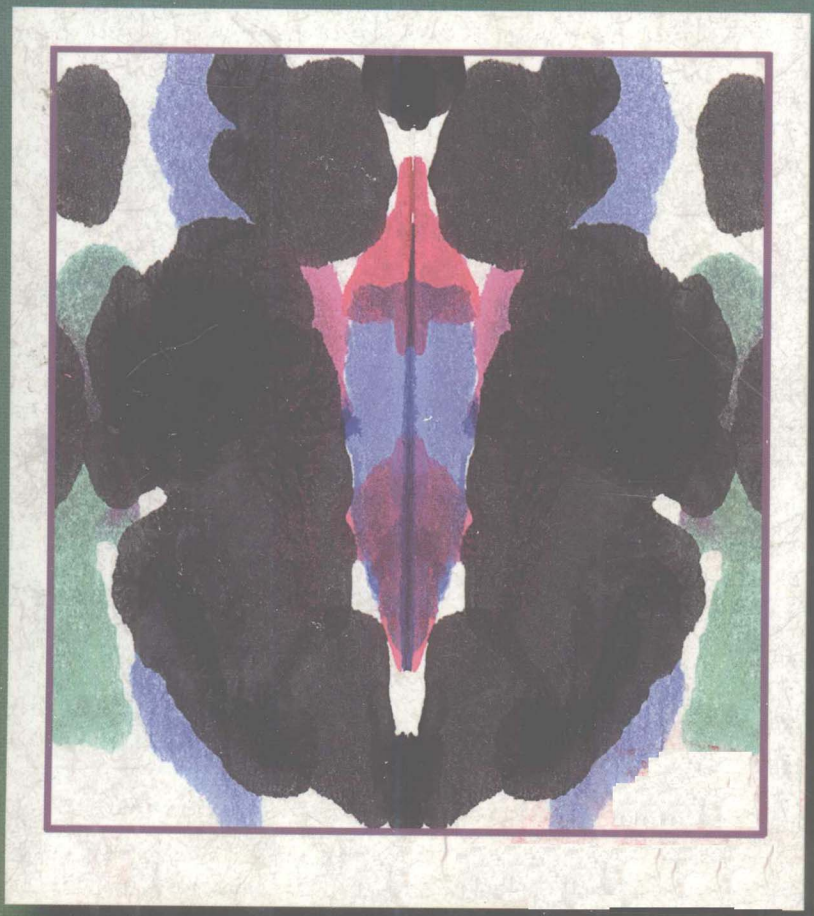
# EVIL AND/OR/AS THE GOOD

*Omnicentrism, Intersubjectivity, and Value Paradox in Tiantai Buddhist Thought*



BROOK ZIPORYN

# *Evil and/or/as The Good*

## OMNICENTRISM, INTERSUBJECTIVITY, AND VALUE PARADOX IN TIANTAI BUDDHIST THOUGHT

Brook Ziporyn

Published by the Harvard University Asia Center
for the Harvard-Yenching Institute
Distributed by Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England 2000

Printed in the United States of America

The Harvard-Yenching Institute, founded in 1928 and headquartered at Harvard University, is a foundation dedicated to the advancement of higher education in the humanities and social sciences in East and Southeast Asia. The Institute supports advanced research at Harvard by faculty members of certain Asian universities and doctoral studies at Harvard and other universities by junior faculty at the same universities. It also supports East Asian studies at Harvard through contributions to the Harvard-Yenching Library and publication of the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* and books on premodern East Asian history and literature.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Ziporyn, Brook Anthony.
Evil and/or/as the good : omnicentrism, intersubjectivity and value paradox in Tiantai Buddhist thought / Brook Ziporyn.
p. cm. -- (Harvard-Yenching Institute monograph series)
Includes bibliographic references and index.
ISBN 0-674-00248-2
1. T'ien-t'ai Buddhism--Doctrines--History. 2. Chih-li, 960–1028. 3. Good and evil. I. Title. II. Series.

BQ9118.4.Z56 2000
294.3'42042--dc21

00-022030

Index by the author

Printed on acid-free paper

Last figure below indicates year of this printing

09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01 00

# *Acknowledgements and Conventions*

There are many who share whatever credit there may be for the completion of this work, which grew in the usual wayward fashion from a muddled set of obsessions into a dissertation and then through long transmutations and skin-sheddings into a book. It is a testament to them all that it is with a sense of genuine gratitude, rather than any kind of "guilty indebtedness," that I here acknowledge their contributions; a heavier-hand on the part of any one of them would no doubt have inspired the opposite response. I would like to thank, first of all, all the members of my original dissertation committee—that is, Professors Donald J. Munro, Kenneth J. Dewoskin, T. Griffith Foulk, Shuen-fu Lin, and Daniel B. Stevenson—both for all I have learned from their work and from their personal examples over the years and also for their patience and guidance and especially the courage to allow me to take on this unruly topic.

Professor Munro is one of the few people I have known whose stature and influence continue to grow the longer I have known him, and the importance of his warm even-handed guidance, his unprecedented and far-reaching insights into early Chinese thought (several of which stand at the foundation, scarcely concealed, of this project), and his personal example, seem to take on increasing significance for me the longer they percolate, and the more I experience the way the fit into—or contrast with—the rest of the world.

I would certainly never have been able to read and understand Tiantai texts if not for the good fortune of having Dan Stevenson show up for two

years at the University of Michigan at exactly the right moment in my graduate career; my first painful steps into the dense and esoteric Tiantai mode of expression were guided by Professor Stevenson, one of the few people in the country or perhaps the world who could have done the job, and for this I am eternally grateful to him. It was a genuine experience of learning to read and even to see with new eyes, the central tool allowing a new world of thought to open for me.

Professor Foulk was also crucial in these first reading sessions, above all for his sharp inquiring mind, his broad knowledge, his no-nonsense but broad-minded approach to Chinese Buddhism, and his personal example. It is for the last named item, as well as the general orientation in Buddhism and above all a peculiarly effective way of approaching new problems as they arose in the study of that field which I gained as a student in his seminars, for which I am especially grateful; his example as a scholar, as a teacher, and as a person have proved oddly and hauntingly inspirational to me in a surprising number of situations.

Professor Lin was another great benefactor of my graduate career—can anyone bestow a greater gift than the ability to read Chinese poetry?—from whom I learned much about the close reading of Chinese texts, the joy of swimming in the densest undercurrents of intertextual continuity, and a way of being in the world which is itself poetic in the highest sense.

Professor Dewoskin, in his own inimitable way, must be credited with sparking some of the most fertile of the notions that have gone into making this book, in particular those having to do with systems of organization in early Chinese thought, and alternative modes of order; his approach to these questions, and his willingness to pursue them wherever they led, provided me with great courage in pursuing my own course here.

I have been far from forthcoming in talking openly about the matters of concern that animate this work in professional and personal relationships with peers, which makes those who have managed to draw me out of my skittishness all the more precious to me. Alan Cole, my oldest and best friend in this business by far, bears special mention in this context. In the ongoing argument/jam session Alan and I have amused ourselves with over the last ten years, I have been forced to give an account of myself, of my most outlandish claims and most scandalous commitments, in a much more detailed, coherent, and above all interesting way than would have been dreamable had I not had such a sharp-witted, sensitive, sympathetic, and ir-

ritatingly stubborn opponent/Doppelgänger, and one with whom I had so much in common. Years of trying to figure out exactly what small detail of disagreement made our views of the world, which were so close in almost every other particular, so deeply antipathetic to one another have been one of the most enjoyable and educational experiences of my life, without which it would be unbearably lonely.

I must also mention my friend Scott Cook in this regard, who made my days as a graduate student, waist deep in hardcore Sinology, immensely more pleasant and productive; Scott's inimitable humor, his close and careful way with the materials we were both studying, his love of the texts, and his astonishing skill in deciphering them made him an invaluable companion; it also deflated my former hubris over my own Classical Chinese ability once and for all, having discovered with great shock, shame, and admiration, while trading fours with him in the composition of poetry in that language, his superior facility.

Among my teachers in Taiwan, special mention must go to Professor Xin Yiyun, whose interpretive strategies and insights into the overall trends in pre-Qin thought made that great tradition intelligible to me for the first time, profoundly interrelating the texts in ways that have been a source of continual inspiration to me ever since; traces of his influence can be found all over this book. My gratitude is also owed to the Venerable Shi Shengyan, Dharma-master Shi Huimin and Professor Chen Yingshan of the Chunghwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, and also to Professor Yang Huinan of National Taiwan University, Dharma-master Shi Huiyue, Ge Wanzhang, Xu Minhua, Cai Jiawen, Tony K. Lin, and Wen Jinke, each of whom contributed greatly to this dissertation in his or her own way, not the least by virtue of the unstinting magnanimity and kindness they showed me during my stays in Taiwan.

I am also grateful to my colleagues in the Departments of Religion and Philosophy at Northwestern University, above all Richard Kieckhefer, whose welcoming and generous attitude toward me has made my first years teaching there pleasant, instructive, and greatly productive. Thanks also to Peter Bol and Michael Puett, two singular giants at Harvard University who made my year teaching there not only possible, but also exceptionally enjoyable and exciting. I would also like to thank the Fulbright-Hays Foundation, the Charlotte W. Newcombe Foundation, the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, and the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies for their

generous financial support of the original dissertation, without which this work could never have been written. Special thanks, of a whole different and in some ways vaster dimension, go to John Ziemer, my editor at the Harvard University Asia Center, the real midwife of this book, without whom it would quite literally not exist. I can only gasp in awe at the readerly genius, the eyes, that could have seen the coherence, the meaning, the exact fault lines in the giant unruly manuscript I plopped on his desk, and then give concise, exact instructions on what had to be done. A great tailor cuts little; but first he must have eyes to see the cloth he is working with. John is simply one of those rare human beings who truly knows how to read, and in a way I feel this book was not truly read, even by me, until he read it.

Last but not least, I thank my family—my forebears, my siblings, my wife Naoko and her parents, and my son Zhoushu. The pleasures and tribulations of being embedded in interpersonal relations this close are really beyond the realm of gratitude or rancour, I think; but for that fact itself, for having the chance to taste this hyperdense chiasm and for the nuances of experience it brings with it, the lack of which would certainly have seriously impoverished this work, among other things, I offer my thanks.

All translations from Chinese in this work are my own, unless otherwise indicated. All underlines, emphases, and parantheses in these translations are added by me. For Chinese terms and proper nouns I use the mainland *pinyin* system of romanization, except for contemporary scholars or writers who themselves use another romanization system in the spelling of their names in English.

B.Z.

# *Evil and/or/as The Good*

# *Contents*

# ONE

# *Introduction: The Question*

In this work, I hope to make a contribution to three divergent and not always congenial fields: Chinese intellectual history, Buddhist studies, and philosophy. To begin with, the following discussion may be viewed simply as an overview of some fundamental concepts that developed in Tiantai Buddhism in China between the fifth and eleventh centuries and thereby serve as a general introduction to this unique school of thought, which has been underrepresented in Western studies of Buddhism. This, in turn, may enlarge our current understanding of both Chinese intellectual culture and of Chinese Buddhism. In addition, as I will attempt to make clear in the conclusion, the exposition of these developments may provide ideas relevant to certain aspects of modern philosophical inquiry into basic ontological, epistemological, and axiological issues. These three concerns converge in a particularly fruitful vortex, I hope to show, in the Tiantai tradition, especially in the thought of a Song monk, Siming Zhili (960–1028), whose work is the focus of this study.

In the simplest terms, this book in its entirety is an exposition of the philosophical implications of a single eight-character sentence in a letter written by this monk: "Other than the devil there is no Buddha; other than the Buddha there is no devil" (*mo wai wu Fo*; *Fo wai wu mo* 魔外無佛，佛外無魔). Later in this Introduction, I quote the local context in which the phrase occurs and make some preliminary comments about the doctrinal context that frames it. But in a sense the entire work is a gradual expansion and unraveling of a more complete context in which this one idea is to be understood. The aim and focus of the other discussions that follow are sim-

ply a better understanding of the intent, implications, and resonances of this one sentence. Before I get started, then, it would be worthwhile to give some indication of why I consider this idea important and rich enough to merit such intensive consideration.

## *The Problem of Antithetical Values*

A little over a century ago, a perspicacious diagnostician of Western civilization made the following remark about what he considered the root of philosophical error and cultural decline in that tradition:

> 'How *could* something originate in its antithesis? Truth in error, for example? Or will to truth in will to deception? Or the unselfish act in self-interest? Or the pure radiant gaze of the sage in covetousness? Such origination is impossible . . . the things of the highest value must have another origin *of their own*—they cannot be derivable from this transitory, seductive, deceptive, mean little world, from this confusion of desire and illusion. . . .'—This mode of judgement constitutes the typical prejudice by which metaphysicians of all ages can be recognized; this mode of evaluation stands in the background of all their logical procedures. . . . The fundamental faith of the metaphysicians is *the faith in antithetical values.* It has not occurred to even the most cautious of them to pause and doubt here on the threshold, where however it was most needful they should: even if they *had* vowed to themselves *'de omnibus dubitandum'*. For it may be doubtful firstly whether there exist any antitheses at all, and secondly whether these popular evaluations and value-antitheses, on which the metaphysicians have set their seal, are not perhaps merely foreground valuations, merely provisional perspectives. . . . It might even be possible that *what* constitutes the value of those good and honoured things resides precisely in their being artfully related, knotted and crocheted to these wicked, apparently antithetical things, perhaps even in their being essentially identical with them.[1]

Whether we agree with Nietzsche's own value judgment, as expressed elsewhere in his works, that this axiological tendency is the source of dangerous error and a symptom of decadence, his insight into the prevalence and influence of the assumption that there is a sharp antithesis between value and anti-value cannot easily be denied.[2] Indeed, Western thought can in many senses be characterized as sharing a faith in antithetical values and making this faith a cornerstone for further ontological, ethical, and epistemological developments. The contents of this faith can broadly be summed up as What is good is not bad; what is bad is not good. Indeed, the fact that this appears so self-evident to us merely proves the point.

There are, of course, many variants of how this is unpacked—a great many types of relations can still obtain between two things that are "not" one another. Nietzsche seems to have had a more restricted sense of "antithetical" in mind here. He means that Western philosophers tend to believe not only that good "is not" bad but also that what is good does not *come from, grow out of, originate in*, what is bad; it has another, transcendent source.[3] This is certainly the belief of many Western thinkers, although it is surely less universal now than it was in Nietzsche's time. Moreover, it is obviously much simpler to assail this belief than the more general belief that good and bad, certainly at least as abstract concepts and often also as sets of concrete elements, are in themselves antithetical and mutually exclusive, which is still part of our worldview, at both the commonsense and the more philosophically rigorous level.

Indeed, this intuition may even seem to be necessary for all modes of practical engagement with the world, in those ethical or existential situations in which an act of will or choice is necessary. Isn't practical life always a process of deciding which of two (or more) alternatives is to be preferred, and doesn't this concern mean judging one to be in some sense good and the other bad, or at least better and worse? Surely if these were not mutually exclusive, practical efficacy would be undermined, and all action, indeed all life, would be impossible. This, at least, would seem to be the presupposition behind our commonsense belief in the necessity of maintaining, on some level or other, the mutual exclusivity of the good and the bad.

The Nietzschean view is that this intuition, this faith in antithetical values, is the foundation determining the structure of all other cultural phenomena, especially morality. What would a culture look like that did not share this faith? What would its morality look like? How would it moralize, how would it conceive the world, how would its rhetoric seek to convince? Would an understanding of such a culture shed useful light on our own culture past, present, and perhaps even future?

It may plausibly be argued that the Chinese philosophical tradition, and especially Chinese Buddhism, is an exceptionally rich source of alternatives to this paradigm and that this faith in antithetical values did not attain the hegemony in, say, pre-Yuan China that it continues to hold in the West. This is not to say that this non-antithetical view of value opposites is unique to China nor to Buddhism, nor, be it noted, that it constitutes the mainstream of these traditions or the central factor in these traditions with which

they have most readily identified themselves. Nonetheless, certain extraordinary notions concerning the relations between value and anti-value are developed both in indigenous Chinese thought and in Indian Buddhism. When these two traditions came together to form Sinitic Buddhism, these developments were intensified, particularly in the Tiantai tradition and most especially in Zhili's thought.

Again, this tendency is by no means absent in classical Western thought. On the contrary, many intriguing examples of the non-dichotomous treatment of value terms spring to mind that we would do well to keep in mind as points of comparison as we proceed. Indeed, in the interest of framing the scope of alternatives in which this problem must be situated, I present a brief account of some gestures toward value-paradoxical intuitions we do find in the Western tradition, in spite of and in tension with the mainstream tendency indicated by Nietzsche.

Heraclitus, for example, began Western dialectical thought with a theory of flux that unites contraries, including value contraries, in a single process of change, and boldly declared that God is day and night, war and peace, and the like. Moreover, "it is not good for men to get all they want. It is sickness that makes health pleasant; evil, good; hunger, plenty; weariness, rest." This claim introduces a meta-value placed on the *contrast* between opposites itself, on conflict per se, including the conflict between (first order) value and anti-value (e.g., between life and death). Hence we find Heraclitus stating that war is the father of all things, the source of all being and of all value, two terms that, as we shall see, are repeatedly conflated in the history of treatments of this problem. This is not a "neither/nor" doctrine, a transcendence of opposites by reference to their unity in some third thing, a good prototype of which might be Advaita Vedanta, which posits a substratum of all contrary predicates of which nothing can be predicated, thereby effectively negating the apparent conflict between opposed predicates, rather than valorizing this conflict. Rather, Heraclitus' view is the prototypical "both/and" doctrine, which values the self-contradiction of value and anti-value within the world and God as a value, preserving both.

The both/and and the neither/nor conflation of opposite values can be compared with the Empedoclean notion of love and strife, both of which are necessary for all creation and destruction in the intelligible and the sublunary worlds.[4] Love, however, seems to be valued more highly than strife, and the two are not said to have a common source or a shared substratum or a resolution that undermines their contrariety. Rather, they are viewed as in-

separable in fact (not necessarily in the ideal) and responsible for the combination and separation of the elements in all things, but never convertible into each other. There may be a meta-value placed on the combination of the two, since this is the source of all existent things, and the combination may be seen as preferable to the triumph of love over strife, but the point is by no means clear.

The subsequent treatment of this problem in Greek philosophy followed these two possibilities and developed from them new structures to deal with value and anti-value. In Plato, for example, the division of the Good from the Bad may not be as absolute as common wisdom would have it. The subtle relationship of the Idea of the Good to other Ideas and to the phenomenal world must be carefully examined in this connection; the Neo-Platonic take on this problem, which definitively equates value with being, is also not to be overlooked. There is a deep and fruitful ambiguity in the Platonic notion of the Good, which can imply either an absolute value dualism or the thoroughgoing omnipresence of the Good, even in apparent Evil, which could lead to potentially non-dichotomous results. The crypto-Parmenidean concept of Being in the Platonic scheme, as unchanging and utterly free of any negativity, seems to tip the scales decisively toward value dichotomy in practice—a point I return to below.

The Western theological category dealing with the monotheist version of this problem is theodicy. The relation between value (God) and anti-value (evil, Satan, among others) here is obviously powerfully affected by the entity posited as the ultimate good, that is, a being omnipotent, omniscient, and good.[5] The Gnostic systems, particularly those that consider this ultimate Good to be completely separate from this world and its creator, are noteworthy in that two diametrically opposed sets of moral consequences were drawn from this same dualistic premise; namely, either that this called for absolute abstention from this world and hence extreme asceticism or that this meant that nothing occurring in this world matters at all, a view that led to extreme antinomianism. Proponents of the first adopted a variation of the either/or attitude toward Good and Evil, combined with a neither/nor attitude toward worldly goods and evils. Adherents of the second, on the other hand, held that any physical behavior in this world is ultimately neither good nor evil, which in practice resulted in an indifferent both/and attitude toward worldly action.

Augustine's solution to the problem posed by this value duality was to assert that all substance and all being are good, a stance that has remained the

orthodox view throughout mainstream Christian theology. Evil is a perversion of the will, a turning away from God due to pride, and therefore not a positive being itself but merely, in Neo-Platonic fashion, a deficiency of being, In this so-called privation theory of evil, evil is parasitic on Good; it is the corruption, misuse, decay, or perversion of something that, as a being, is intrinsically good, the "distortion" of something inherently valuable. Moreover, there are degrees of good, but everything that has being is good in its own way and degree, except insofar as it may have become "spoiled" or "corrupted." In this fashion, the putatively infinite and transcendent nature of this value impacts on the solution, which allows, by a sort of paradoxical ingenuity, for "everything" to be good while making sure that nothing in human life is as it should be—a useful and probably not uncommon strategy that results in a full-fledged practical value dichotomy. Aquinas added the Aristotelean concepts of potentiality and actuality to this point of view. For him, Being and Good are convertible terms, and evil *acts* only by the power of good. Evil is defined as unfulfilled potentiality "without its proper and due act," and God, value, as "pure, actual, active act." Here good and evil are again paradoxically joined, although, needless to say, this is the opposite of a claim that doing good is equivalent to doing evil.

Perhaps even more germane are mystical theologies such as those of Meister Eckhardt, Nicholas of Cusa, Duns Scotus, and especially Jacob Boehme, whose unique view of evil's place in God was to decisively influence Schelling and Hegel, among others. Boehme's conception of evil has much in common with the Kabbalistic notions of the *Zohar*, one of the central texts of the Jewish mystical tradition, which, in accord with the dark Talmudic injunction to "serve God with both the good impulse and the evil impulse," develops a doctrine that holds evil to be simply God's attribute of justice when isolated from his attribute of mercy, the two being inseparable in God himself. Evil is thus in a sense from God, a part of God, and a rightful part of man's work (even the will to evil being enjoined for man is part of a mysterious second-order Good), while also being a fundamental violation of God's nature (that is, Evil is man's impious separation of God's two inseparable aspects of justice and mercy).[6]

Both Schelling and Hegel explicitly asserted that Good and Evil are not just two inseparable aspects of some third thing but are in a certain sense the same.[7] (Tiantai writers, in an entirely different context and ultimately with quite different implications, made the same assertion.) Schelling's claim that Good is Evil resonates strongly with the privation theories: Good is the

"being" that is all that is substantial in what is identified as Evil. But for Schelling, this Being is no longer the substantialist In-itself of the dominant tradition but is, rather, determined precisely as freedom, that is, absolute free Will as precisely the capacity for *both* Good and Evil. This gives him room for an incisive critique of the privation theory, in the process of which he radicalizes it. For now the capacity for Evil is included in the most primordial definition of Being (freedom, Will) as such. Schelling solved the dilemma implicit in this view by following Boehme and the Kabbalists, positing a primal, unmanifest Will even in God himself. There is something in God that is not yet God, a dark obscure longing to become Himself (that is, to become determinately, actually, manifestly, known to himself). This longing remains other than God even when he succeeds in mastering and integrating it by becoming actual, manifest, conscious. Schelling distinguished the unmanifest Ground of any being (its preconditions, components, raw materials, and the like; for example, hydrogen and oxygen in the case of water) from its manifest Existence (the cohesion of these elements into the determinate X in question; for example, the wateriness of $H_2O$) and suggested that the same held for the Absolute, for God himself. The dark Will is then the "Ground" of God, or Nature in its abysmal unruliness and indeterminacy, which is integrated in God as Existence but still distinguishable from him.

God completely integrates his Ground, whereas finite creatures do not, and herein lies the basis of Evil. Here Evil is defined no longer as merely limitation or privation or an illusion based on a partial view of a greater whole or indeed the mere separation of the two poles that by rights ought to be united in the Absolute. Instead, it is a kind of perverted unity of these two principles, the inversion of their proper relationship. Schelling described blind animal craving as the Ground itself, only dimly connected to the unifying rational principle of God's "Existence," that is, the unifying universalizing of rational awareness. But this is not yet Evil. Only when the Ground is combined with the universalizing function of rational awareness in human subjectivity, in the complete freedom and self-centeredness of the human Will as self-aware—Will known as the universality of Will as such—can there be Evil. This Evil is simply Selfhood itself, the Willing being that also perceives itself as the center and unifying point of the whole of creation. But this Evil as manifest Selfhood itself forms the Ground for a higher Good, the Spirit, which bears the same relation to Selfhood that "Existence" has to "Ground" in all other cases, binding it into a new whole of a different