THE DOCTRINE OF THEODICY:
SUPPLEMENTING CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY WITH LAOZI (老子)

By

Jaeho Jang
(B.Th., Methodist Theological University, 2002;
Th.M., Methodist Theological University, 2004;
B.A., Yonsei University, 2007;
M.A., Seoul National University, 2008)

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology
2013
THE DOCTRINE OF THEOLOGY:

SUPPLEMENTING CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY WITH LAOZI (老子)

By

Jaeho Jang

APPROVED

By

First Reader

Dr. Robert Cummings Neville
Professor of Philosophy, Religion, and Theology
CONTENTS

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................................... 1

II. THEODICIES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND THEIR INTRACTABLE PROBLEMS ......................................................... 4

  Theodicy of the Patristic Period
  Modern Theodicy
  Recent Theodicy

III. CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND DAO IN LAOZI ........................................................................................................ 21

  Dao and Non-action in Laozi
  Christian Elements in the Concept of Dao in Laozi

IV. SUPPLEMENTING THEOLOGY WITH LAOZI ......................................................................................................... 34

  The Incomprehensibility of the Ultimate Reality
  The Creativity and Receptivity of Dao
  The Problem of Good: Dao Is Not Benevolent.
  The Problem of Evil: Dao Contains Both Good and Evil.
  Overcoming the Problem of Evil in Laozi’s Philosophy

V. CONCLUSION ........................................................................................................................................................ 55

BIBLIOGRAPHY ....................................................................................................................................................... 58
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Human life always is full of pain. In Buddhism, the human world is “the bitter human world (苦海).” Existential philosopher Søren Kierkegaard said, “I struggle, therefore I am.” He thought that fighting with evil is the existential decision. What is evil and how have human persons striven to overcome the problem of evil? In encountering evil some people seem to accept it as their fate, and others seem to avoid the problem of evil by focusing on an afterlife. Philosophers have been interested in the definition of evil and origin of evil. Theologians, however, in addition to these questions, also have to answer the problem of evil in relation to God.

Many theologians have tried to prove the righteousness of God and to settle the problem of evil in Christian history. Theologians’ efforts have been responses to these questions: how can we continue to affirm the lordship of God in the face of horrendous evil and if God is both omnipotent and good, why is there so much evil in the world? The “problem of evil” has been a controversial topic that could not be easily solved. Daniel L. Migliore says:

In relation to divine providence and the “problem of evil,” the efforts of theology to clarify the claims of faith seem pitifully weak and unsatisfying. All grandiose theological systems that purport to have an answer to every question are exposed as illusory by the monstrous presence of evil and suffering in the world. Radical
evil is the disturbing “interruption” of all theological thinking and speaking about God and especially about the providential rule of God.¹

Theologians have had to prove the righteousness of God against the evident problem of evil, and Gottfried Leibniz named this ‘theodicy’ in his work, Théodicée, which originated from the Greek ϑεός “God” and δίκη “justice.” John Hick identified two major traditions in the history of theodicy: the Augustinian theodicy, based on the writings of Augustine of Hippo, and the Irenaean theodicy, based on the thinking of St. Irenaeus.

The Augustinian theodicy proposes that evil only exists as a corruption of good and occurs because of the depravity of humans’ free will. According to this tradition, God is not the cause of evil and evil is not substance but just deficiency of good. On the other hand, the Irenaean theodicy denies that humanity and the world were perfect at the time of creation and suggests that moral perfection is only attainable through the experience of suffering. This theory says that human suffering exists for human development. Other approaches are the process theodicy of Alfred North Whitehead, Holocaust theodicy, the person-making theodicy of John Hick, and so on. Many theologians have explained theodicy in their own ways but each encounters intractable problems.

The purpose of this thesis is to supplement the doctrine of theodicy with Laozi (老子). I will examine how the thought of Laozi can enhance the understanding of the Christian God and explore the problem of theodicy in this thesis. The reason Laozi can bring insights to theologians is because the understanding of the ultimate reality itself is different between East and West. He

understands that Dao is not benevolent and good and evil coexist in the ultimate reality. Moreover, Laozi sees good and evil as fluid and exchangeable elements rather than seeing them as fixed and eternal as in Christianity. Laozi cannot settle problems of theodicy completely but leads us to a new chapter of this debate. In addition, the East’s different view about eternal reality helps us to understand the doctrine of theodicy.

The main discourse of this thesis is divided into three parts. In chapter two, I will explain the doctrines of theodicy in Christian history and their intractable problems. In chapter three, I will investigate the relationship between Christian theology and Dao in Laozi. I will briefly explain Laozi’s important Daoistic notions, and I will look into divine elements that appear in the concept of Dao as articulated by Laozi. Also I will try to reveal the transcendence of Dao and the omnipresence of Dao which are considered important topics in theology. In chapter four, I will supplement the doctrine of theodicy with Laozi. I will explain the incomprehensibility of the ultimate reality, creativity and receptivity of Dao, and the unbenevolence of Dao. Moreover, I will explore how Dao does not rule creatures and contains both good and evil. Based on these properties of Dao, I will try to overcome the problem of evil in Laozi’s thought. As a part of the conclusion, I briefly summarized my perspectives and analyzed this study.
CHAPTER TWO
THEODICIES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND THEIR INTRACTABLE PROBLEMS

Thoughts about theodicy might coincide with the beginning of religion because religious people usually think about the problem of how to live in relation to the ultimate reality. In Christian theology, theologians have generally understood the problem of evil in three ways. The first way of understanding this phenomenon is to emphasize the incomprehensibility of God. People cannot know why there is so much evil in the world, but they nevertheless must trust God. Job takes this approach to explain his suffering and highlights the mystery of God and the ignorance of people. God says, “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him,” and Job answers, “I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth.”

In this perspective, putting a hand over one’s mouth is the only way to address the problem of evil. Calvin writes, “The story of Job, in its description of God’s wisdom, power, and purity, always expresses a powerful argument that overwhelms men with the realization of their own stupidity, impotence, and corruption.”

Even though this theodicy poses a solution to the problem of evil, it suppresses all questions and doubts and encourages blind acceptance of all suffering.

---

2 Job 40:2-4. (NIV)

3 Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1.1.3.
The second way of understanding evil is to focus on divine punishment of the wicked or the chastisement of God’s people. Calvin says, “The scriptures teach us that pestilence, war, and other calamities of this kind are chastisements of God, which he inflicts on our sins.” Some parts of the Bible support this theodicy, while others do not. Jesus teaches that the blind man was born blind by “neither this man nor his parents sinned.” This theodicy is criticized because it sees the relationship between sin and suffering too simplistically. This theodicy of punishment becomes destructive when applied because we must accept that God punishes all people through whatever terrors fall upon them.

The third way is to understand evil is to frame it as a divine pedagogy intended to help people turn to God. According to this theodicy, God sends poverty, bereavement, diseases, and other perils to cause us to fix our eyes on heaven rather than on the pleasures of the present life. The Apostle Paul may be interpreted to support this view: “Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” While it is true that people can learn from their suffering, this does not guarantee that suffering is good. Moreover, the theodicy of divine pedagogy does not give careful attention to the cries of victims of injustice.

---

4 Calvin, quoted by Daniel L. Migliore, in Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology, 106.

5 John 9:1-3. (NIV)

6 Daniel L. Migliore, 107.

7 Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 3.9.1.

8 Romans 8:17-18. (NIV)
These traditional theodicies appear in Christian history in the writings of many theologians. From late antiquity, trials which justify God were under active discussion. Augustine and Irenaeus are representative thinkers of the Patristic period. In modern times, Gottfried Leibniz and Schleiermacher, and recently, Alfred North Whitehead (Process Theodicy), John Roth Protest Theodicy), James Conn (Liberation Theodicy), and John Hick (Person-Making Theodicy) have written about theodicy. In this chapter, I will briefly explain theodicies which have been discussed in Christian history and will point out their intractable problems.

Theodicy of the Patristic Period

Augustine

Augustine (354-430) understands that God created the world with good will and that God’s providence is at work both in the lives of individuals and in history even though that involvement is largely hidden. Therefore, the whole creation is good; the sun and moon, human beings, birds, reptiles, fish, and animals, trees, flowers, and plants are all good, expressing as they do the creative fecundity of perfect goodness. Augustine does not agree with the ancient Platonic, Neo-Platonic, Gnostic, and Manichaean ideas regarding matter. Rather, he seeks to use matter and share it with gratitude to God for God’s goodness.\(^9\)

Augustine understands evil not as any kind of positive substance or force, but as something gone wrong in God’s good creation. Even though everything is good, everything is capable of being corrupted because everything is made out of nothing. In *Confessions*, he claims that evil is not independent substance:

Everything that exists is good, then; and so evil, the source of which I was seeking, cannot be a substance, because if it were, it would be good. Either it would be an indestructible substance, and that would mean it was very good indeed, or it would be a substance liable to destruction – but then it would not be destructible unless it were good.10

In other words, everything that exists is good because everything is created by God’s good will. Therefore, evil cannot exist as independent substance. Augustine realized that evil is simply the diminishing of the good to the point where nothing at all is left.11 For Augustine, evil is the “absence of being” or the “privation of being,” and this thought is affected by Neo-Platonism. However, Augustine does not deny evil’s presence and its virulent power. He rejects the idea that evil does not really exist and is therefore not to be feared, saying “either that is evil which we fear, or the act of fearing is in itself evil.”12

Moreover, Augustine defends the goodness of God in claiming that evil is included in God’s design of creation. He says, “By the ineffable mercy of God even the penalty of man’s offense is turned into an instrument of virtue.”13 Specifically, Augustine claims that physical

---

12 Augustine, *Confessions*, VII. 5.
pain and disease can be sacred means of purifying and training human beings. Thus, God sometimes uses evil to reveal good.

Augustine’s theodicy is criticized for many reasons. First, if we accept God’s absolute power, a universe which God has created cannot have gone wrong. John Hick says, “The basic criticism, then, is that a flawless creation would never go wrong and that if the creation does in fact go wrong the ultimate responsibility for this must be with its creator.”¹⁴ Second, Augustine’s theodicy cannot explain natural evils of disease and earthquakes. Third, since, in Augustine’s theory, the eternal torment of hell would never end, it could have no constructive purpose.

*Irenaeus*

Irenaeus (130-202) was Bishop of Lugdunum in Gaul, an early Church Father and apologist. His writings were formative in the early development of Christian theology. Irenaeus explains God’s creation of humanity in two steps. The first step is that human beings were created as intellectual beings which are endowed with the possibility of spiritual and ethical development. He says:

If, however, any one say, “What then? Could not God have exhibited man as perfect from beginning?” Let him know that, inasmuch as God is indeed always the same and unbegotten as respects Himself, all things are possible to Him. But created things must be inferior to Him who created them, from the very fact of their later origin; for it was not possible for things recently created to have been uncreated. But inasmuch as they are not uncreated, for this very reason do they come short of the perfect. Because, as these things are of later date, so are they infantile; so are they unaccustomed to, and unexercised in, perfect discipline. For

---

as it certainly is in the power of a mother to give strong food to her infant, [but she does not do so], as the child is not yet able to receive more substantial nourishment; so also it was possible for God Himself to have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection], being as yet an infant.  

The second step is that human beings mature from mere instinctual beings to fully responsible children of God. Irenaeus differentiates ‘image’ from ‘likeness,’ claiming the former as the proper translation of Genesis 1:26. Human beings were created in the image of God but their status is different from likeness of God. Achieving the likeness of God can only be obtained through long-term training. John Hick explains this:

Irenaeus distinguishes between the image of God and the likeness of God in man. The ‘imago’, which resides in man’s bodily form, apparently represents his nature as an intelligent creature capable of fellowship with his Maker, whilst the ‘likeness’ represents man’s final perfecting by the Holy Spirit.

For Irenaeus, while the image of God is human beings’ nature, divine likeness is a quality of personal existence which finitely reflects the life of the Creator. Although human beings were created in the image of God, human beings should become closer to the likeness of God throughout free choice and struggle. The world is a place of “soul making” or “person making” and a sphere in which the second stage of the creative process is taking place.

Irenaeus’ approach to the problem of evil differs in important aspects from Augustine’s theodicy. Augustine thought that human beings were created finitely perfect and then

---

15 Irenaeus, Against Heresies, IV. 38. 1.


17 Ibid., 218.
incomprehensibly destroyed their own perfection and plunged into sin and misery, but Irenaeus believed that human beings were created as immature creatures who needed to undergo moral development and growth and finally be brought to the perfection intended for them by God. Moreover, for Augustine, evil is represented as the privation of good. In contrast, Irenaeus views evil as a necessary possibility in the growth of humanity toward free and mature likeness of God.

Irenaeus’ theodicy has been criticized for various reasons. First, Irenaeus’ theodicy rejects traditional doctrines of the Fall of humanity and of final damnation. Second, this theodicy cannot justify the actual extent of human suffering such as the Jewish Holocaust. A third critical question is whether or not a painful creative process can be the expression of divine goodness even if it leads to infinite good.

**Modern Theodicy**

*Leibniz*

Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) proposes that if God elects to create a dependent universe, and God is perfect, God will necessarily create the best possible universe. The best possible universe is that which permits a maximization of being. He says:

One may say that as soon as God has decreed to create something there is a struggle between all the possibles, all of them laying claim to existence, and that those which, being united, produce most reality, most perfection, most significance carry the day. It is true that all this struggle can only be ideal, that is
to say, it can only be a conflict of reasons in the most perfect understanding, which cannot fail to act in the most perfect way, and consequently to choose the best.\textsuperscript{18}

Leibniz stands within the broad Augustinian tradition in his attempt to reconcile human freedom with divine sovereignty. He acknowledges evil’s reality even though he still views evil as always a privation of goodness and being. This principle, which accommodates these evils into the best possible world, comes from the aesthetic principle that a good whole may contain parts that are partially bad. Leibniz says: “Not only does [God] derive from [evils] greater goods, but he finds them connected with the greatest goods of all those that are possible: so that it would be a fault not to permit them”\textsuperscript{19} and “a little acid, sharpness or bitterness is often more pleasing than sugar; shadows enhance colors; even a dissonance in the right place gives relief to harmony.”\textsuperscript{20} Leibniz understands that all the evils of the world contribute to the character of the whole as the best of all possible universes in ways that we cannot now trace.

Karl Barth criticizes Leibniz’s theodicy that “at bottom he hardly had any serious interest (and from the practical standpoint none at all) in the problem of evil.”\textsuperscript{21} John Hick also criticizes Leibniz, “Having shown to his own satisfaction that we are living in the best possible world, Leibniz was content to enjoy his own comparatively comfortable lot, leaving it to those who

\begin{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., para. 127.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., para. 12.

\textsuperscript{21} Karl Barth, \textit{C. D.} III/1, 392.
\end{flushleft}
were less fortunate to make the best they could of it.”\textsuperscript{22} If we accept Leibniz’ theodicy that this is indeed the best possible world, his theodicy implies that God was powerless to make a better world, and so his theory denies God’s omnipotence.

\textit{Schleiermacher}

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was a German philosopher and theologian who attempted to reconcile the criticisms of the Enlightenment with traditional Protestant orthodoxy. He saw piety as ‘the feeling of absolute dependence’ and the various phases of this feeling are specified as they correspond to the various aspects of the divine nature. This is the framework within which Schleiermacher writes about the problem of evil. Schleiermacher has argued that evil ultimately serves the good purpose of God, teaching that sin and evil are ordained by God as the preconditions of redemption. Hick understands that “Schleiermacher, it might be complained, is arguing that since God wills man’s redemption, and since redemption presupposes sin, God wills man’s sin!”\textsuperscript{23}

Schleiermacher emphasizes the paradoxical conjunction of original sin and personal responsibility. In other words, Schleiermacher recognizes that a racial solidarity in sin is born into and becomes part of a corrupt society, but at the same time, he accepts that this common sinfulness is built up of the innumerable wrong volitions of individuals. Schleiermacher says about sin and the fall:

\textsuperscript{22} John H. Hick, \textit{Evil and the God of Love}, 160.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 231.
For the contrast between an original nature and a changed nature we substitute the idea of a human nature universally and without exception – apart from redemption – the same; and ... for the contrast between an original righteousness that filled up a period of the first human lives and a sinfulness that emerged in time (an event along with which and in consequence of which that righteousness disappeared), we substitute a timeless original sinfulness always and everywhere inhering in human nature and co-existing with the original perfection given along with it ... finally, for the antithesis between an original guilt and a transmitted guilt we substitute the simple idea of an absolutely common guilt identical for all.²⁴

Schleiermacher supports the conclusion that evil ultimately serves the good purposes of God. Schleiermacher and the Irenaean theodicy see human beings as having been created as imperfect beings, but also beings who may eventually be brought to the perfection that God desires for them in interaction with divine grace. Schleiermacher’s theodicy is close to the thought of Irenaeus, so he could be criticized in the same ways as Irenaeus.

**Recent Theodicy**

*Process Theodicy*

Process theodicy approaches the problem of evil from the perspective of process metaphysics. John Cobb, David Griffin, Marjorie Suchocki and Whitehead are well-known representatives of this perspective. Process theology claims that the reality of God is not fixed

and that God’s self is still developing. Process theologians refuse to compromise on God’s goodness and try to solve the problem of evil with a radical restriction of divine power. For these theologians, the power of God is persuasive rather than coercive. Any suffering in creation is also experienced by God, and creation itself is seen as cooperation between God and all creatures. Whether this cooperation takes place is thus up to humanity. In other words, God cannot force humans to do God’s will, but can only influence them.

According to process theologians, God does not have, and never has had, a monopoly on power. God cannot prevent natural disasters, atrocities like the Holocaust, or human disease. Although God is responsible for evil because God has created the world having the potential not only of great good but also of great evil, God is not blameworthy because “God always intends the good and always shares the suffering of the creatures in a world in which beauty and tragedy are interwoven.”25 Whitehead understands God thus: “The actual but non-temporal entity whereby the indetermination of mere creativity is transmuted into a determinate freedom. This non-temporal actual entity is what men [sic] call God – the supreme God of rationalized religion.”26

Even though process theodicy claims the most comprehensive understanding of evil, it may be the one most distant from the traditional biblical understanding. Process theodicy rejects God’s sovereignty, creation from nothing, and eschatological victory over suffering and evil.

---

25 Daniel L. Migliore, 112.

Protest Theodicy

Protest theodicy questions the total goodness of God assuming, along with the Bible, a very strong view of the sovereignty of God. This view is articulated by John Roth who was influenced by the witness and writings of Holocaust survivor and author, Elie Wiesel. Richard Rubenstein and Arthur Cohen are also considered representatives of this theodicy.27

In the Bible, many scenes of question or protest toward God appear. Jacob wrestled all night with a divine adversary, and his new name, Israel, means “you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.”28 Psalmist asks: “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?”29, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?”30, “Why have you rejected us forever, O God?”31, and “How long will the wicked, O LORD, how long will the wicked be jubilant?”32 Jesus also protested against God, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”33

27 Daniel L. Migliore, 111.
28 Genesis 32:28. (NIV)
29 Psalm 13:1. (NIV)
30 Psalm 22:1. (NIV)
31 Psalm 74:1. (NIV)
32 Psalm 94:3. (NIV)
33 Matthew 27:46. (NIV)
In religious circles, putting God on trial has not been popular. Human beings have struggled to protect God’s innocence. However, protest theodicy aims to put God on trial, to be for God by paradoxically being against God. John Roth says:

God must bear his share, and it is not small unless he could never be described as one for whom all things are possible. God’s responsibility is located in the fact that he is the one who ultimately sets the boundaries in which we live and move are have our being. True, since we are thrown into history at our birth, we appear in social settings made by human hands, but ultimately those hands cannot account for themselves. To the extent that they are born with the potential and the power to be dirty, credit for that fact belongs elsewhere. “Elsewhere” is God’s address.  

Albert Camus also says, “man is not entirely to blame; it was not he who started history.” Protest theodicy is not just protest against God, but an effort to find God’s faithfulness even when it appears that God has ceased to be faithful. A Jewish story summarizes protest theodicy well.

“Could you have done better?”
“Yes, I think so.”
“You could have done better? Then what are you waiting for? You don’t have a minute to waste, go ahead, start working!”

Protest theodicy is criticized that for weakening God’s omnipotence in order to rule out the possibility that God can retain his perfect goodness by redeeming all evil. Moreover, Stephen

---


Davis asks: “If God truly has a demonic side, what ground is there for hope? Surely a partially evil God may well decide perversely to give us ‘life less abundant’.”

*Liberation Theodicy*

Liberation theology is a movement in Christian theology which interprets the teachings of Jesus Christ in terms of liberation from unjust economic, political, or social conditions. It has been described as an interpretation of Christian faith through the poor’s suffering, their struggle and hope, and a critique of society and Christianity through the eyes of the poor. Since liberation theology is a fight against injustice, it is relevant to discussions of theodicy.

However, there is a tension between liberation theology and theodicy. While liberation theology says that God is at work in the world liberating the poor and the suffering, evil still exists and this threatens the omnipotence of God. James Cone refuses to restrict either divine goodness or divine power in order to solve this dilemma. He interprets the Bible as supporting courageous human participation in God’s struggle against suffering. The black religious tradition sees in the cross God’s struggle against evil and in the resurrection God’s promise of the final victory of God over evil and does not focus on the question of the origin of evil. God grants “power to the powerless to fight here and now for the freedom they know to be theirs in Jesus’

---


38 Daniel L. Migliore, 114.
cross and resurrection.” Liberation theodicy is sometimes criticized because of its one-sidedness.

*Person-Making Theodicy*

Person-making theodicy is one of the most powerful theodicies, and John Hick is a representative of this view. John Hick explains the main contents of the Irenaean theodicy:

the creation of man, through the processes of natural evolution, at an epistemic distance from God, giving him a basic freedom in relation to his Creator; and man’s consequent self-centredness as an animal organism seeking survival within a harsh and challenging world which is however an environment in which he can develop, as a morally and spiritually immature creature, towards his ultimate perfection; this development beginning in the present life and continuing far beyond it.

Irenaean theodicy considers moral and natural evil as necessary features of the present stage of God’s creating of finite persons although the precise forms are contingent. Thus the ultimate responsibility for the existence of evil belongs to the Creator. Christianity also believes that God bears with us the pains of the creative process.

Hick accepts the main features of the Irenaean theodicy and recomposes it. Unlike Whitehead, Hick refuses to limit the power of God working as love. He postulates the existence of worlds beyond this one in which persons continue their movement toward the fullness of life.

---


41 Ibid., 385.
in love that God intends for all creatures. According to Hick, God, though sovereign, desires not puppets but persons who freely render their worship and adoration. Therefore, human beings are created incomplete and must participate in the process with free will by which they grow into what God intends them to be.\(^{42}\)

Hick’s weakness is that he stresses growth through the acceptance of suffering rather than resistance to suffering, which can and should be removed. This is a common defect off those standing in the Irenaean tradition. Moreover, whether we can believe that the postulated end can justify the known means and whether all suffering of human life can be rendered acceptable by the final good are the serious problems in this theodicy, because the theodicy considers evil as a necessary feature of the present stage. Dostoievski presents the negative case of this theodicy in *The Brothers Karamazov*.\(^{43}\) This story implies that if there is a God, in the sense of One who is responsible for the evil of the world, then that God cannot be good and cannot properly be worshipped as such. To combat this assertion, Hick supposes a great future good beyond our present imagining.

I therefore end by formulating this ultimate question which lies at the heart of the theodicy-problem: can there be a future good so great as to render acceptable, in retrospect, the whole human experience, with all its wickedness and suffering as

\(^{42}\) Daniel L. Migliore, 113.

\(^{43}\) “Tell me yourself [Ivan asks his brother Aloysha at the end of a long and agonized discussion of evil], I challenge you – answer. Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature – that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance – and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth.” “No, I wouldn’t consent,” said Aloysha softly. (Dostoievski, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett, from pt. n, bk. v, chap. 4.)
well as all its sanctity and happiness? I think that perhaps there can, and indeed that perhaps there is.  

Hick believes in the existence of a great future good that makes all evil acceptable. Hick’s theodicy is still a matter of debate. Why do evils exist which we cannot know the origin? How can people accept God as a positive educator in terrible situations such as genocide, the threat of war, and terrorist attack? These are the intractable problems of Hick’s theodicy.

---

CHAPTER THREE

CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND DAO (道) IN LAOZI (老子)

It is impossible to define in a single word what Dao and Daoism are. Herrlee Creel says about Daoism, “I shall not be so foolish as to try to propound a single, sovereign definition of what Taoism is.” 45 Creel argues that Daoism does not denote a school of thought, but rather is a congeries of doctrines. Julia Ching divides Daoism into Daoist philosophy and Daoist religion. As a philosophy of recluses and for recluses, Daoism idealizes obscurity and chooses to articulate its teachings in riddles. As a religion, Daoism is esoteric and discloses many of its secrets only to the initiated. 46

The thought of Laozi is conveyed by the Daodejing (Classic of the Way and its Virtue). It is comprised of about 5,250 words, and is sometimes referred to as the Laozi. The Daodejing is a combination of poetry, philosophical thought, and mystical reflection. Wing-Tsit Chan says of the Daodejing, “No one can hope to understand Chinese philosophy, religion, government, art, medicine-or even cooking-without a real appreciation of the profound philosophy taught in this little book.” 47 It is true that no other Chinese classic of such small size has influenced so much in


China. Therefore, the *Daodejing* is a proper text with which to do comparative research between Christianity and Chinese philosophy.

Chapter three is a preliminary chapter to prepare for the discussion of theodicy with Dao in Laozi in the next chapter. I will focus on the relationship between Christian theology and Dao in Laozi. First, I will briefly explain Laozi’s important Daoistic notion: Dao and Non-action. Next, I will look into divine elements that appear in the concept of Dao as articulated by Laozi. In the *Daodejing*, which is composed of 81 chapters, about 10 chapters mention metaphysical topics that have been discussed in Western philosophy and theology, and express unique thoughts about existence, the cosmos, the world and human order. I will extract some passages of the *Daodejing* and illustrate the relationship between God and Dao. Also I will try to reveal the transcendence of Dao and the omnipresence of Dao which are considered important topics in theology.

**Dao and Non-action in Laozi**

*Dao (Way, 道)*

Dao literally means ‘way,’ ‘path,’ ‘route,’ ‘doctrine’ or ‘principle.’ Dao is a metaphysical concept originating with Laozi that gave rise to a religion and philosophy. For Laozi, Dao is the One, which is spontaneous, natural, nameless, eternal, and indescribable. The concept of Dao
was later adopted in Confucianism, Chán and Zen Buddhism and more broadly throughout East Asian philosophy and religion.

First, Dao is the origin of all extant beings. Dao is the beginning of all changes and the ultimate reality of all changes. Dao existed before the universe, and there is no time that Dao does not exist. “Nameless, it is the beginning of Heaven and earth. Named, it is the mother of the myriad creatures.”

Laozi explains Dao in the *Daodejing*, Chapter 51:

The Way [Dao] produces them [the myriad creatures];
Virtue rears them;
Things shape them;
Circumstances perfect them.
This is why the myriad creatures all revere the Way and honor Virtue.
The Way is revered and Virtue honored not because this is decreed, but because it is natural.
And so the Way produces them and Virtue rears them;
Raises and nurtures them;
Settles and confirms them;
Nourishes and shelters them.
To produce without possessing;
To act with no expectation of reward;
To lead without lording over;
Such is Enigmatic Virtue!

Laozi says that Dao produces, rears, and shapes myriad creatures. Dao is the beginning of all things and the way in which all things pursue their route. In other words, Dao is the origin of

---


49 Laozi, *Daodejing*, Chapter 51. “道生之, 德畜之, 物形之, 勢成之. 是以萬物莫不存道而貴德. 道之尊, 德之貴, 訳之命而常自然. 故道生之, 德畜之, 長之育之, 亭之毒之, 養之覆之. 生而不有, 爲而不恃, 長而不宰, 是謂元德.” (I referred to Philip J. Ivanhoe’s translation in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*.)
metaphysical and physical existence. Dao is the spiritual substance of all beings, the starting point of all changes and the ultimate reality of human growth.

Second, Dao contains the positive and negative poles and transcends those. For Laozi, the nature of Dao is expressed in opposite poles: *yin* (bright side) and *yang* (negative side), name and nameless, being and non-being, and something and nothing. Laozi says, “To have and to lack generate each other. Difficult and easy give form to each other. Long and short off-set each other. High and low incline into each other. Note and rhythm harmonize with each other. Before and after follow each other.”  

Dao is the interchange *yin* and *yang*, something and nothing.

Third, Dao has a circular movement. Dao is revealed in all creatures, but makes those proceed to Dao. Laozi says, “Turning back is how the Way moves. Weakness is how the Way operates.” Dao is not only the origin of all creatures but also their natural habitat. In this point, Dao explains well both the origin and formation of all things and the destruction and dissolution of all things. The destruction and dissolution of all things is a way to pursuit unity in Dao, so it does not contain a negative meaning but has positive directivity.

*Non-action (wu wei, 無為)*

*Wu wei*, literally “non-action,” “not acting,” “not doing,” “without doing,” “absence of doing,” or “non-striving,” is a central concept of the *Daodejing*. The simplest explanation is that

---


wu wei means “creating nothingness,” “acting spontaneously,” and “flowing with the moment.”

Sung-Peng Hsu and H. Wei interpret wu wei as “not-having willful action,” “non-assertion,” or “non-interference.”52 Wu wei does not mean literally inactivity but rather taking no action that is contrary to nature – in other words, letting nature take its own route.53 Laozi says in the 

Daodejing, Chapter 2:

The sage manages affairs without action (wu wei).
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.
He acts, but does not rely on his own ability.
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.”54

According to Laozi, the sage deals with affairs without action. Moreover, the sage spreads doctrines without words. Logically speaking, it is impossible to manage affairs without action and to spread doctrines without words. This paradox can be understood after grasping the notion of wu wei in Laozi, and this is what distinguishes Laozi’s thought from others. Laozi’s idea of teachings without words is opposed to the Confucian ideal because Confucianists would not regard silence itself as virtue.

52 Sung-Peng Hsu, “Two Kinds of Changes in Lao Tzu’s Thought,” Journal of Chinese Philosophy 4 [1074], 332-333.

53 Wing-Tsit Chan, 136.

54 Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 2. “是以聖人處無為之事, 行不言之教, 物作焉而不辭, 生而不有,為而不恃, 功成而弗居. 夫唯弗居, 是以不去.”
Because non-action is the aggregation of vague concepts, we need to understand it from various angles. First, non-action is the limitation of external behavior. Laozi says “never dare to put oneself first in the world” in the Daodejing, Chapter 67.

I have three treasures that I hold on to and preserve:
   The first I call loving kindness;
   The second I call frugality;
   The third I call never daring to put oneself first in the world.
The kind can be courageous;
The frugal can be generous;
Those who never dare to put themselves first in the world can become leaders of the various officials.55

For Laozi, non-action is not to fight and not to put oneself first. This does not mean to live in seclusion. People who never dare to put themselves first in the world can become leaders of the various offices. The limitation of external behavior is the genuine way of success in Daoist life.

Second, non-action is the limitation of internal behavior. Here it can be defined as “do nothing,” “prefer stillness,” “engage in no activity,” and “be without desires.” These descriptions are found in the Daodejing, Chapter 57.

The more taboos and prohibitions there are in the world, the poorer the people.
The more sharp implements the people have, the more benighted the state.
The more clever and skillful the people, the more strange and perverse things arise.
The more clear the laws and edicts, the more thieves and robbers.
And so sages say,
   “I do nothing and the people transform themselves;"

55 Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 67. “我有三寶, 持而保之. 一曰慈, 二曰儉, 三曰不敢為天下先. 慈故能勇, 儉故能廣, 不敢為天下先, 故能成器長.”
I prefer stillness and the people correct and regulate themselves; 
I engage in no activity and the people proper on their own; 
I am without desires and the people simplify their own lives.”

All things go well if there are not internal and external behaviors. Laozi expresses these as “doing nothing (無為),” “prefer stillness (好靜),” “engaging in no activity (無事),” and “without desires (無欲).” These attitudes allow one to “transform (化),” “correct (正),” “proper (富),” and “simplify (樸).”

Hans Küng explains the importance of non-action: “It is only when the human person, in “emptiness” and freed of passions and desires, allows the Tao to rule his or her life; only when he or she lets himself or herself be filled by the Tao and quietly abides in purposeless action or “doing nothing” (wu-wei) – only then will he or she attain unity with the Tao.”

Küng regards non-action as peoples’ goal according to the universal law of return to the origin.

---

56 Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 57. “天下多忌諱, 先民彌貧, 民多利器, 國家滋昏, 人多伎巧, 奇物滋起,法令滋彰, 盜賊多有. 故聖人云: 我無為而民自化, 我好靜而民自正, 我無事而民自富, 我無欲而民自樸.”

57 Hans Küng and Julia Ching, 171.
**Christian Elements in the Concept of Dao in Laozi**

*Dao vs. God*

Is Dao similar to the God of Christian theology? This question hinges on whether or not we can agree that the sages of non-Christians traditions have access to knowledge of God through observation of the cosmos, the natural world and human history. Küng says about this:

If Dao is everything, if it can be understood as “being in becoming,” would it not then ultimately be identical with God? Naturally, this would not be in the primitive anthropological or even in the ontological, pantheistic sense. Rather it would be understood in the differentiated way of the great occidental philosophical and theological tradition from Augustine to Thomas to Nicholas of Cusa: as “being itself” to which the being of the existent refers.\(^\text{58}\)

The doctrine of creation out of nothing (ex nihilo) is not based in the Bible. The writer of Genesis says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”\(^\text{59}\) Whether the creation of Genesis is the creation out of nothing or the creation out of chaos is not clear, but Church fathers have accepted the idea of creation out of nothing. The clear thing is that God is the origin of creation and all creatures comes from God.

Dao is also the origin of all creatures. Dao created all creatures out of non-being. Although the notion of non-being (無) in Laozi does not exactly correspond with the notion of

---

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 173.

\(^{59}\) Genesis 1:1-2. (NIV)
nothingness in Western thought, researching nothingness in connection with non-being is a good way to understand creation synthetically.

The activity of Dao could be compared to God’s providence. The writer of Psalm 104 says this about God’s providence: “These all look to you to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.”

How is Dao’s activity revealed in Laozi’s metaphysics? Laozi says, “The Way produces them [the myriad creatures]. Virtue rears them, things shape them and circumstances perfect them…. And so the Way produces them and Virtue rears them. [The Way] raises and nurtures them, settles and confirms them and nourishes and shelters them.” Dao, according to Laozi, produces and rears all creatures but does not restrict them. Dao produces “without possessing,” acts “without expectation of reward” and leads “without lording over.”

In short, Laozi’s conception of Dao is located between the ideas of traditional Christian providence and deism. Like Christian providence, Dao is the origin and provider of all beings. However, like deism, Dao rears all beings without possessing or lording over them. Therefore, Laozi’s concept of Dao is similar to the God of Christian process theology.

---

60 Psalm 104:27-30. (NIV)

61 Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 51. “道生之, 德畜之, 物形之, 勢成之.... 故道生之, 德畜之, 長之育之, 亭之毒之, 養之覆之.”

62 Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 51.
The Transcendence of Dao

Transcendence is an important quality of ultimate reality. To discuss Dao and the Christian God the transcendence of Dao is necessary. Laozi’s understanding of Dao involves transcendence. In the *Daodejing*, Chapter 35, Laozi says, “But talk about the Way – how insipid and without relish it is! Look for it and it cannot be seen; Listen for it and it cannot be heard; but use it and it will never run dry!” For Laozi, Dao transcends sensual experience. Dao cannot be seen or heard, but it works and never runs dry. In Chapter 14, Laozi emphasizes Dao’s transcendence of sensory perception:

- Looked for but not seen, its name is “minute.”
- Listened for but not heard, its name is “rarified.”
- Grabbed for but not gotten, its name is “subtle.”
These three cannot be perfectly explained, and so are confused and regarded as one.
- Its top is not clear or bright.
- Its bottom is not obscure or dark.
- Trailing off without end, it cannot be named.
- It turns to its home, back before there were things.
- This is called the formless form, the image of nothing.
- This is called the confused and indistinct.
- Greet it and you will not see its head;
- Follow it and you will not see its tail.
- Hold fast to the way of old, in order to control what is here today.
- The ability to know the ancient beginnings, this is called the thread of the Way.  

---

63 Laozi, *Daodejing*, Chapter 35. “道之出口, 淡乎其無味. 視之不足見, 聽之不足聞, 用之不足載.”

Laozi’s teachings, “Its top is not clear or bright” and “Greet it and you will not see its head, and follow it and you will not see its tail,” show that Dao does not have definite structure and transcends the scope of sensual cognition. According to Laozi, the thread of Dao is “not seen (不見),” “not heard (不聞),” “not gotten (不得),” and “cannot be named (不可名).” Therefore, Dao is “the formless form (無狀之狀),” “the image of nothing (無物之象),” and “the confused and indistinct (惚恍).”

Transcendence is the essential nature of God. In the Bible, the transcendence of God appears many times. St. Paul says, “One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”65 Paul claims both the transcendence of God and the intimate nature of God. God is not only over all things but also in all things. St. John also says, “The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all.”66 Robert Neville says, “A creator God is transcendent as not being among the creatures or a structure of the world created.”67 Therefore, the transcendental property of Dao provides a locus for conversation between Laozi’s thought and Christian theology.

---

65 Ephesians 4:6. (NIV)
66 John 3:31. (NIV)
Panentheism is a belief system which posits that the divine exists in all things. The belief that God exists in all creatures has been accepted by many theologians. Psalmist says, “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.” The psalmist understands that God is in the heavens and in the depths of the earth. Since God exists everywhere, the psalmist confesses, “Where can I flee from your presence?” According to the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, Chapter 77, Jesus says, “Saw wood into pieces, and I am there. Lift a stone, and you can find me there.”

Daoist thought asserts the omnipresence of Dao. Laozi says, “How expansive is the great Way (Dao)! Flowing to the left and to the right. The myriad creatures rely upon it for life, and it turns none of them away.” Dao is so expansive that it flows everywhere.

Zhuangzi, another famous thinker of Daoism, discusses the omnipresence of Dao with his disciples in this way:

The disciple asks, “Where is Dao?”
Zhungzi replys, “There are no places which Dao does not exist.”
“Tell me clearly,” the disciple insists.
Zhungzi answers, “Dao exists in mole crickets and ants.”
“How does Dao exist in humble things?”
“Dao also exists in foxtails and wild millets.”
“How can you say this about still more humble things?”

---

68 Psalm 139:7-10. (NIV)
69 Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 34. “大道氾兮, 其可左右, 萬物恃之而生而不辭.”
In this conversation between Zhuangzi and the disciple, Zhuangzi says that Dao exists everywhere. To enlighten his disciple, Zhuangzi gives some examples showing the omnipresence of Dao. According to Zhuangzi, Dao exists in mole crickets and ants, foxtails and wild millets, roof tiles and bricks, and even in feces and urine. This conversation explains Dao’s property of omnipresence well. The omnipresence of Dao shows the possibility of connection between Dao and the Christian God.

In this chapter, I tried to open the possibility of dialogue between Dao and the Christian God. In confronting attacks that Dao is totally different from the Christian God, I explained the interrelationship between Dao and God I have examined how both Dao and God have the properties of transcendence and omnipresence. This shows that Dao is not simply an irreligious principle but a kind of ultimate reality just as God is in Christianity. On the base of this interconnectedness, I will discuss Christian theodicy through the thought of Laozi.

70 莊子外篇 知北遊
CHAPTER FOUR
SUPPLEMENTING THEODICY WITH LAOZI

Why does evil occur? How does evil occur? What is the origin of evil? Concerning these problems, Laozi does not answer directly. However, the metaphysics of Dao for Laozi offers the grounds of discussion about the problem of evil. The problem of evil arises only for religions which insist that the object of worship is perfectly good and unlimitedly powerful. Therefore, it is possible to get insight about theodicy from religions which have different notions of the ultimate reality. Since Dao can be interpreted to mean many things different from the Christian God, the notion of Dao can help us embark on a journey regarding the problem of evil and theodicy.

In this chapter, I will supplement Christian theodicy with Laozi. First, I will explain the incomprehensibility of the ultimate reality. Since discussions about theodicy are trials for understanding God, the incomprehensibility of the ultimate reality is a way in which the ultimate reality can be freed from the problem of evil. Second, I will show the creativity and receptivity of Dao. Third, I will explore whether the ultimate reality is always benevolent or not. Fourth, I will demonstrate that Dao does not rule creatures. Fifth, I will show that Dao in Laozi contains both good and evil. Finally, based on these properties of Dao, I tried to overcome the problem of evil in Laozi’s thought.
The Incomprehensibility of the Ultimate Reality

Discussions about the ultimate reality usually assume that the ultimate reality can be explained with language even though those explanations will not be perfect. However, Laozi describes the incomprehensibility of Dao in the *Daodejing*, Chapter 1.

A Way that can be followed is not a constant Way.
A name that can be named is not a constant name.
Nameless, it is the beginning of Heaven and earth;
Named, it is the mother of the myriad creatures.
And so,
Always eliminate desires in order to observe its mysteries;
Always have desires in order to observe its manifestations.
These two come forth in unity but diverge in name.
Their unity is known as an enigma.
Within this enigma is yet a deeper enigma.
The gate of all mysteries!\(^{71}\)

Laozi says “A Way that can be followed is not a constant Way. A name that can be named is not a constant name.” Most ancient Chinese philosophical schools accepted names as good and necessary. However, Laozi rejects names, and this is the radical and unique character of Daoism. Chan explains the Dao of Laozi: “Dao is nameless and is the simplicity without names, and when names arise, that is, when the simple oneness of Dao is split up into individual things with names, it is time to stop.”\(^{72}\)

\(^{71}\) Laozi, *Daodejing*, Chapter 1. “道可道非常道, 名可名非常名. 無名天地之始, 有名萬物之母. 故常無欲以觀其妙, 常有欲以觀其微. 此兩者同, 出而異名. 同謂之玄, 玄之又玄, 深妙之門.”

\(^{72}\) Wing-Tsit Chan, 140.
The *Daodejing* is composed of about 5,250 characters. Among these characters, 545 are negative. Therefore, the philosophy of Laozi is generally judged to be a negative philosophy.

Küng summarizes the negativity of Daoism and Christianity:

> What must also be kept in mind is that, for both Taoist and Christian thought, the *innermost essence of the Tao, like that of God*, remains *hidden* to human beings. Whoever thinks he or she can sneak inside the mystery of God to get a kind of inside view of God suffers from the greatest self-delusion. Whoever thinks he or she has comprehended God has already misapprehended him. Whoever thinks he or she has God in hand comes up empty-handed! His or her grasp extends literally into nothingness. On the basis of mystical theology and negative theology, Christians can therefore also understand completely why Taoists refuse all definitions, all naming of the Tao, whether positive or negative.73

In the Bible, Isaiah says, “‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’” declares the LORD. “‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’”74 St. Paul says, “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?’”75

Negative theology is theology that attempts to describe God, the Divine, through negation or in terms of what may *not* be said about the perfect goodness that is God. This stands in contrast to positive theology. Negative theology is an attempt to achieve unity with the Divine.

---

73 Hans Küng and Julia Ching, 178.

74 Isaiah, 55:8-9. (NIV)

75 Romans, 11:33-34. (NIV)
through gaining knowledge of what God is not, rather than by seeking what God is.\textsuperscript{76} Negative theology is similar to this property of Dao. However, negative theology and the incomprehensibility of Dao also have differences. Negative theology is a method which tries to know God’s characteristics, but the incomprehensibility of Dao transcends even the possibility of description of the ultimate reality by words.

The incomprehensibility of Dao and God supports discussion about the incomprehensibility of good in God and the qualitative differences of good and love between God and creatures. Therefore, the incomprehensibility or the indescribability of the ultimate reality, which is characteristic of Dao, provides an alternative way of doing theodicy, albeit in a passive and defensive way.

\textbf{The Creativity and Receptivity of Dao}

In western theology, God is the creator of all creatures, and creativity is the main nature of God. Alfred North Whitehead gives an explanation of creativity with western terms.

Creativity is without a character of its own in exactly the same sense in which the Aristotelian ‘matter’ is without a character of its own. It is that ultimate notion of the highest generality at the base of actuality. It cannot be characterized, because

\textsuperscript{76} The apophatic tradition is often, though not always, allied with the approach of mysticism, which focuses on a spontaneous or cultivated individual experience of the divine reality beyond the realm of ordinary perception, an experience often unmediated by the structures of traditional organized religion or the conditioned role-playing and learned defensive behavior of the outer man.
all characters are more special than itself. But creativity is always found under conditions, and described as conditioned.\textsuperscript{77}

Whitehead understands that creativity is the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact. It is that ultimate principle by which the many become the one actual occasion.\textsuperscript{78}

For Laozi, creativity is also an important nature of Dao. The Creativity of Dao is revealed in the process in which Dao changes one into all creatures. He says, “The Way produces the One. The One produces two. Two produces three. Three produces the myriad creatures. The myriad creatures shoulder \textit{yin} and embrace \textit{yang}, and by blending these \textit{qi}, “viral energies,” they attain harmony.”\textsuperscript{79} For Laozi, all creatures came from Dao, and Dao is the origin of all things. Even though Dao did not create all creatures directly, like the Creator in Christianity, the creativity of Dao is one of the important properties of Dao.

However, Laozi does not emphasize only the nature of creativity in Dao. Dao contains both the nature of creativity and the nature of receptivity. In the \textit{Daodejing} Chapter 25, Laozi says, “People model themselves on the earth. The earth models itself on Heaven. Heaven models itself on the Way. The Way models itself on what is natural.”\textsuperscript{80} The principle of Dao is characterized by spontaneity and Non-action. St. Augustine believes that evil is the absence of


\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 21.

\textsuperscript{79} Laozi, \textit{Daodejing}, Chapter 42. “道生一, 一生二, 二生三, 三生萬物, 萬物負陰而抱陽, 沖氣以爲和.”

\textsuperscript{80} Laozi, \textit{Daodejing}, Chapter 25. “人法地, 地法天, 天法道, 道法自然.”
being or the privation of good. However, for Laozi, non-action or non-being is neither a negation of being nor evil. He says, “Turning back is how the Way moves. Weakness is how the Way operates. The world and all its creatures arise from what is there; what is there arise from what is not there.”81 Nothingness, or non-being, is based on something, or being. Therefore, returning or moving to the opposite side is following the principles of Dao and nature. Regression in movement of Dao is receptivity.

Since Western theology emphasizes the creativity of God, activities against creativity are defined as evil. If being is good, non-being is evil. If life is good, death is evil. However, this kind of diagram is meaningless in Daoism. Dao contains both creativity and receptivity. From a Daoist perspective, all activities are part of the movement of Dao. Therefore, in Laozi’s view, evil is not a problem that Dao has to overcome.

The Problem of Good: Dao Is Not Benevolent.

The doctrine of theodicy is based on the goodness of God. If we accept that God may sometimes be bad, the problem of theodicy can easily be settled because it is meaningless for God to take responsibility for evil. Laozi, however, does not set Dao’s goodness forth as a premise. According to the Daodejing Chapter 5:

---

81 Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 40. “反者道之動, 弱者道之用. 天下萬物生於有, 有生於無.”
Heaven and earth are not benevolent; They treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs. Sages are not benevolent; They treat the people as straw dogs. Is not the space between Heaven and earth like a bellows? Empty yet inexhaustible! Work it and more will come forth. An excess of speech will lead to exhaustion, It is better to hold on to the mean.\(^2\)

In my review of theodicy, it is important to focus on “Heaven and earth are not benevolent. They treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs.” “Heaven and earth” are both different expressions of Dao, each revealing properties of Dao. Chang Chung-Yuan claims that heaven represents the highest divinity.\(^3\) In other words, Chapter 5 asserts that Dao is not benevolent.

Suspicion and concern about the origin of suffering and evil are universal for all of humankind regardless of religion. Küng refers to this suspicion properly:

Indeed, in the light of all the natural catastrophes, all the absurdities of life, all the orgies of evil, all the rivers of blood and tears, all the murdered innocents, is complaining enough? Complaints can be found everywhere in China as well. Does it not seem more than justified to go beyond complaint to accusation, and accusation that cries to heaven in the face of that divine primal principle that is, after all, responsible for order and harmony in the world? And it does not matter if one calls this Heaven, Tao, Lord-on-high, Great Ultimate, Divinity, or God.\(^4\)

---

\(^2\) Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 5. “天地不仁，以萬物為芻狗。聖人不仁，以百姓為芻狗。天地之間，其猶橐籥乎？虛而不屈，動而愈出。多言數窮，不如守中。”

\(^3\) Chang Chung-Yuan, Creativity and Taoism (New York: Harper & Row Publisher, 1970), 59.

\(^4\) Hans Küng and Julia Ching, 187.
Jen (benevolence, 仁) is the basic spirit of inner morals and social norms in Confucianism. Therefore, the sentence, “Heaven and earth are not benevolent,” critiques Kongzi’s thought represented by the concept of jen. Thus, Laozi attacks the artificiality of Confucianism. The reason evil is a severe problem in Christian theology is that people assume God is benevolent. For Laozi, Dao is not imprisoned by the categories of good and bad. Laozi’s understanding of Dao forces us rethink whether we can actually call God to account for evil.

**The Problem of Responsibility: Dao Does Not Rule Creatures.**

To discuss the doctrine of theodicy people have basically to presuppose that God takes responsibility for world matters. Both the Christian God and Dao in Laozi’s thought are the origin of all creatures. God and Dao also create and nurture creatures. In Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” In the Daodejing chapter 51, Laozi says about Dao’s role.

The Way produces them and Virtue rears them;  
Raises and nurtures them;  
Settles and confirms them;  
Nourishes and shelters them.  

---

85 Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 51. “故道生之, 德畜之, 長之育之, 亭之毒之, 養之覆之.”
In addition to creating and nurturing, the Christian God rules all creatures. David confesses, “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations,”\(^8^6\) and “The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations.”\(^8^7\) In Christianity, there is an order of rank among creatures. God creates male and female and commands them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”\(^8^8\) The Christian God reigns over all creatures and human beings rule other living creatures.

According to the Neo-Confucianist, Chu Hsi (朱熹, 1130 ~ 1200), no single physical object existed in the beginning except Principle (\(li\)). Since this Principle is multiple, physical objects are also multiple. This means that without Principle no object can exist. Everything that shapes and forms is instrument (\(qi\), 氣). Dao is that which constitutes the Principle of this instrument. For Chu Hsi, human beings and other creatures come into being by receiving on Ether (\(qi\), 氣). However, human beings’ \(qi\) is different from other creatures’ \(qi\). Chu Hsi says:

The Ether (\(qi\)) received by man is perfect and free from obstruction, whereas that received by other creatures is imperfect and impeding. In the case of man, because he receives it in its perfection, Principle (\(li\)) permeates it without anywhere being impeded. But in the case of other creatures, because they receive it in its

---

\(^8^6\) Psalm 145:13. (NIV)

\(^8^7\) Psalm 146:10. (NIV)

\(^8^8\) Genesis 1:28. (NIV)
imperfection, the principle in them is impeded and fails to give them intelligence. \(^{89}\)

Chu Hsi accepts the order of rank among creatures as in Christianity. The order of rank causes responsibility because those who rank higher have the responsibility to care for those who rank lower. In Christianity, God is responsible for all matters of the world and God is to blame for evil in the world because God reigns over the world.

Dao in Laozi, however, does not rule creatures. Laozi says, “To produce without possessing; to act with no expectation of reward; to lead without lording over” \(^{90}\) Dao is the source of creation and maintenance of all creatures, but Dao does not rule and interfere with them. All creatures work by their own spontaneity. Laozi also opposes rule between creatures. He says, “Lead without lording over.” \(^{91}\)

In conclusion, Dao does not govern creatures and does not try to change creatures artificially. Therefore, Dao does not directly have responsibility for the problem of evil. The Christian God is on a collision course with the problem of evil because Christian theology endows God with absolute power for rule over the world. If Christian theology understands God in relation to Dao, discussions about Christian theodicy could become more constructive.

---

\(^{89}\) Chu Hsi, *Chu-tzù Yü-lei* 朱子語類, 4. 10. (Classified Conversations of Chu Hsi). Referred to as *Conversations*. Comp. by Chu’s disciples and 1st published in 1270. (I referred to Derk Bodde’s English translation in *History of Chinese Philosophy* of Fung Yu-Lan.)

\(^{90}\) Laozi, *Daodejing*, Chapter 51. “生而不有，為而不恃，長而不宰.”

\(^{91}\) Laozi, *Daodejing*, Chapter 10. “長而不宰.”
The Problem of Evil: Dao Contains Both Good and Evil

The problem of evil has become theologians’ biggest conundrum. Alfred North Whitehead says, “All simplifications of religious dogma are shipwrecked upon the rock of the problem of evil.”92 This problem can be classified with dualistic or monistic frameworks. In a dualistic paradigm, good and evil exist in conflict with one another and human beings and the world are affected by the movement of Realities who are in charge of good and evil. Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism are two such frameworks. Good-evil dualism can settle the problem of evil easily because within this model, Satan, and not God, is responsible for evil. However, this dualistic interpretation runs counter to the spirit of the Bible. The Bible’s general perspective is that God is the one who supervises life, death, happiness, and misery.

Monistic perspectives on the problem of evil assert that evil is not an independent entity but rather a privation or absence of being. As mentioned earlier, Augustine says, “Everything that exists is good, then; and so evil, the source of which I was seeking, cannot be a substance, because if it were, it would be good.”93 This monistic form has been articulated by the Church Fathers, the Reformers, Gottfried Leibniz, and Karl Barth. Monistic interpretations support God’s omniscience and omnipotence. However, the monistic worldview has difficulty defending God’s goodness when confronting specific problems people experience from moral and natural evils.

---

92 Alfred North Whitehead, Religion in the Making, 74.

93 Augustine, Confessions, VII. 12. 18.
In contrast, Dao in Laozi’s thought contains a bright side (yang) and a gloomy side (yin), something and nothing, life and death, and good and evil. Yin and yang, which compose Dao, cannot exist independently. Suffering and death, which are parts of yin, cannot be expelled from Dao because yin and yang move interdependently. Laozi explains the complementarity between yin and yang several times in the Daodejing.

Those who are crooked will be perfected.
Those who are bent will be straight.
Those who are empty will be full.
Those who are worn will be renewed.
Those who have little will gain.
Those who have plenty will be confounded.\(^94\)

The heavy is the root of the light.
The still rules over the agitated.\(^95\)

And so the good person is teacher of the bad;
The bad person is material for the good.\(^96\)

What you intend to shrink, you first must stretch.
What you intend to weaken, you first must strengthen.
What you intend to abandon, you first must make flourish.
What you intend to steal from, you first must provide for.
This is called subtle enlightenment.\(^97\)

\(^94\) Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 22. “曲則全, 杖則直, 窮則盈, 幷則新, 少則得, 多則惑.”

\(^95\) Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 26. “重為輕根, 靜為躁君.”

\(^96\) Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 27. “故善人者, 不善人之師, 不善人者, 善人之賓.”

\(^97\) Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 36. “將欲歙之, 必固張之. 將欲弱之, 必固強之. 將欲廢之, 必固興之. 將欲奪之, 必固與之. 是謂微明.”
This kind of thinking pattern flows consistently in the *Daodejing*, and it means that two extremes participate in the activity of the ultimate reality. This polarity of *yin* and *yang* does not form an opposition, but each harmonizes and supplements the other. Laozi says in the *Daodejing*, Chapter 2:

And so,

To have and to lack generate each other.  
Difficult and easy give form to each other.  
Long and short off-set each other.  
High and low incline into each other.  
Note and rhythm harmonize with each other.  
Before and after follow each other.  

For Laozi, all creatures are originated by mutual relation. Good and evil also are related to each other. When all creatures are revealed, the harmonious combination of *yang* and *yin* is “good,” and the disharmonious combination of those is “evil.” As *yin* and *yang* are indispensible to molding reality, good and evil also are inevitable in the cosmological dimension.

The idea that good and evil are both important and necessary is also shown in Neo-Confucianist Chu Hsi’s teaching. He says, “Plants growing are the positive spiritual force (神), plants declining are the negative spiritual force (鬼). A person from childhood to maturity is the positive spiritual force, while a man in his declining year and old age is the negative spiritual force. In breathing breath going out in the positive spiritual force, breath coming in is the negative spiritual force.”

---


99 Wing-Tsit Chan, 644.
(good) and negative spiritual force (evil) as a part of the relationship between expansion (yang) and contraction (yin). In other words, the relationship between good and evil is comparable to young and old or breathing out and in.

In Christianity, however, good and evil are thought of as opposites that remain apart until the end of the earth. At the last day, the kingdom of God will accomplish good and eliminate all evils. John writes: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Isaiah also says:

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. […] and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

In conclusion, in traditional Christian theodicies, the relationship between good and evil is considered exclusive. However, good and evil in the Daodejing contain each other and work reciprocally. For Laozi, absolute good and absolute evil do not exist. Both good and evil are relative concepts. According to Laozi’s thought, we can newly explain Jesus’ teaching, “God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

Even though the Christian concept of God does not contain evil, but God shows

---

100 Revelation 21:4. (NIV)

101 Isaiah 35:5-6, 10. (NIV)

102 Matthew 5:45. (NIV)
all people mercy. This is an important clue in dealing with the problem of evil, and Laozi’s understanding of the ultimate reality can enhance this interpretation in theodicy.

Overcoming the Problem of Evil in Laozi’s Philosophy

The Origin of Evil in Laozi’s Philosophy

In Confucianism, the standard position on the origin of evil is that *jen* (humanity) is corrupted or thwarted by selfishness.\(^{103}\) There are two traditions accounting for selfishness: Mencius and Xunzi. Mencius insists on the innate goodness of the individual, and believes that society’s influence causes bad moral character. He says, “The way of learning is none other than finding the lost mind.”\(^{104}\) Xunzi believes that human nature is originally bad, and the purpose of moral cultivation is to develop our natures into good. Whether selfishness comes from social influence or human nature, selfishness is considered evil in Confucianism.

In neo-Confucianism, the problem of evil was a controversial issue. When his disciples asked him how it is that the Ether is differentiated into the pure and the turbid since Principle is always good, Chu Hsi answered, “Because, if one speaks only of the Ether, there is some that of itself is cold and some that is hot, some fragrant and some bad smelling. In the beginning, how could the two (*yin* and *yang*) Ethers and the Five Elements have been anything but perfect? It is


\(^{104}\) *The Mencius* 6:A11 in Wing-Tsit Chan, 58.
simply because they have since been swished and rolled to and fro, that they are no longer perfect.\textsuperscript{105} Chu Hsi understands that the two Ethers and the Five Elements were perfect in the beginning but they are not perfect anymore because of being swished and rolled around, to and fro. This creates lack of harmony, or evil, in the world.

In Laozi’s case, it is not easy to find his ideas about the origin of evil because he does not divide good and evil dualistically. However, it is possible to infer the origin of evil from his main thoughts. Laozi emphasizes non-action, and he rejects intentional actions. For him, intentional actions make evil. Therefore, Laozi refuses all actions that cause artificiality. Artificial acts bring about artificial division. Laozi says in the \textit{Daodejing}, Chapter 2:

\begin{quote}
Everyone in the world knows that when the beautiful strives to be beautiful, it is repulsive.
Everyone knows that the good strives to be good, it is no good.
And so,
\begin{itemize}
  \item To have and to lack generate each other.
  \item Difficult and easy give form to each other.
  \item Long and short off-set each other.
  \item High and low incline into each other.
  \item Note and rhythm harmonize with each other.
  \item Before and after follow each other.\textsuperscript{106}
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}

According to Laozi, all things are relative and complement one another. There is no distinction originally; for example, the notion of long and short is derived from intentional comparison. Intentional action causes distorted division, and this consequently brings about evil.


\textsuperscript{106} Laozi, \textit{Daodejing}, Chapter 2. “天下皆知美之為美，斯惡已。皆知善之為善，斯不善已。故有無相生，難易相成，長短相較，高下相傾，音聲相和，前後相隨。”

*Overcoming the Problem of Evil in Laozi’s Philosophy*

For Laozi, the highest good is non-action (*wu wei*). The way which overcomes the problem of evil is to live following the laws of nature without intentional action. Laozi expresses the life of sages like this:

Those who would gain the world and do something with it, I see that they will fail. For the world is a spiritual vessel and one cannot put it to use. Those who use it ruin it. Those who grab hold of it lose it. And so, Sometimes things lead and sometimes they follow; Sometimes they breathe gently and sometimes they pant; Sometimes they are strong and sometimes they are weak; Sometimes they fight and sometimes they fall; This is why sages cast off whatever is extreme, extravagant, or excessive.¹⁰⁸

Anyone who would do something will fail because the world is a spiritual vessel and anyone cannot put it to act. Laozi says that the life of sages is to cast off whatever is extreme, extravagant, or excessive. It is natural to be sometimes strong, sometimes weak, sometimes

---


fighting, and sometimes falling. According to Laozi, following the laws of nature or living with
the flow is the life of sages and the way to overcome the problem of evil.

Laozi advises rulers several times in the *Daodejing* because he believes that evils in the
world come from rulers’ intentional behaviors. The most extreme evil is war because it is an
extreme intentional behavior. He says:

One who serves a ruler with the Way will never take the world by force of arms.
For such actions tend to come back in kind.
Wherever an army resides, thorns and thistles grow.
In the wake of a large campaign, bad harvests are sure to follow.
Those who are good at military action achieve their goal and then stop.
They do not dare to rely on force of arms.\(^{109}\)

Laozi criticizes the war saying, “Wherever an army resides, thorns and thistles grow.
In the wake of a large war, bad harvests are sure to follow.” A war is an intentional action for a
king’s or a national desire between countries.

Laozi believes that the gulf between rich and poor is distant from Dao. All people have
success according to the laws of nature, but some people get more than their share through
intentional behaviors.

The court is resplendent;
Yet the fields are overgrown.
The granaries are empty;
Yet some wear elegant clothes;
Fine swords dangle at their sides;
They are stuffed with food and drink;
And possess wealth in gross abundance.

This is known as taking pride in robbery.
Far is this from the Way!\textsuperscript{110}

Laozi regards people who possess wealth in gross abundance when others are starving to death as robbers. He says strongly that this is not the way of Dao (非道也). He also criticizes rulers because their actions create hunger and poverty.

The people are hungry because those above eat up too much in taxes;
This is why the people are hungry.
The people are difficult to govern because those above engage in action;
This is why the people are difficult to govern.
People look upon death lightly because those above are obsessed with their own lives;
This is why the people look upon death lightly.
Those who do not strive to live are more worthy than those who cherish life.\textsuperscript{111}

Laozi says that rulers have trouble ruling people because they strive to do something. Rulers should not practice intentional actions. These only cause people suffering. According to Laozi, not striving to live is more worthy than cherishing life because life is precious but cherishing life produces intentional actions.

The life which follows the laws of nature is in harmony with all creatures. In this life, creatures do not rule over others and all realize the ultimate good – non-action. Chinese

\textsuperscript{110} Laozi, \textit{Daodejing}, Chapter 53. “朝甚除，田甚穉，倉甚虛。服文彩，帶利劍，獵飲食，財貨有餘，是謂道夸，非道也哉。”

\textsuperscript{111} Laozi, \textit{Daodejing}, Chapter 75. “民之饑，以其上食税之多。是以饑。民之難治，以其上之有為。是以難治。民之輕死，以其上求生之厚。是以輕死。夫唯無以生為者，是賢於貴生。”
Philosopher, Zhang Zai (張載, 1020-1077), shows what it means to live with each other in “Western Inscription (西銘).”

Heaven is my father and Earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I finds an intimate place in their midst. Therefore that which fills the universe I regard as my body and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions. The great ruler (the emperor) is the eldest son of my parents (Heaven and Earth), and the great ministers are his stewards. Respect the aged – this is the way to treat them as elders should be treated. Show deep love toward the orphaned and the weak – this is the way to treat them as the young should be treated. The sage identifies his character with that of Heaven and Earth, and the worthy is the most outstanding man. Even those who are tired, infirm, crippled, or sick; those who have no brothers or children, wives or husbands, are all my brothers who are in distress and have no one to turn to.\(^\text{112}\)

Zhang Zai says that heaven is his mother and earth is his mother. All people are his brothers and sisters, and all things are his companions. This enlightened view helps people to live in harmony with all creatures.

In short, the way to overcome the problem of evil in Laozi’s philosophy is to follow the laws of nature. Laozi illustrates lives that pursue non-action and Dao: “Dao of heaven does not contend but is good at victory, does not speak but is good at responding, does not call but things come of their own accord, and is not anxious but is good at laying plans. Heaven’s net is vast. Its mesh is loose but misses nothing.”\(^\text{113}\) The life of non-action is to win without fighting, to respond without speaking, to come without calling, and to plan good without anxiety. These things are

\(^{112}\) Zhang Zai, “Western Inscription (西銘),” in Wing-Tsit Chan, 497.

\(^{113}\) Laozi, Daodejing, Chapter 73. “天之道, 不爭而善勝, 不言而善應, 不召而自來, 繼然而善謀. 天網恢恢, 疏而不失.”
possible because heaven’s net is loose but misses nothing. In other words, the world is perfect in itself. If human beings behave intentionally, the world will be ruined. The world should leave as it is. Therefore, when all human and nature follow the order of nature, the problem of evil will be settled.
The study of the problem of evil should not be speculative but existential. Elie Wiesel introduces an episode from the death camp Auschwitz in his book *Night*. One day, a young boy was hanged in front of all the prisoners because of a minor mistake. When the boy was dangling from the rope, Wiesel was asked by someone. “Where is God now?” and a voice within him replied, “Where is He? Here He is – He is hanging here on this gallows.”

Wiesel’s story means that the problem of evil is an existential problem focusing on the profound crisis of faith in the experience of terrible affliction. My interest in the problem of evil started when I was in the military as a chaplain in South Korea. North Korea attacked a Cheonan warship and killed 46 navy men in 2010. In November of the same year, North Korea fired about 160 missiles at Yeonpyeong Ireland, and two South Korean soldiers died. Moreover, many soldiers died while on duty, for various, unexpected reasons. As a military chaplain, I had to interpret this tragedy to Christian soldiers and the bereaved. I had to preach in their language, and this meant that I had to explain the problem of evil in Asian traditions. This thesis is a product of my existential questions about the problem of evil.

In this thesis, I have attempted to supplement the doctrine of theodicy with the teachings of Laozi. In chapter two, I explored the doctrines of theodicy in Christian history and their

---

insurmountable problems. Among many theodicies, I have chosen theodicy of the patristic period (Augustine and Irenaeus), Modern Theodicy (Gottfried Leibniz and Friedrich Schleiermacher), and Recent Theodicy (Alfred North Whitehead, John Roth, James Conn, and John Hick). In chapter three, I investigated Christian elements present in the concept of Dao in Laozi’s thought, specifically, transcendence and omnipresence. I tried to open the possibility of dialogue between Dao and the Christian God. In confronting attacks that Dao is totally different from the Christian God, I explained the interrelationship between Dao and God. In chapter four, I reconsidered the doctrine of theodicy in light of Laozi’s philosophy. Here, I noted the incomprehensibility of the ultimate Reality and the creativity and receptivity of Dao. Moreover, I examined that Dao is not benevolent and Dao does not rule creatures. In regard to the problem of evil, I explained that Dao contains both good and evil. Based on these properties of Dao, I tried to overcome the problem of evil in Laozi’s thought.

Theodicy is a central topic in Christian theology, which discusses God’s righteousness and the problem of evil, and thus has been a controversial topic in Christian history. Theodicies that minimize the power of evil or deny its reality have been exposed as fantastic and worthless in the twentieth century – an era full of destructive wars, acts of genocide, and the possibility of nuclear annihilation. Even though many famous theologians have offered their own opinions on the topic, there is no theodicy that all theologians accept. Expecting the unification of theologians under one theodicy, in fact, is impossible and is not needed. Therefore, I do not intend to suggest a solution to the dilemmas of theodicy which theologians have not settled in Christian history, rather I want to open new possibilities in the discussion of theodicy with
Laozi’s thought. Laozi’s understanding of the ultimate reality is totally different from the Understandings of Western theologians. Even though it is impossible for Laozi’s interpretation to be totally accepted in Christian theology, Laozi’s thoughts will be able to give theologians a foothold in new dimensions of theodicy and enrich the discussion.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Classical Texts


2. Other Books


