JOSEPH GRANGE

INTRODUCTION: TAO AND GOD

The events of September 11, 2001 show how destructive false ideas of the ultimate principle of creation can be. They also prove that we are now in a world civilization driven as much by religious beliefs as by nation states. Perhaps the essays collected here can help us make better sense of what is rapidly becoming a more and more irrational political process. This issue of the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* is devoted to the theme of “Tao and God.” Given our present political situation, no more pertinent topic could have been selected. As the guest editor of this special issue, I selected the theme long before the events of last September. I claim no prescience, but the theme selected does give readers a unique opportunity to discover for themselves just how culturally potent ideas about creation and its creator really are.

The issue begins with Robert Cummings Neville’s study of the relations spanning Daoist relativism, ethical choosing, and the use of appropriate normative measures. Among this study’s many virtues is the decisive way in which it dispels the easy identification of Daoism with forms of ethical relativism. Daoism as a system of thought is suffused with standards of appropriate feeling, thinking, willing, and doing. It simply will not do to equate Daoism with an invitation to an easy, spontaneous “natural” life-style.

My own contribution, “An Irish Tao,” compares certain Daoist doctrines with the philosophical system created by the ninth-century Neoplatonic Irish philosopher John Scotus Eriugena. Of special note is the way in which Eriugena’s doctrine of immanent causality merges with the Daoist insistence on two Daos—named and unnamed. By having the divine cause continually active within the world of creatures, we are given a vision of theophany that expresses a formidable system of panentheistic speculation.

Michael LaFargue’s “God and Tao: An Experiment in Historicist Theology and Critical Interpretation” illustrates the value of comparative philosophy when it works within the guidelines of the American pragmatic tradition. Good comparative philosophy can protect the unique character of religious experience as well as establish solid foun-

JOSEPH GRANGE, professor, Department of Philosophy, University of Southern Maine. Specialty: process philosophy, comparative philosophy, environmental philosophy. E-mail: grange@usm.maine.edu

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dations for rational criticism. Axiology and epistemology join hands to show the continuities and differences in the Christian Gospel of Mark and the *Daodejing*.

James Behuniak's "Disposition and Aspiration in the *Mencius* and the *Zhuangzi*" broadens the scope of the discussion to include the prescriptive and descriptive quality of Dao as used in these classic texts. Using Whitehead's concept of religion as a direct experiential intuition into the fundamental relations of the cosmos, he is able to distinguish between Confucian prescriptive ideas and the Daoists's descriptive aim to underscore the absolute generosity of the cosmos.

Linyu Gu's "Rethinking the Whiteheadian God and Chan/Zen Buddhism in the Tradition of the *Yi Jing*" provides an important reminder that Chan/Zen Buddhism rests on a more ancient base, the cosmological humanism of *Yi* beliefs and practices. Her comparative analysis of process theology and Chan/Zen raises provocative questions about the ultimacy of transcendence or immanence as defining characteristics of divine matters.

Chung-Ying Cheng's "Ultimate Origin, Ultimate Reality, and the Human Condition: Leibniz, Whitehead, and Zhu Xi" restores metaphysics to its rightful place among the philosophic disciplines. Postmodern thinking has done its best to sabotage the importance of speculative thinking, even declaring that it is part of a political power game intended to exclude permanently various members of the social order. Cheng's article shows the universal character of authentic metaphysical thinking. He brings together the seventeenth-century thought of Leibniz and the twentieth-century process philosophy of Whitehead by means of the mediating influence of the twelfth-century Chinese neo-Confucian, Zhu Xi. He thereby provides a de facto example of the openness of systematic thinking when it is done in the spirit of giving new life to old ideas.

As globalization tightens its grip on the planet, the need for people to understand beliefs that are different from their own becomes more and more obligatory. When our planetary interrelations are also dominated by the economic system of market capitalism that in principle, systematically ignores these belief systems, then surely a crisis of world proportions is in the making. It is because of these geopolitical facts that the essays in this volume take on additional importance. They mark one more milestone in the developing field of comparative philosophy. This effort along with others now happening across the world of East–West scholarship are essential moments in the building of a deeper and more effective disciplinary approach to questions of religious experience. Good comparative philosophy is now more essential than ever.

JOSEPH GRANGE
University of Southern Maine
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