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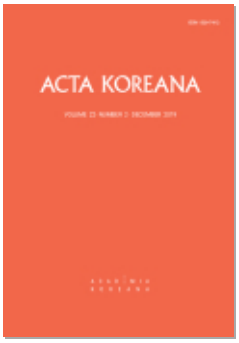

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The Origins of Good and Evil and the Challenge of Theodicy in the Buddhist Tradition

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The origins of good and evil and the problem of theodicy present a special set of challenges in Buddhism, which is relatively less concerned with consideration of first causes than are monotheistic religions. Buddhism focuses less on the issue of *why* evil and its incumbent suffering are present in the world and more on the question of *how* to respond to that evil. This emphasis on soteriology over metaphysics is seen in the characteristic invocation of pragmatic criteria for the evaluation of doctrines and practices; the recurrent motif of the Buddha as therapist rather than theorist; and the pervasive influence of the meta-theory of *upāya* (expedients or stratagems). This article will examine the soteriological dimension of the broader Buddhist response to evil and explore

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some of the explicit examinations of the problem of a Buddhist "theodicy" in later Mahāyāna monistic ontologies, which are explored in Korean Buddhist materials: viz., if the mind is innately enlightened or inherently pure, whence do ignorance or defilements arise?

Keywords: theodicy, evil, Korean Buddhism, tathāgatagarbha, no-thought

Understanding the nature of good and evil and the challenge of theodicy presents a special set of problems in Buddhism. Buddhism is generally unconcerned with first causes. Its emphasis is less on the question of *why* are evil and suffering present in the world and more on a pragmatic inquiry into *how best to respond* to that suffering. Because of its emphasis on soteriology and epistemology rather than metaphysics and ontology, Buddhism offers a more practical response to such questions, instead of speculative flights of philosophical fancy. This tendency is seen, as Robert Gimello and I noted in the introduction to our *Paths to Liberation* volume, on the characteristic invocation of pragmatic criteria for the evaluation of doctrines and practices; the recurrent motif of the Buddha as therapist rather than theorist; and the pervasive influence, especially in Mahāyāna Buddhism, of the meta-theory of expedients (Skt. *upāya*, C. *fangbian,* K. *pangp'yŏn* 方便) (Buswell and Gimello 1992, 3–4).

The Buddhist tendency to affirm soteriology above all else is well illustrated in the famous "simile of the arrow" from the *Maluṅkyasutta* (C. *Jianyu jing*, K. *Chŏnyu kyŏng* 箭喻經).[1] In this scripture, the monk Maluṅkyasutta queried the Buddha about a litany of fourteen standard existential questions commonly asked of teachers and philosophers in ancient India to ascertain their philosophical point of view, such as is the universe eternal or not eternal, infinite or finite; are the soul and the body the same or different; does an enlightened person exist after death, or not, etc.? The Buddha steadfastly treated all these "indeterminate" (*avyākṛta*) questions as being "wrongly framed" (*Pāli ṭhapanīya*) and refused to answer them as posed, deeming them as "not tending to edification" and irrelevant to authentic religious practice: "They are not connected with the goal; they are not fundamental to the religious life. They do not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calming, direct knowledge, self-awakening, liberation. This is why they are undeclared by me."[2]

The Buddha then proceeds to tell the simile of the arrow: would a man wounded by a poisonous arrow refuse treatment until he knows who shot the arrow that wounded him; where his assailant was from; from what fiber the bowstring was made; what kind of feathers were used on the shaft, and so forth? Of course not, the Buddha says; by the time these questions were resolved, the man would have died. Similarly, the question of why evil exists may not tend to edification; instead, the question that demands an answer is: What do people do right now about the evil and reactive suffering they are currently facing?

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1 See specifically the *Cūḷa-Maluṅkyasutta*; *Majjhimanikāya* no. 63, *Madhyamāgama* no. 221: (*Foshuo) Jianyu jing*/(*Pulsŏl) Chŏnyu kyŏng* (佛說)箭喻經, *T* 26:1.801a-805c; *T* 94:1.917b–918b.

2 For these indeterminate questions, see Buswell and Lopez (2014, 87 q.v. "*avyākṛta*").

This lack of interest in first causes is pervasive across Buddhism and creates special challenges in how to address the issue of theodicy in the religion. Theodicy becomes an issue that monotheistic religions, such as the Judeo-Christian tradition, inevitably must face, since they are forced to justify the goodness and omnipotence of God in the face of apparently intractable or unwarranted suffering. To frame the issue very basically: if God is good, why would he allow evil to exist in the world? Or, even more simplistically, why do bad things happen to good people?

One solution that Western religions taught to resolve this problem was the doctrine of original sin. As Philo of Alexandria (c. 20–50 BCE) notes: "It is within ourselves… that the treasuries of evil are located; with God are those of good only" (Winston 1981, 179). Such an answer would seem utterly alien to Buddhism, which has no monotheistic component and retains little or no soteriological or arbitrative role for supernatural beings. Indeed, it is for this very reason that scholars have questioned whether Buddhism can even be considered to address the issue of theodicy. It was Max Weber who first proposed that the semantic range of the term could be expanded to refer to any sort of inexplicable or unwarranted suffering that might occur; theodicy thus becomes the rationale by which that suffering was explained. From such a broader, non-theistic perspective, we may then presume Buddhism might be able to offer an explicit response to the issue of theodicy, since it describes in great detail the etiology of suffering and evil and a detailed treatment plan for responding to those afflictions.[3]

Even so, given the foundational soteriological orientation of earlier mainstream Buddhism, the tradition does not struggle with theodicy anywhere near to the extent as have Western monotheistic religions. But as later Mahāyāna strands of Buddhism began to develop more explicitly monistic types of ontologies, Buddhism does begin to face issues that seem to have parallels with theodicy.[4] Indeed, it is in East Asia, including Korea, that a Buddhist response to theodicy receives one of its most sustained and inspired analyses.

Buddhism and the Origin of Evil

Buddhism, like most religions, has created myths to offer explanations for the etiology of particularly thorny problems, of which the origin of evil is one of the most intractable (Ricoeur 1967). One way we thus might begin to explore the Buddhist attitude toward evil is first to examine one of its myths concerning the incipiency of the human race, the *Discourse on Origins* (Skt. *Aggaññasutta*, C. *Xiaoyuan jing*, K. *Soyŏn kyŏng* 小緣經, *Dīghanikāya* no.

[3] See Max Weber's discussions of theodicy, salvation, and rebirth, in the relevant chapters in (Weber 1963). For a recent philosophical discussion of this issue of suffering across traditions (including Confucianism, but unfortunately not Buddhism) (Samuelson 2018).

[4] Much of my thinking that follows on how to treat the issue of theodicy in an East Asian context has been stimulated by Peter Gregory's groundbreaking article (Gregory 1986).

27, *Dīrghāgama* no. 5).[5] This myth was not widely discussed in Western scholarly literature until the current generation, perhaps because it seemed too superstitious to early scholars of Buddhism, who were enthralled by what they perceived to be Buddhism's positivistic stance. The Buddhists deploy this myth specifically to counter the pretensions of brahman priests in India that they represent the highest of the four traditional social classes: priests (*brahman*), warriors (*kṣatriya*), merchants (*vaiṣya*), and peasants (*śudra*). Buddha rejects this hierarchy by showing that people of all four classes are fundamentally the same as far as their origins and characters are concerned: all are "womb-born" (*jarāyuja*), or viviparous, one of the four modes of birth.[6] Some engage in acts that are "discountenanced by the wise" and should be blamed; others refrain from such acts, and are praised. A person from any one of the classes who has brought an end to further rebirth and has achieved liberation through developing perfect wisdom—only that person would be worthy of being declared "chief among humans."

Let me offer just the briefest of synopses of this lengthy *Discourse on Origins*. In the Buddha's account, the universe is in a constant cycle of evolution and devolution. At the end of one cycle of evolution, the world comes to an end and all remaining beings are reborn in the World of Radiance (Ābhāsvarāloka), the third heaven in the second dhyāna/ Brahmā region of the Realm of Subtle Materiality (Rūpadhātu). "There they dwell, made of mind, feeding on rapture, self-luminous, traversing the air, continuing in glory; and thus they remain for a long, long period of time." As the world begins to re-evolve, beings who die in the World of Radiance are reborn as humans, who at this stage are also similarly "made of mind..." At that incipiency of evolution there are no differentiations in the world, no dichotomies of light and dark, moon and sun, or male and female.

As the earth evolves, the first change is a "savory earth" that spreads out over the surface of the globe, like scum on top of rice gruel. One being eats that savory earth, likes it, and discovers that craving (Skt. *tṛṣṇā*, C. *ai*, K. *ae* 愛) has arisen in him. Others imitate him, breaking off great lumps of the savory earth and greedily consuming it. As they eat, their self-luminescence fades, and the shining of the moon and sun appear, bringing night and day, the seasons, and the years. As beings continue to feed on that earth, their bodies become solid, and beings note that some are physically better endowed than others. Some become proud of their beauty and, when conceit, vanity, and envy arise, the savory earth disappears. In its place appear various types of mushrooms, creepers, and herbs that further solidify their bodies, creating still more conceit and envy regarding their physical appearances. Once the staple of rice appears, at this point growing naturally without husk or powder, their bodies are finally coarse enough that the beings notice the distinction between male and female, and passion arises. Those who act upon this impulse and engage in sexual intercourse are exiled, building huts so they could conceal their immorality. Beings become lazy, so rather

[5] One scholar who drew attention to the importance of this sutta was Steven Collins; see his discussion of this text in Collins (1993); and the summary in Collins (1998). Collins also included a full translation of the text in both Collins (1993) and in Collins (1998, Appendix 5, 627-34).

[6] For these and other common Buddhist technical terms, from here on I refer the reader to (Buswell and Lopez 2014).

than going out to fetch their rice each time they are hungry, they collect enough for two meals on each trip. As they begin to store this grain, first powder and then husks appear on the rice; eventually it no longer grows back naturally right after harvesting, so there are food shortages. The people then decide to divide up the rice fields, creating private property, which leads to theft, lying, and punishments. Their world run completely amok, the people then decide to designate a ruler from among them to force order on society; this is the origin of the warrior class. Others who decide to put away such evil customs became priests. Society then gradually fills in with traders, hunters, farmers, and laborers. All these people are simply fulfilling their own class duties, so none is inherently better or worse than any other. The Buddha explains, however, that those who choose to follow a different path and leave behind the world, destroy craving, and win liberation—they are superior to all the classes, for they are not governed by worldly laws.

What, then, does the *Aggaññasutta* tell us about the origins of good and evil? The overriding message of the scripture is that all differentiations in the world, including the dichotomy of good and evil, derive from craving (Skt. *tṛṣṇā*, C. *ai,* K. *ae* 愛). This craving marks the Buddhist Fall from a pristine state of innocence, or what the *Agaññasutta* calls self-luminescence, to one of evil in humanity's thwarting of its own innate potential. Good and evil are thus not innate, but are products of people's greed and attachment; and removing such attachments becomes the key to liberation in the Buddhism schema. This is why soteriology becomes so all-pervasive across the Buddhist tradition.

This focus on soteriology, on the means by which one may correct one's perceptions and the unsalutary interactions those perceptions create toward the world, is implicit in Buddhist moral rules, which are explained as being expedients designed to respond to behavior that is detrimental to oneself and others. The rules of conduct taught in Buddhism are not commandments handed down from on high by God (e.g., "Thou Shalt Not…") but rather training rules (*śikṣāpada*) and are formulated as follows: "I undertake the training rule to abstain from killing living creatures, etc." (Pāli *pānātipātā veramani sikkhāpadam samadiyami*). Such rules help to promote salutary modes of conduct that wean one from clinging and attachments and bring benefit to oneself and others.

The pragmatic character of Buddhist morality is illustrated even in the way by which the monastic rules were promulgated. During the first twenty years of the Buddhist dispensation, the Buddha ordained no specific rules of conduct; rather, monks knew what society expected of them and fulfilled those customary expectations. It was only after one monk engaged in sexual intercourse, not out of passion, we are told, but in order to give his desperate family an heir so it could maintain its wealth, that the Buddha began to enjoin specific precepts, starting with the prohibition on sex. These rules were created by what we may call *themistes* (lit. "judgments"), a term used by Sir Henry Maine and drawn from classical jurisprudence. In the context of Buddhism, this means that moral judgments were issued *ex post facto* as conduct occurred that needed to be proscribed (Buswell 1983). The Buddha outlined ten specific reasons for promulgating a new rule of conduct:

restraint of the evil-minded;
support of virtuous monks;
restraint of taints in this life;
prevention of taints in future lives;
benefit of unbelievers;
spiritual development of believers;
establishment of right teachings;
establishment of an authentic code of conduct (*vinaya*);
excellence of the community of adherents, or *saṃgha*; and
the well-being of the *saṃgha*.

"Evil" is therefore not something intrinsic in the world itself but instead derives from the intentional choices made by individual human beings. As the Buddha proclaims in his radical redefinition of the doctrine of *karman*: "Action (*karman*) is intention (*cetanā*), for after having intended something, one accomplishes action via body, speech, and mind." (*Aṅguttaranikāya* iii, 415; Buswell and Lopez 2014, 173a, q.v. "cetanā). Overcoming evil and nurturing the good therefore comes from ensuring the rectitude of the intentional choices people make at each and every moment of their lives.

The Problem of Theodicy in East Asian and Korean Buddhism

The forms of Buddhism that become most influential in Korea and the rest of East Asia derive not directly from these mainstream strands of the religion but from Mahāyāna, or Great Vehicle, Buddhism. The Mahāyāna is grounded in the notion of nondualism (Skt. *advaya*, C. *bu'er*, K. *puri* 不二), where the conditioned realm of *saṃsāra* is considered to be identical to the enlightened realm of *nirvāṇa*. This identity posited between apparent differences derives from monistic principles foundational to the Mahāyāna tradition, which include such concepts as emptiness (Skt. śūnyatā, C. *kong*, K. *kong* 空); consciousness-only or mere-representation (Skt. *vijñaptimātra*, C. *weishi*, K. *yusik* 唯識);buddha-nature (C. *foxing,* K. *pulsŏng* 佛性, a Sinographic interpretive translation of *buddhadhātu*, or buddha-element); womb/embryo/repository of buddhahood (Skt. *tathāgatagarbha*, C. *rulaizang*, K. *yŏraejang* 如來藏); and, as Wŏnhyo 元曉 (617–686) in Korea posited, the One Mind (C. *yixin,* K. *ilsim* 一心).

Since *nirvāṇa* was in a very real sense inherent in the ordinary world, enlightenment need not be viewed as a triumph over *saṃsāra*; rather, the East Asians instead conceived of *saṃsāra* as the ground of *nirvāṇa* and the realm within which enlightenment would be realized. This predilection may also account for the interest East Asian Buddhists show in the example of the lay bodhisattva Vimalakīrti, who was able to display profound understanding of Buddhist wisdom while remaining active in the world. If *nirvāṇa* was to be found right here and now in the ordinary world, then this would mean in turn that non-enlightenment and enlightenment must also be nondual, thus removing the expectation that protracted stages of practice must

be fulfilled before enlightenment could be won. Instead, as the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* (C. *Huayan jing*, K. *Hwaŏm kyŏng* 華嚴經), the most influential scripture in Korean Buddhism, says, the initial aspiration for enlightenment (*bodhicittotpāda*), the inception of practice, is identical to its consummation in complete, perfect enlightenment (*anuttarasamyaksaṃbodhi*).[7] In this way, too, the soteriological stages of Buddhism are conflated in the singular experience of enlightenment—the sudden awakening, or subitism, that becomes emblematic of so many of the indigenous schools of East Asian Buddhist thought.

Especially significant in East Asian, and particularly in Korean Buddhism, is a relatively neglected strand of mainstream Buddhism: the notion of the innate luminescence of the mind (*prabhāsvaracitta*). We saw what may be an allusion to this strand in the reference to self-luminescence in the origin myth from the *Agaññasutta*. In its locus classicus in the *Aṅguttaranikāya* (1.10), we are told: "This mind, oh monks, is luminous, but it is defiled by adventitious taints that come from without; this mind, oh monks, is luminous, but it must be cleansed of adventitious taints that come from without" (*pabhassaraṃ idaṃ bhikkhave cittaṃ, tañ ca kho āgantukehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ*). This strand received relatively little attention in earlier mainstream Buddhism, but it resurfaces in Mahāyāna Buddhism, receiving its most systematic presentation in Tathāgatagarbha thought.

This term *tathāgatagarbha* (C. *rulaizang*, K. *yŏraejang* 如來藏) is a Sanskrit compound comprised of the two components *tathāgata* 如來 (Buddha/absolute) + *garbha* 藏 (womb, embryo, or repository), and has two distinct denotations in East Asian exegeses. In its more passive interpretation as "womb of the tathāgatas," *tathāgatagarbha* refers to the immanence of the absolute within the phenomenal realm, viz., the "body of dharma" (Skt. *dharmakaya,* C. *fashen*, K. *pŏpsin* 法身) as lying concealed within the minds of ordinary sentient beings and covered over by defilements. In its more active denotation, *tathāgatagarbha* is interpreted as the "embryo of the tathāgatas": i.e., *tathāgata* as the enlightenment inherent in the mind itself, which exists embryonically in all sentient beings; in this denotation, *tathāgatagarbha* serves as an active force that serves to catalyze enlightenment, demonstrating the soteriological role that the absolute may play in the course of spiritual training.

In Tathāgatagarbha thought, enlightenment is therefore the mind's "natural" state and is thus intrinsic to the mind. Defilements or afflictions (Skt. *kleśa,* C. *fannao,* K. *pŏnnoe* 煩惱), which conceal this innate enlightenment, are external to the mind and thus extrinsic to this natural state. Since defilements remain forever extrinsic to the mind's true, enlightened nature, the individual has actually never been deluded at all; that presumption of ignorance is nothing more than a mistaken perception fostered by unsystematic attention (Skt. *ayoniśomanaskāra*, C. *feili zuoyi*, K. *piri chagŭi* 非理作意) to the true nature of reality. In Tathāgatagarbha thought, enlightenment is therefore not a state that is achieved by controlling the defiling impulses of the mind—that is, by reducing the influence of any predilections toward evil, developing salutary ways of action, and finally permanently incapacitating the defilements; rather, it is the

[7] This is the exact quote from the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra*: "At the moment of the initial production of the aspiration for enlightenment, right enlightenment is achieved." See *Dafangguang Fo Huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 8, *T* 278:9.449c14. See also the discussion in Buswell (2016, 246, n. 138).

fulfillment of the mind's own innate spiritual potential.

The inherence of enlightenment in the minds of ordinary persons is brought out well in the simile of gold coins from the *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra* (C. *Jingang sanmei jing*, K. *Kŭmgang sammae kyŏng* 金剛三昧經), a Korean apocryphon dating from the late seventh century.[8] The scripture tells the tale of a wayward son (an ordinary person) of a wealthy family who was wandering around in poverty and destitution his entire life, barely eking out a living, while unbeknownst to him, he had been carrying around gold coins (innate enlightenment) in his pockets that whole time. One day he came upon his father (the Buddha), who tells him to check his pockets for the coins. The son reaches in pocket, finds the coins, and marvels at his new-found wealth but the father chides him for his stupidity, "You have always been wealthy," he says, "It is not something you have only now achieved." Enlightenment therefore involves nothing more than relinquishing one's misperception that one is ignorant and accepting the fact of one's true enlightened state; one need not master a complex curricula or set of procedures, that is, a *mārga*, or path, such as are taught in many other schools of Buddhism. Tathāgatagarbha thought as it evolved in East Asia and Korea thus provides the ontological justification for the Mahāyāna ideal of universal salvation, as well as the theoretical underpinnings for a viable subitist approach to enlightenment.

But Tathāgatagarbha's exclusive focus on the reality of enlightenment leads to the near-total neglect of the equally compelling problem of the origin of ignorance. If the mind is inherently enlightened, as Tathāgatagarbha doctrine asserts, whence does ignorance arise? Or, to phrase the question slightly differently, if the mind is inherently pure *viz.* enlightened/good, why would it ever seem to become tainted by defilements *viz.* ignorance/evil? Such questions come very close to being a full-fledged issue of a Buddhist theodicy.

To allay this tension between the apparent reality of non-enlightenment, ignorance, and evil in creatures who are allegedly enlightened, wise, and good by nature, East Asian Mahāyāna had to offer some explanation of the origin of evil. One response to this issue, and thus a potential answer to the problem of theodicy, is in the Yogācāra ("Practitioners of Yoga") strand of East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Yogācāra tradition posited that the mind served as a repository of all of one's past experiences, both salutary and unsalutary. In the mind's deepest recesses, which Yogācāra called the storehouse consciousness (Skt. ālayavijñāna, C. *zangshi*, K. *changsik* 藏識), all the seeds (Skt. *bīja*, C. *zhong*, K. *chong* 種) of previous actions were stored in potential form, until the right set of conditions were in place for them to sprout and come to fruition. The Yogācāra tradition considered this storehouse to be an eighth valence of consciousness, which stored the seeds of all past action. In order to produce the immaculate purity that is enlightenment, then, those seeds would have to be removed or destroyed.

In order to effect this shift toward good and away from the inveterate predilection toward evil, the individual must be instructed in the necessity of cultivating constructive types of action, so as to begin producing the salutary seeds that would sanitize the mind

[8] For this simile, see Buswell (1989, 207). For Wŏnhyo's exegesis of this simile, see (Buswell 2007, 157–61).

cum storehouse. Mental purity is thus not innate; that process of decontamination must begin outside the mind by "hearing the dharma," that is, by learning about religious practice and specifically about Buddhism. This external catalyst would initiate a process of religious cultivation that eventually would remove all the seeds of evil and ensure that the mind remains filled exclusively with the seeds of good. This process could involve a protracted period of practice. Indeed, completing the standard *mārga*, or path, outlined in the *Yogācārabhūmiśāstra* required three incalculable eons (*asaṃkhyeyakalpa*), the Buddhist euphemism for an infinity, and in this case, not one but three infinities. Thus, for the East Asian Yogācāra tradition, the mind is not innately immaculate and luminous, as Tathāgatagarbha claimed, but innately defiled.

East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism was thus faced with two radically different perspectives on Mahāyāna ontology and soteriology and two variant solutions to the problem of defilement and purity: Tathāgatagarbha thought clarifies why enlightenment is possible for the ignorant, while Yogācāra explains why sentient beings are ignorant and not already enlightened; but both traditions are woefully inadequate at providing a response to the alternate issue.

Attempts to synthesize these two systems of Mahāyāna thought would inevitably bring East Asian Buddhists face to face with the problem of theodicy. Resolving this problem would demand that they demonstrate how the mind could be simultaneously enlightened (good) and ignorant (evil) and thus, how evil might exist even amid the pervasive reality of enlightenment. The process of reconciling these two systems began fitfully in India, but reaches its full flowering in such indigenous East Asian writings as the *Awakening of Faith* (*Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起心論) in China and the *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra* (*Kŭmgang sammae kyŏng* 金剛三昧經) in Korea, and in the writings of such exegetes as the Silla scholiast Wŏnhyo 元曉 (617-686).

Wŏnhyo reduced both tathāgatagarbha and ālayavijñāna to the One Mind (C. *yixin,* K. *ilsim* 一心). This One Mind he defines, following the *Awakening of Faith*, as the intersection between 1) the mind's True Suchness aspect (C. *xin zhenru men,* K. *sim chinyŏ mun* 心真如門)—the unconditioned realm and the valence of absolute truth (=active aspect of tathāgatagarbha, where enlightenment serves as a beacon that shines throughout all compounded existence)—and 2) the mind's Production-and-Cessation aspect (C. *xin shengmie men*, K. *sim saengmyŏl mun* 心生滅門)—the conditioned realm and valence of conventional truth (=ālayavijñāna and the passive aspect of the "covered" tathāgatagarbha, where enlightenment exists obscured by defilements).

Wŏnhyo identified the scriptural source of this rubric of the One Mind and its Two Aspects in the *Vajrasamādhi-sūtra*, an apocryphon that that I have argued was composed in Korea, probably around 680 C.E., toward the end of Wŏnhyo's life. This is the crucial passage: "The nature of the *mind of sentient beings* is originally *void and calm.* The essence of the mind that is void and calm is *free from materiality and characteristics*" (衆生之心性本空寂。空寂之心體無色相) *(Kŭmgang sammae kyŏng*, chap. 2, T 273:9.366b18-19, Buswell 1989, 84, 189).[9]

[9] For Wŏnhyo's exegesis of this passage, see *T* 1730:34.965c22 ff., translated in Buswell 2007, 75.

Here, Wŏnhyo interpreted "*void and calm*" as the One Mind; the "*mind of sentient beings*" as the Production-and-Cessation aspect; and "*free from materiality and characteristics*" as the True Suchness aspect. Because the true-suchness aspect is revealed through the production-and-cessation aspect, "the essences of those two aspects are nondual and, consequently, they are both nothing more than the dharma of the one mind" (此二門其體無二 所以皆是一心法耳) (*Kŭmgang sammaegyŏng non*, *T* 1730:34.966a8–9, Buswell 2007, 75–6).

Thus, East Asian texts like the *Awakening of Faith* explain the simultaneous reality of the immanence of enlightenment (=*tathāgatagarbha*) and the origin of ignorance (=ālayavijñāna): "The mind, though pure in its self-nature since time immemorial [=*tathāgatagarbha*], is accompanied by ignorance [=ālayavijñāna]" (是心從本以來自性清淨 而有無明).(*Dasheng qixin lun*, T 1666:32.577c2–3, Hakeda trans. 1967; Buswell 1989, 84). For this reason, enlightenment may be innate, but it is still something that must be "brought into being" (Skt. *bhāvanā*, C. *xiuxing*, K. *suhaeng* 修行), the term the Buddhists use for religious practice.

The Chan/Sŏn School and No-thought Practice

What practice stratagems fit this new theological model of East Asian Buddhism where enlightenment can simultaneously be ontologically innate but only mastered soteriologically? One of the first clues as to how East Asian Buddhists would seek to respond to this new ontology of mind is found in the *Awakening of Faith*'s account of the cause of delusion, defilement, and ultimately evil: "Suddenly, a thought arises; this is called ignorance" (忽然念起 名為無明) (*Dasheng qixin lun*, *T* 1666:32.577c6-7, Hakeda trans. 1967, 50). "Suddenly, a thought arises" refers to the introduction of a point of view, which is ultimately what the Buddhists mean by having a sense of self (Skt. ātman, C. *wo*, K. *a* 我). Having such a point of view invariably means that we begin to assess our discrete, unique sensory experiences in terms of what those experiences mean for ourselves: i.e., what things we like or dislike, what things we consider to be good or evil, right or wrong, salutary or unsalutary, and so forth. This mental dichotomization creates a whole world of general classifications, or concepts, in which our own subjective point of view is central and where egoity, craving, views, and ultimately ignorance predominate.

These concepts, which we initially created as convenient pigeon holes to order our sensory experience, ultimately proliferate throughout the entirety of our experience, blocking us from seeing anything as it actually is but rather only for what it means for ourselves. We are then no longer experiencing the object itself as it is but rather only our arbitrary value judgments about that object. Thus the intrusion of ego into the perceptual process causes us to become utterly subjugated to the delimitations of sense-experience created by conceptualization, which starts from ignorance, *viz.* a point of view.

The Buddha outlines this process of bondage to concepts, or, as the *Awakening of Faith* calls it, "to the ignorance creating by the arising of thought," in the *Madhupiṇḍakasutta* (Discourse on the honey ball) (C. *Miwanyu jing*, K. *Mirhwanyu kyŏng* 蜜丸喻經) (*Majjhimanikāya*

18, *Madhyamāgama* 115). In Ñāṇananda Bhikkhu's compelling exegesis of this discourse in his classic *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought* (Ñāṇananda 1971, passim), this process of perception begins as:

> A. An "Impersonal, Causal Process" (viz., the Buddhist sense of "conditionality"):
>
> 1. the coming together of sense-base/sense-object/sense-consciousness (=*vijñāna*, the fifth aggregate, or *skandha*),
>
> 2. leads to contact, or sensory impingement (*sparśa*),
>
> 3. producing stimulus, sensation, or feeling (*vedanā*, the second *skandha*); ego begins to intrude, generating the sensibility that one is experiencing pleasure, pain, or neutral sensations.

This automatic causal process occurs for anyone who is alive and conscious, producing the first hint of separation between the experiencing subject (self) and the experienced object (other). This bifurcation is subsequently maintained from the next step in perception onward until it is fully crystallized and justified at a conceptual level.

> B. This response involves "Intentional, Deliberate Action," creating *karman*:
>
> 4. What one feels, one perceives (*saṃjñā*, the third skandha), i.e., one evaluates the sensation in terms of one's own experience.
>
> 5. What one perceives, one conceptualizes, i.e., "thought arises," in the *Awakening of Faith*'s terminology; here, one's judgment about the nature of the object categorizes it into a class or type, that is, a concept.
>
> 6. What one conceptualizes, one proliferates through concepts (Skt. *prapañca,* C. *xilun,* K. *hŭiron* 戲論). At this stage, the person has succumbed to this proliferating process of conceptualization so that everything in one's experience is from here on treated entirely on a conceptual level.
>
> C. The person then becomes the hapless "Subject of an Objective Order":
>
> 7. Due to that conceptual proliferation, the person is assailed, bound, and limited by conceptualization and utterly subjected to its limiting perspective on sense-experience.

A sensory process that originally had been deployed as a convenient means of dealing with a complex sequence of sensory events has utterly taken over the perceptual process; the person who had hitherto been the subject instead becomes the hapless object, thus creating an inexorable subjugation to an objective order of things. This process may have been initiated by the individual, but it is ultimately overwhelming; as Ñāṇananda so compellingly describes it, this proliferating tendency of consciousness weaves a labyrinthine network of concepts connecting past, present, and future, and all categories of objects, directly to oneself.

Thus intrusion of ego into what initially was an impersonal causal process of sense experience leads to "thought" (that is, conceptualization), which is "ignorance" as the

Awakening of Faith defined it. This ignorance manifests in three ways:

> 1. craving (*tṛṣṇā*), that is, delighting in this conceptual realm where all of experience is focused on oneself;
> 2. value-judgments, technically "pride" or "conceit" (*māna*), that is, asserting that certain concepts are right and others are wrong and it is I who has the privilege of making that decision for all; and
> 3. views (*dṛṣṭi*): dogmatic adherence to conceptual judgments, which create clinging to concepts.
>
> Conceptualization thus completely divorces the individual from objective reality, and he or she subsequently lives in a subjective world of his or her own making. As the *Awakening of Faith* says,
>
> Therefore the three realms of existence are spurious and a product of the mind alone… Since all things are, without exception, derived from the mind and produced by deluded thoughts, all differentiations are none other than the differentiations of one's own mind itself.
>
> 是故　三界虛僞　唯心所作　以一切法　皆從心起　妄念而生　一切分別　即分別自心 (*Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起心論, *T* 1666:32.577b1618; Hakeda trans, 1967, 48).

All the objects to which one responds in one's world, the generalized conceptualizations of discrete sensory experiences, are thus products of the dualistic processes of thought. It is by bringing ratiocination to an end that the world returns to its own natural state, without being oppressed or promoted by greed, hatred, and delusion; this is the state of non-conceptualization (*nihprapañca*). "Bringing this dichotomizing tendency of thought to an end" is what the Chan and Sŏn schools come to call no-thought (C. *wunian,* K. *munyŏm* 無念) or no-mind (C. *wuxin*, K. *musim* 無心), a term without any real analog in Indian materials. Its closest Sanskrit equivalency might be *acittaka*, a mental illness akin to aphasia, the inability to use language, which is really nothing at all like what the East Asians mean by the term. It is the East Asian Chan and Sŏn schools in their discussion of the practice of no-thought that best bring out the implications of the *Awakening of Faith*'s simple but extremely profound statement "suddenly, a thought arises; this is called ignorance."

The locus classicus for this Chan and Sŏn notion of no-thought appears in the *Platform Sūtra*, attributed to the putative Sixth Patriarch of the Chan School, Huineng 慧能 (638–713): "'No-thought' means not to think even when involved in thought"(無念者 於念而不念) (*Liuzu tan jing* 六祖壇經, *T* 2007:48.338c6, Yampolsky trans. 1967, sect. 17, 138). Thought, the deployment of concepts, is not so much the issue but rather the attachment, or "clinging," as the *Agaññasutta* termed it, to thoughts and the inevitable subjugation to conceptualization. If this attachment is overcome, then everything returns to its own natural sphere and enlightenment is achieved:

> If one instant of thought is cut off, the dharma-body separates from the physical body and, in the midst of successive thoughts, all dharmas will be nonabiding [i.e., there will be no place to attachment to anything].
>
> 若一念斷 絕法身即是離色身 念念時中 於一切法無主 (*Liuzu tan jing*, *T* 2007:48.338c7, Yampolsky trans. 1967, 138).

By cutting off one's attraction, viz., attachment, to the external sensory world, the mind does not create thoughts concerning those objects, and the mind returns to its natural state of non-conceptualization, or no-thought, which is liberation:

> To be untainted in regards to all objects is called 'no-thought.' If you keep your own thoughts free from sensory objects, then thoughts will not be produced concerning dharmas. If one does not cogitate upon the hundreds of things, then thoughts will be brought completely to an end. If but a single thought is eradicated, you then will not be reborn in any other realm [*viz.* liberation].
>
> 於自念上離境 不於法上念生 莫百物不思 念盡除卻 一念斷 即無別處受生 (*Liuzu tan jing*, *T* 2007:48.338c12–13; cf. Yampolsky 1967, 138).[10]

It is important to note that no-thought in its Chan and Sŏn definition does not mean the absence of conscious activity; that would be akin to keeping the consciousness like cold ashes or stone, a state reviled in Sŏn literature. Instead, no-thought refers to a transparent state of mind in which the functioning of the mind reflects clearly the mind's essence. As *Chinsim chiksŏl* 真心直說 (Straight talk on the true mind), traditionally attributed to Chinul 知訥 (1158–1210), notes with regard to the synonym "no-mind" (C. *wuxin*, K. *musim* 無心):

> When I say 'no-mind,' I do not mean that there is no mind-essence. It is only when there are no things in the mind that we use the term no-mind. It is like speaking of an empty bottle: we mean that there is no thing in the bottle, not that there is no bottle…. Accordingly, we refer to the absence of the deluded mind [as the definition of no-mind], not to the absence of the true mind's sublime functioning.
>
> 今云無心. 非無心體. 名無心也. 但心中無物. 名曰無心. 如言空瓶. 瓶中無物. 名曰空瓶. 非瓶體無. 名空瓶也. 據此則以無妄心. 非無眞心妙用也 (Buswell 1991, 127).[11]

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[10] My translation here makes a crucial revision that gives the opposite interpretation of the rendering appearing in Yampolsky 1967, 138.

[11] This text is now thought by some scholars (e.g., Ch'oe Yŏnsik) to be not by Chinul, but instead the Jurchen Chan monk Zhengyan 政言(d. ca. 1184–1185) (Ch'oe 2002, 77–101); for a discussion of Ch'oe's article (Buswell 2012, 89–90).

No-mind is the cultivation of a state of mind that restores the original objectivity of sense-perception by bringing an end to the impulsion to defilement that occurs during that perception. As Chinul's magnum opus *Excerpts from the Dharma Collection and Special Practice Record with Inserted Personal Notes* (*Pŏpchip pyŏrhaengnok chŏryo pyŏngip sagi* 法集別行錄節要科目並入私記) clarifies: "'No-mind' means only that we banish the afflictions in the mind. It does not mean that there is no mind" (言無心者 但遣心中煩惱也 非謂無心).[12] No-thought thus allows the defilements to be eradicated naturally, rendering no-thought the basis of all religious practice:

> Even though we cultivate the manifold supplementary practices [of the bodhisattva], they all have no-thought as their source. If we can only maintain no-thought, then liking and disliking will naturally fade away and compassion and wisdom will naturally grow in brightness; immoral actions [viz., evil] will naturally be eliminated and meritorious deeds [viz., good] will naturally be augmented… A quiescent radiance will manifest itself and our responsiveness will be limitless. This is what we call "buddha."
>
> 故修萬 唯以無念爲宗 但得無念 則愛惡自然淡薄 悲智自然增明 罪業自然斷除 功行自然增進… 寂照現前 應用雖備無窮 名之爲佛 (Buswell 2016, 100).

Conclusion

In the Buddhist treatment of theodicy, then, evil derives solely from the bifurcating tendencies of conceptualization produced by human beings, whether unwitting or intentional; human beings rather than God have full responsibility for solving the problem of evil. By positing that evil has a cause, which Buddhism universally defines as clinging and attachment—and whether that attachment be to something as concrete as a material object or as subtle as a single thought—Buddhists offer a solution to the problem of evil. Mind may be the creator of both evil and good but mind is also the faculty that offers individuals the potential to free themselves from the consequences of their creation. Therefore, most fundamental to Buddhism across its many traditions is the practical soteriological response to the problems of evil and defilement. In East Asian and especially Korean Buddhism, the tradition is certainly aware of the issue of theodicy and crafted a doctrinally elegant response to it. But even there, a soteriological response remained front and center. Whether by following a rigorous regimen of training, or through the simple renunciation of one's misconceptions via "no-thought," Buddhists assert that it is ultimately through correct attention (Skt. *yoniśomanaskāra*) that human beings will be able to vanquish evil, win liberation, and solve the problem of theodicy.

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[12] Chinul, "Pŏpchip pyŏrhaengnok chŏryo pyŏngip sagi" (法集別行錄節要科目並入私記), translated in (Buswell 2016, 110–11); quoting Zongmi 宗密 (780–841), and inverting the two sentences.

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