
COMMENTARY: The Teaching of Lao Zi

1. DAO

Ancient Chinese theism taught that there was a god in Heaven on whom the world depended absolutely, and who rewarded good men and punished the evil. This god has human consciousness. He allowed the elect saints, like King Wen, to be his entourage. He was capable of getting angry and meting out punishment if men were evil; but ultimately he would always forgive them and have mercy on them, if their priest and representative, the son of Heaven, purified himself in the right way and approached him with sacrificial offerings. The Earth as mother was partner to this father in Heaven. There was also - though they did not impinge on the monotheistic foundation - an abundance of natural and ancestral spirits who were dependent on Heaven, but nevertheless had their own specific tasks, rather like public officials under a king.

This religious viewpoint had been wrecked under the impact of terrible and extreme events when no god in Heaven showed his face to intervene on behalf of poor, tortured, yet innocent men. It is with Lao Zi that the radical elimination of religious anthropo-morphism begins. In his view, Heaven and Earth have no human feelings of love: to them all beings are like straw dogs. These straw dogs are placed in a shrine and clothed in beautifully embroidered garments in preparation for sacrificial festivities. The priest of the dead fasts and purifies himself in preparation for their sacrifice. However, once they have served their purpose, they are thrown away so that passers-by tread on their heads and backs, and the gatherers of firewood pick them up and burn them. It is the same with the relationship between Nature and all living beings. During their allotted time they readily find the table of life laid for them, and everything prepared for their use. But their moment passes and they are discarded and trampled upon, and the stream of life passes them by.

However, Lao Zi is far from considering the course of Nature to be accidental or unruly. He is free of all scepticism and pessimism. He does not simply fight against popular religion, but replaces it with something that is of a higher order, and leads further. From the ancient wisdom of the Book of Changes (Yi Jing), he had concluded that the essence of the world is not a static or mechanical condition. The world undergoes continuous change and transformation. All that exists is, just because it exists, subject to death: for although birth and death are opposites, they are nevertheless inextricably linked to each other. Yet, although everything that exists passes away, there is no reason to say 'All is vanity', for the same Book of Changes also shows that all transformations take place according to fixed laws. The Book of Changes expresses the view that the whole phenomenal world rests upon a polar opposition of forces: creative and receptive, One and Two, light and shadow, positive and negative, male and female - are all examples of the polar forces that bring about change and transformation. One must imagine these forces as primary principles which are at rest. The world view of the Book of Changes is not one of simple cosmic dualism.

Instead it understands the forces it speaks about as being themselves in a process of continuous change. The One splits itself and becomes Two; the Two unite and become One. The creative and the receptive unite and generate the world. Therefore Lao Zi says that the One engenders the Two, the Two engenders the Three, the Three engenders all things. This is represented in the Book of Changes by the coming together of the undivided line of the creative, and the divided line of the receptive in the formation of eight three-levelled primary trigrams; the combination of these represent the whole world of possible constellations of 'time'.

But Lao Zi had also concluded from the Book of Changes that this all-embracing change in the phenomenal world is not a matter of blind coincidence or chance. The Book of Changes speaks of three kinds of transformation:

1. Cyclical change, such as the change of the seasons. One state of things changes into another, but in the course of such changes the original state of things is restored. So, for example, winter is followed by spring, summer and autumn, but autumn in turn is followed by winter, and thus the cycle of transformations is completed. Cosmic events are like the rising and setting of the sun in the course of the day and the year: the waxing and waning of the moon, and the spring and autumn equinoxes, are examples of such transformations.
2. The second kind of transformation is represented by progressive development. One state of things progressively changes into another, but the line does not revert to its original condition. Progress and development continue with time. Such are the days of men: one is not equal to another - although they are also included in the great cycle of the seasons - but each one contains the sum total of the experiences of the preceding days plus the new day's experiences.
3. Finally, the third kind is the immutable law that works through all these transformations. This law causes all movements to become visible in a definite manner. If one observes the phenomena in Heaven and Earth they appear overwhelming in scale and impact, and confusing in their manifoldness and multiplicity. According to this law, the principle of the creative is the active force which works through time. When this force first enters into action it does so lightly and hardly noticeably, so that the effects can be quite easily traced. Objects of great force or density develop only gradually out of the light and the minimal.

The receptive principle is the principle of spatial mobility. When this reacts to the stimulus of the creative, all spatial change is at first quite simple and gradual, and easily recognisable without confusion. It is only in the further course of events that this simple and gradual change accelerates into a confusing multitude of impressions. And so it is important to recognise the seeds or sources of growth in all things. This is the point from which one has to start if one wants to see clearly and work effectively, just as all effects in Nature develop from the easy and simple to the difficult and multiple. For all these laws work not as a result of an external necessity, but out of an immanent organic vitality, in the freedom of entelechy's own law.

In the final analysis it is the great polarity tai ji, the unity beyond all duality, beyond all occurrence, even beyond all existence, that lies at the root of all these changes. The changes proceed in a firm and meaningful way, the Way of Heaven (tian dao), whose equivalent on earth is the Way of Man (ren dao). For it is one of the most important principles of the Book of Changes that there is a general

relationship and harmony between macrocosm and microcosm, between the images sent from Heaven and the social and cultural thoughts formed by the saints and rulers in imitation of these images. In the Book of Changes we find the astronomical/astrological foundations of Chinese religion shining through in the concepts of the Way of Heaven and the Way of Man. These ideas are taken further in the philosophy of Confucius; but Lao Zi also built his philosophy upon them. For Lao Zi did have a philosophy, even if he only left us a few aphorisms: these aphorisms contain an organic body of thought, which will reveal itself to anyone capable of grasping its true context.

Lao Zi begins by searching for a fundamental principle for his view of the world. Confucianism had come to rest at the image of Heaven. Heaven was somehow thought of as a personal being. It was conceived as something higher and purer than the god of popular religion, Shang Di, which had shown strongly anthropomorphic features. But at moments of high inner tension, Confucius would always speak in such a way that one had a clear sense of his religious relationship to a Heaven which 'knew' him, which entrusted the traditions of civilisation to him, and to which one could pray at times of inner crisis. For Lao Zi this was still not the highest and the ultimate. For him, the highest and the ultimate was beyond personality, even beyond any observable and definable existence. It was not a 'something' beside or above other 'things'. But it was not nothingness either; instead, it was something that eludes all human forms of thinking.

For 'this' there is, of course, no name. For all names stem from experience, whereas it is 'this' that makes all experience possible. It was only in order to speak about it, and for want of a better expression, that he finally called it DAO, to resolve his predicament; and he called it 'great'.

In doing so he took over and transformed an existing expression. The DAO of Heaven and the DAO of Man had been known since ancient times, but absolute DAO had not. DAO means 'way'. But, given the manner in which Lao Zi uses the term, one cannot translate it as 'way' or 'faith'. In the Chinese language there are two words for 'way'. One of them is lu. It is written as a combination of the symbols for 'foot' and 'every'. It is what every foot treads: the way that comes about by being trodden. This term might be used figuratively, for the modern concept of 'law of Nature', for this is also conceived as existing because events tend to occur in accordance with it. The other word for 'way' is DAO. It is written as a combination of the symbols for 'head' and 'to go'. This gives us a meaning quite different from that of the word lu. It means 'the way that leads to a set goal', 'the direction', 'the prescribed way'. It also means 'to talk' and 'to lead'. It seems that the symbol was first used to indicate the astronomic course of the stars. Since ancient times the equator was called 'the red way', and the apparent path of the sun among the stars in the course of the year, the 'yellow way'. These ways are not random or accidental: they have meaning, significance. And it is in this sense that Lao Zi uses the word. DAO is neither something material nor something spiritual, but all meaning emanates from it. It is that which is ultimately free. It provides its own direction while everything else receives its meaning from something outside itself: man receives it from the Earth, the Earth from Heaven, and Heaven from DAO.

When Lao Zi speaks of DAO, he is careful to remove everything that could point to existence of any kind. He is working, then, at a level totally different from anything that belongs to the phenomenal world. DAO is earlier than Heaven and Earth. One cannot tell where it comes from: it is even earlier

than God. It rests upon itself, and is immutable, rapt in eternal, cyclical movement. It is the beginning of Heaven and Earth, in other words, of temporal and spatial existence. It is the mother of all created beings. In another place he also calls it 'the ancestor of all beings'.

Lao Zi quotes an ancient adage in which DAO is compared to the spirit of the empty valley, to the mysterious female, flowing uninterrupted like a waterfall as though it were eternal, its mysterious entrance the root of Heaven and Earth. This concept is probably based on an ancient magic formula for the invocation of the spirit of the pictogram Kan. It represents the moon, and also the heavenly water that flows between steep embankments. It is the darkly mysterious, the dangerous, 'the Abysmal', the highest, freely-moving wisdom, the inexhaustible.

It was originally thought of as female, and it is only since the end of the second millennium BC that it has been called male. It stands in the north or in the west, always in the dark half of the cycle of the sun. Its symbol in the starry sky is the dark warrior, a mysterious union of serpent and tortoise. In ancient times it was no doubt connected with black magic. (According to Lie Zi, this formula is derived from the writings of Huang Di. It is quite possible that Lao Zi also took it from another source, just as so many passages in the Dao De Jing are quotations.) In this formula Lao Zi found features which agreed with what he understood as DAO, and so he used it as a parable. He likens DAO to water on other occasions as well, because it is powerful through 'keeping below', and flowing in places which are generally despised; or he finds likenesses of DAO in the valley, the sea, or the deep rivers, because they all 'keep themselves below', and are able to receive all the water that flows into them without ever filling up or overflowing. For DAO is empty and never becomes full.

Although it is said to have no existence, DAO is not simply 'nothingness'. For from nothingness nothing can come. DAO is neither temporal nor spatial. When one looks for it one cannot see it; when one listens for it one cannot hear it; when one tries to touch it one cannot feel it. Yet this non-spatiality and nontemporality somehow contains the makings of manifoldness: forms and images, but without form, without content. One cannot discern front or back in DAO. It often seems as though it were there, but then it recedes again into non-existence. DAO is therefore on a level beyond existence. It is nothing 'real', for then it would be a 'thing' amongst other 'things'. But on the other hand it is not so unreal that real things cannot proceed from it.

It follows that nothing can be positively asserted about DAO. Every positive assertion about it is wrong, because it is beyond what can be affirmed or denied. For this reason Lao Zi always strives to set limits to his assertions. He speaks in parables. He says 'it seems', 'it may be called', 'it is as if', 'it is about like'. . . - in other words he always uses indefinite, allusive terms. For DAO can be neither perceived nor known. All assertions about it are only pointers towards an immediate experience that cannot be expressed in words.

For the same reason, the term DAO is not a concept. The living experience which is expressed by the term lies beyond our conceptual powers because it is immediate, direct. Nor is it a subject for study. Whoever knows it does not speak about it, and whoever does speak about it does not know it. The more one tries to describe and define it, the further one gets from it. Therefore the road to DAO is opposite to the road to learning. Learning involves increasing one's experiences, and always accumulating more. If one turns towards DAO, however, one decreases the amount of conscious

experiences at one's disposal until one arrives at non-action. If one practises non-action, nothing remains not done. Everything then comes about of its own accord.

In all this Lao Zi is fully aware that his DAO is not a scientific achievement. When the highest kind of men hear about it, they act in accordance. Lesser men doubt: now they hold on to it, now it escapes them again. When ordinary men hear about it, they laugh loudly. If they do not laugh it is not the true DAO.

In order to understand what Lao Zi meant by DAO we must now go back to mystical experiences. A similar concept can be found in Mahayana Buddhism. Through concentration and meditation one reaches the state of Samādhi, in which the psyche reaches beyond consciousness into the sphere of superconsciousness. If these experiences are genuine, they do indeed lead into the depths of being which lie beyond the entire phenomenal world. The visible form of such events is known from certain parapsychological phenomena, and has become the object of scientific research. The experience of DAO, however, can never become an object of scientific research. What we are dealing with here is a primal phenomenon in the highest sense of this term: one can only marvel in awe, but one cannot trace its origins or fathom it out. The experience of DAO is like all immediate experience. For instance, when I perceive the colour 'yellow', or 'blue', the physical processes that take place in the eye can be investigated even though there is much room for speculation; but this does not amount to a real grasp of the perception itself. And one can never succeed in conveying the experience to anyone who has not had it. Whoever has had such an experience - to him Lao Zi's words are immediately understandable, and capable of helping him on his way.

Lao Zi attributes not only psychological, but also cosmic significance to DAO. In this he is correct for the 'cosmos' is not something that exists objectively, quite independent of experience. Every organism exists in a setting or context, and the kind of context is related to the organism's particular skills and capacities. By presenting his DAO in such a way that it is neither temporally nor spatially determined, Lao Zi offers the conditions for every experience and for the whole universe. All experience depends upon interpretation, on adducing meaning. DAO is that meaning which confers significance upon all that is, and in this way calls all that is into existence. DAO creates all that is created, but because it even creates the creative, it has itself never entered the phenomenal world.

However, Lao Zi does not make scientifically verifiable statements about DAO. Given the nature of the issue, he cannot offer proof but he points to ways in which one may come to the experience of DAO. We shall talk about these ways later on. At this point it is important to proceed from the metapsychic and metaphysical world to the phenomenal world.

2. THE PHENOMENAL WORLD

DAO, or essence, is unfolded in reality, that is in the phenomenal world. This world can be the subject of scientific research, for in it are things which can be named and from which concepts can be formed. However, the world of reality is not something different from DAO. Lao Zi is hardly proposing a theory about an earthly world emanating from a higher world. The world of DAO is not an abstract entity but, as we have seen, manifoldness is immanent in it. In DAO there are images, seeds, things. It is true that these images are not distinct and separate phenomena: they are potentially present within

the unitary DAO. But these images and things are the germinal potencies of reality; they condition all the phenomena that are found in our world.

In order to understand what Lao Zi means by these 'images' one can refer to Plato's theory of ideas. Unlike Plato, however, Lao Zi did not develop his theory of ideas dialectically. One cannot gain an understanding of his thought by a process of abstraction; instead, a primal view from one's inner depths will produce these images for oneself. These images or forms are non-corporeal, non-spatial. They are like fleeting images passing over the smooth surface of a mirror. These 'images of things' are the seeds of reality. Just as the acorn contains the oak, ungraspable, invisible and yet completely distinct as an entelechy, so the 'things' of reality are contained in these seed-images. Certain seeds come to the fore and develop in a clear and definite way, because these seeds are totally genuine. The reliability of occurrence is founded in them. One kind of seed will never bring forth a 'thing' of another kind. But even when they do come to the fore in this way, they never become solidified into existence. They return to the realm of the nonreal, leaving behind the dead and empty husks of phenomenality to which they had once given a soul. Life itself has not died - even after the 'straw dogs' of phenomenal existence have been discarded and trampled underfoot.

As I see it, Lao Zi's teaching on ideas is a further development of the teaching on seeds in the Book of Changes. What is there called 'seed' - that from which a successive line of events develops in accordance with the fixed law of changes - becomes Lao Zi's 'image', which as an invisible, immanent law directs the becoming and the passing away of the 'things' of reality. Occasionally Lao Zi puts forward a curious deduction of his own from the Book of Changes, as when he says that the one creates the Two, the Two creates the Three and the Three creates all things. In this way he sets forth and develops the complementarity of opposites: wherever the One - as decision, as limit, or line, or in some other way - is posited, all that is other, i.e. not One, is simultaneously given. By the coming forth of the One the Two is created; by the Two joining the One the Three comes about. These three then form a different and greater entity which already contains the manifold. Beyond this process one cannot go without confronting multiplicity. And therefore it is said that the Three creates all things. In order to understand this philosophical approach one can refer to Neoplatonism in ancient philosophy. Early Christian meditations on the Trinity, in which progression to the Four produces Lucifer, are also closely related to this thinking. Similar ideas can even be found in more recent philosophy: Hegel's dialectic, with its thesis, antithesis and synthesis, where synthesis then becomes the thesis for the next series, the departure point for all that follows - is based on an approach very much like Lao Zi's.

The two primal powers from which the visible world as the Third is born, are Heaven and Earth, yang (the light power) and yin (the dark power), the positive and the negative line, the temporal and the spatial - in other words the opposites from which the phenomenal world proceeds. Heaven and Earth are compared to a musician and a flute. The flute is empty, but the breath of the flute-player brings forth sounds from it; and the more it is played, the more manifold are the sounds. Endless melodies come forth in uninterrupted succession, but they are bewitched by the instrument which is not, in itself, the sound. The flute is the Earth, the breath is Heaven. But who sets the breath in motion? Who is the

great flute-player who lures a colourful world out of this magic flute? In the final analysis it is DAO.

It has no exterior cause: it moves in free naturalness, out of its innermost essence.

Thus DAO occupies a dual position in the phenomenal world. It releases the seed of ideas into existence where they unfold into things that extend in space and time. It is also the great fluteplayer with his magic flute. It is the ancestor of all created beings, the root of Heaven and Earth, the mother of all things. Thus it turns one side towards existence. Nevertheless it is impossible to grasp it, to look at it, or overhear it. It returns into non-existence where it is unreachable and eternal, because all things under Heaven evolve from what exists. But existence itself evolves from the non-existent, and returns to non-existence in which it is forever rooted. This 'non-existent' DAO is the driving force within all that moves in the phenomenal world. The functioning, the effectiveness of all that is 'existence' rests on 'non-existence'. Reality is, in a way, loosened up by gaps and absences or empty spaces; thus it becomes usable and useful by their being 'nothing', that is empty, just as vessels or chambers become usable and useful because they contain 'nothing', by their hollow, empty space. Thus is DAO effective in the phenomenal world: by non-action.

Having shown how the phenomenal world proceeds from DAO, through the intermediary of ideas, we must now consider Lao Zi's theory of cognition, his teaching on concepts. The problem of the relationship between 'name' and 'reality' plays an important part in the Chinese philosophy of his time. Although later rationalists have increasingly adopted a nominalism which considers a 'name' as something completely arbitrary that never reaches 'reality', the classical philosophies of Confucius and Lao Zi are unanimous in considering concepts or names, as somehow corresponding to reality, or as capable of being made to concur with reality, so that they become a medium for establishing order in reality. For Confucius the 'rectification of concepts' is the most important means of establishing order in human relations and in society: empirical relationships must be made to concur with rational relationships, so that order will prevail in society. In the family for instance, the man who is called 'father' must be as a father in order to answer to the rational concept of 'father'; in the same way the son must be as a son, and the other members of the family accordingly; only then will the family have its proper order. A similar principle applies to all other fields of life. This line of thought is also derived from the Book of Changes: there we find the concept that Heaven reveals the primal images which the leaders and prophets of calling take as guidelines for their cultural institutions. The trigrams and hexagrams in the Book of Changes depict all possible world situations, and from the laws which govern their changes one can draw conclusions about the changes that occur at a cosmic level. Lao Zi also puts forward a theory of concepts. The 'images' which are immanent in DAO can somehow be given names, but these names are secret and unutterable. Just as DAO cannot be expressed, so these cannot be expressed. There are, of course, names that can be named, but these are not the highest, not eternal. If, however, the names that can be named are correctly chosen, they somehow come close to existence - even if only as 'guests of reality', not as reality's masters. They can serve in some way to create order, to pass on tradition and thus preserve the continuity of human activity.

In this manner, the world of essence may be named 'non-existence', and the phenomenal world called 'existence'. In that case, 'non-existence' is the beginning of Heaven and Earth, and 'existence' is the

mother of all beings. If one concentrates on non-existence one will see the secrets of essence; if one concentrates on existence one will see the external, three-dimensional appearance of things. But one must not think that this implies a dual world, a present world and a world beyond. The difference between the two states exists only in name: the name of the one is existence, and of the other non-existence. Yet although the names are different, they both represent the same fact: the dark secret, out of whose depths all miracles flow.

Once one has names that can be articulated, one has the instruments for cognition. These concepts, given as names to things, provide one with a means of fastening on to things; and one can then use the name instead of the thing for thinking, just as one uses letters instead of numbers in algebra. Using concepts, one can express laws as formulae, and numbers conform to them. As long as reality, 'things', are used as checks and balances, names and concepts are usable and useful. They can then be used to define the products of cognition. All such definitions, of course, have a necessarily divisive quality. If all men recognise the beautiful as beautiful, then thereby the ugly is already posited. Knowledge is gained by a process of comparison and definition, and is therefore necessarily bound up with the phenomenal world, which is divided into pairs of opposites.

This line of thought leads us even further afield. Having these concepts as tools for the cognition of reality, Man can, in the end, use them quite independently - that is, independent of reality. He can produce concepts which do not correspond to any primal image in reality. He can isolate things from their existential context, and establish something that does not exist as the goal and object which he strives for. In this way 'names' become the creators of desire. By using them in this way he can secure not only what he already has, but also what he does not have. For Lao Zi this is the instance of original sin in cognition. Reality may only be the appearance and the exterior of DAO, but it is nevertheless somehow related to it. Here, however, one is confronted with a teleological, purpose-built world, in which goals and purposes are not real but the creations of human desire, to be attained through human effort. This engenders a craving for what is not one's own but belongs to someone else. Since the owner of this property will not readily let it go, strife and battle will follow and the result will be theft and murder; and this is the opposite of DAO.

In this way, the phenomenal world becomes a world of evil for Lao Zi, a world of craven desires, bound up with the presence of 'names'. Men enter into a maze of error because of it. Perceptions are no longer pure representations in which the will has no voice. They blind and seduce men, and the delusion of desire sends them mad. Reason is at work and the actual quantity of knowledge appears to increase. But the more acutely reason works the more acute reason becomes, the more mankind moves away from DAO. Therefore Lao Zi holds that culture and knowledge should not be fostered any further, but harmlessly assimilated into the context of nature instead. Faced with the excessive development of rationality one must return to the nameless (non-conceptual) simplicity, to the condition in which one lets DAO take its harmless course, without attaching names to it. In this way the connection between the great mother and her child, man, will be re-established.

3. ON THE ATTAINMENT OF DAO

Lao Zi is far from merely offering a theory for understanding the world. He wants to point a way out of the confusion of the phenomenal world, and into the eternal. To find this way, and to walk upon it, is to attain DAO. A dual path leads to this attainment: one goes by way of existence and the other by non-existence. If one wants to find DAO in existence, one should look at phenomena in such a way that one avoids becoming entangled in its web. For these are only the external forms of DAO.

Everything in the phenomenal world is somehow an effect of DAO: the high and the low, the beautiful and the ugly, good and evil. Nothing exists that does not have its existence through DAO. It does not refuse itself even to the merest grain of dust. But one searches in vain for DAO in reality if one has goals and designs, or schemes. The more one searches the world with definite goals and designs in mind the more one fosters wants and desires, and the more one becomes tied up in isolation. In this way one reaches counter-DAO; and that soon comes to an end. The specific direction one takes makes no difference at all. Whether one seeks pleasure, colour, sounds, delicacies, exciting games, or rare goods: all will have the effect of entangling one more and more deeply in the web of delusion. Similarly, it is an illusion to aim at saintliness and wisdom, love and duty, skill and gain, learning and knowledge. For in doing so one exaggerates one pole only, and this necessarily has the effect of evoking its opposite.

For DAO is like an archer. It complements every extreme by its opposite. What is high is brought low, what is low is raised up. It is the DAO of Heaven to reduce what is plentiful, and increase what is lacking.

Therefore the way from existence to DAO leads through an acknowledgment of the opposites in the phenomenal world. The more one is free from the delusions of desire, the more free one becomes of one's own ego. No longer will one view the world scourged by hopes and fears; instead it will be seen merely as an object of contemplation. Enormous powers rage like cloudbursts and cyclones. But a cyclone does not last a morning before it is over. One realises how strong weapons are, and yet they remain without victory; how strong a tree can be, and yet it is cut down. Happiness depends upon sorrow. Sorrow lies in wait for happiness. By recognising this one will succeed in eliminating the ego. For it is this tiny ego, mistaking the space between birth and death for life, that is the true source of all delusion. Desiring possessions and achievements for this brief span of time, realising these desires with the magic of a 'name' - which both causes the object of desire to be known, and is the cause of that desire - this is the source of the delusions that obscure and conceal DAO. Thus even grace is something disquieting, and honour a great torment. The persona/ego is perpetually restless, whether it receives grace or loses it, and it is the same with honour. If one eliminates the persona there will no longer be evil of any kind. Yet DAO is effective in sovereign certainty, even when the ego is darkened by desires: in fact, even these desires are an effect of DAO in accordance with fixed laws. Nothing can be other than it is. The only task is not to block one's way. Thus one's view of the world will become free of delusion, and pure; one will look at life's game with an inner calm. Then one will know that living and dying only means 'going out' and 'going in'. If one follows the eternal law and is not beholden anywhere, never becomes hardened or rigid, one will remain within the flow of DAO, and the

forces of death, which bear down only when something hardens or solidifies will no longer have any power.

And so the external way, via existence, is one way towards DAO, which is, after all, unfolded in all existence - provided one is free of delusion, and looks in pure contemplation upon the skilful work of the mother, who spins her threads and lets them flow like the streams of a waterfall, continuous, incessant. But one knows that this veil is alive, that it is in constant movement, knowing no hesitation, no desire, no ego, no duration: $\pi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha \rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}$, *panta rei*: everything is in a state of flux.

This pure contemplation which sees the eternal DAO in what is transitory, is only one of the two paths. The other path leads through non-existence. It leads man to the sight of the secret forces, to a union with the mother. What had previously been only a spectacle now becomes living experience. One arrives at the One-without-a-Two, the dark source from which Heaven and Earth, all beings and all forces spring. It is there that insights which one cannot talk about, which one must worship in silence, are briefly and brilliantly illuminated. The way of silence leads away from everything personal. For what is personal is only a mortal husk which one moves along as one walks through life. This path leads into stillness, where everything visible dissolves into insubstantial *maya*. It leads back from multiplicity into unity. But one has to prepare oneself inwardly for this way. One must work on one's own soul so that it can hold on to the One without breaking apart. For this is the criterion: when a sage of the highest kind hears about DAO he adheres to it; when a sage of a lower kind hears about DAO he wavers: now he has it, now he loses it again. But one must get beyond this wavering if one wants to gain entry to the innermost sanctum. The first step is to achieve complete unity. Then comes the task of making all the forces of the soul supple. No rigidity must be allowed to remain - the kind that produces a condition of spurious unity - for one's living experience must be utterly simple and easy. The inner forces must begin to flow, must overcome all hindrances. One must become like an infant that can sustain all effort without tiring just because it is soft and supple, not rigid. This inner liquescence does not, however, mean dispersion: it is the precondition of a lasting inner composure. It is a state of relaxation and equilibrium that can no longer be disturbed because it has become certain. Only now does the contemplation of the depths of essence become possible, for now the soul-mirror becomes pure, free of stain and pliable. It no longer wants to hold on to any impression, but follows the stimuli that arise from the depths, without any will of its own. Now it experiences the opening and closing of the gates of Heaven. It sees the invisible, feels the ungraspable. It is beyond existence, far below, where the mothers dwell. It witnesses the mysterious processes of life, and keeps itself still and forbearing like a mother-bird brooding over the secret of growing life in the egg. And the egg-shell breaks. Unification with the ultimate DAO takes place. The son has found the mother... Now clarity permeates everything, the great, redeeming recognition of the One- without-a-Two.

As a result of this recognition one no longer wants to separate and define the opposites in the phenomenal world, but accepts them and unites them in higher synthesis. One recognises the male-creative principle in oneself, and yet holds fast to the female-receptive; one recognises honour, and yet stays willingly in shame. Therefore one remains free of all the demands and desires of the persona and returns to original simplicity. Whoever recognises his child-like nature and guards and protects DAO, the great mother of the world, will not be in danger all his life. Whoever keeps the gates

shut and his mouth closed will not know drudgery all his life. He sees the small, he guards the yielding, and in this way his persona is spared all harm. Whoever knows how to safeguard his life is not afraid of the tiger or rhinoceros, and is even capable of walking right through a crowd of armed men without armour or weapons; for since nothing in him evokes resistance he has no mortal point in which he can be wounded.

The man who has attained DAO will base all of his actions on this knowledge. He will always work on that which does not yet exist, and set to order what is not yet in a state of confusion. For the seeds of all things already exist in the invisible, as the Book of Changes relates. It is important to work upon these seeds, so that whatever is put into them will unfold as the seed grows all by itself, without any further action or external interference. This organic influence upon the seeds of future events is the decisive effect of the man who has attained DAO. Whatever has been planted in this manner will never be uprooted. A good wanderer leaves no trace behind him; a good gatekeeper needs no lock or bolt. Whoever knows how to work upon these seeds also reveals his secret power in letting the opposing forces have their way at first. Whatever one wants to compress one must first allow to expand fully. Only when a power has almost exhausted itself through its own efforts can another power overcome it with ease.

These secret laws do, of course contain formulae that can lead to black magic, and they have in fact been exploited by the magical forms of Daoism. Just as they were exploited by the Japanese method of ju-jitsu, or by the state Daoism of Han Fei Zi. But while Lao Zi sees the mechanisms of magical activity, he is not interested in applying this knowledge in a narrow or onesided way. His greatness consists in penetrating to the final unity of the cosmos, whose silent calmness no longer contains opposites that can be exploited for one purpose or another. Here we see the difference between his way and the way of knowledge. Knowledge goes further and further out into the world, seeks and searches, and piles up more and more facts. But in order to attain DAO one must penetrate deeper and deeper into the 'within', until one reaches the point of unity where the individual personality is in touch with cosmic totality. From this point of unity a view of the great essence becomes possible. Without going out of doors one can perceive the world. Without looking out of the window one can see the DAO of Heaven. Whoever has this standpoint does not wander about, and yet he reaches his goal. He looks for nothing and yet is he clear about all things. He does not act and yet he brings about completion. He will lead his life as a personality but the persona, the mask which is the ego, will no longer deceive him. He will play his part like everybody else but will keep himself away from the hustle and bustle of others. For he has become free of delusion, and values nourishment from the great mother alone.

4. WORLDLY WISDOM

This would be the place to talk about Lao Zi's ethics. But ethics in the sense of rational laws, and legislation for correct action are not to be found in the Dao De Jing. On the contrary, Lao Zi turns against morality and against preached moral virtues, just as he turns against culture (or 'civilisation') and the values it cherishes. In his view, morality and culture are closely related to one another. Every culture is based on a certain morality. Like culture, morality deviates from the maternal grounds of the

natural, and for this he condemns them. This condemnation is aphoristic, often expressed in paradoxical phrases - rather like Nietzsche's attacks on morals - and this means it is not easy to follow a consistent line in Lao Zi's position. For he is a Proteus who eludes our crude grasp by continuous transformation. He gives us few words that can be understood in a literal sense, as expressing his cut and dried convictions. Lao Zi did not write for philistines, and it even seems as though he secretly enjoyed it when philistines laughed at him.

By tracing the reasons which led him to condemn what was in his own time, aimed as 'morality', at directing the actions of men, we will find the ways which Lao Zi points out for men's correct action opening up before us. He traces ethics back from duty to Nature, from man to DAO, from the artificial to the self-evident and simple. The first reason he condemns morality is on account of the formal principle that morality commands and gives orders. It uses the words 'Thou shalt'. It needs laws and yardsticks. But with laws and yardsticks one achieves the opposite of what one wants. The more the laws glitter, and the more the cumbersome 'Thou shalt' is spread about, the more thieves and robbers there will be; for it is a law of human nature to resist all coercion. And so morality is the most paltry and superficial of all motivations held up to men. Morals fight with a blunt sword and achieve the opposite of what is really wanted. Waving one's arms about and resorting to force does not sustain morality either. Morality lacks the grace of self-evidence. Thus one finds that morality flourishes especially in times of decline. When men are no longer naturally kind to one another, morality blossoms. When kinfolk are disunited, filial duty and love will be the supreme virtues. When disorder and confusion reign in the state there will be faithful servants. For only then do these things become special; before this they are not even mentioned. In this way morality always requires the foil of its opposite in order to shine. Its brightness only reveals itself in exceptional circumstances; and just because of this it also condemns itself.

However, it is not only the formal principle of the 'Thou shalt', of the law, which Lao Zi turns against. He also attacks the principal content of morality, the ideal of the 'good' and the 'virtues'. The good is not something absolute: it is always part of a mutually complementing pair of opposites. Just as there is no light without shadow so there is no good without evil. If all men affirm the good as good, then evil is thereby already posited. The opposition between good and evil is no more crucial than the one between the friendly affirmation 'certainly' and the hesitant affirmation 'probably'. Lao Zi resolutely takes his standpoint beyond good and evil. The absolute is beyond such worldly opposites; it is where opposites are joined to produce a higher unity.

What is more, there is no universal agreement about what is good and what is evil. These are different things at different times and in different places. Here we may remind ourselves of the reported conversations between Lao Zi and Confucius, for the remarks attributed to Lao Zi in that context are quite in line with his expositions in the Dao De Jing. In these discussions he speaks of morality and customs as simply relics from times past, and says that the spirit of the ages is something unique which transforms itself continually, and which disappears irretrievably once the rulers who created those customs are dead and gone. The customs and laws of the rulers of antiquity were not great because they were congruent with one another, but because they brought about order- just as different fruits may taste quite different, and yet all taste good. Customs and laws must both be adapted to the

particular times, and continually changed. Morality is therefore something that is conditioned, not something absolute.

The greatest fault of all morals is that they make man too conscious and too goal-orientated. They are therefore something that takes away his capacity for harmlessness and simplicity. Lao Zi expects a whole range of ill effects to result from this. Whoever cherishes Life does not act and has no designs or schemes. Whoever cherishes love acts but has no designs. Whoever cherishes justice acts and has designs. Whoever cherishes morals acts and if he receives no response waves his arms about and resorts to force, in order to subject men to a system of morals. And so morals are paltry versions of faith and trust and the source of confusion, and designs are the sham of DAO and the beginning of folly. Morals - and culture too - are a symptom of decay, a deviation from the genuine, matter-of-course life of Nature.

Morality therefore makes man unnatural and artificial. He has to force himself in all kinds of ways, and cannot live his life in a natural way. He is pompous and affected, and stands on tip-toe. One cannot progress in this manner. The more self-confidence such a man has, the more loathsome and hypocritical he becomes. For DAO he is like the useless waste one throws out of one's kitchen or a festering boil, and all creatures hate him. Morality is simply a means of making most men feel self-important, so that they enjoy shining before other men. These mass-men feel clever and wise; dressed in the scanty mantle of their morality they are in high spirits, and feel only spite and condemnation for outsiders.

Lao Zi represents a turning point in the history of Chinese thought. He dissolved the laws, and placed ethics on a completely new basis. Confucius completely adopted Lao Zi's principal standpoint: for non-action, that is, not acting in accordance with laws and commandments, was also his ideal. For him too the natural, the instinctive, is the highest value. Only his method is different; and in his system the various concepts are ranked quite differently. Whereas for Lao Zi custom is a despicable exterior husk, for Confucius it is the means by which the individual can be led towards the good; and man's proper place within the organic context of mankind is provided by the subtle force of tradition, public opinion and fashion. Confucius also values the natural very highly; however, for him the natural is not the opposite but the harmonious complement of the human. Where Lao Zi separates nature and culture, Confucius unites them.

If we now ask the question 'How is man to find his position in the great context of nature?', we will begin to understand one of the most important concepts of the Dao De Jing - though it is still not as important as the concept of DAO itself. This is the concept of DE. The term DE stands at the beginning of section 38, a section which marks the beginning of the second part of Lao Zi's work. As we have already seen, this is one of the reasons the text has been called the Dao De Jing. Lao Zi gave the term DE a meaning quite different from the one it otherwise had in the Chinese language. The word is made up of the conceptual images of 'straightness' and 'heart', and originally meant 'that which proceeds straight from the heart' - the original life-force. In Chinese commentaries it is defined as 'that which beings receive in order to live'. For Lao Zi it is therefore 'life in its original force', flowing from DAO. DAO is the universal principle, DE refers to 'limitation'. It is the part which the individual has in DAO. This relationship is rather like certain Indian meditations on Brahman as the root of the world,

and Atman as the root of the individual being, which is at the same time identical with the root of the world. For Lao Zi the word DE means something spontaneous, original or primal, that which is timeless and infinite in every individual living being. The Chinese language of later times, however, particularly in non-Daoist usage, has applied it far more abstractly. In these later times, it has come to signify 'the quality of something', and can be good or evil; it also means 'character that is to be fostered'; 'good character', 'virtuous conduct', and 'virtue'. DAO and DE have also often been translated as 'way' and 'virtue', in conjunction with the Confucian concepts of love and justice (ren and yi). No special emphasis is needed to show that the gradual trivialisation of the term (rather like the history of the German word for 'virtue') is absent from Lao Zi's use of it. I have therefore translated the word as 'Life'.

Life, in its highest manifestation, appears in the form of an individual personality; but the personality is, in a manner of speaking, only the vessel whose content is DAO. It wants nothing for itself, it does not even know itself. It does not act, has no goals and no designs; and just because of this, it lives. As soon as this unconsciousness is sullied or spoiled, the gradual downward path begins. The first step is towards love of one's fellow man, as yet with no goals or designs, 'not wanting anything', but nevertheless acting and being effective. The next step is towards justice, which means acting upon the principle *do ut des* and with goals and designs. The final step is morality: here one acts and if no one responds one waves one's arms about and resorts to force in order to subject men to a system of morality. Men, too, correspond to these levels: the lowest among men hardly know that the highest exist; the next ones down they love; the next ones further down they fear; and the next ones down from them they despise. Life, however, has no need to hanker after recognition. It is recognised without any fuss, for it engenders, nourishes, increases, fosters, completes, keeps and protects all beings. It creates without taking possession; it is effective without holding on to anything; it fosters without dominating: herein lies the secret of Life.

This Life is beyond the opposites of the phenomenal world, and unites them. Strong and glorious in itself, it remains calm in weakness or shame, without trying to work its way out of these. Its unrestricted effect springs from just this contrast between the treasure itself and the lowly garment of the treasure's bearer. And because of this it retains its accumulated force, which would otherwise be consumed in one-sided striving. This force renews itself all the time. While it does not provoke any resistance, it is nevertheless always capable of performing whatever activity any given moment requires. Whoever holds Life in hand in this way is like an infant who faces even the greatest perils without guile and safe in itself, and sustains even the greatest effort without tiring. Therefore whoever has this Life has no egotism, desires nothing for himself. He has no heart of his own but makes the heart of the people his heart. In other words he does to people not only what he wants them to do to him, but what the people wish him to do to them. His life is so powerful that before it all earthly opposites disappear. To good men he is good; and to non-good men he is also good: for Life is goodness. For him there are no 'lost causes' among men. Good men are important to him as teachers, evil men as those who are to be taught, so that he has use for both and can treat each on his own terms. Although Life is individual in appearance, it is not limited to the individual. That which lives in me also lives in others. Thus I can see and understand others out of my own person, family, region, country

and realm. This approach, in which one draws conclusions about others from oneself is also important in Confucianism. Lao Zi, however, takes it even further than the Confucians do. Where Confucius holds that one must respond to life with life, and to anger with correctness, Lao Zi says: 'Respond to anger with Life.' And he gives his reasons: 'If great anger is resolved there still remains a residue of anger.' As soon as the person who is offended takes his revenge, the burden of guilt shifts, in a manner of speaking, from the shoulders of the offender to the shoulders of the offended. Therefore the Man of Calling who knows Life takes upon himself the whole burden of duty - without burdening the other person. This, of course, requires strength: only the man who is bound up with Life will have shoulders strong enough to allow him to take the whole burden of duty upon himself and demand nothing of the other. Whoever does not have this Life insists on keeping up appearances, and puts the onus on the other in every case.

Through this non-quarrelling, Life continually gains new strength for it does not use up its strength in fighting against alien things which disturb it. To non-quarrelling belongs non-action. Life grows but it does nothing. 'Doing', 'consciously influencing events', 'efforts of will' - whatever the struggle of the world of appearances, the surface world of consciousness, may be called, all these only defuse states of tension in the short term. If one has ten goals per day and achieves all ten goals, one will exhaust oneself in the pettiness of daily routine, and will have no depth. The cosmic powers that are at every man's disposal are used up in all the unimportant movements which lead from birth to growing strength, and from there to rigidity and ultimately death. 'Wriggling about, growing stiff, and getting stuck in shallow meaninglessness' - this is the fate of the 'doers'. But Life itself does nothing, and yet nothing remains not done. For by relaxing and allowing itself to be permeated by DAO, Life develops limitlessly and reaches into the mysterious cosmic depths.

This produces a very definite attitude to things and events in man. He stands back, remains below, is content, humble, simple, modest. This weakness and softness is true strength, for it is the quality of all Life. What is hard and rigid is given over to death; what is soft and weak belongs to Life. Therefore does Lao Zi say about his three treasures: 'The first is called kindness; the second is called modesty; the third is called "Not daring to stand out in front in the world": for through kindness one can be brave, through modesty magnanimous, and through not daring to stand out in front one can be the leader of the skilled, and the specialists among men.'

This standing back in modesty confers that 'limitation' upon outward behaviour which saves time and energy. Whoever practises this 'limitation' need not expend time and energy unnecessarily. Therefore he will always have the time and energy at his disposal to tackle tasks in good time, when the seeds of future events have not yet entered the phenomenal world. He plans the difficult while it is still easy; and he works upon that which has not yet entered into appearance. This working in good time - a common feature in the philosophies of both Confucius and Lao Zi - is the secret of success. Men usually approach things when they are nearly completed, and in this way spoil everything. But the man who saves energy and time heaps up Life twofold; therefore there is nothing he can not deal with, and men do not know his limits. And just through this, he can have an effect upon them and possess the nourishing and stimulating powers they need.

The man who is permeated by the powers of the secret Life is the Man of Calling. The concept of a Man of Calling (sheng ren) is one that is shared both by Confucius and Lao Zi. This is the man whose mind is open to cosmic events and their laws. Whatever he experiences in the mysterious depths of his superconscious, life permeates all he does. This living experience confers magic upon his language and thought. Through his relatedness to the DAO of the world, the Man of Calling has the power to shape the world. But for this very reason he appears to stand back. For it is from this secret, in its seclusion, that the supernatural powers of essence flow.

Seen from this point of view the personal life of Lao Zi becomes clear. On the one hand he was a mystic, who expanded his Self so that it became the Self of the world, and who had had the great 'sight' of unity. From this sight the cloud-formations of his words were born, in constant flow like the ring of clouds that carried Faust over the abysses: they transform themselves into idealised forms, now of Helen of Troy, now of Gretchen. But Lao Zi is also a magician. Few have looked as deeply as he did into the weaving of universal forces, and revealed the principle by which one can have these forces at one's disposal provided, of course, that one has learned to renounce one's ego, for it would be in dreadful danger once these forces were unleashed.

Comparison with Faust is both obvious and useful. Faust too makes a false start by trying to lay direct hold of what is beyond reach, by seeking to attain the unattainable. Catastrophe results; and only then is the two-fold way leading upwards unveiled to us: on the one hand, pure contemplation of the perceptibly beautiful, the way of affirmation of this world; on the other hand, the way of action stemming from inner experience. This too proves a dead end, but even in physical blindness Faust is vouchsafed a vision of the eternal female that 'leads us ever upwards', the way leading to the world beyond. When Faust yokes and utilises the satanic powers, his actions, gross and temporal, are those of the Titan of the West. Lao Zi's supra-sensual action is that of one who hearkens to Nature in her secret workings, one who can create without tools: it is the 'action' of the magician of the East.

5. STATE AND SOCIETY

Among the most radical of Lao Zi's statements are those sections in the Dao De Jing in which he criticises contemporary political and social conditions. Here he pursues the revolutionary current of the preceding centuries. 'The people are hungry because the upper classes devour too much in tax revenue: for this reason the people go hungry. The people are difficult to lead because the upper classes want to interfere too much: for this reason the people are difficult to lead. The people take death too lightly because the high and mighty seek too luxurious a life: for this reason the people take death so lightly.' With these words Lao Zi criticises the conditions in the state and society of his time. If it is really the case that people face death regardless of whether they do their work peacefully or whether they rise up in dangerous revolt, then they will not of course be worried about dying, and will choose the shorter way to destruction. As it is said in the Book of Songs: 'Had I known that this would be my lot, better that I had never been born.'

According to Lao Zi the reason such conditions arise in a state is that government meddles too much in the affairs of the citizens. The more things there are to avoid, the poorer people become; the more laws and decrees, the more thieves and robbers there will be. For all this meddling by government in

the private lives of individuals brings about unrest and causes a great deal of damage. It is absolutely impossible to improve conditions by means of compulsion and brute force. The tortured populace will meet brute force with passive resistance and, ultimately, with revolution. Meanwhile, everything may well look as though it is flourishing. But this kind of flourishing carries the seed of decay within itself. The great boulevards may be beautiful and smooth, but the people take the side roads. The court may be rich and glittering, but weeds grow in the fields and the barns are empty. The garments of the upper classes are rich and beautiful, and everyone carries a rapier. Eating and drinking habits become refined. Goods abound. Where DAO should rule the land, robbers rule. However, inevitably, counter-DAO soon comes to an end.

Even outstanding individuals are unable to help in these circumstances. Confucius takes the same view. For him too it is a hopeless undertaking to try and create order by force and by law. Confucius is also against the lifelessness of public institutions and state interference in private affairs. But from this point onwards, the two philosophers hold characteristically different views. For Confucius culture, as such, is something precious. It is important for him to keep culture alive, to strengthen the forces that sustain and enliven the cultural organism and to fend off the forces which disturb, mechanise, profane and thereby destroy it. Therefore Confucius constructs a system of tensions and relationships. 'High and low', as the principle of social order, must be strengthened by custom and morality. Relationships must be arranged in such a way that everybody is in one respect an authority - even if only in the family circle - while in another respect he is subject to an authority above him. This explains why Confucius places such importance on morality. For him these relationships of tension are only the sources of power for the regulation of society. The upper classes have, in any case, higher duties, and are responsible for the influence they exercise through the force of example and inner attitude. This influence must be made possible: hence the social order. This influence must be exercised: hence the responsibility of the leaders.

Lao Zi is much more radical in this respect. For him culture and the edifice of the state have no value of their own. They function best if and when they are not noticeable at all. When a truly great man rules, people hardly know he exists. Works are accomplished, jobs are done, and all the people think of themselves as free. Thus freedom, self-reliance, is the fundamental principle of Lao Zi's order of the state. Letting people have their way, letting them do things, non-interference, non-governing: this is the highest goal. For if nothing is 'done', everything will be done of its own accord. Thus non-action is Lao Zi's fundamental principle. The reforms he suggests are, in the first place, purely negative: everything that is praised as morals and culture, conventional saintliness, knowledge, morality, duty, art and profit - is to be thrown overboard forthwith. For these are nothing but illusion, nothing but names invented by men and then held in high esteem, arrangements which everybody praises but which no longer represent any reality. This whole system of conventional lies produces nothing but sham, designed to obscure a bleak and desolate reality. All evil comes from a pathological overgrowth of knowledge. For, as we have already seen, a knowledge of 'names' represents things that do not exist. This arouses desire. The more difficult it is to obtain the things that have come to be known and respected in this way, the fiercer desire becomes. Next, men begin to fight for these things and robbery, theft, and murder follow. It is fantasy that deludes men: colours, sounds, tastes, games, rare

treasures - all these blinding appearances drag men's hearts away from the true depths of reality, and are the source of selfishness and delusion.

Therefore, if one genuinely wants to improve conditions, one must eradicate delusion. But delusion among the people can only be eradicated if the leaders take the lead in this: by not cherishing goods that are difficult to obtain, by being plain in their own requirements, by avoiding pomp, ceremony and all haughtiness, and by carrying themselves humbly and quietly among the people - in other words, by ignoring their ego and, in a sense, disappearing from the surface, so that they can be all the more comprehensively effective in their relationship with the forces of the deep. And so if the leaders of society were to put away what is distant and illusory and hold on to what is near and real it would be an easy matter to set the people aright. If one's goal is power and wealth, then of course one must foster enlightenment and knowledge among the people; then of course one will need all kinds of tools and machines to produce the goods - the profusion of which will benefit the upper classes alone. These means of 'improvement', machines and weapons (Lao Zi calls them collectively 'sharp implements') are, however, the harbingers of disorder. For this reason they must not be used. The path that Lao Zi points leads back from civilisation to Nature, from the 'enlightenment' of the people to simplicity. Wherever desires are aroused, wherever knowledge raises its head, they must be quelled by unutterable simplicity. And those who have knowledge must be prevented from achieving prominence. However, this idyll of a calm people living in peace with Nature must be complemented with a care for their well-being. The people will avoid the delusions of fantasy of their own volition provided their physical circumstances are satisfactory. A wise government therefore looks after the people's well-being, and ensures that their food is healthy and plentiful, their dwellings are calm and peaceful, and their lives cheerful and happy. The Man of Calling cares for the people's bellies, makes sure that they are well-fed and have strong bones. Only then will their hearts become empty, that is, free of desire and dissatisfaction.

A great realm must be led in the same way as one fries small fish: one must not remove the scales; one must not shake them; one must treat them with tenderness and calm. In this way Men will once again find their place in the peaceful state of Nature from which they have been torn by delusion.

These thoughts of Lao Zi have always played an important part in Chinese intellectual and spiritual life during times of political upheaval and social unrest. 'The Well in the Peach-Blossom Forest' of the poet Tao Yuan-Ming depicts a Utopian land, deep inside a mountain cave at the end of the world, which has always been free of the storms and ravages of the world, and has preserved its idyllic calm (see note to section 80, p. 142); and ever since, people have longed for this country in times of turmoil. Nevertheless, at this point Lao Zi is faced with a severe problem. A return to Nature is very impressive as a sentimental construct of the imagination. But is it possible? To be sure, it was possible in Lao Zi's own time, when China was a relatively sparsely populated agricultural country. At that time it was considered a blessing if a state had a large population, and the ability to attract as many immigrants as possible from neighbouring states by means of its own well-ordered conditions. Things are different when the population increases beyond a certain point, and this creates demands on the production of the means of existence which can no longer be satisfied by primitive forms of craft or agriculture. Lao Zi does not suggest that man should return to Nature so that he would have to live from hand to mouth

like an animal. He does, however, want man to be placed in an environment which he can control, and in which he can dwell calmly and contentedly, without losing his connection with the providing forces of the universe by chasing after unattainable things.

Seen from this angle, we can discover in Lao Zi's teaching a point of view that can be freely applied at any period in time, and in all possible economic circumstances. The decisive element is that men must always dominate the means that sustain their lives, and must not bury or block the sources of life in order to survive in the physical world. It is therefore perfectly possible to think, in the spirit of Lao Zi, of a machine culture in which machinery is handled in as matter-of-fact a way as agricultural implements were in ancient times; a society in which men can live in peace and security as the calm masters, and not the slaves of their machines. For the only devices Lao Zi condemns are the 'sharp implements', that is, things which are not mastered in such a way as to leave the mind completely free. It must, however, be emphasised here that Lao Zi did not pronounce these thoughts himself. His ideal is exclusively an idyllic existence of a primitive kind. Yet the thoughts just mentioned are distinctly in line with the ideals he stood for; for it is one of Lao Zi's convictions that the ideal of one era can in no way be a yardstick for another, and that every age must find its own means of living in a balanced and harmonious way.

The section which deals with transcendental forces is of particular interest. In complete harmony with his own times, Lao Zi assumes the existence of such forces, which, ringing out from the past, dominate and excite men as 'collective souls'. A true government also approaches this in a peaceable manner.

The souls of the departed do not wander about as ghosts, that is their power does not harm men, does not cause division and partisanship. The residues of the past do not cause men to fight with one another, whether on religious or partisan grounds, and men face one another without harm.

Lao Zi pays equal attention to the organisation of social life, and to the shaping of political relations between different states. Like Confucius he assumes a hierarchic order of organisms. In the Confucian Great Learning (Da Xue) these are: person, family, state, mankind. Lao Zi adds one intermediate level: person, family, community, state, mankind. For him, therefore, the state is not the ultimate level, but a necessarily corporate part of mankind. Within mankind individual states are related to one another like the individual communities within a state. From this he draws a direct conclusion: absolute condemnation of any war of aggression.

Even the most beautiful weapons are instruments of doom, not instruments for the noble. The noble man uses them only if there is no alternative. Calmness and peace are his highest values. He is victorious but he does not rejoice in victory. Whoever would rejoice in victory would rejoice in the murder of men. Lao Zi looked deeply into the anatomy of war. He knew that wars do not begin with the declaration of war, and nor do they end with a peace treaty. He also knew that wars should be avoided before they even begin - not by means of a frantic build-up of arms, but by the removal of the causes of a possible war. He knew that one must bear the consequences after the fighting has ended. For where soldiers have passed thorns and thistles grow. Where great armies have been, bad times are certain to come. Therefore when order reigns on earth, racehorses are used to cart manure. When order is absent from the earth war-horses are bred in the fields outside the capital. In Lao Zi's view, war is permissible only in defence against an enemy's attack. Even in this case, one should only seek a

decision, nothing more. For only by such restraint, which avoids the swing of the pendulum in the opposite direction, can peace be created. Lao Zi uses this principle of conducting war, which wins victory by retreat, as a parable for the right kind of action in other areas as well. However the clues given in these parables have subsequently been elaborated into a system for warfare which achieved a great deal of fame in China.

In Lao Zi's view, wars can be avoided through a correct relationship between states. Not surprisingly, he condemns all desire for conquest: for all conquest is based on an essential error, and lasting power has never been created by conquest. The purpose of the state is much rather - in fact, only - to enable the people who live within its borders to live their lives. Lao Zi's guidelines for communication between nations develop out of this principle. In his view, there are two forms of state: the male and the female. The female form of state is the one which keeps still, 'keeps itself below', and is 'saturated'. If these states understand their task correctly, they can be the means for the unification of the world; for the female wins victory over the male by its stillness. This process of mutual assimilation does, of course, also depend on the male states, that is, the small and active ones. The principle of fostering only genuine requirements, without hollow glory or a loud-mouthed appetite for conquest, applies to them too. These small states do, however, need expansion. This can be achieved just as well by coming together in peaceful union as it can be by war and subjection.

Most important of all are the attitudes and actions of the great realm or empire. It must 'keep itself below'. It will win smaller states over by uniting and nourishing them. To some extent China has proved this truth time and time again, throughout its history. Up till now [1910] it has assimilated every one of the aggressive, conquest-minded tribes which penetrated it from the periphery, through sheer size and 'stillness'. Obviously, Lao Zi's way of looking at things is fundamentally different from what has emerged in Western history. In the West nationalism and imperialism set the key notes. There was a similar phase in the East, just during Lao Zi's own time. The state of Qin Shi Huang Di was the prime example of this kind of political formation. But Lao Zi's thoughts have found their way into Chinese politics so that nowadays mankind has rather more ambivalent views on the subject. It is interesting to observe how the battle of ideas is being lived out in our time. The spirit of the West no longer simply knocks on China's doors from the outside; instead China itself has become the battleground for a confrontation between the different views of life.

6. DAOISM AFTER LAO ZI

Lao Zi's work has had an enormous influence on Chinese philosophy and on Chinese life. This influence did not come about all at once, but developed and increased gradually. An exposition of some of Lao Zi's views can already be found in the Analects of Confucius, in part agreeing with them, in part modifying them. Meng Zi, a representative of Confucianism at the end of the fourth century BC, does not mention Lao Zi anywhere, although he is critical of several of his successors. It is only in the collection of writings about the customs which originated in the time of the Han dynasty - but which can in fact be traced back to much older sources of various ages - that Lao Zi is mentioned several times as a man from whom Confucius took advice.

In spite of the fact that there are so few direct references to him, we find that Lao Zi's teaching did have a growing influence on the formation of Confucian thinking and teaching. In *The Great Learning* and in *Measure and Mean* (both of which, according to tradition, are earlier than Meng Zi, even though modern Chinese research dates them as later than that) one finds the metaphysical foundation of a Confucian social structure which gives glimpses in many places of an intellectual dialogue with Lao Zi. As for Daoist literature, there are works by alleged disciples of Lao Zi, like the one by the gatekeeper of the Xian Gu mountain pass, Guan Yin Xi, to whom Lao Zi is said to have left the Dao De Jing. However, these works are almost certainly products of a later era, as are many writings - some in the form of Buddhist sutras, for example - which mention Lao Zi or Lao Hun, or Tai Shang Lao Jun as he was called in later times, as their originator.

We must not, however, consider Lao Zi in isolation. He belongs among the 'hidden sages' who played such an important part in Confucius's later life. In those circles views like Lao Zi's were fairly common. But this is not the first time that these thoughts appeared. They are secret teachings that have been handed down from ancient times. This is borne out by the later saga which praises 'the Yellow Emperor' (Huang Di) as the founder of Daoist views. We have already pointed out that there are quotations from these older adages in the Dao De Jing. In some cases, their names are the only traces left of these sages, as for instance the master Hu Kin Lin, or his disciple Po Hun Wu-Jen. In others, legend provides us with some details, in particular about Lie Yu-Kou, from who we have a work in eight volumes under the name of Lie Zi. This man is also specifically mentioned by the philosopher Zhuang Zi (c. 335-275 BC), not as a legendary figure but as a real person who had, however, been so magnified by legend that supernatural and miraculous powers were attributed to him.

It would be very pleasing if we did have an authentic work from the fourth or fifth century BC before us in the work of Lie Zi. However this is not the case. We cannot date the compilation of this book any earlier than the fourth century AD. Nevertheless, the book is based on older material. Lie Zi develops Lao Zi's teaching by giving it a stronger metaphysical emphasis. His thinking deals with the antinomies of space and time, with the evolutionary problems of various species of living beings, and with several similar issues. Its naturalism is, however, more pronounced and narrowly applied than the Dao De Jing. DAO is increasingly presented as a metaphysical substance which brings about all becoming and passing away, and which projects itself into the phenomenal world without itself ever becoming phenomenal. It is characteristic that many stories are told in the form of parables; some of these are miracle stories, designed to show the power of a practice of yoga which is directed towards unification. In Lie Zi we find the magical element being developed side by side with the mystical. Yang Zhu, however, is a historical personality. At the time of the Confucian Meng Zi his teaching had already attracted such a circle of disciples and followers that Meng Zi counted him among his main adversaries. He attacked Yang Zhu for his egotistical views which, he thought, rejected and dissolved all relations in the state and between states. He would not give a hair from his head to benefit the world: this showed a selfishness which made it impossible for men to live together. However, we do not learn from Meng Zi what the real attraction in the teaching of Yang Zhu was, for he had almost as many followers as Confucius and Mo Di (the third great philosopher besides Lao Zi and Confucius in the sixth century BC). But in the book of Lie Zi we have an exposition of the teaching of Yang Zhu

which is a welcome complement to Meng Zi's account. According to Lie Zi, Yang Zhu was a disciple of Lao Zi who had not fully understood the latter's teaching but had developed it in a one-sided manner. In this respect Lao Zi suffered much the same fate as Confucius. Just as the teachings of Confucius were at first turned by the main branch of his school into a one-sided and more or less narrow-minded ritualism, so Lao Zi's teaching was turned into a one-sided and thus restricted naturalism. In Zhuang Zi we find a tale (book VII, 4) in which Yang Zhu seeks instruction from Lao Zi. He asks whether a man who is keen and strong, who has penetrating powers of reasoning and an ever-present sense of clarity, who is untiring in his search for DAO - whether such a man could be put on the same level as the wise kings of ancient times. Lao Zi rebukes him in rather rough terms, and then continues: 'The works of the wise kings were such that they filled the whole world with them, and yet it did not look as if they came from them. They formed all beings and gave them presents, and the people were not aware of it. They stood in the immeasurable and walked in non-existence.'

Here we see Yang Zhu as a disciple of Lao Zi. But we also see a deviation from Lao Zi's true standpoint in his essentially intellectual approach. This manner suits the stories and speeches that are recounted in the seventh book of Lie Zi very well. These passages reveal him to be a ruthlessly sharp-witted thinker. He profiles Lao Zi's views on letting-go and non-action, in other words the complete assimilation of man into the context of Nature. But he lacks Lao Zi's kindness and breadth, and therefore his views appear extreme. All activity is rejected. A pessimistic fatalism pours a caustic fluid over the whole of life. The strongly-flavoured libation leaves a bitter after-taste. Everything is totally vain. Good and evil are completely unimportant, as are all other differences between men. It goes without saying that from his point of view everything to do with life in society is absurd, that every attempt to organise the state or even participate in public life must be rejected from the outset. Consistent egotism, fatalism and pessimism are all that remains for him of Lao Zi's rich world. But it is understandable that it was precisely the extremism and frivolity of his views that found acclaim and became fashionable among a drowning generation. There is no doubt that Yang Zhu has been effective as a dissolving agent in the Chinese thought of that time because of his freedom from all ties. One understands how Meng Zi saw a creeping poison in his views, one which had to be eliminated if mankind was not to disintegrate.

It is Zhuang Zi, a younger contemporary of Meng Zi, who really brought Lao Zi's teaching into Chinese philosophy. Zhuang Zi is a splendid figure in Chinese intellectual and spiritual life. He is the poet among Chinese philosophers of the fourth century BC, and his influence on later poetry in the south of China has been as strong as it has on subsequent philosophy. Hardly anything is known about his life. The few biographical features that one can gather from his work tell us no more than that he led an essentially inner life while living in outward poverty. He consistently rejected invitations from princes to join their courts as an adviser, and turned away the messengers who brought him these propositions rather roughly. On the other hand he did not withdraw from the world, but lived as the head of a family under rather constrained conditions, and not without occasional financial difficulties. He was quite definitely in touch with the intellectual currents of his time. He was in contact with the Confucian school, although not with its orthodox branch but with another group which has made important contributions to Confucian tradition. He had the greatest respect for Confucius the Master,

particularly after the great turning point Confucius experienced in his sixtieth year; and we learn much that is of great value from Zhuang Zi about this intellectual and spiritual turning point. Zhuang Zi also had connections with the philosopher Hui Shi, who made a name for himself as a dialectician and politician. Hui Shi seems to have been close to the so-called 'school of sophists' in central China. Nothing of importance has been preserved from his rather numerous writings. But from Zhuang Zi we learn quite a bit about his views. He seems to have devoted himself mainly to logical distinctions. Zhuang Zi had many disputations with him, probably more as an exercise in dialectics than in the hope of converting him.

But of all these links and associations with other philosophers - links not without influence on Zhuang Zi's thinking - the influence of Lao Zi stands out above all others. Zhuang Zi puts forward not only a Daoist worldly wisdom but a true Daoist philosophy. His fundamental philosophical views are found in the first seven books of his writings, the so-called 'inner section'; the rest are subsidiary and supplementary. The first book is called 'Walking in leisure'. It is an exposition of the whole work. Earthly life with its fates and influences is compared to a small quail darting through the brushwood, while 'Life', in blessed serenity is free of all pettiness. It is also compared to the great bird Peng whose wings appear like hanging clouds in the sky when it begins its flight from the southern to the northern ocean. The second book, 'On the balancing of world views', is of particular importance. Here Zhuang Zi offers solutions to contemporary controversies from the Daoist point of view. His time was one of a great battle of ideas. The ancient, religiously founded world view had collapsed long ago. All kinds of ideas, often diametrically opposed to each other, had arisen in its place, and confronted one another in a dialectical battle. Taking the line of the Dao De Jing, Zhuang Zi realised the inevitably conditioned limits of all these opposing views, fighting battles of logic with one another. None of these views would be proved right. Zhuang Zi found a way out of this by switching from disputation to intuition, whereby a unified view of essence is achieved. This second book begins with a great rhapsody on the music of the heavenly organ; and ends with the enigmatic parable of the dream of the butterfly, in which life and dream confront one another as two different realms, and no one can say which is real and which is unreal. In his third book he offers a practical application of his insight. The task is to find the Lord of Life; not to strive for a particular individual situation but to follow the main arteries of life, and be content with the external situation one is in. For it is not a change of external conditions that can save us, but a different attitude to existing conditions of life as derived from DAO. This gives us access to a world beyond differences.

The subject of Zhuang Zi's fourth book is the world of men in society rather than of individual human life. It shows the way in which one can be effective in the social and political world. Here too it is important to maintain a comprehensive standpoint, and not tie oneself up in 'expertise'. 'Expertise' or specialisation can be useful, but this very usefulness can cause one to be used. One can become caught in the web of the phenomenal world, like a wheel in the large machinery of society, but precisely because of this, one becomes a 'professional', a one-sided expert, while the 'unusable' man, who stands above all opposites, thereby saves his life.

His fifth book deals with the 'Seal of complete life'. It shows in several parables how an inner connection with DAO provides a true life without designs, and exercises an inner influence upon Men

before which all external insufficiencies must vanish. He relates stories of cripples and men of extreme ugliness who demonstrate this truth most clearly contrary to external appearances. The contrast between this inner resource or treasure and the sack-cloth garment of outward appearance is thus brought all the more clearly into focus. This is a feature of Daoism which has given it a somewhat paradoxical quality even in later times. This theme can also be traced in fairy tales where a powerful magician or a saving god appears as a beggar clothed in rags, derelict and covered in dust on some street corner. It is easy to see that this view bears a certain resemblance to the Christian 'scandal of the cross'. For in Christianity too, humility and self-denial are shown as the way to elevation and blessedness. However, there is also a great difference between the two. In Christian terms this elevation, glory and blessedness, the one side of the paradox, is the goal that is longed for. Suffering and lowliness are only the means towards this end. Christianity tends to see the path of suffering within the short span of our time on earth as the purchase price for a glory beyond measure, and of unlimited duration. For Daoism, however, lowliness or ugliness is no longer something that must be suffered. It is not a state one would wish to exchange for another. Instead, once a man has attained the comprehensive view of essence, he is beyond the opposites of happiness and unhappiness, life and death altogether, none of which come anywhere near Dao. For these opposites are equally necessary links in an eternally transforming cycle. It would be wrong to exclude any one pole permanently and eternalise its opposite. In the first place this would be impossible, and in the second it would mean that one would still be beholden to the phenomenal world.

When Hui Shi asked Zhuang Zi whether there really were men without human feelings, the latter answered with an unconditional 'Yes'. Hui Shi-then said: 'Such a man without human feelings cannot be called a man.' Zhuang Zi replied: 'Since the eternal Dao of Heaven has given him human form it must be possible to call him a man.' Thereupon Hui Shi: 'But feelings are part of the concept of "man".' Zhuang Zi replied: 'These are not the feelings I have in mind. When I say that someone is without feelings I mean that such a man does not harm his inner essence by inclinations and disinclinations. He follows Nature in all things and does not actively seek to increase his life.' Then Hui Shi asked: 'If he does not actively seek to increase his life, how can his essence persist?' And Zhuang Zi replied: 'The eternal DAO of Heaven has given him his form, and he does not harm his inner essence by inclinations and disinclinations. But you occupy your mind with things that are outside it and vainly engage your life forces . . . Heaven has given you your physical form, and you know nothing better than to repeat your sophistries.' (Book V, 6.)

Zhuang Zi's sixth book, 'The Great Ancestor and Master', is also very important. It deals with what happens when men find access to the great ancestor, DAO. 'True men did not fear loneliness. They had accomplished no heroic deeds and made no plans. Therefore they had no reason for regret when they failed and no reason for exultation when they succeeded. Therefore they were able to climb the highest peaks without getting dizzy; they could walk through water without getting wet; they could walk through fire without getting burned. They had no dreams when they slept and no worries when they woke. Their food was simple, and they breathed easily and deeply. They did not know an extreme attachment to life nor fear of death; they did not complain about leaving life, nor rejoice about entering it. They came in serenity, and serene they went. They did not forget their origins and did not strive

towards their end. They took what came to them joyfully and let go whatever went without giving it a further thought. This is called "Not impeding DAO by consciousness, and not trying to help what comes from Heaven by what is human". In this way, even the profoundest issues of suffering and death are treated in the most sovereign manner.

The seventh book, 'For use by kings and princes', is the last in the series, and deals with ruling by non-ruling. It is said there: 'The highest of men uses his heart like a mirror. He does not run after things and does not walk towards them. He mirrors them but does not hold on to them.'

To sum up, then, Zhuang Zi develops Lao Zi's Daoism further, by using its methods in order to solve the philosophical problems of his own time. He clothes Lao Zi's teaching in the brilliant gown of poetic language, and formulates pointed parables which make the ineffable in Daoist concepts shine forth in flashes of lightning. With him the parable joins the paradox to make the ineffable approachable. Therefore in his epilogue he says of his method:

Mostly I offer parables
And many words from old sayings;
From a well-filled cup a daily drink
Just so that eternity's light may play upon it.

He also adheres closely to Lao Zi's thinking about the phenomenal world. He too lives in the depths of DAO, and the phenomenal world is a phantom-like dream to him. It does not matter whether he is Zhuang Zi or a butterfly: one is as much dream existence as the other. He lived his life hidden away, like his master. We do not know whether he had disciples. Nevertheless, it seems that a large part of what has been handed down in his name did not come directly from him, and so it is reasonable to assume that some kind of school existed. In any case, it is clear that he had an enormous influence on philosophy and literature. This is borne out by the fact that the term 'Lao Zhuang' - which combines the names of Zhuang Zi and Lao Zi - is often used to describe Daoist views. (In the same way, Lao Zi's affinity to antiquity is indicated by the term 'Huang Lao', where 'Huang' refers to Huang Di, 'the Yellow Emperor', venerated as the patron saint of Daoism, just as Yao and Shun are the patron saints of Confucianism.) The influence of the poet-philosopher Zhuang Zi is most apparent in the literature of the south. The world view of the poetry of Chu, which has enriched Chinese culture as a new art form from the Yangtse river basin, shows this influence clearly.

A peculiar outgrowth of Daoism can be found in the philosophy of Han Fei Zi. He was a prince from the ruling family of the state of Han, which was in great danger at this time. He tried to get a plan to save his country accepted by his government, but they would not listen to him. He then turned to the state of Qin in the west, which under its ruler Qin Shi Huang Di, had begun to usurp the rule of the whole empire by the destruction of all other states. Li Si was then the all-powerful minister in Qin. Earlier, Han Fei Zi had visited the classes given by the Confucian Xun Qing together with Li Si; the general opinion was that he was the more illustrious of the two friends. It is therefore understandable that the ruler of Qin, who already knew Han Fei Zi from his writings, was happy to make use of him for a time. The part played by Li Si is not quite clear. In any case, Han Fei Zi was imprisoned soon after his arrival in Qin, whether by design or with the acquiescence of Li Si. He committed suicide

there in 233 BC, in order to escape a worse fate. His writings, however, were highly regarded in Qin after his death.

At this time influences from different cultural centres - northern Confucianism, southern Taoism and the central Chinese school of Mo Di - had already begun to merge with one another. A compilation like the Lü-Shi Chun-Qiu (Spring and Autumn Annals of Lü Bu-Wei) shows this new eclecticism at quite an early stage. It was no longer considered important to support one particular school of disputation or another; instead thoughts were taken from here and there according to what had come to common knowledge at the time. Han Fei Zi was not purely eclectic, but took up a unified standpoint which he supported with views from all schools. He took his central theme from the thought of the statesmen of central China. It was thought that order and the government of the state could be achieved through laws and political arrangements. This approach contradicted both Confucianism - which wanted to effect order not through correct laws but through correct men - and Daoism, whose highest aim was that no ordering arrangements should be made at all. The idea of a legal foundation for the state had evolved out of the views of Mo Di, but was also prevalent among the great statesmen of the era. The way in which the Confucian Xun Qing conceives morality as a means for creating order is also similar to this line of thinking. Han Fei Zi took the strong emphasis on authority and the ruler's right from Confucianism, but developed this into a principle of absolute monarchy, stressing the importance of employing competent men. But all these thoughts are wrapped in certain Daoist principles. It is therefore quite understandable that he took to commenting expressly on, and collecting examples of Lao Zi's sayings.

As we have already seen, Lao Zi valued non-action above all as the best way of doing things, and taught that the highest and wisest of rulers were the ones who understood how to stand back to such an extent that the people were hardly aware of their existence. This non-action on the ruler's part is also emphasised by Han Fei Zi. But he imparts a different meaning to it. For Lao Zi non-action is the highest form of action, for through it the nature of the ruler comes into accord with cosmic influences, and in this way secretly co-operates with the necessity of a natural force. According to Lao Zi only an exceptionally great and magnanimous man - one who loves the world in himself - could practise this kind of rule through non-action. Han Fei Zi sees things quite differently. For him non-action is important for the comfort and safety of the ruler. Why should the ruler have to make any effort? All he has to do is choose competent and industrious officials. They will not cease in their efforts to do all the work for him, so that he can enjoy the happiness of his elevated position without having to make any effort himself. 'He does "non-action" and nothing remains not done.' This seems to be quite in accord with Lao Zi - but, of course, it only seems so.

There is yet another point. It is not only more comfortable for the prince to have his officials act for him, it is also safer. For if something goes wrong it will be the responsibility of those who did it, while the monarch himself will remain free of responsibility and in a position to punish his clumsy officials. One could well ask whether this account, which completely excludes the prince from the mechanics of government, is not simply aimed at providing a kind of *dolce vita* for the ruler, so that he will not disturb the business of state by his intervention; yet it becomes clear, in the end, that Han Fei Zi is offering his advice, in the manner of Machiavelli, to princes alone. This follows from the second

principle he propounds. Lao Zi had said that one must not show the realm's sharp implements to the people just as one must not take the fish from the deep. What he meant was that one should keep the people in a state of simplicity and contentment, so that the peace of this great simplicity might not be disturbed by all kinds of political scheming or trickery. Han Fei Zi takes up this principle, but transforms it too, in characteristic manner. In his view, the ruler should always keep his state officials fully occupied and in suspense, without clear definition and in fear about their status, so that every one of them will fulfil his task as perfectly as possible. But he should always keep the final decisions to himself. He should be mysterious and invisible like a god, and unpredictable and sudden in meting out reward and punishment in order to enhance the attitudes which serve his purpose. In this way he keeps reward and punishment, as the levers of power, absolutely in his own hands and uses them to achieve his aims - which he never discloses. The power and terror that result from uncertainty, are the means which Han Fei Zi counsels the prince to use. Here we see Lao Zi's thought already distorted into a system of black magic.

This can also be seen in Han Fei Zi's views on human nature. For Lao Zi the origins of human nature were in harmony with the universe and its laws. Desire alone was the source of all evil, and had to be subdued. For Han Fei Zi, however, desire is the core of human nature. Of course, desire is evil from the beginning. And yet it must be nourished and fostered, for it is the only lever by which the prince can force men into his service. A man who desires nothing, who no longer fears anything, who no longer hopes for anything is useless to the prince; he is even dangerous. The best thing to do with him is to do away with him. All others must be thoroughly mistrusted. A prince must not trust his officials for they are his enemies: only by keeping them in suspense does he make them ready to serve him. But he must not trust his wife and his child either, for they might become tools in the hands of ambitious officials who will use them for their ends. Trust is the root of all evil. One must love men only as a means to an end. One loves a horse because it runs well. A king loves his subjects because they fight for him. One loves a doctor because he heals wounds and stops one losing blood. One must be cautious in one's love. A cartwright wishes people to be rich and refined, not because he does not begrudge them their wealth and refinement, but because he wants to sell them his carriages. A coffin-maker wants people to die not because he hates them, but because otherwise nobody would buy his coffins. In the same way a prince must always remain aware that his offspring will always wish for his death, not because they hate him but because the way that things are, they will benefit from his death. Therefore he must always behave cautiously towards men who would benefit from his death. Han Fei Zi applies these principles cold-bloodedly to all matters of state. He derives an absolutely tyrannical policy of power from them. He allows no firm principles, because whatever benefits the prince in any situation must be done. Ruthless opportunism is the only principle worthy of an unprejudiced ruler. Laws must be strict, and they must function with unfailing certainty, mechanically, like the forces of nature. Only in this way will the prince remain above all responsibility; for it is not he who kills men but they who kill themselves when they get caught between the jaws of an automatically functioning penal machinery. No one should be allowed to be free within the state, except the prince himself. Nor should there be freedom of thought or speech. Only when the inclinations and views of the people are in complete accord with the prince's goals can the prince be

certain of his people. For this reason love and pity on the part of a prince must be condemned, for these would introduce an element into government that would be incompatible with its mechanism. Only if and when that mechanism is flawless can it be truly effective.

Han Fei Zi turned Daoism into something strange and peculiar - although logically one can see how every one of his conclusions could be deduced from the words of Lao Zi. Han Fei Zi was a bold thinker who did not allow the machine-like structure of his thoughts to be disturbed by considerations of kindness, or motives of the heart. As I have already mentioned, this ice-cold consistency is something he has in common with Machiavelli. But it is fitting that this defender and teacher of tyrants of the world should meet his death in prison at the hands of his most eager disciple, Qin Shi Huang Di. His friend and fellow-traveller, Li Si, who helped to bring about his death - not because Han Fei Zi was more humane than Li Si, but because the latter felt that he could apply these principles better alone, as the only servant of his lord and master, rather than in his fellowship with such a competent companion - was himself cut in two not long after this by the son of the prince he had made emperor of the world, in gratitude for services rendered.

From this example, we can see how things had developed in China at the time of the collapse of its ancient civilisation. The beautiful, free world with its high heavens above, the calm, peaceful realm of DAO which Lao Zi had unveiled to the enchanted eye, had become a sinister inferno in which daemons had been let loose. Han Fei Zi's teaching is to the Daoism of Lao Zi what the Spanish *autos-da-fé* and the witch-hunts of the Middle Ages were to the gentle teaching of the Man from Nazareth in whose name they were executed.

Another encyclopaedia of Daoist teaching can be found in the works collectively known under the name *Huai-Nan-Zi*, after the time of Han Fei Zi. These writings can be traced to Liu An, the grandson of the Emperor Wu Di of the Han dynasty, who had been appointed prince of the district of Huai Nan. He was deeply devoted to Daoism and gathered a large number of scholars and magicians at his court. He had them make a compilation of Daoist knowledge which at first was called *Hong Lie Chuan* (Notes on the Great Clarity), but was later given the title *Huai-Nan-Zi*. Liu An spent his fortune on alchemical experiments, and later became involved in a political intrigue which was meant to secure the succession to the imperial throne for him. However, the conspiracy was discovered and the prince committed suicide in 122 BC. Later Daoist writers, however, claimed that his disappearance from the world was due to the fact that he had succeeded in being accepted into the company of the immortals. His teaching reveals how the union of northern and southern thought had progressed, and how the strength of the waves from the central Chinese school of thought that had first given Han Fei Zi's views their clarity and precision, had faded away. By Liu An's time all the strategies for enslaving men and helping the tyrants' power had not only rebounded on their perpetrators, but everything they had achieved by helping the house of Qin to world domination had collapsed before long, and with it had gone the whole of ancient Chinese culture. It had exceeded the limits of its strength. Meanwhile the Han dynasty had surfaced. At first it gave free reign to the superstitions of popular religion, but then it discovered in Confucianism the most useful support for order in the state. In this way, Confucianism was given the position which it was to hold for some two thousand years afterwards, though not without considerable crises or changes in fortune.

The Huai-Nan-Zi compilation is an interesting attempt to unite Daoism and Confucianism. It too begins with DAO - which in name, at least, is as much the foundation of Confucianism as it is of Daoism, even though, as we have seen, the same term has a somewhat different meaning in the two schools. There is a hymnal glorification of the omnipotence and omnipresence of DAO in Huai-Nun-Zi, just as there had been in earlier Daoist writings. However, it is clear that it does not always reach the heights of the original teaching. Where Lao Zi's view of DAO is essentially qualitative, Huai-Nan-Zi emphasises the quantitative aspect. In addition, some of its comments suggest that DAO and the world belong together, that DAO is the omnipresent soul of the world and yet capable of being narrowed down by magic. The phenomenal world of individual differences and the world beyond appearances and individual differences begin to separate into a present world and a world beyond. No wonder, then, that the Huai-Nan-Zi compilation turns to magical means in order to pass from this world into the one beyond, or else drag what is beyond into this world and so achieve immortality or deathlessness. For under these circumstances one would want to hold on to having-been-born, to life in this world, without having to pay the price of death, of stepping out of life and the phenomenal world for it. The art of magic takes the place of this price. We shall have to come back to this problem when we consider magical Daoism. At this point, it is sufficient to draw attention to the fine cracks in the structure of the thought of the time through which these mists were able to penetrate.

The influence of the Confucian school as it is set forth in the metaphysics of *The Great Learning* and *Measure and Mean*, can be seen quite clearly in Huai-Nan-Zi, for it replaces the concept of DE, or Life - which to Lao Zi meant 'DAO become-individual' - by the Confucian concept of *xing* or nature, essence. Like DAO, the essence of man is calm and pure in its original state, and only becomes clouded and restless through contact with the objects that cause desires and emotions. In its purity the essence of man is one with DAO. This original pure essence dwells in man. It will be temporarily covered, just as the clouds cover the stars. It fluctuates just as the raging waves make the sky appear to fluctuate. But just as the polar star shows the seafarer the course he must take when the elements are in uproar, so man's innermost essence is his guiding star in the hustle and bustle of life.

According to Huai-Nan-Zi, it is easy to foster this essence; since it is originally good and spoiled only by reacting to external influences, it is enough to remove the external causes and man will right himself all of his own accord. However, the Huai-Nan-Zi compilation acknowledges desire as something that necessarily belongs to human nature, and that cannot be completely eliminated. Where desire is simply directed at the satisfaction of natural needs it is not harmful and need not be fought. Only when it chases after phantoms and causes man to 'get beside himself' is it an evil and must it be fought. But since goodness is engrained in the essence of man, he needs no effort and no action to become good: he simply has to obey his inner voice. Therefore it is easy to do what is good, but far more difficult to do evil because it contradicts Nature and causes man to pervert his own essence.

In order to avoid the excessive desires that would lead to evil, it is necessary to eliminate as far as possible the differences that exist between men with regard to possessions and pleasures. For if men no longer see desirable things in the possession of others they will not be drawn to envy or argument.

The ideal world of Huai-Nan-Zi is constructed in such a way that simplicity rules as far as possible, so that general contentment may bring about happiness for all in society.

Considering the way in which the work has been compiled, it is not surprising that one finds certain contradictions in it. It assumes that goodness has a factual existence in Nature, so that it is only a question of setting it free by means of cultivation and education; but it also puts forward the view that good and evil are natural talents which are man's inheritance through fate. There are noble men who are good just because they cannot be otherwise; they need not learn or practise good, because it is engrained in their original essence. On the other hand there are those who cannot be improved by any amount of education and effort, because evil is engrained in their nature. These talents are as inescapable as a beautiful or an ugly face, which essentially cannot be changed no matter how much one tries. According to this view, education and culture can only influence the large mass of the mediocre who have talents for both good and evil. This contradiction between necessity (fate) and freedom is, of course, one that is very difficult to overcome, if it can be overcome at all. Confucius, too, once said that the loftiest saints and the lowliest fools could not be changed, although he also held that men are, by nature, close to one another and only the fleeting habits of fashion produce distances between them.

To sum up, then, we must say that the Huai-Nan-Zi compilation shows hardly any signs of independent thought. However, this eclectic work does have some merit because of the skilful way in which it brings the various trends of the preceding era into a unified and coherent system, giving pride of place to goodness wherever it finds it. The whole work has an aura of mildness and kindness, which is almost certainly an expression of the personality of the prince who had the work compiled by his scholars.

Huai-Nan-Zi marks the end of what may be termed the philosophically creative literature of Daoism. However, Daoism has influenced philosophers of other schools, just as Confucian influences can be found in Daoism after Zhuang Zi. Among the Confucian philosophers who based themselves to some extent on Daoist teaching were Dong Zhong-Shu and Yang Sheng, as well as the sceptic and materialist Wang Chong. The influence of Daoism on poets of the Confucian school is traceable even today. It has led the more thoughtful among statesmen, particularly during periods of political unrest, out of the political arena of the day and into the quiet mountains, or to the shores of the great ocean. But the tendency towards religious magic in Daoism has been even more influential than this, and has found its way into popular thought.

Classical Chinese philosophy is distinguished by a remarkable absence of superstition. There is hardly any classical literature of that period in human history which bypasses these lower depths with as much sovereign calm. It would, however, be wrong to assume that these lower depths had not existed among the people of China. They existed below and beside the philosophical heights, as is always the case when the thinking of a few rises up to purer spheres. This had to do with the unquiet times at the end of the classical period, for with the collapse of the ancient culture the lower strata came once more to the surface.

The conditions for this upsurge had been prepared by various elements. In the north, Confucianism had always emphasised ancestral cults. Confucius himself, however, was free of all superstition. For

him ancestral cults were simply a religious form of the ordinary ethical duty of filial love after the death of one's parents. He never deliberately pronounced on whether or not the dead possessed consciousness. It was quite understandable that this solemn concern with death in burial rites and ancestral cults had its effects. What is more, a belief in ghosts which had not been previously associated with ancestral cults found a point on to which they could fasten in these cults. Thus popular beliefs developed a rich hierarchy of all kinds of gods and daemons, who were all thought of as somehow connected with the souls of men who had passed away. The teaching of Mo Di (who was otherwise distinctly inclined towards rationalism and utilitarianism) strengthened this trend by its resolute theism, and by its emphasis on belief in higher beings. The sophisticated sceptics and the massive materialists had no way of stemming the tide. Gods and daemons were happily revived. But in the south, too, the intellectual and spiritual life showed signs of the new tendency. In Zhuang Zi one finds a great number of parables about adepts and 'true men', who come onto the stage as magicians, 'who do not drown even when the floods rise to the sky, and who do not become hot even in the midst of the fire that melts rocks and metal'. From this developed a belief in Daoist circles that it was possible during one's lifetime to escape the cycle of death and rebirth with one's physical body intact, and rise up to immortal life as a blessed spirit. It is clear that in Zhuang Zi we are dealing with a mystical experience which is the product of a sublime practice of yoga, 'when the heart becomes like dead ashes and the body like dry wood'. The tendency to embellish these supra-intellectual experiences, and project them into a colourful fairytale world of superstition, is, however, easy to understand.

In addition, a new philosophy originated by the scholar Zou Yan and his school developed a dynamic view of Nature which was based on the dual powers of light and darkness taken from the Book of Changes, and on the five states of transformation - the watery, the fiery, the metallic, the vegetal and the earthy - taken from the Book of Records; and this threw the gates wide open to a belief in miracles. Alchemical ideas appeared on the scene: one of Zou Yan's followers wanted to make use of the miraculous powers of nature in order to produce the 'Golden Potion', the elixir of life that would impart immortality to the human body.

External circumstances favoured these views. Chinese culture originated in the basin of the Yellow River, and only during the time we are now looking at did it reach the area of the Yangtse River. There, however, it encountered not a savage tribe without culture, but another equally highly developed culture, albeit one that had quite different features. In the *Elegies* of Chu in particular we find figures from this mythology leading a colourful life, and from there these myths flow into Chinese literature in general. This movement spread towards the south, and finally reached the coast. Before this, ancient culture had been distinctly continental: now for the first time it touched a maritime sphere of influence. As in all maritime cultures, the myth of the sun now becomes a prominent feature, along with the myth of the sea. Tales of the Three Islands of the Blessed appear, islands that lie somewhere far in the eastern sea, inhabited by blessed spirits who have been freed of all earthly heaviness.

Daoism, itself close to the south, naturally adopted this new body of mythology with enthusiasm. It already contained a number of tendencies that inclined towards these myths. I mentioned Yang Zhu's pessimism and the other-worldliness of Zhuang Zi earlier in this commentary. These views were the

starting points for imagining a better world beyond, a world that was waiting, somewhere lost in space, for the chosen who had fled from the battle fields of life, and who would there find peace.

The reason this trend permeated Chinese thought for several centuries was that a large number of Chinese princes of the pre-Christian centuries expressly encouraged it. The magicians who knew the secrets of this cult were called *fang shi*, roughly translatable as 'sorcerers'. They were welcome at the princely courts because the princes wanted to add physical immortality to their worldly power. Many a prince died of the strange medicinal brews that his court magicians prepared for him. It is a strange coincidence that the two most powerful rulers at the turn of the millennium were adherents of this kind of magical Taoism. Qin Shi Huang Di, having united the world under his rule, wanted to ascertain how long he would be able to enjoy his power. He summoned magicians from everywhere in great numbers. He then made a pilgrimage to the holy mountain in the east, the Taishan, and personally offered sacrifices to it; the god of this mountain, who rules over life and death, has played an important part in Daoism ever since. He also sent messengers into the eastern sea and a whole group of young people, male and female, sailed out into the uncharted ocean in order to discover the Islands of the Blessed. He gathered hundreds of sorcerers at his court to concoct the elixir of life.

The founder of the Han dynasty, too, was very favourably inclined towards Daoism. A number of his heroes and advisers - the mysterious Dong Fang Shuo, for example, who was considered a reincarnation of Lao Zi within a hundred years after his death, or his most faithful friend Zhang Liang (d. 189 BC) - were adherents of these forms of Daoist sorcery. The legend that developed around Zhang Liang is characteristic. In his youth he had met an extremely old man who was sitting down, and who had let one of his sandals fall from his foot. Zhang Liang reverently picked it up. At this, the old man asked him to come to a certain place five days later where he would impart an important revelation. When Zhang Liang arrived at this place, the old man was already there; he rebuked him for being late and asked him to come back another day. It was only on the third occasion that Zhang Liang succeeded in arriving in good time. Then the old man gave him a book which would make him the teacher of an emperor, and asked him to come back to the same place thirteen years later, when he would meet him again in the shape of a yellow stone (*huang shi*). This book gave Zhang Liang the wisdom with which he helped his lord and friend to success. When he returned to the same place thirteen years later he did indeed find a yellow stone, in which he recognised his old teacher.

A descendant of Zhang Liang, born in AD 34, was Zhang Dao-Ling. He was born near the Tian Mu Shan in what is now the province of Zhejiang, near the mouth of the Yangtse River. Early on he turned to the study of Daoist teaching - he is said to have grasped the Dao De Jing at the age of seven - refused all worldly honours and riches and went west into the mysterious mountain world of Sichuan, which is to this day considered to be the place of origin of all miracles and secret teachings in China. There, after a period of fasting and meditation, he met Lao Zi himself in a supernatural manner and the latter handed him a magical secret scroll. Later on he returned to the Dragon and Tiger Mountain (Lung Hu Shan) in the province of Jiangxi, where he attained immortality. His disciples and descendants were later given land by the rulers of the Wei, the Tang and Song dynasties, and even the Mongols were generous. The title of Tian Shi, or 'Master from Heaven', was hereditary in his family; rather like the title of the Tibetan Dalai Lama, the same personality was reincarnated in a child of the

family whenever the current Master from Heaven died, the incarnation being revealed in a supernatural manner. The office of the Master from Heaven has sometimes been called that of a Daoist pope. This is not quite justified, because although the Master from Heaven has absolute power over daemons and ghosts, who are subject to his magic spells and unable to resist, he only has moral influence, without any constitutional foundation, upon the Daoist 'church' - if, in fact, one may speak of such a thing. We can follow the development of Daoism thus far. Later, under the influence of advancing Buddhism, it was to develop into something quite different from what it was originally meant to be. An account of these changes, however, does not belong within the framework of a review of Daoism after Lao Zi, but in a general history of Chinese religion.