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A Study of the Tao Tê Ching and Its Place In Chinese Thought

By Arthur Waley

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CHAPTER I

The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way;
The names that can be named are not unvarying names.
It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang;
The named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand creatures, each after its kind.
Truly,[1] 'Only he that rids himself forever of desire can see the Secret Essences';
He that has never rid himself of desire can see only the Outcomes.[1]
These two things issued from the same mould, but nevertheless are different in name.
This 'same mould' we can but call the Mystery,
Or rather the 'Darker than any Mystery',
The Doorway whence issued all Secret Essences.

Paraphrase

The Realists demand a *ch'ang-tao*, an 'unvarying way' of government, in which every act inimical and every act beneficial to the State is codified and 'mated' to its appropriate punishment or reward. The Taoist replies that though there does exist a *ch'ang-tao*,[2] 'an unvarying

[1] See additional notes.

[2] *Han Fei Tzu*, 51.

Way', it cannot be grasped by the ordinary senses nor described in words. In dispassionate vision the Taoist sees a world consisting of the things for which language has no names. Provisionally we may call them *miao*, 'secret essences'. The Realist, his vision distorted by desire, sees only the 'ultimate results', the Outcomes of those essences, never the essences themselves. The whole doctrine of Realism was founded on the conviction that just as things which issue from the same mould are mechanically identical, 'cannot help being as they are',[1] so by complete codification, a series of moulds (*fa*), can be constructed, which will mechanically decide what 'name' (and consequently what reward or punishment) should be assigned to any given deed. But the two modalities of the Universe, the world as the Taoist sees it in vision and the world of everyday life, contradict the basic assumption of the Realist. For they issue from the same mould ('proceed from a sameness'), and nevertheless are different as regards name. Strictly speaking, the world as seen in vision has no name. We can call it, as above, the Sameness; or the Mystery. These names are however merely stop-gaps. For what we are trying to express is darker than any mystery.

[1] *Kuan Tzŭ*, 36, just after middle.

CHAPTER II

It is because every one under Heaven recognizes beauty as beauty, that the idea of ugliness exists.
And equally if every one recognized virtue as virtue, this would merely create fresh conceptions of wickedness.
For truly 'Being and Not-being grow out of one another;
Difficult and easy complete one another.
Long and short test[1] one another;
High and low determine one another.
Pitch and mode give harmony to one another.
Front and back give sequence to one another.
Therefore[2] the Sage relies on actionless activity,
Carries on wordless teaching,
But the myriad creatures are worked upon by him; he does not disown them.
He rears them, but does not lay claim to them,
Controls them, but does not lean upon them,
Achieves his aim, but does not call attention[3] to what he does;
And for the very reason that he does not call attention to what he does
He is not ejected from fruition of what he has done.

Paraphrase

The Realists say that virtue (i.e. what the State desires)

[1] See textual notes.
[2] Because 'action' can only make one thing high at the expense of making something else low, etc.
[3] Lit.: 'does not place (i.e. classify) himself as a victor'. cf. *Mencius*, II. 1. 2. 19.

must, by complete codification, be made as easily recognizable as beauty. When people see Hsi Shih (the legendary paragon of beauty) they at once know that she is the most beautiful of women; but when they see good men (i.e. those who are strong-limbed but docile, see *Shang Tzŭ*) they mistake them for boors. This can only be avoided if the State clearly labels the good as good.

But, says the Taoist, by admitting the conception of 'goodness' you are simultaneously creating a conception 'badness'. Nothing can be good except in relation to something that is bad, just as nothing can be 'in front' except in relation to something that is 'behind'. Therefore the Sage avoids all positive action, working only through the 'power' of Tao, which alone 'cuts without wounding', transcending all antinomies.

The type of the Sage who in true Taoist manner 'disappeared' after his victory is Fan Li[1] (5th century B.C.) who, although offered half the kingdom if he would return in triumph with the victorious armies of Yüeh, 'stepped into a light boat and was heard of no more'.

[1] *Kuo Yü*, 21. The passage is closely akin to the *Tao Tê Ching* both in language and thought.

CHAPTER III

If we stop looking for 'persons of superior morality' (*hsien*) to put in power, there will be no more jealousies among the people. If we cease to set store by products that are hard to get, there will be no more thieves. If the people never see such things as excite desire, their hearts will remain placid and undisturbed. Therefore the Sage rules

By emptying their hearts
And filling their bellies,
Weakening their intelligence[1]
And toughening their sinews
Ever striving to make the people knowledgeless and desireless.

Indeed he sees to it that if there be any who have knowledge, they dare not interfere. Yet through his actionless activity all things are duly regulated.

Commentary

This chapter is a bait for Realists. The author shows that like them he is against the raising of *hsien*, is against knowledge, trade, luxury, etc. But he slips in *wu-yü*, desireless (see Introduction, p. 89) and *wu-wei*, 'non-activity', i.e. rule through *tê* ('virtue', 'power') acquired in trance.

[1] Particularly in the sense of 'having ideas of one's own'.

CHAPTER IV

The Way is like an empty vessel
That yet may be drawn from
Without ever needing to be filled.
It is bottomless; the very progenitor of all things in the world.
In it all sharpness is blunted,
All tangles untied,
All glare tempered,
All dust[1] smoothed.
It is like a deep pool that never dries.
Was it too the child of something else? We cannot tell.
But as a substanceless image[2] it existed before the Ancestor.[3]

[1] Dust is the Taoist symbol for the noise and fuss of everyday life.

[2] A *hsiang*, an image such as the mental images that float before us when we think. See Introduction, p. 61.

[3] The Ancestor in question is almost certainly the Yellow Ancestor who separated Earth from Heaven and so destroyed the Primal Unity, for which he is frequently censured in *Chuang Tzŭ*.

CHAPTER V

Heaven and Earth are ruthless;
To them the Ten Thousand Things are but as straw dogs.
The Sage too is ruthless;
To him the people are but as straw dogs.
Yet[1] Heaven and Earth and all that lies between
Is like a bellows —
In that it is empty, but gives a supply that never fails.
Work it, and more comes out.
Whereas the force of words[2] is soon spent.
Far better is it to keep what is in the heart.[3]

Commentary

Jên, which I have here translated 'ruth' and elsewhere 'gentle', 'kind', etc., is cognate to *jên* 'man'. I believe that *jên* did not originally mean mankind in general, but the members of one's own tribe or group, for whom one has feelings of 'nearness'. (The *Shuo Wên* defines *jên* as *ch'in*, 'akin', 'near'.)

Compare the origin of 'kind' from 'kin' and 'gentle' from *gens*, Latin for a clan. Hence (because members of one's own ethnic group are better than members of other groups) 'good' in the most general sense. In the *Book of*

[1] Though ruthless (as the Realists never tired of maintaining), nature is perpetually bounteous.

[2] Laws and proclamations.

[3] For *chung* as 'what is within the heart', see *Tso Chuan*, Yin Kung 3rd year and *Kuan Tzŭ*, 37, beginning. The comparison of Heaven and Earth to a bellows is also found in *Kuan Tzŭ* (P'ien 11, beginning).

Odes, *jên* only occurs coupled with *mei*—'handsome and good', i.e. true member of the tribe both in appearance and character. In early Confucianism *jên* acquires a mystic sense, 'The Highest Good', and comes near to playing the part that the term Tao plays in Quietist terminology.

It is to be noted that in the earliest literature (e.g. *Odes* Nos. 249, 256, 257; *Book of History*, Hung Fan) *jên*, 'men of rank', 'men of the tribe' are contrasted with *min*, 'subjects', 'the common people'.

CHAPTER VI

The Valley Spirit never dies.
It is named the Mysterious Female.
And the Doorway of the Mysterious Female
Is the base from which Heaven and Earth sprang.
It is there within us all the while;
Draw upon it as you will, it never runs dry.[1]

[1] For these six lines see Introduction, p. 57. *Lieh Tzŭ* quotes them as coming from the *Book of the Yellow Ancestor*; but it does not follow that the *Tao Tê Ching* is actually quoting them from this source. They may belong to the general stock of early Taoist rhymed teaching. For *ch'in* compare below, p. 206, line 9, and *Huai-nan Tzu* I, fol. 2.

CHAPTER VII

Heaven is eternal, the Earth everlasting.
How come they to be so? It is because they do not foster their own lives;
That is why they live so long.
Therefore the Sage
Puts himself in the background; but is always to the fore.
Remains outside; but is always there.
Is it not just because he does not strive for any personal end
That all his personal ends are fulfilled?

CHAPTER VIII

THE HIGHEST good is like that of water.[1] The goodness of water is that it benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself does not scramble, but is content with the places that all men disdain. It is this that makes water so near to the Way.
And if men think the ground the best place for building a house upon,
If among thoughts they value those that are profound,
If in friendship they value gentleness,
In words, truth; in government, good order;
In deeds, effectiveness; in actions, timeliness——
In each case it is because they prefer what does not lead to strife,[2]
And therefore does not go amiss.

[1] For water as a Taoist symbol see Introduction, p. 56.
[2] Even ordinary people realize the importance of the Taoist principle of 'water-like' behaviour, i.e. not striving to get on top or to the fore.

CHAPTER IX

Stretch a bow[1] to the very full,
And you will wish you had stopped in time;
Temper a sword-edge to its very sharpest,
And you will find it soon grows dull.
When bronze and jade fill your hall
It can no longer be guarded.
Wealth and place breed insolence
That brings ruin in its train.
When your work is done, then withdraw!
Such is Heaven's[2] Way.

[1] The expression used can also apply to filling a vessel to the brim; but 'stretching a bow' makes a better parallel to 'sharpening a sword'.
[2] As opposed to the Way of man.

CHAPTER X

Can you keep the unquiet[1] physical-soul from straying,
hold fast to the Unity, and never quit it?
Can you, when concentrating your breath, make it soft
like that of a little child?
Can you wipe and cleanse your vision of the Mystery till
all is without blur?
Can you love the people and rule the land, yet remain
unknown?
Can you in opening and shutting the heavenly gates play
always the female part?[2]
Can your mind penetrate every corner of the land, but you
yourself never interfere?
Rear them, then, feed them,
Rear them, but do not lay claim to them.
Control them, but never lean upon them;
Be chief among them, but do not manage them.
This is called the Mysterious Power.

Commentary

For other versions of the old Taoist hymn which the author here adapts to his own use, see *Chuang Tzŭ*, XXIII. 3, and *Kuan Tzŭ* 37 (near beginning). For the physical-soul or *p'o* see Introduction, p. 28. But as we have seen *p'o* literally means semen, and there is here an allusion to a technique of sexual hygiene parallel to

[1] See textual notes.
[2] Read *wei*, not *wu*. This is the original Wang Pi reading, as the commentary shows.

breathing technique. For the necessity of soft breathing, see Appendix III. The female (i.e. passive) opening and shutting of the heavenly gates also refers to the opening and shutting of mouth and nostrils. This however was a mildly esoteric meaning; the completely uninitiated would take it in the sense: 'Handle the weightiest affairs of state', as indeed does Wang Pi, the earliest commentator.

Huai-nan Tzŭ (Ch. XII) is quite aware that the opening passage of this chapter deals with the technique of Taoist *yoga*, for in illustration of it he quotes the story (*Chuang Tzŭ*, VI. end) of Yen Hui and his practice of *tso-wang*, 'sitting with blank mind'. See Appendix III.

The phrase *pao-i* or *chih-i* ('holding to the Unity') has a curious history, very typical of the way in which the various schools while retaining the same time-hallowed watchwords, adapted them to their own needs. In *Mencius* (VII. 1. 26) it means having a 'one-sided' view, and is the opposite of *chih-chung*, 'holding to the middle' between two extremes. In Quietist language it has a metaphysical sense, meaning to 'hold fast to' the One as opposed to the Many, to utilize the primal, 'undivided' state that underlies the normal consciousness. Finally, to the Realists the phrase meant to maintain the ruler's or the State's absolute, undivided sway. Writers such as Kuan Tzŭ, who base their Realism on a mystic foundation, pass bewilderingly from the Quietist to the political application of the phrase, often seeming to attach both meanings to it simultaneously.

CHAPTER XI

We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel;
But it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the wheel depends.
We turn clay to make a vessel;
But it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the vessel depends.
We pierce doors and windows to make a house;
And it is on these spaces where there is nothing that the usefulness of the house depends.
Therefore just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognize the usefulness of what is not.

CHAPTER XII

The five colours confuse the eye,
The five sounds dull the ear,
The five tastes spoil the palate.
Excess of hunting and chasing
Makes minds go mad.
Products that are hard to get
Impede their owner's movements.
Therefore the Sage
Considers the belly not the eye.[1]
Truly, 'he rejects that but takes this'.[2]

Commentary

This is an answer to the Hedonists; see Introduction, p. 39. Any attempt to exploit to the full the use of the senses leads to a dulling of those senses. There is a proverb 'Poverty does not impede movement' (cf. *Yen T'ieh Lun*, XVI); whereas riches do, because they tempt bandits to attack. This is sometimes interpreted in a moral sense: 'Poverty is no impediment to (virtuous) courses.' I do not think that the moral sense of *hsing* is intended here.

[1] The belly in this instance means 'what is inside him', his own inner powers.

[2] For this use of 'that' and 'this' (i.e. the world outside and the powers within oneself) cf. *Kuan Tzŭ*, 36, middle.

CHAPTER XIII

'FAVOUR AND disgrace goad as it were to madness;[1] high rank hurts keenly as our bodies hurt.' What does it mean to say that favour and disgrace goad as it were to madness? It means[2] that when a ruler's subjects[3] get it[4] they turn distraught, when they lose it they turn distraught. That is what is meant by saying favour and disgrace goad as it were to madness. What does it mean to say that high rank hurts keenly as our bodies hurt? The only reason that we suffer hurt is that we have bodies; if we had no bodies, how could we suffer? Therefore we may accept the saying: 'He who in dealing with the empire regards his high rank as though it were his body is the best person to be entrusted with rule; he who in dealing with the empire loves his subjects as one should love one's body is the best person to whom one can commit the empire.

Commentary

In this chapter the author takes a number of Individualist (Yang Chu school) sayings and adapts them to his own use. Every individual must devote himself to the perfection of his own life, regardless of outside opinion. 'High rank is greatly detrimental to your (*jo*) body', i.e. to your self-perfection. Such, I think, is the original meaning of this sentence. But our author is at constant war with this 'self first' school, and by taking *jo* not as 'your' but in its alternative sense 'like', 'as', he extracts the meaning:

[1] See additional notes. [2] See textual notes. [3] *Hsia.* [4] i.e. favour.

'High rank hurts even as the body hurts'. For the body, the self, which in Yang Chu's doctrine must be put before everything else, is in fact (our author points out) the source of all pain. But so long as we regard the body in this light we can accept the Individualist saying:[1] 'Only he who in dealing with the empire makes the perfection of his own body (i.e. self, life) the primary consideration, may be entrusted with rule. Only he who cares for his own body is fit to govern an empire'—reinterpreting it however as meaning that he must regard his own high position just as he regards his body, that is to say, as the potential source of pain; and he must regard his subjects in the same light.

In *kuei i shên, ai i shên* the *i* has a limiting force. Compare *Analects*, I, 5. 'He must employ the people only at the proper times', and not when they have work to do in the fields. For the Buddhist interpretation of this passage, see additional notes.

[1] Cf. in the summary of Individualism in *Lü Shih Ch'un Ch'iu*, P'ien 7: 'He alone may be entrusted with empire who does not let empire interfere with his own life-culture'. *Chuang Tzŭ* (XI. 1. and XXVIII. 1) adapts similar sayings.

CHAPTER XIV

Because the eye gazes but can catch no glimpse of it,[1]
It is called elusive.
Because the ear listens but cannot hear it,[1]
It is called the rarefied.
Because the hand feels for it but cannot find it,
It is called the infinitesimal.
These three, because they cannot be further scrutinized,
Blend into one.
Its rising brings no light;
Its sinking, no darkness.
Endless the series of things without name
On the way back to where there is nothing.
They are called shapeless shapes;
Forms without form;
Are called vague semblances.
Go towards them, and you can see no front;
Go after them, and you see no rear.
Yet by seizing on the Way that was
You can ride[2] the things that are now.
For to know what once there was,[3] in the Beginning,
This is called the essence[4] of the Way.

[1] This is the traditional description of ghosts and spirits (cf. *Doctrine of the Mean*, paragraph 16) adopted as a description of the Way.
[2] i.e. dominate.
[3] Macrocosmically, in the Universe. Microcosmically, in oneself.
[4] Literally, main-thread.

CHAPTER XV

Of old those that were the best officers of Court
Had inner natures subtle, abstruse, mysterious, penetrating,
Too deep to be understood.
And because such men could not be understood
I can but tell of them as they appeared to the world:
Circumspect they seemed, like one who in winter crosses
a stream,
Watchful, as one who must meet danger on every side.
Ceremonious, as one who pays a visit;
Yet yielding, as ice when it begins to melt.
Blank, as a piece of uncarved wood;
Yet receptive as a hollow in the hills.
Murky, as a troubled stream——
Which of you can assume such murkiness, to become in
the end still and clear?
Which of you can make yourself inert,[1] to become in the
end full of life and stir?
Those who possess this Tao do not try to fill themselves to
the brim,
And because they do not try to fill themselves to the brim
They are like a garment that endures all wear and need
never be renewed (?).

Commentary

Jung (appearance, attitude, 'how they appeared to the world') is a technical term with a long history. In fulfilling religious rites it is not sufficient merely to say the

[1] Text doubtful. It is better to omit *chiu*.

right words or perform the right actions. Each rite requires also an appropriate 'attitude', one of reverence, eagerness, reluctance, joy, gloominess, etc. These 'attitudes' are always defined in Chinese by quasi-onomatopæic words, rather of the 'cock-a-hoop' type; they are often reduplicatives, and are always followed by an exclamatory or adverbial particle. Among the Confucians the study of correct attitudes was a matter of prime importance. The *Analects* (especially Book X) constantly defines these attitudes, and mnemonic jingles were current, in which a whole string of *jung* were connected into a sort of didactic poetry. The literature of the 3rd century B.C. teems with *jung*, modelled on those of the ritualists, but often defining a correct attitude towards life in general, rather than one appropriate to a particular ceremony. Thus in *Chuang Tzŭ*[1] we find a *jung* of the ancient *chên-jên* (Taoist adept, 'perfected, purified man'), and another[2] of the possessor of 'power', *tê*. The *Lü Shih Ch'un Ch'iu*[3] gives a *jung* of the perfect State officer, rather on Taoist lines. *Hsün Tzŭ* has general *jung*, like that of the 'perfect gentleman'[4] and the Sage;[5] but also a more ritualistic definition of the attitudes to be adopted by fathers and elder brothers, sons and younger brothers, and finally by pupils in relation to their masters.

The 'which of you can assume murkiness . . . to be clear' is a *fan-yen*, a paradox, reversal of common speech. Thus 'the more you clean it the dirtier it becomes' is a common saying, applied to the way in which slander 'sticks'.[6] But the Taoist must apply the paradoxical rule: 'The more you dirty it, the cleaner it becomes.'

[1] VI. 2. [2] XII. 12. [3] P'ien 79 [4] P'ien 3. [5] P'ien 8.
[6] *Hsün Tzŭ*, P'ien 4 and P'ien 27.

CHAPTER XVI

Push far enough towards the Void,
Hold fast enough to Quietness,
And of the ten thousand things none but can be worked on by you.
I have beheld them, whither they go back.
See, all things howsoever they flourish
Return to the root from which they grew.
This return to the root is called Quietness;
Quietness is called submission to Fate;
What has submitted to Fate has become part of the always-so.
To know the always-so is to be Illumined;
Not to know it, means to go blindly to disaster.
He who knows the always-so has room in him for everything;
He who has room in him for everything is without prejudice.
To be without prejudice is to be kingly;
To be kingly is to be of heaven;
To be of heaven is to be in Tao.
Tao is forever and he that possesses it,
Though his body ceases, is not destroyed.

Commentary

To have room in one for everything (*jung*) is cognate both in writing and etymology with 'to be without prejudice' (*kung*). But *kung* happens also to mean a royal Duke, the person next in rank to the king. There is here a play on these two senses of *kung*. That the resemblance of two words may be due to a series of phonological accidents is a

conception that is quite recent in the history of thought. All early thinkers, including the Greeks,[1] attributed a profound significance to such resemblances. *Kung*, then, is a sort of king. And kings are, as has been thought all over the world, delegates of Heaven. Heaven in our author's thought is synonymous with Tao. Tao is the absolute, the enduring, the ever-so.

Such a passage, depending on rhyme, plays on words and resemblance of characters, is of course bound to appear pointless in translation.

1 With the exception of certain rare passages, such as Plato's *Timaeus* (38 b) where rather irrelevantly, in a sort of parenthesis, and in a work which teems with plays on words, it is noted that the verb to be has two uses (1) as a connecting word, (2) meaning 'to exist'; more generally, Hermogenes says in the *Cratylus* (384 D and E) he 'cannot believe' that names are otherwise than conventional.

CHAPTER XVII

Of the highest[1] the people merely know that such a one exists;
The next they draw near to and praise.
The next they shrink from, intimidated; but revile.
Truly, 'It is by not believing people that you turn them into liars'.[2]
But from the Sage it is so hard at any price to get a single word[3]
That when his task is accomplished, his work done,
Throughout the country every one says 'It happened of its own accord'.

1 i.e. most Taoist.

2 The same saying is quoted in Ch. 23. Cf. Ch. 49: 'The truthful man I believe; but the liar I also believe, and so he (the liar) gets truthfulness.' Similarly it is 'lack' in the ruler which creates in the people every other fault and crime.

3 Literally: 'How, reluctant, he raises the price of his words!'

CHAPTER XVIII

It was when the Great Way declined
That human kindness and morality arose;
It was when intelligence and knowledge appeared
That the Great Artifice began.
It was when the six near ones[1] were no longer at peace
That there was talk of 'dutiful sons';[2]
Nor till fatherland was dark with strife
Did we hear of 'loyal slaves'.[3]

1 Father, son, elder brother, younger brother, husband and wife.

2 Read *tzŭ* 'son' not *tz'ŭ* 'compassionate', as in the *Yung Lo Ta Tien* text.

3 As Ministers called themselves.

CHAPTER XIX

Banish wisdom, discard knowledge,
And the people will be benefited a hundredfold.
Banish human kindness, discard morality,
And the people will be dutiful and compassionate.
Banish skill, discard profit[1],
And thieves and robbers will disappear.
If when these three things are done[2] they find life too plain and unadorned,
Then let them have accessories;
Give them Simplicity to look at, the Uncarved Block to hold,
Give them selflessness and fewness of desires.

Commentary

For *jên* (human kindness) see above, p. 147. For *i* (morality) see Introduction, p. 66. The virtues which the author here discards were also discarded by the Realists, who maintained that loyalty, for example, may exist in exceptional people, but is absent in most; whereas the love of gain exists in everyone. Consequently, government should be based solely on a complete system of punishments and rewards. The Taoist ruler, on the other hand, creates in his subjects the qualities and tendencies that he desires solely by the exercise of the *tê* that Tao confers.

[1] i.e do away with skilful artisans and enterprising traders, who supply things likely to attract thieves.

[2] I suspect that a negative has fallen out in front of 'these three', and that the original ran: 'If without these three . . . they find life, etc.'

'Simplicity' (*su*) means literally 'raw silk'. It is the symbol of the attributeless' nature of Tao. The Uncarved Block is the symbol of the primal undifferentiated unity underlying the apparent complexity of the universe. *Ssŭ* (the 'self' element in the word translated selflessness) is the opposite of *kung*, 'public'. It means absence of personal ambition. For *kua-yü* 'fewness of desires', see Introduction, p. 89.

CHAPTER XX

Banish learning,[1] and there will be no more grieving.
Between *wei* and *o*
What after all is the difference?
Can it be compared to the difference between good and bad?[2]
The saying 'what others avoid I too must avoid'
How false and superficial it is!
All men, indeed, are wreathed in smiles,
As though feasting after the Great Sacrifice,
As though going up to the Spring Carnival.[3]
I alone am inert, like a child that has not yet given sign;[4]
Like an infant that has not yet smiled.
I droop and drift, as though I belonged nowhere.
All men have enough and to spare;
I alone seem to have lost everything.
Mine is indeed the mind of a very idiot,
So dull am I.
The world is full of people that shine;
I alone am dark.

[1] 'Learning' means in particular learning the '3300 rules of etiquette'. *Wei* and *o* were the formal and informal words for 'yes', each appropriate to certain occasions. For 'learning' in the sense of knowing which words are taboo at which Courts, see *Kuo Yü*, 15, fol. 3.

[2] Good and bad in the Taoist sense, i.e. like and unlike the Way. This leads up to the description of the great gulf that separates the Taoist from other men. This description is in the form of a generalized *jung* (see Ch. 15, above) and cannot be taken as in any sense a self-portrait of the author. The sense of the first six lines is very doubtful.

[3] See additional notes. I read *têng ch'un t'ai*.

[4] A child 'gives sign' by stretching its hand towards some object. This is an important omen concerning its future.

They look lively and self-assured;
I alone, depressed.
I seem unsettled[1] as the ocean;
Blown adrift, never brought to a stop.
All men can be put to some use;
I alone am intractable and boorish.
But wherein I most am different from men
Is that I prize no sustenance that comes not from the Mother's[2] breast.

Commentary

The saying 'What others avoid I too must avoid' refers to keeping the same taboos, ritual avoidances, etc., as people with whom one finds oneself in contact. Thus Confucius (*Analects*, VII, 9), if he found himself eating side by side with someone who was in mourning imposed upon himself the same abstentions as were required of the mourner. Conversely of course, it is ill-omened to weep when others are rejoicing. But the Taoist, who is the antithesis of other men, cannot obey these rules.

[1] For this sense of *tan*, see *Li Sbih Ch'un Ch'iu*, P'ien III, line 7.

[2] i.e. the Way's. The image may equally well be that of a child in the womb, 'feeding on the mother'.

CHAPTER XXI

Such the scope of the All-pervading Power
That it alone can act through the Way.
For the Way is a thing impalpable, incommensurable.
Incommensurable, impalpable.
Yet latent in it are forms;[1]
Impalpable, incommensurable
Yet within it are entities.
Shadowy it is and dim;
Yet within it there is a force,
A force that though rarefied
Is none the less efficacious.
From the time of old till now
Its charge[2] has not departed
But cheers onward the many warriors.
How do I know that the many warriors are so?
Through this.[3]

1 Thought-images, ideas.
2 See additional notes.
3 Through inward knowledge, intuition.

CHAPTER XXII

'To remain whole, be twisted!'
To become straight, let yourself be bent.
To become full, be hollow.
Be tattered, that you may be renewed.
Those that have little, may get more,
Those that have much, are but perplexed.
Therefore the Sage
Clasps the Primal Unity,
Testing by it everything under heaven.
He does not show himself; therefore he is seen everywhere.
He does not define himself, therefore he is distinct.
He does not boast of what he will do, therefore he succeeds.
He is not proud of his work, and therefore it endures.
He does not contend,
And for that very reason no one under heaven can contend with him.
So then we see that the ancient saying 'To remain whole, be twisted!' was no idle word; for true wholeness can only be achieved by return.[1]

1 To the Way.

CHAPTER XXIII

TO BE always talking is against nature. For the same reason a hurricane never lasts a whole morning, nor a rainstorm all day. Who is it that makes the wind and rain? It is Heaven-and-Earth.[1] And if even Heaven-and-Earth cannot blow or pour for long, how much less in his utterance should man? Truly, if one uses the Way[2] as one's instrument, the results will be like the Way; if one uses the 'power' as one's instrument, the results will be like the power. If one uses what is the reverse of the 'power', the results will be the reverse of the 'power'. For to those who have conformed themselves to the Way, the Way readily lends its power. To those who have conformed themselves to the power, the power readily lends more power. While to those who conform themselves to inefficacy, inefficacy readily lends its ineffectiveness. 'It is by not believing in people that you turn them into liars.'[3]

Commentary

Wind and rain are taken as the utterances of nature, parallel to speech in man. 'Talking' here refers to government by laws and proclamations. Tê, the power of Tao, also means 'getting' as opposed to 'loss', success as opposed to disaster. The author puns on these two senses, which were often expressed by the same character. For the silence of heaven, see *Analects*, XVII. 19; and for that of heaven and earth, see *Hsün Tzŭ*, P'ien 3, middle.

[1] Nature, as we should say.

[2] The text is here somewhat confused; but the general meaning is clear. [3] See above, Ch. 17. If one uses disbelief as one's instrument of government, the result will be a nation of liars.

CHAPTER XXIV

'He who stands on tip-toe, does not stand firm;
He who takes the longest strides, does not walk the fastest.'
He who does his own looking sees little,
He who defines himself is not therefore distinct.
He who boasts of what he will do succeeds in nothing;
He who is proud of his work, achieves nothing that endures.
Of these, from the standpoint of the Way, it is said:
'Pass round superfluous dishes to those that have already had enough,
And no creature but will reject them in disgust.'
That is why he that possesses Tao does not linger.[1]

[1] Over the scene of his successes, thus calling attention to them. Cf. Ch. 2.

CHAPTER XXV

There was something formless yet complete,
That existed before heaven and earth;
Without sound, without substance,
Dependent on nothing, unchanging,
All pervading, unfailing.
One may think of it as the mother of all things under heaven.
Its true name[1] we do not know;
'Way' is the by-name that we give it.
Were I forced to say to what class of things it belongs I should call it Great (*ta*).
Now *ta*[2] also means passing on,
And passing on means going Far Away,
And going far away means returning.[3]
Thus just as Tao[4] has 'this greatness' and as earth has it and as heaven has it, so may the ruler also have it. Thus 'within the realm[2] there are four portions of greatness', and one belongs to the king. The ways of men are conditioned by those of earth. The ways of earth, by those of heaven. The ways of heaven by those of Tao, and the ways of Tao by the Self-so.[5]

1 i.e. we do not know to what class of things it belongs.
2 See textual notes.
3 Returning to 'what was there at the Beginning'.
4 Henceforwatd I shall use the Chinese word Tao instead of the Way; to do so avoids many inconveniences.
5 The 'unconditioned'; the 'what-is-so-of-itself'.

Commentary

The intention of this 'chain-argument' (a rhetorical form very commonly used by early Chinese writers) is to show that a line of connection may be traced between the ruler and Tao. This connection exists macrocosmically, in the line ruler, earth, heaven, Tao; but also microcosmically, in that by passing on and on through successive stages of his own consciousness back to the initial Unity he can arrive at the Way which controls the multiform apparent universe. The ecstasy called Far Away Wandering[1] is also known as the Far Away Passing On.[2]

The Realists insisted that there must be only one 'Greatness' in the realm—that of the State. I suspect that the clause 'There are four portions of greatness . . .' is adapted from a saying of the logicians. See Textual Notes.

1 The subject of one of the *Ch'u Elegies*. These travels, these 'wanderings alone with Tao in the Great Wilderness' (*Chuang Tzŭ* XX. 2.) are not external journeys, but explorations of oneself, back to the 'Beginning of Things'.
2 For example, in the *Li Sao*.

CHAPTER XXVI

As the heavy must be the foundation of the light,
So quietness is lord and master of activity.
Truly, 'A man of consequence[1] though he travels all day
Will not let himself be separated from his baggage-wagon,[2]
However magnificent the view, he sits quiet and dispassionate'.
How much less, then, must be the lord of ten thousand chariots
Allow himself to be lighter[3] than these he rules!
If he is light, the foundation is lost;
If he is active, the lord and master[4] is lost.

1 Reading *Chün-tzŭ*, which has considerable ancient support; cf. Ma Hsü-lun's *Lao Tzŭ Fu Ku*.

2 Literally, 'his covered heavy', 'heavy' being the Chinese name for carts as opposed to light travelling carriages. There is a play on the two senses of 'heavy'. This is a patrician proverb, a maxim of the *chün-tzŭ*, 'gentlemen'.

3 i.e. more easily moved.

4 i.e. Quietness, the magical passivity that is also called *wu-wei*. There is a secondary meaning: 'His lordship is lost.'

CHAPTER XXVII

Perfect activity leaves no track behind it;
Perfect speech is like a jade-worker whose tool leaves no mark.
The perfect reckoner needs no counting-slips;[1]
The perfect door has neither bolt nor bar,
Yet cannot be opened.
The perfect knot needs neither rope nor twine,
Yet cannot be untied.
Therefore the Sage
Is all the time in the most perfect way helping men,
He certainly does not turn his back on men;
Is all the time in the most perfect way helping creatures,
He certainly does not turn his back on creatures.
This is called resorting to the Light.[2]
Truly, 'the perfect man is the teacher of the imperfect;
But the imperfect is the stock-in-trade[3] of the perfect man'.
He who does not respect his teacher,
He who does not take care of his stock-in-trade,
Much learning though he may possess, is far astray.
This[4] is the essential secret.

1 Slips of bamboo thrown into little bowls; forerunner of the abacus.

2 'Light' has been defined above as self-knowledge. 'This' means the way in which the Sage saves the world, though appatently shunning it. For 'resorting to' see additional notes.

3 Cf. *Chuang Tzŭ*, I. 4.

4 The power to influence mankind through Tao. The commonest charge brought against Taoists was that of being merely interested in self-perfection without regard for the welfare of the community as a whole. The present chapter is devoted to rebutting that charge.

CHAPTER XXVIII

'He who knows the male, yet cleaves to what is female
Becomes like a ravine, receiving all things under heaven,'[1]
And being such a ravine
He knows all the time a power that he never calls upon in vain.
This is returning to the state of infancy.[2]
He who knows the white, yet cleaves to the black
Becomes the standard by which all things are tested;
And being such a standard
He has all the time a power that never errs,
He returns to the Limitless.
He who knows glory, yet cleaves to ignominy
Becomes like a valley that receives into it all things under heaven,
And being such a valley
He has all the time a power that suffices;
He returns to the state of the Uncarved Block.
Now when a block is sawed up it is made into implements;[3]
But when the Sage uses it, it becomes Chief of all Ministers.
Truly, 'The greatest carver[4] does the least cutting'.

1 Adapted from a Lao Tan saying. See *Chuang Tzŭ*, XXXIII. 5.
2 Cf. Introduction, p. 55.
3 Play on the double sense of this word which also means 'a subordinate', 'an instrument of government'.
4 Play on *chih* 'to cut', 'to carve', and *chih* 'to rule'. The secondary meaning is that the greatest ruler does the least chopping about.

CHAPTER XXIX

Those that would gain what is under heaven[1] by tampering with it—I have seen that they do not succeed. For that which is under heaven is like a holy vessel, dangerous to tamper with.
Those that tamper with it, harm it.
Those that grab at it, lose it.
For among the creatures of the world some go in front, some follow;
Some blow hot when others would be blowing cold.
Some are feeling vigorous just when others are worn out.
Some are loading[2] just when others would be tilting out.
Therefore the Sage 'discards the absolute, the all-inclusive,[3] the extreme'.

1 i.e. empire.
2 Read *tsai*.
3 *Shê* means (1) 'spread out' (2) dissipated. It is the first meaning which is appropriate here. The author is, however, certainly adapting a maxim that was aimed against dissipation, luxury etc. cf. *Han Fei Tzŭ*, P'ien 8, beginning.

CHAPTER XXX

He who by Tao purposes to help a ruler of men
Will oppose all conquest by force of arms;
For such things are wont to rebound.[1]
Where armies are, thorns and brambles grow.
The raising of a great host
Is followed by a year of dearth.[2]
Therefore a good general effects his purpose and then stops; he does not take further advantage of his victory.
Fulfils his purpose and does not glory in what he has done;
Fulfils his purpose and does not boast of what he has done;
Fulfils his purpose, but takes no pride in what he has done;
Fulfils his purpose, but only as a step that could not be avoided.[3]
Fulfils his purpose, but without violence;
For what has a time of vigour also has a time of decay.
This[4] is against Tao,
And what is against Tao will soon perish.

1 Lit. 'To be reversed'. He who overcomes by violence will himself be overcome by violence.

2 This does not only refer to direct destruction, but also to the curse that war brings upon herds and crops by its intrinsic 'balefulness'.

3 For the construction compare *Chuang Tzŭ* XXIII. 6: 'To move only when movement cannot be avoided, that is the true power.' This principle of *pu tê i* 'action as a last resort' was preached by the 4th century Quietist Shên Tao, and pervades *Chuang Tzŭ*.

4 Violence.

CHAPTER XXXI

FINE[1] WEAPONS are none the less ill-omened things. That is why, among people of good birth,[2] in peace the left-hand side[3] is the place of honour, but in war this is reversed and the right-hand side is the place of honour. The Quietist,[4] even when he conquers, does not regard weapons as lovely things. For to think them lovely means to delight in them, and to delight in them means to delight in the slaughter of men. And he who delights in the slaughter of men will never get what he looks for out of those that dwell under heaven. A host that has slain men is received with grief and mourning; he that has conquered in battle is[5] received with rites of mourning.

Commentary

In this chapter, as has been generally recognized, a considerable amount of commentary has become inextricably confused with the text. Now upon this chapter Wang Pi[6] makes no comments. The natural inference, as

1 *Chia* also means 'auspicious', e.g. *chia jih*, 'a lucky day'. I see no reason to tamper with the text.

2 Of good birth, and consequently of good manners.

3 See additional notes.

4 For this expression cf. *Han Fei Tzŭ*, P'ien 51, near end, and *Chuang Tzŭ*, X, end.

5 Whether such a custom actually existed we do not know; but we learn from *Huai-nan Tzŭ* (15, end) that the general, having received his marching orders, cuts his nails (as was done by mourners before a funeral), dresses in mourning garb, and leaves the city by a 'gate of ill-omen' constructed for the purpose.

6 226-249 A.D. The earliest commentator on the *Tao Tê Ching* whose work survives.

the Japanese scholar Tojo Hiroshi has pointed out,[1] is that the text as we have it is an amalgamation of the original with the lost Wang Pi commentary. Several attempts[2] have been made to separate this intrusive commentary from the text. My reconstruction comes fairly close to that of Ma Hsü-lun (1924).[3]

1 In his *Roshi Ochu Hyoshi*, 1814.

2 e.g. by T'ao Fang-chi, Li Tz'ŭ-ming and Ma Hsü-lun.

3 It should however be noted, in connection with the above line of argument, that there is also no Wang Pi commentary on Ch. 66.

CHAPTER XXXII

Tao is eternal, but has no fame (name);[1]
The Uncarved Block,[2] though seemingly of small account,
Is greater than anything that is under heaven.[3]
If kings and barons would but possess themselves of it,
The ten thousand creatures would flock to do them homage;
Heaven-and-earth would conspire
To send Sweet Dew,[4]
Without law or compulsion, men would dwell in harmony.
Once the block is carved,[5] there will be names,[6]
And so soon as there are names
Know that it is time to stop.
Only by knowing when it is time to stop can danger be avoided.
To Tao[7] all under heaven will come
As streams and torrents flow into a great river or sea.

1 See textual notes.

2 See Ch. 28.

3 Literally 'under Heaven no one dares regard it as an inferior'.

4 'Sweet Dew tastes like barley-sugar or honey; it falls only when a kingdom is at complete peace.' *Lun Hêng*, XIX. 2. See also *Kuan Tzŭ*, P'ien 20, fol. 16, and *Lü Shih Ch'un Ch'iu*, 115, end.

5 Secondary meaning 'Once there is government'.

6 Categories, distinctions. Things depending on contrast with something else; as opposed to Tao, which 'is so of itself'.

7 i.e. to the possessor of Tao. The last two lines resume the thought of lines 4 and 5.

CHAPTER XXXIII

To understand others is to have knowledge;
To understand oneself is to be illumined.
To conquer others needs strength;
To conquer oneself is harder still.
To be content with what one has is to be rich.
He that works through[1] violence may get his way;
But only what stays[2] in its place
Can endure.
When one dies one is not lost;[3] there is no other longevity.

Commentary

Shou longevity means, strictly speaking, potential longevity, 'staying-power', what we should call having a good constitution, and is a quality that may be possessed by the young as well as the old. One branch of the 'life-nurturing' school sought it by means of diet, hygiene, drugs, etc. For the Taoist view of death see Introduction, p. 54.

1 The word *hsing* implies movement as well as action.
2 As, for example, mountains.
3 One's left arm may become a cock; one's right arm a bow; one's buttocks wheels (*Chuang Tzŭ* VI. 6). In any case, no part of one will be lost.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Great Tao is like a boat that drifts;
It can go this way; it can go that.
The ten thousand creatures owe their existence to it and it does not disown them;
Yet having produced them, it does not take possession of them.[1]
Tao, though it covers the ten thousand things like a garment,
Makes no claim to be master over them,
And asks for nothing from them.
Therefore it may be called the Lowly:
The ten thousand creatures obey it,
Though they know not that they have a master;
Therefore it is called the Great.
So too the Sage just because he never at any time makes a show of greatness in fact achieves greatness.

1 Cf. Chapter 2, where similar words are used of the Sage, who is identified with Tao. For the reading, see textual notes.

CHAPTER XXXV

He who holding the Great Form goes about his work in the empire
Can go about his work, yet do no harm.
All is peace, quietness and security.
Sound of music, smell of good dishes
Will make the passing stranger pause.
How different the words that Tao gives forth!
So thin, so flavourless!
If one looks for Tao, there is nothing solid to see;
If one listens for it, there is nothing loud enough to hear.
Yet if one uses it, it is inexhaustible.

Commentary

The Great Form is the form that is formless, i.e. Tao. Strictly speaking the word means a mental image as opposed to concrete reality.

See introduction p. 61, *hsiang*.

CHAPTER XXXVI

What is in the end to be shrunk
Must first be stretched.
Whatever is to be weakened
Must begin by being made strong.
What is to be overthrown
Must begin by being set up.
He who would be a taker
Must begin as a giver.
This is called 'dimming' one's light.[1]
It is thus that the soft overcomes the hard
And the weak, the strong.
'It is best to leave the fish down in his pool;
Best to leave the State's sharpest weapons where none can see them.'

Commentary

The Sage must 'stoop to conquer', must make himself small in order to be great, must be cast down before he can be exalted. He must remain like the fish at the bottom of the pool. The last two lines are a maxim of common statecraft, here applied in a metaphorical way: the 'sharp weapons' symbolize the Taoist sage who is a kind of secret armament on whom the safety of the state depends. The fish symbolizes armour because both have 'scales'. Compare the *I Chou Shu* 52, where it is said that on the tenth day of spring the fish come up above the ice. If they fail to do so, this is a sign that armour is being secreted in the houses of private people with a view to rebellion.

[1] *Wei* means (1) 'obscure because so small', (2) 'obscure because so dark'. It is etymologically connected with *mei* 'dark'.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Tao never does;
Yet through it all things are done.
If the barons and kings would but possess themselves of it,
The ten thousand creatures would at once be transformed.
And if having been transformed they should desire to act,
We must restrain them by the blankness[1] of the Unnamed.
The blankness of the Unnamed
Brings dispassion;
To be dispassionate is to be still.
And so,[2] of itself, the whole empire will be at rest.

[1] Literally, 'the uncarven-wood-quality'.
[2] If the Sage is 'still'.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

The man of highest 'power' does not reveal himself as a possessor of 'power';
Therefore he keeps his 'power'.
The man of inferior 'power' cannot rid it of the appearance of 'power';
Therefore he is in truth without 'power'.
The man of highest 'power' neither acts[1] nor is there any who so regards him;[2]
The man of inferior 'power' both acts and is so regarded.[3]
The man of highest humanity, though he acts, is not so regarded;
Whereas a man of even the highest morality both acts and is so regarded.
While even he who is best versed in ritual not merely acts, but if people fail to respond
Then he will pull up his sleeves and advance upon them.
That is why it is said:[4] 'After Tao was lost, then came the "power";
After the "power" was lost, then came human kindness.
After human kindness was lost, then came morality,
After morality was lost, then came ritual.
Now ritual is the mere husk[5] of loyalty and promise-keeping

[1] Does not act separately and particularly, but only applies the 'power' in a general way.
[2] Regards him as a possessor of power. Compare *Kuan Tzŭ*, P'ien 5, paragraph 2. [3] i.e. is regarded as a possessor of *tê*.
[4] The same saying is quoted by *Chuang Tzŭ*, XXII. 1.
[5] Or 'attenuated form'; but it balances *hua* ('flower', as opposed to fruit) and it is better to indicate the vegetable metaphor.

And is indeed the first step towards brawling.'
Foreknowledge[1] may be the 'flower of doctrine',
But it is the beginning of folly.
Therefore the full-grown man[2] takes his stand upon the
solid substance and not upon the mere husk,
Upon the fruit and not upon the flower.
Truly, 'he rejects that and takes this'.

(The repeated use of nouns as verbs, not possible in English to the same extent as in Chinese, makes anything but a clumsy paraphrase of the first ten lines of the chapter impossible.)

[1] See additional notes. [2] Full-grown in Tao.

CHAPTER XXXIX

As for the things that from of old have understood the Whole—
The sky through such understanding remains limpid,
Earth remains steady,
The spirits keep their holiness,[1]
The abyss is replenished,
The ten thousand creatures bear their kind,
Barons and princes direct[2] their people.
It is the Whole that causes it.
Were it not so limpid, the sky would soon get torn,
Were it not for its steadiness, the earth would soon tip over,
Were it not for their holiness, the spirits would soon wither
away.
Were it not for this replenishment, the abyss would soon go dry,
Were it not that the ten thousand creatures can bear their kind,
They would soon become extinct.
Were the barons and princes no longer directors of their people
and for that reason honoured and exalted, they would soon
be overthrown.
Truly 'the humble is the stem upon which the mighty grows,
The low is the foundation upon which the high is laid.'
That is why barons and princes refer to themselves as 'The Orphan', 'The Needy', 'The Ill-provided'. Is this not indeed a case of might rooting itself upon humility?[3]

[1] Their *ling*, which is to spirits (or objects and animals 'possessed' by spirits) what *tê* is to man. It is cognate to words meaning life, name, command, etc.
[2] See additional notes. [3] From 'Truly' to 'humility' is quoted with slight variants by the *Chan Kuo Ts'ê* (IV. 14 recto) as a saying of Lao Tzŭ. It is probable that we have here an actual quotation of the *Tao Tê Ching*. For the date of the *Chan Kuo Ts'ê*, see Appendix VI.

True indeed are the sayings:
'Enumerate the parts of a carriage, and you still have not explained what a carriage' is, and 'They[1] did not want themselves to tinkle like jade-bells, while others resounded like stone-chimes'.

Commentary

'Have understood the Whole'; literally 'Have got the Whole'. But the parallel passage in *Chuang Tzŭ* (XXV. 10) uses the expression 'getting a horse' in the sense of realizing what a horse is, as opposed to knowing what its parts (ears, body, tail, etc.) are. 'Get' therefore here means 'get the idea of'. Compare our colloquial expression 'Do you get me?' Of the two sayings at the end of the chapter, the first illustrates the theme of 'understanding the Whole' with which the chapter opens; the second recapitulates the latter part of the chapter, which deals with the reluctance of the wise ruler to put himself 'above' his subjects and so spoil the unity of empire.

In line 8, the words 'It is the Whole' are accidentally omitted in the Wang Pi text.

CHAPTER XL

In Tao the only motion is returning;[2]
The only useful quality, weakness.
For though all creatures under heaven are the products of Being,
Being itself is the product of Not-being.

[1] The Sages of old.

[2] Compare Ch. XXV, line 12.

CHAPTER XLI

When the man of highest capacities hears Tao
He does his best to put it into practice.
When the man of middling capacity hears Tao
He is in two minds about it.
When the man of low capacity hears Tao
He laughs loudly at it.
If he did not laugh, it would not be worth the name of Tao.
Therefore the proverb has it:
'The way[1] out into the light often looks dark,
The way that goes ahead often looks as if it went back.'
The way that is least hilly often looks as if it went up and down,
The 'power' that is really loftiest looks like an abyss,
What is sheerest white looks blurred.
The 'power' that is most sufficing looks inadequate,
The 'power' that stands firmest looks flimsy.[2]
What is in its natural, pure state looks faded;[2]
The largest square has no corners,
The greatest vessel takes the longest to finish,[3]
Great music has the faintest[4] notes,
The Great Form[5] is without shape.
For Tao is hidden and nameless.
Yet Tao alone supports[6] all things and brings them to fulfilment.

[1] Tao.
[2] See additional notes.
[3] Metaphorical meaning, 'The greatest capacities develop latest'.
[4] 'Most rarefied.' Cf. Ch. 14.
[5] Cf. Ch. 35.
[6] A commercial metaphor. Literally 'backs financially'.

Commentary

'The largest vessel. . . .' When the great Han dynasty general Ma Yüan[1] was young, he was worried by the fact that he could not understand or get any pleasure from the *Book of Odes*, but preferred hunting. 'I am sure', his brother told him, 'you have "high capacities" that will "develop late". A good craftsman does not show his work while it is still in the rough. The best thing you can do for the present is to go off and have as much fun as you can.'

[1] *Hou Han Shu*, Ch. XXIV, fol. 1.

CHAPTER XLII

TAO GAVE birth to the One; the One gave birth successively to two things, three things, up to ten thousand.[1] These ten thousand creatures cannot turn their backs to the shade without having the sun on their bellies,[2] and it is on this blending of the breaths[3] that their harmony[4] depends. To be orphaned, needy, ill-provided is what men most hate; yet princes and dukes style themselves so. Truly, 'things are often increased by seeking to diminish them and diminished by seeking to increase them.' The maxims that others use in their teaching I too will use in mine. Show me a man of violence that came to a good end,[5] and I will take him for my teacher.

Commentary

To be a prince is a 'sunny' as opposed to a 'shady' thing. But a prince does not feel properly 'harmonized' unless he also has 'the shade at his back', which he obtains by humbling himself.

A proverb[6] says: 'The man of violence never yet came to a good end; nor did he that delights in victory fail to meet his match.' Another proverb[7] says: 'The best doctor

[1] i.e. everything.

[2] Which symbolizes the fact that they are themselves a mixture of light and dark, hard and soft, water and fire, etc.

[3] The warm 'breath' of the sun and the cold 'breath' of the shade. Hence 'breath' comes to mean a 'state of the atmosphere' in a wider sense.

[4] Or 'balance', as we should say. [5] See textual notes.

[6] See additional notes. [7] See *Hou Han Shu*, XXX. fol. 3.

cannot save one whose life-span has run out; nor can the man of violence strive with Heaven.' It is possible that *Ch'iang-liang*, 'man of violence', is in reality the name of a mythological figure, a sort of Titan who warred unsuccessfully against Heaven. *Ch'iang* means 'violent'; but *liang* means 'rafter', and though the two together are said to mean 'man of violence', no proof is adduced; and I suspect that this Titan was called 'Rafter' because his image was carved on the ends of rafters. This theory is borne out by a passage in *Chuang Tzŭ* (VI. 9) which speaks of a strong man called Chü-liang, 'holder of the rafters' who like Samson 'lost his strength'. In order to conform to a quotation by *Huai-nan Tzŭ*, many modern editors have tampered with the text at the beginning of the chapter.

CHAPTER XLIII

What is of all things most yielding[1]
Can overwhelm that which is of all things most hard.[2]
Being substanceless it can enter even where there is no space;
That is how I know the value of action that is actionless.
But that there can be teaching without words,
Value in action that is actionless,
Few indeed can understand.

CHAPTER XLIV

Fame or one's own self, which matters to one most?
One's own self or things bought, which should count most?
In the getting or the losing, which is worse?[3]
Hence he who grudges expense pays dearest in the end;
He who has hoarded most will suffer the heaviest loss.[4]
Be content with what you have and are, and no one can despoil you;
Who stops in time nothing can harm.
He is forever safe and secure.

1 Water. 2 Rock.

3 i.e. which is better, to get fame and wealth but injure oneself, or to lack fame and wealth and save oneself?

4 He drives people to such exasperation that they attack him and help themselves. For *ai* in the sense 'grudge' compare *I Chou Shu* 54, 'He who is stingy about rewards and gifts is called *ai*'. The primary meaning of *ai* is 'to want to keep to oneself'. Hence the commoner meaning 'to love', which would here be out of place.

CHAPTER XLV

What is most perfect seems to have something missing;
Yet its use is unimpaired.[1]
What is most full seems empty;
Yet its use will never fail.[2]
What is most straight seems crooked;
The greatest skill seems like clumsiness,
The greatest eloquence like stuttering.[3]
Movement overcomes cold;
But staying still overcomes heat.
So he[4] by his limpid calm
Puts right everything under heaven.

[1] Metaphor of a pot or vessel; applied to Tao.
[2] It can be drawn upon indefinitely.
[3] Compare *Analects* IV, 24; and the stuttering of Moses (*Encyclopædia of Islam*, under Musa).
[4] The Sage.

CHAPTER XLVI

When there is Tao in the empire
The galloping[1] steeds are turned back to fertilize the ground by their droppings.
When there is not Tao in the empire
War horses will be reared even on the sacred mounds[2] below the city walls.
No lure[3] is greater than to possess what others want,
No disaster greater than not to be content with what one has,
No presage of evil greater than that men should be wanting to get more.
Truly: 'He who has once known the contentment that comes simply through being content, will never again be otherwise than contented'.

[1] i.e. carriage-horses, used not for war but for travelling. Every one will be contented where he is.
[2] See additional notes. They are reared, of course, as a preparation for offensive war, i.e. for 'getting more'.
[3] i.e. incitement to evil doers. See additional notes.

CHAPTER XLVII

Without leaving his door
He knows everything under heaven.
Without looking out of his window
He knows all the ways of heaven.
For the further one travels[1]
The less one knows.
Therefore the Sage arrives without going,
Sees all[2] without looking,
Does nothing, yet achieves everything.

[1] Away from Tao; away from the Unity into the Multiplicity.
[2] Read *ming* 'illumined', not *ming* 'name'. The two characters are constantly interchanged in old texts.

CHAPTER XLVIII

Learning consists in adding to one's stock day by day;
The practice of Tao consists in 'subtracting day by day,
Subtracting and yet again subtracting
Till one has reached inactivity.
But by this very inactivity
Everything can be activated.'[1]
Those who of old won the adherence of all who live under heaven
All did so by not interfering.
Had they interfered,
They would never have won this adherence.

[1] Compare *Chuang Tzŭ* XXII. 1.

CHAPTER XLIX

The Sage has no heart[1] of his own;
He uses the heart of the people as his heart.
Of the good man I[2] approve,
But of the bad I also approve,
And thus he gets goodness.
The truthful man I believe, but the liar I also believe,
And thus he gets truthfulness.[3]
The Sage, in his dealings with the world, seems like one dazed with fright;[4]
For the world's sake he dulls his wits.
The Hundred Families all the time strain their eyes and ears,[5]
The Sage all the time sees and hears no more than an infant sees and hears.

[1] Makes no judgments of his own.
[2] i.e. the Sage.
[3] Cf. Ch. 17 and 23.
[4] Read 'heart' beside 'leaf'.
[5] This line is accidentally omitted by the Wang Pi text.

CHAPTER L

HE WHO aims at life achieves death. If the 'companions of life'[1] are thirteen, so likewise are the 'companions of death' thirteen. How is it that the 'death-spots'[2] in man's life and activity are also thirteen? It is because men feed life too grossly. It is said that he who has a true hold on life, when he walks on land[3] does not meet tigers or wild buffaloes; in battle he is not touched by weapons of war. Indeed, a buffalo that attacked him would find nothing for its horns to butt, a tiger would find nothing for its claws to tear, a weapon would find no place for its point to enter in.[4] And why? Because such men have no 'death-spot' in them.

Commentary

In military language 'he who *ch'u ssŭ*[5] "goes out prepared to die" comes back alive and victorious'. Conversely, he who 'goes for' (aims at) life, achieves death. This is here adapted as an attack on the Hedonists, who maintained that the aim of life consists in giving satis-

[1] The four limbs and nine apertures that constitute the human apparatus.
[2] A military expression.
[3] One would expect this to balance a clause about what happens when he is on the water.
[4] Compare *Chuang Tzŭ* XVII. 1, end.
[5] Cf. *Han Fei Tzŭ* P'ien 50: How can soldiers be expected to 'go out prepared to die', when at home admiration is accorded to those whose consciences (*i*) forbid them to enter endangered towns, dwell in camps, or in fact give one hair of their bodies, even if it would benefit the whole world?

faction to every constituent part of the human apparatus. But excessive 'feeding of life', says our author, defeats its own end, creating 'death-spots' (as I have said, this too is a military term). Ordinary people by 'fostering life' convert their thirteen constituent parts, which might be 'companions of life', into 'companions of death'.

We attribute the fact that some people do not meet tigers or get killed in battle to a thing we call 'chance'. The Taoist attributed such immunity to qualities in the 'lucky' person himself. Their view has perhaps as much to be said for it as ours. All efforts to make *shih yu san* mean anything but 'thirteen' do violence both to idiom and sense.

CHAPTER LI

Tao gave them birth;
The 'power' of Tao reared them,
Shaped them according to their kinds,
Perfected them, giving to each its strength.[1]
Therefore of the ten thousand things[2] there is not one that does not worship Tao and do homage to its 'power'. No mandate ever went forth that accorded to Tao the right to be worshipped, nor to its 'power' the right to receive homage.
It was always and of itself so.
Therefore as Tao bore them and the 'power' of Tao reared them, made them grow, fostered them, harboured them, brewed[3] for them, so you[4] must
'Rear them, but not lay claim to them,
Control them, but never lean upon them,
Be chief among them, but not manage them.
This is called the mysterious power.'[5]

1 Its 'strong point', inborn capacity.
2 Excepting Man?
3 The word means a 'decoction', whether nutritive, medicinal or (as always in modern Chinese) poisonous.
4 The Sage.
5 Cf. Chapter 10.

CHAPTER LII

That which was the beginning of all things under heaven
We may speak of as the 'mother' of all things.
He who apprehends the mother[1]
Thereby knows the sons.[2]
And he who has known the sons
Will hold all the tighter to the mother,
And to the end of his days suffer no harm:
'Block the passages, shut the doors,
And till the end your strength shall not fail.
Open up the passages, increase your doings,
And till your last day no help shall come to you.'
As good sight means seeing what is very small
So strength means holding on to what is weak.[3]
He who having used the outer-light[4] can return to the inner-light
Is thereby preserved from all harm.
This is called resorting to the always-so.

1 Tao, ~~the One, the Whole~~.
2 The Many, the universe.
3 i.e. Tao.
4 This corresponds to 'knowing the sons'. *Ming* ('inner light') is self-knowledge.

CHAPTER LIII

He who has the least scrap[1] of sense, once he has got started on the great highway has nothing to fear so long as he avoids turnings. For great highways are safe and easy.
But men love by-paths.[2]
So long as the Court is in order
They are content to let their fields run to weed
And their granaries stand empty.
They wear patterns and embroideries,
Carry sharp swords, glut themselves with drink and food, have more possessions than they can use.
These are the riotous ways of brigandage;[3] they are not the Highway.

1 See additional notes.
2 All this is of course metaphorical. The highway is Tao; the by-paths, the Confucian virtues. 'Loving by-paths' implies also neglecting the essential and pursuing the secondary.
3 Compare the riotous ways of the Robber Chê in *Chuang Tzŭ*.

CHAPTER LIV

What Tao[1] plants cannot be plucked,
What Tao clasps, cannot slip.
By its virtue alone can one generation after another carry on the ancestral sacrifice.[2]
Apply it to yourself and by its power you will be freed from dross.
Apply it to your household and your household shall thereby have abundance.
Apply it to the village, and the village will be made secure.
Apply it to the kingdom, and the kingdom shall thereby be made to flourish.
Apply it to an empire, and the empire shall thereby be extended.
Therefore just as through[3] oneself one may contemplate Oneself,
So through the household one may contemplate the Household,[4]
And through the village, one may contemplate the Village,
And through the kingdom, one may contemplate the Kingdom,
And through the empire, one may contemplate the Empire.
How do I know that the empire is so?
By this.[5]

1 Literally 'what is well planted', i.e. planted by Tao.

2 The 'power' of the ancestor's Tao carries the family on.

3 By delving back through the successive stages of one's own conscious one gets back to the Unity of the Whole which is one's Tao. Cf. the *Maitri Upanishad* (Hume, p. 435) 'having seen the Self through oneself one becomes selfless'.

4 i.e. the Tao of the household. When one has had vision of the Tao (underlying essence) of a thing, one can control it. This catena (self-household-village, etc.) is found in every branch of Chinese philosophy, applied in a variety of ways. It originated I think with the Yang Chu theory that to perfect a family one must perfect the individual members of it, to perfect a village one must perfect each several family, etc.

5 What is inside me.

CHAPTER LV

The impunity of things fraught with the 'power'
May be likened to that of an infant.
Poisonous insects do not sting it,
Nor fierce beasts seize it,
Nor clawing birds maul it.
Its bones are soft, its sinews weak; but its grip is strong.
Not yet to have known the union of male and female, but to be completely formed,
Means that the vital force is at its height;
To be able to scream all day without getting hoarse
Means that harmony[1] is at its perfection.
To understand such harmony[2] is to understand the always-so.
To understand the always-so is to be illumined.
But to fill life to the brim is to invite omens.[3]
If the heart makes calls upon the life-breath,[4] rigidity follows.
Whatever has a time of vigour also has a time of decay.
Such[5] things are against Tao,
And whatever is against Tao is soon destroyed.

1 Of hot and cold, soft and hard, etc. For the state of infancy as a Taoist ideal, see Introduction, p. 55

2 Compare *Analects*, I. 12.

3 Here, as in the Short Preface to the *Book of History* (Legge, p. 6) and *Shih Chi*, Ch. III, fol. 6, *hsiang* means a bad omen. It originally meant a portent of any kind, whether good or bad. In current Chinese it is, of course, only used in the favourable sense.

4 The emotions were thought by the Chinese to make call upon and use up the original supply of breath which was allotted to a man at birth and constituted his life-spirit.

5 Filling to the brim, calling upon the life-breath, having a time of 'vigour'. Cf. Ch. 30.

CHAPTER LVI

Those who know do not speak;
Those who speak do not know.
Block the passages,
Shut the doors,
Let all sharpness be blunted,
All tangles untied,
All glare tempered.
All dust smoothed.[1]
This is called the mysterious levelling.[2]
He who has achieved it cannot either be drawn into friendship or repelled,
Cannot be benefited, cannot be harmed,
Cannot either be raised or humbled,
And for that very reason is highest of all creatures under heaven.

[1] Cf. Ch. 4.

[2] In which there is a general perception not effected through particular senses. See *Lieh Tzŭ*, II. 3. 'Henceforward my eyes were one with my ears, my ears with my nose, my nose with my mouth. . . .'

CHAPTER LVII

'Kingdoms can only be governed if rules are kept;
Battles can only be won if rules are broken.'[1]
But the adherence of all under heaven can only be won by letting-alone.
How do I know that it is so?
By this.[2]
The more prohibitions there are, the more ritual avoidances,
The poorer the people will be.
The more 'sharp weapons'[3] there are,
The more benighted will the whole land grow.
The more cunning craftsmen there are,
The more pernicious contrivances[4] will be invented.
The more laws are promulgated,
The more thieves and bandits there will be.
Therefore a sage has said:
So long as I 'do nothing' the people will of themselves be transformed.
So long as I love quietude, the people will of themselves go straight.
So long as I act only by inactivity the people will of themselves become prosperous.
So long as I have no wants the people will of themselves return to the 'state of the Uncarved Block'.

[1] A military maxim, to the pattern of which the author proceeds to fit his Taoist formula. Cf. Lionel Giles, *Sun Tzŭ* pp. 34, 35. *Ch'i* means unexpected manœuvres. *Chêng* 'rules kept' is not here used in its technical military sense of 'open attack'.

[2] See Ch. 12. Through what I have found inside myself, 'in the belly'; through the light of my inner vision.

[3] i.e. clever people.

[4] Cf. the story in *Chuang Tzŭ* (XII. 11) about the man in whom the idea of a simple labour-saving contrivance inspired feelings similar to those aroused in Wordsworth by the sight of a railway train.

CHAPTER LVIII

When the ruler looks depressed[1] the people will be happy
and satisfied;
When the ruler looks lively and self-assured[2] the people
will be carping and discontented.
'It is upon bad fortune that good fortune leans, upon good
fortune that bad fortune rests.'[3]
But though few know it, there is a bourn where there is
neither right nor wrong;[4]
In a realm where every straight is doubled by a crooked,
and every good by an ill, surely mankind has gone
long enough astray?
Therefore the Sage
Squares without cutting,
Shapes the corners without lopping,
Straightens without stretching,
Gives forth light without shining.[5]

1 As the Taoist is described as doing in Ch. 20.

2 Like the people of the world in Ch. 20.

3 Such are the maxims that pass as wisdom. The author is here manifestly satirizing a passage in the *Lü Shih Ch'un Ch'iu* (P'ien 29, beginning): 'It is upon bad fortune that good fortune leans, upon good fortune that bad fortune rests. The Sage alone perceives this. How should ordinary men reach such a bourn (of wisdom)?' To the Taoist the real 'bourn of wisdom' lies far beyond the world of contraries and antinomies.

4 *Hsieh*, omitted by some versions of the Wang Pi text, should be retained.

5 Through Tao he reaches his *ends* without use of *means*. To translate 'shines without dazzling' is to misunderstand the whole sequence. The Confucians as their 'means' use the virtues of 'squareness', i.e. rectitude, and 'angularity' i.e. incorruptibility.

CHAPTER LIX

You cannot rule men nor serve heaven unless you have laid up a
store;
This 'laying up a store' means quickly absorbing,[1]
And 'quickly absorbing' means doubling one's garnered 'power'.
Double your garnered power and it acquires a strength that
nothing can overcome.
If there is nothing it cannot overcome, it knows no bounds,
And only what knows no bounds
Is huge enough to keep a whole kingdom in its grasp.
But only he who having the kingdom goes to the Mother
Can keep it long.
This[2] is called the art of making the roots strike deep by fencing
the trunk, of making life long by fixed staring.

Commentary

There is a common saying, which takes a variety of different forms, 'With but one year's store, a land is a land no more'. In order that the food of the living and of the dead[3] may be assured in case of a failure of the crops or an invasion, part of last year's grain must be retained in the barns as a basis for the new store. This 'laying of the new upon the old' is here used as a symbol for the reinforcing of one's stock of vital-energy (*ch'i*, 'breath') by Quietist practices. Compare Mencius's famous *hao-jan chih ch'i* 'welling breath' which issuing from such a

1 See textual notes.

2 i.e. going to Tao the Mother.

3 i.e. sacrifices to the Ancestors (Heaven).

'garnered store' as our author here describes was so great and strong 'that it would fill heaven, earth and all that is in between'. There is little reason to doubt that 'fixed staring' was used by the Taoists, as it was by Indians and by Byzantine Quietists, as a method of trance induction. Non-Taoists used the phrase without understanding it, imagining apparently that it was synonymous with *ch'ang-shêng*, 'long life'. Cf. *Hsün Tzŭ* 4, middle, and *Lü Shih Ch'un Ch'iu* 3, fol. 2.

CHAPTER LX

RULING A large kingdom is indeed like cooking small fish.[1] They who by Tao ruled all that is under heaven did not let an evil spirit[2] within them display its powers. Nay, it was not only that the evil spirit did not display its powers; neither was the Sage's good spirit[3] used to the hurt of other men. Nor was it only that his good spirit was not used to harm other men, the Sage himself was thus saved from harm.[4] And so, each being saved from harm, their 'powers' could converge towards a common end.

Commentary

A number of parallel passages, which the author quite certainly had in mind, make it evident that both ***kuei*** and ***shên*** are here used in a subjective sense: 'The enlightened (i.e. Realist) monarch in the carrying out of his institutes is a god (*t'ien*); in his use of men he is a demon (*kuei*).[5] He is a god, in that he cannot be gainsaid; a demon, in that he is subject to no restraint.'[6] 'The Sages of old did not damage their souls (*shén*)' by evil passions.[7] Another parallel passage, containing both a reference to ***kuei*** and the

[1] The less one handles them the better. [2] *Kuei*. [3] *Shên*.

[4] Omit *jên*, which has crept in under the influence of *Han Fei Tzŭ* who is, I think, simply adapting a traditional text to his own purposes. (P'ien 20, fol. 9.)

[5] A *kuei* is not of course necessarily bad. It is simply the spirit of a commoner as opposed to that of a dweller in heaven (*t'ien*) i.e. a Former King. But 'possession' by a *kuei* was always evil.

[6] *Han Fei Tzŭ*, 48. 1. [7] *Lü Shih Ch'un Ch'iu*, 119.

curious sequence of a statement followed by 'Nay, it was not so . . .' was certainly also in the author's mind: 'If with the whole essence of your being you ponder on a question, the *kuei* will give you the answer. Nay, it is not that the *kuei* answer you, it is simply that you have pondered with the whole essence of your being.'[1]

The general meaning is that if the ruler follows the Realist's advice and is a 'demon' in his dealings with the people, he will do as much harm to his own soul as to them.

[1] *Lü Shih Ch'un Ch'iu*, 147.

CHAPTER LXI

A LARGE kingdom must be like the low ground towards which all streams flow down. It must be a point towards which all things under heaven converge. Its part must be that of the female in its dealings with all things under heaven. The female by quiescence conquers the male; by quiescence gets underneath.[1] If a large kingdom can in the same way succeed in getting underneath a small kingdom then it will win the adherence of the small kingdom; and it is because small kingdoms are by nature in this way underneath large kingdoms that they win the adherence of large kingdoms. The one must get underneath in order to do it; the other is underneath and therefore does it. What large countries really need is more inhabitants; and what small countries need is some place where their surplus inhabitants can go and get employment. Thus[2] each gets what it needs. That is why I say the large kingdom must 'get underneath'.

[1] Literally 'becomes underneath', i.e. induces the male to mount her.

[2] i.e. if the large kingdom 'gets underneath'. It is assumed that the population of the large kingdom will be relatively sparse; that of the small kingdom relatively dense.

CHAPTER LXII

Tao in the Universe is like the south-west corner[1] in the house.
It is the treasure of the good man,
The support of the bad.
There is a traffic in speakers of fine words;
Persons of grave demeanour are accepted as gifts;
Even the bad let slip no opportunity to acquire them.
Therefore[2] on the day of an Emperor's enthronement
Or at the installation of the three officers of State
Rather than send a team of four horses, preceded by a disc of jade,
Better were it, as can be done without moving from one's seat, to send this Tao.
For what did the ancients say of this Tao, how did they prize it? Did they not say of those that have it 'Pursuing, they shall catch; pursued, they shall escape?' They thought it, indeed, most precious of all things under heaven.

Commentary

The 'speakers of fine words' and 'persons of grave demeanour' were the itinerant sophists and sages who at that time went round from capital to capital, selling their services to the ruler who offered them the highest inducements.

[1] Where family worship was carried on; the pivotal point round which the household centred.

[2] i.e. if things other than presents in kind are not only accepted as gifts, but even purchased at high price.

CHAPTER LXIII

It acts without action, does without doing, finds flavour in what is flavourless,[1]
Can make the small great and the few many,
'Requites injuries with good deeds,
Deals with the hard while it is still easy,
With the great while it is still small.'[2]
In the governance of empire everything difficult must be dealt with while it is still easy,
Everything great must be dealt with while it is still small.
Therefore the Sage never has to deal with the great; and so achieves greatness.
But again 'Light assent inspires little confidence
And "many easies" means many a hard.'
Therefore the Sage knows too how to make the easy difficult, and by doing so avoid all difficulties!

Commentary

The author first appropriates the maxim 'Requite injuries with good deeds, etc.',[3] and shows how perfectly it fits in with his own teaching. He then, as a *tour de force*, appropriates a second and apparently contradictory proverb, with equal success.

The word *tê* ('good deeds' in the proverb) is the same as

[1] In Ch. 35 Tao itself is said to be 'flavourless'.

[2] Compare *Han Fei Tzŭ*, 38. The saying originally merely meant 'attend to troubles in time, before they get out of hand'.

[3] Confucius (*Analects* XIV. 36) criticizes this proverb and says if you repay injuries with good deeds, how are you going to repay good deeds?

that by which Taoists denoted the mysterious 'power' of Tao. The world laughs at Tao, the author says, and we requite this injury with the gift of *tê*. In what follows the 'easy' and 'small' is the Primal Unity underlying the apparent diversity of things. The Taoist passes as easily from the 'easy' aspect of things to their 'hard' aspect as he does from the 'hard' to the 'easy'; that is to say he is capable of seeing things as parts or as a unity, according to what the occasion requires.

CHAPTER LXIV

'What stays still is easy to hold;
Before there has been an omen it is easy to lay plans.
What is tender is easily torn,[1]
What is minute is easy to scatter.'
Deal with things in their state of not-yet-being,
Put them in order before they have got into confusion.
For 'the tree big as a man's embrace began as a tiny sprout,
The tower nine storeys high began with a heap of earth,
The journey of a thousand leagues began with what was under the feet'.
He who acts, harms; he who grabs, lets slip.
Therefore the Sage does not act, and so does not harm;
Does not grab, and so does not let slip.
Whereas the people of the world, at their tasks,
Constantly spoil things when within an ace of completing them.
'Heed the end no less than the beginning,'[2]
And your work will not be spoiled.
Therefore[3] the Sage wants only things that are unwanted,
Sets no store by products difficult to get,

[1] Reading *p'an* with the 'knife' determinative; or 'What is soft is easily melted', if we keep the 'water' determinative.

[2] For similar sayings see *Book of History*, Legge, pp. 183 and 211.

[3] Because the 'end' (the world around us) is as important as the 'beginning' (the primal state, the One, the Whole). The Sage does not only work through Tao; he also shows the world the degree to which ordinary life can be moulded to the pattern of Tao.

And so teaches things untaught,
Turning all men back to the things they have left behind,[1]
That the ten thousand creatures may be restored to their Self-so.[2]
This he does; but dare not act.

[1] Such as walking instead of riding, used knotted ropes instead of writing, etc. See Ch. 80.

[2] To what they are of themselves, as opposed to what they are in relation to other things.

CHAPTER LXV

IN THE days of old those who practised Tao with success did not, by means of it, enlighten the people, but on the contrary sought to make them ignorant.
The more knowledge people have, the harder they are to rule.
Those who seek to rule by giving knowledge
Are like bandits preying on the land.
Those who rule without giving knowledge
Bring a stock of good fortune to the land.
To have understood the difference between these two things is to have a test and standard.
To be always able to apply this test and standard
Is called the mysterious 'power',
The mysterious 'power', so deep-penetrating,
So far-reaching,
That can follow things back——
All the way back to the Great Concordance.[1]

[1] Cf. *Chuang Tzŭ*, XII, 8.

CHAPTER LXVI

How did the great rivers and seas get their kingship over
the hundred lesser streams?
Through the merit of being lower than they; that was how
they got their kingship.
Therefore the Sage
In order to be above the people
Must speak as though he were lower than the people.
In order to guide them
He must put himself behind them.
Only thus can the Sage be on top and the people not be
crushed by his weight.
Only thus can he guide, and the people not be led into
harm.
Indeed in this way everything under heaven will be glad
to be pushed by[1] him and will not find his guidance irk-
some. This he does by not striving; and because he does
not strive, none can contend with him.

[1] 'From behind'.

CHAPTER LXVII

EVERY ONE under heaven says that our Way is greatly like
folly. But it is just because it is great, that it seems like
folly. As for things that do not seem like folly[1]—well,
there can be no question about *their* smallness!
Here are my three treasures.[2] Guard and keep them! The
first is pity; the second, frugality; the third: refusal to be
'foremost of all things under heaven'.
For only he that pities is truly able to be brave;
Only he that is frugal is truly able to be profuse.
Only he that refuses to be foremost of all things
Is truly able to become chief of all Ministers.[3]
At present your bravery is not based on pity, nor your
profusion on frugality, nor your vanguard on your rear;[4]
and this is death. But pity cannot fight without conquer-
ing or guard without saving. Heaven arms with pity
those whom it would not see destroyed.[5]

[1] Literally 'that seem normal'.

[2] The three rules that formed the practical, political side of the author's teaching (1) abstention from aggressive war and capital punishment, (2) absolute simplicity of living, (3) refusal to assert active authority.

[3] The phrase has exactly the same meaning as the *kuan-ch'ang* of Ch. 28.

[4] i.e. your eminence on self-effacement. This is as perilous as to leave one's line of communication undefended.

[5] Such is the sense that our author gives to the saying. It is probable, however, that it is simply a couplet from some old ritual-song (like those in the last part of the *Book of Odes*) and means 'Heaven deigned to help them; in its pity it protected them'.

Commentary

The opening passage cannot be rendered satisfactorily, for it depends on a series of plays on words. *Ta* (1) greatly, (2) great. *Pu-hsiao* 'below the average in capacity'; the opposite of *hsien* 'above the average in capacity'. But there is a play on *hsiao* 'average', 'normal' and *hsiao* 'small' which is sometimes written with this same character.

CHAPTER LXVIII

The best charioteers do not rush ahead;[1]
The best fighters do not make displays of wrath.[2]
The greatest conqueror wins without joining issue;
The best user of men acts as though he were their inferior.
This is called the power that comes of not contending,
Is called the capacity to use men,
The secret of being mated to heaven, to what was of old.

1 Wang Pi says quite rightly that *Shih* is a 'leader' of foot-soldiers. The leaders rode in war-chariots. He also says that *wu* means 'rushing in front of the others'. Cf. *Sun Tzŭ* P'ien 9, end. The usual translation ('The best soldiers are not warlike') misses the point.

2 *Nu* is anger shown outwardly, as by glaring, grimacing or the like.

CHAPTER LXIX

The strategists have the sayings: 'When you doubt your ability to meet the enemy's attack, take the offensive yourself', and 'If you doubt your ability to advance an inch, then retreat a foot'.

This latter is what we call to march without moving,
To roll the sleeve, but present no bare arm,
The hand that seems to hold, yet has no weapon in it,
A host that can confront, yet presents no battle-front.[1]
Now the greatest of all calamities is to attack and find no enemy.
I can have no enemy only at the price of losing my treasure.[2]
Therefore when armies are raised and issues joined it is he who does not delight in war that wins.

Commentary

In the scramble for empire that marked the final phase of the feudal period in China the watchword was 'No enemy under heaven', i.e. each State looked forward to a time when it should have crushed all the other States. The Realists used this watchword in an extended application, applying it also to internal polities: the State can tolerate no criticism or opposition. That this maxim, in either of its senses, can only be fulfilled at the expense of 'pity' is obvious. Later editors, no longer understanding

[1] The Wang Pi commentary shows the order in which these clauses should come.

[2] i.e. pity. Secondary sense: 'He whose enemy presents no front, loses his booty'. For this sense of *pao* see *Kuan Tzŭ*, P'ien 17, middle.

the connotations of the phrase 'no enemy' altered the text to 'despising one's enemy'; but Wang Pi's commentary makes it clear that he read 'no enemy' and perfectly understood what the phrase denoted.

The two strategists quoted at the beginning of the chapter would appear to be Wang Liao and I Liang, cf. *Lü Shih Ch'un Ch'iu*, 99. A book by the latter still survived at the beginning of the Christian era, see *Han Shu* XXX, fol. 26.

CHAPTER LXX

My words are very easy to understand and very easy to put into practice. Yet no one under heaven understands them; no one puts them into practice. But my words have an ancestry, my deeds have a lord;[1] and it is precisely because men do not understand this that they are unable to understand me.

Few then understand me; but it is upon this very fact that my value depends. It is indeed in this sense[2] that 'the Sage wears hair-cloth on top, but carries jade underneath his dress'.

[1] To have 'neither ancestors nor lord' was to be a wild man, a savage. This is a metaphorical way of saying that all the Sage did and said was related to a definite system of thought.

[2] In this sense, and not in the sense that he flies in panic from the horrors of the world. Rich people, in times of tumult, dressed up as peasants and hid their jade treasures under their clothes. Metaphorically 'to wear haircloth' etc., came to mean 'to hide one's light under a bushel', 'to keep one's knowledge to oneself'.

CHAPTER LXXI

'To know when one does not know is best.
To think one knows when one does not know is a dire disease.
Only he who recognizes this disease as a disease
Can cure himself of the disease.'
The Sage's way of curing disease
Also consists in making people recognize their diseases as diseases and thus ceasing to be diseased.

Commentary

The best way to explain this chapter is to paraphrase it. The people of the world, the author says, have a saying to the effect that it is best of all never to think that one knows when one doesn't know, for to think one knows when in reality one is ignorant is a dire disease; most people, however, are bound to suffer to some extent from this disease, and if they will only recognize the fact that they suffer from it, they will take steps to extend their knowledge and so protect themselves from the 'disease'.

'Well, the whole of my teaching', he replies, 'consists simply in making people recognize that what they mistake for conditions of health are really conditions of disease; that their virtues (humanity, morality, observance of etiquette, etc.) are really vices, that what they prize (luxury, fame, power, etc.) is really worthless.

In the last chapter the author says that his style seems obscure, yet to anyone possessing the clue is perfectly lucid. In this chapter he supplies the classic example of this 'enigmatic lucidity'.

CHAPTER LXXII

NEVER MIND if the people are not intimidated by your authority. A Mightier Authority[1] will deal with them in the end. Do not narrow their dwellings[2] or harass their lives;[3] and for the very reason that you do not harrass them, they will cease to turn from[4] you. Therefore the Sage knows himself[5] but does not show himself. Knows his own value, but does not put himself on high. Truly, 'he rejects that but takes this'.[6]

1 Heaven. Cf. *I Chou Shu*, P'ien 67.
2 i.e. put them in prison. See textual notes.
3 Literally, 'that whereby they live', their livelihoods. The author is thinking of heavy taxation and the like.
4 There is a pun on 'harass' and 'turn from'; see textual notes. The root means originally 'to press down from above'. Hence (1) to oppress (2) to have food crammed into one, to be 'fed up', to turn away in disgust.
5 i.e. knows his own power, but does not display it.
6 See Ch. 12.

CHAPTER LXXIII

He whose braveness lies in daring, slays.
He whose braveness lies in not daring,[1] gives life.
Of these two, either may be profitable or unprofitable.
But 'Heaven hates what it hates;
None can know the reason why'.[2]
Wherefore the Sage, too, disallows it.
For it is the way of Heaven not to strive but none the less to conquer,
Not to speak, but none the less to get an answer,
Not to beckon; yet things come to it of themselves.
Heaven is like one who says little,[3] yet none the less has laid his plans.
Heaven's net is wide;
Coarse are the meshes, yet nothing slips through.

1 i.e. in not daring to slay.
2 Heaven hates the shedding of blood (i.e. it is 'against nature'), and those who ignore the will of Heaven are bound to be trapped at last in the meshes of Fate. This is the traditional pacifist argument of the Mo Tzŭ school, which our author is here able to utilize by identifying Heaven with Tao. For 'Heaven hates what it hates. . . .' Cf. *Lieh Tzŭ*, VI. 5.
3 See textual notes.

CHAPTER LXXIV

THE PEOPLE are not frightened of death. What then is the use of trying to intimidate them with the death-penalty? And even supposing people were generally frightened of death and did not regard it as an everyday thing, which of us would dare to seize them and slay them?[1] There is the Lord of Slaughter[2] always ready for this task, and to do it in his stead is like thrusting oneself into the master-carpenter's place and doing his chipping for him. Now 'he who tries to do the master-carpenter's chipping for him is lucky if he does not cut his hand'.[3]

[1] i.e. even supposing the death-penalty really had the effect of scaring people and keeping down crime, is it fair to ask anyone to undertake such a task?

[2] i.e. Heaven, or its agents (pestilence, famine, lightning, earthquake, etc.).

[3] Adaptation of a proverb meaning 'let every man stick to his task'.

CHAPTER LXXV

THE PEOPLE starve because those above them eat too much tax-grain. That is the only reason why they starve. The people are difficult to keep in order because those above them interfere. That is the only reason why they are so difficult to keep in order. The people attach no importance to death, because those above them are too grossly absorbed in the pursuit of life. That is why they[1] attach no importance to death. And indeed, in that their hearts are so little set on life they are superior to those who set store by life.[2]

[1] The people.

[2] i.e. are superior to their rulers; so that there is no chance of the state being well governed.

CHAPTER LXXVI

WHEN HE is born, man is soft and weak; in death he becomes stiff and hard. The ten thousand creatures and all plants and trees while they are alive are supple and soft, but when they are dead they become brittle and dry. Truly, what is stiff and hard is a 'companion of death'; what is soft and weak is a 'companion of life'.[1] Therefore 'the weapon that is too hard[2] will be broken, the tree that has the hardest wood will be cut down'. Truly, the hard and mighty are cast down; the soft and weak set on high.

[1] Cf. Ch. 50.

[2] The proverb exists in several forms, and the text has been tampered with, so that the exact reading is uncertain. But the general sense is quite clear. Cf. *Lieh Tzŭ* II. 16.

CHAPTER LXXVII

HEAVEN'S WAY is like the bending of a bow.[1] When a bow is bent the top comes down and the bottom-end comes up. So too does Heaven take away from those who have too much, and give to those that have not enough. But if it is Heaven's way to take from those who have too much and give to those who have not enough, this is far from being man's way. He takes away from those that have not enough in order to make offering to those who already have too much. One there is and one only, so rich that he can afford to make offerings to all under heaven. Who is this? It is the possessor of Tao. If, then, the Sage 'though he controls does not lean, and when he has achieved his aim does not linger',[2] it is because he does not wish to reveal himself as better than others.

[1] Not in the act of stringing it, but in the act of shooting an arrow from it. There is no reason at all to suppose with Wilhelm that the composite, double-bending bow is meant.

[2] Over the scene of his triumph. Cf. Ch. 2. If he leaned, the people would know who it was that was controlling them; if he lingered, they would recognize who it was that had done the work. They would regard him as 'better', 'superior'; and to allow oneself to be so regarded is to sin against 'Heaven's way' and so lose one's power.

CHAPTER LXXVIII

NOTHING UNDER heaven is softer or more yielding than water;[1] but when it attacks things hard and resistant there is not one of them that can prevail. For they can find no way of altering[2] it. That the yielding conquers the resistant and the soft conquers the hard is a fact known by all men, yet utilized by none. Yet it is in reference to this that the Sage[3] said 'Only he who has accepted the dirt of the country can be lord of its soil-shrines;[4] only he who takes upon himself the evils of the country can become a king among those what dwell under heaven.' Straight words seem crooked.[5]

1 Cf. Ch. 12; also 43.

2 i.e. damaging.

3 Lao Tan. Cf. *Chuang Tzŭ*, XXXIII. 5.

4 Reference to a custom similar to the 'seizin' of medieval Europe, whereby a new tenant took a clod of earth in his hand to symbolize possession of the soil. The Chinese expression *han hou*, generally used in this connexion, suggests that the clod was originally held by the new feudal lord or tenant between his teeth—a sort of symbolic eating. Thus he absorbed the 'virtue' of the soil.

5 Seem, as we should say, to be paradoxes.

CHAPTER LXXIX

TO ALLAY the main discontent, but only in a manner that will certainly produce further discontents can hardly be called successful. Therefore the Sage behaves like the holder of the left-hand tally, who stays where he is and does not go round making claims on people. For he who has the 'power' of Tao is the Grand Almoner; he who has not the 'power' is the Grand Perquisitor. 'It is Heaven's way, without distinction of persons, to keep the good perpetually supplied.'

Commentary

The meaning of this chapter, which exemplifies the author's literary procedure at its subtlest, can best be made clear by a paraphrase.

It is no use trying to govern in the ordinary way, by laws and restrictions, penalties and rewards. For at any given moment (see Ch. XXIX) some of your subjects will be 'blowing hot while others are blowing cold. Some will be loading while others are tilting'. You will only be able to content some by discontenting others. In fact it is no use trying to *ho* (fit together, harmonize). Thus the Sage is like the holder of the left-hand half of a tally, who is ready to give out what is due (i.e. is ready to vouchsafe the bounties of Tao), but does not go round trying to fit (*ho*) his half of the tally to someone else's half, as the creditor does. He is indeed like the officer who gives public assistance (pun on *ch'i* 'tally' and *ch'ieh* 'help', 'assist')[1] to

1 See textual notes.

the needy and aged; whereas the ordinary ruler is a sort of Grand Tithe-Collector. In the author's application of the proverb which he quotes at the end of the chapter, 'the good' of course means the Taoist Sage, whom Heaven supplies with the inexhaustible treasures of Tao, so that, though a debtor, the Sage is in a position to be always 'giving out', to be always 'meeting claims'. For the origin of the terms employed, see additional notes.

CHAPTER LXXX

GIVEN A small country with few inhabitants,[1] he could bring it about that though there should be among the people contrivances requiring ten times, a hundred times less labour,[2] they would not use them. He could bring it about that the people would be ready to lay down their lives and lay them down again[3] in defence of their homes, rather than emigrate.[4] There might still be boats and carriages, but no one would go in them; there might still be weapons of war but no one would drill with them. He could bring it about that 'the people should have no use for any form of writing save knotted ropes,[5] should be contented with their food, pleased with their clothing, satisfied with their homes, should take pleasure in their rustic tasks. The next place might be so near at hand that one could hear the cocks crowing in it, the dogs

1 i.e. no need for a large country and many inhabitants, which was what the princes of the world pined for.

2 Cf. *Shang Tzŭ*, I. 1, and *Chan Kuo Ts'ê* VI. 26, where the principle is laid down that new mechanical contrivances may be accepted if they are ten times more efficient than the old. For the Taoist objection to mechanical contrivances see *Chuang Tzŭ* XII. 11, already quoted.

3 For *ch'ung-ssŭ* in the sense of 'die twice over' compare *Lü Shih Ch'un Ch'iu*, 131, end: 'Every one has to die once, but it may be truly said that Ch'ing Fêng died twice over'.

4 Cf. Introduction, p. 80.

5 One knots ropes as an aid to one's *own* memory (compare our 'tying a knot in one's handkerchief'); whereas one writes contracts down in order to make other people fulfil them. That, I think, is why 'knotting' belongs to the Golden Age. I doubt whether the *quipus* of South American Indians are relevant.

barking; but the people would grow old and die without ever having been there'.[1]

[1] The passage in inverted commas occurs (with trifling differences) in *Chuang Tzŭ* (X. 3) as a description of life under the rule of the legendary agricultural Sage Shên-nung. The whole chapter can be understood in the past, present or future tense, as the reader desires.

CHAPTER LXXXI

True words are not fine-sounding;
Fine-sounding words are not true.
The good man does not prove by argument;
And he who proves by argument[1] is not good.
True wisdom is different from much learning;
Much learning means little wisdom.
The Sage has no need to hoard;
When his own last scrap has been used up on behalf of others,
Lo, he has more than before!
When his own last scrap has been used up in giving to others,
Lo, his stock is even greater than before![2]
For Heaven's way is to sharpen without cutting,[3]
And the Sage's way is to act without striving.

[1] i.e. the 'sophist'; see Introduction, p. 64.
[2] Adaptation of a saying that occurs in several forms. Cf. *Chuang Tzŭ*, XXI, end.
[3] To achieve the end without using the material means.