

Metaphor as Conflict, Conflict as Metaphor

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This article deals with a double idea: Metaphor itself, by bridging two domains of experience, lives in the tension, even contradictoriness, of what it brings together, and in that way may be uniquely suited to present a theory of mental life that centers on inner polarities and antitheses, i.e., inner conflict in a wide sense, not necessarily bound to the drive or structural metaphors. In turn, the concept of *conflict* itself entails a spectrum of warlike or violent metaphors, such as defense, antitheses, clashing values or forces, being torn or broken apart, inner part personalities fighting with each other, etc. The history of the metaphors for various forms of inner conflict are traced back in Western and Eastern literature (Homer, Plato, the Bible, the Talmud, St. Augustine, Confucius, and Lao Tzu), thus broadening the search for a common ground for psychoanalytic perspectives.

The concept of *symbol*, encompassing that of metaphor, is itself derived from a striking and ritualized metaphor of fitting together what has been broken apart, a ritual that is very similar in ancient Greek and Chinese tradition.

“THE SEAL OF THE MIND”

Since I wrote my paper defending the use of metaphor in theory formation in the sciences in general, in psychoanalysis in particular (Wurmser, 1977), there have been several pertinent developments. They have been ably summarized and examined in various perspectives in the previous issue of *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* (2009, vol. 29, no. 1). The most important step, it seems to me, was distinguishing metaphoric processes from metaphor proper. The latter is bound to language and is one form of symbolic formation. The former is a biologically deeply anchored process of cross-modal equations that can already be observed in newborns (Stern, 1985; Wurmser 2000, p. 27; Aragno, 2009, p. 31). The new, broader view is simply put: “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another . . . most of our normal conceptual system is metaphorically structured; that is, most concepts are partially understood in terms of other concepts” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980/2003, pp. 5, 56). It goes beyond words and deals more generally with concepts, understanding, and action: “Metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action and only derivatively a matter of language” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 153). Aragno (2009) speaks of “metaphoric thought as a primary activity of mind” (p. 33). Quoting Borbely, she refers to the *metaphorical process* as being situated between primary and

secondary process (Aragno, 2009). “It is a fundamental *law* of ideation, a principle of synthesis and integration” (Aragno, 2009, p. 36).

I asked, therefore (Wurmser, 1989, p. 33), “Is not all conceiving of truth [*Erfassung der Wahrheit*] lastly founded in the metaphoric action of the human being?” More specifically, and summarizing, I wrote in the same work:

Natural science does not rest until it has resolved everything into mathematical relations. The humanities trace back their phenomena to formal stylistic relations. Could it be that psychoanalysis has to put everything into relations of polarities? Is the idiom specific for it that of metaphors for paradoxes, for multiple refractions of conflicts and polarities? Does it live in the spirit of Socratic irony, like creativity in general, forever questioning all knowledge anew, disquieting, constantly on the way? “Restlessness and dignity—this is the seal of the mind (or spirit)” [*Rastlosigkeit und Würde—das ist das Siegel des Geistes*, Thomas Mann, *Joseph und seine Brüder*, 1933/1966, p. 50]. And doesn’t it therefore show, more than all the other symbolic activities of man, the dominating double principle of conflict and complementarity? [Wurmser, 1989, pp. 499–500].

There is hardly any moment in psychoanalytic work in which we are not aware of voices of the personality that contradict each other, of parts that struggle with each other. Such inner splits are the hallmark of the mind when studied with our method, an *a priori* starting point for our systematic efforts to understand our inner life and our dialogue with others: “We seek not merely to describe and to classify phenomena, but to understand them as signs of an interplay of forces in the mind, as a manifestation of purposeful intentions working concurrently or in mutual opposition. We are concerned with a *dynamic view* of mental phenomena. On our view the phenomena that are perceived must yield in importance to trends which are only hypothetical” (Freud, 1916/1917, p. 67).

It is important to begin in good time to reckon with the fact that mental life is the arena and battleground for mutually opposing purposes or, to put it non-dynamically, that it consists of contradictions and pairs of contraries. Proof of the existence of a particular purpose is no argument against the existence of an opposite one; there is room for both. It is only a question of the attitude of these contraries to each other, and of what effects are produced by the one and by the other [Freud, 1916/1917, pp. 76–77].

The central concern for us as psychoanalysts is the consistent, systematic exploration of inner conflict, especially of unconscious inner conflict. No matter how we try to define our work, it always comes down to the fact that the focus, the center of our interest during our analytic work at its best, lies on inner conflict. Everything else moves to the periphery; it is not irrelevant, but our inner orientation is so that we notice it as part of the surrounding field, not as the beacon that guides us. In this way, our inner life becomes the most prominent example for the word of Heraklitus, the pre-Socratic philosopher, that “war is the father of all things—*polemos pater panton*.” *Polemos* can certainly be translated as conflict.

As I described in 1977 in more detail, there are other approaches to an understanding of the mind, especially those that look for the inner growth toward harmony and the full development of what Aristotle dubbed *entelechy*: that try to achieve the indwelling essence of being, and correspondingly to rectify deviations from such a path and hence deficits and defects. But our approach centers on the vision of conflicts of contradictory forces or parts or values and their

possible complementarity, i.e., that such opposites do not exclude each other, but complement them: “*Contraria sunt complementa.*”

The notion of inner conflict did not originate with Freud; its systematic use as explanatory device par excellence did. In his, and even more so in our, work, relevant explanation more and more moves away from the shortcut attempts at reducing our inner life to certain large factors, like trauma, stages of libido development, narcissism, masochism, and repetition compulsion. If these concepts are taken as explanations of causality, the clinician soon discovers that their usefulness stops precisely there where the problem begins. They are the beginning, not the end, of the search. Instead, the stopping point of such exploration is the concept of a specific inner conflict, specifically inner preconscious conflict that stands for, is derivative of, long-range, unsolved unconscious inner conflicts in multiple layerings. Thus, psychoanalytic explanation rests in an understanding of *conflict causality*: the causes of what we observe are seen in many layers of inner conflict. Conflict does not simply refer to that between drives and ego, drives and superego, ego and outer reality, but also between opposite ego aspects, between discordant superego parts, as between different ideals and values, between sharply split loyalties, even between opposing drives, between ideas and affects, between conformity and self-loyalty, etc. It is also not so that conflict psychology is synonymous with the exploration of Oedipal issues or even with the structural model, as important as both are for conflict psychology; both of them deal with special forms of conflict. Nor does conflict understanding, including the analysis of unconscious conflict, have to be tied to drive theory (Modell, this issue). There are very many levels of inner conflict: between ideas, values, affects, entire “subpersonalities” within the self, as it were different selves, “the soul as multitude of subjects, as community building of drives and affects” (Nietzsche, 1885, p. 20), as “dividua,” as Nietzsche somewhere put it ironically.

Thus psychoanalysis is grounded in a philosophy that sees its center in *conflict and paradox, in polarity and complementarity*, and that seeks on many levels the dichotomies of knowing, acting and feeling. This vision did not originate with Freud, but is profoundly rooted in Western literature and philosophy, and hints of it may even be traced in Chinese thought. Our classical writings for thousands of years are replete with metaphors for such inner oppositions: for inner breaks and struggles and for the abyss that opens up when such contradictions are unbridgeable and unsolvable.

THE CENTRALITY OF METAPHOR

As stated earlier (Wurmser, 1977, 1989; see also Sharpe, 1940, Caruth and Ekstein, 1966, Voth, 1970; Arlow, 1979; Modell, 2003, 2005, 2009), the analyst’s work has to be largely *metaphorical*. Arlow (1979) spoke of the whole of psychoanalysis as a metaphorizing odyssey, it “is essentially a metaphorical enterprise” (Arlow, 1979, p. 373, quoted by Aragno, 2009, p. 45): “The patient addresses the analyst metaphorically, the analyst listens and understands in a corresponding manner. Under the influence of neurotic conflict, the patient perceives and experiences the world in a metaphorical way” (Arlow, 1979, pp. 373–374), and he quotes Empson that it is ambiguity that makes metaphor possible: “Ambiguity implies a dynamic quality to language which enables meaning to be deepened and enriched as various layers of it become simultaneously available” (Arlow, 1979, p. 373).

“The language of dreams is entirely metaphorical,” says Aragno (2009, p. 42). “Metaphor is fictive, not factual; its message imaginative, not literal. Metaphors do not deliver data, but evoke *insight*; image and concept here fuse in thought” (p. 43). Quoting Goodman, she adds: “The oddity is that metaphorical truth is compatible with literal falsity” (p. 36). “Truth is always relative to a conceptual system that is defined in large part by metaphor” (Lakoff and Johnson, p. 159); there is no absolute, objectivist truth.

Primary process thinking underlying both neurosis and dream follows the logical laws of mythical thinking. Because they work with images and because they overstep the lines between perceptual categories, metaphors appeal to mythical thinking. Already the etymology of the word *metaphora* indicates the close relationship to one of the basic concepts of psychoanalysis: it means *transference* (Wurmser, 1977; Grassi, 1979).

One of the most fascinating discoveries in the research of early infancy is the newborn’s and infant’s striking “capacity to transfer perceptual experience from one sensory modality to another” (Stern, 1985, p. 47). Such “yoking of the tactile and visual experiences is brought about by way of the innate design of the perceptual system, not by way of repeated world experience. No learning is needed initially” (p. 48). This implies “that the infant, from the earliest days of life, forms and acts upon abstract representations of qualities of perception” (p. 51). In other words, *abstraction*, i.e., the ability to transfer formal qualities between different modalities, exists from the very beginning, independent from all experience, and thus is an immediate given, is *a priori*. Metaphorical thought is only a special case of this fundamental characteristic of our mind. Metaphorical process is an inborn readiness and manifests itself independent from language.

What Aristotle saw as the “by far greatest token of genius” (*euphyias te semeion*) in the poet, i.e., the use of metaphor (*poly de megiston to metaphorikon einai*) can by rights also be claimed for the analyst: “Seeing what is similar” (l.c.). Similes, figures of speech, are an important road that may very directly lead to what is unconscious. Philosophically, it means also a great deal that the analytic models of insight and of ordering the data are themselves of metaphorical nature.

This philosophical attitude does also greater justice to the complexity of inner life than a closed and dogmatic system of theories could do. Theoretical models as metaphorical renderings that allow approximation to *the truth*, but are not absolute; models that are more useful for this purpose than others; all the models of the different schools being attempts to order smaller or larger segments of observations, some handier than others; based on such models, the technical guidelines as being more or less effective, short or long term, helpfully, yet unfortunately also often harmfully—these are the *pragmatic* foundations upon which, in my own psychoanalytic work, the concept of truth is built (Wurmser, 2000). “Each metaphoric explanatory system represents, for its adherents, the best possible current understanding of the phenomena displayed in our consulting rooms, and is therefore heuristically useful, even essential, to the followers of that system” (Wallerstein, this issue).

METAPHOR AS REPRESENTATION OF CONFLICT

If psychoanalysis is the art and scientific study of interpreting our inner life, especially those parts disguised and hidden from ourselves—that is, if it is a form of symbolically connected, meaningful wholes, patterns, strands, sequences of experience—then the science of analysis has to describe and

develop as many comprehensive “models,” “frameworks,” “myths” (metaphors) as are practically useful and theoretically consistent, coherent, and integrated [Wurmser, 1977, p. 493].

Today I add: In these theoretical endeavors at explanation, metaphoric systems that center on conflict and related concepts have to assume a privileged position.

The trivial definition of metaphor is “a word *substituted* for another on account of the resemblance or analogy between their significations” (Black, 1962, p. 31). The one Aristotle uses is more specific and is based on the etymology of *metaphora* as transference (Wurmser, 1977): “Metaphor is the application of a strange term either transferred from the genus and applied to the species (*epiphora . . . apo tou genous epi eidos*) or from the species and applied to the genus, or from one species to another or else by analogy (*kata to analogon*)” (Aristotle, 1927, p. 80). According to Black, it is a contracted comparison (1962, p. 36). Furthermore, Black suggests the “interaction view”: “In the simplest formulation, when we use a metaphor we have two thoughts of different things active together and supported by a single word, or phrase, whose meaning is a resultant of their interaction.” (Black, 1962, p. 38). He comments: “To speak of the ‘interaction’ of two thoughts ‘active together’ (or, again, of their ‘interillumination’ or ‘co-operation’) is to use a metaphor emphasizing the dynamic aspects of a good reader’s response to a nontrivial metaphor” (p. 39). “The metaphor selects, emphasizes, suppresses, and organizes features of the principal subject by implying statements about it that normally apply to the subsidiary subject” (Black, 1962, p. 44–45). Metaphor transforms and reorganizes the view. “The set of literal statements so obtained will not have the same power to inform and enlighten as the original” (p. 46).

This idea is deepened by Beardsley (1967) when he talks about the “verbal-opposition theory”: “This theory . . . rests upon 1) a distinction between two levels of meaning, and 2) the principle that metaphor involves essentially a *logical conflict of central meanings*” (p. 286, italics in original).

This inherent difference, and I add contradictoriness and tension, is implied, but not made explicit when Modell (1997, p. 106) defines metaphor as “the mapping of one conceptual domain onto a dissimilar conceptual domain . . . resulting in a transfer of meaning from one to the other” (quoted by Bornstein and Becker, this issue). Similarly, the latter authors describe the metaphor (metaphorically, in an inevitable circularity) as “the glue that links disparate aspects of human life, over time and across different contexts, enabling us to construct cohesive life narratives that give meaning to past and present experience” (Bornstein and Becker, this issue).

In contrast, White (this issue) stresses “the emphasis on collision, tension and opposition over collusion and similarity” in modern metaphor. I understand it similarly when Borbely (this issue) writes about “the tension inherent in metaphor which keeps the target away from the source yet at the same time connects source and target.”

I would stress the “logical conflict of central meanings” as the nub of my argument. At the end of this article, in connection with Lao Tzu, I talk about indirect, i.e., metaphorical, presentation of conflict, by using logical and perceptual contradiction as an indirect presentation of affective conflict.

Taking this together, we conclude that we may see in nontrivial metaphors the result of a conflict of mental contents that usually have a strong emotional significance. If the psychoanalytic method as the study of inner processes focuses, above all, on seeing their essence as conflict, it is evident that metaphor has to be the instrument *par excellence* to represent conflict. Such

symbolization of conflict by metaphor serves a causal understanding of mental processes and is specifically and essentially explanatory.

“WORDS HAVE AN ANCESTOR”¹—A HISTORY OF SOME CENTRAL METAPHORS

I suggest that the search for common grounds for our divergent perspectives may be considerably helped if we study the metaphors that have been central throughout history for the understanding of the mind, most specifically those for conflict and its opposite: harmony.

Fitting Together What Is Broken

Metaphor is a special form of symbol; metaphoric processes are paramount forms of symbolic processes. But there is an inevitable circularity involved: When we talk about this, we can only do so by employing metaphors as well; faded, even unconsciously deployed metaphors to be sure, but metaphors and metaphoric processes, nevertheless. Etymology is largely a study of the emerging and development of metaphors.

The next question is then: What is the original metaphor standing behind *symbol*? It has a fascinating history in both world cultures, the Western and the Eastern.

The Greek word *symbolon* is derived from the verb *syballein*, which means *to throw together*. Its original meaning is that of sign, of a contract, in particular the sign by which old friends—guest and host—recognize each other. This sign consisted of a little tablet or a ring that had been broken in two at the time of farewell. Now, at the reencounter, these two pieces should fit together (Benseler-Kägi, 1931; Tzermias, 1976). Thus the symbol fits together two disparate realities: things and significance, concrete and what we call abstract.

It is fascinating to observe that something parallel happened in China: The ideogram for minister, *Qíng*, is derived from the sign for *qíng*, the image of a piece of wood or jade that had been broken in two. Here, the two separate pieces have to signify and verify charge and honor:

In ancient times the Emperor, when investing the feudatories or officials, handed over to them one half of a piece of wood or of jade diversely cut out; the other half was used to make the proof, as the modern counterfoil. The two pieces gathered are the *qíng*. . . . When they appeared before the Emperor, or when they held the functions of their office, the feudatories or officials had this kind of scepter in their hands. It was used also as a seal [Wieger, 1927, p. 147].

Astonishingly, even the modern word for symbol, *Fúhào*, uses another ideogram for the verification in front of emperor or king by such a fitting correspondence of pieces of bamboo, jade, or bronze.

To return to the Greek, in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, the fiery message of Troy's fall transmitted from mountaintop to mountaintop is called “proof and symbol—*tekmar* . . . *symbolon te*.” Here the word has already our meaning: The fire has only one signification, the one that had been previously agreed upon.

On the other side we find in Plato's *Symposium* the original use in the famous myth of Eros: Zeus had cut apart the previously complete human being: “So ancient is the desire of another

¹Lao Tzu, 1981, ch. 70.

which is implanted in us, reuniting our original nature; making one of two, and healing the state of man. Each of us when separated, having one side only, like a flat fish, is but the indenture of man (*anthropou symbolon*), and he is always looking for his other half” (Jowell, 1967, p. 158).

Just like in Chinese magical Taoism, *symbola* can also in Greece be used in a mythical religious sense: In the orphic tradition about the mysteries of Dionysos, the story goes that the god as child was lured away by the titans with the help of such *symbola*, in particular by a mirror, then torn to pieces by them, buried, or resurrected. Therefore, the mirror became the symbol for his death, to a mythically powerful, paradoxically valued, sacred object because it also meant transmigration of the soul and liberation. It became a symbol for spiritual resurrection and fulfillment (Guépin, 1968, pp. 241–251). It reappears in the mirror image of Narkissos and in our newer narcissism theories (Kohut, 1971).

“Whereas in allegory something that can be represented is replaced by something else that is expressed, in the mystical symbol something that can be presented stands for another reality that is removed from the world of presentation and expression. . . . A hidden life that has no expression finds it in the symbol. Symbol is sign, but more than sign” (Scholem, 1957, p. 29).

“Fight, but Do Not Sin”—Conflict in the Western Tradition

The view of inner life as conflict is one that is, among others, intrinsic to the Western intellectual tradition. We find prototypes for it already in the Homeric epics: In the *Odyssey*, when Odysseus is about to stab the Cyclops Polyphemos, he stopped: “The second mind [thought] stopped me” (*heteros de me thymos eryken*), the recognition of their own inability to remove the giant boulder from the entrance. And then there is the beautiful passage in the *Iliad*, 11. 402 ff. Left alone by the other Greeks in the middle of battle, Odysseus

spoke to his own great-hearted spirit (*eipe pros hon megalétora thymon*): ‘Ah me, what will become of me? It will be a great evil if I run, fearing their multitude, yet deadlier if I am caught alone; and Kronos’ son drove to flight the rest of the Danaans. Yet still, why does the heart [mind] within me debate on these things (*alla tie moi tauta philos dieléxato thymos*)? Since I know that it is the cowards who walk out of the fighting, but if one is to win honor in battle, he must by all means stand his ground strongly, whether he be struck or strike down another” [trans. Lattimore; cf. Dodds, 1951, pp. 16, 25, also for additional examples].

Ancient Greek tragedy revolves around the pivot of the tragic choice—the necessity to decide between the opposing commitments to two enormously important values, ideals, and loyalties. Many symbols or metaphors in Greek tragedy reflect this consciousness of inner conflict—e.g., the “blue clashing rocks” or *Symplegades* of Euripides’ *Medea*, the repeated use of the term *diphrontis*, “of two minds” in the *Libation Bearers* of Aeschylus and in the *Hippolytos* of Euripides. It appears to refer with particular poignancy to what I have referred to as the shame–guilt dilemma. Yet, more generally, these presentations of the fatal consequences of tragic choice refer to the unresolvability of such basic, existential conflicts of conscience, i.e., that in this absolutely, extremely posed form, as it is put to the protagonists and lived out by them, it never can be resolved once and for all, that there cannot be a final, right, perfect solution, but that only the measure represented by the Chorus, the moderation, the acceptance of both parts of conflict, and with that of the paradox inherent in human life, is compatible with the survival of individual and society, of the culture and its ideals (the Gods). This measure, however, entails the

insight of wisdom that the opposite parts of inner conflict complement each other, i.e., that the understanding of inner life as conflict has to encompass the reconciliation of the hitherto clashing forces—the drives, emotions, values, loyalties—in form of complementarity. I believe it is this that, recently, Anton Kris (1985, 1986, 1987) has presented in the duality of convergent and divergent conflict (cf. also Rangell 1963).

The consciousness of inner conflict accompanies Western thought and creativity throughout its history and with that the guiding metaphors for self-understanding. Speaking in the *Phaidros* of “the soul being like the combined force of the winged pair of horses and the charioteer,” Plato describes how “the bad horse pulls the chariot down” and then adds: “And then there is pain (*ponos*) and extreme conflict (*agon eschatos*) inflicted upon the soul” (pp. 246–247).

In the *Talmud* we hear: “A man should always incite the good impulse to fight against the evil impulse (*le’olam yargiz adam jetzer tov al yetzer hara’*). For it is written: Fight, but do not sin (*rigezu we’al techeta’u* [Ps. 4.5]). If they overcome it, fine! If not, they should study the Torah. For it is written: Speak with your hearts (*imru bilvavchem*)” (Berakot, 5a). Seeing a man and a woman part without engaging in anything forbidden, Abaye who had followed them, said: ‘If it were I, I could not have restrained myself,’ and so went and leaned in deep anguish against a doorpost, when a certain old man came up to him and taught him: The greater the man, the greater his Evil Inclination (*Kol hagadol mechavero, yitzro gadol hemennu*)” (*Sukkah*, 52a).

Before our modern age, however, such inner conflict has been, to my knowledge, nowhere more keenly expressed and reflected upon than by Augustinus in the *Confessions*, even in its unconscious dimensions and with the very concept (metaphor) of conflict at its center: “So stood two wills of mine in conflict with each other, one old, the other new, one carnal, the other spiritual, and in their discord they wasted out my mind. *Ita duae voluntates meae, una vetus, alia nova, illa carnalis, illa spiritalis, confligebant inter se, atque discordando dissipabant animam meam*” (p. 424).

“This was the controversy I felt in my heart, about nothing but myself, against myself. *Ista controversia in corde meo non nisi de me ipso adversus me ipsum*” (p. 460). Here, it is even the very word underlying conflict, namely the verb *confligere*: *clashing together, crashing, fighting*.

“It was myself who willed it, and myself who nilled it; it was I myself. I neither willed entirely, nor yet nilled entirely. Therefore was I at strife with myself, and distracted by mine own self (*Ideo mecum contendebam et dissipar a me ipso*)” (p. 450). And crucially he immediately adds that there are many such inner conflicts: “For if there be so many contrary natures in man, as there be wills resisting one another; there shall not now be two natures alone, but many. *Nam si tot sunt contrariae naturae, quot voluntates sibi resistunt, non iam duae, sed plures erunt*” (p. 450). There is a multiplicity of inner conflicts that tear apart the will and, hence, the consciousness of the self.

He even commented upon the complementarity between these opposite parts of his self: “Hence it is that there be two wills, for that one of them is not entire: and the one is supplied with that, wherein the other lacks. *Et ideo sunt duae voluntates, quia una earum tota non est, et hoc adest alteri, quod deest alteri*” (p. 448).

He gives an etiology for such an inherent inner discord—for the existential nature of man’s conflict—in the *Civitas Dei*: God commanded Adam and Eve obedience because the fulfillment of their own will in opposition to that of their Creator’s is destruction. It was a fitting punishment for their own disobedience that they suddenly were compelled to notice the disobedience of their own genitals, and with that the disobedience of their desires, the lack of control over their bodies;

all mental activity, all reasoning becomes overrun, the entire human being is being totally taken by it. And on the other side, this pleasure cannot be willed and compelled, even if one so decides and desires it. This powerlessness, this loss of control in the face of the overpowering force of the sexual parts, necessarily fills man with shame, even if the sexual act is permitted and specifically engaged in for the procreation of children; even in front of one's own children it, therefore, has to be treated with secrecy.

In these excerpts, the conflict is sharply delineated: The primary concern is the conflict between the sexual desires (and member) and the will led by reason, and with that by Godly command. The loss of control over these desires and their executive organs is inherently a cause for shame. Yet this loss of control is, in itself, already the punishment for a deeper, prior conflict: the conflict between the wish to follow one's own will and the obedient submission under God's command. The first conflict is a shame conflict, the second, deeper and antecedent conflict is one leading to guilt, a guilt to be punished by that loss of control. The assertion of power and independence (*potestas voluntatis*) is, by itself, evil; it leads to the secondary evil, the punishment by the omnipotence of lust.

Looking back to the Tamudic sources, we see the same doubleness, although not as sharply divided: Whenever there is talk about the *Yetzer haRa'*—the Evil Inclination—it always refers to sexual desire and lust, but this lust also is always equated with rebellion against God.

Yet, farther back, in Platon, the negative part of human nature that pulls the soul perniciously down and apart is sensuality altogether—the attachment to the body and its desires—against the autonomous power of Reason and with that against the vision of the ideas.

The Augustinean view came to dominate the value system of the Western world for about one millennium: Sexual lust was the Evil *par excellence*, prideful assertion of will power, even in the service of Reason, ran a close second. The power of the faith in this value hierarchy is not completely broken even today.

It was Goethe who took up the concept of inner conflict as an explanatory metaphor when he described, in 1815, how Shakespeare put in the foreground “the inner conflict” between *Sollen* and *Wollen*, between what man ought to do and what he wants to do.² This inner conflict converges with an external one, “a wanting that goes beyond what the individual is able to, is modern”³ (Goethe, 1961, p. 186).

The Question of Conflict and Complementarity in Confucius (Kong Tzu) and Lao Tzu

What do we find in the other great and continuous tradition of thought—the Chinese world, as exemplified by these two leading thinkers? (Both were said to have lived around 500 BCE, although there is much controversy about the time of Lao Tzu.) There are a number of leading metaphors in opposition to each other that dominate the ethical, political, and metaphysical debates, centering around balance, harmony, the right path (*dao*), the uncarved block, the great flow versus strife, disorder, doubt, or what we also call conflict.

²“Die Person, von der Seite des Charakters betrachtet, soll: sie ist beschränkt, zu einem Besonderen bestimmt; als Mensch aber will sie. Sie ist unbegrenzt und fordert das Allgemeine. Hier entspringt schon ein innerer Konflikt, und diesen läßt Shakespeare vor allen anderen heraustreten” (Goethe, 1961, p. 186).

³“Ein Wollen, das über die Kräfte eines Individuums hinausgeht, ist modern” (Goethe, 1961, p. 22).

Harmony was seen as the great norm of both the natural and social worlds; Confucianism and Taoism were equally philosophies of balance, whether man's counterpoise was society or the natural cosmos. Imbalance would have meant man against man, man against nature, in either case a separation between the self and the 'other.' But Confucianism and Taoism, each in its way, meant union, oneness, the concord and stasis of the eternal pattern [Levenson and Schurmann, 1969, p. 113].

"Conflict between Confucianism and Taoism was abortive, a) because they had a common theme, harmony, and b) because that common theme, harmony, implied a philosophical deprecation of conflict" (Levenson and Schurmann, 1969, p. 116).

By now it should be evident that basic among Chinese thought patterns is the desire to merge seemingly conflicting elements into a unified harmony. Chinese philosophy is filled with dualisms in which, however, their two component elements are usually regarded as *complementary and mutually necessary rather than as hostile and incompatible*. A common feature of Chinese dualisms, furthermore, is that one of their two elements should be held in higher regard than the other. Here again, therefore, we have an expression of the concept of harmony based upon hierarchical difference, such as we have already seen in the Chinese view of society [Bodde, 1953, p. 54].

This does, of course, not imply that there is no awareness of conflict or that there is a relative absence of social, historical, or psychological conflict. Rather, it appears that there is an overriding concern to shift the focus of attention away from conflict, to the point of denying its emotional relevance. Why Chinese culture and tradition, in spite of its inner orientation, its greatly creative and expressive inwardness, seems so peculiarly inimical to psychoanalysis may very well lie in this deep and abiding antipathy to inner conflict. This means, also, a different approach to ethical and psychological choice.

In discussing this issue, Fingarette (1972, p. 22) refers to two passages in the *Lun Yü*, the "book of the discussions (or sayings)" of *Kung Tse* (Confucius): "You love a man and wish him to live; you hate him and wish him to die. Having wished him to live, you also wish him to die. This is doubt" (*huo* or delusion). "For a morning's anger to disregard one's own life, and involve that of his parents—is not this a case of doubt (delusion, *huo*)."

In such conflict, the task is not posed as one of *choosing* or *deciding* but of distinguishing or *discriminating* (*bian*) the inconsistent inclinations. Furthermore, in each passage, we have no doubt about which inclination is the right one when we have discriminated one from the other. In short, the task is posed in terms of knowledge rather than choice. *Huo*, the key term in the passages, means here "deluded or *led astray* by an *un-li* inclination or tendency." It is not doubt as to which to choose to do (Confucius, 1966, pp. 22–23).

I interject here that the decisive word *huo*, which does not appear rarely in both Confucius and Lao Tse, is usually translated as *doubt*, *suspicion*, *deception*. Yet, as symbol it is composed of *huo* and *xin*. *Huo* means *either, or, if*; *xin* is *heart, mind*, the common radical associated with any emotional, or generally mental processes. The *huo* used in this context can therefore etymologically be rendered as the *either-or of the mind*, the *or of the mind*. Fingarette (1972) is right that there is hardly anywhere an explicit formulation of inner conflict, and yet, it seems to me that the repeatedly emerging "doubt," *huo*, is something like a symbol for suppressed, hidden, veiled conflict.

This means, Fingarette (1972) continues, that

we must recognize at once that the absence of a developed language of choice and responsibility does not imply a failure to choose or to be responsible. . . . The task is posed in terms of knowledge rather than choice. . . . This Confucian commitment to a single, definite order is also evident when we note what Confucius sees as the alternative to rightly treading the true Path: It is to walk crookedly, to get lost or to abandon the Path. . . it is the following of the Way itself that is of ultimate and absolute value. . . . The imagery in the *Analects* [*Lun Yü*] is dominated by the metaphor of traveling the road [pp. 18–22].

He then refers to a passage that “seems . . . to present a situation where the issue, as we would define it, is one of internal conflict in the moral code, a conflict to be resolved by personal choice” (Fingarette, 1972, p. 23). I quote from Legge’s translation, adding some modifiers:

The duke of She informed Confucius, saying: “Among us here are those who may be styled (*gong*, meaning personally, self, own; I think this is what Legge translates as styled; Fingarette takes this word as a proper name Gong [Kung]) upright (*zhi*) in their conduct. If their father have stolen a sheep, they will bear witness to the fact.” Confucius said: “Among us, in our part of the country, those who are upright are different from this. The father conceals the misconduct of the son, and the son conceals the misconduct of the father. Uprightness is to be found in this” [Confucius, 1966, pp. 184–185].

It is the conflict between the value of *Xiao*, the loyalty and reverential commitment, the *pietas* (*Pietät*) toward the parents, versus the value of *Zhi*, honesty, sincerity, uprightness, straightforwardness (the very sign symbolizes *straightness*). Here, two deep commitments stand in irreconcilable conflict. Fingarette (1972) comments:

When two profound duties conflict, *we* must choose. And it is in this necessity to make a critical choice that lies the seed of tragedy, of responsibility, of guilt and remorse. . . . Confucius merely announces the way *he* sees the matter, putting it tactfully by saying it is the custom in *Li*.⁴ There is nothing to suggest a decisional problem; everything suggests that there is a defect of knowledge, a simple error of moral judgment on the Duke’s part. . . . When we take into account Confucius’s stature as a moralist and his insightfulness into human nature, his failure to see or to mention the problem of internal moral conflict in such a case as this can only be accounted for by supposing that his interests, ideas, concerns, in short his entire moral and intellectual orientation, was in another direction” (p. 23, italics in original).

“Zai Yü being asleep during the daytime, the Master said: ‘Rotten wood cannot be carved; a wall of earth and dung cannot be covered with the trowel. This Yü! What is the use of reproving him?!’ The Master said: ‘At first, my way with men was to hear their words, and give them credit for their conduct. Now my way is to hear their words, and look at their conduct. It is from Yü that I have learned to make this change’” (Lun Yu, 5: 9, p. 53).

“Here the active disease, the fulminating wound of Augustine, is replaced by a state of mere deadness, of passivity and inherent insensitivity to moral values,” comments Fingarette (1972, p. 31). “The proper response to a failure to conform to the moral order (*li*) is not

⁴*Li* is variably translated as propriety, beauty, holy ritual, sacred ceremony, used as metaphor for “the entire body of mores, or more precisely, of the authentic tradition and reasonable conventions of society,” as Fingarette (1972, pp. 6–7) defines it.

self-condemnation for a free and responsible, though evil, choice, but self-reeducation to overcome a mere defect, a lack of power, in short a lack in one's 'formation.' The Westerner's inclination to press at this point the issue of personal responsibility for lack of diligence is precisely the sort of issue that is never even raised in the *Analects*" (Fingarette, 1972, p. 35).

Confucius's vision provides no basis for seeing man as a being of tragedy, of inner crisis and guilt; but it does provide a socially oriented, action-oriented view which provides for personal dignity. Moreover ... we see then that the *images of the inner man and of his inner conflict are not essential* to a concept of man as a being whose dignity is the consummation of a life of subtlety and sophistication, a life in which human conduct can be intelligible in natural terms and yet be attuned to the sacred, a life in which the practical, the intellectual and the spiritual are equally revered and are harmonized in the one act—the act of *li* (Fingarette, 1972, p. 36, italics added).

For Confucius, man is not tragic since he is not determined by the inner crisis of choice, decision, and guilt, but oriented toward action and toward the concentric circles of obligations surrounding him.

The center of gravity has entirely shifted away from the metaphors for what we would, analytically speaking, describe as the *choosing and deciding ego* and to the *absolutely (unconditionally) certain and commanding superego*. The side of the drives (*yü*) is not often mentioned; they have to yield to the dictates of conscience. The ego itself is the site of inner conflict, its complete subordination under the inner authority of conscience amounts to a kind of *invalidation of inner conflict*.

This statement is predicated on the *a priori* assumption, as a basic vision of existence, that inner conflict is, indeed, an indispensable part of human nature. It is both a philosophical premise of vision (i.e., a metaphorical system) and a methodological premise of exploration of man's nature—neither provable, nor refutable—not merely of the psychoanalytic understanding of human nature, but of the Western understanding of Man in general.

Now just a few references from the other great thinker who shaped Chinese culture for over two thousand years, Lao Tzu (also known as the Old Master or the Old Child):

Nothing in the world is softer and more supple than water, yet when attacking the hard and the strong, nothing can surpass it. The supple overcomes the hard. The soft overcomes the strong. None in the world do not know this, yet none can practice it. That is why the Sage says: To accept the filth of a nation is to be lord of the society.⁵ To accept the disasters (the ill omens) of a nation (country) is to be the ruler of the world.⁶ Words of truth seem contradictory⁷ (Lao Tse, 1981, ch. 78).

This last sentence is: "*Zheng yan ruo fan—Zheng*: Straight or regular or correct—*yan*: words or speech—*ruo*: is as, follows—*fan*: to turn back, contrary, opposite, to rebel." I paraphrase it: "The direct talk also has the opposite meaning, turns into its opposite." The outer references, like water, dirt of the country, ruler, appear like metaphors for the inner truth: that our inner life incessantly moves in contraries, in opposites.

⁵Better by Waley: Only he who has accepted the dirt of the country can be lord of its soil-shrines; Chan Wing-Tsit (1967): He who suffers disgrace for his country is called the lord of the land.

⁶Waley: can become a king among those what dwell under heaven.

⁷Waley: Straight words seem crooked [seem, as we would say, to be paradoxes]; Chan Wing-Tsit (1967): Straight words seem to be their opposite.

“Words have an ancestor; actions have a lord” (Lao Tau, 1981, ch. 70). There is a past to one’s thought; there is a context that gives it the meaning; “If they don’t know this, they cannot understand me.” The first reminds us of the basic premise of our genetic understanding; the latter of the coherence theory of truth; the first of Freud, the latter of Wittgenstein and of the criterion for truth stressed precisely by Freud over that by correspondence and by pragmatism.

Of special beauty is the 11th chapter (I quote from Waley’s translation):

We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel; but it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the wheel depends. We turn clay to make a vessel; but it is on the space where there is nothing that the usefulness of the vessel depends. We pierce doors and windows to make a house; and it is on these spaces where there is nothing that the usefulness of the house depends. Therefore, just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognize the usefulness of what is not. [p. 155].

What Waley circumscribes as “the space where there is nothing,” the Chinese has *wu you*—not having, nonbeing. The object is visible and concrete, yet its function *dang qi... yong* depends on the absence, the void, the No, the *there is not*. Is this No not also the No to consciousness, the No inherent in all defense? Are not these expressions very beautiful metaphors for the inner life we deal with in our work—clearly, metaphors of a very different kind from those we use in our theory formation, yet, nevertheless, metaphors that should bridge the visible world of the Yes with the invisible, but far more powerful world of the No—the *wu* or *wu you* or *wu ming* or *wu wei* (No, non-being, nameless, no action)?

Just as the emptiness gives the objects their ability to function, so does the silence give to the mind and to the spoken words the dimension of depth. The *Tao Te King*, itself, is indeed like a finely woven, and yet mighty structure built of spare words and much silence. The contradictions open up abysses of meaning.⁸

Yet what is the central concern?

‘To remain whole, be twisted [Chan: yield; Lao Tzu, 1979]!’ To become straight, let yourself be bent. To become whole, be hollow. Be tattered, that you may be renewed. Those that have little, may get more. Those that have much, are but perplexed [*huo*, as discussed previously, the *Either-Or of the heart or mind*]. Therefore the Sage clasps the Primal Unity [Chan: the sage embraces the One; Lao Tzu, 1979], testing by it everything under Heaven [Chan: and becomes the model of the world; Lao Tzu, 1979]. He does not show himself; therefore he is seen everywhere. He does not define himself, therefore he is distinct. He does not boast of what he will do, therefore he succeeds. He is not proud of his work (loves himself), and therefore he endures. He does not contend (*bu zheng*). And for that very reason no one under heaven can contend with him [Chan: It is precisely because he does not compete that the world cannot compete with him; Lao Tzu, 1979]. So then we see that the ancient saying: ‘To remain whole be twisted!’ [Chan: ‘To yield is to be preserved whole’; Lao Tzu, 1979] was no idle word; for true wholeness can only be achieved by return (*gui* = home coming) [ch. 22, trans. Waley].

Here again, the contraries are seen as part of an overarching unity; the aim of the wise person (*sheng ren*) lies in overcoming what is in conflict—of what “competes,” *zheng*.

The most expressive formulation however comes right at the beginning of the *Tao Te King*. I follow Chan Wing-Tsit’s translation:

⁸“Diese mannigfachen Gestalten der Gegensätze benutzt nun Laotse, um im Widerschein das Unsagbare sagbar zu machen, das Sein im Nichtsein, das Wissen im Nichtwissen, das Tun im Nichttun” (Jaspers, 1957, p. 926).

When the people of the world all know beauty as beauty, there arises the recognition of ugliness. When they all know the good as good, there arises the recognition of evil. Therefore: *Being and nonbeing produce each other* (*you wu xiang sheng*); *difficult and easy complete each other*; long and short contrast (*jiao* or, alternately, *xing* compare; Waley: test) each other; high and low distinguish each other; sound and voice harmonize each other; front and behind accompany each other. Therefore the sage manages affairs without action (*wu wei zhi shi*), and spreads doctrines without words. All things arise, and he does not turn away from them. He produces them but does not take possession of them (Gibbs: [Nature] gives birth but does not possess; Lao Tzu, 1981). He acts but does not rely on his own ability (Gibbs: It acts but does not demand subservience, Lao Tzu, 1981). He accomplishes his task but does not claim credit for it. It is precisely because he does not claim credit that his accomplishment remains with him. [Lao Tzu, 1979, ch. 2, italics added].

The first four of the six pairs of contraries are rendered by Gibbs as follows: “Is and is not are mutually arising; difficult and easy are complementary; long and short arise from comparison; higher and lower are interdependent” (Lao Tzu, 1981, p. 24). The accompanying commentary by Man-Jan Cheng calls the pairs *mutual functions, reciprocity: hu xiang*, and speaks of the *paradox of the mutual support of opposites: xiang fan xiang cheng*. In all of the six pairs, the third of the four words is *xiang, mutual*, translated here as *each other*. Waley comments: “But, says the Taoist, by admitting the conception of ‘goodness,’ you are simultaneously creating a conception ‘badness.’ Nothing can be good except in relation to something that is bad, just as nothing can be ‘in front’ except in relation to something that is ‘behind.’ Therefore the Sage avoids all positive action, working only through the ‘power’ of Tao, which alone ‘cuts without wounding,’ *transcending all antinomies*” (italics added).

Although there is no special word about or for *inner conflict*, there is thus the clear awareness of the centrality of opposites, of contradiction, and the insistence to *overcome*, as we would say, conflict by recognizing complementarity. Si-Ma Qian speaks of the *unity of spirit* as being advocated by the Taoist school (quoted by Fung Yu-Lan, 1931/1934). We would say in our theoretical framework that there is a consistent transcendence of conflict in favor of the *synthetic function of the ego* that attempts to reconcile all the opposites within and without, as well as between inwardness and outside world, while letting the paradoxes stand—“the mysterious leveling” (*yüan tong*, ch. 56, Waley tr.): “The Sage ‘discards the absolute, the all-inclusive, the extreme’” (ch. 29, Waley tr.) “It is precisely because he does not compete (*bu zheng*, literally, *no conflict*) that the world cannot compete with him” (Lao Tzu, 1979, ch. 66). The very last sentence of the *Tao Te King* is, I believe not coincidentally, “The Way of the sage is to act but not to compete—*Sheng ren zhi Dao—wei er bu zheng*.”

If we assume now in all these references that *zheng* does not merely refer to outer conflict in the meaning of *competition*, but that it expresses, with the consistent equation of inwardness and outwardness, equally inner conflict, then we can conclude that one of the major aims of Lao Tzu is the overcoming of all conflict, inner and outer, in favor of a great unity (e.g., “embracing the one,” *bao yi*) or synthesis. It is what is called in chapter 68 *bu zheng zhi Dé*—the power of no conflict (Lao Tzu, 1979: the virtue of noncompeting, Lao Tzu, 1981: the Teh of noncontention, Waley: the power that comes of not contending).

Instead of the social virtues of Kong Fu Zi to deal with inner and outer conflict, Lao Tzu postulates something that appears to be radically different: “Banish learning, and there will be no more grieving” (ch. 20, Waley tr.). In the place of these societal concerns, of the loyalty toward outer norms now internalized, there is the loyalty to what Waley translates as the uncarved block,

bo, to an inner truth (*chang*, the *constant*), to spontaneity (*Zi-Ran*, the *Self-So*) and creativity (*sheng*, *life*, *birth*) beyond all contraries, transcending all strife (*zheng*). Putting it positively, he speaks of the “three treasures: the first is deep love, the second is frugality, and the third is not to dare to be ahead of the world” (Lao Tzu, 1981, ch. 67).

Most explicitly the Confucian virtues appear to be disavowed in Ch. 19 (Lao Tzu, 1979): “Abandon sageliness and discard wisdom; then the people will benefit a hundredfold. Abandon humanity (better: human solidarity) and discard righteousness; then the people will return to filial piety and deep love. Abandon skill and discard profit; then there will be no thieves or robbers. However, these three things are ornaments and are not adequate. Therefore, let people hold on to these: manifest plainness, embrace simplicity, reduce selfishness, have few desires.” Waley suggests for the latter portion: “If without these three things they find life too plain and unadorned, then let them have accessories; give them Simplicity [‘raw silk’] to look at, the Uncarved Block to hold, give them selflessness and fewness of desires.” Gibbs translates: “I believe these three statements show that words are inadequate. The people should be made to adhere to these principles: ‘Look to the origins and maintain purity; diminish self and curb desires’” (Lao Tzu, 1981, ch. 19).

I think all these translations struggle to approximate the original’s interweaving of inward and outward, its deft, yet bewildering use of metaphors bridging both worlds. For instance, in the concluding sentence: “Diminish ‘self,’ make desires scarce” involves the symbol for self, *si*. It is derived from *si*: “a cocoon. It represents a silkworm that coils itself up and shuts itself in its cocoon. By extension, selfish, to care only for one’s self, separation, private, particular.” The compound used means: “my share of grains. By extension, private, personal, partial, selfish” (Wieger, 1927, p. 224).

For this kind of emphasis on the synthetic ego function—especially in the sense of bridging resolutely the gap between inner world and outer world in spite of their disparate laws—learning and reeducation, in the sense of Kong Zi, can evidently not be as desirable, as a complete retreat from the entanglements in *zheng*, in conflict, would be. Instead of dealing with conflict by subordinating oneself entirely to a superego modeled after the magical power of the Sage-Kings of hoary antiquity and their impersonal representatives in the shape of rules and forms (*li*), Lao Tzu suggests a much more determined withdrawal from choice, decision, will, wish, and action, especially however from all ambition and competition, in behalf of an ideal of the unity of opposites and of the power of yielding to “the spontaneous Becoming” (*Zi-Ran*, often now translated as *Nature*)—a passivity, very akin to what I alluded to before as the stance of the analyst. It is very much a “feminine superego,” even far more pronouncedly so as the Confucian superego (which, after all, also suggests submission, renunciation of self and of competition): “The good use of people is by putting oneself below” (ch. 68, my trans.). “The female always overcomes the male by tranquility, and by tranquility she is underneath... Thus some, by placing themselves below, take over (others), and some, by being (naturally) low, take over (other states)” (Lao Tzu, 1979, ch. 61). “Therefore, ‘the weapon that is too hard will be broken, the tree that has the hardest wood will be cut down.’ Truly, the hard and mighty are cast down; the soft and weak set high” (ch. 76, Waley tr.).

“The original power (*yüan Dé*) is so deep, so distant; it makes things so paradoxical (*fan*). Thus one goes back until one reaches the Great Flow (*Da Shun*)” (end of ch. 65, my trans.).

One removes conflict by undoing knowledge and desire; yet therewith something else is veiled: Culture and society are themselves expression of human nature; conflict itself is human

nature, an indispensable basis of the *conditio humana*. It is the same dilemma as the one later on faced by Rousseau (1765). That unity is only attained at the cost of denying such conflict. With social and cultural reality, with knowledge and social virtues, an entire part of the inner world is bypassed, too—the fidelity to the need to know⁹ and to curiosity, the deep need for activity and symbolization—all in favor of that overriding longing for synthesis. In our frame of reference, in our metaphorical system, *the executive side of the ego—the deciding and distinguishing function—is sacrificed at the behest of the synthetic side*. With that the attempt at synthesis appears to be, itself, subverted and undermined. “If one desires to be in front of the people, one must speak as if behind them” (Lao Tzu, 1981, ch. 66). Yet can this be done without deception? Does not, thus, the very split to be avoided recur, the conflict reemerge as inner and tragic reality, as outer isolation and estrangement?

Wildly, endlessly, all men are merry, as though feasting upon beef or sitting on the veranda in the spring sunshine. I alone remain uncommitted, like an infant who has not yet smiled. I alone seem as mindless as one who has no home to return to. Everyone else has enough and more, yet I alone seem to be left with nothing. What a fool’s mind I have! How muddled I am! Most people seek brightness and clarity. I alone seek dullness and darkness. Most people are imaginative and observant. I alone am stifled and mum; I am as unmoved as the ocean, as ceaseless as the wind high in the sky. Everyone else has something to do; I alone am ignorant and dull. I alone am different from the rest in that I value taking sustenance from the Mother (Lao Tzu, 1981, ch. 20).

In contrast to this supreme identification with the maternal as ideal in Lao Tzu, we have the equally strenuous identification with the idealized paternal in Confucius—yet both in the service to avoid any power struggle and competition, be that of an anal or Oedipal-phallic nature. Clearly, however, the *Tao Te King* is by no means a pamphlet dedicated to the overthrow of the superego altogether. Rather it is, as I would postulate, the overcoming of an archaic, mostly anal superego in favor of the positing of a new ideal. It is a revolutionary superego, a protest against a value system that, at least for us, has become associated with Confucius. It is a superego that aspires to reach back to the origin (*yüan*), a superego living from a new vision, a very different metaphorical system. There is, as already noted, clearly a radical shift in valuation, compared with the Confucian ethos, regardless if Lao Tzu preceded Confucius, as the tradition presumed, or followed him by centuries, as is assumed by many today—a shift without requirements of faith, without a belief in a divinity in any customary sense, yet a deep spirit of reverence, a kind of philosophical belief—using a wonderful spectrum of metaphors without the fixation into any dogma.

What does that new vision entail? The great connectedness of life is seen, the advice given that the encompassing cohesiveness of what we know never be lost. Purposive and ambitious doing interferes with such knowing of the whole context of Being. All forms of external power destroy such awareness and should be avoided. It is a grand vision of existence that treats all the external entities—realm, war, ruler, plants, and animals—as metaphorical help to formulate such inner truth. The most important, however, of all the insights of such an inwardness is that of *mutually conditioning* attributes and actions, instead of the *absoluteness* of any one thing, subject or object, its either-or. Nothing that is being put into words can claim unconditional truth:

⁹Aristotle’s (1927, p. 2) insight: “All men naturally desire knowledge,” the beginning sentence of the *Metaphysics*.

There was something undifferentiated and yet complete, which existed before heaven and earth. Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not change. It operates everywhere and is free from danger. It may be considered the mother of the universe. I do not know its name; I call it *Dao* (Way). If forced to give it a name, I shall call it great. Now being great means functioning everywhere. Functioning everywhere means far-reaching. Being far-reaching means returning to the original point. Therefore, *Dao* is great. Heaven is great. Earth is great. Man is also great. There are four great things in the universe, and man is one of them. Man models himself after Earth. Earth models itself after Heaven. Heaven models itself after *Dao*. And *Dao* models itself after Nature [*Zi-Ran*, Waley: the “Self-So” Lao Tzu, 1981, ch. 25; note that I follow the reading “Man” *ren*, not “king”].

Still, the most fascinating question remains: What about the seeming merging of opposites, that what has been called *fan yan*, the speaking in paradoxes—that big is small, small is big, full is empty, old is new, strong is weak, weak is strong? How can that be understood?

The immediate response is: Speaking and knowing are impotent. It seems to imply an advocacy of a return to the preverbal, to the all-encompassing and global affects. Then we think of such absurd reversals in dreams, that may imply: “This is incredible, ridiculous!”

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

And yet it goes deeper still: This is the language of the soul, the discourse of the inner world where we discover layer upon layer, where we can tear off mask behind mask. It represents the depth dimension of inner reality. This is its hallmark, in Dickens’s expressions: “Things are not always as they seem” (Dickens, 1864–1865, p. 321) and “But seeming may be false or true” (Dickens, 1870, p. 262). The layering is laced with anxiety; it is a layering of defenses and of dangers.

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

It is evident that in the *Tao Te King* (Lao Tzu, 1981) metaphysics, ethics, and politics are united, even amalgamated (Jaspers, 1957); but it is also clear how everything points back to the one central and original issue: that of the insight in the inner reality, of its many-layeredness and multiplicity of meaning, of its contradictoriness, and, ultimately and inevitably, of its roots in conflict and complementarity. However, at the same time, that insight says: Inner and outer truth manifest each other in mutually reflecting mirrors. Therefore, its discourse has to be eminently metaphorical: Truth can only be approached with the help of images; it cannot be grasped and held. Proceeding, it has to be “cautious like crossing a frozen stream in the winter—majestic in appearance—yielding, like ice on the verge of melting” (Lao Tzu, 1981, ch. 15).

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In 1977, I published my paper in the *Quarterly* defending the use of metaphor in psychoanalytic theory formation against the attacks by Schafer (1973), Holt (1975), Kubie (1960, 1978), and others (see Wallerstein, this issue). This article does not repeat what has been presented there but is based on its main ideas.

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