

Two Kinds of Changes in Lao Tzu's Thought

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An important aspect of Lao Tzu's thought is his explanation or interpretation of the changes in the universe. The way in which the changes are explained or interpreted constitutes his world-view. The Taoist sage is the one who can understand all changes in the light of Lao Tzu's world-view and follow the right course of action. In spite of the importance, there are many problems for an adequate understanding of his conception of changes.

This paper attempts to offer an overall interpretation of Lao Tzu's view of changes. It will argue that there are two kinds of changes in his thought. They will be called the "spontaneous" and the "unspontaneous" changes. It will be shown that the failure to make the crucial distinction has caused many serious misunderstandings. It has often been thought that the normal process of changes in Lao Tzu's view of the universe is some kind of cyclical or circular movement between two opposites. One important conclusion of this paper is that the cyclical movement between two opposites is not normal but abnormal in Lao Tzu's world-view. In other words, it is typical of the "unspontaneous" changes but absent in the "spontaneous" changes. The conclusion is contrary to the well-known interpretation made by Fung Yu-lan.¹ Even though it is in some respects similar to the theory proposed by D. C. Lau,² our general approach and some points of interpretation are significantly different from his.

In order to develop an overall interpretation of Lao Tzu's view of changes, the paper shall avoid discussing or criticizing other theories in detail. It is, however, a conscious effort to solve the puzzles that the other theories try to solve. We shall start with a general discussion of the distinction between the two kinds of changes, and then discuss each of them separately in terms of the relevant passages from the *Tao Te Ching* to support or illustrate our interpretation.³

I. DISTINCTION BETWEEN SPONTANEOUS AND UNSPONTANEOUS CHANGES

A discussion of the distinction between the spontaneous and the unspontaneous changes in Lao Tzu's world-view must presuppose many basic concepts or beliefs of his philosophy.⁴ The most important concept is undoubtedly that of Tao, supposedly the ultimately real, the supreme good, and the source of all things and lives. Here we shall concentrate on the outstanding quality of Tao, *tzu-jan*,^a to be translated as "spontaneity" in this paper. The importance of *tzu-jan* in Lao Tzu's thought is best expressed in chapter 25:

Man models himself after Earth.
Earth models itself after Heaven.
Heaven models itself after Tao.
Tao models itself after *tzu-jan*.

It is sometimes argued that *tzu-jan* is a principle or reality higher than Tao. Since the *Tao Te Ching* does not discuss any difference between them in principle or reality, it is quite possible that the last line is simply another way of saying that *tzu-jan* is at the heart or essential to the nature of Tao. There is probably no distortion to regard “Tao” and *tzu-jan* as practically synonymous. But, theoretically, it may be better to regard *tzu-jan* as the outstanding quality of Tao.

The term *tzu-jan*, literally “self-so”, is often translated as “nature” or “Nature.” This translation is in my judgment very misleading. In the first place, the term “nature” or “Nature” is too ambiguous. Secondly, in Western usage, it often denotes some “substance.” But, according to Lao Tzu, Tao or *tzu-jan* is *wu*,^b “non-being” or “not-having-anything.” It is in an important sense “empty” or “non-substantial.”⁵ Thirdly, the Western term is sometimes static in connotation. But *tzu-jan*, like Tao, is fully dynamic. Moreover, if “nature” is understood to mean the natural world, it would not be consistent with the explicitly stated belief that the natural universe is produced from or “given birth to” (*sheng*)^c by Tao. *Tzu-jan* is a quality, principle, or reality equal to, if not higher than, Tao. The fact that, according to Lao Tzu, the natural world is permeated by Tao or *tzu-jan* does not make Tao or *tzu-jan* identical with the natural world. They are ontologically identical but cosmologically distinct.⁶ Moreover, the term for the natural world in the *Tao Te Ching* is “heaven” “under the heaven,” or “heaven and earth.” Though the term “heaven” is often used to represent Tao or *tzu-jan*, it is similar to the case that a son may represent his mother.

In my view, the term *tzu-jan* is best translated as “spontaneity”. It is basically equivalent to the term *tzu-hua*^d or “self-transformation.”⁷ As it will be seen later, the self-transformation of Tao is the “evolution” or “production” of the universe from Tao. The self-transformation of all things is the changes according to Tao or *tzu-jan*. The changes according to Tao or *tzu-jan* are called “spontaneous changes.”

It may be appropriate here to note that Lao Tzu’s concept of spontaneity is in some respects similar to the importance of the concept of creativity in Alfred Whitehead’s process philosophy. According to Whitehead, the “ultimate” of the universe is “creativity,” and God is “its primordial, nontemporal accident.” The creativity is said to be the “ultimate notion of the highest generality at the base of actuality,” equivalent to the Aristotelian “matter” and the modern “neutral stuff.” He maintains that it does not have any character of its own and must be “divested of the notion of passive receptivity” found in the Aristotelian “matter.”⁸ It would be dangerous to make a close comparison between Lao Tzu’s thought and Whitehead’s well developed system. But the idea that the creativity is empty of all characters and fully dynamic is strikingly similar to Lao Tzu’s idea of Tao or *tzu-jan*. Moreover, the distinction between *tzu-jan* and the natural world in Lao Tzu’s thought may be roughly compared to the distinction between creativity and the actual universe (consisting of “actual entities”) in Whitehead’s system.⁹

A crucial issue arises in Lao Tzu’s thought at this point. If all things in the universe are produced from Tao, then all changes must be spontaneous. This means that there can only be spontaneous changes and cannot be any unspontaneous change. But if we study the *Tao Te Ching*, there is no doubt that Lao Tzu regards certain changes in the universe as not in

accordance with Tao or spontaneity. They can be called “unspontaneous changes.” Why then are there unspontaneous changes? This is the problem of “evil” that will confront every monist philosophy and monotheistic religion if it affirms the ultimate reality as the *summum bonum* and the source of all things and at the same time recognizes the existence of something (call it “evil”) that is supposedly not in accordance with the ultimate reality. We cannot deal with the problem of “evil” in Lao Tzu’s thought in detail here.¹⁰ Suffice it to say that somehow, according to Lao Tzu, the spontaneous changes in the universe can be turned into unspontaneous changes through the interference of the human will. This assumes that somehow the will has the “freedom” to interfere with Tao’s movements. Lao Tzu seems to think that the will is the only agent that can interfere with spontaneous changes. Thus, all unspontaneous changes are supposedly caused or created by man through interfering.

Lao Tzu is evidently aware of the dilemma or paradox of human existence: man is not only an animal dominated by instincts but also a conscious self who wants to create a symbolic world for himself.¹¹ The creation of the symbolic world is possible by virtue of his free will. But Lao Tzu, who lived in the chaotic and tumultuous times of the late Chou dynasty, saw the pitfalls and harmful effects of man’s attempt to create a tower of Babel in terms of “moral” virtues, “cultural” values, and “character” traits, not to speak of competition, war, and exploitation. He was undoubtedly a great, if not the greatest, critic of society and culture in ancient China.

It is important to note that, in Lao Tzu’s thought, the will can be used in two opposite ways. The first way is to use it to follow Tao or the spontaneous changes in the universe. In this case, no interference occurs, and no unspontaneous change is created. Reality is seen as it is. We may call this the “non-willful” or “non-assertive” use of the will. Lao Tzu’s various advice and recommendations presuppose that there is a proper place for man to use the will in the non-assertive sense. The Taoist sage is the one who can follow the advice and recommendations and thus flow with spontaneous changes. This is the way to lead an “authentic” life (to borrow a term from Existentialism) in Taoism. The second way is to use the will to go against or interfere with the spontaneous changes in the universe. This may be called the “willful” or “assertive” use of the will. It is supposedly the cause of all unspontaneous changes. The “unauthentic” life is supposedly created by the assertive use of the will. One can get to know the nature of the assertive use of the will and unspontaneous changes from what Lao Tzu condemns or advises against in the *Tao Te Ching*. For convenience, we shall use the term “will” to mean in the assertive sense, unless qualified otherwise. We shall also use the term “natural world” in the sense that it consists only of spontaneous changes. But when the term “universe” or “world” is used without any qualification, it may or may not include unspontaneous changes, depending on whether any will is used assertively.

The distinction between spontaneous and unspontaneous changes is really the same as the distinction between *wu-wei*^e and *wei*^f in Lao Tzu’s thought. The term *wei* is usually translated simply as “action,” but the correct translation or interpretation should be “willful action.” It is an action caused by the assertive use of the will or, in other words, an action in the symbolic world created by man. It is really Lao Tzu’s technical term for unspontaneous changes. Since *wei* is unspontaneous, *wu-wei*, which means “not having willful actions,” is

spontaneous. Thus, *wu-wei* is Lao Tzu's technical term for spontaneity or spontaneous changes. This is undoubtedly the reason why Lao Tzu repeatedly describes Tao or the sage as *wu-wei*. In the following discussion, we shall consistently translate *wei* and *wu-wei*, when used technically, as "willful action" and "not having willful actions" (or in similar forms when used as verbs) respectively. Whether the interpretation is valid can be seen and judged accordingly. For the moment, it is worth quoting a passage that shows the contradictory meanings of *tzu-jan* and *wei*. Chapter 64 states that the sage "assists the spontaneity (*tzu-jan*) of the ten thousand things and does not dare to act willfully (*wei*)."

A serious difficulty in understanding the *Tao Te Ching* is the fact that the same word is frequently used in different contexts to mean opposite things.¹² An important example is the word *wei*. Though it means "willful action" when technically used, it is often used in the sense of spontaneous or non-willful action. Chapter 37 says, for example: "Tao always does not *wei* and yet nothing it does not *wei*." This sentence would be self-contradictory if the two occurrences of *wei* are not contradictory in meaning. According to our interpretation, the first *wei* means "to act willfully," but the second *wei* means "to act non-willfully." Thus, the sentence can be translated as "Tao always does not act willfully and yet nothing it does not accomplish spontaneously."

Another important example is the word *tzu*^g or "self." It is often used as an adverb to qualify a verb, and can be translated as "spontaneously" or "of its own accord." Thus, chapter 57 says: "I do not act willfully (*wu-wei*), therefore the people are transformed spontaneously (*tzu-hua*)."^d But the word is also often used as an adverb to mean some kind of self-assertion, thus contrary to spontaneity. Thus, chapter 7 says: "Heaven and earth last long. Heaven and earth can last long because they do not live 'for themselves' (*tzu*). Therefore, they can live long."

There are other words that can mean either in the spontaneous (nonwillful) or unspontaneous (willful) sense, such as "good," "mind," "knowledge," etc.¹³ As a general rule, when the word is used as an object of Lao Tzu's condemnation, it has the willful meaning; but when it is used as something recommended by him, it has the non-willful meaning. This rule can solve many puzzles one may find in the *Tao Te Ching*. In the following discussion, we shall deal with the important idea of return. It will be seen that the distinction between spontaneous and unspontaneous returns is crucial for understanding Lao Tzu's idea of changes.

II. PRINCIPLES OF SPONTANEOUS CHANGES

It may be mistakenly thought that since all things in the natural world are spontaneously produced from Tao, there is no cause-effect relationship in the changes, as if all things came into existence out of the blue. But, as we have shown, spontaneity means basically that there is no assertive will in the changes. It does not necessarily mean that there cannot be any causality. To the Western mind, it may be difficult to conceive of a "cause" without some element of will, force, or compulsion in it. The "effect" is usually thought to be something inevitable and forcefully determined by its "cause." When this idea of causality is applied to God, it is the "will" of God that "created" the universe. When applied to the universe, it is the "laws of nature" or some laws legislated by God that force the universe to work

mechanistically. When applied to man, philosophers cannot find any room for the “freedom” of the will in the mechanistic universe.¹⁴ Since the Western term “cause” or “causality” is so dominated by the above view, it would be less misleading to talk about spontaneous changes in terms of “principles” rather than “causal laws.” But this should not be taken to mean that the principles do not represent some kind of causality.

It is significant to note that since David Hume, Western philosophy has re-examined its traditional conception of causality. The distinction between “hard determinism” and “soft determinism” has been made. Soft determinism attempts to eliminate precisely the element of will or compulsion from the idea of cause. It is argued that the “free” will is more conceivable in such a universe.¹⁵ It is not easy to say whether Lao Tzu’s world-view is some kind of soft determinism in the sense understood in the West. It may be closer to some kind of indeterminism.¹⁶ In any case, there is no will or compulsion in Lao Tzu’s view of spontaneous changes. But it is important to note that in unspontaneous changes the causality is that of hard determinism, because there is will or force in them. Whereas the universe of spontaneous changes is open and creative, the world of unspontaneous changes is closed and mechanistic. This point will be seen more clearly later.

Since the universe is produced within the womb of Tao, and since Tao does not have any will, it would not make sense to say that the principles of spontaneous changes are superimposed by Tao on the universe. But it is not easy to say in what sense the principles are internal to Tao or the universe. One possible interpretation is to regard them as eternally present in Tao. It is not clear whether Joseph Needham takes this position when he defines Tao as “the Order of Nature.”¹⁷ Another possible interpretation is to regard the principles as emergent phenomena in the evolution of the universe from Tao. In other words, the principles are not actually present in Tao before the evolution of the universe. Their existence depends on the conditions or “causes” at a given time and space. Nothing is eternally fixed by external or internal principles. This interpretation has the good point of seriously taking into account the emergent process of evolution from *wu*^b (non-being or not-having-anything) to *yu*^h (being or having-something) or from the simple to the complex. It allows the possibility of novelty not only of things and events but also principles. It would be a genuinely open universe. The view that all things come from Tao or “non-being” and return to Tao or “nonbeing” should not be interpreted as nihilistic world-view. It should probably be understood as representing an open universe of infinite possibilities. Chapter 5 says: “The empty space between heaven and earth, isn’t it like a bellows? It is vacuous yet never exhausted. When it moves, it produces even more.” It is possible, however, to harmonize the two interpretations by adopting the distinction between potentiality and actuality. Thus, it may be said that all principles of changes (spontaneous and unspontaneous) are potentially existent in the original Tao. They become actual only when the universe is evolved from Tao or when man interferes with spontaneous changes.

We must now discuss the principles of spontaneous changes that can be found in the *Tao Te Ching*. Since the little book is not written systematically, our discussion must be an interpretation. I shall propose that there are four basic principles of spontaneous changes in Lao Tzu’s thought. They will be called (1) the principle of evolution, (2) the principle of order and harmony, (3) the principle of the *yin*¹ or “feminine” cosmic power, and (4) the

principle of return. They may be called the principles of spontaneity. As we shall see, unspontaneous changes are contrary to these basic principles.

That the universe is produced from or given birth to by Tao is explicitly stated by Lao Tzu in many different places. It may be objected that the term “evolution” does not adequately describe the process of changes from Tao to the myriad things. The term is closely associated with the Darwinist theory of the survival of the fittest through struggle and with the “progressive” interpretation of evolution. If “evolution” is taken in this narrow sense, then Lao Tzu’s view is indeed diametrically opposed to it. But if “evolution” means basically that something “evolves” from something else, usually from the simple to the complex, then his view is certainly some kind of evolution. But it is an evolution without struggle or competition, because no will is involved. Chapter 40 says: “The ten thousand things in the universe are produced from ‘being’, and ‘being’ is produced from ‘non-being.’” Another important passage is found in chapter 42:

Tao gives birth to One.
One gives birth to Two
Two gives birth to Three.
Three gives birth to the ten thousand things.
The ten thousand things carry the *yin* and embrace the *yang*.^j
It is through the union of the cosmic forces (*ch’i*)^k that harmony is achieved.

There are different interpretations of the meanings of the One, Two, Three, and the “cosmic forces.” It is very likely that the Two are the *yin* and *yang*, the “feminine” and “masculine” cosmic energies respectively. In any case, there is an evolutionary process from the simple to the complex.

The principle of order and harmony is implied in the above passage from chapter 42. The evolution is a harmonious process. The *yin* and *yang* are a polarity, but no conflict or opposition is implied. On the contrary, it is through their union that harmony is achieved. The idea of order and harmony in spontaneous changes can be found in numerous passages in the *Tao Te Ching*. Chapter 51 may be chosen as a representative one:

Tao gives birth to them (the myriad things).
Te^l (power of Tao) nurtures them.¹⁸
Matter endows them with physical forms.
Environment completes them.
Therefore none of the myriad things does not revere Tao and honor *te*.
The reverence for Tao and honoring of *te* are always expressed by the myriad things spontaneously (*tzu-jan*) without anyone’s order.
Therefore Tao gives birth to them.
Te nurtures them.
They rear them and nourish them.
They provide them security and give them peace.
They feed them and protect them.
(Tao) gives birth to them but does not possess them.

It acts but does not take pride in its own ability.
It rears them but does not dominate them.
This is called the “mystical *te*.”¹⁹

This passage expresses several fundamental ideas. First, it is a statement about evolution. Secondly, it is an orderly and harmonious process of changes. Thirdly, Tao and *te* do not act willfully or dominate the myriad things. Fourthly, the ten thousand things act spontaneously.

The principle of the *yin* is extremely important in Lao Tzu’s philosophy, but not easy to interpret systematically. The polarity of the *yin* and *yang* is mentioned only once in the *Tao Te Ching*, in chapter 42, quoted above. Their significance in Lao Tzu’s thought has been variously interpreted. Scholars are tempted to borrow too much from the *Book of Changes* to explain them.²⁰ This could easily lead to serious distortions and misunderstandings. I shall attempt to explain the relationship between the *yin* and *yang* on the basis of similar ideas in the *Tao Te Ching* itself. It seems clear that the polarity of the *yin* and *yang* is parallel to many other polarities in the *Tao Te Ching*, especially mother and son, female and male, mare and horse, soft and hard, weak and strong, low and high, behind and front, easy and difficult, heavy and light, quiet and noisy, innocent and learned. How these polarities are associated in this way must be left to psychology, sociology, and anthropology.²¹ For convenience, we shall call the former of each polarity the “*yin* entity or quality” and the latter the “*yang* entity or quality.”²²

Several important things can be said about the relationship between the *yin* entities and the *yang* entities. I shall first list them briefly, then discuss, support, or illustrate them in the rest of the paper. First of all, all polarities in spontaneous changes exist in a harmonious state. They are non-conflicting polarities. Secondly, the *yin-yang* polarity is really parallel to the archetypal polarity of “non-being” (*wu*) and “being” (*yu*). Since non-being produces being, the *yin* entities are in an essential sense the source of the *yang* entities. The *yin* always has the priority over the *yang*, because the latter depends on the former for its normal or spontaneous changes. This is what I call the principle of the *yin*. Thirdly, the *yang* entities somehow have the tendency to alienate themselves from the *yin* entities, to assert their independence from them, or to rebel against or to dominate them. This is another way of saying that the *yang* entities have the tendency to become the entities of willful actions. In modern psychology, this phenomenon is called the Oedipus complex.²³ When this happens, spontaneous changes are turned into unspontaneous changes. In unspontaneous changes, the *yin-yang* relationship is in tension, conflict, and opposition. We shall call this “conflicting polarity” or “opposites.” But in the *yin-yang* opposites, the conflict is always one-way, because the *yin* does not compete with the *yang*. The conflict is created by the *yang* entity. Fourthly, as a result of willful actions, another kind of opposites is created. We shall call it the *yang-yang* opposites, in distinction from the *yin-yang* opposites. In the *yang-yang* opposites, the conflict is always two-way, because both have the will to compete. Lao Tzu uses the term *cheng*^m or “competition” to express the idea of conflict between opposites, either one-way or two-way.

Fifthly, in unspontaneous changes, the harmonious universe will be inevitably spoiled. Chaos and sufferings will be the consequences. In the *yin-yang* opposites, the loser will always be the *yang* entity (at least in the end); but in the *yang-yang* opposites, both will be the losers. Sixthly, in order to solve the chaos, suffering, and competitions in the world, the way is to

overcome the *yang* entity with the *yin* entity. To use the *yang* entity to overcome another *yang* entity can only make the conflict worse. Since the *yin* entities represent Tao, non-being, spontaneity, and non-willful action, they can win the world by not competing. Lao Tzu says in chapter 22 and 66, “It is because Tao (or the sage) does not compete that nothing in the world can compete with it (or him).” This is to Lao Tzu the true victory.

The priority of the *yin* entities over the *yang* is typical of Lao Tzu’s philosophy. This is why Taoism is often called the *yin* philosophy of China. The origin of the *yin* ideology could probably be traced to some matriarchal form of society in ancient China,²⁴ but the reason for Lao Tzu to advocate it was probably due to his opposition to the *yang* ideologies, such as Confucianism. He evidently believed that the *yang* ideologies were responsible for the chaos and suffering of his times, for the *yang*, when alienated from the *yin*, stands for the assertive will. The *yang* must be softened and overcome by the *yin* power in order to recover the paradise that had been lost because of the “Oedipus complex” in man.

The exaltation of the *yin* power is probably best expressed in his frequent description of Tao as the “mother:” The universe is said to be her “son.” Chapter 52 states: “He who has found the Mother knows her Son through her. He who has known her Son and still keeps to the Mother can be free from dangers till his (natural) death.” The key to the good life without dangers is to keep to the Mother. This is apparently the reason why Lao Tzu idealizes the state of the newborn baby. Chapter 55 says:

He who has *te* (power of Tao) in abundance may be compared to the newborn baby.
Poisonous insects do not sting him.
Fierce beasts do not seize him.
Birds of prey do not strike him.
His bones are weak, his muscles soft, but his grip firm.
He does not yet know the union of the female (mare) and male (horse),
but (his penis) is aroused.
This is perfection of his essence (semen?).²⁵
He cries all day, but does not become hoarse.
This is perfection of harmony.

Whether the description of the newborn baby is true is another matter. It is clear that Lao Tzu uses the baby to represent the paradise before the “fall” caused by willful actions. It is full of *yin* qualities, thus the *yang* qualities are in perfect state.

The priority of the *yin* over the *yang* is also seen in the passage from chapter 28: “He who knows the male and keeps to the female becomes the ravine of the universe.” The ravine of the universe is evidently a symbol for the source of life, like the womb. Probably no other natural phenomenon is more highly praised by Lao Tzu than water. Water is said to be good because it is soft, weak, low, etc. It benefits all things and conquers the hard and strong. It does not compete, therefore nothing can compete with it and there will be no evil consequences. Since it has all the *yin* qualities, it is near to Tao.²⁶

There is a significant exception to the principle of the priority of the *yin* over the *yang*, *i.e.*, the

polarity of heaven and earth. Generally speaking, heaven is a *yang* entity, and earth a *yin* entity.²⁷ But in chapter 25, quoted above, it is said that earth models itself after heaven. Though earth is extolled in the *Tao Te Ching*, it is nowhere put above heaven. This significant exception was probably due to the fact that by Lao Tzu's times the priority of heaven over earth was so widely accepted that he had to recognize it. This compromise, however, is compensated by his insistence that Tao has the priority over heaven. Tao is the *yin* in the archetypal sense, and heaven is the *yang* relative to Tao. Tao is "non-being" and heaven is "being." "Heaven," however, is often used together with "earth" to mean the natural universe. In such cases, no polarity is necessarily implied. But a polarity is definitely implied in the passage from chapter 32: "Heaven and earth unite to drip sweet dew. The sweet dew drips evenly of its own accord (*tzu*)^g without man's command." It is clear that the polarity is not a conflicting one, thus, typical of spontaneous changes.

We come now to the principle of return. The importance of the principle is stated in chapter 40: "Return (*fan*)ⁿ is the movement of Tao. Weakness is the function of Tao." The second sentence is obviously another way of stating the principle of the *yin*. As to the first sentence, there are various interpretations. It seems to me that the most crucial point is to distinguish between the return in spontaneous changes and that in unspontaneous changes. It will be argued that the spontaneous return is consistent with the principles of evolution, order and harmony, and the *yin*, discussed above.

It is my view that, in spontaneous changes, "return" means basically two things to Lao Tzu. The first is the natural end of a particular process of changes. Everything is supposedly produced directly or indirectly from Tao. After it has passed its normal process of existence, it will return to Tao. To living things, it means natural death. If there is no interference with the spontaneous changes of life by the will, there would be no danger, suffering, or untimely death. In a sense, it is a cyclical movement because it starts from Tao or "non-being" and returns to Tao or "non-being." But this is no more cyclical than the common saying that from the dust we came and to the dust we return. Moreover, as we discussed earlier, the cyclical movement from Tao to Tao should not be regarded as a closed universe or a nihilistic world-view. On the contrary, it would be better to regard it as a genuinely open universe with infinite possibilities. In any case, it should not be confused with the cyclical movement between two opposites. This confusion is a major cause of many misunderstandings. The movement from Tao to Tao is best expressed in chapter 25:

There is something undifferentiated and complete,
before heaven and earth are produced.
Silent and formless, it is independent and unchanging.
Moving everywhere, it is free from dangers.
It may be considered the mother of the universe.
I do not know its name, I call it Tao.
If forced to give a name, I shall call it Great.
Being great means moving everywhere.
Moving everywhere means far-reaching.
Far-reaching means retrun (*fan*).

There is no idea of cyclical movement between two opposites in this passage. It is rather like the movement of light in the Einsteinian space-time.

The second meaning of return is more emphasized in the *Tao Te Ching* than the first meaning. It is the return to Tao in order to tap the power of Tao for a good and long life on earth. This is of course based on the belief that Tao is the spring of life, peace, order, and harmony. Since the *yin* qualities represent the power of Tao, the return to Tao also means to nurture and cultivate the *yin* power. Without the *yin* powers, the *yang* entities or actions cannot last long. Thus, Lao Tzu asks in chapter 10:

Can you preserve the vital energies and embrace the One without departing from it?
Can you concentrate the vital forces and realize the weakness like a newborn baby?²⁸
Can you clean and purify the “mystical mirror” and make it spotless?²⁹
Can you love the people and govern the state without willful actions?³⁰
Can you open and close the “gate of heaven” like a female?³¹
Can you understand and penetrate all things without being learned?

The One, weakness, mystical mirror, not having willful actions, gate of heaven, and not being learned are *yin* qualities or entities. They represent the energy for an abundant life. The most important passage expressing the idea of return is undoubtedly chapter 16:

Realize ultimate emptiness.
Maintain steadfast tranquility.
The myriad things rise to activity.
I contemplate their return (*fu*).^o
All things grow luxuriantly.
Each one returns (*fu-kuei*)^p to its root.
Returning to the root is called tranquility.
This is called returning to the original nature (*fu-ming*).^q
Returning to the original nature is called the Constant (*ch'ang*).^r
Knowing the Constant is called enlightenment.
Not to know the Constant is to act blindly to court disaster.
He who knows the Constant is all-embracing.
Being all-embracing, he is impartial.
Being impartial, he is universal.
Being universal, he is at one with the universe.
Being at one with the universe, he is in unity with Tao.
Being in unity with Tao, he lives a long life.
He is free from dangers till his death.

Several terms are used here to express the idea of return. It is clear that the basic thrust of the chapter is to advise the readers that they should return to Tao in order to tap the power of Tao to achieve long life and avoid danger and disaster. The power of Tao resides in “emptiness,” “tranquility,” “constant,” etc. Similar idea of return is expressed in chapter 65.

It is clear that in spontaneous changes we do not find any hint that the movement of Tao is one between two opposites. In the first place, there are no opposites in Tao. Secondly, even though there are non-conflicting polarities in Tao, Lao Tzu believes that *the yin* entities always have the priority over the *yang*. The movement in spontaneous changes is typically one-way, namely from the *yin* to the *yang*, in which the *yang* is sustained and nourished by the *yin*. We may call this an evolutionary movement. The *yang*, by itself, does not have the power to produce the *yin*. Thus, there cannot be any evolutionary movement from the *yang* to *the yin*. There is, however, a special movement from the *yang* to the *yin*, not in the sense of production, but in the sense of returning to the source. The return to the source can be either an end to a natural process of changes or an act to tap the power of Tao for continuous evolution. In short, there is no equal or mutual movement between the *yin* and *yang*. I suggest, therefore, that the sentence in chapter 40, "Return is the movement of Tao," should not be understood as some kind of cyclical movement between two opposites. This idea must have been unconsciously imported either from the *Book of Changes* or from what takes place in unspontaneous changes.

III. PRINCIPLES OF UNSPONTANEOUS CHANGES

Unspontaneous changes are contrary to the four basic principles of spontaneity discussed above. They disrupt the spontaneous evolution of the universe, spoil its order and harmony, oppose the *yin* power, and bring about evil returns.

The most important element in unspontaneous changes is the assertive will or willful action (*wei*). The willful action can be either mental or physical. As a matter of fact, willful physical actions cannot occur without the willful ideas that support them. Lao Tzu is deeply concerned with the problems of war, competition, oppression, and exploitation. He believes that they arise from the assertive will. He seems to think that the cause for man to assert his will is his discontentment with what things naturally are. In other words, man is not satisfied with the spontaneous changes in the universe. This is called "not knowing what is enough" (*pu chih tsu*).⁵ Once he is discontent with the universe, he will impose his will on it in order to get what he wants. He begins to make the distinctions between good and evil, beautiful and ugly, fortune and misfortune, etc., on the basis of his desires and wishes. This kind of distinctions may be called man-made, willful, unspontaneous, or "prescriptive." Since it is not based on the supposed nature of Tao and the natural world, Lao Tzu is opposed to it. But it is important to note that he believes in another kind of distinctions based on the nature of Tao. This kind of distinctions may be called non-willful, spontaneous, or "descriptive." It is, therefore, important to keep the two kinds of distinctions in mind in interpreting the *Tao Te Ching*.³²

Generally speaking, there are five important characteristics of willful actions. The first is the mental state of not knowing what is enough. The second is the alienation of human actions from the source of life, represented by Tao and the *yin* qualities. There arise the *yin-yang* opposites, in distinction from the harmonious *yin-yang* polarity. The third is the creation of extremes, opposites, or the *yang-yang* conflicts, such as the man-made distinction between two opposites. The fifth is the inevitable evil consequences. The last two points are really the two meanings of return in unspontaneous changes. Both are absent in spontaneous changes.

The first meaning of the unspontaneous return is the cyclical movement between two opposites as long as the will is applied. The good becomes the evil, and the evil becomes the good. The second meaning of the unspontaneous return is the evil consequences of chaos and suffering caused by the extremes. It is important to note that Lao Tzu sees the two kinds of unspontaneous return as inevitable. They are determined by the causality of hard determinism. It is not easy to discuss the five characteristics of willful actions separately, therefore we shall discuss them in a somewhat random manner. Each quotation from the *Tao Te Clung* usually contains more than one characteristic. Since the mental state of not knowing what is enough is the cause of man to assert his will, Lao Tzu teaches that we should know what is enough. Chapter 33 states: "He who knows what is enough is wealthy." One does not have to get more in order to become really wealthy. To try to get more will bring calamity to oneself. Chapter 46 says:

There is no calamity greater than not knowing what is enough.
There is no sin greater than the desire to get more.
Therefore, the enough of knowing what is enough is always enough.

Once one tries to get more than enough, one will inevitably go to the extremes. When he reaches one extreme, the movement will inevitably go to the other extreme. Chapter 9 says:

To insist to make it full is not as good as to stop in time.
To temper it to its sharpest cannot keep it last long.
When gold and jade fill your hall, you cannot protect them.
When you become extravagant because of fame and wealth,
 You are sowing evil consequences for yourself.
To withdraw yourself when the task is accomplished
 Is in accordance with the Way of Heaven.

Similar idea is expressed in chapter 44:

Therefore, he who loves excessively will necessarily spend extravagantly.
He who hoards much will necessarily lose heavily.
He who knows what is enough will not suffer disgrace.
He who knows when to stop will not face dangers.
He will live a long life.

To go to the extremes is an important feature of unspontaneous changes. It is contrary to the nature of Tao or spontaneity. The way of Tao or the sage is to know what is enough, to stop in time, and to withdraw when the task is accomplished. This is also called "the Way of Heaven" (*t'ien chih tao*).[†] In chapter 77, Lao Tzu makes a contrast between the Way of Heaven and "the way of man" (*jen chih tao*).[‡] The former is in fact the way of spontaneous changes, and the latter the way of unspontaneous changes. He says:

The Way of Heaven, isn't it like the bending of a bow?
It brings down what is high and raises what is low.

It reduces what is excessive and supplements what is insufficient.
The Way of Heaven reduces the excessive and supplements the insufficient.
But the way of man is different.
It reduces the insufficient to serve the excessive.
Who can use the excessive to serve the world?
Only the man who has Tao.

In bending a bow, one aims at the target. It would be a great distortion to use the passage to show that the Way of Heaven naturally moves between two extremes. All extremes are man-made. It is the regulating function of Tao, after the extremes are created by man, to equalize them. Man's symbolic world consists mainly of the prescriptive distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong, friend and enemy, rich and poor, etc. They are really extremes. Chapter 29 says that the sage "discards the extremes, the extravagant, and the excessive."

In Lao Tzu's thought, the hard, the strong, and the high stand for the assertive will, i.e., when they are alienated from the soft, the weak, and the low. Chapter 55 states:

When the mind (*hsin*)^v takes control of the vital forces (*ch'i*),^k it is called "strong."
When things become strong, they are old.
This is called not in accordance with Tao.
Being not in accordance with Tao they will die untimely.

Here the "mind" really means the assertive will, and the "vital forces" stand for the energies of spontaneous changes. When the spontaneous energies are controlled by the will, it is called "strong." Chapter 42 says: "The strong and fierce will not die a natural death." The same idea is expressed in chapter 76:

When man is alive, he is soft and weak.
When he is dead, he is hard and strong.
When the grass and trees are alive, they are soft and tender.
When they are dead, they are hard and dried.
Therefore the stiff and strong are companions of death.
The soft and weak are companions of life.
Thus when the army is strong, it will not win.
When the tree is stiff, it will break.
The strong and the great are inferior.
The soft and the weak are superior.

The priority of the *yin* over the *yang* is clearly stated here. When the *yang* tries to get the upper hand, it will destroy itself. The idea of evil return is explicitly stated in chapter 30:

He who assists the ruler according to Tao does not dominate the world by force.
The use of force is wont to cause a return (*huan*).^w
Wherever armies are stationed, briars and thorns will grow.
After the great wars, years of disaster will inevitably follow.

All the important characteristics of willful actions are probably best expressed in the passage from chapter 29, with the last four lines from chapter 64:

If one desires to take over the universe and acts willfully (*wei*) to it,
I see that one cannot succeed.
The universe is a sacred vessel.
One should not act willfully to it.
He who acts willfully to it will spoil it.
He who grasps it will lose it.
Therefore the sage does no willful actions (*wu-wei*).
Thus there is no spoiling (or failure).
He does not grasp.
Thus nothing is lost.

Here the term “grasp” is a form of *wei*. It is a willful action to appropriate the universe for oneself. Is it not man’s Oedipus complex? He tries to find satisfaction in his symbolic world.

The way to solve the Oedipus complex or to destroy the symbolic world is not to interfere with the Oedipus complex or to build another tower of Babel to replace the symbolic world already created. To do so is, according to Lao Tzu, to make the situation worse. To use the will to solve the problems created by the will is like to pour more oil into the burning fire. The way of Tao or the sage is to solve the problems by means of non-willful actions (*wu-wei*) or non-competition (*pu-cheng*).” In other words, one should cultivate the *yin* qualities in oneself and the universe, for “the female always overcomes the male by means of tranquillity” (chapter 61). Many passages in the *Tao Te Ching* express the same idea, as in chapters 73 and 78. Suffice it to quote the one in chapter 43:

The softest in the universe gallops through the hardest in the universe.
That which does not have anything penetrates that which does not have any room.
Therefore I know the advantage of not having willful actions (*wu-wei*).

It is important to note that the victory of the *yin* over the *yang* is a true victory, not a phase in the inevitable cyclical movement between two opposites, such as between victory and defeat in the *yang-yang* opposites, because no assertive will is involved in the true victory.

The discussion of unspontaneous changes would not be complete without analyzing some of the passages often cited to show that Tao moves cyclically between two opposites. Due to the limitation of space, we shall deal with them as briefly as possible. The first passage is from chapter 58:

Calamity is that upon which happiness depends.
Happiness is that in which calamity is latent.
Who knows their limits?
There is no correctness.
The correct reverts (*fu*)^o to become the perverse.
The good reverts to become the evil.

Man's delusion has lasted for a long time.

The most important point for understanding the passage is to realize that the pairs, happiness and calamity, the correct and perverse, and the good and evil, are here the *yang-yang* opposites created by "man's delusion," as explicitly stated in the last line. They should not be understood as the descriptive distinctions based on the nature of Tao. As long as the distinctions are based on the will, there will be cyclical reversion between the opposites. They are unspontaneous changes. The context of the passage in chapter 58 clearly shows that Lao Tzu is condemning the dichotomies made by rulers and politicians. Thus, he concludes the chapter by saying:

Therefore the sage is square, but does not cut.
He is sharp, but does not chop (as with a knife).
He is straight, but does not act oppressively.
He is bright, but does not dazzle.

It is clear that there are no opposites or extremes in Tao for it to move cyclically.

The second passage is from chapter 36:

Desiring to shrink it, one must first expand it.
Desiring to weaken it, one must first strengthen it.
Desiring to make it decline, one must first make it prosper.
Desiring to take it, one must first give it.
This is called *wei-ming*.^v

This is a very controversial passage and attacked most fiercely by Confucianism.³³ Lao Tzu is often accused of advocating tricks like a Legalist. It seems clear that the passage deals with man's willful actions, as implied in the phrase *chiang yu*^z (desire, wish, or want). It is unlikely that Tao or the sage would behave in such a way as if it or he had a will. However, the sentence, "Desiring to take it, one must first give it," can be interpreted in such a way that it is compatible with the movement of Tao, for "to give" may be regarded as a *yin* action, and as long as "to take" (a *yang* action) is not alienated from it, the change from "to give" to "to take" is spontaneous. But it can become unspontaneous if "to take" is alienated from "to give." Unlike the fourth sentence, which can be either spontaneous or unspontaneous, the first three sentences can only be interpreted to mean unspontaneous changes, for "to expand," "to strengthen," and "to make prosper" are *yang* qualities, thus, the changes from the *yang* qualities to something else cannot be spontaneous. In this context, it may be reasonable to regard the change expressed in the fourth sentence also as an unspontaneous process.

The crucial issue with regard to the passage is whether Lao Tzu endorses that way of doing things or governing the world. If he does, as it is traditionally understood, then he would be advocating willful actions and thus seriously inconsistent with the basic teachings of the *Tao Te Ching* as a whole. Moreover, the passage is evidently in contradiction with the statement in chapter 81: "The Way of Heaven benefits (all things) and does not harm them. The Way of the sage acts but does not compete."

Assuming that there should not be such a serious inconsistency in Lao Tzu's thought, one may try to defend him in three possible ways. First, it may be argued that the phrase *wei-ming* in the last line is not expressing an endorsement but some kind of condemnation. The phrase can mean either "subtle enlightenment" or "faint light." If the second meaning is adopted, it can be interpreted to mean some kind of mocking. While the interpretation cannot be lightly ruled out, the way the passage is put makes the interpretation a little difficult to accept. Secondly, it may be argued that the passage must be understood in the light of the sentence that follows immediately after the passage quoted here. The sentence is "The soft and weak overcome the hard and strong." Since, as we have explained, the passage expresses the opposite view, it must have been stated in order to show the futility of willful actions rather than to express an endorsement. This argument would then be consistent with the first argument in conclusion. It may be questioned, however, whether the sentence was originally linked as a conclusion to the passage being discussed.

Thirdly, it may be argued that the passage was written and inserted into the *Tao Te Ching* by someone who had a strong inclination toward the Legalist way of thinking. Assuming that the book in its final form was a product of more than one person, the view widely accepted by modern scholars, this argument has a great force. As H. G. Creel has shown,³⁴ there was a considerable interaction or mutual influence between the Taoist circle and the Legalist school in the late Chou dynasty. The passage, therefore, can be regarded as an indication of the extreme development of what Creel calls "purposive Taoism." But it has apparently gone so far as to become contradictory to the basic teachings of the *Tao Te Ching*.

The third passage is from chapter 42:

What people dislike is to be called "the orphaned," "the widowed," or "the poor."
Yet the kings and lords use those names to call themselves.
Therefore, things gain benefits through losing them.
They lose benefits through gaining them.

It is my view that the sentence, "Things gain benefits through losing them," is expressing a spontaneous change, because "to lose" is a *yin* quality, and it is spontaneous to achieve the *yang* (i.e., "to gain") through the *yin*. But the sentence, "They lose benefits through gaining them," is expressing an unspontaneous change, because it is not spontaneous to achieve something through the willful action of "to gain." Chapter 29 says: "He who acts willfully will spoil it. He who grasps it will lose it."³⁵ Lao Tzu is evidently saying in the passage that in order to bring true benefits to the world, the kings and lords must put themselves below the people, as in calling themselves "the orphaned," "the widowed," or "the poor." Chapter 78 says:

He who receives the dirt of the country is called the lord of the land.
He who takes upon himself the misfortunes of the country is the king of the world.

Lao Tzu is evidently advising the kings and lords to take up a role similar to the "suffering servant" in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.³⁶ It would be a sheer misunderstanding to interpret

the passage in chapter 42 as expressing the idea that Tao moves between two opposites cyclically.

The fourth passage is from chapter 22:

Suppressed then whole.
Bent then straight.
Hollow then full.
Worn out then renewed.
Little then given.
Much then perplexed.

I believe that the interpretation used for the passage from chapter 42 can be applied to this passage. In short, the first five lines express the spontaneous changes from the *yin* qualities to the *yang* qualities. It is important to note that as long as they are spontaneous changes, i.e., without willful actions involved, the *yang* qualities are not extremes. Thus, the “whole,” “straight,” “full,” “renewed,” and “given” stand for perfect states of peace or harmony. The last line, however, expresses an unspontaneous change. Through a willful action to get more than what is enough, one will become perplexed. For different reasons, the passage expresses ideas similar to the promises given by Jesus in the famous Sermon on the Mount.³⁷

Finally, we must consider an important passage from chapter 2. For convenience, it will be divided into three parts:

- (1) When the people of the world all know the beautiful as beautiful, there arises the ugly. When they all know the good as good, there arises the evil.
- (2) Therefore, being and non-being produce each other. Difficult and easy complete each other. Long and short shape each other. High and low depend on each other. Sound and voice harmonize each other. Front and behind accompany each other.
- (3) Therefore, the sage manages affairs without acting willfully (*wu-wei*). He teaches without using words (*pu-yen*).^{aa}

This is a passage more difficult to interpret than generally realized. First of all, it is not clear whether the pairs mentioned in part 1 are of the same kind as those mentioned in part 2. Secondly, it is not clear how part 3 is logically related to part 1 and part 2. The main thrust of the passage is undoubtedly expressed in part 3: the sage is the one who does not act willfully and does not use “words.” It is my view that *pu-yen* (do not talk or do not use words) really means “do not use assertive words or orders,” such as making artificial or willful distinctions between good and evil, beautiful and ugly, etc. We may be right to infer from this that the pairs mentioned in part 1 are really man-made, willful, unspontaneous, or prescriptive distinctions. The way in which the pairs are stated in part 1 seems to be compatible with the interpretation. In other words, there is a logical continuity between part 1 and part 3, because the willful distinctions in part 1 are rejected in part 3. But this should not lead us into thinking that Lao Tzu does not recognize any distinction between good and evil or beautiful and ugly in the nonwillful or descriptive sense based on the supposed nature of Tao.

There are, however, serious problems with regard to the pairs mentioned in part 2. Taken by itself, part 2 seems to say that each pair exists harmoniously with each other. Indeed, it seems to describe the perfect universe in accordance with Tao. The pairs are not stated in such a way as to indicate that they are man-made, willful, or prescriptive distinctions. They seem to be not of the same kind as those in part 1. The term “therefore” at the beginning of part 2 is a little baffling. If we take the pairs in part 2 to be harmonious polarities in the universe, an important element is however missing. According to Lao Tzu, as we have seen, the *yin* entity always has the priority over the *yang* entity. Thus, with regard to being and non-being, chapter 40 explicitly states that being is produced from non-being. This is inconsistent with the statement in part 2. The same can be said with regard to the relationships between high and low, front and behind, etc. Thus, the pairs are really not harmonious polarities in the sense we have expounded in the paper. The other possibility is to regard the pairs purely as logical distinctions, without any metaphysical meaning. But we can ask whether the pairs are stated in such a way that they can be readily understood as purely logical distinctions. Even if this is the case, we can still ask whether the logical distinctions are rejected in part 3 as assertive “words.” These questions are not easy to answer. It is possible that Lao Tzu regards all logical distinctions as “assertive words,” thus man-made and willful. But this should not lead us into thinking that he does not recognize any distinction with regard to the pairs mentioned in part 2 on the basis of his world-view. Otherwise, it would not make sense for him to say that the *yin* entities always have the priority over the *yang* entities. Though the interpretation offered here with regard to part 2 is quite possible, serious problems still remain, especially the way in which the pairs are stated. I tend to think that part 2 may have been written by someone other than the author of parts 1 and 3. It was probably inserted between parts 1 and 3, and thus interrupts, in a significant way, the logical continuity between them.³⁸

CONCLUSION

We have started with a general discussion of the distinction between spontaneous and unspontaneous changes, then discussed each of them separately in terms of the relevant passages in *the Tao Te Ching*. We have attempted to solve many puzzles in the text. It is hoped that we have demonstrated convincingly the main conclusion that the cyclical movement between two opposites is absent in spontaneous changes and is typical of unspontaneous changes. The Taoist sage is the one who can follow the course of spontaneous changes and avoid unspontaneous changes. In so doing, he can preserve or restore the peace and harmony in the universe and live a long life free from dangers.

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NOTES

1. For Fung Yu-Ian's theory, see his *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, tr. by Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), Vol. I, pp. 180-183.
2. See D. C. Lau, 'The Treatment of Opposites in *Lao Tzu*', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, XXI (1958), pp. 344-360. He discusses five different theories and proposes his own interpretation.
3. There are many theories about the person of Lao Tzu and the formation of the *Tao Te*

Ching, also known as the *Lao Tzu*. Unless serious problems arise, we shall assume that the work was written by a certain Lao Tzu who lived some time between the sixth and third centuries B.C. The quotations in the paper are translated by myself. Wing-tsit Chan's translation is recommended for comparison: *The Way of Lao Tzu* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963).

4. I have recently written two papers on Lao Tzu's thought: 'Lao Tzu's Conception of Ultimate Reality: A Comparative Study', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 16: 2 (June, 1976), 197-218; 'Lao Tzu's Conception of Evil', *Philosophy East and West*, 26: 3 (July, 1976), 301-316. Many ideas more or less taken for granted in this paper are discussed extensively in the two papers.
5. "Empty" means basically "empty of qualities or characters." See *Tao Te Ching*, chapters 4, 5, 6, 11, 40, 43.
6. Lao Tzu believes that all things share the same ontological nature, i.e., Tao. In chapter 1, the ontological identity of being and non-being is called *hsuan*^{bb} or "the mystical." But this does not mean that there is no cosmological distinction between non-being and being. This point is discussed extensively in my paper, 'Lao Tzu's Conception of Ultimate Reality: A Comparative Study'.
7. *Tzu-hua* is probably better translated as "spontaneous transformation" or "to transform spontaneously." On *tzu-jan* or *tzu-hua*, see chapters 17, 23, 25, 37, 51, 57, 64.
8. Alfred N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 11, 46-47, 339. Cf., Donald W. Sherburne, *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 32-35. It is significant to note that Whitehead speaks of self-causation or *causa sui* in all actual entities, and acknowledges some similarity of his thought to some strains of Chinese thought.
9. The importance of creativity in Taoism is emphasized by Chang Chung-yuan in his *Creativity and Taoism* (New York: Julian Press, 1963). His discussion, however, covers many areas, including but not limited to the *Tao Te Ching*.
10. This problem is discussed in my paper 'Lao Tzu's Conception of Evil'.
11. The dilemma or paradox of human existence has been clearly brought out in psychoanalysis. See Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973), pp. 25-30.
12. This may be partly due to the terseness of classical Chinese, but probably largely due to Lao Tzu's fondness to play a language-game different from or even contrary to the conventional rules. This fondness, however, may have been dictated by the revolutionary character of his philosophy. Realizing this, he says in chapter 78, "The true words look like the reverse." Cf., chapters 41, 45.
13. For example, *jen*^{cc} or "human-heartedness" is recommended in chapter 8, but condemned in chapters 5 and 19. *Chih*^{dd} or "knowledge" is condemned in chapter 3 and 19, but recommended in chapter 33.
14. Joseph Needham argues convincingly that the concept of the laws of nature in the traditional Western sense is absent in Chinese philosophy as a whole. See his *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp. 516-583. See also, Derk Bodde, 'Evidence for "Laws of Nature" in Chinese Thought', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 20 (1957), pp. 709-727.
15. The terms "hard" and "soft" determinisms are coined by William James. For a recent discussion, see Paul Edwards, "Hard and Soft Determinism," in Sidney Hook, ed.,

Determinism and Freedom (New York: Collier Books, 1961), pp. 117-125. For a general discussion on the topic, see Kai Nielsen, *Reason and Practice* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 17-94.

16. Soft determinism and indeterminism are two different theories for defending some kind of free will. There are different formulations for each theory. We do not have enough information from the *Tao Te Ching* to say which theory fits Lao Tzu's position. One thing is clear, i.e., that he believes in the free will. Precisely because of this, he is opposed to the assertive use of the will. To the extent his thought is akin to Whitehead's philosophy, his world-view may be some kind of indeterminism (assuming that Whitehead's position is indeterminism); but to the extent that there is no will or compulsion in spontaneous changes, his view is akin to the Humean causality and/or soft determinism. Whitehead's position may be seen in the article by William Barrett, "Determinism and Novelty," in Sidney Hook, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 46-54.
17. Joseph Needham, *op. cit.*, p. 37. He translates *tzu-jan* as "Nature." Leaving aside the question of translation, I think he is right in interpreting *wei* as "action contrary to Nature." See pp. 68-70. But he fails to recognize that the cyclical movements between two opposites are not in accordance with "Nature." See his interpretation of chapter 58 on p. 75. His position on this point is similar to Fung Yu-lan's. Cf., my discussion on chapter 58 later.
18. *Te* means basically that which is obtained from Tao. See chapter 21. Here it means "the power of Tao," but it may also mean, in other contexts, the natural world, individual things, or "virtue" (in the "descriptive" but not "prescriptive" sense).
19. As explained in note 6, "mystical" (*hsuan*) means the ontological nature of all things, i.e., Tao. The "mystical *te*" really means the power of Tao itself.
20. D. C. Lau argues, probably correctly, that Fung Yu-lan's interpretation that Tao moves cyclically may have been influenced by his reading of the *Book of Changes*. See his article, *op. cit.*, pp. 351-353.
21. Almost all cultures have tried to explain the changes in the universe in terms of some polarities, though in different ways. For the use of polarities in early Greek thought, see G. E. R. Lloyd, *Polarity and Analogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 15-171. In the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, see Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1965), pp. 199-227.
22. Instead of the distinction between the yin and yang entities, D. C. Lau uses the distinction of the lower and higher terms.
23. The phrase "Oedipus complex" was originally used by Freud to refer to the child's sexual problem of lust and competitiveness in relation to his father and mother. But I am using it in the broader sense as reinterpreted by Otto Rank and Norman O. Brown. It is also called the "Oedipus project." In short, it is the child's basic problem to assert his will against his parents in order to control his own fate. See Ernest Becker, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-37. In the context of this paper, we may regard the *yin* as the mother (or parents) and the *yang* as the son.
24. There is no accepted theory about the origin of the ideas of the *yin* and *yang* and related polarities. The fact that they are traditionally mentioned in that order may indicate that when the terms were first used, the *yin* had the priority over the *yang*. But in the *Book of Changes*, especially the latter strata, probably written under the influence of the patriarchal form of society in the Chou dynasty, the *yang* came to have the priority over

- the *yin*. See Hellmut Wilhelm, *Change*, tr. by Cary F. Baynes (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), first three chapters, esp., pp. 11, 29-30. The historical relationship between the *Book of Changes* and Lao Tzu's thought is a very difficult question.
25. There is a textual problem as to whether any explicit term for the penis is used. But the penis is evidently implied. The word *ching*^{ee} may mean "essence" or "semen." There is probably no real difference in Lao Tzu's mind.
 26. The symbol of water can be seen in chapters 8, 34, 61, 66, 78.
 27. Hellmut Wilhelm says that there is abundant evidence of an earlier conception of the earth as masculine. See *op. cit.*, p. 26. But by Lao Tzu's times, the earth is definitely feminine.
 28. The words for "vital energies" in the first line are different from the word for "vital forces" (*ch'i*)^k in the second line, but I think they are basically the same, i.e., the energies of life.
 29. On "mystical," see notes 6 and 19.
 30. In some texts, "without willful actions" (*wu-wei*) in this line and "without being learned" in the last line are inter-changed.
 31. The "gate of heaven" is probably an euphemism for the womb. It apparently symbolizes the creative and productive function of Tao. Cf., the bellows mentioned in chapter 5.
 32. For the distinction between "prescriptive" and "descriptive" views, see W. D. Hudson, *Modern Moral Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1970), chapters 5 and 6. Lao Tzu's descriptivist theory of values is discussed in my paper 'Lao Tzu's Conception of Evil'.
 33. See Wing-tsit Chan, 'Chu Hsi's Appraisal of Lao Tzu', *Philosophy East and West*, 25:2 (April, 1975), pp. 131-144.
 34. See H. G. Creel's two articles, 'On the Origin of *Wu-wei*' and 'On Two Aspects in Early Taoism', collected in his *What is Taoism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. 48-78 and 37-47, respectively.
 35. It is interesting to note that the two sentences in chapter 42 are strikingly similar to the passage in Matthew (16:25): "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." The difference is that in Christianity the changes are apparently accomplished by the will of God.
 36. See Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12. The difference is that in Lao Tzu's thought there is no God to call or command the suffering servant.
 37. See Matthew 5:3-12.
 38. Without making the distinction between parts 1 and 2, D. C. Lau similarly suggests that the logical distinctions made here are not typical of Lao Tzu's thought but more akin to Chuang Tzu's teachings. See *op. cit.*, p. 360. I think this may be the case with regard to part 2 but not part 1.

Glossary

- a. 自然
- b. 無
- c. 生
- d. 自化
- e. 無為

- f. 為
- g. 自
- h. 有
- i. 陰
- j. 陽
- k. 氣
- l. 德
- m. 爭
- n. 反
- o. 復
- p. 復歸
- q. 復命
- r. 常
- s. 不知足
- t. 天之道
- u. 人之道
- v. 心
- w. 還
- x. 不爭
- y. 微明
- z. 將欲
- aa. 不言
- bb. 玄
- cc. 仁
- dd. 知、智
- ee. 精