

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
THE KEY PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS
IN
SUFISM AND TAOISM

II

by

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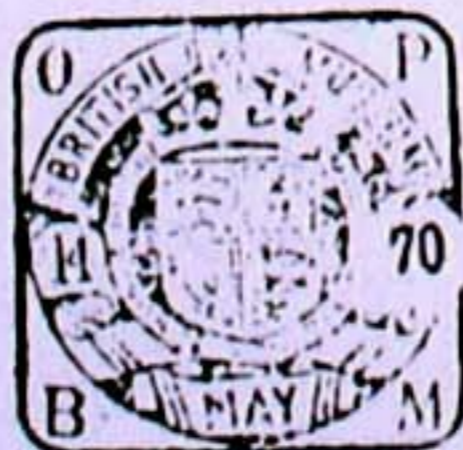
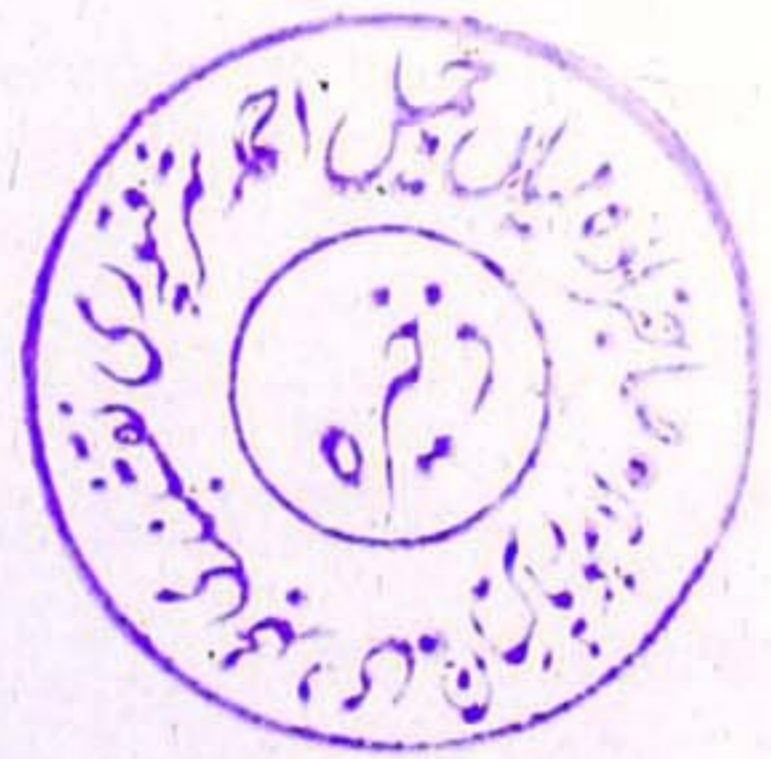
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VOLUME X

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
THE KEY PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS
IN
SUFISM AND TAOISM

—IBN 'ARABÎ AND LAO-TZŪ, CHUANG-TZŪ—

Part Two Part Three



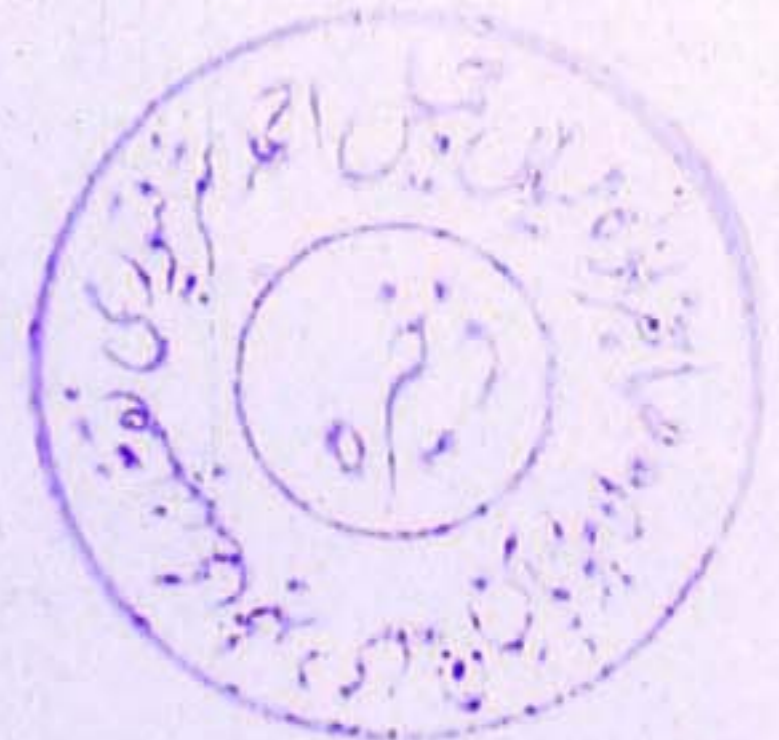
CONTENTS

Part Two THE PHILOSOPHICAL WORLD-VIEW OF LAO-TZŪ AND CHUANG-TZŪ

Chapter	I	LAO-TZŪ AND CHUANG-TZŪ	1
	II	FROM <i>MYTHOPOIESIS</i> TO METAPHYSICS	15
	III	DREAM AND REALITY	25
	IV	BEYOND THIS AND THAT.....	34
	V	THE BIRTH OF A NEW EGO	48
	VI	AGAINST ESSENTIALISM	71
	VII	THE WAY	92
	VIII	THE GATEWAY OF MYRIAD WONDERS	115
	IX	DETERMINISM AND FREEDOM	136
	X	ABSOLUTE REVERSAL OF VALUES.....	148
	XI	THE PERFECT MAN.....	163
	XII	HOMO POLITICUS	178

Part Three EXISTENCE —A Comparative Consideration—

Chapter	I	A METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION	191
	II	THE INNER TRANSFORMATION OF MAN.....	196
	III	THE MULTISTRATIFIED STRUCTURE OF REALITY	201
	IV	ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE	204
	V	THE SELF-EVOLVEMENT OF EXISTENCE.....	208



Part Two

THE PHILOSOPHICAL WORLD-VIEW
OF
LAO-TZŪ AND CHUANG-TZŪ

Chapter I

LAO-TZŪ AND CHUANG-TZŪ

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 precious 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-tzū, a senior contemporary of Confucius. In more scholarly circles no one today takes such a statement as literally true.

In fact, since the Ch'ing Dynasty when the question of the authorship of the book was first raised in China,¹⁾ 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-tzū 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 existed once as a historical person a sage called Lao-tzū in the state of Ch'u, who lived to be more than one hundred and sixty years,²⁾ whether or not this sage really wrote *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" (*waḥdah al-wujūd*) type of philosophy as represented by Ibn 'Arabī in Arabia.

1) Ts'ui Shu (崔述 in his 「洙泗考信錄」 I) 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-tzū. Of the *Tao Tê Ching* he says: "As for the 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 (楊朱之徒之所偽託)."

2) The name Lao-tzū, incidentally, simply means Old Master, the word "old" in this context meaning almost the same as "immortal".

I have just made a broad statement that the problem of authorship does not concern us except in a peripheral way. But, to be more strict, we must admit that there are a few aspects to the problem, which do concern us in the sense that they are vitally connected with a right analytic understanding of the very structure of the philosophy in question. In what follows I shall try to point out these aspects and give a brief explanation of them with a view to preparing the ground for a better and deeper understanding of what will be given in full detail in the subsequent chapters. The problems may conveniently be brought under two heads: one relating to the chronology of *Tao Tê Ching*, and the other relating to the shamanistic background of its author, whoever he may have been.

Lao-tzū 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 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 at a description of Lao-tzū's life and adventures in his *Book of History*,³⁾ Ssū Ma Ch'ien of the Han Dynasty (the beginning of the 1st. century B.C.), had to be content with giving a very inconsistent and un-systematic narrative made up of a number of stories stemming from heterogeneous origins.

According to one of those legends, Lao-tzū was a native of the state of Ch'u.⁴⁾ He was once in the position of being 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-tzū. "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-tzū whom I met to-day may probably be compared only to a dragon!"

The story makes Lao-tzū an older contemporary of Confucius (551-479 B.C.). This would naturally mean that Lao-tzū was a man who lived in the 6th century B.C., which cannot possibly be a historical fact.

3) 司馬遷: *Shih Chih*, 「史記」, LXIII, 「老莊申韓列傳」, III.

4) The significance of this alleged birthplace of Lao-tzū will be discussed later in this chapter. For the reason for which I translate 「周守藏室之史」, as "an official of the royal Treasury of Chou", see Shigeta Koyanagi: *The Thought of Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū and Taoism* 小柳司氣太「老莊思想と道教」, Tokyo, 1942, pp. 26-27.

Many arguments have been brought forward against the historicity of the narrative which we have just quoted. One of them—or perhaps we should say: one “type” of argument, for there is noticeable a wide divergence among scholars as regards the evidential details they produce in support of this kind of argument—is of particular importance to us because 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.

Sōkichi Tsuda in his well-known work, *The Thought of the Taoist School and its Development*,⁵⁾ 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-tzū—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 *jên-i* which is found in Chap. XVIII of the *Tao Tê Ching*,⁶⁾ and which is a compound of two words *jên* and *i*. These two words, *jên* (“humaneness”) and *i* (“righteousness”), properly speaking, do not belong to the vocabulary of Lao-tzū; they are key-terms of Confucianism. As representing two of the most basic human virtues, they play an exceedingly important role in the ethical thought of Confucius himself. But in the mouth of Confucius, they remain two independent words; they are not compounded into a semantic unit in the form of *jên-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 *jên-i* is Mencius. This fact, together with the fact that in the above-mentioned passage Lao-tzū uses the terms *jên* and *i* in this compound form, would clearly suggest that the *Tao Tê Ching*, is a product of a period in which the Confucian key-term *jên-i* has already been firmly established, for the passage in question is most evidently intended to be a conscious criticism of Confucian ethics. Lao-tzū, 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 endeavor to criticize Lao-tzū or *Tao Tê Ching* in spite of the fact

5) 津田左右吉「道家の思想とその展開」, Complete Works of S. Tsuda, XIII, Tokyo, 1964. The work was published earlier in 1927 as a volume of the series of publications of Tôyō Bunko.

6) 「大道廢有仁義」, “Only when the great Way declines, does the virtue of humaneness-righteousness arise.”

that the teaching of the latter is diametrically opposed to his own doctrine; he does not even mention the name Lao-tzū. 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-tzū (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-tzū.

There are some problematic points in Tsuda's argument, which I would not discuss here because they are rather irrelevant to our present concern. On the whole, I think, he is 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-tzū 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, i.e. unreal "way" and ordinary, unreal "names",⁷⁾ 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 "names", 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-tzū, Yang Chu, Shang Yang, and even Chuang-tzū, Shên Tao, and others. And there are some scholars who, basing themselves on this observation, go farther than Tsuda and assert that the *Tao Tê Ching* belongs to a period after Chuang-tzū 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 Ancient China*.⁸⁾

Some of these alleged "references" to the thinkers who have traditionally been considered later than Lao-tzū may very well be explained as due to the influence exercised by the *Tao Tê Ching* itself. 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

7) This passage will be translated and explained later.

8) 楊榮國「中國古代思想史」Peking, 1954, 3rd ed. 1955, Chap. VII, 4, pp. 245-247. At the outset (p. 245), the author states: 'The Book of Lao-tzū is, in my opinion, a product of an age subsequent to the flourishing of the school of Chuang-tzū in the Warring States period.'

presupposes the existence of the Confucian school of thought. And for the purposes of the present work, we do not have to go beyond this point as far as concerns the chronology of the *Tao Tê Ching*.

Now I turn to the shamanistic background of Lao-tzū. This is a problem far more important than that of chronology which we have just discussed; it is, indeed, a point of central significance for the basic thesis of the present work. Since, however, the following chapter will be entirely devoted to a detailed discussion of the shamanistic origin of the philosophical thinking of Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū, I shall confine myself here to a simple preliminary remark.

It is worthy of remark that the biography of Lao-tzū as given by Ssū Ma Ch'ien in his *Book of History* makes Lao-tzū a man of Ch'u.⁹⁾ Thus he writes in one passage, "Lao-tzū 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 states that according to a different tradition, there was a man called Lao Lai Tzū in the time of Confucius; that he was a man of Ch'u, and produced fifteen books in which he talked about the Way. Ssū Ma Ch'ien adds that this man may have been the same as Lao-tzū.

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-tzū 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 shamanistic tendency of the mind or shamanistic 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 shamanistic practices thrived.

But this apparently primitive and "uncivilized" atmosphere could provide an ideal fostering ground for an extraordinary visionary 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.¹⁰⁾ The same atmosphere could also produce a very peculiar kind of metaphysical thinking. This is possible because, though

9) 楚.

10) 屈原. We may note as quite a significant fact that this great poet of Ch'u was a contemporary of Chuang-tzū. According to a very detailed and excellent study done by Kuo Mo Jo (郭沫若「屈原研究」), Ch'ü Yüan was born in 340 B.C. and died in 278 B.C., at the age of sixty two. As for Chuang-tzū, an equally excellent study by Ma Hsü Lun (馬叙倫「莊子年表」) has established that he lived c. 370 B.C.-300 B.C.

originally a crude phenomenon, shamanistic experience of ecstasy is of such a nature that it can be refined and elaborated into a high level of metaphysical experience. The very process of this philosophical elaboration is vividly pictured by Chuang-tzū himself. Lao-tzū merely gives the result in its final, static form. But, in any case, the metaphysical depth of Lao-tzū's thought can, I believe, be rightly understood and appreciated only as a philosophical culmination of an age-old shamanistic tradition in ancient China. It is a system of metaphysics based on the personal experience of unitative immersion in the Absolute, a vision of the super-sensible order of the things, which is, in fact, an eternal value contained *in potentiâ* in the phenomenon of shamanism even in its crude elementary forms.

In this respect Henri Maspero¹¹⁾ 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-tzū, was very much developed philosophically by Chuang-tzū toward the end of that century and vulgarized to a considerable degree by Lieh-tzū 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū, 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-tzū. Is it at all imaginable that such a metaphysical refinement of shamanism should have been achieved as a result of a process of natural development, without an active intervention or participation of an individual thinker endowed with an unusual philosophical genius? I do not think so. Shamanism would remain in its original crudity as a popular expression of religious feeling unless it be elaborated into something of a higher order by the mind of a genius. At the very most it would simply produce cosmogonical myths destined to explain the genesis of the universe and the nature of gods and spirits. Myths of this kind are admittedly of capital importance in the sense that they furnish material for the development of a philosophical Weltanschauung. But they have to be elaborated first. And the elaboration of such a nature requires a tremendous intellectual endeavor. In order

11) Henri Maspero: *Le Taoism (mélanges posthumes sur les religions et l'histoire de la Chine, II)* Paris, 1950, III.

to produce the *Elegies of Ch'u* the primitive shamanistic vision of the world had to pass through the mind of a Ch'ü Yüan. Likewise, the same shamanistic 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 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 palpable 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 himself give a self-portrait in XX of the book?

“The multitude of men are blithe and cheerful as though they were invited to a luxurious banquet, or as though there were going up to high places in spring.

I alone remain silent and still, giving no sign of activity, like an infant that has not yet begun to smile. Forlorn and depressed I look, as if I had nowhere to go.

All men are brimming over (with hopes and expectations), I alone seem to be vacant and blank.

Mine indeed is the mind of a stupid man! Dull and confused it is! Ordinary men are all clever and bright, I alone am dark and obtuse. Ordinary men are all quick and alert, I alone am slow and tardy. Like a deep ocean that undulates constantly, like wind that blows never to rest, I am!

All others have some work to do, while I alone remain uncivilized and uncultured. I am different from all others because I value being nurtured by the Mother”.¹²⁾

Similarly in another passage (LXVII), he says of himself:

“Everybody under Heaven depicts me and says that I¹³⁾ am big, but look stupid. Yea, I look stupid because I am big. If I were clever I would long

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.

13) The text usually reads; 天下皆謂我道大……making “my Way” the subject of the sentence.

ago have become small”.

And again in LXX, we read:

“My words are very easy to understand and very easy to practise. And yet no one under Heaven understands them; no one practises them. My words stand on a principle, my actions stem from a governing rule. But people do not understand (this principle). That is why they do not understand me.

However, the very fact that those who understand me are rare is the proof that I am highly to be prized. Thus it is that the “sacred man” wears hair-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 petty pleasures of life. He takes such an attitude because he is conscious of himself being 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-tzū* 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-tzū calls *tso wang* “sitting in oblivion”, that is, the experience of ecstatic union with the Absolute, the Way. In this sense, the man who stands behind the utterances which we have quoted above is a shaman-philosopher, or in other words, a visionary shaman elevated to the level of a philosopher.

It is highly significant for our specific purpose also to note that the spirit of a philosophically developed shamanism just described 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.

However, the problem of the authorship in itself is by no means a matter of primary importance to the present study. What is far more important from our particular point of view is to perceive this personal unity underlying the *Tao Tê Ching* 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 sym-

bolism of the *Tao Tê Ching* and analyze with precision the structure of its metaphysics. I lay special emphasis on this point because misinterpretations of this sort have been made by not a few philologists.¹⁴⁾ In the first part of the present study, in which I dealt with the mystical metaphysics of Ibn 'Arabî, I emphasized the necessity of our approaching the subject with an attitude of "empathy", a particular kind of sympathetic intuition, by which alone we could at all hope to reach the personal existential depth from which the thought wells forth. Exactly the same attitude is required with regard to Lao-tzū.

Turning from Lao-tzū to Chuang-tzū, 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-tzū¹⁵⁾ 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-tzū or Chuang Chou¹⁶⁾ was a native of Mêng;¹⁷⁾ 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-tzū; and his writing, which counted more than 100,000 words, was for the most part symbolic or allegorical.

It is significant that Mêng which is mentioned by Ssü Ma Ch'ien as Chuang-tzū's birthplace¹⁸⁾ is in present-day Ho Nan and was a place in the ancient state

14) As an example we may mention the Japanese philologist Tsuda to whom reference has earlier been made. As a philologist, he was a first-rate scholar, but his mind was closed to the significance of the shamanistic-mystical aspect of the *Tao Tê Ching*. As a result, he came to the conclusion (*ibid.*, pp. 107-108) that Lao-tzū taught nothing but the pragmatic way of living; i.e. how a man should behave in every possible circumstance in order to manage to live through safely and peacefully an age in which all kinds of evil were in full sway. As for the metaphysics of Lao-tzū, it is, he says, extremely superficial and of no great value. With all the abstract concepts and subtle expressions which might give an impression of depth and profundity, "the very gist of his thought is of quite a mundane and worldly nature" (*ibid.*, p. 97).

15) 惠施, 惠子, known as one of the representatives of the "school of dialecticians (*pien chê*)", or "sophists", in the Warring States period. The *Chuang-tzu* records several anecdotes in which Chuang-tzū 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-tzū* are—but they are very interesting in that they disclose the basic characteristics of the one as well as of the other.

16) 莊子, 莊周, *Chou* being his personal name.

17) 蒙.

18) According to what has been established by Ma Hsü Lun (馬叙倫「莊子宋人考」).

of Sung.¹⁹⁾ I regard this significant because Sung was a country where the descendants of the ancient Yin²⁰⁾ people were allowed to live after having been conquered by the Chou people.²¹⁾ 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 remember the animistic-shamanistic spirit of the 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".²²⁾

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*²³⁾ points out—quite rightly, to my mind—that the form of Chuang-tzū'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-tzū 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-tzū's thought. Fung Yu Lang compares the *Elegies of Ch'u* (*Ch'u Tz'ü*)²⁴⁾ with the *Chuang-tzū* 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 real shamanistic 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

19) 宋.

20) 殷.

21) 周.

22) 「商尚鬼周尚文」(Cf. 錢穆「莊老通辨」, Hong Kong, 1957, pp. 1-2).

23) Trans. by D. Bodde, 2 vols., Princeton, 1952-53; vol. I, pp. 221-222.

24) 「楚辭」, some of which are by the poet Ch'ü Yüan himself, *Li Sao* 「離騷」 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 shamanistic. Some of them describe in a typical way the spiritual, visionary journeys of a shaman in an ecstatic state.

following chapter.

The problem of the relationship between Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū has very much been discussed by philologists. As touched upon earlier, Chuang-tzū's major doctrines have traditionally been regarded as being based upon the teachings of Lao-tzū. On this view, Lao-tzū of course was a predecessor of Chuang-tzū in Taoist 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-tzū himself often mentioning Lao-tzū 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. And 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-tzū*, although Lao-tzū, as a legendary figure, appears in its pages, and his ideas are therein described. 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-tzū* are simply fictitious. Similarities in language may easily be explained away either as later interpolations in the *Tao Tê Ching* itself, or as something going back to common sources.

Yang Jung Kuo, to whom reference has been made in this chapter, may be mentioned as a representative present-day scholar who not only doubts Lao-tzū's having been a predecessor of Chuang-tzū, 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*,²⁵⁾ he decidedly takes the position that Chuang-tzū was not a disciple of Lao-tzū; 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-tzū*. 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū. And he concludes that the *Tao Tê Ching* presupposes the prior existence of the *Chuang-tzū*. For instance, the most important key-concept *tao* (Way), he maintains, as the cosmic principle of natural growth, or Nature, is in the *Chuang-tzū* said to be prior to "Heaven and Earth"; yet, the inner connection between these two aspects of the Absolute

25) pp. 252-257.

is but imperfectly developed in that book. The concept is already there, 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-eternal²⁶⁾ and from which emanate all things.²⁷⁾ And Yang Jung Kuo thinks that this historical relation between the two—Chuang-tzū being the initial point and Lao-tzū representing the culmination—is observable regarding the whole structure of Taoist philosophy.

This argument, highly interesting though it is, is not conclusive. For the key-concepts in question allow of an equally justifiable explanation in terms of a process of development running from Lao-tzū to Chuang-tzū. As regards the metaphysics of *tao*, for instance, we have to keep in mind that Lao-tzū gives only the results, a definitely established monistic system whose center is constituted by the absolute Absolute, *tao*, which develops stage after stage by its own "natural" 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-tzū, 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-tzū, on the other hand, is interested precisely in this experiential aspect of Taoist mysticism which Lao-tzū 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 colors 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 "illumined" and goes on approaching the real structure of the world hidden behind the veil of sensible experience.

His attitude is, in comparison with Lao-tzū, epistemological, rather than metaphysical. And this difference separates these two thinkers most fundamentally, although they share the 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 the upward movement and downward movement. Lao-tzū 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

26) 「道先天地」 The concept may rightly be compared with the Islamic concept *qadim*.

27) 「道生萬物」, lit. "The Tao produces, or makes grow, the ten thousand things".

Three into "ten thousand things".²⁸⁾ 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-tzū 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-tzū does not take the trouble of 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 represents chronologically an earlier stage than that of Lao-tzū. For, as we have just seen, the difference between them can 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-tzū*.

The important *Bibliography* contained in the *Chronicle of the Han Dynasty*²⁹⁾ notes that the *Chuang-tzū* 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.³⁰⁾ In fact all the later editions of the *Chuang-tzū* 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 the problem of possible additions and interpolations aside we might say generally that the *Interior Chapters* represent Chuang-tzū'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-tzū. Whether the *Interior Chapters* come from Chuang-tzū'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 but of secondary importance.

28) See, *Tao Tê Ching*, XLII. The process of "emanation" will be dealt with later in fully detail.

29) 「漢書」藝文志 which was compiled in the 1st century B.C.

30) 郭象, a scholar of the 4th century A.D.

In the present study, I shall depend exclusively on the *Interior Chapters*. This I shall do for the reason just mentioned and also because of the desire of giving consistency to my analytic description of Chuang-tzū's thought.³¹⁾

31) In quoting from the *Chuang-tzu* I shall give page numbers according to the recent Peking edition of *Chuang-tzū Chi Shih* 「莊子集釋」, by Kuo Ch'ing Fan 郭慶藩, 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 (「莊子注」) and two other equally famous glosses by Ch'êng Hsüan Ying 成玄英 (「莊子注疏」) and Lu Tê Ming 陸德明 (「莊子音義」), supplemented by some of the results of modern scholarship. As for Lao-tzū, I shall quote from the edition of Kao Hêng: *Lao-tzū Chêng Ku* 高亨「老子正詁」, Shanghai, 1943, giving, as is usually done, chapter numbers instead of page numbers.

Chapter 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. I tried to outline the idea that the thought or world-view of Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū must be considered against the background of the age-old tradition of the shamanistic spirit in ancient China, if we are to understand the essential structure of the former as a historical phenomenon. The present chapter will be devoted to a more detailed discussion of this problem, namely, the shamanistic background of the Taoist philosophy as represented by the *Tao Tê Ching* and *Chuang-tzū*.

In fact, all through the long history of Chinese thought there runs what might properly be called "shamanistic 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū as a philosophical crystallization or culmination of this shamanistic 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.

The Taoist philosophers who produced the works like the *Tao Tê Ching* and *Chuang-tzū* were "shamans" on the one hand, as far as concerns the experiential basis of their world-vision, but they were, on the other, people who, not content with remaining 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.

Lao-tzū 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

1) 聖人.

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-tzū 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 Tzū* (XII) in its explanation of the etymological structure of this word states: "*Shêng* designates a man whose orifices of the ears are extraordinarily receptive".⁵⁾ In other words, the term designates a man, being endowed with an unusually keen ear, is capable of hearing the voice of a supernatural being, like god and 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 Dynasty⁶⁾ 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.⁷⁾

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

2) 真人.

3) 至人, i.e. a man who has attained to the furthest limit of perfection.

4) 神人. We may note that this and the preceding words all refer to one and the same concept which is the Taoist counterpart of the Arabic concept of *insân kâmil* or the Perfect Man, which we discussed in the first volume of this study.

5) 「說文解字」:「聖通也,从耳壬聲」.

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 (巫 wu) representing the highest administrative power in the non-secularized state in ancient China, see for example Liang Ch'i Ch'ao: *A History of Political thought in the Periods Prior to the Ch'in Dynasty* 梁啓超「先秦政治思想史」, 1923, Shanghai, Ch. II.

surface of the metaphysical world-view of Taoism there is perceivable a shamanistic 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.⁸⁾ 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 ecstasy communes with supernatural beings, whether gods or spirits. A man who has a natural capacity of this kind tends to serve in a primitive society as an intermediary between his tribesmen and the unseen world.

Now mythopoiesis is a typical feature of the shamanistic mentality. And no wonder, because shamans are by definition people who, in their ecstatic 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 the world itself on quite a different level from the one on which ordinary people understand the world they live in. This is a level of human consciousness on which the things appear 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, 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 shamanistic 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 see clearly and in a very concrete form what kind of cosmology the shamanistic mode of thinking actually produced. And by comparing, further, the *Elegies of Ch'u* with a book like *Huai Nan Tzū*,⁹⁾ we can observe the most intimate relationship that existed between the shamanistic cosmology and the Taoist metaphysics. There one will see almost *sur le vif* how the mythical world-view represented by the former develops and is transformed into the ontology of the Way.

The same shamanistic vision of Being which was elaborated into a metaphysical system by the philosophical minds, produced on a different level—on a

8) I would refer the reader to Mircea Eliade's recent work: *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, English tr., London, 1964.

9) 「淮南子」, an eclectic work compiled by thinkers of various schools who were gathered by the king of Huai Nan, Liu An 劉安, 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.

more popular level of imagination, we might say—a myth about the creation of the cosmos. By this I do not want to assert that a Lao-tzū or a Chuang-tzū took over the grotesque but colorful creation-myth from the popular imagination and tempered it into a metaphysical system of Being. What I want to say is rather that most probably the same primordial visionary experience of shamans produced two different systems on two different levels of human consciousness, mythopoeic and philosophical, and that if there did exist a thinker called Lao-tzū and a thinker called Chuang-tzū, they were the first to produce one of these systems, namely, the philosophical one.

Another fact which seems to confirm the existence of a close relationship, both essential and historical, between the Taoist metaphysics and the shamanistic 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū, 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-tzū*, and returns to its original mythopoeic form, revealing thereby its shamanistic 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 shamanistic background, but in the philosophical description of the *tao* by Lao-tzū, for instance, there is undeniably something uncanny and uncouth that would seem to be indicative of its connection with shamanism.

Lao-tzū 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 very obscurity. The metaphysical Way thus depicted has an interesting counterpart in the popular mythopoeic mentality as represented by *Shan Hai Ching*,¹⁰⁾ 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

10) 「山海經」, 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, 「山海經新校正」, (國學基本叢書), with a commentary by Pi Yüan of the Ch'ing dyanasty 畢沅, Tai Pei, 1945, p. 57.

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 my thesis 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, and of “calling down” spirits from the invisible world. The above-mentioned dictionary, *Shuo Wen*, 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, calls down spirits”.¹¹⁾ It is interesting that the same dictionary explains the character itself which represents this word, 巫, 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,¹²⁾ 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 shamanistic 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 present study than the first—is the particular expression used in the description of the monster’s visage, *hun tun*,¹³⁾ 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-tzū’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.

11) 巫 = 女能事無形以舞降神者也。

12) The character 巫 as it appears in the oracle-bones is: 𠩺 or 𠩻.

13) 渾敦. The word is written in the *Chuang-tzū* 渾沌.

The allegory given by Chuang-tzū reads as follows:¹⁴⁾

The Emperor of the South Sea was called Shu, the Emperor of the North Sea was called Hu,¹⁵⁾ and the Emperor of the central domain was called Hun Tun.¹⁶⁾ 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-tzū was so 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 space 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 “undifferentiation”, 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 this very act of intellectual grasp destroys the Absolute itself.

14) Chapter VII entitled “Fit to be Emperors and Kings”, p. 309.

15) Both *shu* (倏) and *hu* (忽) literally mean a brief space 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.

It is not time yet for us to go into the details of the existentialist position taken by Chuang-tzū. I simply wanted to show by this example how closely the shamanistic mythopoeic imagination was originally related with the birth and structure of Taoist Philosophy, and yet, at the same time, how far removed the latter was in its really philosophical import from the former.

This sense of distance between shamanism and philosophy would 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 shamanistic myth and the highly developed metaphysics of the Way.

Here we give in translation the cosmogony as formulated in the above-mentioned *Huai Nan Tzū*:¹⁷⁾

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 produced¹⁸⁾ a spotless void. The spotless void produced the Cosmos. The Cosmos produced (the all-pervading) vital energy.¹⁹⁾ 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.

17) 「淮南子」, III, *Tien Wên* 天文訓.

18) The received text reads 「故曰大昭道始于虛廓……」 which is apparently unintelligible. Following the emendation suggested by Wang Yin Chih (王引之) I read: 「故曰太始, 太始生虛廓……」.

19) The “all-pervading vital energy” is a clumsy translation of the Chinese word *ch'i* 氣, 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, constitutes its ontological core, molds it and makes it grow into what it really is. Everything that has a “form”, whether animate 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 analytical study of it we may mention Teikichi Hiraoka: *A Study of Ch'i in Huai Nan Tzū*, 平岡祇吉「淮南子に現われた氣の研究」, Tokyo 196.

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 caloric 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 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 cosmogonical 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 passage²⁰⁾ in the same book we read:

Long long time 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 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.

20) *ibid.*, VII, 精神訓.

Historically speaking, this 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 its 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū.

In a similar fashion, we can bring out to light the subjective—i.e. epistemological—aspect of the relationship between shamanism and the Taoist philosophy by comparing the above-mentioned *Elegies of Ch'u* and the books of Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū. The possibility of our obtaining an interesting result from a comparative study of Ch'ü Yüan, the great shaman-poet of the state of Ch'u, and the philosophers of Taoism was noted long ago by Henri Maspero,²¹⁾ although death prevented him from fully developing his idea.

In the *Li Sao*²²⁾ and the *Yüan Yu*,²³⁾ 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 shamanistic *unio mystica*. And we clearly perceive the same visionary ascension refined and elaborated into the form of a metaphysical contemplation in the thought of Lao-tzū, and Chuang-tzū, particularly the latter. Just as the shaman-poet experiences in his ecstatic oblivion of his 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,"²⁴⁾ reaches the primordial Purity, and stands side by side with the Great Beginning."²⁵⁾ In Taoist terminology, we would say that the poet at this

21) *ibid.*, III.

22) 「離騷」.

23) 「遠遊」. 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 胡澐源「楚辭新註求確」), composed in the very atmosphere of the Taoist philosophy.

24) *wu-wei* 無爲, one of the key-terms of the Taoist philosophy, which we shall analyze in a later passage. "Non-Doing" means, in short, man's abandoning all artificial, non-natural effort to do something, and identifying himself completely with the activity of Nature which is nothing other than the most natural 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—he is no longer a human being; he is deified.

25) 「超無爲以至清兮, 與泰初而爲隣」.

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-tzū and Chuang-tzū. Here again, however, the problem of authenticity is by no means a matter of primary importance to us. For even if we admit the poem—or some parts of it—being a Han Dynasty forgery, it remains true that the very fact that Taoist metaphysics could be so naturally transformed—or brought back—into a shamanistic world-vision is itself a proof of the real congeniality that existed between shamanism and Taoism.

A detailed analytic comparison between the *Elegies of Ch'u* and the books of Lao-tzū and Chauang-tzū 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 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 shamanistic origin of Taoism, and turn to the purely philosophical aspects of the latter. Our main concern will henceforward be exclusively with the structure itself of Taoist metaphysics and its key-concepts.

Chapter 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 shamanistic form, the figure of the Chaos as an indescribable 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū, 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 Hai 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 so 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-tzū to shatter to pieces these seemingly watertight compartments of Being, allowing us to have a peep into the fathomless depth of the primeval Chaos. But this is not in any way an easy task. Chuang-tzū 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,¹⁾ and merge together into something "amorphous".

1) We may profitably recall at this stage a chapter in the first volume 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-tzū, 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.

The following is a very famous passage in the *Chuang-tzū*, in which the sage tries to give us a glimpse of the "chaotification" of things:²⁾

Once, I, Chuang Chou,³⁾ dreamt that I was a butterfly. Flitting about at ease and to my heart's content, I *was* indeed a butterfly. Happy and exhilarated, 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 passages touches upon the central theme of Chuang-tzū. 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 "real" and "concrete" 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—the Chaos.

This ontological situation is called by Chuang-tzū the Transmutation of things, *wu hua*.⁴⁾ The *wu hua* is one of the most important key-terms of Chuang-tzū'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.⁵⁾

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 on a 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

2) II, p. 112. The heading itself of this Chapter, *ch'i wu* 齊物, is quite significant in this respect, meaning as it does "equalization of things".

3) 莊周, the real name of Chuang-tzū.

4) 物化, meaning literally: "things-transform".

5) II., pp. 104-105.

that all this⁶⁾ is but a Big Dream. But the stupid imagine that they are actually awake. Deceived by their petty intelligence,⁷⁾ 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:⁸⁾

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.⁹⁾

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"?¹⁰⁾

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-tzū reduces everything to a Big Dream. This abrupt negation of "reality" is but a first step into his

6) i.e. everything that one experiences in this world of so-called "reality". "Great Awakening": *ta chieh* 大覺.

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.*

philosophy, for his philosophy does have a positive side. But before expounding 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; the “reality” which we consider as solid as anything is a dream. 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-tzū 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. This latter is an ontological level at which “dream” and “reality”, or “man” and “butterfly”, lose the essential distinction between them, at which the significance itself of such distinctions is lost. On its subjective side, it is a state of consciousness far above that of normal human consciousness, where nothing any longer remains being “itself”, and anything can be anything else. It is an entirely new order of Being, where all beings, liberated from their ordinary limitations, freely transform themselves into one another. And this is what Chuang-tzū calls the Transmutation of things.

The Transmutation of things, as conceived by Chuang-tzū, 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 effervescent with multiplicity. 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū.

The same Transmutation allows, on the other hand, of being understood as a temporal process. And this is also actually done by Chuang-tzū. A thing, *a*, continues to subsist as *a* for some time; then, when the limit which has been naturally assigned to it comes,¹¹⁾ it ceases to be *a* and becomes transmuted or

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.

transformed into another thing, *b*. From the viewpoint of the supra-temporality to which reference has been made in the last paragraph, *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*.

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.

Applied to the concepts of “life” and “death”, such an idea naturally produces a peculiar type of 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-tzū 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 problem for the ordinary minds. And a man’s having overcome the “angoisse” of being faced constantly and at every moment of existence 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-tzū 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 or 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-tzū 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 utterly obscure and 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?¹²⁾

In a similar passage concerned with the problem of Death and the proper attitude of "true men" toward it, Chuang-tzū lets Confucius make the following statement.¹³⁾ 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. 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 energy¹⁴⁾

12) The meaning of this sentence can, I think, be paraphrased as follows. It may well be that "being transmuted" (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 transmuted" (i.e. remaining alive without dying) he has already been transmuted (i.e. is already dead). The original sentence runs: 且方將化惡知不化哉. 方將不化惡知已化哉. Kuo Hsiang in his commentary—which, as I said before, happens to be the oldest commentary now in existence—explains it by saying: 已化而生, 焉知未生之時哉. 未化而死, 焉知已死之後哉, (p. 276), 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 dealing with the shamanistic cosmogony, is thought to have existed before the creation of the world. It refers to the cosmogonical 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, before it polarizes itself into Multiplicity.

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 body.¹⁵⁾ Hence they are conscious neither of their liver nor of their gall, and they leave aside their ears and eyes.¹⁶⁾ 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-tzū 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 end. Death is but a stage in this circle. When it occurs, one particular phenomenal form is effaced from the circle and disappears therefrom, only to reappear as an entirely different phenomenal form. Nature continuously makes and unmakes. But the circle itself, that is, the Reality itself is always there unchanged and unperturbed. Being one with the Reality, the mind of a "true man" never becomes perturbed.

A "true man", Chuang-tzū relates,¹⁷⁾ 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 should have 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,

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.

then, simply ride in the carriage. 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".¹⁸⁾ If man cannot loose himself from the tie, it is because "things" bind them fast.

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-tzū¹⁹⁾ 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 the 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,²⁰⁾ 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

18) *Hsien chieh* 縣解, "loosing the tie", i.e. an absolute freedom. Lin Hsi I (林希逸 [莊子口義]) says: (「縣者心有係著也.則天帝不能以死生係著我矣」).

19) *ibid.*, p. 261-262.

20) a noted sword made in the state of Wu (吳) in the sixth century B.C.

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 Transmutation of things as conceived by Chuang-tzū might seem to resemble the doctrine of "transmigration". But the resemblance is only superficial. Chuang-tzū 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. Besides, as we have seen before, this 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.

Chapter IV

BEYOND THIS AND THAT

We have seen in the last pages of the preceding chapter how Chuang-tzū obliterates the distinction or opposition between Life and Death and brings them back to the original state of "undifferentiation". We have devoted to the subject fairly liberal space because it is one of the most favorite topics of Chuang-tzū, and also because it discloses to our eyes an important aspect of his Philosophy of Life.

Properly speaking, however, and from an ontological point of view, Life and Death should not occupy any such privileged place. For all so-called "opposites" are not, in Chuang-tzū'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 structure. In the eye of a man who has ever experienced what I called above the "chaotification" of things, everything loses its solid contour, being deprived of its "essential" foundation. All things become ontologically blurred, and the distinctions which the common-sense has established between them 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 such a leading rôle in human life, are, in reality, far from being absolute. And this statement will be found to be of tremendous importance if one places it in the historical situation in which the Taoist philosophy was developing. For, as we shall see later, these distinctions and oppositions, taken as "essential", are the very basis on which stands the whole edifice of Confucian philosophy.

This attitude of Chuang-tzū toward the "opposites" and "distinctions" which are generally accepted as cultural, esthetic, or ethical "values", would appear to be neither more nor less than so-called relativism. The same is true of Lao-tzū'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 an attitude of "undifferentiation" which is a natural outcome of a metaphysical view of the Reality as it unfolds and diversifies itself into myriads of things and qualities 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-tzū and Lao-tzū 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-tzū and Lao-tzū 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 try to have an idea of this point by quoting a few appropriate passages from the two books. Even at this preliminary stage of analysis, we shall clearly observe that this relativism is directed against the "essentialist" position of the school of Confucius. In the last sentence of the following passage¹⁾ 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 of these three (i.e. man, mudfish, and monkey) which one knows the (absolutely) right place to live?²⁾

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 taste?

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 Chi³⁾ are regarded as ideally beautiful women by all men. And yet, if fish 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 between

1) *Chuang-tzū*, II, 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.

“humaneness” (*jên*) and “righteousness” (*i*),⁴ and the limits between “right” and “wrong” are (also) extremely uncertain and confused, 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 found in the book of Lao-tzū, too. The underlying conception is exactly the same as in the book of Chuang-tzū; so also the reason for which he upholds such a view. As we shall see later, Lao-tzū, 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. The only difference between Chuang-tzū and Lao-tzū 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-tzū implicitly criticizes the cultural essentialism of the Confucian school by upholding relativism.⁵

Cut off Learning,⁶ and there will be no more trouble. What, in fact, is the distinction between “yes, sir” and “yes”? How far is the distance between “good” and “bad”? (The principle underlying such distinctions is) “whatever others respect I also must respect”.

The Reality, however, is a vast and limitless plain (where nothing is marked off by a distinct boundary).

The people tend to imagine, Lao-tzū says, that the 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

4) That these concepts, 仁 *jên* and 義 *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* 學) 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 “yes”—the kind of Learning which was so strongly advocated by the Confucian school under the name of Ceremonies (*li* 禮).

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-tzū calls Chaos. On the cultural level, such a view naturally leads to relativism. Lao-tzū describes the latter in the following way:⁷⁾

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" produce one another; "long" and "short" measure one another; "high" and "low" incline one toward another; "tone" and "noise" give harmony to 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 the 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. They lack, as Lao-tzū says,⁸⁾ the ability of "making 'small' 'big', and making 'little' 'much'".

As I remarked earlier, this surely is "relativism", but it is a relativism based on, or stemming from, a very remarkable intuition into the ontological structure of the world. The original intuition is, I think, common both to Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū. 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-tzū, the same intuition leads, in its dynamic aspect, to what we might call "dialectical ontology", the static aspect of which is the relativism we have just discussed.

As Transmutation (*hua*) is the key-word of Chuang-tzū in this section of his philosophy, Return (*fan*⁹⁾ or *fu*¹⁰⁾) is the key-term which Lao-tzū proposes as an appropriate expression for his idea.

On the cosmic significance of the Return as understood by Lao-tzū we shall have occasion to talk in a later context. Here we shall confine ourselves to con-

7) *op. cit.*, II.

8) *ibid.*, XLIII.

9) 反.

10) 復(歸) *fu(-kuei)*, lit. "returning" - "going-back".

sidering 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-tzū, 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.¹¹⁾

The Return (or "turning back") is the real activity of the Way. Likewise, weakness is the way in which the Way works. The ten thousand things under Heaven are born from Being. And Being is born from Non-Being.

This passage would seem to need a few words of explanation. 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 dialectical movement, from *a* to *b*, and then from *b* to *a*. This is, Lao-tzū says, the rule of the ontological "movement" (*tung*),¹²⁾ or the dynamic aspect of the Reality.

The second sentence refers to the form in which the Reality functions. The "weakness" here means the "negative". Lao-tzū sees in the "negative" the starting-point of the functioning of the Reality in every matter. The "negative" is the source and principle of all creative activity. Everything has its birth in the "negative", and thence develops into the stage of "positive".

The next sentence considers the same ontological rule from its reverse side, that is, looks back from the state of "multiplicity" in which all things are there actualized and realized, and 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 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 occurring in our minds; it is, for Lao-tzū, primarily a cosmic process. All things ontologically "return" to their ultimate source, undergoing on their way dialectical transformations among themselves.

11) *op. cit.*, XL.

12) 動.

This cosmic "returning" of all things to the ultimate origin will, as I have just said, be a subject of discussion in a later chapter. Here we are concerned with the dialectical Return of things, which is referred to in the first sentence of the above-quoted passage, i.e. the process of reciprocal "returning" between *a* and *b*. Lao-tzū has a peculiar way of expressing this idea as exemplified by the two following passages.

Bad fortune is that upon which good fortune leans, and good fortune is the place where bad fortune lurks. (The two thus turn into one another indefinitely, so that) nobody knows the point where the process comes to an end. (Likewise) it would seem that there is no (absolute) "right"; for "right" tends to "return" to "wrong". "Good" too tends to "return" to "evil". So much so that the people (not knowing this fundamental rule of Being) has long been in delusion.¹³⁾

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.¹⁴⁾

Thus in the view of both Chuang-tzū and Lao-tzū, everything in the world is relative; nothing is absolutely reliable or stable in this sense. As I have indicated before, this last statement must be understood in reference to Chuang-tzū and Lao-tzū, 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

13) *op. cit.*, LVIII.

14) *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-tzū's relativism" (老子之相對論也), p. 69. The last sentence of the passage quoted in its original form is 「或挫或隳」, 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 載 instead of 挫 (河上註「載安也, 隳危也」), which, as Yü Yüeh (俞樾「諸子平議」) remarks, is probably the right reading.

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 itself of the judgment is ontologically relative.

The argument which Chuang-tzū puts forward on this point is logically very interesting and important. The Warring States period witnessed a remarkable development of logico-semantical theories in China. In the days of Chuang-tzū, Confucians and Mohists¹⁵⁾ stood sharply opposed to each other, and these two schools were together opposed to the Dialecticians¹⁶⁾ (or Sophists) otherwise known as the school of Names¹⁷⁾ (i.e. concepts). Heated debates were being held among them on 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 the form of dialectics. "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-tzū for whom the Reality itself is "chaotic". The objects themselves about which those people exchange heated words are essentially unstable and ambiguous. The Dialecticians, however, "are talking about the distinction between 'hard' and 'white', for example, as if these could be hung on different pegs".¹⁸⁾

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 does not in any way determine 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

15) The followers of Mo-tzū (墨子).

16) *pien chē* 辯者.

17) *ming chia* 名家.

18) *Chuang-tzū*, XII, p. 427, quoted by Fung Yu Lan, *op. cit.*, I, p. 192. The reference is to the famous thesis put forward by the Dialectician Kung Sung Lung (公孫龍子), which asserts 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. Fung Yu Lan's translation of the sentence, however, is a little doubtful. Perhaps it should be rendered: The distinction between "hard" and "white" is clearly visible as if they were hung on the celestial sphere.

“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 judge who agrees with you. How could such a man give a fair judgment, seeing that he shares from the beginning the same opinion with you? Suppose we let someone judge who agrees with me. 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 nor the third person can know (where the truth lies). Shall we expect a fourth person to appear?¹⁹⁾

How is this situation to be accounted for? Chuang-tzū 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”. The so-called “right” and “wrong” are all relative matters.

In accordance with this non-essentialist position, Chuang-tzū asserts that the only justifiable attitude for us to take is to know, first of all, the relativity of the “right” and “wrong”, and then to transcend this relativism itself into the stage of the “equalization” of all things, a stage in 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 proper only to the “true man” is called by Chuang-tzū *t'ien ni*²⁰⁾ (Heavenly Levelling),

19) II, p. 107.

20) 天倪. 倪, *ni*, means usually “boundary”, “limit”, “division”. But here I follow the interpretation of Lu Shu Chih 陸樹芝 (「莊子雪: 天倪, 端倪之未露者, 猶天籟也」) and that of Pan Ku 班固 (quoted by Lu Tê Ming in 經典釋文) who makes it synonymous with 天研.

*l'ien chün*²¹⁾ (Heavenly Equalization), or *man yen*²²⁾ (No-Limits).

“Right” is not “right”, “so” is not “so”.²³⁾ If (what someone considers) “right” were (absolutely) “right”, it would be so (absolutely) different from what is not “right” that there could be no place for discussion. And if “so” were (absolutely) “so”, it would be so (absolutely) different from “not-so” that there could be no place for discussion.²⁴⁾

Thus (in the endless chain of) “shifting theses”²⁵⁾ (i.e. of “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.²⁶⁾

(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.²⁷⁾

“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 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-tzū emphasizes, put oneself in a mental state prior to all judgments, prior to all activity of the Reason, in which one would see things in their original—or “Heavenly” as he says—“essence-less” state.

21) 天鈞.

22) 曼衍. The lexical meaning of this expression is difficult to ascertain. In translating it as “without limits” I am simply following an old commentator (司馬-quoted by 陸德明 in his 「莊子音義」) who says 「曼衍, 無極也」, (p. 109). The same word is used in Bk. XXVII. And in Bk. XVII it appears in the form of 反衍 *fan yen* which obviously is the same as 曼衍 (a commentator spells it 漫衍) because the passage reads: “From the point of view of the Way, what should we consider ‘precious’ and what should we consider ‘despicable’?”.

23) i.e. What is considered to be “right” from the viewpoint of a man is not “right” from the viewpoint of another. What is affirmed by a man is not affirmed by another.

24) But, in reality, every “right” is opposed by “not-right”, and to every “so” stands opposed “not-so”, in the basic form of an endless chain of theses-antitheses.

25) 化聲 Cf. Kuo Hsiang's *Commentary* (p. 109): 「是非之辯爲化聲, 夫化聲之相待, 俱不足以相正, 故若不相待也」; and Chia Shih Fu (家世父): 「言隨物而變, 謂之化聲」.

26) for, however far we go, we never come to an absolutely “right” position.

27) *Chuang-tzū*, II, p. 108.

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-tzū calls *ming*,²⁸⁾ "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.²⁹⁾

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-tzū develops his idea regarding the relative and conventional nature of the ontological "distinctions". The passage will help to prepare the way for our discussion of the "existentialist" position Chuang-tzū takes against the "essentialist" view of Being.³⁰⁾

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" is "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. It may be noticed in passing that this is precisely what is being discussed in

28) 明. 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".

29) I, p. 30.

30) 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 explanation.

contemporary philosophy of language and meaning as the basic function of "ego-centric terms".

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". So the statement: "everything is 'that'" cannot exhaustively describe the reality of Being. Nor can the contrary statement: "everything is 'this'" alone do justice to the reality of Being. Only when we realize the fundamental relativity of "this" and "that" can we hope to have a real understanding of the structure of things.

Of course the most important point is that this relativity should be understood through "illumination". The understanding of this ontological relativity by the Reason—which by no means is a difficult thing to achieve—is useless except as a preparatory stage for an intuitive grasp of the matter. It will be made clear in the following chapter that the "relativity" does not exhaust the whole of the ontological structure of things. The "relativity" is but one aspect of it. Or rather we should say, 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, inspite of that, Reason persists in trying to understand it in its own way, the "undifferentiation" comes into its grasp only in the form of the "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:³¹⁾ "that" comes out of "this", and "this" depends upon "that". This doctrine is called the *Fang Shêng* theory,³²⁾ 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

31) by the Dialectician 惠施 Hui Shih.

32) 方生論, more exactly the "theory of *fang shêng fang ssü*" (方生方死之說) held by Hui Shih meaning literally: the theory of "life" giving birth to "death" and "death" giving birth to "life". See *Chuang-tzū*, XXXIII. For this particular meaning of the word *fang* 方, see the *Shuo Wen* (說文): 「方, 併船也」 "fang means (originally) two ships placed side by side with each other",

“birth” there is “death”, and since there is “death” there is “birth”. Likewise, since there is “good” there is “not-good”, and since there is “not-good” there is “good”. When one (of the disputants) bases himself on (what he considers) “right” (and approves of something), the other bases himself on (what he considers) “wrong” (and denies the same thing being “right”). When on the contrary one of them bases himself on (what he considers) “wrong”, the other bases himself on (what he considers) “right”.

Chuang-tzū 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”³³⁾ does not base himself (upon any of these oppositions), but illuminates (everything) in the light of Heaven.³⁴⁾

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”.

(Viewed from such a standpoint) is there still a distinction between “that” and “this”? Or is there neither “that” nor “this” any longer?³⁵⁾

This stage at which each of “that” and “this” has lost its companion to stand opposed to—this stage is to be considered the Hinge of the Way.

33) *shêng jên* 聖人, which is synonymous with “true man” or “divine man”, i.e. the Perfect Man. The expression *shêng jên* is more often used by Lao-tzū than by Chuang-tzū.

34) *t'ien* 天, meaning the great Way of Nature, the absolute standpoint of Being itself, which is, so to speak, a viewpoint transcending all viewpoints.

35) This is a peculiar expression which Chuang-tzū uses very often when he wants to deny something emphatically.

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, nay, which *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-tzū says, "is different from the blowing of wind, for he who speaks is supposed to have a meaning to convey".³⁶⁾ 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?³⁷⁾ They do 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"? In reality, where can the Way go so that it might cease to be present? Where can Language exist in such a way that it might not be acceptable?

(The fact is that) the Way is concealed by petty virtues,³⁸⁾ and Language is concealed by vaingloriousness.³⁹⁾ This is why we have the "right" - "wrong" discussions of the Confucians and the Mohists, the one party regarding as

36) 「夫言非吹也言者有言」, II, p. 63.

37) See above, Note (35).

38) The "petty virtues" 小成—or more literally, "small acquirements"—refer to the five cardinal virtues of the Confucians—Ch'êng Hsüan Ying (成玄英「莊子注疏」).

39) i.e. the natural tendency of the human mind toward showing-off, which manifests itself typically in the form of discussions and debates.

“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”.⁴⁰⁾

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 and beyond the distinctions between “this” and “that”, “I” and “you”. But how can one attain to such a spiritual height, if there is at all a thing like that? What is the content and structure of this experience? These are the main problems that will occupy us in the following two chapters.

40) *op. cit.*, II, p. 63.

Chapter V

THE BIRTH OF A NEW EGO

We have seen in what precedes how futile and absurd, in the view of Chuang-tzū, is the ordinary pattern of thinking typified by the this-is-"right"-and-that-is-"wrong" kind of discussion. What is the source of all these futile verbalizations? Chuang-tzū 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 nothing but something which is 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-tzū calls the Creator, or more literally, the Maker-of-things.¹⁾ Chuang-tzū describes this situation through a parable of "Shadow and Penumbra".²⁾

Penumbra³⁾ 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."⁴⁾

1) *tsao wu chē* 造物者 (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* 大師. The word Heaven, *t'ien* 天 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) 罔兩 is explained by Kuo Hsiang as 「景外之微陰也」, "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.

How should I know, then, why I act in this way, and why I do not act in that way?

Chuang-tzū thus 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, 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 mental, become united. The "ego" thus understood is called by Chuang-tzū the "mind".⁵⁾

I think it proper to introduce at this juncture a pair of key terms which seem to have played a decisive rôle in the formation of the main lines of thought Chuang-tzū followed concerning the nature of the mind: *tso ch'ih*⁶⁾ lit. "sitting-galloping" and *tso wang*⁷⁾ lit. "sitting-forgetting".

The first of them, *tso ch'ih*, purports to describe the situation in which the mind of an ordinary person finds itself, being 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 sits still but the mind is running around. It is to the human mind in such a state that the word *hsin* (Mind) refers in this context. It is the exact opposite of the mind in the state of a 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. We might call this situation the tyranny of the Mind. But in truth, Chuang-tzū 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-tzū uses a characteristic expression for this basic situation of man: *shih hsin* or "making the Mind one's own teacher".⁸⁾

5) *hsin* 心.

6) 坐馳. The word appears in an important passage (IV, p. 150) which will be given in translation presently.

7) 坐忘.

8) 師心, IV, p. 145.

The "ego", thus understood, is man's own creation. But man holds on to it, 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-tzū calls it *ch'êng hsin* or "finished mind".⁹⁾ 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 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) *to-day* and arriving in the country of Yüeh (in the southern limit of China) *yesterday!*¹⁰⁾

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-tzū, is the source and origin of all human follies.

This idea of the Mind is shared by Lao-tzū, although his approach is a little different from Chuang-tzū'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-tzū in this passage uses the term *ch'ang*

9) 成心, II, p. 56. My interpretation of this word is based on that given by Kuo Hsiang and Ch'êng Hsüan Ying. The latter says: 夫域情滯著, 執一家之偏見者, 謂之成心。夫隨順封執之心, 師之以爲準的, 世皆如此, 故誰獨無師乎, (p. 61). Some commentators (like Lin Hsi I 林希逸, for instance, in his famous 莊子口義) 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-tzū on this problem.

10) *ibid.*

hsin,¹¹⁾ i.e. "constant or unchangeable mind". The term reminds us of Chuang-tzu's *ch'êng hsin* "finished mind". By *ch'ang hsin* Lao-tzū 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-tzū, 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". He makes the minds of the people his mind.¹²⁾ (His principle is represented by the dictum): "The good I treat as good. But even those who are not good I treat as good. (Such an attitude I take) because everything by nature is good. The truthful I treat as truthful. But even those who are not truthful also I treat as truthful. (Such an attitude I take) because everything by nature is truthful."

Thus the "sacred man", living in this world, maintains a flexible attitude and "chaotifies"¹³⁾ 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, takes, in every matter, the attitude of an infant.¹⁴⁾

Lao-tzū sometimes uses the word *chih*¹⁵⁾ "knowing" to designate the dis-

11) 常心. The word *ch'ang* is an ambiguous term in the *Tao Tê Ching*, because Lao-tzū 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-tzū. 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"; nay, he does not distinguish between "good" and "bad".

13) *hun* 混, a characteristic word, whose meaning has been explained in an earlier passage in connection with Chuang-tzū's concept of the "chaotification" of things.

14) XLXL.

15) 知.

criminating activity of the mind here in question. But a caution is needed in understanding this word, because for Lao-tzū 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-tzū is the same distinguishing and discriminating activity of intelligence as the one which we have seen is so bitterly denounced by Chuang-tzū. Unlike Chuang-tzū, 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-tzū 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-tzū 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,¹⁶⁾ 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 contending with one another. If (the ruler) does not value goods that are hard to obtain, the people will be kept away from committing thefts. 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,¹⁷⁾ while making their bellies full; weakens their wills¹⁸⁾ while rendering their bones strong.

In this way, he keeps his people always in the state of no-knowledge¹⁹⁾ and no-desire, so that the so-called "knowers"²⁰⁾ might find no occasion to

16) *Tao Tê Ching*, III.

17) *hsin* 心, the discriminating activity of the intellect, the natural tendency of the Mind toward gaining "knowledge".

18) *chih* 志, that aspect of the Mind, which is manifested in "desires".

19) *wu chih* 無知.

20) *chih chê*, 知者 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.

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 am in grave danger of going astray even if I am actually walking the great highway (i.e. the Way). The highways are naturally quite level and safe, but men tend to choose by-paths.²¹⁾

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.²²⁾

It is significant that here we come across exactly the same word, *ming* "illumination", which we encountered in the *Chuang-tzū*. It is also very significant that in the passage just quoted the "illumination" is directly connected with man's knowledge of himself.²³⁾ 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū, 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 the "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, so to speak. 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-*

21) LIII.

22) XXXIII.

23) We are reminded of the Islamic adage: *Man 'arafa nafsahu 'arafa rabba-hu* "He who knows himself knows his Lord", which, as we saw in the first Part of this study, plays an important role in the philosophy of Ibn 'Arabi.

to find it in the 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 personal 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 the direction is described by Lao-tzū 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-tzū 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,²⁴⁾ the importance of the "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 (*tzū*)²⁵⁾ which in this understanding represents an individualized duplicate of the Mother (*mu*),²⁶⁾ is nothing other than what Lao-tzū 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, such a creative and vital force of each individual existent as an individual determination of the Way is called by Lao-tzū "Virtue".²⁷⁾

All things under Heaven have a Beginning (or the First) which is to be regarded as the Mother of all things.²⁸⁾

If one knows the "mother", one thereby knows her "children". And if knowing the "children", one goes back to the Mother and holds fast to

24) LI.

25) 子.

26) 母.

27) That the word *tê* 德, here translated as Virtue, is one of the most important of all the key terms of Lao-tzū will be seen from the very fact that the Book itself is known by the title *Tao Tê 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.

Her, one will never fall into a mistake until the very end of one's life.

If a man blocks all his openings and closes up all his doors (i.e. stops the normal functioning of the sense organs and the usual centrifugal activity of the Mind), his (spiritual energy) will never become exhausted all through his life.

If, on the contrary, he keeps his openings wide open, and goes on trying ever to increase the activity (of the Mind), he will never be safe all through his life. To perceive a small thing (i.e. the supra-sensible thing, which is the Child of the Way within himself) is properly to be call Illumination. To hold on to what is soft and flexible (i.e. abandoning the rigidity of the Mind enslaved by the "essential" distinctions among the things and accepting "softly" all things in their real state of mutual transformations) is properly to be called strength.

If man elaborates his own Light and thereby goes back to the (original) state of Illumination, he will no longer suffer any harm. Such an (ultimate) state is what is to be called "stepping into the eternally real".²⁹⁾

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) blind the eyes of men. The five musical notes deafen the ears of men. The five tastes (i.e. sweet, salty, sour, pungent, bitter) spoil the mouths of men. (The games like) racing and hunting madden the hearts of men. Goods that are hard to obtain impede men's conduct.

Therefore the "sacred man" cares for 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.

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 else than leading him away from the Way. The Way is there in his own "inside" in the

29) *hsi ch'ang* 襲常. For the meaning of the word *ch'ang* 常, see above, note (11). The word *hsi* means "step into", "enter", here in the mystical sense of the "inner" grasp of a thing, *in-tuition*. The word is used in XXVII in a very characteristic combination: *hsi ming*, 襲明, "stepping into illumination",

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.

Even 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 know the Way of Heaven. Nay, the further one goes out, the less one knows.

Therefore the "sacred man" knows without going out. He becomes illumined³⁰⁾ without looking. And he accomplishes (everything) without "doing".³¹⁾

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-tzū 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-tzū, 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 has come to an end. Two things are his main concern. One is the real, practical and visible effect produced by the intuition of *ming* on the basic attitude and behavior of man. How does the "sacred man"—that is, a man who has already attained to the height of spiritual development—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-tzū'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 in an extremely vague way. Lao-tzū is more interested to describe the ontological process by which the Way as the absolutely Unknown-Unknownable 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.

30) 名. The word is here the same as 明—both having the same pronunciation. As quoted by *Han Fei Tsū* (喻老篇) we see 明 actually used in this passage (不見而明).

31) XLVII.

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 the "illumination", with the eye of a man who knows perfectly the secret of Being. Chuang-tzū is different from Lao-tzū in this respect. He is vitally interested in the process itself which precedes the final stage of "illumination" and by which the latter is reached. Chuang-tzū tries even 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 specifically be concerned 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 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-tzū gives a typical description of such a man. The man here described is Nan Kuo Tzū Ch'i, or Tzū Ch'i of the Southern Quarter. He is said to have been a great Sage of Ch'u,³²⁾ living in hermitic seclusion in the "southern quarter". And for Chuang-tzū he was surely a personification of the very concept of the Perfect Man.

Once Tzū 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 Tzū 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!"

Tzū Ch'i replied, "It is good indeed that you ask that question,³³⁾ Yen!

32) 楚. 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.

(I look different from what I have been) because I have now lost myself.³⁴⁾
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 beautiful and forceful passages in the whole book of *Chuang-tzū*. 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-gallop".

But what exactly is the "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-tzū, however, tries to do so.

In Bk VI he gives his own definition of the "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 I call "sitting in oblivion".³⁵⁾

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 the outside of the "I" is called by Chuang-tzū *hsü*,³⁶⁾ the Void, or a spiritual-metaphysical state in which there is nothing whatsoever to obstruct the all-pervading activity of the Way.

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 (林希逸) 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". (莊子口義 *ad loc.*)

35) VI, p. 284.

36) 虛; cf. Ch'êng Hsüan Ying: 「既悟一身非有, 萬境皆空」, p. 285.

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".³⁷⁾ This interpretation seems to be right, but it must be supplemented 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 an totally different form, as what we might call the Universal, Cosmic, or Transcendental Ego which transforms itself freely into all things that are transforming themselves into each other.

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".³⁸⁾

Chuang-tzū himself expresses the same idea in a far more laconic way:

Being unified, you have no liking. Being transmuted, you have no fixity.³⁹⁾

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 throb-

37) 「大通猶大道也。道能通生萬物，故謂道爲大道也」, p. 285.

38) 「內不覺其一身，外不識有天地，然後曠然與變化爲體而無不通也」, p. 285.

39) *ibid.*

bing with the 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; nay, he is the cosmic Transmutation itself. This is what is meant by the expression: "you have no fixity"⁴⁰⁾ "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 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 one's own mind completely "void", does he find himself in the very midst of the metaphysical Void. This part of Chuang-tzū's teaching takes on the form of a 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-tzū's characteristic expression: "making the Mind one's own teacher".⁴¹⁾ 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-tzū 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.

40) The word used here for "fixity" is *ch'ang* 常, whose double meaning has been explained above; see notes 11 and 29.

41) See above, p. 49.

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.⁴²⁾

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 anybody does think it easy, the vast and bright Heaven will not approve of him.

The word translated here as "fast", *chai*,⁴³⁾ means the act of "fasting" which man practises in the period immediately preceding the Sacrifice 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 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 past 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'i*).⁴⁴⁾

42) IV, pp. 146-148.

43) 齋.

44) 氣. 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 inanimate. 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.

The ear (or more generally, sense perception) is confined to listening⁴⁵⁾ (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).⁴⁶⁾ 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-tzū. 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-tzū, as we shall see in detail in a later chapter which will be devoted to a discussion of the metaphysics of the Way. Here we 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 "illumined" 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, now that I have received this instruction, I have realized that from the very beginning there never was (an "ego" called) Hui. Is this state worthy to be considered the

45) The text reads: 「聽止於耳」, "listening stops with the ears", which gives but a poor meaning. Following Yü Yüeh (俞樾) I read 「耳止於聽」 (cf. 王先謙「莊子集解」, *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 the "reality".

“void” (which you have just spoken of)?

Confucius: So it is, indeed!

Then Confucius contrasts this psychological state with the state of “sitting-galloping”, and goes on to describe the former comparing it to a firmly closed empty room which mysteriously and calmly illumines itself with a white light of its own.⁴⁷⁾

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.⁴⁸⁾

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), (into the ego-less “interior” of such a man) even gods and spirits come to reside freely, not to speak of men. This is (what might be called) the Transmutation of ten thousand things.⁴⁹⁾

The last sentence represents one of the cardinal points of Chuang-tzū'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”. Nay, 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”.⁵⁰⁾

47) IV, p. 150.

48) The repetition of the word 止 in 「吉祥止止」 is a little difficult to account for. Yü Yüeh simply disposes of the second 止 as a scribal error on the ground that the sentence as quoted in other books does not have it. (俞樾「止止連文，於義無取。『淮南子』一傲真篇一作『虛室生白，吉祥止也』。疑此文下止亦也字之誤。唐虛重元注『列子』一天瑞篇一曰『虛室生白，吉祥止耳』亦可證止止連文之誤)。 However, the second 止 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: 「止者，凝靜之智。言吉祥善福止在凝靜之心」, p. 151.

49) 「萬有之化」, “The *hua* of ten thousand things”.

50) In doing this, I shall strictly follow Chuang-tzū'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.

On the level of 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 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 bustle and confusion of the 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".

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 the stage of the cosmic Transmutation. In its subjective aspect, the Transmutation is a psychological 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 'Arabí 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-wujûd*), and personally experiences the whole world of Being in that position. The situation is described by Chuang-tzû in the following way:⁵¹⁾

Dying and being alive, being subsistent and perishing, getting into a predicament and being in the ascendant, being poor and being rich, being

51) V, p. 212.

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 the (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 penetrate into the "innermost treasury"⁵²⁾ (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.

Day and night, without ceasing, he enjoys being in spring-tide with all things. Mingling with (the infinitely changing things on a supra-sensible level of existence) he goes on producing within his "interior" the "time"⁵³⁾ (of the world).

Such a state I would call the perfection (i.e. perfect actualization) of the human potentiality.⁵⁴⁾

When a man attains to this height of spiritual development, he fully deserves the title of the 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-tzū sometimes calls it the "extreme limit (*chih*)"⁵⁵⁾ of knowledge (*chih*).⁵⁶⁾ At this last highest 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",⁵⁷⁾ the ultimate metaphysical state of the Absolute, at which the latter has not yet

52) *ling fu*, 靈府 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 alteration of the four seasons, which is the "time" of all phenomenal things. That is to say he is completely one with all the things which are in the incessant process of transformations.

54) *ts'ai ch'üan* 才全, one of the key terms of Chuang-tzū. It means the natural human ability brought to the highest degree of perfection.

55) 至.

56) 知 II, p. 74, 「其知所有至」.

57) *Hsüan chih yu hsüan* 「玄之又玄」, the expression is from the *Tao Tê Ching*. It denotes the Way, but with a peculiar connotation which will be explained in the chapter concerning the concept of Way.

come down to the state of the 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. The Way at this stage is not present in the consciousness of the man as the Way. 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-tzū in several places of his book. In doing so he sometimes takes an ascending course, and sometimes a descending course. The former corresponds to the real process by which the mind of a man develops toward the spiritual perfection. As a typical example of this type of description we may refer the reader to a passage⁵⁸⁾ which claims to reproduce a conversation between a certain Nan Po Tzū K'uei and a Perfect Man (or Woman?) called Nü Yü. In this passage, Chuang-tzū 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 *fanâ'* or "self-annihilation".

The conversation starts from Nan Po Tzū K'uei's astonishment at the complexion of old Nü Yü, which, as he observes, is like that of a child.

Nan Po Tzū 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?

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 Tao but lacked the potentiality.⁵⁹⁾ I wanted to give him guidance to see if, by any chance, he could become a "sacred man". Even if I should fail to achieve my goal, it was, (I thought), easy for a man in possession of

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.

the Tao 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 something 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 the 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 be put outside the Mind".⁶⁰⁾ And Ch'êng Hsüan Ying:⁶¹⁾ "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".

However this may be, by forgetting the familiar things that surround the man and are connected with him in various ways in daily life, the external world completely disappears from the consciousness of the man.

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, disappears from the consciousness. This stage is immediately followed by the next which is the sudden coming of the dawn of "illumination".

60) 「物者，朝夕所須，切已難忘」，p. 253.

61) 「天下萬境疏遠，所以易忘，資身之物親近，所以難遺」，p. 254.

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, but 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 the 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 the subject and the 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 the 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.

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 rather the ultimate metaphysical state, the absolute Unity, to which the dispersion of the ontological Multiplicity is brought back. It is a

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 turmoil.

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-tzū refers to this aspect of the Way in the following words.

That which kills Life does not die.⁶²⁾ That which brings to Life everything that lives does not live.⁶³⁾ It is of its very nature that it sends off everything, and that it 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.⁶⁴⁾ 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 spiritual development, 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. It would be natural for

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* 撓寧. It is one of the key terms of Chuang-tzū. According to Ch'êng Hsüan Ying, *ying* means "commotion", "agitation", and *ning* "tranquillity", "stillness" (「撓擾動也, 寧寂靜也」, p. 255).

us to imagine that the view of Being in the spiritual eyes of a Taoist sage will be of an essentially different nature and 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū take a determined position against it. The next chapter will be devoted to an elucidation of this particular point.

Chapter VI

AGAINST ESSENTIALISM

Toward the end of the preceding chapter I pointed out the fact that in the *Chuang-tzū*, the stages of the spiritual development of "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 passage¹⁾ from the *Chuang-tzū* in which the stages are described in this way. In this passage, Chuang-tzū, instead of speaking of the "sitting in oblivion", divides the human knowledge of Reality into four classes which constitutes among themselves a chain of successive degrees. These degrees are the epistemological stages corresponding to the ontological stages which Lao-tzū 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 the "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:²⁾ "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,

1) II, p. 74.

2) *ibid.*, p. 75: 「此忘天地，遺萬物，外不察乎宇宙，內不覺其一身，故能曠然無累，與物俱往，而無所不應也」.

he has lost all consciousness of his own existence. Being limitlessly 'void', he is obstructed by nothing. 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.

At this second stage, the man becomes conscious of the Way which contains all things in the pure state of 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 a "continuum", 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 is distinguished 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 the 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", the 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".³⁾

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 which Chuang-tzū 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-tzū 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 "consciousness". And this subjective Nothing-ness corresponds to the objective Nothing-ness of the Way. For the Way, too, is in its original absolute purity a Nothing-ness, a state "where nothing has ever existed from the very beginning", that is, a

3) 王先謙,「見是非,則道之渾然者傷矣」.

metaphysical state where nothing whatsoever is distinguishable as an existent.

Now 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" being existent. The consciousness, however, is still at this stage a dim and subdued light. It is not yet the glaring brilliance 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 negative 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-tzū, the real state of Reality.

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 the Reality in its integrity be illumined. The glaring and dazzling light of the normal consciousness does cast a strong spotlight on this or that particular object. But by concentrating the light on one particular object, it makes all the rest of the world sink into darkness. Referring to this point Chuang-tzū remarks:⁴⁾

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 illuminate particular things), but lends it to all things universally. This is what is called "illumination".

The phrase here translated as "diffused and indistinct Light"⁵⁾ means a kind of light of which one cannot be certain as to whether it does exist 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-tzū calls this kind of spiritual Light also the "shaded Light" (*pao kuang*).⁶⁾ The word *pao* means "to cover", "to conceal within". As Ch'êng

4) II, p. 75.

5) 「滑疑之耀」.

6) 葆光, II, p. 83 成玄英:「葆蔽也。至忘而照, 即照而忘, 故能韬蔽其光, 其光彌朗」, II, p. 89.

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-tzū. 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 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 Chuang-tzū, because the higher stage, that of the Absolute in its absoluteness, is properly speaking beyond all thinking and reasoning,⁷⁾ 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-tzū fights against the view that this latter stage does represent the 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-tzū's metaphysics. We might call this metaphysics "existentialism", taking the word "existence" (*existentia*) in its mediaeval sense.

From the very outset I have been emphasizing implicitly as well as explicitly the "existentialist" attitude of Chuang-tzū. 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 the Chaos. It is not a position standing on the same level as "essentialism". For the latter is based on a vision of Reality, which is 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 that was 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

7) Lao-tzū, however, does think and talk about this "ineffable" Something. We shall come to this point in the following chapter.

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 or "abnormal" from the 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-tzū or a Lao-tzū, "essentialism" is a wrong and mistaken view of Being, and that it distorts and disfigures the real structure of things. No, because "essentialism" does correspond to a self-manifestation of the very Absolute at a certain stage, just as "existentialism" corresponds to another self-manifestation of it at a different stage. 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-tzū 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-tzū and Lao-tzū 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.

Chuang-tzū sees a typical exemplification of the "essentialist" position in the moral philosophy of Confucius. Confucian philosophy is, in Chuang-tzū's view, nothing but an ethical elaboration 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 is 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!"

8) *Chuang-tzū* IV, p. 183,

Ontological "essentialism" is dangerous because as soon as we take up such an attitude, we are doomed to lose our natural flexibility of the mind and consequently lose sight of the absolute "undifferentiation" which is the real source and basis of all existent things. "Essentialism" will not remain in the sphere of ontology; it naturally grows into categorization of values which, once established, begin to dominate our entire behavioral system.

Chuang-tzū in the following passage⁹⁾ 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 been dried up, and the fish are all on the ground. (In the agonies of death) they are spewing each other with moist breaths 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". 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. Deprived of such a view of Being, our mind would stop to exercise reasoning. And the entire system of Aristotelian logic would be overturned from its bottom, and become meaningless.

Now according to the "essentialist" view, 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 the things, if it is put in the right place, that is to say, as long as one understands it to be the picture of the things at a certain ontological level. Chuang-tzū takes no exception to this. The point he

9) VI, p. 242.

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 the 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-tzū 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 the things. In any event, the so-called "essences" lose, in this view, their solidity, and become liquefied. "Dream" and "reality" become confused into 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, it is at the same time, countless 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, *wahdah al-wujūd*. And we know already that this is what Chuang-tzū calls the Chaos.

Ibn 'Arabi could speak of the Unity of Existence because he looked at the world of Multiplicity, the world of illimitable existents, from the point of view of the Absolute in its absoluteness, 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 number 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*, i.e. non-*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-tzū. 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.¹⁰⁾ But (when the correspondence becomes established between the two) there arise real (essential) "boundaries".¹¹⁾

Referring to the sophistic logic of the school of Kung Sun Lung, Chuang-tzū points out that this kind of logic is a product of linguistic "essentialism".¹²⁾

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 prevalent in Chuang-tzū'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-tzū 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 being not a "finger". And this latter view—although superficially it gives the same conclusion;

10) i.e. the words which correspond to these "boundaries" have no unalterable semantic fixity.

11) II, p. 83.

12) II, p. 66.

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 contradictory of "finger". It means something like "super-finger", or an ontological state in which a "finger" is no longer a "finger". "Why not prove by means of 'non-finger'?", Chuang-tzū 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 "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", being 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-tzū gives one more example, that of a "horse" not being a "horse", which was also a very well-known 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"?

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. So 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-tzū 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-tzū 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. Nay, we can even say on this level 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-tzū goes on to criticize the “essentialist” position in the following manner.¹³⁾

(Instead of looking at the matter from the viewpoint of “non-finger” and “non-horse”, the people divide up the originally undifferentiated whole of Being 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 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).¹⁴⁾

(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

13) II, pp. 69-70.

14) Note, again how Chuang-tzū 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.

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 into one.

The Reality perceived on such a level is called by Chuang-tzū Heavenly-Equalization,¹⁵⁾ or -Walking-Two-Ways (at the same time).¹⁶⁾ 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-tzū* is entitled *Ch'i Wu Lun*,¹⁷⁾ 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 'Arabí's Unity of Existence.

15) *t'ien chün* 天鈞, p. 70. Ch'êng Hsüan Ying: 「天均 (=鈞) 者自然均平之理也。夫遠道聖人，虛懷不執，故能和是於無是，同非於無非，所以息智乎均平之鄉，休心乎自然之境也」, p. 74.

16) *liang hang* 兩行, p. 70.

17) 齊物論. This can also be translated as "Equalization of Various Views on Being", i.e. the nullification of the opposition among various views on Being on the level of absolute transcendence.

"Essentialism", if it is to be a philosophical view of the 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 developments and transformations. In order to comprehend the whole of the world of Being as it really is and as it really works, we must, Chuang-tzū 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-tzū explains his point through the concrete example of Chao Wên, a famous lute player.

A thing's becoming "perfect" and "defective" (at the same time) may aptly be exemplified by what happens when Chao Wên plays the lute. A thing's remaining "not-perfect" and "not-defective" may aptly be exemplified by what happens when Chao Wên does not play the lute.¹⁸⁾

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: "a thing's becoming 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 the meaning of the expression: "a thing's becoming defective". Thus a perfect actualization of one single piece of music is at the same time the negation and nullification of all the rest of 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 "perfected" in an absolute sense, that is, in a sense in

18) II, p. 74.

which it transcends the very distinction between "perfection" and "imperfection" (or "defectiveness").

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-tzū 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* ontological 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 "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.¹⁹⁾

19) V, p. 190.

Unfortunately, the eyes of ordinary men are dazzled by the phenomenal scintillations of Multiplicity and cannot perceive the dynamic Unity that underlies the whole. They cannot, as Chuang-tzū says, "unify the objects of their knowledge".²⁰⁾

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".²¹⁾ 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-tzū means to say; but it is wrong for us to remain on the same phenomenal level and observe the Multiplicity of things from the phenomenal point of view, ourselves being in the very midst of those things. 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 relation between the original absolute Unity and the phenomenal Multiplicity, that is to say, the dynamic process by which the Absolute, stepping out of its metaphysical darkness, diversifies itself into a myriad of things and forms of the world of phenomena, is something which, as I have repeatedly remarked, discloses its reality only to a mind in the state of *ekstasis*, or as Chuang-tzū 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, so to speak, in its incessant self-manifestations 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-tzū, 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*

20) V, p. 193. 「一知之所知」, lit. "to unify what is known by the knowledge".

21) V, p. 191 「遊心乎德之和」. Commenting upon this phrase Ch'êng Hsüan Ying says: 「既而混同萬物, 不知耳目之宜, 故能遊道德之鄉, 故乎至道之境者也」, p. 192.

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 a peculiar sort of ontological truth in themselves. 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 certainly say that the "essences" *exist* in the ordinary sense of the word. But we cannot say either that they do not exist absolutely.

It is at this point that Ibn 'Arabī, 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 'Arabī 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-tzū 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-tzū 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.²²⁾ 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 trailing sound of the wind as it comes blowing from afar? The trees in the mountain forests begin to rustle, stir, and

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 'Arabī 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 Vol. I, pp. 125-126.

sway, and then all the hollows and holes of huge trees measuring a hundred arms' stretches around begin to give forth different sounds.

There are holes like noses, like mouths, like ears; some are (square) like crosspieces upon the 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 a light trailing sound, there comes the following one with a deep rumbling sound. To a gentle wind the 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.²³⁾

As I said before, this is not intended to be a mere literary description of wind. Chuang-tzū's real intention is disclosed by what follows this passage. The philosophical intention of Chuang-tzū 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 is here not an ordinary physical wind. It is the Cosmic Wind corresponding exactly to Ibn 'Arabi's concept of *sarayân al-wujûd*, lit. the "spreading of Existence". It is interesting and, indeed, extremely significant, that both Ibn 'Arabi and Chuang-tzū conceive of "existence" as something moving—"blowing", "flowing", or "spreading". For both of them, "existence" is *actus*.

(One and the same Wind) blows on the 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

23) pp. 45-46.

reality, is the one who makes (the hollows) produce various sounds?²⁴⁾

Who is it? Unless you have the proper answer to this question, you cannot understand the philosophical meaning of the Cosmic Wind. It is important to note that this very form of posing the question would seem to lead us directly to what I have called above the Taoist proof of the existence of God. But, instead of taking up this problem in such a way, Chuang-tzū gives a fairly long description of what is happening in the "inside" of man. Just as the "hollows" of the trees emit all kinds of sounds as the Wind blows upon them, the "inside" of man is in the 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 the external things its causes? No, Chuang-tzū 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 themselves. And this induces them to use their minds 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 more 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 brightness.

Indeed (the movements of the human minds are as 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 over the irretrievable past. Sometimes fickle, sometimes obstinate.

24) II, p. 50.

Sometimes flattering, sometimes self-conceited. Sometimes 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!²⁵⁾

After describing in this way the endless psychological events which are actually taking place in our minds day and night, Chuang-tzū 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". 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 movements. 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 the 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.²⁶⁾

Chuang-tzū admits that the 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 the external objects to act upon our minds and thereby causes the latter to become agitated. Beyond and

25) II, p. 51.

26) II, p. 55.

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*.

It would seem that there is some real Ruler.²⁷⁾ 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.²⁸⁾

It is philosophically very important that Chuang-tzū asserts the Absolute in its personal aspect, i.e. as the absolute Agent, being 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, and that everywhere, in everything. But we can never see its form itself, 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 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-tzū compares the situation with the complicated functioning of the members and organs of a body, the whole mechanism of which is governed and controlled by an invisible "something": the soul.

One hundred joints, nine openings, six entrails—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 can hold dominion over the body), is it the case that all of them are mere servants and maids (there being no Ruler among them)? However, if

27) *chên tsai*, 眞宰.

28) II, p. 55.

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 be 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.²⁹⁾

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-tzū 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-tzū, 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 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.

29) II, pp. 55-56.

Chapter VII

THE WAY

Up to this point we have been following the footprints of Chuang-tzū 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-tzū 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-tzū, 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-tzū 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-tzū 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 ecstatic experience by which man "ascends" toward the Absolute until he becomes completely unified with it. Certainly, Chuang-tzū is equally interested in the "descending" movement of the mind, from the state of *ecstasis* 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 so made that to each objective stage of Being there corresponds a subjective stage of ecstatic experience, so that the ontological system, in the case of Chuang-tzū, is at the same time a complete epistemological system, and *vice versa*. Moreover, it is typical of Chuang-tzū that these two aspects are so completely fused together that it is at times even 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.

Lao-tzū, on the contrary, does not seem to be very much interested in the epistemological stages which precede the ultimate vision of the Absolute. He does not take the trouble of explaining to us *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?

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 the 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-tzū 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-tzū, 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 going systematically into an analysis of Lao-tzū's thought, and confined ourselves to the task of clarifying this "prehistory" in the light of what Chuang-tzū says about it.

But the particular situation which we have just mentioned concerning Lao-tzū'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-tzū and Chuang-tzū is by its very nature beyond all verbal description. Despite that, Lao-tzū does endeavor to describe, at least symbolically, this ineffable Something. And he succeeds marvellously in so doing. 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-tzū 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*)¹⁾ or Nothing (*wu*).²⁾ 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-tzū in a passage which bears ample witness to his being an excellent dialectician. Let us begin by carefully reading the passage in question as an illuminating theoretical introduction to Lao-tzū's conception of the Absolute.

1) 無物, XIV.

2) 無, XL.

Chuang-tzū 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 *logos*, 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. The people, he says, distinguish between "right" and "wrong" in all matters and take thereby the position of there being a fundamental distinction between "right" and "wrong", while he himself puts forward the thesis that there is no distinction between "right" and "wrong".³⁾ The people and Chuang-tzū 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 a *logos*⁴⁾ just as the opposite proposition: "there-is-a-distinction-between-right-and-wrong" is a *logos*. In this respect, both belong to one and the same category.⁵⁾

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 to 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-tzū, in describing the stages of the spiritual development of "sitting in oblivion", mentions as the ultimate limit of ecstatic cognition the view that "nothing has ever existed from the very beginning".

3) See Chap. IV.

4) *yen*, 言.

5) *lei*, 類.

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.⁶⁾

“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.⁷⁾ 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.

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 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-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 intuition. And this would seem to indicate that No-No-Beginning,

6) See above, p. 71.

7) II, p. 79.

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 proves powerless and ineffectual 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 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 being 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.

At this point, Chuang-tzū 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 attacking 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 discussed in Chapter IV Chuang-tzū's position concerning this problem. The key-term is *t'ien ni* (Heavenly Levelling) or *t'ien chün* (Heavenly Equalization), meaning the "equalization" of all things in the Absolute.

The Way or the Absolute, according to Chuang-tzū, 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 T'ai (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 becoming 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.

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 any thing 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) "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-tzū, ironically enough, comes to conclude the futility of reasoning. He advises us to abandon all logical thinking about the Absolute and to remain immersed 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-tzū'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-tzū. As I remarked at the outset of this chapter,⁸⁾ Lao-tzū 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-tzū begins by mentioning negative attributes of the Way. The Way, to begin with, is "nameless".

The Way in its absolute reality (*ch'ang*) has no name.⁹⁾

Interminable (is its activity) like a thread, but itself cannot be named.¹⁰⁾

The Way is hidden and nameless.¹¹⁾

That the Way is "nameless" implies that the very name "Way" (*tao*) is nothing other than a makeshift. Lao-tzū forcibly calls it "Way" because without naming it somehow or other 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 is properly to be called "way" is not the real¹²⁾ Way.
The "name" which is properly to be "named" is not the real¹²⁾ Name.¹³⁾

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

8) Cf. pp. 92-93.

9) *Tao Tê Ching*, XXXII. 「道常 (*ch'ang*) 無名」。The word *ch'ang* here is synonymous with 眞 (*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 Tzū (韓非子) in his chapter on the *Interpretation of Lao-tzū* (解老篇) 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 will 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.

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 "humaneness", "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 elder 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 "humaneness".¹⁴⁾

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 human morals. This inborn goodwill, when expanded into a universal goodwill toward all the fellow-members of the society, turns into the highest principle of ethical conduct, the "way", as exemplified by the virtue of "humaneness".

Clearly, the conceptual structure of the argument is based on the terms "filial piety", "fraternal respect", and "humaneness". 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,¹⁵⁾ my "way" is a unity running through (all forms of my behavior). Master Tsêng respectfully replied: Yes!

14) *Confucian Analects* I, 2.

15) Confucius addresses himself to his disciple Master Tsêng.

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 "benevolence" (i.e. being thoughtful for others, as if their problems were one's own).¹⁶⁾

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.¹⁷⁾

Confucius often speaks of the "way" prevailing in a state—or more literally "a state's possessing the way".¹⁸⁾ 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"!¹⁹⁾

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 its metaphysical core. The "way" in its original metaphysical form is the all-pervading supreme law of Being. The

16) *Analects* IV, 15.

17) *ibid.*, XIV, 4.

18) See VIII, 13; XIV, 1.

19) *ibid.*, XIV, 30.

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 from inside human behavior.

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.²⁰⁾

In this "cosmic" aspect, the Confucian conception of the "way" might be said to have something in common with the Taoist counterpart. And yet, the difference between the two 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū to rise in revolt against the "way" as understood by Confucius and his followers. The "way", Lao-tzū 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 anything which an ordinary mind can become conscious of. How could one "know" it? How could one "hear" it? It is by nature something unknown and unknowable.

Being essentially unknown and unknowable, the Way is "nameless". Here again we encounter Lao-tzū in conscious revolt against the Confucian attitude toward the "names". Certainly, Lao-tzū 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)

20) *ibid.*, IV, 8.

uncarved wood.²¹⁾.....Only when it is carved are there "names".²²⁾

But there is a basic difference between Lao-tzū and Confucius with regard to "names" in that Lao-tzū does not regard these "names" as absolutely established. As we have learnt in the preceding chapters from the explanation given by Chuang-tzū of the "chaotification" as well as from Lao-tzū'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: "humaneness", "righteousness", "(ritual) propriety", "wisdom", "faithfulness". Against this, Lao-tzū puts forward the view that these "names which may be named" are not real "names". In his mind, the Names, or the cardinal virtues, which are so highly valued by the Confucianists 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, does the virtue of "humaneness-righteousness" arise. Only when intelligence and cleverness emerge in the world, does glaring deceit arise. It is only because the six basic kinship relations (i.e. the relationships between father and son, elder and younger brothers, husband and wife) are out of harmony that "filial piety" and "paternal love" are emphasized. Only when the state is in confusion and disorder, do "loyal" ministers appear.²³⁾

It is only after Virtue is lost that "humaneness" becomes prominent. And it is only after "righteousness" is lost that "(ritual) propriety" becomes prominent.

Indeed, "(ritual) propriety" emerges in an age in which "loyalty" and "faithfulness" have become scarce. It marks the beginning of disorder in society.²⁴⁾

Far from being real values as the Confucianists assert, all these so-called

21) *p'u* 樸, 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 carved" (*chih* 制) is a symbolic expression for the "nameless" Way becoming "determined" into myriad things.

23) *ibid.*, XVIII.

24) *ibid.*, XXXVIII.

Names are but signs of man's alienation from the 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-tzū says, a "name which is properly to be named" 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-tzū himself explicitly admits, the "nameless" Way does assume a more positive "name" at its very first stage of self-manifestation or self-determination. That first "name" assumed by the Absolute in its creative activity is Existence (*yu*).²⁵⁾ Lao-tzū, making a concession to popular parlance, sometimes calls the latter Heaven and Earth (*t'ien ti*).²⁶⁾ 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 looks, 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.²⁷⁾

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 above²⁸⁾ 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 is properly to be called "way" is not the real Way. The "name" which is properly to be "named" is not the real Name.

The same conception of the Way is expressed by Chuang-tzū in a somewhat different way as follows.

If the Way is made clear, it is no longer the Way.²⁹⁾

25) 有.

26) 天地.

27) *op. cit.*, I.

28) See p. 99.

29) *Chuang-tzū*, II, p. 83.

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 even a "way"?³⁰⁾

This, of course, means that the real Way is something having no visible trace 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—in modern terminology—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 neither Reason can conceive of it nor can 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 might be called "figureless".³¹⁾

Even if we try to hear it, it cannot be heard. In this respect it might be called "inaudibly faint".

Even if we try to grasp it, it cannot be touched. In this respect it might be called "extremely minute".

In these three aspects, it is unfathomable. And the three aspects are merged into One.³²⁾

(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). Its upper part is not (particularly) bright. Its lower part is not (particularly) obscure.

Interminable (is its activity) like a thread, but itself cannot be named. And (this interminable creative activity) ultimately returns back to the original Nothingness.

(By forcing the expression) shall we describe it as a shapeless Shape, or imageless Image? Shall we describe it as Vague-and-Indistinct? Standing in front of it, we do not see its front. Following behind it, we

30) *ibid.*, II, p. 83. The sentence is found in a passage which has been quoted before in this chapter; see p. 98.

31) 夷 (=幾) meaning "dim 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.

do not see its back.³³⁾

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*).³⁴⁾

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 Arab 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. For, as we have just seen, the reality of the Way is indescribable and ineffable. And yet Lao-tzū 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.³⁵⁾

Utterly indistinct, utterly vague, and yet there is in the midst of it (a faint and shadowy) Image (of Something beyond).

Utterly vague, utterly indistinct, and yet there is in the midst of it Something.

Utterly profound, utterly dark, and yet there is in the midst of it a pure Reality.

This pure Reality is, indeed, eternal and unchanging.

(Eternally and unchangingly its creativeness is at work, so that) from of old till the present its Name³⁶⁾ has never left it. Through this Name it governs

33) *Tao Tê Ching*, XIV.

34) *ibid.*, XL. See above, p. 93.

35) i.e. a metaphysical state in which Being and Non-being are indistinguishable from each other.

36) In this passage Lao-tzū 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: *yu* or Existence.

the principles of all existents.

How do we know the reason why all existents in the world are as they actually are? From what I have just said.³⁷⁾

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" (of Something beyond). 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 'Arabî, 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 *Allâh*. Likewise in Lao-tzû, this Something is made to be antecedent even to God (lit. the heavenly Emperor)—IV.

Deep and bottomless, it is like the origin and principle of the ten thousand things.

There is nothing,³⁸⁾ and yet there seems to be Something.

I know not whose son it is.³⁹⁾

It would seem to be antecedent even to the Emperor (i.e. God).

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.⁴⁰⁾

There is Something in a state of chaos,⁴¹⁾ born before Heaven and Earth.

37) *op. cit.*, XXI.

38) *Shuo Wên*: 「湛，沒也」.

39) "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. To express the same thought, the Arabs would say: the Absolute is *ghani*, lit. "rich", i.e. completely self-sufficient.

40) *op. cit.*, XXV.

41) *hun ch'êng* 混成, lit. "formed by (all things) being fused together", a symbolic expression indicating that the Way is a metaphysical Reality transcending both conceptualization and sense perception.

Absolutely tranquil, absolutely void, it stands alone,⁴²⁾ and it is changeless. And yet it goes everywhere (i.e. it is all-pervading) and never stops.⁴³⁾ It is properly to be considered the Mother of the whole world.⁴⁴⁾

I know not its "name". But provisionally I would call it the "Way".

(Since I have—though provisionally—given it the name, "Way")

I should forcibly call it further by the "name": the "Great".

Being "Great", however, would imply "Moving-forward".⁴⁵⁾ "Moving-forward" would imply "Going-far".⁴⁶⁾ And "Going-far" would imply "Turning-back".⁴⁷⁾

In the passage just quoted Lao-tzū 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 to do 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 water plant) floating on the water. It may go left; it may go right.

42) *tu li* 獨立, "standing alone", that is, "self-sufficient", an expression corresponding to the Arabic term *ghani*: see above, Note 39.

43) *tai* 殆 (= 怡). See 羅運賢「老子餘義」, 1927, *ad loc.*: 「殆怡同聲通用. 司馬相如傳『怡儼』, 張揖訓爲『不前』, 不前凝止之意也. 故『不殆』猶不止, 與『周行』義相成」.

44) 天下, "all-under-Heaven". Ma Hsü Lun (馬叙倫「老子叢話」) proposes to read: 天地, "Heaven and Earth", which is most probably right. The reading is based on an old edition (范應元「老子道德經古本集註」) of the Sung Dynasty. It accords with the expression: "born before Heaven and Earth" which is found in the first sentence of the present 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) so that the metaphysical movement of the Way forms a big universal circle. And being circular, it never comes to an end.

The ten thousand things owe their existence to it. And yet it does not boast (of its own creative activity). Even when a work has been completed, it makes no claim to any merit. It clothes and nourishes the ten thousand things, and yet it lays no claim to being their Master. In this respect, it may properly be called Small.

The ten thousand things go back to it, and yet it makes no claim to being their Master. In this respect, it may also be called Great.⁴⁸⁾

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-tzū 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 "tasteless"?⁴⁹⁾ 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 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū make this point clear.

Lao-tzū says:

If you hold the reins of the great Image,⁵⁰⁾ wherever you may go you can

48) *op. cit.*, XXXIV.

49) *ibid.*, XXXV.

50) *ta hsiang* 大象 (「象」=「像」). 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-tzū uses the word *hsiang* "(a faint and shadowy) Image (of Something beyond) in reference to the first self-manifestation of the Absolute.

go without suffering any harm.⁵¹⁾ You will always be in peace and tranquillity.

Beautiful music and delicious food will make a wayfarer stop. On the contrary, the Way, when expressed, is insipid and flavorless.

Even if one looks at it, it cannot be seen.

Even if one listen to it, it cannot be heard.

And yet, when it is used,⁵²⁾ it cannot be exhausted.⁵³⁾

A really big sound is hardly audible.

A really great Image has no form.

The Way is hidden and has no name. And yet the Way (manifests itself by) bestowing and accomplishing.⁵⁴⁾

And Chuang-tzū:

The Way does have effect and evidence.⁵⁵⁾ But (this does not imply that it) does something intentionally. Nor does it possess any (tangible) form. So it 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.⁵⁶⁾

It is the thing that confers spirituality upon the Spirits. And it is the

51) See *Chuang-tzū*, 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) The existence of the Way is felt through its effect. The Way, in other words, is *actus*.

53) *Tao Tê Ching*, XXXV.

54) *ibid.*, XLI.

55) 「夫道有情有信」, The Way possesses a reality as *actus*, and it presents an unmistakable evidence of its existence in the effects it produces.

56) We have already seen above how Chuang-tzū solves the problem of the Beginning of the Way. The statement: "It has unmistakably existed from ancient times" should not tempt us into imagining that Chuang-tzū recognizes a "beginning-point" in "ancient times" or "eternity". It is merely a figure of speech. It is significant in this connection that Chuang-tzū, a few paragraphs down in the same chapter, calls the Way *i shih* (疑始) 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.

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".⁵⁷⁾ It exists even beneath the six directions (i.e. the whole world).

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".⁵⁸⁾

Thus Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū 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 solid "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". 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-tzū calls "sitting in oblivion".

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 "abysmal Darkness" of Ibn 'Arabi. In the world-view of the latter too, the Absolute (*ḥaqq*) in itself, i.e. in its absoluteness, is an abysmal Darkness ('*amā*'). 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 — nay, it is Existence itself. Likewise, it is an abysmal Darkness not because it is deprived of light, but rather because it is too full of light, too luminous — nay, it is the Light itself.

Exactly the same holds true of the Way as Lao-tzū intuits it. The Way is not dark, but it *looks* dark because it is too luminous and bright. He says:

The Way which is (too) bright looks dark.⁵⁹⁾

The Way in itself, that is, from the point of view of the Way itself, is bright. But since "it is too deep to be known by man"⁶⁰⁾ it is, from the point of view of

57) "High" is, as we have seen, a relative concept which cannot be applied to the Absolute.

58) *Chuang-tzū*, VI, p. 217.

59) *Tao Tê Ching*, XLI.

60) *ibid.*, XV.

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 'Arabī, the Absolute by its own unfathomable Will comes down from the stage of abysmal Darkness or "nothingness" to that of self-manifestations. 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-tzū 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.⁶¹⁾

This passage allows of being 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-tzū, the "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 'Arabī even the highest "self-manifestation" (*tajalli*) is a stage lower than the absolute Essence (*dhât*) of the Absolute, so in Lao-tzū 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 (*yü*), and Being itself is born out of Non-Being (*wu*).⁶²⁾

If we put these two passages side by side with each other, we understand

61) *ibid.*, I.

62) *ibid.*, XL. See also XLI quoted above, p. 102, which reads: 'The Way in its absolute reality has no "name". It is (comparable to) uncarved wood. Only when it is carved are there "names".'

that in Lao-tzū's conception the Absolute in its ultimate metaphysical stage is the Nameless and Non-Being, while at the first stage of world production it becomes the Named and Being. The expression: "the beginning of Heaven and Earth", which Lao-tzū 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 Ibn 'Arabī's conception of the successive stages of Divine self-manifestation, 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 "metaphysical ground" 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 second stage of which is Being. Metaphysically, however, there can be no temporal development in the Absolute. The Absolute, for Lao-tzū, is both Non-Being and Being, the Nameless and the Named at the same time.

Lao-tzū describes the relationship between Non-Being and Being in the following way.

In the eternal and real Non-Being (the "sacred man") would see its mysterious Reality, while in the eternal and real Being he would see its aspect of limitations.

These two are (in origin) one and the same thing. But once externalized, they assume different names (i.e. "Non-Being" and "Being"). In (the original state of) "sameness", (the Way) is to be called the Mystery. The Mystery of Mysteries it really is! And it is the Gateway of myriad Wonders.⁶³⁾

The Non-Being (or Nameless) in which the mysterious Reality (*miao*)⁶⁴⁾ is to be observed would correspond to the state of the Absolute (*ḥaqq*), in the conception of Ibn 'Arabī, before it actually begins to work in a creative way. And the

63) *ibid.*, I.

64) 妙, meaning something unfathomably deep and profound.

Being (or Named) in which the Way manifests itself in infinite "limitations" (*chiao*)⁶⁵ and determinations would find its counterpart, in Ibn 'Arabī's thought, in the state of the Absolute when its creative activity spreads itself, being "determined" in an infinite number of things.

It is remarkable that in this passage Lao-tzū goes even beyond the distinction between Being and Non-Being. The latter is 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-tzū sees beyond the opposition of Being and Non-Being Something absolutely ineffable which he symbolically calls *hsüan*.⁶⁶ 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-tzū 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 the 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.

65) 微, literally meaning a "fortress on a frontier district"; and by extension a "border" or "limit".

66) 玄.

Chapter 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-tzū himself does use—the term in describing the metaphysical world-view of Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū.

Now of the three primary aspects of the Absolute, which, as we have seen, Lao-tzū distinguishes: the Mystery (*hsüan*), Non-Being (*wu*), and Being (*yu*), it is clear that the word Way most properly applies to the first alone. 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, the "limitation" or "determination" is so weak and slight that it is almost the same as "non-limitation".

However, it is true 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-tzū does, the concept itself of Non-Being and the very distinction between Non-Being and Being, and conceptually posit No-[Non-Being]—or more exactly, No-[No Non-Being]. This we have learnt in the first pages 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 created world. Our major concern will be with the problem of creative activity of the Way. This being the case, our description here will begin with the 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 attain to, 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-tzū says:

The Way is the Granary¹⁾ of the ten thousand things,²⁾

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. In the passage which we have quoted and explained toward the end of the preceding chapter,³⁾ Lao-tzū refers to this aspect of the Absolute as "the eternal and real Non-Being" or the "Nameless". It is to be noted that the "Nameless" in the same passage is said to be the "Beginning of Heaven and Earth". 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-tzū 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 *ahadiyyah* and *wāḥidiyyah* plays a decisive role in the thought of Ibn 'Arabi concerning the "self-manifestations" (*tajalliyyât*) of the Absolute. No less an important role does the concept of "one" play in the thought of Lao-tzū.

For Lao-tzū, 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-tzū*, in a chapter entitled *On Heaven and Earth*. The chapter is one of the "Exterior Chapters" (*wai p'ien*),⁴⁾ and may not be from the pen of Chuang-tzū himself. But this subtracts nothing from the importance of the passage. It reads as follows:

1) 奥 (See 廣雅釋詁「奥，藏也」河上公注「奥，藏也。道爲萬物之藏，無所不容也」).

2) *Tao Tê Ching*, LXII.

3) *ibid.*, I. See above, p. 112, and p. 113.

4) For the significance of this classification, see Chap. I., p. 13.

Before the creation of the world,⁵⁾ there is only No-[Non-Being]⁶⁾ (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, it (i.e. the One) is called Virtue.⁷⁾

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.⁸⁾

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.

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 林雲銘 (of the Ch'ing Dynasty, 「莊子因」, *ad loc.*: 「泰初, 造化之始初也. 無無者, 連無之字... 無名者, 卽老子所謂無名天地之始也」) who punctuates it: 「泰初有無無, 有無名, 一之所起」. The ordinary reading represented by Kuo Hsiang articulates the sentence in a different way: 「泰初有無, 無有, 無名」 etc. which may be translated as: "Before the creation of the world there was Non-Being. — There was (then) no Being, no Name".

7) *tê*, 德. This is, as we shall see, one of the key terms of Lao-tzū. The very title of the book, *Tao Tê Ching* (The Book of the Way and the Virtue) attest to its importance. 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*, 命, "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.

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-tzū, 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 halfway 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 metaphysical continuum 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-tzū 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 Yin⁹⁾ and embrace the Yang,¹⁰⁾ and are constituted harmoniously with the vital force of harmony (formed by the blending of the Yin and the Yang).¹¹⁾

The word "way" at the beginning of the passage will, in accordance with the above-quoted explanation by Chuang-tzū, have to be taken as referring to the stage at which the Mystery manifests itself as the Nameless. For, strictly speaking, the Mystery of Mysteries does not beget anything. It is above and beyond such an activity. However, it may well be that Lao-tzū is here using the word in a somewhat less strict way, meaning thereby the Absolute as the ultimate metaphysical Principle of everything existent.

From this ultimate metaphysical principle—or more strictly, from this metaphysical principle 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 Heaven and Earth. The former symbolizes the principle of Yang, whereas the latter symbolizes 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,¹²⁾ "is the

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. See above, p. 112.

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 union of the Yin and the Yang. 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, and "shadow" 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 Duality, 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 *quâ* 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 thereby knows her "children". And if, knowing the "children", one goes back to the "mother" and holds fast to (i.e. does not lose sight of) her, one will never fall into a mistake until the very end of one's life.¹³⁾

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

13) *ibid.*, LII.

of phenomena begins at the stage of the One. 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-tzū 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-tzū does use it in reference to that particular aspect of the Way. But in the most rigorous usage, the "One" is the appropriate term in contexts of this sort.

Heaven, by acquiring the One, is limpid.

Earth, by acquiring the One, is tranquil.

The Spirits, by acquiring the One, are divine.

The valley, by acquiring the One, is full.

The ten thousand things, by acquiring the One, are alive.

The sovereigns, by acquiring the One, are the standard of the world.

All these are what they are because of the One.

If Heaven were not limpid thereby (i.e. by acquiring the One), it would break apart.

If Earth were not tranquil thereby, it would collapse.¹⁴⁾

If the Spirits were not divine thereby, they would cease to be active.¹⁵⁾

If the valley were not full thereby, it would dry up.¹⁶⁾

If the ten thousand things were not alive thereby, they would perish.

If the sovereigns were not noble and lofty thereby, they would fall down.

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 "aquisition" of the One, while from the side of the Way, it is the creative activity of the Way in the form of 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 ground. It develops its activity in everything in accordance with the latter's particular ontological structure; thus, the sky is limpid and clear, the earth is calmly settled, the

14) 發, which is the same as 廢 (劉師培:「發讀爲廢. 說文:廢,屋頓也」).

15) 歇, which, according to the *Shuo Wen*, means to "take a rest" (「歇,息也」).

16) 竭=渴.

valley is 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 essentially affects everything. Nothing lies outside the reach of this universal immanence of the Way.

The Heavenly Way does not contend, and yet it is sure to win. It does not speak, and yet it is able to (make others) respond (to its call). It does not (explicitly) summon, and yet things come to it of themselves. It does not lay thought-out plans, and yet it makes excellent arrangements (for all things). The Heavenly Net has only large meshes, and yet nothing slips through them.¹⁷⁾

The "immanence" of the Way in the phenomenal world must not be taken in the sense that something completely different comes from the 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-tzū 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, although it is metaphysically true that the phenomenal things are made to be as they actually are by the activity of the Way, they are—from their own point of view—not what they are by virtue of something alien to them, but by virtue of their own natures. Lao-tzū speaks in this sense of "the natures—or Nature—of the ten thousand things."¹⁸⁾ It is significant that the original word here translated as "nature", *tzū jan*,¹⁹⁾ 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

17) *op. cit.*, LXXIII.

18) *ibid.*, LXIV.

19) 自然.

meaning of the famous "Non-Doing" (*wu wei*)²⁰⁾ of the Way. 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.

Therefore the "sacred man"...only assists the "being-so-of-itself" of the ten thousand things. He dares not act (i.e. refrains from trying intentionally to force the things to be different from what they are by nature).²¹⁾

To be calm and soundless—that is the "nature" (or "being-so-of-itself"). This is why a whirlwind does not last all morning. This is why a rainstorm does not last all day. Who is it that causes these (phenomena)? It is Heaven and Earth. Thus, if even Heaven and Earth cannot make them last for a long time, how much less can man (hope to succeed in maintaining an "unnatural" state)!²²⁾

This idea of the "nature" or "being-so-of-itself" of the existent things leads us immediately to another major concept: Virtue (*tê*).²³⁾ 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:²⁴⁾ "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-tzū that what is here considered the "natural" activity of the Virtue of a thing is nothing else 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

20) 無爲. The concept will be explained in more detail presently.

21) *op. cit.*, LXIV.

22) *ibid.*, XXIII.

23) See above, note 7.

24) 王弼 (3rd. century A.D.); *ad* LI: 「道者物之所由也. 德者物之所得也」. See also his words: 「德者得也. 常得而無喪利而無害. 故以德爲名焉」, *ad* XXXVIII.

Way is in itself the activity of the thing. We encounter here something comparable with Ibn 'Arabi's concept of the "breath of the Merciful" (*al-nafas al-rahmâni*), or more generally, the concept of Divine Mercy (*rahmah*),²⁵⁾ 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 will be interesting to note in this connection that in the Book of *Kuan-tzū*—spuriously attributed to Kuan Chung, the famous statesman of the 7th. century B.C.—we find this significant statement: "Virtue (*tê*) is the Way's act of giving in charity",²⁶⁾ 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-tzū remarks about the activity of Virtue in the following passage.

The Way gives birth to (the ten thousand things). (Once they are brought into existence) Virtue fosters them; things furnish them with forms;²⁷⁾ and the natural impetus completes their development.

This is why the ten thousand things, all without exception venerate the Way and honor Virtue. However, the Way being venerable and Virtue being honorable is not due to conferment of nobility upon them by some authority; they are eternally so of themselves.²⁸⁾

Thus the Way gives them birth. Virtue fosters them, makes them grow, feeds them, completes them, crystallizes²⁹⁾ them, stabilizes them,³⁰⁾ rears them, and shelters them.

In this way, the Way gives birth (to the ten thousand things), and yet does not claim them to be its own possession. It (i.e. the Way in the form of Virtue) does (so many great things) to them, and yet is not boastful. It makes (things) grow, and yet exercises no authority. This is what I

25) See Part One, Chap. IX, pp. 109-132.

26) 「德者道之舍」(管子, 心術篇, 上). For the interpretation of the last word, 舍 (*shê*), see Kuo Mo Jo (郭沫若)'s remark in the Peking edition of the *Kuan-tzu* (管子集校), 1965, vol. I, pp. 642-644. He says: 「舍字當爲施舍之舍. 下文云『道也者, 動不見其形, 施不見其德』 ("The Way acts, but its figure is invisible. It gives in charity, but its Virtue is invisible") 可證……故知舍與施同義. 施舍亦即化有萬物之意」.

27) i.e. being fostered by Virtue, they grow up and become "things" each having a definite form.

28) 自然; see above, p. 121.

29) 亭, 亭=凝結 (傅奕) or 亭=停 (釋名), meaning to "crystallize" into a definite form.

30) 毒, 毒=安 (according to 「廣雅」).

would call the Mysterious Virtue.³¹⁾

We saw earlier how Lao-tzū “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,³²⁾ as the purest white seems soiled.

The “wide” Virtue (*kuang tê*) looks insufficient.

The “firm” Virtue (*chien tê*) looks feeble.

The “simple” Virtue (*chih tê*)³³⁾ looks dirty.³⁴⁾

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.. What is implied by these adjectives with regard to Virtue will be clear.

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, being as it is concrete forms assumed by the Way as it actualizes itself in the phenomenal world, is liable to suffer the intervention of the “unnatural”, i.e. intentional, activity on the part of the things. 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 in that way. 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

31) *op. cit.*, LI.

32) “Valley” (谷) is a favorite symbol of Lao-tzū, which he uses in describing the nature of the Way, as we shall see presently, and the nature of the “sacred man”.

33) The standard Wang Pi edition reads: 「質真若渝」, Following Liu Shih P'ei 劉師培 who argues: 「案上文言『廣德若不足, 建德若偷』此與並文, 疑真亦作德. 蓋德字正文作德與真相似也」, I read: 「質德若渝」.

34) *op. cit.*, XLI,

perfect embodiment of the Way and to make his Virtue "high".³⁵⁾

The "high" Virtue is non-Virtue. Therefore it is Virtue.

The "low" Virtue is never-to-abandon-Virtue. Therefore it is not Virtue.

The "high" Virtue does not act intentionally (*wu wei*); so it leaves nothing undone.

The "low" Virtue acts intentionally; thus it leaves things undone.³⁶⁾

"The high Virtue is non-Virtue"—the sentence may also be translated as "a man of the high Virtue does not aim at being virtuous"—means that 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.

The activity of the Great Virtue is the one that follows exclusively (the Command) of the Way.³⁷⁾

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 the Virtue as the most direct actualization of the Way.

The foregoing discussion most naturally leads us to the problem of the Non-Doing (*wu wei*).

The Way is eternally active. Its activity consists in creating the ten thousand

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. The 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. See First Part, pp. 234-236.

36) *op. cit.*, XXXVIII.

37) *ibid.*, XXI.

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 and Earth are eternal and everlasting. The reason why Heaven and Earth are eternal and everlasting is that they do not consciously try to go on living. Therefore they can be eternal and everlasting.³⁸⁾

In this passage the Way is referred to as “Heaven and Earth”, that is, at the stage of Heaven and Earth. We already know by what we have seen above 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-tzū refers “Heaven and Earth” back to their ultimate metaphysical origin.

The Spirit of the Valley is immortal. It is what I would call the Mysterious Female.³⁹⁾ The gateway of this Mysterious Female is what I would call the Root of Heaven and Earth. (The Way in these various forms) is only dimly and obscurely visible. And yet, it would seem, it never ceases to exist. Nor does it in its activity consciously try to do anything.⁴⁰⁾

Paradoxical as it may sound, the Way does everything precisely 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.

The real Way⁴¹⁾ acts (in accordance with the principle of) Non-Doing. Therefore it leaves nothing undone.⁴²⁾

Since, thus, the Way is not conscious of its own creative activity, it is not

38) *ibid.*, VII.

39) The symbolic meaning of the “Valley” and “Female” will be elucidated presently.

40) *op. cit.*, VI.

41) 道當. For this expression, see note (9) of the preceding chapter.

42) *op. cit.*, XXXVII.

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, on the part of the Way, any intention 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 does (so many great things), and yet is not boastful. It makes (things) grow, and yet exercises no authority. This is what I would call the Mysterious Virtue.⁴³⁾

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-tzū 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 concerned with the Perfect Man. Here I shall be content with quoting one more passage from the *Tao Tê Ching*, in which Lao-tzū 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 come into existence (through its, or his, activity), and yet he (or, it) does not talk about it boastfully. He (or, it) gives birth (to the things), and yet he (or, it) does not claim them to be his (or, its) own possession. He (or, it) does (so many great things), and yet he (or, it) is not boastful. He (or, it) brings his (or, its) work to perfection, and yet he (or, it) does not occupy (the place of honor). He (or, it) does not occupy (the place of honor); therefore it (i.e. the place of honor) never deserts him (or, it).⁴⁴⁾

Thus the Way never makes a boast of its own activity. Whatever it does, it

43) *ibid.*, X. The same sentences are found as part of LI which I have quoted above, pp. 123-124.

44) *ibid.*, II.

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 uncared-for and neglected.

With a touch of sarcasm Lao-tzū speaks of the Way having no "humaneness" (*jên*). The *jên*, as I have pointed out earlier, was highly valued by Confucius and his disciples as a cardinal virtue. It was, in their view, one of the highest ethical values.

Heaven and Earth lack "humaneness". They treat the ten thousand things as if the latter were straw dogs.⁴⁵⁾

Likewise, the "sacred man" lacks "humaneness". They treat the people as if they were straw dogs.⁴⁶⁾

What Lao-tzū 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-tzū 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-tzū emphasizes very much in describing the creative activity of the Way. That is the "emptiness" or "voidness" of the Way.

We have in the earlier contexts often referred to the conception of the Way being "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 the human eyesight is the same as darkness or lack of light, the Way is "Nothing" or "Non-Being" precisely because it is the plenitude of Being. The concept of "Nothing" which is in question in the present context

45) Straw dogs used to be 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.

46) *op. cit.*, V.

is of a different nature. It concerns the "infinite" creativity of the Way. The Way, Lao-tzū says, can be infinitely and endlessly creative because it contains within itself nothing substantial. It can produce all things because it has nothing definite and determined in the inside. The *Kuan-tzū* clearly reflects this idea when it says: "Empty and formless—that is what is called the Way",⁴⁷⁾ and "The Heavenly Way is empty and formless".⁴⁸⁾

For this idea Lao-tzū finds in the daily experience of the people several interesting symbols. An empty vessel, for example:

The Way is an empty vessel.⁴⁹⁾ No matter how often you may use it, you can never⁵⁰⁾ fill it up.⁵¹⁾

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—nay, 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 of things. 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 looks as if it were emptiness. But (its being, in reality, fullness is proved by the fact that) when you actually use it, you can never exhaust it.⁵²⁾

47) 「虛而無形，謂之道」。The second word of this sentence is, according to the commonly accepted reading is 無 (「虛無無形」 etc.). That this is wrong has been established by the editors of the above-mentioned Peking edition (See above, Note, 26), vol. II, pp. 635-636.

48) *ibid.*

49) 道沖. As Yü Yüeh rightly observes, the character 沖 stands for 盅 which, according to the *Shuo Wen*, means the emptiness of a vessel. (俞樾「諸子平議」VIII:「說文皿部，盅，器虛也。老子曰：『道盅而用之』盅訓虛，與盈正相對，作沖者假字也……第四十五章，『大盈若沖』沖亦當作盅。)

50) 或 must be emended to 久——meaning "for an extremely long time", i.e. "forever"—on the basis of the reading of a T'ang inscription (唐景龍碑:「久不盈」); see again Yü Yüeh, *ibid.*

51) *op. cit.*, IV.

52) *ibid.*, XLV, 「大盈若沖」 Concerning the character 沖, see above, Note 49.

The Way, in this particular aspect, is also compared to a bellows. It is a great Cosmic Bellows whose productive activity is never exhaustible.

The space between Heaven and Earth is a bellows. It is empty; but it is inexhaustible. The more it works the more it produces.⁵³⁾

Lao-tzū 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 the wheel works only because there is "nothing" (i.e. an empty space in the axle).

You knead clay to make a vessel. But the vessel is usable only because there is "nothing" inside.

You cut out doors and windows to make a room. But the room properly functions only because it has "nothing" (i.e. an empty space) in its interior. Thus it is clear that Being can produce its beneficial effects only because "Nothing" performs its proper function.⁵⁴⁾

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-tzū uses this symbol in talking about the inexhaustible creative activity of the Way.⁵⁵⁾

The Spirit of the Valley is immortal.⁵⁶⁾

The "high" Virtue looks like a valley.⁵⁷⁾

The underlying idea is made more explicitly clear in another place where Lao-

53) *ibid.*, V.

54) *ibid.*, XI.

55) See p. 125, and p. 124.

56) *op. cit.*, VI.

57) *ibid.*, XII.

tzū 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.⁵⁸⁾

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-tzū. 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.⁵⁹⁾

The world has a Beginning, which is to be regarded as the Mother of the world.

If one knows the "mother", one thereby knows the "children". If, knowing the "children", one continues to hold fast to the "mother", one will never fall into a mistake to the very end of one's life.⁶⁰⁾

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 Spirit of the Valley is immortal. It is what I would call the Mysterious Female. The gateway of this Mysterious Female is what I would call the Root of Heaven and Earth.⁶¹⁾

In the expression: Mysterious Female (*hsüan p'in*), we encounter again the word *hsüan*⁶²⁾ which, as we saw above, is used by Lao-tzū in reference to the Way as the unknown-unknowable metaphysical Absolute, that is, the Way as it lies even beyond Being and Non-Being.

58) *ibid.*, XXII.

59) *ibid.*, I, quoted above, p. 112 (Chap. VII).

60) *ibid.*, LII, quoted above p. 119 (Chap. VIII).

61) *ibid.*, VI, quoted on p. 126.

62) 玄.

The Mystery of Mysteries it really is! And it is the Gateway of myriad Wonders.⁶³⁾

It is remarkable, further, that in both passages the endless and inexhaustible creativeness of the Way is symbolized by the "gateway" (*mên*).⁶⁴⁾ 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 described 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-tzū is suggestive, furthermore, of weakness, humbleness, meekness, stillness, and the like. But, by the paradoxical way of thinking which is peculiar to Lao-tzū, to say that the "female" is weak, meak, low, etc. is precisely another way of saying that she is infinitely strong, powerful, and superior.

The female always overcomes the male by being still (i.e. without quarreling, and without trying to overcome). Being still, she (always) keeps the lower position. (And by keeping the lower position, she ends by obtaining the higher position)⁶⁵⁾

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-tzū 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-tzū 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".

Knowing well the "male", yet holding fast to (the principle of) the "female", will turn a man into the "valley" of the whole world.

63) *op. cit.*, I. See above, p. 113.

64) [ʹ].

65) *op. cit.*, LXI.

And if a man becomes the "valley" of the whole world, the real Virtue⁶⁶⁾ will never desert him.⁶⁷⁾

And it is evidently in this sense that the following statement is to be understood:

"Being weak" is the way in which the Way works.⁶⁸⁾

We have been in what precedes trying to describe the ontological process—as conceived by Lao-tzū—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".⁶⁹⁾ The ten thousand things, that is, the world and all the things that exists therein, represent the extreme limit of the self-manifesting activity of the Way. The phenomenal things are the last stage of the metaphysical Descent. From the point of view of the phenomenal things, this is the perfection of their own individual natures. For it is at this stage 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 metaphysical 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 to the darkness of the Mystery of Mysteries. Lao-tzū expresses this idea by the key term: *fu*⁷⁰⁾ or Return.

The ten thousand things come into being all together. But as I watch them, they "return" again (to their Origin).

Thus things⁷¹⁾ grow up exuberantly, luxuriantly, but (when the time comes)

66) 常德. Note again the use of the word *ch'ang* whose meaning in this kind of context has been explained earlier; see Chap. VII, Note 9. The *ch'ang tê* is, in accordance with what we have established above (pp. 124-125), 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".

67) *op. cit.*, XXVIII.

68) *ibid.*, XL.

69) *ibid.*, XLII, quoted and explained above, p. 118.

70) 復.

71) Here the ten thousand things that grow up with an amazing vitality are compared to plants that vie with one another in developing their vital energy in spring and summer.

they all "return" to their "roots".

The Return to the Root is to be called Stillness. And this, again, is to be called the Return to the (Heavenly) Command (or the ontological destiny).⁷²⁾

The Return to the Command is to be called the eternal Reality.⁷³⁾

And to know this eternal Reality is to be called Illumination.⁷⁴⁾

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 their origin.⁷⁵⁾

Lao-tzū calls this final state the Stillness⁷⁶⁾ 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-tzū. For the "stillness" as 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 in reality neither an initial point nor a final point.

We have also to keep in mind in understanding this idea another typical pattern of Lao-tzū's thinking, which we have encountered several times. I mean the very important fact that Lao-tzū 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

72) *ming*, 命 (=天命). For a provisional explanation of *t'ien ming* (Heavenly Command), see above, Note 8.

73) *ch'ang*, 常, see above, Chap. VII, Note 9.

74) *ming* 明. The epistemological structure of the experience of Illumination has been fully elucidated in Chapters VI and V in accordance with what we find concerning it in the Book of *Chuang-tzū*. The passage here quoted is from the *Tao Tê Ching*, XVI.

75) This part of my explanation is an almost literal translation of the comment upon the passage by Wu Ch'êng 吳澄 (of the Yüan Daynasty, 道德真經註): 「藝藝, 生長而動之貌. 凡植物春夏則生氣自根而上達于枝葉, 是曰動, 秋冬則生氣自上反還, 而下藏于根, 是曰靜. 天以此氣, 生而為物者曰命, 復于其初生之處, 故曰復命」.

76) *ching*, 靜.

Return to their original source is given in the *Tao Tê Ching* in a temporal form. And what is thus described is in fact a temporal process.

(Rather than "going out" being the only real activity of the Way,) "turning back" is the real activity of the Way.

Likewise (contrary to the common-sense idea) "being weak" is the way in which the Way works.

The ten thousand things under Heaven are born out of Being. And Being itself is born out of Non-Being.⁷⁷⁾

But in giving a description of the process in such a form, Lao-tzū 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. It is a metaphysical statement. It simply refers 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 "reveal 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-tzū *tê* or Virtue.

77) *op. cit.*, XL.

Chapter IX

DETERMINISM AND FREEDOM

In the previous chapter we have twice come 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 *qadâ'* and *qadar*.¹⁾

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-tzū and Chuang-tzū. 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 chē*), 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 that had 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-tzū* has a chapter entitled "The Great

1) See Part One, pp. 168-175, where the Ibn 'Arabi's interpretation of the *qadâ'* and *qadar* is given in detail.

Lordly Master".²⁾ 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū. 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-tzū 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-tzū 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.³⁾ And yet He has no consciousness of doing "justice". His

2) 大宗師 (王先謙「莊子集解」:「本篇云, 人猶效之. 效之言師也. 又云, 吾師乎, 吾師乎, 以道爲師也. 宗者主也」). 師 *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) 斃. The word here is usually interpreted as meaning "to crush". Ch'êng Hsüan Ying (成玄英「莊子疏」 p. 282), for example explicates the sentence「斃萬物」 etc. 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"? (「斃碎也. 至如素秋霜降, 碎落萬物, 豈有情斷割而爲義哉」). Ch'êng

bounty extends to the ten thousand generations. And yet He has no consciousness of doing any particular act of "humaneness".⁴⁾ 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.⁵⁾

The point I am making will become clear if one compares this passage with the words of Lao-tzū about the activity of the Way in the form of Virtue, which were quoted in the previous chapter.

In this way, the Way gives birth (to the ten thousand things), and yet does not claim them to be its own possession. It does (so many great things) to them, and yet is not boastful. It makes (things) grow, yet exercises no authority. This is what I would call the Mysterious Virtue.⁶⁾

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-tzū, 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 of the concept of Chaos in the philosophical system of Chuang-tzū. We have learnt there that, according to Chuang-tzū, 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 freely and without obstruction being transmuted into one another.

Hsüan Ying's idea is that the "justice" of the Way corresponds to the relentless destructive activity of the cold season, while the aspect of "humaneness" 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 humaneness"? 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 Confucian virtues are spoken of.

5) VI, 281.

6) *Tao Tê Ching*. LI; see above, p. 127.

This image of Being must not mislead us into thinking that the Reality is literally chaotic and nothing else. For Chaos represents but one aspect of the Reality. Chaos is a metaphysical reality. But in the very midst of this seeming disorder and confusion, there is observable a supreme order governing everything that happens 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 the 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-tzū by various terms, such as *t'ien* (Heaven), *t'ien li* (the natural course determined by Heaven), *ming* (Command), and *pu tē i* (that which cannot be evaded).

Chuang-tzū 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 each in docile obedience to its own destiny. 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, revolts 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 escape 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-tzū preach a completely negative passivity or nihilism? No! But how could he reconcile the concept of Necessity with that of human Freedom? 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 does occur through the activity of Heaven—Heaven here being understood in a "personal" sense. Chuang-tzū 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,⁷⁾ (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 the work of man!⁸⁾”

Not only this and similar individual cases of misery and misfortune—and also of 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-tzū 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 context in connection with the problem of destiny or Heaven.

When Lao-tzū died, (one of his close friends) Ch'in Shih went to the ceremony of mourning for his death. (Quite perfunctorily) he wailed over the dead three times, and came out of the room.

Thereupon the disciples (of Lao-tzū) (reproved him for his conduct) saying, “Were you not a friend 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

7) 有與. 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)”. (「兩足共行曰有與. 有與之貌, 未有疑其非命也」). To this Ch'êng Hsüan Ying adds: Since being biped is due to the Heavenly Command, it is evident that being one-footed is not due to man. (「以有與者命也, 故知獨者亦非我也」).

8) *Chuang-tzū*, III, p. 124.

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 (lit. gather) sympathy of his people in such a form, he must have (during his lifetime) cunningly induced them somehow or other 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.⁹⁾

This,¹⁰⁾ 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 such behavior used to be considered of those who were liable to be punished 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 come). Now he left (i.e. died) 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".¹¹⁾

The last paragraph of this passage is found almost *verbatim* in another passage which was quoted earlier in Chapter III,¹²⁾ where the particular expression: "loosing the tie" too 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 after having gained a lucid consciousness that everything is due to the Will of Heaven.

The next step one should take consists, according to what Chuang-tzū observes about "loosing the tie of the Heavenly Emperor", in one's being 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 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.

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. 127-128.

12) *ibid.*, VI, p. 260, quoted on p. 32.

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.¹³⁾

To be deprived of one foot is to be deprived of 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, cannot enjoy being existent 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-tzū'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 could this be achieved?

Chuang-tzū 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, he gains through resignation "freedom" to some extent, it cannot be a complete Freedom. The 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.

13) *ibid.*, III, p. 126.

Go with the things wherever they go, and let your mind thereby 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.¹⁴⁾ That, surely, is the highest mode of human existence.¹⁵⁾

To take such an attitude toward the inexorable Necessity of Being is, needless to say, possible only for the "true man". But that is no reason for ordinary men abandoning all hope of coming closer to this highest ideal. For even the ordinary people can live in accordance with the dictates of this principle on their proper level. All they are asked to do is positively accept their destiny instead of committing themselves passively and sullenly to fatalistic resignation. Chuang-tzū 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 succeeding 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 the things.

Man usually respects his own father as if the latter were Heaven itself,¹⁶⁾ 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)!¹⁷⁾

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 in cases of this kind—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

14) *chung* 中 (王先謙:「中, 吾心不動之中」).

15) *op. cit.*, IV, p. 160.

16) Reading 「以父爲天」 instead of 「以天爲父」.

17) *op. cit.*, VI, p. 241.

sure to receive quite a different impression of the matter. And if, further, we identify ourselves with the Way at this stage of activity and become completely united and unified with it,¹⁸⁾ 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 the 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 the universal Transmutation. Without encountering any obstruction, he goes wherever he goes".¹⁹⁾

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-tzū says:

The "sacred man" has no rigidly fixed mind.²⁰⁾ He makes the minds of the people his mind.

"The good, (he says), I treat as good. But even those who are not good I treat as good. (Such an attitude I take) because Virtue (i.e. everything by nature) is good.

The truthful I treat as truthful. But even those who are not truthful I treat as truthful. (Such an attitude I take) because Virtue (i.e. everything by nature) is truthful.

Thus the "sacred man", living in this world, maintains a flexible attitude, and "chaotifies" 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, takes, in every matter, the attitude of an infant.²¹⁾

Here the attitude of the "sacred man" toward things is sharply contrasted with that of the 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.

18) To express the idea Chuang-tzū uses the phrase: 「化其道」 meaning "to be transmuted into the Way" (Cf. VI, p. 242).

19) 「忘善惡，遺死生，與變化爲一，曠然無不適矣」, VI, p. 243.

20) 常心. In this combination, the word *ch'ang* (常)—whose original meaning is, as we saw earlier, "eternal", "unalterable"—means "stiff" and "inflexible".

21) *Tao Tê Ching*, XLIX.

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 the activity itself of the Way? And is it not also the case that every particular form of Virtue is his own form?

Chuang-tzū 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 put me upon a definite form (i.e. has furnished me with a definite bodily form). It is laboring me with living. 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-tzū 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 conspicuous examples. The gist of his argument is that the Necessity of Being will no longer be "necessity" when a man becomes completely one with the 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-net²²⁾ 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.

22) The text has 「藏山於澤」 which is meaningless. Following the suggestion by Yü Yüeh 俞樾 (「諸子平議」: 「山非可藏於澤, 且亦非有力者所能負之而走, 其義難通, 山疑當讀爲油」) I read 油 instead of 山.

If, on the contrary, you hide the whole world in the whole world itself,²³⁾ 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 will indeed 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 they find that upon which depend the ten thousand things and that which is the very ground of the universal Transmutation.²⁴⁾

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.²⁵⁾

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

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-tzū*, VI, pp. 243-244.

25) See p. 141. The passage is taken from *Chuang-tzū*, VI, p. 260.

(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 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 Taoist Perfect Man.

Chapter 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 *insân kâmil* ("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.²⁾

The Master said: How dare I claim for myself being a "sacred man" or even a man of (perfect) "humaneness"?³⁾

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 intellectually cultivated men of the age of Confucius, and that Lao-tzū wrought a drastic change in the connotation of this word. This semantic change was effected by Lao-tzū through his metaphysical standpoint which was of a shamanistic origin.

We have already seen in the first chapters of this book how Lao-tzū—and Chuang-tzu—came out of a shamanistic milieu. The Perfect Man for Lao-tzū was originally a "perfect" shaman. This fact is concealed from our eyes by the fact that his world-view is not nakedly shamanistic, but is presented with an

1) 聖人.

2) *Analects*, VII, 25.

3) *ibid.*, VII, 33.

extremely sophisticated metaphysical elaboration. But the shamanistic origin of the Taoist concept of the "sacred man" will be disclosed if we correlate the following passage, for example, from the *Tao Tê Ching* with what Chuang-tzū remarks concerning the ecstatic experience of "sitting in oblivion".

If a man blocks all his openings (i.e. eyes, ears, mouth, etc), and closes up all his doors (i.e. the activity of Reason), his (spiritual energy) will never become exhausted all through his life.

If, on the contrary, he keeps his openings wide open, and goes on trying ever to increase the activity (of the Mind), he will never be safe all through his life.

To perceive a small thing⁴⁾ is properly to be called Illumination (*ming*).

To hold on to what is soft and flexible⁵⁾ is properly to be called strength.

If a man elaborates his own Light and thereby goes back to the (original) state of Illumination, he will no longer suffer any harm. Such an (ultimate) state is what is to be called "stepping into"⁶⁾ the eternally real.⁷⁾

The "eternally 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū, 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 the worldly-minded people represent the "normal", the "sacred man" is surely to be considered a strange, bizarre creature.

4) "A small 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 the infant, see above, Chap. IX, p. 144. The point will be further elaborated in the following chapter.

6) 襲常. For an explanation of the meaning of this expression, see above, Chap. V. Note 29.

7) *Tao Tê Ching*, LII.

An "abnormal"⁸⁾ 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 it is possible to say that a petty man from the viewpoint of Heaven is, from the viewpoint of ordinary men, a man of princely virtue;⁹⁾ 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 the "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, from the standpoint of the common people, something strange and "abnormal", so "abnormal" indeed that they treat it as funny and ridiculous. As Lao-tzū says:

When a man of low grade hears about the Way, he laughs immoderately. If such a man did not laugh at it, it would not be worth being considered the Way.¹⁰⁾

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 Men who is a living image of the Way should also look ridiculous or sometimes vexatious and unbearably irritating. Chuang-tzū often describes in his Book the "strange" behavior of the "abnormal".

Once a disciple of Confucius—all 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 the expression. Their

8) *Chi jên* 畸人.

9) The ordinary text reads: 「人之君子, 天之小人也」 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: 「天之小人, 人之君子」. Following his suggestion I read the second half: 「天之君子, 人之小人」 (王先謙: 「莊子集解」); *Chuang-tzū*, VI, p. 273.

10) *Tao Tê Ching*, XLI.

conduct (is so abnormal that) I am completely at a loss to characterize them. What kind of men are they?"

Quite ironically, Chuang-tzū 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 (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.

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?¹¹⁾

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, the trace of their conduct naturally results in the actualization of a very peculiar standard of values, which could never square with that accepted by common sense and Reason.

Chuang-tzū 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-

11) *Chuang-tzū*, VI, pp. 267-268.

sounding phrase: "deforming, or crippling the virtues".¹²⁾ After relating how a certain man of hideous deformity—Shu the Crippled—because of his deformity, completes his term of life safely and pleasantly, Chuang-tzū 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"!¹³⁾

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 "crippled" is thus radically opposed to that of the common people, their real greatness cannot be recognized by the latter. Even the most sophisticated of men of Reason—Reason being, after all, an elaboration of common sense—fails 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-tzū), a famous dialectician of Chuang-tzū's time, of whom mention was made earlier,¹⁴⁾ criticizes Chuang-tzū—in one of the anecdotes about this "sophist" recorded in the Book of *Chuang-tzū*—and remarks that Chuang-tzū'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-tzū 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, the things that are "useful" in the real sense of the term are those things that transcend the common notion of "usefulness". 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-tzū describes the "uselessness" of things that are "abnormally big".

The king of Wei once gave me 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

12) *Chih li tê*, 支離德.

13) *op. cit.*, IV, p. 180.

14) See Chap. I, Note 15.

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.¹⁵⁾

It is interesting to notice that Hui-tzū does recognize the gourds being big, very big indeed. But their excessive bigness renders them unsuitable to 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 the spiritual size exceeds a certain limit, it turns him practically into a stupid fellow. This, however, only provokes a sharp retort from Chuang-tzū who points out that Hui-tzū has found the gourd to be of no use "simply because he does not know how to use properly big things". And he adds:

Now that you had a gourd big enough to contain as much as five piculs, why did it not 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!¹⁶⁾

Exactly the same kind of situation is found in another anecdote which immediately follows the preceding one.

Hui-tzū once said to Chuang-tzū: "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-tzū said: "You must have observed a weasel, how it hides itself crouching down, and watches for carelessly sauntering things (i.e. chicken, 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.

15) *op. cit.*, I, p. 36.

16) *ibid.*, p. 37.

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,¹⁷⁾ or in the Wilderness of the Limitlessly-Wide,¹⁸⁾ 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?¹⁹⁾

The passage just quoted, in which Chuang-tzū expounds his attitude against the kind of rationalism and utilitarianism represented by Hui-tzū is of great importance for our purposes, containing as it does in a symbolic form some of the basic ideas of Chuang-tzū. 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 some others are directly or indirectly related with those that have been touched upon in the foregoing. Here for convenience I would classify them under four heads, and discuss them briefly one by one in the particular context 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) the "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-tzū. They describe symbolically the spiritual state in which the Perfect Man finds his absolute tranquillity and freedom. In another passage Chuang-tzū gives us a hint—symbolically, again—through the mouth of a fictitious Perfect Man²⁰⁾ 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).

17) 無何有之鄉.

18) 廣莫之野.

19) *op. cit.*, I, pp. 39-40.

20) It is interesting that the name of that Perfect Man is "Nameless-Man".

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.²¹⁾

In the light of what we already know about Chuang-tzū's major ideas, the "Village of There-Is-Absolutely-Nothing" or the "Wilderness of the Limitlessly-Wide" evidently refers to the spiritual state of Nothingness or Void which the perfect Man experiences in the moments of his ecstatic intuition. At the highest stage of ecstasy—as suggested by the expression "sitting in oblivion"—the mind of the Perfect Man is in a peculiar kind of blankness. All the traces of phenomenal things have been erased from his consciousness; even the consciousness itself has been erased. There is here no distinction between the "subject" and the "object". For both the mind and the things have completely disappeared. He is now an inhabitant of a strange metaphysical region which is "limitlessly 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-tzū in a more philosophical way as the problem of the Transmutation of all things.

Being perfectly familiar with that which has no falsehood (i.e. the true Reality, the Way), he does not shift about together with the shifting things.²²⁾ He regards the universal Transmutation of things as (the direct manifestation of the Heavenly Command, and holds fast to (i.e. intuitively through the changing things) their Great Source.²³⁾

21) *op. cit.*, VII, p. 293. See also VII, p. 296: 「立乎不測，而遊於無有者也」.

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 the ever changing Nature, all the "shifts" he makes ultimately amount to his being changeless.

23) *op. cit.*, V, p. 189.

(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 a Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū, 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 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)²⁴⁾ 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.²⁵⁾

24) In this passage, the Perfect Man is designated by the term *chih jên* 至人, "ultimate man", one of the several terms which Chuang-tzū uses to express the concept of the Perfect Man.

25) *op. cit.*, VII, p. 307.

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.²⁶⁾

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*.

(The best possible thing for man to do is) to cleanse and polish the Mysterious Mirror so that it might become spotless.²⁷⁾

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-tzū*. We have already seen some of them: the huge gourd which is too big to be of any use, the big useless *shu*-tree in the garden of Hui-tzū, 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-tzū*.

In the dark mysterious ocean of the north (i.e. the northern limit of the world) there lives a Fish whose name is known as 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 transmuted into a Bird whose name is 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 tur-

26) *ibid.*, V, p. 197.

27) *Tao Tê Ching*, X.

bulent (with raging storms of wind) the Bird intends to journey toward the dark mysterious ocean of the south. The southern ocean is the lake of Heaven.

In fact, in the Book entitled *Ch'i Hsieh*²⁸⁾ 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".²⁹⁾

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. Only difference is that the world looked down from this vertiginous height strikes the Bird's eyes as something 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).³⁰⁾

Chuang-tzū brings this description of the Bird's journey to an end by going

28) 齊諧, "Equalizing Harmony" or the "(Cosmic) harmony in which all things are equalized", a title very typical of Chuang-tzū's ontology (see Chap. III, Chap. 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-tzū'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-tzū*, I, pp. 2-4.

30) *ibid.*, I, p. 4.

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.³¹⁾

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-tzū, 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-tzū 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 toward the south?"

A man who goes on a picnic to a near-by field, will go out carrying food

31) *ibid.*, I, p. 7.

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 wisdom are not able to understand the mind of those who possess Great Wisdom.³²⁾

This description of the imaginary flight of the Bird P'êng across the world is a very famous passage. It is significant that the passage is placed at the very outset of the whole Book of *Chuang-tzū*. 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 directly be led into the strange mythopœic atmosphere which is typical of what we might call the shamanistic mode of thinking. Unlike ordinary forms of shamanistic intuition, 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.

Be this as it may, the forceful, dynamic style of Chuang-tzū 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" in question 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 the "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-tzū, from the viewpoint of the "dependence" and "independence", divides men into four major categories. The first is the man of "petty wisdom"; the second is the man of middle

32) *ibid.*, I, pp. 9-11.

wisdom, represented by Sung Jung Tzū;³³⁾ the third is the man of "great wisdom" who is still somewhat defective in his spiritual perfection, represented by the famous Taoist sage Lieh-tzū; 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 upon himself with self-conceit just like (the above-mentioned small creatures).³⁴⁾

Sung Jung Tzū 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) 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.³⁵⁾ 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-tzū.³⁶⁾ 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?

33) Sung Jung Tzū 宋榮子 (=Sung Chien 宋鉞), 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-tzū*. His name is mentioned also by Mencius, Hsün-tzū, and Han Fei Tzū.

34) Like the cicada and the little 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-tzū is considered to have been a Perfect Man who, together with Chuang-tzū, represented the school of Taoist philosophy that had been inaugurated by Lao-tzū. He is made to stand chronologically between Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū.

Therefore it is said: The (Perfect Man *quâ*) "ultimate man" has no "ego", (and having no "ego", he adapts himself to everything and every event with limitless flexibility). The (Perfect Man *quâ*) "divine man" has no merit (because he does nothing intentionally). The (Perfect Man *quâ*) "sacred man" has no fame (because he transcends all worldly values).³⁷⁾

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 up 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-tzū* is entitled "Free Wandering". It is not, I think, a mere coincidence that one of the masterpieces of shamanistic poetry, *Yüan Yu* ("Traveling Afar"), which is found in the *Elegies of Ch'u*, presents striking similarities to the mythopoeic part of the world-view 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".³⁸⁾

37) *op. cit.*, I, pp. 16-17.

38) *ibid.*, I, p. 28.

Chapter XI

THE PERFECT MAN

Of the characteristic features of the Perfect Man the majority 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-tzū and Chuang-tzū is nothing else than the personification of the Way itself. The Perfect Man is "perfect" because he is an exact personal image 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 his spiritual experience of ecstasy 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-tzū calls this stage "embracing the One".¹⁾

The "sacred man" embraces the One, and thereby becomes the standard for everything under Heaven.²⁾

Keeping down the unstable soul under control, (the Perfect Man) embraces the One and is never separated therefrom.³⁾

The opening clause⁴⁾ of this second quotation is interesting because of its sham-

1) *pao i*, 抱一.

2) *Tao Tê Ching*, XXII.

3) *ibid.*, X.

4) 「載營魄」.

anistic 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*, and⁵⁾ other *p'o*⁶⁾ Or we could say that man was believed to possess two souls. The former was the 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.⁷⁾ As for the phrase *ying p'o*, here translated as "the unstable (physical) soul", it is significant that exactly the same combination is found in the famous shamanistic poem "Traveling Afar" (*Yüan Yu*) of the *Elegies of Ch'u*:

Keeping down the unstable soul, I ascend to a misty height,
And riding on the floating clouds, I go up and up.⁸⁾

But of course the Perfect Man knows how to put under control his fretful soul by "sitting-in-oblivion", and freely ascends to the height of Unity and embraces 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 ascends 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

5) 魂.

6) 魄.

7) *Li Chi, Chiao Tê Shêng* (禮記「郊特牲」): 「魂氣歸于天, 形魄歸于地也」。 Concerning the *p'o* we find in the *Tso Ch'uan* (左傳, 昭公七年) the following statement: "When a man is born, (we see) in his first bodily function what is called the *p'o*".

8) 「載營魄而登遐兮, 掩浮雲而上征」。 This interpretation of the word *ying* (營) 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: 夜耿耿于寐兮, 魂營營而至曙。

point of perfection in (being unified with) the Way.⁹⁾

The Taoist *ataraxia* 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 (i.e. as to what they would become after Death).

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.

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".¹⁰⁾

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.¹¹⁾ The common people, on the contrary, breathe with their throats (i.e. their respiration is shallow). You know those who are cornered in argument—

9) *Chuang-tzū*, 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 as if the breathing naturally welled up from the heels.

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.¹²⁾

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-tzū emphasizes as the ideal of the Taoist mode of human existence: "no-wisdom and no-desire" (*wu-chih wu-yu*)¹³⁾ "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 blind the eyes of men. The five musical notes deafen the ears of men. The five tastes spoil the mouths of men. (The games like) racing and hunting madden the hearts of men. Goods that are hard to obtain impede men's conduct.

Therefore the "sacred man" cares for 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.¹⁴⁾

We have already seen above how, in the view of Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū, Reason obstructs the free activity of Nature. Reason in its lowest form is the "sound" or "normal" common sense. The common people live against the natural course of things because they are at the mercy of their own Reason and common sense.

Boundless desire and the argumentative Reason constitute the 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

12) *op. cit.*, VI, p. 228.

13) 「無知無欲」, *Tao Tê Ching*, III.

14) *Tao Tê Ching*, XII.

15) *ibid.*, XIII.

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-tzū finds in the "infant" an apt symbol for this ideal.

A man who possesses within himself the plenitude of Virtue may be compared to an infant.

Even poisonous insects dare not sting it. Even ferocious animals dare not pounce upon it. Even birds of prey dare not attack it.

An infant has weak bones and soft sinews, and yet its grip is very firm. Though it does not know yet the union of male and female, its male member¹⁶⁾ is full of force. This is due to the fact that in the infant the vital energy is at its height.

It screams all day long, yet it does not become hoarse. This is due to the fact that the (natural) harmony in it is at its height.

To know in this way the (natural) harmony is to be regarded as (being one with) the eternal Reality (*ch'ang*). And to know in this way the eternal Reality is to be regarded as being illumined (*ming*).¹⁷⁾

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 and lissom. It is a symbol of real Life.

Man, at his birth, is soft and weak, whereas in death he is stiff and rigid. The ten thousand things, grass and trees, are soft and fragile while they are living; once dead, they are dry and stiff.

Thus we see that the hard and rigid are the companions of Death, while the soft and weak are the companions of Life.

This is illustrated by the fact that an army which is too powerful is liable to lose the battle, 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.¹⁸⁾

The following passage is remarkable in that it gathers together the majority

16) 「全作」. Yü Yüeh (俞樾「諸子平議」VIII) thinks that the word 全 is a mistake for 会 meaning "hidden place", i.e. the genitals. In some other editions we find 峻 and 股 used instead of 全.

17) *op. cit.*, LV.

18) *ibid.*, LXXVI.

of Lao-tzū's favorite symbols for "flexibility", "softness", "being low", "being simple", in short, the virtue of Negativity.

Knowing well the "male", yet holding fast to (the principle of) the "female", will turn a man into the "ravine" of the whole world.

And if a man becomes the "ravine" of the whole world, the real Virtue will never desert him, and thus he will ultimately go back to the state of the "infant".

Knowing well the "white", yet holding fast to the "black", will turn a man into the standard of all under Heaven.

And if a man becomes the standard of all under Heaven, the real eternal Virtue will never fail him, and thus he will ultimately go back to the state of the Limitlessness.

Knowing well "glory", yet holding fast to "ignominy", will turn a man into the "valley" of all under Heaven.

And if a man becomes the "valley" of all under Heaven the real eternal Virtue will be in abundance, and he will ultimately go back to the state of "uncarved wood".

"Uncarved wood" (in its "simplicity" contains potentially all kinds of vessels); when it is cut up, it produces 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. (i.e. Each vessel carved out of the "uncarved wood" may be a perfect piece of work in itself, but it is "determined" and is good only for one particular use. The "uncarved wood", on the contrary, may not yet be "perfected", but it is the "lord" of all vessels in the sense that it is the very source from which all of them are produced).¹⁹⁾

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.

19) *ibid.*, XXVIII.

Heaven and Earth are eternal and everlasting. The reason why Heaven and Earth are eternal and everlasting is that they do not consciously try to go on living. Therefore they can be eternal and everlasting.

In accordance with this, the "sacred man" puts himself in the rear, but (precisely because he puts himself in the rear) he comes naturally to the fore. He puts his own self out of consideration, but his "self" is preserved thereby. Is it not because he possesses no "ego" (i.e. the small ego) that he can thus establish his Ego? 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 and lives by the very same principle by which Heaven and Earth exist and live. 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 has intended to achieve.

He who stands on tiptoe cannot remain standing for a long time.

He who walks with big steps cannot go (very far).

He who tries to make himself conspicuous does not glitter.

He who justifies himself does not become illustrious.

He who boasts of himself does not achieve a real success.

He who places too great confidence in himself does not endure.

Such an attitude, from the point of view of the Way, may be described as excessive food and an excrescence in the body. It is detested by Something (i.e. the Creator). Therefore, he who possesses (i.e. is unified with) the Way never takes such an attitude. ²¹⁾

Therefore, the "sacred man" keeps to the principle of Non-Doing, and practises the teaching through No-Words. ²²⁾

In practising learning, knowledge goes on increasing every day.

In practising the Way, (what one obtains) goes on decreasing every day. Decreasing, and ever more decreasing, one finally reaches Non-Doing. And when one practises Non-Doing, one does not leave anything undone. Therefore an empire is sure to be gained by practising (the principle of) There-Is-

20) *ibid.*, VII.

21) *ibid.*, XXIV.

22) *ibid.*, II.

Nothing-To-Do. If one adheres to (the principle of) There-Is-Something-To-Do, one can never gain an empire.²³⁾

Even without going out of the door, one can know everything under Heaven. Even without peeping out of the window, one can know the Way of Heaven. Nay, the further one goes out, the less one knows! Therefore the "sacred man" knows (everything) without going out. He becomes illumined without looking. And he accomplishes (everything) without "doing".²⁴⁾

The "Way of Heaven" appearing in the last quotation 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-tzū'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,²⁵⁾

Kuo Hsiang makes the following interesting and important remark:

"Heaven" here 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".

23) *ibid.*, XLVIII.

24) *ibid.*, XLVII.

25) *Chuang-tzū*, VI, p. 224.

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". Likewise, "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.²⁶⁾

This is, indeed, an excellent explanation of the key term "Non-Doing" as understood by Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū, so much so that it makes all further efforts to clarify the concept superfluous and meaningless.

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-tzū's way of thinking. I have repeatedly pointed out as something typical of Lao-tzū the "symbolic" way in which he develops his thinking. In the majority of cases, particularly in dealing with problems of crucial importance from his point of view, 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 the hardest of all things in the world (like stones and rocks). Having no "being" of its own (i.e. having no definite form of its own as a substance) it penetrates even into that which has no crevices.

By this I know that Non-Doing is most effective.

However, the teaching through No-Words (i.e. the word-less teaching given by the Perfect Man, himself remaining silent but his personal influence affecting "naturally" all about him) and the effect of Non-Doing are indeed

26) 郭象：「天者自然之謂也。夫爲爲者不能爲，而爲自爲耳。爲知者不能知，而知自知耳。自知耳，不知也。不知也，則知出於不知矣。自爲耳，不爲也。不爲也，則爲出於不爲矣。爲出於不爲。故以不爲爲主，知出於不知。故以不知爲宗，是故真人遺知而知，不爲而爲。自然而生。坐忘而得。故知稱絕，而爲名去也」。 p. 224.

within the reach of but a very few in the whole world.²⁷⁾

In this passage no explicit mention is made of water. But that Lao-tzū means water by "the softest of all things" is made clear by the following passage.

There is under Heaven nothing that is softer and weaker than water. And yet in attacking things hard and strong, nothing can surpass it.

This is because there is nothing that can conquer it.²⁸⁾

That the weak overcomes the strong, and the soft overcomes the stiff is known by everybody in the world. But no one is able to put this (knowledge) into practice.²⁹⁾

The "positive passivity" or the "powerful weakness" of water is for Lao-tzū one of the most appropriate images of the Way and, therefore, of the Perfect Man.

The highest goodness is like water. Water by its nature benefits the ten thousand things, and yet it never contends with anything. It is content with staying in (low) places which are loathsome to the common people. But precisely because of this (natural inclination) it is closest to the Way (and the "sacred man").

(The "sacred man", like water,) never contends with anybody (or anything). Therefore he never commits a mistake.³⁰⁾

"Never-contending-with-anybody" which is suggested by the nature of water is another highest principle that governs the conduct of the Perfect Man.

An excellent warrior does not look fierce. An excellent fighter does not allow himself to be driven to anger. He who excels in defeating does not force war (on the enemy). He who excels in using men makes himself humble before them.

This I would call the Virtue of "never-contending". This may also be called the (real) power to use men.

And such a man may rightly be regarded as equal even to Heaven. Nay,

27) *Tao Tê Ching*, XLIII.

28) 「易之」 The character 易 here stands for 夷 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.

this represents the ultimate limit of (the Way of) Heaven.³¹⁾

The "sacred man" ... never contends with anybody. This is why nobody under Heaven is able to contend with him.³²⁾

Thus the Perfect Man does not contend with anybody or anything. Like a good fighter he does not allow himself to be roused and excited. In this respect, he may be said to lack ordinary human emotions and feeling. In fact, he is not a "man", if one understands by this word an ordinary human being. He is, in reality, an infinitely large cosmic being. Concerning this problem Chuang-tzū has left an interesting record of a discussion between himself and the Dialectician Hui-tzū to whom reference was made earlier. We do not know for sure whether the dialogue is fictitious or real. But, whether fictitious or real, it is a valuable document for us in that it elucidates one important aspect of the connotation of the Perfect Man.

The discussion starts when Chuang-tzū makes the following statement:

The "sacred man" has the physical form of a man, but no emotion of a man. Since he has the form of a man, he lives among other human beings as one of them. But since he has no emotion of a man, "right" and "wrong" (or likes and dislikes) cannot have access to him. Ah how insignificant and small he is, in so far as he belongs to common humanity! But infinitely great is he, in so far as he stands unique (in the world) in perfecting Heaven in himself!³³⁾

Against this statement, Hui-tzū raises a serious question. And the question provokes a theoretic discussion over the theme between Chuang-tzū and Hui-tzū.

- Hui-tzū: Is it at all possible that a man should be without emotions?
 Chuang-tzū: Yes, it is.
 Hui-tzū: But if a man lacks emotions, how could he be called a "man"?
 Chuang-tzū: The Way has given him human features. And Heaven has given him his bodily form. How, then, should we not call him a "man"?

31) *ibid.*, LXVIII. The original word which I have here translated as "(the Way of Heaven) is 古, lit. "old" or "ancient". The word "ancient" is often used synonymously with "Heaven", (see Yü Yüeh 俞樾「諸子平議」 *ad loc.*).

32) *ibid.*, XXII.

33) *Chuang-tzū*, V, p. 217.

- Hui-tzū: But since you call him a "man", it is inconceivable that he should be without emotions.
- Chuang-tzū: 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-itself" of everything, never trying to increase his vital energy.
- Hui-tzū: If he does not try to increase his vital energy (i.e. by eating nutritious food, clothing himself, etc.),³⁴⁾ how could he preserve his body alive?
- Chuang-tzū: The Way has given him human features. And Heaven has given him his bodily form. (And as a result, he has come into existence as a "man"). This being the case, all he has to do is not to let his inner self be hurt by likes and dislikes. (This is what I mean by "not trying to increase life".) Now 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 selected for you a bodily form. But you (instead of conforming to the Will of Heaven, waste your time in) making a fuss about "(a stone) being hard and white".³⁵⁾

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".

Ordinary men busily run about (in pursuit of ever changing phenomena),

34) Here again, Hui-tzū misunderstands what Chuang-tzū 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, Chap. IV, Note 18.

while the "sacred man" (remains so unperturbed that he) looks stupid and dull. He participates in ten thousand ages, yet (since he is not moved by none of the phenomena occurring therein) he remains "one" and maintains the original pure simplicity. (Looked at from such a viewpoint) all things in the world are so (i.e. "one" in their pure simplicity). (However different they may look from each other) they are, in reality, no other than so many things that are "affirmable", piled up one upon the other. (i.e. All things are so many manifestations of the Way, and as such, they are at one with each other in being fundamentally "good").³⁶⁾

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; 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 infinitely variegated things of the phenomenal world. Rather, his "making no distinction between the things" means only that, being well 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" and "affirmable".

(The "true man") is "one", whether (seemingly) he 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. it is the position of the Heavenly Equalization). 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 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.

36) *ibid.*, II, p. 100.

Such is the nature of the "true man".³⁷⁾

"Being without emotions" should not be taken to mean that the Perfect Man does not actually experience anger, delight, sadness, gladness, etc. He does experience all these things. 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 at the innermost core of his heart, even while he is experiencing those 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.³⁸⁾ 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.³⁹⁾

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 maintain firmly the "tranquillity" (i.e. unperturbedness) of the mind.⁴⁰⁾

(The "sacred man"), by being limpid and tranquil, becomes the norm of all

37) *ibid.*, VI, pp. 234-235.

38) 「其心志」 The last word 志 is explained by Kuo Hsiang as "being contented with whatever place it happens to be in" (「所居而安，爲志」). See *Shuo Wen*: 「志，心之所之也」。 There are many scholars who think that it is a mistake for 忘 (See, for example, Hsüan Ying 宣穎「南華經解」: 「志，當作忘，無思」), 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.

under Heaven.⁴¹⁾

Chuang-tzū, as usual, is less laconic in describing the virtue 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.⁴²⁾

41) *ibid.*, XLV.

42) *Chuang-tzū*, V, pp. 214-215.

Chapter 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 "tranquillity" 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 alone the ten thousand things 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 of Heaven, i.e. ultimately with the Way itself. In comporting himself in this manner, the Perfect Man embodies the activity of 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 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* is, in fact, a central theme of all the major schools of Chinese thought. Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū are no exception to this general rule. It is extremely interesting to notice in this respect that a man like Lao-tzū 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-tzū, 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 show himself. Therefore he is conspicuous.
 He does not justify himself. Therefore he is illustrious.
 He does not boast. Therefore he acquires merit.¹⁾

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 background, but the people spontaneously, and even without being conscious of it, push him to the fore. The *Tao Tê Ching* is filled with expressions which refer 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)".

(The "sacred man") blunts his sharpness, unfastens his knots, softens his glare, and falls into line with the dust. This I would call the Mysterious Levelling.

Such a man cannot be approached too intimately. Nor can he be kept too distant. One cannot benefit him, nor can one harm him. One cannot ennoble him, nor can one disgrace him.

For this reason he becomes the noblest of all under Heaven.²⁾

1) *Tao Tê Ching*, XXII.

2) *ibid.*, LVI; see also IV.

The "Mysteriohs Levelling" (*hsüan t'ung*)³⁾ is a very significant expression. The Perfect Man, as a human being, lives among ordinary people as a member of the 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. He looks the same as other men. 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. His is a "mysterious" levelling.

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-tzū and Chuang-tzū, 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".⁴⁾

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 enjoy wandering to his heart's content in the Village of There-Is-Absolutely-Nothing". But exactly by virtue of existing in this way beyond the world of dust and dirt, he places 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."⁵⁾ But he is good enough to be the absolute ruler of an empire, or even of the whole world.

What, then, are the politics of the Perfect Man? From the point of view of common sense, Chuang-tzū 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?"⁶⁾

Chuang-tzū declares that such a thing is nothing other than a "deceptive virtue".⁷⁾ "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 make a mosquito carry on its back a mountain!"⁸⁾

3) 玄同.

4) *op. cit.*, XXVIII.

5) *Chuang-tzū*, I, p. 16.

6) *ibid.*, VII, p. 290.

7) 欺德, *ch'i tê*.

8) *ibid.*, VII, p. 291.

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? 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 the bird flying high in the sky, escaping thereby the danger of being shot down by a stringed arrow; or of the 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?⁹⁾

What Chuang-tzū 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).¹⁰⁾

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-tzū, and Chuang-tzū, the highest and most ideal form of politics.

Lao-tzū describes the situation in the following terms:

9) *ibid.*, VII, p. 291.

10) *ibid.*, VII, p. 294.

A state may well be governed by "rectitude".¹¹⁾ A war may well be won by surprise. The empire, however, can be obtained only by Non-Action.¹²⁾

How do I know that it is so? By the following observation.

The more prohibitions and forbidden things there are in the empire, the poorer the people.

The more civilized instruments the people possess, the more confused the land.

The more arts and skills the people have, the more bizarre (useless) things will be produced.

The more laws and ordinances are promulgated, the more robbers and bandits there are.

Therefore the "sacred man" says: As I practise Non-Doing, the people are (morally) transformed of themselves. As I love "tranquillity", the people become righteous of themselves. As I practise Non-Action, the people become rich of themselves. As I am without desire, the people of themselves become as simple as "uncarved wood".¹³⁾

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 "non-doing". And (by being "non-doing") it leaves nothing undone.

Now if the lords and kings abide by this principle, the ten thousand things will of themselves be transformed (by their influence).

If in the process of this transformation, desire (to act positively, against Nature) should arise (on the part of some of the ten thousand things), I would calm it down with (the power of) the "nameless" simplicity of "uncarved wood".¹⁴⁾ (By being influenced by) the "nameless" simplicity of

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 (*chêng* 政) means "rectitude" (*chêng* 正). If you (govern the people) by "rectifying" yourself in the first place, no one would venture to act against "rectitude"—*Analects*, XII, 17.

12) 無事, *wu shih*, synonymous with *wu wei*. *Shih* is defined by Hsün-tzū as "doing something in expectation of getting a profit" (正利而爲謂之事), 荀子, 正名篇 XXII.

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.

“uncarved wood”, the (original) state of no-desire will (spontaneously) come back.

And if (the people) become “desireless” and, consequently, “tranquil”, the whole empire will of itself become rightly governed.¹⁵⁾

The Way in its absolute reality is “nameless”. (It is in this respect like “uncarved wood”).¹⁶⁾ The “uncarved wood”, insignificant though it might seem, is in reality such that nothing under Heaven is able to subjugate it. If the 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.¹⁷⁾

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”.¹⁸⁾ 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.

If there is anything which the “sacred man” desires, that is “not to desire” anything.....If there is anything which he learns, that is “not to learn”.¹⁹⁾ He thereby turns back constantly to (the Ultimate Source) which is passed by unnoticed by the common people. He assists the spontaneous development of the ten thousand things. (This is what he “does”) but he dares not act.²⁰⁾

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.

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.

18) 「爲無爲, 事無事」(*ibid.*, LXIV).

19) Ordinary men try hard to study and learn in order to increase their knowledge. The Perfect Man, on the contrary, learns to be without learning, so that at the ultimate stage of the decrease of knowledge he might be unified with the “simplicity” of the “uncarved wood”.

20) *op. cit.*, LXIV.

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. The point I would like to make this time concerns the inner state or attitude of those who are governed, the common people as the subjects over whom rules the Perfect Man.

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,²¹ while making their bellies full; weakens their wills,²² 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, there will be nothing that will not be duly governed.²³

Of old those (rulers) who excelled in practising the Way did not try to make the people wise and clever. Rather they used to make the people ignorant. The reason why the people are difficult to rule is that they have too much "knowledge".

21) It is the "mind" that insatiably seeks for "knowledge".

22) The "will" drives man toward gratifying his limitless desires.

23) *op. cit.*, III.

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 felicity to the country.

To know (the difference between) these two principles belongs to the standard measure (of the ruler). And always to know the standard measure (of politics) is to be regarded as 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;²⁴⁾ (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).²⁵⁾

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 government peculiar to the Perfect Man. And judged by this standard, all the remaining political forms are found to be imperfect in varying degrees.

The absolutely highest of all types of the ruler is represented by one of whom (the people) know only that there is a ruler (over them.)
 The next is the ruler to whom they are attracted and whom they praise.
 The next is the ruler whom they hold in awe.
 The next is the ruler whom they despise. The cause of this is the lack of truthfulness. (Because the ruler lacks truthfulness, his subjects do not trust him). (In order to prevent the occurrence of such a situation) he must (at least) be cautious and thoughtful enough to respect his own words. (However, even if he succeeds in keeping the confidence of his subjects in this way, his rule remains, after all, the lowest of all forms of government). (In the case of the highest type of government, on the contrary), the work is admirably accomplished, and the task done perfectly, yet the people all say: "This has been actualized to us of its own accord."²⁶⁾

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

24) 大順.

25) *ibid.*, LXV.

26) *ibid.*, XVII.

the ruler and greatly praise him, evidently refers to the Confucian ideal of "humaneness". We would do well to recall in this connection the words of Lao-tzū which we have quoted earlier.²⁷⁾ "Only when the great way declines, does the virtue of 'humaneness-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-tzū, not only the second-best, but something indicative of the decline of great Way.

Only when the great Way declines, does the virtue of "humaneness-righteousness" arise.

Only when intelligence and cleverness emerge in the world, does glaring deceit arise.

It is only because the six basic kinship relations are out of harmony that "filial piety" and "paternal love" are particularly emphasized.

Only when the state is in confusion and disorder, do "loyal" ministers appear.²⁸⁾

If (the ruler) abolishes "cleverness" and abandons "intelligence", the benefit received by the people will increase a hundredfold.

If he abolishes "humaneness" and abandons "righteousness", the people will (spontaneously) return to "filial piety" and "paternal love".²⁹⁾

If he abolishes skill and abandons (the pursuit of) profit, there will be no more thieves and bandits.

These three (principles) in themselves are (mere) adornments, and are not yet enough. They must be established on a real basis.. (That basis is): exhibiting (on the exterior) "simplicity", embracing (in the interior) the (principle of) "uncarved wood", decreasing the "ego", and reducing (to the utmost limit of possibility) "desires".³⁰⁾

We find basically the same idea clearly expressed in the *Chuang-tzū*. The great statesman of ancient times, Shun,³¹⁾ who is venerated by the Confucians as

27) See Chap. I, Note 6.

28) *op. cit.*, XVIII.

29) This may be thought to contradict what we have read in the preceding passage. In reality, however, there is no contradiction. For there, the point at issue was "filial piety" and "paternal love" being *verbally emphasized*. Here Lao-tzū is simply talking about the natural state of "filial piety" and "paternal love" which is actualized in the minds of the people, without there being anybody who "emphasizes" the importance of these virtues.

30) *op. cit.*, XIX.

31) 舜 (Yu Yü 有虞氏).

a "sacred emperor" was, from the standpoint of Chuang-tzū, but a politician of the second order, because Shun based himself on the virtue of "humaneness".

He held in himself the idea of "humaneness", and thereby sought to win men over. And he did win men over. But he did not transcend himself into the (spiritual) state of the "non-human".³²⁾

This observation of the "sacred emperor" Shun indicates that in the view of Chuang-tzū, the highest statesman must be a man who stands above the level of the Confucian virtues. He must be a man who has attained to the spiritual state of the "non-human". His spiritual state is "non-human", that is, far above the level of humanity, not to speak of "humaneness", because he has completely exterminated his "ego".

(Such a man), when he sleeps, sleeps peacefully, and when he is awake, looks "void" (because his mind is not sharply focused on the "goodness" or "badness" of this and that).

Sometimes he regards himself as a horse (i.e. if others call him a "horse", he accepts that appellation); sometimes he regards himself as an ox. (He is totally indifferent to these and other "essential" distinctions, because in his eyes all things are "chaotically" one.) His wisdom is really trustworthy, and his virtue is very true. None the less, he does not go entirely into the realm of the "non-human" (i.e. in spite of his "non-human" perfection, he still remains in the world of ordinary people, living with them, and among them, and governing them as their supreme ruler).³³⁾

In one of the passages which were quoted above, we saw how in Lao-tzū'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-tzū unreservedly agrees with Lao-tzū on this point. It goes without saying that, according to both Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū, in such a form of ideal government not only the people do not notice the merit of the ruler, but the ruler himself is not conscious of his own merit.

Lao-tzū:

32) *Chuang-tzū*, VII, p. 287. See also II, p. 83: 「大仁不仁」 "The Great Humaneness is non-humane", 「仁常而不成」 "Humaneness, when it is fixed (i.e. established as a virtue), is not perfect".

33) *ibid.*

The "sacred man" is such that he accomplishes his work, yet does not boast of his achievement; he performs meritorious deeds, yet does not place himself in the place of honor. He has no desire at all to manifest his ability.³⁴⁾

And Chuang-tzū:

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.³⁵⁾

I shall bring this chapter to a close by quoting from the *Tao Tê Ching* a passage in which Lao-tzū 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, few inhabitants. There are actually (in this country) men of great abilities, each being equivalent to ten or even a hundred (ordinary) men. But they find no place to use their abilities. The people (are so happy and contented that) they do not make light of their life, (i.e. they are reluctant to die because the life is so enjoyable.) Nor do they want to move to distant places. Thus, though there are ships and carts, there is no one who would use them. Though there are weapons of war, there arises no occasion to display them.

The people go back to (the Simplicity of immemorial antiquity) using knotted ropes (instead of the complicated system of writing).

34) *Tao Tê Ching*, LXXVII.

35) *Chuang-tzū*, VII, p. 296.

They are pleased with their food. They find beauty in their clothes. Happy and contented with their own homes, they find delight in their own customs.

The neighboring 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.³⁶⁾

36) *Tao Tê Ching*, LXXX.

Part Three

EXISTENCE

— A Comparative Consideration —

Chapter I

A METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION

As stated in the Introduction to the Part One of this work, I started this study prompted by the conviction that what Professor Henry Corbin calls "un dialogue dans la métahistoire" is something urgently needed in the present world situation. For at no time in the history of humanity has the need for mutual understanding among the nations of the world been more keenly felt than in our days. "Mutual understanding" may be realizable—or at least conceivable—at a number of different levels of life. The philosophical level is one of them, perhaps the most basic one. And it is characteristic of the philosophical level that, unlike other levels of human interest which are more or less closely connected with the current situations and actual conditions of the world, it allows of the "mutual understanding" here in question being actualized in the form of a meta-historical dialogue. And meta-historical dialogues, if conducted methodically, will, I believe, eventually be crystallized into a *philosophia perennis* in the fullest sense of the term. For the philosophical drive of the human Mind is, regardless of ages, places and nations, ultimately and fundamentally one.

I readily admit that the present work of mine is far from even coming close to this ideal. But at least such was the motive from which I undertook this study. In the first volume, attempt was made to lay bare the fundamental philosophical structure of the world-view of Ibn 'Arabi, one of the greatest thinkers of Islamic mysticism. The analytic work was done quite independently of any comparative considerations. I simply tried to isolate and analyze as rigorously as possible the major ontological concepts that constitute the basis of Ibn 'Arabi's philosophical world-view in such a way that it might form a completely independent study.

The second volume dealing with Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū is of a slightly different nature. Of course it is in itself an equally independent study of Taoist philosophy, which could very well be read as such. But it is slightly different from the first volume in one point; namely, that in isolating the key-concepts and presenting them in a systematic way, I already began preparations for the work of co-ordination and comparison. By this I am not simply referring to the fact that in the course of this work mention was made from time to time of this or that part of Ibn 'Arabi's thought. I am referring to something more fundamental

and of a more methodological nature.

I have just spoken of the "preparatory work for co-ordination and comparison". Concretely, this refers to the fact that I consciously arranged and presented the whole matter in such a way that the very analysis of the key-concepts of Taoism might bring to light the common philosophical ground upon which a meta-historical dialogue could become possible. Let this not be taken to mean that I modified the given material with a view to facilitating comparison, let alone having distorted the given facts, or forced something upon Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū for such a purpose. Rather, I should have said that an objective analysis itself of the Taoist key-terms naturally led me to the discovery of a central idea which might work as the most basic connecting link between the two systems of thought. The only arbitrary thing I did—if "arbitrary" it was—consisted in my having given a philosophical "name" to the central idea. The name is "existence". And the name once established, I could characterize the guiding spirit of the philosophical world-view of Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū as "existentialist" as opposed to the "essentialist" tendency of the Confucian school.

I think I have made it abundantly clear in the course of the present volume that by understanding the philosophy of Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū in terms of "existence", I have not arbitrarily forced upon them anything alien to their thought. The only point is that the Taoist sages themselves do not propose any definite "name" for this particular idea, whereas Ibn 'Arabī has the word *wujūd* which is, historically as well as structurally, the exact Arabic expression for the same idea. Certainly, Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū do use the word *yu* meaning "being" or "existence" in contradistinction from *wu* "non-being" or "non-existence". But, as we have seen, the *yu* in their system plays a very special role which is different from that of "existence" here in question. The *yu*, to wit, refers to a particular aspect or stage of the creative activity of the Absolute, the stage at which the absolutely "nameless" Absolute definitely turns into the "named" and begins to be diversified into myriads of things.

Far better than *yu* in this respect is the word *tao*, the Way, which is primarily an exact Taoist counterpart of the Islamic *ḥaqq*, the Truth or Reality. But *tao*, to begin with, is a word having an extremely complex connotative structure. It covers an extensive semantic field, ranging from the Mystery of Mysteries to the "being-so-of-itself" of all existents. Its meaning is, so to speak, tinged with so variegated nuances and charged with so many associations. Certainly it does cover to a great extent the meaning of "existence". But if used as an equivalent of "existence" it would inevitably add so many elements to the basic meaning of "existence". The use of the term "taoism", for example, instead of "existentialism" in those contexts where we want to bring out the radical contrast between the fundamental position of Taoism and "essentialism"—which by the

way, is an English equivalent for the Confucian conception of "names" (*ming*)— would make the whole situation more obscure and confusing. In order to refer to the particular aspect of the *tao* in which it is conceived as the *actus purus*, it is absolutely necessary that we should have a far less "colorful" word than *tao*. And "existence" is just the word for this purpose.

These considerations would seem to lead us to a very important methodological problem regarding the possibility of meta-historical dialogues. The problem concerns the need of a common linguistic system. This is but natural because the very concept of "dialogue" presupposes the existence of a common language between two interlocutors.

When our intention happens to be to establish a philosophical dialogue between two thinkers belonging to one and the same cultural and historical background, Plato and Aristotle, for instance, or Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, Kant and Hegel, etc., the problem of the necessity of a common language does not of course arise. The problem begins to make itself felt, when we pick up within a cultural tradition two thinkers separated one from the other by a number of factors, like Aristotle and Kant, for example. Each of them philosophized in a language which is different from that of the other. There is, in this sense, no common language between them. But in a broad sense, we can still say that there is a common philosophical language between the two, because of the strong tie of a common philosophical tradition that binds them together inseparably. It is, in fact, hardly imaginable that any key-term of primary importance in Greek should not find its equivalent in German.

The linguistic distance naturally becomes more conspicuous when we want to establish a dialogue between two thinkers belonging to two different cultural traditions, Avicenna and Thomas Aquinas, for example. But even here we are still justified in recognizing the existence of a common philosophical language in view of the fact that in the last analysis they represent but two varieties of scholastic philosophy, both of which ultimately going back to one and the same Greek source. The concept of "existence", for instance—in the linguistic form of *wujūd* in Arabic and in that of *existentia* in Latin—appears with the same basic connotation in both the Eastern and Western scholastic traditions. Thus the problem of a common language does not arise in a very acute form.

The problem does arise with acuity where there is no historical connection in any sense whatsoever between the two thinkers. And this is precisely the case with Ibn 'Arabī and Lao-tzū or Chuang-tzū. In such a case, if there happens to be a central concept being active in both systems, but having its linguistic counterpart only in one of the systems, we have to pinpoint the concept in the system in which it is in a state of non-linguistic fluidity or amorphousness, and

then stabilize it with a definite "name". The "name" may be borrowed from the other system, if the term actually in use in it happens to be a really appropriate one. Or some other word may be chosen for the purpose. In our particular case, Ibn 'Arabī offers the word *wujūd*, which, in its translated form, "existence" serves exactly our purpose, because it does express the concept to be expressed in as simple a manner as possible, that is, without "coloring" it with special connotations. The word remains connotatively colorless mainly due to the fact that Ibn 'Arabī uses with preference a variety of other terms, like *tajalli*, *fayḍ*, *rahmah*, *nafas*, etc., in order to describe the same concept with special connotations.

That we are not doing any injustice to the reality of the world-view of the Taoist sages by applying the word "existence" to the central idea of their thought will be clear if one takes the trouble of re-examining Chuang-tzū's description of the Cosmic Wind together with the analytic interpretation of it which has been given in Chapter VI.

However this may be, with the establishment of "existence" as the central concept of both systems, we are now in possession of a common philosophical ground on which to establish a meta-historical dialogue between Ibn 'Arabī on the one hand and Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū on the other. With this in mind, let us review the main points of the two philosophical systems which we have already analyzed in detail in the preceding pages.

I would like to point out at the outset that the philosophical structure of both systems as a whole is dominated by the concept of the Unity of Existence. This concept is expressed in Arabic by *wahdah al-wujūd*, literally the "one-ness of existence". For expressing the same basic concept, Chuang-tzū uses the words like *t'ien ni* "Heavenly Levelling" and *t'ien chün* "Heavenly Equalization".

The very words "levelling" and "equalization" clearly suggest that the "unity" in question is not a simple "unity", but a "unity" formed by many different things. The idea, in brief, is this. There are actually different things, but they are "equalized" with each other, or "levelled down" to the state of "unity". Otherwise expressed, the "unity" in question is a "unity" of "multiplicity". The same is true of the "*wahdah*" of Ibn 'Arabī.

In both of the systems, the whole world of Being is represented as a kind of ontological tension between Unity and Multiplicity. The Unity in the world-view of Ibn 'Arabī is represented by the *ḥaqq*, "Truth" or "Reality", while in that of Taoism it is represented by the *tao*, "Way". And the Multiplicity is for Ibn 'Arabī the *mumkinât* "possible beings" and for Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū the *wan wu*, "ten thousand things".

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{ḥaqq} \xrightarrow{\text{tajalli}} \text{mumkinât} \\ \text{tao} \xrightarrow{\text{shêng}^{1)}} \text{wan wu} \end{array}$$

And the relation between the two terms of the ontological tension is that of Unity. It is a Unity because all the things that constitute Multiplicity are, after all, so many different phenomenal forms assumed by the Absolute (the Truth and the Way respectively). The phenomenal process by which the original One diversifies itself into Many is considered by Ibn 'Arabî as the *tajalli*, "self-manifestation" of the One, and by Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū as *shêng* "producing". And Chuang-tzū, in particular, further elaborates this idea into that of the universal Transmutation, *wu hua*, lit. "things-transforming".

Such is the broad conceptual framework which is shared by the world-views of Ibn 'Arabî and the Taoist sages. The framework is in its entirety constructed on the most basic concept of "existence". In what follows we shall examine in terms of this framework and in terms of this basic concept the major points of emphasis which characterize the two philosophical systems.

1) 生, "produces" or "brings into existence".

Chapter II

THE INNER TRANSFORMATION OF MAN

The philosophical world-view of the "Unity of Multiplicity", whether in the form of the "Unity of Existence" or in the form of "Heavenly Equalization", is an unusual—to say the least—world-view. It is an extraordinary world-view because it is a product of an extraordinary vision of Existence as experienced by an extraordinary man. The most characteristic point about this type of philosophy is that philosophizing activity starts from an immediate intuitive grasp of Existence at its real depth, at the level of its being the "absolute" Absolute.

Existence, which has always and everywhere been the central theme for innumerable philosophers, can be approached and grasped at a number of different levels. The Aristotelian attitude represents in this respect the exact opposite of the position taken by the philosophers of Taoism and Sufism. For an Aristotle, Existence means primarily the existence of individual "things" on the concrete level of phenomenal "reality". And his philosophizing starts from the ordinary experience of Existence shared by all men on the level of common sense. For an Ibn 'Arabi or Chuang-tzū, however, these "things" as experienced by an ordinary mind on the physical level are nothing but a dream. From their point of view, the "things" grasped on that level—although ultimately they are but so many phenomenal forms of the Absolute, and are, as such, no other than Existence—do not reveal the real metaphysical depth of Existence. And an ontology based on such an experience touches only shallowly the surface of the "things" themselves; it is not in a position to account for the structure of the "things" in terms of the very ground of their Existence. A philosopher of this type is a man standing on the level of the "worldly state of being" (*nash'ah duniyawiyyah*), in the terminology of Ibn 'Arabi. Such a man lacks the "spiritual eyesight" (*'ayn al-baṣīrah*)—or "illuminating light" (*ming*) as Chuang-tzū calls it—which is absolutely necessary for a deeper penetration into the mystery of Existence. In order to obtain such an eyesight, man must experience a spiritual rebirth and be transferred from the "worldly state of being" to the "otherworldly state of being" (*nash'ah ukhrawiyyah*).

Since the former is the way the majority of men naturally are, men of the "otherworldly state of being" must necessarily appear as "abnormal" men. The world-view of Taoism and Sufism represents in this sense a vision of Existence

cular to "abnormal" men.

It is significant that the process by which this spiritual transformation occurs in man is described by Ibn 'Arabî and Chuang-tzū in such a way that it discloses both cases exactly the same basic structure. Ibn 'Arabî describes it in terms of "self-annihilation" (*fanâ*), and Chuang-tzū in terms of "sitting in oblivion" (*tso ung*). The very words used: "annihilation" and "forgetting", clearly point to the same and the same conception. And the same underlying conception is the "purification of the Mind", or as Chuang-tzū calls it, the spiritual "fasting".

As to what actually occurs in the process of the "purification", details have been given in the First and Second Parts of this book. And it would be pointless to repeat the description here. The "purification" in both Taoism and Sufism consists, in brief, in man's purifying himself of all desires as well as of the activity of Reason. It consists, in other words, in a complete nullification of the "ego" as the subject of all activities of the discriminating Reason and desires, resulting in the establishment of a new Ego, the Cosmic Ego, which, in the case of Taoism, is considered to be completely at one with the Absolute in its creative activity, and, in the case of Ibn 'Arabî, is said to be unified with the Absolute to the utmost limit of possibility.

Perhaps the most interesting point concerning this topic from the viewpoint of comparative consideration is the problem of the "stages" of the "purification". A comparative consideration is here the more interesting because both Ibn 'Arabî and Chuang-tzū distinguish in the process three basic stages. The two systems differ from each other in details, but agree with each other in the main.

Let us begin by recapitulating the thesis put forward by Chuang-tzū. The first stage, according to him, consists in "putting the world outside the Mind", that is to say, forgetting the existence of the objective world. The world as something "objective" being by nature relatively far from the Mind from the very beginning, it is relatively easy for man to erase it from his consciousness through contemplation.

The second stage consists in "putting the things outside the Mind", that is, erasing from the consciousness the familiar things that surround the man in his daily life. At this stage, the external world completely disappears from his consciousness.

The third stage is said to consist in the man's forgetting Life, that is, his own life or his personal existence. The "ego" is thereby completely destroyed, and the world, both external and internal, disappears from the consciousness. And at the same time as the "ego" is nullified, the inner eye of the man is opened and the light of "illumination" suddenly breaks through the darkness of the spiritual night. This marks the birth of a new Ego in the man. The man now

finds himself in the Eternal Now, beyond all limitations of time and space. He is also "beyond Life and Death", that is, he is "one" with all things, and all things are in his "no-consciousness" unified into "one". In this spiritual state, unusual Tranquillity or Calmness reigns over everything. And in this cosmic Tranquillity, away from the turmoil and agitation of the sensible world, the man enjoys being unified and identified with the very process of the universal Transmutation of the ten thousand things.

As for Ibn 'Arabī who, as I have just said, divides the process into three stages, provides a markedly Islamic version of the spiritual "purification". The first stage is the "annihilation of the attributes". At this stage the man has his "human" attributes nullified, and in their place he assumes as his own the Divine Attributes.

The second stage consists in that the man has his own personal "essence" nullified and realizes in himself his being one with the Divine Essence. This is the completion of the phenomenon of the "self-annihilation" in the proper sense of the word, what comes thereafter being, properly speaking, the stage of "self-subsistence" (*baqā'*). This stage corresponds to the first half of the third stage of Chuang-tzū, in which the man is said to abandon his old "ego".

The third stage, according to Ibn 'Arabī, is the stage at which the man regains his "self" which he has "annihilated" at the previous stage. Only he does not regain his "self" under the same conditions as before, but he regains it in the very midst of the Divine Essence. This is evidently but another way of saying that having abandoned his old "ego" he has obtained a new Ego. Having lost his life, he has found a new Life in being unified with the Divine Reality.

This third stage corresponds to the latter half of the third stage according to Chuang-tzū's division of the process. Now the man witnesses all phenomenal things mingling with each other and merging into the boundless ocean of Divine Life. His consciousness—or, to be more exact, supra-consciousness—is almost identical with the Divine Consciousness in an ontological stage previous to its actual splitting into an infinity of determinations and particular forms. Naturally he falls into profound Silence, and an extraordinary Tranquillity reigns over his concentrated Mind.

There is another important point to be mentioned in connection with the problem of the "purification" of the Mind. It concerns the centripetal direction of the "purification". The process of the "self-annihilation" or "self-purification", if it is to succeed, must definitely be turned and directed toward the innermost core of human existence. This direction clearly goes against the ordinary movements of the Mind. The activity of the Mind is usually characterized by its centrifugal tendency. The Mind has a very marked natural tendency to "go out

toward the external world, attracted by, and in pursuit of, external objects. For the sake of "purification", this natural tendency must be curbed and turned to the opposite direction. The "purification" is realizable only by man's "turning into himself". This is expressed by Ibn 'Arabi through the famous Tradition: "He who knows himself knows his Lord". To this corresponds on the side of Taoism the dictum of Lao-tzū: "He who knows others (i.e. external objects) is a 'clever' man, but he who knows himself is an "illuminated" man. In reference to the same situation, Lao-tzū also speaks of "closing up all the openings and doors". "Closing up all the openings and doors" means obstructing all the possible outlets for the centrifugal activity of the mind. What is aimed at thereby is man's going down deep into his own mind until he comes into direct touch with the existential core of himself.

The reason why this point must be mentioned as being of special importance is the fact that such a thesis would appear at first sight to contradict the more fundamental thesis of the Unity of Existence. For in the world-view of both Ibn 'Arabi and the Taoist sages, not only ourselves but all the things in the world, without a single exception, are phenomenal forms of the Absolute. And as such, there can be no basic difference between them. All existents equally manifest, each in its particular way and particular form, the Absolute. Why, then, are the external things to be considered detrimental to the subjective actualization of the Unity of Existence?

The answer is not far to seek. The external things, although they are so many forms of the Absolute, and although we do know the fact intellectually, we cannot penetrate into their interior and experience from the inside the palpitating Life of the Absolute as it is actively working within them. All we are able to do is look at them from the outside. Only in the case of our own selves, can each of us go into his "inside" and *in-tuit* the Absolute as something of his own. Only in this way can we subjectively participate in the Mystery of Existence.

Besides, the centrifugal tendency of the mind is directly connected with the discriminating activity of Reason. And Reason cannot subsist without taking an "essentialist" position. For where there are no conceptual boundaries Reason is utterly powerless. In the view of Reason, the "reality" consists of various "things" and "qualities", each having what is called "essence" by which it is distinguished from the rest. These "things" and "qualities" are, in reality, nothing but so many forms in which the Absolute manifests itself. But in so far as they are self-subsistent and independently existent entities, they conceal the Absolute behind their solid "essential" veils. They intervene between our sight and the Absolute, and make our direct intuition of the Reality impossible. The majority of men are those whose eyesight is obstructed in this way by the thick curtain of the "things". They have their counterpart in Taoism in those people

who, being unable to "chaotify" the "things", cannot interpret the reality except in terms of "this"-or-"that", "good"-or-"bad", "right"-or-"wrong", etc.

When the "purification" of the Mind is completed, and when the man has turned into a metaphysical Void, forgetting both the inside and the outside of himself, he is allowed to experience what the Taoist sages call "illumination" (*ming*) and what Ibn 'Arabī calls "unveiling" (*kashf*) or "immediate tasting" (*dhawq*). It is characteristic of both "illumination" and "unveiling" (or "tasting") that this ultimate stage once fully actualized, the "things" that have been eliminated in the process of "purification" from the consciousness all come back once again, totally transformed, to his Mind which is now a well-polished spotless mirror—the Mysterious Mirror,¹⁾ as Lao-tzū calls it. Thus it comes about that the highest degree of the metaphysical intuition is not that of those who witness only the Absolute, wholly oblivious of the phenomenal aspect. The highest form of "unveiling", according to Ibn 'Arabī, is of those who witness both the creatures and the Absolute as two aspects of one Reality, nay, who witness the whole as one Reality diversifying itself constantly and incessantly according to various aspects and relations, being "one" in Essence, and "all" with regard to the Names.

Likewise, the Perfect Man of Taoism does perceive infinitely variegated things on the phenomenal level of Existence, and the spotless surface of his Mysterious Mirror reflects all of them as they appear and disappear. But this kaleidoscope of ever shifting forms does not perturb the cosmic Tranquillity of the Mind, because behind these variegated veils of the phenomenal world, he intuits the metaphysical "One". Nay, he himself is one with the constant flux of Transmutation, and being one therewith, he is one with the "One".

The philosophical world-view of an Ibn 'Arabī or a Lao-tzū (Chuang-tzū) is a product of such an "abnormal" spiritual state. It is an ontology, because it is a philosophized vision of Existence. But it is an extraordinary ontology, because the underlying vision of Existence is far from being an ordinary one.

1) 玄覽, *hsüan lan*, X.

Chapter III

THE MULTISTRATIFIED STRUCTURE OF REALITY

In terms of historical origin there is obviously no connection at all between Sufism and Taoism. Historically speaking, the former goes back to a particular form of Semitic monotheism known as Islam, while the latter—if the hypothesis which I have put forward at the outset of this study is correct—is a philosophical elaboration of the Far Eastern type of shamanism.

It is highly significant that, in spite of this wide historico-cultural distance that separates the two from each other, they share, on the philosophical level, the same ground. They agree with each other, to begin with, in that both base their philosophical thinking on a very peculiar conception of Existence which is fundamentally identical, though differing from one another in details and on secondary matters.

They further agree with one another in that philosophizing in both cases has its ultimate origin not in *reasoning* on Existence but in *experiencing* Existence. Further more, “experiencing” Existence in this particular case consists in experiencing it not on the ordinary level of sense perception, but on the level (or levels) of supra-sensible intuition.

Existence or Reality as “experienced” on supra-sensible levels reveals itself as of a multistratified structure. The Reality which one observes in this kind of intuition is not of a uni-stratum structure. And the vision of Reality thus obtained is totally different from the ordinary view of “reality” which is shared by the common people.

It is extremely interesting that both Ibn ‘Arabî and Chuang-tzū begin by giving a rude shock to common sense by flatly refusing to admit any reality to the so-called “reality”, saying that the latter is nothing but a dream. Quoting the famous Tradition: “All men are asleep; only when they die, do they wake up”, Ibn ‘Arabî says: “The world is an illusion; it has no real existence..... Know that you yourself are an imagination. And everything that you perceive and say to yourself, ‘this is not me’, is also an imagination”. In an exactly similar way Chuang-tzū remarks: “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". Thus we see the so-called "reality" being all of a sudden transformed and reduced to something dreamlike and unreal.

Far more remarkable, however, is the fact that for both Ibn 'Arabi and Chuang-tzū the dictum: "All are a dream" has a very positive metaphysical meaning. It is not in any way an emotive statement to the effect, for instance, that the world we live in is like a dream, that everything in this world is tragically ephemeral and transient. It is, on the contrary, a definite ontological statement recognizing the existence of a higher ontological level where all things are deprived of their seemingly solid essential boundaries and disclose their natural amorphousness. And paradoxically enough, this "dreamlike" level of Existence is, in the view of both Ibn 'Arabi and Chuang-tzū, far more "real" than the so-called "reality".

This dreamlike level of Existence is in the ontological system of Ibn 'Arabi what he calls the "world of similitudes and Imagination", while in that of Chuang-tzū it is the Chaos.

Thus the basic proposition that all are a dream does not mean that the so-called "reality" is a vain and groundless—and therefore utterly valueless—thing. Instead of meaning simply that the physical world is a sheer illusion, the proposition indicates that the world which we experience on the sensible level is not a self-subsistent reality, but is a Symbol vaguely and indistinctly pointing to "Something beyond". The sensible things, thus interpreted, are phenomenal forms of the Absolute itself, and as such, they *are* "real" in a particular way.

However, this again is a matter of immediate intuitive experience. The metaphysical fact that behind and beyond the so-called "reality", which is apparently a colorful fabric of fantasy and imagination, there lies hidden the "real" Reality does not become clear except to those who have learnt how to "interpret" rightly—as Ibn 'Arabi says—the infinitely variegated forms and properties as so many manifestations of the Reality. This is what is meant by Ibn 'Arabi when he says that one has to "die and wake up". "The only 'reality' (in the true sense of the term) is the Absolute revealing itself as it really is in the sensible forms which are nothing but the loci of its self-manifestation. This point becomes understandable only when one wakes up from the present life—which is a sleep of forgetfulness—after one dies to this world through self-annihilation in God". Chuang-tzū, likewise, speaks of the need of experiencing a Great Awakening. "Only when one experiences a Great Awakening does one realize that the 'reality' is but a Big Dream. But the stupid imagine that they are actually awake.How deep-rooted and irremediable their stupidity is!".

In the eye of those who have experienced this spiritual Awakening, all things,

each in its own form and on its own level, manifest the presence of "Something beyond". And that "Something beyond" is ultimately the *ḥaqq* of Ibn 'Arabi and the *tao* of Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū—the Absolute. Both Ibn 'Arabi and the Taoist sages distinguish in the process of the self-revealing evolvment of the Absolute several degrees or stages. Ontologically speaking this would mean that Existence is of a multistratified structure.

The strata, according to Ibn 'Arabi, are:

- (1) The stage of the Essence (the absolute Mystery, abysmal Darkness);
- (2) The stage of the Divine Attributes and Names (the stage of Divinity);
- (3) The stage of the Divine Actions (the stage of Lordship);
- (4) The stage of Images and Similitudes;
- (5) The sensible world.

And according to Lao-tzū:

- (1) Mystery of Mysteries;
- (2) Non-Being (Nothing, or Nameless);
- (3) One;
- (4) Being (Heaven and Earth);
- (5) The ten thousand things.

The two systems agree with each other in that (1) they regard the first stage as an absolute Mystery, that is, something absolutely unknown-unknowable, transcending all distinctions and all limitations, even the limitation of "not being limited"; and that (2) they regard the four remaining stages as so many various forms assumed by this absolute Mystery in the process of its ontological evolvment, so that all are, in this sense, "one". This latter point, namely, the problem of Unity, will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter IV

ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

As we have seen above, both Chuang-tzū's "Heavenly Levelling" and Ibn 'Arabī's "Unity of Existence" are based on the idea that all things are ultimately reducible to the original Unity of the Absolute in its absoluteness, that is, the "Essence at the level of Unity (*aḥadiyyah*)".

It is to be remarked that the *Essence* in the Unity of its unconditional simplicity is, in Ibn 'Arabī's view, nothing other than pure *Existence*, there being here not even the slightest discrepancy between "essence" (i.e. "quiddity") and "existence". In other words, the Absolute is *actus purus*, the act itself of "existing". The Absolute is not a "thing" in the sense of a "substance".

As Qâshânî says: "The Reality called the 'Essence at the level of Unity' in its true nature is nothing other than Existence pure and simple in so far as it is Existence. It is conditioned neither by non-determination nor by determination, for in itself it is too sacred to be qualified by any property and any name. It has no quality, no delimitation; there is not even a shadow of Multiplicity in it. It is not a substance....., for a substance must have an 'essence' other than 'existence', a 'quiddity' by which it is a substance as differentiated from all others".

The conception of the Absolute being conditioned neither by determination nor by non-determination is more tersely expressed by Lao-tzū through single words like "Nothing" and "Nameless", and by Chuang-tzū through the expression No-[No Non-Being]. The last expression, No-[No Non-Being], indicates analytically the stages in the logical process by which one arrives at the realization of the Absolute transcending all determinations. First, the idea that the Absolute is *Being*, i.e. "existence" as ordinarily understood, is negated. The concept of *Non-Being* is thus posited. Then, this concept of Non-Being is eliminated, because, being a simple negation of Being, it is but a relative Non-Being. Thus the concept of *No-Non-Being* is obtained. This concept stands on the negation of both Being and Non-Being, and as such it still keeps in itself a trace or reflection of the opposition which exists between the contradictories. In order to eliminate even this faint trace of relativity, one has to negate the No-Non-Being itself. Thus finally the concept of No-[No Non-Being] is established, as "Nothing" in its absolutely unconditional transcendence.

And Chuang-tzū clarifies through the admirable symbol of the Cosmic Wind

that this transcendent Nothing is not a purely negative "nothing" in the usual sense of the word; that, on the contrary, it is a supra-plenitude of Existence as the ultimate ontological ground of everything, as Something that lies at the very source of all existents and makes them exist. "It would seem", Chuang-tzū says, "that there is some real Ruler. 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". This simply means that the No-[No Non-Being]—or theologically, the real Ruler of the world—is *actus*, not a substance. The Cosmic Wind in itself is invisible and impalpable—because it is not a substance—but we know its presence through its ontological activity, through the ten thousand "holes" and "hollows" producing each its peculiar sound as the Wind blows upon them.

The basic idea underlying the use of the symbol of the Wind is comparable with Ibn 'Arabi's favorite image of the "flowing" of Existence (*sarayân al-wujûd*). "The secret of Life (i.e. Existence) lies in the act of flowing peculiar to water". The "water" of Existence is eternally flowing through all things. It "spreads" throughout the universe, permeating and pervading everything. It is significant that both Chuang-tzū and Ibn 'Arabi represent Existence as something moving: "blowing", "flowing", "spreading", "permeating" etc. This because Existence is *actus* in their view.

Existence which is *actus*, thus spreading itself out far and wide, goes on producing the ten thousand things. The latter, as I have repeatedly explained, are various forms in which Existence (or the Absolute) manifests itself. And in this sense, all are Existence, nothing but Existence. And there is nothing but Existence. Viewed from this angle, the whole world of Being is one.

On the other hand, however, it is also an undeniable fact that we actually see with our own eyes an infinity of infinitely variegated "things" which are definitely different from one another. "It is evident", Ibn 'Arabi says, "that *this* is different from *that*. And in the Divine world, however wide it is, nothing repeats itself. This is a truly fundamental fact". From this point of view, there is not a single thing that is the same as any other thing. Even "one and the same thing" is in reality not exactly the same in two successive moments.

These individually different things, on a more universal level of Existence, still retain their mutual differences and distinctions, not "individually" this time, but in terms of "essences". And these ontological differences and distinctions which the "things" manifest on this level are even far more solid and unalterable because they are based on, and fixed by, their "essences". The latter provide the "things" with an "essential" fixity which ensures them from disintegration. A "horse" is a "horse" by its "essence"; it can never be a "dog". A "dog" is

“essentially” a “dog”, nothing else. It goes without saying that this is the very basis on which stands the “essentialist” type of ontology.

How could we account for the apparent contradiction between the above-mentioned absolute Unity of Existence, Unity of all things, and the undeniable Multiplicity of the ten thousand things which are not reducible to each other, let alone to a unique and single thing? Surely, if one puts these two points of view side by side with each other, one's mind cannot help being thrown into bewildering confusion. To see the One in the Many and the Many in the One, or rather to see the Many as One and the One as Many—this naturally causes what Ibn 'Arabi calls (metaphysical) “perplexity” (*hayrah*).

Faced with this problem, Chuang-tzū takes a thoroughgoing anti-essentialist position. The view of the things, each being distinguished from the rest by a solid “boundary” of “essence”, he maintains, does not give a true picture of these things themselves. The “essential” distinctions which common sense and Reason recognize between the things are, according to him, devoid of reality. The “things” ordinarily look as if they were distinct from each other in terms of Essence, simply because ordinary men are not “awake”. If they were, they would “chaotify” the things and see the latter in their original “undifferentiation”.

The things being “chaotified”, however, is not the same as their being sheer nothing. The very concept of “chaotification” would be meaningless if there were no plurality at all in the world of Being. It is, as Ibn 'Arabi maintains, a truly fundamental fact that many “different” things do exist, no matter how “unreal” they may be in themselves and from the viewpoint of the higher metaphysical level of Existence. The differences and distinctions that are observable in the world may reveal themselves as “unreal” when observed with the “spiritual eyesight” of an ecstatic philosopher, but in so far as the things are *factually* different and distinct from each other, there must be some ontological ground for that, too. And the ontological ground cannot be anything other than “essences”

The “essences” are symbolically designated by Chuang-tzū through the image of the “hollows” in the trees, which emit all kinds of sounds as the Wind blows upon them. Chuang-tzū does not assert that the “hollows” do not exist in any sense whatsoever. They are surely there. The only point is that they do not produce any sound by themselves. It is the Wind, not the “hollows”, that really produces the sounds. “(One and the same Wind) blows on the 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?”

All this would seem to be tantamount to saying—although Chuang-tzū himself does not talk in terms of these concepts—that the “essences” are not

sheer nothing, that they are potentially existent. The "essences" do exist, but only *in potentia*, not *in actu*; they are not actual or real in the fullest sense of the word. What is really "real" is Existence, nothing else. And the "essences" look as if they were "real" only by dint of the actualizing activity of Existence.

The position of the "hollows" in the ontology of Chuang-tzū corresponds to that of the "permanent archetypes" in the ontology of Ibn 'Arabī. The main difference between the two lies in the fact that in the former the relation between Essence and Existence is merely symbolically suggested, whereas Ibn 'Arabī consciously takes up the problem as an ontological theme and elaborates it far more theoretically.

Details have been given in Chapter XII of the First Volume regarding the conceptual structure of the "permanent archetypes". Suffice it here to note that the "permanent archetypes" are the "essences" of the things, and that they are described as "neither existent nor non-existent"—which would exactly apply to the "hollows" of Chuang-tzū. It is remarkable, however, that the "permanent archetypes" are also described by Ibn 'Arabī as "realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) eternally subsistent in the world of the Unseen". That is to say, the "permanent archetypes", although they are "non-existent" in terms of "external existence", do exist *in actu* within the Divine Consciousness. The ontology of Ibn 'Arabī is, in this respect, Platonic; it is more "essentialist" than that of Chuang-tzū who does not recognize anything more than sheer potentiality to the "essences".

Chapter V

THE SELF-EVOLVEMENT OF EXISTENCE

The absolute and ultimate ground of Existence is in both Sufism and Taoism the Mystery of Mysteries. The latter is, as Ibn 'Arabi says, the *ankar al-nakirât*, "the most indeterminate of all indeterminates"; that is to say, it is Something that transcends all qualifications and relations that are humanly conceivable. And since it is transcendent to such a degree, it remains for ever unknown and unknowable. Existence *per se* is thus absolutely inconceivable and inapproachable. Ibn 'Arabi refers to this aspect of Existence by the word '*amâ*', or abysmal Darkness. In the Taoist system, it is *hsüan* or Mystery that is the most proper word for referring to this absolutely transcendent stage of Existence.

The Taoist sages have also a set of negative words like *wu*, Non-Being, *wu-wu*, No-thing or "Nothing", *wu-ming*, Nameless etc.. These terms are properly to be considered as functioning still within the domain of the original transcendence. Conceptually, however, there is already observable a distinction between these negative terms and the "Mystery", because their very being "negative" indicates their being opposed to something "positive", i.e. the following stage of *yu* or Being, at which the "boundaries" of the things-to-be are adumbrated. This is the reason why Chuang-tzū proposes to use the complex expression, No-[No Non-Being] or No-No-Nothing in order to refer to the ultimate stage of Existence (i.e. the Mystery of Mysteries) without leaving the level of negativity. However, this distinction between the Mystery and these negative terms is exclusively a conceptual one. Otherwise, "Non-Being", "Nothing", and "Nameless" denote exactly the same thing as the "Mystery". They all denote the Absolute in its absoluteness, or Existence at its ultimate stage, *qua* Something unknown-unknowable, transcending all qualifications, determinations, and relations.

Now Ibn 'Arabi calls this ontological level the "level of Unity (*aḥadiyyah*)". The Absolute at this stage is "One" in the sense that it refuses to accept any qualification whatsoever. Thus, being one here means nothing other than absolute transcendence.

The Taoist sages, too, speak of the Way being "One". As I have tried to show earlier, the "One" in the Taoist system is conceptually to be placed between the stage of Non-Being and that of Being. It is not exactly the same as the Way

quâ Mystery, because it is considered as something which the ten thousand things "acquire", i.e. partake of. The One, in other words, is the principle of immanence. The Way is "immanent" in everything existent as its existential core, or as its Virtue, as Lao-tzū calls it. But whether regarded as "immanent" or "transcendent", the Way is the Way. What is immanent in everything is exactly the same thing as what transcends everything. And this situation corresponds to the conceptual distinction between *tanzîh* and *tashbîh* and the factual identity of the two in the system of Ibn 'Arabî.

Thus the Taoist concept of One, in so far as it refers to the Absolute itself, is an exact counterpart of Ibn 'Arabî's *aḥad*, the "absolute One", but in so far as it is "One" comprising within itself the possibility of Multiplicity, it is a counterpart of *wāḥid*, i.e. the "One at the level of the Names and Attributes", or the Unity of the Many. In short, the Taoist One comprises both the *aḥad* and the *wāḥid* of Sufism.

These considerations make us realize that the first and ultimate stage of Existence itself naturally allows of being considered from two different angles: (1) as the Absolute *per se*, and (2) as the Absolute as the very origin and starting-point of the process of self-evolvement. In the first of these two aspects, the Absolute is Mystery and Darkness. In the second aspect, on the contrary, a faint foreboding of light is already perceivable in the very midst of utter darkness. As Ibn 'Arabî says: "Everything is contained in the bosom of the Breath, just as the bright light of day is in the very darkness of dawn".

It is quite significant in this respect that the word used by the Taoist sages to denote the Mystery: *hsüan*, originally means "black" with a mixture of redness. Lao-tzū, as we have noticed, likes to use in this sense also the word *p'u* meaning originally "uncarved wood". Existence, at this stage of absolute simplicity, is like "uncarved wood". In so far as it still remains "uncarved", there is nothing observable but "wood". But in so far as it contains the possibility of producing all kinds of vessels and utensils, it is more than sheer "wood". Actually it is still "Nothing", but potentially it is all things. There is at least a vague and indistinct feeling that something is about to happen. And that is the "positive" aspect of the Mystery, the face of the Absolute turned toward the world of creation. Ibn 'Arabî conveys the same idea by the expression: "hidden treasure", which he has taken from a Tradition. And it is of the very nature of the "hidden Treasure" that it "loves to be known".

It is, however, at the stage of the Divine Names and Attributes—in terms of Ibn 'Arabî's world-view—that this "love of being known", i.e. the inner ontological drive of Existence, becomes actualized. At the stage of the absolute Unity, the Absolute *qua* Absolute is characterized by a perfect "independence",

and it does not require by itself and for itself any creative activity. If "creation" is at all conceivable at this stage, it is simply in the form of a faint foreboding. In the system of Taoism the concept of Non-Being or Nothing refers precisely to this delicate situation. "Deep and bottomless", Lao-tzū says, "it is like the origin and principle of the ten thousand things.....There is *nothing*, and yet there seems to be Something. I know not whose son it is. It would seem to be antecedent even to the Heavenly Emperor". "The Way in its reality is utterly vague, utterly indistinct. Utterly indistinct, utterly vague, and yet there is in the midst of it an Image. Utterly vague, utterly indistinct, and yet there is in the midst of it Something".

The "hidden treasure loves to be known". The treasure lies "hidden", and yet it is, so to speak, pressed from inside by the "desire to be known". Speaking less symbolically, the infinite things that are contained in the Absolute in the state of pure *potentia* forcefully seek for an outlet. This naturally causes an ontological tension within the Absolute. And the internal ontological situation, growing ever more strained, finally relieves itself by bursting forth. It is highly interesting to notice that both Ibn 'Arabî and Chuang-tzū resort to the same kind of imagery in trying to describe this situation. Chuang-tzū talks about "eructation". He says: "The Great Earth eructates; and the eructation is called Wind. 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". The issuing forth of the ten thousand things from the Absolute is here compared to the Great Earth belching forth the Wind.

No less bold and picturesque is the mythopoeic image of "breathing out" by which Ibn 'Arabî tries to depict the matter. The ontological state of extreme tension which precedes the "bursting out" and which has been caused by an excessive amount of things accumulated inside is compared to the state in which a man finds himself when he holds his breath compressed within himself. The tension reaches the last limit, and the air compressed in the breast explodes and gushes forth with a violent outburst. In a similar way, the creative drive of Existence gushes forth out of the depth of Absolute. This is the phenomenon which Ibn 'Arabî calls the "breath of the Merciful". In the theological language peculiar to Ibn 'Arabî, the same phenomenon can also be described as the Divine Names, at the extreme limit of inner compression, suddenly bursting out from the bosom of the Absolute. "The Names, previous to their existence in the outer world (in the form of phenomenal things) exist hidden in the Essence of the Absolute (i.e. the Mystery of Mysteries), all of them seeking an outlet toward the world of external existence. The situation is comparable to the case in which a man holds his breath within himself. The breath, held within, seeks an outlet

toward the outside, and this causes in the man a painful sensation of extreme compression. Only when he breathes out does this compression cease to make itself felt. Just as the man is tormented by the compression if he does not breathe out, so the Absolute would feel the pain of (ontological) compression if it did not bring into existence the world in response to the demand of the Names". This may also be compared with the image of a great Cosmic Bellows by which Lao-tzū symbolically describes the inexhaustible creative activity of the Way. "The space between Heaven and Earth is comparable to a bellows. It is empty (i.e. the Absolute *qua* the Mystery of Mysteries is 'Nothing'), but its activity is inexhaustible. The more it works the more it produces".

Thus Existence, in compliance with its own necessary and natural internal demand, goes on inexhaustibly determining itself into an infinity of concrete things. And the "breath of the Merciful" or the ontological Mercy pervades all of them, constituting the very existential core of each one of them. And the existential core thus acquired by each phenomenal thing is what the Taoist sages call *tê* or Virtue.

It is worthy to be remarked that the *rahmah* or Mercy as understood by Ibn 'Arabi is primarily an ontological fact. It refers to the *actus* of Existence, namely, the act of making things exist. It does not primarily denote the emotive attitude of compassion and benevolence. But Mercy as *bestowal* of existence of course carries an emotive and subjective overtone. And this squares well with the ethical understanding of God in Islam. The creative activity of Existence is represented in Taoism in a form which is diametrically opposed to such a conception. For in Taoism the Way is said to be "non-humane" (*pu jên*). "Heaven and Earth", Lao-tzū says, "lack 'humaneness'. They treat the ten thousand things as if the latter were straw dogs". The difference between the two systems, however, is only superficial. For whether described in terms of Mercy or non-Mercy, the basic fact described remains exactly the same. This because the ontological Mercy, in the conception of Ibn 'Arabi, is absolutely gratuitous. What is meant by both Mercy and non-Mercy is nothing other than the all-pervading creative activity of Existence. Ibn 'Arabi himself warns us against understanding the word *rahmah* with its usual associations. "There does not come into its activity any consideration of attaining an aim, or of a thing's being or not being suitable for a purpose. Whether suitable or unsuitable, the Divine Mercy covers everything and anything with existence".

This explanation of Mercy by Ibn 'Arabi is so congenial to the spirit of Taoism that it will pass *verbatim* for an explanation by a Lao-tzū of the Taoist concept of non-Mercy which is as equally impartial and indiscriminating as Ibn 'Arabi's Mercy in bestowing the gift of "existence" upon everything and every-

body. In the view of Lao-tzū, the creative activity of the Absolute is extended over the ten thousand things without a single exception precisely because it stands on the principle of non-Mercy. If even a trifling amount of human emotions were involved therein, the Absolute would not be acting with such an absolute impartiality. In the view of Ibn 'Arabi, on the contrary, the Absolute bestows "existence" to all things without excluding anything precisely because it is an act of Mercy. The Divine Mercy being by nature limitlessly wide, it covers the whole world. As is obvious, the underlying idea is in both cases one and the same.

The structure itself of this concept of Mercy or non-Mercy is directly connected with another important idea: that of the Absolute being "beyond good and evil". The creative activity of the Absolute, which consists in the bestowal of "existence" *qua* "existence" upon everything involves no moral judgment. From the point of view of the Absolute, it does not matter at all whether a given object be good or bad. Nay, there is absolutely no such distinction among the objects. The latter assume these and other evaluational properties only after having been given "existence" by the indiscriminating act of the Absolute; and that from the particular points of view of the creatures. Otherwise, all existents are on the "straight way"—as Ibn 'Arabi says—or all existents are "so-of-themselves"—as the Taoist sages say. There is no distinction at this stage between good and evil.

This idea is formulated by Lao-tzū and Chuang-tzū in terms of a "relativist" view of all values. Ordinary men distinguish between "good" and "bad", "beautiful" and "ugly", "noble" and "ignoble", etc., and construct their life, social as well as personal, on these distinctions as if they were objective categories that have been fixed in an unalterable way by the very nature of the things. In truth, however, these and other seemingly solid objective categories, far from being "objective", are but products of "subjective" and "relative" points of view. A "beautiful" lady from the human point of view, Chuang-tzū argues, is "ugly" and "terrifying" enough, from the point of view of other animals, to make them run away as fast as their legs or wings can carry them. The distinctions are a sheer matter of relative viewpoints, a matter of likes and dislikes. As Ibn 'Arabi says: "The bad is nothing other than what one dislikes, while the good is nothing other than what one likes".

Thus in both Sufism and Taoism the basic proposition holds true that everything is primarily, that is, *qua* "existence", neither good nor evil. However there is a certain respect—again both in Sufism and Taoism—in which everything is to be considered fundamentally "good". This because everything *qua* "existence" is a particular self-manifestation of the Absolute itself. And looked at

from such a viewpoint, all things in the world are "one". As Chuang-tzū says: "(However different they may look from each other) they are, in reality no other than so many things that are 'affirmable' piled up one upon the other". They are at one with each other in being fundamentally "affirmable", i.e. good. The Perfect Man "is 'one', whether he (seemingly) likes something or dislikes something". And Lao-tzū: "The good I treat as good. But even those who are not good I treat as good, because Virtue is good. The truthful I treat as truthful. But even those who are not truthful I treat as truthful, because Virtue is truthful". Such an attitude would immediately be approved by Ibn 'Arabi, who says: "What is bad is bad simply because of (the subjective impression caused by) the taste; but the same thing will be found to be essentially good, if considered apart from the (subjective attitude on the part of man) of liking or disliking".

These considerations make it clear that for both Ibn 'Arabi and the Taoist sages there is the closest and most intimate relationship between the Absolute and the things of the phenomenal world. Although the latter are apparently far removed from the Absolute, they are after all so many different forms which the Absolute assumes in making itself manifest at various stages and in various places. This intimate ontological relationship between the two terms of the creative process is in Taoism symbolically expressed by the image of Mother-Child relationship. The Way at the stage of the "Being" or "Named" is considered by Lao-tzū the "Mother of the ten thousand things". The symbolic implication of this statement is that all things in the phenomenal world are the very flesh and blood of the Absolute. And the Taoist ideal consists in man's "knowing the Children by knowing the Mother, and in his knowing the Children and yet holding fast to the Mother".

On the side of Ibn 'Arabi, the same ontological relationship between the Absolute and the phenomenal things is compared to the inseparable relationship between "shadow" and its source, i.e. the man or object that projects it upon the earth. "Do you not see", Ibn 'Arabi asks, "how in your ordinary sensible experience shadow is so closely tied up with the person who projects it that it is absolutely impossible for it to liberate itself from this tie? This is impossible because it is impossible for anything to be separated from itself". The world is the "shadow" of the Absolute, and, as such, it is connected with the latter with the closest relationship which is never to be cut off. Every single part of the world is a particular aspect of the Absolute, and is the Absolute in a delimited form.

Ibn 'Arabi describes the same relationship by referring to the Divine Name: "Subtle" (*latîf*). The "subtleness" in this context means the quality of an

immaterial thing which, because of its immateriality, permeates and pervades the substances of all other things, diffusing itself in the latter and freely mixing with them. "It is the effect of God's 'subtleness' that He exists in every particular thing, designated by a particular name, as the very essence of that particular thing. He is immanent in every particular thing in such a way that He is, in each case, referred to by the conventional and customary meaning of the particular name of that thing. Thus we say: 'This is Heaven', 'This is the earth', 'This is a tree', etc. But the essence itself that exists in every one of these things is just one".

We shall do well to recall that in a passage of his commentary upon the *Fuṣūṣ*, Qâshânî uses also the Mother image. "The ultimate ground of everything is called the Mother (*umm*) because the mother is the (stem) from which all branches go out".

It is worth noticing, further, that both Ibn 'Arabi and the Taoist sages picture the process of creation as a perpetual and constant flow. Their world-view in this respect is of a markedly dynamic nature. Nothing remains static. The world in its entirety is in fervent movement. "As water running in a river, which forever goes on being renewed continuously" (Ibn 'Arabi), the world transforms itself kaleidoscopically from moment to moment. The Cosmic Bellows of Lao-tzū is an appropriate symbol for this incessant process of creation. "The space between Heaven and Earth is comparable to a bellow. It is empty, but its activity is inexhaustible. The more it works, the more it produces".

The thesis of the universal Transmutation of the things which Chuang-tzū puts forward also refers to this aspect of Reality. All things in the phenomenal world are constantly changing from one form to another. Everything is ontologically involved in the cosmic process of Transmutation. "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.....all these are but constant changes of the things, and the 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". These changes "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".

Ibn 'Arabi pursues this perpetual flux of things down to a single moment. The result is his theory of "new creation", that is, the thesis that the world goes on being created anew at every single moment. At every moment, countless things and properties are produced, and at the very next moment they are an-

nihilated to be replaced by another infinity of things and properties. And this ontological process goes on repeating itself indefinitely and endlessly.

It is remarkable that neither in Sufism nor in Taoism is the ontological Descent—from the Mystery of Mysteries down to the stage of the phenomenal things—made to represent the final completion of the activity of Existence. The Descent is followed by its reversal, that is, Ascent. The ten thousand things flourish exuberantly at the last stage of the descending course, and then take an ascending course toward their ultimate source until they disappear in the original Darkness and find their resting place in the cosmic pre-phenomenal Stillness. Thus the whole process of creation forms a huge ontological circle in which there is in reality neither an initial point nor a final point. The movement from one stage to another, considered in itself, is surely a temporal phenomenon. But the whole circle, having neither an initial point nor a final point, is a trans-temporal or a-temporal phenomenon. It is, in other words, a metaphysical process. Everything is an occurrence in an Eternal Now.



INDEX

of Chinese words and phrases

ao (奧) 116*chên* (眞) 99 (n)*chên jên* (眞人) 16, 30, 32, 164, 165*chên tsai* (眞宰) 90-91*chêng* (正) 182*chêng* (政) 182 (n)*chi jên* (畸人) 150-151*chiao* (徼) 114*chien tê* (建德) 124*chih* (制) 103 (n)*chih* (志) 52, 176 (n), 184*chih* (智) 184-185*chih* (知) 51-53, 65, 170-171*chih chê* (知者) 52, 184*chih jên* (至人) 16, 156, 162*chih li tê* (支離德) 152*chih tê* (質德) 124*ching* (靜) 134, 176*ching* (鏡) 156-157*chung* (盅) 129 (n)*chung* (中) 143*chung miao chih mên* (衆妙之門) 104,
113, 114*chün tzü* (君子) 150*ch'ang* (常) 51 (n), 60, 99, 134, 149, 167*ch'ang hsin* (常心) 50-51*ch'ang ming* (常名) 104*ch'ang tao* (常道) 99*ch'ang tê* (常德) 133, 168*ch'êng hsin* (成心) 50*ch'i* (氣) 21 (n), 30, 61, 151, 181*ch'i tê* (欺德) 180*ch'i wu* (齊物) 26 (n), 82*ch'ih tzü* (赤子) 167*ch'ing* (情) 173-176*ch'u kou* (狻狗) 128*fan* (反) 37, 108*fan yen* (反衍) 42 (n)*fang shêng* [*fang ssü*] (方生 [方死]) 44*fei jên* (非人) 187*fu* (復) 37, 38-39, 133-135*fu kuei* (復歸) 37 (n)*fu ming* (復命) 134*ho kuang t'ung ch'ên* (和光同塵) 179*hsi ch'ang* (襲常) 55, 149*hsi ming* (襲明) 55*hsia tê* (下德) 125*hsiang* (象) 106, 109 (n)*hsiao yao* (逍遙) 160-162*hsiao* (小) 108-109, 149*hsiao ch'êng* (小成) 46*hsiao chih* (小知) 160*hsien chieh* (縣解) 32, 141, 146-147*hsin* (心) 49, 184*hsin chai* (心齋) 60-62, 64, 197*hsü* (虛) 58-60, 62-63, 71-72, 128-129,
155, 156, 176*hsüan* (玄) 113, 114, 115, 118, 208, 209*hsüan chih yu hsüan* (玄之又玄) 65,
104, 113, 114, 115, 116, 118, 132, 133

- hsüan lan* (玄覽) 157, 200
hsüan p'in (玄牝) 126, 131
hsüan tê (玄德) 124, 127, 185
hsüan t'ung (玄同) 179-180
hsüeh (學) 36 (n)
hu (忽) 20 (n)
hua (化) 37, 63, 146, 155
 hua shêng (化聲) 42
hua i chih yao (滑疑之耀) 74
hun (魂) 164
hun (渾) 51
 hun tun (渾沌, 渾敦) 19, 20, 72, 138-139

i (一) 105, 116-121, 175
i (義) 3, 36, 103, 137
i shih (疑始) 110 (n)

jên (人) 173-174, 175
jên (仁) 3, 36, 100, 103, 128, 138, 148, 186, 187
 jên i (仁義) 3, 103, 186

ku (谷) 120, 124, 126, 130, 133 (n), 168
ku (古) 173 (n)
kuang tê (廣德) 124
kuang mo chih yeh (廣莫之野) 154-155

k'un (鯁) 157
k'ung tê (孔德) 125

li (禮) 36, 103
liang hang (兩行) 82
ling fu (靈府) 65

man yen (曼衍) 42

mên (門) 132, 133
miao (妙) 113
ming (命) 117, 139, 142, 143
ming (明) 43, 46, 47, 53, 54, 55, 56
 (written: 名), 57, 63, 67-68, 74, 134, 149, 163, 167, 196, 197, 199, 200
ming (名) 20, 102-103, 104-105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 112 (n), 193
 ming chia (名家) 40 (n)
mu (母) 7 (n), 54-55, 108, 112, 119, 121, 131

pao i (抱一) 163
pao kuang (葆光) 74-75, 98
pian chê (辯者) 40 (n)
pu (不)
 pu chêng (不爭) 172-173
 pu chih (不知) 170-171
 pu jên (不仁) 211
 pu ssü pu shêng (不死不生) 68-69
 pu tê i (不得已) 139, 142, 143, 149
 pu wei (不爲) 170-171
 pu yen (不言) 127, 169, 171

p'êng (鵬) 157-160, 180
p'in (牝) 132
p'o (魄) 164
p'u (樸) 103, 112 (n), 168, 182-183, 186, 209

shang tê (上德) 124, 133 (n)
shê (舍) 123 (n)
shên jên (神人) 16, 162
shêng (生) 29-33, 67, 143, 147, 151, 165, 167, 195
shêng (聖) 16

- shêng jên* (聖人) 15, 45 (n), 51, 55-56, 74, 82, 93, 122, 127, 144-145, 146, 148-149, 162, 163, 166, 168, 169, 170, 173, 175, 181, 182, 183, 184, 188
shêng jên chih ts'ai (聖人之才) 66
shih (事) 182 (n)
shih (始) 95-96, 113
shih (師) 137 (n)
shih hsin (師心) 49, 60
shu (儻) 20 (n)
shu (桴) 153, 157
shui (水) 170-171, 177

ssü (死) 29-33, 143, 145, 151, 165, 167
ssü (私) 169

ta (大) 108
ta chih (大知) 160
ta chüeh (大覺) 26-27, 28
ta hsiang (大象) 109
ta jên (大仁) 187
ta mêng (大夢) 27
ta shih (大師) 48 (n)
ta shun (大順) 185
ta tao (大道) 3, 108, 186
ta tsung shih (大宗師) 136-137
ta t'ung (大通) 59
tao (道) 7 (n), 11, 12, 13, 18, 93-114, 115-134, 150, 163, 165, 167, 169, 179, 182, 192
tao ch'ang (道常) 126
tao shu (道樞) 45-46
tê (德) 54, 117, 122-125, 135, 145, 152, 177, 180
ti (帝) [*t'ien ti* 天帝] 107, 111, 136, 141

tu (獨) 68
tu li (獨立) 108
tung (動) 38

t'ai shih (太始) 21-22, 23
t'ien (天) 45 (n), 48 (n), 136, 139, 140, 141, 143, 170, 172, 173, 174, 175
t'ien [chih] tao (天[之]道) 121, 170, 178
t'ien chün (天鈞) 42, 82, 97, 194
t'ien fu (天府) 98
t'ien hsia (天下) 67, 108, 112
t'ien li (天理) 139
t'ien ming (天命) 117 (n), 136
t'ien ni (天倪) 41, 97, 194
t'ien ti (天地) 104, 107, 108 (n), 110, 111, 113, 116, 119, 122, 126, 128, 169, 178, 183
t'o yüeh (棗籥) 130

tsao wu [chê] (造物[者]) 48, 136-137, 154
tso ch'ih (坐馳) 49, 57, 63
tso wang (坐忘) 8, 49, 57-58, 62, 63, 66, 72, 73, 75, 76, 85, 92, 94, 111, 138, 149, 155, 164, 197
tsung (宗) 155

ts'ai ch'üan (才全) 65

tzü (子) 54
tzü jan (自然) 121, 123, 169-170, 174, 181

tz'ü (雌) 132

wan wu (萬物) 13, 68-69, 77, 81, 84, 85, 109, 112, 113, 118, 125-126, 127, 128,

133, 139, 144, 146, 170, 178, 182,
183, 188, 194
wei (爲) 170-171
wu (無) 66, 73-74, 93, 106, 112, 113, 114,
115, 116, 128, 130, 178, 192, 208
wu wu (無無) 117-118
wu wu wu (無無無) 96-97, 116
wu chên (無朕) 156
wu chih (無知) 52
wu chih wu yü (無知無欲) 166, 184
wu ho yu chih hsiang (無何有之鄉)
154-155
wu ming (無名) 79, 102-103, 104-105,
107, 109, 112, 113, 116, 117, 118,
183, 208
wu shih (無事) 169-170, 182, 183
wu wei (無爲) 23, 122, 125-128, 156,
157, 168, 169-171, 178, 181, 183,
184, 185

wu wu (無物) 93, 105, 208
wu yu (無有) 188
wu yü (無欲) 183
wu (巫) 16 (n), 19
wu (物) 67
wu hua (物化) 26, 28-33, 59-60, 62,
64, 144, 214

yang (陽) 118-119
yen (言) 94
yin (陰) 118-119
ying ning (櫻寧) 69
ying p'o (營魄) 164
yu (有) 104, 106 (n), 112, 113, 114, 115,
116, 192, 208
yu ming (有名) 104, 112, 113, 118
yu shih (有事) 170
yü (欲) 186

