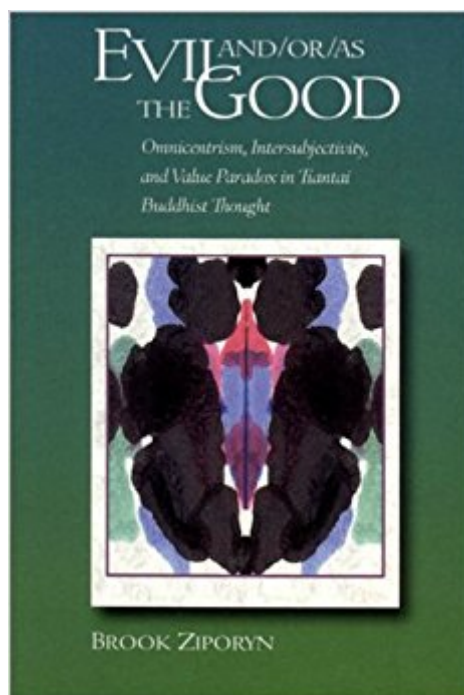




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# Evil And/or/as The Good: Omnicentrism, Intersubjectivity, And Value Paradox In Tiantai Buddhist Thought



## Synopsis

"Other than the devil, there is no Buddha; other than the Buddha, there is no devil." The Chinese monk Siming Zhili (960-1028) uttered this remark as part of his justification for his self-immolation. An exposition of the intent, implications, and resonances of this one sentence, this book expands and unravels the context in which the seeming paradox of the ultimate identity of good and evil is to be understood. In analyzing this idea, Brook Ziporyn provides an overview of the development of Tiantai thought from the fifth through the eleventh centuries in China and contributes to our understanding of Chinese intellectual culture and Chinese Buddhism, as well as to basic ontological, epistemological, and axiological issues of interest in modern philosophy.

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## Customer Reviews

"Other than the devil, there is no Buddha; other than the Buddha, there is no devil". The Chinese Tiantai Buddhist monk Siming Zhili (960-1028) uttered this remark as part of his justification for his planned self-immolation. As an exposition of the intent, implications, and resonances of this one sentence, this book expands and unravels the context in which the seeming paradox of the ultimate identity of good and evil -- or to use another of Zhili's memorable phrases, "the ultimacy of the dung beetle" -- is to be understood. This value paradox in Tiantai Buddhist thought is centered on the notion of the inherent evil in the Buddha nature, a doctrine that sets this school apart from all other forms of Buddhism. In analyzing this idea -- and the related concepts of holism, intersubjectivity, and

value theory that are its foundation -- Brook Ziporyn provides an overview of the development of Tiantai thought from the fifth through the eleventh centuries in China and contributes to our understanding of Chinese intellectual culture and Chinese Buddhism, as well as to basic ontological, epistemological, and axiological concepts. In the conclusion, he looks at these ideas from a wider perspective by teasing out the philosophical and moral implications of Zhili's ideas.

Brook Ziporyn is Assistant Professor of Asian Religion and Philosophy at Northwestern University.

what a great read with mind opening possibilities. a deep penetrating look into the nature of knowledge, being and reality. what more can i say. Ok, ill say more, this book shows the contrast between western dual thought and the omnicentric view of reality in tiantai Buddhist thought. it is not an easy read as it touches on deep topics in the fields of ontology, epistemological and axiological concepts. i have many years of study on philosophy and Buddhist thought and i still had to read this book slowly and deliberately to really grasp the underlying meaning into the nature of omnicentric thought. i dont recommend this book as a first read into the look of Buddhist thought or those new to philosophy. i did give it a five star because it was written giving multiple comparisons to other philosophical systems and it did open up some new understanding to me into the nature of what is?

Especially difficult for someone without a background in Buddhist philosophy but it is pleasant to read once you understand the terms, like upāya and omnicentric holism. If you get through it you will have an entirely new worldview and greater understanding of a particular form of Buddhism.

In his learned and inventive work Ziporyn presents us with a philosophy practically unheard-of in the West. T'ien-T'ai's enlightenment perceives reality neither as just "mundane" nor as transcendent in the more (Zen) or less ("separate teaching") exclusive sense of "beyond", but rather as immanent transcendence grounded in samsara. Therefore, only the "provisional" can incarnate the ultimate and only "provisional" words can convey the "unspeakable", employing them allegorically so that even fairy tales can express some particular aspect of the Middle Way. Ziporyn choses the model of setup/punch line as a metaphor for the Lotus-Sutra's supreme marvel to "open up provisional" words/reality as dwelling place of the ultimate. But life is largely not funny at all. Given the terrible suffering in this world, how could Buddhas, who always suffer when seeing others suffering, not view samsara as one monumental tragedy?! Zhili maintains the impossibility of attaining pure goodness arguing that there's nothing but evil, the realization of which is itself the good. I believe

T'ien-T'ai wouldn't agree to that. Instead he ascribed very specific psychological and behavioural qualities like compassion to Buddhahood. If there didn't exist a tenth substance endowed with distinguishing qualities, why then 100 worlds? Ninety would do just fine, adding to each of the nine deluded worlds a tenth state of aggregation which would correspond to Zhili's enlightened "dung-beetle-hood" (= wickedness). As for the 100 worlds, imagine ten different substances that can manifest themselves in ten different ways, just like water can appear in various states of aggregation, and you get 100 worlds, each of which comprising ten "categories" and "three realms of existence" (= 3000). Apart from assuming different states of aggregation, the ten worlds can also migrate from one to another, thereby changing from latency to manifestation and vice versa. Ziporyn seems to endorse Zhili's position that poison (greed, anger etc.) are identical with medicine (contentedness, compassion etc.), that delusion is identical with true understanding and that good is identical with evil. Or, as Ziporyn puts it somewhere else, that Hitler's extermination of the Jews could be validly considered (the contextualized) the action of a Bodhisattva seeking to free the world from what he/she believes to be harmful to its well-being. Obviously, the relationship between good and evil and its identity, oneness or mutual inclusiveness is so profound a matter that T'ien-T'ai calls it elusive and ultimately transcending word and principle. The world's foremost contemporary scholars like Paul Swanson remain dubious as to the question what really distinguishes the separate (or specific) teaching from the perfect teaching. The following passage of a Japanese teacher may provide some clue: According to the provisional teachings and the schools based on them, both good and evil remain in one's life through all the stages of the bodhisattva practice up to the stage of near-perfect enlightenment. Hence people at the stage of near-perfect enlightenment or below have faults of some kind, [but not those at the highest stage]. In contrast, the heart of the Lotus school is the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, which reveals that both good and evil are inherent even in those at the highest stage of perfect enlightenment. Accordingly, and in a sense differing from Ziporyn's understanding, the most horrible evils are indeed an inseparable aspect of our intrinsic nature even when we are enlightened, and vice versa: when manifesting our devilish nature, we are but deluded Buddhas, and when manifesting our buddhahood we are nothing but enlightened devils. Analogously, there is a clear difference between a Bodhisattva (or a Buddha, for that purpose) applying lethal force to combat evil (war) and - keeping within the before mentioned example - Hitler (supposedly) killing in order to protect humanity from a (supposed) evil. The former would be, let's say, the world of Ashura

experienced within the world of bodhisattva (the 9th), whereas the latter would be the world of bodhisattva experienced within the world of Ashura (the 4th). As one can see, the mutual possession/inclusiveness of the ten worlds taught by T'ien Tai entails two different levels never to be confused (sic!): a (traditional) vertical level stressing the axiological differences between the ten worlds, forming a hierarchy. And on the other hand a horizontal level with no axiological difference between the ten worlds. Meaning that each of the ten worlds can manifest themselves in ten different ways according to which is the dominant theme. All of the ten worlds can manifest themselves within the world of Buddhahood. It appears that both Zhili and Ziporyn confused these two levels, thereby dramatically misunderstanding the essence of T'ien Tai's teaching.

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