CHAPTER THREE

FOUNDATIONS OF THE BUDDHIST AND TAOIST ETHICS

1. Origin and Nature of Buddhist and Taoist Ethics

1.1. The Origin of Buddhist Ethics

1.1.1. The Noble Truth (Ariyasacca)

Ethics in Buddhism originated from the enlightened perspective of the Buddha. Buddhist ethics are included in Buddhist scriptures and handed down through tradition. Buddhist scriptures and the anthropological evidence from traditional Buddhist societies are highly reliable sources to justify claims about the nature of Buddhist ethics.¹ Buddhist ethics are genuinely based on the Truths. All ethical principles of Buddhism are comprised within the Four Noble Truths as the footprint of every creature that walks on earth goes into the elephant’s footprint.²

The first one is the Noble Truth of suffering: “This is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.”³ In the early Buddhist scriptures the word “Dukkha” is used in more than one sense. It is used in the psychological, physical and philosophical sense according to the context. To those who try to see things as they really are, the concept of Dukkha (suffering) is no insignificant thing. It is the key-stone

² Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta (MLS. I, p.230).
³ Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (CDB. p.1843).
in Buddhist thought. To ignore this essential concept implies ignoring the remaining three truths. The importance of knowing suffering is seen in these words of the Buddha: “He who sees suffering, sees also the arising of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering.” As these truths are interconnected and interdependent, seeing one or more of the four truths implies seeing the others as well. To one who denies suffering, a path, treading along which one gains deliverance from suffering, is meaningless. In brief, denying one single truth amounts to denying the other three as well, and that is to deny the entire teaching of the Buddha.

The second one is the Noble Truth of the origin of suffering: “This is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving which leads to renewed existence, accompanied by delight and lust, seeking delight here and there, that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination.” It is clear that suffering is the effect of craving which is the cause. This is seed and fruit, action and reaction, cause and effect, a reign of natural law. This most powerful force, craving or “thirst”, keeps existence going. It makes and remakes the world. Life depends on the desires of life. It is the motive force behind not only the present existence, but past and future existence, too. The present is the result of the past, and the future will be the result of the present. This is a process of conditionality.

The third one is the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering: “This is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering: it is the remainderless fading away and cessation of that same craving, the giving up and relinquishing of it, freedom from it, non-reliance on it.” In this definition “complete cessation of craving” implies Nibbāna. Elsewhere

4 Gavampati Sutta, (KS. V, p.369).
5 Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, (CDB. II, p.1843).
6 Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, (CDB. II, p.1843).
this is made clear by the Buddha: “Verily, Rādha, the extinction of craving (Taṇhakkhayo) is Nibbāna.”\(^7\) It is clear from the above that Nirodha or Nibbāna is the cessation, the extinction of craving (Taṇhā). Craving is the arising of suffering which ceases only when its origin, craving, ceases. With the giving up of craving one also gives up suffering and all that pertains to suffering. Nibbāna, therefore, is explained as the extinction of suffering.

The fourth and final one is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering: “This is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering: it is the Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.”\(^8\) The Noble Eightfold Path is an ancient path which has been followed and practiced by all previous Buddhas.\(^9\) The eight factors of the Noble Path are not steps to be followed in sequence, one after another. With a certain degree of progress all eight factors can be present simultaneously, each supporting the others. Considered from the standpoint of practical training, the eight path factors divide into three groups: the moral discipline group, made up of right speech, right action, and right livelihood; the concentration group, made up of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration; and the wisdom group, made up of right view and right intention. These three groups represent three stages of training: the training in the higher moral discipline, the training in the higher consciousness, and the training in the higher wisdom.\(^10\) The division of moral discipline makes up the first of the three divisions of the Path and the three path factors are to be treated together. The principles laid down in this section restrain immoral actions

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\(^7\) Bhavanetti Sutta (KS. III, p.157).
\(^8\) Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta (CDB. II, p.1844).
\(^9\) Nagarā Sutta, (KS. II, p. 74).
and promote good conduct. They are not prescribed merely as guides to action, but primarily as aids to mental purification. As a necessary measure for human well-being, ethics has its own justification in the Buddha’s teaching and its importance cannot be underrated. But in the special context of the Noble Eightfold Path ethical principles are subordinate to the path’s governing goal, final deliverance from suffering. Thus for the moral training to become a proper part of the path, it has to be taken up under the tutelage of the first two factors, right view and right intention, and to lead beyond to the trainings in concentration and wisdom. The training in moral discipline is the foundation for the entire path, essential for the success of the other trainings.\textsuperscript{11} From the perspective of the Four Noble Truths, ethics is an essential constituent on the path that leads to the peaceful life. This is well expressed in a passage which explains that “purity of virtue” leads onward to “purity of mind”, this to “purity of view”, and this, through various stages of increasing spiritual insight, to achieve the final goal.\textsuperscript{12} In this process of development, the cultivation of one stage leads on to the cultivation of the next, so that the components of the Path support one another and wholesome virtues lead gradually to the summit. The foundational importance of ethics for the rest of the Path is, therefore, crucial.\textsuperscript{13}

1.1.2. The Perfection (Pāramita)

Pāramita is the most essential practice in order to attain the highest level in ethical, intellectual and spiritual achievement. Pāramita provides a useful framework for developing a fruitful attitude toward the moral conduct in daily activities so that any activity or relationship undertaken

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\item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p.40.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Rathavinīta Sutta (MLS. I, pp.192-193).
\item \textsuperscript{13} Peter Harvey, \textit{An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.41.
\end{itemize}
wisely with the primary purpose of developing the perfections in a balanced way becomes part of the practice. It should be noted that in established Buddhist tradition Pāramītas are regarded as practices which must be fulfilled by all aspirants to enlightenment and deliverance. As the standard constituents of the Buddhist practice, there are ten kinds of Pāramīta: (1) Dāna: generosity, (2) Sīla: virtue, morality, proper conduct (3) Nekkhamma: renunciation, (4) Paññā: transcendental wisdom, insight, (5) Vīriya: energy, diligence, vigour, effort, (6) Khanti: patience, tolerance, forbearance, acceptance, endurance, (7) Sacca: truthfulness, honesty, (8) Adhiṭṭhāna: determination, resolution, (9) Mettā: loving-kindness and (10) Upekkhā: equanimity, serenity.

Dāna is translated as generosity. It means giving away, making a gift or offering or sharing something with someone. If one does the task without extolling himself, without afflicting others, and without discrimination, it is the fulfilling of the perfection of generosity (Dāna Pāramī).

Sīla is controlling of the bodily misdeeds and the verbal misdeeds (Vārittasīla); and cultivating virtuous habits (Cārittasīla). It is the fulfilling of the perfection of morality (Sīla Pāramī).

Nekkhamma means to give up or to renounce the worldly pleasures. In other words, it means retirement into solitary life, in search of the highest truth and peace. If one accomplishes the task without any hope or longing whatever for material affluence, high offices or honor, leadership, respect by others, fame or other privileges, but does the task accepting it as worthy and it is the fulfilling of the perfection of Renunciation (Nikkhema Pāramī).
Paññā means wisdom, right understanding. It is not mere wisdom or knowledge, but it is the wisdom which leads to the complete realization of truths. If one does the task, not regarding it as the highest advantage for oneself, but regarding it as of the highest advantage to the world, using physical and mental capabilities to the utmost, studying its causes and effects, it is the fulfilling of the perfection of wisdom (Paññā Pāramī).

Vīrya literally means virility, perseverance, effort, energy and it supports to phenomenon that is associated with it. If one does the task with unremitting zeal and energy for the wellbeing of the world, it is the fulfilling of the perfection of diligence (Vīrya Pāramī).

Khanṭī literally means patience, endurance or forbearance. It is the endurance of suffering caused by others, or the forbearance of others’ wrong. If one does the task undaunted by the difficulties and obstacles encountered from the world, it is the fulfilling of the perfection of forbearance (Khanṭī Pāramī).

Sacca means truthfulness or keeping one’s promise. Here, Sacca does not mean simply telling the truth but fulfilling one’s engagement or keeping one’s word, assurance or promise even at the point of death. If one does the task believing to deserve and without betraying this belief physically, verbally and mentally, faithfully goes on with the task in accordance with this belief, it is the fulfilling of the perfection of truth (Sacca Pāramā).

Adhiṭṭhāna literally means determination, resolution or fixedness of purpose. It can be regarded as a foundation for all the perfection, because without a firm determination one cannot fulfill the other Pāramitas. If one does the task, though he has to change the manner, in which it is being done to be in keeping with the changing times and
conditions, he does not let any deviation from the original aim. It is the fulfilling of the perfection of resolution (Adhiṭṭhāna Pāramī).

Metta is translated as loving-kindness; it means friendliness, goodwill, benevolence and the wish for other beings and happiness of all of living beings without any discrimination. If one does the task with genuine loving-kindness upon the surrounding world, the loving-kindness which can enable one to renounce one’s life, wealth and riches for the sake of the world, it is the fulfilling of the perfection of loving-kindness (Metta Pāramī).

Upekkhā is translated as equanimity, impartiality or keeping a well-balance mind without attachment and detachment or favor and disfavor. If one does the task, with composure, unperturbed or unmoved by praise or threats but keeping his mind steadfastly on the work in hand, it is the fulfilling of the perfection of equanimity (Upekkhā Pāramī). It is believed that the Noble beings (Bodhisattas), in daily life, perform these ten kinds of task for the welfare of the world.

“These great men bent on renunciation, detached from all the planes of being, plow their course for the good of the world, striving to fulfill the Pāramīs.”

2.1. The Origin of Taoist Ethics

2.1.1. Virtue (Te, 德)

Taoism is an indigenous religion of China, which has had a profound influence on Chinese traditional culture for thousands of years. The ethical thought of Taoism plays an important role in the building of a

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harmonious society in China. In the Taoist opinion, the value of life is constituted not in the pursuit of material benefit or personal fame, but the respect for Tao—the only thing to be desired to pursue—and the prize of virtue. Lǎo Zǐ says: “He who pursues the Tao identifies with the Tao. He who pursues virtue identifies with virtue. The Tao, too, shall requite him with favor.”

Lǎo Zǐ says: “He who pursues the Tao identifies with the Tao.

The virtues are the form of the Tao; and the Tao, the contents of the virtues. The two rely on each other for their existence. Without the Tao, the virtues have no way to give expression to themselves; without the virtues, the Tao has no way to manifest its power. Lǎo Zǐ says: “The manifestations of grand virtue follow only the Tao.”

Te is, in a sense, Tao-made manifest, the revelation of the true nature of the Tao. Although occasionally employed to signify conventional virtue, the true meaning is the quality of natural goodness which is the result of enlightenment and of the manifestation and function of the Tao in man and all that exists in the universe. Te signifies the personal qualities or strengths of the individual, one’s personhood. Te is determined by the sum total of one’s actions, good and bad. Therefore, it is possible to speak of “cultivating one’s Te.” Te is the moral weight of a person, which may be either positive or negative. In short, Te represents self-nature or seal-realization. Te is the embodiment of the Way and is the character of all entities in the universe. Each creature, each object has a Te which is its own manifestation of the Tao.

The Tao is the source of creation. The Tao gives birth to all living things. Virtue raises all living things. In other words, all living things grow and develop by virtue of the life force within them. Their virtue is

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17 故従事於道者，道者同於道；德者同於德；同於道者，道亦樂得之；同於德者，德亦樂得之；(TTC. Chapter.23).
18 孔德之容，惟道是从。(TTC. Chapter.21).
their inherent power of life, which is an essential part of the Tao. This veneration of the Tao and esteeming of its virtue is something they do naturally, without being forced. Therefore, Tao gives birth. When the Tao produces and its energy nourishes, nature forms and natural forces establish. Tao cultivators wish to return to a purer and simpler state of mind. Someone who has cultivated much virtue and thus become more child-like is likewise protected. Just as infants are protected by their loving parents, virtuous cultivators are protected by the all-nurturing mother, the Tao. By following the Tao, they cannot be stung by poisonous insects of malicious gossip, clawed by the wild beasts of fear and anger, or attacked by the vicious birds of greed and envy.\textsuperscript{20}

Such virtuous cultivators may appear soft and yielding, and yet they have a firm handle on their goals and objectives. They are flexible in their approach, and unwavering in their determination. They live life with energy and vitality. Their energy works in perfect harmony with their surroundings. This harmonious interaction arises from their constant purpose and sense of mission. They understand the meaning of life - why they are here and what they are here to do - and this clarity of vision powers their every thought and action. They can endure the test of time because they never overdo anything. They do not cultivate physical vitality to excess, nor do they overtax the mind. It is an essence of Taoist ethics. Lǎo Zǐ states: “If you accumulate virtue repeatedly, there is nothing you cannot overcome.”\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{2.1.2. The Three Treasures (Sān Bǎo, 三寶)}

Taoism stresses the importance of preserving the “three treasures” (Sān Bǎo, 三寶) as the fundamental ethics. Lǎo Zǐ states: “I constantly

\textsuperscript{20} TTC. Chapter.54.

\textsuperscript{21} 重積德則無不克。(TTC. Chapter.59).
have three treasures which I uphold and value: first, compassion; second, conservation; third, not daring to proceed all under heaven.”  These three elements are inseparable and interdependent. One cannot exist without the other two. Taoist cultivates these three treasures: (1) compassion (Cí, 慈) - a love and kindness toward all things, (2) conservation (Jiǎn, 儉) - knowing when and how to avoid wasting one’s time and energy, and direct them in a meaningful way, in accordance with one’s purpose in life, (3) humility (Bù Gǎn Wéi Tiān Xiān Xiān, 不敢為天下先) - the awareness that seeing oneself as being above or ahead of other people can only lead to failure. By having compassion, one gains courage. It comes from love and commitment to something greater than oneself. By having the mindset of conservation, one understands how to allocate and direct one’s efforts to best effect, and therefore reach the most people and have the widest impact. By having humility, one can connect with the Tao of leadership. Leaders who lead best do not focus on themselves. They have no wish to be the center of attention and prefer to let others shine. They direct their attention to what needs to be done, and do not need to take credit or remind others of their accomplishments. Taoists believe that all are kind and considerate by nature. If left to themselves, they will naturally develop into good human beings.  

The Taoist view on the value of life urges the people to reflect imperturbably upon what the worth of life is, to maintain a harmony between material and spiritual life, and to seek the equilibrium in their mind. To seek for Tao, one must carefully obey the tenet of returning the condition of simplicity and trueness, keeping no fame or self, but cleanness in mind, being indifferent to worldly merit, fame, wealth and glory, avoiding selfish desire, always preserving the sentiment of being  

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22 夫我有三寶, 持而保之: 一曰慈, 二曰儉, 三曰不敢為天下先。(TTC. Chapter.67).
content with his lot and condition, and regarding simplicity as honorable. The Taoist doctrine claims explicitly that “It is more important to see the simplicity, to realize one’s true nature, to cast off selfishness and temper desire,”\(^{24}\) and that “one should avoid extremes, excesses, and complacency.”\(^{25}\)

All three treasures are important and must work together. Courage without compassion would be nothing more than brutality. To reach widely without conserving one’s resources will quickly lead to exhaustion. Forgetting the lesson of humility and becoming arrogant are the beginning stage of self-delusion. These negative consequences can only lead to failure. Those who hold on to the three treasures can achieve extraordinary achievements. Warriors who fight with compassion in their hearts achieve victory, because love gives them the strength they need. If they fight to defend loved ones or a cherished cause, they achieve security and protection. Because they follow the Tao, Heaven itself will come to their aid. Events will seem to conspire in rendering assistance at just the right time, as if they are safeguarded by divine powers.

Aiming to build a perfect world of peace and tranquility, Taoism advocates loving others as well as loving oneself, and encourages everyone to accumulate merits and become a virtuous man. When one accumulates virtues by directing time, energy, mind and spirit toward worthwhile cultivation, there are no obstacles one cannot overcome. The focus that is possible when one consciously conserves and directs inner resources makes him powerful spiritually. It allows him to become, quite literally, an unlimited individual. Lǎo Zǐ says: “Cultivate it (the Tao) in your own person, your virtue will be genuine; Cultivate it in your own fief, your virtue will be more than enough; Cultivate it in your own

\(^{24}\) 故令有所屬: 見素抱樸 - 少私寡欲! (TTC. Chapter.19).
\(^{25}\) 是以聖人 去甚, 去奢, 去泰。 (TTC. Chapter.29).
prefecture, your virtue will be long-enduring; Cultivate it in your own state, your virtue will be abundant; Cultivate it in the empire, your virtue will be universal.”

2. Buddhist Law of Conditionality and Taoist Nature Law

2.1. Buddhist Law of Conditionality (Paṭcasamuppāda)

The teaching of causal interdependence is the most important of Buddhist principles. It describes the law of nature, which exists as the natural course of things. The Buddha states: “This condition exists and is a natural fact, a natural law; that is, the principle of conditionality.”

The progression of causes and conditions is the reality which applies to all things, from the natural environment, which is an external and physical condition, to the events of human society, ethical principles, life events and the happiness and suffering. These systems of causal relationship are part of the one natural truth. Given that all things are interconnected, and all are affecting each other, success in dealing with the world lies in creating harmony within it.

The principle of Dependent Origination can be divided into two main categories. Firstly, those which describe the general principle, and secondly, those which specify constituent factors linked together in a chain. The former format is often used to precede the latter as a general outline. The latter, more frequently encountered, is mostly expressed on its own. This latter description may be regarded as the practical manifestation of the principle of Dependent Origination, showing as it

26 修之於身，其德乃真。修之於家，其德乃餘。修之於鄉，其德乃長。修之於邦，其德乃豐。修之於天下，其德乃普。 (TTC. Chapter.54).
does how the natural process follows the general principle. In essence, this general principle corresponds to what is known as Idappaccayatā, the principle of conditionality:

Where there is this, that is.
With the arising of this, that arises.
When this is not, neither is that.
With the cessation of this, that ceases.\(^\text{28}\)

When applied to the problem of suffering, the abstract principle becomes encapsulated in a twelve-term formula disclosing the causal nexus responsible for the origination of suffering. It begins with ignorance, the primary root of the series though not a first cause, conditioning the arising of ethically determinate volitions, which in turn condition the arising of consciousness, and so on through the salient occasions of sentient becoming down to their conclusion in old age and death:

With ignorance as condition, the kamma formations;
With kamma formations as condition consciousness;
With consciousness as condition, mentality-materiality;
With mentality-materiality as condition the six-fold sense base;
With the six-fold sense base as condition, contact;
With contact as condition, feeling;
With feeling as condition, craving;
With craving as condition, clinging;
With clinging as condition, existence;
With existence as condition, birth;

\(^{28}\) *Iti imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imassuppādā idaṃ uppaññija. Imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti, imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati* (Dasabala Sutta: KS. II, p.23).
With birth as condition, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair arise. Such is the origination of this entire mass of suffering.\textsuperscript{29}

The corollary of this formula, which constantly accompanies it, describes the conditioned cessation of suffering. It shows how, when ignorance ceases, all the following conditions successively cease, down to the cessation of the “entire mass of suffering.”\textsuperscript{30} The teaching of Dependent Origination is part of what is known as the Middle Teaching (Majjhena-dhammadesana.)\textsuperscript{31} It is taught as an impersonal, natural truth, a description of the nature of things as they are. The cycle of Dependent Origination which describes the problem of human suffering comes in two limbs: the first limb, called the origination mode, “Samudayavāra” is a description of the arising of suffering, corresponding with the second Noble Truth, the cause of suffering; the second limb, called the cessation mode, “Nirodhavāra” is a description of the cessation of suffering, corresponding with the third Noble Truth.

Practice, techniques and methods of practice in this context are known by the specialized term of Paṭipadā, the methods of practice, which leads to the cessation of suffering. The Buddha laid down methods of practice which are in harmony with the natural process, or the Middle Teaching, and called this practice the Middle Way (Majjhima Paṭipadā) consisting of techniques which are balanced, in conformity with the natural processes, and perfectly attuned to bringing about the cessation of suffering. The Way avoids the two extremes of sensual indulgence and self torment which lead to stagnation or digression from the true goal.


\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Kaccāyana Sutta} (\textit{KS. II}, p.13).
the texts, these two kinds of practice are described: Micchā-paṭipadā, wrong practice or the wrong way, being the way leading to suffering and Sammā-paṭipadā, right practice, or the right way, being the way which leads to the cessation of suffering. The origination mode of the Dependent Origination cycle is said to be Micchā-paṭipadā, and the cessation mode is said to be Sammā-paṭipadā. In another place, however, the Buddha explained the practices which are directly opposed to the Eightfold Path as Micchā-paṭipadā, and the Eightfold Path itself as Sammā-paṭipadā.

The cycle of Dependent Origination is a description of a natural process, not a path of practice. However, the first set of right and wrong practices described practice in terms of the cycle of Dependent Origination. These two kinds of right and wrong practice for comparison are simply to incorporate them into an examination of the progression from the natural process of cessation to the humanly devised technique known as the Path. There is one way in which the Buddha described the cycle of Dependent Origination in its cessation mode. The beginning half describes the arising of suffering in accordance with the normal Dependent Origination cycle in origination mode and all the way up to the arising of suffering. From there, instead of presenting the cycle of Dependent Origination in the regular sequence, it describes a progression of skillful conditions. This is a wholly new sequence of conditions which does not refer to the cessation of conditions in the origination mode at all. This sequence is a very important example of how the Path factors may be applied to a practical and ethical system. This sequence gives prominence to moral practice and shows clearly the path of practice in relation to the cycle of Dependent Origination. That is a concern of the

32 Paṭipadā Sutta (KS. II, p.5).
33 Pathamapatipada Sutta (KS. V, pp. 16-17).
34 Upanisa Sutta (KS. II, pp.25-26).
Path, the fourth of the Noble Truths, or the Middle Way, which deals with the Buddhist ethical system, moral practice based on knowledge of the natural processes.

2.2. Taoist Nature Law

2.2.1. The Tao (道)

So far as the relation between man and nature is concerned, the Taoist ethical thought grounds its basic proposition on the idea of the harmonious oneness of universe and man. Taking Heaven, Earth and Man as an integral unity, the Taoist claims that man is inherently a part of nature, and attaches much value to harmonious development between man and all things. From this point of view, Taoism, featuring fundamentally that Tao is the first-cause of the universe, and that man and nature come into being from same source, claims that “The Tao begot one; one begot two; two begot three; and three begot the ten thousand things.” The Taoist ethical idea of “the universe and man having the same cause, as well as being the oneness” helps to recognize the dialectic relation of man and nature. Human itself is the outcome of universal evolvement. Man and the universe, constituting the oneness, derive from the same root and the same source. Man cannot develop independently or without nature, in that human needs nature as its parent, all things as its friend. In another word, nature provides man with a place to dwell and all resources to use. Therefore the relation of man and nature would involve a moral dimension, which prescribes man should protect and take good care of nature.

35 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物. (TTC. Chapter.42).
Taoism, on one hand, maintains all things originate from Tao that is the source and the reason of every being; on the other hand, it claims Tao is a force that flows through all life, and hence the objective natural law should be acknowledged seriously and respected fully. As Lǎo Zǐ says “Man follows the earth. Earth follows Heaven. Heaven follows the Tao. Tao follows what is natural.”\textsuperscript{36} The Taoist ethical idea of “Tao follows what is natural” favors the belief and practice of respect for nature. Tao is the first-cause of the universe. It follows naturalness, enveloping, surrounding and flowing through all things tangible. People should cognize and respect the law of nature, and act in accordance with the laws, rather than trample and vandalize nature as they please, or do factitiously and coercively damage to the process of natural development.

Concerning the problems of morals and society, the general trend of the Taoist school is one of detachment from secular life and mere survival—that is the highest moral principle of Taoism. The philosophical meaning of Tao in the Taoist school is the origin of the world, and its meaning in ethics is the common norm of human activity. Tao as the highest standard of human activity means taking nonintervention as the highest virtue of man. A man of real morality would never perceive himself as being moral and he would not pursue anything either, including morality itself. The virtues which Lǎo Zǐ praised highly are: the greatest esteem for weakness, an acceptance of things as they are, never being the first, never contending for anything. Lǎo Zǐ says: “Tao models itself on nature.”\textsuperscript{37} Lǎo Zǐ’s concept of morality is based on a concept of human nature in which man is ignorant and in a desireless condition by nature. Its characteristic aim is to make for a complete serene life. And the mental serenity of the individual is the highest virtue.

\textsuperscript{36} 人法地, 地法天, 天法道, 道法自然。(TTC. Chapter.25).
\textsuperscript{37} 道法自然 (TTC. Chapter.25).
and the greatest happiness. The aim of Lǎo Zǐ’s concept of morality is not to adjust the relationship between men, but to request individuals to part from the social relations in which they are situated. According to Lǎo Zǐ, Tao was a kind of general substance with neither figure nor name. In Lǎo Zǐ, there is still a kind of morality of pursuing social withdrawal and there is a kind of simple, plain and virtuous nature in the human race.38

2.2.2. Yīn Yáng (陰陽)

The concept of Yīn Yáng (陰陽) is used to describe how contrary forces are interconnected and interdependent in the natural world, and how they give rise to each other in turn. This concept lies at the heart of Taoism. People cannot see Tao but they can experience it in the rhythmic cycles of nature: night and day, winter and summer, rain and sun, death and birth. These opposing forces of the natural world express the Chinese concept of Yīn and Yáng. The specific notion of Yīn and Yáng was not originally Taoist, but it chimed with what Lǎo Zǐ and the other early Taoist philosophers believed. The concept of Yin and Yang is central to Taoist understanding. These two forces demonstrate Tao, and because Tao is in everything, Yīn and Yáng are a part of Tao. Yáng is the heavenly force. It is the force of movement, of light, fire, warmth, and life. Yáng literally means “the sunny side” of a hill. In Chinese, sun is Tài Yáng (太陽), or “great Yáng”. Yīn, the shady side of the hill, is Yáng’s opposite, but it cannot be separated from Yáng. Just as there can be no shadow without sun, there can be no Yīn without Yáng. The two operate together, in the cycles that are a part of nature and of Tao.39

One observes that changes in the world always take the form of one Yīn and one Yáng in a relation of reciprocity and resonance. This experience comes from observation of the brightness of light together with the darkness or shade which forms the background of the light. Hence, the word “Yáng” originally means the bright side of a hill facing south whereas Yīn means the shaded side facing north. It is then generalized to mean a contrasting correlation between the light and the dark. The phenomenological observation also indicates that whenever there is Yáng there is Yīn and where there is Yīn there is Yáng. Hence what is Yīn could be experienced as what is given as the invisible, pre-existing background of a thing, whereas what is Yáng is hence experienced as what is given as the visible thrust of the formation of a thing. In this sense Yīn and Yáng are to be understood phenomenologically in a dynamic context of alternation or correlation. The alternation of one Yīn and one Yáng as a process of Tao contributes to understanding of the Tao as both the source-origin and the creative process of the Yīn and Yáng. For it implies that Yīn and Yáng are to emerge as a related pair of forces and states of becoming through the agency of the Tao. Lǎo Zǐ in the Tao-Te-Ching said:

The Tao generates one,
One generates two,
Two generate three.
Three generate all things.
All things bear the Yīn and hold the Yáng,
Reach harmony by dynamically mixing the Yīn and the Yáng. 40

Lǎo Zǐ may have come to the notion of Tao through reflecting on the origin of all things. One may also come to see the Tao through a

40 道生一, 一生二, 二生三, 三生萬物。萬物負陰而抱陽, 沖氣以為和。(TTC. Chapter.42).
process of becoming by way of Yīn and Yáng alternation.\textsuperscript{41} The harmony of Tao is prior, activated by passivity, by inactivity. But as Tao is expressed in being; it generates an interchanging, dynamic play of opposites: Yīn and Yáng, the manifestation of Tao in the world. They mutually produce each other as polarities that are part of the fabric of existence. All active energy is manifested as these Yīn Yáng dualities. Nonbeing accompanies being. The Tao manifests itself as change due to the flowing polar nature of energy. Energy is not static, not a fixed object. The Taoist sage believes that every force acts with its opposite, as potential, and the opposite will act as well. The opposite, complementary force comes to be, in time, as night follows day, as winter follows summer. The Taoist sage learns to be in harmony with these cycles of activity and inactivity. Yīn and Yáng bring a dynamic balance of forces of movement and rest, activity and passivity, so that the balance point returns to center. The unity of opposites emerges. In many applications of Taoism, this unity is the source of guidance, the criterion, the standard by which correctness can be evaluated when reason is brought to bear on things. Yīn and Yáng also testify to the basic Oneness that underlies the world, by the close correlation that binds them together. They illustrate the dynamic of opposites, a dynamic that can be seen only in pairs whose opposition shows in the law of alternation that governs their functioning. One member of the pair does not operate at the same time as the other, in the same place, unless it is virtually within the other. When one dominates, the other retreats into a state of potentiality, a stored, compressed, and intensified force. The rhythm and principle of the play of Yīn and Yáng are essential in all of Taoism.\textsuperscript{42}

Yīn and Yáng as two basic categories of reality give rise to further Yīn and Yáng in a hierarchical differentiation and branching which may

be unlimited. Yīn and Yáng will have to be realized and recognized in different qualities to be described in such terms as movement and rest, firmness and softness, progression and retrogression, and so on. Concrete things can be said to be formed from different combinations of qualities from the Yīn-series and the Yáng-series. It is in light of these principles Yīn and Yáng are regarded as pervasive and basic categories of identification and description and therefore in considering natural events and human affairs as related and even correlated experiences of the same basic qualities and powers of nature and humanity.43

The universe, from the Taoist viewpoint, move perpetually through its various stages as part of an ongoing process that is supremely balanced. It suggests that apparent opposites not only complement each other, but evolve into new forms. Within Taoism, the acceptance of alternation is part of the way. Yīn and Yáng follow each other continuously and without effort in the Taoist view. The transformative relationship between Yīn and Yáng is what gives rise to the process of life and death itself. This interplay makes possible humanity and all other manifestations. In the Taoist view, all phenomena can be analyzed according to the principles of opposites.44 Yīn and Yáng are built into the perceptual process. The contrast of Yīn and Yáng is absolutely essential in order to be able to notice things. Yīn and Yáng are so bound together that pure Yīn and pure Yáng ultimately reverse. Reversion of forces is a dynamic law of Tao, a mysterious property of Yīn Yáng interaction.45 In Taoism, even apparent opposites actually express a fundamental and pervasive unity. This is the principle that guides the world, and it is also the principle that elucidates the problems of human life. Lǎo Zǐ says:

43 Bo Mou, (ed.) op.cit., 2008, p.84.
“Knowing his masculinity and adhering to his femininity, He remained to all under heaven a brook. Being to all under heaven a brook, his constant virtue never departed. His constant virtue never departed, he again reverted to infancy.”

“Knowing his whiteness, and adhering to his blackness, He remained to all under heaven a horizontal bar. Being to all under heaven a horizontal bar, his constant virtue never changed. His constant virtue never changed, he again reverted to Infinity.”46

3. Kamma in Buddhism and Wú Wéi in Taoism

3.1. Kamma

Kamma, literally, means action or doing. It covers all kinds of intentional actions whether mental, verbal or physical—thoughts, words and deeds. Generally speaking, all good and bad actions constitute Kamma. In its ultimate sense Kamma means all moral and immoral volition. The Buddha says: “Mental volition is what I called Kamma. Having volition one acts by body, speech and thought.”47 Kamma in Buddhism includes both intentional actions and unintentional actions. The difference between these two classes of Kamma is that the ethical value and moral consequence of the latter is minimized or lesser than that of the former. The reason behind this is that all ethical Kamas are manifested or originated from intention (Cetanā). Having intention as motive force or functioning energy, Kamma is manifested whether,

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46 知其雄, 守其雌, 爲天下谿; 爲天下谿, 常德不離, 復歸於嬰兒. 知其白, 守其黑, 爲天下式; 爲天下式, 常德不忒, 復歸於無極. (TTC. Chapter.28).
physically, verbally or mentally while some Kammas performed without intention at all or the intention misdirected to someone or something else, instead of directing to the right object.

According to Buddhist ethical theory of Kamma, each individual is responsible for whatever performed by him. He is subject to bear consequences of his own. It is in this sense that Kamma is both ethical agent’s heir and creator. All beings are inferior, exalted, beautiful, ugly, well-faring and ill-faring according to their Kamma preformed and they heirs to what they have done and doing. It is clearly stated that “Kamma is of one’s own performance, not performed by one’s father, mother, brother, sister, friends and comrades; not by kinsmen, devas, recluses and Brahmans. It is the ethical agent who performs it. It is, therefore, the agent that who experiences the fruit thereof.” Becoming (Bhava) of a being in terms of morality and immorality, development and degeneration is originated from his ethical performance. If ethical performance (Kamma) is of one’s own, becoming (Kamma-bhava) is of one’s own. The fortune and misfortune of human being are in fact his own Kamma, not another’s. There are four kinds of Kamma: (1) Kamma which is dark and with dark results, (2) Kamma which is bright and with bright outcomes, (3) Kamma which is both dark and bright and produces both dark and bright results, (4) Kamma which is not dark and nor bright, neither dark and nor bright results and eradicates Kamma. Whatever it does determines what it becomes, and the impressions which gather. Creatures are the heirs of their own actions and behaviours. Understanding consequence of both past and present Kamma, one should be aware of his ethical performance for the future of his and the others.

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48 Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta (MLS. III, p.249).
49 Devadiṭṭa Sutta (GS. I, p.122).
50 Sirikāḷakāṁṇi Jātaka (J. III, p.168).
51 Kukkuvatika Sutta (MLS. II, p.57).
Kamma bodily, verbal or mental performed by the agent is that agent’s possession and goes with him and follows him like a shadow. Mankind therefore should act out of goodness and should accumulate things that will be of benefit in the present and future. Goodness and benefit are their refuge in the future world.52

In Buddhism the law of ethical responsibility is expressed in the form of good producing good, bad producing bad and the very doer is subject to experience that fruit. Ethical good or bad results, which one has to bear, are one’s own Kamma, both the past and the present. The evil done by oneself, caused by oneself, arising in oneself, ethically destroys the foolish one. It is the agent who performs evil to bear the suffering. It is the agent who cultivates good to enjoy the purification. The Buddha said:

   By oneself is evil done; by oneself is one defiled.
   By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself is one made pure.
   Purity and impurity depend on oneself; no one can purify another.53

There is no deed, which performed by man to be blotted out and each deed comes home. The evil doer definitely finds unhappiness waiting for him, in this world and the worlds to come.54 From the Buddhist point of view, human profession or work or career is the result of what he has been pursuing with motive (Cetanā), invested energy and creative thinking. In other words, our profession is a series of accumulative and habitual actions, both past and present. Kamma as social career or profession, which in turn makes the differences in social status amongst mankind, is of the Buddhist distinctive contribution to the ethical theory of Kamma in Indian history of thought as well as to moral education and development of mankind. The Buddha says: “The world proceeds

52 Dutiyaaputtaka Sutta (KS. I, p.118).
53 Cūḷakāla Upāsakā Vatthu (Dh. Acharya Buddharikkhita, (tr.), p.65).
54 Kokālika Sutta (GD. II, p.77).
according to Kamma, all beings proceed according to Kamma, and beings are bound together in Kamma like the bolts that hold a vehicle together as it rolls along.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, in Buddhism, all kinds of measuring or evaluating the ethical agent from his social footing or class, instead of his ethical virtues, personality and social career, are proved irrational, and therefore, should be avoided by the wise. Buddha propounded that moral Kamma is essentially mental in its nature and each individual is responsible for bearing consequences of his own Kamma.\textsuperscript{56}

It is the doctrine of Kamma that give consolation, hope, reliance, and moral courage to a Buddhist. When the unexpected happens, difficulties, failures, and misfortunes confront him, the Buddhist realizes that he is reaping what he has sown, and is wiping off a past debt. Instead of resigning himself, leaving everything to Kamma, he makes a strenuous effort to pull out the weeds and sow useful seeds in their place and the future is in his hands. He, who believes in Kamma, does not condemn even the most corrupt, for they have their chance to reform themselves at any moment. A Buddhist who is fully convinced of the law of Kamma does not pray to another to be saved but confidently relies on himself for his emancipation. Instead of making any self-surrender, or propitiating any supernatural agency, he would rely on his own willpower and work incessantly for the weal and happiness of all. This belief in Kamma, “validates his effort and kindles his enthusiasm,” because it teaches individual responsibility. To an ordinary Buddhist Kamma serves as a deterrent, while to an intellectual it serves as an incentive to do good. This law of Kamma explains the problem of suffering, the mystery of the

\textsuperscript{55} Vāsetṭha Sutta (GD. II, p.74).
\textsuperscript{56} Yuvraj Krishan, The Doctrine of Karma, 1\textsuperscript{st} edition, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private limited, 1997, p.68.
so-called fate and predestination of some religions, and above all the inequality of mankind.\textsuperscript{57}

### 3.2. Wú Wéi (無為)

Wú Wéi (無為) is a central concept in Taoism. The literal meaning of Wú Wéi is “without action”. It is often expressed by the Wéi Wú Wéi (為無為), meaning “action without action” or “effortless doing”\textsuperscript{58}. Wú Wéi is an important concept of Taoism that involves knowing when to act and when not to act. Another perspective to this is that Wú Wéi means natural action. Thus, knowing when (and how) to act is not knowledge in the sense that one would think now is the right time to do this but rather just doing it; doing the natural thing. The practice and efficacy of Wú Wéi are fundamental in Taoist thought, most prominently emphasized in Taoism.

The goal of Wú Wéi is alignment with Tao, revealing the soft and invisible power within all things. The practice of Wú Wéi is the expression of what in Taoism is considered to be the highest form of virtue – one that is in no way premeditated, but rather arises spontaneously. In Tao-Te-Ching, Lǎo Zǐ states:

- The highest virtue is to act without a sense of self.
- The highest kindness is to give without a condition.
- The highest justice is to see without a preference.\textsuperscript{59}

The concept of Wú Wéi is often described as performing a selfless act but this merely exposes the background of the writer. Faith-based religions have selfless acts and “doing good” as part of their belief system. In Taoist teaching however “good” is unknowable and a selfless

\textsuperscript{57} Narada Mahathera, \textit{The Buddha and His Teachings}, reprinted, Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1998, pp.300-301.


\textsuperscript{59} 上德 無為而無以為; 上仁 為之而無以為; 上義 為之而有以為。 (TTC. Chapter.38).
act can only be performed by someone in an egoless state. Every act performed by someone in the usual way of things has some kind of reward attached whether it is financial, power, love, status or just feeling good about oneself. All these things are ego re-enforcing. To perform a selfless act one must let go of one’s ego and pass into an altered state of consciousness. This is called Wú Wéi, the state of doing without doing. Lǎo Zǐ said:

He who acts upon them ruins them;
He who holds on to them loses them.
Hence, the sage man acted not
So that he ruined not;
He did not hold on to them
So that he did not lose them.⁶⁰

Lǎo Zǐ further stated:

Hence, the sage man
Assumed the office of non-action,
Conducted speechless instruction.
When the ten thousand things rose,
He did not initiate.
He assisted without taking credit;
Scored merits without claiming.
Precisely because he claimed not,
They never vanished.⁶¹

The difficulty is that Wú is always looked upon as a negative and nothing else. This narrow definition forgets the possibility of language and Wú, the negative, may become a term of positive quality. The vast

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⁶⁰ 為者敗之, 執者失之。是以聖人無為, 故無敗, 無執故無失。("TTC. Chapter 64").
⁶¹ 是已聖人處無為之事, 行不言之教, 萬物作焉而不辭, 生而不有, 為而不恃, 功成而不居。夫唯不居, 是已不去是以不去。("TTC. Chapter.2").
empty spaces of the universe are looked upon as purely negative quality, but they may become to be looked on from another point of view, as the immense abode of either or some other fluid, and, thus, have a positive significance. From being looked on as a vast invisible space, containing nothing, it may be looked on as the great expanse full of vital fluid. So the vast empty spaces that were looked upon as the abode of the non-existent may come to be looked on as the source of all existence. The existent is begotten of the non-existent. It is not negative, but something positive. To go a step further, it is said, “Wú and Tao are equally the mother of all things.” Thus Wú and Tao are the same. Lǎo Zǐ says:

    It (Tao) generates without possessing,
    Assists without taking credit,
    Leads without dominating.
    This is called deep and remote virtue.  

It may be said that Wú Wéi, no action is Tào Wéi (道為), action by the spirit. It is in this sense that the phrase: “there is no doing, but there is nothing undone” is to be understood. Wú Wéi must be rendered by “spirit action,” which makes the meaning full of force.

A key principle in realizing oneness with the Tao is that of Wú Wéi, or “non-doing.” Wú Wéi refers to behavior that arises from a sense of oneself as connected to others and to one’s environment. It is not motivated by a sense of separateness. It is action that is spontaneous and effortless. At the same time it is not to be considered inertia, laziness, or mere passivity. Rather, it is the experience of going with the grain or swimming with the current. The contemporary expression, “going with the flow,” is a direct expression of this fundamental Taoist principle,

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62 生而不有, 為而不恃, 長而不宰, 是謂玄德。（TTC. Chapter.51）
63 無為而無不為。（TTC. Chapter 38）
which in its most basic form refers to behavior occurring in response to the flow of the Tao. In Tao-Te-Ching, Lǎo Zǐ said:

The gentlest thing in the world overcomes the hardest thing in the world.
That which has no substance enters where there is no space.
This shows the value of non-action.
Teaching without words, performing without actions:
That is the Master's way.\(^{65}\)

4. Wholesome and Unwholesome Nature in Buddhism and Good and Evil in Taoism

4.1. Wholesome and Unwholesome Nature in Buddhism

In Buddhism there are three roots of the unwholesome (Akusalamūla): greed, hatred and delusion and there are three roots of the wholesome (Kusalamūla): non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion.\(^{66}\) The words “wholesome” and “unwholesome”, as used here, are renderings of the Pāḷi terms “Kusala” and “Akusala”, respectively. Alternative renderings are, for the wholesome: profitable, skilful; for the unwholesome: unprofitable, unskillful. The term ‘Mūla’ (root) has the sense of firm support, cause, condition and producer. The figurative character of the term suggests that the roots can also be taken as conveyors of the “nourishing sap” of the wholesome or unwholesome.\(^{67}\) Kusala, the wholesome, has its own characteristics: it is a healthy state of mind (Arogya), morally faultless (Annavaṇja), and has pleasant kamma-

\(^{65}\) 天下之至柔馳騁天下之至堅. 無有入無間. 吾是以知無為之有益. 不言之敎, 無為之益, 天下希及之. (TTC. Chapter.43).
\(^{66}\) Sangīti Sutta (DB. II, p.207).
results (Sukha-vipāka). Akusala, the unwholesome, has the opposite characteristics: it is an unhealthy or sickly state of mind (Gelañña), morally faulty and blameworthy (Sāvajja), and has unpleasant kamma-results (Dukkha-vipāka).

Greed (Lobha) has the characteristic of grasping an object, like birdlime. Its function is sticking, like meat put in a hot pan. It is manifested as not giving up, like the dye of lampblack. Its proximate cause is seeing enjoyment in things that lead to bondage. Swelling with the current of craving, it should be regarded as carrying beings along with it to states of misery as a swift-flowing river does to the great ocean. Hatred (Dosa) has the characteristic of savageness, like a provoked snake. Its function is to spread, like a drop of poison, or its function is to burn up its own support, like a forest fire. It is manifested as persecuting like an enemy that has got his chance. Its proximate cause is the grounds for annoyance (Āghāta-vatthu). It should be regarded as being like stale urine mixed with poison. Delusion (Mohā) has the characteristic of blindness, or it has the characteristic of unknowing. Its function is non-penetration, or its function is to conceal the true nature of an object. It is manifested as the absence of right view, or it is manifested as darkness. Its proximate cause is unwise attention. It should be regarded as the root of all that is unwholesome.

Non-greed has the characteristic of the mind’s lack of desire for an object, or it has the characteristic of non-adherence, like a water drop on a lotus leaf. Its function is not to grasp, like a liberated Bhikkhu. It is manifested as not treating the desire-evoking object as a shelter, as a man who has fallen into filth. Non-hatred has the characteristic of lack of savagery, or the characteristic of non-opposing, like a congenial friend. Its function is to remove annoyance, or its function is to remove fever, as

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68 PP. pp.529-530.
sandalwood does. It is manifested as agreeableness, like the full moon. Non-delusion has the characteristic of penetrating according to their true nature, or it has the characteristic of sure penetration of an arrow shot by a skilful archer. Its function is to illuminate the objective field, like a lamp. It is manifested as non-bewilderment, like a forest guide. The three should be regarded as the roots of all that is wholesome.

The three unwholesome roots are not restricted to the strong manifestation suggested by the English terms greed, hatred and delusion. To understand their range it is important to know that in Pāḷi these three terms stand for all degrees of intensity, even the weakest, of the three defilements, and for all varieties in which these appear. In their weak degrees their unwholesome influence on character and kammic consequences is not as grave as that of their stronger forms. But even weak forms may carry the risk of either growing stronger or making a person’s character more susceptible to their graver manifestations. A fuller view of the various forms of the unwholesome roots can be gained from a list of their synonyms:

Greed — liking, wishing, longing, fondness, affection, attachment, lust, cupidity, craving, passion, self-indulgence, possessiveness, avarice; desire for the five sense objects; desire for wealth, offspring, fame, etc.

Hatred — dislike, disgust, revulsion, resentment, grudge, ill-humour, vexation, irritability, antagonism, aversion, anger, wrath, vengefulness.

Delusion — stupidity, dullness, confusion, ignorance of essentials.

Though formulated negatively, the three wholesome roots signify positive traits:
Non-greed — unselfishness, liberality, generosity; thoughts and actions of sacrifice and sharing; renunciation, dispassion.
Non-hatred — loving-kindness, compassion, sympathy, friendliness, forgiveness, forbearance.
Non-delusion — wisdom, insight, knowledge, understanding, intelligence, sagacity, discrimination, impartiality, equanimity.\(^69\)

Even though the wholesome and unwholesome roots are individual mental states, their manifestations and repercussions have the greatest ethical significance in society. Each individual in society rises up at once to protect himself, his loved ones, his property, security and freedom, from the greed, hatred and delusions of others. One’s own greed, hatred and ignorance may in turn arouse others to anxious concern and resentment. From all this there results an intricate interlocking of suffering which caused to others and experienced by oneself. Hence, the Buddha repeatedly said that the unwholesome roots cause harm both to oneself and to others, while the wholesome roots are sources of benefit for both the individual and society.\(^70\)

The wholesome and unwholesome roots are of paramount human concern on all levels. As the originating causes of kamma, they are the motive powers and driving forces of deeds, words and thoughts. All stages of the path to deliverance are closely concerned with the wholesome and unwholesome roots. At the very beginning, the coarsest form of greed, hatred and irresponsible ignorance have to be abandoned through virtue (Sīla), while in the advanced stages the aids of meditation (Samādhi) and wisdom (Paññā) have to be applied to a deeper-reaching removal of the unwholesome roots and to the cultivation of the

\(^70\) \textit{Akusalamū Sutta} (GS. I, pp.182-185).
wholesome ones. The wholesome that can be cultivated comprises everything beneficial, including those qualities of mind and heart which are indispensable for reaching the highest goal of final liberation. The unwholesome that can be abandoned includes even the finest traces of greed, hatred and delusion. It is, indeed, a bold and heartening assurance of the Buddha, that what is beneficial can be cultivated and what is harmful can be abandoned.\(^{71}\)

### 4.2. Good and Evil in Taoism

In general, the principle of Taoist morality is that one should practice self-restraint while working to cultivate and refine oneself, for in that way one brings benefits to others as well as to oneself. In Tao-Te-Ching this principle is called Shàn (善) and it corresponds to wholesome natural principles seen in the environment and the characteristics of an imperceptible force called Tao.\(^{72}\) To understand the Taoist notion of good (Shàn, 善) and evil (Bù Shàn, 不善), it is important to distinguish between the “concepts” of evil versus the “reality” of evil. As a concept, Taoists do not hold the position of good against evil; rather they see the interdependence of all dualities. So when one labels something as a good, one automatically creates evil. That is, all concepts necessarily are based on one aspect vs. another; if a concept were to have only one aspect, it would be nonsensical. Neither good nor evil are accorded a metaphysical grounding in Taoist philosophy. No real difference exists between these axiological extremes, only a difference conceived and perceived by the

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\(^{71}\) Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, ahusalaṃ pahīnaṃ hitāya sukhāya saṃvattati. Tasmā evaṃ vadāmi 'ahusalaṃ, bhikkhave, pajahatih'ti. Yasmā ca kho, bhikkhave, kusalanā bhāvitaṃ hitāya sukhāya saṃvattati. Tasmā evaṃ vadāmi 'kusalaṃ, bhikkhave, bhāvethā ti.' (GS. III, p.53).

circumscribed view of human beings. Concepts of good and evil are human constructs imposed upon a value-free universe, as Lǎo Zǐ observes:

Between good and evil
What difference it is!
He whom the people fear
Cannot but fear the people also.
Faintly, it seems boundless!

The reality of good and evil is that all actions contain some aspect of each. This commonly referred to as the Yīn Yáng symbol. Any action would have some negative (Yīn) and some positive (Yáng) aspect to it. Taoists believe that nature is a continual balance between Yīn and Yáng, and that any attempt to go toward one extreme or the other will be ineffective, self-defeating, and short-lived. When people interfere with the natural balance by trying to impose their egoistic plans, they will not succeed; rather, the non-egoistic person allows nature to unfold, watching it ebb and flow from good to bad and back again. Another way of understanding this is that the sage person understands the reality of good and evil, whereas the fool concentrates on the concept of good and evil. The sage knows that any evil will soon be replaced by good as the fool is forever fruitlessly trying to eliminate evil. If action is necessary, the wise person follows Wú Wéi which is in harmony with the Tao.

A temptation exists to try to smuggle in the good and evil dualism by arguing that the introduction of distinctions is an “evil” degeneration, a falling away from primal “goodness.” However, this is not consistent with the broad vision of Taoist philosophy. The cryptic language of the Taoists has led many interpreters to assert wrongly that Taoism espouses

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74 善之與惡, 相去若何? 人之所畏, 不可不畏。荒兮, 其未央哉! (TTC. Chapter.20).
a doctrine of human goodness. However, as Taoist literature amply attests, the term “good,” like the term “evil,” is merely a relative term unsuitable for describing the essential nature. Pluralism is a fact of life, although many seek to circumvent it by pontificating on “good versus “evil.” A sweeping egalitarianism follows from this insight:

The sage man never had a predisposed heart,
Taking the hundred family’s heart
To be the concern of his heart.
Good people - he was good to them;
Evil people - he was also good to them.
Goodness was attained.
Honest people - he was honest to them;
Dishonest people - he was also honest to them.
Honesty was attained.
When the sage man presided over the empire,
Unbiased, he muddled their hearts
For all under heaven.
The hundred family names
All lent him their ears and eyes;
The sage man turned them all into infants.\(^75\)

Dualistic opposition, including good and evil, are generated by the human mind in its continuing, and ultimately futile, attempts to control and improve on reality. Both good and evil lie in the myopic eye of the beholder:

When all under heaven know beauty as beauty,
There is ugliness;
When all know goodness,

\(^75\) 聖人無常心，以百姓心為心。善者吾善之，不善者吾亦善之。信者吾信之，不信者吾亦信之。德信。聖人在天下，歙歙焉，為天下，渾其心。百姓皆注其耳目，聖人皆孩之。(TTC. Chapter.10).
There is evil.
That being and nonbeing mutually generate,
Difficult and easy mutually complement,
Long and short mutually formulate,
High and low mutually fulfill,
Music and voice mutually harmonize,
Front and back mutually follow
Is constant.  

The simplistic dualism may appeal to humanly circumscribed sense of order in the universe, by dividing the world into the heroes and villains that satisfy the childish longings. For the Taoist, this is nothing more than misguided wish fulfillment. Evil as well as good are considered to exist as human conceptualizations only, neither corresponding to nor coherent with the reality of Tao. Embodying Wú Wéi, the Sage goes with the flow of Tao, not as passive observer, but as interactive participant. The humanly devised dualism of good and evil is abandoned, superseded by recognition of a “good” that surpasses both the inherent limitations of human understanding and the equally limited human evaluations of good versus evil.

Taoist neutrality and indifference with respect to opposites such as long and short, before and after, or above and below will not seem strange. Even the equanimity in regard to distinctions such as beautiful and ugly, good luck and bad luck will probably seem plausible while viewing them within the Taoist philosophical context. Taoist indifference, however, becomes problematic in regard to the moral distinction between good and bad or, to put it in more religious terms, the difference between good and evil. But even if this may seem somewhat scandalous,

76 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，長短相形、
高下相傾，音聲相和，前後相隨。(TTC. Chapter.2)
indifference is particularly important when it comes to moral evaluations from a Taoist perspective. The Taoist sage does not take sides in moral quarrels or in quarrels about what is right or what is wrong, about what is true and what is false. Actions that seem to be good may well have bad consequences, and actions that seem to be bad may well have good consequences. The sage in the Tao-Te-Ching is also morally impartial or beyond good and evil.78

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