The Question of Conflict in Chinese Thought Specifically in Confucius: Some Psychoanalytic Considerations II

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"Those who are clever and keen minded are close to death, because they love to judge other people".

At first I have to say something about the problems of translation of these old Chinese texts. It is important to stress how varied the meanings of most Chinese words are, and how the content of the picture represented by the ideogram belongs inextricably to that meaning. You know that each word is represented by one symbol, which may be simple or highly complex, very concrete or very abstract, and often both at the same time. The ambiguous, many-layered character and the visual nature of those symbols does indeed more justice to the inner reality than the more discursive use of language. Moreover the shift of the meaning of the same word from its use as noun to verb and adjective, the complete openness — indeterminacy — whether the verb is meant in the passive or active form, as past, present or future, as imperative or as indicative, or if the noun stands in the nominative or any other case, in the singular or the plural, gives the text an enormous, even bewildering variety of meaning. The curious thing with that is that such a style of thought is quite difficult to reconcile with the practical concerns of everyday life, but is admira—

1) I take the quote from Jaspers, p. 177; I have not yet been able to trace it.
bly suited to reflect the *inner world*. This *fluidity of meaning* militates against the concretization and reification that bedevils our own talk about mental processes: it gives the language a *movement*, a *liquidity* of thinking which is beautifully appropriate to the inner processes. Language itself is then very similar to the experience of dreams in the individual: of visual nature, concepts with clouds of connotations, sequentially ordered images which themselves are composed by condensation, displacement and similarity of sound (puns), all this intertwined with incredibly manifold strands of social, cultural and philosophical history, often of a paradoxical quality where the opposites of meaning are expressed by the same symbol. With this seeming coexistence of *primary process quality* with the outer-directedness of discourse we analysts are on strangely familiar ground.

Nowhere does this doubleness more affect the attempts at understanding and interpretation than in the reading of Lao Tse’s *Tao Te King* (Lào Zi, *Dào Dé Jīng*), as you recognize from the enormous disparity in the translations. Some sentences are simple and straightforward. Most can be read in quite different ways. Some are so enigmatic that the interpretations are guesses often diametrically opposed by those of other authors. The very first of the Chinese commentaries available to us, that of Wang Pi (Wang Bi, 226-249 AD), was written already several centuries after the life of Lao Tse. Wang Bi’s explanations, though fascinating in their own right (e.g. with their differentiation of substance and function, cf. Introduction by A. Rump), are of rather limited help for our modern understanding.

We do not even know when Lao Tse lived. Ancient tradition had it that he lived in the 6th century BC and that he was already an old man when he held his famous though legendary conversation with Confucius (who in turn supposedly lived 551-479 BC). According to the “Record of the Historian” (*Shì Ji*, by Si-Ma Qian), it is possible that Lao Tse was a person of the 4th century, Li Er. In the view
of the current day philosopher Fung Yu-Lan, this indeterminate figure
cloaked himself in the identity of a much older, legendary figure,
Lao Dan. Waley puts Lao Tse even a century later, in the third century,
and sees him not so much in dispute with Kung Tse’s philosophy
but with that of the so-called Realists or Legalists; we might call
them a kind of extreme positivists.

And yet when we enter into a detailed reading of Lao Tse I think
most of us can agree that there is in his way of thinking and valuing
a peculiar relevance precisely for us analysts:

Nothing in the world is softer and more supple than water, yet
when attacking the hard and the strong, nothing can surpass it. The
supple overcomes the hard. The soft overcomes the strong. None in
the world do not know this, yet none can practice it. That is why
the Sage says: To accept the filth of a nation is to be lord of the
society. To accept the disasters (the ill omens) of nation (country)
is to be the ruler of the world. Words of truth seem contradictory
(transl. Tam C. Gibbs and alternate interpretations, where indicated;
Ch. 78). This last sentence is: “Zhèng yán ruò fān 正言若反- Zhèng
: Straight or regular or correct – yán : words or speech – ruò : is as,
follows – fān : to turn back, contrary, opposite, to rebel.” I would para-
phrase it: “The direct talk also has the opposite meaning, turns into
its opposite.” The outer references, like water, dirt of the country, ruler,
appear like metaphors for the inner truth: that our inner life incessant-
ly moves in contraries, in oppositities. I shall return to this central
issue.

2) Better by Waley: Only he who has accepted the dirt of the country can be
lord of its soil-shrines: Chan Wing-Tsit: He who suffers disgrace for his country
is called the lord of the land.

3) Waley: Can become a king among those what dwell under heaven.

4) Waley: Straight words seem crooked (seem, as we would say, to be parado-
xes): Chan Wing Tsit: Straight words seem to be their opposite.
“Words have an ancestor; actions have a lord” (Ch. 70). There is a past to one’s thought; there is a context that gives it the meaning; “If they don’t know this, they cannot understand me.” The first reminds us of the basic premise of our genetic understanding; the latter of the coherence theory of truth; the first of Freud, the latter of Wittgenstein and of the criterion for truth stressed precisely by Freud over that by correspondence and by pragmatism.

“‘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, what is minute is easy to scatter.’ Deal with things in their not-yet-being (wei zhi yú wèi yǒu 爲之於未有); 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 (Chan: The journey of a thousand li starts from where one stands)’.

He who acts, harms (Chan: He who takes action fails) (bài 敗, translated actively as ‘harms’, passively as ‘fails’, means: ‘defeat, ruin, destroy’) : he who grabs, lets slip. Therefore the Sage does not act (wú wèi 無為), and so does no harm (wú bài 無敗) (Chan: For this reason the sage takes no action and therefore does not fail); does not grab, and so does not let slip. Whereas the people of the world, at their tasks, constantly spoil things (Chan: often fail) when within an ace of completing them. ‘Heed the end no less than the beginning’, and your work will not be spoiled (Chan: If one remains as careful at the end as he was at the beginning, there will be no failure). Therefore the Sage wants only things that are unwanted (Chan: Therefore the sage desires to have no desire—yù bù yù 欲不欲), sets no store by products difficult to get (Chan: He does not value rare treasures), and so teaches things untaught (Chan: He learns to be unlearned—xué bù xué 學不學), turning all men back to the things they have left behind (Chan: and returns to what the multitude has missed
that the ten thousand creatures may be restored to their Self-So (Zì-Rán 自然 Chan : natural state) [Waley comments : to what they are of themselves. as opposed to what they are in relation to other things]. This he does : but dare not act” (Ch. 64, transl. by Waley).

This is one of the many instances where the famous suggestion “do not act, wú wéi 無為” appears : to act only in order to restore what is natural, to go back to the beginning, to observe what is minute and order things before they become so entangled that they cannot be understood — yet to refrain from acting, from intervening with wishes and desires of one’s own — does not that remind us of the stance of the analyst? Is this “not acting” mere passivity, or is it not rather a peculiar kind of highly effective action? Shared introspection as such a powerful form of action which yet can also be considered as a kind of “not-acting”? In Wang Bi’s comments to the ending of Ch. 54 : “It means that one looks at oneself in order to understand the world and does not look to the outside. That is meant in saying, ‘One may know the world without going out of doors’” (transl. Rump).

“So long as I ‘do nothing’ (wú wéi 無為) the people will of themselves be transformed. So long as I love quietude (jìng 靜), the people will of themselves go straight. So long as I act only by inactivity (wú shì 無事；Gibbs : not interfere) the people will of themselves become prosperous. So long as I have no wants (wú yù 無欲) the people will of themselves return to the ‘state of the Uncarved Block’ (pó 撲；Chan : ‘simple’)” (Waley transl., 57).

The 21st Chapter is particularly interesting, but also very puzzling : “The countenance (ròng 容) of a person of high moral cultivation (kǒng dé 孔德) comes from living according to the Tao” (transl. Gibbs). (The same sentence by Chan : “The all-embracing quality of
the great [empty] virtue follows alone from the Tao.”). The continuation is translated (by Gibbs) : “The phenomenon of Tao is so elusive and so evanescent (wei huang wei hu 惟恍惟惚). Evanescent (hu 惚) and elusive (huang 晃) it is, yet there is a form (Waley : forms) contained within it. Yes. elusive and evanescent (huang xì hu xì 悍兮惚兮), yet there is substance (Waley : entities) to it. So vacant and so dark, yet there is a vital essence (Waley : a force) there. This vital essence is very real. It is verifiable (Waley : a force that though rarefied is none the less efficacious). From past to present its name has not been obliterated, because it is evident in the origins of all things. How do I know the circumstances of the origins of all things? Exactly by this phenomenon.” What has here been translated as “elusive and evanescent”, by Chan as “vague and eluding”, and by Waley as “impalpable, incommensurable” : huang and hu, both mean “wild”, “crazy”, “confused”, but together, huang hu, they are the Chinese word for “unconscious”. (The same attribute huang hu is used in Ch. 14).

Certainly, it would be foolhardy simply to equate the Tao with the Unconscious. But if we assume that for Lao Tse the a priori point of departure of understanding Being is the inner reality—that the starting point of his metaphysics is “what is deep and profound” (xuan 玄) by “holding to the Center” (Ch. 1, 5) — “what has no name” and “not being” suddenly assume a great meaning : What is so wild and perplexing is something that is not known, “unconscious”, and yet extremely powerful—“dark and deep”, “seemingly empty”, and “abyss”, as it is often called by him. The following of inner reality and, based on it, our understanding of the world altogether are determined by those laws of the inner depths which are “so crazy and perplexing—huang xī hu xī!”

Of special beauty is the 11th chapter (I quote from Waley’s transl.) : “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.” What Waley circumscribes as “the space where there is nothing”, the Chinese has “wú yǒu 無有— not having, non-being”: The object is visible and concrete, yet its function “dàng gí… yòng 當其…用” depends on the absence, the void, the No. the “There is not”. Is this No not also the No to consciousness, the No inherent in all defense? Are not these expressions very beautiful metaphors for the inner life we deal with in our work—clearly, metaphors of a very different kind from those we use in our theory formation, yet nevertheless metaphors that should bridge the visible world of the Yes with the invisible, but far more powerful world of the No—the Wú or Wú yǒu or Wú míng or Wú wéi (No, non-being, nameless, no action)?

Just as the emptiness gives the objects their ability to function, so does the silence give to the mind and to the spoken words the dimension of depth. The Tao Te King itself is indeed like a finely woven, and yet mighty structure built of spare words and much silence. The contradictions open up abysses of meaning⁵.

Yet what is the central concern?

“To remain whole, be twisted (Chan: yield)! ’ To become straight, let yourself be bent. To become whole, be hollow. Be tattered, that you may be renewed. Those that have little, may get more. Those that have much, are but perplexed (huò 惑).⁶ Therefore the Sage

⁵ “Diese mannigfachen Gestalten der Gegensätze benutzt nun Laotse, um im Widerschein das Unsagbare sagbar zu machen, das Sein im Nichtsein, das Wissen im Nichtwissen, das Tun im Nichttun” (Jaspers, p. 926).

⁶ huò = in conflict? — s. above
clasps the Primal Unity (Chan: the sage embraces the One), testing by it everything under Heaven (Chan: and becomes the model of the world). 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, (loves himself), and therefore he endures. He does not contend (bù zhèng 不爭). And for that very reason no one under heaven can contend with him (Chan: It is precisely because he does not compete that the world cannot compete with him). So then we see that the ancient saying: 'To remain whole be twisted!' (Chan: 'To yield is to be preserved whole') was no idle word; for true wholeness can only be achieved by return (guī 帵 home coming)” (Ch. 22, transl. Waley).

Here again, the contraries are seen as part of an overarching unity; the aim of the wise person (shèng rén 聖人) lies in overcoming what is in conflict—of what “competes”, zhèng 對.

The most expressive formulation however comes right at the beginning of the Tao Te King (Ch. 2). I follow Chan Wing-Tsit’s translation: "When the people of the world all know beauty as beauty, there arises the recognition of ugliness. When they all know the good as good, there arises the recognition of evil. Therefore: Being and non-being produce each other (yǒu wú xiāng shēng 有無相生); difficult and easy complete each other; long and short contrast (jiǎo 僅 or, alternately, xíng compare; Waley: test) each other; high and low distinguish each other; sound and voice harmonize each other; front and behind accompany each other. Therefore the sage manages affairs without action (wú wéi zhì shì 無為之事), and spreads doctrines without words. All things arise, and he does not turn away from them. He produces them but does not take possession of them (Gibbs: [Nature] gives birth but does not possess). He acts but does not rely on his own ability (Gibbs: It acts but does not demand subservience). He accom-
plishes his task but does not claim credit for it. It is precisely because he does not claim credit that his accomplishment remains with him.” The first four of the six pairs of contraries are rendered by Gibbs as follows: “Is and is not are mutually arising; difficult and easy are complementary; long and short arise from comparison; higher and lower are interdependent.” The accompanying commentary Man-Jan Cheng calls the pairs mutual functions, reciprocity: 互相互相 and speaks of the paradox of the mutual support of opposites: 相反相成. In all of the 6 pairs the 3rd of the 4 words is xiāng 相. “mutual”, translated here as “each other”. Waley comments: “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.”

Though there is no special word about or for inner conflict, there is thus the clear awareness of the centrality of opposites, of contradiction, and the insistence to overcome, as we would say, conflict by recognizing complementarity. Si-Ma Qian speaks of the unity of spirit as being advocated by the Taoist school (Ch. 130, quoted by Fung Yu-Lan, p. 170). We would say in our theoretical framework that there is a consistent transcendence of conflict in favor of the synthetic function of the ego that attempts to reconcile all the opposites within and without, as well as between inwardness and outside world, while letting the paradoxes stand—“the mysterious leveling” (yūn tóng 元同, Ch. 56. Waley tr.): “The Sage ‘discards the absolute, the all-inclusive, the extreme’” (Ch. 29. Waley tr.) “It is precisely because he does not compete (bù zhēng 不争 lit. ‘no conflict’) that the world cannot compete with him” (Ch. 66. Chan tr.; cf. also 68, 72, 73, 77, 78, 81).
The very last sentence of the Tao Te King is, I believe not coincidentally: “The way of the sage is to act but not to compete—zhèng rén zhi Dào—wéi ér bù zhèng 聖人之道・為而不爭”. It we assume now in all these references that zhèng 爭 does not merely refer to outer conflict in the meaning of “competition”, but that it expresses, with the consistent equation of inwardness and outwardness, equally inner conflict, then we can conclude that one of the major aims of Lao Tse is the overcoming of all conflict, inner and outer, in favor of a great unity (e.g. “embracing the one”, bào yī 抱一) (ch 22) or synthesis. It is what is called in Ch. 68 bù zhèng zhi Dé 不爭之德 the power of no conflict (Chan: the virtue of noncompeting, Gibbs: the Teh of non-contention, Waley: the power that comes of not contending).

Instead of the social virtues of Kung Fu Tse to deal with inner and outer conflict, Lao Tse postulates something that appears to be radically different: “Banish learning, and there will be no more grieving” (Ch. 20, Waley tr.). In the place of these societal concerns, of the loyalty towards outer norma now internalized, there is the loyalty to what Waley translates as the Uncarved Block, pò 樸, to an inner truth (cháng 常 the “constant”), to spontaneity (Zì-Rán 自然, the “Self-So”) and creativity (shèng 生, “life, birth”) beyond all contraries, transcending all strife (zhèng 爭). Putting it positively, he speaks of the “three treasures: the first is deep love, the second is frugality, and the third is not to dare to be ahead of the world” (Ch. 67, transl. Chan).

Most explicitly the Confucian virtues appear to be disavowed in Ch. 19 (Chan tr.): “Abandon sageliness (shèng 僧) and discard wisdom (zhì 智); then the people will benefit a hundredfold abandon humanity (rén 仁) and discard righteousness (yì 義); then the people will return to filial piety (xiào 孝) and deep love (cǐ 慈). Abandon skill and discard profit; then there will be no thieves or robbers. However, these three things are ornaments (wen 文) and are not adequate. Therefore let people hold on to these: manifest plainness, embrace simp-
licity, reduce selfishness, have few desires.” Waley suggests for the latter portion: “If without these three things they find life too plain and unadorned, then let them have accessories; give them Simplicity ['raw silk'] to look at, the Uncarved Block to hold, give them selflessness and fewness of desires.” Gibbs translates: “I believe these three statements show that words are inadequate. The people should be made to adhere to these principles: ‘Look to the origins and maintain purity; diminish self and curb desires.’”

I think all these translations struggle to approximate the original’s interweaving of inward and outward, its deft, yet bewildering use of metaphors bridging both worlds. E.g. in the concluding sentence: “Diminish ‘self’, make desires scarce” involves the symbol for self, 私. It is derived from 私 私: “a cocoon. It represents a silkworm that coils itself up and shuts itself in its cocoon. By extension, selfish, to care only for one’s self, separation, private, particular.” The compound used means: “my 私 share of grains 禾. By extension, private, personal, partial, selfish” (Wieger, p. 224).

Similarly Ch. 18 and 38 clearly designate the main Confucian virtues as symptoms of decay.

Accordingly, Waley paraphrases Ch. 71: “‘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.”

The chapter itself, reminiscent of Socrates’ Apologia, is in its iterative insistence on 知 (know) and 病 (disease), very poignant: “To know that you do not know is the best. To pretend to know when you do not know is a disease. Only when one recognizes this disease as a disease can one be free from the disease. The sage is free from the disease. Because he recognizes this disease to be disease, he is
free from it” (Chan tr.).

For this kind of emphasis on the synthetic ego function—especially in the sense of bridging resolutely the gap between inner world and outer world in spite of their disparate laws—learning and reeducation, in the sense of Kung Tse, can evidently not be as desirable, as a complete retreat from the entanglements in zhēng 爭, in conflict, would be. Instead of dealing with conflict by subordinating oneself entirely to a superego modeled after the magical power of the Sage-Kings of hoary antiquity and their impersonal representatives in the shape of rules and forms (禮), Lao Tse suggests a much more determined withdrawal from choice, decision, will, wish, and action, especially however from all ambition and competition, in behalf of an ideal of the unity of opposites and of the power of yielding to “the spontaneous Becoming” (Zì-Rān 自然, often now translated as Nature)—a “passivity”. very akin to what I alluded to before as the stance of the analyst. It is very much a “feminine superego”, even far more pronouncedly so as the Confucian superego (which, after all, also suggests submission, renunciation of self and of competition): “The good use of people is by putting oneself below” (Ch. 68, my transl.). “The female always overcomes the male by tranquility, and by tranquility she is underneath… Thus some, by placing themselves below, take over (others), and some, by being (naturally) low, take over (other states)” (Ch. 61, Chan tr.). “Therefore ‘the weapon that is too hard 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 high” (Ch. 76, Waley tr.).

“The original power (yùn Dé 元德) is so deep, so distant: it makes things so paradoxical (fǎn 反). Thus one goes back until one reaches the Great Flow (Dà Shùn 大順)” (end of Ch. 65, my transl.).

One undoes conflict by undoing knowledge and desire; yet there-
with something else is veiled: Culture and society are themselves expression of human nature, conflict itself is human nature, an indispensable basis of the conditio humana. It is the same dilemma as the one later on faced by Rousseau. That unity is only attained at the cost of denying such conflict. With social and cultural reality, with knowledge and social virtues, essential parts of the inner world are bypassed too — the fidelity to the need to know7) and to curiosity, the deep need for activity and symbolization — all in favor of that overriding longing for synthesis. In our frame of reference: the executive side of the ego — the deciding and distinguishing function — is sacrificed in behalf of the synthetic side. With that the attempt at synthesis appears to be itself subverted, undermined. “If one desires to be in front of the people, one must speak as if behind them” (Ch. 66, Gibbs, tr.). Yet can this be done without deception? Does not thus the very split to be avoided recur, the conflict reemerge as inner and tragic reality, as outer isolation and estrangement?

“Wildly, endlessly, all men are merry, as though feasting upon beef or sitting on the veranda in the spring sunshine. I alone remain uncommitted, like an infant who has not yet smiled. I alone seem as mindless as one who has no home to return to. Everyone else has enough and more, yet I alone seem to be left with nothing. What a fool’s mind I have! How muddled I am! Most people seek brightness and clarity. I alone seek dullness and darkness. Most people are imaginative and observant. I alone am stifled and mum: I am as unmoved as the ocean, as ceaseless as the wind high in the sky. Everyone else has something to do: I alone am ignorant and dull. I alone am different from the rest in that I value taking sustenance from the Mother” (Ch. 20, transl. Gibbs).

Yet what is the conflict denied or shunned?

The Question of Conflict in Chinese Thought Specifically in Confucius

Before we can answer that it may be easier to seek a response to the simpler question: What is unambiguously negative, what are the “counter-values”, what is the “negative identity”? The answer is clear: The stress on purpose, intention, goal orientation, willfulness, ambition, power is very negatively viewed. Put more specifically: The autonomy of will, the pursuit of independence, the search for power by the means of aggressive intent are looked at as doomed, as harmful and bad. What is emphasized as positive? Clinging to mother, nourishment, submission, softness, yielding, receptiveness.

There emerges a sharply contradictory image of the “self”: the bad self is the willful self, the good self is the yielding self, the one that merges with the maternal. Thus we deal with what we would describe as the conflict of separation and individuation. And the solution proffered is the disavowal of separateness and of individuation, the fulfillment of the fantasy of merger, the lifting of the boundaries. However, if put in such an absolute form of an Either-Or, the conclusion does not seem to do justice to the cautiousness, the metaphorical character of Lao Tse’s thought, his care not to do violence to human nature. Therefore it has to be restated: the emphasis is shifted from the end of individuation and separateness towards the other end, that of union with the “Mother”.

Special forms of individuation are power, attempts at control, winning in competition. It is in particular these manifestations of individualness that are condemned. Formulated differently: Power in and by itself is evil, or more carefully put, power in every form tends to move

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9) “Dieses Werk Laotse ist die erste grobe indirekte Mitteilung, auf die der eigentlich philosophische Gedanke immer angewiesen ist... Dann aber ergibt sich, daß alle solche Anweisungen bei Laotse nur Gleichnisse sind” (Jaspers, p. 924).
towards the negative pole: love, not as a command, but as a state of unity with the other and with Nature, is being considered good. The self as powerful is bad, the self as one that participates and submerges itself in the great motherly unity, the Great Flowing and Following (Da Shùn), self as the “Uncarved Block”, is good.

This means: he appears to suggest that the union with Mother is the solution of all conflicts that have to do with curiosity (“without leaving his door he knows everything under heaven”, Ch. 47; “ever striving to make the people knowledgeless and desireless”, Ch. 3) and exhibition (“close the mouth, shut the door”, Ch. 52; “he does not show himself; therefore he is seen everywhere”, Ch. 22), conflicts that have to do with power and control, with oedipal competition and triumph. This, however, leads to a deeper form of power and control: “where there is nothing that cannot be overcome and where one knows one knows no limits” (Ch. 59). It is the “merger with the dusty world which is called the original merger—yüán tóng 元同” (Gibbs calls it “mysterious assimilation”, Ch. 56, Chan “profound identification”. Waley “mysterious levelling”, meaning according to Waley a merger of all sensory modalities); I think it is close to our often used postulate of a kind of rather mysterious “primary identification”, and expression that corresponds in fact quite well with the Chinese term.

In contrast to this supreme identification with the Maternal as ideal in Lao Tse we have the equally strenuous identification with the idealized Paternal in Confucious—yet both in the service to avoid any power struggle and competition, be that of an anal or oedipal-phallic nature.

Still the most fascinating question remains: What about the seeming merging of opposites, that what has been called fān yán, 反言, the speaking in paradoxes—that big is small, small is big, full is empty, old is new, strong is weak, weak is strong? How can that be understood?
The immediate response is: Speaking and knowing are impotent. It seems to imply an advocacy of a return to the preverbal, to the all-encompassing and global affects. Then we think of such “absurd” reversals in dreams, that may imply: “This is incredible, ridiculous!”

What does it entail? It expresses a deep doubt on the perception of reality and on the validity of everyday logic. Thus, by its very movement from one opposite to the other, it gives metaphorical expression to the profound quandary: What is truth?

And yet it goes deeper still: This is the language of the soul, the discourse of the inner world where we discover layer after layer, where we can tear off mask behind mask. It represents the depth dimension of inner reality. This is its hallmark, in Dickens’ expression: “...things are not always as they seem...” (“Our mutual friend, p. 321) and “But seeming may be false or true” (The mystery of Edwin Drood, p. 262). The layering is laced with anxiety, it is a layering of defenses and of dangers.

Could it therefore be that we deal here, in the fān yán, with an indirect presentation of conflict, in the sense of using logical and perceptual contradiction, as an indirect presentation of affective conflict—in our terms: of intrasystemic and intersystemic conflict (whereby it is, I would think, mostly the former)?

Yet clinical evidence indicates that where we encounter such intrasystemic (intra-ego) conflict—conflict between perceptions, estrangement of perceptions, doubt in the validity of common logical assumptions—there we also find an underlying conflict within the superego: There it is the attempt to fight off intolerably harsh superego representatives, to deal with the sense of helplessness in front of overpowering external and internal authority, and the more or less successful attempt to oppose to it a new, better, less condemning superego.

Is it possible to give with this a coherent interpretation to the Tao Te King?
The best evidence is that there is an almost complete absence of terms that have to do with shame and guilt. Especially the former's omission is so striking, because it is, as we have noticed, so prevalent in the Confucian ethics and has of course remained the determining moral issue for Chinese culture and those cultures deeply influenced by it, like the Japanese. There are two passing references, as far as I remember, to rú 負, in the meaning of disgrace; there is none to chī 恥, shame. There is one to zuì 惧, guilt.

Again using an outside image to reflect (also) an inner reality: "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? There is the Lord of Slaughter (Si Shā 司殺) always ready for this task, and to do it in his stead is like thrusting oneself into the master-carpenter's (Dà Jiàng 大匠) 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' (Ch. 74, Waley tr.).

Where there is superego, there is the sense of justice and injustice. The sense of injustice is resentment. There is one chapter (Ch. 79) devoted to prevent resentment. yuàn 愠: "To patch up great grudge is surely to leave some grudge behind. How can this be regarded as good. Therefore the sage keeps the left-hand portion (obligation) [the symbol of debr] of a contract and does not blame the other party. Virtuous people attend to their left-hand portions while those without virtue attend to other people's mistakes. 'The Way of Heaven has no favorite. It is always with the good man'" (Ch. 79, Chan tr., except that I replaced "hatred" with "grudge" for yuàn 愠).

Yet there is a deeper way to avert resentment: "to be content" "not to strive", "not to compete". And: "Thus if Dào is lost, Dé appears. If Dé is lost, humanism (rén 仁) appeas. If humanism is lost, justice
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(义) appears. If justice is lost, etiquette (礼) appears. When conscience (忠) and honesty (信) wear thin, etiquette is the beginning of strife" (Ch. 38, Gibbs, transl.). Thus the central virtues embodied in the Confucian ethic are discarded, among which is the sense of justice, 义. Hence the prevention of resentment from this second side.

In the alleged discussion between Lao Tse (Lao Dan) and Kung Tse, as reported by Chuang Tse, we read as Lao Tse's instruction: "Humanism (仁) and justice (义) are the grass huts of the former kings; you may stop in them for one night but you mustn't tarry there for long. A lengthy stay would invite many reproaches... Chaff from the winnowing fan can so blind the eye that heaven, earth, and the four directions all seem to shift place. A mosquito or a horsefly stinging your skin can keep you awake a whole night. And when humanity and justice in all their fearfulness come to muddle the mind, the confusion is unimaginable. If you want to keep the world from losing its simplicity, you must move with, the freedom of the wind, stand in the perfection of Virtue (總德而立矣). Why all this huffing and puffing, as though you were carrying a big drum and searching for a lost child! The snow goose needs no daily bath to stay white; the crow needs no daily bath to stay white; the crow needs no daily inking to stay black. Black and white in their simplicity offer no ground for argument: fame and reputation in their clamoroussness offer no ground for envy. When the springs dry up and the fish are left stranded on the ground, they spew each other with moisture and wet each other down with spit—but it would be much better if they could forget each other in the rivers and lakes!" In regard to the Six Classics (collected by Kung Tse): "[They] are the old worn-out paths of the former kings—they are not the thing which walked the path. What you are expounding are simply these paths. Paths are made by shoes that walk them, they are by no means the
shoes themselves!” And about those great leaders of antiquity that held for Kung Tse the promise of the rightness of the origin: “They called it ‘ruling’, but in fact they were plunging [the world] into the worst confusion... their wisdom was more fearsome than the tail of the scorpion... And yet they considered themselves sages! Was it not shameful—their lack of shame! (Bù yì kě chī kǔ, qí wú chī yē 不亦可恥乎, 其天恥也)” (translation of Chuang Tse by Burton Watson, except that I translated ulla with “humanity” instead of “benevolence”, yì with “justice” instead of “righteousness”). Chuang Tse’s Lao Dan is obviously not identical with the Lao Tse of the Tao Te King, although identified with him: but one aspect of the “message”, the one I am dealing with right now, stands out in stark relief.

Clearly, however, the Tao Te King is by no means a pamphlet dedicated to the overthrow of the superego altogether. Rather it is, as I would postulate, the overcoming of an archaic, mostly “anal” superego in favor of the positing of a new ideal. It is a revolutionary superego, a protest against a value system that at least for us has become associated with Confucius. It is a superego that aspires to reach back to the “origin” (yīán 元), a superego living from a new vision. There is, as already noted, clearly a radical shift in valuation, compared with the Confucian ethos, regardless if Lao Tse preceded Confucius, as the tradition presumed, or followed him by centuries, as is assumed by many today (I share this latter view)—a shift without requirements of faith, without a belief in a divinity in any customary sense, yet a deep spirit of reverence, a kind of “philosophical belief”—using a wonderful spectrum of metaphors without the fixation into any dogma.

What does this new vision entail? The great connectedness of life is seen. The advise given that the encompassing cohesiveness of what we know never be lost. Purposive and ambitious doing interferes with such knowing of the whole context of Being. All forms of external power destroy such awareness and should be avoided. It is a grand
vision of existence that treats all the external entities—realm, war, ruler, plants and animals—as metaphorical help to formulate such inner truth. The most important, however, of all the insights of such an inwardness is that of mutually conditioning attributes and actions, instead of the absoluteness of any one thing, subject or object, its Either-Or. Nothing that is being put into words can claim unconditional truth: “There was something undifferentiated and yet complete, which existed before heaven and earth. Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not change. It operates everywhere and is free from danger. It may be considered the mother of the universe. I do not know its name: I call it Dao (Way). If forced to give it a name, I shall call it great. Now being great means functioning everywhere. Functioning everywhere means far-reaching. Being far-reaching means returning to the original point. Therefore Dao is great. Heaven is great. Earth is great. Man is also great. There are four great things in the universe, and man is one of them. Man models himself after Earth. Earth models itself after Heaven. Heaven models itself after Dào. And Dào models itself after Nature” (Zì-Rán, 自然 Waley: the “Self-So” (Ch. 25, transl. Chan; except that I follow the reading “Man” rén, not “kiang”).

Thus it also appears that implicit in the philosophy advocated is a superego shunning all forms of absoluteness: “Who knows why Heaven dislikes what it dislikes? Even the Sage considers it a difficult question. The Way of Heaven does not compete, and yet it skillfully achieves victory. It does not talk and yet skillfully responds to things. It comes to you without your invitation. It is not anxious about things and yet it plans well. Heaven’s net is indeed vast. Though its meshes are wide, it misses nothing” (Ch. 73, Chan transl.)

Herbert Fingarette raises the same objections against the drift of my considerations as in regard to the first part: “I will only say briefly about Lao Tzu that there again you stress that he is dealing with
the "depth dimension", the Tao of the unconscious. But, like others who take analogous lines, you give no language or imagery that speaks of inner depths. Actually, almost all Lao Tzu's imagery and language is objective, "external". And that, in my view, is one of the great distinctive things about it. He speaks of aspects of life that we are inclined to formulate in inner terms: subjective; but he does not. We can learn from this. I think it's extremely important to learn how to think about and to see life in other ways—seriously—not merely as "metaphors" for the "real" truth that we have. I'm not saying Lao Tzu's is the truth and ours is a metaphor. I think you can read it either way. But once you adopt one or the other, the paths eventually diverge. It is hard to free ourselves from the vision and way of seeing we have evolved: but, for me, that is what we can learn from the study of Confucius and Lao Tzu."

Here too I believe that we cannot say that his imagery is objective and "external"; but rather that it can be read either way and in its very style reflects the deep unity of both. The concept of depth goes in fact through the imagery of Lao Tse, and it is clearly so placed that it can be taken for inner world as for outer world. I give as an almost arbitrarily chosen example the 8th Chapter in the translation by Win-Tsit Chan: "The best (man) is like water. Water is good; it benefits all things and does not compete with them (bù zhēng 不爭). It dwells in (lowly) places that all disdain. This is why it is so near to Tao. (The best man) in his dwelling loves the earth. In his heart, he loves what is profound\(^\text{10}\). In his associations, he loves humanity. In his words, he loves faithfulness. In government, he loves order. In handling affairs, he loves competence. In his activities, he loves timeliness. It is because he does not compete that he is without reproach." Here yüān 輕 abyss is clearly related to the

\(^{10}\text{Xīn shān yūān 心善淵, Gibbs: "In cultivating one's mind/heart, search the deeps well."} \)
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"heart", again the main symbol for inner life. I was explicit in not equating the Tao with the Unconscious, but I consider it extremely relevant that those terms I referred to there—huǎng hū—again are marked by the same 61st classifier for "heart". However I fully agree with Prof. Fingarette that Lao Tse. Just like Kung Tse, has to tell us far more than just to give us some archaic and imperfect formulations for psychoanalytic insights. The point should rather be made that they, especially Lao Tse, may be of the very greatest relevance for a deepened understanding of our inner life, of our 心, that in many regards transcends our Western knowledge by far. And we can approach their insights and accept their moral guidance only with the deepest reverence.

It is evident that in the Tao Te King metaphysics, ethics and politics are united, even amalgamated (Jaspers): but it is also clear how everything points back to the one central and original issue: that of the insight in the inner reality, of its many-layeredness and multiplicity of meaning, of its contradictoriness, and, ultimately and inevitably, of its roots in conflict and complementarity. However, at the same time, that insight says: Inner and outer truth manifest each other in mutually reflecting mirrors. Therefore its discourse has to be eminently metaphorical: truth can only be approached with the help of images; it cannot be "grasped" and "held". Proceeding, it has to be "cautious like crossing a frozen stream in the winter—majestic in appearance—yielding, like ice on the verge of melting..." (Ch. 15).