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CHUANG-TZU

A New Selected Translation with an
Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang

——战国—庄子—著 冯友兰—译

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莊子 PREFACE

There are already several English translations of Chuang Tzu's writings in circulation. Why should we offer a new one?

In answering this question, two reasons may be given: In the first place, a translation is an interpretation or commenting. So far as the English translations of the *Chuang-tzu* are concerned, they may be good and useful from a literary or linguistic point of view. But in their interpreting the *Chuang-tzu*, they do not seem to have touched the true philosophical spirit of the author. In other words, they are successful in the literary or linguistic aspect, but not in the philosophical. Since Chuang Tzu's writings, like Plato's "Dialogues," are more a philosophical work than a literary one, it seems that a new translation, which would put more emphasis on Chuang Tzu's philosophy, is needed.

In the second place, the Ching Dynasty is famous for scholarship. Through the works of many scholars in the field of higher and textual criticism, most of the ancient books have become more readable and intelligible. The earlier English translations of the *Chuang-tzu* do not seem to have utilized the fruit of the labour of these scholars. In this respect, a new translation, which embodies the results of recent scholarship, is also needed.

William James said that every great philosopher has his vision. When one has grasped the vision, the whole system is easily understood. Croce said somewhere that the greater a philosophical system is, the simpler the central idea. Although the present translation is limited to the first seven chapters of Chuang Tzu's writings, it is believed that it contains the main vision or idea of the author. With the Introduction, which was originally prepared in

a lecture form delivered at different institutions in Peking, and an appendix that was originally written for the *Philosophical Review*, Peking, it is hoped that something may be contributed to the right understanding of Taoism as a philosophy.

In preparing the present translation of the *Chuang-tzu*, I have consulted other translations and utilized them freely, especially that of Legge and Giles. When a rendering is correct, it is not necessary to make it different simply for the sake of difference. However, there are important terms, phrases, or passages, which are the keys to the whole chapter, of which a different rendering may give the whole chapter a different tune or colour. In such cases, I usually give a new rendering according to what I consider the right interpretation of Chuang Tzu's philosophy. This, together with the explanations and comments, may justify my calling the present translation my own. To the other translators, however, especially to Legge and Giles, I must acknowledge my obligation.

Lastly, the reader is asked to excuse me for my limited ability in expressing myself in the English language. If he should find the book not very unreadable, or that his literary taste is not seriously offended in reading it, the merit is due to the assistance of my friends, Mr. L. C. Porter, Mr. A. W. Hummel, Mr. Mi Wu, who have read the manuscript and corrected mistakes as they found them, and to whom I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude.

Fung Yu-lan

June, 1928

Peking

莊子 INTRODUCTION

In China, Taoism has been as influential as Confucianism. It was more influential than Confucianism in the time of the "Six Dynasties"; viz., from the third to the sixth centuries. It was at that time that the Taoistic classics had their best commentators. Wang Pi's "Commentaries on the *Lao-tzu*," and Kuo Hsiang's "Commentaries on the *Chuang-tzu*," for instance, have become classics themselves; I venture to say that some passages of their "Commentaries" are even more illuminating than the texts.

The sayings of Lao Tzu and the books of Chuang Tzu and Lieh Tzu are usually regarded as the earlier classics of Taoism. Lao Tzu's book is brief enough, yet in it he spoke about many things. Sometimes his meaning is not clear, and opens up many different interpretations. The authenticity of *The Book of Lieh Tzu* (*Lieh-tzu*) as we possess it is much questioned. A great part of the book is now regarded by most scholars as the production of the "Six Dynasties." It is only in the *Chuang-tzu* that we have a well-developed philosophy; and a great part of that book, especially the "inner chapters," is usually considered genuine. There are also side branches of Taoism, the ultramaterialism and hedonism of Yang Chu, for instance. But Chuang Tzu's philosophy represents the main current of the Taoistic teaching. His book, with Kuo Hsiang's "Commentaries," is the most important literature of Taoism.

THE GENERAL VIEWPOINT AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TAOISM

Before discussing Taoism in detail, it is better for us to get familiar first with its general viewpoint. William James divided philosophers according to their temperament into two classes — the “tough-minded” and the “tender-minded.” The “tough-minded” philosophers reduced mind to matter, the “higher” to the “lower”; according to them, the world is materialistic (at least nonspiritualistic), mechanistic, and deterministic. Man is alien to the world, in which there is no God, no immortality, no freedom. On the other hand, the “tender-minded” philosophers reduced matter to mind, the “lower” to the “higher.” According to them, the world is spiritualistic, in which there is God, immortality, and freedom; and man, though insignificant he may appear to be, is inwardly connected with the whole. These are really the two points of view to see the world. Science takes the one point of view, religion, the other; the one is more congenial to intellect, the other, to feeling. Because the two viewpoints are different, science and religion are always in conflict. And how to reconcile this conflict has become a problem in philosophy.

In the history of philosophy, generally speaking, there were mainly two ways to reconcile these two points of view. Some philosophers (Kant, for instance) said that science is valid only in the phenomenal world; beyond the phenomenal, there is the noumenal world, which is not governed by the laws of science,

and is the place for God, immortality, and freedom. James, Bergson, generally speaking, both took this view. We may call it the pragmatic (in the broad sense of the word) point of view. Other philosophers (Spinoza, for instance) fully accepted the naturalistic conception of the universe, but in their system, by a peculiar combination, there is still place for God, immortality, and freedom; man is still one with the universe, if only he can "see things under the form of eternity." The so-called new realism in contemporary philosophy seems also to take this view. We may call this the neorealistic point of view. As we shall see, Taoism also took this view. Some people said that Taoism is naturalistic and scientific, while others said that it is mystic and religious. In fact, it is both.

Among the Taoistic classics, Chuang Tzu's book is not only instructive but also interesting. Chuang Tzu was not only a philosopher but also a poet. His philosophy is like that of Spinoza; his style is like that of Plato. He expounded the laborious, abstract principles of Spinoza with concrete illustrations and poetic expression. His genius is both philosophical and literary.

TAO AND TE

Tao and *Te* are two important conceptions of Taoism. According to Taoism, *Tao*, or the Way, the Truth, is everywhere. In Chuang Tzu's book, a story reads:

Tung Kuo Tzu asked Chuang Tzu: "Where is the so-called *Tao*?"

Chuang Tzu said: "Everywhere." The former said: "Specify an instance of it." "It is in the ant." "How can *Tao* be anything so low?" "It is in the panic grass." "How can it still be lower?" "It is in the earthenware tile." "How can it still be lower?" "It is in excrement." To this Tung Kuo Tzu made no reply. Chuang Tzu said: "Your question does not touch the fundamentals of *Tao*. You should not specify any particular thing. There is not a single thing without *Tao*.... There are three terms: complete, all-embracing, and the whole. These three names are different, but denote the same reality; all refer to the one thing."¹

This passage shows that *Tao* is not something transcending the world. It is in the world. It is everywhere. It is the whole.

The whole of what? The whole of the spontaneity or naturalness of the world. In Chuang Tzu's book, Chapter II, a person named Nan Kuo Tzu Chi is telling the story of the music of man, the music of earth, and the music of nature. But after the description of the music of earth (the noise of the wind), he stopped. Then Tzu Chi was asked by Yen Cheng Tzu Yu: "The music of earth is the noise of the wind; the music of man is the sound produced by musical instruments; but what is the music of nature?" Then Nan Kuo Tzu Chi replied: "The types of the noise are extremely different, yet they all produce themselves. Could there be any other agency that excites them?" Every noise spontaneously produces itself; this spontaneity is the music of

1 *Chuang-tzu*, Ch. XXII.

nature. In the same way, every thing in the world spontaneously produces itself. The totality of the spontaneity of all things is *Tao*.

Because *Tao* is the total spontaneity of all things, so it can do everything by doing nothing. As Lao Tzu said, it is "producing without possession"; and Chuang Tzu said:

O, my master! O, my master! He tears all things into pieces, yet he is not just. His blessing reaches all generations, yet he is not benevolent. He is more ancient than the highest antiquity, yet he is not old. He covers heaven, supports earth, and fashions the various forms of all things, yet he is not skillful.²

Passages like these seem to be paradoxical enough. But they are not. *Tao* is the total spontaneity of all things, and not something transcending the world. Everything spontaneously just is what it is and does what it does. So *Tao* is doing nothing. But from another standpoint what everything spontaneously is and does is also the works of *Tao*, since *Tao* is the total spontaneity of all things. *Tao*, therefore, can "do everything by doing nothing."

Taoists often said that *Tao* is "nothing," because it is not something transcending the world. Yet this "nothing" is not equal to zero, since it is the total spontaneity of all things.

Thus, by insisting that everything produces itself, Taoism destroyed the popular, or, in some instances, religious, conception

2 *Id.*, Ch. VI.

of God, who is looked upon as the Creator. In this respect, Taoism is naturalistic. Yet, since there is the total spontaneity of all things, there is still unity of the world, which may also be called God, if one is pleased to call it.

Next we come to the conception of *Te*, or virtue. Lao Tzu said: "*Tao* produces a thing; *Te* maintains it."³ Chuang Tzu said: "That which things get in order to live is called *Te*."⁴ So *Te* is what an individual thing receives from *Tao*. The total spontaneity of all things is *Tao*. The spontaneity that an individual thing receives from *Tao* is *Te*. As some commentator said, the relation between *Te* and *Tao* is just like that between the water in river or lake, and water in general.

THE THEORY OF LETTING ALONE

Everything has its own *Te*, or virtue. Everything has its own proper nature. Everything is happy, if it is allowed to be in accordance with its own nature. In Chuang Tzu's book, Chapter I, a story was told concerning the difference between the large fish and the small bird. Though there is a great difference between these two, yet both of them are happy, so far as they both act according to their own nature. Every modification of nature is the cause of pain and suffering. Chuang Tzu said:

3 *Tao Te Ching*, 51.

4 *Chuang-tzu*, Ch. XII.

The duck's legs are short, but if we try to lengthen them, the duck will feel pain. The crane's legs are long, but if we try to cut off a portion of them, the crane will feel grief. We are not to amputate what is by nature long, nor to lengthen what is by nature short.⁵

Yet in the world, most people try to modify the nature of things. Their intention may be good. But what they consider to be good may not be considered good by others. In Chuang Tzu's book, Chapter XVIII, he told a story about the treatment of a bird by the prince of Lu. There was a peculiar bird, newly arrived in Lu. The prince welcomed it with his state carriage, and put it in the temple. He played before it the best music, and served it with the best dinner. But the bird was frightened, was very sad and not able to drink and eat. After three days, it died. "This is to treat a bird like a man, not as a bird." This is to impose one's own idea of good upon others. This is an example of the tragedies of our world. Taoism opposes institutions, rules, laws, and government, because all these are to impose one idea of good (if it is good) upon the infinite variety of things. So the best way to govern the world is not to govern it. As Chuang Tzu said:

Let your mind make excursion in pure simplicity. Identify yourself with nondistinction. Follow the nature of things, and admit no personal bias, then the world will be in peace.⁶

5 *Id.*, Ch. VIII.

6 *Id.*, Ch. VII.

THE ART OF LIVING

The theory of letting alone is not only a political philosophy; it can also be applied as an art of living. In the human world, in the relations between man and man, we are always in a place of safety, if we will let everything do what it is fit to do, while we ourselves maintain the appearance of inferiority, ignorance, and humbleness. In Chuang Tzu's book, Chapter IV, after a description of the appearance of a most awkward man, Chuang Tzu said:

If this man who was awkward in his bodily appearance was still able to make his living and complete his term of existence, how much more may he do who is awkward in his virtue?

And Kuo Hsiang said:

The perfect man is useless to others, but everything is useful to itself. So the perfect man lets everything have its own achievement and name, while he himself is mingled with things without distinction. Therefore, he is free from the harms of the human world, and always receives the real benefit. This is he who is awkward in his virtue.

In dealing with other men and other things, we should let them alone without interfering with them; in dealing with ourselves, we should also let the different bodily functions alone without interfering with them. Kuo Hsiang said:

The feet can walk; let them walk. The hands can hold; let them hold. Hear what is heard by your ears; see what is seen by your eyes. Let your knowledge stop at what you do not know; let your ability stop at what you cannot do. Use what is naturally useful; do what you spontaneously can do. Act according to your will within the limit of your nature, but have nothing to do with what is beyond it. This is the most easy matter of nonaction. When you are in accordance with the principle of nonaction, your life cannot but be perfect. Life in perfection is nothing but happiness. Happiness is the perfection of life, and need no external thing to be added to life.⁷

This is the Taoistic theory of the cultivation of life.

EQUALITY OF THINGS AND OPINIONS

What by nature is, is good. Chuang Tzu said:

If a man sleeps in a damp place, he will have a pain in his loins, and half his body will be as if it were dead; but is it so with an eel? If a man lives up in a tree, he will be frightened and all in a tremble; but is it so with a monkey? Among these three, who knows the right way of habitation?⁸

The truth is that they are equally right and their ways of habitation

7 "Commentaries to Chapter IV."

8 *Chuang-tzu*, Ch. II.

are equally good. In the same way, although there is an infinite number of differences between things in different aspects, yet all are right and good. So are the different opinions in the human world. In Chuang Tzu's book, the chapter "On The Equality of Things" began with the interesting story of the different noises of the wind, the "music of earth," as was mentioned above. All these different noises, different ways of blowing, are equally good. The different human opinions are like the different noises of wind, like what Chuang Tzu called the singing of birds. They together constitute what we may call the "music of man"; they are equally right and good. The sages just amuse themselves with these variety of opinions, but do not quarrel with them. They simply stand at the "centre of the circle," as Chuang Tzu called it, to meet the infinite varieties. They let the different opinions alone, and they themselves transcend them. This is what Chuang Tzu called "to take two courses at once."⁹

LIFE AND DEATH

So in the universe, nothing can be said to be superior to others; nor one form of existence can be said to be superior to another. In life we assume one form of existence. Death simply means that we have to give up this form of existence and to assume another. If this form is good, there is no reason to suppose that the

9 *Ibid.*

others are not. As Chuang Tzu said:

To have attained to the human form is a source of joy. But, in the infinite evolution, there are thousands of other forms that are equally good. What an incomparable bliss it is to undergo these countless transitions!¹⁰

In the same chapter, a story was told about Tzu Yu, who was going to die. His friend asked him: "Do you dislike to die?" Then Tzu Yu said: "No, why should I? If my left arm would be transformed into a cock, I should mark with it the time of night. If my right arm would be transformed into a crossbow, I should then be looking for a bird to bring down and roast. If my rump bone would be transformed into a wheel, and my spirit into a horse, I should then be mounting it, and would not change it for another steed."

To those who feel too much sorrow for death, Chuang Tzu said:

This is to violate the principle of nature and to increase the emotion of man, forgetting what we have received from nature. These were called by the ancients the penalty of violating the principle of nature. When the Master [he was speaking of Lao Tzu] came, it was because he had the occasion to be born. When he went, he simply followed the

10 *Id.*, Ch. VI.

natural course. Those who are quiet at the proper occasion and follow the natural course, cannot be affected by sorrow or joy. They were considered by the ancients as the man of the gods, who were released from bondage.¹¹

What Chuang Tzu called suspension is what Spinoza called the human bondage. In Chuang Tzu's book, Chapter V, a man named the Toeless spoke of Confucius as being in bondage. Then Lao Tzu said: "Why did you not lead him to see that life and death are one, and that the right and the wrong are the same, thus freeing him from his handcuffs and fetters?" The knowledge of seeing this is the means to transcend human bondage and to attain freedom.

IMMORTALITY

Chuang Tzu said: "Life is the composition of matter; death is the decomposition of it."¹²

There is no immortality in the ordinary sense of the word. In this respect, Taoism is again naturalistic. Yet there is another way to see the matter. Chuang Tzu said:

If we see things from the point of view of their difference, even liver and gall are as far away from each other as Chu from Yueh. If we see things

11 *Id.*, Ch. III.

12 *Id.*, Ch. XXII.