CHAPTER FOUR
CRITERIA FOR JUDGING MORAL AND IMMORAL ACTIONS
IN BUDDHISM AND TAOISM

1. The Voice of Conscience in Buddhism and Taoism

1.1. A Sense of Shame and Blame (Hīrī and Ottapa)

Conscience, as commonly understood, is the faculty within us that
decides on the moral quality of our thoughts, words, and acts. It makes us
conscious of the worth of our deeds and gives rise to a pleasurable feeling
if they are good and to a painful one if they are evil. Conscience is the
moral sense of right and wrong and is recognized as such in Buddhism as
well. Conscience has a role to play in deciding the moral worth of an
action. Buddhism measures the moral worth of an action in terms of its
results. Thus one’s conscience must be free to take all possible
consequences of one’s actions into account.

Closely associated with this notion of awareness (Appamāda) or
mindfulness (Sati) and providing a central dimension of human self-
understanding at the core of Buddhist sensitivities about how to act,
arising from the zero level, are notions which are considered “two truly
supportive qualities that are guardians of the world” The two are a sense
of “shame” (Hīrī) and a sense of “blame” (Ottappa). The “shame” in this
case has to do with modesty based on a natural valuing of oneself, one’s
basic sense of self-worth, even respect for oneself (Attagārava). One
would refrain from what is detrimental (Pāpa) because such behavior is
embarrassing, leads to one’s being ashamed, is self-incriminating, is

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simply that which one would not bring oneself to do. The sense of “blame” arises from an awareness of others, a valuing of others, respecting others (Paragārava) in the sense that their opinions matter. Both of these dimensions, personal-and-also-social, alive dynamically, cooperate in leading one not to do what is detrimental.²

The Buddha points to two mental qualities as the underlying safeguards of morality, thus as the protectors of both the individual and society as a whole. These two qualities are called Hirī and Ottappa. Hirī is an innate sense of shame over moral transgression; Ottappa is moral dread, fear of the results of wrongdoing. The Buddha calls these two states the guardians of the world (Lokapāla).³ He gives them this designation because as long as these two states prevail in people’s hearts the moral standards of the world remain intact, while when their influence wanes the human world falls into unabashed promiscuity and violence, becoming almost indistinguishable from the animal realm. While moral shame and fear of wrongdoing are united in the common task of protecting the mind from moral defilement, they differ in their individual characteristics and modes of operation. Hirī, the sense of shame, has an internal reference; it is rooted in self-respect and induces humans to shrink from wrongdoing out of a feeling of personal honor. Ottappa, fear of wrongdoing, has an external orientation. It is the voice of conscience that warns humans of the dire consequences of moral transgression: blame and punishment by others, the painful kammic results of evil deeds, the impediment to one’s desire for liberation from suffering.

By cultivating within oneself the qualities of moral shame and fear of wrongdoing, one not only accelerates one’s own progress along the path to deliverance, but also contributes one’s share towards the

³ Sukkadhama Sutta (Itv. p.141).
protection of the world. Given the intricate interconnections that hold between all living forms, to make the sense of shame and fear of wrong the guardians of one’s own minds is to make ourselves guardians of the world. As the roots of morality, these two qualities sustain the entire efficacy of the Buddha’s liberating path; as the safeguards of personal decency, they at the same time preserve the dignity of the human race.\(^4\) Without ethical-practical reason, the voice of conscience cannot lead to righteous action because the active use of intelligence based on experience is an inseparable part of right action (Dhamma). So the reason that the Buddha gave such a central importance to Hirī and Ottappa is because they are that voice that says “it’s not proper, it’s not right”, the voice that says “if you do this then that will happen and that's going to be very unpleasant for ourselves and for others”.

Hirī, the sense of shame or conscience is really a shrinking away from that which is inappropriate, the corollary of which is, that one should always consider the significance and appropriateness of one’s actions. Ottappa is a reflection on Kamma; that willingness and preparedness to stand back and think it through. One considers the whole process from the initial action with the ramifications both for oneself and others to the final results. There develops a wise fear, an intelligent fear based upon the painful consequences of one’s unskillful activities. These guiding forces or influences are not blind emotions although there is an emotional force there grounded in Wisdom and Understanding, an understanding of what is appropriate and what will result from one’s actions.

When Hirī and Ottappa are strong and resolute one has the brake of self-discipline which allows to refrain from any pleasure of the immediate

\(^4\) *Carita Sutta* (GS.I. p.46).
moment through realizing it will lead ultimately to an increase in attachment, to fear, paranoia, anxiety, worry, sorrow and despair. When Hirī and Ottappa are present, then one can easily keep the Precepts as the basis for the spiritual life not only through their intellectual acceptance, but by the additional emotional support, as a friend and a strong force for protection. The right-minded man concerns himself with the act, and not with the consequences; he considers not what is pleasant or unpleasant, but what is good and right according to the rules of morality. When he does right, and does not seek any result, he is relieved of all the burdens of doubt, fear and perplexity; he never becomes involved in an inextricable tangle or difficulty. His mind is at peace, his conscience serene; these are the requisites for health, happiness and long life.⁵ As a moral being guided by moral conscience, man should rise much above an animal. He should become a being of a higher world in which higher values are preferred to mere material life and material gain, in which every human being is regarded as an equal and never as inferior to another, and in which truth, justice, honesty, fellowship and freedom are the intuitively accepted principles of action.⁶

1.2. A Sense of Selflessness (Wú Sī, 無私)

Conscience corresponds to the social nature. Conscience is distinct from preference, which can be unreflective, instinctive, and strictly internal. In many circles today, conscience has been reduced to “a principle of individual self-assertion against social standards,” which confuses “the dignity of individual conscience with the absolutizing of individual desires.” By contrast, conscience consists of shared moral

⁶ Ibid., p.91.
belief – if not literally shared among persons, at least susceptible to sharing among persons. Because conscience is rooted in sources external to the person, the dictates of conscience call the person outside of oneself even while providing a moral center for one’s own deeply personal values and priorities. This understanding of conscience lends insight into the social nature of the human person. The viability of conscience will often depend on the viability of the relationships through which conscience is formed.\footnote{Robert K. Vischer, \textit{Conscience and the Common Good}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.71.}

The basic premise of Taoism is that nature has its own structures and patterns. The goal of life should be to live close to nature and reproduce those patterns in your own behavior. By observing our environment we can discover the easiest life path to travel. Tao-Te-Ching suggests that we make decisions by following our instincts, not by following human-made rules and rituals. Faith and conduct depend upon our inner accord with the conscience of the Universe, not on stylized ceremonies. Lǎo Zǐ advocated a life of action determined by modesty and individual conscience. He believed that a person's conduct should be governed by instinct and conscience.

Human and nature constitute a harmonious and unified system, in which human, on one hand, has to wring, exploit and utilize nature in order to develop itself, and hence inevitably impinges on, even bust up nature; on the other hand, nature can reduce and clear up the bad effects that human has on it with its capability in self-regulation and self-regeneration, provided that human exploitation is within reason. Therefore it is possible to lead to inharmoniousness of human and nature, if man becomes insatiable and conscienceless, and impacts on nature so far-reaching as to go beyond the limit of nature’s capability. Lǎo Zǐ says:
Diminish selfishness and reduce lusts.\(^8\)
Hence, the sage man
Withdraw himself to the back,
Yet found himself in front;
Cast himself aside,
Yet found himself preserved.
Is it not because he was selfless
That he could fulfill the self?\(^9\)
To hold and fill it to the brim –
You’d better stop it;
To hammer and sharpen it –
You cannot long preserve it;
To fill a room with gold and jade –
Nobody can safeguard it;
To be noble, rich but arrogant –
You will bring yourself calamity.
To withdraw yourself after scoring merits –
Heaven’s Tao.\(^{10}\)

2. Consequence or Result of Action in Buddhism and Taoism

2.1. The result of Kamma (Vipāka)

Vipāka is the fruit or result of Kamma. The cause produces the effect, the effect explains the cause. The seed produces the fruit, the fruit explains the seed. Even so are Kamma and its effect.

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\(^8\) 少私寡欲! (TTC. Chapter.19).

\(^9\) 是以 聖人後 其身 而身先，外其身 而身存。非 以其無 私邪? (TTC. Chapter.7).

\(^{10}\) 持而盈之不如其已; 揣而銳之 不可長保: 金玉滿堂 莫之能守; 富貴而驕, 自遣其 疑。功遂 身退, 天之 道載。(TTC. Chapter.9).
According to the seed that’s sown,
So is the fruit you reap therefrom,
Doer of good will gather good,
Doer of evil, evil reaps,

Down is the seed and thou shalt taste the fruit thereof.\textsuperscript{11}

The principle of kamma and vipāka in Buddhism fixes the responsibilities of the agent and subjects him to face the consequences—pleasant or unpleasant, according to the nature of action performed. Buddhism emphasizes the performance of ethical action and sees no escape from its consequences. The Buddha denied one could avoid experiencing the result of a kammic deed once it’s been committed. It is stated that kammic results are experienced either in this life (Diṭṭadhammika) or in a future lives (Samparāyika).\textsuperscript{12} The Buddha said that there are three sorts of the result of kamma: that which arises right here and now, that which arises later in this lifetime, and that which arises following that. This is called the result of kamma.\textsuperscript{13}

Every time a person acts there is some quality of intention at the base of the mind and it is that quality rather than the outward appearance of the action that determines the effect. The Buddha stated: “If one speaks or acts with a wicked mind, pain follows one as the wheel, the hoof of the draught-ox.”\textsuperscript{14} The Buddha further states: “If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows one as the shadow that never departs.”\textsuperscript{15} According to Buddhism, the law of kamma is so perfect that it is impossible to find a case where a wrong deed does not bear disagreeable fruit and a right deed does not bear an agreeable fruit. It is also

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Samuddaka Sutta} (CDB. I, p.328).
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Pathamasaitetanika Sutta} (GS. V, p.189).
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Nibbedhika Sutta} (GS. III, p.294).
\textsuperscript{14} Dh. verse.1.
\textsuperscript{15} Dh. verse.2.
impossible for virtuous action to produce unfavorable results, and for non-virtuous action to produce favorable results.16

The Buddha spoke of wholesome actions (Kusala-kamma) that result in happiness, and unwholesome actions (Akusala-kamma) that result in unhappiness. Every volitional activity is inevitably accompanied by its due effect. If unwholesome actions are accumulated with deliberate intent they cause pain and result in pain.17 If wholesome actions are done with deliberate intent they cause happiness and result in happiness.18 While unwholesome actions produce unwholesome results - suffering, wholesome actions produce wholesome results - happiness. One can interpret wholesome actions in two ways. One can simply regard wholesome actions as avoiding the unwholesome actions, avoiding killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and the rest. Or one can speak of wholesome actions in positive terms. The wholesome actions have as their consequences similar wholesome effects just as unwholesome actions have similar unwholesome effects.

One may ask how one knows whether an action that is wholesome or unwholesome will produce happiness or unhappiness. The answer is time will tell. The Buddha Himself answered the question. He has explained that so long as an unwholesome action does not bear its fruit of suffering, for so long a foolish person will consider that action good. But when that unwholesome action bears its fruit of suffering then he will realize that the action is unwholesome. Similarly, so long as a wholesome action does not bear its fruit of happiness, a good person may consider that action unwholesome. When it bears its fruit of happiness, then he will realize that the action is good. One needs to judge wholesome and unwholesome action from the point of view of long-term effect. Very

17 Akusalasaṅcetanikā dukkhudrayā dukkhavipākā hoti (Pathamasāṅcetanika Sutta: GS. V, p.189).
18 Kusalasaṅcetanikā sukhudrayā sukhavipākā hoti (Pathamasāṅcetanika Sutta: GS. V, p.192).
simply, wholesome actions result in eventual happiness for oneself and others, while unwholesome actions have the opposite result, they result in suffering for oneself and others.

If kammic action were always to bear fruits of invariably the same magnitude, and if modification or annulment of Kamma-result were excluded, liberation from the samsaric cycle of suffering would be impossible; for an inexhaustible past would ever throw up new obstructive results of unwholesome Kamma. Hence the Buddha said: “If one says that in whatever way a person performs a kammic action, in that very same way he will experience the result — in that case there will be no possibility for a religious life and no opportunity would appear for the complete ending of suffering.” “But if one says that a person who performs a kammic action with a result that is variably experienceable, will reap its results accordingly — in that case there will be a possibility for a religious life and an opportunity for making a complete end of suffering.”

Every kammic action, as soon as it is performed, first of all affects the doer of the deed himself. This holds with as much truth for bodily and verbal deeds directed towards others as it does for volitional thoughts that do not find outward expression. Again, an act or word meant to harm or hurt another may not provoke him to a hostile reaction but only meet with self-possessed calmness. The bad deed and words, and the thoughts motivating them may fail to harm the other, but they will not fail to have a damaging effect on the character of the doer; and it will affect him even worse if he reacts to the unexpected response by rage or a feeling of resentful frustration. Hence the Buddha says that beings are the responsible owners of their Kamma which is their inalienable property.  

19 Abhidhappaccavekkhitabbāna Sutta (GS. III, p.59).
They are the only legitimate heirs of their actions, inheriting their legacy of good or bad fruits.

In Buddhism, right view (Sammādițṭhi) is applied to understand the action and its result. There is fruit and result of deeds well done and ill done. This is a part of the right view. In order to realize the nature of kamma and vipāka it must be understood that not all Kamma has to ripen as a matter of necessity. Although it has the tendency to ripen, it does not ripen inevitably. Kamma is like a seed. Seeds ripen only if they meet the right conditions. But if they do not meet the right conditions they remain as seeds and they can never ripen at all if they are destroyed. Similarly, it can be said of kamma that kamma pushes for an opportunity to mature. It has a tendency to mature. If kamma finds the opportunity then it will bring its results. If it does not meet the right conditions it won't ripen. One kamma can even be destroyed by another kamma. Buddhism teaches that kamma and result are void of one another, although no results exist without kamma. The results depend on kamma entirely, but the results do not exist within kamma, nor does kamma persist within the results. Kamma and results belong to different times. The results are born wholly depending on kamma done in the past, and when circumstances combine in a way that is favorable for the results to appear, results will appear.

The benefits of understanding the Law of Karma are that this understanding discourages one from performing unwholesome actions which have suffering as their fruit. Once we understand that in our own life every action will have a similar and equal reaction, once one understands that he will experience the effect of that action, wholesome or unwholesome, he will refrain from unwholesome behavior, not wanting to experience the effects of these unwholesome actions. And

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20 Arthī sukatadukkāṭā naṃ kammānaṃ phalamvīpāko (Sāleyya Sutta: MLS. I, p.348).
similarly, understanding that wholesome actions have happiness as their fruit, he will cultivate these wholesome actions. Reflecting on the Law of Karma, of action and reaction in the moral sphere encourages him to renounce unwholesome actions and cultivate wholesome actions.

2.2. The benefit of Wú Wéi (無為之益)

Wú Wéi is also a mode of “action” that reflects the nature of the Tao itself. There is an intrinsic dynamism in the way Tao functions which is exemplified in nature and natural phenomena. Nature functions “effortlessly” without “conscious” effort and with no specific “goal” or “purpose” in view. Water flows down to the lower grounds “effortlessly” by its own intrinsic nature and this it does not to “show off” its virtue of humility. There is nothing “intended” in the way nature functions. Such a “natural action” is contrasted with “intended” and deliberate action in the Tao-Te-Ching where one intervenes to change things for the better or worse. It is the latter kind of action that creates tension or contention. Any “deliberate action” interfering with this natural flow of things is self-defeating. In the world of nature, there is a cyclical movement whereby things come and go as in the case of the seasons, and movements from one state to its opposite as in the case of day and night. Interference with the natural flow of things often results in disastrous consequences. Refraining from such interference and avoidance of deliberate or intended action by a person to make things “better” or “different” is the state of non-action.

Wei refers to “human action intending to achieve results,” and more specifically results thought to be “superior to what would result if

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nature were simply allowed to take its own course." Wú is a prefix that negates what comes after. Therefore, Wú Wéi means “not to engage in human action intending to achieve results superior to those that would naturally occur.” Wú Wéi is generally translated as non-striving, acting without acting, non-action, or perhaps most appropriately, “action as non-action.” Wú Wéi “refers to a higher standard of human actions and their results,” instructing practitioners to abandon human intrigue and live “in accordance with nature” without attempting to control or change the surrounding world or other creatures. Wú Wéi is consistent with our ordinary place in a much larger universe, it is consistent with keeping a low profile and maintaining harmony. In the Tao-Te-Ching, the greatest accomplishment is no accomplishment.

Lǎo Zǐ says:

The Sage is occupied with the unspoken
And acts without effort.
Teaching without verbosity,
Producing without possessing,
Creating without regard to result,
Claiming nothing,
the Sage has nothing to lose.

The sage desires to have no desire.
He does not value rare treasures.
He learns to be unlearned,
And returns to what the multitude has missed (Tao).

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25 是以聖人處 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 而弗居。夫唯弗居，是以不去。 (TTC. Chapter.2).
Thus he supports all things in their natural state but does not take any action.\textsuperscript{26}

Tao has also been translated as “the wayfarer,” indicating that there is no distinction between a person and the way, between oneself and one’s own actions and their results. The path is the unfolding of potential and the overcoming of obstacles, the results of actions that an individual has created. Aids and obstacles are thus an extension of oneself, and the path and wayfarer merge into one. By one’s own doing one prevents oneself from realizing one’s true inner nature. Lǎo Zī asserts that all one needs do is to realize that one obscures one’s own inner light and step aside. It is the Way of Tao not to act from any personal motive; to conduct affairs without feeling the trouble of them; to taste without being aware of the flavor; to account the great as small and the small as great; to repay injury with kindness. One’s observation of nature shows that the softest things have power over the hardest things in the world. Consider a horseman riding a powerful, galloping steed. The rider cannot compare to the horse in terms of physical strength, but there is no question who is controlling whom.

Water seeps into and dissolves rocks; electricity flows through a block of metal. This is how the Tao, which lacks substance, can permeate all things even if they appear to be solid, without any cracks or openings. One can extrapolate from this to understand life. The Tao acts in a Wú Wéi manner and effortlessly achieves the miracle of life. One, too, can act without attachment in affairs of the world to achieve great benefits effortlessly. The most effective teaching is conveyed through personal examples rather than preachy words. The most effective results are achieved through acting without any attachments to specific outcomes.

\textsuperscript{26}是以聖人欲不欲, 不貴難得之貨, 學不學, 復眾人之所過, 以輔萬物之自然 而不敢為. (TTC. Chapter.64).
This is the way of the Tao. Its power and effectiveness are unmatched in the world. Lǎo Zǐ says:

The softest things of the world
Override the hardest things of the world
That which has no substance
Enters into that which has no openings
From this I know the benefits of non-attached actions
The teaching without words
The benefits of actions without attachment
Are rarely matched in the world.27

When a person pursues academic study, each day he gains book knowledge, which leads to more complexity and ever-increasing desires. The more he knows the more things he wants. When he pursues the Tao, each day he reduces, detaches, discards and simplifies. He loses more and more complexity every day. As a result, his desires will also decrease. A simple and uncluttered life leads to peace and contentment. This process of reduction and simplification continues, until he reaches Wú Wéi, the state that is free of striving and without any unnecessary effort.

With the principle of Wú Wéi, achievement without strife and with effortless grace there is nothing he cannot accomplish. The impossible becomes possible; the difficult becomes easy. He does less and accomplishes more. Using this principle, he allows all things to progress naturally and minimize our meddling interference. This is the most effective way for him to achieve his goals and objectives in the world. Those who do not understand this aspect of the Tao cannot let things be. They insist upon asserting their manipulative influence. Their lack of

27 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，不言之教，無為之益: 天下希及之。(TTC. Chapter.43).
understand will lead to the expenditure of excessive resources, time and energy, but not the results proportional to their effort. Lǎo Zǐ says:

He who pursues learning daily increases;
He who hears the Tao daily decreases.
He decreases and decreases until he acts not
And has no intention to act.
He who wishes to win all under heaven
Never creates disturbances.
If he creates disturbances,
He is no longer fit to win all under heaven.\(^{28}\)

3. Judging a Case of Killing: An Ethical View in Buddhism and Taoism

3.1. Destruction of Life (Pāṇātipātā)

As an act involving the intentional destruction of life, it is undoubtedly prohibited by Buddhist precepts. Confirmation of this can be found in the Monastic Rule (Vinaya), which sets out the regulations governing monastic life. The Monastic Rule is an authoritative source for Buddhist ethics, and includes a body of case law in which the Buddha is represented as giving judgment on specific matters. The cases are recounted under the rubric of the precept against the destruction of human life (the third Pārājika). The penalty for breaking the precept is the severest which can be imposed lifelong excommunication.\(^{29}\)

\(^{28}\) 為學日益，為道日損。損之又損：以至於無為；無為而無不為。取天下常以無事；及其有事不足以取天下。（TTC. Chapter.48).

\(^{29}\) Vin. I, pp.125-126.
The Buddha did not give the explicit definition about when the life starts, but the indirect sources seem to mention that according to Buddhism life starts at the first moment of fertilization. It is recorded in the monastic rules that one time a monk committed an abortion for a girl and the Buddha judged that his action is seriously wrong and that brought him a highest monastic crime. A monk who was given this kind of monastic crime judgment must be expelled from the monk community. Normally a crime done by the monk in the above case is the killing of an adult person. The Buddha considered the embryo as person like the adult, so the monk who killed the embryo through abortion was judged by Buddhist monastic rules as committing the highest crime as same as killing the adult. In the commentary to the rule said above, it is stated clearly that killing human being means destroying human life from the first moment of fertilization to human life outside the womb.\textsuperscript{30} Even though the Buddha himself did not give the clear-cut definition about when life occurs, the Buddhist tradition clearly states that life starts when the process of fertilization takes place.

According to Buddhism five factors are necessary to fulfill the offence of killing the living beings.

1. A living being,
2. Knowledge of this living being,
3. Intention to kill this living being,
4. Act of killing this living being,
5. Death of this living being because of the act of killing.

If all five factors are present, then the offence of killing is committed.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{30} Vin. I, p.126.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
3.2. Pleasure in killing (Lè Shā Rén, 樂殺人)

Taoism speaks clearly against killing, and provides a “universalistic ethic” that extends not only to all humanity, but to the wider domain of all living things. In the Taoist Context, views and concepts on killing are based on the precepts found in the Taoist scripture. In the Precepts of the Highest Lord Lǎo (太上老君戒經), the Lord Lǎo said: "The first precept is “No Killing.” If any men or women can keep this precept and never violate till the end of their lifetimes, they are recognized as the men and women with pure faith.” The Lord Lǎo said: “The precept against killing is that all living beings, including all kinds of animals, and those as small as insects, worms, and so forth, are containers of the uncreated energy, thus one should not kill any of them.”

In Twelve Highest Precepts of Admonition” (十二上品權戒) The Heavenly Lord said: “If you wish to learn my Tao, be careful not to even think of killing. All living beings love to be alive and fear for death. My life is his life, thus we should be careful not to despise the lives of other beings. Some people’s mouths and stomachs desire fleshy and greasy things so that living beings are killed and eaten as food. However, if you can have mercy in your heart and consider their fears and pains, you cannot bear to eat them and this is to prove that you are carrying out the merciful and compassionate practice.”

In The Scripture of Ten Precepts (十戒經), it is said that “Do not kill but always be mindful of the host of living beings.” In the Great Precepts of the Highest Ranks (上品大戒) it is also said that “Maintain a kind heart and do not kill. Have pity for and support all living beings. Be compassionate and loving. Broadly reach out

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32 CC. pp.147-148.
33 SCC. p.87.
34 CC. p.185.
to bring universal redemption to all.”³⁵ In “the Great Precepts of Self-Observation” (觀身大戒) it is said that students of the Tao must not kill any living beings, even the wriggling worms and instruct anyone to kill any living beings, even the wriggling worms.³⁶

The many lists of Taoist precepts are generally very similar, usually containing five foundational precepts, the first of which is an injunction not to kill. For example, in the 180 Precepts of Lord Lǎo (老君一百八十戒) which is one of the oldest Taoist compositions and remains foundational to Taoism, the Taoist injunction against killing is repeated frequently in varied forms, warning against killing in general, and killing animals. The examples of the Taoism precept of non-killing were inscrolled as follows:

The ⁴th precept: Do not kill or harm any lives.
The ³⁹th precept: Do not engage in killing.
The ⁴⁰th precept: Do not encourage others to kill.
The ⁷⁹th precept: Do not go fishing or hunting.
The ⁹⁵th precept: Do not dig out any lives from underground in winter.
The ⁹⁷th precept: Do not break nests and eggs.³⁷

Apart from these precepts, Lǎo Zǐ simply says in Tao-Te-Ching:

Those who delight in killing
Cannot achieve their ambitions upon the world.
He who enjoys killing men
Cannot be allowed to prevail in the empire.³⁸

³⁵ CC. p.169.
³⁶ CC. p.205.
³⁷ CC. pp.137-144.
³⁸ 樂殺人者，則不可以得志於天下矣。（TTC. Chapter.31).
4. Doctrine of Harmlessness: An Ethical View in the Buddhism and Taoism

4.1. Non-violence (Ahiṃsa)

Ahiṃsa, which literally means no harm, is a rule of ethical conduct that bars the killing or injuring of living beings. In Buddhism, the basic of the practice of Ahiṃsa is compassion (Dayā), mercy (Hitānukampā) and a consciousness of shame (Lajjā) of the cruelty of killing and injuring life. Where there is compassion in the heart, it is expressed in an outward act as Ahiṃsa.\(^{39}\) It is considered as a noble act and a person who is harmless towards all living beings is called noble one.\(^{40}\) In Buddhism the practice of Ahiṃsa is taught in many ways. In the Noble Eightfold Path right thought (Sammāsaṅkappa), right speech (Sammāvācā) and right action (Sammākammanta) can be explained and interpreted as Ahiṃsa.\(^{41}\) The Buddha said:

> It is one who does not harm at all by body, speech or mind,
> Who really is a harmless one as he does not harm others.\(^{42}\)

Harmlessness (Avihiṃsa) is one of the three folds of right thought. The intention of harmlessness is thought guided by compassion (Karuṇa), aroused in opposition to cruel, aggressive, and violent thoughts. Compassion has the characteristic of wishing that others be free from suffering, a wish to be extended without limits to all living beings. Compassion arises by entering into the subjectivity of others, by sharing their interiority in a deep and total way. It springs up by considering that all beings, like ourselves, wish to be free from suffering, yet despite their

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40 *Ahiṃsā sabbapāṇīnam, ariyoti pavuccati*. (Dh. verse.270).
41 *Saccavibhaṅga Sutta* (MLS. III, p.298).
42 *Yo ca kāyana vācāya, manasā ca na hiṃsati/*
*Sa ve ahiṃsako hoti, yo paraṃ na vihiṃsati/* (Ahiṃsaka Sutta: KS. I, p.205).
wishes continue to be harassed by pain, fear, sorrow, and other forms of Dukkha.\textsuperscript{43}

Abstaining from harsh speech is one of the four components of right speech. One must abandon harsh speech and use speech that is harmless, pleasant to the ear, agreeable, touching to the heart, courteous, delightful to many folk. It is called honey speech (Madubhāṇī).\textsuperscript{44} Speech and its offshoot can have enormous consequences for good or for harm. Speech can break lives, create enemies, and start wars, or it can give wisdom, heal divisions, and create peace. Harsh speech is speech uttered in anger, intended to cause the hearer pain. Such speech can assume different forms. The first one is abusive speech: scolding, reviling, or reproving another angrily with bitter words. The second one is insult: hurting another by ascribing to him some offensive quality which detracts from his dignity. The third one is sarcasm: speaking to someone in a way which ostensibly lauds him, but with such a tone or twist of phrasing that the ironic intent becomes clear and causes pain. The main root of harsh speech is aversion, assuming the form of anger. Harsh speech is an unwholesome action with disagreeable results for oneself and others, both now and in the future, so it has to be restrained. The ideal antidote is patience; learning to tolerate blame and criticism from others, to sympathize with their shortcomings, to respect differences in viewpoint, to endure abuse without feeling compelled to retaliate.\textsuperscript{45}

Abstaining from taking of life is one of the three components of right action. One must abandon taking of life; lay aside the rod and the knife; one must be conscientious, full of sympathy, and desirous of the

\textsuperscript{44} Gāthabhāṇī Sutta (GS. III, p.111).
welfare of all sentient beings.\(^{46}\) “Abstaining from taking life” has a wider application than simply refraining from killing other human beings. The precept enjoins abstaining from killing any sentient being. A “sentient being” (pāṇi, satta) is a living being endowed with mind or consciousness; for practical purposes, this means human beings, animals, and insects. The “taking of life” that is to be avoided is intentional killing, the deliberate destruction of life of a being endowed with consciousness. The abstinence may be taken to apply to two kinds of action, the primary and the secondary. The primary is the actual destruction of life; the secondary is deliberately harming or torturing another being without killing it. The Buddhist perspective on non-injury is quite simple and straightforward. The positive counterpart to abstaining from taking life, as the Buddha indicates, is the development of kindness and compassion for other beings. One not only avoids destroying life; he dwells with a heart full of sympathy, desiring the welfare of all beings. The commitment to non-injury and concern for the welfare of others represent the practical application of the second path factor, right intention, in the form of goodwill and harmlessness.\(^{47}\)

Apart from Noble Eightfold Path, the practice of Ahiṃsa is again taught in the Path of Ten Kinds of Good Action (Dasakusalakamma-patha) which contains abstaining from taking of life (Pāṇātipātā verāmaṇi), abstaining from harsh speech (Pharusāya vācāya veramani) and the thought of loving-kindness (Abyāpāda). These three kinds of Good Action can be explained and interpreted as Ahiṃsa. Regarding the manifestation of the thought of loving-kindness it is described that a virtuous person bears no ill-will and is not corrupt in the resolves of his heart. He wishes, “May these beings be free from animosity, free from

\(^{46}\) Ekacco pā nā tipā tām pahāya pā nā tipā paṭīvirato hoti nihita daṅgho nihitasattho liṇji dayāpanno sabbapāna-bhuṭaḥtiṇukampi viharati (Cunda Sutta: GS. V, p.178).

\(^{47}\) Bhikkhu Bodhi, op. cit., 1984, pp.50-51.
oppression, free from trouble, and may they look after themselves with ease."\(^{48}\) Abyāpāda signifies a strong wish for the happiness of others and a caring for the well-being of another living being. Moreover, it has direct qualities such as showing patience, receptivity, and appreciation. In this way, no harmful action, no harsh speech and no ill-will underline the key role of Kusalakammapatha in the development of Ahiṃsa. As a result, the purification of body, speech and mind is achieved through the Path of Ten Kinds of Good Action.\(^{49}\)

Ahiṃsa to living beings is the first basic code of ethics in Buddhism.\(^{50}\) To cause another to kill, torture, or harm any living being offends against the first precept. It is really a call to life and creation and an offering of fearlessness to all living beings. By abstaining from destroying living things, one gives freedom from fear, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression to innumerable beings. Giving freedom from fear, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression, to innumerable beings, he himself shares that freedom from fear, freedom from animosity, freedom from oppression. This is the reward of virtue.\(^{51}\) It is true that one comes to know the genuine feeling of compassion and attains happiness when Ahiṃsa is practiced. In this way, taking delight in the application of Ahiṃsa leads to cultivate a mind of compassion. By developing a compassionate heart, one motivates one’s desire to remove harm and suffering from others and then to awaken in oneself the feeling of compassion towards innumerable and infinite kinds of life. Ahiṃsa merges with the emancipation of mind by the power of compassion (Karunā-cetovimutti) as the mind achieves serenity by developing a


\(^{49}\) Dasa kusakammapathā sucitveva honti suciṣṭhāṇā ca. (Cunda Sutta: GS. V, p.180).

\(^{50}\) Pāṇātipātā veramagī (Sāṅgīti Sutta: DB. III, p.225)

\(^{51}\) Abhisanda Sutta (GS. IV, p.168).
compassionate heart and thus the mind is free from harmfulness (Hiṃsa).\textsuperscript{52}

4.2. Compassion (Cí, 慈)

Tao is non-violence, non-aggression, and non-competition as compassion is the essence of Taoism. While the basic meaning of Cí (慈) is love, Cí is deeper, gentler, and broader than love. Cí manifests as “gentleness, motherly love, commiseration,” and is not limited to one’s own species. Cí requires “fostering life,” a concept that is central to Taoist morality. Consequently, Taoists ought to avoid harming any living being, even the wriggling worm. In Tao Te Ching, Lǎo Zī says:

I constantly have three treasures
Which I uphold and value:
First, compassion.
For compassion, used in battle,
Will bring you victory;
Used in defense,
Will make you impregnable.
When heaven is about to establish someone,
It seems to wall him up with compassion.\textsuperscript{53}

In the rare instances where Lǎo Zī does condone combat, he speaks of it with great reservation:

Good weapons are instruments of fear; all creatures hate them.
Therefore followers of Tao never use them.
The wise man prefers the left.

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Nissaraṇaṁ hetam, āvuso, vihesāya, yadidam karuṇācetovimuttī (Sāṅgīti Sutta: DB. III, p.233)}

\textsuperscript{53} 夫我有三寶，持而保之：一日慈。夫慈以戰則勝，以守則固。天將救之以慈衛之 (TTC. Chapter.67).
The man of war prefers the right.  
Weapons are instruments of fear;  
They are not a wise man’s tools.  
He uses them only when he has no choice.  
Peace and quiet are dear to his heart,  
And victory no cause for rejoicing.  
If you rejoice in victory, then you delight in killing;  
If you delight in killing, you cannot fulfill yourself.  

Furthermore, in contrast to the patriotic enthusiasm that is often exhibited by the public when soldiers are sent off to war, the Tao Te Ching likens victory in war to a funeral.  
When many people are being killed,  
They should be mourned in heartfelt sorrow.  
That is why a victory must be observed like a funeral.  

The martial training that one received in Taoist temples was seen as a metaphor for removing conflict from within oneself and waging an inner struggle to resist and overcome anger, revenge, impatience, passion, envy, and hatred.  
A good soldier is not violent.  
A good fighter is not angry.  
A good winner is not vengeful,  
A good employer is humble.  
A brave and passionate man will kill or be killed.  
A brave and calm man will always preserve life.  

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54 夫佳兵者 不祥之器，物或 惡之；故有道者不處。君子居 則貴左，用兵 則貴右。兵者不祥之器，非君子之器；不得已 而用之：恬淡為 上。勝而不美，而美之者 是樂殺人。夫 樂殺人者，則不可以 得 志於天下矣 (TTC. Chapter.31).
55 殺人之眾，以悲哀泣之；戰勝以喪禮處之! (TTC. Chapter.31).
56 善為士者不武，善戰者不怒；善勝敵者不與，善用人者為之下。 (TTC. Chapter.68).
57 勇於敢則殺，勇於不敢則活 (TTC. Chapter.73).
Thus from the Taoist point of view, when dealing with conflict the true enemy is not outside oneself. Rather it is the demons of fear, anger and hatred one harbors within. In Taoism violence is primarily defined by one’s inner mental and emotional state rather than by outer behavior. As one Taoist saying expresses it: “For the heart that is one with nature, though the body contend, there is no violence. But for the heart that is not one with nature, though the body be at rest, there is always violence.” Violence therefore, like harmony, is understood in Taoist philosophy more as an internal psychological condition. To shift into a mode of self-defense does not constitute violence if one’s heart is free from anger. 

Tao is the generator, nurturer, and caretaker of the world and the myriad of things in it. In the Taoist worldview, human beings do not have dominion over the nonhuman world; instead, they are placed side by side with nonhuman beings. Humans are simply one of the myriad of things that are generated, nurtured, and cared for by Tao. Since “virtue” in Taoism is defined as being one with Tao, humans are encouraged to emulate the “behavior” of Tao and take good care of other forms of existence as well as their fellow human beings. In a text attributed to Lǎo Zǐ entitled the One Hundred and Eighty Precepts, Taoists are admonished to abstain from all kinds of killing and hurting, particularly in the spring and the summer, when animals and plants are growing. According to the same text, Taoists should not disturb animals during their hibernation, climb up trees to reach into nests lest the eggs are broken, or set snares to catch animals. The Taoist ethos is to nurture things and let them be themselves. The Taoist worldview values animate beings as well as the inanimate natural environment upon which they depend. Being one of the myriad of sentient beings in the world, Taoists are expected to respect

nature; the environment that makes every form of life possible. The One Hundred and Eighty Precepts attributed to Lǎo Zǐ admonishes people not to willfully chop down trees, pluck flowers, or change natural landscapes; it also exhorts individuals to make adjustments in order to fit into nature rather than to exploit nature to accommodate their need or greed.\textsuperscript{59}

Taoist precepts specifically promote “compassion, empathy, and kindness” toward other creatures. For example, “the Record of Purgations of Precepts” teaches Taoists to be compassionate, nurturing, caring, and selfless “for the sake of all beings.”\textsuperscript{60} These precepts tend to be stated in the form of prohibitions, but “The Great Precepts of the Highest Ranks” offers a list of affirmative actions under the title of “The Highest Precepts of Wisdom for the Salvation of All Living Beings.” Three out of six of these precepts focus on munificence in our interactions with living beings:

Precept 4. Give wisely to the birds and beasts, to all species of living creatures. Take from your own mouth to feed them, let there be none left unloved or not cherished. May they be full and satisfied generation after generation. May they always be born in the realm of blessedness.

Precept 5. Save all that wriggles and runs, all the multitude of living beings. Allow them all to reach fulfillment and prevent them from suffering an early death. May they all have lives in prosperity and plenty. May they never step into the multiple adversities.

Precept 6. Always practice compassion in your heart, commiserating with all. Liberate living beings from captivity and rescue them from danger.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} CC. pp.138-140.
\textsuperscript{60} CC. pp.68-71.
\textsuperscript{61} CC. p.175.
“The 180 Precepts of Lord Lǎo” warn against harming other creatures, whether insects, birds, or mammals, whether by disrupting their homes, destroying their families, or abuse and overwork:62

1. Do not keep many animals…
4. Do not kill or harm any being…
8. Do not raise pigs or sheep…
24. Do not… eat meat…
39. Do not engage in killing…
40. Do not encourage others to kill…
49. Do not step on or kick . . . domestic animals . . .
79. Do not fish or hunt and thereby harm and kill the host of living beings…
95. Do not in winter dig up insects hibernating in the earth . . .
97. Do not wantonly climb trees or plunder nests and destroy birds’ eggs.
98. Do not catch birds or beasts in cages or nets.
129. Do not wantonly whip the six domestic animals.
130. Do not ride a horse or drive a carriage without good reason…
132. Do not startle birds or beasts . . .
142. Always be mindful of purity and remember the divine law, honor the pure and wise, and sparingly eat like a deer and drink like cattle . . .
150. Always diligently avoid being cruel . . .
172. If someone kills birds and beasts, fish or other living beings for you, do not eat them.
173. If something has been killed for food, do not eat it . . .

62 CC. pp.137-144.
176. To be able to cut out all meat of living beings and the six domestic animals is best. Without doing this, you will violate the precepts.

180. Practice these precepts without violation, and if you violate one make sure you repent properly. Then change your behavior… Widely pursue the salvation of all beings.

Taoist precepts speak often and strongly against harming living beings and Taoism encourages people to love deeply and live compassionately. The world’s largest religions, at their heart, encourage adherents to live gently, and to understand their place in the world not as exploiters, but as a small and humble part of much larger, and more important, spiritual whole. Taoism is but one example of strong non-violent tendencies in the world’s great religions. The Taoist worldview implicitly rejects worldviews that depict humanity in opposition to nature or that pit spirit against matter. Human beings, nonhuman beings, and the non-animate natural world are all generated by Tao and are obligated to take care of one another. The non-anthropocentric worldview of Taoism has resounding ecological implications and therefore has drawn much attention from those concerned about the environment.63

5. Comprehensive Views on Ethical Judgments

5.1. Ethical Judgments in Buddhism

Buddhism is ethical and moral from beginning to the end. Value of moral life is stressed throughout and the retributive effect of an action that manifests itself in this life. Since Buddhism is specific with regard to

moral value of an action, motive and intention of an action are evaluated with reference to righteous or unrighteous means adopted in performing an action. Moreover, the benefit that particular action can vouchsafe to the performer and the others are also taken into consideration together with its outcome as the ultimate good of that particular action. According to Buddhism, to classify an action as wholesome, righteous means have to be adopted in performing that action. Assuredly the action must be directed towards one’s own good and that of others.

For this purpose, there are three principal references (ādhipateyya):

1. Reference to one’s own conscience (Attādhipateyya)
   It is stated that one must evaluate the action that one is going to perform with reference to one’s own conscience.

2. Reference to conventions in the world (Lokādhipateyya)
   Herein the conventions in the world have to be taken as a criterion for judging an action.

3. Reference to the Dhamma (Dhammādhipateyya)
   The dhamma (doctrine) provides the direct guideline to evaluate the action. Then one realizes that if one performs an unwholesome action against what the Dhamma has ordained, it would be inappropriate.\textsuperscript{64}

As a moral criterion of universal application the Buddha addressing Rāhula says that if any action is not beneficial to oneself, it is not beneficial to others, and not beneficial to both oneself and others, that is an unwholesome action that should be avoided. On the other hand, if an action is beneficial to oneself, beneficial to others and beneficial to both oneself and others, that is a wholesome action that is to be practiced.\textsuperscript{65}

The Buddha further advises him to reflect on the pros and cons of an action before it is performed. The criterion given in the discourse is three

\textsuperscript{64} Ādhipateyya Sutta (GS. I, p.130).
\textsuperscript{65} Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovāda Sutta (MLS. II, pp.88-89).
faceted and applicable to all humans despite the differences of caste, creed, race or color.

First of all there are the ethical rules themselves. When we consider what actions are considered “good” and what are deemed to be “bad,” it might appear that there is a great deal of agreement between the different ethical systems. Such actions like killing, theft, sexual misconduct, and falsehood seem to be condemned universally. The differences emerge when we examine the question more closely, e.g. when we investigate the rationale for these rules, whether they are absolute or are relative to some other end, and so on. The rule against killing could be taken as an example. Many ethical systems proscribe only the killing of humans, but Buddhism applies the rule to all sentient existence. Furthermore even in the case of humans, exceptions are sometimes allowed, e.g. for “holy” or “just” war. Buddhism admits of no such exemptions. In Buddhism the ethical quality of actions depends on the mental factors associated with their commission or even contemplation, and on the impact they have on the well-being of others. If action is committed with greed, aversion or delusion it is unwholesome (Akusala), but the degree of moral reprehensibility and karmic consequence depends on a whole host of factors. Even an “accidental” killing could have adverse consequences if it was caused through negligence and unmindfulness, which is a kind of “delusion” (Moha). What has been said of the rule regarding killing, may also be extended to the other ethical precepts as well. Furthermore Buddhist ethics does not stop at the Five Precepts (Pañca Sīla), which provides only the very minimum for the proper conduct of lay persons.

The second criterion that could be adduced for the evaluation of ethical systems relates to the motivation for adhering to the ethical rules of the system, religious or secular. In Buddhism the goal of ethical
conduct is self-control, self-understanding, and self-development. It is an essential prerequisite for the training of the mind, the elimination of ignorance and the attainment of Enlightenment. The pursuit of Buddhist ethics too leads to social harmony, but this harmony is achieved through individual perfection, rather than through the compulsory observance of legalistic rules. But because of the non-compulsive nature of Buddhist ethics, they are not intended to replace the laws of society, but neither are those of other ethical systems erected on religious and philosophical foundations.

The third aspect of the question relates to the way in which “good” and “bad” conduct results in appropriate consequences. This is the question of the “policing of the rules.” The legal model of trial-and-punishment is best suited to the enforcement of the laws of society, such as are necessary for the preservation of the authority of the State and the well-being of society.

5.2. Ethical Judgments in Taoism

In Tao Te Ching, Lǎo Zǐ expressed that there can be one true perspective on ethical judgment: the perspective of the Way. He says, “From the point of view of the way these are excessive food and useless excrescences. As there are Things that detest them, he who has the Way does not abide in them.”

Lǎo Zǐ also says:

Those who are good I treat as good.

Those who are not good I also treat as good.

In so doing I gain in goodness.
Lǎo Zǐ’s treating good people and bad people equally does not mean that he is denying the true distinction between good and bad. Finally, Lǎo Zǐ says:

It is the way of heaven to show no favoritism.

It is forever on the side of the good men.⁶⁸

Taoist ethics are rooted in an understanding of the Way or Tao. The Tao is the nameless, shapeless force or Non-being which brings all things into existence, or Being, and then nurtures them. Once the Tao takes form, it manifests itself through natural principles. One such principle is the notion of complementary opposites, the Yīn and the Yáng. There is no mountain without the valley, no light without darkness, no prosperity without calamity, no life without death. The universe operates as it should when these forces are in equilibrium. The second principle is circular movement or reversion, which means that plants, animals, rocks and other forms of matter ultimately return to their natural state.

The principles of the Tao apply equally to all individuals, regardless of their place in society. Ethical leaders and followers develop Te or character by acting in harmony with the Tao, not by following commandments. The Taoist sages advocate a minimalist approach to leadership because artifice or “government” reflects a distrust of the working of the Tao and human nature and followers obey natural laws, and society as a whole benefits. Therefore, she or he who governs best governs least. The ideal Taoist leader maintains a low profile, leading mostly by example and allowing followers to take ownership. Ethical decision-making in Taoism is based on conformity to principles manifested in the natural or phenomenological world rather than on the consequences of the choices or on cultural standards or values. To follow the Tao is to recognize that the universe is fluid. The seasons change,

⁶⁸ 天道無親 – 常與善人。 (TTC. Chapter.79).
plants and animals follow the cycle of reversion, and so on. The constancy of change means that what is right in one context may be wrong in another. Even judging the consequences of ethical choices is difficult because the people involved do not know how events will unfold.

Leaders may decide to adopt only certain Taoist practices. However, they should first wrestle with the fact that Taoism is complex, comprehensive, integrated system of thought, not a set of unrelated concepts. Utilizing Taoist principles may well produce better results and more personal fulfillment, as its advocates claim. Nevertheless, leaders seeking to follow the Tao must carefully consider the ways in which the philosophy’s assumptions about the origins and workings of the universe, human nature, knowledge, and spirituality influence ethical choices. Leaders and followers need to empty themselves by clearing away distractions or barriers that keep them from the true knowledge of Tao. One barrier is language - words are inadequate to describe the true nature of Tao. Naming is dangerous because giving labels to objects divides nature which needs to be seen in its totality into categories and fosters the mistaken belief that humans can somehow control it. Taoism is an awareness and understanding of the interdependent relationship between oneself, those being led, and nature. Understanding the world as moving in an ongoing flow of rise and fall, increase and decline, people can make wise decisions. Too much growth will result in reduction; a period of calmness and apparent stagnation is the beginning of a new surge of energy. There cannot always be nothing but growth; nature requires moves in all directions, up and down, rise and decline, come and go.\footnote{Livia Kohn, \textit{Introducing Taoism}, New York: Routledge, 2008, p.205.}