

Tao te Ching

Julius Evola



TRADITION

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Editor's Note

In an undated, but April-May 1923 letter, Julius Evola writes to Tristan Tzara, "A new translation-interpretation of Lao Tze's Tao- Teh-King is about to come out, which I have made with the help of a Chinese man. In this book I try to show that Lao Tze's doctrine can be regarded as a transcendental presupposition of the Dadaist position." Forty years later, in his autobiography *The Way of the Cinnabar* (1963) Evola states, "The antecedence, indeed the priority of the extra-philosophical background over speculative elaborations already results from the fact, that my first book published immediately after the artistic period was a presentation of Lao-tze's Tao-té-ching. It was with a reference - sometimes quite questionable - to this ancient master of extreme-oriental Tao-ism that I anticipated some of the essential ideas of my system, while the book also constituted a kind of link between the two phases, certain anti-rationalistic and paradoxical sides of Lao-tze not being without a certain affinity with the positions of Dadaism, apart from an absolutely different background."

And indeed, rereading that introductory essay, which the 24-year-old Julius Evola completed in September 1922 in Assisi where- can we assume? - perhaps he had wanted to go in order to find a suitable environment for his work, a suitable spiritual atmosphere (a clue might be what he writes about Christ in those pages), one can see quoted for the first time compared to the Taoist "Perfect One" that "Absolute Individual" which was the pivot intomo to which a work at the time still in the process of being elaborated revolved, the *Theory and Phenomenology of the Absolute Individual* completed only in 1924 and consisting of "300 protocol-size pages filled 4/5 in manuscript" (letter to Benedetto Croce dated April 13, 1925).

But, today, in that "youthful work" about which he later had so many reservations and which landed in the prestigious series "Italian and Foreign Writers" of the Lanciano publisher (who knows if the go-between was Giovanni Papini, whom Evola knew and who edited for Carabba various series of works ...), one can find something more than inanello di congiunzione" between the "artistic period" and the "philosophical period," between the extremist theses of Dadaism in art and the no less extremist theses of magical idealism in philosophy. In fact, in that first translation

"discussed" with "Mr. He-sing," then modified later, "political" applications of Taoism arise that bring to mind the "anagogic" function of the Tradition where it is concretely expressed in an "organic state." One thinks of phrases such as, "Without knowing or desiring, he leads the people: he confounds those who know, he avoids action: and society lives for him freely in its organization" (III); and "When the government (seems) inactive, the people are glad; when the government is informed by excessive zeal, the people are unhappy" (LVIII). The same applies to the interpretation of the Taoist maxim of *wei-wu-wei*, of "acting without acting," which does not mean passivity but "acting subtly, indirectly," a theory that was the focus of a published essay later in *Bilychnis* of January-February 1925, and which appears as the substance of "traditional" acting, exemplary deliberation," of the formative example radiating from the center to the periphery, which Evola would later speak of in addressing issues of "political doctrine" both during the Fascist two decades and after World War II. Of this indirect connection there is a more precise trace in the new introductory essay written in 1959, where "acting without acting of the Taoist sovereign" is linked to an "Olympian and supernaturalistic concept of sovereignty," and those expounded by Lao-tze are defined as "principles of a metaphysically based politics, of Olympian sovereignty and invisible action, from above."

And it is surprising to consider the fact that during the fascist regime there were two men of culture, in so many ways so dissimilar to each other as Julius Evola and Ezra Pound. both "poets," but one "right-wing" and the other "left-wing," who chose two wise men of ancient China, the irrational Lao-tze and the rational Confucius, moreover among their contemporaries, to point to two "worldviews," two "policies," two "morals," which the rulers and intellectuals of the time could profitably draw upon, actualizing those far-flung precepts of theirs...

In the 1950s "at the urging of a friend of mine," Julius Evola took over that "youthful work" and transformed it into something else, as he readily admits in *The Way of the Cinnabar*. Who was C'amico?" It is, evidently, that Mario Moretti to whom Evola dedicated, for the first and only time in his life, officially one of his works, precisely the Ceschina edition of the *Tao-tè-ching*: he lived in Bologna and at his house in Via Parigi 18 he stayed several times after his return to Italy, when in the Emilian capital he went from Rome for vacation periods or for medical checkups at the Putti Center. Perhaps, during those periods of meditation and rest, in the course of conversations with his friend, came that "incitement" that convinced Evola to tackle Taoism again and a new version of the Lao-tze. after updating himself with the many translations-interpretations that appeared in the meantime in various languages.

The extensive introductory essay had its own independent fortune: republished as "Notebook" No. 22 by the J. Evola Foundation ne! 1989, it was first translated into French in the same year by Jean Bernachot and Philippe Baillet, and then into English in 1995 by Guido Stucco in the col

wool "Oriental Classics" by Holmes, alongside texts by A. E. Waite, G.R.S. Mead, R.A. Nicholson, E.A. Wallis-Budge. Some 50 copies of the *brochure*, the American publisher announced, were purchased by the People's Republic of China for distribution in its libraries nationwide. *Habent sua fata libelli!*

This characteristic of the book, the fact that *Tao-té-ching* is subject to a symbolic-traditional interpretation, both because it is written in ideograms and because it is also an esoteric text, i.e. it is not a mere translation like so many others that Julius Evola made of famous authors and texts (from Weininger to Guénon, from Bachofen to Spengler, from Jünger to Meyrink), induced us to include this new edition of Lao-tze's text, not in the series "Horizons of the Spirit," as before, but in the one devoted precisely to the "Works of Julius Evola," prompted also by the suggestion of our friend Silvio Vita who then took care of its editing, standardizing the citations and compiling a "bibliographical guide," as the specialist he is.

Given the occasion, it was therefore thought to present for the first time together both versions that Julius Evola prepared: thus the first one from 1923, which has been difficult to find until now, is also available, and it is possible to make comparisons and comparisons, both for the introductions and the translations, and to understand the development of Evolian thought. Both versions of the *Tao-té-ching* are presented here as they were published at the time, including differences in transcription of ideograms, titles and names: only obvious typos have been corrected (for the second version by a comparison of the Ceschina 1959 and Mediterranee 1972 editions); notes in the first edition Carabba 1923 have been unified; brackets for completing the discourse have been left round in the second edition Ceschina and those for explanation and other or different translation have been turned into squares; some references deemed useful have been made and some works translated in the meantime have been indicated.

While there are no doubts about the editions of *Il Libro del Principio e della sua Azione*, which was published in June 1959 by Ceschina (a house also responsible for the second edition of *Il mistero del Graal*, in December 1962), perplexities have been raised about a second edition of *Il Libro della Via e della Virtù* carried out by Carabba in 1947 and indicated by me in some bibliographies: I confirm its existence, although not everyone has had the opportunity to track it down or see it firsthand. Unless one is a fundamentalist follower of Berkeley's philosophy, according to which what one does not see with one's own eyes and touch with one's own hands is not to be considered extant, one can be sure that that edition printed by Carabba in 1947 is indeed there: after all - to reduce the matter to its most basic terms - for what reason would one have invented it?

G.d.T.

Rome, January 1996

I thank Alessandro Crossato for his cooperation

Julius Evola's "Tao-té-ching": from Philosophy to Tradition

The *Tao te ching* is certainly one of the writings that has most marked China's spiritual tradition. Like all texts to which the sacred or secular culture of every civilization ascribes the dignity of "classic," over the centuries it has been a source of perennial inspiration for those who have sought to come into consonance with its message. In East Asian cultures that have shared the models elaborated by the Chinese tradition, interpreters have continued to ask questions about the meaning behind an elusive and elusive language. Thus, much has been written about this text, in various ways caging it in the reassuring mesh of meaning. And yet, while this has served to obtain clarifications in detail, to this day we cannot say that we have reached definitive certainties on such fundamental questions as the purpose of its composition, the recipients of it, some of the obscure allusions it contains. As a "classic," precisely, it has enjoyed an autonomous life with respect to these questions, without evading them, but remaining open to different answers.

In modern times, there have been scholars, in China as in the West, who have been keen to find Lao-tze a place in the "history of Chinese philosophy," placing him in the theater of "schools" (*chia*) competing with each other to gain the ear of the royal courts into which the declining Chou empire was then divided (era of the warring states, 403-221 B.C.). This classification into schools, long after their disappearance, was due to those dos-sographs who, under the dynasty of the flat (202 B.C.-9 A.D.. and 25-220 A.D.). examined the doctrines contained in the writings of the imperial library, not with an intent that we would call philosophical, but with the aim-most lofty in their eyes-of evaluating the forms of knowledge useful to the emperor in the task of giving order to the kingdom. Among them was thus also counted a "school of the

The Wade-Gilcs system has been adopted for transcribing Chinese terms. It is also used by Evola in *Book of Principle and its Action*, but he often reports words transcribed by different systems depending on the secondary sources from which he derived them. In the reissue of this text, the transcriptions have been standardized. *The Book of the Way and Virtue*, on the other hand, has been reproduced without change.

way and virtue" or, more simply, a "school of the way," whose teachings were traced back first to Lao-tze. These, however, do not seem at first glance to constitute a "philosophy," if we ascribe to that word the sense of an analytical exposition of concepts. Rather, they are a set of maxims with an oracular tone, effectively called, for lack of a better expression, a "philosophical poem" (1). Indeed, the poem unravels slowly and in flashes thanks in part to the musicality of the rhythmic verse, whose rhymes hark back to an archaic pronunciation rediscovered thanks to the patient work of philologists (2). These are probably traces of an earlier oral tradition, or at any rate a text also intended for recitation, and it presents precisely the artifices that orality has in ancient cultures: repetition, parallelism and redundancy first among all (3).

The exhortative style invokes imagery that from time to time seems to reflect an inner experience. It is this, as many recent studies have shown on the basis of a comparative examination of all the older literature in this tradition, that is evoked to illustrate its noetic content and from it to develop a conception of the cosmos centered on the concepts of *Dao* and *Thee*. Once it became the written word, explaining the meaning of the text was the task of glossators and commentators, who, at the same time, acted as guides to the disciple. The masters, in short, provided the key to interpretation handed down from generation to generation along with a *techné* that allowed one to retrace the path indicated by the verses of Lao-tze (4). From the Han era onward evidence of them remains in exegetical literature and, indeed, reviews of the *Tao te ching* have come down to us along with one or another of the commentaries (5). While this has also been the subject of "intellectual" forms of enjoyment over the centuries, they have, however, always been accompanied by others, more in keeping with a sacred book. Thus, for example, in addition to being "read," the *Tao te ching* has been part of the canonical heritage of that religious tradition which, by now inveterate convention, we are accustomed to call "Taoism." Here, as "scripture," it acquired a liturgical function and,

(1) The definition, perhaps traced to what Chu Ch'ien-chih says in *Lao-tze chiao-shih* (Chung-hua shu-chii. Beijing, 1984, p. 313), is from A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*, Open Court, La Salle, Illinois, 1989, p. 218.

(2) See Bernard Kalgren, *The Poetical Parts of Lao-tsi*, in *Gdtehorgs Hogskolas Arsskrif* L you. 38 (1932), pp. 3-45.

(3) Victor H. Mair, *Tao Te Ching, the Classic Book of the Integrity and the Way, Lao Tzu*, Bantam Books, New York, 1990, p.119 ff.

(4) See, in this regard, rinteressante study by Harold D. Roth, *Redaction Criticism and the Early History of Taoism*, in *Early China*, 19 (1994), pp. 1-46, together with Michael Lafargue, *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching*, Stale University of New York Press, Albany, 1992; and *Tao and Method: A Reasoned Approach lo the Tao Te Ching*, Stale University of New York Press, Albany, 1994; for a general overview, Livia Kohn, *Early Chinese Mysticism, Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992, is also useful.

(5) A detailed overview of this literature in ancient and medieval China can be found in Isabelle Robinet, *Les commentaires du Tao to king jusqu au VII siede*, Mémoires de

recited by adepts for its magical and thaumaturgical efficacy, there was seen the revelation of the teachings of a divine character identified with its author (6).

These, moreover, appear from the beginning as little more than a symbolic figure. His human individuality disappears into the anonymity of an epithet: Lao-tze, meaning "the old master." A cycle of stories around him is passed down in the historical sources, whose tendency to rationalize myths is an obvious fact pointed out by many. As ancient deities take on the reassuring forms of human rulers, Lao-tze is presented to us in the guise of Lao Tan, elder archivist of the state of Lu—the state where Confucius was born—and thus holder of the records of a very ancient wisdom connected to the mystery of the sacred authority of rulers (7). Tradition thus dates the *Tao te ching* to the time of its supposed author, who lived as Confucius in the 6th century BCE.

Considerations of style, language and content, however, have convinced us to date the present text to three centuries later, a belief reinforced by the fact that it only begins to be mentioned in other writings from the third century onward. This, admittedly, in itself says nothing about its inherent antiquity, since it may have had a much later written redaction. And indeed numerous clues are recently leading to the conclusion that indeed it did. Archaeological discoveries over the past two decades have revealed to us a mass of writings encased in tombs along with the bodies of their possessors, as a viaticum of knowledge to be used even in the afterlife. The study of these documents has restored some credence to the data of traditional historiography, often dismissed on principle with too hasty skepticism. In particular, reflections on the *Tao te ching* have received renewed impetus from the discovery of two silk manuscripts of this text dating from the second century B.C. in the tomb of a nobleman excavated in 1973 at Ma-wang-tui, near Ch'ang-sha, capital of today's Hu-nan province. We now know that, apart from a few details and the order of the two parts that compose it-

l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, vol. V, Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises. Paris, 1981. Studies and translations of some of the most important commentaries are: Eduard Erkes. *Ho-shang-kung's Commentary on Lao-tse*. Artibus Asiae, Ascona, 1958; Ariane Rump (in collaboration with Wing-tsit Chan), *Commentary on the Lao Tzu by Wang Pi*, Monographs of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, No. 6, The University Press of Hawaii, Honolulu, 1979; Alan K. L. Chan. *Two Visions of the Wsy, a Study of the Wang Pi and the Ho-shang Kong Commentane! on the Lao-tzu*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1991.

(6) Or. Anna Seidel. *La divinisation de Lao Tseu dans le Taoisme des Han*, Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient. vol. LXXI. École Française d'Extrême Orient Paris. 1969.

(7) The legend of Lao Tan, however, had a remarkably complex history before it was adopted by official historiography. See A. C. Graham, *The Origins of the Legend of Lao Tan*, in *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, State University of New York Press. Albany, 1990. pp. 111-124.

no, the *textus receptus* roughly corresponds to that of two millennia ago. Moreover, thanks to a number of other previously unknown writings, also contained in the same burial, we can refer to a whole body of literature inspired in one way or another by Lao-tze's doctrines, with a wealth of detail that sheds light on the "cultural" context of their dissemination. It also suggests that the *Tao te ching* must have had a much earlier history, and there are already those who go so far as to consider it a work no later than the late fifth century (8).

Lao-tze's name at the beginning of the Han dynasty is paired with that of HuangTi, the "Yellow Emperor," placed in earliest antiquity as an archetypal model of the royal figure. They would have passed on the elements of the art that bases sovereignty on a spiritual principle and not on the simple brutal manipulation of the instruments of power, a theme that the text effectively emphasizes at several points. According to the Taoist tradition, this is a different kind of knowledge from that of Confucius, who is said to have taught instead values and rituals to be resorted to when the ruler's sacred charisma, a gift from "heaven" and magical "virtue" (*te*) that moves and compels without the need for recourse to action, is lacking. From the beginning, however, sovereignty over the world was seen as analogous to sovereignty over oneself, obeying a sympathetic principle that we find attested in China in the most diverse contexts. Macrocosm and microcosm are in this conception mirror entities, according to a general symmetry in which things respond to each other and resonate. The order of the external world must be matched by an internal order, and along these two lines the interpretative traditions of the text develop: the complex symbolism associated with the art of government also serves to evoke the path of an inner asceticism and vice versa. Lao-tze, therefore, conceived as a god, is also a master and adviser to the Han emperors (9).

This tradition emerges to the surface in a more properly religious dimension from the 11th century CE, when documentation on "Daoist" movements becomes richer and more detailed. To this era is traced the birth of what French scholars call the Taoist "church," that is, a movement organized into communities of adherents. It is no coincidence, perhaps, that the time coincides with that of the collapse of the Han Empire. Following the disappearance of the visible manifestation *deus imperium*, the religious tradition indeed seems to take on its outward vestiges and the *royal way* preached by Lao-

(8) A convenient summary of the textual problems is provided by William G. Boltz, *IMO Tzu Tao te ching*, in *Early Chinese Texts: a Bibliographical Guide*, edited by Michael Loewe. The Society for the Study of Early China and the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1993, pp.269-292. Ma-wang-tui's version was translated by Robert G. Henricks. *IMO-IZM, Te-tao ching*. Ballantine Books, New York, 1989; D. C. Lau, *Chinese Classics, Tao Te Ching*, The Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, 1982 and, in Italian, by Lionello Lanciotti, *IMO Tzu. The Book of Virtue and the Way*, Editoriale Nuova, Milan, 1981 (originally published in *China*, 14 [1978], pp. 7-26, as *Il Lao-tzu di Ma-wang-tui ovvero il Te-lao-ching*).

(9) Anna Seidel. *La divinisation*, cit. p. 50 ff.

tze for the ruler in a text of spiritual instructions acquires valences not directly related to an actual "political" function. Parallel to this appropriation of the text, Daoist religion adopts the entire royal symbolism of the Han. The initiation of the adept is conceived as a royal investiture, and the divine figures of the *pantheon* are modeled on the imperial bureaucracy (10). The *Tao te ching* from now on, however, finds a numerous array of exegeses both within and outside organized Taoist groups. It ends up becoming common heritage, to which anyone can claim privileged and more "true" access. Its hidden meaning is therefore illustrated by emphasizing one aspect rather than another as the case may be, and alongside "Taoist" commentaries, "Buddhist" or "Confucian" ones will also appear over the centuries, as everyone finds a way to translate the phrases of the text in the terms of the doctrine to which they adhere.

This ubiquitousness of the *Tao te ching* and the variety of interpretations of it, on the other hand, is reflected in the work of those who have helped to elaborate an image of China that was meaningful to European culture. It is undoubtedly the most translated and commented upon Chinese book in other languages, so much so that it can easily rival the *Bible* in this respect. It has continued to be appealed to by us as a mouthpiece for a wide variety of ideals in the fields of theology, philosophy, and politics, right up to the recent swarming of publications purporting to demonstrate its usefulness from a pacifist, feminist, environmentalist, scientist, and so on perspective. Indeed, it is possible to reconstruct the history of the image of Lao-tze in Europe from the 17th century to the present, a history that for the most part coincides with the translations of this text (11).

The sinology made by the Jesuits and echoed by Enlightenment *philosophes* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries pays little attention to "Taoism," since it developed largely along the lines drawn by Matteo Ricci, who looked at it through the eyes of those Chinese scholars he had chosen to be inspired by. He sternly and somewhat mockingly describes the "Taoists," who "by the affluence of their *saints*, can achieve living eternally in heaven or at least many years in this world" (12). Rather, in the Age of Enlightenment it is Confucius who is appreciated, as an archetype of secular wisdom in an atheistic and tolerant China

(10) Isabelle Robinet. *History of Taoism, from its origins to the fourteenth century*, Ubaldini, Rome, 1993 (Lcs Éditions du Cerf. Paris. 1991). p. 53 ff.

(11) See, in this regard. Erich Ztrcher, *Lao-Izu in East and West*, in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Values in Chinese Society*, Center for Chinese Studies Research Series No. 3, Center for Chinese Studies, T'ai-pei. 1992. pp. 281-309.

(12) *History of the introduction of Christianity in China written by Matteo Ricci S.J.*, edited by Pasquale d'Elia. La Libreria dello Stato, Rome, 1942, part 1,11. 1-111. you. 1, p. 129, no. 194, cited in Jean-Christophe Demariaux. *The Dao*, Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo, 1993 (Les Éditions du Cerf/Fides, Paris. 1990), p. 112. See also Giuliano Bertuccioli, *Matteo Ricci and Daoism*, in *Il Veltrò*, voi. XXVI, phas. 5-6. 1982. pp. 371-377; Johannes Beckmann. S.M.B., *Die katholischen Missionare and der Taoismus*, in *Neue Zeitschrift fiir*

vague as the realm of reason. When one speaks of (Taoism, however, it is only to report in a scandalized tone on the primitive form of idolatry it represents. In the 18th century, moreover, some Jesuits tried to rehabilitate its message, finding in it allusions to the dogma of the Trinity, but the Latin translations of the *Tao te ching* remained a product for internal use, like most of the versions from the Chinese classics produced in those years.

For Lao-tze's doctrines to achieve any repercussion in European intellectual society, one has to wait until the last century. Then, in the eyes of Romantic Europe he wore the guise of the representative of a different, mysterious and irrational China, to which it was impossible to attribute signification through the veil of images with which his work was cloaked. This aspect perplexed, somewhat later, the minds of Victorian and post-Victorian England, so much so that James Legge, perhaps the greatest of the translators of Chinese classics of his era, is inclined to state disconsolately, "There has been a tendency to overestimate rather than underestimate its value as a pattern of thought and discipline for the individual and society" (13). The emergence of Orientalism, moreover, assigns a publicly recognized authority to a class of specialists, and it is they who are entrusted with the task of providing reliable versions of the text. Every translation, however, cannot avoid becoming glossed, in an attempt to express in the terms of the European intellectual tradition what the *prima facie* Chinese does not say. It represents, from time to time, the opinion of only one of the classical commentators, to whom the translator relies, or it reflects a choice he has made among past interpretations, based on reasoned argument or simply on an opinion formed prejudicially. Finally, if he has decided not to take into consideration at all the exegetical literature of later periods—which is, moreover, in most cases far more authoritative and informed than many modern epigones—the resulting version is inspired by a philological reconstruction of Chinese society and mentality under the Chou dynasty, a reconstruction that has become increasingly accurate over the decades (14).

Among those who set out to illustrate what the *Tao te ching* meant at the time it was written stands out, between the 1930s and 1950s of this century.

Missionswissenschaft, XXVI (1970). pp. 1-17; Joseph Dehergne, S.J., *Les historiens jésuites du taoïsme*, in *Actes du Colloque International de Sinologie: La mission française de Pékin aux XVII et XVIII siècles*, Centre de Recherches Interdisciplinaire de Chantilly, 20-22 sept. 1974, Paris, 1976; Étienne, *The Taoist Myth in the Eighteenth Century*, in *Do We Know China?*, Il Saggiatore, Milan, 1972 (Gallimard, Paris, 1964), pp. 107-121.

(13) Quoted in Holmes Welch, *Taoism, The Parting of the Way*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1965, pp. 13-14.

(14) Holmes Welch, *Taoism*, cit., pp. 12-13; for nineteenth-century translations see Erich Zürcher, *Lao-tzu*, cit., p. 289 ff., and Kristofer Schipper, *The History of Taoist Studies in Europe*, in *Europe Studies China, Papers from an International Conference on the History of European Sinology*, Han-Shan Tang Books and The Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for International Exchange, London, 1995, pp. 467-491, especially pp. 467-481.

the work of Arthur Waley and J.J.L. Duyvendak (15). 11 Waley's merit, in particular, was to have emphasized a dimension of the text not always clear to previous interpreters. Indeed, he was able to show how it develops the theme of the efficacy of a power that was believed to come to the ruler (and, as noted above, later to the adept) from an inner training, to which physique techniques analogous to those of Indian *yoga*, aimed at breath control, must not have been unrelated. Others, however, have been less sensitive to such a "mystical" reading of the text. D.C. Lau, for example, equally influential as a translator but of "Confucian" *forma mentis* (he has published since the 1960s a series of justly celebrated translations of Chinese classics, among which Mencius' book is considered the best around), asserts that the *Tao te ching*, as a treatise on personal conduct and governance, "is moral rather than mystical in tone and advocates a philosophy of meekness as the surest path to survival" (16). In other words, opposite readings have been a constant feature of sinology as applied to the interpretation of the *Tao te ching*, and how unsatisfactory the proposals remain is evidenced, moreover, by the fact that sinologists do not seem to want to cease trying their hand at its translation. Even the more recent versions by Robert Henricks and Victor Mair (both made on the basis of the text found at Ma-wang-tui and published in 1989 and 1990, respectively) remain on completely opposite interpretive sides. The former is tending to deny great importance to any "realization" aspect, while the latter, whose author is one of the sharpest and most fruitful connoisseurs of medieval China, takes up the ancient hypothesis, suggestive and moreover well argued by him with the help of sometimes astonishing similarities with an Indian text such as the *Bhagavad-gity*. of a direct borrowing, in a "diffusionist" key, of the techniques of vogue from China to India (17).

Such conflicting sinological interpretations arise not, as Evola naively imagines, from the "ideographic nature of the Chinese language," but from other factors. The lack of data to help us piece together the context of the transmission of the *Tao te ching* in the earliest era is one of them. This has been compounded, moreover, by an inability to understand how such a text had, perhaps from the very beginning, such characteristics as to allow

ti 5) Arthur Waley, *The Way and its Power: a Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought*, George Alien and Unwin, London, 1934; J.J.L. Duyvendak, *Le livre de la Voie et de la Verté*, Maisonneuve, Paris, 1953, and *Tao Te Ching: The Book of the Way and its Virtue*, The Wisdom of the East Series, John Murray, London, 1954. The Italian translation of Duyvendak's text, published by Adelphi in 1978 (*Tao té ching. The Book of the Way and its Virtue*), was conducted on the French version.

(16) D.C. Lau, *Lao Tzu. Tao Te Ching*. Penguin Books. Harmondsworth. 1963.

(17) Robert G. Henricks. *Lao-tzu. Te-tao ching. cit.*; Victor H. Mair, *Tao Te Ching, the Classic Book of the Integrity and the Way. Lao Tzu. cit.* Mair continues a tradition that goes back at least to the last century and to Jean Pierre Guillaume Pauthier's 1831 book, *Mémoire sur l'origine et la propagation de la doctrine du Tao. fondée par Lao-Tseu, et accompagnée d'un*

tain a "reading" articulated on several levels: political, metaphysical, cosmological, spiritual training. The apparent failure of the specialists, then, caused the natural consequence of involving others in the search for the "true" meaning of the text. How is it possible that translations from the same original could turn out to be so different from each other? Faced with this question, the answer was the continuing proliferation of versions that scandalized Duyvendak, by which, as the case may be, efforts are made to "translate" Lao-tze not from Chinese, but from one European language to another or even from one technical register of one's own language to another.

Evola's works presented here should also be placed in this vein and grew out of his dissatisfaction with the interpretations that the philology of the Orientalists then seemed to him incapable of providing. In the troubled climate of the early 1920s the restless author, already on the verge of leaving the Dadaist adventure, resolved to present to the Italian public a document of those "essays from the Orient," which later Adriano Tilgher would count among the inspirational masters of his philosophy (18). The importance of the work in the framework of the development of Evola's thought does not seem so far to have attracted adequate attention. It does, in fact, on careful reading, reveal *in nuce*, already at this stage, all the themes of inquiry that he pursued throughout his activity as a writer. We find in it the experience of the artistic avant-garde, of whose theoretical foundations Lao-tze gii seems to bring confirmation, his original interpretation of idealistic philosophy, the cornerstones of which he claims to see anticipated "in this Chinese of the seventh century B.C.," and, finally, the first hints of the assimilation of an "esoteric-occultist" culture, in the 1920s linked to his frequentation of theosophical circles, which was to serve the function of an "operative" counterpart to the speculative apparatus that Evola was elaborating. And a substantial confirmation of a line of continuity in his entire oeuvre, beyond the fractures and "overcoming" that he himself wished to identify by dividing his intellectual path into "periods." Finally, the book inaugurates another constant in the figure of Evola, since he was - and in the 1920s and 1930s this was done with greater energy and imagination - a great cultural stimulator. In this sense, *The Tao te ching* is the first in a series of texts by ancient and modern authors that he saw fit to present to the Italian public in order to disseminate or deepen the themes that were closest to his heart.

commentaire tire des livres sanskrits et dti Tao-te-king de Lao-tseu, établissant la conformite de certaines opinions philosophiques de la Chine et de l'inde. See, in this regard, Erich Ziircher, Lao-tzu, cit, pp. 291-93. The "affinities" with the Gita are already recalled by Giuseppe Tucci in his Apologia del Taoismo. Formiggini, Spoleto, 1924, p. 41.

(18) In *Anthology of postwar Italian philosophers*, edited by Adriano Tilgher. Guanda. Modena. 1937, cited in Marco Rossi, *L'avanguardia che si fa tradizione: l'itinerario culturale di Julius Evola dal primo dopoguerra alla metà degli anni 30s*, in *Storia Contemporanea*, a. XII, no. 6, December 1991. p. 1072.

It appeared in 1923 at the publisher Carabba in Lanciano under the title *Il Libro della Via e della Virtù di Lao-tze* (19) to make up for, in the words of the editor, the scant consideration given to a work of great philosophical importance. Actually, translations of Lao-tze already existed in various European languages, and in 1905 the first Italian version by Guglielmo Evans had appeared, which Evola lists among those he studied (20). Indeed, it was precisely these kinds of texts that had tickled sinologists until then, so much so that as early as 1916 they provoked the complaints of Giovanni Rapini who wished he could also appreciate in translation the forms of poetic expression (21). For Evola, however, the poetic aspect of the *Tao te ching* constituted an obstacle to serious consideration by the philosophical scholar. He takes on, therefore, the task of elevating the text "to the form of the concept," stripping it of all symbolic or metaphorical expression. The version he presents seems to have been inspired by Alexander Ular's work, *Die Bahn und der Rechte Weg des Lao-tse*, a publication that enjoyed considerable publishing fortune in Germany (22), and by the assistance lent to him by an unidentified Chinese informant, a certain "He-sing" (perhaps Ho Hsing), of whom unfortunately nothing is known. However, to the little more than 20-year-old Evola this text appears as an exotic representative of the genre of the "aphorism," and from it he aims to extract a philosophical system in order to grasp the essence of his thought through "the categories that are imposed for a presentation in our language and in present-day European culture" (23).

It is therefore European philosophical culture that he considers his interlocutor, in an attempt to make it share "the highest thoughts that speculation

(19) In *Il Libro del Principio e della sua Azione* (in this edition on p. 75), advocate recalls it, however, as having been published in 1922. An anastatic reprint appeared in 1982 from the publisher Arktos of Carmagnola.

(20) William Evans. *Lao-tse. The book of the way and virtue*. Mouth. Turin, 1905 (reprinted in facsimile in 1982 in Foggia by Bastogi). In addition to this, Evola is familiar with Stanislas Julien's old French translation, *IMO Tseu Tao Te King. Le livre de la voie et de la vertu compose dans le VI siecle ovatti Vére chrétienne par le philosophe Lao-Tseu traduit en franfais et publié avec le texte chinois et un commentaire perpétue!*, Paris, 1842, and Reinhold von Planckner's ampulosa German version in a theistic key, *Lao-tse Tao-te-king. Der Weg zur Tugend*. Brockhaus, Leipzig, 1870.

(21) "To our misfortune, our sinologists have an understandable aversion to translating poetry. All they care about are philosophical and religious texts-and history," from *Inutility Necessary*, in *Il Resto del Carlino*. Jan. 16, 1916, quoted by Carlo D'Alessio in the introduction to *Jade Moons. Chinese poems translated by Arturo Onofri*. Salerno editrice, Rome, 1994, p. 22, and in Federico Masini, *halian Translations of Chinese Literature*, in the volume edited by Vivianc Alleton and Michael Lackner, *Translations from thè Chinese imo European Languages*. Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, in press.

(22) A first edition of Ular's book had appeared in Leipzig by insel-Vorlag in 1903. 1! book was republished four times by the same publisher between 1920 and 1932. Unfortunately, it has not been possible for me to locate it in Italian libraries.

(23) For further details, see *Il cammino del cinabro*. Scheiwiller, Milan*. 1972. p. 30 ff., c Marco Rossi, *L'interventismo politico-culturale delle riviste tradizionaliste negli anni venti: Atanòrt 1924) and Ignis 11925)*, in *Storia Contemporanea*, a. XVI11, no. 3 (June 1987), pp. 485-86.

has conquered to date." His "interpretive grid" is ready to impose itself on the text in controversy against philologists unable to arrive at its current meaning. Evola's translation, in fact, constitutes an opportunity to meditate on the great themes of Western philosophical reflection, using the jargon of which he was then master and which served him, as he would later declare, to make himself an interlocutor with the idealists (24). From this point of view, the work should be included in that strand of nineteenth-century culture that tended to bring into contemporary intellectual debate the contributions of "other" cultures, an operation destined to have several epigones even in the twentieth century. The most recent parallel that I would feel like drawing, given the due differences in intellectual environment and, above all, in specialized support regarding the text under consideration, is with the work of Herbert Fingarette, in which occasion is taken from Confucius to deal with themes of interest to post-modern thought, such as the concept of personality or the theory of linguistic acts, in a way that contributes, in the author's intention, both to the philosophical discourse and to the interpretation of Confucius himself (25). Here again, as in Evola's book on Lao-tze, the problem of the relationship between a "philological" interpretation and the "philosophical" signification of the text appears to be one of the dominant themes and has, in the case of Fingarette, given rise to a long chain of discussions and retorts. The problem of philological insight, however, in Evola seems to give way, in those early years, to considerations of another kind. Indeed, the author considers it already solved, in the unshakable confidence that he has arrived at the "true" meaning of the text. It will be René Guénon, shortly thereafter, who will remind him, irritated by a critical review of his *L'uomo e il suo diventando secondo il Vedutita*, that "he is very young, and this is undoubtedly what excuses him; he still has many things to learn, but he has time before him and will perhaps be able to learn them... on condition, however, that he changes a little attitude and does not imagine that he already knows everything!"(26).

Youthful enthusiasm shines through everywhere in the early version of Lao-tze's book, so much so that many of the key terms, those that most tickle his fancy, are concepts Evola himself created. His Dadaism comes in polemic with the avant-garde and, in particular, stands in antithesis to the "Dionysian" annihilation of the ego, such as futurism according to him interpreted "in the vertigo of intuition, speed and sex." To the problem of the idealist ego is offered by Dadaism a freedom that must be absolute and indeter-

(24) *The way of the cinnabar*, cit. p. 36. It should be noted that Lao-tze's interpretation from an idealistic perspective had famous precedents precisely in Germany. Victor Voti Strauss's first German translation, *Lao-tse Tao-te-king*, Fleischer, Leipzig, 1870, makes abundant use of the conceptual heritage of that philosophical system. See E. Zürcher, *Lao-tze*, cit. pp. 294-95.

(25) *Confucius, the Secular as Sacred*, Harper & Row, New York, 1972. Another interesting attempt, this time a collaboration between a philosopher and a professional sinologist, is: David H. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1987.

(26) Quoted in Marco Rossi, *Julius Evola and the Independent Theosophical League of Rome*, in *Storia Contemporanea*, a. XXV. no. 1 (February 1994), p. 50.

undermined, to the point of putting an end even to the "dialectic of the artistic myth," in the sense of a "mystical development of the ego, of whose development aesthetic consciousness is but the parodic anticipation or-in the words of Lao-Tze (*Tao-teh-king*, II. c. 45, v. 5)-the motionless pacing." The concept of art as "motionless pattering" is an evocative metaphor, on which Evola repeatedly insists, but such a formula no matter how many efforts are made cannot be traced in the original, whose metaphorical image concerns "eloquence that appears similar to stammering." And what about the solipsistic imperative of "I am," which he "found," in some controversial passages, by which he takes Lao-tze to the heart of the issue he intended to discuss with this text? The "sage" (*sheng-jen*) that Lao-tze proposes as a model of human perfection here preconceives the "absolute individual." So that, the message coming from ancient China resolves itself into a hymn to the power of individuality, in the face of which "Stirner's *The One* or the Man of Marx and Lenin's social ideologies, the absolute self of idealism or the lyrical subject of avant-garde aesthetics" appear to the author, these yes, timid babblings. Therefore, for the modern consciousness, which -- it is pointed out -- has begun to realize the solitude of the person, the absolute freedom of an individual to whom is proper an attitude "such that we can act on things without things being able to act on us," appears of disconcerting relevance as a proposal for a "methodology of perfection."

The limits of this reading, however, will become clear to Evola the moment he transforms himself from a "philosopher" into an interpreter of Tradition, from the Confucian "I transmit and I do not create" perspective. Then, he will reserve only ill-concealed sarcasm for the "critical" valorization of an ancient text in an idealist key (27). His 1923 study of the *Tao te ching* also played a key role in this turn of events. Through it, he was approached by those theosophical circles in which, for a time, he seemed to seek the absolute immortality and freedom he theorized in the terms of philosophical speculation. In the 1920s, Evola lectured as part of "spiritual culture courses" of the Independent Theosophical League in Rome together with academics such as Carlo Formichi or Giuseppe Tucci, then a very young promise of Italian orientalism, while on the same themes of Taoism and Chinese philosophy there was no lack in the same years of publishing initiatives of both academic and popular slant (28). Aided by maturity, by new and more thoughtful readings and perhaps also by the influence exerted on him by Guénon's work from the second half of the 1920s onward (29), the need to document his studies as broadly as possible gradually gained prominence in Evola. The remake published in 1959 as *II Book of the Principle and its Action* represents the final result of this transformation of his

(27) *The path of cinnabar*, cit. p. 36.

(28) For example, the *History of Chinese Philosophy*, Zanichelli. Bologna. 1922. and the *Apology of Taoism*, Formigini. Spoleto, 1924 by Tucci himself. See Marco Rossi. *Julius Evola and the Independent Theosophical League of Rome*. cit., p. 48.

(29) Guénon as early as 1910 dealt with the various French translations of the *Tao te ching*, in a

attitude toward a certain type of texts, although he himself, in retrospectively tracing his intellectual biography, does not seem to attach as much value to it (30). Over the course of nearly four decades, the gradual discovery of translations and research of more or less recent publication evidently led him to become aware of the real elusiveness of the *Tao te ching* and, above all, of the unreliability of the versions he had had his hands on in his youth, while it made him acquire more detailed information about Taoism both as metaphysics and as an "initiatory way" (31). Thus, even through signs of ill-concealed impatience, he himself admits, with great honesty, that he had endeavored to follow so-called "scientific" canons in his exposition, insofar as these had not interfered with his underlying inspiration.

For the rough edges and misunderstandings that here and there remain in the translation and, therefore, in the commentary on individual passages can hardly be blamed on Evola, who worked on second-hand material and often had to interpret concepts analogically, based on data drawn from other cultures. To this kind of difficulty, all things considered, he himself alludes when he speaks of "concessions" made to the "secular" point of view and the meter followed where he had to establish the "meaning" of a given passage. The end result reflects in a perfectly mature way his interpretation of Taoism, understood in the sense of an "initiatory tradition" rather than a religion, within the framework of a presentation and "fine-tuning" of its major themes that is perfectly sharable in its general lines. 11 Taoism is considered to be the expression of an essentially identical knowledge that appears in a different form according to cultural contingencies. Within Chinese civilization, accepting, it seems to me, Guénon's interpretation (32), Evola acutely notes how the habit of contrasting it antithetically and irreconcilably with Confucianism is actually a misrepresentation of the complementary function of these two doctrines: metaphysical and initiatory the one, of engagement within social forms and inspiration for a conduct of "external" nobility the other. The reconcilability of the various doctrines, moreover, is an ancient *leitmotif* that has found in China, over the centuries, alongside opposition from what Evola calls "a Confucianism degenerated into a Mandarin formalism," also enthusiastic supporters in the same class of people. Moreover, Taoism itself includes within itself a "poly-

short article published in *La Gnose* (now in *Mélanges*. Gallimard, Paris, pp. 213-222), *A propos d'une mission dans l'Asie centrale*, on the occasion of Paul Pelliot's return from China with the news of his extraordinary discovery of the Tun-huang deposit of Chinese manuscripts. (I thank Prof. Alfredo Cadonna of the University of Venice for bringing this article to my attention.)

(30) He makes only a fleeting mention of it in *11 Way of the Cinnabar*, cit. p. 146.

(31) Evola refers to the translations by Walcy, Duyvendak and Wieger, first, c then to the Italian translations by Alberto Castellani, *Lao-Tse's Heavenly Rule (Tao tè ching)*. Sansoni. Florence, 1927. and by Paul Siao Sci-Yi. // *Laotse's Tao-te-King*, Laterza, Bari, 1941. along with studies by Maspéro, Granet c De Groot.

(32) Exposed organically in the essay *Confucianism and Daoism*, in *Writings on Islamic Esotericism and Daoism*, Adelphi, Milan, 1993 (originally in *Le Voile d'Isis*, 1932, pp. 485-508), pp. 95-116.

tic" or, perhaps better, of "sovereignty theory," which, in addition to being a symbolic and evocative model of "self-rule," was aimed at those who take on the task of ordering society.

Of all the aspects of the Taoist tradition, clearly identified in Evola's terms as a "metaphysics," an "ethics," a "political doctrine," and an "esoteric doctrine of immortality," the presence in the *Tao te ching* has been recognized. As noted above, what appears problematic at first glance is whether or not this "polysemy," explicitly accepted from the Han era onward, has a more ancient history. It must be determined, in particular, whether allusions to "body techniques," an integral part of the "realizational path" in the "Taoism" of later ages, can be recognized in some parts of the text. Evola is evidently moving in the direction of recognizing such a message in Lao-tze's text *ab antiquo*, and indeed this is finding confirmation in the research that is being published (33). No less pertinent, then, are some polemical reminders found in the long introductory study: both that to a more careful consideration of the concept of "immortality," certainly not to be understood, as is often done, in the sense of a sublimated attachment to life; both those to a reading of the Taoist themes of passivity and "non-acting" as an allusion to a quietism of an outward character and not to a disposition of the soul that preludes or, rather, manifests a profound transformation of the person's spiritual roots; and, again, the warning not to confuse the call to "spontaneity" as a kind of projected "return to nature" of Rousseauian inspiration. but rather as an identification with the universal rhythm of the "Way." Finally, Evola's reflection on some of the key terms in the text also leads to suggestions for serious consideration. However, these do not always seem to me to be agreeable. For *Tao and Te*. for example, rather than resorting to abstract terms such as "principle" or "action," which are also effective as glosses, it would be better to retain the metaphorical and, why not, poetic value that they had, thus using the already known expressions of "Way "and "Virtue," or "Power."

For all these considerations, // *The Book of Principle and its Action* offers a significant contribution not only to the study of Evola's overall work and the "myths" he intended to arouse with it. Beyond the detail, this book can likewise provide inspirational grounds for the study of the *Tao te ching*, fitting into the history of its interpretations in the West. Although through the mediation of others, there does indeed emerge here that "hermeneutic sympathy" that Mircea Eliade judges to be an important pre-requisite for a scholar of religions. Evola, of course, did not intend to be, but he has equally given us happy insights, which sometimes seem more reliable reconstructions of Lao-tze's message than those of so many titled translators.

(33) See, for example. Isabelle Robinet, *History of Daoism*, cit. p. 31.

I
THE BOOK OF THE WAY AND VIRTUE

Introduction

Lao-tze was born in the late 7th century B.C. in the village of Kio-gin of the kingdom of Tzu to a peasant family. What is known for sure about his life boils down to very little: namely, that he was a chronicler and archivist to the princely rulers of the Ceu dynasty; after a time he gave up his post and retired to a lonely hut, which he left in his eighties to leave for the West and never to be seen again. His real name was Li-pe-jang; he was called Lao-tze - or old child - as a result of a legend that has him being born with white hair and eyelashes and with the wisdom of an old man, after a pregnancy of eighty-one years; a legend that is significant in relation to his doctrine in which all profound wisdom - as befits a mature thought of multiple evolutions - is transfigured into the originality of the present consciousness, eternally young and simple. Instead, the anecdote portraying Confucius' reencounter with Lao-tze (reported in Co-hong's *Si-sien-ciuen*) is historical: Those tried to essay the philosopher of the Dao in the manner of those insipid maxims of traditional morality-denying all personality, expressions of the prudent and mediocre ethics of an already old-fashioned society automatically handing down its own equilibrium-that constituted his sluggish doctrine; but he got such answers that, referring to the conversation, he found no better way than to say: "Nets and hooks seize even the nimblest fish of the dark waters, in snares fall the animals of the forest, even free birds are reached by the arrow of the skilful hunter: but with what could we ever catch the dragon that hovers in the ether, above the clouds?"

The only work left to us by Lao-tze is the *Tao-teh-king* (= Book of the Way and Virtue). This small volume of aphorisms leaves us doubtful of any ideal finality of history: for through it we must see the clear presence in a mind of 700 B.C. of the highest thoughts that speculation has hitherto conquered. It is only to be deplored that little and inadequate consideration has been given to this work by us moderns; perhaps this can be clarified by the fact that the translations that have so far been made of it - beginning with the first, French, by S. Julien (1842) - are exceedingly defective. E

This is not so much because of the radical difference between European (alphabetic) and Chinese (hieroglyphic) languages, and because of the error only recently revealed by A. Ular of giving the ancient signs of Lao-tze the meanings of present-day linguistic usage (1), as much as due to the fact that orientalists in the main son mere scholars and grammarians, incapable of thinking according to the philosophical concept, completely alien to that sense of the historicity of the spirit which, by revealing the concrete essentials of even a distant personality, makes it possible to obviate the inevitable difficulties inherent and accidental gaps and aporias of the texts, and the categories that are imposed for a presentation in our language and present-day European culture. This negative factor has a particular efficiency in the case of Lao-tze: whose profound thought is expounded in his book only according to the most general and essential conclusions in dry and bare formulas, with little trace of the process that generated them, not always systematically connected, and moreover with a certain I would say almost deliberate paradoxicality of form. Hence to the lazy spirit, accustomed to indulging without friction on the rails of well-connected exposition, *Tao-teh-king* may well appear as a collection of oddities and inconsistencies. This is also true of the Chinese; and if we consider that one of the main foundations of all natural religion is a superstitious and mythical transmutation of that which the intellect does not comprehend, we may understand how from Lao-tze's philosophy-so intimately human and devoid of any nebulous transcendence-could come forth the Taoist mythology that makes Lao-tze a God with the accompanying regulation of entities, devils and wonders. Except that Daoism itself has accomplished its own dissolution, and beyond the ruin of the religion-now the object only of irony by the Chinese educated classes-it has returned Lao-tze's little book intact.

I precede the text with a systematic exposition in terms of modern thought of the content of *Tao-teh-king*, developed with interpretation and rendered into action where it is necessitated by the over-ellipticity of the form. This outline and the few notes, I believe, can clearly highlight the speculative value of Lao-tze's doctrine.

The beginning (I) is metaphysical: it is the definition of the Dao or Way, which is the essential mode of reality. Now metaphysics itself-as Kant will show-needs a demonstration of its validity. "What is the foundation of principles?" asks Lao-tze (LIV): it is the I am (XXI): in the absolute knowing the human and the cosmic are one (XXL XXV) and the basis of the thought-form is this form itself (LIV). By deepening my reality, abandoning the ray and holding to the origin (XXXVIII) I am given to know ('absolutely certain. He says, "Without going out one can see, the Perfect comes without walking" (XLVII); and to inner knowing he contrasts the procedure of intellectual science (LXXI, LXXXI. LXIV) that leads from conditioned to conditioned farther and farther (XLVIII) toward *schlechte Unendlichkeit*

(1) A. Ular, *Die Iahh and del Rechte Weg des Lao-tze*, Leipzig. 1921. p. 100 ff.

unveiled by Hegel, where the Way leads further and further back, until it leads all of reality back to the center, in a circular recourse in which the gnoseological and the cosmic merge. In fact, the starting point for everyone is the empirical man, which is not grounded in himself, but rests on a series of conditions; if we turn to this and want to exhaust it, we see that it puts down to that which is grounded in itself, that is, to the Way (XXV), to the I = I. to the inner man: starting from man, in man to find therefore to converge the eternal circle of things. And so, in this 7th century B.C. Chinese we find anticipated the cornerstones of German idealism. It is therefore a matter of seeking our true humanity. Where? Lao-tze rejects the lazy pretense of a sufficiency realizable in the categories of the merely human: perfection, fullness, the knowledge of men - he says - remain irremediably imperfection, emptiness, stupidity (XLV); art itself remains a motionless pawing (XLV), expresses man's aspiration to realize himself as original and creative, but in fact does not move him forward one step: the Way that is the Way is not the ordinary way (I).

However, the Perfect Earthly remains the ultimate goal of the universe (XLV). How then? The fact is that we live in the prejudice that humanity is only that which is limited and common in man, whereas it is precisely by denying that which is immediately human that humanity is truly affirmed. Lao-tze states that to live outside life is to live more intimately than to live in life (LXXV). Applying this principle to the understanding, it follows that it must be denied in order for it to be truly understood (LXIV, XIV). For if we turn to the Tao, we see that our habitual categories are incapable of grasping it: yet there is something in us that makes it present to us in everything; a dialectic of meaning ensues whereby this is denied, extends to nonmeaning, and adapts the undifferentiation of nonmeaning to the Tao (XIV). which therefore can be understood as non-distinct, imperceptible and uncreated: essentially, as the form of formlessness, the phenomenon of non-phenomenon.

Therefore, man must surpass himself, he must make himself Perfect, that is, "Absolute Individual," for then he will find in himself the elements by which real knowledge can be established; knowledge that will no longer be something extrinsic, as in the science of human discursiveness, but will be life of Gnosis, for it will express nothing but the very consciousness of the Perfect that is one with the root of all real.

Perfect, accomplished individual and Tao are terms that recur in Lao-tze with the same attributes. For he says that mere knowledge of the Dao and its utilization is the proper of inferior wisdom, that extrinsically adhering to the Way-that is, morality in accordance with law-is the proper of unaccomplished wisdom; while it is only perfect wisdom to implement the Way in itself (XLI).

That being the case, what is the metaphysics that the Perfect One discovers and justifies with its own completeness? The central vision Lao-tze gives us of the world is a phenomenalization of the One in an opposition of the nominable and the unnamable; the universal-unnamable is contrasted with the particular and determi-

na with this as nominable becoming (I). Such opposition is only phenomenal, and its truth is the Tao. unfathomable, real-irreal basis, which, as the principle of the possibility of the real (IV), that is, of the opposition that develops the dialectic. becoming, as the principle *and* antecedent of all determination remains in itself as the unconceivable (VI), the unconcrete, the void (*passim*).

11 transcendental process unfolds thus: the Way specializes in the One which, determining itself, creates the opposition, the dyad: from which, as its determination, proceeds the synthesis, the triad: with which the law is fulfilled, and from the triad can proceed, by successive determinations, the becoming, the multiple hovering around the center (XLII). Here, in the ellipticity of a few sentences, there is the whole outline of Hegel's *Logic*, and even more; for in Hegel the idea, if it is in its immanent rationality, the light of each of its moments is, however, conceived so connected with the various determinations that it leaves little intelligible the internal possibility of itself if identified with its development. For - here I am compelled only to hint - one cannot conceive how from position one passes to negation and then how from the dissolution in itself of the antithesis a new term arises, unless one admits that at every moment of the process there is a principle of general positivity by virtue of which a new production flourishes together with and at the dissolution. This principle evidently cannot resolve itself into absolute immanence in the individual terms, but must stand in opposition to the principle of becoming in general: hence the immanent dialectic of becoming cannot be conceived of as productive unless, at becoming itself, a principle is posited which realizes with it a transcendental opposition on which rests the possibility of all the particular oppositions which unfold the very course of becoming. And since all the real is summarized and born only in becoming nor is it distinguished from it, the transcendental opposition will be that between the unreal and the real, between the unnameable and the nameable as well as in Lao-tze: and as in Lao-tze only in the unreal, in the emptiness that exists behind everything, will stand the true foundation of everything (XXXVI), as in the emptiness of the hub stands the essentiality of the wheel (XI). In short, in Lao-tze the mystical need is very clear to admit an absolute spirit, irreducibly indeterminate per the infinity of its possibilities, at the spirit that, determining itself, creates the world; a need this has not yet been felt in its logical and vital necessity by modern thought, all concerned as it is to resolve the world in the empty insufficiency of the merely speculative spirit.

Except that here a difficulty arises: is not this second term something transcendent, and is it not then shown to be ignorant of the fact that all European speculation, from the Greeks down to Hegel and Gentile, has had no other purpose than to bring truth, which for the ancients fell outside things, into things themselves? But this difficulty is overcome in Lao-tze: emptiness is not detached from fullness, the Tao is not outside of becoming, but in becoming itself emptiness, the Tao itself does not exist without the full, the concrete. The climax of Taoistic speculation is precisely this thought, that non-being, that is, the Tao. is nothing

without the being, the becoming; in the sense that the Tao is absolute act, so it is not if it does not posit itself, but by posing itself it creates, that is, it passes into the concrete things, into the other term that is so necessary for the reality of the first. But the fact is the opposite of the act; the Tao therefore by posing itself denies itself, but also, since only the fact enacts, demonstrates the act, by denying itself poses itself; from death life and from life death - Heraclitus will later say in a formula that condenses the profound meaning of all mystical life. There is thus an unconscionable, concrete duality, sufficient in itself. The beyond, says Lao-tze (XXXII), imbues the terrestrial though man in this does not comprehend it; the infinitely distant is the returning (XXV). Lao-tze thus remains as free from transcendence as any other ever was; but, in fact, in this denial of transcendence lies the reversal of transcendence, for the transcendent is falsehood if relegated to a fantastic background, it is truth instead if it lives in us as the intimate principle of all certainty and development. Lao-tze has intuited this reciprocity of creation whereby the finite is externalized, inasmuch as in itself it contains the very principle whereby the divine, the Tao, is true; he says (LI1): knowing oneself as son (finite) means recognizing the infinite (the mother), and this expresses denying oneself as finite, knowing oneself as life, the continuation of the mother, that is, infinite. The belonging of finiteness only to the phenomenon (I) and Tesser the reality the profound unity actualized through the duality of the infinite act and the finite product, results in the *Tao-teh-king* also *a posteriori*, from the analysis of the nameable; in fact, about becoming it is understood that its essence, its profound truth is precisely the opposite, the eternally stable, and that beyond the dialectical movements of ascent and descent it resolves itself into a circular recourse (XVI). The metaphysical deduction of this truth is latent in various passages of Lao-tze and may sound, in short, as follows: becoming is opposite to Dao, yet being produced by the latter, in this in a certain way it must reconvert. However, one cannot speak of an absolute conversion, in which becoming is identified with Dao, for then, as the opposition ceases, both terms would vanish into nothingness. Therefore, becoming does not reconnect with the Dao *and* remains in itself opposed to it; but at the same time it reconnects with it, inasmuch as becoming is realized through a law that is like the moving image of the Dao. This law will be common to the two opposites, just as the image is common to the projecting body and to the thing on which it is projected: as belonging to the Dao is the immovable, the unnamable, as belonging also to becoming is the shifting immovable, that is, the cyclic course. Thus it is made explicit how the unnameable is contained in the nameable through the cyclic law that is called in the text (XXI) the phenomenal form, the way of the Way: the Dao of the Dao (XL). This same theory, developed yes but in nothing altered in its essence, we will find in the Neo-Platonists (in Proclus especially), Scotus Eriugena, in Eckhart, in the Christian doctrine of the eternal origin of time of which there is a trace as early as Augustine and on to Schelling and Hegel.

A further determination of Dao is fundamental in Lao-tze, and that is the character of *non-acting*. This may seem a paradox: and indeed to the naive and unphilosophical consciousness it cannot appear but strange that at the principle of everything, which here moreover is immanentistically understood as an act, should

agree with the predicate of non-acting, - accustomed as she is. to the purely anthropomorphic conception of the theistic God as infinite power. In fact among the ancients non-being and absolute passivity were rather ascribed to matter, to ἰΑρ): but if we consider that for Platonic consciousness God is something external to thought, thus itself a thing, it is already to be supposed that more than in the noetic empyrean the determination of the divine in-self was to fall into the intuition of pure matter. Later with the Neo-Platonists up to Christian mysticism (Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, Scotus, etc.) a reversal was accomplished, and non-being was adapted to the τὸ Ἐν. to the inaccessible and tenebrous principle of emanationism and theophanies: but in an entirely extrinsic manner, that is, only in relation to the intellectual faculties which not even in their highest category - that of being - could comprehend the divine. Senonché for a theory of immanence that absolute not for us (KaT'aviῖποTtov), but in itself (KaT'É^oxqv) must result as non-being.

Lao-tze's concept is thus that the first principle in itself is non-being, non-acting, non-wanting, since all that is being, acting and wanting already belongs to the sphere of creation, in which the creator is in fact dead, overcome in things; it belongs to the creating activity that has already immersed itself in becoming - indeed it is itself becoming - not to the creator, which in itself remains null, incoherent, non-acting; like a bellows that though creating inexhaustibly in itself remains empty (IV. V, XXXIV, XXXVI etc.). Hence, he calls the Tao eternal matrix of everything and yet eternally without essence, mother and not mistress and therefore great and omnipotent (XXXIV), whose mode of action is not doing or willing, but abandoning (XL); finally, the Tao directs and does not possess, acts without remaining agent, has and is not lord (LI); he does not know love (V), since its product is his own essence which he detaches from himself in order to realize himself infinitely; only by disappearing does he reveal himself; it is by exhausting himself that he attains absolute being (VII), since one cannot possess by retaining (IX) - in fact, by retaining, one fixes the self in the thing retained, one is but does not have oneself in the absolute originality of freedom (and in this regard it is said that avarice, understood in the metaphysical sense of empty permanence in oneself, of being rather than creating since creating is surrendering oneself into something else, that is, negation of avarice - is guilt). Similarly, neither can it be sharpened if one touches (IX), i.e., if one partakes with passion in the thing, because - likewise - passion, complacency for the thing, binds the creator to its product and thus prevents him from being self; instead, one must live by keeping oneself in the nothingness of the act, pure from the action and doing that proceeds from it (IX).

I believe that this is one of the highest peaks that human thought has conquered. Here the profound meaning of the doctrine of divine sacrifice, *called the folly of the cross, is* also revealed to us. There is no more universal myth in the history of religions than this one: from the Mexican Quetzalcaatl to the Egyptian Osiris quartered by Typhon-Set, from the Indians Parusha and Crishna to the Babylonian Bel- Merodac of whose blood men were made, from the Greek god immediately devoured (rtπροίόTOVOC) of Oxirincus mythology to the mystical figure resolved on Golgotha into ineffable light, we see transmuted in time and space

the same theme, of alienation, of the death of the L'no in the birth of the world. And the *consensus gentium* - whose importance Cicero elevated to the point of proof of the truth of the God - on that occasion so strongly realized, should well have drawn the philosopher's attention, and incited him to elevate to clear logical consciousness what was poetically thought of in that myth; which, on the other hand - if we exclude the Hegelian attempt in regard to Christian dogma - is still taken in its naivete, so that it is either relegated among the fantasies of primitive peoples, or is misunderstood according to the mere letter. Now, the deep meaning of sacrifice is that by it the divine essence is realized and, on the other hand, the world itself. God would not be if he did not sacrifice himself, if he did not produce and in himself remain nothing, if he did not depart with creation from himself. It is one and the same act therefore that gives reality and to the world and to God: since, as Lao-tze puts it (XXXIX). the other rests on the low, the Tao that is absolute only in itself is pure act, that is, non-being, is conditioned by being, that is, by the placing of things, in which it annihilates itself and by annihilating itself is, as Tao. The Gospel will later configure this wisdom in the symbolic episode of Christ washing the feet of his disciples.

But then sacrifice is but the mediator of supreme egoism, alienating oneself in others is but realizing oneself as an individual. The spirit of the myth thus contradicts the letter, and in *Tao-teh-king* it will be possible to say that only by being inegoist one is an individual, that is, selfish (VII, XIX). From which it also follows that vulgar egoism marks only a naive and contradictory stage of individuality; as a selfish, I shall say so, empirical self, the self in fact excludes the possibility of being truly, profoundly selfish; whereas only if he sacrifices himself. if he yields (LXXXIII), if he abandons himself - if he denies, in short, egoism - can he be selfish in the most to the power and realize himself as absolute individuality. Consequently, in Lao-tze the inegoism of the Dao - creator and yet eternally empty, giver of reality and yet not lord - is contrasted with the human who proceeds only outwardly, never affects the essence - the real self - remains in self and thus has no self. The inexhaustible creation in words (V) masks the evil egoism, which has immanent its own critique and dissolution: for since one has sacrificed oneself only outwardly, what is correlatively realized is a superficial, discursive self, and beyond it remains the inner darkness of the real self which, locked in its avarice, deludes itself into being but in fact is not. While the absence of the inner self, non-egoism, resolves itself into perfection, it is only thus that one is truly an individual and lord of the self (XV). Five centuries later the Gospel will say, "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who loses it will have eternal life in the kingdom of heaven." But how different in the presentation of the two doctrines! In the Chinese everything is placed sharply, logically in its truth, in the calmness and transparency of a thought that knows no contamination of sentiment: in that clarity the maxim appears directly- minded in its inner sense, cold, shining, not invoking faith but expressing the inexorable logic that conditions divine selfishness, the original model of every individuality, the purpose of the universe (XLV). In orthodox morality, on the other hand, the profound wisdom of the law is depotentiated, reduced to a merely human precept, a true exoteric *caput mortuum* in itself, not only incomprehens-

sible, but attesting to the sense of individuality that is in us as our best nobility, and to which that maxim-if properly understood-points instead to developments to the point of deification.

These are the cornerstones of Taoist metaphysics. But-we have said-in this system speculation has value only if it is justified by a real process of modification whereby man achieves perfection, and he himself experiences-as his own life-the divine rhythm of the Tao. Thus, closely connected to the doctrine of the Way, we have a doctrine of virtue, of *Teli*, outlining the methodology of perfection (2). In principle, the doctrine of *Teli* tends to move man from phenomenal consciousness, from life in the fact-from the state, in short, of being a creature in which he lives in perpetual forgetfulness of himself, in a true living death-to present consciousness, to the original source of the real, which is not outside him, but is his own intimacy. A caveat must be made here. The act, it has been said, is the Dao, which in itself is non-esse- re: one might therefore think that Daoist morality has for its end the total erasure in consciousness of all concrete determination: and there has been no lack of well-meaning Orientalists who have tried to make a poorly understood Buddha digest Lao-tze's morality. Now, this is called equivocating in the most deplorable way the Chinese philosopher, and mainly making abstraction of the metaphysical presuppositions of Lao-tze's ethics, whereby the latter speculatively indeed rises to a far greater height than Sakia Muni; so much so that the Buddhist teaching, at least in its ordinary exoteric-Western presentation, could be taken as a mere moment of the morality of the Dao. Indeed, I hope I have highlighted that the culmination of Daoist theodicy is the conception of a logic of the Divine, whereby the Divine realizes its absoluteness only by denying itself-that is, by creating, by positing the world as real. To deny the concrete world would therefore be to deny God, and this is absurd and contradictory. Nor is the compromise of Vedanta and neo-Platonic philosophy worthwhile, which, while retaining creation, wants to transmute it along the increasingly abstract scale of essences of emanationism: for the world in so far as it is concrete and ròtttXóxnq will be able to volatilize it into a KÓapoq voqróq but not make it be what in essence it is not, that is, something outside of creation. Lao-tze's morality, consistent with its metaphysical premises, does not at all tend toward a "negation" of the world, much less a sublimation of it: the world, he says, is to be left as it is, in its full normalcy; the work is to be centered on another plane, interpenetrated yes, but yet essentially distinct from the first (LXV).

Here Lao-tze unfolds another profound doctrine: man ordinarily lives only in the product,

to be the center, so the life force is not closed in itself, but dispersed, prostituted in a purely human consciousness and utilization. This dispersion realizes the excess of our life, with its empty splendors, an excess that is deeply desired by Lao-tze (HIM) as a theft on the one hand, as an ambitious conceit on the other: theft, because in this way we remove our power from the center and with it realize ourselves instead as a personality made up of will, of practical actions, of passions; conceit, because we think to enforce this obscure product in which our nobility as individuality, as I, as the true self, has been used and made to decay. Instead, we need to detach ourselves from the world by letting it subsist indifferently (LIX), to concentrate, to enclose instead within ourselves -- within it, I would say almost in depth -- all that there is of originality in the human being, in order to realize ourselves as *avtftottoq'appaToq*, as absolute actuality, as the nothingness imbibing the world and thus establish in us the duality of the divine formula.

Outwardly, therefore, it is necessary to identify oneself with the ordinary, such is the depth (LXX): even better, to be adequate to everything (Vili), to all assent, no effort, for to strive to stand on tiptoe is an illusion of rising, and he who possesses the Way is far from such decadence (XXIV); he who stands in the light remains in the dark (XXIV), blunt instead the sharp, soften the dazzling (IV). All faculties proceed according to the earthly demands of the various domains (Vili): full automatism (LV, X), being of mourning in the ordinary, this is required to depart from the ordinary. Grief and death are the profound warning to those who delude themselves that they can overcome themselves by standing out, by opposing fact as fact (i.e., to overcome humanity as man) and not as act, but adaptation resolves it (Vili). Letting go: letting go testifies deep root, strong trunk, path to immortal power (LIX). Greatness is nothing but letting go (LXI). And, at the deepest possession, wanting without wanting to want, acting without wanting to act, feeling without wanting to feel (LXIII, LXXVII); thus one is above all influence and struggle (*passim*): like water, the Perfect One is indomitable and invulnerable because he adapts himself to everything (VII, LXXVI, LXXVII); he, in order to place himself at the apex, veils, eclipses, his I (LXVI, LXXVII); outside mediocre, inside great (LXX): acquiring without conquering, possessing without taking, progressing without advancing (LXIX), to be understood as progressing in depth and not in extension. Indeed, all acting according to the Dao is acting without force or domination (XXX); in fact good prisoner has no need to enclose. good ruler has no need to rule (XXV11). Naiveté will be the veil of perfection (XVIII), the Perfect One knows himself to be enlightened, strong and great and yet shows himself to be dark, weak and small (XVIII): but he, retracting himself into the impenetrable depths, reaches the essential element and makes himself elusive, inexhaustible, never reducible to powerlessness; while he appears flexible, never recurring to rejection and opposition (XVIII). Thus he is sweet *and* strong lord (XXV111).

11 Perfect is far from connecting any desire or complacency to power: it is not attracted by it, it avoids its splendor, it does not there

aspires (XXIX); he, simply, *is*, without his being based on the action or needs of force (XXX), will or those other forms of self-persuasion on which the false and empty human personality feeds.

Such a norm is profound: the empirical individual ordinarily places himself in the same plane as the fact; but since the fact is himself, if the powers of the act are applied to that plane, nothing but hysteria can come forth, and the "I" which here attempts to overcome the fact, insofar as in the sphere of the fact it carries the conflict, is in this irretrievably chained. Only when the individual adapts itself to the given, to the worlds, does the sterile opposition in extension cease, the force that is now free can instead move in depth, and the ego is liberated because it goes to possess itself in the act. It is necessary, therefore," says Lao-tze, "to move from fullness to emptiness where the essentiality of fullness consists and converges; it is also said that the passion of life leads to death, for the love of living enchains, thus kills, prevents that possession of the origin whereby the Perfect One, while living, stands so far above life that neither rhinoceros horn nor enemy's sword would know where to strike it (L). The hysteria shown above is enacted as an enhancement of the given or ungiven, which, however, engenders in it nothing but decadence and corruption (L, III, XII). While the Perfect One does not lose the self in the non-self, he subtracts himself from it, can thus consist in the self and thus truly gain the non-self (XII); consequently he instead of gathering, abandons his riches, and thus is realized in the center (LXXX1). Spontaneity and selflessness are thus the phenomenon of the Perfect One, who realizes his absence from the "I," and thus veils absolute immovable individuality (XIX). Hence arises the sense of the grandmother of adequacy, which also sounds: to be all in the fragment, straight in the curved, full in the void (XXII); for by abandoning through non-act the fact and instead shifting the I to the act - which is in itself one and absolute - the whole individuality remains intangible in its straightness behind every thing, however transient and finite it may be.

And at such conceptions Lao-tze thus draws his Perfect: he appears, impenetrable in his loftiness (XX), a beguiler of sound human reason (LXIV), at society beyond glory and shame, beyond honor and contempt (LVI), for he who conceives the Dao has no pious duties (XXXV) and the esteem of men has no place at his freedom. He appears obscure (XV). idiot, clumsy, without purpose or desire (XIX. XX), wandering stranger who assists (XXXV), in himself devoid of all love (V), locked up in his lonely summit (XX); sufficient to himself (LXXII). straight but flexible, clear but without splendor (LVIII). In its height it does not even know of itself (111), yet it confounds those who know (III). The turbid river of passion passes over him without moving him, for that river is himself according to his wandering and rolling humanity without ceasing (XX). Beyond letting go, contracted in himself, he becomes center (XXII); concentrated, he achieves himself, (XXII); different from all, alone among all he is a lo (XX).

At these general maxims, we find in *Tao-teh-king* important methodological details: it is, for example, acknowledged the absolute power of faith in the phrase: "believe not, and that shall not be" (LXXII); but on the other hand

knowledge is understood as capable of a real modification of consciousness; whence it is said that he who penetrates the immutable to which the disrupted becoming is veiled, recognizes the Tao and such knowledge is worth drawing him into solitude or *oneness*, making him Master, placing him in the omnipresent way, in the motionless center of the act (XVI).

Lao-tze also preempts that false interpretation of his doctrine, whereby it should be believed that by surrendering oneself, by not wanting in one's empiricity, one should expect to see perfection fall from heaven, without any effort or merit (LXX, LXXXIII); and he distinguishes a propaedeutic stage of approximation to Virtue in which action must well be willed, and one is indeed aimed at acquiring power, however without purpose, taking care not to use it, watching over the threshold (XXXVII, LXXX), from Virtue proper in which non-willing action and non-willfulness of action dominates (XXXVIII). Concerning propaedeutics, since it is a self-evident absurdity to will the Way (XXXVII) - in fact, by doing so one would only exclude oneself from the Way, in the Way being only when all willing ceases and one avoids all that becomes concrete only through willing - all our willed work must be aimed only at detaching oneself from the human center of consciousness. Which is achieved through internal indifference (LXXIX), leveling everything, however without struggle (LXXXI); for all struggle, as we have seen, only demonstrates the importance, the reality of the thing being fought and subordinates to it indeed the energy we steal from ourselves under the illusion that we can bring it down. Instead, a subtle, effortless action is pointed out - for this measuring with our own humanity: it is, again, the action of water: there is in the world - he notes (LXXVIII) - nothing weaker and more docile than water, and yet, at the same time, there is also nothing more powerful and infallible than it in vanquishing the rigid and the strong. 11 value of such an attitude is found in our day recognized by the psychology of the subconscious, which shows how the "law of converted effort" renders sterile, indeed negative, all direct and voluntary action in the life of consciousness. - A particular maxim is that of the soul's dominion over the senses (X) aimed at establishing a constant parallelism, a full adequacy between the two. whereby, since it is no longer possible to be interested in the senses as a what outside oneself, to which one goes to chain oneself neck exploiting them, or even seconding them, indifference, automatism, is also psychologically realized.

The secret of initiation into the Dao lies, therefore, in realizing such an attitude that we can act on things without things being able to act on us (3), placing ourselves beyond that reciprocity inevitable in all human acting-mentioned in the Hermetic Books (4)-whereby the agent, precisely because of his acting, is as passive as the acted upon.

(3) It is the theoretical premise of what 40 years later will be more precisely formulated in *Riding the Tiger* (1961), as a method for suppressing an "age of dissolution," a contemporary version of the *Kali-yuga*, of which Evola will speak in *The Man as Power* (1926) and *The Rouse of Power* (1949) (Ed.)

(4) Trad. Ménard, p. 80.

It is a difficult thing to exaggerate the value of Lao-tze's doctrines, in which the divine is resolved into the human in a purity and simplicity of which we are rarely given to observe the equal. Having ripped open the mass of the opaque clouds of anguish, of doubt and passion of our outer humanity, he fixes in a cold and calm atmosphere with a few strokes the anatomy, the inner logic of the divine, reveals it as the very rationality of the real, and thus makes it true in spirit by identifying it with the very nature of man as an Absolute Individual, as Perfect, every following religion or philosophy far from surpassing his positions, has seldom been able to possess them in that clear and pure nakedness in which they lived in the mind of the great Chinese. On the contrary, most religions and morals have succeeded only in insulting man, for they have treated him as what he is not, as a creature, and have endeavored to humiliate his nobility in an ever-increasing ingrandizement in the sphere of the human, of the effect. Beyond them there remain in history only the scattered and uncertain fires of various mysticisms. However, all this is now inadequate for the modern consciousness, which has begun to realize the sense of the absolute reality and solitude of the person. Senonché price of such a conquest has been everything that previously formed his life and faith: his illusion. Hence man appears today a castaway clinging to that "I" which he does not yet know how to comprehend without tainting, but which he nevertheless intuits as his only certainty; without religion nor faith nor enthusiasm, between a science that in itself breaks down and a philosophy exasperated in a formal and empty sufficiency; thirsting for freedom and yet stiffened in the contrast with a nature, a society and a culture in which he now no longer recognizes himself.

At such a state of affairs, I feel the absolute relevance of Lao-tze's theories (5). Modern man has yet to learn that "I" which still knows only to babble in those deformed images that are Stirner's *V Unico* or the Man of Marx and Lenin's social ideologies, the absolute ITO of idealism or the lyrical subject of avant-garde aesthetics. Now it can be said that all of Lao-tze's work converges in a single interest: the Absolute Individual, the Perfect. It is for it that he - sensing the truth of the Tübingen school, that in God man projects that absolute which he does not yet dare to attribute to himself - has cleansed the divine from the mists of transcendence and the lees of sentiment, analyzed its rhythm and drawn from it a morality by which the individual can possess creation in its deepest root and realize the grandeur of his nature. Of course, Taoist ethics is very dangerous: but there are parts-

(5) It can be noted in passing here how of Lao-tze's theories are revealed as the metaphysical presuppositions-sometimes even conscious-of the strangest and most significant fruit of today's European culture, *Dadaism*.

[References to Lao-tze in the context of Dadaism can be found in Evola in one of his letters to Tzara in 1923 (see *Julius Evola's Letters to Tristan Tzara*. J. Evola Foundation, Rome. 1991. pp. 53-54) c in the essays *On Dadaism* of 1923 and *On the Meaning of Very Modern Art* of 1925 (see both in: Julius Evola. *Writings on avant-garde art*, edited by Elisabetta Valente, J. Evola Foundation. Rome. 1994. pp. 45-51 and 57-73) (Ed.)

te in which one must play all one's cards, in which man must know how to lead his will on a razor's edge: and it is in those alone that we can understand whether we are or whether we are not, whether there is a light or whether a gloomy atteiptov is the essence of creation.

In this version of *Tao-teh-king* of mine, I have kept in mind the earlier German version by Planckner and Uiar, the French by Julien, the English by Legge, and the Italian by Evans. Let my gratitude then be expressed here to Mr. He-sing for the discussion of the Chinese original.

The informing principle of the translation has been the constant elevation to the form of the concept-at the working hypothesis of the coherence of *Tao-teh-king* thought-that content which in Lao-tze. because of the structure of Chinese writing where every idea can only be expressed in direct or indirect reference to a sensible image, is found in symbolic and metaphorical species. The goodness of such a criterion seems to me to be proved even in *retrospect* by this, that by it the great part of those indeterminacies and absurdities which, if they could appear as a merit to the empty reverie of poetic consciousness, were, however, worth excluding *Tao-teh-king* from the serious consideration of the scholar of philosophy; to which we here intend to address ourselves.

J. EVOLA

Assisi, September 1922

FIRST BOOK

I

The Way of Ways (1) is not the ordinary way; the Name of Names is not the ordinary name.

Undetermined, unnameable, it appears as the universal essence; nameable, concrete, it appears as the becoming of the individual.

However: those who detach themselves, those who contemplate from afar can see where it is murky mist for those who with their passion participate in things (2). Now the Way is one beyond the opposition (3) that implements its phenomenon: fundamental essentiality, it is the unfathomable, the unfathomable basis that appears beyond the pan of the ultimate mystery.

II

Human consciousness, positing the beautiful, necessarily created along with it the ugly: defining the good, it gave in one necessarily reality to evil as well (4).

Being and non-being thus arise from each other from the differentiation of essence; possible and impossible from the differentiation of sensory experience; large and small from the differentiation of space; high and low from the differentiation in direction; articulate sound and

(1)) That which implements and grounds the laws of man and the world. Way (= Tao) will henceforth be valid to mean the essential law of reality.

(2) That is to say, the possibility is preached in man, of disentangling himself from the phenomenal opposition in which he is determinate as a becoming individual, when with indifference he distances things from himself.

(3) Of nameable and unnameable = individual and universal.

(4) This is the same theme stated by St. Paul in saying that with the law comes sin.

Noise from the differentiation of sound; antecedent and consequent from the differentiation of continuity.

Thus:

The Perfect One lives without purpose, directs without ordering, acts without impulse, creates without giving form, conceives unselfishly, accomplishes without acting (5). Essentially:

It is outside the differentiation of human consciousness the source of the original force.

III

Over-enhancement breeds strife (6); over-valuing the rare breeds guilty craving; superb display of that which transcends one's own being breeds envy.

Hence the Perfect One goes without preference or prejudice: he is wavering and weak in his passion, but strong in his inner being (7).

Without knowing it or desiring it he leads the people (8); he confuses those who know, he avoids action: and society lives freely for him in its organization.

IV

He Via is not (has) essence, he is inexhaustible act.

Unfathomable, it gives the essential norm to things.

It blunts the sharp, clears the murky softens the dazzling, orders the elementary of matter. Unquenchable clarity! Could there ever be a creator - a father for this Supreme?

V

The universal does not know love: he transcends the individual who is worth to him only as a means; the Perfect does not know love: he passes over individuals as a means.

About human consciousness as a principle of differentiation and polarity. Lao-tze anticipates here the fundamental principle of the philosophies of Fichte and Schelling.

(5) This is made clear by the maxim that follows; to stand in the originality of the Dao the Perfect One must absorb and dissolve within himself the duality inherent in every determination of normal consciousness.

(6) In fact, the greater intensity given to bread upsets the balance and, in the reaction of the whole, generates struggle.

(7) Lett.: in his bones.

(8) The I Ching also allows, "He leads the people by making them unconscious and without desire." Thus the Julien and the Evans. The Ular leaves the alternative: "*Erführt das Volk Wissens - und Wunsch-los.*"

*The whole (9) resembles a bellows that, while creating inexhaustibly in its movement, in itself remains empty.
Man, on the other hand, beyond the inexhaustibility of his speech, remains in his not at all full self (to self) (10).*

VI

*The life force of becoming is eternal: it is the inconceivable Mother, the inconceivable Mother root of Heaven and Earth.
Eternally turning in on itself, it needs no push.*

VII

*The universal is eternal. It is eternal because it is not individual: such is the condition for eternity.
Hence the Perfect is by disappearing that it reveals itself, it is by exhausting itself that it acquires infinite being, it is by losing itself that it becomes Individual (11).*

Viii

*Virtue, similar to water, taking without struggle the form of everything, to everything is adequate. The further it leads away from the ordinary, the more it leads near the Way.
Hence the Perfect is earthliness in the domain of immediate being, depth in the domain of the soul; love in the domain of feeling; truth in the domain of thought; development in the domain of purpose; strength in the domain of Pagi re; opportunity in the domain of practice.
Basically: adequacy toward everything dissolves pain (12).*

IX

One cannot at one time preserve and fill; one cannot at one time sharpen and touch (13); one cannot at one time possess and maintain (14).

(9) In the context with the usual attributes of the Dao, here should be taken to mean not the universal or the whole (graphically and mythically in the text: "heaven and earth") which is instead only one term of the phenomenal opposition (cf. I), but the Way itself. I think the aporia-recurring in several other places and of no small moment for the unity of the Lao-tze system-can be explained by the graphic expression: the sign of heaven could be taken here for the concept of *totality*, to express with it the Dao as the basis of *all* real.

(10) See Introduction. Cf. the guilt of avarice ch. IX.

(11) The individual, denying itself in its empirical and immediate form, is affirmed in the universal, whence it is realized as an absolute, or Perfect, individual.

(12) This theme will be developed by the doctrines of Christian gnosis: thus for Basilides in the "Final Consumption" each element will be restored to its own plane and nature, with which the pain of the spirit will cease.

(13) Gaining the extreme essentiality is while participating in things.

(14) By maintaining, one *becomes* fixed in the thing, one *becomes* so, and one can then no longer possess it or possess oneself, having thereby lost the absolute centrality of the act, of the Way.

Inner avarice means guilt.

Acting, implementing while remaining in nothingness, such is the Way.

X

*The dominance of the spirit over the senses-establishing the parallelism of the senses to that-
leads to indifference.*

Self-education, through the maxim of adaptation, leads to simplicity.

Extending judgment is purification and leads to excellence.

The feeling of reciprocity (15) at the basis of society brings its self-ordination.

The instability of fate forms the receptivity of the spirit.

The vision that penetrates things leads to the futility of knowledge/discourse!

*To implement development: to create without maintaining, to act without profiting, to rise
without dominating.*

This is the Way.

XI

*Thirty spokes converge in the hub: and it is in the emptiness of the hub that the
essentiality of the wheel rests. Jars are made of clay: but it is the inner void
that realizes the essentiality of the jar. Walls and roof constitute the house: but
the inner void realizes the essentiality of the house.*

In general: from being proceeds/usability. from non-being essentiality.

XII

Excessive application to visual impressions dulls the ability to see.

Excessive application to auditory impressions dulls the ability to intend.

*Excessive application to tastes obtunds the possibility of tasting. Too great passion for play
obtunds the possibility of knowing. Excessive lust destroys the possibility (16).*

(15) Recall, for the understanding of this element, the Kantian "Operate in such a way, that the maxim of your will may stand as the principle of a universal legislation."

(16) Desire, immediately realizing according to necessity only one direction, already in itself excludes other possibilities, thus kills in the spirit arbitrariness, freedom. Likewise, in the preceding sentences it is meant that in full adherence to things, one loses oneself in that principle of freedom, of self-possession, in which alone a pure dominated cognition of things is likewise possible. Cf. ch. I.

[The concept would later be developed by Julius Evola in *The Man as Power* of 1926, *The Doctrine of Awakening* of 1943, *The Vogue of Power* of 1949, in part also in *Orientalisms* of 1950. *Men and Ruins* of 1953 and in a very special way in *Riding the Tiger* of 1961 (Ed.)]

Hence, the Perfect - in order to gain the Not-I to the I - does not lose the I in the Not-I, subtracts itself from the outer, consists in the inner (17).

XIII

//forgiveness brings the humiliation of shame. Honors weigh down The spirit] like the body.

What does it mean, "Forgiveness brings the humiliation of shame " ?

Forgiveness [others'] presupposes one's own subordination to the other], one therefore obtains it through the subordination of oneself to the other]: it brings, when one has undergone it, shame.

What does it mean, "Weighing down like the body"?

The proper of the body is to offer grip to every weight [= affection], the body is thus the bearer of all heaviness.

It follows: those who take away themselves from both body and society will be able to rule them both freely; those who stifle their passion aimed at the body or society will be able to lead them loyally.

XIV

The sense (18) seeks it but does not see it: whence it appears to it as the undifferentiated; the sense hears it but does not understand it, whence it appears to it as the unperceivable; the sense touches it but cannot grasp it, whence it appears to it as the uncreated. These three determinations insofar as they transcend sense are indistinguishable, and sense thus gathers them into a 'unity beyond itself: negation of the higher light and the lower darkness, eternally indeterminate, folding into the incoherent, form of the formless, phenomenon of the non-phenomenon, unmediated by anything else, not coming from synthesis of anything else, without beginning or end.

Beyond such analysis, synthetic knowledge of its eternal nature is possible: an act that draws itself from itself absolutely in development (20).

(17) Note the antithesis of such a method with that of Indian mysticism, in which the individual must resolve himself in the understanding and love of the Universal, until in the so-called *samādhi* he disappears "like a grain of salt dissolving in a sea of water" (*Hathayogapradipikā*, IV, 5-7)); where in Lao-tze there is precisely the opposite direction, of centralization and egoization, and its result is the life of the individual in the absolute act. The same opposition occurs in Christianity between St. Francis and Meister Eckhart.

(18) To be understood as the ordinary categories of the intellect = man.

(19) The Way, the Tao.

(20) Sentence translated somewhat loosely: in the text are the ideas of development and spontaneity, also referring to human evolution. Analysis refers to the apprehension of the Way *from outside*, as a function of and in opposition to the categories of sense; in synthesis one is transported to *the* Way, so that the negative determination resulting from analysis is transmuted into experimentation, that the Way is aulocytosis.

[Self-consciousness is a "technical" term in Gentile idealism: the act of self-consciousness as an inner, free process by which the self posits itself, thus determining its own being (Ed.)]

XV

The Masters of ancient times were free, clairvoyant, intuitive: in the vastness of the forces of their spirit the self was still unconscious: and this unconsciousness of the inner force gave greatness to their appearance.

They were as cautious as one who wards a winter torrent, as vigilant as one who knows around him the enemy, as cold as the stranger, as vain as melting ice, as rough as unruffled wood, as vast as great valleys, as impenetrable as murky water.

Who, today, could with the greatness of his light lighten the inner darkness? Who, today, could with the greatness of his life animate inner death?

In those was the Way: they were individuals and lords of the self: and in perfection their absence was resolved (21).

XVI

He who has penetrated the apex, beyond the particular finds the eternally identical; for the life of the particular, beyond the interplay of the moments of ascent and dissolution, resolves itself into the cyclic course, and the circle is the immovable, the eternally identical. The immutable is the eternal norm of becoming, and the norm of becoming is the essence of all life.

Consciousness of the unchanging essence of life leads to calm vision; ignorance of the essence of life generates the dark chaos of the soul.

Awareness of the essence of life leads to loneliness (22).

To be alone is to be superior.

To be superior means to be lord.

To be lord means to be sublime.

In sublimity flows the Way: the omnipresent, the invariably identical.

XVII

The early organizers of the society were barely known to the people.

I following were loved and praised.

! following were feared.

The following were scorned.

Only the feeling of reciprocity can ground society.

(21) The absence of the ego of the empirical, "outer" center of consciousness. Always keep in mind the dialectic, whereby the consciousness of the absolute individual excludes the peripheral coagulation of the empirical self.

(22) For that essence is the absolute self, which by its nature is *unique* and solitary.

/ first, grave and reserved in their speech, accomplished their work: and the people lived in the illusion of an order born of their own nature.

XVIII

The Way was lost: and then judgment arose.

At the lordship of judgment the primitive spontaneity of actions disappeared.

Broken the consanguineous bond by which man lived in communion with the original, the family was born; estimated the primitive social unity arose the deployment in nations.

XIX

Devalue the usefulness of knowing, despise the obligation -- and the welfare of society will be increased a hundredfold.

Devalue the usefulness of the law, despise the duty-and the feeling of reciprocity will reign again in society.

Devalue the usefulness of purpose, despise the interested will - and guilt will die in society.

Conforming to the appearance of these three maxims would not conform to their truth.

It is necessary essentially: to be Individual and to appear natural: to be without lo and to appear disinterested (23).

XX

Reason (24) is a source of pain.

Contradiction in decision (25) is regrettable, but contradiction in action (26) testifies to power.

"Act like everyone," duty born of reason...

No! guilty folly!

(23) The maxims preach anintellectualism, simplicity and disinterestedness not in themselves, but only as effects in the discursive self of that inner process in which the individual realizes his own absoluteness by denying himself as an empirical egoist. Effect of such an effect would be for Lao-tze a natural state of harmony and justice in society. To "conform to the appearance of these maxims" is to assume and actualize them as valid in themselves, and in themselves having meaning and purpose; to conform to their truth is to assume and practice them with the understanding that they have no truth and rationality other than as a moment (or effects) of the transcendental process of the absolute individual; so that for example Tesser natural and disinterested (= moral) is but *Vappearance*. the phenomenon of individual being-which in one is (see note to ch. XV) being without self.

(24) Reason, to be understood in a pejorative sense, as inherent in merely phenomenal or human consciousness.

(25) That is, the choice, the oscillation between opposites of human judgment, as opposed to the absolute spontaneity of the present.

(26) It is the one inherent in the consistency of human consciousness with inner consciousness, of the emptiness of that with the fullness of it, which will be colored in the following lines: it is in the action-

Everyone is easily ravished by superficial joy: all they need is a party, a spring evening, I, on the other hand, strongly anchored at the bottom of the river of feeling, remain serious and quiet beyond joy like the child who does not yet know affection. I let myself live ... like this ...; detached from everything, I don't know where to go.

All desire excess, while I am devoid of all craving; I am clumsy in life, I have no practical sense. All live in light, while I am deep in darkness. All need companionship (27), while I love nothing but solitary height: I am as unstable as the wave, I wander restlessly. Everyone has an experience: whereas I behave like a mere, like an idiot!

I am different from all: but, possessing the original essentiality, only I am a lo!

XXI

Law (28) is the phenomenal (nameable) form of the Way: but the in-self of the Way is inexplicable and incomprehensible.

Inexplicable, incomprehensible it contains the rational. Inexplicable, incomprehensible it contains the real. Inexplicable, incomprehensible it contains the spiritual essentiality: as such it is TAssolute; as such it is Human.

Never will it wane: being has its original principle from her.

What is the foundation of this knowledge ? - "I am ".

XXII

Being whole in the fragment, straight in the curved, full in the empty. Concentrated, one achieves; dispersed, one fails.

Hence the Perfect maintains its unity and becomes the model of the world.

He does not put himself in the light, and he shines; he is dissatisfied with himself, and he excels; contracted in himself, he becomes center; he has no complacency for himself, and he becomes great: devoid of desires, he is invulnerable.

Would the old saying, "Whole in the fragment " be meaningless?

No: the original will (29) realizes the truth of it.

ne. because the Dao is act, and it is in the movement of its dialectic that the opposition of the two consciousnesses is created and held firm.

(27) Grazio's *appetitus societatis*.

(28) That is, the circular course; see ch. XVI.

(29) That is, the transparency of various human limitations or determinations in the consciousness of the absolute individual.

.XXIII

The truth lies in transmuting ideas: a cyclone does not rage for an entire day; a heavy rain does not last all day. What symbolizes such instability? The way of nature. Nature is changeable and even more than it is man.

Therefore (30): to imitate the Way's way of acting in order to make oneself similar to it; to represent the Virtue of the Way in order to be able to resolve oneself into it; to surrender oneself to disruption in order to realize it in oneself.

Adapt to the Way in order - by virtue of it - to resolve into it; adapt to Virtue in order - by virtue of it - to resolve into it; adapt to disintegration in order - by virtue of it - to resolve into it.

The imitant and the idea that informs it are mutually realized to the point of homogeneity (31).

XXIV

The exertion of one who holds himself on the tip of his toes is not elevating himself, the exaggerated beating forward of his legs is not walking (32).

He who sets himself in the light (33), remains in the dark; he who believes himself to have arrived, finds himself pushed back; to put forth (exhibit) oneself is to depend (34); to esteem oneself (35) is to decay.

All this in relation to the Way is corruption of the spirit, and in relation to the purpose is the useless: it is far from that who possesses the Way.

XXV

There is an indistinct principle cause of all becoming; eternally stable, occult; having in itself basis, in everything eternally equal to itself; impulse of all development, original form of life.

Unnameable, Tuomo calls it Via.

Strength passes into greatness, greatness passes into the immeasurable, the immeasurable passes into the infinitely distant, the infinitely distant is the return.

(30) The inference is: since the idea is true only in its adequacy to the mode of nature (mutability), the adaptation (imitation) of the self to the mode of the Way will realize the truth of the Way in the self.

(31) The idea realizes the action (*fornaliter*), the action realizes the idea (*Onaterialiter*): the two terms are homogenized in concreteness in the activity that realizes its ideal or purpose.

(32) To be understood: it is not by an empowerment of man-the sphere of fact-that the overcoming of man is achieved.

(33) = One who places self in the sphere of the fact which is (34) a bit out of self. a performing: the fact as such has lapsed from present independence, thus implies subordination, relation to other: obscurity.

(35) In the ego thus exteriorized, phenomenalized.

Now the Way, Heaven [the universal], Earth and the Ordinator are the four extreme quantities: the Ordinator is one of them. But man is founded on Earth, Earth is founded on Heaven, Heaven is founded on the Way. the Way is founded on itself (36).

XXVI

*Gravity is deeper than joy; stillness is the lord of motion.
Hence the Perfect One, ever wandering, never in fact departs from his grave stillness; even in earthly apogees he stands alone with himself, beyond the exterior.
Cursed, then, be the superficial life of the great of the world, who, by his example of joy, weakens the social bond: for easy indulgence in pleasure dazzles the people and destroys order (37).*

XXVII

*Good walker leaves no trail, good speaker does not hitch, good calculator does not need to count, good keeper does not close, good prisoner does not need ropes.
Hence the Perfect One always knows what he has to do, he is never forced into refusal, he always finds means, he is never reduced to helplessness. Such is his double glory (38).
It follows that the Perfect One is master of the inferior man (39), the latter is but his instrument. Veneration of the master, love for the instrument are - in spite of everything - the basis for a social constitution.
This is subtle and essential.*

XXVIII

*To know oneself strong and appear weak, such is the basis (40) (of social life); he who possesses it never derives from Virtue and will return to the simplicity of childhood.
Knowing how to be enlightened and seeming obscure, such is the basis (of social life); one who possesses it never lapses from Virtue and will return to the pinnacle.*

(36) It is a kind of phenomenology of spirit in which the human proceeds through the various planes of nature, overcomes the relation to other in the Way and there recognizes itself, the infinitely distant being the return. Cf. ch. XXI.

(37) In the sense that the desire to enjoy a life similar to that of the grown-ups causes revolt c destroys the state.

(38) On the one hand, to remain invulnerable in himself; on the other hand, to second, to be adequate, by this shirking, to every instance of his lower life.

(39) As those who contain within themselves the action of the inferior without being in any way affected by it.

(40) It is still the antithesis of phenomenon and essence, inherent in the displacement in the act of the center of consciousness and the related depowering of the self as humanity.

*Knowing oneself large and showing oneself small, such is the basis (of social life);
he who possesses it always progresses in Virtue to the state of naiveté; naiveté
is the veil of perfection.
The Perfect One, conforming to this, becomes chief, becomes strong and sweet lord.*

XXIX

*Wanting to distinguish society according to a norm drawn from experience is
impossible; as a complex system of contingent factors, society on the other
hand cannot conform to a rational ordering determined by an individual.
To order it is to disorder it, to fix it is to destroy it, for the action of the individual
varies: now it is a going forth, now it is a yielding; now it is heat, now it is
frost; now it is strength, now it is weakness; now it is motion, now it is
stillness.
Hence the Perfect avoids the pleasure of power, is not attracted by it, avoids its
splendor.*

XXX

*Dominion according to Life is not dominion by force: for there is no action on which a
reaction does not reconvene (41).
And where armies passed, brambles spring up, where war raged, famine rages.
The Good is, and you don't have to of force.
Is, and is stripped of the splendor [of his being],
Is, and does not adorn itself with fame.
is, without its being based on action.
Is, and has no need to oppress.
Is, and does not aspire to power.
The point that is the highest is likewise that of decadence. Outside the Way, everything is
destined for corruption.*

XXXI

*Through empire, not good is realized but rather decadence.
True strength is not empire: without tending to it the wise man proceeds in greatness.
The empire is the bearer of neither good nor wisdom, it does not improve; even by pacifying it
oppresses; it is not hello, that beauty is joy, and it instead generates contentment only in
the spirit of destruction; and the destroying spirit in man is not a sign of strength.
Happiness is on the left, misfortune on the right: the commanded are on the left, the leaders on
the right.*

(41) Action as such has the passion of its object, so it would not know how to achieve absolute dominance.

Announcement of war, announcement of doom: death of men, source of weeping. Victory by force is sorrow (42).

XXXII

The Way is eternal and beyond the particular: simple as the extreme part of matter, it encompasses the whole in itself. It is the ordinator in itself (43).

The beyond. penetrating the terrestrial, brings down the sweet fertilizing dew, which though men do not understand. For the individual is a product of differentiation and as such implies an end: the possibility of suffering an end demonstrates limitation of consciousness, and such a consciousness is the essence of the individual (44).

The Way is scattered throughout the universe, but it is also as a valley in which the rivers and streams of the mountains converge.

XXXIII

To know the human is prudence; to know oneself /I'interior! is enlightenment. To dominate others is strength; to dominate oneself is power.

Sufficiency in itself is superiority: possibility to accomplish is energy.

He who does not disintegrate himself (45) is eternal; he who lives after death (46) is immortal.

XXXIV

The Way is infinite and omnipresent: it is by it that every being is born, develops and persists: it is the original creator of everything and yet it is not dominating. As eternally without essence, it seems infinitely small I humble].

In Her the eternal circle of things is closed. As non-signor she reveals herself to be infinitely great.

And the Perfect is not the instrument of greatness [of the Way], but the purpose of greatness.

XXXV

He who understands His great image [of the Way], goes through the world without duties, wandering stranger attending.

(42) See, for the meaning of pain, which clarifies this phase. the introduction.

(43) That is, the organization in it is latent, not yet deployed in becoming as law.

(44) Leti.: it is that which maintains the individual as such. It is understood by itself, that here individual is taken naturalistically, as an individual.

(45) He who does not apply himself to the external, but always keeps himself in the collected unity of the act.

(46) After the realization of indifference. after detachment. Cf. Valentinus: "Inasmuch as you dissolve the world and are not yourselves dissolved, you are lords of all destruction and of all creation" (Clement of Alexandria, *Straniata*, IV, 20).

Freedom, tranquility, height, joy, sovereignty are its foods: and yet the Way-described-appears dry and dull.

It was toward Her that the eyes of many were directed, but they did not see Her; it was for Her that many listened, but they did not hear Her. But yet they invariably lived in Her life.

XXXVI

The small implies the great, weakness implies strength; descent implies elevation, emptiness implies fullness (47). Such is the basis of transcendental wisdom.

The soft triumphs over the hard, the weak triumphs over the strong. But as the fish would not know how to live by abandoning the dark depths, so let man [volga re] not be unfamiliar with the weapon of this wisdom of the Lord.*

XXXVII

The Way. in its invariable non-action, contains the principle of all action. By imitating it, the organizer holds all beings to himself.

Everything is moved by passion: I, on the other hand, am unshakable in my transcendental simplicity; for simplicity, whose unity transmutes into the whole (48), is imperturbable.

When this imperturbability (at the passions) is realized in society, it will become free.

(47) To refer to Virtue, where in fact negation is realized by the supreme affirmation. where non-being, emptiness, is the expression of the actual nature and fullness of Dao.

(48) Lett: the unity-less simplicity that subsumes everything into itself.

SECOND BOOK.

XXXVIII

To be truly in Virtue is not to want to be in Virtue: and the Virtue thus possessed is that of the Way (1).

An imperfect possession of Virtue is shown by the concern (2) not to deviate from Virtue: thus one deviates from the Virtue of the Way.

Higher Virtue is unwilling action and unwillingness to act (3).

Approximation [preparation] to Virtue is intentional action and will to action.

Morality is willed action and non-willed action (4); law is willed action and fulfillment of action; custom is willed action and exchangeably limited action.

Hence: having lost the Way, Virtue remains; having lost Virtue, morality remains; having lost morality, law remains; having lost law, custom remains. Custom is only the exteriority of morality and marks the beginning of decadence: likewise, culture, though it is the image of the Way, is a means of decadence.

Therefore the Perfect One holds to the essential and abandons the phenomenon, holds to the origin and abandons the ray: it avoids this, it holds to that.

(1) The way of the Way is the absence of the way.

(2) Leu ; from the will.

(3) Non-willing action as absolute act, non-willing action as indifference and non-power of the fact, of the periphery.

(4) = Acting Distinterested

[On the concept of "selfless action" as it will be developed by Julius Evola, see in sequence the works already cited: *Man as Power. The Doctrine of Awakening. The Yoga of Power. Riding the Tiger* (Ed.).]

XXXIX

The foundation of being is its being a participant in unity.

Heaven is pure because it has unity in itself, the earth is solid because it has unity in itself, the soul is conscious because it has unity in itself, emptiness (5) him contained because it has unity in itself, beings are living because they have unity in themselves, the prince (the organizer) can inform society with order because he has unity in himself. All that is, is as it is in grace of 'unity: heaven without purity would dissolve, earth without solidity would collapse. emptiness without content would be a non-being, beings without life, would disappear, the prince if he did not realize order would be a destroyer.

The superior rises from the inferior, the high rests on the low. And the ordainer keeps itself null, neither expressing nor signifying anything, born of that which is to be organized (6). [However:]

The sum of the parts does not give the whole [in its organic unity]: if the original force is absent, in place of the regular clarity of the diamond there will be nothing but formless gangue.

XL

The eternal return to nonbeing is the way of the Way (7).

Abandonment is the Way's mode of action.

Particular beings from non-being proceed into life; but their life is only a reconversion into non-being (8).

XLI

The perfect savant understands the Way and implements it [in himself]; the incomplete savant understands the Way and abides by it; the inferior savant understands the Way and unable to follow it-uses it.

(5) To be understood as the spiritual. In the following lines saying, "emptiness without a content would be a non-being" refers to the now well-known dialectic, whereby the spirit is only insofar as, by *sacrificing itself* in a content, it is conquered as actuality.

(6) In the sense that the Way, actual being becomes real only in the position of the fact, of things. But these are existent only by means of law: the Way therefore must be ordering in order to realize itself; as such, it turns out to be born of that which is to be organized, but yet already having in itself the primordial Svaptq, without which the two terms would dissolve back into a murky chaos, instead of realizing the individual: as is said in the following sentences

(7) For the Way lets itself escape in creation (= abandonment), by this it denies itself, but through such denial it affirms itself as an act and reconverts to itself, to non-being. Cf. Hegel. *Aencycl. d. philos.* IV^oiss. .,§ 244.

(8) Cf. Proclus. *Inst. Theol.* 35. The life of the individual is a progressive consummation of bad individuality into absolute individuality, a progressive conquest of non-being, i.e., of being, until death. Cf. for this a *posteriori* deduction. Feuerbach. *Gedan. u. Tod u. Unsterblich.* chapters 2 and 3.

Hence it was said, He who penetrates the Way is in the solitude of upper darkness, he who goes the Way is isolated he who is conscious of the Way is human. The Virtue [= way] of greatness is universal surrender, perfect purity is simplicity. The Virtue of the Far is non-willingness of action, the Virtue of Strength is absolute spontaneity. It magnifies indefinitely those who have knowledge of it. The infinite square has no more corners, the infinitely large vessel has no more capacity, the infinitely high sound is no more audible, the infinitely large image has no more shape. The Way transcends sense and the particular: yet it lends itself to beings and carries out their development.

XLII

The Way is determined in the one; the one is determined in the opposition (in the dyad): the opposition is determined in the triad, and this is finally determined in the multiple. The multiple hovers around (central) abandonment and valve in becoming: an immaterial principle informs it with harmony. The individual possessed by impulses to action-not letting go-has no place in society. The ordainer is [instead] a propitiator of balance, and therefore great. "Gain becomes loss, loss becomes gain" (9). so speaks the vulgar wisdom. But I teach, "The Perfect One will never come to his death." Such is my Wisdom.

XLIII

The more flexible elements direct the more rigid elements into the world: the spiritual penetrates Timpenetrability of matter. This is why it recognizes the superiority of the unwilling. But very few can instruct without speaking, accomplish without doing.

XLIV

*What is closer to me, the self or fame? What is more precious to me, the self or riches? Is gain or loss harder for me? (1)
Excess (11) brings decadence, wealth brings loss.
He who is sufficient to himself suffices does not suffer ruin: he has the condition of eternity.*

(9) = "To conquer the Way you must give up the joys of humanity, which you would gain in loss instead." Lao-tze op[X>ne that, by overcoming such "gain," man achieves immortality.

(10) Gain is the pure self, loss l the discursive realized by fame c wealth.

(11) Recall that for Lao-tze, the empowerment of "fact," the excess from which human splendor, wealth and fame arise, marks a form of decay of the absolute self into the Non-Ego.

XLV

*She human perfection remains irremediable imperfection; human fullness remains an irreemphile emptiness; human straightness remains obliquity; human knowledge remains foolishness; human art remains a motionless pawing (12).
// motion wins the cold, rest wins the heat (13).
However, the Perfect Earthly remains the ultimate goal of the universe.*

XLVI

*When society lives by the Way, warhorses can be employed for the culture of the fields; when it moves away from it, warhorses are taken to guard the borders.
There is no greater fault than adherence to passion; greater evil than excess; greater deficiency than desire to acquire.
He knows satisfaction only who knows how to be sufficient for himself.*

XLVII

*Without going outside, one can penetrate the universe; without looking outside, one can see.
The farther one goes [in outer knowledge], the less one knows.
The Perfect One comes without walking: he penetrates the concept (14) of things without observing; he accomplishes without willing.*

XLVIII

*Study leads farther and farther (15); the Way-followed, on the other hand, leads farther and farther back, all the way to the [original] non-wanting.
The not-willing and not-acting make every door yield; for them one becomes lord of the 'Empire.*

XLIX

*The Perfect One has no special affections: his affections are those of the community.
He is good to the good as well as to the non-good; this is Virtue in goodness.
He is loyal to the loyal as well as to the non-loyal; this is Virtue in loyalty.
The Perfect One-in society-remains unflappable and ensures that no disturbance occurs in the common consciousness.*

(12) Ted. *Stammeln*; frane, *piétiner sur place*.

(13) I could not grasp the connection of this sentence with the rest.

(14) Leu.: the name.

(15) To be understood, naturalistic science always unfinished, leading indefinitely from conditioned to conditioned.

The members of society are his eyes and ears: he is the center, and the universal name.

L

Entering life is a turning toward death.

On man act thirteen causes of life and thirteen causes of death: now the thirteen causes of life precipitate him into death. Why? Because of the excessive enhancement of life (16).

Those, however, who have penetrated the essence of life, live and do not fear tigers or rhinos, fight and do not need armor: the rhino would not know where to strike him with his horn, the tiger where to sneer at him with his claws, the enemy where to pierce him with his sword.

Why? He, in life, is above life [= death].

LI

The Way is the principle, Virtue the preserver. Determination is the formative process in which the occult force unfolds (17).

So beings venerate the Way. honor Virtue: such veneration and honor is a duty they perform without knowing it, for it is the hidden foundation (conatus) of their nature.

The Way produces everything, nurtures everything, develops everything; everything is nurtured, accomplished, matured by her: she protects everything, keeps everything in circular motion; she creates and does not possess, acts without being an agent, has, and does not dominate.

Such is its occult Virtue.

LII

The original principle appears as the Mother of man: to recognize Mother means to know oneself as her child; to know oneself as a child means to recognize oneself as a continuation of Mother's life, and this means to overcome all corruption of human life.

Let the life force be shut in, let the dispersion (18) be ended, and the well (19) will never be exhausted. Dispersion of the life force, abandonment

(16) It is still the translation of the pure ego into the empirical or human ego that brings the empowerment of the latter, and yet its own decay. The ego by placing itself outside leaves room for passion and *motte*. This theory is found in Baadcr and Schelling, for whom evil and illness would be explained by the translation of the individual's deep power into his peripheral consciousness. Cf. Schelling. *trini. Uni. ii.d. IVessen d. in. Freiheittecc.* (transl. il.: Carabba. Lanciano, 1910. pp. 65-68).

(17) Virtue is the mode, the logical rhythm of the Way; and therefore the principle of the Way is through the Vinti that accomplishes and maintains its own nature. Remember then that Virtue comes to expression in the realizing process by determination the becoming.

(18) Cf. the "scattering of the members of the ineffable" in the *Apocryphal Huns of John* (M. R. James, *Apocr. Anecdota*, II).

(19) The ego, which enclosed within itself is eternal and inexhaustible, is the Tao; but that applied to its phenomenon and lost to itself, participates in the corruption of it.

to the pulses of action and the well will soon be exhausted. He who can penetrate its bottom [of the well I (20) will be enlightened.

Mastering in weakness is true strength; living in that greatness, entering that enlightenment; then the dissolution of the body will no longer be a loss. This is the eternal life.

LIII

Knowledge has for its fruit life in the Way. Will is evil.

The Way is vast, but men love the paths (21).

Splendor of fantastic palaces on one side, on the other uncultivated fields and barns

empty(22).

[...]

(23).

LIV

Those who can lay firm foundations will not fear decay; those who can strongly preserve will not fear loss: and what proceeds from him will testify to its eternity.

Now Virtue in the domain of lo is straightness, in the domain of commonality duration, in the domain of the people turmoil, in the domain of social life order.

For the knowledge of the self one must ground oneself in the [concept of] self: for that of humanity in the [concept of] human: for that of the community in the [concept of] community: for that of the people in the [concept of] people; for that of society in the [concept of] society. [For] the foundation of the thought-form is the thought-form itself (24).

LV

He who possesses Virtue resembles the infant, who fears neither sting of venomous animals nor claws of fierce beasts nor rostrum of birds of prey; who, though he has weak bones and delicate sinews, knows how to grasp at once; who is oblivious to sensuality, yet his member is aroused. Perfect order! He can shout the whole day without his voice becoming altered. Perfect automatism!

(20) The actual essence of life, the Dao.

(21) Human greatnesses.

(22) The glitz of man's illusory grandeur masks the inculcation and abandonment of the essential, the true self.

(23) If one takes away the theft and presumption in which-through wanting-the possibility of all external life is resolved, what original essence and purity of the human appears to be the Way.

(24) Aristotle, *Met.* XII, 9^o11 voquq; tffi voupévot pfa.

*To know the automatism of life means to be immortal (25); to know the essence of 'immortality means clarity.
Contemplation (26) of one's life means decadence; will of one's life means struggle, and struggle equally leads to decadence (27).
Everything like this is outside the Way: and outside the Way everything is decadence.*

LVI

*Those who know (the Dao) do not speak: those who speak do not (know) it.
Keeping life concentrated, excluding dispersion; dulling the sharp (28), brightening the confused, softening the dazzling, outwardly identifying with the common: this is depth.
Beyond glory and shame, honor and disrepute; this is Virtue in social life.*

LVII

*Loyalty presides over empire, cunning (artifice) presides over the means of accomplishment.
Non-will produces the order of society. Why? In that prohibition implies constraint of energies, authority produces disorder [riots], cunning produces fraud, law produces crime.
In accordance with this the Perfect One says: - Observe non-will, and the people will develop according to their nature: observe non-will. and the people by themselves will realize the deep will of their destination: observe non-will, and the people will prosper because left to themselves: observe the exclusion of desires, and the people through themselves will become what they are meant to be.-*

LVIII

*When the government (seems) inactive, the people are happy; when the government is informed by excessive zeal, the people are unhappy.
Unhappiness has happiness around it: happiness has in itself latent Tinfelicità (29). Who can see the solution?*

(25) Knowledge of the automatism-i.e., the possibility of self-regulation-of life, supposes that the self without its denial can detach itself from it to realize absolute self-nothing (which leads toH immortality).

(26) That is, the empty and dull vision - mere aestheticism - not enlivened by current consciousness.

(27) The ego in order to want life must *terrestrialize itself*, with which it is engrossed in the laws of human decadence.

(28) Energy that sharpens into will to action.

(29) It is the absolute relationship of pleasure and pain: in activity the moment of pain arises

Going straight? But the straight passes into the bent, the good into evil. Eternal blindness, defile men!

Waves the Perfect is a square without corners, an angle without a vertex (30), straight but flexible, clear but not glaring.

LIX

The highest means for the mastery of the human and the development of the spiritual is letting go; through letting go one enters Virtue; entry into Virtue becomes progress in Virtue: the progress of Virtue becomes that absolute adjustment whereby all limits disappear; from the absolute adjustment proceeds the fulfillment of the absolute individual (31): in the absolute individual rests the condition for possessing the Kingdom: and in the possession of the mother of the Kingdom rests immutability.

To apply such principles is to /realize] a deep root, a strong trunk, a path to immortal power.

LX

Social governance resembles letting it simmer.

When society is in the Way, no spirit stiffens in the individual will anymore; not because the individual will is suppressed, but because it no longer turns against others.

The Perfect One never turns his will against others, for he knows that he may well do so. But Perfect and "others" never meet: their paths are constantly parallel.

LXI

The great state is the depth at which rivers come together in a sea: it fulfills the function of the femina. The feminine always enchains the masculine through passivity: passivity is condescension.

Therefore, the large state through condescension absorbs the small states; the small state through condescension absorbs the large state. In both cases condescension realizes supremacy.

The end of the large state is the society and maintenance of men, the end of the small state is the sustenance and welfare of men. And yet [with condescension absorbi rice] they both accomplish their end.

In general: greatness is nothing more than releasing (= condescension).

from that of pleasure, and the moment of pleasure from that of pain: the one takes reality and meaning from the other. Cf. the well-known place in Plato's *Phaedo* (transl. Acre, p. 60).

(30) It is the synthesis of contraries—the straightness that is realized in the curve and the curve that is realized in the straightness—in which the Dao is pinned.

(31) The avtipmKog'ópppog of the Gnostics, the individual who through self-denial reaffirms himself in the Way.

LXII

The Way is the condition of all men; it is the treasure of the good, the refuge of the misled. It fruits honors to those who speak of it, it fruits reputations to those who act in accordance with it; but, above all, it does not abandon the lost.

The power of the emperor, the splendor of the palace do not equal the value of those who return to the Way.

Why did the ancients place their ideal in the Way? Because it can really be found, because the fallen obtain life and freedom in it: that is why it is the supreme thing in the world.

LXIII

To will without wanting to will, to act without wanting to act, to feel without wanting to feel; that the little is as good as the great, that the little is as good as the much; to see the good in the bad.

It is the development of the easy that brings the difficult to fruition; it is the development of the small that implements the great. The most arduous things in the world necessarily began from the easy: the greatest things in the world, from the small.

Hence the Perfect One is not troubled by the character of greatness that the thing has once accomplished; and because of this he accomplishes great things.

Those who promise much deliver little; those who deem everything easy will find everything difficult.

But the Perfect One thinks everything difficult, and everything he finds easy.

LXIV

It is easy to preserve what is kept quiet; it is easy to prevent what has not yet manifested; it is easy to destroy what is still weak.

Prevent the fact before it becomes, calm the crisis before it erupts.

The giant tree had a root as fine as a hair; the nine-story tower began with a fistful of earth; a journey of a thousand miles had for its beginning a step.

Failure is made possible by wanting.

Loss is made possible by attachment. But the Perfect One, devoid of will and passion, leaves no ground in himself for disillusionment and loss. On the other hand, the gain of most is but loss.

Most fall at the moment of succeeding: being present at the end as at the beginning, this is required in order not to lose.

The Perfect One has for desire the absence of desires; makes the absence of study the purpose of his study; sickens "sound" human reason; observes non-wanting; makes no obstacle to the development of absolute spontaneity.

LXV

Those, among the ancients, who possessed the Way, did not enlighten the people, but kept them in unsuspecting simplicity: it is difficult to govern an educated people. To rule with prudence is misfortune for the kingdom; to rule with loyalty (simplicity) is happiness for the kingdom. Those who behave according to these principles are models /among rulers]; and those who are models are partakers of Virtue. Deep and occult virtue, how different you are from the way of creatures! Thou understandest all things, and universal harmony subsists for thee.

LXVI

Rivers and lakes are the lords of the dispersed waters, because-in the valleys-states lower than those. Such is the condition for lordship. So the Perfect One, to place himself above the many, lowers himself with words of humility; to place himself at the summit he veils his lo. Wherefore he is above without compelling, he is at the summit without humiliating. Society under him will live in prosperity and believe itself free. The ordinator observes the non-will and society can do nothing about him.

LXVII

I am called great, yet I appear altogether like others. It is because I am great that I appear like the others: those who are [empirically] great are those who really resemble the common altogether and are, in fact, quite small (32). I have three precious things that I cherish and revere: the first is the feeling of reciprocity: the second is the dignity of origin (33); the third is modesty in social relations. The feeling of reciprocity (solidarity) infuses me with courage; the dignity of origin gives me pride; by modesty I avoid being the first in the empire, and by this I have a chance to become the leader of all men. Nowadays, on the other hand, the feeling of reciprocity is abandoned for arrogance, intimate dignity is abandoned for the empty sound of praise, modesty is abandoned for the greed of honorific offices: this is the way of decadence. The feeling of solidarity in war means victory, in peace strength. It is through the feeling of solidarity that Heaven saves man (34).

(32) The meaning of the passage is doubtful and I have interpreted it freely: the various translations diverge. I believe that Lao-tze wanted to show how those who are like others in their empirical lo can be altogether different from others because of being realized on the other plane of consciousness, while those who diverge empirically from others because of their greatness, are qualitatively-in relation to inner poverty-entirely like others.

(33) It is probably to be understood in a mystical sense.

(34) Cf. Schopenhauer, D. *Welt a. VII. u. Vors.* 11. § 25.

LXVII1

Good knower does not argue, good fighter is not violent, good victor does not fight, good director does not direct. This is the power of Virtue in non-acting; this is the means to make use of the forces of the human, this is the way of Heaven, this is the original perfection.

LXIX

Here is the maxim of the good fighter; be the guest, not the visitor (35); step back a foot rather than advance an inch (36).

Therefore: progressing without advancing, absorbing without conquering, having without taking.

There is no greater evil than to resist [secondo the human form]: that is to lose one's treasure (37). Between two combatants the one who yields (who does not fight) wins. The rational principle grounds the victory.

LXX

My doctrine is easy to understand, easy to practice: but most cannot understand it, cannot practice it.

My doctrine has but one principle (38), my practice has but one rule (39). Those who do not know them cannot understand my wisdom (40).

Few understand me: this is my title of glory: the Perfect One appears mediocre, but he is great.

LXXI

Knowing and not-knowing is greatness (41).

Not-knowing and knowing is sickness. Whoever feels this disease, ceases to have it (42).

The Perfect One feels it, so he does not have it and is free from it.

(35) In Chinese conveniences, it is up to the host to set the example first, which the visitors follow. The meaning is: to prevent, to ensure that one is never faced with the action already determined by the opponent's initiative.

(36) That is, never to commit, preserve one's freedom, not to bind oneself, not to exhaust oneself in action. Such sense also belongs to the last sentence of the chapter. All this is to be understood more in a metaphysical and mystical sense than as mere tactical wisdom.

(37) Indeed, by this is transmuted the absolute into a form, in which it can be vulnerable by the action of the lower element opposed.

(38) The absolute nature of the self.

(39) The non-action.

(40) = Those who do not have an inner experience of the supreme reality will not be able to recognize it in my doctrine, and it will therefore not be understood by them.

(41) The first term refers to transcendental wisdom, the other to human or discursive wisdom, in this sentence as well as in the one that follows.

(42) That is, one who knows that one's inferior knowledge is nonknowledge is taken out of delusion and initiated into higher knowledge.

LXXII

*Those who do not take into account the unexpected succumb to it.
Believe not little, believe not small, believe not unworthy; believe not and that will not be.
Now the Perfect One knows Himself without performing (43); He is sufficient to Himself
without overestimating Himself; He avoids this, He holds to that.*

LXXIH

*Those who are brave dare to push to death; those who are not dare to leave in life.
Both are sometimes good, sometimes bad: for who knows the ends of Heaven? On this the
Perfect One meditates deeply.
[Now] the Way of Heaven is this: to win without struggling, to be obeyed without
commanding, to draw to oneself without calling, to act without doing.
Heaven's net has wide meshes, but nothing escapes her (44)...*

LXXIV

*If the mass no longer fears death, how to direct it with the fear of death? And if it fears
death, can one dare to inflict death?
But there is in eternity a superior arbiter of life and mone; he who wants to replace it with
himself resembles the man who wants to cut down a tree instead of the lumbering one:
he will certainly injure his hands...*

LXXV

*The people are hungry while the princes dissipate the proceeds of crude taxes: here is the
cause of their hunger. The people are agitated because the princes do abuse: here is the
cause of their agitation.
The people fear mone for love [because they are slaves] of life; here is the meaning of their
fear of death.
But to live outside of life is to live more intimately than to live in life.*

LXXVI

*Man is born weak and delicate, dies hard and stiff. Plant is born flexible and tender, dies
inflexible and strong.
Waves rigid and strong are the modes of death, weak and flexible are the modes of life (45).*

(43) That is, without externalizing self to self: the Perfect is known-or rather, possessed-outside the objectifying category of discursive knowing.

(44) Lao-tze's morality may seem to be the glorification of sloth and cowardice: in fact, there is no other that requires for its implementation a will so terribly subtle and indomitable, a presence of self to self so inexorable as for this to be current and yet distant at *any* moment of our lives.

(45) Keep in mind, especially in this chapter, the spiritual reference that erases the one-sidedness and paradox with which such statements may appear to the common intellect.

*The victorious army is the one that has never fought (46). The strong tree is felled...
Big and strong are at the bottom, sweet and flexible are at the top.*

LXXVII

*The action of the universal resembles stretching a bow: lowering what is above, raising what is below; taking away from the excessive to give to the deficient.
The way of the Way is to remove the excess, to supplement the deficient. Instead, man still thinks what is already deficient, supersaturates what is already excessive.
He who resolves his excess in society is in the Way. [It is] thus [that] the Perfect One acts without doing, operates without being operating, disappears (47).*

LXXVIII

*There is nothing in the world weaker and more yielding than water, but at the same time there is nothing that surpasses it in overcoming the strong and the rigid. It is indomitable because it is adapted to everything.
Thus the weak triumphs over the strong, the flexible triumphs over the rigid: this truth is clear, but no one acts in accordance with it.
Therefore the Perfect One says: - He that receiveth in himself the obeisances of the world is the providence thereof: he that receiveth in himself the misfortunes of the world (48) is the Lord thereof.-
This is the hidden truth.*

LXXIX

*After great hatred, a residue of hatred always remains; nothing is erased.
Now the Perfect fulfills his part and expects nothing from others. He who is in Virtue thinks only of giving, he who is outside Virtue thinks only of taking (coveting): those concentrate his power, these disperse it.
The Way of Heaven is indifference (49): in it the good fly.*

(46) Another lesson: "The invincible army is the one that does not bring back victory." Leaving point or possibility (and this is implied in entering combat) of taking, already brings with it subjugation.

(47) This passage is important: it shows that the Perfect One, in so far as he possesses his absolute present nature, insofar as that which lives in the human (through self-denial and automatism) is not himself according to this absolute nature, but its excess, the "second virtue," not the act, but the "a" "o of the fact," of emanation. Therefore, when he operates, he, as Perfect, is not the operant: his lo is *vanished* from the human center of consciousness.

(48) Leti.: of the kingdom. Note how the transcendental logicity of Christ's soteriological mission is revealed here (as a function of individual value).

(49) The giving of the Perfect is indifferent, it is pure of the stain of feeling; it is the

LXXX (50)

Small state, large people (51). - Arming ten or a hundred men, but not using them.

Fear Death, watch over the threshold.

Having ships and chariots, but not using them.

Arming for defense and offense, however, without purpose.

Return to the knotted cords (52).

Then foods would be enjoyed (53), clothing (54) would please, habitation (55) would satisfy, simple customs would be loved (56).

And even if the kingdoms come so close that the cries of the dogs and roosters are distinctly heard from one to the other, live, grow old and die without passing into the neighboring kingdom (57).

LXXXI

True words are not beautiful; beautiful words are not true.

The man who has Virtue does not argue; the man who argues does not have Virtue.

Knowing is not knowing, knowing is not knowing (58).

The Perfect One does not gather his riches: by lavishing to the human he gains: by giving to the human he becomes rich.

The Way of Heaven: leveling without struggle (59).

Xi Way of Man: acting effortlessly (60).

cold transcendental function, not the "gute *Leidenschaft* der Menschen" (the "good-passion of men").

(50) It is to be believed that the entire chapter has metaphorical value.

(51) Fullness in recollection.

(52) .It alludes to the time when writing did not yet exist in China, and they used variously knotted and intertwined ropes as writing. It means: to return to the original simplicity, to the Tao.

(53) One would understand the meaning of the human.

(54) The phenomenon of humanity proper.

(55) The category of the human in relation to the human.

(56) Any enhancement of the human would be avoided.

(57) Even when the rhythm of the sphere of the fact was so in harmony with that of the sphere of the act that it tended almost to merge with them, always keeping to itself and incommunicable the absolute center of consciousness.

(58) It is the opposition of gnosis to discursive philosophy: see ch. LXXXI.

(59) It is the subtle action of water that realizes internal indifference, whence proceed, in man, effortless acting, an expression of non-acting.

(60) It may be noted here that Daoist theory has its characteristic and concise expression in the well-known passage from the Egyptian initiation, which one tradition has it was marked by Hermes in the so-called *Tabula smaragdina*: "The Father of everything, of everything in the universe-the *Telesma-is here*. Its force or power *is whole if it is converted into earth*: thus you will gently and with great art separate the earth from the fire, the crude from the subtle. It *rises from the earth* and reabsorbs the power of higher and lower things. Thou shalt have by this means the glory of the whole world, and all darkness shall depart from thee forever." (I emphasize to highlight the immanentist instance).

Appendix

Having brought to completion in the long years of solitude the process of his inner development, Lao-tze silently eclipsed himself from his land and people, leaving behind him-in the synthetic ideograms of Tao-teh-king-the trace of his wisdom now elevated to life.

Lao-tze seems to have had two disciples, who in turn initiated ten others; and it has been claimed that elements of the related oral teachings are contained in the main text of early Taoism, the *Thai-Scian-Kan-ing-pien* (or *Thai-Scian's Book of Concurrent Action and Reaction*). In fact such a work is evidently informed by the central principle of Lao-tze ethics, v. d. that, outside of transcendental action in the Dao, there is no agent which, as such, does not already imply Tesser acted in itself. However, the *Kan-ing. in* place of understanding this principle in its entire absolute truth - that is, as an *a priori* value - assumed it rather according to the mythicity of the naturistic form; whence - by expounding how to every action (*Kan*) of man in the world reconverts a congruent cosmic reaction (*big*) by which the initial energy bounces back almost to the center that emitted it, and how nothing escapes such a movement whereby every action in itself automatically receives sanction and judgment and every being has its own form - it almost comes to nothing but a paraphrase of the *Karma* of Brahmanism, and by losing the point of view of the absolute individual, it often teeters on the brink of naturistic spiritualism.

On the other hand-as mentioned above-the intense and profound wisdom of Tao- *teh-king* was soon completely depotentiated in the interpretations and commentaries of the mythicizing and poetic fantasy, sentimentality and moralism from which Taoism drew life. Nevertheless, beyond this decadence - out of all ritual, all worship and all superstition, centralizing solely in the cold and concrete teaching and realization of Science - an initiatory tradition of the Tao was and is maintained.

Taoist initiation-as little as the West has been able to learn about it (1)-consists of three moments, which are likewise hierarchical grades (or colleges)

(1) For the following nolizie I have largely relied on Matgjoï. *La vote raion- nelle*, Paris, 1907, ch. VII.

of the relevant community. The first degree is that of *Tong-sang*, and in it the metaphysical content of the Taoist texts is penetrated rationally and then integrated with the fundamental principles of esotericism. The following degree, of *Phii-tiiy*, is characterized by the full isolation of the individual, and yet by the fact that the degree of Science to be achieved there must absolutely be conquered by means of oneself (*one does not acquire it by means of another unless one contravenes the law*), through the concentration of all individual powers pushed to the point of bringing to life according to an entirely new reading and in a mystical experience the wisdom of those texts, which are nevertheless those same ones that are used by the *Tong-sang*. The *Phii-tiiy*, after a long period of intense study, isolation and *silence* (enwrtq), can succeed *Phap*. *Phap* is the one who has fully realized in himself the dialectic of the Dao; he is a dark and powerful being, revered and ignored, wandering, detached from everything; he is lord of the secrets and forces of nature, so that he can absolutely command his own body as well as other things in the outer world.

Here it is perhaps worth drawing the reader's attention again to the fact that the preceding pages contain instances that go far beyond merely philosophical consciousness. The actualism of the Dao, as concrete has nothing to do with the *schlecht und bülig* (2) actualism that can be professed in words from the heights of a Western university chair. In reality, the Tao is not known unless one realizes it, and not in words, thoughts or beautiful sentiments, but by a concrete process in which the whole individual engages and with his or her most real powers. To know the Tao in truth is to be the Tao: but the realization of the Tao has immanent in itself real dominion over the world; power is therefore the rite through which knowledge proves itself to itself. Not power, means not knowing and therefore not being. And by this is evidently not to say that the Perfect must go in search of potency, but that potency, and only it, testifies to real perfection and proceeds naturally from it like light from the sun. Not in beautiful books of philosophy, but in the quiet indifference with which the seldom-revealing *Phap* lets the "prodigies" slip by - almost out of the wonder and confusion of the sufficiency of Western civilization - rests the sign of the accomplished, concrete actuality.

Reserved for the *Phap* is the knowledge and practice of the *Phankhoatu* (or *Book of Returning Things*), an extremely secret text in which is set forth the initiatory High Science proceeding from the positions of Lao-tze (and yet also the method for bringing things back to alfo, that is, for "returning" things). It is with the translation of Ch. 3 of Part I' of that book (a chapter that Matgioi [3] has managed to get to know) that I believe I can close the present work. In this passage from the *Phankhoatu* is expressed the formula of thea reduction of duality (the esoteric *androgynous theory*) and yet the celebration of the advent of the

- (2) Bad and Right (Ed.).
- (3) *La vote rationnelle*, cit. p. 215.

Tao (4); we refrain from commentary given the nature of the present book, leaving each reader to take whatever he or she is capable of.

PHANKHOATU

(p. I. ch. 3)

You will worship your right hand where your heart is and detest your left hand where your liver and courage [your strength] is.

But you shall worship your right hand, where your brother's left hand is. Thou shalt worship thy brother's left, where his soul is.

You will forsake your brother's soul for the spirit of his left.

It will be so that the Dragon will bite your left breast. And by his bite, the God will enter.

The voice, without the word; Tudito, without the sound; the sight, without the object; the possession, without the contact: these are the blood strands of the bite.

Praying with mute lips, believing with closed ears, commanding with submissive eyes, taking with motionless hands: this is the bite of the Dragon.

Sleep is lord of the senses and souls: so sleepeth thy head upon thy brother's heart.

The right of his body responds to the left of your spirit. The right of your spirit responds to the left of his body.

Let your right hand penetrate his left; let your left hand be penetrated by his right hand. Thus your spirit will be his thought and his blood will be your blood.

The Dragon's bite will heal: he will take flight; you will be invisible in his wings.

You will be united with heaven.

Thus, you are two-and one-and the original God.

(4) The Dragon, conceptually and perhaps also philologically (cf. Matgioi, *La vaie métaphysique*, Paris. 1905. p. 51) identical with Logos, and the Dao. the original, transcendental truth of the self.

II
THE BOOK OF PRINCIPLE AND ITS ACTION

Introduction

to MARIO MORETTI

To whom I owe the inducement for this new work.

Under the title *Il Libro della Via e della Virtù* (*The Book of the Way and Virtue*) in 1922 our presentation of Lao-tze's Tao-té-ching came out for Carabba Editions (1). The present version of the same Far Eastern text differs considerably from that early work of ours-so much so as to constitute almost a new thing-for two reasons.

First of all, in that edition Lao-tze's work had been taken in isolation, and to its content we had given an interpretive framework following a line of thought resentful of transcendental idealism (though supplemented with some original instances of a not merely intellectualistic order) according to the kind of studies we were then concerned with. But the new presentation deliberately sets aside any philosophical superstructure and follows a traditional point of view. Thus" Lao-tze's work here is no longer considered in isolation, but in the framework of the Far Eastern tradition to which it belongs. In it was then seen not as an original speculation or "mysticism" of personal inspiration, but rather as one of the formulations of an identical knowledge, found at the basis of other great currents of metaphysical orientation in other cultures and, in its proper form, more in the sapiential and esoteric domain than in that of conceptual formulations and translations. This domain is, indeed, the "proper place" of *Tao-té-ching* doctrines. It is in their "orthodoxy," in the broadest sense of the term, that therefore these doctrines will now be considered.

Secondly, since we drafted that first presentation having come out, or having become accessible to us, numerous other translations of the *Tao-té-ching*, it seemed to us appropriate to proceed, on the basis of them, to revi-

(1) As noted above, the Evolian introduction bears the date "Assisi, September 1922," while the small volume published by Carabba has "April 1923" (Ed.) as its printing indication.

sion of the basis on which our version rested. Thus various lessons of passages found to be insufficiently justifiable were rectified and fine-tuned. Every effort has been made, therefore, to make the new version as satisfactory as possible, even from the point of view that one his! to call "scientific," but always within the limits permitted by that higher instance which, from the point of view now assumed, that is, from the traditional point of view, must be constantly enforced.

Indeed, it must remain firm that *Tao-tè-ching* cannot be interpreted linguistically alone. This is, first of all, because the essential content of no traditional, sapiential text can be grasped in those terms, even when dealing with texts in Western languages, such as Greek, for example. Then, in the case of an ancient Chinese text, there is a specific circumstance that reduces to a physique any claim to fix its content definitively and "critically" on the basis of linguistic competence alone, and that is the peculiar character of the Far Eastern language, which is ideographic. An ideographic language: that is as much as to say a language for images and symbols. But when images are used to express not concrete things but abstract ideas, polysemy is inevitable, many interpretations are possible. Add to this the fact, that most Chinese ideograms consist of several elementary signs, that the overall signification does not automatically result from the simple sum of these components, and, finally, that the overall meaning attributed to each character of the genres in ancient times—that is, when the text was composed—may correspond very little to that of the most recent linguistic usage. There is also the fact that the style of Lao-tze is particularly elliptical, deliberately obscure *and* ambiguous, like the oracular style of many sapiential texts. All this makes the *Tao-tè-ching* present a wide margin of indeterminacy, a margin that will subsist, however hard even sinologists want to give themselves, and which, moreover, from the orthodox point of view has not been regarded as a flaw at all. It is attested that in some Taoist schools the sign of a disciple's being mature, or not, in order to pass from one degree to another had been seen in his ability to discover different, deeper and deeper meanings in the same text of the master. The latitude of terms is synonymous with richness, with multidimensionality; it is defined only by a free act of the spirit, starting from a meditation and not from a discursive analysis of ideas. M. Granet (*La pensée chinoise*, Paris, 1950, p. 503) honestly acknowledges, "The short sentences composing it (the *Tao-tè-ching*) were visibly intended to serve as themes of meditation. It would be vain to try to lend them a unique sense, or even a sufficiently defined sense. Those formulas were valid because of the multiple suggestions that could be found in them. They had one or more esoteric meanings, indiscernible today" (2). Of "a kind of magical elasticity" of language, speaks A. Waley (*The Why and its Power*, London, 1934, p. 12). This will suffice to dismiss the claims of definiti-

(2) Tr. il.: *Chinese thought*. Adelphi. Milan, 1971 (ed.).

vity, of "critical reestablishment" of the text, and so on, pitched by every new Western specialist translator, despite what had been recognized even by us, until a Dante, namely that every scripture (a title, this one, which also suits the *Tao-té-ching* already for the fact, that the designation *ching* in China has been reserved for traditional texts and is not used for individual secular works) admits precisely various interpretations, which are ordered, ranging from the literal and moral to what Dante called "anagogical," referring to the potential essential and spiritual content of it (3).

We have held firm to this point and, as mentioned above, if on the basis of the new material we have been concerned that the new version be as "in order" as possible even from the secular point of view, we have also made use of the intrinsic latitude of the text to make the interpretation of spiritual and traditional order, among all other possible ones, count. This has brought a definite difference from the greater number of existing translations oriented in the opposite direction, especially in the many places where the literal sense of the text would seem to vèrtere on the merely social and moral level, while a different interpretation in inner and spiritual terms remains equally possible (cf. Chuang-tze, XXVII, i : "I have used allegories taken from the external world to express abstract ideas."). In various linguistically controversial complexes, we have left to decide, as to a sword of Alexander, a general methodological criterion, which is this: a text from a tradition that has countenanced minds of the highest stature cannot fail to have its own internal unity and meaningfulness. Now, when the application of the spiritual and traditional interpretation resulted, both for the controversial passages and for many others, in a greater intelligibility and coherence of the whole-which will not fail to strike the reader-while the other interpretations, especially the heavily linguistic ones, led to trivial, incongruent and sometimes even childish things, in this we seemed to see a precise counter-evidence of the legitimacy of the first interpretation and of a greater adherence of the version to the actual content of the text. Subject to such a criterion, not even the Chinese commentaries in the public domain have been given much consideration here: they are generally of a very low standard, to say nothing of what has been perpetrated by modern Chinese who have set out to zealously follow the "scientific method" of the Europeans. Otherwise things would stand to refer to what has existed as a tradition of secret schools beyond the degeneration of Taoism into popular religion. But these are particularly closed circles, the written records of which are almost nonexistent. Of some use are, at best, references to parallel teachings of the two other masters of ancient Taoism. Lieh-tze and Chuang-tze.

Having thus indicated the orientation of this presentation of ours on *Tao-té-ching* and what makes it different from the previous presentation of 1922. for the sake of enlivening the reader we will premise the text with a nod to the general historical and doctrinal background of Taoism.

(3) Cf. *Convivio*, I (ed.).

According to tradition, Lao-tze and Confucius would have been contemporaries: the former would have lived between 570 and 490 BCE and the latter between 552 and 479 BCE. The doctrine of both the former and the latter does not represent something new, but a reformulation or adaptation of the primordial Far Eastern tradition, based on *sM'l-ching* and its commentaries, a reformulation necessitated by a partial obscuration of that tradition and undertaken by Lao-tze and Confucius on two distinct planes. Because of the diversity of those planes, it has often been desired to see, between the Confucian and Daoist teachings, an antithesis that, in reality, is relative. It is that the doctrine of Lao-tze is essentially metaphysical and initiatory in order, although it also comes to ethical and social applications: that of Confucius, on the other hand, is centered in the moral and political realm. The one has for its ideal the adept who is and acts beyond all conditionality, beginning with those of his own ego; the other - Confucius' - is limited to an ideal of human culture, targets the "noble," the man who in political society gives himself a style and uprightness by the exercise of certain positive virtues and by conforming to given forms. And while Confucius favors a line of rationality, Lao-tze's own is paradox, he holds to nonconformist summit lines, professing a subtle wisdom expressed in terms that are often enigmatic, elusive and puzzling. These two types only come into conflict at the point where one or the other becomes absolutized. Only Confucianism degenerated into Mandarin formalism and outward preceptism is in antithesis with the essentially metaphysical doctrine of Lao-tze. Hence the words that the historian Sse Ma Ts'ien put into Confucius's mouth, after a meeting the latter is said to have had with Lao-tze: "To animals you can tend strings, you can catch fish with nets, birds with arrows. But how to grasp the dragon that hovers in the ether above the clouds? Today I saw Lao-tze. He resembles the dragon." On the other hand, in the Taoist writings, beginning with those of Lieh-tze, Confucius is not infrequently presented as a disciple of Lao-tze or as a master of Taoist doctrine: which means that, in spite of everything, an intimate relationship between the two teachings was well perceived, a relationship that is real and due to the two masters' drawing back to the common source of the primordial tradition and the extreme-oriental orthodoxy.

This aside, it is noteworthy that while Confucius' historical existence as a well-defined person is established and there is fairly precise information about his life, the same cannot be said for Lao-tze, to such an extent that one may wonder whether this name corresponded to a single person, or is not primarily a symbolic designation. Already the exact name of him is not known, "Lao-tze" being a title: literally it means the "old child," with which is associated the popular legend that he was born already looking like an old man and with white hair. Except that old age in Chinese tradition has tinche had a translational meaning, becoming synonymous with perenniality *and* even immortality (so, for example, the correct translation of the name of a great deity, Huang-lao kiun, is not "Old Yellow Lord" but the "Immortal Lord of the Center"-yellow is the color of the center). So "Lao-tze" - "old child" - properly stands for the quality of

perennial actuality, durability and youthfulness proper to those who keep in touch with origins, according to what is attributed to the "men of the Dao."

For the rest, "Lao-tze" is said to have been a "historiographer" in charge of the archives of Lo, capital of the Chou. In this regard, it must be remembered that, as in ancient Rome, in the ancient Chinese empire "officials" had at the same time a sacred character, that the "historical archives" contained the documents of tradition and were sometimes kept so secret that there are reports of cases in which those who had them in their possession preferred to go to their deaths rather than make them accessible to people-even princes-to whom they were not reserved. So, in any case, it is not in the capacity of a kind of archival bureaucrat that "Lao-tze" was imagined. Later such a person would leave office, spend part of his life in solitude, and finally leave for the West after fixing the essence of his doctrine in a book at the invitation of the guardian of the Han-ku crossing on the northwestern border. Since then, nothing has been heard of him: "he left, and no one knows where he went," says historian Sse Ma Ts'ien. He adds, "Of him, it can only be said that he loved darkness above all, and that he deliberately erased all traces of his life": it is, this, the precipitous style attributed by his book to the so-called "Royal Men." Referring then to legends, Lao-tze. left the empire, allegedly retreated to the K'un Lun. mountain on the border of Tibet, which, however, vested a symbolic character, of "center," and to the "Mysterious Capital," a designation that was later (but partly abusively) to apply to the seat of the "Yellow Church" of Taoism turned religion. Others want him to have died at the age of 81, which is again a symbolic reference, because 1'81 is a sacred number in Taoism, corresponding to Heaven and the perfect fulfillment of the *yang* quality (in connection with this, the book of Lao-tze itself is divided, generally, into 81 chapters): fulfillment which, involving the overcoming of transience, leads to yet another legend, to that according to which "Lao-tze" continued to live for a very long age, as one of the so-called "earthly immortals."

According to another group of legends, "Lao-tze" would have changed his name several times, or there would have been more than one person called "Lao-tze" (which would explain the divergent reports about the period in which he would have lived). Putting aside the deification he was to undergo in popular Taoism (like the Buddha in Buddhism-religion), there was also conceived of a supertemporal "Lao-tze" ("born before Heaven and Earth," as is said in a late second-century BCE inscription.C.), who would precisely appear under various names in thirteen successive existences after Fo-hi and Chen-nong as the initiator of the "Royal Men" and the occult inspirer of the founding sacral rulers of dynasties, up to the Chang and Chou. It was also intended that "Lao-tze" was the progenitor of the Tang Dynasty. All of these traditions should not be held as pure fantasies. From them can be gathered, as a content in its own positive way, the idea of the relation of Lao-tze's doctrine to a non-human influence and initiatory current closely connected with the royal function. The part of "Lao-tze" would be played by piti people, among whom was the Lao-

tze historian, if he really existed. These would have continued a chain and would have been exponents of a corresponding organization; the same name, after him, may have been transferred to other exponents of the same chain, in all this the mere individualities remaining in the background.

About the *Tao-té-ching*, if it certainly contains original formulations and if even personal traits of the person who composed it are reflected in it (see, for example, ch.15), even the relation of the doctrine expounded in it to the Far Eastern primordial tradition has always been recognized. Apart from the fact that it often refers in it to the origins and masters of ancient times, at the beginning of the Han period, that is, in the second century B.C.E., Taoism was thought to have begun with the first emperor of China, Huang-Ti (2697-2598 B.C.E.)-the so-called "Ruler of the Center" or "Yellow Emperor"-when the imperial patriarchal civilization asserted itself over an archaic society of the opposite, matriarchal orientation. And the sense of the ideal relationship between "Lao-tze" and HuangTi was so vivid, that for a time one of the designations of Daoist doctrine was the "Huang-lao," a term composed of parts of each other's names. Similarly, *Tao-té-ching* was associated with *WU-ching*, so another name for the doctrine, similarly formed by combination, was "Lao-i."

Character as a creation less of a single person than of a current also had the work of the second father of) Taoism, Lieh-tze, who like Lao-tze is not clear whether he existed historically or was primarily a symbolic figure. Certain, however, is the historical existence as an individual of the third patriarch of Daoism. Chuang-tze, whose work also has a much more personal imprint, however, with a teaching in various respects already quite flaky and diluted, with a wide margin given to poetry and episodics, as opposed to the essential, bare and lucid style of "Lao-tze" (4).

Turning now to the text, it should be noted that the *Tao-té-ching* designation is not the original one; the book was so called only under the later Han, or Hou Han (25-220 CE), thus several centuries after it was written. *Ching-it* has already been noted-is the designation reserved for traditional texts. The most current translation of the title, followed in our earlier version, is *II Book (ching) of the Way (Tao) and Virtue (tea)*. We thought it appropriate to change it to *// Book of Principle and its Action*. It already indicates the fundamental ideas of the text, which includes a metaphysics, an ethics, a political doctrine and, finally, elements of an esoteric doctrine of immortality, in the interweavings of sentences with multiple senses and in the summaries of short chapters.

As for pure metaphysics, the concept of Tao was known even before Lao-tze, it recurs in all orthodox Chinese currents or schools derived from the *de\Y I-ching* tradition. Literally (and ideographically) Tao means "Way." It is the Way, in which the All moves. In its origins, however, the term did not have a

(4) In the random quotations we will make of passages from the other Masters of Taoism we will refer, in principle, to the versions of P. L. Wiegcr and J. J. M. De Groot.

unambiguous meaning, for it designated on the one hand the Great Principle (although the prevailing designation of this has been the "Great One" or "Great Summit," *T'ai Chi*), on the other hand the sense of the course of the world, the productive force and immanent law of manifestation. Already in the title of Lao-tze's work these two aspects of the Dao are distinguished: the *Dao* is the Great Principle, its action, "virtue" or law, is the *té*. This distinction, however, is that of the terms of a dynamic unity; by this means the characteristic of the Far Eastern worldview is maintained in *Tao-tè-ching*.

To make this point clear, it must be remembered, on the one hand, that from the very beginning the Far Eastern tradition was not religious but metaphysical in character. It ignored anthropomorphism, the humanization of the divine; it considered abstract and impersonal principles that remained essentially so even when material images taken from the world of nature were used for them. Thus there spoke not of a "God" but of Heaven, *T'ien*, in the sense of a symbol of transcendence, a figurative expression of the infinite height above the human of the Great Principle. Even when this in state religion became enchanted in the "Lord from on high," *Shang-ti*, it did not cease to have an impersonal character and was understood as a function of the aforementioned Principle, through the title *Huang-t'ien Shang-ti* ("the Heavenly Supreme God"). This is the first characteristic of the Far Eastern conception: it has a trans-human purity and essentially metaphysical characters. At the same time, it was proper to it to forfeit the dualism of a superworld opposed to the world. A fundamental unity was recognized, despite the feeling of the 'infinitely distant and the non-human, in the terms of what may be called an "immanent transcendence." The Tao of Heaven is elusive and, at the same time, truly present and acting among the webs of phenomenal reality.

This metaphysics is taken up, specified and developed in an original way in the *Tao-tè-ching*. Here the "transcendence" aspect of the Principle is emphasized again with the specific use of the concepts of "emptiness," "non-being," "non-acting," and "formless" and "nameless" to indicate the supreme, detached essentiality of the Great One and the Great Beginning, superior to and prior to the "being" of theistic and religious theologies.

Instead, Virtue, *té*, is given as the immanent and acting aspect of the Principle; it is the power that develops the eternal manifestation of Perfection, a manifestation that does not have a "creationist" character in the theistic sense, that is, it is not tied to a will and intention but is part of the eternal, immutable and impersonal logic of the divine.

Beyond this, in Lao-tze the use of the term "Way" refers precisely to the conception of the One not in static terms but in those of an eternal process in which immanence and transcendence not only coexist but intercondition themselves, are generated by a single act. Herein lies the most characteristic side of the doctrine of *Tao-tè-ching*, which, if it could be brought back to terms of simple intellectual speculation, would recall some of the ideas of the so-called European transcendental philosophy (hence, the interpretation proper to our previous presentation of the text). Such a metaphysical situation is expressed by Lao-

tze saying that it is by "emptying itself" that the Principle is and produces. The image of the bellows (chap. 5:45) is used to indicate the eternal act that on the one hand produces the "emptiness" and on the other gives being to the current of forms, to the "ten thousand beings." Especially in the many passages in which the Principle in such a way is presented as a model, this idea is given as a denying itself, or non-being, in order to be - it can be said: as a transcendence that in the same act on the one hand realizes the Principle as "emptiness," as absolute and center, on the other hand externalizes and distances its substance in an inexhaustible, impersonal giving, emanating, flowing and vivifying. Thus it could not wrongly be said that in Lao-tze's Taoism "virtue is the mode which the Principle itself needs in order to realize itself" (A. Castellani, *Lao-tze's Celestial Rule*, Sansoni, Florence, 1927, p. LIV). For our part, in addition we had also mentioned that, in a metaphysical transparency, here is given what can be gathered from various confusing myths relating to "sacrifices" of divine entities which give rise to creation.

So: interconditionality and co-presence of transcendence and immanence, of hypersubstantial non-being and being as the ultimate meaning of the Way of Heaven, but also of the eternal process of the world. From such a view derives, in a particular way, that of non-being as an omnipresent substratum or internal and essential dimension of being. From a different point of view, another inference is that all things, all being and all life are found in the Way and Perfection, and have never ceased to be there. As another Taoist master will express it, "If anything were or lived outside the Tao, the Tao would not be Tao." From which, as will be seen, also proceeds the theory of "natural" spontaneity and perfection and the ethics of being in the Way with just being what one is. In this regard there is a certain convergence between Taoism and Mahâyànic Buddhism, where the latter affirms the transcendent identity of *raṃsóra* (contingent world) and *nirvana* (the unconditioned) as two aspects of the one reality. Because of this, and other convergences-for example, concerning the metaphysical notion of the Void, common to both schools-in China there was an interesting symbiosis between Buddhism (imported there, precisely in its Mahâyànic form, during the period of a revival of Taoism) and Taoism itself, a symbiosis that appears in various schools, from the ancient Chinese Ch'an school to its promanations as Japanese Zen. The mentioned view about immanent transcendence and natural perfection is expressed here by saying that every being has Buddha nature and that every being, even if he does not know it, from the beginning is a "liberated one."

Let us now bring attention to the virtue - *tea* - of Principle, taken in its aspect of ordering power. It should be noted that in the ancient Chinese language the term *tea* did not have a moral sense (such a sense did not acquire it until later, after Confucianism), but that of power of action (as in the Middle Ages people spoke of the "virtues" of a substance or element) and, above all, of magical power. Magical power was designated as both *ling* and *tea*. It is in this sense that, for example, there was talk of the five powers - *wu tea* - by which the Chinese dynasties ruled. Such a character also does not exempt *tea* as a virtue or action of Heaven. The teaching of *Tao-tè-ching* is that, for the pre

without real of transcendence in immanence, a higher order is realized in the world in an invisible and spontaneous way, a way in a certain magical sense called in Taoism "non-acting." By this expression is meant that it is not a direct regulatory or moralizing intervention in the course of the world, as in the theistic theology of Providence, but a superordinate influence not tied to particular ends or intentions, without regard for individuals (it is "inhuman," says Lao-tze. ch. 5), which, while leaving things to be their freedom, causes the whole to be composed into a totality reflecting the Great One and Perfection. The Taoist image is that of the net of Heaven that has great meshes but from which nothing ever escapes (ch. 73), or that of the great valley that does not act but toward which they gravitate irresistibly, into which all the waters of the slopes descend and flow. This character has the Virtue, *té*, of the Principle. We can also refer to these sayings of Chuang-tze (XII. 3; XXII, 2): "The action of the Principle through Heaven is infinite in its expansion, elusive in its subtlety.... Of the Principle one can only say that it is the origin of everything, that it influences everything by remaining indifferent." More generally, that is, outside of pure metaphysics, *té* is also conceived as a "power of presence." Beings and things can be centers of *té*, as we shall see, especially "Real Men" and "Transcendent Men." Then they "act without acting," and imagine of the Dao: that is, they exert an effective and irresistible influence by their mere beingness, impersonally, outside all "doing" and particular intention. Hence the shift from the metaphysics of the Dao to ethics and politics according to the Dao. Adding to the ideas fixed above this particular conception of *tia té*, the overall cosmic picture is thus that of an inexhaustible flowing and producing permeated by the "Void," and of an eternal and unchanging law that through the magic of Virtue operates in all change by directing without touching, dominating without compelling, bringing about without "doing": in this-in this imponderable action-having a large part the principle called the principle of concordant actions and reactions, a principle already contained in the metaphysics of Z-c/rriig. Cf. Chuang-tze (XXV, 10): "11 Principle, acting as the pole, as the axis of the universality of beings, of him, we say only that he is the pole, the axis, without seeking either to understand or to explain him.... Modifications, the effect of a unique norm, do not alter the unchanging whole. All opposites find their place in this totality, without bumping into each other."

In terms of Taoist metaphysics we will mention two final points.

The first concerns the traditional theory of the metaphysical Dyad, which already figured in the 7-dung teaching as that of *yin* and *yang*. The manifestation of Dao is developed through the alternate play of *yang* and *yin*. opposing and, at the same time, complementary and inseparable principles, which have multiple valences: they are *Peterno* masculine and the eternal feminine, the active and the passive, Heaven (in a narrow sense) and Earth, the bright and the dark, the creative and the receptive, and so on. *Ul-ching* had traced the structure of every process, being and phenomenon back to various dynamic combinations of these two powers or qualities, fixing them in the image system of trigrams

mi and hexagrams, signs composed precisely of *yin* and *yang*. It is thus through *yin* and *yang* that the Way of Heaven operates. A particular idea that recurs in *Tao-té-ching* is that of the conversion of opposites: there is no indefinite accretion or development of a given quality, whether *yin* or *yang*: having reached the apex, there is also the limit beyond which the reversal, the passing into the opposite quality, takes place. For example, a peace protracted beyond the mark blossoms into disorder and war, extreme disorder produces order, ascent is followed by descent and descent all the way up (cf. the Chinese folk proverb, "When the moon is full, it begins to wane"), and so on, in a whole in which the invisible regulating, rectifying and compensing action of the Virtue of the Great Principle is manifested, as in an immense circulation.

The second point concerns the concept of mutation, *i*, in which in both *l-ching* and Taoism are summarized those of production, creation, development or becoming. Beings and things appear, become, disappear by "mutation of state." In everything that happens, rises, sets, in birth, life, death, there are but changes of state: this is a fundamental view of Far Eastern metaphysics. In the Principia the potentialities of being are contained in the preformal state; through the eternal power of the One. in this respect likened to the feminine function (*yin*) of emitting generating, nurturing and nourishing, they pass into the formal state (as will be seen, "corporeality" is synonymous with this) and enter the current of transformations. In that current they can remain, in an indeterminate affair analogous to that of the Hindu *samsóra* and the Hellenic "circle of generation" (not to be interpreted, however, as reincarnation, that is, as a necessary repeated reappearance in the human condition, but as "transmigration"- "being a man is but an episode in the chain of transformations"), if attachment to form subsists in them. They then undergo the crises of discontinuity due to the various changes of state, "going out" (being born) and "coming back in" (dying). That is, they can overcome them when they break away from the formal state and become integrated into the transcendence present and ongoing in immanence: and then they become the "men of the Dao," or "men of the Way." "Transformation," in technical language, in accordance, moreover, with the etymological meaning of our term ("the going beyond form"), corresponds properly to the second case; the transformations in the, shall we say, horizontal sense, in succession, or circle, of the first case are mere "state modifications" and metaphysically irrelevant. Apart from what is proper to the operative domain of esoteric Taoism, to which we shall refer later, from the absolute point of view in this doctrine, not unlike in the Vedánta and Maháyàna (wanting to add Western references: that in Scotus Eriugena and Meister Eckhart), the difference between the two conditions, however, is constituted by a pure fact of consciousness. In fact, it has already been said that from that point of view there is no being who is ever outside the Way and the Great Perfection. In the *Tao-té-ching* this is also expressed by saying that I "extremely far away is the return" (ch. 25; cf. ch. 32); in the current of forms the end and the beginning become confused

and-as we read in another text-"are illumined by a great light." Thus from metaphysics directly derives what for the men of the Tao must be the way: to exclude all that is extrovert action proceeding from! peripheral center or aimed at empowering and stiffening the peripheral center, that of externalized formal existence-the common individual ego-to instead *be* and act by keeping oneself in transcendence, in the metaphysical, "empty" dimension, ever present beyond all changes of state, where the true root and the unchanging and untainted essential center is to be found.

Let us turn, then, to the domain of personal realization as it is considered in *Tao-té-ching*. At the center of the text is the figure of the one who is called the *sheng-jén*. Again and again Lao-tze describes to us its type, behavior, mode of action, and sovereignty. The dependence of ethics on metaphysics is explicit. As the reader will see, in *Tao-té-ching* metaphysical utterances almost always come first, then with the particle "so," or other analogous one, we indicate what is proper to *sheng-jén*. This being is thus modeled on the Way, and not on a human moral ideal. While in Lao-tze the prevailing term is *sheng-jén*, in Taoism, however, we also encounter those of *chen-jén* and *shen-jén* to designate a being often identified with the former. It is on the basis of this that we have made the choice of the most suitable term to translate *sheng-jén*. Those almost always used by translators-the Sage or the Saint-are to be excluded. While "Sage" is linguistically correct, as well, such a designation has a primarily noetic-philosophical coloring, and for Westerners, by bringing to mind, for example, a Socrates, a Plato or a Boethius, it refers to a very different type from the Taoist one. Moreover, *sheng-jén* as Sage is precisely an ideal of Confucian exotericism, whose distance from the plane of Taoism has been said. Even less suitable is the term "Holy," because of its background of a moral and religious character in the strict sense, a background that *sheng-jén* lacks altogether: as it also lacks the emotional, yearning and ecstatic background proper to the mystic. Finally, for a similar reason, namely a possible reference to a merely moral fulfillment within the domain of the human, we discarded a third term, "the Perfect," although we had used it in our earlier version. Based on the relationship just mentioned above between the various Daoist designations, we have instead adopted, for *sheng-jén*, the translation "Real Man," or "Realized Man" A higher dimension, that of "Transcendent Man," *shen-jén*, must be equally referred to "Real Man," despite the difference which, strictly speaking, exists between "Real Man" and "Transcendent Man," and which Guénon has well illuminated (*La Grande Triade*, Paris, 1946, ch. XVIII) (5). If the term were not too technical, one could also speak of adept in the initiatory sense, rather than of saint, philosopher, mystic or sage, because, as to ontological *status*, that is precisely what we are dealing with; among other things, this would not make one lose sight also of a certain magical quality equally present in the type in question. In

(5) Tr. il. *The Great Triad*, Adelphi. Milan. 1980 (Ed.).

Indeed, "men of the Tao"-*tao-shih*-even at the beginning of our era were called *fang-shih*, a term that certainly alludes to that quality. It is a general idea that possession of the Dao confers magical power, and masters are referred to as *té-jèn*, that is, "men from the *té*" (from power). But the term "adept" or "initiate" is too specific, so we preferred to render *sheng-jèn* as "Real Man."

"Real Man" is thus the one who reproduces in himself the metaphysical law of the Tao: who, in order to be, is not, who by denying himself affirms himself, who by disappearing preserves himself at the center, who is full with empty Tesser, who by obscuring himself shines, who by lowering himself towers above. All this, in an impersonal and asentimental sense. thus with a definite difference from the spirit that informs similar ethics outside the Taoist East, for example in the Christian religion. The fundamental theme is also expressed by the technical term "preserving the One" - *chen-i* - or "preserving the Essence" - *ching*. Man loses himself because he displaces the original force outwardly, creating the concretion of the self, supersaturating that concretion, immersing himself in "life" or energizing it, nurturing attachment to that portion of life he "stole" and convulsively grasped at. Opposite is the path of perfection or integration: desaturating, letting go, denuding, simplifying, not acting, letting go of the ray, going back to the origin. That, as in the Tao, there is also in man the continuous, free flow of life that allows essential detachment, transcendence, the consistence in the immaterial and the elusive, and that dissolves into a higher spontaneity and calm dominion the existential tangle. In the human world, this is the "higher virtue" as opposed to the "lower virtue" which has in view instead acting and tending starting from the limited human strength and illusory center of the individual self, being ultimately cut off from the Way.

It thus seems quite clear how absurd it is to conceive of the doctrine of Lao-tze as "quietism" in this regard. And when, apart from many Europeans, one hears from a modern Chinese that the "non-acting" indicated for attaining "conformity to the Tao" is "the weakness that is manifested by not desiring, not knowing, contentment, humility, etc." (P. Siao Sci-Yi, in his translation of *Tao-té-ching*, Laterza, Bari', 1947, p. 20), one is really faced with the height of incomprehension. If anything, not a "quietism" of the most subtle and purified doctrine of "superman" can be spoken of. Such misunderstandings are then exercised deplorably in the terms in which, in general, many passages of the *Tao-té-ching* have been rendered by referring them to maxims of a most mediocre wisdom in social and political life. While everyone, because of the virtual polysemy of an ideographic language, may also find in such passages a meaning reflecting his own flatness, nevertheless it must be held firm that the essential meaning is almost always that in inner, spiritual terms: these are norms of the deepest inner life, almost we would say transcendental, not of external social conduct. Lao-tze ethics is essentially an initiatory ethics.

About Daoist "non-acting," *wu-wei*, its positive counterpart is "acting without acting," *wei-wu-wei*. As noted above, *wu-wei* only means not to

peripheral To intervention, exclusion of "doing" in the direct and material sense, of the use of externalized power-as a condition for the manifestation of a higher form of action, which is precisely the "acting without acting," *wei-wu-wei*. *Wei-wu-wei* takes over as the very "action of Heaven" in its characters of *tea*, of invisible spiritual power that brings everything to fruition, irresistibly but also "naturally." With paradoxical fonnules. Lao-tze returns again and again to this concept: detachment, abandonment, not-wanting, not-acting in order to liberate true acting, in identity with the Way itself. "To be man is to be Heaven," adds Chuang-tze (XX, 7), "what prevents man from being Heaven is his own activity. And *Chung Yung* himself (26): "He who so is can remain imperceptible or manifest his influence; without moving he can cause upheaval, and without striving he can perform works."

In this context one encounters another patently absurdity in many translators or commentators, that of seeing in Taoist precepts relating to both the individual and society those of a "return to nature" with the premise of natural goodness or spontaneity, almost as if one were dealing with a Rousseau anticipated by twenty-three centuries, with the apologetics of the "good savage" and the corresponding trial of "corrupting culture" proper to eighteenth-century Europe. To be sure, in Taoism the denial of "culture"-external knowledge, rationalism, the contrived social system, petty political facetious wisdom, the zeal to "enlighten the people," and all the rest, including the very study of books on the Tao (which, says Chuang-tze, are but "the excrement of the Ancients")-is even more radical than in those Rousseau-like ideologies. Here, however, the counterpart is something, which with nature and naturalness such as we in the West have been able to conceive them, has nothing to do. Just as in Far Eastern texts "natural" appears very often as a synonym for "celestial," likewise as "nature" was conceived the Way itself in its sensible form, the elusive, incorporeal celestial order in action (cf. *Chung Yung*, 1: "Celestial development is called nature"). Thus the spontaneity spoken of and that everything operates only that "no action is taken," i.e., only that the individual does not meddle, is the transcendental spontaneity of the Way of Heaven; the "original simplicity," p 'u, taoi- sta is not a trivial idealized almost animalistic primitivistic innocence, but the state that in other traditions was adumbrated with the myth of the Golden Age or other myths of origins, a state to which was proper, if one may so express it, the naturalness of the supernatural and the supernaturality of the natural. Moreover, it is noteworthy that both in Lao-tze and in older orthodox texts, up to that attributed to the legendary Fo-hi (who is said to have reigned from 3468 B.C.), we refer to an even more remote antiquity, the way of which is meant to be restored (of Lao- tze, Confucius is said to have said, "This man claims to practice what was the wisdom of the primeval age."). Making the heavenly element a synonym for the natural element, and contrasting it with the human element, it is a Taoist saying that "it is necessary for the heavenly element to predominate in order for action to conform to the original perfection." The Westerner must therefore keep in mind that where he is led to see a "naturalism" it is instead the vision of the

world proper to a humanity that, in a certain way, was still connected to the origins or "super-nature"; directly and existentially, not through theories, revelations or religions in the strict sense (*religio*, from *religare*, i.e., to reconnect what is already split) as in later stages or cycles of civilization. This is the key to understanding the true face of Far Eastern spirituality in general, up to expressions, such as artistic ones (think, for example, of painting, with a subtilized "nature" that has as its constant background theme, or "canvas," the plane and the metaphysical "void"); it is the key, likewise, to explain, in that ancient spirituality and in what has subsequently been preserved of it, the absence of the ascetic moment in a narrow sense, that is, as effort, mortification and violent overcoming, and, finally, to understand the suaccused-and thus misrepresented-aspects of the *Tao-tè-ching* teachings on non-acting.

Referring to "Real Man," non-acting, on another hand, concerns those who shun the play of concordant interactions, actions and reactions to act, instead, on the invisible and preformal plane of causes and processes in their nascent state. In this is to be found, in *Tao-tè-ching*, the fundamental idea of *l-ching* itself considered in its aspect as an "oracular" book; that of preventing the coercion of events and situations, of bringing action to bear on that which is still in the process of becoming on the basis of knowledge of the "images" of what happens in heaven and on earth. And already in the deH7-c/">ig tradition, the type of one who, using such knowledge, is able to foresee, control and direct the play of actions and reactions (of *yin* and *yang* in the world of forms and beings), beyond the motionless and impersonal principle whose nature he reproduces, was defined. Thus one can define this aspect of Taoist "non-acting" as not putting oneself on the same plane as the forces or things one wants to come to terms with. Rightly has been recalled, by analogy, the principle of Japanese wrestling, which is "never to oppose force to force but to bring down the opponent by the strength of him alone" (C. Puini). The "Real Man" "does not act" - yields, retreats, bends - in order to act in such a way, that is, to secure the initiative of true action, referring to which Lao-tze speaks of a winning without fighting, of tying without using knots, of drawing to oneself without calling and moving. In a more special venue, reference can also be made to what is proper to magic, when *wu-wei* is brought back to the imperceptible action on what is still "weak" or "soft" (in germ) to prevent subsequent developments, to arrest them or to lead them in a desired direction, which to the layman will seem natural. In this context in *Tao-tè-ching* it is said that the weak triumphs over the strong, the minute over the great, the soft over the rigid, and the image of water is used, which takes the form of everything but has no equal in corroding the hard and rigid.

Apart from the doctrine of *wu-wei*, two possible ways of appearance are indicated (though not without interference) for *sheng-jèn*. The first is what may be called that of the unknown initiate. Sse Ma Ts'ien reports; "For his (Lao-tze's) school, the main care was to keep oneself hidden and to have no name or fame." Another said, "One is not a Sage if one leaves a trace." The *sheng-jèn* can outwardly identify himself to the common man, even to the man

despicable, seeming devoid of knowledge, skill, practical spirit, culture, ambition, like one who lets himself be carried along by the current of the world, avoiding standing out, putting himself as it were in the light: as if by a kind of reflection, in his own empirical humanity and conduct, of his keeping himself in the depths, nothing externalizing. This impenetrable type of the initiate may seem-and to a certain extent indeed is-very extreme-oriental; but after all it recurs in other traditions as well, in Mahāyāna and Islam for example, then in Western Hermeticism and Rosicrucianism. And where in Lao-tze the description of the "Real Man" in such a cryptic form includes some colorings of antinomianism, that is, of disdain for current values and grandmothers, for "small virtue" and what is attached to it in regulated social living, one may refer back, for a parallel, to the *sūfī*, Islamic type of the so-called "blameworthy" (*malāmātiyah*), such insofar as they may have a high, unacknowledged dignity, or to the Tibetan legend of Naropa, who cannot find the master Tilopa because, although he meets him again and again, he cannot recognize him in the person of those who perform actions that are reprehensible to him, or, finally, to another Islamic type, that of the *majādth*, initiates who have made a split whereby transcendental development has no reflection in the lower, human part, which is left to itself.

One finds, in the *Tao-tê-ching*, suggestive characterizations, given in the well-known paradoxical style, of this kind. To him one is not near, to him one is not far. he is above honor and above shame (ch. 56). Without duty in the world, he is a wandering stranger attending (ch. 35). Indeterminate as the ocean wave, he loves nothing but solitary height (ch. 20). He is straight in the curved, full in the void, untouched in corruption (ch. 22). He wears common garments and conceals precious matter (ch. 70). According to the symbol already mentioned, like water he is elusive and untamable, because he is adaptable to everything (ch. 8, 76, 78). He progresses without advancing, possesses without taking, arrives without walking, wins by abandoning (ch. 69). To keep himself at the top he veils his ego (ch. 66). It is a being that offers no hold, while, if it wants to act, its action, because it is from another plane-from behind the scenes, one might say-achieves the goal without resistance being possible. The magical trait of even physical invulnerability is not absent, almost as a *chrysm*, a tangible symbolic sign, of its transcendent detachment creating a different ontological *status* (ch. 50). Chuang-tze (v. 5) speaks of it thus, "In the body of a man, he is no longer a man. He lives among men, but is absolutely indifferent to their approval or disapproval, for he no longer has their feelings. Infinitely small in that for which he is still a man; infinitely great in that for which he is one with Heaven." And Lieh-tze (II. 5), "He carries his gaze to the heights of the heavens, or to the depths of the earth, and to the farthest horizons without his spirit being moved."

In contrast, the second type of Daoist *sheng-jên* corresponds to situations in which a given structure of society and civilization makes it possible to match the intema and secret quality with an authority and dignity

exterior, in the exercise of the visible functions proper to a chief, an ordainer and a ruler. In that case the figure of *sheng-jên* is confused with that of the *Wang and Ti*, of the "Son of Heaven" of the Far Eastern dynasties. This is the second possibility. I references to the "Real Man" in such a capacity are, in *Tao-té-ching*, no less numerous than those to his other eventual mode of appearance. This leads to consideration of the third aspect of the teaching, namely, the application of the metaphysics of the Tao to politics.

While intrinsically Lao-tze's doctrine has nothing "mystical" about it, this character is confirmed here in one special respect: precisely because of the constant reference of the Way to the one who is to order society and act as the center or pole for the forces of the world, to whom the exponent of an abstract evasive spirituality is not at all contrasted. In this, too, Lao-tze keeps strictly in the line of the primordial Chinese tradition, which was a tradition of unity not only on the purely metaphysical but also on the political level. For it ignored the division of the two powers (spiritual authority and political authority), associated the teachings of transcendent wisdom, beginning with *theVI-ching* and commentaries to it, with figures of emperors and princes-Fo-hi, the "Yellow Emperor," Wen-Wang and so on and not with a distinct priestly or "philosophical" line. As repositories of doctrine, they were regarded as the rulers: just as it seemed natural that eminently those who possess knowledge and are in the Way as "Real Man" or "Transcendent Man" should be entrusted with the command and function of *ruling* according to the "mandate of Heaven." Of fundamental significance in this context is the Far Eastern conception of the so-called Great Triad, consisting of Heaven, Earth and Man: Man, as the mediator between Heaven and Earth, is essentially man as ruler and the ruler as "Real Man." This teaching, which is also Confucian (cf. *Ching Yung*, 22), is exactly found in *Tao-té-ching* (ch. 25). The eminent function of the ruler is to maintain contact between Heaven and Earth.

As of ethics, so also of Taoist politics the essence is the imitation of the Principle, thus also non-acting, according to the mentioned valence. And until 1912 (6), that is, as long as the ancient regime lasted, *wu-wei*, non-acting, was the formula that, written on cinnabar, stood on the Chinese imperial throne. It hardly needs to be said that in this regard the incomprehension of most of Lao-tze's translators and commentators has been no less than that shown in speaking of Daoist "quietism" and "passivity" as an individual ideal. The precept to exclude, in government, force and coercion, not to intervene heavily in the delicate and complex mechanism of social forces, the idea that overdoing and super-organizing, rationalism, bridling, legislating and banishing precepts of "sociality" and virtue lead to effects opposite to those aimed at, the principle that everything must order itself and that one must only

(6) The year in which the Manchu dynasty fell, after the secession of the southern part of the country by Sun Yat-sen (Ed.).

propitiating natural developments and the accrual of effects from certain causes, so much so that *V* political *optimum* is to be recognized where the "ten thousand beings" and "everything under heaven" hardly know they are governed and directed—all of which in *Tao-té-ching* cannot help but suggest a political absenteeism, a societal utopia that, again, leads back to Rousseau, the denial of any superelevated authority or power and thus, at bottom, of the very idea of the state. This misrepresentation is almost inevitable on the part of modern Europeans, since they no longer have any sense of the environment and core values proper to the traditionally based regimes of their origins. But to have understood the true meaning of Taoist metaphysics and the way of being of the "Royal Men" is also to realize that this is about something else entirely. The idea of the state, first of all, is recognized, indeed in an eminent degree, since, as mentioned above, the state, the empire, is even conceived as the earthly image of the Way and almost as a promanation of it. As for the regime conforming to the Dao, it is well suited to the attribute of "Olympism" (L. Wiegner) when taken in a positive sense, and the ruler's norm is that of personal ethics itself: detachment, non-acting as an individual in order to exert an action which, for being subtle, invisible and immaterial, is no less real but rather - given certain conditions of environment - is more effective than that of any heavy and obtuse use of force, any "activist" intervention, any coercion. The ruler must constitute the "invariable means" (this is the same idea as Confucius). Like the Great Principle, he is absent, but precisely with that supremely, impersonally present. He exercises the "action of! Heaven" by acting by his mere presence, by his mere being as "Real Man," by his transcendence. It is in this sense that Kuan-tze (1:5) says, "Sovereign is he who is without movement."

It is, this, the direct application of the aforementioned extreme-oriental doctrine of the Great Triad, of man conceived as the third power between Heaven and Earth, in a framework that may appear unusual only if one overlooks the aforementioned combination, in that tradition, of the political function with the sacral one: for if not, limited to the sacral realm, a similar idea was not unknown to the West itself, it finding itself precisely in the function of the "pontiff" according to the archaic etymological meaning of the term (= "bridge-maker"): beings conceived as mediators, as avenues for the radiating of an influence from above into the human world or even as impersonal centers of such influence - in Taoist terms: of the *té*. The idea of H "agent immobility" was also known to Aristotelianism, as well as to other Eastern traditions (it is reflected, for example, in Hindu deities of the "purushic" type). Taoism merely specifically refers this same order of ideas to *sheng-jén* as ruler.

Thus the essential thing, for the *ruler*, is not specific material actions, not a "doing" or even a human care, but -- by union with the Principle, by the destruction in oneself of all particularity and irrational motion, by the adaptation of one's nature to that of the "center" -- is to possess and nurture *tea*, Virtue. Then the ruler will radiate an influence that resolves tensions, moderates, invisibly and imperceptibly composes the play of forces

in total balance, which wins without fighting, which bends without using violence, which rectifies and propitiates a climate where everything can develop in a "natural" way, in accordance with the Way, so much so as to "bring us closer to the primordial state." To this, two conditions are necessary.

The first is precisely, at the top, the non-acting, impersonal impassibility of the leader, detached from all human feeling, from all mania for greatness, neutral in the face of both good and evil as is, metaphysically, the Principle itself, because any declination in one sense or the other from such neutrality or centrality would paralyze Virtue and have for immediate repercussion disorder around him. Second, in the environment and on the periphery, the condition is that the "ten thousand beings," that is, the people, hold in principle to "original simplicity," that is, that one does not want to be what one is not, that one remains true to one's nature and realizes to a certain degree, on one's own plane, the Taoist ethic that condemns extraversion, individualism, agitation for unnatural ends, greed, imbalance and excess. Then Heaven's Inaction" will be felt, both positively, through the aforementioned climate in which positive dispositions will be brought to develop freely and naturally, and negatively, by gradually bringing back into the right order the discarding forces, through the play of concordant actions and reactions, the compounding of ways and destinies and the law of the conversion of opposites when they reach their limit. Acting without acting within this framework, at an Olympian and supernaturalistic concept of sovereignty, such is the function of the Taoist ruler. as it is variously highlighted in the *Tao-té-ching* and, later, emphasized by the other two early masters, Lieh-tze and Chuang-tze.

We recognize that of the two conditions the second is utopian only in referring to the orientation of the most recent humanity. In fact, the European world itself knew, until after the Middle Ages, the loyalty of large strata of the people to their state and nature, and this was the basis of the stability of the ancient regime. As for the first point, Olympian sovereignty, traces of it had been preserved in Europe at least where temporal power did not dissociate itself from spiritual authority, and monarchies of divine right had an intrinsic prestige, symbolic character and their own mystique. Already, however, China itself in the early centuries of Taoism was far from presenting without fail the social environment presupposed by the political principle of non-action reaffirmed by the doctrine of Lao-tze. In view of this, Confucianism beat the other path, that of a social and human orthopedics based more on normative principles than on original spontaneity. Han Fei-tze's so-called School of Law gave proof of sound realism by combining the two demands, interpreting Daoist ideas to mean that in the first instance drastic steps should be taken to restore individuals and the masses to their natural state by striking down all transgressions and excesses, and only in the second instance would the political principle of non-action be applied within the framework of free and natural developments favored by superordinate influence. Instead, in Lao-tze, the principles of a metaphysically based politics, Olympian sovereignty and invisible, top-down action are presented without compromise or mitigation, in adherence to the pure doctrine of origins. This, even though the stages of the

descent, of the involution of the political principle (ch. 17), leading all the way to the leader who is only feared and, in the end, hated and despised. Chuang-tze, having recognized that "under the rulers of antiquity the condition of men was altogether different: the people only followed their own nature," had to push his pessimism to the point of saying, "Those who have known the Principle have become the emperors and kings of the heroic age, those who have not known it have remained earthly and carnal beings... Now the Principle is so forgotten, that all beings, having left the earth to the earth return" (IX, 2; XI, 3). From this we are led to say something about the fourth and final aspect of the Dao doctrine, concerning the initiatory notion of H immortality.

The current view among sinologists is that after the period of Lao-tze, Lieh-tze and Chuang-tze, Taoism would have become corrupt and degenerated; ceasing to be "philosophical and mystical," it would, on the one hand, have turned into a religion that absorbed the most spurious and primitive folk beliefs, and on the other hand would have given rise to a complex of superstitious doctrines and practices, associated with magic and alchemy, at the center of which lay the quest for "bodily immortality" and thaumaturgic powers.

This is accurate only in one respect. Acknowledging that the essential core of the doctrine in its origins had a character that was not "philosophical and mystical" but, what is very different, metaphysical, in the history of Taoism we certainly see the same process of degradation undergone by Buddhism, which in its beginnings, as a doctrine of awakening and enlightenment, had had an almost exclusively initiatory character (7). For Luna *and* the other doctrine this was the fatal consequence of their spread and popularization. Already in the first centuries after Christ Taoism had developed into a religion that attracted the popular masses, reaching its apogee between the fourth and sixth centuries under the six dynasties. It even gave rise to a political movement with the revolt of the so-called "Yellow Turban" that overthrew the Han empire in the mid-2nd century. In that religion, what in the original doctrine had the character of abstract metaphysical principles and moments of inner experience, became transformed into a set of deities, spirits and entities that in ever-increasing numbers populated an imaginative and baroque *pantheon* analogous to that of the Buddhist religious Mahāyāna. Like the Buddha, Lao-tze was deified. The constant forms of what is simple religion were reaffirmed: deferring to the gods to obtain salvation, the need for external spiritual help, faith, devotion, worship with even collective rites and ceremonies. Well, in regard to all this one can certainly speak of a regression that departed completely from the spirit of early Taoism. However, Taoism which became a popular religion and exoterism, after partly mingling with Buddhism, was to rapidly decline in turn and survived only as a cult of monks or as the practice of sorcerers, becoming the object of scorn by the intellectualizing Chinese educated classes.

(7) Cf. Julius Evola. *The doctrine of awakening* (1943). Edizioni Mediterranee, Rome' 1995 (ed.).

Things are different in regard to what, through misunderstanding, has been conceived as a set of superstitious and magical techniques for the attainment of "bodily immortality." In fact, here we are not dealing with a degradation but, on the contrary, with the esoteric and operative side of Taoism, where a doctrine assumed a particularly precise form, a doctrine which in essence is not peculiar only to the tradition in question but is found at the basis of all that is initiation, even outside the East. The misunderstanding arose from the fact that of these aspects of Taoism the most came to know something only when they were degraded into circles and sects that no longer understood their true meaning: then it was natural to attribute to the doctrines themselves as they had already previously been transmitted the problematic or distorted characters proper only to what had appeared later. Even of sinologists, however, they have had to recognize that already in the Fathers of Taoism the presence of elements of the initiatory doctrine of immortality is attested, that this therefore is not, as many others want, something more recent and spurious resting on strained and fanciful interpretations of the *Tao-té-ching* and other scriptures. It is indeed true that in such ancient texts one finds only hints that are often involuted; but, as we have noted, in Lao-tze and the others one should not see isolated individuals given to personal speculations, but the exponents of schools and chains that guarded certainly *ab antiquo* the integral doctrine. To the latter one must refer when in certain Taoist traditions one speaks of the "royal immortals who have realized the Tao" and who pass on only among themselves, orally, the secret teaching about initiatory procedures, swearing by blood not to reveal them to others.

That being said, although in this regard more than *Tao-té-ching* there is therefore to be referred to the tradition in general into which it falls and which in such aspects became known only later at various distortions, we shall give a brief outline of what it is about.

In order to bring out well the meaning of the doctrine of immortality mentioned above and which, as we noted, is common to both Taoism and other Eastern and Western initiatory schools, a comparison with religious views - to simplify, with those of Christianity - will be needed. For Christianity, every soul is immortal; immortality is consubstantial to it and is guaranteed. Not the soul's survival to death, but only how it will survive-whether it will attain the bliss of heaven or whether it will have to suffer the eternal torments of hell-is the issue here. So all the believer's concerns are not to escape death, but to spare the immortal soul from the tormenting afterlife and to assure it of the beatific one: that for him means "health" or "salvation."

According to initiatory doctrine, things are very different: the issue is not how one survives but whether one survives. The alternative is between actual survival and non-survival, survival and immortality being conceived not as a given but as a simple, non-ordinary possibility. According to Taoism, almost all humans are indeed inscribed in the Book of Death; only in exceptional cases does the Regent of Destiny erase them from that book and place them in the Book of Life, that is, of immortals.

It would, moreover, be easy to point to correspondences of such an anti-democratic idea of immortality, especially as the content of myths, in other traditions - it would suffice to recall the notion of double destiny, that of "heroes" destined for the quasi-Olympic seats of immortals, and that of "the most" in ancient Eliade. But in esoteric Taoism apart from doctrine it is a complex of techniques put in place to secure the privilege of immortality by causing a change of state, that is, the "transformation" mentioned above.

A second point of differentiation from religious exotericism is that, while for this the soul is made immortal by detaching itself from the body, in Taoism there is instead the apparently bizarre idea of an immortality to be elaborated already in life in the body and by transformation of the body. Such an idea, which, *pari-mens*, is also characteristic of other initiatory and mystical teachings, finds a very suitable framework in Far Eastern metaphysics. In fact, this metaphysics, starting from the earliest *dcitl'-ching* commentaries, ignored the dualism between soul and body, between "spirit" and matter. As has been dello, here birth was conceived as a passage of being from the invisible and aformal state into the visible and formal one, and as corporeality was conceived simply resisting with form, or externalized existence. This has also been explained as a coagulation or binding of the spiritual, and for such a change of state symbolic bodily images have also been given, those of a fixation of spirits and breaths or the coagulation of the subtle ethereal substance (*ch'i*). In its deepest sense, however, fixation is the identification or identification of being in existence with form. Externalized formal existence is taken up in the current of transformations, is thus subject to the crises inherent in every change of state, the leaving of one state (dying) and the passing of another. It seems natural that for those fixed in form, that is, in the bodily state, this crisis can be destructive. Not having retained, having "dissipated" the One, or Essence, he in the proper sense may not survive, will recurrently "enter" and "exit" without anything substantial persisting. According to Taoism, his being as an individual disintegrates; the metaphysical principle being obnubilated, having come to an end the manifold forces (depicted as various entities residing in the body) provisionally held together in the bodily frame and, in general, in the human personality, are released, ceasing to provide the basis for the consciousness and continuity of the individual self.

Against this backdrop, in its own way not rambling but realistic, is also defined the esoteric doctrine of an immortality to be worked out in the body and in life (as a deplorable circumstance is thus considered to die before one's time) on the basis of an ontological and existential transformation of the condition of formal existence: immortality, which does not mean escaping death materially but rather escaping the crisis bound, for the common man, to the transformation or change of state, *Ima*. Thus of the legendary ruler Jan- siang it was said, "He alone remained untransformed in the universal transformation." And Chuang-tze (I, 2), about ("Real Man": "Neither life nor death can cause any change in his Ego: apart from the hearths of harmful influences."

It is not the case here to dwell on the details. We will only say that the techniques contemplated are aimed at curbing the extroverted tendency of identification with life and dissipation of essence in life (in *Tao-té-ching* there are many maxims susceptible to be taken up operationally in this sense), at generating and nurturing what is called ("immortal embryo" or "mysterious embryo," dissolving the coagulation of formal existence. Which could be expressed in Western dualistic language by saying that the "body" is transformed into "spirit," or that "body" and "spirit" become one by reintegration into Principle. One may quote the following passage from a text, from the *Yun-chi ch'i-ch'ien*, referred to by Maspéro (*Le Taoisme*. Paris. 1950, p. 39): "The body is penetrated by the Tao and becomes one with the spirit: he in whom body and spirit are united and make no more than one is called a divine man (*shen-jén*). Then the nature of the spirilo is empty and sublimated, its "substance not destroyed in the transformation. The body being wholly like life, there is no longer either life or death...enduring or ending depend only on itself; one goes out and comes back in without intermission." Then, "The transformed material body is identical with the spirit; the fused spirit becomes subtle, is one with the Tao" (*Le Taoisme*. p. 40). "Molten," "to melt," is a technical term in operative Taoism, synonymous with "decoagulate" (in the same sense as a metal passing from a solid state to a fluid state by the effect of fire, that is, precisely by fusion). And that is, overcome the stiffening in form, only because of which death can mean something other than a mere change of state, not held to affect the essence. The whole being becomes alive in the current of the primordial vital fluid, *ch'i*, with which contact has been reestablished.

It remains to be added that all this is not thought of in abstractly spiritualistic terms. In the fusion, the many powers of the psycho-physical composite, which would otherwise be dissociated and released, are integrated and taken up into the essential One. Hence the specifically Taoist notion, recurring in various "biographies of the Royal Men who enchanted the Tao," of the fusion or solution of the corpse, *shi chieh*: the Taoist adept dying leaves no body; in his grave is nothing but a sword or rod-sceptre as a symbol. This is the sign of the "men of the Dao" of higher degree, delti the "Immortals." They are thus such-let us repeat-not in the sense that they will live perpetually as men, but in the sense that they die only in appearance, because they are integrated without residue into the higher central principle both in life and death. Thus the true meaning of Taoist "bodily immortality" is that the form integrated into the preformal is transferred into the primordial nonexternalized condition, and yet removed from the flow of modifications and changes so much so that one can think of an "immortal body" by analogy. If one wishes, one can also speak here of "pure forms," in a sense analogous to that given by scholasticism to that term. Only by laymen or semi-initiates, who could not understand the teaching in these metaphysical and esoteric terms, was the whole taken up in a crude and superstitious way, and thus thought of procedures that promised to eliminate old age and ill

tia and to indefinitely prolong physical endurance. The misunderstanding, with the inevitable shift to superstitious forms, is thus self-evident, although it is not to be ruled out that from spiritual realization certain extranormal possibilities in human existence may possibly proceed by way of effect, and that these have been much cultivated by some schools (8).

For Westerners, the same terminology then lends itself to misunderstanding, for the expression almost always used is *ch'ang-sheng*, which, while literally meaning "long life," actually alludes to a life that has no end, to a continuous life, therefore also to immortality (we mentioned earlier that a not different meaning in China was had by "old age" itself, hence the attribute of "old" applied to deities and to Lao-tze himself); it is easy, on that basis, to believe that the Masters had longevity and a kind of composition of the elixir of long life exclusively in view. Finally, an even more serious misrepresentation took place, in China, in the Taoism-religion, where the mentioned esoteric doctrine gave rise to the myth of the believer who, after death, takes up the body and leaves the tomb to go to the paradise of the immortals. And the exact correspondence of the coarse esoteric Christian conception of the "resurrection of the flesh," which arose by the same route, that is, by an obtuse interpretation of certain mystic teachings gathered from early Christianity and echoed in the Pauline notion of the "glorious body" or "resurrection body." The "resurrection of the flesh" is not the fantastic event at the end of time, but the hinted initiatory "decoagulation" of the bodily condition. or with form.

A striking Taoist image for the one who passes through, free and invulnerable. any change of state is that of the "flying immortal," *fei-hsien*. One finally encounters the initiatory hierarchical distinction between the "terrestrial immortal" and the "celestial immortal," a distinction that is likely to be traced back to two degrees of immunization from changes of state, with respect to those on the plane of the human condition alone in the one case, with respect to those proper to other, higher conditions of being, in the other case. See also Chuang-tze (XXII, 2): "Among beings, some seem to disappear, yet they continue to exist; others with having lost their (physical) bodies only become even more transcendent."

It is not the case here to deal with the procedures used by operative Taoism. Apart from the discipline of thought and contemplation, yogic, breath-based and even sex-based techniques, possibly with a dietary regimen, drugs, forms of an applied alchemy and even a kind of gymnastics (so-called *tao-yin*) have been considered as adjuvants (9). On the inner side, the premise is detachment, thus not "desiring the desi-

(8) See also Julius Evola. *The Hermetic Tradition* (1931), Edizioni Mediterranee, Rome*. 1996. Part Two. Introduction, §§ 24 and 26 (ed.).

(9) Cf. Huang Ti, *Nei-Ching*, Edizioni .Mediterranee, Rome. 1977; and Lu K'uan YU, *The Yoga of the Daos*. Edizioni Mediterranee. Rome. 1976. On Chinese alchemy, see also: Julius Evola, *Metaphysics of Sex* (1958), Edizioni Mediterranee. Rome*. 1996, § 56 (ed.).

derio," as Lao-tze already says, to decoagulate the flow of life energy; it is the re-establishment on its throne of the One, ruler that usurpers or rebellious generals had banished-the technical term "nurturing the spirit" is synonymous with strengthening the One, which is also sometimes called the Great *Yang*. At the opposite of mystical exaltation, it is the cold impersonal magical quality that must be acquired; at the opposite of moralism, it is the balanced neutrality with respect to both good and evil that is needed. "Cooling the heart," "emptying the heart," *hsii-hsin*.

In a Taoist text it is said, "The heart, like dull ashes, without emotion or tendency," expressions, these, which are already found in Chuang-tze. Then one will perceive the Tao and realize that one is in the way. The rest is a consequence, a consolidation. In Chuang-tze (VI, 5 - cf. XXVII, 4), referring to master Pu Leang Yi, seven stages are distinguished: 1) to detach oneself from the outer world; 2) to detach oneself from neighboring things; 3) to detach oneself from one's own existence; 4) a clear intuition then intervenes, like "morning light"; 5) having reached this point, one perceives the One; 6) having perceived the One, the distinction between past and present falls away; 7) after that "the mystery is fulfilled," there arises the state "in which one is neither alive nor dead," i.e. the superiority to life and death proper to being "transformed," united with the fixed Principle "from which all mutations derive." After that, we read, "He had therefore killed life, and yet was not dead; he lived life, and yet did not live; he was a bodily being who did everything and was in relationship with everyone, and yet for him all this was destroyed, although he was able to bring everything to completion. This state is called "being embraced by calmness," embrace which is followed by perfection."

It is this realization that gradually, proceeding from the subtle to the thick, will decoagulate or produce the "fusion" of the form, until the dissolution of the body, the *shih-chieh*. Finally, for the initiatory amalgamation of soul and body into the "mysterious embryo," there is an explicit reference in the *Tao-tê-ching* as an outcropping of the secret teaching (ch. 10). In terms of written documents, on all this the best accessible information is found collected in a study by Maspéro (*Les procédés de "nourrir l'esprit vital" dans la religion taoïste ancienne*, in *Journal Asiatique*, voi. CCXXIX, April-June, July-September 1937). But if these techniques are attested as early as the fourth and third centuries B.C., likewise it is difficult to separate the genuine core of ideas from what comes from misunderstanding and misrepresentation, from deviations or degradations of doctrine. After all, in the Masters the warning is explicit, that the real key to operative Taoism is not given in writing, but is only transmitted orally.

As early as the Han period the esoteric Taoism of the "men of the Tao," *tao-shih*, separated from Taoism-religion, continuing as a secret tradition almost to the present day. One of the few Europeans who came into direct contact with representatives of it, the Matjoi (pseudonym of Commander A. de Poupourville). at the beginning of this century reported on the existence in Taoist initiatory groups of a hierarchy of three grades. The first is that of *tong-sang*. in which one is introduced to the teaching formulated in the texts. The second degree is that of *phu-uy*, and includes a special in-depth

ments not merely intellectual doctrine; by oneself one must be able to discover the higher and secret meanings contained in the texts, here science not being able to be acquired through any other person than by contravening the law. To the third and final degree one is admitted after a period of seclusion and the discipline of silence; after which one obtains full initiation, with the degree of *phap*. The *phap* generally corresponds to the first of the two types of the adept previously described; he is a dark and powerful being, revered and ignored, wandering, detached from everything. He is attributed with the power to absolutely command his body and the knowledge of the secrets and hidden forces of nature. He corresponds to the "Immortal" of ancient Piti Taoism (see Matjoi, *La vaie rationnelle*, Paris, 1907. ch. VII). It can be referred to by the saying, "They neither act nor rest, neither live nor die, neither rise nor fall."

This, so far as the area of Chinese civilization is concerned, where, as it was said, the other, outward and degraded forms of Taoism-religion or semi-Buddhism-had long ago fallen into disrepute and lost more and more ground to the second orthodox orientation, to the Confucian one. Much of the spirit of "Lao-tze" Taoism, even as a general conduct of life and internal discipline, has, on the other hand, been preserved, mixed with Buddhism, in other schools, such as in Zen, which still subsists in Japan and on which the attention and interest of various Western circles have also recently been brought there. There recurs especially the theme of the elimination of the ego and its tensions (the "emptiness") and anti-intellectualism as the way to a higher spontaneity and perfection (acting without acting) not confined to an ascetic or "mystical" world, but embedded in all domains of existence. In the Zen way an enlightenment, usually conceived as a sudden, abrupt break in level, produces the change of polarity and brings the self back to the true center, unites it with the Great Principle (10).

To this brief briefing on! Taoism according to its various aspects, metaphysical, ethical, political and esoteric, we therefore follow up the new presentation of *Tao-té-ching*. As we said, within the framework of the maximum that can be afforded to what we use to call the "scientific," linguistic treatment of it, we have consistently attended to an interpretation in the manner of the higher meaning to which most of the maxims are susceptible, so that we can make the text count as what it really is: as one of the fundamental expressions of the traditional spirit in general. A few comments added to the individual chapters will serve to reconnect their content to the basic ideas illustrated as a whole in this introduction.

JULIUS EVOLA

(10) Cf. Julius Evola, *The Doctrine of Awakening* cit. II. ch. 11 (ed.).

Tao-te-ching

1

*The Tao that can be named Is not the eternal Tao
The Name that can be pronounced is not the eternal Name.
(As the) Namelessness it is the principle of Heaven-and-Earth.
With the Name lossia: determined as Heaven-and-Earth] is the origin of the infinity of
particular beings
Thus: those who are detached
He perceives the Mysterious Essence.
Of those who are clouded by desire
The gaze is arrested by the limit f sees only the phenomenal appearances of the Principle].
Now of the two IH Nominable and the Non-Nominable, the being and the non-being] One the
essence, different only the denomination
Mystery is their identity
It is the unfathomable bottom
Beyond the threshold of the last arcane.*

Indicated here are the two aspects of the Principle, transcendent the one (unnamable, without form-equivalences: the non-being, the Void, the motionless), immanent the other (nameable, with form-equivalences: the being, the full, the mobile). Other Daoist designations: the "Before Heaven" (*hsien t'ieri*) and the "After Heaven (*hou t'ien*). The first determination of the Dao (also called "the Great Mutation") is Heaven-and-Earth as cosmic symbols of *Yang and Yin*. This Diad produces all the modifications, thus the infinity of particular beings, their paths and destinies ("The Great Flow," the "current of forms").

The unmanifest and the manifest, the aformal and the formal, the "before" and the "after Heaven" are not to be distinguished temporally (as if at a given moment something like a "creation" intervenes), but in logical-metaphysical terms. Transcendence is immanent, "fullness" coexists with "emptiness," non-being is the bottom of being: identity, which constitutes the ultimate mystery of Daoist realization.

Cf. Lieh-tze (I, 1. 3): "The chain of productions and transformations is unbroken, the producer and transformer producing and transforming without it.... The producer is immobile, the transformer comes and goes. And the motionless and the motionless will always last." "Analyzing the production of the universe, the unfolding of the sensible from the non-sensible, the germ of the calm generating action of Heaven and Earth, the ancient Sages distinguished therein these stages: the Great Mutation, the Great Origin, the Great Beginning, the Great Flow."

For everyone under this sky, conceived the beautiful
The ugly is born (as a correlative)
Fixed the good
The non-good takes shape.
Likewise: being and non-being intercondition themselves
Possible and impossible are complementary differentiations
Large and small characterize each other
The high flips into the low
Articulate sound and noise complement each other
"First" and "then"/or: "ahead" and "behind"/run in a circle.
So the Real Man
Lingers in the non-acting
He teaches without speaking
He directs without touching /without commanding/.
Shape (makes become, leads to development/ without appropriating
Accomplishes without doing /without calling attention to what he does/
Essentially: not residing (in the domain of correlatives, where it takes place
the play of opposites)
It always participates (of the original force).

In the first lines, reference on the one hand to the law of correlation of all human notions; then, on the other hand, to its ontological counterpart, to what may be called the "dialectic of the real." Taoistically: the solidarity and alternating action of opposites, of *yin* and *yang*, gives rise to modifications of the phenomenal world that now complement each other, now transcend each other.

This dynamism, already *ne\VI-ching* given by the circle of "Heavenly Figures," i.e., trigrams and csagrams. does not touch the calm, undifferentiated essence of the Principle. Chuang-tze (II. 3): "Still center of a circle on the circumference of which all contingencies, distinctions and individuals run." Hence, the transition ("thus") to the non-acting behavior of the Real Man, the *sheng-jén*. as it reflects within itself the Principle in its nameless aspect (cf. Ch. I).

On the gnoseological level, from the principle of correlation of opposites is deduced the relativity and irrelevance of human distinctions, thus of all current values, to which in reality nothing corresponds: which, however, "only great spirits are capable of understanding" (Chuang-tze, II, 4).

*Empowering beyond the mark
 You provoke (by reaction) the fight
 By emphasizing what is rare to have
 A guilty desire for appropriation is aroused.
 Veil that which, in things, attracts
 And the soul will remain calm.
 Thus: the Real Man as leader.
 It goes without preferences and appetites
 Weakens the impulses [the man of desire, the physique self], hardens the inner being [lit: the
 bones]
 Without (outward) knowledge and without desires guides the ten thousand beings Confuses
 those who know
 Avoid action (self-centered)
 And society will always live free in its own order.*

Some translators have rendered the line "(the *sheng-jèn*) without knowledge and without desire guides the people" with "(the *sheng-jén*) makes the people have neither knowledge nor desire." To ignore the symbolic significance of the respective characters, in a modern Chinese translator the "devoid of preferences and appetites" later became, "(the royal tiomo) empties his heart and fills his belly" (!!!). Along the same lines, there are, among sinologists, those who have interpreted the grandmotherly contained in these lines even as "numbing the people" (the "ten thousand beings") on the one hand and, on the other, as "repressing the most nobly human part in heart and will (*hsin* and *chih*) and blandening instead the most vulgarly bestial part - belly and bones (*fu* and *ku*)."

Instead, the internal logic of the entire chapter corroborates the lesson adopted here. Not knowing and not desiring (in the sense of the individual's discursive knowing and desiring) are the traits repeatedly attributed to the Real Man by the *Tao-tè-ching*, which in him are virtues, how much they would be the opposite in the layman and the people, that is, how much they would be unrealizable in this one (if taken in the positive sense, as virtues).

Elsewhere in the chapter there is mention, yes, of the usefulness of keeping the people in an ignorance that will safeguard their original simplicity (which is different from "stupefying" them). But for now, it rather alludes to a propitiatory desaturation of measure and away from tensions and disordered appetites (first lines of the chapter). As noted above, it is thought that by his presence alone the Real Man acts in this sense .on the environment, fostering an orderly spontaneity in social life.

Dao is not substance, it is inexhaustible activity
Acting that does not increase it How unfathomable it is!
It is like the primordial source of everything.
Blunts the sharp
It clears up the confused
Temper the dazzling
It orders the elemental parts ["the dust"] (of matter) It is elusive yet omnipresent
How could it have been generated?
And prior (and superior) to the Lord of Heaven.

The insubstantiality (the "emptiness"), the pure actuality of the Principle is emphasized, an actuality that neither increases nor diminishes it (thus opposition to both the theory of the "becoming" or "becomingness" of Spirit and that of its degradation by emanation). The Taoist image is also that of a vase that by continually pouring out what it contains remains full and that while always filling up again remains empty. "Primordial scaturigine" is the abstract sense of the text's *tsung* = avo, original father. If one retains the image, given the ordering part proper to the Chinese head-family, the idea of an ordering power may also be included in the fourth line, following some translators. Then a natural connection would be established with the next four lines, which deal with the action of the Dao.

Important for Taoist metaphysics are the last two lines, where the principle is said to be "without origin"-*wu yuan*-, superior and prior to the Sovereign of Heaven (the Shang Ti), that is, the god-person. In this passage a certain cautious manner of expression has been noted linguistically, due to the part that the Shang Ti played in the state cult under the Chou dynasty when the *Tao-tè-ching* was composed. It is as if out of a regard for that conception of exotericism. But in the introduction we have already noted the foreignness of personal, theistic and anthropomorphic conceptions of the divine to the Far Eastern primordial tradition, taken up in its abstract, metaphysical orientation by Lao-tze. Chuang-tze (II, 3) makes it clear that one can admit the principle of a universal regulator (from which by participation is derived the principle of every unity, family, people, etc.) but on condition that one does not make it a distinct personal being, that one understands it "as an influence without a graspable form."

The Universal [Heaven-and-Earth] is not human [compassionate] All things (produced) uses them as means

Real Men are not human (jèn) Beings they have them as means.

(As) the void between Heaven and Earth / = in its Virtue] The Principle is similar to a bellows

It empties itself and is inexhaustible

While inexhaustibly creating with his motion.

(So) it is vain to multiply words and plans (in caring for individuals) Keeping in the middle is best.

The term in the text rendered as "means" (second *and* fourth lines) is literally "straw dogs" (*ch'u kou*), simulacra manufactured in ancient China for certain rituals and then abandoned, thrown away. It is meant to express that the Absolute considers individuals only in universal function, that is, in function of what transcends them, for every other way, that is, for what they are mere ephemeral appearances in the current of forms, not caring about them (non-"humanization" of the Principle, as opposed to the religious conception of Providence and God-love).

Because it reproduces in itself the detached quality of Principle, the Real Man equally ignores human solicitude, even as the Confucian *jèn* (solidarity, sociability), by some Taoist commentaries called the "little virtue" or "lower virtue." In the last two lines, words and measures in view of the particular as such are contrasted with action from the "center," that is, from a neutrality free of preference and sentimentality, in view not of the part, but of the whole, of the universal. It models the virtue of the Dao, which while producing inexhaustibly remains "empty" (image of the bellows), that is, pure, simple, "free from the self." Cf. Chuang-tze (V, 1) who, referring to Wang-t'ai, whose influence "derives from his transcendence," says: Having attained perfect impassibility "he lets beings evolve according to their destinies, and he maintains himself as the immovable center of all destinies" (as in another passage, II, 3, is said, of the Principle: "motionless center of a circle on the circumference of which run all contingencies, distinctions, individuals"): for "there are two ways of considering beings, as distinct individuals or as all in a great whole." It is the imperturbability of a spirit that, "superior to heaven, earth

And to all beings, he dwells in a body.... Absolutely independent, he is lord of men."

In the above ideas there are those who have wanted to see the reflection of a cold, unscrupulous Machiavellianism. Even if one wanted to go all the way down to the political level, this could only be right if the point of reference was a powerful individual's will to dominate, i.e., that exasperation of a particular ego that, by contrast, is the first thing that the Royal Men destroy in them (cf. already ch. 6).

About the last line, even in the *Chung Yung* we read, "Keeping the right middle is perfection, but very few in the world can last there" (4). Its metaphysical sense is the opposite - it is hardly worth saying - of that of moderation, of practical "golden mediocrity." About the aforementioned relativity of the divergence of views in Lao-tze and Confucius, the following passage from the latter can be quoted, again in the same context: "He who reigns according to the virtue of Heaven resembles the polar star; he is motionless, but everything turns orderly around him" (*Lun yii*, II, I).

*Eternal is the energy of the middle space [of the valley/ It is the Mysterious Femina
The door of the Mysterious Femina It is the root of Heaven and Earth
Continuous and invariable
It acts and does not run out.*

Possible interference, in this chapter, of the doctrine of the Dao with remnants of the archaic conception of the primal maternal Feminine (*Magna Mater Genitrix*). "Power of the median space" - literally, in imagini: "life force (or spirit) of the valley." The valley, understood as the space between two rows of mountains, brings back to the idea of both the Void and the median space where the virtue of the principle is manifested, in eternal promanation and transformation (unlike the meaning of the valley - and the feminine - referred to in chapters 61 and 66). The two-leaf door in some commentaries has been referred to the Principle acting through the Dyad, the *yin* and *yang*. The whole is unclear, because here the idea of Principle is overlaid to some extent with that of Virtue. Finally, it may be the "ethereal fluid" (*ch'i*). This is one of the most involuted chapters, variously explained. It is also of those that have been made the subject of esoteric interpretations in operative Taoism, with reference to the occultly considered human being. Characters with technical meaning are used, the meaning of which is difficult to trace. As a hint to such interpretations, the Mysterious Femina is the *yin* (*p'o*) soul principle or energy from which those seeking bodily immortality must extract and coagulate the subtle essence; the two-leaf door alludes to the nose; from the last two lines we get the allusion to the technique of breathing: "in long, long strokes (one breathes) as if one wished to hold the breath, remaining motionless" (cf. J. J. M. De Groot, *Universismus*, Berlin, 1918, pp. HO-111). The Mysterious Femina is the "interna woman": "she is continually in us," says Kuan-tze.

The Universal is hermitage
It is eternal
Because he does not live for himself.
Therefore: the Real Man
Backing away advances
Staying outside is always present
With not making oneself the center
It achieves perfection.

Although the characters used in the first line are "Heaven and Earth," here they express the idea of totality, and it is not to the qualified, "nameable" Principle that we refer but to the action that makes it eternal: it "is" in a transcendent sense insofar as it denies itself.

"Stepping back" = not putting forth self. By reproducing in himself the way of the Dao, the Real Man advances, grows transcendentally as an absolute individual to the extent that he does not make his human individuality the center (it can also be translated: by not having person-person inclinations, he becomes a person, personhood ensues). Taoist technical expression: "letting the person fall like a garment."

*The transcendent quality resembles water Without resisting it takes the form of everything It takes the lowest position, which men despise (because they seek heights).
 The further you are from (acting) communal, the closer you are to the Way.
 (Thus: the Real Man) in the material domain holds for good the staying in the place he has
 In the domain of feeling holds for good the depth of the 'abyss If he gives, he holds for good the generosity (impersonal) Speaking, he holds for good the truth
 Governing keeps orderly development for good
 Acting holds for good the shrewd attainment of the end In the practical domain holds for good the intervening in the right place. Indeed, precisely through adjusting without struggle Nothing alters its being.*

Classic Taoist comparison of water for subtle action and "higher virtue" (*shang shan*). Adapting outwardly to things and situations, not extolling but descending below (which also means: beyond the surface) to exert the desired influence. According to another aspect: in this context, the "I break but do not bend" related to the ego mania could be contrasted with the "by bending (= water) I break." The set of behavior illustrated in this chapter being designated as *i hsing* (which is as good as saying: "ease of nature"), the positive counterpart is also indicated: spontaneous and essential way of operating, beyond antitheses.

Keep when filled to the brim Not possible

Keep an extremely sharp blade Not possible.

One cannot, at one and the same time, Possess and preserve, possessions and power united with pride Prepare by themselves for ruin Acting and retreating / = passing into the shadows/ Is the Way of Heaven.

References, by imagery, to the law of converting into the opposite of all that has reached the extreme. In the apex one begins decadence. For essential possession and control of transformation, one must know how to abandon at the right point what one has brought to completion; to bind oneself to it, and especially to associate with it the pride of the ego, is to expose oneself to being thrown off balance. The inner meaning of these maxims must be put before the social and political meaning, to which one has usually arrested oneself, in mundane terms (for example: do not accumulate riches and possessions because they cannot be secured -- or: retire to a dark life after accomplishing or collecting honors).

*Preserving the One to that spirit and body join And piti do not separate
Circulating (in the body) the fresh and subtle breath Generating the embryo.
Clean the secret mirror excluding all complicated thoughts A that the mind does not wear
you out.*

*In dealing with others and holding up the state Follow the non-action.
The instability [mutability] of fate [the opening and closing of the Gate of Heaven]
Worth developing the receptivity of the soul [= the virtue of the feminine]
With the essential vision embracing every aspect ["the four dimensions"]
Eliminate knowledge (discursive) [= look ignorant]
To achieve development:
Creating without owning
Act without appropriating Elevate without forcing. This is the Way.*

The first part of the chapter reflects the ideas of operative Taoism about the elaboration of immortality (see Introduction, p. 97 ff.). It hints at practices with the breath, the vehicle of life energy, which, subtilized, was used as a means for the occult unification of spirit and body in the original. "Spirit and body," *hun* and *p'o* (first line)-strictly speaking, technically: *yang soul* and *yin soul*, spiritual soul and physical soul. The former is the non-terrestrial light principle, the latter the life entity. One could also say: "being" principle and "life" principle. The privileged condition of immortality is achieved through the union of the two principles, in the sense of a perfect interpenetration of the *p'o* by the *iun*, of "life" by "being," overwhelmed and obnubilated upon entering the current of forms. The integration of the two principles into the One is compared to the forming of an embryo - the embryo of an existence removed from transformation. On these practices, in addition to the already cited study by H. Maspéro, see the text, also translated into Italian, // *Mystery of the Flower of Óro* (Edizioni Mediterranee, Rome, 1971).

The starting point of such practices is also mentioned: detachment from the environment, simplification and calming of the mind, to keep one's nature completely pure and whole. Cf., in Chuang-tze (IV, 1), The "abstinence of the heart": "Do not listen with the ears nor with the heart, but only with the spirit. Preclude the way of the senses, keep the mirror of the heart pure. Keep empty... From the outside, let only things penetrate into the inside that have no more name (impressions freed from mental translations)."; VII, 6: "The Transcendent Man exercises his intelligence only in the manner of a mirror: he knows and knows without any attraction or repulsion following, without any impression subsisting. In this way he is superior to all things and neutral before them"; XIII, 1: "The heart of the Real Man, completely calm, is like a mirror reflecting Heaven, Earth and all beings." All this, to be reconnected with Lao-tze's "cleaning the secret mirror."

Subsequent operational developments, as a "decoagulant" conjunction of body and spirit, are also attested in Lieh-tze (li, 3; IV, 6) in these terms: "The spirit condenses as the body dissolves" (becomes "etherized," "rarefied"). One noli the correspondence with the *solve et coagula* formula of the Western hermetic-alchemical tradition, which likewise knew the formula: "corporize the spirit, spiritualize the body, make fixed the volatile and volatile the fixed" (on this, see our work *The Hermetic Tradition* cit., Part Two. § 16).

The second part of the chapter returns to sketch the "nonagent" behavior of the Royal Men.

*Thirty spokes converge in the hub
 But it is the emptiness of the hub that is the essence of the wheel.
 The pots are made of clay
 But it is the internal vacuum that makes the essence of the vessel
 Walls with windows and doors form a house
 But it is the emptiness of them that makes their essence.
 Generally: being serves as a useful means Not non-being [in the void]lies the essence.*

Various imagery used to express the idea, that the essence of the material and the sensible lies in the immaterial and the invisible, that the "full" is ordered to the "empty": reference to the metaphysical plane ("emptiness" = transcendence) and concordant reference to the nature of non-acting. The wheel with thirty spokes was that of an ancient sacral chariot.

In the esoteric interpretation proper to operative Daoism this chapter has also been related to the distillation of the subtle from the dense, the latter being ordered to the former and having to be resolved in the former (in the *yang* soul) in the "solution of form."

For the ambivalence of the Dao, cf. the expression, "It is heavy as a stone, light as a feather."

*The sight of colors blinds the eyes of man The perception of sounds deafens the hearing
 The taste of flavors dulls the mouth The identification with action obscures the mind The
 craving desire [passion] destroys the possibility of movement (binding to the
 corresponding object)
 Therefore: the Real Man
 Doesn't lose the self in the not-it
 It excludes the outer; it consists of the inner.*

Maxims with possible initiatory value as well, in relation to the discipline of removing oneself from the violence of the impressions of the external world (see, further on, the "closing the door") in order to develop a subtle sensitivity (that, which in the first lines is said to be stifled or impeded) and consolidate inner freedom, which amounts to a gradual shifting of the center from the *p'o* to the *hun* soul plane. It is Taoist teaching that already the natural use of the senses can be harmful, when it comes to defending and preserving intact the "original simplicity" (*p'u*): this, because of the irruption of the multiplicity of sensible appearances into the mind.

An example of the distance in the Chinese text between the literal sense of the characters and their abstract meaning: literally the penultimate line would sound something like this, "(Real Man) is for the belly and not for the eye." It is that the eye is taken as the door through which the external world penetrates into the self, altering and transporting it, suffocating the internal senses, while the belly is taken as the "empty" part of the body, thus, transposing (according to the ideas set forth in the previous chapter), as symbolizing the essential and transcendent part of the human being. The pre-eminence of the belly over the eye therefore stands to signify that the Real Man is not lost in the world that is revealed to the eye, that is, in the external world, in the non-lo. A thing generally ignored in the West, the obesity, the "big belly" with which "Immortals" and Taoist sages, but also certain Chinese and Japanese Buddhas, have often been depicted, has a symbolic character based on the idea now explained: it alludes to the development that in such beings has precisely the "emptiness" principle or dimension of "emptiness"-the immaterial or transcendent element. Belly, lower belly - in Japanese: *hara*. On its meaning as a center in still existing Japanese esoteric schools.

cf. K. Dürckheim, *Hara, Vital Center of Man According to Zen* (Edizioni Mediterranee, Rome, 1969), and on the problems related to it our essay, *The Japanese Hara-theory in its Relation to East and West* (in *East and West*, No. 2, 1958).

*Grace received wounds as much as misfortune Greatness weighs down as does the body.
 What does it mean, "Grace received wounds as much as misfortune"? Grace received
 implies one's own lowering W is anxiety in waiting for it
 There is anxiety in losing it.
 What does it mean, "Greatness weighs down like the body"?
 Having a personal moon body means offering grip
 The body is the principle of heaviness
 If one did not have it
 There would be no passibility.
 Therefore: those who break away from greatness
 Can freely rule the empire
 Those who are attached to the body so little count to the empire May rely on the empire.*

The text of this chapter is very corrupt. Thus divergent translations have been given. Instead of "grace received," it can also be read: favors, honors received; we refer, then, to being dependent because of it, with the implied lowering of one's own, innermost dignity, which is "disgrace." The ideogram for "body" can also be rendered as "person"; then the passibilities, given as a term of comparison for that to which external, profane greatness exposes, are those inherent in being a person, in a limiting sense: a variant, this, to which by making slight modifications the whole can be equally accorded, preserving the overall interpretation given to the chapter.

You look at it and do not see it, whence it is called invisible You hear it and do not understand it, whence it is called soundless You touch it and do not grasp it, whence it is called incorporeal. These three characteristics of the transcendent They mix and say one 'thing. It is denial of the higher brightness And of the lower darkness It is immense and insusceptible of name Refers to what is before (and above) being Its form is the absence of form Its figure is the absence of figure Indiscernible depth If you bring your gaze forward you don't see the end of it If you take your gaze back you don't see its origin Primordial principle In place now [as in all time - perpetually current]. Follow the way of the Ancients And the eternal essence of the Principle will be known.

The ninth line can be understood either metaphysically: the Dao stands before and above being-or in these terms, referring to individual beings: the Dao brings them back from the current of transformations to that which stands before and above being (the preformal state).

In the first lines: the Principle, tangible but elusive. Its non-being, which is the non-existent. You may be interested in this passage from Kuan-tze (XIII, 36), to reencounter the attributes of the principle with the technique of realization: "The Tao is not far away, though reaching it is difficult... Emptiness and nonbeing, incorporeality and immateriality, this is called Dao. Heaven is empty, Earth is calm, neither one nor the other strives. Cast away the self and be silent: then divine clarity will abide in you. He who deeply understands silence (*p'u jen*) and stillness will understand the essential tow of the Dao... If (man) renounces cravings, emptiness (*listi*) will interpenetrate him entirely; by it interpenetrated, he will remain calm and non-acting; calm and still, he will regain contact with the vital ether; he who possesses the vital ether is detached (from the earthly form); detached, he will radiate light like a god (*ming shen*)."

The Masters of Ancient Times

They were free, clairvoyant, mysterious, intuitive

In the vastness of the forces of their spirit they did not know of a lo

This unawareness of inner strength gave greatness to their appearance.

To characterize them with imagery:

They were cautious

As one who crosses a (frozen) stream in winter

Firefighters

As one who knows around him the enemy

Cold

As a stranger

Vanenti Ielusivi]

Like melting ice

Rudi

As undirozed wood

Vast

Like the great valleys

Impenetrable

Like murky water.

Who, today, with the greatness of his light could lighten the inner darkness?

Who, today, with the greatness of his life could revive the death [inertia] within?

In those was the Way

They were individuals and lords of the self

And their non-being [their vacation = the not grasping, taking or filling, in a translational sense]

In them was perfection.

The characterization of the Masters of Ancient Times, models of Taoism, appears to be associated with the traditional idea of the regressive course of historical iimanity, vividly felt even in the Far Eastern world (a Chinese proverb says, "Antiquity was like full rice, we are like empty shells"-see also Lao-tze's reference to the "way of the Ancients" in the previous chapter). This is a teaching of general significance, and what in *Tao-té-ching* lo

reflects should not be referred to mere local Chinese political conditions, to the decadence of the Chou dynasty, under which Lao-tze would have lived, as according to the banal interpretation of several commentators or translators. "A living light illuminated high antiquity, but scarcely a few rays of it have come down to us. To us it seems as if the Ancients lived in darkness because we see them through the thick fog from which we emerge. Man is a child born at midnight: when he sees the sun rise he believes that yesterday never existed" (Taoist text quoted by R. Rémusat). Cf. Chuang-tze (XXXIII, 1): "The ancients collaborated with the transcendent celestial and terrestrial influences, with the action of Heaven and Earth" (this is the concept, already mentioned, of the Great Triad)

Because of their structure in the original, the last lines of the chapter are controversial. We have essentially followed the lesson of Ular (1) as the one that organically connects these lines with the rest and keeps them at the level of the whole.

(1) See Introduction to *11 Book of the Way of Virili*, *supra* note 1

Those who realize extreme emptiness

Find that (which beyond the changeable and the particular) subsists motionless and calm In the flow of countless beings

He sees their going out [going to formal state] and swarming And how they all return to the root.

Returning to the root means a state of rest

From such rest (succeed to) a new destiny

This is the immutable law (of transformation)

Knowledge of the immutable law leads to the clear vision

Non-knowledge of immutable law leads to blind and harmful action Knowledge of immutable law leads to detached equanimity Being detached means being superior

To be superior is to be regal

To be regal means to be like Heaven

To be like Heaven is to be similar to the Principle To the eternal and identical

And one will be forever out of harm's way.

The chapter usually goes under the designation *kuet kén* - "return to the root." It briefly outlines the two ways we mentioned in the introduction. On the one hand, the eternal law of the flow of transformations, their "entering" and "exiting" of beings, an affair for which the imagery of being exhaled (exiting, being born, in the sign of *yang*) and re-inhaled (returning, dying, in the sign of *yin*) is also used in the commentaries. *or* that of the back-and-forth motion of a weaver's loom (Lieh-tze). On the other hand, the contemplation of this law, contemplation that initiates detachment, and the perception of the motionless substratum of transformations, which "brings one back to the root," makes Real Man similar to Heaven and puts him out of harm (only in the exoteric interpretation, out of the harm and risks inherent in this one life - esoterically: immunity with respect to what may proceed of the crises bound up with ontological changes of state).

It should be emphasized that Taoism knows this dual possibility, that therefore its horizon is by no means exhausted-as more than one has argued-in the eternal monotonous affair of appearing and disappearing, of leaving and

re-entry of beings, resulting in a fatalistic indifference as the norm of wisdom. Lieh-tze (I, 9) calls this "the lower knowledge." The higher knowledge, on the other hand, concerns the knowledge of the Principle and reintegration into the root (from Lieh-tze, IV, 2, indicated in these terms: first, deep union of body and spirit, then integration of that unity into the forces of the world, brought by "non-being," i.e., transcendence). For those who come to such a point, says Lieh-tze (VI, 2), endurance in the current of forms appears as a long sleep, and death as the great awakening from a dream (Chuang-tze, IL 8 - cf. VI, 8: "You and I who are speaking at this moment are like two unawakened dreamers").

Chuang-tze himself (XIX, 1, 2) says that he who, having his body and spirit intact and united with nature, "having gathered all his powers," "has reached the starting point of transformations and remains there," upon the occurrence of the dissolution of form "is capable of transmigration." It does not dissolve, but, "quintessentially, becomes a cooperator with Heaven."

The people in the origins hardly knew that there were (rulers)
1 successive (rulers) were loved and exalted
/ subsequent were feared
1 following were despised
Their disloyalty [incomplete loyalty] destroyed all trust
The first, serious, reserved in speaking
They fulfilled their function perfectly
And the ten thousand beings said:
" We live according to our nature."

Until recent times in China the "invisibility of the emperor" (because, according to ritual, he only very rarely showed himself) was an outward symbol of the invisible "non-agent" government. The text indicates the later, increasingly degraded forms taken by the type of the leader. First of all, "distance" is lost (the principle, before, was, "one exerts influence, only by keeping oneself distant"). The ruler is visible and "popular": he loves popularity or needs it. His prestige is not based on the feeling of distance, but on the feeling of closeness to him of the ruled mass; for this he is loved. In a third time takes over the type of the prince who rules only because he is feared. Finally we come to the leader who, at one and the same time, is feared and despised, with which all relations of loyalism and mutual loyalty are broken, and the structure of a state reaches the limit of instability.

The ruler of origins, "whose power is derived from that of the Principle," was called "the Mysterious One"-says Chuang-tze. He transmits the influence of the Principle to all beings, causing natural capacities to develop in them; originally his "policy" was "to bring the individual nature of individuals back into conformity with the universal acting virtue" (XII, 1-10). The general idea is summarized quite well by Granet (*La pensée chinoise*, cit., p. 547) in the following terms: "For the profit of all things, but without charity or pride, he limits himself to concentrating in himself an intact Majesty... this sovereign Majesty is not distinguished from a pure Power nor from an integral knowledge (*! she*)... Unknown autocrat, it does its work without anyone being aware of it, and this work is accomplished without affecting in any way the one from whom it emanates."

Lost the Way

They put forward "humanity and justice "

(Lost original simplicity) from skill and cunning

The great hypocrisy was born

Broken the blood bond that bound the original

They made up for it with family feelings When kingdoms fell into disorder "good ministers" stepped forward,

Take away (small) wisdom, put away prudence And far greater will be the benefit of the people

Let not humanitarianism and morality be banished And a spontaneous [=family-like] solidarity will reign in society Let utilitarian purposes be devalued, self-interested action be despised

And in society guilty actions will disappear.

(But also) about these three maxims

One should not stick to the letter

It is essentially necessary:

Being (themselves) in rough, natural directness

Detached from particular ambitions free from vain desires.

Visible continuity of this chapter with the previous one. Banning "virtues" is, for Taoism, only a sign of a corrupt society. See ch. 38: "Higher virtue does not give itself as virtue." It also speaks of the "non-virtue of virtues," in the latter meaning those artificial ones corresponding to an outward precept that, rather than restoring a life of integrity, will only increase harm by propitiating hypocrisy and cunning. Taoist polemic in this regard, not without reference to a deterrent or misunderstood Confucianism, has often gone overboard. "Humanity and justice" - *jén* and *i* - are precisely cardinal Confucian virtues. Family sentiments reduced to conventional and obligatory behavior also belong to decadence (ch. 18). Cf.

Chuang-tze (XIII, 5): "This scurrying after humanity and justice reminds one of a fellow who beat a drum in chasing a runaway son, with the sole effect of making him flee piti far away.... Unite your influence with that of the Principle instead of imposing artificial virtues, and you may come to something."

From the last lines of ch. 19, the positive point of reference becomes clear: the conduct that comes from being oneself, instead of reflecting a grandmother of society. The elimination of desires, as vain desires, is not to be understood here in an ascetic, striving or renunciatory sense. It is a fundamental idea of Taoism that in man a complex of desires, tendencies and interests is not "natural" at all, it is an error, it is something artificial and parasitic. One is truly oneself-and is in the Way-when one frees oneself from it. Then true virtues also manifest themselves. "Morality," far from restoring this state of natural balance, moves one even further away from it, adding to one stratification another stratification. Effective image: "The beginning is what I call the thaw (the dissolution of the concretion of the outer self), after which the river begins to take its course" (Chuang-tze, XXIII. 3).

In a way, in the following chapter the same double instance is reaffirmed. Among the outgrowths with respect to the natural state, of which one must prune oneself, the world of intellectualism and social distinctions between "good" and "evil" is also brought within its ambit. However, in contrast, a being oneself is described that already leads quite far along the line of Transcendent Man in his closed and impenetrable form. The reference, as will be seen, is in the first person-it is almost the only passage in the *Tao-té-ching* where the author speaks of himself: however, with the visible intent of sketching a model.

*Intellect (discursive, reasoning) is a source of pain
 Dialectical distinctions, what consistency do they have?
 Between "good" and "evil" what is the difference?
 "Acting like everyone else" - fear-based norm.
 No! (filo ri da) this squalor.*

*Everyone is carried away by an easy joy
 All they need is a party
 A spring landscape such as is offered to us from a terrace lo, instead, anchored in the
 depths of the current of feeling I remain serious and calm [beyond joy] like a child who has
 not yet smiled.
 I live like this and go as if I don't belong anywhere.
 Everyone desires excess
 While I am like one who possesses nothing
 (I look) unaware, simple, without practical spirit
 Everyone lives in the light
 While I am dark
 Everyone needs company
 While I love nothing but the lonely height
 Indeterminable as the waters of the ocean
 Like the wave I turn without ceasing
 Everyone is aiming for something
 While I look simple and incapable
 I am different from everyone
 But combined with the 'original producing essence, only I am a lo.*

*The great Virtue as manifested
 And only the exteriorization of the Principle
 But the substance of the Principle
 It is undifferentiated and elusive
 Indifferent and elusive
 It contains the seeds The archetypes, the seminal possibilities of beings, constituting their
 indestructible element, their "heaven."]
 Mysterious and incomprehensible
 It contains the existences [= beings passed to the formal stage] Deep and hidden
 It contains the essences/transformed beings - the "spirits"]
 As such is the great Reality (Of all beings) the secure seat. From the origin until the present
 It does not change its Name
 From him proceeds the animating principle (of all things) What is the foundation of such
 knowledge?
 This.*

Beings do not cease to live in the Principle and to have their "secure seat" in him in the threefold condition: 1) in the preformal state "being part of Heaven-and-Earth" as archetypes or seeds (κόυοτ ΟΤτppαTixοι) ; 2) in formal existence or existence in the proper and limiting sense; 3) as pure forms. Coexistence of the issue, of the eternal movement where such stages succeed each other, and of the mysterious, elusive, motionless Oneness.

The unknowability and elusiveness that would be the predicates of the Principle in this respect is contrasted in the last lines with the form proper to a possible knowledge of its mystery: "this," a term to refer to direct, metaphysical and superrational intuition (it recurs in ch. 54). Compare the expression *tathata* which, used with a similar meaning, in Mahâyânic Buddhism designated the content of the supreme, unutterable experience.

Being whole in the fragment

Straight into the curve

Full in the void

Intact in corruption.

Collected is achieved

Missing you fail

Therefore: the Real Man preserves the original One.

He thus becomes a model for the world He does not stand out and shine By not asserting himself he imposes himself Devoid of complacency for himself he becomes great Because he does not fight

No one can attack him.

"Being Whole in the Fragment"

This ancient maxim

Would it be meaningless? No: in the Way it is the truth.

The saying in the first line, repeated in the third last - *ch'il tsè ch'iian* - can be interpreted as much in the sense of a norm ("to be whole in the fragment") as in an ontological sense (wholeness *of the* fragment). Ontologically it is meant that in the Way the fragment (the part) is the whole (as well as the curved is straight, the empty is full, etc.). It is the idea of "partial perfections" reflecting in their own way the Principle. It should not be understood (as various translators have done) that the fragment *will become* the whole, etc. materially, by transformation or development, but rather that it already is when seen in the Way. Instead, in the nonnative sense that maxim ("to be whole in the fragment") refers to a specific extreme-Eastern concept of perfection: to accomplish exactly and perfectly everything, with natural and effortless concentration. Then, whatever activity one is engaged in, one is in the Way. Cf. in Chuang-tze (XIX. 3): "To unify intentions; to have only one. which is confused with vital energy" (cf. XIX, IO. 12). There is a relationship between this idea and that, already explained, of "original simplicity," even in its "magical" aspect.

Speak little and act like nature

A rushing wind does not blow a 'whole morning

A downpour does not last a whole day

This impersistence is proper to nature itself [~ to Heaven-and-Earth] If not even nature has the power to persist (in extreme actions) Man even less can

Therefore: in life imitate (not act) the Principle.

To become one with the Principle

Imitating (acting) the (its) Virtue (tea) perfecting one with it Abandoning oneself to the transformations to realize) in oneself the power Adapting oneself to the Principle enjoying it

Adapting to Virtue enjoy it

Adapting to the transformations enjoy them

(However, in most) so much inner confidence is lacking, whence the incomplete confidence...

Real Man conforms to the Principle and reproduces it in its dual nature: non-agent (the Dao proper) and agent (the Virtue of the Dao). The latter, as is known, acts in perpetual transformation. So in all that is external the Real Man does not stiffen and resist against the instability that Heaven-and-Earth itself, especially in its extreme manifestations, shows him; he follows the course of the transformations of forms, the immutable not being to be grasped and realized on this plane. So much, however, requires an inner confidence, something like an intrepidity or "metaphysical trust" (in the Way): the art of an active letting go, as one who surrenders to the play of the waves without being submerged. Which, is from a few (last line).

In the tenth and thirteenth lines, the character *shih*, rendered as "transformation," has the more current sense of "defect" ("transformation" would properly be t). The literal translation would therefore be, "to join the defect (*shih*) in order to enjoy (or enjoy) it." With "transformation" (referring to the instability and changes spoken of in the beginning and which are the way of the Way) in place of "defect," the meaning of the two lines fits well with the rest. Wanting instead to keep the literal meaning, the phrase could bring one back again to the norm of being whole in the fragment and of one's own nature: joining the defect is equivalent to wanting what one is in the limiting conditions of the formal state; with this adaptation, excluding the arbitrariness and mania of the self, one is in the Way.

*The effort of those who keep themselves on tiptoe is not to rise Exaggeratedly discarding their
 legs is not walking Those who put themselves in the light remain in the dark
 He who thinks he has arrived finds himself brought back To put himself ahead is to lose value
 To estimate oneself is to decay
 Compared to the Way all this
 It is but excrescence and detritus [waste].
 Respect at last, it is a thing to disdain
 He is far from this who is in the Way.*

The line of one who, united with the Principle, manifests a natural, impersonal spontaneity is opposed to all behavior based on displacing and externalizing the center of the self in the concretion of the small ego, a simple outgrowth (the text adds: "refusal") with respect to being. Any accentuation of that automatically converts into an impairment of this: a Taoist theme already familiar to us. On the same order of ideas an even more drastic Taoist expression is: the ego is an abscess that bursts with death.

There is an indefinable and perfect Principle [being and non-being].
Anterior to Heaven-and-Earth
Calm and hidden
Lonely and changeless
Present in everything that moves (and yet) unchanging (because it does not participate in movement)
It nourishes all that is.
Unmentionable
Man calls it the Way (Tao)
Greatness he strives to conceive.
Greatness means process
To proceed is to turn toward the infinitely distant
The infinitely distant is the return.
Thus: great is the Principle, great is the Heavens
Great is the earth, great is the royal man (wang)
(As) in the universe four are the greatnesses [the four elements] Who rules is one of them.
Of man the foundation is the Earth
Of the Earth the foundation is Heaven
Of Heaven the foundation is the Way
The Way is foundation to itself [is the unconditioned].

In the first line the opposition of the characters *wit* and *yu* can also express a simultaneity of being and non-being (Wilhelm). The parenthesis has been added so that the reader, if he or she wishes, also has in view this second possible interpretation, which is adherent to the metaphysics of the Dao.

The fifth line expresses the idea that although the Principle is present in every movement (lit.: "goes around everywhere"), it does not participate in it, thus does not remain modified by it (opposition to pantheism and absolute immanentism). Cf. Chuang-tze (XXII, 6): "The Principle produces the succession (of opposites), but it is not this succession. It is the author of causes and effects, but it is not the cause and effects."

The tenth, eleventh, and twelfth lines deal with the cyclical course whereby the extremely distant brings back the origin and the apex of existence for-

evil transpires in leaving the form and returning to the root (metaphysical coincidence of beginning and ending).

In lines 13-16 if one abstracts from the Principle there remains the Great Triad—a classical concept throughout Chinese tradition—which consists of Heaven, Earth and Man. The *wang* character for "man" can also have the meaning of ruler, for these are man in the eminent sense: to such a mark, that in China one of the expressions designating him is "the One Man." So in those lines we have associated the two concepts by using the term "royal man." As mentioned in the introduction, the third term in the Great Chinese Triad is in fact Man above all in the function of sovereign-pupil. As Guénon noted (*The Great Triad*, cit., ch. XVII), the "pontifical" function, that is, mediating and linking Heaven and Earth (as metaphysical principles and not as elements of visible nature), is indicated by the very structure of the *wang* character.

Instead, in the seventeenth line it is the case to interpret *wang* simply as "man," because only of man in the current sense can the foundation be said to be the Earth.

*// grave lies at the root of mild
 Calm is lord of disorderly movement
 Therefore: the Real Man while acting
 Never abandons its calm gravity
 Even in the glory and among the splendors of the world He remains alone with Himself,
 detached from the external.
 But what will it be if the great ones make a show of levity ?
 With being light you lose the root
 By letting go we lose all authority, we lose imperium.*

Parts of this chapter have been given esoteric interpretations, with reference to the theory of "cinnabar fields," *tan t'ien*, considered by the hyperphysical physiology of human beings. The lower field, which lies at the root, is called "the force field" and plays an important part in the processing procedures of "bodily immortality." See also the aforementioned Diirckheim's book for the Japanese notion of the /iara.

Good walker leaves no footprints
Good talker does not attack
Good calculator does not need to count
Good imprisoned man closes without bars
Good binder ties without using rope or knots.
Thus: the Real Man always knows what to do.
Nothing rejects
Always has adequate means for the purpose
He never finds himself reduced to helplessness
This is veiling (his) light.
CosThe Real Man
He is the lord of the 'lower man
The inferior man
It is not that his matter
To this quality of his (the Real Man) he does not value
He does not cease to cure (impersonally) that which is his matter His wisdom does not appear.
This is subtle and essential.

New references to modes of acting without acting. Some translators have seen in this chapter an antithesis between those who exercise such modes of action and those who use direct action to assert their power over men or, as Wieger puts it, "to make the professional savior of men and things." Rather, the sense is that even to wish to achieve such aims the best means is precisely the invisible "trackless" influence that Real Man exerts by concealing his true nature from the profane. The title generally given to such a chapter, *ch'iao yung*, underscores precisely this substantive meaning, for it means the technique or art of indirect action (in the pejorative vernacular sense, *ch'iao* even means "skill as shrewdness").

*Knowing about one's own strength
 And look willfully weak ■
 It means possessing the quality of the valley.
 Who is like the valley
 Preserve Virtue
 Regain the primordial staro.
 Knowing about one's own light
 And look dark
 This is the basis.
 Of those who own this base
 Virtue does not waver
 He returns to the perfect state.
 Knowing about one's height
 And look small
 It means possessing the quality of the valley.
 To whom the valley is counted
 Constant Virtue will suffice
 In the state of original simplicity
 The simplicity of the elemental not yet dispersed in forms.
 Man realized by using it
 Becomes chief
 And it governs from the One, not by particular actions.*

Sticking to the literal rather than the abstract sense, the first two lines can also be rendered as: "knowing of one's own strength as a male and having the virtue of the femina" (male = strong, femina = weak). Then it is not only a question of the duplicity of the Real Man insofar as outwardly he presents himself as the opposite of what he is, and in the specific case he knows a virility quite different from that based on a crude outward assertion; the simile with the valley rather imports a reference to the subtle virtue of the receptive or feminine, which is also spoken of more explicitly in ch. 61, combined with the already well-known image, used for the *tea* of the Principle, of the valley as the lowest place that attracts and captures the waters of every higher place.

The fourth last line is referable to the Principle: "a simplicity that specifying itself by modification produces the essences." As can be seen, the fundamental Taoist idea of "primordial simplicity" according to its metaphysical value recurs in the chapter. Its application (last lines) is "Olympian government"(Wieger): influencing the whole by holding oneself at the center, rather than by direct particular actions. Because of the homonymy of "sculpting" and "governing," ideas both expressed by the ideogram *chih*, the meaning can also be derived: "the great sculptor little cuts"(Waley).

*To maintain the empire having to resort to direct action Means being forced into the
 opposite of what should be done. The empire is a delicate and complex organism
 It does not conform to regulations decreed by an individual To order it (mechanically) is
 to disorganize it To want to fix it is to let it slip away
 Because changeable is the behavior of beings
 Now it is an advancing, now a yielding
 Now there is ardor, now there is apathy
 Now there is impetuosity, now there is weakness
 Now he is agitated, now he is calm.
 Therefore:/'Real Man (regarding the whole of beings).
 Avoid forcing
 Eliminates pompous opulence
 Reject the excess.*

Sense of the last lines: apart from his "presence" action, the function of the Real Man as leader must only be that of "moderator": he lets each being follow its own nature not by trying to regiment it in a mechanical and artificial order (cf. ch. 18 and 19), however, by repressing every excess (cf. ch. 74), every point of tension or saturation that would go to disturb the mutual connection and compensation of the forces at play in society (cf. ch. 77). The model is always the Dao. The expression *tiao ho* indicates "the concerting, harmonizing or coinspiring action that lies beneath all contrasts" (Granet).

*Dominate according to the Way
 It is dominating without resorting to force
 (Because) there is no action that does not attract a reaction.
 There where armies passed
 Weeds and thorns grow
 Where there was war
 One will certainly have bad vintages.
 The good leader wins and stops
 Asserting himself does not abuse the power
 It is, and does not seek its own glory
 It is, and it does not seek its own advantage
 And, and he doesn't get superfluous
 Acts only when necessary He is resolute without being violent.
 At the highest point the decline also begins.
 This is out of the Way
 Out of the Way, swift is the end.*

As the specific content of the chapter, eventual application to warrior actions of the detached and enlightened way of being in accordance with the Way. They must be dictated by necessity and be carried out having a clear view of the consequences; then everything that may have, reference to the human personal element and ambition of the military leader must be eliminated. The latter must not be carried away by his action, even in winning he must know the limit. By ignoring the limit, he will be exposed to the consequences of the law of actions and reactions, of the subito converting into its opposite of what is achieved by violence and by an excess that alters right relations. The following chapter partly develops the same ideas.

As an example of a leader who followed the style of the Dao, and fired after his victories, Fan-li (5th cent. B.C.) is often cited, who, though he was offered half the kingdom where he returned in triumph with the victorious armies of Yiieh, "got on a small boat instead, and nothing more was heard of him" (*Kuo Yii*, 21, *apud* A. Waley. *The Way and its Power*, cit., p. 144).

Even in the best forms domination IS a nefarious thing
True strength is not dominance
This is not cared for by those who follow the Way.
The Real Man in peace honors the left In war honors the right
Nefarious is the force even when it is peaceful It is not the instrument of Real Man When I
'adopts it being compelled He keeps himself impassive He takes no joy in destruction The
spirit of destruction in man is not a sign of strength It is not the way of (true) dominion
[The auspicious stands to the left The inauspicious stands to the right The subordinate
stands to the left
The leader stands to the right
According to the order of funeral rites J
Announcement of destruction, announcement of doom
Death of men, source of weeping Victory with strength Is sorrow.

There seems to be interpolations or a mixing of the text with a commentary in this chapter. Certainly interpolated are the five lines put in square brackets. Literally, in the last two lines it is said that the victor in war, or one who is such by the use of mere force, should feel as one who attends a funeral rite; to grieve, rather than to rejoice. Only in the outward sense, to grieve for the deaths or destruction caused; according to the inner sense, to grieve, instead, for himself, for having to leave the Way. However, Taoist anti-belligerence is not to be given greater prominence than the principle of impassibility: cf. Chuang-tze (VI, 2), where it is said that "Royal Men make war without hating, and good without loving," in this having likewise an imitation of the) Principle, to which Chuang-tze himself thus appeals, "You destroy without being evil, you build without being good" (XIII, 1). Only the power of the Dao "cuts without wounding."

*In its essentiality, the Principle is nameless
 It is as simple as the extreme particle of matter
 Yet the whole would not know how to contain it.
 If sovereigns and princes were to reproduce its nature.
 To them the ten thousand beings would spontaneously obey
 Heaven and earth would harmonize
 By descending the subtle fertilizing dew And the people would order themselves even without
 being commanded. The particularization of the Principle produces individuation [beings with a
 name].
 Identification means limit
 Limit that leaves the Principle intact
 Compared to the beings all in the universe
 The Principle is like the ocean and the great river where the waters of streams and valleys
 converge.*

Return to the metaphysics of Principle: its transcendence (its not being able to be contained by the world, i.e., by manifestation) when considered in its eternal, aformal simplicity (lines I -3); simultaneously, its presence in all beings, its not being affected by the limit (by name) that defines them.

The "fertilizing dew": the invisible, propitiatory influence of the natural order, when the ruler as the "Third Power" imitating the Principle "helps Heaven," harmonizes Heaven and Earth.

*To know others is wisdom
 To know oneself is enlightenment
 Dominating others is strength
 To dominate oneself is superiority
 Rich is he who is sufficient to himself
 Energy in applying to the purpose means character
 Those who do not leave the place they have will last
 Not ceasing to be after death is immortality.*

In the penultimate line one comes to the norm *deli'essere se se*, in fidelity to the part assumed upon entering the human condition. If forcing, changing place, refining oneself without contact with one's original nature creates only a kind of fictitious being outside being, destined to dissolve, not to last; instead, that fidelity brings one back to that which subsists beyond transformation. The last line is not a trivial truth in that the survival involved is by no means guaranteed for everyone (see the introduction). In fact, another possible interpretation of that line is, "after death, do not forget"-that is, maintain the continuity of consciousness. This is why the present is one of the chapters referred to in Operational Taoism.

*Great is the Principle! It flows endlessly
 Indifferent in every direction
 All beings have life from him without being annulled in him
 Of them he carries out the unfolding (in the course of transformations) Without imposing
 himself as a master /without binding them, without asking anything of them/. For this his
 eternal giving without taking
 Seems devoid of being /seems infinitely small]
 In him the eternal circle of things is closed.
 With not dominating
 It turns out to be infinitely large.
 Therefore: /Real Man not seeking greatness.
 Greatness follows.*

It tomes on the dialectic of the Principle, which in its eternal giving and emanating realizes its own simplicity or superessential infinity (the "Void"), the center, beginning and end of the circulation of forms. Contrast this with the conception of a jealous and domineering personal God in the face of his "creatures." The Taoist Principle is with the "emptiness" itself created by its impersonal flowing and giving. it is with the pure dissolving from itself of beings, which generates the occult virtue that will cause their return (cf. the image of the "valley").

He who has in himself his great image (of the Principle)
It goes into the inundation without duties
Wandering foreigner attending.
Freedom, calmness, height
They are his foods
There is no stopping him, who goes.
Yet the Way, to speak of it
It looks dry and drab
Toward her the gaze of many peeped, but they did not see her To perceive her many stood
listening, but they did not Puddle Yet never had they ceased to live in her.

Chapter, which in translations by Sinologists has almost always been rendered with platitudes. The exception is the Ular version, which has been substantially followed here.

*To retain [to close
 It is quicker to extend
 To weaken
 It's quicker to strengthen
 At the àpice following the descent
 It makes what you want to tear down ascend
 To take
 You must first give
 This is the subtle wisdom
 The yielding and the weak overcome the hard and the strong
 But how the fish cannot live outside the deep water
 So the weapon of this wisdom
 Do not show it to the man in the crowd.*

The most obvious sense of the first part of the chapter concerns that aspect of non-acting, or subtle acting, which, based on the law of inversion, precisely by letting a situation or a power develop, by giving it free rein, even by favoring it, knows how to come to terms with it. However, it is also possible to hold to the metaphysical plane and interpret by referring to ! Principle, according to what was said in ch. 34 (the original power developing in letting go c in giving).

Principle is always non-agent
Yet there is no thing he does not do (with his unseen influence) If rulers would imitate him
All beings would proceed in their natural development
Cravings are aroused in their movement (unnatural)
But I stand firm
In transcendental simplicity [unnamed]
In the simplicity that has no name
It is imperturbability [immunity from cravings].
In the peace created by this imperturbability
In freedom everything will go to order.

Known pair: non-acting and original simplicity. Keep in mind the Taoist theory about the artificiality and parasitic nature of cravings compared to the "natural state."

*Higher virtue (shang té) does not give itself as virtue AND such without wanting to be
 The lower virtue (hsia té) is concern not to deviate from virtue And so it is far from virtue
 Higher virtue in acting does not will and does not set ends Lower virtue is the effect of will and
 sets ends Justice in acting wills and sets ends
 Social custom acts and if it does not find consensus
 He operates aggressively.
 Thus: lost the Way comes virtue Lost virtue comes morality Lost morality comes justice Lost
 justice comes social custom [conformity] Custom, mere semblance of the blunt form
 And principle of disorder (as opposed to natural order)
 Tao traditionalism based on culture alone [on ancient literature] also.
 And principle of forfeiture.
 Therefore: the superior man
 Holds to the substance, rejects the rind [the outward, the artificial] Holds to the kernel [the
 fruit], not the flashy [alfiore] Rejects this, chooses that.*

Downward succession of the forms assumed by acting as it progressively moves away from the Principle: the higher virtue, *shang té*, which, based on being, does not proclaim itself as such and is "non-acting," is contrasted with the lower virtue. *hsia té*. preoccupied with self, ordered to precepts and ends. Having failed essential virtue, higher morality (*shang jén*) appears, which, while not natural and impersonal, while "acting," is not extroverted, follows an autonomous principle; having failed this, the forms of law, *shang i* (of legal equity), appear; finally social custom, *shang li*, intervenes. The text seems to refer properly to Confucianism in its aspect of scrupulous observance of stereotypical forms of behavior in social life (almost as in a "social ritualism ": *li* = (also) the rites, the etiquette). Along this

regression "acting" in the intentional, "willed" sense has more and more prominence, flax to even coercive and aggressive forms, and ends up leading more to disorder than order (a well-known Taoist theme) because it has for its premise the lack of an inner form, a "being." Not even what was called "the flower of Dao," *tao chin* (the cultural heritage of the classics), can be the way and make up for higher virtue; the traditionalism of scholars and literati is not the living tradition, nor can it restore it.

Of past, it can be noted that within the framework of this morphology of varieties of behavior, in the face of the "higher virtue" conforming to the Way the same morality understood in an autonomous, disinterested, but "acting" sense falls under ethical by-products and surrogates. Thus, opposition of the doctrine of naturalness (= transcendental integrity) to Kantian ethical rationalism itself.

*The original One is the principle
 Heaven owes the One its luminous purity
 Earth owes its stability to the One
 The spirit owes its strength to the One
 The void [the median space, the valley - that is: the vital fluid, the ether/ owes the One its
 fullness
 By participating in it beings are living
 Through the One the rulers rectify what is in the empire
 All this proceeds from the original One
 The bright sky without it
 It would collapse
 The stable earth without it
 It would falter
 The spirit without it
 It would dissolve
 The valley without it
 It would dry up [its subtle virtue of drawing waters to itself would be lost].
 Beings without it, which makes them living,
 They would vanish
 I sovereigns without it
 They would not emanate the calm, decisive ordering influence
 The noble rests on the humble
 II Sublime rests on the simple.
 Therefore: the (true) rulers are devoid of ostentation [they cancel themselves, give themselves
 humble titles I
 Humility and simplicity (impersonal) of one who has root (in the Principle).
 The whole of the parts does not make the whole.
 It is.
 If the original One disappeared instead of the precious stone.
 You would have nothing but formless gangue.*

For line 23: it was customary for Far Eastern rulers to give themselves humble titles, to veil their person. On Taoist humility, which is devoid of moral coloring and expresses spontaneous depersonalization and adherence

to the "original simplicity," noted above. Fourth to last line: without the simple, immaterial One there would be a mere sum of parts (in the text: the many parts of a chariot), not the organic unity of a whole (the chariot as such). Placing them in another context, of the last two lines a different lesson is possible, given by the some in these terms: "not wanting to be as precious as jade but having the roughness of stone" (Castellani), by the others: "considering beings with serene impartiality, not esteeming some as precious as jade, others as vile as stone" (Wieger). However, these lessons connect less logically (especially the second one) with the rest of the chapter.

About the One and the technical formula "grasping the One" or "preserving the One" (see Ch. 10) in the operative doctrine of immortality, it was mentioned in the introduction.

*The eternal motion of return is the essence of the Way
Abandonment is the way of the Way
All things come to life from being
Being comes to life from non-being.*

This short chapter admits of a double interpretation: metaphysically, it is the well-known idea of manifestation as "abandonment" (emanation) and return. But the second line can also be referred to the individual, in whom conformity to the Principle (= return) entails abandonment (bad individuality, being). Instead of "abandoning" one can read "weakening," possibly "subtilizing." Hence yet another, operative meaning of the same line: "subtilization is the process of the Way" (in those who return = reintegrate into the ethereal aformal state).

*The perfect sage understands the Way
 And in it firmly is established
 The imperfect knower understands the Way
 And now he follows her, now he loses her
 The knower of the lowest rank hearing of the Way
 Laughing about it
 If he did not laugh at it the Way would not be the Way
 Therefore it applied as an ancient saying:
 Those who are enlightened through the Principle seem obscure
 Those who progress in the Principle seem to retrograde
 He who has been made great by the Principle seems a simple man
 The higher virtue resembles the valley
 Absolute white looks black
 The virtue of the far seems non-action inefficiency/
 Virtue at work is secret
 Curve may opinion the straight (of the Real Man)
 The infinitely large square has no more corners
 The infinitely large vessel has no more capacity
 The infinitely high-pitched sound is no longer audible
 The infinitely large image no longer has form
 The Principle is mysterious and nameless
 But his giving is perfect and leads to fulfillment.*

Very expressive imagery, in the last lines, for transcendence and inafferrability proceeding from conformity to Principle.

The Dao produced the One
The One produced the Two[/< yin and yang].
The Two produced the Three
The Three gave birth to the multitude of particular beings [to the ten thousand things! Coming out of the power [yin = from "darkness"]
They move to the act [yang = to "light"].
The primordial unity (ch'i) (to which the varied play of yin and yang is ordered) composes the ways.
The vulgar man does not let go [no!; abandon] He wants to be worth, to be from much
By their being the opposite sovereigns are propitiators of balance Loss becomes accretion
Accretion becomes loss.
Conforming to what has always been taught is what I teach The strong do not die a natural death
This is the basis of my doctrine.

Much-discussed chapter that first contains a concise metaphysical summary in accordance with the concordant teaching of other traditions. The determination or crystallization of the nameless universal possibility in the One (i) is the "Great Beginning," the first stage of manifestation ("first," in the sense of ontological precedence, not temporal). Then the metaphysical Dyad (that of *yang* and *yin* = of positive and negative, of form and matter, of bright and dark, of masculine and feminine, of celestial *and* terrestrial, etc.) is manifested. The varied juggling of these opposing principles, constrained and regulated by unity (by the One being added to the Two, thus manifesting itself in the Three, in the Ternary) gives physiognomy and life to the particular beings that transform themselves and follow their ways in an overall order that derives from the invisible and uniform influence of the non-acting primordial unity. About the latter, the term used in the seventh line, *ch'i*, is generally translated as "primordial ether." The sense is not substantially different, for in the Far Eastern system, ether has often been given as the first determination ("production") of the Principle. In a way, of the metaphysical process, semi-corporeal imageries have been given when speaking of the ether freezing or coagulating into forms by the action of yin-yang-almost colluding with an exposition of the

ne "physicow-cosmological with a purely metaphysical exposition, or interference of two distinct but, in a sense, complementary points of view.

The logical connection of the first part of the chapter (of the metaphysical one) with the second is somewhat tenuous, so much so that additions or spurious parts have been assumed. In the version followed here, the opposition between the one who does not let go and maintains the tensions peculiar toH asserting himself and wanting to assert himself as a mere individual, and the ruler who, following the opposite path, reproduces the function of the One, is presented again; then it is a logical sequel what the two lines say about the mutual conversion of (outer) accretion and (inner) loss. It is unclear what the *ch'iang liang*, the subject of the penultimate line, refers to: the "strong," to interpret it-as has often been done-with "violent," gives a rather trivial sense, which is almost a jarring to refer it to what would be the basis of the doctrine hinted at in this chapter, rich in metaphysical elements. Thus a different, esoteric interpretation would not be ruled out: "strong" taken in a positive, spiritual sense-allusion, then, to overcoming the natural fate of death (rather than the violent death that awaits those who affirm external strength).

//more yielding in the inundation [cf. the image of water].

Toughest wins

There is nothing that non-being (wu yu) does not penetrate

Therefore, I recognize the superiority of non-acting (wu wei)

But teaching without words

Accomplishing without doing

Very few can

"Teaching without words" - *pu yen chili chiao* - is a theme that often recurs in Taoist texts. Cf. in the Ch'an and Zen ("teaching by keeping silent." It is a variety of the "acting without acting" proper to the Masters. As "language of silence," moreover, has often been designated, not only in the East, that by means of symbols and signs. Finally, the term "mystery" is known to be derived from the term pu©, which means to keep silent, to keep one's lips closed. Cf. Lich-tze (Vili, 8), "The most effective word is that which is not heard."

Which is closer to me, the name [fame/ or the self?

What is more precious to me, the self or wealth?

Which is worse, the gain or the loss?

Because he who hoards dissipates

He who possesses much loses much

Those who recognize their place suffer no shame

He who knows how to arrest himself is in no danger He will not cease to be safe and secure.

Same idea as ch. 42: displacing value in the outer domain is tantamount to loss. The real man curbs any impulse that would lead him outside himself, because of the interest accorded to splendor, wealth and fame. Usual trivial and outward interpretation, that of the last maxims, as advice of prudence to prevent risks in social or political life: whereas it is about the danger of internal impairment. In the first and second lines we read properly "body," not "it"; but the sense is the one we give, because "body" is an image used for what is real and most intimate to us, as opposed to what is unreal and extrinsic.

The ultimate (human) perfection is imperfection
The highest human fullness is vacuity
The highest human straightness is obliquity
The highest human knowledge is nonsense The highest human art is babbling.
Motion overcomes cold (producing heat)
Rest overcomes the heat
In its calm purity (the Real Man) rectifies the world.

The first lines of this small chapter also admit of a different interpretation, leading back to the theme of "non-acting," according to the title sometimes given to it, *hung tea* (the great or overwhelming virtue): the higher perfection that may have the appearance of imperfection, the true fullness that may have the appearance of emptiness, the true straightness that may appear to be incapacity: beyond these appearances an influence of a higher order is manifested instead. Such ideas being known to us and being repeated in the other chapters, here we thought it good to follow the other interpretation, equally possible if we refer the first lines not to the Real Man, but to common humanity, whose apparent values are non-values.

The third-to-last and penultimate lines concern the compensatory juggling of opposites, on which the perfect balance of the Real Man is based, who by his calm "agent inactivity" (or "his action disguised as inaction," as Wieger puts it) rectifies his environment.

When (in the empire) the Principle is followed.
War horses are used for field cultivation
When (the empire) moves away from the Principle.
They even breed war horses in sacred places.
There is no greater fault
Of giving in to greed
There is no greater evil
Of the excess [of the lack of limit]
There is no thing more nefarious
Of always wanting more
Therefore: (only) those who know what is enough.
They are always satisfied.

By using the comparison of wars waged out of unnatural expansionist greed, it actually stigmatizes the demonia of limitless action, the lust for ever greater grasp that is counterpart to ever greater internal inconsistency and a turning away from the Principle. It comes to reaffirm the creative virtue of the limit. Thus an allegorical interpretation has also been given to the reference to war, seeing the war horses as a symbol of human impulses, so much so as to give greater emphasis to the overall internal meaning of the chapter.

Without leaving home
Getting to know the universe
Without looking out the window
Penetrating the Ways of Heaven
The farther one goes the less one knows.
Thus: the Real Man arrives without walking
Without seeing grasps the name Accomplishes without acting.

Antithesis between inward, essential and synthetic knowledge and outward, particularistic knowledge. The latter the farther it goes, developing indefinitely in analytical research closed in the sensible and phenomenal world, exchanged with the world of true reality, the farther it moves away from actual knowledge, which is indivisible knowledge according to principles. Imagine for outward-oriented, profane knowing: "walking out of the house," "looking out of the window." The "coming without walking" is also referable to intuitive knowledge, which has a direct character (*wu wei* character, "non-agent"). The "name" here applies as the essence of the thing, which is precisely the object of such intuition, as opposed to the object of "seeing," that is, of external perception.

Cf. this passage from Chuang-tze (XI, 1): "Without putting his organs to work, without using his physical senses, (the Real Man) sitting motionless would see everything with his transcendent eye; absorbed in contemplation, he would shake everything, like thunder: the sky would adapt to the movements of his spirit; all beings would follow his non-acting influence as dust follows the wind."

Study always leads further

The Way, followed, leads further and further back

Falling further and further behind

Up to the original non-action

Not-acting and not-wanting make every door give way

It is by constantly sticking to non-acting that one secures sovereignty. You don't get it as soon as you give yourself to acting.

In the first four lines, the concept expressed in the previous chapter is developed: while outward knowledge is always unfinished, always leading further away, from phenomenon to phenomenon, from conditioned to conditioned, metaphysical knowledge goes backward, leading further and further back, that is, toward causes and principles having as its limit the supreme non-acting Principle. Thus this chapter was also given the title of *wang chili*, that is, "forgetting knowledge," with reference to external and profane knowledge by orienting oneself toward which or having interest for which one forms a *forma mentis* antithetical to that necessary for true knowledge.

In the remaining lines of the chapter we return to the practical field and to ideas already known (imitation of Principle, virtue of non-acting).

The Real Man has no special affections
His soul is universal
He is good to the good guys
It is good with non-goods
This is the perfection of goodness
And loyal to the loyal
He is loyal to the disloyal
This is the perfection of loyalty
Equanimous in the face of beings
He embraces them all in his impersonal soul.
They are like his eyes and ears
He has them as his limbs
(He is at the center; He is the universal Name).

Depersonalization of the Real Man, for the influence or virtue of which in the texts is also given the image of sunlight pouring equally and impassively on the good and the bad, the noble and the vulgar. The absence of an affective background in the proper sense, of any intentional motion going toward others, in this aspect of the Taoist adept is to be highlighted: something that marks a difference, for example, from the attitude of the Christian saint.

The last line is missing in most texts but, after all, it gives the key to the whole. The penultimate line is usually translated in trivial terms: "The Real Man bambinizes - *hai chih* - beings," that is, he makes children of them, treats them as children. Instead, the deeper meaning is that in universalized consciousness the various beings become like so many limbs or parts of the transcendent man, almost his emanations (= *tigli*, children), he, however, retaining qualities of the center, of the "universal Name" (the *real* man, in the eminent, indivisible sense. archétypical, or "one man").

To be born is to go out, to die is to re-enter

Thirteen are the causes of life

Thirteen causes of death

What are the principles of life Are the principles of death Why ?

For Morbid attachment to life.

But the truth of those who know is: He who is detached in life When he goes to wild places He need not avoid rhinos or tigers He can go into battle Without armor or sword The rhinoceros would not know how to strike him with his horn The tiger would not know how to gherm him with his claws The enemy, he must pierce him with his weapons. Why?

Because in him nothing pili is vulnerable [= there are no death grip points in him].

"Life," in the common sense, corresponds to one of the intervals between "going out" and "coming in."

It makes one vulnerable to attach oneself to it, to transfer one's center to it. About the thirteen principles of life and death, and generally about the corresponding lines in the text, interpretation is controversial. They have also been related to the senses and the "openings" of the body by which contact with the external world is established. It is easy then to come to the idea, that the principles of life -- that which nourishes life through contacts with the external inworld -- are also the principles of "death" (in the translational sense) when the process of externalization and the immersion of being in life so conditioned occurs. Cf. in this same context the Taoist saying, "Man fears death instead of fearing life" (because this, in those who lean into it entirely, creates a hold for death, creates the vulnerability of being). The theme of invulnerability understood in a magical sense as well (almost a "magic circle") recurs in Taoist traditions and texts, as already discussed in this

chapter, in regard to those in life who are actually detached—we mean, detached in terms not simply moral but because of a change in their ontological *status*.

About Daoist invulnerability cf. Chuang-tze: "Nothing reaches Transcendent Man. A flood would not submerge him, a universal conflagration would not consume him" (1:4); "Neither water bathes him, nor fire burns him" (VI, 2); "Only one being is not dominated by anything, the Real Man" (XVII, 1). Lieh-tze says, of the Real Man, "Although his bones and joints are like those of other men, one and the same trauma does not have the same effect on him, for his spirit, being intact, protects the body" (II, 4). These are consequences of the "initiatory fusion of form."

*Tao is the principle (of beings)
 And his Virtue brings them forth
 Until the development of their nature
 To the fullness of their faculties.
 So all beings
 They venerate the Principle
 And they appreciate its virtue
 The Greatness of the Principle
 The power of virtue
 They unintentionally worship them
 By the impulse of their very nature.
 The Way produces everything
 (His) Virtue nourishes everything
 Develops and nurtures
 Complete and mature
 Preserves and sustains
 Driving without owning
 Acts without binding to itself
 It leads without dominating Such is the mysterious Virtue.*

11 chapter deals essentially with the feminine-maternal aspect of Heaven (in Hindu terms: Shakti or Prakrti). It is the energy that brings into being the potentialities included in the Principle, which makes beings "become" in the proper sense when they "come forth," yet leaves them free in their development. In similar terms Plato spoke of the power that is the "nurturer" of beings, the eternal feminine as the maternal element, and Plotinus of the Life, Zoe force-life or Psyche of the One which "chronizes" (i.e., brings to development in time - Chronos) that which is included in it.

That which is before the existing
She became (by transformation) the universal Mother
He who (going back to the Principle) finds the Mother
He can also get to know his son
Who knows the son
Starting with Mother,
To the end he is out of danger.
Closed mouth
Closed the door [excluding dispersion)
The well will never be exhausted
With his mouth open
Giving himself to the impulse to act and accomplish
The well will soon be exhausted.
To glimpse what is minute is illumination
Keeping in the weak is strength
In the own-light
Preserve (that) clear vision
It means to no longer let the being be worn out It means to clothe oneself with eternal durability.

Unlike in the previous chapter, here, not without matriarchal reminiscences, the symbolism of the mother is used for the Principle itself, which at the point of being productive comes to stand with respect to what it has produced in a relationship similar to that of the mother giving birth to the child: Imagine thus deals from the purely physical order, not considering which the image of the procreating father is instead the one predominantly encountered in traditions of a higher type: unless here the mother stands to emphasize the idea of the "issuance" of beings in their own right—rather than the exoteric one of their creation or generation. In any case, as a title often given to the chapter puts it (*hwei yuan* = return to the origin), and as is clear from the context of the subsequent lines, the central idea is, once again, the going back to the Principle and the natural connection with it, which drives away existential dangers. According to the well-known method of antitheses, the Principle is given the predicate of littleness or minuteness (as opposed to that which has material extension) and weakness (as opposed to externalized material energy).

The second part of the chapter, in initiatory Taoism has had operational interpretations, in relation to the already mentioned practices for the generation of the "immortal embryo": curbing the extroverted and dispersive movement (closing mouth and door) first and foremost on the mental level. Mention has already been made of the Taoist idea that the wear and tear, the wear and tear of being is largely due to the mind itself, the artificial use of thought and indulging in emotional life. It then enters into consideration the deep life energy (reference to the "wells" and the so-called "breath of the Mysterious Femina"), then the practices (which also use the breath) to unite with it. The vision of the Principle, or enlightenment, then initiates the transformation, the "decoagulation."

*Even the smallest wisdom
 It comes from going in the great Way
 Bad is (however) to put it forward.
 The Way is vast, but men love the narrow paths
 Splendors of palaces on one side
 Fallow fields and empty barns on the other
 Lavish display of garments
 Sharp swords at the belt
 Feasts with every food and every drink All this is theft, in empty jattance Far from this is
 the Way.*

The references to a vain exterior sumptuous and princely life are not to be taken in the immediate, social sense alone: rather, this life, in its illusory grandeur, is identical with what, compared to the Way, appears as a "narrow path." Its counterpart is the abandonment and uncultivation of the essential (fallow fields, empty barns). The idea of "stealing" is to be understood metaphysically: one steals by asserting oneself as an empirical individual, ordering to the "I" - in order to empower it - the force that, in itself, would be eternal and inexhaustible, while fixed by the "I" it becomes finalized, corporatized and consumed: hence a relation to the order of ideas mentioned in the previous chapter, but also the first lines of what will follow. Confining itself to the ethical plane, it is the norm of simplicity and collected sobriety that is defended here.

As a curiosity: in Communist China of the 1950s, holding to social interpretation, and referring the idea of "theft" to private property and the charge against luxury and wealth toH anti-capitalism, propaganda presented Lao-tze as a national precursor of Marxism...

He who has firm root [root in the Dao, in the 'One] is not taken away
Those who make right hold need not fear being undermined
And the line that proceeds from him will be eternal
Virtue [conformity to Principle] in the domain of the person
It is true straightness
In the domain of the family
It will expand
In the domain of society
It will be the good
It will be greatness
In the domain of the Empire
In regards to the world
It will be universal principle of order.
To get to know the person
You need to know (about the principle) of the person
To get to know the family
You need to know (about the principle) of family
To learn about the society
You need to know (about the principle) of society
To learn about the empire
You need to know (of the principle) of empire
To learn about the world
One must know (of the principle) of the world What is the foundation of such
knowledge?
This.

The last line in this paragraph is identical to the last line in ch. 21 (see ch. 57): *i tz'ii*. It refers to the direct experience of the Principle in oneself. Hence, almost as its key, the whole chapter was also appropriately given the title *hsiu kuan* = "developing vision" (inner). We refer, then, to the idea mentioned in the commentary to ch. 4, namely, that the essence of the various organic units named here is to be sought in their participation in the great ordering One: this is what one must know in order to really know them. Then one will penetrate the Way.

*He who fully possesses Virtue
 He resembles the child
 Who is not afraid of poisonous insects
 Nor claws of beasts
 Nor roosts of birds of prey
 That while having weak bones and delicate tendons
 Can grasp firmly
 Who while not knowing of the 'sex act has the erect member Retaining whole the
 essential power of semen Can cry out all day long
 Without his voice becoming hoarse
 Perfect neat spontaneity!
 (Restoring) this rhythm of life is to be immortal
 To know the immortal is to obtain the light
 Exhaustive is congesting life
 Strong life obtained by immersing oneself in life [energizing vital spirits with the mind I
 It is stiffening that leads to decadence
 This is out of the Way
 And everything outside the Way has a swift end.*

In Taoism there is frequent reference to "childishness" taken as a comparison. As when texts speak of "naturalness," to mean more or less the same thing, here it is easy to misunderstand: for the child is merely expressing the condition in which there is complete adherence with the primordial essence and the absence of "I," whereby a tension-free, secure and inexhaustible spontaneity manifests and operates in it. When, on the other hand, the "I" intervenes, and it believes that it enhances and increases life by unnaturally exciting it, it produces a halting of the flow and stiffening, one is cut off from an immortal continuity, transparent with the light of the Principle.

In Operant Taoism the interpretation introduces notions of occult physiology: returning as a child (indeed, one even speaks of an embryonic state) is understood as preserving whole and pure mind and "ethereal fluid," to the exclusion of the corrosive forces of thought and ego. This is aimed at re-establishing contact with what in ch. 6 is called "the spirit of space

median," for the "etherification" and vivification of the body, for the thawing of form. Cf. Lieh-tze (IV, 6 - cf. II, 3): having abandoned all distinctions between yes and no, advantageous and disadvantageous, all notions of right and wrong, of good and evil, of for himself and for others, "there settled down for him the perfect communication between the outer world and his inwardness. He ceased to make use of the senses. The spirit solidified as the body dissolved; his bones and flesh liquefied." "Keeping the original vital spirit intact" is indicated as the key to powers of even magical order: it is the way to attain the absolute simplicity "which bends all beings," for acting together with universal motion, by "impulse of complete and undivided being," and yet so that no external resistance is possible (II, 6, 8, 9; XIX, 2, 9). Lieh-tze. IV, 12: "Only the spirit restored to the state of perfect natural simplicity" can perceive the Principle. Cf. Chuang-tze (XXIII, 4): "In time, the artificial will disappear entirely; only the natural will remain in him. Men who have attained this state are called heavenly children, heavenly people, that is, men who have returned to their natural state." Appropriately, it has been noted (Granet) that the Masters affirm the identity of the "state of nature" with a "magical state of grace."

Also in operative Taoism, the mention of sexuality found in this chapter connects to practices that use sex in addition to breath. The basic teaching is that the procreative sexual act involves lethal dissipation, to be understood not in a salutary or moralistic sense but as dissipation of the One, of Essence. But following an order of lines analogous to that of the Tantric principle of "converting the toxic into a drug," operative Taoism considered a special regime of intercourse, such as not to dissipate but rather to galvanize the "essential power of the sperm," *ching chih chih*. discussed in this chapter, by nurturing the "mysterious embryo" through the joining of *yin* and *yang* in the act of possessing a woman. This has been understood as a path to immortality. The reference to what would happen in the child (state of erection without loss of the essential power of sperm) is used precisely pel regime to be given to intercourse (on this, see our *Metaphysics of Sex*, cit. §§ 55-56).

Those who know do not speak
Those who speak do not know
Close your mouth
Close the door
Bevel the cutting edge
Clearing up the confused
Softening the dazzling
Blending outwardly with the common man
This is the depth.
(To the Real Man) you are not close
You are not far away
For him, there is no gain
For him, there is no loss
It is beyond honor/praise/
It is beyond contempt.
That is why it is what is highest in the world.

About the first two lines, cf. Chuang-tze: "Knowing and keeping silent, that is perfection. Knowing and speaking is imperfection. The ancients tended to perfection" (XXXIL 3); "The man of the Principle remains silent; the perfect man seeks nothing; the great man no longer has an ego" (XVL, I).

*It is governed by straightness
 It wages war with stratagems
 But it is with non-action that one has empire
 The foundation of such knowledge?
 It is this.
 The more numerous are the prohibitions and bans
 The more the beings sadden
 The more the people arm themselves (against the authority that intervenes and
 prohibits)
 So much greater is the disorder in the kingdom
 Resorting to the 'ability
 Cunning is brought to life
 The more ordinances and laws are enacted
 The more the crime spreads
 So the Real Man says:
 Follow the non-action
 And the people will develop according to their nature
 Do not fret
 And the people will find the right way
 Don't get busy
 And the people will prosper by themselves
 Want nothing [exclude rationalizing plans and programs/
 And the people will return high natural spontaneity.*

We are already familiar with the Taoist theme, that every external measure, every extrinsic interdiction and regulation produce, in government, the opposite effect, they only increase evil. In the Introduction, the assumptions have been pointed out because of which the opposite direction, that of non-action, to which we return again in the following chapter, is quite different from the miracleism of a *laissez faire, laissez aller* liberalism.

*When government is simple
 The people abound in virtue
 When the government shows excessive zeal
 The people lack virtue.
 Evil may be followed by good
 Good may be followed by evil
 How to fix [stabilize] the limit I the east oar, the apex] reached
 In this continuous motion of conversion?
 Going straight: but the straight pierces into the curved
 The good in the bad
 Eternal blindness of men!
 Therefore: the Real Man is a square without corners.
 It is a corner without vertex
 Straight but not rigid
 Clear but not glaring.*

The ideas about the "Olympian" non-agent government (that, whereby of some rulers it is said, "They make everything go unmixed, so imperceptibly, so impersonally, that the people do not even know their names"- Lieh-tze, IV, 3), are now supplemented with a reference to the circular alternation of *yin* and *yang* whereby each quality or situation, having reached the limit, reverses into the opposite one: movement, which is disregarded by those who exercise direct and material actions, rigidly, on the complex web of reality by forcing and framing everything in one direction. The quality of one who exercises a very different action is given in the last lines, with suggestive imagery, which in part anticipates the surrealist and paradoxical ones peculiar to the Taoist-Buddhist Ch'an school (1).

(1) Cf. Lu K'uan Yii. *Ch 'an and Zen*, Editions .Mediterranee. Rome. 1978 (Ed.).

*To govern men by cooperating with Heaven.
 Nothing is better than following the pattern [the Principle].
 By following the model early you participate in Virtue
 Virtue is developed
 Development in Virtue
 It leads to the irresistible force
 Possessing the irresistible force
 The absolute individual is realized [boundaries or borders fall = conditions-who].
 Realized the absolute individual
 One possesses the principle of empire [read: the Mother, i.e., the generating principle,
 of empire].
 The beginning of an empire
 Which is not transient.
 This means having firm hinge, strong trunk
 It is the path of a 'non-perishing existence and vision.*

The idea, that to rule is to "cooperate with Heaven," was so current in the Far East that to say that a people has no sovereign, it was said, "that people is without Heaven," and to ask whether a given being is qualified for the function of sovereign, it was said, "does he have what it takes to cooperate with Heaven?"

Commentary on this chapter, "The essential task of the Real Man is to preserve and increase magical *tea* (virtue); then everything will go in order through natural development."

To rule a great kingdom

Do as one who carefully simmers.

When a State is ruled by following the Principle Spirits will not be the cause of evil Not that spirits lack power But they will not be able to harm men. As they cannot harm men So also the Real Man (though he may) does not harm men There remains (between the Real Man and other men) the distance (of two parallels, which never meet)

In the 'harmony of their ways.

The comparison, in the second line, is literally that of frying small fish, which requires care and a slow fire so that the fish do not brazen out and burn: it is still a reference to the subtle art of governing.

In the next four lines the concept detraction by the presence of the Royal Man as ruler is extended to the suprasensible and cosmic realm. The ancient cosmocentric conception of kingship, attested particularly in China but also present in other cultural areas, ascribed to the behavior of the sovereign an influence on the natural, as well as the social, environment itself (1) so that of disturbances or calamities occurring in the order of things, the cause was sought, in a certain way, in some alteration or deviation occurring at the center: any moral imbalance at the center was thought to bring with it a cosmic imbalance as well. Thus it was customary that, at the foretelling of unrest, danger or calamity, the ruler would isolate himself, impose on himself a period of absolute silence, and practice asceticism by purifying himself in body and soul. As a positive counterpart, here we have the idea, that the impassive presence of the Real Man exorcises, in the environment, the invisible influences that can act in an evil or nefarious sense on men: it paralyzes them or changes, so to speak, their direction of effectiveness. The idea of a function that is not only political

(1) For the physical c spiritual relationship between ruler and kingdom in Arthurian legend see Julius Evola, *The Mystery of the Grail* (1937), Edizioni Mediterranee, Rome⁴ . 1994 (ed.).

and human but also metaphysical nature of the empire is confirmed by the expression often used for the latter in *Tao-té-ching* itself: *t'ien hsia* = "all-under-heaven." So this very expression has been used by some translators (J. J. L. Duyvendak: *all-under-heaven*).

*The great State is like the deep
 Where the waters of the rivers converge and flow It is the universal feminine.
 In its passivity the fern always wins the male.
 Passivity is condescension
 Therefore, the great state condescendingly
 Absorbs smaller states
 >> Minor state by condescending
 Participates in the great state
 Liabilities to attract and to receive Liabilities to be received.
 The purpose of the great state is to order and govern
 The purpose of the small state is to integrate & that dual purpose is realized It is
 necessary for the piti grande to maintain the position at the bottom (to which the
 attractive and absorbing virtue is proper).*

Application of Taoist non-acting to the plane of great politics, in situations where a large state becomes a natural center of gravitation for smaller states, which allow themselves to be taken up and integrated into it. Just as in the domestic order acting in accordance with the Principle is the opposite of centralism and direct intervention, so it in the international order is the opposite of "imperialism." Moreover, in general, the principle of any true empire has always been of a similar kind: a superordinate authority that unites and orders particular and partial units without constraining them with external, merely political power (thus, also, coexisting with national and feudal autonomies) (1). In the conception set forth in this chapter, however, the idea of central authority is veiled in favor of that of a more subtle power of attraction, of the (specifically Far Eastern) virtue of apparent passivity or impassibility.

For a particular aspect of magical nonaction, the comparison with the subtle power of the woman who, with her apparent passivity, like a magnet attracts and binds the male is effective. Analogous is the image of the valley (cf. chapters 8 and 28) that with its lower position irresistibly attracts the waters of the nearby slopes.

(1) On the meaning to be given to the concept of Empire, see Julius Evola. *Revolt against the Modern World* (1934), Edizioni Mediterranee. Rome' 1969; and, in a current version, *Men and Ruins* (1953), Ed. Settimo Sigillo. Rome', 1990 (ed.).

*In the Way all beings have their sacred and secret principle
 It is the wealth of the good It is the support of the perverse.
 With fine words (about it) one can obtain honors from men But it is by right action [by
 acting in accordance with it] that one rises. Even the non-good
 It is not abandoned by it
 Therefore [for the preservation and development of that principle in every being] rulers
 are installed, magistrates are established.
 Better than the exercise of any force
 Of all ostentatious dignity
 It is the being established and proceeding in the Way
 Therefore, the ancients honored the Principle.
 For even unsought his Virtue is manifested
 Redeem the same culprit
 That is why it is the highest thing in the world.*

The essential concept of this chapter is that in every being, whether good or evil, there is an ontological fund, its sacred and secret principle, in which he is always in the Way. In this sense it is said that even the perverse is not forsaken, that in the Way he is redeemed (in the metaphysical, not by the initiatives of a theistic deity). Propitiating the surfacing of this metaphysical bottom of every being (its "nature" = its "Heaven") should be the goal. Maintaining the same transcendent neutrality in the face of both the good and the non-good proper to the Principle by allowing the operant virtue of the Way (*wei tao*, chapter title) to act impersonally and automatically ("unsought"); this, as already known, should be the task of the true state.

The ontological background mentioned in the text is given through the image of the hidden southwestern corner where a shrine was located in ancient Chinese dwellings. As an illustration of this doctrine, one can go back to Chuang-tze, who speaks of that part of Heaven, or celestial law, which constitutes the being of a given person and which does not cease when that person ends because "it was before her, it is after her, unalterable, indestructible," the rest being only illusory (II, 2). He returns to it as the part that subsists in the current of transformations "when the physical self ceases" (XXI, 3).

To will without wanting to will To do without wanting to do To taste without wanting to taste To see the great in the small The much in the little To hate oppose Virtue (tea) Through the easy accomplish the difficult Through the small accomplish the great. The hardest things in the world Begin with the easy The greatest things in the world Begin with the small That is why the Real Man He never acts on things that have become great That's how he accomplishes great things He who promises easily difficilmente keeps. Therefore the Real Man properly considers the difficult And never encounters difficulty.

"To taste without wanting to taste" (third line) = to taste without identification, without the greedy grasp of the ego. By extension, "taste" can designate feeling, sensation in general. "To hatred oppose Virtue" (sixth line): this is not the evangelical loving the enemy, at least if the precept is taken in a moralizing sense, because Virtue, *té*, here is to be understood in its magical aspect, as the power emanating from non-acting impassibility, a power capable of paralyzing the opponent. Similar conception of an extranormal, magical power of love in Buddhism (see the texts adduced in our *Doctrine of Awakening*) (1).

The second half of the chapter, generally misinterpreted, has its natural development in the chapter that follows and connects with the *de\|V I-ching* oracular tradition: effective action is preventive action exercised over beginnings.

(1) Cf. Julius Evola. *The Doctrine of Awakening* (1943), Edizioni Mediterranee, Rome⁴. 1995 (ed.).

on germane causes (the easy, the small from which the great and the strong derive). Action then will be easy, how difficult it would be, on the other hand, when faced with situations already developed, processes already in place, forms already manifested. On these, rUmo Real never acts; it does not encounter difficulties because it recognizes and excludes the scope of "difficult" action. It has already been said in the introduction about this aspect of subtle acting. See also further on, ch. 76.

It is easy to direct what is still calm
It is easy to prevent what has not yet manifested itself
There is no difficulty in breaking what is still tender
There is no difficulty in dispersing what is still weak
Discerning the fact when there are no signs yet
Dissolving the crisis before it erupts
The giant tree
It took its beginning from a threadlike root
A nine-story tower
He began with a fistful of soil
A journey of a thousand miles
Begin with your own step (in the direction of the goal) He who acts (directly) fails, he who
grasps loses. That is why the Real Man
Refraining from doing does not fail
Not grasping does not leak.
Instead in heavily pursuing the end
Many fall just as they are about to reach it
Being present (with detachment) at the beginning as well as at the end
This is the condition for success.
Thus: the Real Man
It has for desire not to desire
He doesn't care about the things that are hard to have
As the purpose of his study he does non-study
Return there where all others have passed over
Helps the development of things according to their nature By not disturbing it with
(individual) action.

As can be seen, this chapter largely continues the previous one; so already in ancient times, in China and Japan, there were those who made one chapter of the two by ordering the individual lines differently. However, this does not bring an appreciable difference in the order of ideas, which is the one clarified in the previous commentary.

"Wanting without intending"; in practical applications, the maxim of some Taoist-derived schools corresponds to it: "By intention attain the intentionless state." Cf. Chuang-tze (XXIII, 7): "Always keep yourself

In the natural balance. One must be neutral before making an effort, before acting: so that the effort, the action, coming from non-effort, from non-action, are natural."

By the third-to-last line-"ritoma there where all others have passed over"-is to be understood that the Real Man detaches himself from what men have already fixed and evaluated with their petty wisdom, makes a *clean slate* of agreed ideas, and regains contact with reality and nature. Back in the last line is the maxim of propitiating the natural ripening of things in the Way, without intervening with direct, external actions.

*Among the Ancients those who followed the Way did not enlighten the masses
They cared that the people remained simple It is difficult to direct the masses When they
become too intelligent.*

An enlightenment-based government

It only brings ruin to the country

But those who govern with non-knowledge

It will make him happy

He who observes these two principles also knows the measure

The constant application of the measure

It is the formula of mysterious and profound virtue.

Occult and distant virtue!

It is the opposite of the way of ordinary beings

But it eventually leads to the Great Equilibrium.

Those who retain a sound faculty of judgment, especially today can easily recognize what was already seen by Taoism: the political and social calamities that have been and continue to be the effect of the education and enlightenment of the masses. It hardly needs to be said that this is not a matter of keeping the people in ignorance in order to better exploit them in the interests of a parasitic upper class. Rather, it is a matter of avoiding a pseudo-culture which, first of all, is detrimental to the masses themselves, because it destroys natural simplicity in everyone, creates displaced people and is the principle of continuous social imbalances. The knowledge to be condemned is not that which is necessary for the exercise of useful and healthy activities in accordance with one's vocation, but that which serves only to "politicize the masses" and awaken in them artificial and materialistic aspirations. On this basis no natural order is any longer possible, and in order to contain disorder and a latent anarchy one will have to move to centralized mechanical "agent" forms of government, in antithesis to the imperceptible and non-agent forms of reigning according to Principle.

*/ great rivers and lakes are the kings (of waters) of the thousand valleys Because they stand lower than those
Such is the reason for their being the kings of the (waters of the) thousand valleys.
CosThe Real Man
To rise above the many
In his expressions he lowers
To stay on top
Sail his lo.
So he stands above the many
Without forcing
It stands at the top of the many
Without humiliating.
The people will always be ready to obey him.
Since (the Real Man) never fights
No one can anything against him.*

*I am called great
 And they say they are not like the other big
 Precisely because I am big I am not like others If I were like others I would be small.
 I have three precious things
 That I cherish and cultivate
 The first is openness of mind
 The second is the balanced dignity
 The third is the lack of ambition
 Openness of mind infuses me with courage Balanced dignity makes me generous Lack of
 ambition puts itself at the head of men Instead, today, openness of mind gives way to
 arrogance Balanced dignity is abandoned for the empty sound of praise Lack of ambition
 yields to the pursuit of honors
 This is the path of decline.
 Free soul gives victory in war
 And safety in peace
 Such a spirit Heaven grants To those who want to save.*

Maxims, such as those appearing in the present and previous chapters, recall the Christian virtue of humility, the evangelical idea of the last who will be first, etc.: it will be worth recalling the difference in spirit existing between the two attitudes. In Christianity, the reversal of values and the reward of humility are referred to an existence in the afterlife and guaranteed by divine will; psychologically, there is no lack of a certain resentment toward the great ones of the world on the part of those who are humble and small not by virtue but by necessity, and who hope for revenge on the plane of the spirit. In Taoism, on the other hand, it is a matter of maxims of an immanent perfection based on imitation of the Principle, at the recognition of the dialectic, whereby every external affirmation is *eo ipso* transformed into an internal loss, at the knowledge that the very act of *wanting to emerge* puts one on the same level as others, makes one similar to others, takes away the

possibility of truly overpowering based on an ontologically different, transcendent quality.

In connection with all this, the term *ts'u* (ninth line), designation of the first of the three virtues of the Real Man, has not been translated as "love," "compassion," or "charity," as most interpreters have done, but as "openness of mind," the jarringness that those terms would represent being visible where one keeps in mind the explicit references to a detached, impersonal, not at all humanitarian and Christian-like attitude of the Real Man (and Principle) given in so many other chapters. The second virtue is not rendered by the lesson "modesty," "temperance," or "moderation"; the reference is to one's actual worth, so the actual meaning is "balanced dignity." The term designating the third virtue of the Real Man in the text has the literal sense of "not daring to put oneself before others"; similarly, it is not the case to translate with "humility" in the Christian manner, but, if at all, with absence of pride. That is, only the ego-centered assertion of those who put themselves in value against others is excluded: for, as for *not putting oneself* but *being in* fact above others, without ambition, pride and conceit, by one's very nature, this is explicitly stated as an automatic effect of following the Way. Cf. Chuang-tze (XXII, 5) about Royal Men: "They act spontaneously, naturally, as the sky is elevated by nature, the earth is extended by nature, the sun and moon are bright by nature."

Good ruler does not fight
Good warrior does not turn on
Good winner does not fight
Good manager does not direct
This is the power of the Virtue of non-combat
This is the strength in employing men
This is the way of Heaven (to be reproduced)
Summit of Virtue in Origins.

Already known characterizations of non-acting. Its metaphysical foundation is highlighted by one of the titles given to this chapter: *p'ei t'ien* = reconnecting with Heaven, realizing or reproducing in oneself the way of Heaven.

*The maxim of the good fighter is:
 Indulge to maintain the initiative
 Retreating one foot rather than advancing one inch
 Therefore: progress without advancing
 Defending without moving arms Attacking without having an opponent Possessing
 without taking
 Nothing is worse than engaging lightly
 This almost means losing what is most precious.
 Between two fighters
 The one who leaves wins.*

Development of the ideas of the previous chapter, in a paradox style. The sixth line says, literally: be the guest, not the host. It is that according to Chinese etiquette what the host does is subito imitated by the guest and others (for example, if he stands up). In context with the next few lines, the meaning is precisely: indulge in order to retain the initiative. One should not limit the sense of the last lines to subtle tactics in the clash of forces; one should also keep in mind the possible extension of the maxims to the domain of inner life in general. The most precious thing (or "treasure," or "what one possesses" = *pao*) that can be lost is the essential principle, not to be engaged lightly where it might be vulnerable. "Let go" (last line) is equivalent to detachment in action, so as not to be subjected to the initiative of others. He wins who, "empty of ego," lets act for him an almost impersonal power which can more than the greatest tension of individual will and the most heated identification.

*My teaching is easy to understand
 And easy to follow
 But the pili can't understand it
 They don't know how to follow him.
 My doctrine is derived from one principle [the Tao].
 My practice is fixed on a single force Ila tè/
 Who doesn't know them
 He cannot comprehend my wisdom.
 Few understand me
 This is my title of glory.
 Therefore: the Real Man wears common clothes [eliminates everything that is appearance,
 that is flashy!
 He keeps the precious matter concealed within himself.*

The ease mentioned in the first lines is relative, so much so that the title the chapter generally has alludes to the opposite: *chili nan* = the difficult knowledge. It is in the assumption that one perceives the Great Principle and its Virtue that the Taoist teaching appears self-evident: which practically amounts to saying that it is the thing of few, that it is secret knowledge. "Ease" can also be referred to the "non-agent" character that intuitive knowing has, as opposed to the speculative efforts and constructions of discursive thinking. The last lines could be matched by the Roman saying: *esse non haberi*.

Knowing and not knowing is greatness
Not knowing and knowing is disease
Those who experience (as such) the disease
He will know how to defend himself against it.
Real Man is free from evil
Because he feels the evil of evil That is why evil does not touch him.

Resumption of the theme of value inversion, applied to the plane of knowing: essential knowledge, correlative to an exclusion of profane and only human knowledge. Believing to know in order to possess this second knowledge, is sickness, *ping*. The most difficult thing for those who cultivate such knowledge (which could refer to much of what is boasted of as "culture," to what some have called "intelligent stupidity" (1), others "the knowledge of what is not worthy of being known," Luther the works of reason, "prostitute gone mad") is to realize that such is its nature. To be from so much is already to be on the way to overcoming evil or making oneself immune from it. A drastic imperative of Chuang-tze is, "Puke up your intelligence."

(1) A definition by Fritjof Schuon often quoted by Evola (Ed.).

*Those who do not fear what they should fear.
 It will succumb to that which is most to be feared.
 Don't think yourself small
 Do not consider one's condition unworthy
 Indeed, it is not unworthy
 If one does not imagine it to be such.
 That is why the Real Man
 He knows himself without showing off
 He holds to what is without attributing false value to himself
 He avoids this, he holds to that.*

One chapter title is *ai chi* = read "loving oneself," but the sense is: fidelity to one's own nature, to what one naturally is: Taoist doctrine already encountered repeatedly. Cf. the Hindu notion of *svàdharma*, with the idea of the danger inherent in following another's *dharma*, even if it seems superior (*dharma* = law of one's own nature).

V? is an active courage that leads to death
There is a non-active courage that preserves life Both are sometimes good, sometimes bad
The judgment of Heaven, who can know it?
The way to Heaven is:
Don't fight and win
Getting obeyed without commanding
Attracting without calling
Calmly, it brings everything to fruition.
Heaven's net has wide meshes
But nothing escapes it.

The first two lines Moon refers to the courage of those who do not care to go to their deaths in action, the other to the courage of those who know how to impose on themselves instead the principle of non-action, non-affirmation. Depending on the case, that is, depending on their ultimate meaning, both behaviors can be good or bad. Non-action, sparing oneself, non-exposure, supposed by some to be the essence of Taoism, may simply be sloth and sluggishness; then it is certainly not a value. It is a different line, whereby Confucius himself condemned useless daring, urging to preserve life for what is truly worth pursuing (it is the other courage).

Very well known and incisive is the saying of the last two lines, "The net of Heaven has wide meshes but nothing escapes it." Cf. the Western saying, "The mill of the Lord grinds slow but grinds fine," and also the image in De Maistre, of a clock that always strikes the right time even though the motion of each of the wheels is disordered-image, which in turn leads back to another Far Eastern saying, "Order is the sum of all disorder." This is what Lao-tze also expresses by saying that the way of Heaven, calm and indifferent, brings everything to completion: it allows individual beings freedom, even the freedom to deviate, but with elusive influences and reactions it causes the disturbances to balance out and they themselves bring about the unmanifest final plan, always making the cosmic clock mark the right time.

*When the masses no longer fear death
 What is the use of trying to restrain it with the fear of death?
 Let it be made to always fear death
 But only the few who act perversely
 Let them be taken and put to death
 (Otherwise) how dare you kill?
 W is a superior arbiter of life and death [the Way] Whoever replaces him
 He resembles someone who sets out to cut down a tree instead of a log splitter He will
 easily injure his hands.*

Chapter with an essentially political background: it warns against provoking those conditions, in which the masses, exasperated, no longer fear death. If not, it will only be fitting to strike, by way of warning, the few who truly break the natural order. In this same regard, the justice of men must not be heavy-handed and presume too much. The idea of immanent justice is already contained in the saying of the previous chapter, namely, that no one escapes the net of Heaven. The Principle is the true arbiter of life and death, in a neutral, impersonal framework. Replacing it obtusely can also create causes that will react against the administrators of a harsh, unenlightened law. the case-limit being the rise of the masses who no longer fear death.

The people are hungry
Why princes dissipate the proceeds of serious taxes
This is the cause of his destitution
If the people are difficult to guide themselves
It is because the ruler exceeds in action
This is the cause of the resistance
The people [vulgare] man exposes himself slightly to death
Because he is greedily attached to life
This is the cause why he does not fear death. Only he who by acting holds himself above
life Rightly values life.

Note, in the last four lines, the shift from the social domain to the inner domain as well, albeit at a parallelism. There is to be referred back to the order of ideas, the dialectical reversal, already considered in ch. 67: the inner negation (death), of which there is no sense, hence not even fear, which is the counterpart of greedily grasping life. Again, one of the chapter's titles provides the key to its internal sense: *t'an sun*, which is as much as to say: the covetousness (of life) that is tantamount to loss. Cf. Chuang-tze: "Of all the instruments of death, desire is the deadliest" (XXIII, 4). Let it not be forgotten, however, that the Taoist ethic is foreign to the denial of desire per se: it is *servitude to desires* that is condemned, it is it that is considered execrable and must be escaped (1).

(1) This is a fundamental aspect of the Evolian theory of phagire," that of action in itself perfect insofar as it is not moved by "craving," "mania," or "passion," through which one is conversely "acted upon." Cf. what is explained in the aforementioned *The Hermetic Tradition* and *The Doctrine of Awakening*, but also in *The Yoga of Power* (1949), Edizioni Mediterranee. Rome*. 1994; and in *Riding the Tiger* (1961). Edizioni Mediterranee. Rome'. 1996 (ed.).

Man is born weak and delicate
Dies stiff and hard
The tree is born flexible and tender
He dies unyielding and strong
So: stiff and sturdy
These are the ways of death
Weak and flexible
These are the ways of life.
The victorious army
He is the one who never fought The strong tree is felled.... Big and strong are at the bottom
Sweet and flexible are at the top.

Various comparisons, to express the well-known idea that true strength binds to the original subtle stage, opposed to developed and fixed forms. We then move on to the other, equally well-known theme of action imposing itself as one does not exert it on the plane where it can offer grip and can be reached by the direct action of the opponent (true victor is the one who does not fight). The same order of ideas is still taken up in ch.78.

The action of Heaven

Resembles stretching an arc It is a smoothing out what is convex A stretching out what is concave A reducing the excessive

To increase the lacking.

The way of Heaven

It is taking away from the overabundant

Add to the shortfall.

Different is the way of man

He takes away from the already lacking

To strengthen what is already in excess.

He who of his own excess makes a gift to the world

Those are in the Way.

For this: the Real Man

Acts without binding to the result Operates without appearing operable Disappears [does not show]

About the similarity of the first lines it should be remembered that the ancient Chinese bow, on the opposite side of ours, was curved outward; thus it was ready for arrow throwing when pulling the string made it, from curved (concave and convex), straight. Generally, the chapter refers to the subtle balancing action of the Way. Instead, men exacerbate the polarizations thus binding themselves to the external and the particular.

"He is in the Way who of his own excess gives the world a gift." The deeper meaning of this maxim brings one back to the imitation of] Principle: keeping the center in the deep dimension, the adept gives the world 1"excess," that is, what spontaneously emanates from it, an influence and not an externalization of its essence. Therefore, when it operates, it is not operating; its being is not visible. In the last line: the opposite of *hsien* (a term containing the idea of visibility), usually interpreted trivially as voluntarily keeping oneself in the shadows, as not performing in social life.

*There is nothing in the world more yielding and weak than water
 But at the same time.
 There is nothing that surpasses it in overcoming the stiff and the strong
 It has no equal (in such virtue).
 Thus: the weak triumph over the strong
 Flexible triumphs over rigid
 This truth should be clear to everyone But there is no one who acts in accordance with it.
 Therefore the perfect man says:
 Only he who takes upon himself the burdens of the kingdom
 He is its priestly leader
 Only he who takes upon himself the misfortunes of the kingdom
 He is the ruler of it
 This is the mysterious truth.*

The connection between the first part of the chapter and the last six lines is tenuous, so much so that some have transferred its principle to another chapter. The last lines visibly connect to the already mentioned cosmocentric conception of kingship. In his function as the center and third power between Heaven and Earth, the ruler takes upon himself the weight of the realm (= of "all-below-heaven"), thus also of the negative and inauspicious. The literal translation of the fourth last line is: he becomes the leader who celebrates the Shé Chi sacrifice, which in China was the highest state sacrifice officiated annually by the ruler for all the people, precisely in his also priestly or pontifical capacity.

*After a great hatred
There always remains a little hatred
No return to the initial state
That is why the Real Man
Fulfills his part and does not press on others
He who has virtue thinks only of what he has to do
Those who do not have virtue think (instead) about what others should do
The Way of Heaven does not look at people [is neutral, has no preferences].
But those who adhere to it are always carried forward [without the tensions mentioned
in the first lines].*

*In small kingdom of not dense population To have some good men [ten to a hundred]
 But without using them
 Let the people attach importance to death Do not go far there.
 While having means to travel by sea and land
 Don't use it
 While having means of defense and offense
 Don't show it off
 Let there be a return
 To knot the ropes
 Then for one's food one will have taste, one will find one's garments beautiful Quiet will
 become one's dwelling, one will take pleasure in one's way.
 When even two states were so close together.
 Let the cries of the animals be heard from each other Let it come to death
 Without passing into the neighboring realm.*

The chapter also admits of an interpretation in terms of inner life-not simply a description of a small political and social house foot-which everyone will be able to draw from by giving the concrete references an imagery value: for this, we have left those references in as much latitude as possible. From such an interpretation we will pick up themes already known: gathered strengths and possibilities, neither externalized nor artificially saturated; simplicity that gives calmness, that makes one love one's way and does not leave one's condition (passing into the other realm, even if close); while knowing that one can go far, "by land and sea," into multiple external experiences, not having the taste for it and seeking the Way (cf. the "without going out, one can know" of ch. 47); loving to be alone (hence one of the chapter titles: *you them*). The ritome to the use of braided cords means renunciation of useless culture-it seems that variously knotted and braided cords were used in China before writing was employed. This has no reference to a primitive ignorance; after all, among other things, a ritual and sacral character was also attached to the means of fixing ideas or transmitting them using knots and braiding.

*True words are not beautiful Beautiful words are not true The man who has Virtue does not argue The man who argues does not have Virtue Knowing is not knowing Knowing is not knowing The Real Man does not hoard By giving to others He gains The more he gives to others The more he possesses for himself. The Way of Heaven: Ordering without Struggle
The way of the realized man: Acting without effort.*

For the opposition between true knowledge and mere knowing (culture, erudition) see also ch. 71; here the indifference to all tinsel is added: true, bare speech, aimed exclusively at the essential, *hsien chili*. The other motif of this last chapter is also familiar to us: the realized man who, in the image of the Principle, by not keeping for himself has, by giving acquires; whereby there is no need to remind us that this is not "altruism," but an impersonal motion proceeding from one who is free from the constraint of the "I" (thus also from that of the "you," the other). The text concludes with a reference to what has been called "transcendental spontaneity." Joined to the Way, the Real Man acts effortlessly, is "Heaven," cooperates with Heaven.

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