Laotse, who lived two and a half thousand years ago, is the oldest Chinese philosopher known and is, to my mind, the most alive even now. Unlike most thinkers of his people he was not a traditionalist, and I shall treat the two chapters of his Tao Teh Ching I intend to comment upon without even referring to the tradition of Laotse himself, just as if they were written in our days.

Unfortunately I do not know Chinese. I shall use Dr. Lin Yutang's recent translation (in: Lin Yutang, The Wisdom Of China, Michael Joseph, London, 1948), which, after comparison with several English, French, and German versions and consultation with some Chinese philosopher friends, seems to me a very good one.

The second chapter of the Tao Teh Ching reads as follows:

When the people of the Earth all know beauty as beauty,  
there arises (the recognition of) ugliness.  
When the people of the Earth all know the good as good,  
there arises (the recognition of) evil.  
Therefore:  
Being and non-being interdepend in growth;  
difficult and easy interdepend in completion;  
long and short interdepend in contrast;  
high and low interdepend in position;  
tones and voice interdepend in harmony;  
front and behind interdepend in company.  
Therefore the Sage:  
manages the affairs without action;  
preaches the doctrine without words;  
all things take their rise, but he does not turn away from them;  
he gives them life, but does not take possession form them;  
he acts, but does not appropriate;  
accomplishes, but claims no credit.  
It is because he lays claim to no credit  
that the credit cannot be taken away from him.
This is the fundamental idea of dialectical thinking. Knowing, naming, and becoming conscious of, beauty and goodness imply the awareness of ugliness and evil. There may be beauty without ugliness, but the idea of the one calls for that of the other; for the one is delimited by the other, by its being different from the other or, as classical logic would say, by its being the negation of the other. As Paulette Destouches-Février so clearly formulated it, "Nature only knows the affirmative — facts, relations, actions — it is human reason which introduces the negation". She referred to Plato's *Phaidon* to show that great and small are not attributes belonging to objects but only relative qualities attributed to them by an observer under certain circumstances.

I suggested (The Science Of Liberty — *Morale de la liberté*, 1944) the terms "direct" and "indirect" notions to distinguish between those whose origin is our need and desire to master the multiplicity of objects and phenomena — e.g. book, animal, snow, joy — and those that originate in our reason's reaction to certain psychological situations — e.g. order, injustice, hazard, negation, and the series given by Laotse in above quotation. In order to understand these indirect notions we not only must know the phenomena they are applied to, but we also should realise that they refer to something in the minds of those who use them.

A chair or a book exists; order or negation or, of course, existence does not exist; only their notions do. Order "exists" when we put things in a certain order we have in mind; or when we understand a multiplicity of facts we say they are ordered. The understanding of certain notions as indirect ones makes it clear that expressions such as "absolute greatness", "absolute good", or "absolute truth" are logically meaningless and only give voice to certain feeling, aspirations, and so on.

The idea of negation led to Aristoteles' dichotomical principle of the excluded third, which is no longer valid, as shown by L.E.J. Brouwer, G.F.C. Griss, A. Heyting, and others. It should be replaced by what one may call the anti-dichotomical principle of dialectical logic, i.e. we cannot exhaust reality in any given case by the alternative: statement $a$ or contradictory statement non-$a$.

The anti-dichotomical principle says that there is something beyond the classical alternative as well as something that $a$ and non-$a$ have in common in all cases concerned with a domain other than the purely tautological. In other words, all statements about reality abstract from, and simplify, reality in a way further research will always prove as having been illicit. "It is either raining" — for some