

SUGGESTIONS OF OCCIDENTAL THOUGHT IN ANCIENT CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

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PART I.

SOME of my friends who are interested in the history of thought think that there is little of value to the student in the philosophy of the east. This is natural enough as regards China, because the difficulty of the classical language deters all but a few from its study, and also because those who have devoted themselves to things Chinese have had little training except in linguistics. It requires a training in philosophy to understand the philosophic literature of any race, as well as a knowledge of the language, and this professional point of view is lacking in most of the translations of the Chinese classics which have appeared in western tongues. The result has been that we have thought of the Chinese as a practical people who were interested only in ethics, and have given little effort to speculative thought. That the rich mine of Chinese philosophy has recently been opened for us is due partly to European scholars like Professor Forke, of Berlin, and partly to modern-trained Chinese, like Dr. Hu Shih, whose history of ancient Chinese thought, which has not been translated, has begun a new era in Chinese writing. Only the surface of this mine has been worked, and there is a depressingly large field which awaits careful investigation by properly equipped men. With the exception of Dr. Henke and Dr. H. H. Dubs, Americans have had very little to do with the results until now, but it is to be hoped that we will develop scholars who may cope with the problems which wait solution. Already it is known that the Chinese have furnished a long line of thinkers who can challenge comparison with the best of any nation, and without a knowledge of whom no account of the search for truth is adequate.

The best known and the most interesting period of Chinese philosophy is that of the Chou dynasty, which lasted roughly from 1100 to 230 B. C. During the last three centuries of this dynasty the real power lay in the hands of feudal princes, whose quarrels kept the country in continual war and reduced the common people to starvation and brigandage, while the courts, cities and armies multiplied and flourished. In spite of the disorder, civilization advanced at the same time that morals declined, and the constant communication between the feudal capitals aided in the spread of ideas.

There was in China a class of men who were peculiarly fitted to advance the development of thought. These were the peripatetic scholars whose business was the science of government, and who wandered from court to court seeking employment from the feudal lords. These men were advisors and not fighters, owing their positions to their knowledge and mental ability. Nearly all the thinkers of the period came from their ranks, and most of them had practical experience in official positions, yet it is to their credit that a surprising number preferred their self-respect to honor and fame, resigning their posts when the ruler indulged in unethical conduct against their advice. The Chinese have always recognized the close connection between ethics and politics.

In their struggle to solve the problems of their own time they attacked questions which have arisen whenever men have reasoned about the universe and human existence. The main positions in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics and even logic were taken and debated, while man after man elaborated and entrenched the teaching of his school in the light of criticism and argument. During the latter part of the period the city of Liang in the central state of Wei, where the dukes were patrons of literature, attracted a group of brilliant men whose solutions of the problems of philosophy often anticipated the best results of occidental thought. When their writings are put into the technical language of western scholarship, it becomes apparent that the human mind reasons in the same way when faced by certain difficulties, whether in China or in Europe, and that eastern Asia can lay claim to a line of thinkers who may be placed in comparison even with their contemporaries in ancient Greece.

THE ABSOLUTE.

Chinese classic literature is not old, compared with that of Egypt and Mesopotamia. The three works generally accepted as the earliest are the *Book of History*, the *Book of Changes*, and the *Book of Poetry*. While there is considerable dispute concerning certain passages, the first of these may possibly contain material of the 18th Century B. C. but took its present form after the year 1000 B. C., and the second is attributed to the last quarter of the 12th Century, B. C.

The *Book of History* is an interpretation of the chief events in the ancient history of the Chinese in terms of a practical monotheism. Although lesser spirits, connected with mountains, forests and bodies of water are recognized and sacrifices to them recorded, throughout the book nothing occurs except by the will or command of Heaven. Another phrase is also used, which sinologues generally agree is equated to Heaven, Shang Ti, or the Emperor on High. The first term is impersonal in the sense of our Providence, while the second is usually translated by God, and they are used interchangeably. The ruler owes his position to the Decree of Heaven, the virtues and the social order have their origin in Heaven, dynasties change and calamities occur by the will of Shang Ti, and his decisions are shown by the course of history, through divination, by the words of great men who represent him, and by the desire of the nation as a whole. In the book no war, either civil or foreign, is declared to be a struggle between divinities. On the contrary, Heaven rules over all impartially, barbarians as well as Chinese, and the ruler of a new dynasty sacrifices to Shang Ti in the same way as the man he superseded. While this God cannot be called an impersonal absolute, there are almost no traces of anthropomorphism. His attributes imply personality, and he is supreme in the universe. This concept of God was embodied in the later Confucian tradition and is still of great influence in China.

The Book of Changes, however, gives a somewhat different picture. The work seems to be an attempt to solve the problem of the one and the many, based upon ancient geometrical figures, or trigrams, which had long been used for divination. The trigrams are formed of broken and unbroken straight lines. These lines, the eight trigrams, and further combinations of sixty-four hexagrams, represent natural objects and forces, as well as ethical qualities, and

by using them as a text, the authors have constructed a description of the universe which gives a large amount of moral instruction and a good account of the civilization of the period. The book contains the following sentence.

"Therefore Change has the Great Ultimate, which gives birth to the two Principles. The two Principles give birth to the four Images (or Forms). The four Images give birth to the eight Trigrams."¹

The Great Ultimate is represented by an unbroken line, the Principles by two lines, one broken and the other unbroken, the four Images or Forms are combinations of two lines each, and it can be seen how the Trigrams, which stand for the sun, clouds, fire and so on, can be combined into a short-hand account of the universe, all developed from a single source.

There is nothing in the text which justifies equating the Great Ultimate to Heaven, and it appears to be an impersonal absolute. The passage is brief, and does not seem to have had much influence in the period which immediately followed, but it was seized upon by the scholars of the Sung dynasty in the 11th Century of our era and made the keystone of their system of thought. As 2000 years lay between the Sung thinkers and the authors of the Book of Changes, it is very uncertain whether their interpretation of the text existed in the minds of those who wrote it.

An attempt to construct an absolute which was more immediately effective was made by Lao Tzu in the 6th Century B. C. Lao Tzu's effort has been studied by European scholars more as mysticism than as philosophy, but it is a very respectable intellectual achievement. His problem is the old one, which he probably inherited from the Book of Changes, how to account for change by that which does not change, and for the particular by the universal. That the first serious attack upon this question should be a little vague is not surprising.

Lao Tzu's method is the use of antinomies. He couples opposite and mutually exclusive statements, asserting both to apply to his absolute, which he calls Tao. Tao has a name, and yet is nameless. Nameless, it originated Heaven and Earth; named, it is the mother of all things, and yet named and nameless, it is the same. It is existence and non-existence, which give birth to each other. Six

¹ *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 16. Chapter I "Chi Tsi Chuan."

pairs of opposites are given, such as length and shortness, which are opposed and yet unified because one requires the other. Good and evil, beauty and ugliness are relative, and the existence of one term implies the existence of the other. The statement that all things change is itself an unchanging rule. Tao is a flow and pervades all things. It is undefined and complete, existing before Heaven and Earth, weak and yet strong. It can be found and practised, yet no one is able to find or practice it. It is not knowledge, but rather a forgetting of wisdom, and yet it may be known. It does nothing, and so there is nothing which it does not do.

Tao, the word which Lao Tzu uses for the absolute, probably meant road or way originally, but by the 6th Century it had already acquired a philosophic meaning, and there are reasons for supposing that he was not unique in his application of the term. It is not the equivalent of Heaven, for it is distinctly said to have existed prior to Heaven, and it is not ethical, but superior to the distinctions of ethics. Benevolence and justice did not come into being until men had lost Tao, and this opposition to the virtues is characteristic of the later Taoist writers. Lao Tzu seems to have caught his inspiration from nature, which appears to produce the growth of plants and animals as well as the course of the seasons and the celestial phenomena without effort or disturbance.

Confucius was a younger contemporary of Lao Tzu. He adhered closely to the teaching of the *Book of History*, and the expression Heaven was constantly on his lips. As he added nothing to the Chinese conception of the absolute, no more need be said about his views except that opinions differ as to whether he was a complete agnostic, or believed in a personal God. Some of his followers incline to one side and some to the other, depending upon whether they regard Heaven as personal or impersonal. Their dispute with the disciples of Lao Tzu was ethical and epistemological rather than metaphysical. Both schools use the word Tao, but with the Confucianists the term stands for the moral order of the universe, which is quite different from the content given the word by Lao Tzu.

In the 5th and 4th Centuries B. C. Lieh Tzu and Chuang Tzu developed the teachings of their master, Lao Tzu, but without changing his position materially. Both seem to have been genuine mystics in the sense that they passed through an abnormal psycho-

logical experience in which distinctions were gradually obliterated until at last even that between subject and object disappeared, and they were united with the universe. Though there is no trace of such an experience in Lao Tzu himself, his doctrine lends itself easily to mysticism. However, ancient Taoist thought can hardly be said to be religious, since Tao cannot be called a god in any sense, and Taoism does not appear to have resulted in any religious behaviour nor cults before the 3rd Century B. C.

An interesting attempt to rationalize the belief in Heaven was made by Meh Ti in the 5th Century B. C. He is said to have been the first Chinese thinker to have used the syllogism and to have attempted proofs. His argument for the existence of God is doubtless the first appearance of the ontological proof.

"How do we know that there is a universal being. We know because Heaven eats universally. How do we know that Heaven eats universally? It is said, 'Within the four seas, all people who eat grain never fail to feed sheep and cattle, and to prepare wine and rice for making sacrifices to Shang Ti and the spirits.'²

This may be expressed a little crudely, but the argument is clear. All men prepare sacrifices to Shang Ti, therefore all men have the idea of Shang Ti in their minds, and this universal conception is of the nature of proof. Meh Ti goes on to point out that unless Heaven and the spirits exist, the religious ideals of the people would be overthrown, and it would be "as though the sacrifices were poured into a dirty gully."

Meh Ti also uses the argument from design.

"For it is Heaven that created the sun, moon, stars and constellations, making them shine and duly follow their courses. By arranging the four seasons it regulates the lives of the people. By means of thunder, snow, frost, rain and dew, it quickens the growth of the five cereals and thread-giving flax. It planned the formation of mountains, rivers and valleys, producing wealth in manifold forms. It created rulers, princes and lords in order to supervise the morals of the people, rewarding the good and punishing the wicked."³

These arguments for the existence of God have had a varied history in the west and in China they were criticized by Wang Ch'ung

² *The Open Court*, May, 1928, "Meh Ti," by Quentin K. Y. Huang, p. 278.

³ *Ibid.* April, 1928, p. 234.

about the beginning of the Christian era. Meh Ti himself mentions those who doubted the existence of spirits, who appear to have been some of the followers of Confucius, but the reference is indefinite.

The influence of Meh Ti was indirect and he was neglected even by the Chinese until recently, when interest in his work has revived. The mystical teaching of Taoism could be understood by only a few, and in the Ch'in and Han periods it was perverted into a polytheistic religion which borrowed extensively from Buddhism and the popular shamanistic cults, Lao Tzu himself becoming a deity, but there continued to be real seekers after Tao, and the Tao Teh Ching is still a force in Chinese thought.

THE THEORY OF IDEAS

The brief passage from the *Book of Changes* already quoted states that the two Principles give birth to the Images of Forms, and these in turn to objects. The word translated as Form is said in the same chapter to mean copy. Dr. Hu Shih interprets the text as showing that change and progress are due to ideas,⁴ and the *Book of Changes* seems to imply that ideas or forms come before objects.

In Lao Tzu there is an important sentence bearing on this point.

"Tao is that which is vague and eluding. It is vague and eluding, yet there is the Form in it. It is vague and eluding, yet has an object in it."⁵ A later commentator remarks that Lao Tzu was careless here, since the object obviously exists before the idea of it, but probably Lao Tzu knew what he was doing, which was in accordance with the Book of Changes. But it is not until Confucius that there is a clear doctrine of Ideas, which suggests Plato. Where Lao Tzu speaks vaguely of knowing beauty as beauty and goodness as goodness,⁶ Confucius is quite definite. When asked what should be done first in administering the government, he said,

"What is necessary is to rectify names."

"Indeed," remarked Tzu Lu, "you are wide of the mark. Why must there be such rectification?"

The Master said, "How uncultivated you are, Yu. The superior man shows a cautious reserve in regard to what he does not know. If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the

⁴ Hu Shih, *History of Chinese Philosophy*. Section on the I Ching. The book has not been translated.

⁵ *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 39. "The Tao Teh Ching," Chap. 21.

⁶ *Ibid.* Chap. 2.

truth. If language be not in accordance with the truth, affairs cannot be successful."⁷

Again, the Duke of Ch'i asked about government, and Confucius replied, "When the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son."⁸

In another passage he exclaims, "A cornered vessel without corners! What a vessel!"⁹

These quotations show that Confucius considered the reality of sacrificial vessels, princes, ministers, fathers and sons to depend upon the degree to which they conformed to ideal patterns of these things which existed independently of their material copies. What a real ruler is does not depend upon any man conforming to that standard, but good government lies in an approximation to the ideal, or as Confucius puts it, in the rectification of names.

Mencius carried this principle to its logical conclusion. When asked whether it was right for Wu Wang to have killed Tsou, the last of the Yin rulers, he replied,

"He who outrages benevolence we call a thief; he who outrages righteousness we call a ruffian. I have heard of the cutting off of the thief and ruffian Tsou, but I have not heard of putting a sovereign to death."¹⁰ In other words, although Tsou possessed the rank and title by inheritance, he was not really emperor because he did not possess the qualities Heaven had decreed for the position.

In ancient China, long before the period of the Chou philosophers, it had been the custom for princes to carry with them on military expeditions the tablets of their ancestors and of the Gods of the Land and Grain. Rewards were distributed before the former, and punishments inflicted before the latter, so that in time they came to symbolize the abstract virtues of benevolence and righteousness or justice, which are emphasized in the Analects. The peculiarly Chinese virtue which is rather lamely translated as propriety seems to have developed from the sacrificial ritual. Loyalty was a necessary accompaniment of the feudal system. These and other virtues appear as abstractions or universals from the time of Lao Tzu and Confucius onward, and more and more ethical dis-

⁷ *Analects*, 13, 3. There are many translations of the *Four Books*, so these references are to the chapter and verse of the Chinese text.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12, 11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 6, 23.

¹⁰ *Mencius*, 1, 2, 8.

cussion centered about them. They were the backbone of the Confucian system, and were bitterly attacked by the Taoists.

The chief foe of virtue was the brilliant Chuang Tzu, who flourished about 300 B. C. Mencius had ascribed the virtues to Heaven, which had implanted them in the human heart as innate ideas or intuitions. A contemporary and friend of Chuang Tzu, named Hui, had discussed abstract nouns like hardness and whiteness, and what can be affirmed about them. Chuang Tzu attacks both on the ground that universals are only names, and that discussion of them is useless. There is no such thing as propriety in the abstract, for the old ways of Chou cannot be used in modern Lu.¹¹ All knowledge is relative. Suppose an eel and a man both slept in a damp place. The eel would draw the conclusion that dampness is an excellent thing, while the man would get rheumatism and claim the reverse.¹²

Unfortunately little of Hui Tzu has survived, so we have only the word of Chuang Tzu for their discussion. Mencius was dead. But Hsun Tzu, the last of the great Confucian thinkers of the ancient or Chou period, seems to have been so impressed with the attack of the Taoists that he abandoned the position of Mencius entirely and instead of making the virtues intuitions of heavenly law common to all men, he declares them to be nothing but artificial standards erected by society for its own purposes. Subsequent Chinese thought has generally held with Mencius and against Chuang Tzu and Hsun Tzu on the question of the virtues, and Hsun Tzu, although a Confucian, has not been honored with a place in the Confucian temples. But Chinese common sense has supported Chuang Tzu in his attack on universals other than the virtues, and today little is known except that the question was discussed. The orthodox Confucian position is that the virtues have their origin in Heaven, which has placed them in the human heart. How Hui Tzu and others thought of a stone as connected with the idea of hardness we do not know.

¹¹ *Sacred Books of the East*. Vol. 39, p. 353.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 191.

PART II.

THE NATURE

The Chinese character translated as Nature occurs in both the Book of History and the Book of Poetry.

"Men have no regard for their heavenly nature," complained the founder of the Chou dynasty.¹³

"Heaven gave birth . . . but the nature it confers is not to be depended on. All are good at first, but few prove themselves to be so at the last."

"Heaven, in giving birth to the multitudes of the people, to every faculty and relationship annexed its law. The people possess this normal nature, and they love its normal virtue."¹⁴

The Chinese point of view, whose antiquity is witnessed by these texts, is that all things were created with a certain nature or form or purpose appropriate to each, and that this nature is conferred by Heaven. In the case of men, this nature has generally been regarded as ethical.

Lao Tzu, however, taught that the purpose of man was to achieve or reach Tao. Tao was a respectable word already in general use, so that not even the conservative Confucius was shocked by it, but the way in which Lao Tzu employs the term is vague, to say the least. The opening sentence of the Doctrine of the Mean, which is attributed to the grandson of Confucius, appears to be an attempt to explain Tao by uniting it with the older conception.

"What Heaven has conferred is called the Nature. Tao is accordance with this Nature." In other words, man is made as he is by Heaven with a view to a certain end or purpose, and Tao is achieved when a man lives according to his nature and conforming to that purpose. This statement leaves the term nature undefined beyond saying that it is given by Heaven, and about the beginning of the 4th Century B. C. the Chinese were shocked—and they have not recovered from it yet—by a definition of the Nature in terms of a complete egoistic hedonism.

"Sorrow and grief," said Yang Chu, "are contrary to human nature; ease and pleasure are in accord with it."¹⁵

¹³ *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 3, p. 120.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 410.

¹⁵ *Wisdom of the East Series*, A. Forke, "Yang Chu's Garden of Pleasure," p. 64.

“Allow the ear to hear what it likes, the eye to see what it likes, the mouth to say what it likes, the body to enjoy what comforts it likes to have, and the mind to do what it likes.”¹⁶

Yang Chu is nothing if not consistent. The most extreme case in such an argument would be a man who takes pleasure in cruelty. Yang openly defends the two worst men in Chinese history, represented as monsters of lust and brutality, by saying that if it were their nature to behave in that way, and it gave them pleasure, they were right to do it. It is only fair to add that Yang himself appears to have been a very mild man who found his own pleasure in cultivating his garden. Yet such a theory demands an answer, and the right man was found in Mencius.

The attack of Mencius was both negative and positive. His destructive criticism, in which he mentions Yang Chu by name, is that Yang is hopelessly selfish, that his doctrine would destroy society and would result in a relapse into savagery.¹⁷ Positively Mencius stated the famous doctrine which is the key to an understanding of Confucian ethics, that the nature of man is good. Just as water always seeks the lowest level, so men have a craving for virtue that is an ineradicable part of humanity.¹⁸ Even the most depraved man cannot see a child about to fall into a well without feelings of sympathy and alarm.¹⁹ Heaven has given to man a nature which is its own image, but which man himself corrupts. Mencius has a list of four virtues—the generally accepted number at present is five—which do not correspond exactly with any English words and are misleading when translated, so that they need not be enumerated. The important point is that Mencius holds that a man is benevolent and just, or at least recognizes these qualities as admirable, because he was made that way by Heaven. It is not the nature of man to desire sense pleasures as the chief good, but rather virtue.

Mencius was followed by the Taoist Chuang Tzu, who attacked the reality of universals, and pointed out that the virtues are only relative. A robber may be said to have all the virtues.

“That he knows there are valuables in an apartment shows his wisdom; that he is the first to enter it shows his courage; that he

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁷ *Mencius*, 3, 2, 9, 9, 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 6, 1, 2, 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 2, 1, 6, 3.

is the last to quit it shows his righteousness; and that he makes an equal division of the plunder shows his benevolence. Without these qualities no one has ever become a great robber."²⁰

Hsun Tzu, who flourished during the 3rd Century B. C., closes the great creative period of Chinese thought. He abandoned the position that the Nature is good, taking the contrary view that it is evil. If men are naturally good, why is education necessary? What we actually observe, argues Hsun Tzu, is that children are naturally selfish, and have to be taught altruism, fair play and conformance with the rules of society. Education thus becomes largely corrective. Men are superior to beasts because they combine, specialize in their activities, and work for the common good. In order to do this they are obliged to subordinate their selfish interests in a way which is not natural, but must be taught. The virtues therefore become standards set up by society, or by the ruler as the head of society, and virtue itself entirely external and utilitarian.

There are two other views of the Nature possible. One was taken by a contemporary opponent of Mencius, named Kao, that it is neither good nor evil. The other was held by a Han thinker named Yang Hsiung about the beginning of the Christian era, that the heart of man contains the seeds of both good and evil, and that it lies with him how they are developed. The overwhelming weight of Chinese opinion has sided with Mencius, and his doctrine of the essential goodness of man's nature, which is also the nature of Heaven, is memorized by every Chinese schoolboy.

THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

In the second chapter of the Tao Teh Ching, Lao Tzu speaks of knowing beauty as beauty and goodness as goodness. This seems to imply that both these concepts have a separate existence which we recognize. As to how we acquire such knowledge, Lao Tzu and the Taoists generally agree that it is by intuition. Without going outside his door or looking through his window, a man may see Tao and understand all things. Knowledge is to be gained neither by observation, nor by rational processes, for it is a forgetting of wisdom. This conclusion is natural to a mystic, because his approach to reality is through his peculiar experience, and that experience discards both observation and the labor of thought. An-

²⁰ *Sacred Books of the East*. Vol. 1, p. 283.

other metaphysical conclusion which is apt to result from a mystical experience is that the distinctions between things are not real. The Chinese do not go as far in this direction as the Hindus, but Chuang Tzu dreams that he is a butterfly, and on awaking wonders whether he is a man dreaming he is a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he is a man. The Taoists all teach that there is no absolute knowledge except the mystical knowledge of Tao.

Confucius was not a mystic but a man of affairs who cared little for metaphysics. He has no clear position as to how knowledge is gained and what it is, although his theory of ideas makes it evident that both objects and universals have an existence outside ourselves, and that the reality of the former is due to the latter. He emphasizes experience and study, and in teaching he lifted one corner of a subject, requiring his pupils to lift the other three; in other words he made his students do a good deal of thinking for themselves. He also taught that real knowledge includes practice.

His followers are divided on the theory of knowledge. In the Great Learning, a small treatise attributed to his disciple Tseng Tzu, there occurs the expression, "The investigation of things," and while the development of Confucian epistemology from this phrase did not take place until the 11th Century of our era, the lines along which it followed may be indicated. The first of the Sung philosophers, Chou Teng I, had as pupils two brothers named Ch'eng. From Ch'eng Hao developed Chu Hsi and his followers, who taught that knowledge was gained from the investigation of things in the sense of what we would call a scientific or inductive observation of the universe. The Sung thinkers have not been thoroughly studied by European scholars, and it is not certain whether Chu Hsi thought of our knowledge of external objects as immediate, or as a correspondence, but it does seem clear that he regarded such knowledge as real and not as appearance. On the other hand, from Ch'eng I there was a line of development through Lu Hsiang Shan and Wang Yang Ming which taught that knowledge was to be gained by introspection and tested by experience, which has led some to call Wang Yang Ming a pragmatist. While the interpretation of Chu Hsi is regarded as authoritative, all these men are considered orthodox Confucians, and their names are placed in the Confucian temple.

To return to the ancient period. Meh Ti, in the century follow-

ing Confucius, was a thorough empiricist and his three standards for the testing of any principle are all based on experience.

"There is the standard of precedent; there is the standard of observation; and there is the standard of function."²¹ The meaning may be phrased in this way. Is a principle true or valid? First, it may be checked by the recorded experience of the nation; second, it may be tested by the ears and eyes of the common people; and third, it may be tried out and if it works well, adopted. Meh Ti says nothing about intuition, nor about the rectification of names. Sense perception seems the only way he recognizes that truth can reach us, and his argument for the existence of ghosts and spirits is a naive application of his method. We have the records of the appearances of spirits in the past, and we know many people alive today who say that they have seen them, therefore they must exist.

The Taoists are not so sure of this argument. Lieh Tzu makes a distinction between perception and the thing perceived. Sound is not the same as that which causes sound, and which is not itself audible. Sight is different from the object seen, and so on.²²

In two remarkable stories, Lieh Tzu shows the part played by the mind in making truth. The first tells of a man who had lost an axe, and was convinced by the behaviour of a boy that he had stolen it. Shortly after he found the axe, and on again meeting the boy observed none of the suspicious signs.

The second describes how a certain man's mind was so set on obtaining gold that he walked into a shop and helped himself. When the judge asked why he had committed the theft in broad daylight, he answered that he had seen and been conscious of nothing except the gold. The moral is that we see what we look for.²³

The story of the deer²⁴ is too intricate to retell but is well worth reading. A simple occurrence soon becomes so involved with dreams, discrepancies of testimony and fiction that after the most thorough investigation the authorities despair of coming at the real facts, and order a decision to be made on grounds of convenience. In other words, there is no such thing as absolute truth, or if there is, we cannot know it, and are forced to exercise choice in deciding what

²¹ *The Open Court*, April, 1928, p. 231.

²² *Wisdom of the East Series*. L. Giles, "Taoist Teachings," p. 21.

²³ *Ibid.* p. 120.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 66 f.

is to be considered true. Naturally faith plays a great part in Lieh Tzu's teaching, and he makes much use of fable and the miraculous.

Dr. Hu Shih has pointed out that a number of minor philosophers who seem to have been influenced by Meh Ti and are sometimes called Neo-Micians, of whom Kung-sen Lung is the best known, made valuable contributions to the development of the theory of knowledge. Meh Ti had made knowledge empirical and Lieh Tzu had emphasized the part played by the mind in making truth. These later men distinguish three elements in knowledge. First, there must be the ability to know; second, knowledge implies reception, that is sensation due to stimuli; third, knowledge is meaning.²⁵ This amounts to a synthesis of Meh Ti and Lieh Tzu, for there must be both sensation and an orderly grouping of sensations by the mind. The Neo-Micians seem to have held that this grouping or correlation of sensations was accomplished by what we would call time and space coordinates, but the Chinese text is extremely cryptic and Dr. Hu's interpretation has been questioned.

The difficult form in which these teachings were expressed, and Kung-sen Lung's use of paradoxes which resemble Zeno's, rather discredited the school. It is criticized by both Chuang Tzu and Hsun Tzu, though from different points of view. How is one to know whether the image in the mind corresponds to the real object? Chuang Tzu follows Lieh Tzu, holding that there is no way of telling, and that all truth is relative. Hsun Tzu revives the Confucian doctrine of the rectification of names, implying that there is a real connection between terms and objects, though what it is he does not define. He also holds that the meaning of such terms is fixed by social agreement. In the main, he accepts the Neo-Mician analysis of knowledge with common sense reservations, and so closed the discussion of the problem in the Chou period.²⁶

THE DECREE

The character translated as the Decree, or as Fate, is at least as old as the Book of History, and presumably much older. Very often it occurs in the phrase, the Decree of Heaven. It may be given two interpretations, depending upon whether the interpreter is a determinist, or a believer in free-will. The determinist uses the

²⁵ H. H. Dubs, *Hsüntze. Probsthain's Oriental Series*, p. 213 f.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 227 f.

word in the sense of fate, or unavoidable destiny, while the other uses it as the command of Heaven, which may be disobeyed even though disobedience brings with it inevitable consequences.

While the *Book of History* unequivocally declares against fatalism, it also shows that by the beginning of Chinese history the term was already used as fate. Chieh and Tsou, the last rulers of the two dynasties preceding the Chou, are condemned because they relied upon the Decree, or as we would put it, upon divine right. Against this view the *Book of History* points out that the continuation of the decree appointing a man to office depends upon his good behaviour, and that disobedience to the commands of Heaven will result in the changing of its appointment.

"Shang Ti has changed his Decree regarding Yin, though many of its former kings were in heaven."²⁷

"Heaven had no purpose to do away with Hsia or Yin, but the last rulers reckoning on the Decree, abandoned themselves to excess, so Heaven sent down ruin."²⁸

Meh Ti also refers to these bad rulers as having taught fatalism.

"I have heard from the men of Hsia that he, (Chieh), feigned the orders of Heaven and taught fatalism to those below."

"Tsou did not worship Shang Ti nor the spirits above, and troubled his ancestors by neglecting sacrifices. He even said, 'My people have their fate; there is no use in punishing their disgrace in which Heaven also indulges.'"²⁹

It may be that fate is the original meaning of the word, but it is certainly true that one of the purposes of the *Book of History* as we have it, is clearly to combat determinism. Heaven does send disaster, but only as a test or a punishment, and men may rise superior to it. Only the consequences of their own acts are inescapable.

When so much discussion of the term had already taken place, it is surprising to find that the two great leaders of the line of Chou philosophers say little or nothing about it. Lao Tzu uses the word only once, merely saying that the honor and reverence paid to Tao and its complement Teh are not due to the Decree, but are part of the natural order of things.³⁰ Confucius seldom spoke of the

²⁷ *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 3, p. 184.

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 216.

²⁹ *The Open Court*, July, 1928, p. 434.

³⁰ *Tao Teh Ching*, Chapter 51.

Decree,³¹ but placed himself squarely against determinism by saying that "the will of even a common man cannot be taken from him."³²

Although the founders of the two chief schools of thought were reticent on the subject, their followers were not, and in general it may be said that the Confucianists, who stressed ethics and the virtues, declared for freedom, while the Taoists, who decried the virtues and sought inspiration in the course of nature, were on the side of determinism, both parties using the same word.

Mencius limited the working of the Decree to "that which happens without man's causing it to happen,"³³ excepting man's will from the law of mechanism, though not excluding the consequences of his actions. The book of Mencius contains very little of a religious nature and begins with a statement that he discussed nothing but benevolence and righteousness. This accent upon the virtues and the place he gave them in the Nature of man necessitated the acceptance of freedom and a corresponding definition of the Decree.

"He who has the true idea of the Decree will not stand beneath a wall about to fall."³⁴

On the other hand, the Taoist Chuang Tzu is a clear fatalist. Life and death are ordained,³⁵ and the only correct attitude is that of submission to fate.³⁶ He damns Confucius with faint praise by calling him a good man who was condemned by Heaven to an undue interest in ephemeral matters.³⁷ "Acquiesce in what has been arranged"³⁸ is his teaching. "The sages contemplated Heaven but did not assist it."³⁹ Birth and death are like the procession of the seasons,⁴⁰ as usual he caps his argument with a story, in this case about a tortoise which was wise in divination but could not prevent its own capture and death.⁴¹

Hsun Tzu does not seem to have differed from Mencius on this point, defining the Decree as what one meets at the moment,⁴² but

³¹ *Analects*, 9, 1.

³² *Ibid.* 9, 25.

³³ *Mencius*, 5, 1, 6, 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 7, 1, 2, 2.

³⁵ *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 39, p. 241.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 248.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 252.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 255.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 305.

⁴⁰ *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 40, p. 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 137.

⁴² H. H. Dubs, *Hsüntze*, p. 71.

he was probably less religious than Mencius and Confucius. His translator, Dr. Dubs, says that he considered Heaven as impersonal law, borrowing the Taoist conception,⁴³ but rather inconsistently he allowed man a measure of freedom.

The great opponent of fatalism in ancient China was Meh Ti, who devoted an essay to the subject, though in its present form it is probably the work of his pupils. He lays the blame for the disorders in the China of his day to the apathy caused by the current belief that there is no use in struggling against fate.

"The fatalist says: 'Being rich by fate, a man is rich; while being poor by fate, he is poor. Whether a nation increases or decreases is determined by fate. When order is fated, there will be peace; when disorder is fated, there will be trouble. . . . What is the use of working against fate?' Thus, they preach to the rulers, dukes and great men above, and prevent the people below from doing their business. Therefore the fatalists are charged with being unbenevolent. We cannot fail to understand what the fatalists say. But how do we discriminate these sayings? Meh Ti says, 'We must have a standard.' If there be no standard . . . the distinction of right and wrong, of benefit and harm, can never be known."⁴⁴

Meh Ti goes on to point out the disintegrating influence of such a doctrine upon society, enumerating the evils which ensue when men consider themselves helpless. "These are the results of believing in fate. They have their birth in evil words. Therefore Meh Ti says, 'Now the scholars and superior men . . . cannot fail to know that the words of the fatalists are wrong. It is the greatest evil in the world.'⁴⁵

In this brief paper I have endeavored to indicate some of the problems which the thinkers of ancient China attacked, the solutions they offered, and the play of mind on mind among the different schools. The enormity of the attempt would be equalled by trying to describe the development of Greek thought from Thales to Aristotle in a similar space. Yet the effort is worth while if it indicates the width and depth of the golden period of Chinese philosophy, and stimulates western scholars out of their apathy towards the East, which is not creditable either to our learning or our sympathies.

One of the most striking features which one notices in the study

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴⁴ *The Open Court*, July, 1928, p. 430.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

of Chinese thinkers is the number of solutions and arguments which suggest or run parallel to the results of European thought. I have refrained from making comparisons because I had to be brief, but they will readily occur to everyone. And I have taken the liberty, which I feel is quite justifiable historically, of treating the development of an idea as a continuous process, each man adding something to what had gone before. The fact that there is known to have been frequent communication between the feudal states, that ideas travelled easily, that most of these men are known to have lived in the same city for portions of their lives, and that in nearly all, the effects of previous thought can readily be traced, make the assumption admissible even when the influence is not admitted directly. Some of these men refer to their predecessors, Chuang Tzu, for instance, mentioning by name nearly every Chinese thinker before and contemporaneous with him, while others write without any direct reference as to where they received their stimulus to thought.

The notes refer to English translations, which are always unsatisfactory, and which usually fail to indicate that the Chinese text employs technical terms which cannot be loosely rendered into a foreign language. The quotations have been checked with the Chinese by Mr. Huang K'uei Yuan.