is our 'ego' [371]

To say that the 'ego' is the cause of all this is nothing other than recognizing — indirectly — that the stimuli coming from the external world are the causes of our psychological movement. He describes this relation between the external stimuli and the changing states of our minds in terms of a relation between 'that' (i.e., the objects) and ego'.

Without 'that', there would be no 'ego'. Without 'ego', 'that' would have nothing to lay hold of. (Thus our 'ego', i.e., the whole of our psychological phenomena, would seem to owe its existence to external stimuli). This view appears to come close to the truth. And yet it still leaves the question unanswered as to what really does make (our minds) move as they do.<sup>26</sup>

Chuang-tzû admits that external stimuli do excite commotions in our minds. Such a view, however, does not reach the very core of the matter. Those who imagine that this view is capable of fully accounting for the psychological changes that are taking place in ourselves are comparable to the 'holes' and 'hollows' of the trees that naively imagine that they themselves are producing the sounds they produce, without paying attention to the activity of the Wind.

Beyond the stimuli coming from the external objects, there is Something which is the ultimate cause, Something which induces external objects to act upon our minds and thereby cause the latter to become agitated. Beyond and behind all these phenomena there seems to be a real Agent who moves and controls all movements and all events in our minds, just as there is a Wind behind all the sounds produced by the 'holes'. However, just as the Wind is invisible and impalpable, so is this Agent unknowable and unseen. But just as we can feel the existence of the Wind — although it is invisible — through its activity, we can feel the existence of the Agent through His *actus*.<sup>28</sup>

It would seem that there is some real Ruler.<sup>27</sup> It is impossible for us to see Him in a concrete form. He is acting - there can be no doubt about it; but we cannot see His form. He does show His activity, but He has no sensible form.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> NDE la comparaison de la mélodie unique issue d'instruments divers ressemble, mais est moins parfaite puisqu'elle suppose des sourds.

It is philosophically very important that Chuang-tzû asserts that the Absolute in its personal aspect, i.e., as the absolute Agent, is only accessible to our understanding as *actus*. The Absolute in this aspect is *actus*; it is not a 'thing' Without having any sensible form, that is, without being a 'thing', it never ceases to manifest its activity. We can only follow its trace, everywhere, in everything. But we can never see its form because it has no form and because it is not a 'thing'. However, the human mind is by its own nature an 'essentialist. It finds it extremely difficult, if not absolutely impossible to represent anything except in the form of a 'thing'. It cannot, except [372] in very rare cases, conceive of anything as Nothing. The conception of the Absolute as Something which is Nothing is to an ordinary mind simply an intolerable paradox, if not sheer nonsense.

In order to render this metaphysical paradox a bit more acceptable, Chuang-tzû compares the situation with the complicated functioning of the members and organs of the body, the whole mechanism of which is governed and controlled by an invisible 'something': the soul.

One hundred joints, nine openings, six entralls — these constitute a human body. Now of all these, which one should we respect most (i.e., which should we regard as the Ruler of the body)? Do you say that you respect (as the Rulers) all of them equally? (No, that is impossible). Then, do you favor one of them as particularly your own? (No, that again is impossible). But, if not (i.e., if neither all of them nor any particular one of them is in a position to rule over the body), is it the case that all of them are mere servants and maids? (However, if they were all servants and maids), how could the country (i.e., the body) be kept in order? Or is it the case that they rule and are ruled, occupying the positions of the Ruler and the subjects by turns?

No, there does exist a real Ruler (who governs them all). And whether or not man knows the concrete form of this Ruler, his reality is never affected thereby; it neither increases nor decreases thereby.<sup>29</sup>

The true Ruler in this case is the soul whose concrete form is known to nobody. But of course this is here put forward as an image which would clarify the relation between the Absolute and all events and all phenomena in the world of Being. Just as the bodily organs and members are under the domination of the invisible soul, all that exists and happens in the world is under the dominion of the unknown-unknowable Ruler.



As I pointed out earlier, it is highly significant that Chuang-tzû here presents the true Ruler' of the world as *actus*. No one can see the Absolute itself as 'something' existent, but no one can deny, either, the presence of its *actus*. And that *actus* is philosophically nothing other than Existence.

We have to notice also that the *actus* of the Absolute which, in the earlier passage, was described as the Cosmic Wind, i.e., a cosmic force, is here presented as something personal — God. In the world-view of Chuang-tzû, the Absolute or the Way has two different aspects, cosmic and personal. In its cosmic aspect the Absolute is Nature, a vital energy of Being which pervades all and makes them exist, grow, decay, and ultimately brings them back to the original source, while in its personal aspect it is God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Lord of all things and events. As conceptions and Against Essentialism [373] representations, the two are totally different from one another, but in reality both point to exactly one and the same thing. The difference between Nature and God is merely a matter of points of view, or the ways in which the human mind conceives of the Absolute which is in itself wholly unknown and unknowable. To this ultimate metaphysical mystery we shall try to come closer in the following chapter.

#### Notes

1. II, p. 74.
2. *ibid.*, p. 75 : ()
3. ()
4. II, p. 75.
6. () II, p. 89.
7. Lao-tzû, however, does think and talk about this 'ineffable' Something. We shall come to this point in the following chapter.
8. Chuang-tzû IV, p. 183.
9. VI, p. 242.
10. i.e., the words which correspond to these 'boundaries' have no unalterable semantic fixity.
11. II, p. 83.
12. II, p. 66.
13. II, pp. 69-70.
14. Note again how Chuang-tzû attributes 'essence'-forming power to language. A thing which in its original state, is 'nameless', turns into

something rigidly fixed and unchangeable, once it is given a definite name.

15. tien chün ( )

16. *liang hang*

17. ( ). This can also be understood as meaning 'Equalization of Various Views on Being', i.e., the nullification of the opposition among various views on Being on the level of absolute transcendence.

18. II, p. 74.

19. V, p. 190.

20. V, p. 193. ( ) lit. 'to unify what is known by the knowledge'.

21. V, p. 191 ( ) Commenting upon this phrase Ch'êng Hsüan Ying says: ( )

22. The issuing forth of the phenomenal things from the absolute One is here compared to the great Earth belching forth the Wind. Note the remarkable similarity of this mythopoeic image to that used by Ibn 'Arabi when the latter tries to describe the ontological inner tension of the Divine Names within the Absolute, which is so acute that it cannot but be relieved by the Names 'bursting out'; see Part I, pp. 125-126.

23. pp. 45-46.

24. II, p. 50.

25. II, p. 51.

26. II, p. 55.

27. *chén tsai*, ( )

28. II, p. 55.

29. II, pp. 55-56.

## VII The Way

Up to this point we have been following the footprints of Chuang-tzû as he tries to describe analytically the process by which a vision of the Absolute is revealed to the Taoist Perfect Man, opening up in his mind a new vista of the whole world of Being which is totally different from, and radically opposed to, that shared by ordinary men on the level of common sense. In so doing we have discarded Lao-tzû except in a few places. Nor have we analyzed in a systematic manner the philosophical thought expressed in the *Tao Tê Ching*. We have adopted this course for several reasons, the most important of them being that Chuang-tzû, as I have pointed out a number of times, is vitally interested in describing the epistemological aspect of the problem of the Tao, while Lao-tzû is almost exclusively interested in giving the result of the experience of the Absolute, i.e., what comes after, and out of, that experience.

We have seen in the preceding chapter how Chuang-tzû submits to an elaborate theoretical analysis the process of the gradual development of the human mind toward a Taoist perfection. He attempts to give an accurate description of the Taoist variety of metaphysical or spiritual experience by which man 'ascends' toward the Absolute until he becomes completely unified with it. Certainly, Chuang-tzû is equally interested in the 'descending' movement of the mind, from the state of *ekstasis* back to the level of daily consciousness, that is, from the stage of the absolute Unity back to that of 'essential' Multiplicity. But even then, his description of the Descent is epistemological as well as ontological. That is to say, his description is made so that to each objective stage of Being there corresponds a subjective stage of spiritual experience, so that the ontological system, in the case of Chuang-tzû, is at the same time a complete epistemological system, and vice versa. Moreover, it is typical of Chuang-tzi that these two aspects are so completely fused together that it is at times difficult for us to decide whether a given passage is intended to be a description of the subjective side of the matter or of the objective, ontological structure of things. The 'sitting in oblivion' is an example in point. [376]

Lao-tzû, on the contrary, does not seem to be very much interested in the experiential stages which precede the ultimate vision of the Absolute. He does not take the trouble to explain how and by what process we can obtain the vision of the Absolute. He seems to be

more interested in the questions: (1) What is the Absolute, i.e., the Way?; and (2) How is the 'Sacred man' expected to behave in ordinary circumstances of social life on the basis of his vision of the Way?

From the very outset he utters his words in the name of the Absolute, as a representative of those who have already attained to the highest stage of Taoist perfection. Behind the pages of the *Tao Tê Ching* we feel the presence of a man who has experienced the most intimate union with the Absolute, who, consequently knows what the Absolute is.

Quite abruptly Lao-tzû sets out to talk about the Way. He tries to impart to us his personal knowledge of the Absolute, and his strange — so it seems to common sense understanding — vision of the world. If it were not for Chuang-tzû, we would hardly be able to know for sure what kind of experiential background this extraordinary vision of the world has as its unstated 'prehistory'. This is why we have up till now intentionally refrained from turning systematically toward an analysis of Lao-tzû's thought, and confined ourselves to the task of clarifying this 'prehistory' in the light of what Chuang-tzû says about it.

But the particular situation which we have just mentioned concerning Lao-tzû's basic attitude would seem to suggest that the *Tao Tê Ching* is the best possible thing for us to have recourse to, if we want to obtain a clear understanding of the Taoist conception of the Absolute, its reality and its working. As we shall realize immediately, the Absolute as conceived by Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû is by its very nature beyond all verbal description. Despite that, Lao-tzû does endeavor to describe, at least symbolically, this ineffable Something. And he succeeds marvellously. In point of fact, the *Tao Tê Ching* is a remarkable work in that it attempts to delineate to the utmost limit of possibility the Absolute which is essentially indescribable. This is why we shall be greatly dependent in the present chapter upon this book for elucidating the metaphysical structure of the Absolute.

We must remark, however, that here again, Lao-tzû does not explain how and why it is ineffable, and indescribable. He simply states that the Way is 'nameless', 'formless', 'imageless', 'invisible', 'inaudible', etc., that it is nothing' (*wu wu*)' or Nothing (*wu*)<sup>2</sup>. As to the psychological or logical process by which one reaches this conclusion, he says nothing positive. This process is clarified in an interesting way by Chuang-tzû in a passage which [377] bears ample witness to his being an excellent dialectician. Let us begin

by reading the passage in question as an illuminating theoretical introduction to Lao-tzû's conception of the Absolute.

Chuang-tzû is keenly conscious of the fact that the Way, or the Absolute in its absoluteness, defies all verbalization and reasoning; that, if brought down to the level of language, the Way will immediately and inevitably turn into a concept. As a concept, even the Absolute is exactly in the same rank as any other concept. He makes this observation the starting-point of his argument. People, he says, distinguish between 'right' and 'wrong' in all matters and thus take the position of there being a fundamental distinction between 'right' and 'wrong'.<sup>4</sup> Chuang-tzû on his part, puts forward the thesis that there is no distinction between 'right' and 'wrong'.<sup>3</sup> Ordinary people and Chuang-tzû are in this respect diametrically opposed to each other. And yet, he goes on to say, as a logical proposition, 'there-is-no-distinction-between-right-and-wrong' is no less a *logos*' than the opposite proposition: 'there-is-a-distinction-between-right-and-wrong'. In this respect, both belong to one and the same category.<sup>5</sup>

In reality, the two propositions refer to two completely different levels of discourse. The difference, as we already know, comes out only when one realizes that the positive statement is a statement typical of the empirical level of discourse, while the negative one is originally intended to represent the ontological 'chaotification' which is experienced by the Perfect Man in the moments of his ecstatic union with the Absolute. As an expression of this original experience, the statement is not a logical proposition except in its outward form. But as long as it does have a logical form, it is a logical proposition; and as such, it does not properly represent the unique experience of 'chaotification', being as it is nothing but the contradictory of the proposition: 'there-is-a-distinction-between-right-and-wrong'. If such is the case, could there be any other attitude for us to take than maintaining a complete silence? 'Despite this', he says, 'I would dare to discuss the problem (on the logical or conceptual level).' With these preliminary remarks, he sets out to develop an extremely interesting argument in the following way. The argument, in brief, establishes that the Absolute in its original absoluteness is conceptually the negation-of-negation-of-negation, that is, the negation of the Absolute's being Nothing which, again, is the negation of Being. And that is the furthest limit in which our logical thinking can go in its venturesome attempt at grasping the Absolute on the level of concepts.

We have seen in the preceding chapter how Chuang-tzû, in describing the stages of the spiritual development of 'sitting in [378] oblivion', mentions as the ultimate limit of ecstatic cognition the view that 'nothing has ever existed from the very beginning'.

What is the ultimate limit of Knowledge? It is the stage represented by the view that nothing has ever existed from the very beginning. This is the furthest limit (of Knowledge), to which nothing more can be added.<sup>6</sup>

'Nothing has ever existed from the very beginning' appearing in this quotation is the key-phrase for the right understanding of the passage we are going to read.<sup>7</sup> It is important to keep in mind, however, that in this latter passage we are no longer concerned with the epistemological question of the utmost limit of human cognition. Our problem here is essentially of a metaphysical nature. For it concerns the ultimate origin of Being, or of the Universe. The 'beginning' here in question means the beginning point of the world of Being. Whenever we think logically of the formation of the world of Being, we have to posit a 'beginning'. Our Reason cannot conceive of the world of Being without imagining a point at which it 'began' to exist<sup>29</sup>.

So we posit Beginning. (But the moment we posit Beginning, our Reason cannot help going further back and) admit the idea of there having been no Beginning. (Thus the concept of No-Beginning is necessarily established. But the moment we posit No-Beginning, our logical thinking goes further back by negating the very idea which it has just established, and) admits the idea of there having been no 'there-having-been-no-Beginning'. (The concept of 'No-No-Beginning' is thus established.)

The concept of Beginning, i.e., the initial point of the whole world of Being, is but a relative concept. It can be conceptually pushed further and further back. But no matter how far we may push it back, this conceptual process does not reach an end. In order to put a definite end to this process we have to transcend it at one stroke by negating the Beginning itself. As a result, the concept of No-Beginning is obtained.

However, the concept of No-Beginning is, again, a relative one, being as it is a concept that subsists only by being opposed to that of Beginning. In order to remove this relativity and attain to the absolute No-Beginning, we have to transcend the No-Beginning itself by negating it and establishing No-No-Beginning. The No-No-Beginning — which must be articulated as No-[No-

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<sup>29</sup> NDE la limite rencontrée

Beginning] — is, however, a concept whose real significance is disclosed only to those who are able to understand it as signifying a metaphysical state of affairs which is to be grasped by a kind of metaphysical intuition. And this would seem to indicate that [379] No-No-Beginning, although it is something that has been posited by Reason, lies beyond the grasp of all logical reasoning.

In the same manner, (we begin by taking notice of the fact that) there is Being. (But the moment we recognize Being, our Reason goes further back and admits that) there is Non-Being (or Nothing). (But the moment we posit Non-Being we cannot but go further back and admit that) there has not been from the very beginning Non-Being. (The concept of No-[Non-Being] once established in this way, the Reason goes further back and admits that) there has been no there-having-been-no-Non-Being' (i.e., the negation of the negation of Non-Being, or No-[No Non-Being]).

This concept of No-[No Non-Being] or No-No-Nothing represents the ultimate logical stage which is reached by our negating — i.e., transcending — the negation itself of the opposition of Being and Non-Being. This is the logical and conceptual counterpart of the Way or the metaphysical Nothing which is not a simple 'nothing', but a transcendent Nothing that lies beyond both 'being' and 'non-being' as ordinarily understood.

We have thus seemingly succeeded in conceptualizing the Way as an absolutely transcendent Nothing. However, does the Absolute thus conceptualized mirror faithfully the reality of the Absolute? To this question, we can say neither Yes nor No. As in the case of the concept of No-No-Beginning, we must remark that the concept of No-No-Nothing does justice to the reality of the Absolute only when we transcend, in understanding it, the sphere of logical thinking itself into that of ecstatic or mystic intuition. But when we do so, the concept of No-No-Nothing will immediately cease to be a concept. And we shall end up by realizing that all the logical reasoning that has preceded has in reality been futile and of no use. If, on the contrary, we refuse to transcend the level of reasoning, the concept of No-No-Nothing will remain for ever an empty concept devoid of all positive meaning and, therefore, in no position to do justice to the reality of the Absolute. Thus, either way, the conceptualizing activity of the mind provokes powerless in grasping the Absolute as it really is.

(When Reason begins to be active), all of a sudden we find ourselves confronted with 'being' and 'non-being'. (Since, however, these are relative concepts in the sense that 'being' at this stage turns into 'non-being' at the next stage, and so on

and so forth), we can never know for sure which is really 'being' and which is really 'non-being'. Now I have just established something (that looks) meaningful, (i.e., I have established the Absolute as No-No-Nothing). But I do not know whether I have truly established something meaningful or whether what I have established is, after all, nothing meaningful.

[380] At this point, Chuang-tzû suddenly changes the direction of his thinking and tries another approach. This time he turns to the aspect of Unity which, as we have seen earlier, is one of the most salient features of the Absolute. But before discussing the problem on the level of logical reasoning, he reminds us by way of caution of what is to be understood by the statement that the Absolute is 'one'. The Absolute, he says, is 'one' as a *coincidentia oppositorum*. We have already examined in Chapter IV Chuang-tzû's position concerning this problem. The key-term is 'equalization' of all things in the Absolute.

The Way or the Absolute, according to Chuang-tzû, is the metaphysical state of Heavenly Equalization, that is, the absolute One which 'equalizes' all oppositions and contradictions. At this stage, the smallest is at the same time the biggest, and a moment is eternity.

(The state of Heavenly Equalization defies common sense and reason, for we admit at this stage that) there is in the world nothing bigger than the tip of a hair of an animal in autumn, while Mount Tai (which is usually mentioned as an example of a very big thing) is considered extremely small. No one lives longer than a child who dies before coming of age, while P'êng Tsu (who is related to have lived 800 years) is considered to have died young. Heaven and Earth endure for the same length of time as I do (i.e., the eternal duration of Heaven and Earth is equivalent to the momentary duration of my individual existence in this world). And the ten thousand things are exactly the same as my own self.

Thus, from the viewpoint of Heavenly Equalization, all things become reduced to a single unity in terms of both time and space. How does logical reasoning grasp such an absolute Oneness? That is the question we are faced with now.

All things (at this stage) are absolutely 'one'. But if so, how is it possible for us to say something? (i.e., Since all things are absolutely 'one', there is no longer anything whatsoever opposed to anything else whatsoever. And since there is no opposition, it is meaningless even to say: 'one').

(But in order to reason, I have to posit something). So I have said: 'one'. But how could I judge that (it is, or they are) 'one'?



without explicitly positing the term (i.e., word or concept: 'one')? However, (the moment I posit the term 'one'), the (original) 'one' (i.e., the absolute One which is a coincidentia oppositorum) and the term (or concept of) 'one' necessarily make 'two'. (This would mean that the least amount of reasoning makes the original One split itself into Two and thus produces dualism.)

Then, these 'two' (i.e., the two-term judgment: 'The Way is One') together with the 'one' (i.e., the absolute One which is prior to any judgment) make three.

And from this point on the process extends endlessly, so much so that even a talented mathematician will not be able to count out the number, much less ordinary people.

If, in this way, moving from Non-Being to Being leads us inevitably to (at least) 'three', where shall we get if we move from Being to Being (i.e., if, instead of starting from the absolute One, we take a relativist point of view and begin to pursue the individual things which go on being endlessly diversified)? Better not to make any move (i.e., better not to exercise reasoning concerning the Absolute and the things). Let us content ourselves with abiding by the (great) Yes (which transcends all oppositions and contradictions, and leaves everything as it is)!

Thus after developing an elaborate reasoning on the nature of the Absolute, Chuang-tzû, ironically enough, ends by asserting the futility of reasoning. He advises us to abandon all logical thinking about the Absolute and to remain immersed ecstatically in the absolute intuitive Knowledge. For only by doing so can we hope to be in direct contact with the absolute One.

Thus the highest stage of Knowledge is remaining motionless in what cannot absolutely be known (by reasoning). Is there anyone who knows the Word which is no longer a 'word'? Is there anyone who knows the Way which is not even a 'way'? If there is a man who knows such a thing, he deserves to be named the 'Treasury of Heaven' (i.e., he who is in possession of the key to the limitless treasure house of Being. Nay, he is the same as the treasury itself). (The Treasury of Heaven with which such a man is completely identical and unified is like an unbounded ocean); no matter how much you pour water into it, it will never become full; and no matter how much you dip up water therefrom, it will never run dry. And nobody knows how and from where all these (limitless) things come into being.

It is the Knowledge of such a man that is properly to be called the Shaded Light'.

Thus by following step by step Chuang-tzû's argument we have been led to the conclusion that the Way or the Absolute in its

ultimate reality transcends all reasoning and conceptualization. This conclusion forms the starting-point for the metaphysical thinking of Lao-tzû. As I remarked at the outset of this chapter, Lao-tzû does not take the trouble of explaining the logical or epistemological process which underlies his metaphysical system. But we are now in a position to understand the background against which this metaphysics must be set.

Quite naturally, the metaphysics of Lao-tzû begins by mentioning negative attributes of the Way. The Way, to begin with, is 'nameless'.<sup>8</sup> [382]

The Way in its absolute reality (ch'ang) has no name.<sup>9</sup>

Interminably continuous like a thread, no name can be given to it.<sup>10</sup>

The Way is hidden and nameless.<sup>11</sup>

That the Way is 'nameless' implies that the very name 'Way' (*tao*) is nothing other than a makeshift. Lao-tzû forcibly calls it 'Way' because without naming it he cannot even refer to it. This fact is clearly indicated by the very famous opening sentence of the *Tao Tê Ching*.

The 'way- which can be designated by the word 'way » is not the real 12 Way.

The 'name' which can be designated by the word 'name' is not the real Name.<sup>13</sup>

It is interesting and important to remark that this passage, besides being a clear statement to the effect that the Absolute is 'nameless', is designed to be an implicit criticism of Confucian realism. The 'way' which is here said to be not the real Way is the human (or ethical) 'way' as understood in the Confucian school. And the 'name' which is said to be not the real Name refers to the so-called 'names' of the Confucianists, such as 'benevolence', 'righteousness', 'wisdom', etc., which the Confucianists consider cardinal virtues.

As to the meaning of the word 'way' (*tao*) as it was originally used by Confucius himself and his circle, authentic information is furnished by the *Lun Yü* ('The Analects'). Entering into the fine details of the problem would lead us too far beyond the scope of the present study. Here I shall confine myself to giving a few examples just to clarify the most essential characteristics of the Confucian concept of *tao*.

Master Yu (one of the disciples of Confucius) once remarked: Those who are by nature filial and fraternal (i.e., those who behave with an inborn goodwill toward their parents and eider

brothers) at home are seldom inclined (in public life) toward comporting themselves against the will of their superiors. And (of those who do not comport themselves against the will of their superiors) none, indeed, has ever wanted to stir up confusion (in society).

(The observation of this fact makes us realize that) the 'princely man' should strive (to establish) the root, for the root once established, the 'way' (*tao*) will naturally grow up. The right attitude toward parents and elder brothers may, in this respect, be considered the root of 'benevolence' (or « human love »)."

It is contextually clear that the 'way' in this passage means the proper ethical attitude of man toward his brethren in society. The argument is typical of Confucianists. It recognizes man's inborn goodwill toward those closest in blood as the 'root' or 'origin' of [183] human morals. This inborn goodwill, when expanded into a universal goodwill toward all fellow-members of society, turns into the highest principle of ethical conduct, the way, as exemplified by the virtue of 'benevolence'.

Clearly, the conceptual structure of the argument is based on the terms 'filial piety', 'fraternal respect', and 'benevolence'. The word 'way' is mentioned almost in a casual way. It is not even a key term in the real sense of the word.

The Master (Confucius) said: O Shên,<sup>15</sup> my 'way' is a unity running through (all forms of my behavior). Master Tsêng respectfully replied: Yes!

When the Master left the place, the other disciples asked (Master Tsêng) saying: What did he mean?

Master Tsêng said: Our Master's 'way' consists in loyalty (i.e., being loyal or faithful to one's own conscience) and, 'kindness' (i.e., being thoughtful for others, as if their problems were one's own).<sup>16</sup>

In this passage, the 'way' means again the leading principle of ethical conduct. By the statement: 'my way is a unity running through' Confucius means to say that although his behavior appears concretely in various forms, there underlies them all a unique ethical principle. The 'way', in other words, is here the unifying principle of all forms of moral conduct.

The Master said: In case the 'way' prevails in a state, you may be daring in both speech and action. But in case the 'way' does not prevail, you may be daring in action, but you should be reserved in speech.<sup>17</sup>

Confucius often speaks of the way' prevailing in a state — or more literally 'a state's possessing the way'.<sup>18</sup> What is meant by the word in such contexts is too clear to need elucidation.

The Master said: The 'way' of the 'princely man' is (manifested) in three (forms). But I myself am equal to none of them. He who is really virtuous does not worry. He who is really wise is never perplexed. He who is really bold does not fear.

Master K'ung (one of the disciples of Confucius) said: Master, these precisely are your own 'way'!<sup>19</sup>

The interpretation of the word *tao* may vary more or less in accordance with contexts, but the fundamental meaning is observable in all the uses of the word. It means the right or proper 'way' of acting in social life. The 'way' for Confucius is the highest principle of ethical conduct.

It would be going too far to assert that this Confucian concept of the 'way' is exclusively human. For, although it is essentially human and ethical in its concrete manifestation, the concept would seem to have in the moral consciousness of Confucius something cosmic as [384] its metaphysical core. The 'way' in its original metaphysical form is the all-pervading supreme law of Being. The supreme law governing the working of the universe in general, and governing man as a part of the whole universe in particular, is called 'way' when it is comprehended by, or reflected in, the consciousness of man. The highest principle of ethical conduct is, in this sense, nothing other than a particular manifestation of the universal law of Being in the form of the supreme law governing the right forms of human life. The principle of ethical conduct is, for Confucius, by no means a man-made rule, or set of rules, regulating from outside the behavior of man. It is a reflection in the human consciousness of the highest law of the universe. And as such, it is the 'internalized' cosmic law regulating human behavior from within.

Thus to know the 'way' does not consist merely in learning the formal rules of good manners and correct behavior. It consists in man's coming into contact with the all-pervading metaphysical law of the Cosmos through becoming conscious of it. The following very forceful and passionate statement would sound absurd or even ridiculous if the Confucian 'way' were merely a matter of etiquette and correct behavior.

The Master said: If a man hears (i.e., understands the profound meaning of) the 'way' in the morning, he may die contented in the evening.<sup>20</sup>

In this 'cosmic' aspect, the Confucian conception of the way' might be said to have something in common with the Taoist counterpart. The difference between the two, however, is far more conspicuous and essential than the point of contact, as we shall see presently. There is, in any case, a conscious attitude noticeable on the part of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû to reject the 'way' as understood by Confucius and his followers. The 'way', Lao-tzû says, which can be recognized as the 'way' by ordinary people — Confucius and his followers being their representatives — is not the real Way. The real Way, or the Absolute in its absoluteness, is not something which an ordinary mind can become conscious of. How could one 'know' it? How could one 'hear' it? It is by nature something unknown, unknowable and inaudible.

Being essentially unknown and unknowable, the Way is 'nameless'. Here again we encounter Lao-tzû consciously taking up a position against the Confucian attitude toward the 'names'. Certainly, Lao-tzû too speaks of 'names'. The 'nameless' Way, he says, goes on assuming various 'names' in its process of self-determinations.

The Way in its absolute reality has no 'name'. It is (comparable to) uncarved wood.<sup>21</sup> . . . Only when it is cut out are there 'names'.<sup>22</sup>

[385] But there is a basic difference between Lao-tzû and Confucius with regard to 'names' in that Lao-tzû does not regard these 'names' as absolutely established. As we have learnt from the explanation given by Chuang-tzû of 'chaotification' as well as from Lao-tzû's thesis that everything in this world is 'relative', all 'names' — and ultimately the 'things' designated by the 'names' — are but of a relative nature. Confucian 'realism' on the contrary, takes the position that behind every 'name' there is a corresponding objective and permanent reality. And to the highest Names there correspond the highest realities. These Names represent the cardinal virtues: 'benevolence', 'righteousness', 'decorum', 'wisdom', 'truthfulness'. Against this, Lao-tzû puts forward the view that these 'names' which may be mentioned as 'names' are not real 'names'. In his mind, the Names, or the cardinal virtues, which are so highly valued by the Confucians are but so many symptoms of degeneration and corruption, that is, symptoms of men's having alienated themselves from the Absolute.

Only when the great Way declines, do 'benevolence' and 'righteousness' arise. Only when cleverness and sagacity make their appearance do wiles and intrigues arise. Only when the six basic kinship relations (i.e., the relationships between father

and son, elder and younger brothers, husband and wife) are out of harmony do filial sons make their appearance. Only when the state falls into confusion and disorder, do loyal subjects make their appearance.<sup>23</sup>

It is only after Virtue is lost that 'benevolence' becomes prominent. It is only after 'benevolence' is lost that 'righteousness' becomes prominent. And it is only after 'righteousness' is lost that 'decorum' becomes prominent.

Indeed, 'decorum' emerges in an age in which loyalty and 'faithfulness' have become scarce. It marks the beginning of disorder (in society).<sup>24</sup>

Far from being real values as the Confucians assert, all these so-called Names are but signs of man's alienation from Reality. In the very establishment of these Names as absolute and permanent values there is an unmistakable indication that the Absolute has been lost sight of. Speaking more generally, no 'name' is absolute. For, as Lao-tzû says, a 'name' which can be designated by the word "name" is not the real Name. The only real Name' (ch'ang ming) which is absolute is the Name assumed by the Absolute. However, that absolute Name is, paradoxically, 'Nameless', or as we shall see presently, the 'Mystery of Mysteries', the 'Gate of all Wonders'.

I have just used the phrase: 'the Name assumed by the Absolute'. And in fact, as Lao-tzû himself explicitly admits, the 'nameless' Way does assume a more positive 'name' at its very first stage of [386] self-manifestation or self-determination. That first 'name' assumed by the Absolute in its creative activity is Existence (*yu*).<sup>25</sup> Lao-tzû, making a concession to popular parlance, sometimes calls the latter Heaven and Earth (*t'ien ti*).<sup>26</sup> Strictly speaking, the Way at this stage is not yet actually Heaven and Earth. It is Heaven and Earth only *in potentia*. It is that face of the Absolute by which it turns, so to speak, toward the world of Being which is to appear therefrom. It refers to the Absolute as the principle of eternal and endless creativity.

The Nameless is the beginning of Heaven and Earth. The Named is the Mother of the ten thousand things.<sup>27</sup>

But before we go into the details of the problem of the Named, we must pursue further the 'nameless' aspect of the Way.

With a view to making a fresh start in the consideration of this aspect of the Way, we may conveniently begin by recalling the opening words of the *Tao Tê Ching*, which has been quoted above <sup>28</sup> and which has led us into a sort of long digression on the fundamental difference between Confucianism and Taoism

regarding the understanding of 'way' (*tao*) and 'name' (*ming*). The passage reads: The 'way' which can be designated by the word 'way' is not the real Way. The 'name' which can be designated by the word 'name' is not the real Name.

The same conception of the Way is expressed by Chuang-tzû in a somewhat different way as follows.

If the Way is made clear, it is no longer the Way.<sup>29</sup>

He means to say by this that a thing which can be pointed to as the Way is not the real Way. And again,

Is there anyone who knows the Way which is not a 'way'?<sup>30</sup>

This, of course, means that the real Way has no visible form by which one could designate it by the word 'way'.

'To say that the Way or the Absolute in its absoluteness is 'nameless', that it refuses to be designated by any 'name' whatsoever, is to say that it transcends all linguistic comprehension. And this is the same as to say that the Way is beyond the grasp of both thought and sense perception. The Way is of such a nature that Reason cannot conceive of it nor the senses perceive it. The Way, in other words, is an absolute Transcendent.

Even if we try to see it, it cannot be seen. In this respect it is called 'figureless'.<sup>31</sup>

Even if we try to hear it, it cannot be heard. In this respect it is called 'inaudibly faint'.

Even if we try to grasp it, it cannot be touched. In this respect it is called 'extremely minute'.

[387] In these three aspects, it is totally unfathomable. They merge into One.<sup>32</sup>

(Ordinarily, the upper part of a thing is brightly visible, while the lower part is dark and obscure. But this is not the case with the Way.) Upward, it is not bright. Downward, it is not dark.

It continues interminably like a thread, but no name can be given to it. And (this interminable creative activity) ultimately returns to the original Nothingness.

Shall we describe it as a shapeless Shape, or imageless Image? Shall we describe it as something vague and undeterminable? Standing in front of it, we do not see its head. Following behind it, we do not see its rear.<sup>33</sup>

Thus the 'namelessness' of the Way is the same as its being Non-Being. For whatever is absolutely imperceptible and inconceivable, whatever has no 'image' at all, is, for man, the same as 'non-existent' It is 'Nothing' (*wu*).<sup>34</sup>

It is important to notice that the Way appears as 'Nothing' only when looked at from *our* point of view. It is Nothing for us because it transcends human cognition. It is, as Islamic philosophers would say, a matter of *i'tibâr* or (human) 'viewpoint'. Otherwise, the Way in itself is — far from being 'nothing' — Existence in the fullest sense of the term. For it is the ultimate origin and source of all Being.

For ordinary human consciousness the Way *is* Nothing. But it is not nothing' in a purely negative sense. It is not a *passive* nothing' It is a *positive* Nothing in the sense that it is Non-Being pregnant with Existence.

It goes without saying that this positive aspect of the Way is far more difficult to explain than its negative side. Properly speaking it is absolutely impossible to explain it verbally. As we have just seen, the reality of the Way is indescribable and ineffable. And yet Lao-tzû does try to describe it, or at least to give some hints as to how we should 'feel' its presence in the midst of the world of Being. Quite naturally, the hints are extremely dim and obscure. They are of necessity of a symbolic nature.

The Way in its reality is utterly vague, utterly indistinct.<sup>35</sup> Utterly indistinct, utterly vague, yet there is within it an Image. Utterly vague, utterly indistinct, yet there is within it Something. Utterly profound, utterly dark, yet there is within it the purest Essence.

The purest Essence is extremely real.

(Eternally and unchangingly its creativeness is at work, so that) from of old till now its Name" has never left it. Through this Name it governs the principles of all things.

How do we know that it is so with the principles of all things? From what I have just said.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>388</sup> Thus the Way in its purely negative aspect which is absolutely beyond human cognition is Nothing and Non-Being. In this aspect the Way has no 'name' whatsoever. Even the word way' (*tao*) is properly inapplicable to it. It is 'nameless'.

This absolutely intangible and impenetrable Mystery steps out of its own darkness and comes a stage closer to having a 'name'. It is, at this stage of self-manifestation, a faint and shadowy 'Image'. In the Image we feel vaguely the presence of Something awful and mysterious. But we do not yet know what it is. It is felt as Something but it has still no 'name'.

In the first part of the present study we saw how, in the metaphysical system of Ibn'Arabi, the Absolute in its absoluteness



is 'nameless'. We saw how the Absolute in such a state is even beyond the stage at which it is properly to be designated by the name Allāh. Likewise in Lao-tzû, this Something is made to be antecedent even to God (lit. the heavenly Emperor).

Unfathomably deep it is like the ancestor of the ten thousand things

...

Like a deep mass of water it is (and nothing is visible on the surface),

yet Something seems to be there.

I know not whose son it is.<sup>38</sup>

It would seem to be antecedent even to the Emperor (i.e., God).<sup>39</sup>

This 'nameless' Something, in its positive aspect, i.e., in its eternal and everlasting creativeness, may be 'named' provisionally the 'way' Lao-tzû himself admits that it is a provisional 'name'. But of all the possible provisional 'names', the way' is the representative one. Actually, Lao-tzû proposes several other names' for the Way, and points out several typical 'attributes', each one of which refers to this or that particular aspect of the Way.<sup>40</sup>

There is Something, formless but complete," born before Heaven and Earth.

Silent and void, it stands alone;<sup>42</sup> never changing. It goes round everywhere, never stopping." It may be considered the Mother of the whole world."

I know not its 'name'. Forging a pseudonym, I call it the Way'. Being forced to name it (further), I call it 'Great'.

Being 'Great' would imply 'Moving-forward'.<sup>43</sup> Moving-forward' would imply 'Going-far'.<sup>46</sup> And 'Going-far would imply 'Turning-back'."

In the passage just quoted Lao-tzû suggests the possibility of the Absolute being named in various ways. At the same time, however, he makes it clear that all these 'Names' or 'attributes' are provisional, relative, and partial. For instance, he proposes to call the Absolute the 'Great'. He is justified in doing so because the Absolute or the Way is 'great'. But it is, we have to remember, 'great' only in a certain sense, from a particular standpoint. To look upon the Way as something 'great' represents but one particular point of view which we human beings take with regard to the Absolute. This naturally implies that there is also a certain respect in which the Way should be called 'small'. It can be

considered 'great'; it can be considered 'small'. Both names' are right, but neither of them can do full justice to its reality.

In this respect, the Way is comparable to a water plant adrift, turning this way or that. It has no fixity. Having no fixity, it accepts any 'name', but no 'name' can represent it perfectly.

The great Way is like a thing drifting on the water. It goes every-where, left and right.

The ten thousand things owe their existence to it. And yet it does not boast (of its own creative activity). It accomplishes its work, yet makes no claim. It clothes and nourishes the ten thousand things, yet never domineers over them. Being absolutely free of desire, it may be called 'Small'.

The ten thousand things go back to it, yet it makes no claim to being their Master. In this respect, it may also be called 'Great'.<sup>48</sup>

This difficulty which we inevitably encounter in attempting to give a proper 'name' to the Absolute is due not only to the fact that it is essentially 'nameless' but also to the fact that the Absolute is not a 'thing' in the sense in which we usually understand the term 'thing'. The descriptive power of human language is tragically limited. The moment we linguistically designate a state of affairs, whether metaphysical or empirical, by a noun, it becomes reified, that is, it turns into a 'substance' in our representation. We have earlier referred to the Absolute as Something; but 'Something' is in our imagination some substance, however mysterious it may be. And exactly the same is true of such 'names' as Mother', Way', etc., or even 'Nothing'.

The Absolute which we designate by these 'names' however, is not a 'substance'. And it should not be understood as a 'substance'. This is the reason — or at least one of the main reasons — why Lao-tzû emphasizes so much that all the 'names' he proposes are nothing but makeshifts. Whatever 'name' he may use in referring to the Absolute, we should try not to 'reify' it in understanding what he says about it. For as a 'thing' in the sense of a 'substance', the Absolute is nothing'. How can a thing be a 'substance' when it is absolutely 'formless', 'invisible', 'inaudible', 'intangible', and taste-less'?<sup>49</sup> The Absolute is 'Something' only in the sense of an Act, or the act of Existence itself. Scholastically we may express the conception by saying that the Absolute is *Actus Purus*. It is *Actus Purus* in [390] the sense that it is pre-eminently 'actual', and also in the sense that it exists as the very act of existing and making 'things' exist. The following words of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû makes this point clear. Lao-tzi says:

He who goes through the world, holding in hand the great Image,<sup>50</sup> wherever he may go will meet with no harm.<sup>51</sup> Safe, tranquil and calm he will always remain.

Beautiful music and delicious food will make wayfarers stop. The Way, on the contrary, uttered in words is insipid and flavorless. One looks at it, and finds it unworthy to be seen.

One listens to it, and finds it unworthy to be heard.

Yet when one uses it, one finds it inexhaustible.<sup>52</sup>

The loudest sound is hardly audible.

The greatest Image has no form.

The Way is hidden and has no name. And yet it is the Way alone that really excels in bestowing help and bringing things to completion.<sup>53</sup>

And Chuang-tzû:

The Way does have a reality and its evidence.<sup>54</sup> But (this does not imply that it) does something intentionally. Nor does it possess any (tangible) form. Soit may be transmitted (from heart to heart among the 'true men'), but cannot be received (as in the case of a thing having an external form). It may be intuited, but cannot be seen.

It is self-sufficient. It has its own root in itself.

It existed even before Heaven and Earth existed. It has unmistakably existed from ancient times.<sup>55</sup>

It is the thing that confers spirituality upon the Spirits. And it is the thing that makes the Heavenly Emperor (i.e., God) divine.

It produces Heaven. It produces Earth.

It exists even above the highest point of the sky. And yet it is not 'high'.<sup>56</sup> It exists even beneath the six directions." And yet it is not 'deep'.

It was born before Heaven and Earth. And yet it is not 'ancient'. It is older than the oldest (historical) time. And yet it is not 'old'.<sup>58</sup>

Thus Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû agree with each other in asserting that the Way is *actus*. It goes without saying that *actus* exists. But it does not exist as a 'substance'. It should not be 'reified'. In order not to reify it, we have to intuit it. For we cannot possibly imagine, represent, or conceive the Absolute without turning it into a kind of 'substance'. Metaphysical or ecstatic intuition is the only possible means by which we can approach it without doing serious harm to its image. But an intuition of this sort is open only to those who have experienced to the utmost limit what Chuang-tzû calls 'sitting in oblivion'.

[391] However this may be, the preceding explanation has at least made it clear that the Way has two opposite aspects, one positive and the other negative. The negative side is comparable with the metaphysical Darkness of Ibn'Arabi. In the world-view of the latter too, the Absolute (*haqq*) in itself, i.e., in its absoluteness, is absolutely invisible, inaudible and ungraspable as any 'form' whatsoever. It is an absolute Transcendent, and as such it is 'Nothing' in relation to human cognition. But, as we remember, the Absolute in the metaphysical intuition of the Arab sage is 'Nothing', not because it is 'nothing' in the purely negative sense, but rather because it is too fully existent — rather, it is Existence itself. Likewise, it is Darkness not because it is deprived of light, but rather because it is too full of light. too luminous — rather, it is the Light itself.

Exactly the same holds true of the Way as Lao-tzû intuitively it. The Way is not dark, but it seems dark because it is too luminous and bright. He says:

A 'way' which is (too) bright seems dark.<sup>59</sup>

The Way in itself, that is, from the point of view of the Way itself, is bright. But since it is too profound to be known by man<sup>60</sup> it is, from the point of view of man, dark. The Way is 'Nothing' in this sense.

This negative aspect, however, does not exhaust the reality of the Absolute. If it did, there would be no world, no creatures. In the thought of Ibn Arabi, the Absolute by its own unfathomable Will comes down from the stage of abysmal Darkness or 'nothingness' to that of self-manifestation. The Absolute, although it is in itself a Mystery having nothing to do with any other thing, and a completely self-sufficient Reality — has another, positive aspect in which it is turned toward the world. And in this positive aspect, the Absolute contains all things in the form of Names and Attributes. In the same way, the Way of Lao-tzû too, although it is in itself Something 'nameless', a Darkness which transcends all things, is the 'Named' and the 'Mother of the ten thousand things'. Far from being Non-Being, it is, in this respect, Being in the fullest sense.

The Nameless is the beginning of Heaven and Earth. The Named is the Mother of ten thousand things.<sup>61</sup>

This passage can be translated also as follows:

The term 'Non-Being' could be applied to the beginning of Heaven and Earth. The term 'Being' could be applied to the Mother of ten thousand things.

Whichever translation we may choose, the result comes to exactly the same thing. For in the metaphysical system of Lao-tzû, the [392] 'Nameless' is, as we have already seen, synonymous with 'Non-Being', while the 'Named' is the same as 'Being'.

What is more important to notice is that metaphysically the Nameless or Non-Being represents a higher — or more fundamental — stage than the Named or Being within the structure of the Absolute itself. Just as in Ibn'Arabi even the highest 'self-manifestation' (*tajallî*) is a stage lower than the absolute Essence (*dhât*) of the Absolute, so in Lao-tzû Being represents a secondary metaphysical stage with regard to the absoluteness of the Absolute.

The ten thousand things under Heaven are born out of Being (*yu*), and Being is born out of Non-Being (*wu*).<sup>62</sup>

If we put these two passages side by side with each other, we understand that in Lao-tzû's conception the Absolute in its ultimate metaphysical stage is the Nameless and Non-Being, while at the first stage of the emergence of the world it becomes the Named and Being. The expression: 'the beginning of Heaven and Earth', which Lao-tzû uses in reference to the Nameless, would seem to suggest that he is here considering the Absolute in terms of a temporal order. And we must admit that only from such a point of view can we properly talk about the 'creation' or 'production' of the world. The temporal expression, however, does not do full justice to the reality of the matter. For, as in the case of the successive stages of Divine self-manifestation in Ibn 'Arabi's metaphysics, the 'beginning' here in question is not properly speaking a temporal concept. It simply refers to that aspect of the Absolute in which it embraces in itself 'the myriad things under Heaven' in the state of *potentia*. Otherwise expressed, the Absolute *qua* the myriad things in the state of metaphysical concealment is the Beginning. The Beginning in this sense is the same as Non-Being. We would make the meaning of the word 'Beginning' more understandable if we translate it as the 'first principle' or the *Urgrund* of Being.

The concept of 'production', or 'coming-into-being' of all existent things, is also non-temporal. In our temporal representation, the 'coming-into-being' is a process, the initial stage of which is Non-Being and the last stage of which is Being. Metaphysically, however, there can be no temporal development in the Absolute. The Absolute, for Lao-tzû, is both Non-Being and Being, the Nameless and the Named at the same time.

Lao-tzû describes the relationship between Non-Being and Being in the following way.

In its state of eternal (or absolute) Non-Being one would see the mysterious reality of the Way. In its state of eternal Being one would see the determinations of the Way.

These two are ultimately one and the same. But once externalized,

[393] they assume different names (i.e., 'Non-Being' and 'Being'). In (the original state of) 'sameness', (the Way) is called the Mystery. The Mystery of Mysteries it really is! And it is the Gateway of myriad Wonders.<sup>63</sup>

The Non-Being (or Nameless) in which the mysterious Reality (*miao*) is to be observed would correspond to the state of the Absolute (*haqq*), in the conception of Ibn 'Arabi, before it actually begins to work in a creative way. And the Being (or Named) in which the Way manifests itself in infinite 'determinations' (*chiao*)<sup>65</sup> would find its counterpart, in Ibn Arabi's thought, in the state of the Absolute when its creative activity spreads itself, as the Breath of the Merciful, being 'determined' in an infinite number of things.

It is remarkable that in this passage Lao-tzû goes beyond even the distinction between Being and Non-Being. Non-Being is surely the ultimate metaphysical principle, the most fundamental source of Being. It is the Way, just as Being also is the Way. And yet, since it is here conceptually opposed to 'Being', it cannot be the last thing. The basic opposition itself must be transcended. And Lao-tzû sees beyond the opposition of Being and Non-Being something absolutely ineffable which he symbolically calls *hsüan*.<sup>66</sup> The word originally means 'black' with a mixture of redness, a very appropriate term for something absolutely 'invisible', an unfathomable Mystery ('black'), but revealing itself, at a certain stage, as being pregnant with the ten thousand things ('red') in their state of potentiality. In this Mystery of Mysteries Lao-tzû sees the Absolute in a state in which even Being and Non-Being are not yet distinguished from each other, an ultimate metaphysical state in which 'these two are one and the same thing'.

The Absolute or the Way, in so far as it is the Mystery of Mysteries, would seem to have nothing to do with the phenomenal world. But, as we have just observed, in the utter darkness of this great Mystery ('black'), we already notice a faint foreboding ('red') of the appearance of phenomenal things. And the Mystery of Mysteries is at the same time said to be the 'Gateway of myriad

**Wonders'. In the following chapter we shall be concerned with the process by which the ten thousand things stream forth out of this Gateway.**

**Notes**

1. ( ) XIV.
2. ( ) XL.
3. See Chapter IV.
4. yen, 0.
5. lei, 0
6. See above, Chapter VI.
7. II, p. 79.
8. ( )
9. *Tao Tê Ching*, XXXII. The word *ch'ang* here is synonymous with ( ) (*chên*) meaning 'true' or 'real'. For a similar use of the word, see XVI, XXVIII, LII, LV. The original meaning of the word *ch'ang* is 'constant' or '(eternally) unalterable'. Han Fei Tzû ( ) in his chapter on the Interpretation of Lao-tzû ( ) says: 'Those things that flourish first but later decay cannot be called *ch'ang*. Those things only deserve to be called *ch'ang* which came into being together with the separation of Heaven and Earth and which will neither die nor decay even when Heaven and Earth be dispersed into nothing. That which is really *ch'ang* never changes.' The *ch'ang* is, in brief, the true reality which remains for ever unalterable.
10. XIV.
11. XLI.
12. Note again the use of the word *ch'ang* in the sense of 'real', 'eternal', 'unalterable' or 'absolute'.
13. I.
14. *Confucian Analects*, I, 2.
15. Confucius addresses himself to his disciple Master Tséng.
16. *Analects*, IV, 15.
17. *ibid.*, XIV, 4.
18. See VIII, 13; XIV, 1.
19. *ibid.*, XIV, 30.
20. *ibid.*, IV, 8.
21. *p'u* ( ) meaning 'uncarved block'. The uncarved block from which all kinds of vessels are made is still 'nameless'. Only when it is carved into vessels does it acquire various 'names'.

22. *Tao Tê Ching*, XXXII.' Being cut out' ( ) is a symbolic expression for the 'nameless' Way becoming 'determined' into myriad things.

23. *ibid.*, XVIII.

24. *ibid.*, XXX VIII.

25. ( )

26. ( )

27. *op. cit.*, I.

28. See p. 99.

29. Chuang-tzû, II, p. 83.

30. *ibid.*, II, p. 83.

31. ( ) meaning 'dirt and figureless'.

32. The three aspects represent sense perception in general. The Way is beyond the reach of sense perception so that at the ultimate limit of the latter the Way only appears as an unfathomable and imperceptible One. Everything supposedly perceptible is 'merged into' it; that is to say, it has absolutely no articulation.

33. *Tao Tê Ching*, XIV.

34. *ibid.*, XL.

35. i.e., a metaphysical state in which Being and Non-Being are indistinguishable from each other.

36. In this passage Lao-tzû is trying to describe the absolute One which is both Non-Being and Being at the same time. The two aspects are in fact indistinguishable from one another. But if we concentrate our attention upon the positive side, the Way appears first as a vague and obscure Image of Something, then as a pure Reality which is eternally creative. In this aspect and at this stage the Way has an eternal Name: *yü* or Existence.

37. *op. cit.*, XXI.

38. 'Nobody knows who is the father of the Absolute.' That is to say, the Way has no 'cause' for its existence; it is its own cause.

39. *op. cit.*, IV.

40. *op. cit.*, XXV .

41. *hun ch'êng* ( ).

42. *tu li*, 'standing alone' , that is 'self-sufficient', an expression corresponding to the Arabic term *ghanî*.

43. tai ( )



44. ( ) 'all-under-Heaven'. Ma Hsü Lun ( ) proposes to read: 'Heaven and Earth', which is most probably right. The reading is based on an old ( ) of the Sung Dynasty. It accords with the expression: 'born before Heaven and Earth' which is found in the first sentence of the prescript passage.

45. 'Moving-forward' means that the working of the 'Great' permeates Heaven and Earth without being obstructed.

46. i.e., the working of the 'forward-mover' goes to the extremity of the world of Being.

47. 'Turning-back' means returning to the original point of departure, so that the metaphysical movement of the Way forms a big universal circle. And being circular, it never comes to an end.

48. *op. cit.*, XXXIV.

49. *ibid.*, XXXV.

50. *ta hsiang* ( ). For the expression *ta hsiang* in the sense of 'great Image', see the next quotation from the *Tao Tê Ching*. Compare also XXI which has been quoted above (p. 106), where Lao-tzû uses the word *hsiang* '(a faint and shadowy) Image (of Something beyond)' in reference to the first self-manifestation of the Absolute.

51. See Chuang-tei, I, pp. 30-31: 'Nothing can harm this man. Even if flood waters reach the sky, he will never be drowned. Even if in a burning heat metals and stones begin to flow and the earth and mountains are burned down, he alone will never feel hot.'

52. *Tao Tê Ching*, XXXV.

53. *ibid.*, XL1.

54. ( ) The Way possesses a reality as actus, and it presents unmistakable evidence of its existence in the effects it produces.

55. We have already seen above how Chuang-tzû solves the problem of the Begin-ning of the Way. The statement: 'It has unmistakably existed from ancient times' should not tempt us into imagining that Chuang-tzû recognizes a 'beginning-point' in 'ancient times' or 'eternity'. It is merely a figure of speech. It is significant in this connection that Chuang-tzû, a few paragraphs down in the same chapter, calls the Way *shih* ( ) meaning literally 'likening to a beginning'. The Way is so called because it is something to be 'likened to a thing having a beginning', or more exactly, something which looks as if it had a beginning, though in reality it has none.

56. 'High' is, as we have seen, a relative concept which cannot be applied to the Absolute.

57. The 'six directions' means the whole universe.
58. Chuang-tzü, VI, p. 247.
59. *Tao Tè Ching*, XLI.
60. *ibid.*, XV .
61. *ibid.*, I.
62. *ibid.*, XI — See also XLI quoted about, which reads: The Way in its absolute reality has no 'name' It is (comparable to) uncarved wood. Only when it is cut out are there 'names'.
63. *ibid.*, I.
64. ( ), meaning something unfathomably profound and mysterious.
65. ( ) literally meaning a 'fortress in a frontier district'; and by extension a 'border' or 'limit'.
66. ( ).

## VIII The Gateway of Myriad Wonders

We have learnt in the preceding chapter that the name 'Way' is, after all, but a makeshift, a forced expression for what is properly not to be named. The word 'Way' is a symbol conveniently chosen for referring to Something which is, strictly speaking, beyond even symbolic indication. With this basic understanding, however, we may use — as Lao-tzû himself does — the term in describing the metaphysical world-view of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû.

It will be clear that, of the three primary aspects of the Absolute, which Lao-tzû distinguishes: the Mystery (*hsüan*), Non-Being (*wu*), and Being (*yu*), the first alone is the one to which the word 'Way' properly and directly applies. The rest, that is, Non-Being, Being, and even the 'ten thousand things' that effuse from the latter, are, all of them without exception, the Way, but not primarily. They are the Way in the sense that they represent various stages of the Mystery of Mysteries as it goes on determining itself. In other words, each one of them is the Way in a secondary, derivative, and limited sense, although in the case of Non-Being, which is nothing but pure Negativity, 'limitation' or determination' is so weak and slight that it is almost the same as 'non-limitation'.

It is true, however, that even the stage of Non-Being is not the ultimate and absolute stage of the Way, as long as the concept of 'Non-Being' is understood in opposition to, and in contradistinction from, that of 'Being'. In order to reach the ultimate and absolute stage of the Way in this direction, we have to negate, as Chuang-tzû does, the concept itself of Non-Being and the very distinction between Non-Being and Being, and conceptually posit No-[Non-Being], more exactly, No-[No Non-Being]. This we have learnt in the first part of the preceding chapter.

In the present chapter we shall no longer be primarily concerned with this absolute aspect of the Way, but rather with that aspect in which it turns toward the empirical or phenomenal world. Our major concern will be with the problem of the creative activity of the Way. This being the case, our description here will begin with the 'The Gateway of Myriad Wonders [399] stage which stands slightly lower, so to speak, than that of the Mystery of Mysteries.

I have just used the phrase: 'the stage which stands slightly lower than that of the Mystery of Mysteries'. But it is the last and ultimate stage which we can hope to reach if we, starting from the

world of phenomenal things, go up stage after stage in search of the Absolute. For, as we have seen above, the Mystery *per se* has nothing to do with the phenomenal world. And this makes us understand immediately that when Lao-tzû says:

The Way is the Granary' of the ten thousand things,<sup>2</sup>  
he refers by the word Way to the 'stage which is slightly lower' than the Mystery of Mysteries. It is precisely at this stage that the Way is to be considered the Granary of the ten thousand things. It is at this stage that it begins to manifest its creativity. The word 'granary' clearly gives the image of the Absolute as the very ontological source of all things in the sense that all things are contained therein in the state of potentiality. Lao-tzû refers to this aspect of the Absolute as the eternal (or absolute) Non-Being' or the 'Nameless' . It is to be noted that the Nameless' is said to be the Beginning of Heaven and Earth'.<sup>3</sup> The Absolute at the stage of 'Nameless' or Non-Being' is actually not yet Heaven and Earth. But it is destined to be Heaven and Earth. That is to say, it is potentially already Heaven and Earth. And the expression: 'Heaven and Earth' is here clearly synonymous with the more philosophical term, 'Being'.

At this juncture, Lao-tzû introduces into his system another important term, 'One' . In the first part of the present study we saw how the concept of 'one' in the forms of *tajalliyat* and *wahidiyah* plays a decisive rôle in the thought of Ibn 'Arabi concerning the 'self-manifestations' of the Absolute. No less an important rôle does the concept of 'one' play in the thought of Lao-tzû.

For Lao-tzû, the One is something closest to the Way; it is almost the Way in the sense of the Mystery of Mysteries. But it is not exactly the Way as the Mystery. Rather, it is an aspect of the latter. It represents the stage at which the Way has already begun to move positively toward Being.

A very interesting explanation of the whole situation is found in a passage of the Chuang-tzû, in a chapter entitled 'On Heaven and Earth' . The chapter is one of the 'Exterior Chapters' (*wai p'ien*),<sup>4</sup> and may not be from the pen of Chuang-tzû himself. But this does not detract from the importance of the idea itself expressed in the passage. It reads as follows:

Before the creation of the world,s there is only No-[Non-Being] 6

[400]

(Then) there appears the Nameless. The latter is that from which the One arises.

Now the One is there, but there is no form yet (i.e., none of the existential forms is manifest at this stage). But each (of the ten thousand things) comes into existence by acquiring it (i.e., the One, by participation). In this particular respect, the One is called Virtue.<sup>7</sup> Thus (the One at the stage of being itself) does not manifest any form whatsoever. And yet it contains already (the potentiality of) being divided (into the ten thousand things).

Notwithstanding that, (since it is not yet actually divided) it has no break. This (potentiality of being divided and diversified into myriad things) is called the Command.<sup>8</sup>

This important passage makes it definitely clear that the One is not exactly the same as the Way *qua* the Mystery. For in the former there is observable a sort of existential potentiality, whereas the latter allows of no potentiality, not even a shadow of possibility. It is the absolute Absolute.

At the stage of One, the Way is found to be already somehow 'determined', though it is not yet fully 'determined' or limited! It is, according to the explanation given by Chuang-tzû, a metaphysical stage that comes after the Nameless (or Non-Being) which, again, comes after the original No-[Non-Being]. And as such, it is a half-way stage between pure Non-Being and pure Being. It stands at the end of Non-Being and at the initial point of Being.

The One is, thus, not yet actually Being, but it is potentially Being. It is a metaphysically homogeneous single plane which is not yet externally articulated; it is a unity which is going to diversify itself, and in which the creative activity of the Way will be fully manifested.

The whole process by which this creative activity of the Way is manifested in the production of the world and the ten thousand things is described by Lao-tzû in the following way.

The Way begets 'one'; 'one' begets 'two'; 'two' begets 'three'; and 'three' begets the ten thousand things.

The ten thousand things carry on their backs the Yin energy<sup>9</sup> and embrace in their arms the Yang energy<sup>10</sup> and the two (i.e., Yin and Yang) are kept in harmonious unity by the (third) energy emerging out of (the biending and interaction of) them.<sup>11</sup>

From the Way as the metaphysical Absolute — or more strictly, from the metaphysical Absolute at the stage of Non-Being —

there emerges the One. The One is, as we have just seen, the metaphysical Unity of all things, the primordial Unity in which all things lie hidden in a state of 'chaos' without being as yet actualized as the ten thousand things.

From this Unity there emerges 'two', that is, the cosmic duality of [401] Heaven and Earth. The former symbolizes the principle of Yang, the latter that of Yin. At this stage, the Way manifests itself as Being and the Named. The Named, as we have learnt from a passage quoted earlier,<sup>12</sup> 'is the Mother of the ten thousand things'. Before the 'two' can begin to work as the Mother of ten thousand things', however, they have to beget the third principle, the 'vital force of harmony' formed by the interaction and mixture of the Yin and the Yang energy. The expression: two begets three' refers to this phase of the creation of the world.

The combination of these three principles results in the production of the ten thousand things. Thus it comes about that everything existent, without exception, has three constituent elements: (1) the Yin which it 'carries on its back' — a symbolic expression for the Yin being negative, passive 'shadowy' and 'dark' — (2) the Yang which it 'embraces in its arms' - a symbolic expression for the Yang being positive, bright and 'sunny' — and (3) the vital force which harmonizes these two elements into an existential unity.

It is to be remarked that Heaven and Earth, that is, the Way at the stage of Being, or the Named, is considered the Mother of the ten thousand things'. There is a firm natural tie between the 'Mother' and her children'. This would seem to suggest that the 'ten thousand things' are most intimately related with Heaven and Earth. The former as the children' of the latter provide the most exact image of the Way *qua* the Named.

All things under Heaven have a Beginning, which is to be regarded as the Mother of all things.

If one knows the 'mother', one knows the 'child'. And if, after having known the child' one goes back to the 'mother' and holds fast to her, one will never fall into a mistake until the very end of one's life.<sup>13</sup>

These words describe in a symbolic way the intimate ontological relationship between the Way at the stage of the Named, or Being, and the phenomenal world. The phenomenal things are to be regarded as the 'children' of the Named. That is to say, they are not to be regarded as mere objective products of the latter; they

are its own flesh and blood. There is a relationship of consanguinity between them.

And since the Named, or 'Heaven and Earth', is nothing else than a stage in the self-evolvement of the Way itself, the same relationship must be said to hold between the Way and the phenomenal things. After all, the phenomenal things themselves are also a stage in the self-evolvement of the Way.

I have just used the expression: 'the self-evolvement of the Way'. But we know only too well that any movement on the part of the Way toward the world of phenomena begins at the stage of the One. [402] The One represents the initial point of the self-evolvement of the Way. All things in the phenomenal world partake of the One. By being partaken of in this way, the One forms the ontological core of everything. The Way *per se*, that is, *qua* the Mystery, is beyond that stage. Thus Lao-tzû often mentions the One when he speaks about the phenomenal things partaking of the Way. In a looser sense, the word 'Way' may also be used in that sense, and Lao-tzû does use it in reference to that particular aspect of the Way. But in the most rigorous usage, the 'One' is the most appropriate term in contexts of this sort.

Heaven, by acquiring the One, is serene.

Earth, by acquiring the One, is solid.

The Spirit, by acquiring the One, exercise mysterious powers.

The valleys, by acquiring the One, are full.

The ten thousand things, by acquiring the One, are alive.

The lords and kings, by acquiring the One, are the standard of the world.

It is the One that makes these things what they are.

If Heaven were not serene by the One, it would break apart.

If Earth were not solid by the One, it would collapse.<sup>14</sup>

If the Spirits were not able to exercise mysterious powers by the One, they would cease to be active.<sup>15</sup>

If the valleys were not full by the One, they would run dry.

If the ten thousand things were not kept alive by the One, they would perish.

If the lords and kings were not noble and lofty by the One, they would be overthrown.<sup>16</sup>

The first half of the passage expresses the idea that everything in the world is what it is by virtue of the One which 'it acquires', i.e., partakes of. Viewed from the side of the phenomenal things, what

actually happens is the 'acquisition' of the One, while from the side of the Way, it is the creative activity of the Way as the One.

The second half of the passage develops this idea and emphasizes the actual presence of the Way in the form of the One in each of the things that exist in the world, ranging from the highest to the lowest. The One is present in everything as its ontological ground. It acts in everything as its ontological energy. It develops its activity in everything in accordance with the latter's particular ontological structure; thus, the sky is limpid and clear, the earth solidly settled, the valley full of water, etc. If it were not for this activity of the One, nothing in the world would keep its existence as it should.

The Way in this sense is an indwelling principle of all things. It pervades the whole phenomenal world and its ontological activity. The Gateway of Myriad Wonders [403] affects everything. Nothing lies outside the reach of this universal immanence of the Way.

The Net of Heaven has only wide meshes. They are wide, yet nothing slips through them.<sup>17</sup>

The 'immanence' of the Way in the phenomenal world must not be taken in the sense that something completely alien comes from outside into the phenomenal world and alights on the things. To put it in a different way, the phenomenal things are not moved by force by something which is not of their own. On the contrary, the Way is 'immanent' in the sense that the things of the phenomenal world are so many different forms assumed by the Way itself. And this must be what Lao-tzû really means when he says that the Way is the 'Mother of the ten thousand things'. There is, in this respect, no ontological discrepancy between the Way and the things that exist in the world.

Thus, to say that the phenomenal things are as they actually are by virtue of the activity of the Way is to say that they are what they are by virtue of their own natures. Lao-tzû speaks in this sense of 'the natures — or Nature — of the ten thousand things'.<sup>18</sup> It is significant that the original word here translated as 'nature', *tzû jan*,<sup>19</sup> means literally 'of-itself it-is-so'. Nothing is forced by anything to be what it is. Everything 'is-so of-itself'. And this is possible only because there is, as I have just said, no ontological discrepancy between the immanent Way and the things of which it is the vital principle. The very driving force by which a thing is born, grows up, flourishes, and then goes back to its own origin — this existential force which everything possesses as its own



'nature' — is in reality nothing other than the Way as it actualizes itself in a limited way in everything.

The Way, in acting in this manner, does not force anything. This is the very basis on which stands the celebrated Taoist principle of 'Non-Doing' (*wu wei*)<sup>20</sup>. And since it does not force anything, each of the ten thousand things 'is-so of-itself'. Accordingly the 'sacred man' who, as we shall see later, is the most perfect image of the Way, does not force anything.

Thus the 'sacred man' . . . only helps the 'being-so-of-itself' (i.e., spontaneous being) of the ten thousand things. He refrains from interfering with it by his own action."

To be calm and soundless — that is the 'natural' (or « being-so-of-itself »). This is why a hurricane does not last all morning, and a rainstorm does not last all day. Who is it that causes wind and rain? Heaven and Earth. Thus, if even Heaven and Earth cannot perpetuate (excessive states of affairs), much less can man (hope to succeed in maintaining an 'unnatural state')<sup>22</sup>

[404] This idea of the 'nature' or 'being-so-of-itself' of the existent things leads us immediately to another major concept: Virtue (*tê*).<sup>23</sup> In fact the *tê* is nothing other than the 'nature' of a thing viewed as something the thing has 'acquired'. The *tê* is the Way as it 'naturally' acts in a thing in the form of its immanent ontological core. Thus a Virtue is exactly the same as Nature, the only difference between them being that in the case of the former concept, the Way is considered as an 'acquisition' of the thing, whereas in the case of the latter the Way is considered in terms of its being a vital force which makes the thing 'be-so of-itself'.

Everything, as we saw above, partakes of the Way (at the stage of the One). And by partaking of the Way, it 'acquires' its own existential core. As Wang Pi says;<sup>24</sup> 'The Way is the ultimate source of all things, whereas the Virtue is what all things acquire (of the Way)'. And whatever a thing is, whatever a thing becomes, is due to the 'natural' activity of its own Virtue.

It is characteristic of the metaphysical system of Lao-tzû that what is here considered the 'natural' activity or Virtue of a thing is nothing other than the very activity of the Way. The Way exercises its creative activity within the thing in the capacity of the latter's own existential principle, so that the activity of the Way is in itself the activity of the thing. We encounter here something comparable with Ibn Arabi's concept of the 'Breath or the Merciful' (*al-nafas al-rahmâni*), or more generally, the concept of Divine Mercy (*rahmah*)," which, issuing forth from the unfathomable depth of the Absolute, spreads itself over the whole extent of possible

Being and brings into actual existence all the phenomenal things of the world. It is interesting to note in this connection that in the Book of *Kuan-tzû* - spuriously attributed to Kuan Chung, the famous statesman of the 7th century B.C. - we find this significant state-ment: 'Virtue (*tê*) is the Way's act of giving in charity',<sup>26</sup> that is, Virtue is the act of Mercy manifested by the Way toward all things. And this act of Mercy is concretely observable, as Kuo Mo Jo says, in the form of the 'bringing up, or fostering, the ten thousand things'.

This conception completely squares with what Lao-tzû remarks about the activity of Virtue in the following passage.

The Way gives birth to (the ten thousand things), the Virtue fosters them, things furnish them with definite forms,<sup>27</sup> and the natural impetus completes their development.

This is why none of the ten thousand things does not venerate the Way and honor the Virtue. The Way is venerated and its Virtue honored not because this is commanded by somebody, but they are naturally so.<sup>28</sup>

Thus the Way gives them birth. The Virtue fosters them, makes them [405] grow, feeds them, perfects them, solidifies<sup>29</sup> them, stabilizes them,<sup>30</sup> rears them, and shelters them.

In this way, the Way gives birth (to the ten thousand things), and claims no possession. It does great things, yet does not boast of it. It makes (things) grow, and yet exercises no authority upon them. This is what I would call the Mysterious Virtue.<sup>31</sup>

We saw earlier how Lao-tzû 'provisionally' and 'by force' gives 'names' to the Way, that is, describes it by various attributes. In a similar way, he distinguishes in Virtue several attributes or qualities. And, accordingly, he refers to Virtue by different 'names', as if he recognized the existence of various kinds of Virtue. The 'Mysterious Virtue' (*hsüan tê*) which we have just come across is one of them. Other 'names' are found in the following passage.

The 'high' Virtue (*shang tê*) looks like a valley,<sup>32</sup> as the purest white seems spoiled.

The 'wide' Virtue (*kuang tê*) looks insufficient.

The 'firm' Virtue (*chien tê*) looks feeble.

The 'simple' Virtue (*chih tê*)<sup>33</sup> looks deteriorated.

All these 'names', however, do not designate different 'kinds' of Virtue, no less than the different 'names' of the Way indicate the existence of different kinds of Way. They simply refer to different 'aspects' which we can 'forcibly' distinguish in that which is properly and in itself indeterminable. In this sense, and only in

this sense, is Virtue 'high', 'wide', 'firmly-established', 'simple', etc.

There is one point, however, which deserves special mention. That is the distinction made in the *Tao Tê Ching* between 'high' Virtue and 'low' Virtue. The distinction arises from the fact that Virtue, representing as it does concrete forms assumed by the Way as it actualizes itself in the phenomenal world, is liable to be affected by 'unnatural', i.e., intentional, activity on the part of phenomenal beings. Quite ironically, Man, who is by nature so made as to be able to become the most perfect embodiment of Virtue - and hence of the Way - is the sole creature that is capable of obstructing the full activity of Virtue. For nothing other than Man acts 'with intention'. Things are naturally as they are, and each of them works in accordance with its own 'nature'. Whatever they do is done without the slightest intention on their part to do it. Man, on the contrary, may 'lower' his naturally given Virtue by his very intention to be a perfect embodiment of the Way and to make his Virtue 'high'.<sup>35</sup>

A man of 'high' Virtue is not conscious of his Virtue. That is why he has Virtue.

A man of 'low' Virtue tries hard not to lose his Virtue. That is why he is deprived of Virtue.<sup>36</sup>

[406] The 'high' Virtue consists in Virtue being actualized completely and perfectly in man when the latter is not even conscious of his Virtue. Consciousness obstructs the natural actualization of the Way. And in such a case, Virtue, which is nothing but the concrete actualization of the Way, becomes imperfect and 'low'. For when a man is conscious of Virtue, he naturally strives hard 'never to abandon' it. And this very conscious effort hinders the free self-manifestation of the Way in the form of Virtue.

Virtue in such a case is considered 'low', i.e., degenerate and imperfect, because, instead of being perfectly united with the Way as it should, it is somehow kept away from the Way, so that there is observable a kind of discrepancy between the two.

A man of Great Virtue in his behavior follows exclusively (the Command) of the Way.<sup>37</sup>

The 'low' Virtue, following as it does the command of human intention as well as the Command of the Way, and not exclusively the latter, is no longer Virtue as the most direct actualization of the Way.

The foregoing discussion most naturally leads us to the problem of Non-Doing (*wu wei*).

The Way is eternally active. Its activity consists in creating the ten thousand things and then — in the particular form of Virtue — in fostering them and bringing them up to the limit of their inner possibility. This creative activity of the Way is really great. However, the Way does not achieve this great work with the 'intention' of doing it.

Heaven is long lasting and Earth is long enduring. The reason why Heaven and Earth are long lasting and long enduring is that they do not strive to go on living. Therefore they are able to be everlasting.<sup>38</sup>

In his passage the Way is referred to as 'Heaven and Earth', that is, the Way at the stage of Heaven and Earth. We already know the metaphysical implication of this expression. The expression is here in the proper place because it is precisely at this stage that the creative activity of the Way is manifested. In the following passage, Lao-tzû refers 'Heaven and Earth' back to their ultimate metaphysical origin.

The Valley-Spirit is immortal. It is called the Mysterious Female.<sup>39</sup> The gateway of the Mysterious Female is called the Root of Heaven and Earth. (The Way in these various forms) is barely visible, yet it never ceases to exist. Unceasingly it works, yet never becomes exhausted.<sup>40</sup>

[407] The Mysterious Female, Lao-tzû says, is unceasingly creative, yet it never becomes exhausted because it 'does not do anything', i.e., consciously or intentionally. When we try hard to do something with the definite intention of doing it, we may achieve that very thing which we expect to achieve, but nothing else. The field of human action is, therefore, always limited and determined in varying degrees by consciousness and intention. The activity of the Way is of a totally different nature from human action. For the Way acts only by 'not acting'.

The Way is permanently inactive, yet it leaves nothing undone.<sup>41</sup>

Since, thus, the Way is not conscious of its own creative activity, it is not conscious of the results of its activity either. The concept of the Mysterious Virtue, to which reference was made a few pages back, is based on this very idea. The Way, in this particular aspect, is infinitely gracious to all things. Its activity is extremely beneficial to them. And yet it does not count the benefits and

favors which it never ceases to confer upon the things. Everything is done so 'naturally' — that is, without any intention on the part of the Way of doing good to the things — that what is received by the things as benefits and favors does not in any way constitute, from the point of view of the Way itself, benefits and favors.

(The Way) gives birth (to the ten thousand things) and brings them up.

It gives them birth, and yet does not claim them to be its own possession.

It works, yet does not boast of it. It makes (things) grow, and yet exercises no authority upon them. This is what I would call the Mysterious Virtue."

The principle of Non-Doing — the principle of leaving everything to its 'nature', and of doing nothing consciously and intentionally — assumes special importance in the world-view of Lao-tzû in connection with the problem of the ideal way of life in this world. We shall come back to this concept in a later chapter. Here I shall be content with quoting one more passage from the *Tao Tê Ching*, in which Lao-tzû talks about Non-Doing in reference to both the Way and the 'sacred man' at one and the same time. In this particular passage the 'sacred man' is represented as having made himself so completely identical with the Way that whatever applies to the latter applies to the former.

Therefore the 'sacred man' keeps to the principle of Non-Doing, and practises the teaching of No-Words.

The ten thousand things arise (through its, or his, activity), and yet he (or it) does not talk about it boastfully. He (or it) gives life (to the

[408] things), and yet he (or it) does not claim them to be his (or its) own. He (or it) works, and yet he (or it) does not boast of his (or its) own work. He (or it) accomplishes his (or its) task, and yet he (or it) does not stick to his (or its) own merit; therefore it never deserts him (or it).<sup>43</sup>

Thus the Way never makes a boast of its own activity. Whatever it does, it does 'naturally', without the slightest intention of 'doing' it. One may express the same idea by saying that the Way is totally indifferent to both its creative activity and the concrete results it produces. The Way does not care about the world it has created. In one sense this might be understood as the Way giving complete freedom to all things. But in another we might also say that the

Way lacks affection for its own creatures. They are simply left uncaredfor and neglected.

With a touch of sarcasm Lao-tzû speaks of the Way having no 'benevolence' (or « humaneness », *jên*). The *jên*, as I have pointed out earlier, was for Confucius and his disciples the highest of all for ethical values.

Heaven and Earth lack 'benevolence'. They treat ten thousand things as straw dogs."

Likewise, the 'Sacred man' lacks 'benevolence'. He treats the people as straw dogs.<sup>45</sup>

What Lao-tzû wants to assert by this paradoxical expression is that the Great Way, because it is great, does not resort, as Confucians do, to the virtue of *jên* in its activity. For the *jên*, in his eye, implies an artificial, unnatural effort on the part of the agent. The Way does not interfere with the natural course of things. Nor does it need to interfere with it, because the natural course of things is the activity of the Way itself. Lao-tzû would seem to be suggesting here that the Confucian *jên* is not the real *jên*; and that the real *jên* consists rather in the agent's being seemingly ruthless and *jên*-less.

There is another important point which Lao-tzû emphasizes very much in describing the creative activity of the Way. That is the 'emptiness' or 'voidness' of the Way.

We have often referred to the conception of the Way as 'Nothing'. There 'Nothing' meant the absolute transcendence of the Way. The Way is considered 'Nothing' because it is beyond human cognition. Just as a light far too brilliant for human eyes is the same as darkness or lack of light, the Way is 'Nothing' or 'Non-Being' precisely because it is plenitude of Being. The concept of 'Nothing' which is in question in the present context is of a different nature. It concerns the 'infinite' creativity of the Way. The Way, Lao-tzû says, can be infinitely and endlessly creative because it contains within [409] itself nothing substantial. It can produce all things because it has nothing definite and determined inside it. The Kuan-tzû clearly reflects this idea when it says: Empty and formless — that is what is called the Way' ,<sup>46</sup> and 'The Heavenly Way is empty and formless' ."

For this idea Lao-tzû finds in the daily experience of the people several interesting symbols. An empty vessel, for example:

The Way is an empty vessel.<sup>48</sup> No matter how often you may use it, you can never<sup>49</sup> Fill it up.<sup>50</sup>

It is a sort of magical vessel which, being forever empty, can never be filled up, and which, therefore, can contain an infinity of things. Looked at from the opposite side, this would mean that the 'vessel' is infinitely full because it is apparently empty. Thus we come back exactly to the same situation which we encountered above in the first of the two meanings of 'Nothing' with regard to the nature of the Way. The Way, we saw there, is Nothing because it is too full of Being — rather, it is Being itself — and because, as such, it is absolutely beyond the reach of human cognition. Here again we find ourselves in the presence of something which looks 'empty' because it is too full. The Way, in other words, is 'empty' ; but it is not empty in the ordinary sense of a thing being purely negatively and passively void. It is a positive metaphysical emptiness which is plenitude itself.

Great fullness seems empty. But (its being, in reality, fullness is proved by the fact that) when actually used, it will never be exhausted.<sup>51</sup>

The Way, in this particular aspect, is also compared to a bellows. It is a great Cosmic Bellows whose productive activity is never exhausted.

The space between Heaven and Earth is indeed like a bellows. It is empty, but it is inexhaustible. The more it works the more comes out <sup>52</sup>

Lao-tzû in the following passage has recourse to more concrete and homely illustrations to show the supreme productivity of 'emptiness'.

(Take for example the structure of a wheel). Thirty spokes share one hub (i.e., thirty spokes are joined together round the center of the wheel). But precisely in the empty space (in the axle-hole) is the utility of the wheel.

One kneads clay to make a vessel. But precisely in the empty space within is the utility of the vessel.

One cuts out doors and windows to make a room. But precisely in the empty space within is the utility of the house. Thus it is clear that if Being benefits us, it is due to the working of Non-Being.<sup>53</sup>

[410] It is, I think, for this reason that the symbol of 'valley' plays such a prominent part in the *Tao Tê Ching*. The valley is by nature hollow and empty. And precisely because it is hollow and empty, can it be full. Add to this the fact that the valley always occupies a 'low' place — another important trait of anything which is really

high, whether human or non-human. The valley is thus an appropriate symbol for the Way understood as the absolute principle of eternal creativeness, which is the plenitude of Being because it is 'empty', or 'Nothing'.

We have already quoted two passages in which Lao-tzû uses this symbol in talking about the inexhaustible creative activity of the Way.

The Valley-Spirit is immortal.<sup>54</sup>

The 'high' Virtue looks like a valley.<sup>55</sup>

The underlying idea is made more explicitly clear in another place where Lao-tzû discusses the problem of anything being capable of becoming truly perfect because it is (apparently) imperfect.

It is what is hollow that is (really) full.<sup>56</sup>

Being 'hollow' and 'low' suggests the idea of 'female'. This idea too has already been met with in the foregoing pages. In fact, the emphasis on the feminine element in the creative aspect of the Way may be pointed out as one of the characteristic features of Lao-tzû. It goes without saying that, in addition to the idea of 'hollowness' and 'lowliness', the 'female' is the most appropriate symbol of fecundity.

The Way, for instance, is the *Mother* of the ten thousand things.

The Nameless is the beginning of Heaven and Earth. The Named is the Mother of the ten thousand things.<sup>57</sup>

All things under heaven have a Beginning which is to be regarded as the Mother of the world.

If one knows the 'mother', one thereby knows the 'child'. If, after having known the 'child', one holds fast to the mother', one will escape error, even to the end of one's life.<sup>58</sup>

The metaphysical implication of the Way being the Mother of all things and the things being her 'children' has been elucidated earlier in the present chapter.

We have also quoted in this chapter in connection with another problem a passage where mention is made of the 'Mysterious Female'.

The Valley-Spirit is immortal. It is called the Mysterious Female. The gateway of the Mysterious Female is called the Root of Heaven and Earth.<sup>59</sup>

[411] In the expression: Mysterious Female (*hsüan p'in*), we encounter again the word *hsüan* 60 which, as we saw above, is used by Lao-tzû in reference to the Way as the unknown-



unknowable metaphysical Absolute, that is, the Way as it lies even beyond Being and Non-Being.

The Mystery of Mysteries it really is! And it is the Gateway of myriad Wonders.<sup>61</sup>

It is remarkable, further, that in both passages the endless and inexhaustible creativeness of the Way is symbolized by the 'gateway' (*mên*).<sup>62</sup> And this clearly indicates that the 'gateway of the Mysterious Female' is exactly the same thing as the 'gateway of myriad Wonders'. The Absolute in its active aspect is symbolically imaged as having a 'gateway', or an opening, from which the ten thousand things are sent out to the world of Being. The image of the 'female' animal makes the symbol the more appropriate to the idea because of its natural suggestion of fecundity and motherhood.

As I pointed out earlier, the image of the 'female' in the world-view of Lao-tzû is suggestive, furthermore, of weakness, humbleness, meekness, stillness, and the like. But, by the paradoxical way of thinking which is peculiar to Lao-tzû, to say that the 'female' is weak, meek, low, etc. is precisely another way of saying that she is infinitely strong, powerful, and superior.

The female always overcomes the male by being quiet. Being quiet, she (always) takes the lower position. (And by taking the lower position, she ends by obtaining the higher position)<sup>63</sup>

As is clear from these words, the weakness of the 'female' here spoken of is not the purely negative weakness of a weakling. It is a very peculiar kind of weakness which is obtained only by overcoming powerfulness. It is a weakness which contains in itself an infinite possibility of power and strength. This point is brought into the focus of our attention by what Lao-tzi says in the following passage, in which he talks about the basic attitude of the 'sacred man'. Since, as we know, the 'sacred man' is for Lao-tzû the perfect personification of the Way itself, what is said of the former is wholly applicable to the latter. It is to be noticed that here again the image of the 'female' is directly associated with that of the 'valley'.

He who knows the 'male', yet keeps to the rôle of the 'female', will become the 'valley' of the whole world.

Once he has become the 'valley' of the whole world, the eternal Virtue will never desert him<sup>65</sup>

And it is evidently in this sense that the following statement is to be understood:

412 'Being weak' is how the Way works."

We have been in what precedes trying to describe the ontological process — as conceived by Lao-tzû — of the ten thousand things coming out of the 'gateway' of the 'Absolute'.

'The Way begets One; One begets Two; Two begets Three. And Three begets the ten thousand things'.<sup>67</sup>

The ten thousand things, that is, the world and all the things that exist therein, represent the extreme limit of the ontological evolution of the Way. Phenomenal things, in other words, make their appearance at the last stage of the Descent of the Way. From the point of view of phenomenal things, their very emergence is the perfection of their own individual natures. For it is here that the Way manifests itself — in the original sense of the Greek verb *phainesthai* — in the most concrete forms.

This, however, is not the end of the ontological process of Being. As in the case of the world-view of Ibn 'Arabi; the Descent is followed by the reversal of the creative movement, that is, Ascent. The ten thousand things, upon reaching the last stage of the descending course, flourish for a while in an exuberance of colors and forms, and then begin to take an ascending course back toward their original pre-phenomenal form, that is, the formless Form of the One, and thence further to 'Nothing', and finally they disappear into the darkness of the Mystery of Mysteries. Lao-tzû expresses this idea by the key term: *fu* 68 or Return.

The ten thousand things all arise together. But as I watch them, they 'return' again (to their Origin).

All things 69 grow up exuberantly, but (when the time comes) every one of them 'returns' to its 'root'.

The Return to the Root is what is called Stillness. It means returning to the (Heavenly) Command (or the original ontological allotment of each).<sup>70</sup>

The Return to the Heavenly Command is what is called the Unchanging.<sup>71</sup>

And to know the Unchanging is what is called Illumination.<sup>72</sup>

The plants grow in spring and summer in full exuberance and luxuriance. This is due to the fact that the vital energy that lies *in potentia* in their roots becomes activated, goes upward through the stems, and at the stage of perfection becomes completely actualized in the form of leaves, flowers, and fruits. But with the advent of the cold season, the same vital energy goes down toward the roots and ends by hiding itself in its origin.<sup>73</sup>

Lao-tzû calls this final state Stillness<sup>74</sup> or 'Tranquillity'. We have noticed above that 'stillness' is one of his favorite concepts. And it

is easy to see that this concept in its structure conforms to the general pattern of thinking which is typical of Lao-tzû. For the 'stillness' as [413] understood in terms of the present context is not the stillness of death or complete lifelessness. The vital energy hidden in the darkness of the root is actually motionless, but the root is by no means dead. It is, rather, a stillness pregnant with infinite vitality. Externally no movement is perceptible, yet internally the incessant movement of eternal Life is carried on in preparation for the coming spring.

Thus the creative activity of the Way forms a cyclic process. And being a cyclic process, it has no end. It is an eternal activity having neither an initial point nor a final point.

We have also to keep in mind in understanding this idea another typical pattern of Lao-tzû's thinking, which we have encountered several times. I am referring to the fact that Lao-tzû often describes a metaphysical truth in a temporal form. That is to say, his description of a metaphysical truth in terms of time (and space) does not necessarily indicate that it is, in his view, a temporal process.

The emanation of the ten thousand things out of the womb of the Way and their Return to their original source is described in the *Tao Tê Ching* in a temporal form. And what is thus described is in fact a temporal process.

Returning is how the Way moves.

Being weak is how the Way works.

The ten thousand things under Heaven are born out of Being.  
And Being is born out of Non-Being.<sup>75</sup>

But in giving a description of the process in such a form, Lao-tzû is trying to describe at the same time an eternal, supra-temporal fact that lies over and above the temporal process. And looked at from this second point of view, the Return of the phenomenal things back to their origin is not something that happens in time and space. Lao-tzû is making a metaphysical statement, referring simply to the 'immanence' of the Way. All the phenomenal things, from this point of view, are but so many forms in which the Way manifests itself concretely — *phainesthai*. The things are literally *phainomena*. And since it is the Way itself that 'uncovers itself' or 'reveals itself' in these things, it is 'immanent' in each of them as its metaphysical ground. And each of the things contains in itself its own source of existence. This is the metaphysical meaning of the Return. As we have seen above, the Way in this particular form is called by Lao-tzû *té* or Virtue.

## Notes

1. ao ( ).
2. *Tao Tê Ching*, LXII.
3. *ibid.*, I, quoted and explained toward the end of the preceding chapter.
4. For the significance of this classification, see Chapter 1.
5. Here again Chuang-tzū describes the situation in chronological order, in the form of historical development. But what he really intends to describe thereby is clearly a metaphysical fact having nothing to do with the 'history' of things. The situation referred to by the expression: 'before the creation of the world', accordingly, does not belong to the past; it directly concerns the present, as it did concern the past and as it will continue to concern the future forever.
6. In interpreting this opening sentence of the passage I follow Lin Yün Ming ( ) (of the Ch'ing Dynasty, ( ), ad loc.: ( ), who punctuates it: ( ). The ordinary reading represented by Kuo Hsiang articulates the sentence in a different way: ( ), which may be translated as: 'Before the creation of the world there was Non-Being. There was (then) no Being, no Name'.
7. *tê*, ( ) This is, as we shall see, one of the key terms of Lao-tzū. The word *tê* literally means 'acquisition' or 'what is acquired', that is, the One as 'acquired' by each of the existent things. This part of the semantic structure of the word is admirably clarified by the explanation which Chuang-tzū has just given in this passage.
8. *ming*, ( ), 'command' or 'order' ; to be compared with the Islamic concept of *amr* '(Divine) Command'. The corresponding concept in Chinese is often expressed by the compound *t'ien ming*, meaning 'Heavenly Command'. The underlying idea is that everything in the world of Being is what it actually is in accordance with the Command of the One. All things participate in the One and 'acquire it', but each of them 'acquires it in its own peculiar way. And this is the reason why nothing is exactly the same in the whole world, although all uniformly owe their existence to the One. all this would naturally lead to the problem of 'predestination', which will be elucidated in a later context.
9. i.e., the Cosmic element which is 'shadowy', dark, negative, and passive.
10. i.e., the 'sunny', light, positive element.
11. *Tao Tê Ching*, XLII.
12. *Tao Tê Ching*, I.

13. *ibid.*, LII.

14. ( ), which is the same as ta ( ).

15. ( ), which, according to the *Sshuo Wen*, means to 'take a rest' ( ).

16. *Tao té Ching*, XXXIX.

17. *op. cit.*, LXXIII.

18. *ibid.*, LXIV.

19. ( ).

20. ( ). The concept will be explained in more detail presently.

21. *op. cit.*, LXIV.

22. *ibid.*, XXIII.

23. See above, note 7.

24. ( ) (3 rd. century A.D.); ad LI: ( ) *ad* XXXVIII.

25. See Part One, Chapter IX.

26. ( ). For the interpretation of the last word, ( ) (*shè*), see Kuo Mo Jo's remark in the Peking edition of the Kuan-tzû ( ), 1965, vol. 1, PP. 642-644. He says: ( ) (The Way acts, but its figure is invisible. It gives in charity, but its Virtue is invisible') ( )

27. i.e., being fostered by Virtue, they grow up and become 'things' each having a definite form.

28. ( )

29. ( ) meaning to 'crystallize' into a definite form.

30. ( ) = ( ) (according to ( ).

31. *op. cit.*, LI.

32. 'Valley' ( ) is a favorite symbol of Lao-tzû, which he uses in describing the nature of the Way and the nature of the 'sacred man'.

33. The standard Wang Pi edition reads: ( )

34. *op. cit.*, XLI.

35. The idea here described is comparable with what Ibn' Arabi observes about Man being situated in a certain sense on the lowest level on the scale of Being. Inanimate things have no 'ego'. That makes them obedient to God's commandments unconditionally; that is to say, they are exposed naked to God's activity upon them, there being no hindrance between them. The second position is given to the plants, and the third to the animals. Man, because of his Reason, occupies in this respect the lowest place in the whole hierarchy of Being.

36. *op. cit.*, XXXVIII.

37. *ibid.*, XXI.

38. *ibid.*, VII.

39. The symbol, meaning of the Valley' and 'Female' will be elucidated presently.

40. *op. cit.*, VI.

41. *op. cit.*, XXXVII.

42. *ibid.*, X. The same sentences are found as part of LI which I have already quoted.

43. *ibid.*, II.

44. Straw dogs specially prepared as offerings at religious ceremonies. Before the ceremonies, they were treated with utmost reverence. But once the occasion was over, they were thrown away as waste material and trampled upon by the passers-by.

45. *op. cit.*, V.

46. ( ), The second word of this sentence according to the commonly accepted reading is ( )( ). That this is wrong has been established by the editors of the Peking edition (See above, Note, 26), vol. II, pp. 635-636.

47. *ibid.*

48. ( ). As Yü Yüeh rightly observes, the character ( ) stands for ( ) which, according to the *Shuo Wen*, means the emptiness of a vessel. ( )

49. ( ) must be emended to ( ) - meaning 'for an extremely long time', i.e., 'forever' - on the basis of the reading of a Tang inscription ( ); see again Yü Yüeh, *ibid.*

50. *op. cit.*, IV.

51. *ibid.*, XLV

52. *ibid.*, V.

53. *ibid.*, XI.

54. *op. cit.*, VI.

55. *ibid.*, XL1.

56. *ibid.*, XXII.

57. *ibid.*, I, quoted above.

58. *ibid.*, LII, quoted above.

59. *ibid.*, VI.

60. ( ).

61. *op. cit.*, I. See above, p. 113.

the character i4, see above, Note 49.

62. ( ).

63. op. cit., LXI.

64. ( ) Note again the use of the word *ch'ang* whose meaning in this context has been explained earlier; see Chapter VII, Note 9. The *ch'ang t'ê*, in accordance with what we have established above is synonymous with 'high' Virtue. See in particular *Tao Tê Ching*, XLI, in which the 'high' Virtue is associated with the image of a 'valley': 'The high Virtue looks like a valley'.

65. op. cit., XXVIII.

66. *ibid.*, XL.

67. *ibid.*, XLII.

68. ( ).

69. Here the ten thousand things that grow up with an amazing vitality are compared to plants that vie with one another in manifesting their vital energy in spring and summer.

70. *ming*, ( ) ( ). For a provisional explanation of *tien ming* (Heavenly Command), see above, Note 8.

71. *ch'ang*, 14.

72. *ming* ( ). The epistemological structure of the experience of Illumination has been fully elucidated in Chapters VI and V in accordance with what is said concerning it in the Book of *Chuang-te*. The passage here quoted is from the *Tao Tê Ching*, XVI.

73. This part of my explanation is an almost literal translation of the comment upon the passage by *Wu Ch'êng g*( ) (of the Yüan Dynasty, ( )

74. *ching* ( )

75. *op. cit.*, XL.

## IX Determinism and Freedom

In the previous chapter we came across the concept of the Heavenly Command (*t'ien ming*). The concept is philosophically of basic importance because it leads directly to the idea of determinism which, in Western thought, is known as the problem of 'predestination', and in the intellectual tradition of Islam as that of '*qadà*' and '*qadar*.'

The most interesting part of the whole problem is admittedly its profound theological implication within the context of monotheistic religions like Christianity and Islam. The problem as a theological one might, at first sight, seem to be quite foreign to the world-view of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû. That such is not the case, however, will become clear if we but remember that Taoism too has its own theological aspect.

In the foregoing chapters the Way or the Absolute has been approached almost exclusively from the metaphysical point of view. We have been, in other words, trying to analyze the metaphysical aspect of the Way. And with reason. For that, after all, is the most fundamental theme upon which is based the whole system of Taoist philosophy.

But the Way as conceived by the Taoist philosophers is not simply and exclusively the metaphysical Ground of all beings. It is also God - the Creator (lit. the Maker-of-things, *tsao wu ché*), Heaven (*t'ien*), or the Heavenly Emperor (*t'ien ti*), as He is traditionally called in Chinese. The 'personal' image of the Absolute in ancient China had a long history prior to the rise of the philosophical branch of Taoism which we are considering in this book. It was quite a vigorous living tradition, and exercised a tremendous influence on the historical molding of Chinese culture and Chinese mentality. And we would make a fatal mistake if we imagined that the Way as conceived - or 'encountered', we should rather say - by the Taoist sages were a purely metaphysical Absolute. For them too the Way was a metaphysical Absolute as well as a personal God. The image of the Maker-of-things must not be taken as a metaphorical or figurative expression for the metaphysical Principle. The *Chuang-tzû* has a [419] chapter entitled 'The Great Lordly Master'.<sup>2</sup> The title refers to this 'personal' aspect of the Way.



If we are to analyze this 'personal' concept of the Absolute in terms of the metaphysical structure of the Way, we should perhaps say that it corresponds to the stage of 'Being' at which the creative activity of the Way becomes fully manifested. For, strictly speaking, the Way at the stage of the Mystery, or even at the stage of Nothing, is absolutely beyond common human cognition. Just as in the world-view of Ibn 'Arabi the word 'Lord' (*rabb*) refers to the ontological stage at which the Absolute manifests itself through some definite Name - like Producer, for instance - and not to the absolute Essence which transcends all determinations and relations, so is the Taoist concept of 'Maker-of-things' properly to be taken as referring to the self-manifesting, or creative, aspect of the Way, and not to its self-concealing aspect. All this, however, is but a theoretical implication of the metaphysical doctrine of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû. They themselves do not elaborate this point in this particular form. Besides, the concept of the Absolute as the highest Lord of Heaven belongs to a particular domain of religious experience which is of quite a different nature from that of the ecstatic intuition of the Absolute as the One, then as 'Nothing', then as the Mystery of Mysteries, although it is also true that the two types of religious experience seem to have greatly influenced each other in the historical process of the formation of Taoist philosophy, so much so that the Taoist concept of the Absolute as it actually stands can justifiably be said to contain two different aspects: metaphysical and personal.

However this may be, the description given by Chuang-tzû of the activity of the Great Lordly Master in the administration of the affairs of the creaturely world is exactly the same as what he and Lao-tzû say about the working of Nature or the Absolute. The following is one of a number of passages which could be cited as evidence in support of this statement.

Oh my Master, my (sole) Master — He cuts the ten thousand things into minute pieces.<sup>3</sup> And yet He has no consciousness of doing 'justice'. His bounty extends to the ten thousand generations. And yet He has no consciousness of doing any particular act of 'benevolence.'<sup>4</sup> He is older than the oldest time (of history). And yet he has no consciousness of being aged. He covers Heaven (which covers everything) and sustains Earth (which sustains everything). He carves and models all kinds of forms. And yet he has no consciousness of being skilful.<sup>5</sup>

The point I am making will become clear if one compares this passage with the words of Lao-tzû about the activity of the Way in

the form of Virtue, which were quoted in the previous chapter.

420 The Way give birth (to the ten thousand things), yet claims no possession. It does great things, yet does not boast of it. It makes things grow, yet exercises no authority upon them. This is what I would call the Mysterious Virtue.<sup>6</sup>

With this general theological background in mind we may rightly approach the problem of necessity or 'predestination' in Taoism. In discussing this idea, we shall be mainly dependent upon Chuang-tzü because he seems to have been particularly interested in the problem of Necessity and human Freedom within the particular context of Taoist philosophy.

We have pointed out earlier in this book the central importance observed of the concept of Chaos in the philosophical system of Chuang-tzü. We have observed there that, according to Chuang-tzü, Being which surrounds us from all sides and in which we live as part of it, reveals itself as a Chaos when we intuit its reality in the 'experience of 'sitting-in-oblivion'. In the ecstatic vision peculiar to this experience, all things appear 'chaotified'. Nothing remains solid and stable. We witness the amazing scene of all things being freely and unobstructedly transmuted into one another.

This image of Being must not mislead us into thinking only that Reality is literally chaotic and nothing but chaotic. Chaos is a metaphysical reality. But it represents only one aspect of Reality. In the very midst of this seeming disorder and confusion, there is observable a supreme order governing all things and events in the phenomenal world. In spite of their apparent utter confusion, all things that exist and all events that occur in the world exist and occur in accordance with the natural articulations of Reality. In this respect, the world we live in is a world determined by a rigorous Necessity. And how could it be otherwise? For the ten thousand things are nothing but forms in which the Absolute appears as it goes on determining itself; they are so many forms of the self-revelation of God.

This concept of the ontological Necessity is expressed by Chuang-tzü by various terms, such as *t'ien* (Heaven), *t'ien li* (the natural course of things determined by Heaven), *ming* (Command), and *pu tê i* ('that which cannot be evaded').

Chuang-tzû regards « living in accordance with the *t'ien li* » as the ideal way of living in this world for the 'true man'. The expression means 'to accept whatever is given by nature and not to struggle against it ». It suggests that there is for everybody and everything a natural course to take, which has been determined from the very beginning by Heaven. The world of Being, in this view, is naturally articulated, and nothing can happen against or outside of the fixed course. All things, whether inanimate or living, seem to exist or live [421] in docile obedience to their own destinies. They seem to be happy and contented with existing in absolute conformity with the inevitable Law of Nature. They are, in this respect, naturally 'living in accordance with the *t'ien li*'.

Only Man, of all existents, can and does revolt against the *t'ien li*. And that because of his self-consciousness. It is extremely difficult for him to remain resigned to his destiny. He tends to struggle hard to evade it or to change it. And he thereby brings discordance into the universal harmony of Being. But of course all his violent struggles are vain and useless, for everything is determined eternally. Herein lies the very source of the tragedy of human existence.

Is there, then, absolutely no freedom for man? Should he acquiesce without murmuring in his naturally given situation however miserable it may be? Does Chuang-tzû uphold the principle of negative passivity or nihilism? Not in the least. But how could he, then, reconcile the concept of Necessity with that of human free-dom? This is the question which will occupy us in the following pages.

The first step one has to take in attempting to solve this question consists in one's gaining a lucid and deep consciousness that whatever occurs in this world occurs through the activity of Heaven — Heaven here being understood in a 'personal' sense. Chuang-tzû gives a number of examples in the form of anecdotes. Here is one of them.

A certain man saw a man who had one foot amputated as a punishment for some crime.

Greatly surprised at seeing the deformity of the man, he cried out: 'What a man! How has he come to have his foot cut off? Is it due to Heaven? Or is it due to man?'

The man replied: 'It is Heaven, not man! At the very moment when Heaven gave me life, it destined me to become one-footed. (Normally) the human form is provided with a pair,'

(i.e., normally man is born with two feet). From this I know that my being one-footed is due to Heaven. It cannot be ascribed to man!'<sup>8</sup>

Not only this and similar individual cases of misery and misfortune —and also happiness and good fortune — but the very beginning and end of human existence, Life and Death, are due to the Heavenly Command. In Chapter III we discussed the basic attitude of Chuang-tzû on the question of Life and Death, but from an entirely different angle. There we discussed it in terms of the concept of Transmutation. The same problem comes up in the present con text in connection with the problem of destiny or Heaven.

422 When Lao-tzû died, (one of his close friends) Ch'in Shih went to the ceremony of mourning for his death. (Quite perfunctorily) he walled over the dead three times, and came out of the room.

Thereupon the disciples (of Lao-tzû) (reproved him for his conduct) saying, 'Were you not a freind of our Master?'

'Yes, indeed,' he replied.

'Well, then, is it permissible that you should mourn over his death in such a (perfunctory) way?'

'Yes. (This is about what he deserves.) Formerly I used to think that he was a ('true') man. But now I have realized that he was not. (The reason for this change of my opinion upon him is as follows.) Just now I went in to mourn him; I saw there old people weeping for him as if they were weeping for their own child, and young folk weeping for him as if they were weeping for their own mother. Judging by the fact that he could arouse the sympathy of his people in such a form, he must have (during his lifetime) cunningly induced them somehow to utter words (of sorrow and sadness) for his death, without explicitly asking them to do so, and to weep for him, without explicitly asking them to do so.'<sup>9</sup>

This,<sup>10</sup> however, is nothing but 'escaping Heaven' (i.e., escaping the natural course of things as determined by Heaven), and going against the reality of human nature. These people have completely forgotten (from where) they received what they received (i.e., the fact that they have received their life and existence from Heaven, by the Heavenly Command). In days of old, people who behaved thus were considered fiable for punishment for (the crime of) 'escaping Heaven'. Your Master came (i.e., was born into this world) quite naturally, because it was his (destined) time (to corne). Now he has (departed) quite naturally, because it was his turn (to go).

If we remain content with the 'time' and accept the 'turn', neither sorrow nor joy can ever creep in. Such an attitude used to be called among the Ancients 'loosing the tie of the (Heavenly) Emperor'.<sup>11</sup>

The last paragraph of this passage is found almost *verbatim* in another passage which was quoted earlier in Chapter III,<sup>12</sup> where the particular expression: 'loosing the tie' appears with the same meaning; namely, that of complete freedom. And this idea would seem to indicate in which direction one should turn in order to solve the problem of the conflict between Necessity and human freedom on the basis of a lucid consciousness that everything is due to the Will of Heaven.

The next step one should take consists, according to what Chuang-tzû observes about 'loosing the tie of the Heavenly Emperor', in one's becoming indifferent to, or transcending, the effects caused by the turns of fortune. In the latter half of the anecdote about the one-footed man, the man himself describes the kind of freedom he enjoys by wholly submitting himself to whatever has been destined for him by Heaven. Other people — so the man [423] observes — might imagine that, being one-footed, he must find his life unbearable. But, he says, such is not actually the case. And he explains his situation by the image of a swamp pheasant.

Look at the pheasant living in the swamp. (In order to feed itself) the bird has to bear the trouble of walking ten paces for one peck, and walking a hundred paces for one drink. (The onlookers might think that the pheasant must find such a life miserable.) However it will never desire to be kept and fed in a cage. For (in a cage the bird would be able to eat and drink to satiety and) it would be full of vitality, and yet it would not find itself happy.'<sup>3</sup>

To be deprived of one foot is to be deprived of one's so-called 'freedom'. The one-footed man has to endure inconvenience in daily life like the swamp pheasant which has to walk so many paces just for the sake of one peck and one drink. A man of normal bodily structure is 'free' to walk with his two feet. But the 'freedom' here spoken of is a physical, external freedom. What really matters is whether or not the man has a spiritual, inner freedom. If the man with two feet does not happen to have inner freedom, his situation will be similar to that of a pheasant in a cage; he can eat and drink without having to put up with any physical inconvenience, but, in spite of that, he cannot enjoy being in the world. The real misery of such a man lies in the fact that he

struggles helplessly to change what can never be changed, that he has to fret away his life.

Chuang-tzû's thought, however, does not stop at this stage. The inner 'freedom' which is based on a passive acceptance of whatever is given, or the tranquillity of the mind based on mere resignation in the presence of Necessity, does not for him represent the final stage of human freedom. In order to reach the last and ultimate stage of inner freedom, man must go a step further and obliterate the very distinction — or opposition — between his own existence and Necessity. But how can this be achieved?

Chuang-tzû often speaks of 'what cannot be evaded' or 'that which cannot be made otherwise'. Everything is necessarily fixed and determined by a kind of Cosmic Will which is called the Command or Heaven. As long as there is even the minutest discrepancy in the consciousness of a man between this Cosmic Will and his own personal will, Necessity is felt to be something forced upon him, something which he has to accept even against his will. If, under such conditions, through resignation he gains 'freedom' to some extent, it cannot be a complete freedom. Complete freedom is obtained only when man identifies himself with Necessity itself, that is, the natural course of things and events, and goes on transforming himself as the natural course of things turns this way or that.

[424] Go with things wherever they go, and let your mind wander about (in the realm of absolute freedom). Leave yourself wholly to 'that which cannot be made otherwise', and nourish and foster the (unperturbed) balance of the mind.<sup>14</sup> That, surely, is the highest mode of human existence.<sup>15</sup>

To take such an attitude toward the inexorable Necessity of Being is, needless to say, possible only for the 'true man'. But even the ordinary man, Chuang-tzû says, should not abandon all hope of coming closer to this highest ideal. And for this purpose, all that ordinary people are asked to do is positively accept their destiny instead of committing themselves passively and sullenly to fatalistic resignation. Chuang-tzû offers them an easily understandable reason why they should take the attitude of positive and willing acceptance. Quite naturally Necessity is represented at this level by the concrete fact of Life and Death.

Life and Death are a matter of the (Heavenly) Command. (They succeed one another) just as Night and Day regularly go on alternating with each other. This strict regularity is due to Heaven. There are things in this world (like Life and Death,

Night and Day, and countless others) which stand beyond the reach of human intervention. This is due to the natural structure of things.

Man usually respects his own father as if the latter were Heaven itself,<sup>16</sup> and loves him (i.e., his father) with sincere devotion. If such is the case, how much more should he (respect and love) the (Father) who is far greater than his own!

Man usually regards the ruler whom he serves as superior to himself. He is willing to die for him. If such is the case, how much more should he (regard as superior to himself) the true (Ruler)!"

The expression 'what cannot be evaded' (*pu tê i*) is liable to suggest the idea of man's being under unnatural constraint. Such an impression is produced only because our attention is focused — usually — on individual particular things and events. If, instead, we direct our attention to the whole of 'that which cannot be evaded', which is no other than the Way itself as it manifests its creative activity in the forms of the world of Being, we are sure to receive quite a different impression of the matter. And if, further, we identify ourselves with the working of the Way itself and become completely united and unified with it,<sup>18</sup> what has been an inexorable Necessity and 'non-freedom' will immediately turn into an absolute freedom. This is Freedom, because, such a spiritual state once achieved, man suffers nothing from outside. Everything is experienced as something coming from inside, as his own. The kaleidoscopic changes that characterize the phenomenal world are his own changes. As Kuo Hsiang says: Having forgotten (the distinction between) Good and Evil, and having left aside Life and Death, he is now completely one with [425] the universal Transmutation. Without encountering any obstruction, he goes wherever he goes'.<sup>19</sup>

And since everything is his own — or we should say, since everything is himself as he goes on transforming himself with the cosmic Transmutation — he accepts willingly and lovingly whatever happens to him or whatever he observes. As Lao-tzû says:

The 'sacred man' has no rigidly fixed mind of his own.<sup>20</sup> He makes the minds of all people his mind.

'Those who are good, (he says), I treat as good. But even those who are not good also I treat as good. (Such an attitude I take) because the original nature of man is goodness.

Those who are faithful I treat as faithful. But even those who are not faithful I treat as faithful. (Such an attitude I take) because the original nature of man is faithfulness.

Thus the 'sacred man', while he lives in the world, keeps his mind wide open. He 'chaotifies' his own mind toward all. Ordinary men strain their eyes and ears (in order to distinguish between things). The 'sacred man', on the contrary, keeps his eyes and ears (free) like an infant.<sup>21</sup>

Here the attitude of the 'sacred man' toward things is sharply contrasted with that of ordinary people. The former is characterized by not-having-a-rigidly-fixed-mind, that is, by an endless flexibility of the mind. This flexibility is the result of his having completely unified himself with the Transmutation of the ten thousand things.

The 'sacred man' is also said to have 'chaotified' his mind. This simply means that his mind is beyond and above all relative distinctions — between 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong', 'truthful' and 'untruthful', etc. Being one with the Way as it manifests itself, how could he make such distinctions? Is everything not a particular form of Virtue which is itself the activity of the Way? And is it not also the case that every particular form of Virtue is his own form?

Chuang-tzû sees in such a situation the manifestation of the absolute freedom of man.

The great clod (i.e., the earth — Heaven and Earth, or Nature) has placed me in a definite form (i.e., has furnished me with a definite bodily form). It has placed upon me the burden of life. It will make my life easier by making me old. And (finally) it will make me restful by letting me die. (All these four stages are nothing but four different forms of my own existence, which, again, are four of the infinitely variegated forms of Nature.) If I am glad to have my Life, I must be glad also to obtain my Death.

What Chuang-tzû is concerned with in this particular context is not the problem of transcending Life and Death. The question at issue is that of Necessity, of which Life and Death are but two concrete [426] conspicuous examples. The gist of his argument is that the Necessity of Being will no longer be 'necessity' when man becomes completely one with Necessity itself. Wherever he may go, and into whatever form he may be changed, he will always be with the Necessity which has ceased to be 'necessity'. If, on the contrary, the union is not complete, and if there is even one part of the whole left alien to himself, that particular part may at any moment damage his freedom.

(A fisherman) hides his boat in the ravine, and hides his fishing-net <sup>22</sup> in the swamp, thinking that the boat and net are thereby ensured (against thieves). In the middle of the night,



however, a powerful man (i.e., a thief) may (come and) carry them off on his back, without the stupid (fisherman) noticing it.

Hiding, in this way, a small thing in a large place will certainly serve your purpose to some extent. But (that will guarantee no absolute security, for) there will still be ample possibility (for the small thing) to escape and disappear.

If, on the contrary, you hide the whole world in the whole world itself,<sup>23</sup> nothing will find any place through which it might escape. This is the greatest truth common to all things.

It is quite by chance that you have acquired the form of a man. Even such a thing is enough to make you glad. But (remember that) a thing like the human form is nothing but one of the infinitely variegated (phenomenal) forms of the universal Transmutation. (If only one phenomenal form is sufficient to make you so glad) incalculable indeed will be your joy (if you could experience with the Way all the transformations it manifests). Therefore the 'sacred man' wanders to his heart's content in the realm of 'that from which there is no escape and in which all things have their existence'. And (being in such a spiritual state) he finds everything good - early death is good, old age is good, the beginning is good, the end is good. (The 'sacred man' is, after all, a human being). And yet he serves as a model for the people in this respect. All the more so, then, should (the Way itself be taken as the model for all men - the Way) upon which depend the ten thousand things and which is the very ground of the universal Transmutation.<sup>24</sup>

In Chapter III we read a story of a 'sacred man' whose body was made hideously deformed by some serious illness and who made the following remark upon his own situation.<sup>25</sup>

Whatever we obtain (i.e., Life) is due to the coming of the time. Whatever we lose (i.e., Death) is also due to the arrival of the turn. We must be content with the 'time' and accept the 'turn'. Then neither sorrow nor joy will creep in. Such an attitude used to be called among the Ancients 'loosing the tie (of Heaven)'. If man cannot loose himself from the tie, it is because 'things' bind him fast.

And to this he adds:

From of old, nothing has ever won against Heaven. How could I resent (what has happened to me)?

Instead of 'loosing the tie of Heaven', people ordinarily remain bound up by all things. This is to say, instead of 'hiding the whole world in the world', they are simply trying to hide smaller things in larger things'. In the minds of such people, there can be no room for real freedom. They are, at every moment of their existence,

made conscious of the absolute Necessity of the Will of Heaven or— which is the same thing — the Law of Nature, oppressing them, constraining them against their will, and making them feel that they are in a narrow cage. This understanding of the Will of Heaven is by no means mistaken. For, ontologically, the course of things is absolutely and 'necessarily' fixed by the very activity of the Way, and no one can ever escape from it. And nothing has ever won against 'Heaven' . On the other hand, however, there is spiritually a certain point at which this ontological Necessity becomes metamorphosed into an absolute Freedom. When this crucial turning point is actually experienced by a man, he is a 'sacred man' or Perfect Man as understood in Taoist philosophy. In the following chapters we shall be concerned with the structure of the concept of the Perfect Man in Taoism.

#### Notes

1. In the first Part of the present book Ibn 'Arabi interpretation of the *qadā'* and *qadar* has been given in detail.

2. ( ) *shih* means a teacher or leader who is obediently followed by his followers. Here the Absolute or God who 'Instructs' all existent things as to how they should exist is compared to an aged venerable Master instructing his students in the Truth. The idea is comparable with the Western concept of 'Lord' as applied to God.

3. ( ). The word here is usually interpreted as meaning 'to crush'. Ch'êng Hsûan Ying ( ) p. 282), for example explicates the sentence ( ), as follows: (This may be visualized by the fact that) when autumn comes, frost falls and crushes the ten thousand things (and destroys them). Frost does not cut them down and crush them with any special intention to do so. How could it have the feeling of administering 'justice'? ( ). Ch'êng Hsûan Ying's idea is that the 'justice' of the Way corresponds to the relentless destructive activity of the cold season, while the aspect of 'benevolence' corresponds to the 'fostering' activity of spring. Concerning this latter aspect he says: "The mild warmth of spring fosters the ten thousand things. But how is it imaginable that spring should have the emotion of love and affection and thereby do the work of 'benevolence'? It would seem, however, better to understand the word 'cutting to pieces' as referring to the fact that the creative activity brings into actual existence an infinite number of individual things.

4. Note again the sarcastic tone in which the Confucian virtue is spoken of.

5. VI, 281.

6. *Tao té Ching*. LI.

7. () Kuo Hsiang says: 'Having a pair here means man's walking (usually) with two feet. Nobody would ever doubt that the human form being provided with two feet is due to the Heavenly Command (or destiny)'. () To this Ch'êng Hsüan Ying adds: Since being biped is due to the Heavenly Command, it is evident that being one-footed also is not due to man. ()

8. *Chuang-tzû*, III, p. 124.

9. Since he himself was not a 'true man', he could not teach his people how to behave properly.

10. 'This' refers to the behavior of the people who were weeping so bitterly for him.

11. op. cit., III, pp. 127v-128.

12. *ibid.*, VI, p. 260.

13. *ibid.*, III, p. 126.

14. *chung* ()

15. op. cit., IV, p. 160.

16. Reading () instead of ()

17. op. cit., VI, p. 241.

18. To express the idea Chuang-tzû uses the phrase: () meaning 'to be trans-muted into the Way' (Cf. VI, p. 242).

19. () P. 243 —

20. () In this combination, the word ch'ang () - whose original meaning is, as we saw earlier, 'eternal', 'unalterable' - means 'stiff' and 'inflexible'.

21. *Tao té Ching*, XLIX.

22. The text has () which is meaningless. Following the suggestion by Yüeh ()

23. This refers to the spiritual stage of complete unification with the Way which comprises everything. 'Hiding the whole world in the whole world' is contrasted to hiding, as we usually do, smaller things in larger things. In the latter case, there are always possibilities for the smaller things to go somewhere else, while in the former, there is absolutely no such possibility. Thus 'hiding the whole world in the whole world' is paradoxically tantamount to 'hiding nothing' or 'leaving everything as it naturally is'.

24. *Chuang-tzû*, VI, pp. 243-244.

25. *ibid.*, VI, p. 260.

## X Absolute Reversal of Values

Throughout the *Tao Tê Ching* the term *shêng jên* ('sacred man') 1 is consistently used in such a way that it might justifiably be considered the closest equivalent for the Islamic *insàn kàmil* ('perfect man').

This word seems to go back to remote antiquity. In any case, judging by the way it is used by Confucius in the *Analects*, the word must have been widely prevalent in his age.

The Master said: A 'sacred man' is not for me to meet. I would be quite satisfied if I could ever meet a man of princely virtue.<sup>2</sup>

The Master said: How dare I claim for myself being a 'sacred man' or even a man of (perfect) 'benevolence'?<sup>3</sup>

It is not philologically easy to determine the precise meaning attached by Confucius to this word. But from the general contexts in which it is actually used as well as from the dominant features of his teaching, we can, I think, judge fairly safely that he meant by the term *shêng jên* a man with a sort of superhuman ethical perfection. Confucius did not dare even to hope to meet in his life a man of this kind, not to speak of claiming that he himself was one.

This, however, is not the problem at which we must labor in the present context. The point I would like to make here is the fact that the word *shêng jên* itself represented a concept which was apparently quite understandable to the intellectuals of the age of Confucius, and that Lao-tzû wrought a drastic change in the connotation of this word. This semantic change was effected by Lao-tzû through his metaphysical standpoint, which was of a shamanic origin.

We have already seen in the first chapters of this book how Lao-tzû — and Chuang-tzû — came out of a shamanic milieu. The Perfect Man for Lao-tzû was originally a 'perfect' shaman. This fact is concealed from our eyes by the fact that his world-view is not nakedly shamanic, but is presented with an extremely sophisticated metaphysical elaboration. But the shamanic origin of the Taoist concept of the 'sacred man' will be disclosed if we correlate the [431] following passage, for example, from the *Tao Tê Ching* with what Chuang-tzû remarks concerning the ecstatic experience of 'sitting in oblivion' .

Block all your openings (i.e., eyes, ears, mouth, etc.), and shut all your doors (i.e., the activity of Reason), and all your life you (i.e., your spiritual energy) will not be exhausted.

If, on the contrary, you keep your openings wide open, and go on increasing their activities, you will never be saved till the end. To be able to perceive the minutest thing<sup>4</sup> is properly to be called Illumination (*ming*).

To hold on to what is soft and flexibles is properly to be called strength.

If, using your external light, you go back to your internal illumination, you will never bring misfortune upon yourself. Such an (ulti-mate) state is what is to be called 'stepping into 6 the eternally real'.<sup>7</sup>

The 'eternal real' (*ch'ang*), as we have often noticed, refers to the Way as the eternally changeless Reality. Thus the concept of the 'sacred man' as we understand it from this passage, namely, the concept of the man who 'has returned to Illumination' and has thereby 'stepped into', that is, unified himself with, the Way, is exactly the same as that of the man who is completely one with 'that which cannot be made otherwise', which we have discussed in the previous chapter in connection with the problem of Necessity and Freedom.

The 'sacred man', for both Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû, is a man whose mind is 'wandering about in the realm of absolute Freedom', away from the bustle of the common people. It is quite natural, then, that such a man, when judged by the yardstick of common sense, should appear as outrageously 'abnormal'. If worldly-minded people represent the 'normal', the 'sacred man' is surely to be considered a strange, bizarre creature.

An 'abnormal's man — what kind of man is he, if I may ask?

The answer: An 'abnormal' man is one who is totally different from other men, while being in perfect conformity with Heaven. Hence the saying: a petty man from the viewpoint of Heaven is, from the viewpoint of ordinary men, a man of princely virtue;<sup>9</sup> while a man of princely virtue from the viewpoint of Heaven is, from the viewpoint of ordinary men, a petty man.

Thus the Perfect Man, by the very fact that he is in perfect conformity with Heaven, is in every respect in discordance with ordinary men. His behavior pattern is so totally different from the commonly accepted one that it excludes him from 'normal' human society. The latter necessarily regards him as 'abnormal'. He is 'abnormal' because the Way itself with which he is in perfect conformity is,

[432] from the standpoint of the common people, something strange and 'abnormal', so 'abnormal' indeed that they treat it as funny and ridiculous. As Lao-tsû says:

When a man of low grade hears about the Way, he bursts into laughter.

If it is not laughed at, it would not be worthy to be the Way.<sup>10</sup>

If the Way is of such a nature that it looks not only strange and obscure but even funny and ridiculous, it is but natural that the Perfect Man who is a living image of the Way should also look ridiculous or sometimes vexatious and unbearably irritating. Chuang-tsû often describes in his Book the 'strange' behavior of the 'abnormal'.

Once a disciple of Confucius - this is of course a fictitious story - saw two 'abnormal' men merrily and playfully singing in unison in the presence of the corpse of their friend, another 'abnormal' man, instead of duly performing the funeral service. Vexed and indignant, he hastened back and reported to his Master what he had just seen. 'What sort of men are they?' he asked Confucius.

'What sort of men are they? They do not observe the rules of proper behavior. They do not care at all about external forms. In the presence of the corpse they sing a song, without even changing their countenances. Their conduct (is so abnormal that) I am completely at a loss to characterize them. What kind of men are they?'

Quite ironically, Chuang-tzû makes Confucius perspicacious enough to understand the real situation in terms of Taoist philosophy and explain the nature of their conduct to his perplexed disciple. Here is what Confucius says about it.

They are those who freely wander beyond the boundaries (i.e., the ordinary norms of proper behavior), while men like myself are those who wander freely only within the boundaries. 'Beyond the boundaries' and 'within the boundaries' are poles asunder from one another. . . .

They are those who, being completely unified with the Creator Himself, take delight in the realm (i.e., spiritual state) of the original Unity of the vital energy before it is divided into Heaven and Earth. To their minds Life is just the growth of an excrescence, a wart, and Death is the breaking of a boil, the bursting of a tumor. . . . They simply borrow different elements, and put them together in the common form of body (i.e., in their view a human being is a composite made of different elements which by chance are placed together into a bodily unit). Hence they are conscious neither of their liver nor of their gall, and they leave aside their ears and eyes.

Abandoning themselves to infinitely recurrent waves of Ending and Beginning, they go on revolving in a circle, of which they know neither the beginning-point nor the ending-point.

[433] Thus, without being conscious (of their personal existence), they roam beyond the realm of dust and dirt, and enjoy wandering to their heart's content in the work of Non-Doing.

How should such men bother themselves with meticulously observing the rules of conduct peculiar to the vulgar world, so that they might attract (i.e., satisfy) the ears and eyes of the common people?<sup>11</sup>

Thus the behavior pattern of these men necessarily brings about a complete overturn of the commonly accepted order of values. Of course it is not their intention to turn upside down the ordinary system of values. But as these men live and behave in this world, their conduct naturally reflects a very peculiar standard of values, which could never square with that accepted by common sense and

Reason.

Chuang-tzû expresses this idea in a number of ways. As one of the most interesting expressions he uses for this purpose we may mention the paradoxical-sounding phrase: deforming, or crippling the virtues'.<sup>12</sup> After relating how a man of hideous deformity - Shu the Crippled - because of his deformity, completes his term of life safely and pleasantly, Chuang-tzû makes the following observation:

If even a man with such a crippled body was able to support himself and complete the span of life that had been assigned to him by Heaven, how much more should this be the case with those who have 'crippled the virtues'!<sup>13</sup>

To 'cripple' or deform' the virtues is a forceful expression meaning: to damage and overturn the common hierarchy of values. And since the system of values on which is based the mode of living or principle of existence peculiar to these 'cripples' is thus radically opposed to that of the common people, their real greatness cannot be recognized by the latter. Even the most sophisticated man of Reason - Reason being, after all, an elaboration of common sense - falls to understand the significance of the 'abnormal' way of living, although he may at least vaguely sense that he is in the presence of something great.

Hui Shih (Hui-tzû), a famous dialectician of Chuang-tzû's time, of whom mention was made earlier,<sup>14</sup> criticizes Chuang-tzû - in one of the anecdotes about this 'sophist' recorded in the Book of

*Chuang-tzû* - and remarks that *Chuang-tzû*'s thought is certainly 'big', but it is too big to be of any use in the world of reality. It is 'big but crippled'. Against this *Chuang-tzû* points out that the eyes of those who are tied down to a stereotyped and fossilized system of traditional values cannot see the greatness of the really great. Besides, he says, things that are 'useful' in the real sense of the term are those things that transcend the common notion of 'usefulness'.

[434] The 'usefulness' of the 'useless', the greatness of the 'abnormal', in short, an absolute reversal of the order of values — this is what characterizes the world-view of the Perfect Man.

Let us, first, see how *Hui-tzû* describes the 'uselessness' of things that are 'abnormally big'.

The king of Wei once gave me the seeds of a huge gourd. I sowed them, and finally they bore fruit. Each gourd was big enough to contain as much as five piculs. I used one of them to contain water and other liquids; but I found that it was so heavy that I could not lift it by myself. So I cut it into two pieces and tried to use them as ladles. But they were too flat and shallow to hold any liquid.

Not that it was not big enough. Big it surely was, to the degree of monstrosity! But it was utterly useless. So I ended up by smashing them all to pieces.<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting to notice that *Hui-tzû* does recognize the gourds as big, very big indeed. But their excessive bigness renders them unsuitable for any practical use. Through this symbol he wants to indicate that the spiritual size of the Perfect Man may be very large, but that when his spiritual size exceeds a certain limit, it turns him practically into a stupid fellow. This, however, only provokes a sharp retort from *Chuang-tzû*, who points out that *Hui-tzû* has found the gourd to be of no use 'simply because he does not know how to use big things properly'. And he adds:

Now that you had a gourd big enough to contain as much as five piculs, why did it occur to you that you might use it as a large barrel? You could have enjoyed floating over rivers and lakes, instead of worrying about its being too big and shallow to contain any liquid! Evidently, my dear friend, you still have a mind overgrown with weeds! <sup>16</sup>

Exactly the same kind of situation is found in another anecdote which immediately follows the preceding one.

*Hui-tzû* once said to *Chuang-tzû*: 'I have (in my garden) a big tree, which is popularly called *shu* (useless, stinking tree). Its main stem is gnarled as with tumors, and nobody can apply a



measuring line to it. Its branches are so curled and bent that no one can use upon them compass and square. Even if I should make it stand by the thoroughfare (in order to sell it), no carpenter would even cast a glance at it. Now your words, too, are extremely big, but of no use. That is why people desert them and nobody wants to listen to you'.

Chuang-tzû said: 'You must have observed a weasel, how it hides itself crouching down, and watches for carelessly sauntering things (i.e., chickens, rats, etc.) to pass by. Sometimes, again, it nimbly leaps about east and west, jumping up and jumping down without any hesitation. But finally it falls into a trap or dies in a net.

[435] Now look at that black ox. It is as big as an enormous Cloud hanging in the sky. It is big, indeed! And it does not know how to catch a rat. (It is useless in this sense, but it does not die in a trap or a net.)

You say you have a big tree, and you are worried because it is useless. Well, then, why do you not plant it in the Village of There-Is-Absolutely-Nothing,<sup>17</sup> or in the Wilderness of the Limitlessly-Wide,<sup>18</sup> idly spend your days by its side without doing anything, and lie down under it for an untroubled sleep?

The tree, then, will never suffer a premature death by being cut down by an axe. Nor will there be anything there to harm it. If it happens to be of no use, why should it cause you to fret and worry?<sup>19</sup>

The passage just quoted, in which Chuang-tzû clarifies his attitude against the kind of rationalism and utilitarianism represented by Hui-tzû is of great importance for our purposes, containing as it does in a symbolic form some of the basic ideas of Chuang-tzû. These ideas are so closely interrelated with each other that it is difficult to deal with them separately. Besides, some of them have already been discussed in detail in connection with other problems, and others are directly or indirectly related with those that have been touched upon in the foregoing. Here for convenience I will classify them under four heads, and discuss them briefly one by one from the particular viewpoint of the present chapter. These four are: (1) The image of a strange, fantastic region which is designated by such expressions as the Village of There-Is-Absolutely-Nothing and the Wilderness of the Limitlessly-Wide; (2) the idea of idling away one's time; (3) 'abnormal bigness'; and (4) the idea of free wandering.

(1) The two expressions: the Village of There-Is-Absolutely-Nothing and the Wilderness of the Limitlessly-Wide, are very characteristic of the philosophical anthropology of Chuang-tzû. They describe symbolically the spiritual state in which the Perfect

Man finds his absolute tranquillity and freedom. In another passage Chuang-tzû gives us a hint — symbolically, again — through the mouth of a fictitious Perfect Man 20 as to what he means by these terms.

I am going to unify myself with the Creator Himself. But when I become bored with that, immediately I will mount on the Bird-of-Pure-Emptiness and travel beyond the limits of the six directions (i.e., the Universe).

There I shall wander to my heart's content in the Village of There-is- Absolutely- Nothing and live alone in the Wilderness of the Limitlessly- Wide.<sup>21</sup>

In the light of what we already know about the major ideas of Chuang-tzû, the 'Village of There-Is-Absolutely-Nothing' or the [436] 'Wilderness of the Limitlessly-Wide' evidently refer to the spiritual state of Nothingness or Void in which the perfect Man finds himself in the moments of his ecstatic experience. At the highest stage of 'sitting in oblivion' the mind of the Perfect Man is in a peculiar kind of blankness. all traces of phenomenal things have been erased from his consciousness; even consciousness itself has been erased. There is here no distinction between 'subject' and 'object'. For both mind and things have completely disappeared. He is now an inhabitant of a strange metaphysical region which is 'wide' and where 'there is absolutely nothing'.

This, however, is but the first half of his being an inhabitant of the Village of There-Is-Absolutely-Nothing or the Wilderness of the Limitlessly-Wide. In the second half of this experience, the reality of the phenomenal world begins to be disclosed to his spiritually transformed eyes. all the things that have once been wiped out from his consciousness — including his own consciousness — come back to him in an entirely new form. Being reborn at a new level of existence, he is now in a position to command an extensive and unobstructed view of the whole world of Being as it pulsates with eternal life, in which infinitely variegated things come and go, appear and disappear at every moment. We know already that this aspect of the Perfect Man, namely, his being an inhabitant of the region of Nothingness and Limitlessness, is discussed by Chuang-tzû in a more philosophical way as the problem of the Transmutation of all things.<sup>30</sup>

Being perfectly familiar with that which has no falsehood (i.e., the true Reality, the Way), he does not shift about driven by the shifting things.<sup>22</sup> He regards the universal Transmutation of

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things as (the direct manifestation of) the Heavenly Command, and holds fast to (i.e., keeps his inner gaze inalterably focused upon) their Great Source.<sup>23</sup>

(2) The Idea of idling away one's time is closely related to the idea of living in the region of Nothingness and Limitlessness. For the Perfect Man cannot be an inhabitant of such a country unless he is idling away his time, doing nothing and enjoying from time to time an untroubled sleep. 'To be idle' is a symbolic way of expressing the basic idea of Non-Doing. The principle of Non-Doing which, as we saw earlier, represents, for Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû, the highest mode of human existence in this world, demands of the Perfect Man 'being natural' and leaving everything in its natural state and to its natural course. He does not meddle with the fate of anything. This is the 'indifference' of the Perfect Man to the ten thousand things, of which mention was made earlier.

But 'indifference' in this case does not imply ignorance or lack of Absolute Reversa! of Values [437] cognition. On the contrary, all things, as they come and go, are faithfully reflected in the 'void' of the mind of the Perfect Man. His mind in this respect is comparable to a spotless mirror. A well-polished mirror reflects every object, as long as the latter stands in front of it. But if the object goes away, the mirror does not show any effort to detain it; nor does it particularly welcome a new object when it makes its appearance. Thus the mind of the Perfect Man obtains the most lucid images of all things, but is not perturbed thereby.

(The Perfect Man)<sup>24</sup> does not become the sole possessor of fame, (but lets each thing possess its own fame). He does not become the treasury of plans (but lets each thing make a plan for itself). He does not undertake the responsibility for all things, (but lets each thing undertake the responsibility for itself). He does not become the sole possessor of wisdom, (but lets each thing exercise its own wisdom). He embodies completely what is inexhaustible (i.e., the 'limitless' activity of the Way), and wanders to his heart's content in the Land-of-No-Trace (i.e., the region of Nothingness).

He employs to the utmost what he has received from Heaven, and yet he is not conscious of having acquired something. He is 'empty' - that is what he is.

The 'ultimate man' makes his mind work as a (spotless) mirror. It detains nothing. It welcomes nothing. It simply responds to, and reflects, (whatever comes to it). But it stores nothing. This is why he can exercise mastery over all things, and is not hurt

by anything.<sup>25</sup> I have heard that if a mirror is well-polished, dust cannot settle upon its surface; (that is to say) if dust settles upon a mirror, (we can be sure that) the mirror is not well-polished.<sup>26</sup>

The image of the perfectly polished mirror as a symbol for the state of the mind of the Perfect Man is found also in the *Tao Tê Ching*.

Purifying your Mysterious Mirror, can you make it spotless?<sup>27</sup>

Thus the Perfect Man does not *do* anything — that is, with the intention of doing something. The moment a man does something, his very consciousness of doing it renders his action 'unnatural'. Instead, the Perfect Man leaves all things, himself and all other things, to their own natures. This is the meaning of the term Non-Doing (*wu wei*). And since he does not *do* anything, he leaves nothing undone. By virtue of his Non-Doing, he ultimately does everything. For in that state, his being is identical with Nature. And Nature accomplishes everything without forcing anything.

(3) The 'abnormal bigness' of the Perfect Man has produced a number of remarkable symbols in the Book of *Chuang-tzû*. We have already seen some of them: the huge gourd which is too big to [438] be of any use, the big useless *shu*-tree in the garden of Hui-tzû, the black ox, lying in the meadow, doing nothing, being unable to catch even a rat. These, however, are relatively homely symbols; they are things of a moderate size compared with others which we find in the same Book. As an example of such fantastic symbols, we may mention the famous story of a huge mythical Bird, which we encounter on the very first page of the *Chuang-tzû*.

In the dark mysterious ocean of the north (i.e., the northern limit of the world) there lives a Fish whose name is K'un. Its size is so huge that nobody knows how many thousand miles it is.

(When at last the time of Transmutation comes) the Fish is trans-muted into a Bird known as P'êng. The back of the P'êng is so large that nobody knows how many thousand miles it is.

Now the Bird suddenly pulls itself together and flies off. Lo, its wings are like huge clouds hanging in the sky. And as the ocean begins to be turbulent (with raging storms of wind) the Bird intends to journey towards the dark mysterious ocean of the south. The southern ocean is the lake of Heaven.

In fact, in the Book entitled *Ch'i Hsieh*<sup>28</sup> which records strange events and things, we find the following description (of this Bird). When the P'êng sets off for the dark mysterious ocean of the south, it begins by beating with its wings the surface of the water for three thousand miles. Then up it goes on a whirlwind to the height of ninety thousand miles. Then it continues to fly for six months before it rests'.<sup>29</sup>

This is immediately followed by a masterly description of the impression which the Bird is supposed to receive when it looks down upon our earth from the height of ninety thousand miles. The Bird is already wandering in a region which is far above the 'worldly' world where all kinds of material interests and inordinate desires are bubbling and foaming in an endless turmoil. It is not that the Bird does not see the 'dirty' world of vulgarity. The 'dirty' world is still there, under the Bird. The only difference is that the world looked down from this vertiginous height strikes the Bird's eyes as some-thing beautiful, infinitely beautiful — another symbolic expression for the way the mind of the Perfect Man mirrors everything on its spotless surface.

(Look at the world we live in. You will see there) ground vapor stirring; dust and dirt flying about; the living things blowing (fetid) breaths upon each other!

The sky above, on the contrary, is an immense expanse of deep blue. Is this azure the real color of the sky? Or does it look (so beautifully blue) because it is at such a distance from us? (However this may be), the Bird now, looking down from its height, will surely be perceiving nothing but a similar thing, (i.e., our 'dirty' world must appear to the eyes of the Bird as a beautiful blue expanse).<sup>30</sup>

[439] Chuang-tzû brings this description of the Bird's journey to an end by going back again to the idea of the 'bigness' of the Bird and the corresponding 'bigness' of its situation. By the force of his pen, the Bird is now alive in our imagination as an apt symbol for the Perfect Man who, transcending the pettiness and triviality of human existence is freely wandering in the 'void' of Infinity and Nothingness.

(Why does the Bird soar up to such a height?) If the accumulation of water is not thick enough, it will not have the strength to bear a big ship. If you pour a cup of water into a hollow on the ground, tiny atoms of dust will easily float on it as if they were ships. If, however, you place a cup there, it will stick fast to the ground, because the water is too shallow while the 'ship' is too large.

(Likewise) if the accumulation of wind is not thick enough, it will not have the strength to support huge wings. But at the

height of ninety thousand miles, the (thick accumulation of) wind is under the Bird. Only under such conditions can it mount on the back of the wind, and carry the blue sky on its back, without there being anything to obstruct its flight. And now it is in a position to journey toward the south.<sup>31</sup>

Here the Perfect Man is pictured as a colossal Bird, soaring along far above the world of common sense. The Bird is 'big', and the whole situation in which it moves is correspondingly 'big'. But this excessive 'bigness' of the Perfect Man makes him utterly incomprehensible, or even ridiculous, in the eyes of the common people who have no other standard of judgment than common sense. We have already seen above how Lao-tzû, in reference to the 'abnormality' of the Way, makes the paradoxical remark that the Way, if it is not laughed at by 'men of low grade', would not be worthy to be considered the Way. In fact, the Bird P'êng is 'abnormally big'. Chuang-tzû symbolizes the 'men of low grade' who laugh at the 'bigness' of the Perfect Man by a cicada and a little dove.

A cicada and a little dove laugh scornfully at the Bird and say, 'When we pluck up all our energies to fly, we can reach an elm or sapanwood tree. But (even in such flights) we sometimes do not succeed, and are thrown down on the ground. (Of small scale it may be, but our flight is also a flight.) Why is it at all necessary that (the Bird) should rise ninety thousand miles in order to journey towards the south?'

A man who goes on a picnic to a near-by field, will go out carrying food sufficient only for three meals; and he will come back (in the evening) with his stomach still full. But he who makes a journey to a distance of one hundred miles, will grind his grain in preparation the night before. And he who travels a thousand miles, will begin to gather provisions three months in advance.

What do these two creatures (i.e., the cicada and the dove) know about (the real situation of the Bird)? Those who possess but petty [440] wisdom are not able to understand the mind of those who possess Great Wisdom.<sup>32</sup>

This description of the imaginary flight of the Bird P'êng across the world is a very famous one. It is significant that the passage is placed at the very outset of the whole Book of Chuang-tzû. The uninitiated reader who approaches the Book for the first time will simply be shocked by the uncouth symbols that constitute the story, and will be driven into bewilderment not knowing how to interpret the whole thing. But by this very bewilderment, he will be directly led into the strange mythopoeic atmosphere which is typical of what we might call the shamanic mode of thinking.

Unlike the ordinary kind of shamanic visions, however, there reigns over this image of the Bird's journey an unusual air of serenity, purity, and tranquillity. And this is a reflection of the inner state of the Perfect Man who is no longer a mere 'shaman', but rather a great 'philosopher' in the original Greek sense of the word.<sup>31</sup>

Be this as it may, the forceful, dynamic style of Chuang-tzû and his creative imagination has succeeded in producing an amazing symbol for the spiritual 'greatness' of the Perfect Man.

(4) As regards the idea of free wandering, there remains little to say. For the foregoing description of the flight of the Bird is itself an excellent description of the 'free wandering' as well as of the 'bigness' of the Perfect Man.

The 'free wandering' is a symbolic expression for the absolute freedom which the Perfect Man enjoys at every moment of his existence. What is meant by 'absolute freedom' must be, by now, too clear to need any further explanation. The Perfect Man is absolutely free, because he is not dependent upon anything. And he is not dependent upon anything because he is completely unified with the Way, there being no discrepancy between what he does and what Heaven-and-Earth does. In the following passage, Chuang-tzû, from the viewpoint of 'dependence' and 'independence', divides men into four major categories. The first is the man of 'petty wisdom'; the second is the man of middle wisdom, represented by Sung Jung-tzû;<sup>33</sup> the third is the man of 'great wisdom' who is still somewhat defective in his spiritual perfection, represented by the famous Taoist sage Lieh-tzû; and the fourth and the last is the man of ultimate perfection, who is the real Perfect Man.

Here is a man whose wisdom is good enough to make him suitable for occupying with success an official post, whose conduct is good enough to produce harmony in one district, whose virtue is good enough to please one sovereign, and whose ability is good enough to make him conspicuous in the politics of one state. Such a man looks [441] upon himself with self-conceit just like (the above-mentioned small creatures).<sup>34</sup>

Sung Jung-tzû would surely laugh at such a man. Sung is the kind of man who, even if the whole world should praise him, would not be stimulated thereby to increase his usual (moral)

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exertion, and even if the whole world should blame him, would not be affected thereby and become disheartened.

This is due to the fact that he draws a clear line of demarcation between the internal and the external.<sup>35</sup> He is, thus, clearly conscious of the boundaries of real glory and real disgrace. This makes him rather indifferent to petty interests in this world. However, he is not yet firmly established (i.e., completely self-sufficient and independent).

Next comes Lieh-tzû.<sup>36</sup> He rides on the wind and goes wandering about with amazing skilfulness. He usually comes back to earth after fifteen days (of continuous flight). He is not at all interested in obtaining happiness. Besides, (his ability to fly) saves him the trouble of walking. And yet, he has still to be dependent upon something (i.e., the wind).

As for the man (of absolute freedom and independence) who mounts on the natural course of Heaven and Earth, controls at will the six elemental forms of Nature, and freely wanders through the realm of the Limitlessness — on what should he be dependent?

Therefore it is said: The Ultimate Man has no ego, (and having no ego, he adapts himself to everything and every event with limitless flexibility). The Divine Man has no merit (because he does nothing intentionally). The Sacred Man has no fame (because he transcends all worldly values).<sup>37</sup>

The last of the four classes of men here described is the Perfect Man. And the 'free wandering' is nothing other than a symbolic expression for the absolute spiritual independence which characterizes his mode of existence in this world. It refers to his absolute Freedom, his not being retained in one place, and his not being tied to any particular thing. The expression is also interesting in that it is evocative of the original form of the Taoist Perfect Man as a shaman who, in his ecstatic state, used to make a mythopoeic journey around the limitless universe freely, without being obstructed by the shackles of his material body. The first chapter of the Book of Chuang-tzû is entitled 'Free Wandering'. It is not, I think, a mere coincidence that one of the masterpieces of shamanic poetry, *Yüan Yu* ('Traveling Afar'), which is found in the *Elegies of Ch'u*, presents striking similarities to the mythopoeic part of the worldview of Taoism. Both the Taoist Perfect Man and the great Shaman of Ch'u 'mount on the clouds, ride a flying dragon, and wander far beyond the four seas'.<sup>38</sup>

#### Notes

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2. *Analects*, VII, 25.



3. *ibid.*, VII, 33.

4. The 'minutest thing' here means the Way as it manifests itself within the mind of man. The shaman-mystic, by closing up all the apertures of the senses and the intelligence, turns back into the depth of himself, where he perceives the Way working as a very 'small thing'.

5. For the idea that the 'sacred man' constantly maintains the flexibility of the mind of an infant, see above, Chapter IX, p. 144. The point will be further elaborated in the following chapter.

6. ( ). For an explanation of the meaning of this expression, see above, Chapter V. Note 29.

7. *Tao Tê Ching*, LII.

8. *Chi jên* ( )

9. The ordinary text reads: ( ) which, as Wang Hsien Ch'ien remarks, does nothing but repeat exactly the same thing as the first half of the sentence in a reversed order: ( ) Following his suggestion I read the second half: ( ); Chuang-tzû, VI, p. 273.

10. *Tao Tê Ching*, XL1.

11. *Chuang-tzû*, VI, pp. 267-268.

12. *Chih li té*, ( )

13. *op. cit.*, IV, p. 180.

14. See Chapter I, Note 15.

15. *op. cit.*, 1, p. 36.

16. *ibid.*, p. 37.

17. ( )

18. ( )

19. *op. cit.*, I, pp. 39-40.

20. It is interesting that the name of that Perfect Man is 'Nameless-Man'.

21. *op. cit.*, VII, p. 293. See also VII, p. 296: ( ).

22. This does not simply mean that the Perfect Man remains rigidly fixed and devoid of flexibility. On the contrary, he goes on shifting himself in accordance with the universal Transmutation of all things. Since he is in this way completely unified with ever-changing Nature, all the 'shifts' he makes ultimately amount to his being changeless.

23. *op. cit.*, V, p. 189.

24. In this passage, the Perfect Man is designated by the term *chi iên* ( ) : 'ultimate man', one of the several terms which Chuang-tzû uses to express the concept of the Perfect Man.

25. op.cit. V, p.189

26. *ibid.*, V, p.197

27. *Tao Te Ching*, X

28. () 'Equalizing Harmony' or the '(Cosmic) Harmony in which all things are equalized', a title very typical of Chuang-tzû's ontology (see Chapter III, Chapter IV). Some scholars are of the opinion that this is not the title of the book, but the name of its author. In any case, it is apparently an invention of Chuang-tzû's imagination. He simply wants to imitate jokingly and sarcastically the habit of the thinkers of his age who substantiate their assertions by making references to ancient authorities.

29. *Chuang-tzû*, I, pp. 2-4.

30. *ibid.*, I, p. 4.

31. *ibid.*, I, p. 7.

32. *ibid.*, I, pp. 9-11.

33. Sung Jung-tzû ( ) (= Sung Chien()), a man who was famous for his teaching of pacifism and non-resistance. His thought is expounded in the last chapter (XXXIII) of the *Chuang-tzû*. His name is mentioned also by Mencius, Hsün-tzû, and Han Fei- tzû.

34. Like the cicada and the link dove who scornfully laugh at the 'big' project of the big Bird

35. He knows that what is really important is the inner judgment of himself, and therefore, does not care about how other people judge him from outside.

36. Traditionally, Lieh-tzû is considered to have been a Perfect Man who, together with Chuang tzu represented the school of Taoist philosophy that had been inaugurated by Lao-tzû. He is made to stand chronologically between Lao-tzû and Chuang tzu

37. op. cit., I, pp. 16-17.

38. *ibid.*, I, p. 28.

## XI The Perfect Man

Most of the characteristic features of the Perfect Man have already been mentioned explicitly or implicitly in the foregoing chapters. Some of them have been fully discussed, while others have been touched upon in a cursory manner. Besides, we have repeatedly pointed out that the Perfect Man as understood by Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû is nothing else than the personification of the Way itself. The Perfect Man is 'perfect' because he is an exact personal *imago* of the Way. In this sense, by describing the nature and the activity of the latter we can be said to have been describing the former. Thus in a certain respect, all the preceding chapters may be regarded as a description of the characterizing properties of the Perfect Man. We are already quite familiar with the Taoist concept of the Perfect Man. And the present chapter will necessarily take the form of a mere systematic recapitulation of what has been discussed in the course of this book concerning the Perfect Man.

Let us begin by repeating the most basic observation about the concept of the Perfect Man, namely, that he is a man who is completely unified and united with the Way. When a man in the course of his spiritual discipline reaches the ultimate stage of Illumination, a stage at which there remains no trace of his 'ego', and therefore no discrepancy between 'himself and the Way — that marks the birth of a Perfect Man. Lao-tzû calls this stage 'embracing the One'.<sup>1</sup>

The 'sacred man' embraces the One, and thereby becomes the exemplar for all things under Heaven.<sup>2</sup>

Controlling his vacillating soul, (the Perfect Man) embraces the One in his arms and is never separated therefrom.<sup>3</sup>

The opening clause 4 of this second quotation is interesting because of its shamanic reminiscence. In ancient China, what corresponds to the English 'soul' (Greek *psyche*) was held to consist of two separate substances, one of them being *hun*,<sup>3</sup> and the other *p'o*.<sup>6</sup> Or we could say that man was believed to possess two souls. The former was the [445] superior or spiritual soul, the principle of mental and spiritual functions. The latter was the inferior or physical (or animal) soul, charged with bodily and material functions. When a man died, the *hun* was believed to ascend to Heaven, while the *p'o* was to go down into Earth.<sup>7</sup> As for the phrase *ying p'o*, here translated as 'the vacillating (physical) soul', it is significant that exactly the same combination is found

in the famous shamanic poem 'Traveling Afar' (*Yüan Yu*) of the *Elegies of Ch'u*:

Controlling my vacillating soul, I ascend to a misty height,  
And riding on the floating clouds, I go up and ever higher.<sup>8</sup>

But of course the Perfect Man knows how to put under control his fretful and unstable soul by 'sitting-in-oblivion', so that he might ascend to the height of Unity and embrace the One, never to quit it.

The Perfect Man is no longer harassed by the fretfulness of his soul. On the contrary, he always maintains his soul unperturbed.

What do I mean by the 'true man'? (I am thinking of) the 'true men' of ancient times. They did not revolt against scarcity (i.e., adverse fortune). They did not become haughty in favorable conditions. They did not make positive plans with the intention of accomplishing things.

Such a person does not repent though he might commit an error; he does not fall into self-complacency though he might meet with success.

Such a man does not become frightened even if he ascend to the highest place. He does not get wet even if he enters the water. He is not burnt even if he enters the fire.

All this is the result of the (true) Wisdom having attained to the ultimate point of perfection in (being unified with) the Way.<sup>9</sup>

The Taoist principle of 'unperturbedness' is best illustrated by the attitude taken by the Perfect Man toward his own Life and Death. The problem has been fully discussed in earlier contexts. Here we shall be content with giving one more passage in translation, which would seem to provide a good summary of the whole argument concerning this idea.

The 'true men' of ancient times knew nothing of loving Life and disliking Death. They came out (into this world) without any, particular delight. They went in (i.e., died) without any resistance. Calmly they came, calmly they went. They did not forget how they had begun to exist (i.e., that the beginning of their Life was due to the natural working of the Way). Nor did they worry about the end of their existence.

They simply received (Life) and they were happy (to live that Life). But (when Death came) they simply gave (their Life) back and forgot it.

[446] This is what I would call: not revolting against the working of the Way by the use of Reason, and not interfering with what Heaven does by straining (petty) human (efforts).

Such is the 'true man'.<sup>10</sup>

Such an inner state cannot but produce its effect on the physical conditions of the Perfect Man. His calm unperturbed mind is reflected by the very peculiar way in which his bodily functions are performed. The Perfect Man is different from the common people not only in his spiritual state, but also in his physical constitution.

The 'true men' of ancient times did not dream when they slept. They felt no anxiety when they were awake. They did not particularly enjoy food when they ate.

Their breathing was calm and deep. They used to breathe with their heels.<sup>11</sup> The common people, on the contrary, breathe with their throats (i.e., their respiration is shallow). You know those who are cornered in argument — how desperately they try to vomit out the words sticking in their throats. (Compared with the breathing of the Perfect Man, the breathing of ordinary people is just like that.) (This is due to the fact that, unlike the Perfect Man who has no desire, the common people) are deep in their desires, and shallow in their natural spiritual equipment.<sup>12</sup>

The common people are here characterized as being 'deep in their desires' and 'shallow in their natural equipment'. In this respect they represent exactly the opposite of what Lao-tzû emphasizes as the ideal of the Taoist mode of human existence: 'no-wisdom and no-desire' (*wu-chih wu-yu*)<sup>13</sup>. 'Wisdom' here means the exercise of Reason.

We know already that purifying the Mind of physical and material desires by 'closing up all openings and doors' is the first necessary step toward the actualization of the idea of the Perfect Man.

The five colors make man's eyes blind. The five musical notes make man's ears deaf. The five flavors make man's taste dull. (Games like) racing and hunting make man's mind run mad. Goods that are hard to obtain impede man's right conduct.

Therefore the 'sacred man' concentrates on the belly (i.e., endeavors to develop his inner core of existence) and does not care for the eye (i.e., does not follow the dictates of his senses). Thus he abandons the latter and chooses the former.<sup>14</sup>

We have already seen above how, in the view of Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû, Reason obstructs the free activity of Nature. Reason in its lowest form is the 'sound' or 'normal' common sense. The mode of living of the common people goes against the natural course of things because they are at the mercy of Reason and common sense.

Boundless desire and the argumentative Reason constitute the [447] core of the 'ego'. And the 'ego', once formed goes on

growing ever stronger until it dominates the whole existence of a man; all his actions are dictated by it, and all his feelings, emotions, and thinking are subjugated to its supreme command. This is why it is extremely difficult for an ordinary man to 'nullify his own self' .15

Reason makes man 'stiff' and 'inflexible'. Desire induces him forcibly to fight against the naturally given conditions and to 'intend' to obtain the objects of desire. This is the exact opposite of the Taoist ideal of conforming to the natural course of things, without reasoning and without desiring anything, and thus becoming completely unified with Nature. Lao-tzû finds in the 'infant' an apt symbol for his ideal.

He who possesses within himself the plenitude of Virtue may be compared to an infant.

Poisonous insects dare not sting it. Ferocious animals dare not pounce upon it. Birds of prey dare not strike it.

Its bones are frail and its sinews tender, yet its grip is firm. It does not know yet of the union of male and female, yet the whole body is full of energy.<sup>16</sup> This is because its vitality is at its height.

It howls and cries all day long, yet does not become hoarse. This is because the natural harmony in it is at its height.

To know the natural harmony is to be (one with) the eternal Reality (*ch'ang*). And to know the eternal Reality is to be illumined (*ming*).<sup>17</sup>

Thus the infant is 'naturally' at the stage of Illumination, because it is 'naturally' one with the Way. And the 'weakness' or 'softness' of the infant is a living image of the creative activity of the Way, which is eternally supple, soft and lissom. It is a symbol of real Life.

Man, at his birth, is tender and weak, but, when dead, he is hard and stiff.

The ten thousand things, grass and trees, are tender and fragile while alive, but once dead, they are dry and stiff.

Thus the hard and stiff are companions of Death, while the tender and weak are companions of Life.

Thus an army which is too powerful is liable to lose the baton, and a tree that is too rigid is breakable.

The powerful and mighty end by being cast down, whereas the soft and weak end by occupying higher places.<sup>18</sup>

The following passage is remarkable in that it gathers together the majority of Lao-tzû's favorite symbols for 'flexibility', 'softness', 'being low', 'being simple', in short, the virtue of Negativity.

He who knows the 'male', yet keeps to the rôle of the 'female', will become the 'ravine' of the whole world.

And once he has become the 'ravine' of the whole world, then the eternal Virtue will never desert him. And he will again return to the state of 'infancy'.

[448] He who knows the 'white', yet keeps to the rôle of the 'black', will become the model for all under Heaven.

And once he has become the model for all under Heaven, then the eternal Virtue will never fall him. And he will again return to the Limitless.

He who knows the 'glorious', yet keeps to the rôle of the 'ignoble' will become the 'valley' of all under Heaven.

And once he has become the 'valley of all under Heaven, then the eternal Virtue will be complete. And he will again return to the state of 'uncarved wood'.

'Uncarved wood' (in its 'simplicity' contains potentially all kinds of vessels); when it is cut out, it becomes various vessels. Likewise, the 'sacred man', by using it (i.e., the virtue of 'uncarved wood'), becomes the Lord over all officials. The greatest carving is non-carving.

The highest key term in the particular semantic field of Negativity is the *wu wei*, Non-Doing, which we have met several times in the foregoing. As we have noticed, the most basic meaning of Non-Doing is the negation of all 'intention', all artificial (or 'unnatural') effort on the part of man. And the Perfect Man is able to maintain this principle constantly and consistently because he has no 'ego', because he has 'nullified himself'. But the nullification' of the 'ego' as the subject of all desires and all intentional actions implies at the same time the establishment of a new Ego — the Cosmic Ego — which is completely at one with the Way in its creative activity.

Heaven is long lasting and Earth is long enduring. The reason why Heaven and Earth are long lasting and long enduring is that they do not strive to go on living. Therefore they are able to be everlasting. In accordance with this, the 'sacred man' puts himself in the rear, and (precisely because he puts himself in the rear) he comes (naturally) to the fore. He remains outside, and because of that he is always there. Is it not because he possesses no 'self' (i.e., the small ego) that he can thus establish his Self? 20

Thus the Perfect Man is in every respect a Perfect image of Heaven and Earth, i.e., the Way as it manifests itself as the world of Being. The Perfect Man exists by the very same principle by which Heaven and Earth exist. And that principle common both to the Perfect Man and the activity of the Way is the principle of Non-Doing or 'being-so of-itself'. The conscious effort on the part of man to live or to procure his purpose violates this supreme principle and ends by bringing about a result which is just the contrary of what he intended to achieve.

He who stands on tiptoe cannot stand firm.

He who strides cannot walk far.

He who displays himself does not shine.

[449] He who considers himself right cannot be illustrious.

He who praises himself cannot achieve real success.

He who places too great confidence in himself cannot endure. From the point of view of the Way, such attitudes are to be called 'superfluous food and useless tumors'. They are detested by all. Therefore, he who possesses (i.e., is unified with) the Way never takes such an attitude.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, the 'sacred man' keeps to the principle of Non-Doing, and practises the teaching of No-Words.<sup>22</sup>

If one pursues knowledge, knowledge goes on increasing day by day. If one pursues the Way, (what one obtains) goes on decreasing day by day.

Decreasing, and ever more decreasing, one finally reaches the state of Non-Doing. And when one practises Non-Doing, nothing is left undone. Therefore even an empire is sure to be gained by practising (the principle of) There-Is-Nothing-To-Do. If one adheres to (the principle of) There-Is-Something-To-Do, one can never gain an empire.<sup>23</sup>

Without going out of the door, one can know everything under Heaven.

Without peeping out of the window, one can see the working of Heaven.

The further one goes out, the less one knows.

Therefore the 'sacred man' knows (everything) without going out. He has a clear view of everything without looking. He accomplishes everything without doing'.<sup>24</sup>



What I have translated here as the working of Heaven' is in the original *t'ien tao* meaning literally the 'way of Heaven'. It means the natural activity of Heaven. And Heaven' here means the Way as it manifests itself in the form of Nature, or the 'being-so of-itself' of everything. Heaven, in this sense, is constantly active; it works without a moment's intermission; it 'does' innumerable things. Its 'doing', however, is essentially different from the intentional 'doing' of man. Heaven 'does' everything without the slightest intention on its part to 'do' something. Its 'doing' consists in the ten thousand things being or becoming what they are 'of themselves'. Heaven, in other words, exemplifies in the most perfect form the principle of Non-Doing.

Commenting upon Chuang-tzû's statement:

He who knows what Heaven does (i.e., the 'way of Heaven') . . . is at the highest limit (of human Wisdom). For he who knows what Heaven does lives in accordance with (the same principle as) Heaven,<sup>25</sup>

Kuo Hsiang makes the following interesting and important remark: [450]

'Heaven' in this passage means Nature ('being-so of-itself'). He who 'does doing' (i.e., does something with the intention or consciousness of doing it) cannot 'do' anything (in the real sense of the word). (Real) 'doing' is that the thing 'does itself' (i.e., it is done 'of itself', according to its own nature). Likewise, he who 'does knowing' (i.e., tries to know something intentionally and consciously) cannot 'know' anything (in the real sense of the word). (Real) 'knowing' consists in (the thing) coming to 'be known of itself'. The thing 'becomes known of itself', I say. So (real 'knowing' is, in truth), 'non-knowing'. It is 'non-knowing', I say. So the ultimate source of 'knowing' is 'non-knowing'

In the same way, 'doing' consists in the thing 'being done of itself'. So (real 'doing', in truth,) is 'non-doing'. It is non-doing', I say. So the ultimate source of 'doing', is 'non-doing'.

Thus, 'non-doing' must be considered the principle of 'doing'. Like-wise, 'knowing' originates in 'non-knowing', so that 'non-knowing' must be considered the basis of knowing'.

Therefore, the 'true man' leaves aside 'knowing', and thereby 'knows'. He 'does not do', and thereby 'does'. Everything comes into being 'of itself', (and that is the meaning of the 'doing' of the 'true man'). He simply sits, oblivious of everything, and thereby obtains everything.

Thus (with regard to the 'true man') the word knowing' loses its applicability, and the term 'doing' disappears completely.<sup>26</sup>

This is, indeed, an excellent explanation of the key term 'Non-Doing' as understood by Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû, so much so that it makes all further efforts to clarify the concept superfluous.

There is, however, one more thing which must be mentioned here not in order to clarify the concept of Non-Doing, but rather in order to clarify a peculiarity of Lao-tzû's way of thinking. I have repeatedly pointed out as something typical of Lao-tzû the 'symbolic' way in which he develops his thinking. In the majority of cases, particularly in dealing with problems which he considers of crucial importance, he develops and elaborates his thought by means of imagery. 'Water' is one of his favorite symbols. He uses it in reference to the supreme power of Non-Doing. The empirical observation of the activity of water, provides at once conclusive evidence for his theory of Non-Doing and a picturesque presentation of the way in which Non-Doing produces its effect.

The softest of all things in the world (i.e., water) dominates over the hardest of all things in the world (like stones and rocks). Having no definite form of its own, it penetrates even into that which has no crevices.

By this I realize the value of Non-Doing.

However, the teaching through No-Words (i.e., the wordless teaching given by the Perfect Man, himself remaining silent but his personal influence affecting 'naturally' all about him) and the effect of Non-Doing — few in the whole world can understand them.<sup>27</sup>

In this passage no explicit mention is made of water. But that Lao-tzû means water by 'the softest of all things' is made clear by the following passage.

There is under Heaven nothing softer and weaker than water. And yet in attacking things hard and strong, nothing can surpass it. For there is nothing that can destroy it.<sup>28</sup>

The weak overcomes the strong, and the soft overcomes the hard. This everybody in the world knows, yet no one is able to put this (knowledge) into practice.<sup>29</sup>

The 'positive passivity' or the 'powerful weakness' of water is for Lao-tzû one of the most appropriate images of the Way and, therefore, of the Perfect Man.

The highest goodness is like water. Water benefits the ten thousand things, yet it never contends with anything. It stays in (low) places loathed by all men. But precisely because of this, it is closest to the Way (and the 'sacred man').<sup>30</sup>



Hui-tzû : But if a man Jacks emotions, how could he be called a 'man'?

Chuang-tzû: The Way has given him human features. And Heaven has given him a bodily form. How, then, should we not call him a 'man'?

Hui-tzû : But since you call him a 'man', it is inconceivable that he should be without emotions.

Chuang-tzû: What you mean by 'emotions' is different from what I mean by the same word. When I say he is without emotions', I mean that the man does not let his inner self be hurt (i.e., perturbed) by likes and dislikes, and that he conforms to the 'being-so of-trying itself' of every-thing, never trying to increase his vital energy.

Hui-tzû : If he does not try to increase his vital energy (i.e., by eating nutritious food, clothing himself, etc.),<sup>34</sup> how could he preserve his body alive?

Chuang-tzû: The Way has given him human features. And Heaven has given him a bodily form. (And as a result, he has come into existence as a 'man' .) This case, all he has to do is being the self be hurt by likes and dislikes. (This is what I mean by 'not trying to increase life' .)

You 'externalize' your spirit (i.e., you constantly send out your spirit toward the external objects in the world) and wear out your mental energy, sometimes leaning against a tree, moaning, and sometimes leaning on your desk with your eyes closed.

Heaven itself has selected for you a bodily form. But you (instead of

of Heaven, waste making a fuss about '(a hard and white'. <sup>35</sup>	conforming to the Will your time in) stone) being
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Thus it is clear that 'the Perfect Man having no emotions' means nothing other than his being absolutely unperturbed whatever may happen to him and whatever may occur before his eyes. And there is a deep metaphysical reason for this. He can maintain this fundamental attitude under all conditions because he is 'one' with all things which are themselves ultimately 'one'. Since, as we saw earlier, all things are metaphysically 'one', the attitude of the Perfect Man toward them cannot also but be 'one'.

The concept of the Perfect Man 'having no emotions' is, in this way, ultimately reducible to the more fundamental idea which is by now fully familiar to us;<sup>32</sup> namely, that the Perfect Man has no 'ego' of his own. Having no 'ego' of his own, he makes no distinction between things. He is, in other terms, constantly 'one'. And his being personally 'one' — which is precisely what is meant by the expression: having no emotions' — is based on the objective fact that Reality is 'one'. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the Perfect Man does not know in any sense the distinction between the infinitely variegated things of the phenomenal world. Rather, his making no distinction between the things' means only that, being fully conscious of all these things as different things, he is possessed of a spiritual eye with which he intuits behind the kaleidoscope of the changing forms the metaphysical 'One', of which they are but various manifestations. And when he looks at these seemingly different things from such a particular point of view, they disclose themselves to his eyes as so many repetitions of one and the same thing 'piled up one upon the other', all being equally 'good'.

The true man') is 'one', whether he (seemingly) likes something or dislikes something. He is also 'one', whether he regards all things as being 'one or as not being 'one'.

When he takes the position of (everything being) 'one' he is acting as a companion of Heaven; (i.e., he is taking the position of Heavenly Equalization).<sup>36</sup> When he takes the position of (all things) not being 'one', he is acting as a companion of Man; (i.e., he is looking at the phenomenal world of Multiplicity as it appears to the human eye). Thus in

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<sup>32</sup> NDE suit une tentative d'explication d'un vécu mystique.

him Heaven and Man do not defeat each other (i.e., he unites in himself harmoniously and without contradiction both the 'absolute' viewpoint of Heaven and the 'relative' viewpoint of Man). Such indeed is the nature of the 'true man'.<sup>37</sup>

'Being without emotions' should not be taken to mean that the Perfect Man does not actually experience anger, delight, sadness, gladness. He does experience all these and other human emotions. The only difference between him and ordinary people in this matter consists in the fact that in the case of the former, there always remains something unperturbed and unperturbable at the innermost [454] core of his heart, even while he is experiencing strong emotions, something which is not affected by them, which is not touched by them. The emotions come and go in his inner world as naturally as the four seasons of the year come and go in the outer world.

His mind is content with being in whatever situation it happens to be.<sup>38</sup> His outward appearance is still and calm. His forehead is broad and looks carefree.

Sometimes he is coldly relentless like autumn; sometimes he is warmly amiable like spring. Joy and anger come and go as naturally as the four seasons do in Nature. Keeping perfect harmony with all things (which endlessly go on being 'transmuted' one into another) he does not know any limit.<sup>39</sup>

Such being his basic spiritual state, the Perfect Man perceives in the whole world nothing to disturb his cosmic balance of mind, although he does notice accurately all things that happen to him and to others. He does participate in the activities of the world together with all other men, yet at the same time, at the very core of his heart, he remains detached from the clamor and bustle of the world. Calmness and tranquillity are the most salient features that characterize both the inside and outside of the Perfect Man.

Attaining to the utmost limit of (inner) 'emptiness', I firmly maintain myself in Stillness.<sup>40</sup>

(The 'sacred man'), by being limpid and serene, becomes the norm of all under Heaven.<sup>41</sup>

Chuang-tzû, as usual, is less laconic in describing the virtues of 'calmness' and 'tranquillity':

Of all level things, the most perfect is the surface of water at rest. Because of this (perfect levelness), it can be used as a standard in levelling. And (the perfect levelness of still water) is due to the fact that (water at rest) maintains in its inside (profound calmness) and shows no agitation outside.

Likewise, Virtue is a (spiritual) state which is attained when a man has perfected the calmness (of the mind). (In such a case)

Virtue does not come out in a visible form, (i.e., since the inside of such a man is perfectly calm, no agitation comes out to the surface). But things, on their part, (are spontaneously attracted by his invisible Virtue and) cannot separate themselves therefrom.<sup>42</sup>

## Notes

1. pao I, ( )
2. Tao Tê Ching, XXII.
3. *ibid.*, X.
4. ()
5. ()
6. ()
7. Li Chi, Chiao Tê Shêng (). Concerning the *p'o* we find in the *Tso Chuan* ( ) the following statement: 'When a man is born, (we see) in his first bodily function what is called the *p'o*'.
8. ( ) This interpretation of the word *ying* ( ) is corroborated by another verse in the same poem, in which the shaman-poet describes the instability and fretfulness of his soul — this time the word *hun* is used instead of *p'o* — which keeps him awake all through the night: ( ).
9. *Chuang-tzû*, IV, p. 226.
10. *ibid.*, IV, 229.
11. The expression: 'they breathed with their heels' indicates the incomparable depth and tranquillity of their respiration. The vital energy contained in the inhaled air is made to circulate all through the body, in such a way that one is left with the impression that the breathing naturally welled up from the heels.
12. *op. cit.*, VI, p. 228.
13. ( ) Tao Tê Ching, III.
14. Tao Tê Ching, XII.
15. *ibid.*, XIII.
16. ( ) Yü Yüeh ( ) thinks that the word is a mistake for meaning 'hidden place', i.e., the genitals. The sentence would then mean: 'yet its male member is full of force'. In some other editions we find ( ) and ( ) used instead of ( ).
17. *op. cit.*, LV.
18. *ibid.*, LXX VI.
19. *ibid.*, XXVIII.
20. *ibid.*, VII.

21. *ibid.*, XXIV.
22. *ibid.*, II.
23. *ibid.*, XLVIII.
24. *ibid.*, XLVII.
25. Chuang-tzû, VI, p. 224.
26. () p. 224.
27. Tao Tê Ching, XLIII.
28. () The character ( ) here stands for *ei* meaning 'conquering the barbarians'. The idea evidently is that even the sharpest sword cannot cut water and 'kill' it.
29. *op. cit.*, LXXVIII.
30. *ibid.*, VIII.
31. *ibid.*, LXVIII.
32. *ibid.*, XXII.
33. Chuang-tzû, V, p. 217.
34. Here again, Hui-tzû misunderstands what Chuang-tzû means by 'not trying to increase life'.
35. *op. cit.*, V, pp. 220-222. 'A stone being hard and white' is a reference to the famous sophistic thesis that a 'hard and white stone' is really two things, not one, because 'hard' and 'white' are two entirely different attributes; see above, Chapter IV. Note 18.
36. See above, Chapter VI, Note 17.
37. *ibid.*, VI, pp. 234-235.
38. The fast word is explained by Kuo Hsiang as 'being contented with whatever place it happens to be in' ( ) See Shuo Wên: ( ) There are many scholars who think that it is a mistake for ( ) (See, for example, Hsüan Ying ( ) meaning 'forgetful' or 'oblivious' (of the essential distinctions between the ten thousand things).
39. *op. cit.*, VI, pp. 230-231.
40. Tao Tê Ching, XVI.
41. *ibid.*, XLV.
42. Chuang-tzû, V, pp. 214-215.



## XII Homo Politicus

Throughout the preceding chapters we have been describing the Taoist Perfect Man as a man of absolute transcendence. He wholly transcends the world of ordinary men and ordinary things in the sense that he is 'oblivious' of all distinctions between them, that nothing perturbs his mind, and that consequently, he sits alone in the midst of the profound 'tranquility' of being one with the One. He is 'without – or above – human emotions', accepting the 'good' as 'good' and also the non-good as 'good'. He holds fast to the principle of Non-Doing, and does not meddle with the natural course of things. Instead, he leaves the ten thousand things alone as they come into being, grow and then disappear in accordance with the 'times' and 'turns' of each of them. He is 'indifferent' just as Heaven and Earth are 'indifferent' to the ten thousand things, treating them all as if they were 'straw dogs'.

The Perfect Man in this respect is a man of absolute Negativity. And all these and still other 'negative' properties belong to him because he is completely unified with the 'way' (i.e., natural, spontaneous working) of Heaven, and ultimately with the Way itself. In comporting himself in this manner, the Perfect Man embodies the Way.

But it is very important to remember that pure negativity or passivity does not exhaust the activity of the Way. In fact, the passivity of the Way is not 'passivity' as ordinarily understood. It is a 'passivity' backed with 'positivity'. Or perhaps we should say that the Way is - or looks - 'passive' precisely because it is too positive to be just 'positive' in the generally accepted sense. Non-Doing, for example, is certainly a passive and negative principle, but it is in reality a positive force in that it 'leaves nothing undone'. This fact is an exact counterpart of the Way being described as 'Nothing' not because it is purely negatively and passively 'nothing', but because it is over-plenitude of Being.

The Perfect Man, as a perfect embodiment and personification of the Way, must necessarily reflect this 'positive' - or 'Supra-positive' - aspect of it, too. Just as the Way itself is positively - and more than [458] positively — engaged in the administration of the created world and governs, through the very principle of Non-Doing, the whole process of Nature to the minutest details of individual events, so is the Perfect Man positively interested in governing the world, again through the principle of Non-Doing.

Besides, it is, more generally speaking, very characteristic of philosophical thinking in ancient China that it is vitally concerned with the problem of governing the people. *Homo Politicus* has, in fact, always been a central theme of all the major schools of Chinese thought. Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû are no exception to this general rule. It is extremely interesting to notice in this respect that a man like Lao-tzû who develops, on the one hand, a sophisticated metaphysics of the Way and describes the ideal man as an absolutely unworldly-minded man living high above the noise and fuss of everyday life, shows himself so keenly interested in the art of ruling an empire. For Lao-tzû, the Perfect Man cannot be really 'perfect', unless he stands at the head of an empire as the supreme Ruler of its people. The Perfect Man is at once a philosopher and a politician. This, of course, does not mean that the Perfect Man must positively strive to gain political power or to conquer the world. He does not even try to make himself conspicuous.

He does not display himself. Therefore he is conspicuous.

He does not justify himself. Therefore he is illustrious.

He does not praise himself. Therefore his merit is recognized.<sup>1</sup>

He does not try to make himself conspicuous. But due to that 'negative' attitude toward himself — and more basically, because he is 'perfect' — he 'naturally' becomes conspicuous. He does not do anything on his part to attract attention, but the people spontaneously gather around him. He keeps himself in the rear, but the people spontaneously, and even without being conscious of it, push him to the fore. The *Tao Tê Ching* is filled with expressions referring to this peculiarity of the Perfect Man. The most famous and most typical of them all is probably 'softening the glare and falling into line with the dust (of the common people)'.<sup>2</sup>

(The 'sacred man') blunts his sharpness, unfastens his knots, softens his glare, and falls into line with the dust. Such I would call the state of Mysterious Indistinction.

Such a man cannot be approached too intimately. Nor can one remain too remote from him. One cannot bestow benefit upon him, nor can one harm him. One cannot ennoble him, nor can one humiliate him.

Thus he becomes the noblest of all beings under Heaven.<sup>2</sup>

The 'Mysterious Indiscrimination' (*hsüan t'ung*)<sup>3</sup> is a very significant expression. The Perfect Man, as a human being, lives [459] among ordinary people as a member of society. He exists

there in the midst of everyday life, quietly and calmly, behind and beneath other men. He 'levels' himself with the common people, without 'discriminating' himself from other men. Outwardly he seems to be exactly the same as ordinary people. But this is, in reality, a very peculiar 'sameness', for in his spiritual structure, he is soaring like the Bird P'êng in the azure of absolute freedom and independence.

And it is through the spontaneous activity of such a man that the Virtue of the Way materializes in the form of a perfect political rule. According to the pattern of thought peculiar to Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû, the Perfect Man, because of his spiritual 'perfection', spontaneously occupies the highest place in the spiritual world; and because he occupies the highest place in the spiritual world he must necessarily occupy the highest place in the world of reality. He must be the 'lord over the officials'.<sup>4</sup>

Thus here again we come across the paradoxical way of thinking which characterizes the Taoist sages. For according to them, the Perfect Man is a man who 'freely roams beyond the realm of dust and dirt, and enjoys wandering to his heart's content in the Village of There-Is-Absolutely-Nothing'. But exactly because he exists permanently beyond the world of dust and dirt, he can actually keep himself in the very midst of the dust and dirt of the real, material world. By remaining absolutely 'indifferent to petty interests in the world, he is interested in the great problems of the actual world. Surely, he is not a man 'whose ability is good enough to make him conspicuous in the politics of one state.'<sup>5</sup> But he is good enough to be the absolute ruler Of an empire, or even of 'all under Heaven'.

What, then, are the politics of the Perfect Man? From the point of view of common sense, Chuang-tzû says, the most ideal form of the management of political affairs consists in that 'the ruler should devise all the rules and regulations for his own self, and thereby govern his people, for, in such a case, who would dare to disobey him and not to be "transformed" by his virtue?'.<sup>6</sup>

Chuang-tzû declares that such a thing is nothing other than a 'cleceptive virtue'.<sup>7</sup> 'To govern the world by means of such a principle is like trying to wade through the ocean, to dig a large river with one's own hands, or to let a mosquito carry on its back a mountain!'<sup>8</sup>

The Perfect Man does not govern the world by means of man-made laws, which are but external matters designed to control only

the external aspects of human life. He governs the world by 'governing himself', that is, by perfecting his inner Virtue.

When the 'sacred man' is in the position of the ruler, how could he conceivably be interested in governing the external life of the people? [460] What he is interested in is that he should rectify his 'inside', (i.e., bring his inner Virtue to perfection) and then govern (his people). He is exclusively interested in firmly establishing his own affair. (Thus he leaves all other things in charge of their own natures.) Just think of a bird flying high in the sky, escaping thereby the danger of being shot down by a stringed arrow; or of a little mouse living in a deep hole under the sacred hill, avoiding thereby being dug out or smoked out (Every living being has its own natural wisdom by which it knows instinctively how to live safely.) Do human beings possess less knowledge than these two little creatures?<sup>9</sup>

What Chuang-tzû means by 'rectifying one's inside' is explained by himself in more concrete terms as follows:

Let your mind wander freely in (the field of) Simplicity (where there is not even a trace of desires), unify your vital energy with the limitless Tranquillity, and follow the natural course (lit. « being-so of-itself ») of all things without letting your 'ego' interfere with it. Then the whole world will be governed (spontaneously).<sup>10</sup>

Briefly stated, this means that when the Perfect Man in the real sense of the word is actualized, the world becomes governed 'of itself'. Not that the Perfect Man positively governs the world by instituting severe laws and enforcing them. The right ordering of the world is spontaneously actualized as the Perfect Man, on his part, 'rectifies his inner state'. It is clear that this is nothing but putting into practice the fundamental principle of Non-Doing. And that is, for Lao-tzû, and Chuang-tzû, the highest and most ideal form of politics.

Lao-tzû describes the situation in the following terms:

A state may well be governed by 'rectitude'.<sup>11</sup> A war may well be won by tactics. The empire, however, can be obtained only by Non-Action.<sup>12</sup>

How do I know that it is so? By the following observation.

The more restrictions and prohibitions there are in the world, the poorer the people.

The more civilized instruments the people possess, the more confused the land.

The more skills and crafts the people have, the more bizarre (useless) objects will be produced.

The more laws and regulations are promulgated, the more thieves and robbers there will be.

Therefore the 'sacred man' says: I remain in Non-Doing, and the people are (morally) transformed of themselves. I enjoy quietude, and the people become righteous of themselves. I do not meddle with anything, and the people become prosperous of themselves. I remain free from desires, and the people of themselves become like the uncarved block of wood<sup>13</sup>.

[461] As I have repeatedly emphasized, this supreme ability of the Perfect Man as a statesman is due to the fact that in practising Non-Doing, he is a perfect copy of the Way itself.

The Way in its absolute reality is inactive (i.e., 'non-doing »), yet it leaves nothing undone.

If lords and kings abide by this principle, the ten thousand things will grow up and develop of their own accord.

But if in the process of growth, desire (to act positively, against Nature) should arise (on the part of some of the ten thousand things), I would cairn it down by the weight of the 'nameless' (simplicity of) 'uncarved wood'.<sup>14</sup> The 'nameless' (simplicity of) 'uncarved wood' will take things back to the (original) state of desirelessness.

And if (the people) become 'desireless' and, consequently, 'tranquil', the whole world will of itself become 'peaceful'.<sup>3</sup>

The Way in its absolute reality is 'nameless'. (It is in this respect like 'uncarved wood').<sup>16</sup> The 'uncarved wood' may look insignificant, but nothing under Heaven is able to subjugate it.

If lords and kings abide by the principle (of 'uncarved wood'), the ten thousand things will of themselves come to pay homage to them. Heaven and Earth will join their forces to send down sweet dew, and the people will of themselves become peacefully governed, even if no decrees and ordinances are published.<sup>17</sup>

Thus the Perfect Man in the capacity of a statesman exercises his rule in accordance with the principle of Non-Doing. 'He does nothing other than doing-nothing'.<sup>18</sup> But by 'doing-nothing' he is in truth doing a great thing. For 'doing-nothing' means in his case to do nothing against the natural course of all things. Therefore his doing-nothing' is tantamount to 'assisting' the natural and spontaneous development of all things.

The 'sacred man' desires to be desireless. He learns not to learn.<sup>19</sup> He thereby turns back constantly to (the Ultimate Source) which is passed by unnoticed by the common people.

He assists the spontaneous being of the ten thousand things. He refrains from interfering with it by his own action.<sup>20</sup>

Many other passages could be adduced from the *Tao Tê Ching*, in which the idea of Non-Doing is extolled as the supreme principle of Taoist politics. But for our particular purposes what has been given is quite sufficient.

There is, however, one more point to make in connection with Non-Doing as a political idea. In the foregoing we have been concerned mainly with the attitude of the Perfect Man in governing the empire in accordance with the principle of Non-Doing. We have not yet dealt with the problem of the inner state or attitude of those who are governed, the common people as the subjects over whom the Perfect Man rules. [462]

Already in some of the above-quoted passages it has been suggested that the ideal rule of the Perfect Man encounters hindrance if his subjects happen to have 'desire' and 'knowledge'. The Perfect Man himself may be absolutely above all human desires' — because he is without 'emotions' — and above petty 'knowledge' to be acquired by the exercise of the rational faculty of the mind — because he has completely 'chaotified' his mind. But however Perfect he may be in this respect, he is not in a position to realize the ideal of ruling by the principle of Non-Doing unless the people, on their part, be also perfectly prepared for accepting his rule. And they are perfectly prepared for accepting his rule only when they are purified of desire and 'knowledge'. Thus the act of purifying the people of these obstacles constitutes part of the politics of Non-Doing.

If (the ruler) does not hold the (so-called) wise men in high esteem, the people will be kept away from contending with one another. If he does not value goods that are hard to obtain, the people will be kept away from committing thefts.

If he does not display things that are liable to excite desires, the minds of the people will be kept undisturbed.

Therefore, the 'sacred man' in governing the people empties their minds,<sup>n</sup> while making their bellies full; weakens their wills<sup>22</sup> while rendering their bones strong.

In this way, he keeps his people always in the state of no-knowledge and no-desire, so that the so-called 'knowers' might find no occasion to interfere (and influence the people).

If he thus practises Non- Doing, the world cannot but be governed well.<sup>23</sup>

From of old those who excel in the practice of the Way do not try to make the people wise and clever. Rather they try to keep the people in the (simple) state of knowledgelessness. If the

people are difficult to rule it is because they have too much 'knowledge'.

He who rules a state by (giving the people) 'knowledge' damages the country. He who rules a state by depriving (the people) of 'knowledge' brings prosperity to the country.

To know (the difference between) these two (forms of government) belongs to the standard measure (of the ruler). And to know the standard measure in every matter is what I would call the Mysterious Virtue. How profound and far-reaching the Mysterious Virtue is! (Its profundity is shown by the fact that) it works contrariwise to the nature of things, yet ultimately turns back to the Great Conformity;<sup>24</sup> (i.e., at first sight the working of the Mysterious Virtue looks as if it were against the natural order of things, but in reality it is in conformity with the very working of the Great Way).<sup>25</sup>

The Great Conformity which is to be achieved by the practice of Non-Doing represents the highest degree of perfection among the various possible forms of governing the state. It is the art of gov-  
[463]ernment peculiar to the Perfect Man. And judged by this standard, all the remaining political forms are found to be imperfect in varying degrees.

The highest of all types of the ruler is such that the people under him are only aware of his presence.

The next is the ruler to whom they feel attached and whom they praise. The next is the ruler whom they fear.

The next is the ruler whom they despise. If (the ruler) is not trusted enough, it is because he is not truthful enough.

If (on the contrary) the ruler is cautious and weighs the words he utters, then his task will be accomplished, his work done, and the people will all say: All this we have done naturally, by ourselves.'<sup>26</sup>

The people feel this way because the Perfect Man rules over them by the principle of Non-Doing. They are vaguely conscious of his presence over them, but they do not notice that things run so smoothly because of his being their ruler.

It is very interesting to observe that the second of the types of the ruler enumerated in this passage, namely, the case in which the people feel attached to the ruler and greatly praise him, evidently refers to the Confucian ideal of governing the people with 'benevolence' We would do well to recall in this connection the words of Lao-tzû which we have quoted earlier.<sup>27</sup> 'Only when the great Way declines, do "benevolence" and "righteousness" arise.' The implication is that the highest ideal of politics from the point of view of Confucius and his school is, from the point of view of

Lao-tzû, not only the second-best, but something indicative of the decline of the great Way.

Only when the great Way declines, do 'benevolence' and 'righteousness' arise.

Only when cleverness and sagacity emerge in the world, do wiles and intrigues arise.

Only when the six basic kinship relations are out of harmony do filial sons make their appearance.

Only when the state is in confusion and disorder, do loyal subjects make their appearance.<sup>28</sup>

If the ruler abolishes 'cleverness' and abandons 'intelligence', the benefit received by the people will increase a hundredfold.

If he abolishes 'benevolence' and abandons 'righteousness', the people will (spontaneously) return to 'filial piety and 'paternal love'.<sup>29</sup>

If he abolishes artifice and abandons (the pursuit of) profit, there will be no more thieves and robbers.

If with these three (principles) alone one should think adornments are too scanty, let there be, then, something additional. Show out-wardly the plainness of undyed silk and embrace inwardly the simplicity of uncarved wood. Reduce selfishness and lessen desires.<sup>30</sup>

[464] In one of the passages quoted above, we saw how in Lao-tzû's view the highest type of government is represented by the ruler who governs the country so 'naturally' that the 'people' are conscious only of there being a ruler over them', without attributing to him any particular virtue or merit. Chuang-tzû unreservedly agrees with Lao-tzû on this point. It goes without saying that, according to both Lao-tzû and Chuang-tzû, in such a form of ideal government not only do the people not notice the merit of the ruler, but the ruler himself is not conscious of his own merit.

Lao-tzû :

The 'sacred man' is such that he does great things, yet does not boast of his own achievement; he accomplishes his task, yet does not stick to his own merit. Is this not because he does not wish to display his superiority over others?'<sup>31</sup>

And Chuang-tzû:

When an 'illuminated king' reigns over the world, his merit covers all under Heaven. But he is not conscious of the merit as something proceeding from himself.



His transforming power affects the ten thousand things. But the people do not feel dependent upon him.

There is 'something' occurring (in the world, because of his presence as the ruler), but no one could definitely name it. (The existence of that 'something' is clearly shown only by the fact that) it actually renders all things spontaneously happy and contented.

He himself stands in (the spiritual state of) the Unfathomable, and wanders to his heart's content in the There-Is-Nothing.<sup>32</sup>

I shall bring this chapter to a close by quoting from the *Tao Tê Ching* a passage in which Lao-tzû pictures in an idyllic tone an imaginary state which is governed by a 'sacred man' — a state based on the principle of Non-Doing, in which the highest ideal of Taoist politics is actualized in a concrete form. It is by no means a grand-scale ideal state like the Republic of Plato. It is almost a village. Yet, who knows? The people of this small country may possibly be even happier and more contented than the inhabitants of the Platonic state.

A small country, with small population. There are (in this country) various tools of war, but the people are not tempted to use them. The people (are so happy and contented that) they regard death as no slight matter (i.e., they are reluctant to die because life is so enjoy-able). Nor do they want to move to distant places. Though there are ships and carts, there is no place to go with them. Though there are armor and weapons, there arises no occasion to display them.

The people are taught to go back to (the Simplicity of immemorial antiquity) using knotted cords (instead of the complicated system of writing). [465]

They find relish in their food, and beauty in their clothes. Happy and contented with their own homes, they find delight in their old customs.

The neighbouring country is just there, within sight. The people of this country can hear even the cocks crowing and dogs barking in that country. And yet, the inhabitants of the two countries grow old and die without ever visiting one another.<sup>33</sup>

## Notes

1. *Tao Tê Ching*, XXII.
2. *ibid.*, LVI; see also IV.
3. (). It may be translated also as 'Mysterious Levelling'.
4. *op. cit.*, XXVIII.
5. *Chuang-tzû*, I, p. 16.

6. *ibid.*, VII, p. 290.

7. ( ), *ch'i té*.

8. *ibid.*, VII, p. 291.

9. *ibid.*, VII, p. 291.

10. *ibid.*, VII, p. 294.

11. This is an ironical reference to the Confucian idea of the ideal politics. A man once asked Confucius about the art of ruling the state. Confucius replied: 'Ruling' (*chéng* means 'rectitude' (*chéng* ( ))). If you (govern the people) by 'rectifying' yourself in the first place, no one would venture to act against 'rectitude' — *Analects*, XII, 17.

12. ( ), *wu shih*, synonymous with *wu wei*. *Shih* is defined by Hsün-tzû as 'doing something in expectation of getting a profit' ( )

13. *Tao Tê Ching*, LVII.

14. i.e., I, the ruler, would calm down the desire of the people, not by suppressing it by laws and edicts, but by disclosing myself to them as a living embodiment of the Way in its aspect of absolute 'simplicity', that is, the state of being completely purified of all desires and passions.

15. *op. cit.*, XXXVII.

16. Because it is not yet carved into various vessels, each of which is distinguished from others by a special 'name'.

17. *op. cit.*, XXXII.

# Dream Trippers

## Global Daoism and the Predicament of Modern Spirituality

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The University of Chicago Press

Chicago and London

The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637

The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

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## Spiritual Trajectories

MASTER HU [...]

MASTER HAO [...]

[126]

MASTER CHEN

In contrast to Hu's reverence and Hao's enthusiasm, Master Chen can be characterized in terms of his intellectual brilliance.<sup>21</sup><sup>33</sup> When we first met him in 2004, he appeared as the very embodiment of Quanzhen monastic orthodoxy, both as an official in the Huashan Daoist Association and as an articulate exponent of Daoist teachings who traced his spiritual genealogy to Hao Datong—one of the Seven Perfected Ones, the disciples of Wang Chongyang, the founder of the Quanzhen order. Winn remarked about Chen, « He would never be able to teach the Dao in the West, because he is so much a part of the monastic tradition, and can never get rid of the weight of that tradition. »

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33 Notes omises (limitées à des références de sources).

Little did we know that, within a year, he would definitively leave Huashan and the monastic community to become an urban hermit in Chengdu, Sichuan, a place famous for its leisurely lifestyle, pursuing his spiritual path in a different way, and full of critical insights on the state of contemporary Quanzhen Daoism, as well as on the growing interest in Daoism among Westerners. An avid fan of football matches on TV, he often talked in praise of idleness, with a fondness for the laziness of Chinese people. He was a great admirer of the Tang dynasty, when anyone who could afford it lived a life of genteel idleness, drinking in inns and composing verses, wearing jade pendants and other types of refined ornaments to display one's high state of moral distinction. He was also quite an admirer of America, which he found to be comparable in many ways to Tang dynasty China, notably in its openness to other cultures.

Born in 1969 in Jinan (Shandong Province), Chen was very naughty as a boy; he loved fighting, and climbing on the roofs of houses, and he learned to speak very late, causing much worry to his parents. Only recently did he [127] find out that his primary school building was located in the premises of an old Daoist temple, one of the buildings of which still remained.<sup>22</sup> Chen describes his attraction to Daoism as follows: when he was a boy, he opened a book on ancient thinkers, and saw the word "Daoism" (*daojia*). He fell in love with the two Chinese characters, which left a deep impression on him. But he was not satisfied with the description of Daoist philosophy in the book, which condemned it for being an instrument of the feudal exploiting classes that, nonetheless, contains some good elements of primitive dialectical materialism. China was in the midst of the post-Mao *qigong* and martial arts "fever,"<sup>23</sup> and Chen began practicing as a teenager; he was especially accomplished at Bruce Lee's kicking style, and enjoyed climbing up walls and jumping from one house to another on roofs. According to one of his high school classmates, he had perfect form in physical education, and his teacher gave him special access to a training room.<sup>24</sup> He started reading books on Daoism and, using a manual, started meditating at home. One night, while meditating, he heard a voice telling him: "*Chujia* !"—leave your family to enter the order ! He laughed, but couldn't get rid of the voice. He couldn't sleep. The next day, the voice was still telling him to *chujia* ! After a week, the voice was tormenting him. At the time, he was studying Chinese medicine in a junior college. For six months, he tried various ways to discipline his mind to get rid of the voice, but no luck. So he

gave up. One day, he learned in a magazine that there were Daoist temples and monks at Wudangshan, a mountain famous for its martial arts. He wrote to the chairman of the Wudangshan Daoist Association, telling of his thirst to learn the true teachings of Daoism, and, at the end, asking if they would accept him as a monk. In its reply, the Daoist Association encouraged him in his search for Dao, but, as for joining the monastic order, "it is not important, the key is faith in Daoism" Regardless, Chen decided to set off for Wudangshan.

His parents were teachers; they staunchly opposed his decision. He promised that he would not "leave the family"; he only wanted to "experience" monastic life, and would return a year later. Chen set off with a backpack. He was twenty-two years old.

At Wudangshan, he was surprised that most monks rarely talked about « Dao », but about ghost stories and miraculous events that he was not interested in. Nonetheless, he was deeply moved by the simplicity of many of the elder monks, and by the words in the scriptures he recited every morning. After the year came to an end, he decided to commit his life to Dao, and to become a monk. His brother was the first to accept his choice, but his mother became desperate. But, after some time she felt that he had become less cocky, more "dumb," and more wise, and that he understood more about life and could give advice on how to manage family affairs. [128]

Chen settled at Laoshan, a Daoist monastery on the Shandong coast, where he spent around four years. It was there that he met his master, Xue Tallai. It happened shortly after he had a dream of an old master coming from Huashan, and that he was to become his disciple. Xue was described by Bill Porter in his book *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits*<sup>34</sup>, based on Porter's travels to meet hermits at the Zhongnanshan range and Huashan in the late 1980s. In Porter's account, Xue was seventy years old, having spent forty-five years as a monk, and now lived in the Jade Cloud Temple on the West Peak of Huashan. Porter described Xue affectionately as a likeable monk, who was "straightforward in a very gentle way."<sup>25</sup> A photograph in the book shows an old monk with deep-set eyes, a large forehead, and a long, wispy beard, wearing a dark robe and cap.

Master Chen described his encounter with Xue as follows:

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34 San Francisco, 1993.

« When I was looking for a master, I was not interested in finding someone with much knowledge or accomplishment in techniques, for these things I could find by myself. But I wanted someone of high virtue, who could lead me on that path.

« When I first saw Xue Tallai, I was at Laoshan, and the moment I saw him coming into the temple, limping, I helped him along and arranged for others to take care of his needs, and I knew that he was exactly the master that I had imagined. I asked him to be my master, but he said that he was useless. I insisted, and he said that I should take the current Chairman of the Laoshan Daoist Association as my master. I insisted, and he said that I should get the permission of the Chairman.

« I went to the Chairman and asked him about that old Daoist. He answered right away that one can see at first sight that he is a man of high cultivation. I asked if I could become his disciple, and he said that Xue would surely not take me. I said, "what if he agrees?" He said, "go and see then." So I told him that Master Xue had agreed. The Chairman got angry, saying that "you can't take a master from Huashan; you need to take a master from Laoshan" ».

Chen then brought Xue Tallai to the chairman, to help make his case. As the chairman continued to refuse, Master Xue said, « I am a useless and ignorant person, and only want to study. At every mountain I go, I become a disciple of a master. Let me be your disciple, and let Chen be your disciple too, as well as mine. Then he can be both of our disciples: »The abbot still refused, but Xue kowtowed to him, and told Chen to follow suit, and they kowtowed to him, and it was done. Master Xue gave Chen his Daoist name—Yuming—, but muttered it unclearly, and Chen didn't know exactly what it was. Later, another monk told him. [129]

Chen was delighted and excited that his dream of finding a master had come true. As it was late in the evening, he told Xue, "Master, I will come and see you first thing tomorrow morning!" But the next morning, his master had already left. Chen was deeply disappointed that his master seemed to have already forgotten him.

Once Chen was accused of embezzling some funds, and was mistreated by his fellow monks. Six months later, it was discovered that the bookkeeper had made an error and he was cleared of all suspicion. At that point the monks came to him and apologized. This was his first painful experience of monastic politics. The next day, Chen packed his bags and left on a journey of "cloud

wandering." He visited the Golden Platform Temple at Baoji, where the legendary Zhang Sanfeng had entered the Quanzhen order; the Eternal Spring Temple in Hubei; the Hangu Temple in Henan; and the White Cloud Monastery in Beijing. Everywhere he was disappointed by what he perceived as the flagging religious spirit of Daoism, compared to the prosperity of Buddhism. At Yantai he cried at the tomb of one of the Seven Perfected Ones, Ma Danyang, lamenting the decline of Quanzhen Daoism.

Finally, he reached Huashan. He immediately sought out Master Xue, unsure if his master remembered him. He put his bags down outside of Xue's room, and called out, "My master, I have come!"—and he heard his master's reply: "Yuming, you have come!" Chen was deeply moved and excited that Xue had remembered him.

Chen was deeply attached to his master, and shared the following stories about him:

« I have many masters, but he is the one who had the deepest impression on me. His level of technical practice was very low, and he was almost illiterate. But he was extremely devout and sincere, and a man of utter purity, simplicity, and humility. Even though he was barely literate, he was an assiduous reader. When he came across a character he couldn't read, he would sit by the path with a dictionary and humbly ask a passerby if he could kindly spare a minute to explain the word to him or help him to look it up in the dictionary. Often, especially when I was in a turbulent state of mind, I would go to him in his room, where he was always either sleeping or reading. He would say, "Chen, you have come! Sit down." And he would continue reading. And my troubles would vanish.

« When he was younger, he once decided to retrace the steps of patriarch Qiu Chuji, and went to Panxi stream. But at that spot, the bridge had fallen into ruins, so, like the Patriarch, he decided to help carry people across the river on his back. So he did this for six years. He was reputed among the local [130] people as an extremely good person (though some people also said he was crazy), and on hearing this, the Army gave him an overcoat, and some money. He donated all of the money to rebuild the bridge. Later, he left that spot, and moved to Huashan.

« Sometime later, some of the people from Panxi were at Huashan and recognized him, and were surprised to learn that he was a Daoist monk. But he told them that they were mistaken, that he was not that man.

« When I asked him, why did you deny it? He said, "I am a cultivator, and I must do good deeds. Could I say otherwise?" He always insisted that he was ignorant and good for nothing.

« After 1949, he was for a period an official at Huashan. Then, at the Cultural Revolution, all the monks at Huashan were rounded up, and told they would have to return to married life. They were given three options: (1) to return to their hometowns, (2) to settle in the local town, and the local authorities would find a girl for them to marry, (3) if they insisted on remaining celibate, they would be sentenced to forced labor. Xue Tallai chose to do forced labor. A Daoist nun felt sorry for him and, to spare him that fate, proposed to marry him, but he said he was diseased (implying that he was impotent) as an excuse, and entered forced labor for a decade, where he broke stones on the roadside.

« After the Cultural Revolution, he was the first monk to wear his Daoist robes again. Nobody else dared do it, until they finally heard the change in policy, that religious life was now allowed again. Xue Tallai was rehabilitated and compensated for ten years of unpaid wages, which he spent to build a small shelter for people to rest on their ascent of Huashan. »

At Huashan, most of the old Daoists were dying off and the new ones had no master, so Xue Tallai agreed to ordain several of them as disciples. But he insisted that he knew nothing, and that he was doing this only to transmit the lineage, which would otherwise be cut off. Master Xue died in 2003. For this deeply respected Daoist monk, there was a huge funeral procession.

At Huashan, Master Chen began by trying to be an upright monk, but after some time he began to live a dissolute life. "After I became a monk, I met many eminent Daoists. But when I saw how they behaved it was a real shock, especially concerning their celibacy. I was deeply disillusioned. At that time I didn't really understand about my own cultivation, and only cared about how to save people. At the same time, I began to live a degenerate life." At first Chen wasn't interested in the fights and the arrangement with police for splitting money, and stayed in his room while he heard fights outside, but later he joined them too, Look part in fights, kept money, went out to restaurants for two meals a day, and brought meat into the temple.

He also got caught up in factional politics. During an election for the chairman of the Huashan Daoist Association, he was expected to support [131] a fellow disciple of Xue Tallai, but considered him incompetent. "In fact, I thought there was not a single qualified



person at Huashan. No matter what I did, or did not do, others would see me as their enemy. People would come to me and ask, 'Who do you belong to?' and I would get angry at them. 'I only belong to the ancestral patriarch!' "27

Chen was already disgusted with his own poor spiritual discipline, and the factional struggle was the last straw that led him to escape from Huashan.

« I was very unhappy. I decided to stop living like that. The only way was for me to go. So I left Huashan, and went to Yunnan for a few months, and reflected, and found that my two major faults were my pride and my lust. And I set out to overcome these weaknesses. I tried everything against the lust, to no avail. I would curse myself, and even hit myself when the desire arose, but to no avail. Then a master in Yunnan taught me a meditation method which was simple and effective. The reason I had not been able to control myself was simply a lack of skill. I needed to improve my *gongfu*. The method was very effective, and within about three months I was able to control my desire. There were a few relapses, but gradually my sexual urges were completely stilled. Daoist monks have a huge responsibility as models of sexual restraint. If common people have dissolute lives, it doesn't matter, but if it's a monk, it has a terrible impact. »

On his return to Huashan, he followed discipline more strictly, and his abilities earned him a position of leadership in the monastic community. But factional politics continued. Chen decided to avoid all factional struggles, adopting a "triple no" policy of not participating in organized groups or factions; not commenting on others; and not explaining or justifying himself." Chen was becoming increasingly respected; and he was destined to be promoted to an official post. In order to avoid being called to an official leadership role, he tried acting crazy and unpredictable, such as running around naked in the courtyard—but still he could not avoid being promoted to deputy chairman and general manager."

Master Chen also decided to adopt a low-key approach to cultivation, in which he didn't pretend to have any accomplishment. While deeply committed to his practice, on the outside he wouldn't pretend to be anything, not acting upright and stem, but just acting relaxed and normal. "Otherwise, people will think you are too distant; they will respect your cultivation but they will not do it themselves because they feel it is too different from them." He also never told any of his fellow monks at the

monastery about his cultivation, because, "First, they will test you, to try to put you down. And second, once they recognize your ability, they will seek you out, take you as a model, and seek teachings from you, and bother you. » [132]

Perhaps because of his own experience of inner struggle, when he spoke about cultivation it wasn't in terms of abstract principles, and virtue was central to his discourse: "Without virtue, techniques are useless, even like nuclear bombs." But at the same time, he was far from being an ascetic puritan; he enjoyed going out to eat meat and drink liquor with visitors at banquets in town, and was very smooth in his socializing with nonmonastics: cultured, adept at conversation and self-deprecating jokes, at ease with social etiquette, he could talk about anything and always had entertaining stories to tell at banquets. In fact, he was the type of person who would be successful in any line of work in China, such as business or government.

With such talent and knowledge, and at such a young age, Chen was the ideal candidate for a political position within Daoist officialdom. And while he seemed to be a smooth operator as Office Director of the Huashan Daoist Association, and his family pushed him in that direction, he insisted,

« I have no interest in becoming a Daoist politician. Others talk of "proclaiming Daoism" and so on. It's hard to resist such suggestions, because of one's sense of duty. But I have seen through them, and I won't fall for it. My dream is to one day retreat into the mountains. Now I still need this collectivity to learn and to support me, but when I will no longer need it I will leave it, to go into the mountains to cut wood. Well, maybe not to cut wood, but to go into the mountains. This collectivity will always continue to go on without me. It doesn't need me, there will always be thousands of Daoist officials. All I want to do is to cultivate better. Laozi had the most influence, yet he did not go out and "found" a religion. The same with Lü Dongbin. The most influential Daoists were never involved in Daoist institutions. There were only a few of them and they lived centuries apart, but their influence by far exceeds that of thousands of abbots and sect founders. Even today, what could you do by founding a sect? You still would have to defer to Lü Dongbin, you couldn't teach anything new—so what would the point be? »

At the time, it was hard to judge if he was sincere or if he was only cleverly saying these things to appear humble and conceal a burning ambition for official position—especially when he

mentioned that he would accept an appointment only if it was forced on him. But what sounded like mere ruminations became a reality within less than a year, when he left the monastic order to cultivate in solitude. Not in the mountains, though: "Going into mountains is only for the early stages of cultivation. Then the true cultivation can only be in the city. Then, at a very advanced stage, one can return to the mountains."

He chose the metropolis of Chengdu—because, he said, it's one of the twenty-four dioceses of the early Heavenly Masters movement and, as the center of the Sichuan basin, is the "elixir field" (dantian) of China, a good [133] place for cultivating. It's also "a very leisurely culture, where people try very hard to play. They're always playing. Nobody here will notice if I'm not doing anything. In my hometown, people would always ask and worry for me, and offer to help me find work." When he decided to leave the monastic order, his mother was delighted at first, but she was then disappointed that he wouldn't return to normal life, and had actually given up his promising career as a Daoist official. "But I never tried to explain or justify myself," he said. At first, every time he went home, his parents would hold a "family meeting" for him. "But later, they saw how I had changed, so they accepted my choice."

His parents are well off, and don't have financial needs; so they support him financially, and purchased a house for him in Dujiangyan, a small city close to Chengdu and near to Qingchengshan. But he lives in Chengdu, where life is cheap, and he also gives occasional zither, painting, and taiji quan lessons.

When I saw him in Chengdu in 2005, he had cut the long hair he had grown in his years as a monk; wearing a T-shirt and cheap pants, he looked like a typical Chinese of modest means. In contrast to the times I met him at Huashan, when he displayed some of the worldly jadedness of an official, chatting about international politics and Chinese history as much as about Daoism, his conversation was now very serious and focused on the theme of spiritual cultivation. His goal, he said, was to hurry up in his cultivation, to have the ability in the future to save people. "At this stage I can't go out and save people." Asked how he intended to save people in the future, he didn't answer clearly, but he stressed that it would not be "by going out publicly, by establishing a religion!" "Daoism is much weaker and less developed than other religions in China. At first I was concerned

about this, but now I understand that that's the strength of Daoism. If you try to reform, to 'proclaim Daoism: nobody will follow you, because there is no scriptural basis for doing so. Whereas, in Buddhism and Christianity, there is a dear basis in scripture to go about and spread the religion..'30

Keeping his location and identity secret, he rents a small and simple room in a suburb of the city. In 2009, he told me he was happy to be living a to-tally relaxed lifestyle, practicing a bit of taiji quan every day, living a simple life. He also practiced still meditation, and also occasionally used more complex methods, mostly from the Shangqing and Lingbao traditions?'

His spiritual experience also changed—far from the external environment of Huashan that sustained his previous spiritual practice, he now experienced the power of Dao as something completely internal to himself: "When I was at Huashan, I always felt something outside of me, the *daoqi* that was exactly the same as one thousand years ago at the time of the ancestral patriarchs, as [134] if I was living at the same time as them. It was there, outside of me, and going right into me. But now, in meditation, I have had a completely different feeling, as if that thing was right in me, right in my heart, that it was my heart itself"32

He decided to keep an extremely low profile: he is willing to give talks and lessons to foreigners who invite him, but will not create an organization. In spite of his fame in the Chinese Daoist circle, he would never go to public events or give public lessons to Chinese audiences—"because too many people would know about it, it becomes a source of trouble. When I do things with foreigners, Chinese people won't know about it." He regretted having once attended a public event to see his zither teacher; he was then introduced to many people, but hated the hobnobbing, and meeting some Daoist monks who enjoyed the social networking. "These people, because they have no other world, they are attracted to that world. If they live in another, spiritual world, they will not be attracted."

Master Chen is selective in accepting disciples, and has only a handful of formal ones, half of whom are men and the other half women. Some are lay Daoists, some are business people; one is a tour guide; there is also one old lady; and there are also a few

foreigners, including Komjathy<sup>35</sup>. Most of his disciples are from the days when he was a monk at Huashan. Some of them were referred to by other monks (who strongly urged him to take them), and others asked him directly.

I don't go out and look for disciples, and I only take disciples who have a strong faith and desire to cultivate. I don't teach to those, like many monks, who are only curious or take Daoism as a hobby. Some of them come to me, because they want to be able to talk about different traditions and techniques, and compare them, and display their knowledge, but I never accept. I never take monks as disciples. They are too much trouble. I have some disciples who are more at the level of faith, and solving problems of daily life, to whom I transmit the forms of Quanzhen Daoism, and two disciples interested in cultivation, to whom I do not transmit a particular form; I do not talk of different sects.<sup>33</sup>

He claimed that he is not afraid of losing his disciples, and won't hesitate to cut off communications with them in order to punish them for wrong attitudes, strong desires or attachments, or not doing the basics. "For example, one of my disciples, a woman, asked to learn cultivation techniques but didn't even bother to burn incense and worship deities. How could she progress?" He prefers to start training in the qualities of the heart and in virtue, rather than with techniques, in order to give his students a strong foundation for [135] future progress. "If you want to learn a moving exercise, I will teach you to bow down; if you want to learn Daoist theory, then recite Daoist scriptures every day."<sup>34</sup> In any case, he felt frustrated that many of his disciples made no progress. "Some people are lazy and they can't get themselves to practice. Others are extremely diligent and can submit themselves to a rigorous meditative discipline. But no matter what, it's the same, they don't progress." And he concluded that what they lacked was the effort to do good deeds.<sup>35</sup>

And he also directed the same criticism at himself: "I used to neglect this aspect. I used to consider that to maintain a good heart was good enough, but that it wasn't important to actually do good deeds. I saw passages in Daoist scriptures about the importance of good deeds, but I didn't really understand. I considered that the most important was hidden virtue (*yinde*), not externally visible acts." According to Master Chen, Patriarch Qiu Chuji had forbidden his disciples from becoming hermits and isolating themselves from society; they should devote themselves

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35 Taoiste américain.

to the salvation of all sentient beings. But he realized that he was acting like a hermit himself. "I was closing myself up. Now I realize that progress in cultivation comes from the virtue one has attained. It might, in such a case, be useful to go into retreat for a period, in order to work on oneself, to consolidate an achievement, but to consolidate a virtue already attained. If one has not already attained that virtue, to go into retreat would mean to close oneself from the possibility of progress. Heaven and the myriad beings will respond and lift you up if you do good deeds, but if you don't, why will they come for you?" After coming to this realization, he felt a new life in him; he felt a new energy that led him to act to help others. "Before, it was like being dead. Now I understand the term *walking cadaver* (*xingshi zourou*). That's what people are doing. They get up, they go to bed, they go to sleep, they get up; there is no difference between living and dying. Then they die and they look for another body to continue being dead like this—is there any difference between such life and death? That's the meaning of the cycle of births and deaths" (*Junhui*).<sup>36</sup> So, while Chen's earlier discourse stressed virtue, by 2009 it increasingly stressed doing good deeds—even though, in a Daoist spirit of spontaneity, he did not advocate planned charitable actions or social engagement, or "being attached to specific plans"—simply jumping at opportunities to help people in need, such as a time when he helped pick up for a deaf woman whose shopping bag had burst and her vegetables rolled all over the place. These mundane helping acts acquired a fundamental spiritual significance in Chen's understanding of the process of Daoist cultivation.

This orientation also found expression in his increasing involvement in what could be called exorcistic healing practices, but which, in fact, he defined in terms of good deeds. For instance, one of his disciples had a pain in his [136] upper back, and tried many ways to treat it, but to no avail, and asked Master Chen for help. The image of an animal came to Chen's mind, so he asked him if he had ever harmed or killed an animal. His disciple thought and thought, but could not think of anything. Finally, he remembered that some time ago he had inadvertently disturbed a bird's nest, leading to the death of a chick. "I told him to burn some incense and some paper money for this bird. He did, and his pain went away." In another case, there was a boy who was very ill, and no matter what treatments were used, he did not improve. His parents called on a Buddhist monk, figuring that he was possessed by a demon, and asked Chen to conduct exorcistic

rituals. "But I said, there is an animal spirit near your house, and it is injured and is limping. It is suffering. Don't attack it with magic. At the place I designate, burn some incense and paper money, and also offer some painkilling medicine." After this, claimed Chen, the child got better. Thus, Chen saw his practice as the opposite of exorcism: instead of violently attacking demons, in the manner typical of Daoist priests, you need to "do good deeds" by helping those injured and suffering spirits.<sup>37</sup>

Each summer, when we had long chats with Chen in Chengdu restaurants, coffee shops, and teahouses, he appeared more critical of the Quanzhen institution. By 2007, he stated categorically, "I am increasingly becoming uninterested in the Daoist religion; I am only interested in Dao."<sup>38</sup>

Though he now claimed to be indifferent to Daoist institutions, his opinion of the Daoist clergy was far from neutral. Asked what he thought of the commodification of Daoism by the "Daoist hot springs" developer at Louguantai who had hired him to give lectures to his staff:

« So they are using Daoism for their own purposes. But isn't that what Daoist monks do? They put on their Daoist robes to accomplish their own objectives. If they don't want others to do it, they shouldn't do it themselves. One of my disciples recently told me that he had met a Daoist monk, who was the student of such-and-such, at such temple, of such-and-such generation, etc. Who cares about these things? They are but outer garments. We need only look at the heart. Daoist and Buddhist monks are the most despicable of all people. In a war, the worst people are the traitors. In religion, which doesn't have outside enemies, the traitors are the monks themselves, who completely betray the spirit of the religion.<sup>39</sup> »

For Chen, the people who worship at temples are motivated by their need for faith, and by their true admiration for great figures like Lü Dongbin and Zhang Sanfeng—it has nothing to do with the Daoist monks and priests in the temple, or the religious organizations, that have no good influence on people. "Daoism and Buddhism now care too little about doing good deeds, [137] they only care about themselves. They only look after their own interests and not those of society, of humanity, and of the myriad beings. They complain that they have no money, that they are too weak, so they can't do anything. These are just excuses. Buddhists are good at making money, but I don't consider this to be a sign of development."<sup>40</sup>

Chen's views seemed to be coming closer to those of Winn's Dream Trippers: only concerned with Dao and the spirituality of the heart, and utterly uninterested in Daoism as a religious organization. Now that he was out of the Quanzhen order, he certainly was free to develop his ties with such like-minded Westerners. Indeed, he continued and increased his interactions with networks of foreign practitioners: he gave talks for Dream Trippers when they visited Mount Qingcheng near Chengdu; he served as a guide for Russian Daoist tour groups, and, around 2010, he began teaching at an annual two-week Daoist retreat in Belgium. He had met the leader of this Daoist center at Huashan when hosting the 2002 Dream Trip. The Belgian was also a student of Mantak Chia, practices *Baguazhang*, and teaches Daoist practices. "He is the foreigner I have met who has the highest level of embodied accomplishment. When he came to Huashan, I noticed how good he was, and asked him if his master was Chinese; and was surprised to learn that he was not." Master Chen felt that he has deep *yuanfen* with him. At that time he invited Master Chen to Belgium to teach, but for several reasons it took several years for this plan to come to fruition.<sup>41</sup> The visits to Belgium started to have an impact on his religious worldview. His experiences in churches and cathedrals changed his views on Christianity, and he changed his formulation of the hierarchy of deities he worships every day. As his top tier, he continues to worship the Three Purities (*sanqing*)—the three supreme deities and hypostases of Dao—and as his second tier, the gods of the stars and of the Dipper, but, on the third tier, he now worships "all deities and spirits" (*yiqie shenming*), instead of his previous formulation of "all deities and Buddhas" (*yiqie shenfo*)—because, "After my mission changed through my trips to Europe, I decided to include all gods [including the Christian god] and not to accord special treatment to Buddhist ones."<sup>42</sup>

Teaching and interacting with foreigners became an increasingly important part of Chen's own cultivation and mission. It broadens his horizons, he explained, and allows him to test the universality of the Daoist teachings, as well as to correct some of his own concepts on Daoism. At the same time, given the inevitable spread of Daoism to different countries, it is important to ensure that a correct understanding of Dao is transmitted; otherwise, once erroneous understandings and practices become solidified as a system overseas, it will become almost impossible to correct.<sup>43</sup> [138]



Reflecting on his spiritual path over the previous decades, Chen recalled that, when he had started his life as a monk at Laoshan, a master had asked him: "Are you truly interested in cultivation, or is it the life of a monk that you are attracted to? Think about it and answer me in a week." Chen reflected, and finally told him that it was the life of a monk that he desired: wearing the Daoist robes, solemnly walking back and forth in the ceremonies. . . . Later, even though he had little experience of Daoist cultivation, on seeing the crisis in the Quanzhen order, he wanted to do great things, to start a new sect. And later, that urge having passed, he entered a phase of enjoying chatting about Dao (*lun dao*), knowing much about theory but having little intuitive knowledge. One day in 2000, a master advised him to go into a cave with only one book, and to meditate on it. So he went into one of the caves at the summit of Huashan, taking with him only the *Daodejing* with the *Heshanggong* commentary. He stayed in the cave for two weeks, reading and meditating, until he was called down for a meeting at the Jade Spring Monastery. It was during this time that, for the first time, "my heart/mind descended into my abdomen, and I felt completely grounded, and completely attuned with the world." It was from then on that he lost interest in idle talk on Dao, his focus shifted to cultivating Dao, and then he decided to leave the monastic order."

## The Quanzhen Order and the State

In the above biographical sketches, we have seen how Masters Hu, Hao, and Chen have struggled within the religious institution on their path of spiritual cultivation. In the case of Hao and Chen, they ultimately distanced themselves from the Quanzhen monastic order within which they had acquired their religious training, identity, and lineage affiliation. Though their Quanzhen background predisposed the monks to approach the Americans with benevolent condescension, other factors drew them into a more earnest engagement with the Dream Trippers, an attraction which was reinforced by the strong memories of the moments of meaningful communication with them, as we show in chapter 5. This attraction reinforced their marginalization from the monastic community: the ties with Westerners were possibly the cause of a plot against Hu; they became the center of Hao's dreams for the future development of his hermitage; and for Chen they provided a spiritual role independent of the monastic institution. Their comments, and those of other monks, seem to indicate a state of crisis of authority and authenticity in the contemporary Quanzhen institution as the guardian of Daoist orthodoxy.

Although most large Daoist temples and monasteries in China today are controlled by monks of the Quanzhen order,<sup>45</sup> Quanzhen is not the only [139] form of institutionalized Daoist religion in China, and it represents only the visible tip of the iceberg of Daoism in China. During the current socialist re-gime, in which the legal activities, properties, and personnel of the five state-sanctioned religions (Buddhism, Daoism, Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam) are managed by official state-sponsored associations at the national, provincial, and local levels, monks of the Quanzhen order virtually monopolize the Daoist Associations and control their temples and monasteries.

While Quanzhen generally follows the institutions of celibacy, vegetarianism, and monasticism modeled on Buddhism, the other main Daoist priestly tradition—Zhengyi or Orthodox Oneness—consists of ritual specialists who live among the people and serve the needs of individuals, families, and communities, usually without an affiliation to a temple. Zhengyi priests can marry, hold other jobs, eat meat, and so on. Besides the Zhengyi, dozens of local traditions of Daoist ritual masters, such as the Lüshan, Meishan, and Yuanhuang lineages, flourish in various regions such as Fujian, Taiwan, Hunan, and Guangdong; like the Zhengyi,

these are also lineages of priests operating as local ritual service providers. Non monastic Daoist priests generally remain unable to legally exercise their profession, although the Zhengyi order has gained some degree of official recognition since the 1990s, and Zhengyi priests have been able to obtain official permits in some provinces. Such types of priests are not visibly identifiable; they operate independently, live among the people, and, instead of giving moral exhortations, they organize rituals and exorcisms for a fee—they blur the boundaries between the secular and the sacred, and have thus tended to be labeled by the secular state as practitioners of illegal "superstitions."

Beyond these professional monks and ritual specialists, Daoist ideas and practices have been widely diffused among a great variety of professions including healers, pharmacists, opera singers, martial artists, diviners, geomancers, and body cultivation masters, as well as among lay religious movements. These different lineages, sects, and practitioners have never been united in a single institution, and while one can be the disciple of a master or the follower of a specific sect, there has never been a concept of "membership" in Daoism as a unified "religion." The disembedding of Chinese body cultivation techniques from specific traditional social contexts—and their reembedding in new settings, organizations, and traditions—is a process that has been going on in China for millennia. As "portable practices," Chinese breathing and stretching techniques, meditation, and visualization methods have circulated between mystics, literati, healers, ritual masters, warriors, religious devotees, and charismatic sectarians. They have been put to different uses, embedded in different types of social networks and organizations.....

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