

The Tao Te Ching

Translated by Frederic Henry Balfour (1884)

Published by Taoist-Books.com

1.

The TAO, or Principle of Nature, may be discussed [by all]; it is not the popular or common Tao. Its Name may be named [*i.e.*, the TAO may receive a designation, though of itself it has none]; but it is not an ordinary name, [or name in the usual sense of the word, for it is a presentment or εἰδωλον of the Infinite].

Its nameless period was that which preceded the birth of the Universe;

In being spoken of by name, it is as the Progenitrix of All Things.

It is therefore in habitual passionlessness that its mystery may be scanned; and in habitual desire that its developments may be perceived.

These two conditions, the Active and the Quiescent, alike proceed [from TAO]; it is only in name that they differ. Both may be called profundities; and the depth of profundity is the gate of every mystery.

2.

The Beautiful being once recognised as such by the world, the Repulsive appears [as its converse]. Goodness being once recognised as such, Evil appears in like manner. Thus existence and non-existence produce each other; the difficult and the easy bring about each other; the long and the short impart form to each other; the high and low comply [or change places] with each other; sounds and voices harmonise with each other; priority and sequence alternate with each other.

Wherefore the Sage pursues a policy of inaction, and teaches men in silence; [*i.e.*, he conforms to the TAO or Course of Nature, which proceeds silently and spontaneously, and thus the people learn to govern themselves by his example without needing the interferences of legislation and instruction].

He forms all things without shrinking [from the labour]; produces them without claiming the possession [of virtue]; acts without presuming on [his ability]; and completes his achievements without taking any credit to himself. It is only he who thus does not stand upon his merit; and therefore his merit does not depart from him.

3.

[The Sage], by not showing exclusive approval of those who are eminent in virtue, prevents the people from quarrelling; by not setting high store on things difficult to obtain, he prevents the people from becoming robbers; by closing his eyes to objects of desire, he secures his heart from corruption. Wherefore the Sage, in governing, does so with a heart empty [of all distractions and temptations], but a bosom full [of justice and benevolence]; he makes his will pliant, his bodily frame-work firm; he ever keeps the people from [harmful] knowledge and desires, and prevents those who have such knowledge from daring to put it into practice. He pursues a policy of inaction, and there is therefore nothing that is left ungoverned.

4.

The TAO is full [*q.d.*, exhaustless and complete]; yet in operation as though not self-elated. In its origin it is as it were the Ancestor of All Things. It chastens asperity; it unravels confusion; it moderates the radiance [proceeding from those in whom TAO is embodied—see *Chuang Tsze*, 'Kêng-sang Ch'u']; and it identifies itself with the sordid ones of the earth [the "dust" or common people—see *Mencius*, Book V, chap. 1, sec. 3;*q.d.*, it enables a man to associate with the base

without being defiled]. Pellucid [as a spreading ocean] it yet has the semblance of permanence. I know not whose offspring it is. Its εἶδωλον existed before God was.

5.

If Heaven and Earth were not benevolent, they would regard creation in the light of grass [which is worthless] and dogs [which are killed]. If the Sage were not benevolent, he would likewise regard the people in the light of grass and dogs.

The space between Heaven and Earth may be compared to a leathern bag, or box; [a receptacle with Heaven for a lid and Earth for a floor]. It is a vacuum [outside which there is nothing], exercising no pressure [on that which is within]; the more it moves, the more prolific it is. Those who talk too much will often come to an end of their words. It is better to maintain rectitude [inwardly].

6.

The Spirit of the Depths is immortal; it is called the Azure [Heaven] and the Mother [Earth]. The passage through which these Two Influences emerge and enter is called the root [or *nidus*] of the visible creation. They are ceaseless in action as though permanent, and may be drawn upon [used, or laid under contribution] without ever being exhausted.

7.

Heaven is everlasting; Earth endures. The reason of the endurance of Heaven and Earth is that they were not self-produced. Therefore it is that they are able to endure for ever. Thus, though the Sage [in imitation of them] regards the cultivation of his body as of secondary importance, his body still progresses [of its own accord]; he discards his body, and yet his body is preserved. Is not this because he has no selfishness? Wherefore he is able to realise all his wishes [in carrying out the principles of TAO in his own person].

8.

The goodness of the Ruler resembles water [in pliancy, adaptability, and fertilising power]. The goodness of water is beneficial to all things, and that without struggling.

The abiding-place [of the Imperial goodness] is despised by the multitude [for it is lowly—referring to the downward course of water]; and therefore it is near to TAO. Wherever it dwells, it sanctifies the spot. In the heart, its sanctifying properties are unfathomable. In bestowing, it sanctifies benevolence; in speaking, it sanctifies trustworthiness; in administration, it sanctifies government; in the fulfilment of daily work, it sanctifies ability; in the adoption of public measures it sanctifies acting seasonably. It alone never strives against [or places itself in opposition to] anyone; and therefore it gives rise to no resentful feelings.

9.

It is better to desist altogether, than, having once grasped [the TAO], to pride oneself on one's self-sufficiency. Research, if carried on too p. 7 keen a point, prevents the preservation of the body [*q.d.*, hastens death]. When a hall is filled up with gold and jewels, it cannot be guarded intact. When wealth and honours are combined with arrogance, they themselves invoke calamity. To keep oneself in the background when merit has been achieved and fame has followed in its wake; this is the way of Heaven.

10.

Having received, in the birth-process, a living soul, one is able, by preserving its individuality [pure and uncorrupted], to prevent disunion [with the pure original]. By controlling the vital force, and bringing it to the utmost degree of pliancy, one is able to become as a little child again—[revert to one's pristine state of innocence]. By washing and cleansing oneself of that which Heaven alone can see [*i.e.*, secret sins], one may become without one blemish. By governing the Empire by love

towards the people, one is able to keep them from knowing [evil; they will live in an atmosphere of contentment and trust].

When the Door of Heaven is now open, now closed, then the Female Principle will disappear; [all will be pure Yang].

If one's understanding reaches in every direction, he can disregard knowledge [as such; there will be no such thing, to him, as ignorance]. What he produces, he nourishes. Producing, he does not claim the possession [of virtue]; acting, he does not presume upon [his ability]. Though he be a veteran among his fellows, he assumes no seignory over them. This may be called Sublime Virtue—[the highest development of TAO].

11.

Thirty spokes, uniting in a nave, were employed [in olden times] before the invention of carriages. Clay made into utensils was employed before the time of palaces and dwellings [when there were no sacrificial vases, goblets, or bowls]. A door and a window, hewn [in a hill-side], did duty for a residence before the erection of houses. Wherefore, the possession of these things may be regarded as beneficial, while their [former] absence may be said to have been useful [in that it led to the necessity of their being made].

*** In support of this translation, vide the Commentaries of Confucius on the Yi Ching, Part II, chap. 2.*

12.

The five colours blind the eyes of men. The five tones deafen their ears. The five flavours vitiate their palates. Galloping and hunting induce derangement of the mind. Objects that are difficult of attainment lead them to incur obstacles, [or injury—in their pursuit].

Thus the Sage cares for his inner self, and not for that which his eye can see; for which reason he discards the latter and preserves the former.

13.

Favour and disgrace are alike a cause of fear. Honours bring great calamity upon the body.

What is it that one calls favour and disgrace? Disgrace implies downfall; the loss of one and subjection to the other, are equally causes of apprehension. Therefore it may be said that favour and disgrace both give rise to fear.

And what is meant by saying that honours bring calamity upon the body? The calamities which come upon me are the consequence of my possessing a body; had I none, what calamities could I incur?

Wherefore, if the honours which come upon me personally are on account of my position as a ruler, then the whole Empire will subject itself to me; and those who cultivate personal benevolence in ruling may commit themselves to the Empire for ever.

14.

That which may be looked for, but proves invisible, is called the Distant. That which may be listened for, but proves inaudible, is called Vacancy. That which may be clutched at, but proves intangible, is called the Subtle. Words are inadequate thoroughly to examine these three properties; therefore they blend together and become One.

Above, it is not bright; below, it is not dim. Continuous in endurance, it cannot be named. In reverting to vacuity it may be called the Form of Formlessness, the Image of the Non-existent; for which reasons it is unsearchable.

Standing opposite to it, one cannot see its head [front]; following it, one cannot perceive its back [or foot-prints].

Obtaining the TAO of ancient times, and applying it as an aid to the methods in vogue at the present day, so that one is able to arrive at a knowledge of its long-past origin, may be called [getting] the Germ, or Clue, of TAO.

15.

[The TAO of] those eminent for wisdom in the olden times was subtle, mysterious, recondite, and penetrating; its depths were uncognizable by others. These, [the non-adepts], being unable to learn it, strove by main force, therefore, to act it out in practice. They endured [the hardships of their search] as those who ford streams in the winter. Cautious were they, as those who dread [the ridicule of] their neighbours; reverent were they, as those who entertain a visitor; expansive were they, as ice on the point of melting; simple and unpolished were they, as unhewn wood; vacant were they, as a ravine; undiscerning were they, as turbid water.

Who is able to make turbid water grow gradually clear by reducing it to quiescence? Who is able to impart [unending] life to that which is at rest by setting it in perpetual motion? Those who preserve this TAO desire no fulness; wherefore, having no fulness, they are able to guard it in their hearts for ever and it never requires to be renewed.

16.

When the extreme of emptiness is reached [as by Heaven], and quiescence rigidly preserved [as by Earth], then all things are simultaneously produced; and by this [example] I observe their revolutions. All things, after flourishing like the herb *yün*, return each to what it sprang from. Returning to this source is called quiescence, and this implies a reversion to the original ordinance [of Heaven]. Reversion to the original ordinance [of Heaven] is called the basis or pivot of TAO. Knowledge of this may be called enlightenment, while ignorance of it leads to a reckless working-out of one's own ruin. He who knows it, bears with others. Bearing with others, he is just; being just, he is fit to be a king; being a king, he is the associate of Heaven [whose decree he holds and whose ordinance he carries out]. Heaven is [the offspring of] TAO; and TAO survives the death of him who is the embodiment of it, living on unharmed for ever.

17.

Those of preëminent wisdom and purity knew [this TAO] intuitively from their birth, and so possessed it. Those of the second rank—the men of virtue—approached it nearly, and eulogised it. Those of the third rank—who were still above the commonalty—stood in awe of it. Those of the lowest rank held it in light esteem. Their belief in it was superficial, or imperfect; while there were even some who did not believe in it at all.

[The first] spoke only with forethought and calculation, as though honouring their words. When their [public] labours were achieved, and affairs progressed unimpeded, the people all said, "This is our natural and spontaneous condition."

18.

When the Great TAO [of the Five Rulers and the Three Dynasties] fell into disuse, Benevolence and Rectitude appeared.

*** This refers to the rise of ethical science under the Sages—a substitute for the silent guidance of TAO. under which the golden age of China had been passed.*

Men of wisdom and kindness came forth, and then hypocrisy began to spread—[good men were counterfeited by the base]. Discord arose in families, and this manifested [by contrast] the virtues of filial piety and compassion. The State was thrown into anarchy, and this led to the appearance of faithful Ministers.

19.

When Sages are rejected as rulers, and the services of the wise are discarded, the people's wealth will increase a hundredfold; [for their hearts will all be set on covetousness]. When benevolence and rectitude [in government] are abjured, [such will be the height of disorder that] the people will revert to their natural qualities of filial piety and compassion [by sheer force of reaction]. When ingenuities of luxury and eagerness for gain are renounced, there will be no more robbers—[for there will be no

accumulations of wealth to be worth stealing]. These three propositions show that mere externals are insufficient for good government, and therefore each man should be ordered to confine himself to performing his own special work in life.

*** It is evident, from the forced interpretation of the above sentences, that the Commentator has expended all his ingenuity in an attempt to clear Lao Tszé from the imputation of reviling the Sages and repudiating ethical morality. How far he has succeeded, those who are familiar with the Confucianist expositors are able to judge for themselves.*

20.

By looking always on the reality of things, and preserving the simple truth, [the people] will become less selfish and have fewer desires; and by pursuing their researches [into the Doctrine] to the utmost limit, they may avoid sorrow.

How small is the distance dividing a prompt affirmative from a sycophantic acquiescence; [yet] how great is that between virtue and immorality! I cannot but fear that which is feared by others. [Their scholarship], how neglected is it! It is still night with them.

The world is joyful and merry as on a day of sacrifice, or as those who mount a belvedere in spring-time. I alone prefer solitude and quiet, and seek not to pry into futurity. I am like an infant ere it has grown to be a child; listlessly I roam hither and thither, as though I had no home to go to. The multitude have abundance and to spare; I alone am like one who has relinquished everything. Have I, therefore, the heart of a fool? Confused and dim, while the vulgar are [apparently] enlightened; I alone am in the dark. Tossed to and fro, like the sea; roving without cessation. The multitude have whereupon to employ their energies; I alone am doltish as a clown. [But] I alone differ from all others in that I reverence my Nursing Mother.

21.

The appearance of Virtue in its fullest exuberance is no more than the result of compliance with the TAO. TAO, considered as an entity, is obscure and vague. Vague and obscure! yet within it there is Form. Obscure and vague! yet within it there is Substance. Vacuous and unfathomable! yet within it there is Quintessential Energy—and this is supremely real. Within it, too, there is Trustworthiness; from ancient down to modern times its name has never been lost; by it I can include in the range of my observation the whole of animate nature. How am I cognisant of the acquiescence of animate nature [in TAO]?—By TAO itself.

22.

[In cultivating TAO] there are first the sprouts; then perfection. First, there is perversion; then rectification. First there is hollowness [receptivity]; then plenitude. First there is destruction [of the old]; then renovation. First there is humility; then acquisition. Self-sufficiency is followed by suspicion [on the part of others]. Therefore the Sage preserves unity [in his heart] and becomes a pattern to the whole world. He does not say himself that he can see, and therefore he is perspicacious. He does not say himself that he is right, and therefore he is manifested to all. He does not praise himself, and therefore his merit is recognised. He is not self-conceited, and therefore he increases [in knowledge]. And as he never strives with anybody, so the world does not strive with him.

Can that saying of the olden times—"First the sprouts, then perfection"—be called meaningless? The attainment of genuine perfection implies a reversion [to the original nature of man].

23.

Reticence in speech leads to spontaneity. A boisterous wind does not continue after dawn; a deluge of rain does not outlast the day. Who is it that produces these two phenomena?—Heaven and Earth. Seeing, then, that the forces of nature cannot last for ever, how much less can man?

Wherefore among those who order their affairs in accordance with TAO, those who understand the doctrine are identified with TAO; those who are possessed of virtue are identified with the Virtue [or attributes—of TAO]; while those who lose both are identified with their loss—[so that they do not

recognise it as being loss].

Those who become thus identified with TAO are also received joyfully by those who already possess the TAO. Those who become identified with its Virtue are also received joyfully by those who already possess the Virtue. The loss sustained by those who are identified with the loss of both is also rejoiced in by those who are already in the same case.

Where there is insufficiency of faith on the part of one, there will result an entire absence of faith on the part of others.

24.

A man who raises himself on tiptoe cannot remain firm. A man with crooked legs cannot walk [far]. He who says himself that he can see is not enlightened. He who says himself that he is right is not manifested to others. He who praises himself has no merit. He who is self-conceited will not increase [in knowledge].

Such men may be said to search after TAO that they may gorge themselves in feeding, and act the parasite; moreover, they are universally detested. Therefore those who are possessed of TAO do not act thus.

25.

There was Something formed from chaos, which came into being before Heaven and Earth. Silent and boundless it stands alone, and never changes. It pervades every place, and incurs no danger [of being impaired]. It may be called the Mother of the Universe. I know not its name; but its designation is TAO. If forced to call it something, I will call it great. Being great, it moves ever onward; and thus I say that it is remote. Being remote, I say that it returns.

Therefore TAO is great; Heaven is great; Earth is great; and the King also is great. In the Universe there are four things that are great, and the King is one of them. Man regulates himself by the Earth; Earth regulates itself by Heaven; Heaven regulates itself by TAO; and TAO regulates itself by its own inherent nature—or, spontaneously.

26.

The weighty is the source of the light; stillness dominates disquietude. Wherefore, while the Sage proceeds the whole day [according to TAO], he never departs from either calmness or gravity. Although there may be spectacles of worldly glory [to attract him] he sits quietly alone, far above the common crowd. How is that a Prince of Ten Thousand Studs of Horses can regard his own person as of less importance than his regal dignity?

This lightness [on the part of the Prince] loses him his Ministers, while restlessness [on the part of the Ministers] loses them their Prince.

*** The phrase might well be rendered "is the ruin of their Prince;" but this is not sanctioned by Lü Tsü, who interprets it as meaning that such Ministers will be dismissed.*

27.

The conduct of the virtuous leaves neither trace nor clue. The words of the virtuous afford no ground for fault-finding. The projects of the virtuous require no intrigue.

When the virtuous are obstructed [in their policy], though there be no bolt to the door which shuts them in, it yet cannot be opened. When the virtuous enter into relations with others, though they be not bound by the ties of contract, they yet may not release themselves [from their obligations].

Thus the Sage ever uses his goodness in saving others; and therefore there are none who are abandoned. He ever uses his goodness in saving the inanimate creation; and therefore there are none of these who are abandoned. This is called being doubly enlightened.

Wherefore the virtuous man is the teacher, or patron, of the bad man, while the bad man is employed as material, on which to work, by the virtuous man. If the bad man does not reverence the other as his teacher, nor the good man love the former as his material; then, in spite of any wisdom either may possess, they are both greatly blinded. This doctrine is both important and sublime.

28.

He who, conscious of manly strength, guards a womanly weakness, becomes the channel of the whole Empire [to which all minor streams converge]. Being thus the channel of the whole Empire, the cardinal virtues will never depart from him, and he will revert to a condition of childlike innocence.

He who, conscious of light, keeps in obscurity, will become a model for the whole Empire. Being a model for the whole Empire, the cardinal virtues will never fail him, and he will revert to the Unconditioned.

He who, conscious of his glory, guards humility, will become the valley of the whole Empire. Being the valley of the Empire, he will revert to his original simplicity. When this simplicity is distributed, *q.d.*, brought into play, the man becomes a thing of utility [to the State].

The Sage employs men of this simplicity, and advances them to high rank; therefore his administration is on a grand scale, and never comes to an end.

29.

When a man desires to obtain the Empire, and govern it [by acting on this principle of simplicity], I see that he does so in spite of himself. The insignia of royalty may not be used by such.

Those who make them will break them; those who clutch at them will lose them. For among the things of the world there are those who lead and those who follow; there are ejaculations of grief and ejaculations of gladness; there are those who are strong and those who are weak; there are those who sustain loads and those who are good for nothing. For this reason the Sage puts away excess, display, and pride.

30.

Those who use TAO in assisting their Sovereign do not employ soldiers to force the Empire. The methods of government they adopt are such as have a tendency to react upon themselves. Where garrisons are quartered, briars and thorns spring up—*q.d.*, the land is deserted by the people. Disastrous years inevitably follow in the wake of great armies.

Wise rulers act with decision, and nothing more. They do not venture to use overbearing measures. They are decided without self-conceit, or boasting, or pride. They are decided in spite of themselves, and without presuming on brute force.

After a man has arrived at the prime of his strength, he begins to age. This is attributable to his not possessing TAO. Those who do not possess TAO die before their time.

31.

The finest weapons of war are implements of disaster. All creatures hate them; therefore those who are possessed of TAO make no use of them.

The ideal man, in his own house, regards the left hand as the more honourable. Those who use weapons of war, give honour to the right—[as being that in which arms are brandished]. Weapons are implements of disaster; they are not the implements employed by the ideal man. If he ever uses them, he does so because he cannot help it. He regards tranquillity and passionlessness as supreme.

Victory in war is not a beautiful thing. Those who see beauty in it are such as take delight in killing men. It is impossible for those who take delight in killing others to obtain the suffrages of the Empire.

In matters of joyful import, the left-hand is the more highly esteemed; in matters of disaster, the right-hand. The general second in command occupies the left-hand position [in the war-chariot]; it is the general-in-chief who is stationed on the right. The meaning of this is that the latter is placed similarly to a chief mourner at a funeral—*q.d.*, in an inauspicious position. Having been instrumental in killing multitudes of people, he should weep bitterly with pity and compassion. Having gained a victory in battle, he thus still occupies the position of [chief] mourner at a funeral.

32.

TAO remains ever nameless. However insignificant may be the simplicity [of those who cultivate it] the Empire does not presume to claim their services [as Ministers].

** * * The Commentator points out that even the friendship of those eminent for TAO has often been sought in vain by Princes; how much more difficult, then, is it, to secure their help in subordinate positions!*

If Princes and Monarchs could but preserve this simplicity, every creature in the world would submit itself to them; Heaven and Earth would be in mutual accord, and shower down sweet dew; the people would need no laws, but live in harmony of themselves.

It was in the beginning that a name was fabricated [for TAO]. This name once existing, Heaven, also, may be known; and such knowledge ensures the indestructibility [of the doctrine].

The presence of TAO in the world may be compared to streams [which ever flow], and mountain-gorges [which are indestructible], in their union with rivers and seas [which are unfathomable].

33.

They who know others are shrewd; self-knowers are enlightened. Those who overcome others have bodily strength; self-vanquishers have determination. Those who know when they have enough are rich. Those who act with determination or perseverance have strength of will. Those who lose not what they have learnt—the TAO—retain it always. Those who, up till death, are not lost [to TAO], enjoy posthumous activity.

34.

The Great TAO is all-pervasive; it may be seen on the right and on the left.

All things depend upon it, and are produced; it denies itself to none.

It achieves its works of merit, but has no name or reputation [among men]. With tenderness it nourishes all things, yet claims no lordship over them.

It is ever passionless, and may be named among the smallest things.

All things submit to it, yet it claims no lordship over them; it may be called great.

Thus the Sage to the end of his life never exalts himself; and thus he is able to achieve great things.

35.

If the Great Simulachrum—*q.d.*, the image or 'idea' of TAO—be obtained, the Empire will be for ever free from harm. There will be tranquillity, peace, and universal joy, [the attraction of which], acting as a bait, will detain the passing traveller.

The utterance of TAO is insipid; it has no flavour. If looked at, it appears not worth seeing; if listened to, it appears not worth hearing; but if used, it is found inexhaustible in resources.

36.

When one feels a desire to concentrate it [in one's own heart], it is imperatively necessary to display it openly.

When one feels a desire to cultivate it in its pliant phase, it is imperatively necessary to fortify and strengthen [one's own powers].

When one feels a desire to abandon or neglect it, it is imperatively necessary to stir up one's mind afresh [in its pursuit].

If anyone feels a desire to obtain it, it is imperatively necessary that it should be imparted to him.

By this means, the hidden phases [of TAO] will become clear. The weak and pliable overcomes the strong and hard.

A fish cannot leave the depths. The treasures of a State should not be employed to influence the people.

37.

TAO is ever inactive; yet there is nothing it does not do.

If feudal Princes and Sovereigns can but preserve it, all creatures will reform themselves. But if, once reformed, desires should again arise, I would restrain them by the exercise of the Simplicity which is without a name. This nameless Simplicity will prevent the rise of desires; an absence of desire will produce quiescence; and then the Empire will become settled of its own accord.

38.

Virtue, in those of supreme authority, does not itself claim to be virtue; and that is why [virtuous rulers] are possessed of [true] virtue.

Virtue, in those of lower rank, does not recognise its own loss as such; and that is why unvirtuous [Ministers and people] have no [true] virtue.

The virtue of those in supreme authority is inactive, and does not use action [in government].

The virtue of those of lower rank is active, and employs active measures.

[Although] the benevolence of those in supreme authority is active, it yet does not depend on action [for making itself felt].

The rectitude of those in supreme authority is active, and finds vent in active measures.

The ceremonial observances of those in supreme authority are active, and there is not a single man who does not respond to them. Under these circumstances all will bare the arm and submit to the guidance [of their rulers].

Therefore, when the TAO has attained its full development, it results in Virtue; when Virtue has attained its full development, it results in Benevolence; when Benevolence has attained its full development, it results in Rectitude; when Rectitude has attained its full development, it results in Ceremonial observances.

When ceremonial observances are nothing but an attenuation of uprightness and sincerity, they become the head and front of disorder.

Those who are in advance of others in knowledge constitute the outward glory of TAO; and, from such, comes the beginning of folly—[because those who succeed them are dazzled by the display and take no account of the reality within].

Thus it is that great men take their stand on what is solid, and not on what is flimsy; on what is true, and not on what is showy. For this reason they discard the one and adopt the other.

39.

The things which of old obtained the Unity are,—

Heaven, which by it [the pure *yang*] became clear.

Earth, which by it [the pure *yin*] became motionless.

The gods, which by it became divinely intelligent.

The valleys, which by it became full.

All creatures, which by it are produced.

Princes and Kings, which by it rule uprightly.

To carry out this doctrine to the proof:—Heaven, if deprived of its source of clearness, would be in danger of disruption; Earth, if deprived of its source of motionlessness, would be in danger of upsetting; the gods, if deprived of their source of divine intelligence, would be in danger of being abandoned by their worshippers; valleys, if deprived of their source of replenishment, would be in danger of drying up; creatures, if deprived of their source of production, or life, would be in danger of annihilation; and Princes and Kings, if deprived of their source of honour and dignity, would be in danger of being overthrown.

Therefore, the ruling classes regard the commonalty as the foundation [of their power] and those in high position necessarily regard the proletariat as that upon which they rest. Hence Princes and Kings style themselves orphans, solitary ones, unworthy ones; is not this an acknowledgment that the commonalty is their support, or *point d'appui*? Is it not so? To come, then, to the point: when patricians and plebeians are both without [conflicting] private desires, the only difference between the two is that the former resemble polished gems, while the latter are like unhewn stones.

40.

Resistance is the motion of TAO—[or, Motion implies a withstanding of TAO, the essence of which is repose]. Pliancy is TAO put into practice.

All things in the world owe their life to its [TAO'S] existence, and this existence sprang from non-existence.

41.

When scholars of the first grade hear of TAO, they sedulously practise it.

When second-rate scholars hear of it, they now observe, now lose it.

When scholars of the lowest sort hear of it, they greatly deride it. If it did not provoke derision [on the part of such], it would not be worth the name of TAO.

Wherefore, as the ancient apophthegms express it,—

Those who are illuminated *quoad* TAO are as though in darkness—[for its depths are unfathomable].

Those who enter TAO are as though they receded [from caution and hesitation].

Those who regard the TAO as heterodox appear as though belonging to the same class [as its true adherents].

The highest virtue resembles a ravine—[in profundity].

Great virtue resembles ignominy [in that it is not the highest].

Widespread virtue is as though insufficient.

Established virtue appears like meanness [in the eyes of foolish men].

The purest [human] character, as though liable to excess.

The Great Square has no corners.

The Great Vessel takes long to complete.

The Great Sound is but seldom heard.

The Great Simulachrum has no form.

TAO is imperceptible and nameless; and it is only TAO that excels in imparting itself [to men] and enabling them to achieve merit.

42.

TAO produced the First—[Heaven].

The First produced the Second—[Earth].

These Two produced the Third.

*** The Third, which was produced by the Heavenly and Earthly Affliti, consisted of the six Kua—chên, k'an, kên, hsün, li, and tui, three of which are Yang and three Yin. See Confucius's Commentary on the Yi Ching, Book IV, chap, 11.*

The Third produced all things, and these turn their back upon the Yin and embrace the Yang. The intermingling of these two Affliti results in harmony.

What men most hate is to be orphaned, widowed, and unworthy; and yet Princes and Dukes so style themselves. Wherefore, when things are diminished, they increase; and when they are increased, they diminish.

What men teach me, that I teach them again. Violent and overbearing men never die a natural death. It is my object to instruct men as a father [nourishes his children].

43.

The weakest things in the world subjugate the strongest.

There are no men who persevere uninterruptedly [in the culture of TAO]. I know from this that in inaction there is advantage. There are few in the world who attain to teaching without words, or to the advantage that results from inaction.

44.

Which is the more important—one's reputation or one's body?
Which is the more valuable—one's body or one's goods?
Which is the greater evil—getting or losing?
Inordinate love cannot but result in the utter abandonment of its object [though eventual disgust];
and overhoarding cannot but result in heavy loss.
He who knows when he has enough does not lay himself open to shame. He who knows when to stop, will not incur danger. These two contain the elements of endurance.

45.

The perfection of the great [TAO] is as though incomplete; its uses are inexhaustible.
The fullness of the great [TAO] is as though evaporating; its responsiveness [to requirements] is limitless.
The straightness of the great [TAO] is as though crooked.
The skilfulness of the great [TAO] has the appearance of stupidity.
The eloquence of the great [TAO] is as though defective of speech.
Restlessness overcomes cold; quiescence overcomes heat. Purity and repose will make the whole world upright.

46.

When the world is under the influence of TAO, [*q.d.*, at peace], swift horses are discarded as so much ordure.
When the world is without TAO, [*q.d.*, in a state of war or anarchy], war-horses are born even in remote wilds; [they are bred everywhere].
There is no sin greater than that of permitting desire. There is no calamity greater than discontent. There is no fault greater than the desire of gain. Wherefore the sufficiency of those who are contented is an enduring sufficiency.

47.

[There are those who] understand all about the Empire without going out of doors. [There are those who] see the course of Heaven without peeping through the lattice.
The further one goes [in pursuit of TAO] the less one knows of it.
Thus the Sage has knowledge without going in quest; he can identify things without seeing them; and he achieves results without working.

48.

In pursuing the study [of TAO] there will be daily increase; in acting out the TAO [when learnt] there will be daily diminution.
When this diminution is still further diminished, he will arrive at a state of inaction, or quiescence.
There is nothing that cannot be done by inaction. [The Sage] ever employs inaction in administering the Empire. As for those who put themselves to trouble in the matter, they are inadequate to the task of government.

49.

The Sage's heart is not immutable; he regards the people's heart as his own.
The virtuous I encourage, or approve; the unvirtuous I would incite to virtue. The virtue [of the Sage] makes others virtuous.
The trustworthy I trust; the untrustworthy I would make trustworthy. The virtue [of the Sage] engenders trust.
When the Sage occupies the throne of the Empire, he is anxiously bent on making it all of one mind. The people all fix their ears and eyes on him; and the Sage treats them as his children.

50.

Men, in being born, emerge; in dying, they enter.

There are thirteen organs of life—[the four limbs and nine openings].

There are thirteen causes of death—[the departure of the three souls, the seven spirits, the vital force, the Yin and the Yang].

There are thirteen seats of death in the active life of men—[the eight extremities of the compass and the five elements].

*** This means that death may be met with in all places, and occur from all causes—water, fire, etc. And why is it thus? It is that the succession of births is a substantial [property of TAO].*

Now I have heard it said that a man who understands how to protect his life will never meet with rhinoceros or tiger while travelling by land; if he enters the army, he will not shrink from the weapons [of the enemy].

*** The Commentator refers us to Mencius, *Kung Sun Ch'ou*, Bk. II, Part I, chap. 2, sec. 7.*

Thus the rhinoceros has nothing for his horn to attack, the tiger has nothing on which to stretch his claws, the soldier has no use for his blade. How is this to be accounted for? It is that the man keeps out of the reach of death.

*** He never meets wild animals because he avoids their track; he is not slain in battle because he is brave, and does not fear the enemy.*

51.

What TAO produces, its Energy nourishes. The things [so produced and nourished] have form, which is determined by the nature of their surroundings; so that there is nothing in the whole world that does not reflect honour upon TAO and reverence upon its Energy.

The honour thus paid to the one, and the reverence paid to the other, is the result of no command; it is the ordinary and natural condition of things. Therefore what TAO produces, Energy nourishes. Everything is nurtured as it grows; is brought to maturity when complete; is protected while being fed. [TAO] produces without claiming merit; it works without presuming; it causes increase without destroying. This is called Sublime Virtue.

52.

In the beginning of the world there was that which became the world's Mother.

If one knows the Mother, he will likewise recognise the offspring; and to the end of his days he will incur no danger.

If one represses his lustful inclinations and closes his door, he will be in quietude all his life: but if he gives rein to voluptuousness and indulges his desires, there will never be any salvation for him.

He who can perceive things that are minute is called clear-sighted. He who husbands his weakness is called resolute, or strongminded. He who uses the light that is in him will revert to his native perspicacity. Not exposing the body to disaster implies the practice of ethical morality.

*** That is to say, if a man is always free from harm, you may be sure he does nothing to outrage propriety and virtue, seeing that immorality is actually harmful to the body.*

53.

Given that I am possessed of all-embracing knowledge, I act in accordance with the great TAO. Only, there is danger in conferring [this privilege] on others; for the great TAO is far removed, and the common people are addicted to walking in cross-roads.

When the Imperial Court is devoid [of virtuous ministers], the fields will be entirely neglected, and the granaries entirely empty.

To dress in rich embroideries, to carry a sharp sword, to be wasteful in food and drink, and to have a superabundance of wealth and goods; this is to be what may be called a robber-chief; this is not TAO, indeed!

54.

The man who knows how to establish [virtue] never fears its being uprooted. The man who knows how to maintain [virtue] never fears its escaping him. The sons and grandsons of such never rest in offering sacrifices to them.

The virtue of him who cultivates TAO in his own person is genuine.

The virtue of him who cultivates it in his own home is superabundant [in that he has charity to spare for others].

The virtue of him who cultivates it in his village is enduring.

The virtue of him who cultivates it in his State is exuberant.

The virtue of him who cultivates it in the Empire is universal.

Wherefore I judge the persons of others by my own person; the families of others by my own family; the villages of others by my own village; the States of others by my own State; the Empire [of the ancient kings] by the Empire I rule to-day.

How do I know the acquiescence of the world [in the cultivation of TAO]?—By this method.

55.

He who possesses virtue inwardly may be compared to a new-born child. Venomous reptiles will not sting him, savage beasts will not lie in wait for him, birds of prey will not clutch at him; his bones are supple, his sinews pliable, so that he has a firm grip.

Before the principle of sexual connection was known, the [cosmic] embryo was formed; this was because the germinating essences [of the Yin and Yang] had come together.

To cry all day, and yet not become hoarse; this comes from the completion of the harmony.

*** Here, again, a certain want of continuity is apparent.* The meaning is that all the bodily powers are well balanced, and therefore in mutual accord.

The knowledge of this harmony may be called the basis or pivot [of virtue]; and knowledge of this basis is called enlightenment.

When [TAO] is augmented, it will produce daily omens of good.

When the heart dominates the vital energy, or breath, the man becomes daily stronger.

When things, having become strong, straightway begin to age, this implies a divergence from TAO; those who are not in accord with TAO die early.

56.

Those who know [the TAO] don't speak; those who speak do not know it.

To repress voluptuous desires, to close one's door, to chasten asperity, to unravel confusion, to moderate one's [internal] radiance, to identify oneself with the lowly; this may be called being in conformity with the Sublime.

Wherefore, others cannot be familiar with such, nor yet keep at a distance from them; cannot reap advantage from them, nor yet incur harm; cannot confer honour upon them, nor yet degrade them; and thus their honour comes from the whole world.

57.

[The cultivator of TAO] uses uprightness in governing his State, exceptional sagacity in war, and inaction in obtaining the Empire.

How do I know that such is the case? By this:—When there are many prohibitions in the Empire, the people become the more impoverished. When the people accumulate excess of wealth and goods, both State and family become gradually demoralised. When men are overskilful, the use of fantastical things gradually arises. When instruments of punishment gradually come into play, robbers increase in number.

Wherefore the Sage says, "I do nothing, and the people reform of their own accord. I love quietude, and the people become spontaneously [p. 36](#) upright. I take no measures, and the people enrich themselves. I have no desires, and the people naturally become simple."

58.

When the policy of administration is [apparently] inert, the people are liberal-minded and frank. When such policy is based on espionage the people are resentful and dissatisfied.

Happiness is the correlate of calamity; calamity is ever hidden under happiness. Who can tell the boundary-line which divides one from the other?

If [the prince] be devoid of rectitude, the rectitude [of his people] will be turned into craft, and their goodness be turned into depravity.

When the people are under delusion, the days [of their prince] cannot last long.

Therefore the Sage is correct in his conduct, and never abandons [his correctness]; he is incorruptible, and never inflicts injury [by a bad example]; he is straightforward, and never acts at random; he shines [with internal radiance], but dazzles no one.

59.

In governing men and serving Heaven, there is nothing equal to temperance. It is only by temperance that one may be said to submit betimes [to TAO]. Early submission [to TAO] implies a heavy accumulation of virtue. When virtue is thus heavily accumulated there is nothing to which the man is inadequate; when there is nothing to which a man is inadequate, it is impossible to know the limit of his resources; and the man whose resources are thus limitless, is fit to possess the State.

The possession of the Mother of the State [the principle of TAO] involves its long endurance. It may then be said to have a deep root and a solid stalk. This is the TAO which gives immortality and the power of long observing [the affairs of the world].

60.

To govern a great State as one fries a little fish—*q.d.*, without taking any trouble—is to employ TAO in administering the Empire. The spirits of the departed are not [sacrificed to] as gods; neither are the spirits of those who do not belong to a man's own family.

*** Compare Lun Yü, Book III, chap. XXIV*

The gods of the land do not inflict injury upon the inhabitants; nor do those which belong to other lands.

*** Compare Lun Yü, Book III, chap. VI*

The Sage, also, inflicts no injury on his subjects; neither he nor they injure each other, so that the virtue of both unites and converges [in one direction].

61.

A great State is the rendezvous towards which the whole Empire converges; it is a Mother among all nations. The maternal or female principle, by means of quiescence, ever vanquishes [the inquietude of] the male principle.

The [prince], by a quiescent policy, makes himself humble.

It is for this reason that a great State, by bearing itself humbly towards a small State, gains its allegiance; and a small State, by bearing itself humbly towards a great State, may obtain possession of it. Thus an inferior [State] can either be taken by this means, or can itself take [a superior one].

When a great State has no desire beyond protecting all its subjects equally, and a small State has no desire but to belong to [the greater one] and to serve its Prince, both will attain to the positions proper to each. Those who aspire to greatness must humble themselves.

62.

TAO is the deep reservoir of all things. It is the jewel of the good man, the guardian of the bad.

Virtuous words are marketable; honourable deeds may be made over to the credit of others. What reason is there for casting a man off on account of his being unvirtuous?

Wherefore, though the Emperor be enthroned, and his Ministers appointed, holding their jade badges of office in front of them and riding in a chariot and four: it would be better to remain seated in quiet, and to adopt, or enter into, this TAO.

It was this TAO that the ancients revered. Why do not [the rulers of to-day] strive daily to acquire

it? The ancients taking the national sins upon themselves, their subjects put away their depravity; and therefore they were honoured by the whole Empire.

* * See *Lun Yü, Book XX, chap. 1, sec. 3.*

63.

[The Sage] acts as though not acting. He occupies himself as though having nothing to do. He relishes that which is insipid—the TAO.

The great, the small, the many, the few, [are all equal in his sight]. He recompenses injury with kindness. In setting about difficult tasks, he begins with what is easy. In performing great things, he begins with little ones.

The difficult affairs of the world must be begun from what is easy the great things of the world must be begun from what is small. That is why the Sage never sets about great undertakings and yet is able to accomplish great things.

Lightly made promises lead to very little faith [being placed in the promiser]. He to whom most things are very easy at first will certainly find many difficulties afterwards. Thus the Sage always recognises the existence of difficulty, and by this means he never experiences any difficulty in practice.

64.

When [the State] is at peace, it is easily supported, or maintained. When portents have not yet appeared, it is easy to provide for [future contingencies]. When a thing is brittle, it is easily broken. When a thing is minute, it is easily dispersed.

Act before pressing necessity for action arises. Govern well the State before anarchy breaks out. A tree which takes the arms of two men to span it, grew from a tiny sprout. A tower nine storeys high was raised from a mound of earth. A journey of a thousand *li* begins with a foot's pace.

He who acts, fails; he who grasps, loses. The Sage never acts, and therefore he never fails; he never grasps, and therefore he never loses.

The people, in their undertakings, frequently fail when they are on the verge of accomplishment. The cautious act towards the end of an undertaking as at the commencement; and that is why they never fail.

Thus the Sage desires as though he desired not; and attaches no value to things difficult of acquisition. He learns what others do not learn, and returns to what is passed over by the multitude. By this means he promotes the spontaneous development of all things, and that without venturing to act.

65.

Those who, in ancient times, were eminent for the practice of TAO, abstained from enlightening the people, and kept them simple.

The difficulty of governing the people arises from their excess of shrewdness. He who employs shrewdness in governing a State, becomes a robber of the State; he who does not do so, is a blessing to it. The man who knows both these things presents an ideal of good government, and a knowledge of this ideal constitutes Sublime Virtue. Sublime Virtue is deep and far-reaching, and is in direct opposition to all objects of desire; thus it is able to bring about universal accordance [with TAO].

66.

The fact that rivers and seas are able to be rulers over all water-courses is due to their downward tendency. It is on account of this that they are able to dominate all waters. Therefore the Sage who desires to reign over the people must be retiring in demeanour. Then, when the Sage occupies a high position, his subjects will not be self-sufficient; when he leads the van, his subjects will not work injury [by disobedience or rebellion]. Thus it comes that the whole Empire delights to render him his dues, and that without reluctance, in that he never strives; therefore the Empire is unable to strive with him.

67.

The inhabitants of the world all say that I am great [*i.e.*, greatly tolerant], although I have the appearance of incompetence. This apparent incompetence is the result of my very greatness. In the case of one who is possessed of more than ordinary ability, he sets his mind constantly upon even the smallest matters.

Now there are three things which I regard as precious, which I grasp and prize.

The first is compassion; the second is frugality; the third is not venturing to take precedence of others—modesty.

I prize compassion; therefore I am able to be fearless. I prize frugality; therefore I am able to be liberal. I prize modesty; therefore I am able to become a leader of men. But men of the present day abandon compassion, yet aim at valiancy; they abandon frugality, yet aim at being liberal; they abandon modesty, yet aim at leadership. This is death to them.

Now when one is compassionate in battle, he will be victorious. When one is compassionate in defending, his defences will be strong. When Heaven intends to deliver men, it employs compassion to protect them.

68.

Those eminent for scholarly virtues are not fighting men. Those eminent in war do not lose their temper. Those eminent for victory do not struggle. Those eminent for making use of others descend to their level.

This may be called the virtue which does not contend; the power of utilising men; the utmost limit that can be reached in equalling Heaven and the men of old.

69.

There was a saying among the military commanders [of old]:—"I do not venture to act the host—*q.d.*, to give battle; I prefer to be the guest—to await the attack. I do not venture to advance an inch; I prefer to retire a foot." This may be called operating negatively, and appropriating [the enemy's possessions] without infringing propriety. Were this policy pursued, there would be no withstanding [of our arms], and capture might be effected without striking a blow.

There is no greater calamity than that of despising an enemy. By underestimating the enemy one brings about the loss of [the three things] I prize. Wherefore when opposing forces meet in battle, it is the compassionate who conquer.

70.

My words are easy to understand, easy to put in practice; [yet] the world can neither understand nor practise them.

My words have an underlying intent; my actions have a ruling motive. It is only ignorance that causes men not to understand my doctrine.

Those who understand me are few; those who copy me are worthy. Wherefore the Sage dresses in coarse robes while hiding a jewel in his breast.

71.

Those who understand [the TAO] are up conscious of their upward progress. Those who count their ignorance as knowledge, are diseased. It is only those who treat themselves as sick who are therefore free from disease. The Sage, who is not diseased, treats himself as though he were; wherefore his disease becomes no disease at all.

72.

When the people do not stand in awe of severe enactments, great visitations will befall [the State].

When [a man] does not behave indecorously within doors, he will not inspire disgust in others. It is only when [the prince] does not inspire disgust that [his subjects] will submit to him without reluctance.

Wherefore is it that the Sage, though possessed of intuitive knowledge, yet makes no self-display; respects, but does not exalt himself; thus adopting the one course and avoiding the other.

73.

When bravery is pushed to rashness, a man will incur a violent death. When courage is tempered by caution, he will preserve his life.

These two conditions result, the one in benefit, the other in injury. Who knows the cause of Heaven's animosity [to either]? Thus it is that even the Sage here sees a difficulty.

The TAO of Heaven never strives, yet excels in victory; it speaks not, yet excels in responding [to desert]; it beckons not, yet [things] come to it of their own accord; it lies concealed, yet excels in organising. The net of Heaven extends everywhere. Its meshes are wide, but nothing ever escapes it.

74.

If people do not fear death why attempt to frighten them by capital punishment?

Supposing the people are made constantly afraid of death, so that when they commit unlawful acts I arrest them and have them killed, who will dare [afterwards to misbehave]? For then there will always be *yiu-sze*, or civil magistrates, to execute them. Now the execution of men on behalf of the inflictor of the death-punishment [by those not legally qualified to do so] may be compared to hewing on behalf of a master carpenter; and people who [attempt to] hew instead of a master carpenter mostly cut their hands.

75.

The hunger of the people is due to the exorbitant taxation levied by their rulers. That is why they starve.

The difficulty of governing the people arises from the policy of action adopted by their rulers. That is why government is difficult. The light esteem in which people hold death is due to the over-anxiety with which they struggle for life. That is why they hold death so cheap. It is only those who do not exert themselves on behalf of their life that know how to hold life in true honour; [or, who are superior to those who hold life in too high esteem].

76.

Men, when born, are weak and soft; when dead, they are stiff and hard.

When inanimate objects—say, the vegetable creation—are first produced, they are soft and tender; when dead, they are hard and dry.

Wherefore hardness and rigidity are associated with death; softness and weakness with life. So, when soldiers are violent, they gain no victories; when the tree is strong, a combination of strength is used [to fell it]. Its big parts are below; its soft and tender parts above.

77.

The TAO of Heaven resembles a drawn bow. It brings down the high and exalts the lowly; it takes from those who have superfluity, and gives to those who have not enough. The TAO of Heaven abstracts where there is too much, and supplements where there is deficiency.

The TAO of men does not so. It takes away from what is already deficient in order to bestow on those who have a superfluity. Who is able to devote his surplus to the needs of others?—Only he who is possessed of TAO.

Thus it is that the Sage acts, yet does not plume himself; achieves works of merit, yet does not hold to them. He has no wish to make a display of his worthiness.

78.

There is nothing under Heaven that is weaker or softer than water; yet those who attack what is hard and strong are not aware that it is [the soft and weak] that can overcome it. [Thus] they do not

see that, their task is an easy one.

The fact that weakness overcomes strength, that the soft overcomes the hard, is unknown to none; yet they cannot act upon it.

Therefore the Sage says: He who bears the reproach of the State may be called lord of the nation's altars; he who bears the calamities of the State may be called the King of the world. These are true words, though apparently at variance [with reason]; *i.e.*, paradoxical.

79.

When peace is made after a great quarrel, there is always a feeling of resentment left behind. How can this be regarded as right?

Wherefore the Sage, unwilling to shift responsibility upon others, keeps, on his left hand, an officer to make record [of his obligations]. The virtuous man keeps a record of his compacts; the unprincipled man repudiates [or destroys] them.

The TAO of Heaven has no favourites; its practice is simply to reward the virtuous.

80.

With a small State, sparsely populated, supposing that I had weapons for a thousand men, I would not use them. I would rather teach my subjects to think seriously of death, and not to emigrate to a distance. Then, though they might have ships and chariots, nobody [p. 48](#) would mount them; though they might have armour and weapons, nobody would set them in array. I would make them return to the use of the quipu, render their food toothsome, beautify their clothes [by cultivating the silkworm], live tranquilly at home, be happy in their domestic usages, keep watch with neighbouring states for their mutual safety, and let the crowing of cocks and barking of dogs be heard by one another [from their numbers and proximity]. Thus the people would die of old age without ever coming into [hostile] collision with each other.

81.

Faithful words are not pleasant. Pleasant, or specious, words are not faithful.

The virtuous do not bandy arguments. Those who bandy arguments are not virtuous. The wise do not seek learning [from outside]. Those who do so are not wise.

The Sage does not lay up hidden stores [of TAO], The more he employs it on behalf of others the more he has for himself. The more he imparts to others, the more his own stores increase.

The TAO of Heaven confers benefit, and injures not. The TAO of the Sage acts, and does not strive.