

HEINER ROETZ: Mensch und Natur im alten China. Zum Subjekt-Objekt-Gegensatz in der klassischen chinesischen Philosophie. Zugleich eine Kritik des Klischees vom "chinesischen Universalismus". (Europäische Hochschulschriften, Series 20 (Philosophy), 136). Frankfurt am Main/Bern/New York: Peter Lang, 1984. 427 pp., DM 131.-

With its twofold aim clearly stated in the title, the book under discussion constitutes a contribution not only to a fundamental theme of philosophy, but also to a central issue of our time: the relationship between man and nature. It is all the more topical, as our present-day ecological crisis is leading us to search in East Asia for new directions, for what we have long since lost: the intimate unity of man and nature.

To come straight to the point, Heiner Roetz' book "disillusions" the reader in the positive sense of the word; and this is what makes it so worthwhile.

The investigation is divided into two parts. In part one (pp. 1-109) the theory of 'universalist' 'Chinese thought' is first of all presented, mainly in its European manifestations from the time of the Enlightenment to the present day (pp. 3-42). The twentieth century Chinese conception of 'tian-ren he-yi' (unity of man and heaven) is further touched upon (pp. 43-49). This summary is followed by two sections expounding the various particularities which fashion the 'universalist' image of China: etiquette as the expression of micro- and macrocosmic correspondence; policies as the guarantor of harmony with the cosmos; the harmonious intercourse with nature ('universalism' as a way of life); the unity of micro- and macrocosm; the absence of a subject-object distinction; the absence of objective science; the absence of distinct philosophical disciplines; the absence of philosophy as such ('universalism' as a mode of thought). Several clear examples of 'universalist' theories in ancient Chinese philosophy from the "Yi-jing", "Li-ji", "Huai-nanzi" and from the teachings of Dong Zhong-shu (179-104 BC) (pp. 66-77) lead up to the second chapter of part one. The discussion here presents an initial critique (pp. 78-117) which, while not denying the existence of 'universalist' models of perception, points to the stereotyping process whereby they have come to represent and typify Chinese thought as such, and in particular the Chinese mode of thought (p. 67).

In part two the author deals with "the relationship between man and nature/heaven in the thought of the Zhou-Dynasty" (pp. 110-385) in the centuries before the birth of Christ. First of all an attempt is made to come to terms, on an etymological level, with the conception of "nature" at that time.

There appear to be three stages in the perception of man and nature in the Zhou-Dynasty. Concepts (such as *tian*, *tian-ming*) from the "Shu-jing" and the "Shi-jing", are representative of the first phase, and these are explained with reference to their social and political context (pp. 118-143). The "Zuo-zhuan", "Guo-yu", and "Lun-yu" are used to characterize the middle Zhou-Dynasty which is the next phase. These works provide evidence both of

a gradual discrediting of heaven as an ordered system and of incipient beliefs, interpreted by the author as "naturalism" and "humanism". The albeit temporary end of this development is marked by Zi Chan (581-520 BC) and Confucius himself (pp.144-209).

The age of the "Warring States" (430-221 BC), the third and final phase of the Zhou-Dynasty, provided an impetus not only to the more material side of man's confrontation with nature. The contemporary crisis also forced philosophers and statesmen of all directions to ponder over man's fight against nature as well as the increasingly obtrusive notion of a subject/object distinction.

In this connection the author succeeds in elucidating two fundamental and contrary positions by juxtaposing the ideas of Xun Zi (pp.284-382) amongst others (Mo Zi and Meng Zi (pp.216-225)) and those of Zhuang Zi (pp.226-283). These two positions may be viewed as "almost paradigmatic poles of possible answers" (pp.388) to the issues raised by the subject/object distinction and the harnessing of nature and the environment by man - on the one hand celebrated as a triumph of human achievement, on the other bemoaned as affliction and violation.

It is worth examining the various aspects of man's relationship with nature in the subsequent epochs of China's history, the imperial age (220 BC -1911 AD), in the light of the distinction drawn by the author: we shall increasingly encounter different and varied Chinese models of world perception (the proliferation of forms of Daoism, the fascination of Buddhism, nature as idyll, neo-Confucian "investigations of things" . . .); we shall witness turning-points in the historical transformation of self- and world-contemplation (from the Tang epoch onwards, unmistakable in the Song epoch (618-906 and 960-1279)); we shall encounter class-specific forms of perception (in the sense of an enlightened "elitist culture" and a more 'universist' "popular culture"); and last but not least we shall have to consider a certain popular pragmatism which was astounding in its ability to disregard all seemingly unquestionable beliefs. Even a scrutiny of Zen-Buddhism in terms of these ideas will cost us a few of our favorite illusions. This means for us that: "The hope of enlightenment from the Orient dispelling the destructive powers of technical civilization, evaporates in the light of these facts . . ." (p.390). Such sobering thoughts and stimulating ideas, a comprehensive bibliography and a useful index make this a really indispensable and rewarding book.

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