



# *The Book of Beginnings*

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FRANÇOIS JULLIEN

TRANSLATED BY JODY GLADDING

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## PREFACE

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It is strange—but finally logical—that I am just now coming to the question with which I should have begun in my work. It is strange that after traveling for years between Chinese and European thought, I am only now turning to this question—this preliminary question—that has always bothered me, it is true, but that I have never yet approached, at least directly: What is it *to enter* a way of thought? Yet, as I say, it is also logical for me to be starting on it so late, even though it is the initial question, because of course it is only afterward and in retrospect that the beginning question can be approached. The same is true of the writing process: Isn't it when the book is finished that you write the introduction?

Today in the West, who would not want to enter the thought of the far “East”? But how can we enter it, since we know that it is impossible to summarize; no way of thought can be summarized, but especially not Chinese thought, as vast and varied as it is. And we also know that its principal notions are not directly translatable; that viewing it by school, that classifying and cataloguing it, might lead us to overlook its essential nature; and that following its historical development from beginning to end will not suffice either. In each case we would remain outside the inner self-referential logic specific to this way of thought—because *where* did this way of thought begin? Now when I pose the question of how to enter Chinese thought, I also take the risk of addressing nonsinologists as if they could read Chinese. That is why I will practice a methodical reading of one Chinese sentence, just one, a first sentence, by gradually developing the elements that allow it to be read at once from within (Chinese thought) and from without (Western thought). Because a way of thought can be “entered” effectively only by beginning to work with it, that is, by passing through it in order to question oneself.

The sentence I want to begin reading here is the first one in Chinese thought to address beginnings. I propose reading it from both close-up and far away: reading it literally (although what does “literal” mean when there are no letters or grammar?) and reading it also from a distance, by widening the gap and bringing the contrasts into play. But stepping back to read from a distance does not mean reading in a cursory, vague manner. On the contrary, it means trying to read even more closely, using this roundabout means to get at the biases and presuppositions that lie sedimented and buried there. To show this sentence in relief and to remove it from the comfort of its “obviousness,” without which entering would be impossible, I will also read the sentence that begins Genesis, for the biblical side, as well as the first sentence from the Greek *Theogony*, for the mythological perspective. And tracing these perspectives in turn will necessarily lead me to pose the question that takes us directly from the local nature of such fieldwork to the opposite extreme, because I cannot imagine a more general question: What are the “possibilities” of thought?

Isn't it time to get started on this work—to write a “phenomenology of mind” that is no longer European?



Is that where Western philosophy finds its limit, or maybe its blind spot? In any case, that is where philosophy, which claims to reflect all—“the all”—fails to be self-reflective.

Doubt, we repeat, ever vigilant, is our entryway. But do we know what we have to doubt? “Doubt,” however methodical and even hyperbolic we consider it, always assumes something in place beforehand, in advance, beginning from which we doubt, but which, in and of itself, we do not doubt—which we do not think of doubting: where we remain without hold. In other words, what we doubt already holds us in its dependency, in the snare of the unthought. So we can doubt as much as we like, as the heroic Descartes did, but we are still doubting in our own language and concepts. Doubting lets

us stay at home among ourselves. What I cannot doubt, that is, what I cannot imagine doubting, I will be able to recognize only when I encounter another way of thought to disorient me and loosen me from the—unsuspected—hold of my way of thought. Am I saying that Descartes, although he roamed Europe, did not travel widely enough? We can only dislodge the arbitrary from our way of thought by *leaving* it and, in order to do so, by entering another. But what is this strategic elsewhere that might loosen us from the moorings we cannot envisage? Where will we find it?

What is it “to enter” a way of thought? I am proposing here that we *enter* Chinese thought to create a gap that reveals to us how we think, within what we “doubt”—which may make us reflect not only on our questions but, more importantly, on what made them possible and binds us to them to the point that we believe them necessary. But Chinese thought, it is true, is so vast: Can we ever finish exploring it? And then, too, we all know that today’s reader is in a hurry. Even long-distance travels, for which not so long ago we used to pack books to fill the empty hours, now pass all too quickly. Do we still have the leisure for such labor-intensive investments? Maybe you have only this evening free . . . Fortunately, our purposes do not entail “knowing” Chinese thought extensively, an endless enterprise requiring two lifetimes, but something else entirely: only crossing a threshold and “entering.”

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## ONE ■ WHAT IS IT TO ENTER (A WAY OF THOUGHT)?

To enter, if we define it most literally and introductorily, is to pass from an outside to an inside. Now Chinese thought has effectively remained exterior to our own thought in Europe for a very long time, and vice versa. We can see that *outside* both in the Chinese language and in Chinese history. Let us summarize the initial facts that we all know, although perhaps we have not really weighed their effects. They justify passing through China to attack obliquely what lies unthought and beyond doubt for us. First of all, we must remember that Chinese does not belong to the large family of Indo-European languages, whereas we are still related to India through Sanskrit, the sister language of Greek and Latin. Furthermore, let us remember that Chinese writing is ideographic and not phonetic, and especially that, among all the languages, it alone remains that way, which already indicates its singular relationship to orality as well as its inextricable interdependence on the representative power of the drawn line. How could—must—that have marked Chinese thought? Moreover, it was not until our Renaissance that Europe arrived in China; and relationships between the two ends of that great continent did not truly develop until the expansion of commercial trade in the nineteenth century, which is very late relative to the history of these civilizations, one of which then imposed its imperialism upon the other. At present, the relationship of domination between the two poles is beginning to reverse itself. Nevertheless, the question remains: Beneath power relationships and hegemonic temptations, what intellectual penetration, from either side, is in the process of taking place—or not, depending upon us? Will we be content with the mere semblance of intellectual penetration?

As early as Roman times there was the Silk Road, but did the Romans know that those imported goods came from China, were “made in China”? What marks did they bear of Chinese thought? There was also Marco Polo, two centuries before the missionaries, but Marco Polo traveled overland; the strange spectacle of customs, ways of life and society, realms and languages, currencies and armies, endlessly, continuously, repeated itself before him according to the country he was passing through and without causing any rupture suddenly to appear: without any actual event, without the possibility of *arriving*. It was an entirely different story in the sixteenth century, when the missionaries embarked in ships and docked one fine day at a South China port. To disembark was to leave one’s ship and set foot on new soil: you knew nothing yet, appearing suddenly from “elsewhere,” and you were not expected.

With a way of thought as well, *to enter* implies moving, leaving in order to be able to penetrate. One enters a way of thought as one enters an organization, fraternal order, or political party: it cannot take place without a certain, at least temporary, acceptance on a trial basis—haven’t I been roundly criticized for my “adherence” to the “immanence” of Chinese thought? Or one enters as into the business of others—that is, one begins to take a personal interest in them, even begins to take charge of them and make them one’s own. Entering into the feelings of others, into their difficulties and concerns, means putting oneself in another’s place and adopting that perspective: that does not happen without sharing and connivance; it requires complicity. Entering Chinese thought, then, is to begin to question ourselves according to its perspective, according to its implications and expectations. Now, about Chinese thought we know at least one thing, which hinders us from the outset: that it is among the oldest ways of thought and has extended over a very vast area and length of time. We also know that it has recently been subjected to increasingly strong foreign influence—our own—but it nevertheless lays claim to itself as it is, even today, even concealed or disguised. From this follows a consequence that certainly constitutes a major fact of our generation: we can no longer limit ourselves, in Europe, to the horizon of European thought. We must leave home and shake off our

philosophic atavism—go “to see” elsewhere, which was already the first meaning of “theory” for the Greeks, let us remember, before theory became dully speculative.

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But how can one *enter* this way of thought? It requires so much time, we know, so much patience, “skill,” memory, to be initiated into the classical Chinese language and to venture into its immense forest of texts and commentaries. All the more so because this language offers none of the conveniences of our own: it has no morphology—neither conjugation nor declension—and has almost no syntax (classical Chinese, at least). Thus one can only do what the Chinese literati themselves did for so many centuries: learn and recite by heart. Above all, let us quickly understand, such thought cannot be summarized. No synopsis—no abridged, condensed *digest*—can give us access to it. You perform that reduction beginning with terms that are your own, without disrupting them, without moving, without *leaving*: you have stayed within your initial categories—you discover nothing. Alternatively, would you like to display the principal Chinese concepts on a chart, one after another, *tao (dao)*, *yin*, *yang*, and so on, draw up a list of them, and compile a lexicon? But your next two options amount to one: by not translating them you will leave them aglow in some distant exoticism; by wanting to translate them you will immediately enclose them within a foreign language, your own, and deprive them of their coherence, remove them from their implicitness: *you are no longer sharing*. This other way of thought will provide no more than a *facsimile*, more or less distorted, of our concepts. You have still not cleared a way, built a threshold, for “entering.”

Another alternative, the desire to trace the history of Chinese thought in order to enter it, offers a reassuring feeling of totality: here we might track it from beginning to end as it unfolds, through its ins and outs; we would thus follow the ridgeline of its development. But can we forget that this would be an imposition—a presentation—that is strictly Western, that is to say, responding to a strong constituent historicity, made of resounding ruptures and confrontations, belonging to European philosophy? The Chinese themselves only adopted this approach in Western schools in the early twentieth century, at the same time as they adopted the term “philosophy,” which they translated so badly: *zhe-xue*, “wisdom-study” (in Japanese: “imitation-application,” *tetsu-gaku*)—what remains there of desire or philosophic *eros*? What assures us that such a history, by establishing positions, presenting theses, constructing debates and counterarguments in the thinking (of course, there were debates at times in China, too), does not keep us at a distance from the silently formed complicities, the “obvious facts” endlessly “reheated,” as Confucius says, that have woven this way of thought’s *fund of understanding*—implicitly shared but from then on remaining out of reach for us? Precisely what we hesitate to call “philosophy.”

Or if we wanted to emphasize the diversity of schools through careful, methodical classification (“Confucianism” / “Taoism” / “Buddhism” . . .), under those rubrics we would further exacerbate the separations that, in China even more than elsewhere, serve only to indicate membership: (philosophical schools there are called *jia*, “family.” Such tabulations provide order (reassuringly) but do not give way to thought; they remain exterior to the material beneath their labels. I mean that they do not help us make use of Chinese thought to question ourselves; and even though we can thus speak of “Chinese thought,” we are still thinking in our own language, according to our own tools. One way or another, you always remain outside, at home, you still have not moved; you have not “entered.”

We must take better measure of this Chinese *elsewhere*. And this will be even more necessary the more that which falls under the name of globalization, by spreading its standard categories everywhere, that is, by saturating the landscape—including the mental landscape—with its stereotypes, tends to pass off its uniformity as universality; that is, the more it tends to pass off as legitimate according to principle and logic what is only a convenience of production and its mediatization by portraying it as right and necessary. Or, alternatively, this will be necessary when the particular is isolated, closed off, clichéd; when it goes from residual to overrated and finds itself transformed into artificial folklore, a bait for tourists. Thus, as a form of resistance, we must now construct a geography of this Elsewhere and the *possibilities* of thought. This is not, God forbid, to close the cultures back down into themselves, huddled in quest of a pseudo-identity, but very much the opposite: exploring the resources *for all intelligence* and exploiting them. “Intelligence,” as I understand it, is not an arrested faculty, belonging to fixed or even “transcendental” categories, as it was classically understood to be. Rather, it is activated and deployed, and it progresses in keeping with the intelligibilities it traverses. And the wider the gap between those intelligibilities, the greater the opportunities for discovery and traversal.

Let us set out on the better-marked path. With regard to India, the works of the last generation, of Georges Dumézil and Émile Benveniste in France, showed us what we, as Europeans, might share in terms of semantic elements as well as logical relationships, mental images as well as social functions. Because of proximity, we can also suspect that thinking was influenced on either side of the Indus in earlier periods: the influence of the gymnosophists on Plotinus, for example. With regard to Islam, whose language belongs to another family, we—still the European or, more specifically, the Christian “we”—share religions of the Book, the biblical filiation, the idea of a creator God; we share the absolute of a message delivered in a Revelation. Moreover, the histories of Europe and Islam have continually mingled. Aristotle returned to us through the Arabs; Thomas Aquinas was inspired by Averroës; Islamic monotheism can be added to the stack of precedents. Furthermore, the first outline of the figure of the European intellectual trace back to Andalusia. But how have we thought beyond that horizon? And within that “elsewhere”—because it is elsewhere—could we have thought differently?

Raised in the form of an alternative, this question suddenly becomes our question. Aren’t the various cultures throughout the world only so many infinitely varied responses to the same questions that we ask ourselves—that we cannot help but ask ourselves? In which case, their inventory is no more than a range of nuances. Or is it only in those gaps we reveal between cultures that we can detect, identifying it patiently feature by feature, reflected as what is thus found in those various encounters, what is—or rather, what “goes as”—“human”? Let us retain the open, progressive character of this last formulation and go with the nondefinitive “going.” Let us set down no preliminary definition, especially of “Man,” which is always ideological and which thus affects, as we can see, the universality of the questions themselves.

Is the Kantian summary and breviary—“What can I know?” / “What must I do?” / “What have I the right to hope?”—so conveniently exportable itself? Those questions, which are supposed to be the most abstract questions, the ones that should best hold all that is hypothetical within their triangle—are they really so extractable from their semantic folds? And then, can they be isolated from the theoretical biases that led to them? Nothing guarantees that “to know” and “to do,” the two terms of our classical philosophy, are found *a priori* in other languages, and the question is even more relevant

it seems, for the eschatological “to hope.” Don’t these questions remain fixed in an implicitness they do not probe, being without (external) support for reflecting upon them? Consequently, doesn’t this diversity—the diversity of cultures—send us back into our questions, forcing us to rework them? Indeed, encountering China, I ask myself: Is it even necessary for us to think *by means of questions*? Is it true that to think must always be to respond to a mystery, to interrogate the Sphinx, to sound the depths, as the West has passionately wanted it to be since the Greeks?

It is true that a discipline was born when the West, as explorer of the elsewhere and colonizer of resources, inquired about the diversity of cultures throughout the world—that discipline is “anthropology.” But hasn’t anthropology been given that name too hastily, at too little cost? Does it keep its promises? And furthermore, why hasn’t philosophy taken more advantage of this Elsewhere that anthropology reveals to us, as art has done, for example, by drawing inspiration from it? Why has philosophy found so little there to renew it? Or found renewal only at its margins? After all, there’s Montaigne (but is Montaigne a “philosopher”?). That is to say, why do we limit this inquiry on cultural diversity to such a restricted, sectored mode without letting it renew our universals? Without making it the key to what “humanity” is—or rather, what it *can* be?

Because then we could not continue to repeat with Hegel that philosophy appeared first in the East (the “East,” *oriens*: where the morning sun “rises”) but, through a strangely delayed birth, got its start in Greece, with the discovery of the concept and its operativity linking the universal and the particular; or, to repeat with Husserl that if all the cultures are so many anthropological “variations” and therefore equal, nevertheless only one, the European culture, has experienced the perilous fate of turning back on itself and becoming self-reflective; or, to repeat with Maurice Merleau-Ponty that the East, remaining in the “childhood” of philosophy, can only maintain an “oblique” relationship with it (but, as we well know, we have so much to learn from children!). No, we could no longer conceive of “geo-philosophy” as Gilles Deleuze did, that is, by consigning any thinking exterior to Europe to the stage of “pre-philosophic” for not rising to the “level of immanence,” and so on. Or if we did, we would still judge that thinking according to our reasons, or rather, let us say, our *pre*-reasons, which remain implicit and very much prior to our judgments, our “pre-judices,” since first of all, they must be detected, which Descartes never considered; and regarding those “others,” we would still only be scratching the surfaces of clichés and labels without penetrating their coherences, without calling into question our biases—what biases?—and, consequently, without probing the depths of our unthought, beginning from these outside ways of thought, into which we have still not *entered*.

The usual response I get from my philosopher friends goes as follows. From the time their schools first appeared, the Greeks deployed the possibilities of thought by systematically developing debates: Heraclitus versus Parmenides, or Epicurus against Plato (or materialism as opposed to idealism, and so on). How could there be more radical options, and don’t these oppositions immediately mark off the *entire* field of the thinkable? That is, don’t they become one and the same, let us venture, with the very exercise of Reason itself? Yes, the Greeks did indeed conceive of all the possibilities, I would answer, but configured in a certain way, *already* folded according to certain choices that they were not thinking about, that they did not doubt, that they were neither suspicious of nor surprised by: that they had not thought to think about. It is true that without *fold*, one does not think: one only thinks backed up against the unthought. The axes privileged by the Greeks (“being,” “principle,” “causality,” “truth,” and so on), and, primarily, their deliberate choice to question, to think of thinking as a confrontation, favored certain possibilities but left others in the shadows, unexplored, lying fallow—unexploited. Their strength, most certainly, was to take those options to a conceptual (i.e., universal) level so that, once adopted, once sedimented, they effectively imposed their “necessity” in return, the necessity of the *logos* of “logic.” But that does not mean that those folds—deposits—beginning from which they worked are the only ones, that other perspectives were

not extricable, that other possibilities were not imaginable. It does not mean that China's way of thinking "in course" should be ranked below that of Heraclitus's "all in flow," as one would believe from a distance, or that not promoting a concept of truth in China should be confused with—or even compared to—the "phenomenology," not to mention the skeptical disenchantment, of Protagoras.

### THREE ■ THINKING BEFORE OR BESIDE?

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We can now better understand why anthropology, despite its display of generality, has remained confined to its sector, without philosophical stakes: because what remains a given is the idea that the cultures and the thinking of elsewhere, as complex and varied as they may be, cannot or can only marginally call into question European questioning. Hasn't European thought, that is, the questioning of science and truth, adequately proven its effectiveness through the mastery that it ensures? These ways of thought from elsewhere can certainly enrich it, and even divert us from it (as exoticism does) but not make us relinquish it. European thinking does not divest itself. Upon encountering ways of thought from elsewhere, it ought to forge new concepts, expand its categories, and, in doing so, better yield to perceiving its own locality, but instead it retains its perspective—it has that tool. The Quai Branly Museum of indigenous arts fascinates us by making us see what we could have not become, but it does not disturb us. I would even say that the more spectacular and showy the “elsewhere” is, the less disturbing it is. The problem with China is that its elsewhere is discreet. There are no myths to reconstruct there, no arcane oral traditions to probe, no strange customs to revisit (except foot binding?). Chinese culture developed in text and history just as our own European culture did. Thus its elsewhere subtly escapes the anthropologists' hold. Anthropology withdraws within its (minority) borders; or else its only other option is to put China and Greece in the same bag, or the same box, as Philippe Descola did, labeling it “analogism.” But the consequences are still the same: the “naturalism” that follows after “analogism” arises in Europe alone.

The thinking of the Enlightenment had already encountered this problem, let us remember: into which box on our chart to put what was then called the “Chinese case.” And what if the “Chinese case” surreptitiously undermined our classifications and our display? Montesquieu experienced such a moment of vertigo. The problem posed by this Chinese Elsewhere becomes all the more thorny now that we are no longer sure we can declare it outstripped (by the West). China effectively missed the classical scientific revolution, the one that produced the mechanist-causalist physics of Galileo and Newton that, within a few centuries, so abruptly changed material life on the entire planet; likewise and conjointly, it missed the ascent of the bourgeois Individual of the Enlightenment and the thinking of the political contract. But perhaps it can nevertheless be put in European culture's—outdated—Before box, as so many other cultures have been? And here is a still more delicate question: Is its elsewhere, for that matter, so different? It is true that as soon as we have defined the difference, separated the “same” from the “other,” we have returned home. We know this, don't we—that “to compare” is another way of not moving, of not leaving, and therefore of not entering? One has remained within one's own initial overarching categories, beginning from which one orders things; heterotopia and disorientation have not come into play. Conclusion (the one that has separated me from other sinologists): as long as European reasoning refuses to *de-* and *re-*categorize itself, that is, to reconsider what is implicit in it, to question it and to probe its “obviousness,” it cannot effectively access an elsewhere, another way of thinking; and philosophy, despite its “doubt,” will no longer be able to be self-reflective.

Let us remember, however: Wasn't it this Elsewhere, not yet marked by difference (categorized) that so surprised the first missionaries who landed in China after having discovered the New World, the Americas? The New World appeared empty to them, or they would, in any case, empty it, without resistance, through extermination or conversion. In Europe one could only wonder—an ambiguity cultivated with delight over centuries—whether the specimens discovered beyond the seas represented a humanity that had not yet progressed, or else had not yet fallen and become corrupt. Does the “good savage” disturb us? It confirms our ethnocentrism one way or another, and even our critical awareness.

of it cannot undo this obvious fact: that that form of humanity belongs definitively to the past, and henceforth the West alone remains the single reference point. In China, on the other hand, the missionaries came upon a “full” world; and for a long time the Chinese Literati would not be taken in by them—not that they refuted those evangelists who came from their “Far West,” but they could hardly be bothered: Did they need this imported Message? Was it meant just for them? Euclid’s *Elements* could certainly be put to good use, but the News of salvation hardly seemed to concern them; rather, it left them indifferent. Now *indifference*, between ways of thought, is much more difficult to surmount than difference.

Thus we now find ourselves in an ambiguous historical situation, but perhaps we have not yet sufficiently analyzed the nature of this “crisis,” to use the term proposed by Husserl, and this shift, not to call it, more alarmingly, an upheaval. Because it is precisely at this moment, at the end of the theoretical globalization it began more than a century ago, that the West believes it is seeing its conceptions definitively triumph across the planet, not only its hypothetico-deductive conception of science with its model-making logic (with mathematics as universal language in the background), but also, on the economic and political level, its conceptions of capitalist productivity and democratic right. It is precisely at this moment that this culture, the “West,” is suddenly amazed: If a culture, the Chinese culture for instance, is no longer located only *before*, but experienced its own development on many levels *beside* and parallel to the European culture, isn’t it therefore also true that Europe occupies only one side (of the possibilities of thought)?

Indeed, this perspective can be reversed: What if European culture’s choices did not only push it forward, as it has believed about itself for the past few centuries, considering its success, but also move it to the side, off its mark, cause it to “go wrong,” as the expression goes? But *to the side* of what? In any case, the dualisms beginning from which its logic has so continuously operated now become a burden to it: “mind” / “matter,” “subject” / “object,” “God” / “the world,” and so on—who in Europe today is not trying by some means or other to shake off their yoke, to slip free of it? Could this set of tools be outdated? Might it now obstruct the way forward? Also, the message of salvation that European culture constructed and passionately proffered in its History, that it made so many desire, now loses its hold; or perhaps the ideals, like the “Beautiful,” that it established, to which it sacrificed so much, now seem to it too costly, if not a wretched sham.

Both perspectives simultaneously intrigue it (“it” being European culture, which believes itself to be universal): Through its choices, and first of all its choice of “clarity,” didn’t it miss a certain *connected complexity* of things, and this at the risk of a *complication* leading it ever on, which it would no longer have to pursue? And thus, wouldn’t it have problematized uselessly, carried along as it is by this enthusiasm for analytical “reason,” from which it can no longer step back? To the point that the elemental henceforth escapes it, that it no longer knows how to access it? Europe is suddenly retrospectively, surprised by the great sacrifice that it has thus made, committed as one commits a crime, and first of all from the perspective of what it can only, from now on, dramatically call “existence” and no longer life: indeed, the desire to penetrate the secret of the biological never ends, but we no longer know how to live (how to die)—have we even thought about breathing (which China has thought about constantly)? We never stop wanting to master time, planning it ever more conveniently, but we no longer know how to think about the opportunity of a moment—China began by thinking about the seasonal “moment,” and so on. By relentlessly promoting knowledge, the complicities were broken; and the Individual condemned to confinement within his individualism. What is most fundamental escapes us, a disintegration gets under way, which goes from the social to the metaphysical (the famous “nihilism”), and the mastery acquired will finally leave us destitute.

Thus, but too easily, of course, too lazily, what Western thought vaguely glimpsed of that

Elsewhere of the Far East fascinated it as that which could henceforth serve to name for it what it repressed. Might it even offer itself as a remedy? At least, it is no trouble to concoct this compensatory Elsewhere. To do so, it is enough just to invert the terms—another way of not disturbing oneself: projecting one's fantasy in order not to *enter*. Beneath the heterotopia reappears the utopia: the logic of regulation (in China) would thus prevail over modelization (so praised by the West); or the relaxing of the principle of noncontradiction (belonging to wisdom) would prevail over the need for the excluded middle (required by logic); or again, the global (grasped by intuition) would prevail over the general (defined by concept); or harmony with the world, over autonomy of the subject, and so on. All the way up to where the most contemporary science bumps up against it, there is nothing that would not find a trace of itself at least in harmony with, if not originating from, the insights of ancient China. This holds as much with regard to “space-time” revealing itself to be infrangible as with the—now necessary—renunciation of the very idea of “matter.”

Since that is where we are, historically speaking, it is clear that from now on, sinology can no longer be considered protected territory. Or perhaps it is sinology itself that, in so often limiting itself to erudite monographs, has thus “protected” itself. Hasn't it too hastily slipped into, settled into, the habitus and connivances of the *within* of its discipline? Hasn't it passed too naively from the other side, too hastily straddling the passage, to still be able to allow *entry*? Likewise and conversely, “sino”-logy, a variant of anthropology, can no longer continue to be considered *from without*, as a specialty, as philosophy still too often does. It is not only China's importance today, and above all its economic importance, that compels us; and all the hybridizations and superimpositions of globalization will not let us avoid the great disentangling that has become necessary. We must indeed *enter* into Chinese thought, actually enter, in order to exit that ideological outlet that threatens and allows European reasoning to examine itself, both its rich and its exhausted resources—there is nothing worse, on the other hand, than when it makes itself feel guilty. Or else we risk lapsing into the inanities of personal development and “happiness according to Confucius” that are today's big winners.

The fact remains that we cannot enter into Chinese thought without first approaching it through and in its language. Because “Chinese thought”—I am responding here to the objections of those who are afraid of confining cultures within worlds—is, first of all and essentially, thought that is expressed *in Chinese*. It is in the articulation of the sentence, even before ideas and thus prior to the effects of construction, that the *folds* are sketched. If language does not determine thought, to think, nonetheless is to activate the resources of a language. Now, as I have cautioned, learning classical Chinese requires infinite time and patience. Is there a shortcut to propose? Here I am inviting nonsinologists to read one simple Chinese sentence, but so “simple” that it takes much time to reveal it—to read it simultaneously from within and without, from close-up and from a distance—in order, by “entering,” by exiting and reentering again, by excavating that gap, to open underneath the many expedients of retreat and reflexivity, which is very different from believing it is possible to arrange naively side by side, to trace a parallel and “compare.” I am offering a reading both in what it says and what it does not say, both in what it engages and what it turns away from, in what it does and does not lead us to think. To dispel vague generalities and whiffs of fantasy, nothing is better than fieldwork.



## FOUR ■ THE FIRST SENTENCE

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I do indeed believe in the *sentence* as the modality belonging to thought. I do not know if philosophers have a style, according to the question so often debated; no doubt “style” is too personal (isn’t it, as Buffon said, “the man himself?”), too intimately tied to individuality, and the philosopher might thus have a style despite himself; his style might in fact work against him. But I find there to be a sentence belonging to each philosopher *insofar as he is a philosopher*. A philosopher is recognized by his sentence more than by his concepts. That is even what makes him a great philosopher: when he has his sentence—this “great” being understood less as a word of praise than as a trademark. Plato quite obviously has a sentence, the one that he fully deploys and joyfully affirms his command over in *Gorgias* or the *Republic*. In other words, what makes Plato Plato is his way of developing his sentence much more than his theory of “ideas,” which he calls his great invention, or rather, the theory finds itself already included there, already understood. Aristotle has an entirely different sentence. It is through his sentence and its construction, his method of inventory and allocation, of anonymity and collective opinion, that Aristotle opens a gap between himself and his master, much more so than through ideas, arguments, or conceptions-convictions, as much as these find themselves involved. Merleau-Ponty has a sentence and does not have a concept (the “flesh” is hardly a concept). I can recognize a sentence, each different, for Paul Ricoeur as for Alain Badiou.

But what is a sentence? Let us be clear: a sentence has nothing to do with form in the sense of putting a thought “into form,” because the sentence is its very deployment—in other words, its condition of existence. From beginning to end, or from one period to another period, whether or not sentences are marked (ancient forms of writing, we know, did not mark them), they are the means by which the thought arises, gets going, expands, builds tension, perhaps loses its balance and regains it, promotes itself in any case, and then must end, or at least land, offering some pause or some breakaway. The Greek sentence, as in Plato, with its *an*, its *ara*, and its optatives, all its combinative play of hypotheses and relatives, but also its anacoluthons (traditionally identified with the syntactic freedom of the Greek language), is a sentence that builds, but in a risky fashion, through perilous balancing acts, by going to the limit with audacity, just for the sake of it—it is adventuresome. It is exactly this *audacity* that gave a shot of energy, insolence, and detachment to what has since been called philosophy in Europe. Kant has a Latin sentence in German. Hegel, at least in *Phenomenology*, develops a sentence that splits apart and turns in circles all the diverging, combining elements of German semantics, like a great mill that can grind everything: that is what gives Hegel his power. As for Heidegger, he is so taken up with his sentence that he makes himself untranslatable.

The same is true, and even more so, for the first sentence. That sentence operates as a curtain raiser. It does not say where it comes from, and advances unjustified, a true “throw of the dice” presenting us retrospectively with this enigma: *Through where*—that is, through what hold or according to what means—can elucidation begin, can a beginning take place? But at the same time, as discretely as it presents itself, that first sentence establishes, exudes, an order that can no longer be undone; henceforth one can only think within its orbit or in its wake. It happens just like that: a horizon is already sketched. A first sentence enlists the thinking that follows in a such way that detachment or disengagement will no longer be possible, whatever inventiveness is brought to bear; we remain dependent on it or ensnared by it. At the same time as it arises, it *folds* the thinkable; that inaugural act, because of its scope, already amounts to completion. In some sense, we will do nothing afterward but explain that initial, ventured gesture. Or, put more negatively, hardly has this first sentence begun to be uttered—to be set in motion—than it becomes a rut, than it projects its shadow or its fate over all future developments. We never exit a first sentence.

In Proust's first sentence, the memorable "For a long time, I used to go to bed early," isn't everything already definitively advanced? There the die is cast for *Remembrance of Things Past*; and Proustians will endlessly discover, with pleasure, all that it sets in motion. Like a parasol or a canopy that is opened, and under the shelter of which one remains, that "long time" immediately establishes, without wait or hurry, the sovereign order of duration. Facing that expanse, the "I" that points to and responds to it holds the position of a singular subject but already overflows with its own exiguity: it is tenuously anecdotal but is inscribing opposite the empty available form where everything will come to collect and take shape. Above all, to begin by going to bed is already to take the opposite approach, to set in motion a conversion that will not end. It is to begin to present the interior dimension that lies below the diurnal, dissolute, soon forgotten daily experience—the nocturnal, in other words, where, in the silence and refusal of agitation, events and feelings will finally be able to release a clear sound as they settle; where the impressions then set free will never stop tunneling underground to reconnect, through "Time," in order to escape their dispersion and be rejoined—by way of which the entire world will find its revelation. Thus, after the "long time" gong is struck, the octosyllable that follows demands a pause that makes it resonate—suspense-silence; but the framework is already established, the loom is strung.

One may counter that this is a matter of a "literary" sentence and that it is not the same for a philosophical abstraction. But let us take the first sentence of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. It is more than a threshold; it is already a kind of prescription for what follows: "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly, every action and every choice, aims at some good, it seems." In the framework of this opening sentence alone, we can see that an array of concepts is organized, a first line is traced for systematically inventorying an order of things within its grid, and in the most economic, strictly enumerative fashion, without leaving room for any escape, supposition, or possible disorganization. A system of impersonal generality is established that immediately suppresses the mysterious or strange. Everything is already methodically, serially arranged—all the more so since it is a matter of marks, shown in equal, steady light, so that there is no longer anything to fear, anything that stands out, shadowy, disconcerting. The requirement of an aim is posited in a perspective from which there is no exit; everything will forever be returned to it by that same raking motion: an orbit is fixed, that of *telos*, toward which everything "aims" (according to that Greek construction that serves as matrix: *ephiesthai* + genitive). Consequently, Aristotle will endlessly repeat that if my action has no goal, it is futile; and whether material is submitting to form, or power to action, or the world to God, this is very much what he will endlessly afterward organize "theoretically." Similarly, to the generality so drily opened and allowing no shadow or fissure to remain, the final "seems" (*dokei*) adds, before closing, an empirical flat note that will be heard endlessly, as a continual echo, the one of general "opinion," in other words, the *doxa*'s support, which is dangerous to give up. This is Aristotle's way of issuing warning and immediately marking his distance from the dangerous—Platonic—flight into ideality. In this brief inaugural sentence, in its way of analytically seizing things and organizing, flatly, with no further intrigue, all of Aristotle is already present.

## FIVE ■ A FIRST CHINESE SENTENCE

This first Chinese sentence I will take from the beginning of China's oldest book, which is also its most fundamental book, the *Yijing* (*I Ching*), or "Classic of Change," if we translate the title literally (*yi*, "change"; *jing*, "classic"). But is it a "book," strictly speaking? If there is a book, a text accumulating successive layers from the beginning to the end of the first millennium BCE, that book takes form beginning not from a Word but from a line: a complete line or a broken line ("—" or "— —") symbolizing the two factors in correlation, *yin* and *yang*, simultaneously opposite and complementary and holding all reality. Those horizontal lines, superimposed, combine into figures of three or six lines (for a total of sixty-four hexagrams) such that they derive from one another and form a *mechanism* that, stemming from ancient divination practices and used for drawing lots, is both a chance operation and, as such, manipulatable. According to their arrangement and the intermingling of the two types of lines, these figures allow the consultant to identify and analyze the lines of force at work in each situation encountered, which must be turned to good advantage in order to succeed.

Given its material, we can see immediately what makes this "book" original. It does not teach a Message or claim to deliver a Meaning (about the enigma of the world or the mystery of life—what do I know?) but presents for examination, going from the bottom to the top of each figure and line after line, how this or that situation is deployed and inflected in a positive or negative way, "luckily" or "unluckily," as a function of the tendencies and interactions detected, which continue to evolve. Each of these successive figures, considered as a whole and considering each of its lines, through a macro- and a micro-reading, makes appear in its coherence a moment of the transformation under way. On the other hand, the first two figures stand apart because they are each composed of a single type of line: the initial figure is formed only out of *yang* lines, evoking the capacity of Heaven (☰); the second is formed only out of *yin* lines, evoking the capacity of Earth (☷). *Yin* and *yang* originated as the north-facing and south-facing slopes of the mountain, its dark and its lit sides. Forming a pair, with the six *yang* lines facing the six *yin* lines, these two initial figures comprise the total stock of the lines composing the series—or the energies invested—and represent the polarity of the whole. The first embodies what I will translate as the *initiatory capacity*, *Qian* 乾, and the second, as the *receiving capacity*, *Kun* 坤: as counterparts, they form the double door (門門) through which the process of things endlessly passes.

Once this mechanism is in place, what can we imagine to be the opening formula or the first sentence put forward? But first of all, once again, is it a sentence, strictly speaking? Just four Chinese sinograms follow one another side by side, without anything to indicate rection or relationships of coordination or subordination between them. These four monosyllables are all equal, without anything arranging or hierarchizing them, but in their series they form a complete whole. In such a formula, is it even a matter of verbs, nouns, adjectives, or whatever function these words have? Nothing can mark it grammatically; there is no more morphological specification here than there is syntactical rection. I will choose to translate this parataxis using minimal punctuation:

### Initiatory capacity (*Qian*):

beginning	expansion	profit	rectitude
<i>yuan</i>	<i>heng</i>	<i>li</i>	<i>zhen</i>
元	亨	利	貞

Or just as good: "to begin—to expand rapidly—to profit / to turn to good account—to remain

sound (solid).” Such an opening sentence, as we can see, does not *construct*; it is content with simultaneously unbinding and binding. Each successive term takes over from the preceding one and deploys it; it proceeds from it, renews it, and carries it further: like four points or pieces on an otherwise empty checkerboard, tracing a curve by themselves. Faced with so much non-alternative (compared with that series of alternatives that syntax imposes upon us in our languages), I wonder: Can we imagine an opening formulation that is less inventive, less postulated, and less adventuresome—less risky? Can we imagine a proposition less moved by choices, and especially those grammatical choices required by other languages (choices of person, gender, number, time, and so on), that is to say, advancing itself less as an option—hypothesis/hypothetical—taken on what might be called “reality”? This utterance does not refer to anything in particular, it has no subject or complement, but it marks the stages and the justification of all development: it less has a *meaning*, strictly speaking, than it develops a *coherence*.

Thus it is less a matter of a sentence, exactly, than of successive phases of an unfolding: we can read these four terms one by one and one after the other. A seasonal illustration: the “beginning” is spring; the “expansion,” summer; the “profit” (harvest), autumn; the “rectitude” (both solidity and tenacity), winter, which allows the capacity to endure, through burial, until renewal. But we can also read the terms two by two, already forming a polarity: to the release of a “beginning” responds the “expansion” that spreads the effect; or (then) the “profit” of the harvest calls for the integrity of the “rectitude” in order not to be exhausted. There, in any case, is the key formula—drawn from the old funds of divination operations and repeated many times throughout the book—for that which continually makes reality, in its incessant process, and which nothing can call into question, can neither reduce nor contradict.

“Beginning” does indeed mark that which first detaches itself and comes at the start, as the “initiator” of things (*ji*), when a configuration is barely suggested but its orientation can already be perceived, which applies equally to everything that comes into the world and takes on existence, involves nature as well as humanity, is understood on the physical as well as the moral plane. As the commentators will elaborate, it applies to every formation of “breath,” of vapor, or of energy (*qi* 气), beginning by individuating and actualizing itself, through condensation and concretion: thus the plant germinates or the insect hatches, thus the clouds and rocks are formed, thus things and events alike come about. But it applies as well to the slightest incitement of the inner depths rising in reaction to what we view as unbearable occurrences in the world and triggering in us a first spark of “humanity” from that initial feeling of pity (*ren* 仁), as non-insensibility with regard to what happens to others, the possibility of virtue begins. In relationship to which the time of “expansion” that follows is one of diffusion and maturation or, more precisely, according to the image, the time of inner, invisible “cooking,” of completing the development, then resulting in full manifestation. In this stage, the initial shock deploys itself throughout and spreads, promotes communication from within and leads to increase and growth: what has just begun is propagated, united, becomes a ball of snow or a spot of oil, the effect of which promotes and deploys itself.

With these two first terms we can already see that what makes this opening sentence original is that it refrains from—rids itself of—all originality and confrontation: that it is careful not to introduce any sort of intrigue or offer any opposition; that it puts nothing aside, involves no reference, establishes no preference or proper order, allows nothing be considered as external or elsewhere. If no subject is indicated here, as the Chinese language permits, it is because nothing effectively distinguishes itself as the subject, serving as substantial medium and destined for predication. Neither does anything escape this phenomenal perspective, that is, this perspective on the formation of phenomena: it is equally true for me and for the world; the subjective and the objective are not separated in it. Because, in all my manifestations of existence, internal as well as external, “I” too an

a momentary actualization of this dynamism or this impulse that spreads throughout, invests itself, interacts, and transmits energy.

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This perspective, or angle—although it does everything precisely in order to do away with anything like an “angle”—is thus that of every process activated and propagating itself, caught in its advent and its deployment. Thus to translate the following term (*li*) as “profit” is a bit reductive, or, I might say, too invested. In its usual written form, the ideogram is composed of an ear of grain and a scythe 利: it signifies what there is to harvest henceforth, as long as the expansion succeeds, or, in other words, that this expansion, in deploying itself, is both “pointed” (protruding) and “favorable” (the double meaning of *li*), that there is thus capital to be made out of that shock leading to the sharpening of the effect. But such profit is only durable precisely because it favors nothing in particular, is inclined toward no special bias, respects a just balance, neither deviates nor overflows. It maintains its immanent capacity through its “rectitude,” the last term of the sentence (*zhen*); and this fecundity at work does not run dry.

If we come back to our original inquiry, we will already begin to understand it in a less innocent or more trenchant way: How does one *enter* into the thinking? By what means or first maneuver does one open a way? What can be a start there, a first step that is both effective and that one privileges, beyond which, I am afraid, no more can be done but to develop and accept the consequences? In fact, I wonder whether, with this simple opening sentence, “Beginning → expansion → profit → rectitude,” the die is not already cast, whether everything is not already decided. And that is precisely because this first sentence does not draw up the expected ordinary scene, does not establish the first instant of an agent, is without story and without drama and does not even make anything emerge; because, furthermore, it offers nothing to suppose or to construct, leaves room for neither argumentation nor narration—neither *muthos* nor *logos*. Can we even imagine being disturbed by its truth? What is an utterance that does not even call for justification? Which leads to the question: Can our minds grasp what, in establishing itself, presents so little passion or resistance, fissure or contraction, through which meaning can be produced or emotion filtered? Can this sentence, in its equal, steady unwinding without suspense or tension, speak to our desire? Does it even let us discern some doubt or some question? And if so, I repeat, can we think without questioning?

Chinese thought effectively started from there—not from Being or from God. It did not start from the opposition of Being and becoming, or of truth and appearance, as did Greek metaphysics by splitting the world in two; rather, it conceives of the *initiatory capacity* (“Heaven”), invested in the formation of every process, developing in polarity (with “Earth”) and going its way, so that the process initiates itself—is deployed—makes good—renews itself without deviating from its course, which is the virtue of Heaven, being the condition of its renewal (but already I am glossing by justifying . . .). Neither did it start from a first Subject, author, or Creator, as represented in the biblical account, but conceives the operativity involved in every course—discreetly, in silence, tenaciously, whether that course is one of the world or of behavior. This sentence that moves so little risks or ventures so little, in a certain way already says everything. It circles back in its progression from “rectitude,” where it draws to a close, to a new “beginning.” What could it leave pending? There is no enigma to decipher or worry to resolve: What could there be to add that is not already commentary?

## SIX ■ COMMENTARY

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That first sentence is so complete, comprehensive, and definitive, so clear and calm, leaving nothing pending, that there is nothing left to do but explain it; the only way of adding to it would be to gloss it. So many ancient Chinese texts are constructed beginning from basic formulas that serve as core or matrix, and all the elaboration that follows does nothing but exploit their richness. Here, this opening formulation, stating a “judgment” on the first figure of the *Classic of Change*, is traditionally attributed to King Wen, the civilizing king par excellence, founder of the Zhou dynasty in early Antiquity (turn of the first millennium BCE); and the commentary that follows it was attributed to Confucius but belongs instead to “the literati” of the end of Antiquity (in the fourth century BCE). The commentary begins like this:

Vast is the capacity of *Qian* [the initiatory capacity]!  
The ten thousand beings find their resources there to begin:  
so that it commands Heaven.

This exhaustive introductory formula is one of celebration. What is there at the beginning, *am Anfang*, as Goethe said, or what is this first “there is,” this *es gibt*? What is there to start out from to say things? From nothing other, it is proposed here as if presenting the obvious, than the invested —“initiatory” (*Qian*)—to which all that exists owes its becoming and its developing: finding in it source and resource (the notion of *zi*), and finding simultaneously its point of departure, its reserve or its “capital,” and its support.

And what term to begin with, what first term to venture? That “vast” (“great”) comes first; that “vast” is enough to name here that generous capacity which, opening its arms, can form a wide embrace (look at this mark for “vast” with its horizontal line tracing a man 人 opening his arms 大); that “vast,” in a certain way, already says it all. Or else that “vast” is the opening word, the first qualifier projected, chosen from among the possibilities—and is there any going back? Simply to name this “vastness” in the face of the world, in the face of life, is to keep from awakening surprised panic in the face of what might be, beyond all beyond, infinity: the vertigo that seized Job facing divine Creation’s incommensurability is immediately disposed of. Similarly and conversely, this sufficient, satisfying “vast” dispenses with the need to posit some border or edge; it does not raise questions, as in Greek, with regard to the “limit,” *peras*: one is diverted de facto from the worry of having to name the “all” of the world, *to holon*, which the first Ionian thinkers raised as an enigma. Thus this “vast” or “great,” posted first, does not question. This “ample,” so generously deployed, but without extending to any boundary and thus to confrontation, already buries any question of why. It opens widely but does not bump up against anything. It obliterates any abyss as it dissolves any fixation. Fascination with the Extreme and its impossible beyond is drowned in it, quieted in it, as, conversely, any temptation to withdraw or focus—contract—into the narrowness of the singular is defeated. Through such an opening, all those ways are *already* closed. Throwing this “vast” out at the beginning is enough to create a gap.

What I have translated as “being” (*wu* 物) is indeed the most “ample” term for naming both “beings and things” captured in all their variety (the “ten thousand beings,” *wan wu*). Etymologically this term (the graph 𠄎 depicts an ox (牛) and plowing (耜: a sack and bit of earth?). But how did we get from there to the “ten thousand” as the number of the innumerable? Could it be because the clods of plowed earth are multicolored or because the ox is an animal whose corpulence spreads amply in our eyes (as before the expert butcher in *Zhuangzi*)? In ancient inscriptions, in any case, the word is

attested to designate a particular kind of ox with a multicolored coat that could be offered in sacrifice. We can gather at least that reality is approached as living, in its mass and its diversity of appearance, forming a scene and destined for use, perceived in activity. Here again, beneath this most ordinary naming, choices are already indicated which the language does not reflect. To name what we most commonly call “beings” is just this “plow ox,” that the Chinese language graphically employs, making it the medium for a multiplicity: this term blocks the path of speculation; the way of thought is immediately directed toward function and appearance, not toward essence or existence. Thus, to translate it as “being(s)” —as I have just done, but how else to translate it?—ineluctably throws us off course.

Because once the perspective is projected, once the day has dawned, we are not allowed to consider “what” (noun) the beings and things “might be,” nor “from what” they come. Instead, they situate us in the fundamental, earlier stage, the one of stock or root (*ben* 本). They do not leave room for the question “What is that?” (the *ti esti* of the Greeks) nor for an investigation of origin: it will be enough to note that the incitation is constantly at work, on a wide scale, and the course is continually getting under way. A capacity is invested, in every place as at every moment, that never stops “providing for,” endlessly spreading, promoting, without exhausting itself. That is why it is called “vast” and why it is celebrated. It commands from end to end that continuum of becoming—of flow—that is called “Heaven” (*tian* 天, “vast,” “great,” 大, with a second horizontal line above indicating that it embraces by covering). Now such a “Heaven,” at the time of this commentary, is no longer deified nor separate, strictly speaking, but already serves to name that generous initiatory energy, never running dry, that is found to be involved in every process.

The commentary continues:

Clouds pass—rain spreads:  
the beings, according to their category, flow [into] their actualization.

Such is the progress, or rather, such is the *in progress*, the “expansion” (*heng*) after the “beginning” (*yuan*) that prompts it and governs it. For the passing of what takes form in turn, deploying itself in a purely processive way, what is more obvious indeed than *clouds*? Not clouds exiled beyond the horizon, prompting nostalgia, deepening into infinity, but clouds that condense diffuse energy into vaporous appearances and begin actualizing it by sketching contours with their swells. And for that capacity to spread throughout and, crossing straight through, to assist in the ripening process, what better to evoke than *rain*—the fertile rain that does not target or spare anything? Now we also understand that the same is true of everything that is so “fine”—“light”—“subtle”—“compact” that it becomes imperceptible, but operates all the more easily at the core of all development, as one commentator on this commentary notes (Wang Fuzhi, at the end of the seventeenth century). Indeed, what is life, the world, reality, whatever we call it, if it is not that the actualization that deploys itself through interaction into specific individuations, each according to its rubric, and that thus flows and follows from itself, without any other pretext? What could be added to this pure, simple phenomenality, the Chinese ask us, that would not weigh it down or coat it? What could be assumed to be behind or beyond it? Why must “something”—being or substance—more (than this continuous passage) exist? And in particular, what need is there to conceive of a Cause for this constant promotion, to posit a Mover, to invoke an Agent?

This commentary, as we can clearly see, asks nothing, it explains nothing, and it even makes an questioning moot. It neither claims nor justifies—which is to say that it only presents the obvious in which we are already engaged, and it does so in a strictly self-referential fashion, by relying solely on the six lines, or six “positions” (“dragons”), of the figure that it summarizes:

Vast clarity—end beginning:

the six positions, according to their moment, come to pass:

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according to the moment, to mount the six dragons so as to drive Heaven.

The way of *Qian* [the initiatory capacity] modifying-transforming,  
each renders [holds] correct its nature-destiny.

To retain unity; vast harmony.

From which, profit and rectitude.

Each “moment” comes in its time, opportunely, and that is why, after the “beginning” and the “expansion” come the “profit” (harvest) and the “rectitude.” What better image of this dynamism extending from itself and renewing itself than the body of the *dragon*? There is successive development indeed, as from the lower line to the upper line of the figure, at the same time that light “vast” as well, accompanies this unfolding throughout, leaving no room for suspecting any hole or break. What place is there for worry in what is bound together so well that the possibility of death or interruption, at this level, is inconceivable? It does not even say “beginning and end,” but “end-beginning” (which translators often wrongly correct): this beginning is not inscribed in a single moment in time but is at work in all activation, and likewise there is no final end, neither a raising nor a lowering of the curtain. Thus every end is also a beginning; what is completed gives birth again as well. We have only continuous transitions to deal with.

Or again, there is indeed endless mutation, “modification” and “transformation” (*bian-hua*), so that stable or Eternal being cannot be invoked, but nevertheless this becoming does not deviate. All that is individuated is called to follow in “correct” fashion what makes up its “nature” and forms its “destiny.” In other words, what is invested in it as capacity also commands in it its “rection,” the “mandate” according to a fate that sets its destination: whether it is that of “Heaven” as a whole or that of each singular advent, this course can develop only insofar as it is regulated. It could not follow one particular moral code or, conversely, fall outside the framework of this processivity. “Harmony” (*he*), the master word of this evocation, in keeping “profit” inseparable from “rectitude,” deals with them both: it assumes simultaneously that nothing can intervene from outside the world or secede from within the world. That this “harmony” is also called “vast” means that it holds in all respects, a inner value, unique value, without leaving expectations of a beyond or fears of rebellion or exception. Facing so much coherence, which dissolves all metaphysical surprise at this point—that is to say, makes “Heaven” spill into the natural at this point—we ourselves are surprised. I cannot help but wonder: Will there never be any place here for the Rupture? Will nothing ever come to break in, to rise up in confrontation?

In any case, we must note that the Chinese thinker recognizes nothing specific here, nothing exclusive, and that he keeps everything connected: according to our own terms, the ethical goes hand in hand with the cosmological, and it is the same with the political, which makes it all the clearer why *strictly ideological* order serves as foundation, or rather, let us say, as seal. The commentary continues and comes to an end in this way:

[From the] head to tower over the throng of beings:  
the ten thousand realms are at peace.

It is clear, according to all the glossators, that what comes “at the head” here, what emerges “from the head,” refers back to what was said at the start of the beginning-command (*yuan*): that is, the wise Sovereign who embodies that capacity which is both initiatory and regulatory and whom there is no need even to name as such, since he is so much one with the good order of things. In fact, in this processive logic, impossible to disturb, is there still a place for a political Subject, unique as he might be? Because the sovereign himself is only the medium or the office through which the social



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