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AN UNDERSTANDING OF ORIGINAL SIN FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF *DAO* AND *DE* IN THE LIGHT OF PAUL RICOEUR'S *SYMBOLISM OF EVIL*

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The Christian doctrine of original sin has been challenged and many people today question whether such a doctrine is still sustainable in light of evolution. In the *Symbolism of Evil*,[1] Paul Ricoeur reinterprets this doctrine in the contemporary culture by retrieving symbols of evil and analyzing myths of its genesis. He offers a phenomenological appreciation of the meaning of symbols, and shows not just how primal myths speak to humanity then and now, but also how they once spoke for men and women. Ricoeur has thus shed light on the interpretation of original sin by examining symbols of evil and analyzing myths in which those symbols and their dramatic narrative (myth) give rise to thought.

If that is the case, then a different culture born of different symbols and mythical traditions concerning evil would engender a different view of the problem of evil and create a different understanding of sin. The uniqueness of Chinese culture could then be traced to its own primal thought. It is on this assumption and

[1]Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbol of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967).

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in the light of Ricoeur's working framework that this author seeks to understand the notion of evil in Chinese tradition by detecting some possible symbols of evil and analyzing the anthropogenic myth of the so-called "fall"—with the complementary addition of some early philosophical thoughts on evil—in order to elucidate the Christian doctrine of original sin in this context, particularly from the perspectives of the notion of *Dao* and *De*.

In so doing, this author intends to emulate Ricoeur's phenomenology, extend his observations, and apply the hermeneutical principle proper to the Chinese context in order to draw light on the understanding of original sin in a Chinese context. This is both possible and desirable because, although Ricoeur himself was working primarily with Judeo-Christian materials, he has drawn and cast light on a broad range of symbols and myths which have implications for the study of China. However, before unfolding Chinese symbols, myths and thoughts about evil, there is the important task of crystallizing Ricoeur's framework so that, on the one hand, it unfolds Ricoeur's approach and insights on the problem of evil and original sin and, on the other hand, offers some meaningful comparisons which may be drawn between the two.

Ricoeur's Symbolization of Evil and Interpretation of Original Sin

Implied in Ricoeur's presentation, or at least in its structure, is an evolution in the symbolization of evil from evil primarily conceived as defilement to evil conceived as sin, and finally as guilt. Firstly, according to Ricoeur, defilement is the first primary symbol of evil because involvement in evil is commonly described as becoming dirty or defiled. Defilement, as a symbol of evil, is widespread and primitive enough to be considered universal. However, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, defilement was superseded by sin as an indication of evil. Secondly, for Riceour, sin as a violation of divine interdicts is a necessary transition from defilement to describe evil. Here, humans are set up against God or, more accurately, "before God." In the fundamental experience of Israel in covenantal relationship with God, human culpability is redefined in terms of human violation of the

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Covenant or overstepping a sacred boundary that defined the human-divine difference or relationship. "Thus, sin is a religious dimension before being ethical; it is not the transgression of an abstract rule—of a value—but the violation of a personal bond."[2] Moreover, sin is also seen as captivity by the evil power: "it is a power that binds man, hardens him, and holds him captive."[3] The captivity also suggests a social and intersubjective situation from which humans need to be liberated. Thirdly, according to Ricoeur, this problem of evil, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is understood in terms of guilt, that is, in acute and personal consciousness of radical evil. Guilt is the interiorization of sin. Because what is demanded of the human is beyond what the law requires, it appears that the human bears responsibility for her/his actions and motivations, even to the extent of having to choose between God or nothingness. Finally, Ricoeur uses the concept of the "servile will," i.e., "the unavailability of freedom to itself,"[4] to sum up human experience relating with the symbols of evil in the scheme of defilement-sin-guilt, but it does not deal with the origin and end of such experience. Ricoeur thus moves on to examine mythical symbols.

Ricoeur examines the Adamic myth thoroughly to illumine the understanding of evil and reinterpretation of original sin. In the Adamic myth, the human is seen as created as good, although with limited freedom that may be misused to incline toward evil whose nature is revealed as contingent, historical, and irrational. Turning away from God, the human must face the consequences of suffering and death, but the story does not end in Genesis; rather, it is a symbolic representation oriented toward the future, toward the coming of Christ. Paul identifies Christ as the Second Adam who justifies creation and sets things aright with God's will once again.

Drawing new insights from his analysis of the symbolisms of evil, Ricoeur reflects further on the meaning of the theological work

[2]Ricoeur, *The Symbol of Evil*, 52.

[3]Ricoeur, *The Symbol of Evil*, 93.

[4]Ricoeur, *The Symbol of Evil*, 151–157.

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crystallized in the concept of original sin. His method, which works from images and mythical symbols to rational symbols (original sin), is a hermeneutic one within the framework of symbolism, retrieving the intentions of the concept by way of deconstruction which recovers its meaning.

Original sin was a theological explanation that was conceived in order to explain the universality of sin and the necessity of salvation by Christ. Reading the story of Genesis literally, Augustine regards Adam and Eve as specific historical figures. Augustine explains original sin by referring to Adam's sin which destroyed the created human state of original blessedness, along with its gifts of immortality, integrity, and knowledge. This resulted in death, concupiscence, a hostile disposition toward God, and consequently, the need for God's forgiveness. Moreover, Augustine explains the universality of sin through the biological mode of transmission by which humans inherit Adam's sin. Thus, even an infant needs baptism in order to remove the condition of original sin, but concupiscence remains. Only by the grace of Christ are all saved. Augustine intends to emphasize here the solidarity of all humankind in sin and the universal need of all for Christ.

This traditional concept of original sin, however, must be deconstructed in order to recover its religious meaning in our contemporary time, for we can no longer read the Adamic story literally, as if it happened in history. Ricoeur sees the symbolic function of original sin as a rational symbol: "In tracing back the origin of evil to a distant ancestor, the myth discovers the situation of every man: evil has already taken place. I do not begin evil; I continue it. I am implicated in evil. Evil has a past; it is its past; it is its own tradition."[5] Thus, by retrieving the intentions of the concept by way of deconstruction, Ricoeur notices that the centre of the scene is occupied not so much by Adam and the consequences of sin on humanity, but by Jesus Christ and the grace which, through Him, was abundantly poured upon

[5]Paul Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning," in Don Ihde, ed., *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 282.

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humanity. Nevertheless, the power of evil in the heart and history of humankind is undeniable.

In general, some contemporary views of original sin are in line with Ricoeur's triple description: "[1] the reality of sin anterior to every awakening of conscience, [2] the communal dimension of sin, which is irreducible to individual responsibility, [3] the impotence of will that surrounds every actual fault."[6] Looking at human history and the human situation as a whole, the meaning of sin in "original sin" may refer to a situation or state of being in which humans are sunk, or it may mean the actual turning away of humans, as individuals or as a collective whole, from God. Perceiving human experience inwardly, sin may also refer to the broken interiority of the person which is characterized by the absence of integrity and the conflict of different forces in the human. The term original in "original sin" also has many possible meanings: it may refer to the historical inauguration of sin by our first ancestors, whoever they may be, or the bad influence of humans on others. Sin is thus passed on through social structures and cultural institutions. It points to the ontological solidarity of humankind as sinners before God or the existential fact that all humans sin, thus pointing to a global or cosmic sinfulness. Such is our experience as humans in the world, which desperately needs God's saving grace through the coming of Jesus Christ whose death and resurrection brought new creation and set things aright with God's will once again

Symbols of Evil in China

Having briefly surveyed Ricoeur's symbolization of evil and interpretation of the meaning of original sin, can these be applied, as is, to a study of China's symbols and myths of evil in order to make sense of the Christian doctrine of original sin in the context of China? The easy but simplistic response is merely to impose the Western defilement-sin-guilt scheme on this non-Western culture. One may

[6]Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning," 282.

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easily come to the conclusion that it would not make sense, at least not as much as it does in Western culture.

This is not to say that evil as defilement-sin-guilt has not survived in the Chinese consciousness, but this conception does not constitute the standard for understanding evil or morality in China. Fighting against evil is not manifested through sin or divine law but through *Dao* (道). One who does not act in accordance with *Dao* is said to have lost the *De* (德) which is given to human nature. However, these philosophical characterizations are already post-mythic developments. What were the more primeval symbols of evil?

A simple and direct way to discover the symbols of evil in Chinese culture is to trace the roots of the composition of ideographs or characters which themselves are symbols in Chinese language. Chinese writing is special in that it does not employ an alphabet, but rather characters or ideograms that were originally pictures or conventional signs manifesting the "thoughts" behind the language.

The Chinese term expressing the notion of "evil" is *e* (恶). The composite ideograph *e* (恶) consists of two components—inferior or second-rate (亚) and heart (心). Thus, the ideograph *e* indicates that the cause for evil, *e*, originates from an "inferior heart." In other words, people are considered to be evil if they do not act whole-good-heartedly. Thus, in the traditional Chinese context, "evil refers less to ontological imperfections in the universe—'inequality' in things—or even to the evils connected with human suffering and death, than to the problem of evil in the human heart: moral perversion in its individual or collective manifestations, which bring about so much suffering and havoc, usually to the innocent."[7]

The Chinese word heart 心, which can be equally taken as "mind" in a western sense, or more precisely as "mind-and-heart," derived originally from an image of fire. "It refers to intentions, feelings, as

[7]Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study* (Tokyo, New York & San Francisco: Kodansha International, 1977), 73.

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well as the activity of knowing and judging. The mind-and-heart is that which discerns between right and wrong, as well as that which commands conformance with its judgments."[8] What is remarkable about heart in Confucian understanding is that it is the *locus* of humanity's meeting with Heaven. Mencius says: "He who gives full realization to his heart understands his own nature, and he who understands his own nature knows Heaven."[9] In addition, the well-known Confucian philosopher Wang Yang-ming, of the 15th century BC, affirms: "the heart is the Way (*Dao*), and the Way is Heaven. If one knows [his own] heart, he would also know the Way and Heaven."[10] Clearly, for Confucianism the heart comes to us from Heaven; it also leads us back to Heaven. In Julia Ching's words, "it represents both the symbol and reality of man's oneness with Heaven … the heart is also the reason for man's oneness with himself."[11]

If one fails to hold a whole-good-heart, s/he loses her/his nature and breaks her/his oneness with Heaven and oneness with her/himself. That is where the "inferior or second-rate heart"—the Chinese word for evil *e* (惡) comes in. In other words, *e* (惡, "evil") is the result of one's misuse of her/his gifted integrity of heart, i.e., of breaking the oneness with Heaven as well as with oneself.

Yuet Keung Lo, who uses "*Shuowen jiezi*," a second-century lexicon that explains the etymology of ancient Chinese ideographs, in his article "*The Idea of Evil in Early China*,"[12] studies some terms of transgression

[8]Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 91.

[9]*The Book of Mencius*, 7:1, Readings in Chinese Philosophy (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Philosophy Department, 1993).

[10]Cited by Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 91.

[11]Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 92.

[12]Yuet Keung Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China* (National University of Singapore), http://www.interdiscipinary.net/ati/Evil/Evil%208/Lo%20paper.pdf, 2007), 1–9.

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which are the symbols of evil or are closely related to the idea of evil. Lo's study adds more evidences for the effort to trace back to the "thoughts" behind the symbols of evil.

> *e* is glossed with *guo* 过, which means transgression or error. *e* can also function in a verbal sense, which means "to loathe" or "to despise." The two senses of *e* are actually cognate—when a person commits a transgression, it will be despised by others. Clearly, evil is considered man-made. Indeed *guo* is the most common term for transgression; it literally means "to pass by" or "pass over." From this basic meaning, *guo* also connotes the sense of overshooting. In this derived meaning, *guo* is often used in connection with *bu ji* 不及 (undershooting), both refer to the act of missing the mark and are considered human error alike. A common synonym for *guo* is *qian* 愆. The composite graph *qian* consists of three components—a path (行), water (水), and heart (心). The water graph is placed in the middle of the path graph indicating that the path is flooded. Evidently and graphically, something goes amiss. It is crucial that the heart graph, which is placed beneath the path graph and the water graph, is integral to the composite graph *qian*. Its presence connotes that the cause for the trouble originates with the human heart.[13]

Thus, Lo concludes that "the cognate relationship among the terms of transgression suggests that 'evil' (*e*) was considered to be man-made and thus not perceived to have its own ontology. It was unequivocally understood as the result of man's own errors in judgment."[14] To some extent, this understanding of evil, illumined by tracing back to the roots of the composition of ideographs related with evil, is in line with what Ricoeur discovered about the meaning of evil: "that evil is not something that exists, that evil has no being, no nature, because it comes from us, because it is the work of freedom."[15] Expressing Ricoeur's words in Chinese understanding: "evil is not being but doing, because it comes from us, because it is the work of misuse of the heart."

[13]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 8.

[14]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 9.

[15]Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning," 272.

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Chinese Myth of Evil

Is there a Chinese story of a Fall? According to Whalen Lai, who presents a thorough study on the possible Chinese myths of fall in the light of Ricoeur's study on symbolism of myth in his article "Symbolism of Evil in China: The Kung-Chia Myth Analyzed,"[16] there is no one central myth comparable to that in Genesis. There have been enormous attempts to group the oriental mythical thoughts under the "cosmic egg" variety, coming up with mythical oneness and human-divine continuity thinking.[17] Nonetheless, it is difficult to locate a primeval myth of fall/evil in China given the major source of myth in the Confucian classic, the *Book of History*.

After examining some existing myths, Lai determines: "Emperor Kung-chia of the Xia dynasty, the first ruler to lose his *de* 德 (virtue) and the Mandate of Heaven (the rule), is the first evil man and that embedded in three myths about him is the Chinese myth of the Fall."[18] There is clearly a judgmental account of this evil king given in the *Book of History*: "Emperor Kung-chia was enthroned. He liked to serve the spirits. He also was licentious and unruly. The *de* of the Xia clan declined and the feudal lords showed discontent."[19] This king Kung-chia, who lost his *de* and the mandate to rule, could well represent fallible humanity uprooted from the original (heavenly) good. Where did he go wrong? Lai finds a surviving myth about him indicating a clue:

> When emperor Kung-chia was enthroned, Heaven sent down two dragons. Kung-chia was unable to feed them; this is because he could

[16]Whalen Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China: The Kung-Chia Myth Analyzed," in *History of Religions* Vol. 23, No. 4 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 316–343.

[17]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 320.

[18]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 321.

[19]The *Book of History*, as cited by Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 333.

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> not avail himself of the service of the clan of Dragon-Nurturers that once served the Sage Yu at the founding of Xia.
>
> So the reign declined. Later there was a man called Liu Lu who had acquired somewhat the art of nurturing dragons from the old Dragon-Nurturing clan. He came to serve the emperor. Kung-chia made him the Master of Dragons.
>
> *But somehow the female of the dragons died and it was made by the caretaker into food for the emperor. Later when the King asked for it, Liu Lu fled.*[20]

In order to understand this myth, first of all, the notion of dragon needs some explanations in this context. The classic definition of dragon (龍, *long*) can be found in *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu*: "*Long*, Dragon: most superior of all scaled beings; can be dark or light [i.e. yin or yang], small [like the *chiu* dragon] or gigantic [like the leviathan], short or long [i.e. capable of infinite transformations]; in the spring equinox, it rises to the sky [like a bird] while in the autumn equinox, it descends to the deep [like a fish]."[21] According to the mythical tradition, the dragon is believed to be the sum of all beings; it is bird, beast, and reptile all in one. Moreover, Lai points out that "the dragon is in fact a composite animal which contains archetypes of all water, land, and air beings, from which the birds of the air, the beasts of the forest, and the fishes of the water may evolve."[22] Thus, the dragon is the being of all beings and the latent dynamics of life itself. All Chinese emperors were believed to be living dragons.

Lai analyzes the myth further: as a descendant of *Yu*, *Kung-chia* was himself a son of a dragon and should entertain such kin. That he failed to keep them alive is an indication that he did not "know himself," that is to say that he lost his Heavenly gift—the two dragons, in demythologized

[20]Yüan Ko, *Ancient Chinese Myths* (Shanghai: Shang-wu, 1957), as cited by Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 334.

[21]Shang Wu, *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu ku-lin* (Taipei: Kuo-min, 1964), as cited by Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 332.

[22]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 332.

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language, were his *de* (virtue)—enough to lose his life, the *Xia* throne, and the mandate to rule. In forgetting his dragonic essence, in failing to nurture the dragonic essence in him, this first human died a human and came down in Chinese history as an evil emperor.[23]

Kung-chia's dilemma is the dilemma of all Chinese politically, morally, and religiously. Politically, he is the emperor who, inheriting the Mandate of Heaven (two dragons), brought his house down because he failed to live up to his charge. Morally, he failed to nurture his inner *de*. Mencius would charge him with failure to realize his nature. Religiously, Taoists would lament his inability to "chase" and to "catch the dragon," namely his going away from the "*Dao*."

Kung-chia acted out of ignorance of his true nature, and this was his "sin," the fall. It is not sin in the sense of violating a divine interdict. The fault lies in humanity's inability to make full use of the gift. "Men who lose their *de* simply cannot live long, for *de* is the essence of life."[24] In terms of Neo-Confucianism, there is the notion of the two sides of human nature: "the heavenly, 'essential' nature which is good, and the physical 'existential' nature which may be good or bad, depending upon the quality of the *qi* 气 (vital force, material principle) with which it is endowed."[25] Kung-chia's state of sin represents the transition from "essence" to "existence," i.e., from the created good (dragonic gift) to existential estrangement (inability to know himself and act accordingly).

The "infinite demand of law" is unknown to the Chinese, but the dictum of moderation remains in the Chinese mind. This is precisely why later Confucian philosophy has developed, not a theory of sin as offense against God, but a theory of moral evil and its relationship to human nature. According to *Zhong Yong* (中庸), a Chinese literary

[23]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 333–343.

[24]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 340.

[25]Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 77.

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classic, heaven proposes *ming* (命, mandates), and humankind disposes (*cheng,* 承; humankind completes what nature has already set into motion). If humankind disposes wrongly, not according to the *ming*, then evil arises. "The goal is to reach a man-heaven unity, to bring the dragonic gift in man in line once more with its source in heaven for the well-being of oneself, heaven, and all beings under heaven."[26]

Early Chinese Views of Human Nature with Regard to the Notion of Good and Evil

"Instead of ascribing evil to a super-human principle, or of relegating it to a basically unreal phenomenal world, the Chinese Confucian theory of evil is inseparable from its theory of human nature."[27] The human nature was not a central theme of Confucius' teaching. "We can hear our Master's (Confucius) views on culture and its manifestation, but we cannot hear his views on human nature and the Way of Heaven [because these subjects are beyond the comprehension of most people.]"[28] Nevertheless, Confucius said: "By nature men are alike. Through practice they have become far apart."[29] Apparently, Confucius was more concerned about the power and influence of cultivation on the shaping of humanity rather than about the comprehension of human nature. Nevertheless, a more articulated notion of human nature was developed by Mencius, a third-generation follower of Confucius. Mencius was known in his time for his doctrine that human nature is good (*xing-shan*, 性善). His classic explanation is based on the "four-germ" theory of human nature:

> The heart of compassion is the germ of benevolence; the heart of shame, of dutifulness; the heart of courtesy and modesty, of observance

[26]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 340.

[27]Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 74.

[28]*Analects* 5:12, Readings in Chinese Philosophy (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Philosophy Department, 1993).

[29]*Analects* 17:2.

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> of rites; and the heart of right and wrong, of wisdom. Man has these four germs just as he had four limbs. For a man possessing these four germs to deny his own potentialities is for him to cripple himself …. If a man is able to develop all these four germs that he possesses, it will be like a fire starting up or a spring coming through.[30]

This is what Mencius meant by the four germs—the germs of *De*, the heart of compassion, the heart of shame, the heart of courtesy and modesty, and the heart of right and wrong. The four germs must be cultivated so that the four hearts will be able to come to fruition and blossom into benevolence, dutifulness, propriety, and wisdom. In Arthur Waley's words, "goodness meant conformity to the way of Heaven … it meant the possession of 'power' (*De*) that this conformity brings."[31] Evidently, as Lo points out, "the Mencian theory of human nature is preoccupied with the positive potentialities in human nature and how they can materialize into moral conduct. The question of 'evil' thus was never the focus of Mencian philosophy. At most, it lies only in the background."[32] Thus, Lo concludes: "To Mencius, it would seem that 'evil' is not the result of one's own making; rather, it is the natural consequence of one's failure to do goodness …. 'Evil' can materialize itself only when human goodness leaves a void."[33]

Coming from the same school of Confucianism, Xunzi took a different approach. He was known for his doctrine that human nature is "evil" (*xing-e*, 性恶) and that goodness is the result of conscious activity. Xunzi said:

> The nature of man is such that he is born with a fondness for profit. If he indulges this fondness, it will lead him into wrangling and strife, and all sense of courtesy and humility will disappear. He is born with feelings of envy and hate, and if he indulges these, they will lead him into violence and crime, and all sense of loyalty and good faith will

[30]*The Book of Mencius*, 3.6.

[31]Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Crove Press, Inc., 1958), 21.

[32]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 4.

[33]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 4.

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> disappear. Man is born with the desires of the eyes and ears, with a fondness for beautiful sights and sounds. If he indulges these, they will lead him into license and wantonness, and all ritual principles and correct forms will be lost… Therefore, man must first be transformed by the instructions of a teacher and guided by ritual principles, and only then will he be able to observe the dictates of courtesy and humility, obey the forms and rules of society, and achieve order. It is obvious from this, then, that man's nature is evil, and that his goodness is the result of conscious activity.[34]

Xunzi acknowledges fondness for profit or gain, feelings of envy and hate, and sensual desires as inborn or natural in human nature, and he identifies them as the primary causes of evil. Based on Xunzi's understanding of human nature, Lo remarks,

> Xunzi does not consider evil itself to be innate. Evil is constituted and only occurs when human beings give free rein to their inborn fondness for profit, natural feelings of envy and hate and instinctual sensual desires. Evil does not have its own ontology; it does not come into being when goodness reigns as a result of human conscious activity. Conscious activity as such is the efficient cause of good, and its lack will lead to evil.[35]

As discussed above, while Mencius argues for an innate moral sense in human nature, he emphasizes human agency in turning innate germs of goodness into actuality. Xunzi does not believe in an innate moral sense but he never questions the ability of human beings to hold in check their natural self-serving propensities in the interests of personal good and community welfare. Xunzi and Mencius are not quite opposed to one other in these regards; both exhort people to moral goodness. They both identify a fundamental dualism present in humans, who are attracted, at the same time, both to good and also to evil—the pull of flesh to fondness for profit or gain, feelings of envy and hate, sensual desires and the call of the human heart to

[34]Burton Watson, *Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 157, as cited by Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 5.

[35]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 5.

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compassion, shame, courtesy and modesty, and the heart of right and wrong within us. This is exactly what Paul and each of us have experienced: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:19).

Taoism generally prioritized the natural over the artificial. Taoism does not seek to understand human nature in terms of good and evil, which are understood to be merely conceptions of human valuation. Laozi said: "When the people of the world all know beauty as beauty, there arises the recognition of ugliness. When they all know the good as good, there arises the recognition of evil."[36] If good and evil were indeed inevitable in understanding and describing human nature, the Taoist would recognize them as a pair of bipolar opposites, with good corresponding to the operation of *Dao* and evil violating it. Simply put, for Taoism, good and evil are not inherent in nature; they are entirely artificial.

In conclusion, neither the Confucian nor the Taoist theories of human nature admit of the essential existence of evil in the universe. From the Confucian point of view, evil is the natural consequence of one's failure to do goodness, namely, the consequence of the loss of *De*, which is the essence of life and the power to do goodness. From the Taoist point of view, evil is described as not acting in accordance with *Dao*, i.e., when one, in wrongly using one's free will, departs from *Dao* and corrupts his/her gifted holism and becomes fragmented.

Interpretation of "Original Sin" from the Perspectives of *Dao* and *De*

In the light of Ricoeur's presentation on original sin, derived from thoroughly examining and analyzing the symbols of evil, and having examined some symbols and thoughts of evil in the Chinese tradition,

[36] *Dao De Jing*, chap. 2, Readings in Chinese Philosophy (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Philosophy Department, 1993).

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we concluded that the two key symbolisms of evil, i.e., the departure from *Dao* and the loss of *De*, play a prominent role in Chinese culture. Next, we proceed to unravel the meaning of *Dao* and *De* in order to shed light on the understanding of original sin.

Dao (道), a symbol basic to Chinese thought, commonly means "way," but *Dao* is overflowing with meaning. The Chinese character is composed of the head of a human combined with a primitive depiction of walking. Its simplest sense is a road, path, or way, and hence, the way in which one does something—method, principle, doctrine. However, to Laozi and Chinese mystics, it refers to "the Way" as "the eternal pattern and model of the universe: the Way it operates."[37] Laozi describes this in the *Dao De Jing*:

> There was something undifferentiated and yet complete, which existed before heaven and earth. Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not change. It operates everywhere and is free from danger. It may be considered the mother of the universe. I do not know its name; I call it *Dao.* (ch. 25) The Great *Dao* overflows everything. All things depend upon it for their existence …. It loves and nourishes all beings and does not make itself the owner. (ch. 34)

In Hieromonk Damascene's words describing Laozi and his notion of *Dao*:

> For Laozi, the Way was precisely what its adopted name signified, in its full metaphysical sense: the Way, Path or Pattern of Heaven, the Course that all things follow. The Way is the Uncreated Cause of all things. It is the Way that creates, and it is the Way that nourishes, develops, cares for, shelters, comforts, and protects the creation, balancing the strife of opposites by itself not contending.[38]

If one is familiar with Greek philosophy, one may immediately conclude that what Laozi calls the *Dao* corresponds to the notion of *Logos* which

[37]Joseph Petulla, *The Tao Te Ching and the Christian Way* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 127.

[38]Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao* (Platina: Valaam Books, 1999), 31.

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Heraclitus (who lived at about the same time that Laozi lived in China), a Greek philosopher, had in mind. The *Logos* of Heraclius, according to one textbook of Greek philosophy,

> is the first principle of knowledge: understanding of the world involves understanding the structure or pattern of the world, a pattern concealed from the eyes of ordinary men. The Logos is also the first principle of existence, that unity of the world process which sustains it as a process.[39]

Undoubtedly, the encounter between God's revelation and the Christian community's experience of Jesus as the risen Christ with the Greek philosophical symbol of the *Logos* engendered the Prologue of the fourth Gospel. Nonetheless, the Gospel did not merely borrow an old term; rather, it was transformed and brought into the light of God's revelation. For now the *Logos*—the Word, Pattern and Ordering Principle of nature—was made flesh, and dwelt among us, for the first time in history. What if the author of the fourth Gospel had encountered the Chinese symbol of *Dao* from Laozi instead of the Greek *Logos*? It is not unreasonable to assume that the gospel would go like this: "In the beginning was the *Dao* and the *Dao* was with God …."

With this notion of *Dao* in mind, it is easy to understand that evil arises as humans depart from the *Dao*. According to Damascene's interpretation of the human fall based on Laozi's notion of *Dao*, when human beings, in wrongly using free will, departed from the *Dao*, they corrupted their primal state of simplicity and communion with the *Dao* and became fragmented. In other words, "[their] will became divided. Now [their] 'natural will,' which remained inclined to follow the *Dao* in all things, was set against [their] 'free will,' which had now taken on itself an inclination to depart from the *Dao*."[40] As soon as human beings depart from the *Dao*, they fall in love with themselves instead of desiring the uncreated source of their joy. Accordingly, Damascene

[39]Reginald E. Allen, ed., *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Aristotle* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 9–10.

[40]Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, 219.

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claims that "[a]ll evil in the world can be traced to these two things: self-love and love of sensual pleasure."[41]

In this context, therefore, the Christian doctrine of original sin can be understood as humanity's departure from the *Dao*. For Laozi, as human beings depart from the *Dao*, they lose sight of the *Dao* and become trapped in their individuality and in the desires of their false identity. This is precisely the same understanding that some Christian interpretations of original sin have: sin may mean the actual turning away of the humans, as individuals or as a whole, from God. This is what humans—whether Adam or us—do when we sin.

However, the central theme of Laozi was not so much the consequences of this departure, but the seeking of a way of return. In order to return to the state when humankind was nearer to *Dao*, Laozi took the path of direct intuition, looking back to the state in which humanity was first created, before humanity first departed from the *Dao*: "The primitive origin of man: Here indeed is the clue to the *Dao*" (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 14). If we distill Laozi's teaching on human conduct, it would be simply that one should do what is natural. To be natural, however, one must first find the original nature of humankind. "Acting in accordance with his nature, one acts in accordance with the *Dao*. Thus one no longer has to be choosing all the time, but can be wholly spontaneous. Being spontaneous, one can forget oneself and give oneself over for the good of others."[42] Laozi neither knew, nor could he have attained purely through intuition, the state of intimate personal union with *Dao*—the *Dao* became flesh and dwelt among us. In contrast, for Chinese Christians, when the *Dao* became a human being in Jesus Christ who revealed Himself as "I AM The Way" (John 14:6), Jesus Christ becomes the concrete Way of their return to the true identity of union with the Way.

[41]Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, 220.

[42]Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, 235.

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De (德), being essential to Chinese moral consciousness, is the second character of the title of the *Dao De Jing*, indicating that *De* after *Dao* is the most important idea. Commonly it refers to virtue, power, moral force, and its influence. Nonetheless, Ellen Marie Chen contests the inadequacy of these translations to convey the original meaning of *De* in *Dao De Jing*.[43] Looking at the etymology of *De*, Chen finds that the Chinese character is composed of three parts: first, the crossroad sign "to move," second, an "eye," and third, "the heart." Thus Chen argues that the meaning of *De* is "the state when the eye is turned inward to the kernel of things, thus it discovers and follows the inner rhythm of things."[44] Joseph Petulla quotes a second-century Chinese dictionary defining *De* as "the outward effect of a man and inward effect of self."[45] Classical scholar Yen Ling-feng writes: "*De* is the manifestation of the Way. The *Dao* is what *De* contains. Without the *Dao*, *De* would have no power. Without *De*, the *Dao* would have no appearance."[46] But in Laozi's mind, *De* plays a special role—he called it the "Mysterious Power" of the *Dao*:

> *"Dao* produces them (the ten thousand things) and *De* nourishes them …. Therefore the ten thousand things esteem *Dao* and honor *De* …. *Dao* produces them but does not take possession of them. In acts, but does not rely on its own ability. It leads them but does not master them. This is called Mysterious *De* (*xuan de* 玄德) (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 51). Deep and far-reaching is Mysterious *De*! It leads all things return, till they come back to the Great Harmony!" (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 65)

Reflecting upon these words of Laozi describing the "Mysterious *De,*" Chinese Christians cannot but equate Laozi's notion of *De* with God's

[43]Ellen Marie Chen, "The Meaning of De in Dao De Jing: An Examination of the Concept of Nature in Chinese Taoism" in *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 23, No. 4 (University of Hawaii Press, 1973), 457–470.

[44]Chen, "The Meaning of De in Dao De Jing," 460–462.

[45]Petulla, *The Tao Te Ching and the Christian Way*, 128.

[46]As cited by Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, 238.

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providence or the works of the Spirit insofar as it oversees the growth, maturity, and finally, the return of all things to the earth. However, *De* as God's providence or the works of the Spirit is not a force guiding from above, but is the power within nature itself. Thus, when humans follow *Dao*, they are endowed with the power of *Dao* which is called *De*; they follow the freedom and spontaneity of their own natures. Thus, Damascene convincingly concludes: "The word *De*—in those places where Laozi employs it to speak of the Uncreated Power of the *Dao*—corresponds to the English word 'Grace'."[47]

These explanations of *De* shed light on why Confucianism would charge Kung-chia's fault in the myth of the fall, which was above, as residing in his loss of inner *De*, the essence of his life (symbolized by the dragonic gift) and why Taoism would indict him for departing from the *Dao*, for without *De* one simply cannot be in union with the *Dao*. In this sense, therefore, the Christian doctrine of original sin can be understood as the state in which humans have lost their *De*. The consequence of human loss of *De* is the inability to achieve the human "original goal" of being in Great Harmony with Nature. It is only through *De* that "leads all things return, till they come back to the Great Harmony!" (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 65).

The loss of *De* is manifested firstly and concretely in the inner contradiction of each individual. Every day we experience this reality, the conflict of different forces in ourselves—the pull of flesh to fondness for profit or gain, feelings of envy and hate, and sensual desires, as Xunzi testified, and the call of heart to compassion, shame, courtesy and modesty, and the heart of right and wrong, as Mencius identified. Secondly, the loss of *De* is also manifested in the brokenness of humankind's history and a social context of unjust structures in which oppression, violence, injustice, and suffering are engendered. For Laozi, "the one who possesses *De* can be compared to the newborn baby. Poisonous insects will not sting him. Fierce beasts will not seize him. Birds of prey will not strike him" (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 55). In other words, what Laozi intends to say is that all forms of harms and sufferings are

[47]Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao*, 239.

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results of the loss of *De*. Laozi says: "The Way of nature is to benefit (all things) and not to harm them" (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 81). Thus, "the advice that the natural world should not be tampered with is evidently based on the belief that it is so perfect that no suffering exists in it."[48] The suffering that humans encounter is entirely human-made because of the loss of *De*. In addition, the increasingly prevalent ecological problems as of late reveal more about the consequences of human loss of *De* and incapacity for living in harmony with nature. The conquest of nature for human use in the modern civilization of technology is soundly condemned by Laozi as a great human loss of *De* by violating nature through willful actions. "The world is a sacred vessel; one should not tamper with it …. Therefore, the sage does no willful actions; thus, there is no spoiling (failure)" (*Dao De Jing*, ch. 29, 64).

All of these call for a return to the *Dao* through nurturing of the seed of uncreated *De* within us. One may crystallize the gist of the entire teachings of Confucius and of Laozi as cultivating one's inner *De* so as to achieve the fullness of living with/in/through *Ren* (humaneness, for Confucius) and with/in/through *Dao* (for Laozi). Moreover, in Christianity we find the incarnation of the *Dao* and the embodiment of *De*—Jesus Christ—bringing not only a personal and visible manifestation of *Dao* but, more importantly, His life becoming the source of our *De* (grace) and enabling the whole of humanity and the entire cosmos to return to union with the *Dao*. This is precisely what the doctrine of original sin tells us in a Chinese context: in and through the incarnated *Dao*, Christ's uncreated *De* (grace) becomes our source of *De* so that we are able to live again in union with *Dao* despite our loss of *De* and departure from the *Dao*.

Conclusion

Symbols and their dramatic narrative (myth) indeed give rise to thought. Reflecting on the new thoughts arising from the symbolisms

[48]Sung-peng Hsu, "Lao Tzu's Conception of Evil" in *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 26, No. 3 (University of Hawaii Press, 1976), 301–316.

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of evil, Ricoeur has shed light on the understanding of the "mystery of evil" and the Christian doctrine of "original sin." His working paradigm was situated in a Western culture, primarily a Christian one. Can his method be applied to a Chinese paradigm with its own symbols and myths of evil in its history of civilization? The answer is yes. The fruit of this process of examining the symbols, myths, and thoughts on evil in Chinese civilization is to help us uncover the meanings of *Dao* and *De* which are deeply embedded in Chinese consciousness, and furthermore, to render a Chinese understanding of the Christian doctrine of original sin from the perspectives of *Dao* and *De*. Surprisingly, the lights of the understanding of original sin drawn from the perspectives of *Dao* and *De* are perfectly in line with Ricoeur's outcome. What a surprise! Or perhaps we should not be surprised, because the *Dao* and *De* that we discovered in Laozi's and Confucius' thoughts were already, to a certain extent, in line with God's revelation of Himself which became visible and tangible when the *Dao* became flesh and dwelt among us.

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