

BEING AND THE PERFECT MAN
ACCORDING TO IBN 'ARABI AND LAO TZU

by

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ABSTRACT

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This investigation concerns the philosophies of two great mystics: Lao Tzu and Ibn 'Arabī. The writings of both of these men are examined from the viewpoint that what they have written is meant to be lived as well as to be thought about. Within this context two particular notions are examined: Being, in its most absolute sense, and true sage or Perfect Man. Both of these notions are found to be closely bound together in their respective philosophies.

Lao Tzu lived in China in the sixth century B. C. and Ibn 'Arabī lived in Spain, north Africa and the Middle East in the twelfth century A. D. Despite the wide historical and cultural separation between them the thesis looks at the respective terms of these writers in an attempt to demonstrate that what both of these men wrote about and apparently lived is essentially the same, especially when the languages they wrote in are appropriately transformed.

For the twentieth century reader, the works of Lao Tzu and Ibn 'Arabī can often be quite perplexing since neither of these men were concerned about their statements being consistent. This inconsistency, however, begins to make sense when one sees that they both believed in a multi-stratified pyramidal metaphysics and epistemology, where what is true on one level at a particular time and place is not necessarily true even on the same level at another time and place. The ultimate Mystery for both these men is realizable and realized, in and by itself, but is not knowable. It is only in giving up all ideas about Truth that man has the possibility of being it; however, since the Truth is believed to manifest uniquely in each moment it is only by surrendering or giving up what one believes to be true in each moment that a man can be the Truth in the next. For Lao Tzu, when this occurs the Tao, or Way, and the sage become one. For Ibn 'Arabī, when this occurs the Absolute Being and the Perfect Man become one. The sage or Perfect Man is said by both writers to be most ordinary rather than special. In this ordinariness lies the extraordinary strength of the Perfect Man.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically and culturally, there is no connection between Ibn 'Arabī, who lived in the Mohammedan world of Spain, North Africa and the Middle East around the turn of the twelfth century A. D., and Lao Tzu, who lived in China around the fifth century B. C.

It is highly significant that, in spite of the wide historical-cultural distance that separates the two from each other, they share, on the philosophical (and spiritual) level the same ground. They agree with each other, to begin with, in that both base their philosophical thinking on a very peculiar conception of Being which is essentially identical, though differing from one another in details and on secondary matters.¹

This thesis, its writing and the attendant research, has been in the making for over three years. In the early summer of 1970 I submitted a proposal to write a Master's Thesis on Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, the two foremost Taoist philosophers. I proceeded with research and studied Tai-ch'i Chuan, the Taoist art of self-defense and movement, with Professor W. T. Chung in Berkeley, California. Over the next two years I discovered that the Tai-ch'i movements helped me considerably in understanding the Tao Te Ching. Many times I asked Professor Chung about the Tao, but each time he told me: "Practice; you practice." I continued my studies of the Tao Te Ching and the Chuang Tzu, but no thesis came forth.

Then in September, 1971, I left on a journey which lead me across

Europe to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and finally back to England. Oddly enough, it was in England that I began to learn about Sufism, the mystical aspect of the Islam. In Gloucestershire, at a school called Beshara, situated just 20 miles southwest of Stratford-upon-Avon, I began to understand the teachings of Ibn 'Arabī, who is often referred to as the greatest Shaykh (leader or teacher) of Sufism.

When I returned to the United States in February 1973, I decided that this thesis was finally going to be written, but not just about Taoism. It became clear in my travels (which since the beginning of the research have amounted to around 40,000 miles) that the essence of the Taoist philosophy of Lao Tzu and the essence of the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī are the same. In particular, the notions of Being and the Perfect Man are essentially identical, when one makes appropriate allowances for the historical and cultural settings of each. Here was a thesis which would break new ground in the study of the philosophy of religion and further the evidence for the existence of the "Perennial Philosophy" at work in history, which transcends the usual restrictions of time and place.

Then, about six months ago, I was shown Professor Toshihiko Izutsu's out-of-print, but excellent, two-volume Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism. What initially was to be a thesis breaking into new philosophical ground has become a task of clarifying and extending the exploration already begun by Professor Izutsu and others in an attempt to lay bare the essential framework of the philosophical outlook of two extraordinary men: Ibn 'Arabī and Lao Tzu.

I would like to thank my professors at M.I.T., especially Professor Huston Smith, whose encouragement and advice has been a

constant source of inspiration. Also, I would like to thank Professor William T. Chung, Reshad Feild, Bulent Rauf and John G. Bennett, who helped me to see enough of the reality behind the teachings of Lao Tzu and Ibn 'Arabī to enable me to begin to write about their mystical philosophies. This kind of philosophy, in the words of Ludwig Wittgenstein, may be characterized as follows:

The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem.
(Is not this the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them have then been unable to say what constituted that sense?)
There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical.²

Addendum to the Introduction

It is now June 1975. Two years have passed since the initial writing of this thesis. This thesis, except for minor final changes was essentially complete, as it is now written, in August 1973. However, upon finishing the writing, I realized that the thesis could not be passed in at that time, for what was written had not been experienced and lived deeply enough for me to be honest to the material. Furthermore, there was the question of obtaining permission to write about and use certain materials.

During the past two years, although the written part of the thesis has essentially stayed the same, I felt compelled to delay submission to work on living more fully what is spoken about in the thesis. It has been two very searching years, both inwardly and outwardly, and has resulted in my travelling another 20,000 miles. The advice from Professor Chung, which was to practice, spurred me onward. Twice I gave up all hope of submitting the thesis for final approval.

Finally, in April of this year I went on a two week retreat in the hills of western Massachusetts to meditate and to sit in silence. Just before leaving on this retreat I felt it was finally right to submit the thesis to the Committee on Graduate Students at M.I.T. While on the retreat I meditated from 18 to 20 hours per day. Many seemingly wondrous things happened, but I found that by just sitting I had to let go of even these wondrous things. Experiences of light, of joy, of pain, of the merging of joy and pain, of insight, and the emergence of a sea of sound all came and went. The distinction of good and bad often disappeared.

About ten days into the retreat I realized that all these experiences

are, in essence, empty. I even let go of this thesis feeling that although much work and effort had gone into it, it, too, is empty.

Once again I would like to thank Professor Huston Smith, this time for his patience in waiting for the completion of this project. Thanks are also to be extended to Professor Ki Gammon from the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Pennsylvania for his incisive proof-reading and for helping to shave my ego a bit. Also, many thanks to Hossain Ziai, lecturer at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and Languages at Harvard University, for his constant encouragement and open sharing of aspirations these past two years.

In retrospect, the real task of this thesis has not been in the writing of it, but in accepting what has been written and then letting go of it. My only hope is to be as true as I can to the material in the following pages by living it from moment to moment, while holding on to nothing, not even to emptiness.

I. BIOGRAPHIES AND WORKS OF LAO TZU AND IBN 'ARABI

An appropriate place to begin is with a brief description of the lives of Ibn 'Arabī and Lao Tzu.

The life of Lao Tzu, whose name means "Grand Old Master" or "Ancient Child," is clouded in mystery. According to tradition he was born in 604 B. C. in the village of Chu-jen, in the Kingdom of Ch'u, which corresponds to the modern town of Luyi in the province of Honan. He became Palace Secretary in the Eastern Chou capital at Loyang, and then spent his later years as Keeper of the Archives for the Court of the Chou Dynasty.

At the age of 160 Lao Tzu is said to have grown saddened by the decay of the Chou dynasty and men's disinclination to live in harmony with nature. Seeking greater personal solitude for the end of his life he rode on a water buffalo westward through Hanku Pass. At the pass, the gatekeeper, Yin Hsi, sensed the unusual character of Lao Tzu and asked him to leave a record of his beliefs. He consented to do this and wrote a slim work of 5000 Chinese characters to the civilization he was leaving behind. This work, entitled the Tao Te Ching (Classic of The Way and Virtue), has been translated into English more often than any other book except the Bible. It is a testament to man's at-home-ness and possibility for at-one-ness in the universe. It is ambiguous, often paradoxical, elusive, and open to multiple translations and meanings. In short, it is an enigma to the logician, but nonetheless a treasure-house to anyone who would

like advice on how to live one's life.

"As to the Sage, no one will know whether he existed or not."¹ This paraphrase of the Tao Te Ching is actually a closer account of the life of Lao Tzu than our initial account. Historians such as Ssu-ma Ch'ien, who wrote the first history of China, the Shih Chi, around 100 B.C., as well as sinologists and modern Chinese linguists, cannot agree as to when the book was really written, or, in fact, as to whether Lao Tzu actually lived; or, if he lived, whether he actually wrote the Tao Te Ching! Estimates for the date of authorship range all the way from 440 B.C. to 240 B.C. Some contemporary scholars are of the opinion that Lao Tzu never existed at all, and that the Tao Te Ching is a composite of various teachings and teachers. In the words of Holmes Welch:

One thing we know: we have a book. Some person or persons wrote it. It is convenient to call that person or persons Lao Tzu, and in the following pages I shall do so.²

After examining the arguments and opinions of the scholars, I have decided to do the same in this thesis. His life is clouded in mystery, an enigma which has not been clarified by the scholars and probably never will be.

The life of the Sufi master Ibn 'Arabī is much less enigmatic and less clouded by conflicting accounts. Ibn 'Arabī, also known as Abu Bakr Muhammed ibn al-'Arabī, of the Arabic tribe of Ḥatim, was born in 1165 A.D. (560 hegira) at Murcia in Andalusia, Spain. He died at the age of 80 in 1240 A.D. in Damascus, Syria. In the esoteric circles of Islam he is called Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī ("the animator of religion"), or al-Shaykh al-Akbar ("the greatest master"). His father,

'Ali Ibn al-'Arabī, was a man of standing and influence. In several of his works Ibn 'Arabī describes no fewer than 70 Shaykh's, teachers and masters, whom he met during his lifetime and travels from Spain across north Africa to Turkey and Syria.

Before we proceed any further I shall include a brief note on the ṣūfīs. One meaning of the Persian word ṣūfī is a man who wears a woolen robe. In actuality, the term is used to refer to a man who belongs to a spiritual brotherhood which performs various practices from the mystical perspective of the Islamic religion. He is one who, within that tradition, is a man who aspires to know the Truth by knowing himself. In the Koran there is reference to: "Men whom neither selling nor trading diverts from the remembrance of God (dhikr Allah)."³ Such a man's awareness is constantly focussed on God, no matter whatever else he is doing. The term ṣūfī as used in this paper, refers to a man who is a member of one or more of the Islamic spiritual brotherhoods, rather than ṣūfī in its looser meaning as a self-realized man irrespective of his religious or spiritual heritage.

Ibn 'Arabī is best known among the ṣūfīs as Shaykh al-Akbar:

...because he was the first man to express in writing that vast range of doctrine and learning which had until his time, been confined to oral transmission and veiled allusions. In doing so Ibn 'Arabī made available an enormous corpus of teachings on a multitude of subjects from the loftiest metaphysical doctrines to the study of dreams (oneirology), Ṣūfī practices, and mystical states.⁴

Ibn 'Arabī wrote a total of 251 works. His two most important works are the 2500 page monumental Futuḥat and the Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam. This latter work, which means literally "the settings of Wisdom," was

written in 1229 A. D. in Damascus, and is a condensation into one book of all of his metaphysical teachings. The Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam is the central source for our explorations of Ibn 'Arabī's thought.

If there is, in the doctorial teaching of Ibn 'Arabī, some sort of system, it is the permutation of opposing and complementary terms. This methodical employ of paradox allows no truce to the spirit of the reader, naturally inclined to "fix" himself on a definite, "dogmatic" notion if you like, and it pushes him towards that which Ibn 'Arabī himself calls al-ḥayrah, that is to say "perplexity" or "astonishment" before that which surpasses rational order; this 'ḥayrah,' he says, must become a constant circular movement around a point mentally incomprehensible.⁵

Such a teaching does not leave very much room for the logical mind!

Mental perplexity, as we shall see, is a provisional aim and a central part of the way in the teaching of Ibn 'Arabī. Only in its entirety does his philosophy begin to make sense, but it only does so because the logical mind has been left with no ground to stand upon.

II. THE TAO ACCORDING TO LAO TZU

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.
The named is the mother of the ten thousand things.
Hence rid yourself of desires in order to observe
the mystery.
But always allow yourself to have desires in order
to observe its manifestations.¹

The Tao is the central concept of the Tao Te Ching. It means literally the "way" or the "path." In the following we shall delineate five stages in the manifestation of the Tao, with five attendant meanings of Tao as "Being" in its passage from non-manifestation to manifestation.

The schematization of the Tao as levels of "Being" yields the subsequent multi-stratified structure:

- 1.0 The Way: the Void, the Mysterious Female, ultimate reality, the Tao in its most essential sense (Wu wu wu, No (No Non-being)).²
- 2.0 The One: Pure Being, Absence of non-being (wu wu).
- 3.0 The two: active (yang) and passive (yin), or
 - 3.0.1 The heavenly names (yu ming) and The nameless (wu ming), or
 - 3.0.2 Being (yu) and Non-being (wu)
- 4.0 The three: the generative principle of the forms, the archetypes.
- 5.0 The ten thousand things: the myriad creatures, the immanent world (wan wu).

This structure is affirmed by chapter 42 of the Tao Te Ching:

The Way begets the One: the One begets the two; the two begets the three; the three begets the myriad creatures.

The myriad creatures carry on their backs the yin and embrace in their arms the yang and are the blending of the generative forces of the two.

Let us keep this important section of the Tao Te Ching in mind as we proceed in our discussion.

1) First the Tao is the Way of ultimate reality. This aspect of the Tao, which transcends even the notion of transcendence, is the ineffable ground of all that is or ever can be. It is the essence which is behind, beneath, and permeating the entire universe. The Tao in this first sense can not be perceived or truly imagined, for it is beyond the senses and the intellect. This is the Tao as the Void or "basic mystery" which remains forever beyond even the highest form of mystical intuition. According to Lao Tzu, it is impossible to make any logical sense of the Tao as the Way, referred to symbolically as the "Mysterious Female" (hsüan p'in). By logical inference we know that the "Mysterious Female" exists, but its true nature is forever hidden.

... the Tao is a source of life, the various stages in the formation of the universe are stages in the development of life and from the central principle a current of life spreads by degrees throughout "creation." This is why the Tao is called the Ancestor or the Mother... The Tao can also be symbolized by a female animal: "The Valley Spirit never dies: it is the Mysterious Female. The gate of the Mysterious Female is the origin of Heaven and Earth." ³

Mr. Kaltenmark very pertinently states that the Tao in this first sense is the supreme mode of Being. It is the Void, but in Lao Tzu's conception

the Void harbors within itself all potentialities. Tao as the Mysterious Female is also called ch'an Tao (the Permanent or Supreme Tao). "The Way in its absolute reality has no 'name'. It is (comparable to) uncarved wood... Only when it is carved are there 'names'." ⁴

2) The second aspect of Tao, after the Way as the Void, is the Tao which is the Transcendence of the opposition of Being and Non-being. Alternately put, this is the One which is a unification of Being and Non-being. In its role as a unifier it performs a function of transcendence, but, as such, it already contains the beginnings of duality. It is a unity which has the possibility of splitting into two. The Tao as the Void is a more primal mystery which lies beyond the Tao as the One.

We note, at this juncture, part of Lao Tzu's discussion of the One: "Carrying body and soul (hun-p'o) and embracing the One, Can you avoid separation?" ⁵ Lao Tzu, in these lines, is referring to the process of mystical intuition which allows a sage to embrace the One, but only if he has avoided separating Heaven (the soul, symbolically), and Earth (the body, symbolically). Still more precisely, hun-p'o has two components: hun, which is the heavenly or transcendent aspect of man's soul, and p'o, which is the immanent or earthly aspect of man's soul. By a fusion of both aspects and by embracing the One, man can aspire to such a level of realization of Being that he becomes unified with the Tao. We examine this more deeply in the next chapter.

3) On the third level, Tao refers to the two, which is a symbol for the duality of Being and Non-being. Through realizing the unity of Being and Non-being, in his life, an ordinary man can aspire to be a sage or "Perfect Man". Through the named and the nameless man can evolve to

become a link between heaven and earth. The Tao Te Ching can be, and has been, used as an instruction book on how to conduct one's life so that one is in harmony with the flow from heaven to earth and back again to heaven, from that which is transcendent to that which is immanent, and back again. If a man desires to live his life in harmony with the way the universe operates, he must understand within himself the process of life and change which is determined by the alternations of the yin and the yang, the active and the passive components of all existence.

The second line of Chapter I cautions: "The name that can be named is not the eternal name." An alternative translation from Professor Izutsu is: "The 'name' which is properly to be named is not the real Name."

The name which is said to be not the real Name refers to the so called "names" of the Confucianists, such as "humaneness", "righteousness", "wisdom", etc. which the Confucianists consider virtues.⁶

Lao Tzu is not claiming that virtue is unimportant, but rather that in relation to the real Name, which cannot be named, te or virtue is a non-existent reality which is mistaken for the Real. The "names that can be named" are similar to the divine attributes in the Sufi metaphysics which we shall discuss in a later section. Ultimately, virtue receives its existence and value from the Tao, but in itself te or virtue is non-existent.

4) The Tao in its fourth aspect is the three, which is a blending of yin and yang, passive and active elements, producing the forms for the physical universe.

This stage of being, the last one before the appearance of the

ten thousand things, closely parallels Plato's world of forms. The Mother of the myriad creatures has three elements (Being, Non-being, and the blending) which results in the production of the myriad creatures. The blending creates the form or the valley from which the universe comes into existence. Symbolically in Taoism the three is the black and white interlocking "fish bladders" plus the encompassing circle that unites them. Thus, the Mother is one in essence, but three in Her role as that which produces the physical world. This reminds us of Ibn 'Arabī who very boldly states: "My beloved is three, although He is One."⁷

As Max Kaltenmark points out:

Three is the harmonious union of the preceding elements (Heaven and Earth), for as Lao Tzu says, three waxings and wanings of the moon make up a season.⁸

The moon is also used as a symbol of the Mother of the myriad creatures. The Mysterious Female, an epithet for the Way as Absolute Reality in Her desire to be seen and to be known, differentiates into forms from formlessness.

5) At the fifth and final level, the Tao is the way of the universe, the myriad creatures. In this sense, the Tao is all we can see, smell, hear, taste, and touch. The immanent, or worldly, aspect of the Tao also includes everything that we ordinarily feel and think. It is referred to as "the ten thousand things," the multiplicity of things in existence in physical manifestation.

The main key to this five-leveled structure of being is the already quoted beginning to chapter XLII of the Tao Te Ching:

The Way produced the One.
The One produced the two.
The two produced the three.
And the three produced the ten thousand things.

Here we have a clear statement to the effect that each succeeding level of being is produced from or emanates forth from the previous level of being.

In this summary of the development of the universe from the primordial Tao to the existence of creatures having form, the numbers symbolize sub-principles which are also steps in the evolutionary process. (It is well known how the Chinese were fond of using numbers to represent qualities instead of quantities.)⁹

However, we have to be careful to remember that all of the seemingly different levels of "Being" are only different aspects of the one Tao, or Way, which is the essence of all Being.

Let us elaborate a bit further on the Tao as the two. "...in Taoism the nameless (wu-ming) is equivalent to non-being (wu) and the named (yu-ming) is equivalent to being (yu)."¹⁰ The meaning of "equivalent" as used here is not in the sense of logically equivalent, but rather in the sense that the nameless and non-being are two equivalent ways of looking at the same thing.

Furthermore,

"Being and non-being produce each other."¹¹

"All things in the world come from being
And being comes from non-being."¹²

This indicates that the nameless and the named (non-being and being) each has within itself the seeds of the other. There is a constant flow from one aspect to the other, each eternally producing the other. This constant flow from the nameless to the named, and back again, constitutes the transcendent source of the world of form and physical objects.

The named and nameless make up the One which is part of the process of the effulgence of the Tao from being to non-being and back again. The named and the nameless are separable only to the intellect which distinguishes between being and non-being. To the Perfect Man, whom we will discuss in the next chapter, there is only the One.

There is something mysteriously formed,
undifferentiated
Which existed before heaven and earth,
In the silence and the void,
It depends on nothing and does not change,
Ever present and in motion,
It may be considered the mother of the universe
I do not know its name:
I call it Tao.
If forced to give it a name, I call it Great.
Being great it moves forward;
'Moving forward' it goes far,
Going far it returns
Therefore Tao is great.
Heaven is great.
Earth is great.
And the king is also great.
There are four great things in that which is
without name.¹³

According to Professor Izutsu: "'moving forward' means that the working of the Great permeates Heaven and Earth without being obstructed."¹⁴ Furthermore, "the metaphysical movement of the Way forms an enormous universal circle. And being circular, it never comes to an end."¹⁵ Chapter XXV of the Tao Te Ching reminds us that all of the above mentioned levels or strata of meaning of Tao are only part of the Void. If we forget this we are liable to confusion. A very helpful image to hold in mind is that each of the strata above interpenetrates the strata below, and the strata below flow back into the strata which are above, producing a constant transfer from what is above (symbolically) to what is below (symbolically) and then returning. It is a pyramidal view of

reality where the bottom level (the physical universe) has four dimensions (three dimensions of space and one of time). The successive levels above are like successively finer pyramids of "being" interpenetrating what is below. However, what is on a higher level of "being" is just as dependent on what is below as what is below is dependent on what is above. This picture helps, except as regards the Mystery of Mysteries, about which nothing truly can really be said. The Mystery of Mysteries is quite simply beyond definition and beyond the imagination.

An unbroken thread beyond description.
It returns to nothingness.
The form of the formless,
The image of the imageless,
It is called indefinable and beyond imagination.¹⁶

III. THE PERFECT MAN ACCORDING TO LAO TZU

In the Tao Te Ching the term "sage" or "Perfect Man" (shêng jen or chih-jen) occurs more than twenty times and refers to a man who understands the Tao.

The sage has no mind of his own.
He is aware of the needs of others.

He is good to people who are good.
He is also good to people who are not good.
Because Virtue (te) is goodness,
He has faith in people who are faithful.
He also has faith in people who are not faithful.
Because Virtue (te) is faithfulness.

The sage is shy and humble - to the world he
seems confusing.
Men look to him and listen.
He behaves like a little child. ¹

In the following few pages we shall analyze this chapter of the Tao Te Ching in depth to arrive at a clear picture of the qualities of the Perfect Man.

He "has no mind of his own." This can be interpreted in several ways but is clarified by the line: "He is aware of the needs of others." It is not that the Perfect Man is fickle and can not make up his own mind. It is rather that the Perfect Man, having emptied his own mind of personal desires, is aware of the needs of other beings. Lao Tzu is thus describing a man who is outer directed in his awareness, by having first directed his consciousness inward.

"Block the openings,
Shut the doors,
And all your life you will not run dry. "²

The first two of these lines also occurs in Chapter LVI. "Openings" and "Doors" refer to the senses, to the intellectual mind, and to the desires. This is a strong admonition by Lao Tzu to practice meditation (tso wang):

The Taoist term in question is tso wang (sitting with blank mind) and is defined as: Slackening limbs and frame, blotting out the senses of hearing and sight, getting clear of outward forms, dismissing knowledge and being absorbed into That which Pervades Everything.³

Lao Tzu is advising the reader to cut off the avenues of escape of the "inner forces" in order to be strong and live a long life. A man who practices this can come to know the inner workings of his Self, which, in turn, will allow him to be aware of the needs of others and permit him to understand the workings of "the myriad creatures."

That the Perfect Man is good to all people, irrespective of their goodness, means that he does not judge others. Furthermore, he has faith in people irrespective of their faithfulness. Virtue (te) is goodness; faithfulness and the being of the Perfect Man are united with te as well as the Tao.

"He behaves like a little child." This appears at first to be in opposition to the closing lines of Chapter 64:

Therefore the sage seeks freedom from desire.
He does not collect precious things.
He learns not to hold on to ideas.
He brings men back to what they have lost.
He helps the ten thousand things find their own nature.
But refrains from action.⁴

A little child has many desires and when they are not fulfilled the child will get upset and cry to get attention from its mother. Also, little children are easily attracted to shiny objects, especially jewelry. How can the sage behave like a little child when children often act in this way?

First, the infant's behavior is only a symbol for the action of the sage. Furthermore, we note that an infant if attracted to one piece of jewelry can be made aware of another piece of jewelry by dangling the new object in front of his eyes. The infant is then "awakened" to the new piece of jewelry, having forgotten the former. In a similar way the Perfect Man does not collect anything. All objects are equally precious to the Perfect Man because they all belong to and are made of the Tao. After something is gone and another object or situation is present, that which is now present is what now commands the Perfect Man's awareness. He is "enlightened" to the presence of the Tao in each moment, which is attained by his becoming unattached to what is at this moment. Since the next moment may result in a complete change in what is present, the Perfect Man is unidentified with what appears to be present. He is completely open to change, since the manifestation of the Tao is in constant flux. (Similarly, as we shall see, Ibn 'Arabī states that every moment He is in a different configuration.)

In a complete way the Perfect Man is free from desire and constantly lets go of his ideas. He helps "the ten thousand things" find their own nature: not by telling people what they should do or by putting things right which someone considers to be wrong; instead, "he refrains from action."

An important question arises at this point: "How is the Perfect Man able to do anything if he refrains from action?" Indeed, he appears in this description to be incapable of sustained purposive action. The answer to this potential objection is important to understand. As Professor Huston Smith mentions, in a recent article, one can easily read

Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu as counselling sloth and apathy when, in effect, they state: "Do nothing, and everything, will be done." Professor Smith's answer is an excellent one:

Wu wei (no action) can be read unequivocally only after one has attained Tao-identification. At that point one will continue to act - the Tao, we recall, is never static; to be in it is to be always in the mood of moving - but the far shore attained, one need do nothing save what comes naturally, for what needs doing will claim one's will directly... Until that point (of Tao-identification) is reached there must be labors that are not wholly spontaneous as we try to act our way into right thinking while concomitantly thinking our way into right action.⁵

Thus, it is through identification with Being on the highest level, rather than identification with his own thoughts and his personal actions, that the Perfect Man does all things. The Perfect Man not only follows the Tao: he is the Tao. Since the ten thousand things (the physical world) is produced from the Tao (while remaining at one with the Tao), the Perfect Man (who is the Tao) becomes, or rather is, that from which the physical world is produced, by virtue of his Tao-identification. This is clearly no ordinary conception of man.

Let us summarize what we have discovered so far about Lao Tzu's concept of the Perfect Man. The Perfect Man has no mind of his own; he is aware of the needs of others; he is good and faithful to others irrespective of their goodness or faithfulness because he sees the reality behind appearance; he is like a little child; he seeks freedom from desire; he is completely unified and united with the Tao or Way. Indeed, he becomes one with the Tao.

This last characteristic is, in some ways, the most basic fact about

the Perfect Man. "When a man in his spiritual experience of ecstasy reaches the ultimate stage of illumination, a stage at which there remains no trace of his ego, and therefore no discrepancy between "himself" and the Way, that marks the birth of a Perfect Man. Lao Tzu calls this stage "embracing the One".⁶ In the words of Lao Tzu: "The sacred man embraces the One and hence becomes the standard for everything under Heaven."⁷ Also, "Keeping down the unstable soul under control, (the Perfect Man) embraces the One and is never separated therefrom."⁸

We shall now look more closely at the nature of the unstable soul and how a man can come to control it. In ancient China what corresponds to the English word "soul" consists of two separate substances: hun and p'o. Hun is the superior or spiritual aspect of the soul and p'o is the inferior or animal aspect of the soul, which is responsible for the functioning of the body. Upon a man's death the hun is believed to ascend to Heaven while the p'o descends into the earth. (In the terminology of Ibn 'Arabī, hun is equivalent to the spirit or rational soul whose purpose it is to seek true knowledge and p'o is equivalent to the animal soul, which is defined by Ibn 'Arabī as the vital principle or life-generating power. The animal soul functions through the body and depends upon the body for its existence.)⁹

There are several alternative translations of the above quoted line from Chapter 10 of the Tao Te Ching:

"When carrying on your head your perplexed bodily soul, can you embrace in your arms the One/And not let go?"¹⁰ or

"Carrying body and soul and embracing the One, / Can you avoid separation?"¹¹

The ancient Chinese text admits of a number of different interpretations. Many concepts in the Tao Te Ching such as the Tao, wu wei, and hun-p'o have complex meanings which relate to the other concepts in spheres of interrelation which reflect the viewpoint, even the level of consciousness of the translator.

Returning to our discussion of the soul, we note that the Perfect Man is said to be able to control the fretful animal soul by the practice of "sitting-in-oblivion." In this unperturbed state he is able to maintain awareness of his spiritual soul (h'un) and is able to ascend freely to the level of Unity, embracing the One never to leave it. What, more precisely, is this technique of "sitting-in-oblivion" (tso wang)?

Sitting-in-oblivion stands in opposition to the concept sitting-galloping (tso ch'ih). It is very difficult for a man to free himself from identification with the continual flux of ideas and desires which gallop through his mind. This is especially apparent when one sits still in a relaxed position and begins to watch the tyrannical inconstancy of the mind. Many forms of meditation involve practices for helping one to watch the galloping mind and arrive at the state of sitting-in-oblivion. By means of meditation, which in many cases is a process of self-transformation, one is able to change identification with "being" on the fifth level (in our schema) for "being" on a higher level - eventually resulting in his realizing his Oneness with the Tao.

Man stands in a woeful predicament because he is - almost by nature, one would say - so made that he directs the activity of his mind toward distinguishing and discriminating things from one another.¹²

For most people the response here will be:

'But what is wrong with, or woeful about, a discriminating mind?' Surely, this is a good quality in the eyes of most men. However, according to Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu and Ibn 'Arabī the problems concerning "right" and "wrong", "good" and "bad" are pseudo-problems which only arise from man's galloping mind. The galloping mind results most commonly when a man is identified with the being of the physical world, the fifth level of being. If a man's awareness is also at the same time focussed on the Tao, as the One, then the mind may be galloping, but the Mind, this point of awareness which is focussed on the Tao as the One, is not galloping, since the Tao as the One never changes. The distinction between subject and object, observer and observed, dissolves in this case, for the Mind has become united with the Tao and no longer sees distinctions as real. In fact, there are no "real distinctions." Any distinctions are ultimately illusory since there is no "other" than the Tao or the One Absolute Essence. Thus, "good" and "bad" only arise from the viewpoint of the mind which is identified with the "being" of the Tao on the third, fourth or fifth levels in our previous discussion.

Returning to Lao Tzu, we see that actually he uses the phrase "finished mind" (ch'ang hsin) instead of "galloping mind," the term which is used by Chuang Tzu. The "finished mind" means the mind which has taken on a definitely fixed form, the mind in a state of coagulation. This is the reasoning mind, by whose guidance man discriminates between things and passes judgments on them saying, 'this is right' and 'that is wrong.' From such judgments, endless arguments and disagreements arise among men, because a man is identified only with part of the Tao.

Truthful words are not beautiful, beautiful words
are not truthful. Good words are not persuasive;
persuasive words are not good.
He who knows has no wide learning; he who has
wide learning does not know.
The sage does not hoard. Having bestowed all
he has on others, he has yet more;
Having given all he has to others, he is richer still.
The Way of heaven benefits and does not harm; the
way of the sage (the Perfect Man) is bountiful and
does not contend.¹³

The preceding lines are found at the very end of the Tao Te Ching
and nicely sum up what has been said about the fixed mind.

Still, the reader may ask how is a "galloping mind" the same as a
"finished or fixed mind?" It is because they are two sides of the same
coin, or two viewpoints of the same type of mind. The mind when identi-
fied with the world is constantly wandering about, so that when one
attempts to look at the mind (by means of the Mind) one notices after a
time that although the mind is moving this movement is circular; that is,
the thoughts and desires begin to repeat themselves. This ability to
observe the mind with the Mind is developed in meditation. If one is not
patient enough to watch the mind then the contents of the mind seem to be
going somewhere. But if one sits for awhile quietly watching one begins
to see that the mind is really very fixed in its pattern of movement. It is
only when one makes the effort to see the entire movement, that one sees
how really "fixed" the mind is. Put in another way, the mind becomes
attached to patterns and chains of ideas. In this way, it is rigid, although
there is the appearance of movement. In the words of Chuang Tzu:

Everybody follows his own "finished mind" and
venerates it as his own teacher. . . . It is impossible
for a man to insist on the distinction between
"right" and "wrong" without having a "finished mind."
This is as impossible as a man departing from a

northern country today and arriving in the country
of Yueh (in the southern limit of China) yesterday!¹⁴

Now let us return to "sitting-in-oblivion" or "sitting-forgetting."

The five colors blind the eyes of men.
The five musical notes deafen the ears of men.
The five tastes spoil the mouths of men
(The games like) racing and hunting madden
the hearts of men.
Goods that are hard to obtain hinder man's progress.
Therefore, the "sacred man" cares for the belly
(i. e. endeavors to develop his inner core of
existence) and does not care for the eye (i. e. does
not follow the dictates of his senses). Therefore
he abandons the latter and chooses the former.¹⁵

The Perfect Man tries to develop his inner core of existence, which
is symbolized by the belly (in Japan, the hara or, in China, the tan chi'en
center) and does not care for the eye (does not follow the demands of his
senses and desires) because he is aware of the dispersing activity of the
mind which only leads his consciousness away from the Way. (It is im-
possible to be led away from the Way, except in the sense that one loses
awareness and consciousness of the Way.) The Tao is always there, but
man forgets. Indeed, the Tao is there in his own "inside" in the most
concrete and knowable form. The further one goes toward the "outside,"
the less one is in touch with the Way; not because the Way is not outside,
but because first one must see the action of the Tao within his own being.

Even without going out of the door, one can know
everything under Heaven (i. e. the reality of
things). Even without peeping out of the window,
one can know the Way of Heaven.
The farther one goes out, the less one knows.
Therefore the sage knows without going out.
He becomes illumined without looking.
And he accomplishes everything without "doing."¹⁶

"The purification of the Mind constitutes the pivotal point in the
development from the state of an ordinary man to that of the Perfect Man."¹⁷

Chuang Tzu calls this method "fasting." This fasting is not just involved with limiting the intake of food; it constitutes a renunciation of all habit patterns and identification with the very source of all Being, the Tao.

(Ibn 'Arabī, in a similar manner, says that a true gnostic has no set habits.)

Some translators call this the "primal identification", the "primal union", "the mysterious sameness", or "the mysterious union." Lao Tzu gives very specific advice on how to reach this state:

Keep your mouth closed.
Guard your senses.
Temper your sharpness.
Simplify your problems.
Mask your brightness.
Be at one with the dust of the earth.
This is the primal union.¹⁸

The two lines which run contrary to our reason and logic advise a man to conceal his mental brilliancy and to identify with "the dust of the earth" or what is apparently lowly. It reminds us of the Biblical saying: "the meek shall inherit the earth." Lao Tzu is pointing out that the Perfect Man does not strive to show brightness, for then the mind becomes clouded with the desire to be other than it is. The purification of the mind is a process of transcending the distinctions of right and wrong, good and bad, friend and enemy - indeed, all such dualistic distinctions are given up as limitations of the mind. Lao Tzu even goes so far as to say:

Give up sainthood, renounce wisdom,
And it will be a hundred times better
for everyone.
Give up kindness, renounce morality,
And men will rediscover filial piety and love.
Give up ingenuity, renounce profit,
And bandits and thieves will disappear.
These three are outward forms alone; they
are not sufficient in themselves.

It is more important
To see the simplicity
To realize one's true nature,
To cast off selfishness
And temper desire.¹⁹

The key line in the above is: "These three are outward forms alone; they are not sufficient in themselves." Sainthood, wisdom, kindness, morality, ingenuity, and profit as qualities will still be manifest in the Perfect Man; however, not because the Perfect Man has aimed at manifesting these or, indeed, any of the attributes. The attributes will manifest of themselves because the Perfect Man is in total harmony with himself and the Tao. No inner conflict will exist, although on the outside it may appear to most men that there is conflict and discord. The Perfect Man experiences ordinary emotions, but his feelings only affect the surface. They do not penetrate to the center of his being.

The main idea is that when a man "sits-in-oblivion" with his mind completely "void", into this ego-less "void" all things come exactly as they are, as they come and go in the cosmic process of Transmutation. In such a state, his mind is comparable to a clear mirror which reflects everything without the slightest distortion or disfigurement.²⁰

The highest stage of spiritual development is the point at which a man becomes completely unified with the Tao.

The man at this stage is situated in the very midst of the Way, being identified and unified with it. He is beyond Life and Death, because the Way with which he is one is beyond Life and Death.

The state of the Way or the Absolute, however, is not simply being beyond Life and Death. It is rather the ultimate metaphysical state, the absolute Unity, to which the dispersion of the ontological Multiplicity is brought back. It is a Unity formed by the unification of the "ten thousand things..."²¹

From all of the preceding, it is clear that Being in the eyes of a

Taoist man of wisdom is essentially different from Being as viewed by most people - whether of an eastern or western civilization. The most extraordinary thing about this view of man is that, at the final stage of development of the Perfect Man, he has achieved a state of Being which is identical, according to Lao Tzu, with the Being of the Tao. Such a man sees, hears, thinks and feels in a super-ordinary way for if we are to believe Lao Tzu, then the Perfect Man has the right to say "I am the Tao." However, it is quite unlikely that a Perfect Man would say this. Furthermore, a certain asymmetry exists such that he could never say, "The Tao is me," without betraying a sense of duality.

The softest of all things in the world (i. e. water) dominates the hardest of all things in the world (like stones and rocks). Having no "being" of its own (i. e. having no definite form of its own as a substance) it penetrates even into that which has no crevices.

By this I know that Non-Doing is most effective. However, the teaching through No-Words (i. e. the word-less teaching given by the Perfect Man, himself remaining silent but his personal influence affecting "naturally" all about him) and the effect of Non-Doing are indeed within the reach of but a very few in the whole world.²²

IV. THE ABSOLUTE BEING ACCORDING TO IBN 'ARABI

Ibn 'Arabī uses the term "Absolute Being" (al-wujūd al-Muṭlaq) or "Universal Being" (al-wujūd al-Kullī) to denote the one Reality which is the ground of all that exists (i. e. the Tao).

The real source of all beings is what Ibn 'Arabī calls "Absolute Being" in the sense of a Reality or a Being whose existence is identical with its Essence...¹

There is only one Reality - and a non-existent subjective multiplicity and non-existent subjective relations which limit and determine the One.²

If we remember this throughout our discussion we shall be subject to much less confusion. The content of the above important quotation is summed up in the Ṣūfī practice of remembrance of God (dhikr Allah): "There is no God but God. "

The concept of "Being" in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī is a very intricate one which, as in the case of Lao Tzu, involves five hierarchical planes of being (Hāḍarat). At either end of this hierarchy lie two poles: The Presence of the Absolute Mystery (Hāḍrat al-ghayb al-Muṭlaq) and the Presence of the absolute manifestation (Hāḍrat al-Shahādat al-muṭlaqa). The first plane of being is the source of the other four planes; it is the most essential, in that this plane is ontologically independent of the other four Hāḍarat: it is the Essence a se and per se. The other four Hāḍarat constitute what is referred to as self-manifestations (tajalliyāt) of the Absolute. Thus, the Absolute in its absoluteness

(Ḥaḍrat al-Dhāt) transcends even the Godhead, which is the second level.

According to al-Kāshānī, a well known commentator on Ibn 'Arabī, the five planes of Being in the philosophy of Ibn 'Arabī are as follows:

- 1.1 Plane of the Essence (Ḥaḍrat al-Dhāt) or Ipseity.
(At the moment of Ipseity there is no qualification.)
- 2.1 Plane of the Attributes and Names (Ḥaḍrat al-Sifāt wa'l-Asmā), also called Plane of the Godhead (Ḥaḍrat al-Ulūhiya).
- 3.1 Plane of the Divine Acts or Operations (Ḥaḍrat al-Af'āl), also called Plane of the Lordship (Ḥaḍrat al-Rubūbiya).
- 4.1 Plane of the Image and the Active Imagination (Ḥaḍrat al-Mithāl wa'l Khayāl).
- 5.1 Plane of the sensible and visible (Ḥaḍrat al-Hiss wa'l-Mushāhada).³

The first four planes compose the world of mystery from man's viewpoint. In the Ṣūfī world-view of Ibn 'Arabī these five basic planes of Being represent an ontological mode of the Absolute Reality in its self-manifestation. These planes constitute among themselves an organic whole where the things of a lower plane serve as images for the things on the planes above.

We can examine these five planes from another viewpoint in terms of the types of being which make up each of the planes. From Ibn 'Arabī's Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam we construct the following schema:

- 1.2 al-Ahadiyyah (the One in its bare, abstraction and attributeless).
- 2.2 Ta'ayyunāt Rūhiya (the Spirits) and the Divine Names which includes al Ḥaqq (the Real, the Godhead).
- 3.2 Ta'ayyunāt Nafsiya (the Souls).

4.2 al-'ayān al-thābita (the eternal forms, the latent potentialities of things).

5.2 al-Khalq (the immanent, the phenomenal, the many).

An additional way of referring to Absolute Being on the first plane (al-Ahadīyah) is as the absolute simplicity and unity of the One. This is the One as the transcendence of both the transcendent (tashbīh) and the immanent (tanzīh). It is to be distinguished from the One (al Wahīd) which admits of the possibility of multiplicity. Al Wahīd is one of the Divine Names and, hence, lies on the second level. The absolute simplicity and unity of the One (al-Ahadīyah) this author believes is the same as No (No Non-being) in the Taoist philosophy since this also denotes the transcendence of both transcendence and immanence and also lies on level one.

It is also important to note that al-Ḥaqq (the Truth, the Godhead) is only one of the Divine Names. Traditionally, in the Islamic tradition, there are 99 Divine Names or Attributes (wazīfa). These are considered very sacred within Ṣūfism since they are the initial lines of force by which the Absolute Being in His Essence manifests on successively lower planes. (The Ṣūfīs believe that in Reality the Names are limitless and infinite in number, and the 99 Names are a type of summary.) I have refrained from listing the 99 Names under category 2.2, since they could form an entire thesis in themselves. Indeed, they have their own internal hierarchy of relationships of higher, lower, and complementariness. It is best to leave these aside for now, except to mention their existence within the second plane.

In his short work, Kitāb Inshā' al-Dawā'ir, Ibn 'Arabī mentions that, strictly speaking, there are only three degrees (maratib) of the

One Being which are:

- 1) Absolute Being (al-wujūd al-Muṭlaq)
- 2) Something which is neither Absolute Being nor non-Being, the world of the archetypes.
- 3) Being of a thing in the external world (al-wujūd al-shay'i fī'aynihī), non-Being.

Reality, which is ultimately one and indivisible in Ibn 'Arabī's philosophy, can be regarded from three different points of view in relation to man's ordinary knowledge.

(1) Reality such as we do not directly know or perceive, but which, following our reason, we logically infer, as we infer the existence of a substance when we perceive its accidents. This is the Divine Essence of which we can predicate nothing except bare existence. It is unknowable and incommunicable when regarded in abstraction... It has no qualities and quantities. (This is 1.2 in the preceding.)

(2) Reality such as we do not directly know or perceive, except by mystical intuition, but whose existence we logically infer following our reason (Categories 2.2, 3.2, 4.2 in the preceding).

(3) Reality as we know it, i.e. Reality as manifested in the external world... Ibn 'Arabī calls this the phenomenal world, appearance, and not-Being. (Category 5.2 in the preceding)⁴

The three planes (i.e. 2.1, 3.1, 4.1) in the preceding, which lie between the Plane of the Essence and the Plane of the sensible and the visible, are self-manifestations of the Absolute Unity; however, strictly speaking these modes of the Absolute Being are neither Absolute Being nor pure not-Being. They manifest in their respective planes as the

Spirits, the Souls and the Forms. It is only through the Divine Essence that they have or receive any Real Being. To believe that these planes of being have any Real Being in themselves is to be caught in illusion, for without the permeation of the Divine Essence they are not-Being.

In the preceding schema there is an apparent multiplicity of beings and planes. However,

"Multiplicity is due to different points of view, not to an actual division in the One Essence ('ayn)."
The whole of Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics rests on this distinction and there is not a single point in his system where it is not introduced in some form or other.

Owing to our finite minds and our inability to grasp the Whole as a Whole, we regard it as a plurality of beings, ascribing to each one characteristics which distinguish it from the rest... What seems to multiply the One is the ahkam (predictions) which we predicate of external objects - the fact that we bring them under categories... In itself the One is simple and indivisible.⁵

The relations between the elements of these five planes of being can easily yield material for many years of research. Although in one sense al-Ḥaqq (the Creator) resides on the second Ḥaḍra and al-Khalq (the Created) resides on the fifth Ḥaḍra, this relationship of Creator-Created is repeated on each plane "dualizing and polarizing a unitotality, a bi-unity whose two terms stand to one another in a relationship of action and passion, corresponding to bāṭin-ẓāhir, hidden and manifest, esoteric and exoteric."⁶ Furthermore, each lower Presence is the reflection and mirror, as well as the image, of what is on the next higher plane. As a consequence, everything that exists in the physical world is a reflection of that which exists in the world of latent potentialities and the 'ayān al-thābita, the latent potentialities or essences, are a reflection or

typification (mithal) of what exists in the world of Spirits (third Ḥaḍra) and so on up to the Divine Essence itself. The relationship of Creator/ Created reminds us of our earlier discussion of Being/Non-being in the philosophy of Lao Tzu.

The Truth, or the Real (al-Ḥaqq, second level), is God in the sense of a transcendent Being, which is different from al-Aḥadīyah, the absolute simplicity and unity of the One (first level). The Real (al-Ḥaqq) must not be taken by itself, but in conjunction with al-Khalq (the phenomenal). Similarly, tanzīh (transcendence) and tashbih (immanence), or iṭlāq (absoluteness) and taqyīd (limitedness), are opposing terms which, according to Ibn 'Arabī, must be taken as complementary terms of the same Unity. This is equivalent to the statement by Lao Tzu:

"All things in the world come from being
And being comes from non-being."⁷

That is, the phenomenal world comes from the transcendent Being as the Godhead (al-Ḥaqq) and the transcendent Being in turn depends upon the immanent (for self-manifestation of the hidden perfection) which is non-being in itself. The transcendent and the immanent are only two different viewpoints (i'tibār) of the Absolute as seen by man in his limitedness of vision. This helps to explain the apparent paradox where Ibn 'Arabī states in the Fuṣuṣ al-Ḥikam: "Ḥaqq is Khalq, Khalq is Ḥaqq; Ḥaqq is not Khalq, Khalq is not Ḥaqq." It is only the vision of a true mystic which can transcend both viewpoints at once.

If thou dost affirm the divine transcendence thou dost condition (the conception of God) and if thou dost affirm His immanence thou dost limit Him; But if thou dost affirm simultaneously the one and the other point of view, thou wilt be exempt from error and be a model of knowledge.⁸

However, even the vision of the mystic can not penetrate to the level of Ḥaḍrat al-Dhāt (1.1 the Presence of the Essence).

The five planes of Being form a hierarchy in which the Presence of the Essence encompasses the Presence of the Godhead (2.1 Ḥaḍrat al-Ulūhīya). In turn, the Presence of the Godhead encompasses the Presence of the Suzerainty or Lordship (3.1 Ḥaḍrat al-Rubūbīya). Next, the Presence of the Lordship encompasses the Presence of the Idea-Image (4.1 Ḥaḍrat al-Mithāl wa'l Khayāl), which, in turn, encompasses the Presence of the sensible world (5.1 Ḥaḍrat al-Ḥiss wa'l-Mushāhada).

The planes of Being two through five constitute what is called by Ibn 'Arabī the "creatures."

Taking up the position of "unification" means that you turn your attention exclusively to the Absolute without taking into consideration the creatures. This attitude is justified because Being belongs to the Absolute alone, and any being is the Absolute itself.⁹

Once again, as we discovered with the Taoism of Lao Tzu, we have a multi-tiered view of Reality. It is helpful to use the analogy of pyramids of Being which interpenetrate one another again, and in which each successive level is contained within the previous ones. This pyramidal view of Reality hinges on the central concept of tajallī ("self-manifestation" of the Absolute).

All (of Ibn 'Arabī's) thinking about the ontological structure of the world turns around this axis; and by so doing develops into a grand-scale cosmic system. . . . Tajallī is the process by which the Absolute, which is absolutely unknowable in itself, goes on manifesting itself in ever more concrete forms. Since this self-manifestation of the Absolute cannot be actualized except through particular determined forms, the self-manifestation is nothing other than a self-determination or self-delimitation of the Absolute.¹⁰

This is equivalent to saying that the Absolute, through a process of self-delimitation, makes itself known to progressively "coarser" levels of Being. Ordinary man resides, thinks, feels, and acts within the fifth level. The intellectual part of man's mind operates successfully and convincingly on this level alone. Anytime man tries to think with his logical mind about a higher plane, his thoughts necessarily distort the reality of the higher plane. What is important is to be able to intuit the Reality behind the levels of the self-manifestation of Being. Ibn 'Arabī's view of Reality is a philosophy which consists of pairs of opposing terms which are meant to bring the reader to the point of mental perplexity.¹¹

With this in mind, I would like to mention a comparison which Professor Izutsu has made between the Taoism of Lao Tzu and the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī. He presents the following relations which he states are equivalent within the respective philosophical systems:

A: Ḥaqq (Truth, Reality) $\xrightarrow{\text{tajallī}}$ mumkināt (possible beings)

B: Tao $\xrightarrow{\text{shēng}}$ wan wu (myriad creatures)¹²

(Tajallī in the above means "manifests as" and shēng means "produces.")

This comparison is singularly striking for the way in which it ties together the essential elements of the two philosophies.

It is possible to sharpen up these two statements as follows:

A': al-Ḥaqq, as level two (the plane of Attributes, Divine Names, Godhead, the Real) $\xrightarrow{\text{tajallī}}$ al-Khalq, level five (the plane of the sensible and the visible, the immanent, the phenomenal, the many).

B': The One, as level two (Pure Being, Absence of non-being),
wu wu $\xrightarrow{\text{shēng}}$ wan wu, level five (the myriad creatures).

The Tao is not the same as al-Ḥaqq (level 2) except in the comprehensive sense in which it includes all the levels of Being. Short of this inclusive sense, the Tao is closest in the philosophy of Ibn 'Arabī to al-ghayb al-Muṭlaq, the Absolute Unknown, the Ipseity which is unqualifiable. In a way similar to that in which the Tao encompasses all levels of being (and non-being) including itself, the Divine Essence (al-Dhāt) in the philosophy of Ibn 'Arabī encompasses, permeates and sustains all levels of being including itself. In both cases it is at the stage of the One (level 2) that we can begin to speak about an unfoldment and subsequent production of the myriad creatures of the creation.

As Professor Izutsu points out, "the Multiplicity is for Ibn 'Arabī the mumkināt or 'possible beings' while for Tao Tzu and Chuang Tzu the wan wu are the ten thousand things."¹³ However, Ibn 'Arabī states that "the One (level two) is al-Ḥaqq (the Real or God), the Many (level five) are al-Khalq (the created beings, the phenomenal world)."¹⁴ It is true that the "possible beings" (level four) are produced by the Godhead (al-Ḥaqq); but, within the philosophy of Ibn 'Arabī, Ḥaqq and Khalq are two specific opposing terms which are used to denote the Real and the Phenomenal aspects of one Reality. Therefore, Khalq which refers to the fifth level (as does wan wu) is to be preferred. Finally, we note that in Lao Tzu's terminology wu (nothing or non-being) indicates the emptiness of being or the non-beingness of the physical world (wan wu). For Lao Tzu the physical world is a world without real substance in itself;

it is non-being. This is identical to what we discovered about Ibn 'Arabī's characterization of the physical world as not-being.

Before concluding this section we note several further points about the notion of Being in Taoism and Sufism. The Tao as the ultimate reality of the Way is often referred to as "the Mother of all things" (which is level one), although as we saw earlier the Mother can also be seen as the origin of "the ten thousand things"; in this latter sense the Mother functions as the three (level four) and corresponds to the latent potentialities or eternal forms in Ibn 'Arabī's system. The Tao of the first level, as Essence, is symbolized with a female referent. Al-Dhāt, the Divine Essence in Ibn 'Arabī's formulation, is referred to as al-huwīyah, which connotes "He-ness." Thus, we have a feminine referent to the ultimate Reality in Lao Tzu's philosophy and a masculine referent in that of Ibn 'Arabī. It is important to realize that "He" or "She" do not mean masculinity or femininity - they simply refer with respect to their lingual modes of expression to "the origin of all things."¹⁶ Both men use their respective references to level one with the realization that in so doing they are not really naming the Absolute Mystery which lies beyond the process of begetting and returning, beyond the process of self-manifestation. It remains a Mystery.

V. THE PERFECT MAN ACCORDING TO IBN 'ARABI

"The Perfect Man is in immediate contact with Reality, and through him the essential unity of the universal and the particular are realized."¹ The Perfect Man (al-insān al-kāmil) is not easily described or defined, for any description we might give will depend upon what Ibn 'Arabī means by "Reality" and by "essential unity." Over the next few pages we will be trying to portray the pieces of a puzzle which fit together as a whole, but whose individual pieces seem to vie for the same place by being in apparent contradiction with another piece. A helpful analogy is that our discussion here is like trying to construct a puzzle meant to be put together in three dimensions on the top of a two dimensional table. Actually it is even more complicated than this. The part of the puzzle that we can "talk about" can be partially described using 6-dimensional geometry; however, "Reality" as used by Ibn 'Arabī would require an n-dimensional geometry where n is infinite.²

First we return to the notion of Reality:

According to Ibn 'Arabī there is only one Reality in existence... This Reality is God. "If you regard Him (God) through Him," Ibn 'Arabī says, "then He regards Himself through Himself which is a state of unity; but if you regard Him through yourself then the unity vanishes."³

The Perfect Man is a man who has realized his place in the universe. In realizing this he knows how to contemplate God perfectly. "In fact, it is through Him (the Perfect Man) that God knows Himself, for He (the Perfect Man) is the manifested consciousness of God."⁴ Once again, as

we found with Lao Tzu, it is no ordinary concept of Man that we are examining. It is only a mystic, (that is, a man who has developed a power of transcendent intuition) who can aspire to be such a Man.

According to Ibn 'Arabī, only a man who is able to "see" with the inward eye of the heart (qalb) has the possibility of such mystical intuition.

In Ibn 'Arabī, as in Ṣūfism in general, the heart (qalb) is the organ which produces true knowledge, comprehensive intuition, the gnosis (ma'rifa) of God and the divine mysteries... this "heart" is not the conical organ of flesh, situated on the left side of the chest, although there is a certain connection, the modality of which, however, is essentially unknown... Here we have to do with a "subtle physiology" elaborated on the basis of ascetic, ecstatic, and contemplative experience and expressing itself in symbolic language.¹⁵

This notion of the "heart" as a psycho-spiritual organ, which must be distinguished from the heart which is a bodily organ, has been given the utmost importance by mystics in all periods of history in all countries (including the American Indians, the Hindus of India, Christians, and Jewish Cabbalists). For Ibn 'Arabī, the "heart" is the eye of the knower ('ārif) through which God knows Himself and reveals Himself to Himself in the forms of His Names or Divine Attributes.

At this point, let us mention three classifications of man used by Ibn 'Arabī. The first is a distinction between two types of men: those whose minds have an otherworldly structure and those whose minds are focussed on a worldly structure. The first type of man is "a servant of the Lord" (in Arabic, 'abd al-rabb); he immediately grasps the Reality underlying things. This reminds us of the Perfect Man in Lao Tzu's vision of man: "Keeping down the unstable (physical) soul under control, (the Perfect Man) embraces the One and is never separated therefrom."⁶

The second type of man is a "servant of reasoning": his mind is deeply involved with describing and analyzing the physical universe by the use of the intellect or logical part of the mind.

The second classification distinguishes between three types: the knower ('ārif), the non-knower (ghayr 'ārif), and the ignorant (jāhil). The knower is "a man who sees the Absolute from the Absolute in the Absolute, and by the Absolute itself."⁷ He completely identifies himself with God in every possible respect and sees God with God's own eyes from the very viewpoint of God. The "knower", here, is another name for the Perfect Man.

The "non-knower" is "a man who sees the Absolute from the Absolute, in the Absolute and by his own self."⁸ Since he sees reality by his own self, it is deformed by his sight. The "ignorant one" is a man who adores and worships God only in a form peculiar to a particular religion which he happens to hold while denying all other forms or points of view. Here, religion is to be seen as a point of view from which one sees God. Ibn 'Arabī at this point refers us to the Koran:

God the Blessed and the Exalted is wider and greater than to be confined to one particular religion to the exclusion of others. For He says: "To whichever direction you turn, there surely is the Face of God." (II, 115) God does not specify (in this verse) a particular place in which the Face of God is to be found.⁹

The ignorant is "a man who sees the Absolute neither from the Absolute nor in the Absolute, and who expects to see the Absolute by his own self."¹⁰

The third classification distinguishes once again between three types of men: men of "immediate tasting" (dhawq), men of imagination (khayāl), and men of reason.

The man of reason is the lowest form. This type is content with understanding God and the world by exercising his thinking power. We are reminded of Lao Tzu who says:

"When wisdom and intelligence are born, The great pretense begins."¹¹ and

"Give up learning, and put an end to your troubles."¹²

The men of imagination are people of Belief or Faith (ahl al-īmān). This type of man worships Him as if he sees Him. A man who uses the active imagination to see God becomes after a time a witness (shāhid), that is, he begins to witness various states of affairs in the invisible world of the 'alam al-mithāl, the intermediate plane of Idea-Images or subtle matter. A man through the power of belief by exercising his active or creative imagination may penetrate to this level and see the latent potentialities of all things, the 'ayān al-thābita. Lao Tzu says:

"Deal with it before it happens.
Set things in order before there is confusion."¹³

This is similar to the man of imagination who is able to "see" the form of things before they manifest in the physical world.

The man of immediate tasting is the highest form of man; he sees Reality and the world through the experience of "unveiling" (kashf). This type of man obtains real knowledge of the Absolute for:

...his own "self" is nothing other than the He-ness of the Absolute, (and his knowledge thus obtained is easily extended to everything because) everything in the world of Being, whether present or future, is nothing other than the He-ness of the Absolute; indeed, everything is the He-ness itself.¹⁴

This is the Perfect Man who has become One with the One in realizing that he was never separate from Him. This stage of

realization is higher than knowledge, for there is no longer any distinction between knower and known. This is a state of unity wherein the Perfect Man's being is One with the Being of the Divine Essence.

By means of aspiration, man can come to know his Self, and, through this knowledge, His Lord (al-Rabb). This is the third tajallī, Ḥaḍrat al-Rubūbiya (the Presence of the Lord or Suzereinty), also known as the plane of divine actions. From there, it is possible for a man to be united with the Presence of the Godhead (the Attributes) and, finally, with the Presence of the Essence (ḥaḍrat al-Dhāt). This final state of Being is the final stage of fana (self-annihilation) and baqa (resurrection) which is described as:

the passing away from all the attributes of God (second tajallī) and their "relations", i.e. the contemplation of God as the Essence of the Universe... He (the mystic) realizes the meaninglessness of causality and such divine Names as the Creator, the Designer, the Giver and so on. This is the ultimate goal... (which) is identical with what Ibn 'Arabī calls the station of absolute transcendence of the unity (manzilat tanzīhu't tawḥīd).¹⁵

This final station is one of realization rather than knowledge. As Ibn 'Arabī says at the end of the final canto of his Book of Theophanies:

Dearly beloved!
Let us go toward Union.
And if we find the road
That leads to separation,
We will destroy separation.
Let us go hand in hand.
Let us enter the presence of Truth.
Let it be our judge
And imprint its seal upon our union
For ever.¹⁶

Ibn 'Arabī is describing here man's longing to return to the state of absolute union with the Essence. All separation has been left behind;

"for if thou contemplatest Him through Himself, it is He who is contemplating Himself by Himself..."¹⁷ Beyond this lies 'amā, the abysmal darkness,¹⁸ which is a symbolic way of referring to the ankar al-nakirat, "the most indeterminate of all indeterminates." This is beyond the aspiration of any man. No degree of realization brings man in search for unity past complete unity with the One.¹⁹ The Tao which has no name, remains for Lao Tzu and the ankar al-nakirat remains for Ibn 'Arabī the same: a Mystery of Mysteries.

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, Lao Tzu's notion of the Tao and Ibn 'Arabī's reference to al-Huwīyah (the Divine Essence per se and a se) unequivocally outstrip our ability to express the substance of these terms with clarity. When we try to resolve through the use of the intellect the interrelationships between the various levels or meanings of "being" in the philosophies of these men we discover that on the level of the Mystery of Mysteries we can say very little; however, we have been able to clarify much about the other levels. The two philosophies are strikingly similar in enough ways to challenge the reader to see the world through the eyes of Lao Tzu or Ibn 'Arabī. Perhaps most exciting of all is the vision that man can aspire to the Way or the Absolute through knowing himself. Both Lao Tzu and Ibn 'Arabī, though separated by some seventeen centuries in time, and having no historical or cultural connection that we know of, have left us with two paths to follow which, though different in some respects, eventually lead the aspirant to the same essential point of truth. The author hopes that this thesis has raised certain fundamental questions which the reader may be challenged to resolve for himself. At this point we are reminded of Ludwig Wittgenstein's closing lines in the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus:

6. 54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them - as steps - to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

He must transcend these propositions, and
then he will see the world aright.

What we cannot speak about we must pass over
in silence.

So it is with the mystery of the Way. One uses it and is used by it,
for a time, but in the end even the Way is thrown away or, simply, it
disappears.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹T. Izutsu, A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism, vol. II, p. 201.

²Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, propositions 6.52, 6.521, 6.522.

I. BIOGRAPHIES OF LAO TZU AND IBN 'ARABI

¹Holmes Welch, Taoism: The Parting of the Way, p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 4.

³Koran, XXIV, 37.

⁴Ibn 'Arabī, The Sufis of Andalusia (R. W. J. Austin, tr.) p. 46.

⁵Ibn 'Arabī, Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, (Angela Seymour. foreward and tr.).
p. 4.

II. THE TAO ACCORDING TO LAO TZU

¹Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching (D. C. Lau, tr.), chapter I, p. 57.

²The term "wu wu wu" strictly speaking comes from Chuang Tzu, the other major Taoist author.

³M. Kaltenmark, Lao Tzu and Taoism, p. 38.

⁴Lao Tzu, XXXII, (Izutsu, tr.) vol. II, pp. 102-3.

⁵Lao Tzu, X*, (Feng and English, tr.).

⁶T. Izutsu, op. cit., vol. II, p. 100.

*All footnote references to Lao Tzu are by chapter number since the translation by Feng and English has no page numbers.

⁷A. E. Affifi, The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyid Dīn-Ibnul 'Arabī, p. 87.

⁸M. Kaltenmark, op. cit., p. 39.

⁹Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁰W. T. Chan, The Way of Lao Tzu, p. 98.

¹¹Lao Tzu, II, (W. T. Chan, tr.) p. 101.

¹²Ibid., XL, p. 173.

¹³ibid., XXV, p. 144.

¹⁴T. Izutsu, op. cit., vol. II, p. 108.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Lao Tzu, XIV, (Feng and English, tr.).

III. THE PERFECT MAN ACCORDING TO LAO TZU

¹Lao Tzu, XLIX, (Feng and English, tr.)

²Lao Tzu, LII, (D. C. Lau, tr.) p. 113.

³Arthur Waley, The Way and Its Power, p. 117.

⁴Lao Tzu, LXIV, (Feng and English, tr.).

⁵Huston Smith, "Tao Now - An Ecological Testament", in Ian Barbour (ed.), Earth Might Be Fair (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 79.

⁶T. Izutsu, op. cit., vol. II, p. 163.

⁷Lao Tzu, XXII, (T. Izutsu, tr.) vol. II, p. 163.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Beshara Ibn 'Arabī manuscript, p. 20.

- ¹⁰Lao Tzu, X, (D. C. Lau, tr.) p. 66.
- ¹¹Lao Tzu, X, (Feng and English, tr.).
- ¹²T. Izutsu, op. cit., vol. II, p. 51.
- ¹³Lao Tzu, LXXXI, (D. C. Lau, tr.) p. 143.
- ¹⁴Chuang Tzu, II, p. 56.
- ¹⁵Lao Tzu, XII, (T. Izutsu, tr.) vol. II, p. 55.
- ¹⁶Lao Tzu, XLVII, (T. Izutsu, tr.) vol. II, p. 56.
- ¹⁷T. Izutsu, op. cit., vol. II, p. 60.
- ¹⁸Lao Tzu, LVI, (Feng and English, tr.).
- ¹⁹Ibid., XIX.
- ²⁰T. Izutsu, op. cit., vol. II, p. 62.
- ²¹Ibid., p. 69.
- ²²Lao Tzu, XLIII, (T. Izutsu, tr.) vol. II, pp. 171-2.

IV. THE ABSOLUTE BEING ACCORDING TO IBN 'ARABI

- ¹A. E. Affifi, op. cit., p. 5.
- ²Ibid., p. 48.
- ³H. Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī, p. 360 (quoting al-Kāshānī).

It should be pointed out that in the writings of Ibn 'Arabī and other great Sugi's such as al-Kashani there are several slightly differing descriptions of the Ḥaḍarat. In essence, they come to the same thing and differ only in the point of view taken. The author is indebted to Bulent Rauf for clarifying this point which often causes unnecessary perplexity.

- ⁴A. E. Affifi, op. cit., pp. 36-38.

⁵Ibid., p. 2.

⁶H. Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī, p. 225.

⁷Lao Tzu, XL, (W. T. Chan, tr.) p. 173.

⁸Ibn 'Arabī, Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, (A. Seymour, tr.), p. 26.

⁹T. Izutsu, op.cit., vol. I, pp. 48-49 (quoting al-Kāshānī).

¹⁰Ibid., p. 143.

¹¹See the introduction to Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, (A. Seymour, tr.)

¹²See T. Izutsu, op.cit., vol. II, p. 195.

¹³Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁴A. E. Affifi, op.cit., p. 12.

¹⁵Here again the author is indebted to Bulent Rauf for his assistance.

V. THE PERFECT MAN ACCORDING TO IBN 'ARABI

¹A. E. Affifi, op.cit., p. 80.

²For a further discussion of 6-dimensional geometries as applied to the subject of this thesis see J. G. Bennett, The Dramatic Universe, especially volume I, pages 267-281.

³Ibid., p. 2.

⁴ibid., p. 13.

⁵H. Corbin, op.cit., p. 221.

⁶Lao Tzu, X, (T. Izutsu, tr.) op.cit., vol. II, p. 163.

⁷Ibn 'Arabī, Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, p. 113 in T. Izutsu, op.cit., vol. I, p. 245.

⁸Ibid.

⁹ibid.

¹⁰ibid.

¹¹Lao Tzu, XVIII, (Feng and English, tr.).

¹²Ibid., XX.

¹³ibid., LXIV.

¹⁴Ibn 'Arabī, Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, p. 122 (quoted in T. Izutsu, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 251-2).

¹⁵A. E. Affifi, op. cit., p. 145.

¹⁶Ibn 'Arabī, Book of Theophanies, final canto (quoted in H. Corbin, op. cit., p. 175).

¹⁷Ibn 'Arabī, Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, p. 45.

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