

Religious Ethics in the *Taiping jing*: The Seeking of Life*

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Abstract

This paper is based on sections of the Scripture on Great Peace that do not mention the Celestial Master and are often introduced by the particle *wei* 惟. These sections, here termed *wei* material, are treated as if they were one coherent textual layer. They have so far attracted little scholarly attention. The aim here is to present ideas and terms that characterise the philosophical content of this layer. It is argued that it contains a distinctive although not well organised set of values and moral guidelines. The anonymous authors see the concept of life as their main value and declare seeking life to be men's most important activity. The term is used broadly and refers to the aim of living as long as is predestined by personal fate, as well as to improving this fate, and also to transcending the limits of mortality, leading thus to salvation from death. Since heaven gives and takes life, life is heaven's gift and seeking life consists of gratitude to heaven for the receipt of this gift. Men are expected to document gratitude through religious rituals and by adhering to moral rules of conduct. These rules of conduct are the focus of this paper. It is argued that they integrate rather than oppose established rules of conduct. By submitting to heaven's will, men are good; that is, they

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are self-disciplined, considerate, cooperative, filial, loyal and obedient. To this catalogue are added the virtue of being “with heart” and prohibitions against self-reliance and resentment. The authors stress that seeking life provides social as well as personal benefits since, out of fear of death and heaven’s anger, the believer will become aware of moral rules and thus contribute to social order and peace. This paper’s approach is largely descriptive. It makes much use of the narrative elements spread through *wei* material which depict a believer’s career from being converted to his ascent to heaven in broad daylight where a career as celestial bureaucrat awaits him. The narration is conducted through dialogues between the believer, celestial spirits and Celestial Lord, who reigns supreme as heaven’s representative. The paper’s longish quotations will provide a glimpse of this.

Keywords: *Scripture on Great Peace*, religious ethics, seeking life, man with heart, Celestial Lord

This paper deals with sections in the great-peace corpus that do not belong to the dialogues between Celestial Master and disciples that make up the bulk of the *Taiping jing* 太平經.¹ As most of these sections are introduced by the particle *wei* 惟 we may speak of *wei* material. Their focus is on strategies for postponing death or even avoiding it altogether. Needless to say this topic is central to Daoist thought and practice. The following account is descriptive and restricted to the material's contribution to a history of ideas rather than to the history of rituals and practices.²

¹ This stratum of the great-peace corpus will in the following be referred to as “*wei* material.” For an initial analysis of this stratum see G. Espeset, “Criminalized Abnormality, Moral Etiology, and Redemptive Suffering in the Secondary Strata of the *Taiping jing*,” *Asia Major* 15.2 (2002), 1–50, and Takahashi Tadahiko, “*Taihei kyō no shisō kōzō*,” *Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō* 95 (1984), 295–336. The text of the *Taiping jing* is quoted following Wang Ming 王明, *Taiping jing hejiao* 太平經合校 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), referring to section and page. The following editions and translations were consulted: Yu Liming 俞理明, *Taiping jing zhengdu* 太平經正讀 (Chengdu: Ba Shu shushe, 2001), Long Hui 龍晦 et al., *Taiping jing quanyi* 太平經全譯 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2000), Luo Chi 羅熾, *Taiping jing zhuyi* 太平經註譯 (Chongqing: Xinan shifan daxue chubanshe, 1996). Yu's punctuation is often preferred to that of Wang without drawing specific attention to it. The sections on which this paper is based are 179–190 and 192–203. Takahashi attempts to document two strata within this material, and when this material is treated in full Takahashi's careful analysis must be considered. The stratification is based on the distinction between the narrative account of a sinner's redemption and final ascent to heaven and treatise style teachings. The narrative account includes dialogues. For preliminary purposes all these sections have enough in common to be considered a unit. They were certainly considered as such by someone, possibly the *Taiping jing*'s early editors when they added the introductory particle *wei* to sections and paragraphs in sections 179–184, 190 and 193–203. Section 191 and parts of section 188 have too many characteristics of the Celestial Master stratum of the great-peace corpus to belong to the *wei* stratum. Sections 185–187, 188 (partially), 189 and 192 could well belong to the *wei* stratum and are part of the material used in this paper.

² For ritual aspects of morality, the consciousness of sin and the practice of

The material is read as if it were original, in the sense that its possible predecessors and antecedents are not discussed. That this supposed originality may partly result from oversight must be admitted. The great-peace corpus as a whole is usually understood as stemming from the outgoing Han dynasty and as produced by anonymous authors. It is also seen as poorly written, poorly edited and poorly transmitted. Repetitions abound and the argumentation moves on unevenly. The following account does not provide any evidence against this understanding. This paper will not directly tackle philological issues but will, it is hoped, be of some use for further work in this field.³

The *wei* material consists of slightly over thirty sections of unequal length, ranging from two to over twenty-six pages in the *Daozang* edition. These sections are far from being well argued treatises. Many attempt to provide glimpses of the full picture of how a human sinner

confessions, see Chi-Tim Lai, "Illness, Healing and Morality in Early Heavenly Master Daoism," in *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China*, ed. Alan K.L. Chan and Yuet-Keung Lo (Albany: State University of New York, 2010), 173–201. See also Tsuchiya Masaaki, "Confession of Sins and Awareness of Self in the *Taiping jing*," in *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage and Ritual*, ed. Livia Kohn and Harold D. Roth (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 39–57. For a general introduction to early medieval Daoist attempts at linking the length of life to morality see Jiang Sheng 姜生, *Han Wei Liang Jin Nan Bei Chao dao jiao lunli lungao* 漢魏兩晉南北朝道教倫理論稿 (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1995), 106–120.

³ From the results of this paper we may, in my opinion, conclude that *wei* material has enough in common to be seen as stemming from one source and that we may indeed call it a layer. Moreover, nothing has come up that would force us to oppose Jens Petersen's suggestion that both layers originate in late Han dynasty times. See J. O. Petersen, "The *Taiping jing* and the A.D. 102 Clepsydra Reform," *Acta Orientalia* 53 (1992): 122–158. When the corpus of great-peace texts was collated in the 6th century the Daoists who undertook the task were, we must assume, impressed with the similarities between the two layers and created one scripture consisting of both.

can achieve salvation, just as each sermon in a series of sermons repeats the good news. We are introduced to situations that show how faith and goodness result in longevity or even unending life and how aberrant attitudes and conduct lead to misery, premature death and trouble with subterranean authorities after death. We are not introduced to ethical propositions. Different decision procedures are interwoven and introduced as if they were in mutual support, contradictory or mutually exclusive as they might appear. Heaven and its power to reward and punish are never forgotten but at times the discourse suggests there were indeed rational reasons for being good. The authors' interest lies in the good. They use the term evil to point to what is not good.

So “good conduct” is the conduct with which believers hope to impress heaven to extend their life span. As the believers' wish for life is crucial, “seeking life” is our first topic. Here rather straightforward consequentialist ways of thinking come to the fore. Actions that protect and strengthen life are called good. For the authors this is a safe starting point. The proposition is hard to refute and allows them to draw practical conclusions that agree with popular morality. They can thereby show that their beliefs and aims have positive social consequences. They then move on to depicting a situation of existential crisis and to drawing conclusions from it, as shown in the second part of this paper. This terrain is rather new, as Han dynasty Chinese intellectuals paid little attention to personal crises. This will be this paper's second topic and it is put under the title “salvation from death.” Here the authors introduce multiple decision procedures that depend on aspects of revelational theology, on a divine code⁴ and, most importantly, on the believers' unmitigated conviction — which we might call faith — that life is owed to heaven and

⁴ In Henry Sidgwick's terminology: see *Outlines of the History of Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988; original edition 1902).

that heaven's power naturally reverts to rewards and punishments. The authors finally attempt to analyse what a person is like who has reorganized his life after experiencing such a crisis. They depict his virtues, describe his conduct and conclude that he is still an acceptable person, in traditional terms, only highly empowered by new existential awareness. So this paper's third section deals with the grateful believer. By setting up these sections and following these interpretative lines the paper attempts to present the authors' main argument. However, it will not disregard their meandering ways. At times these meanderings propose new beliefs in excursions that lead them far from the territory of well-established ideas while at the same time showing a general desire to return to it. This ambivalence creates contradictions and ambiguities which this paper does not intend to smooth out but rather register and interpret carefully whenever they are important to the overall intellectual picture.

Seeking Life

For the authors of *wei* material moral action stems from respecting life. In this they differ from what we may call mainstream ethics. In the *Lun yu* 論語 life is seen as of secondary value:

For gentlemen of purpose and men of benevolence, while it is inconceivable that they should stay alive (*qiu sheng* 求生) at the expense of benevolence, it may happen that they have to accept death in order to have benevolence accomplished.⁵

The *Laozi* 老子 and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 disagree and in consequence arrive at alternative moral principles. In the material at hand these alternative

⁵ See *Lun yu* 9.9, in D.C. Lau's translation, *Confucius: The Analects* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 133.

principles play a role, but respect for life also becomes the vehicle for propagating adherence to standard rules and regulations of social conduct. This is in stark opposition to the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, which use the attractiveness of life and vitality to criticize standard rules and make the terms “good” and “evil” look doubtful. It is against this background that the authors of *wei* material explain their own position:

Should a man renege on an oath the two parties involved lose faith in each other and so security is missing. Then in heaven, on earth, in the space between, and up above and down below all beings have their own faith and men, unable to understand what is essential will say: “How should it be the case that some are good and others evil?” This is where all disaster comes from. Men consume *qi* of the five constants. There is nothing they would not be endowed with, could not rely on, or could not undertake. . . . Why does it have to be that they lose track of goodness, adhere to evil, and make life remain incomplete? Therefore Celestial Lord⁶ says that there is good and evil, and that goodness must become general. As this is so, there must be separation and this should not be left to develop on its own. The good must be promoted and the evil must be disciplined. How can one have them move forward together with the good?⁷

This repeats the well-established position that natural disasters spring

⁶ The identity of this figure remains unclear. He rules over spirits and men, talk to all of them in human language, represents heaven, and is bound by its will. Heaven itself does not establish any direct contact. It does not speak.

⁷ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.524–525. Luo, *Taiping jing zhuyi*, 882, and Long, *Taiping jing quanyi*, 1038, see the “two parties” as human beings and heaven. Here as in the following translations make no attempt to include women in the picture. This is problematic as female believers played a considerable role in early Daoist congregations. However, there is no sign of them in the material that is here under discussion, except for references to “mother” and to “earth.” The situation is different in other parts of the great-peace corpus.

from human disregard for the moral content of actions.⁸ So to promote the good and discipline the evil is a cosmic need and heaven does so by shortening the life of wrongdoers while making all men want to live long.⁹ The following passage gives a glimpse of the practical benefits that can be expected from this regimen:

Heaven wants all men to become good. It does not want men to be evil. Were good and evil the same, so too would be suffering and pleasure. Wealth, honor, longevity and old age are arranged by heaven on high.¹⁰ If heaven were not able to distinguish lovable from detestable men then ignorant men would shout: “You and I are of the same rank. What is the use of doing good?” Heaven therefore favors good men by making them live long. Then those ignorant men, feeble as they may be, become aware of where they belong, and that by being more evil than others, they will lose their lives. So they will aim for correction and repent trespassing.¹¹

⁸ See *Bai hu tong* 白虎通 chapter 16 “*Zaibian* 災變,” in Tjan Tjoe Som’s translation: “Why does Heaven [send down] calamities and [cause] extraordinary events? It is to warn the Lord of men and make him conscious of his deeds so that he may wish to repent his faults. . . .” 天所以有災變何。所以譴告人君。覺悟其行。欲令悔過…… See Tjan Tjoe Som, *Po Hu T’ung* (repr. Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1973), 489, and *Bai hu tong suo yin* 白虎通索引 (Tokyo: Tōhō Shoten, 1979), 36. The position here expressed was under discussion in Eastern Han times, as documented for instance by Wang Chong’s (27–c.100) view, see *Lunheng* 論衡, chapter 53 “*Zhiqi*” 治期: 夫賢人有被病而早死, 惡人有完疆而老壽, 人之病死, 不在操行為惡也。……禍變不足以明惡, 福瑞不足以表善, 明矣。 See translation by A. Forke, *Lun-heng* (New York: Paragon, 1962), part 2, 13. This is what the authors of *wei* material argue against.

⁹ For an introduction to the long history of speculation on ties between morality and length of life see M. Csikszentmihalyi, “Allotment and Death in Early China,” in *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*, ed. A. Olberding and P. J. Ivanhoe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 177–190.

¹⁰ Following Luo’s understanding, *Taiping jing zhuyi*, 883.

¹¹ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.525–526. In rudimentary form this idea has a replica in the *Xiang’er* 想爾: “The *dao* established life to reward the good and

The authors do not move in the world of philosophical discourse and have no need to tackle the more complex foundations for virtuous conduct that may involve interactive networks of social integration.¹² For them, interest in life serves as the basis for satisfactory social organization and they make heaven their authority for this proposition. We are told that heaven wants all men to be good just as parents want all their children to be so:

Heaven has given life to men so that they know good and evil, do good deeds and have faith. Heaven does not want them to gain a bad name for themselves.¹³ As this is so, it wants them to desire life (*tan sheng* 貪生) and hate death.¹⁴

The authors rely on heaven's authority, instead of on the classics, and also on "men of the past," without ever mentioning names:

[The ideal men of the past] ventured to seek life (*qiu sheng* 求生) and demand vitality from Celestial Lord.¹⁵

death to threaten the evil." See S. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 110, and cf. M. Puett, "Sages, the Past and the Dead," in *Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought*, 225–248.

¹² As outlined for instance in the *Baihu tong*, when it deals with the "Three major and six minor relationships" *sangang liuji* 三綱六紀 in chapter 29.

¹³ There does not seem to be a need to follow Wang, who adds *ren* 人 after *ling* 令, as does the *Taiping jing chao* 太平經鈔, the *Taiping jing*'s Tang dynasty digest. Cf. also Yu, *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 396.

¹⁴ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.535. That men must seek life and hate death is repeated elsewhere, in slightly different words: see 179.533, 183.559 and 189.580. This attitude is supported by remarks about life and death being at a different place or taking a different road (185.566 and 182.554). Not to be buried in a coffin is worrisome (194.598) but otherwise *wei* material has hardly more room for the "cult of the dead" than has the Celestial Master material of the great-peace corpus. See R. von Glahn, *The Sinister Way: The Divine and the Demonic in Chinese Religious Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), chapter 2.

¹⁵ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.524. The expression "seeking life and

What is meant by life is not explained, as if it did not need any explanation. It is the opposite of death and therefore an intrinsic value, a value in itself. The evening out of life and death that is suggested in *Zhuangzi* passages is replaced by forcefully contrasting the joy of watching the sun, the moon and the constellations with suffering in the darkness below the ground. Life stems from heaven.¹⁶ It is the conscious acceptance of this gift that makes a person a believer in heaven and obedient to its commandments:

If a man hopes to see heaven respond to him he must reproach himself. Earnestly and while shedding tears he will say: "I have received the mercy to have become human and decidedly distinct from all the ten thousand beings. Heaven has allowed me to be different, has made me able to express myself in speech and discuss matters, feel love and disgust and to understand good and evil as well as what must and must not be done. I should act with great care. If I were to speak up against heaven's commandments instead of implementing them respectfully I would be a contrary and unprincipled man. Why should heaven allow such a man to continue pursuing his business?"¹⁷

Human life is a special gift and places special responsibility on those who receive it. From here the authors create webs of argument. Seeking life involves an interest in cosmic laws. The authors argue that a man's understanding of right and wrong stems directly from awareness of his own existence in a cosmic sense:

demanding vitality" (*qiu sheng suo huo* 求生索活) recurs: "It characterizes a person of extreme goodness to well instruct others in *dao* of seeking life and demanding vitality" (179.539). A set of similar expressions are used seemingly without difference in import, like for instance *nian sheng qiu huo* 念生求活 (195.601) or even *zhang sheng qiu huo* 長生求活 (186.568).

¹⁶ Bringing to life is heaven's task and nurturing is the earth's. See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 186.570.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, 179.528.

We know from what has been said in the past that a man needs something to hold on to. Therefore he may decide what is [good and] evil by analyzing what is intended by heaven and earth, the four seasons, and the five phases. This will make him understand how important it is to bring life to the full and will enable him to add to the years fate has destined for him. Understanding *dao* of bringing life to the full, he makes thorough use of its prohibitions and does not dare to offend against any regulations.¹⁸

This understanding also results in prescience, since the rules of prognostics are those by which the natural world is ordered. The authors conclude almost enthusiastically:

A person who thinks of life (*si sheng* 思生) is of the same kind as heaven's *dao*, while a person who is evil loses years of life through his own doing. How could one not worry about this?¹⁹

Thus valuing life enables a person directly to maintain it.

The material reserves a special place for the virtue of filial piety as if devotion to one's father were a replica of one's devotion to the celestial life giver. The *Book on Filial Piety*, which enjoyed great popularity in late Han dynasty times, has the line: "Father and mother give life (*fumu sheng zhi* 父母生之). No continuity is greater than this."²⁰ Filial piety distinguishes human beings from barbarians as well as from animals. Respect for parents, for heaven, and for the rules of moral conduct are all assembled in one heap in the following speech which a father delivers to his son:

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, 179.525.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, 185.566.

²⁰ See *Xiao jing yin de* 孝經引得, Harvard Yenching Institute Sinological Index Series Supplement Series Supplement no. 23, 1950, section 9. Xun Shuang 荀爽 (128–190) was a prominent admirer of the *Book on Filial Piety*, cf. *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 62.2051 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963) and cf. also Rafe de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms* (23–220 A.D.)

My father's conduct was evil. He resided far away in another place and did not return . . . Alive or dead, it was not known where he was . . . I detest that my father when young did evil. Therefore I warn you. From now on you must be good. You must not, like my father, move far away to another place. So if you think of my sins heaven will have pity on you. Put your heart's energy into being good. Don't go wandering. Put your life in order. Don't take valuables that belong to others. The skills you have are enough for your livelihood. In each case it is appropriate to serve others. Don't be reckless in what you eat and drink. Investigate and discuss what is right and wrong and you will not again experience loss. Keep the words of your father and mother in mind and you may avoid trespassing. When this becomes known up in heaven you are seen as a good person and you can obtain long-lasting life and a longevity that allows you to finish the years destined for you. When you grow up, take this as a warning.²¹

So adherence to filial piety is part of "seeking life," as is other virtuous conduct, but the topic takes up more space than do the other virtues.²²

Those seeking life adhere to ongoing self-cultivation and self-criticism.²³ They are so much the opposite of evil people that they avoid the sight of evil people.²⁴ Seeking life bundles up attitudes and actions that look exemplary to the authors of *wei* material. It is the conduct of believers

(Leiden: Brill, 2007), 927. Xun Shuang argued that for correlative reasons Han dynasty rulers were under particular obligation to respect filial piety. Anne Cheng points to the social and political issues that promoted and accompanied the increasing interest in this virtue during the second century C.E. See Anne Cheng, "Filial Piety with a Vengeance," in *Filial Piety in Chinese Thought and History*, ed. Alan K.C. Chan and Sor-hoon Tan (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 29–43.

²¹ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 200.618–619.

²² Sections 192, 194, 196, and 203 deal mainly with filial piety.

²³ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.524, 528, 536 and 182.550, as quoted at note 38.

²⁴ See *ibid.*, 194.597 and 197.606.

as opposed to that of vulgar people. It is a sign of distinction.²⁵ “*Dao* of seeking life” is to be taught and learned.²⁶ We are told that it is written down at length: “Although the writings are very long, they are long because they teach about life.”²⁷ They are meant for the people and therefore they are written in characters the people are familiar with (*sui su zuo zi* 隨俗作字).²⁸ The message conveyed in these “lengthy writings” is the following:

They teach that what comes first is followed by consequences (*qian hou* 前後) and that one must not lose sight of the root. By remembering the root we arrive at something new and feel ardent love as if we were at the beginning. This is *dao* of life. Men have little or much merit, so what they receive is not the same. They should [all] become aware of warnings of what is not yet known and of aims yet unknown. They might not understand these thoughts but words not yet understood and meaning not yet understood will become clear. This is heaven’s intention.²⁹ This is where *dao* of life coming to the full stems from.³⁰

This is an invitation to become a believer that is phrased in rather complex terms when compared to other parts of the corpus. Once people understand the principle of sequence they will then realize that their fate

²⁵ A person seeking life figures in one of the material’s many hierarchies of believers. He is in the third rank, preceded by the wise and the worthy, see *ibid.*, 190.583.

²⁶ See *ibid.*, 185.563.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, 197.609.

²⁸ See *ibid.*, 190.582. This is indeed the case for *wei* material, as for most other parts of the great-peace corpus. However, the corpus does not seem to contain any other mention of this point.

²⁹ Long, *Taiping jing quanyi*, 1161, argues that the passage from *dang wei* 當為 to *tian yi* 天意也 is corrupt. He attempts to restore it but does not trust this restoration enough to include the passage in the translation. The passage could hint at an unfolding of mysteries that is expected to come with the perusal of the newly published texts.

³⁰ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 190.582.

is linked to their conduct. If they don't, they might feel wronged and by their resentment upset cosmic harmony. They must also aim to return to their root, as advocated by the *Laozi*, as this is where vitality is situated. Moreover, in order to guarantee their own safety they should learn to analyse the present symptoms of future developments. In other words, they are expected to view their own situation as having been shaped by past events and as prefiguring the events of the future. Prognostics can be learned and in this the newly presented texts will be of use.

In the above passage, Luo translates “*dao* of life” as “*dao* of prolonging life,” for good reason.³¹ This aspect is indeed central to the term. “*Dao* of seeking life” as used above and “*dao* of prolonging life” as in the following carry much of the meaning of “*dao* of life.” Perusing the use of these terms we gain an impression of their range. They prescribe actions, attitudes and ways of thinking. Attendance at rituals is included, as documented in the following passage, where the lack of respect to body spirits reveals disrespect for life:

Dao of prolonging life is closely connected with the three spirits [representing the three *qi* of Yin, of Yang and of their harmony].³² When the three *qi* get together they create a human being. When they don't, they spread out and become soil that is compacted in tiles and stones or split apart so that nothing can be found and the three cannot become something that is an entity. The spirits of the three fates are situated next to one's heart.³³ How careful one must be! When someone's body is injured by desires it is exhibited to the masses on

³¹ See Luo, *Taiping jing zhuyi*, 969.

³² For this meaning of *san qi* 三氣 see Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 212.675f., in Celestial Master material, and Barbara Hendrischke, *The Scripture on Great Peace: The Taiping jing and the Beginnings of Daoism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 82f.

³³ Another passage (Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 684, from the *Taiping jing chao*)

the market in town. When is life to come back?³⁴

Here the activity of spirits highlights the existential troubles men face but it also simplifies matters and *dao* of prolonging life becomes submission to the bidding of the body spirits. All a person needs to do is control his desires and he will then not come in conflict with the criminal code. Seeking life is specified as avoiding public execution. For analyzing the social and historical home of the great-peace corpus such passages are relevant. Believers do not face the problem of conflicting demands of loyalty as men of other social strata might do. They face the state and its laws as would an outsider.³⁵

The ways by which men seek life or adhere to *dao* of life are not introduced in any particular order or in specific groups, for instance from a learner's perspective or by judging the efficacy of different methods. From an outside perspective, techniques of breathing and meditation might be seen as deserving special attention as they apparently provide direct help in living longer, even without involving the rewards granted by heaven. From reading the material, one can only conclude that this expectation is false. There are what we may term techniques, for instance

links *san ming* 三命 to the three daily meals, which the authors argue it is actually wiser to do without. What is meant here is what Han dynasty cosmologists came up with, pointing to subsections of *ming* 命. Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127–200), in commenting on a *Li ji* 禮記 (46:1590) passage has “The Controller of Fate checks on the three fates,” which is clarified by Kong Yida 孔穎達 (574–648), who quotes the *Yuan shen qi* 援神契: “Fate has three sections. There is fate that is received as guarantee, fate that is suffered as disgrace, and fate that follows as repayment.” See *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經註疏 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), cf. *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大辭典, 1.208 (Shanghai: Hanyu da cidan chubanshe, 1994).

³⁴ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 185.565.

³⁵ For the authors of great-peace material the market place has a powerful presence; see for instance *ibid.*, 182.550, as quoted below at note 41.

the involvement of the three spirits mentioned above, and that of bent *qi* in the following passage, but they figure among other life-seeking activities without special distinction:

In former times the spirit-like men without physical form learned *dao* of seeking life. Up above they shared the designs of bent *qi*. They always kept in mind the wish for longevity of prolonged vitality and remembered never to forget the intentions of bent *qi*.³⁶

Dao of life is, as we have seen, a way to live longer and is also a way to avoid death. If done intently, seeking life prepares for the great transformation by which practitioners will overcome the limits imposed by mortality:

I have from the first been seeking life while living among the vulgar people. Deep in my heart I have always been intent on the great transformation (*da hua* 大化) and desirous of *dao* of life. I keep far away from the realms of death,³⁷ strive to make vital essence shine (*jing guang* 精光), and wish to let it be in my person so that we will love each other. Then I feel secure. If I don't, I am afraid of being found in the middle of what is not always there to be found.³⁸

³⁶ See *ibid.*, 185.563; for the term “bent *qi*” see Hendrischke, *Scripture on Great Peace*, 210.

³⁷ The realms of death *si bu* 死部 are where the Yellow Springs are located, see Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 188.576. It is here used less literally and refers to lifestyle regulations.

³⁸ See *ibid.*, 198.610. The expression *su sheng* 素生 is corrected to *suo sheng* 索生 that occurs at 179.529, 179.536 and 190.584. The term “great transformation” is used several times in *wei* material, pointing to social and personal transformation as it does here. It also figures in sections 139 and 208 of Celestial Master material but not in earlier sections. The term has a prominent Buddhist presence. It reaches back to Xunzi's 荀子 *Tian lun* 天論 and the *Shu jing*'s 書經 “*Da gao* 大誥,” For the term *jing guang* 精光 see Espeset, *Criminalized Abnormality*,

This passage documents the striking gradualism that prevails in seeking life. The authors seem to offer their methods to a mass audience as well as to religious professionals and promise benefits that reach from avoiding conflict with the worldly authorities to becoming immortal.

The authors of *wei* material see a person's interest in his own life as a reasonable starting point for the discussion of moral action. Their approach is highly integrative and avoids finer distinctions of moral or religious reasoning. From the examples given above it is clear that seeking life causes a person to do what would generally be considered right or, turned around, by doing what is right a person prolongs his life. The great-peace corpus provides little information on the details that regulated a believer's daily routine. We are only told that he must follow the existing rules to the letter.³⁹ However, certain actions are geared directly to respect for life. The following passage contains one example, surrounded by all the other items of a believer's good conduct. The passage is quoted in full as it documents points that are raised elsewhere in this paper:

Only by cultivating one's person and through self-examination can one gain [more] life. As the fate one has received has a time span, how could it be that one would exist on his own? Aware of this, the believer's heart aches and tears drip onto his garments. It does not work for him to be idle. Day after day he worries about the years of his life; he is afraid of not achieving longevity and when he meets them he puts questions to men who have lived long. They talk about loyalty and filial piety, about not forgetting the intention of heaven and earth, of supporting the four seasons in making things grow, and of supporting the five phases in bringing things to fruition. He does not dare destroy anything that is meant to live. His

Moral Etiology, and Redemptive Suffering, 32.

³⁹ One specific rule is mentioned below, note 91.

actions are good and his conduct does not offend others. He does not deceive others or break his word. Being sincere and faithful he dares not increase the load of evil [that has been inherited by humankind].⁴⁰ He gets things done on behalf of everyone and does not dare put relatives at a loss or fail the people of his district. When he goes out he immediately announces that he will be back in time. He has not yet been found lying in a stupor in the marketplace.⁴¹

The prohibition against destroying what is meant to live stems directly from valuing life. This prohibition may include infanticide, which is strictly interdicted in the Celestial Master materials of the great-peace corpus, but what is said here remains unspecific. To call killing and other violence evil⁴² certainly means to value life. What one should do instead of violating things is the following:

Be loving, caring, and considerate; take care not to undertake what should not be done and what is unjust to others. Overpowering others is not right.⁴³

The demand that people avoid causing destruction extends to the natural environment and in particular to the process by which plants grow and their fruit ripens. What is said on this point amounts to a moderate version of fruitarianism:

We drink and eat what comes from cereals. Be careful not to lay fire on

⁴⁰ For a recent analysis of the term *cheng fu* 承負 see Yuet-Keung Lo, “Destiny and Retribution in Early Medieval China,” in *Philosophy and Religion in Early Medieval China*, 322–326. Cf. also my own attempt, “The Concept of Inherited Evil in the *Taiping jing*,” *East Asian History* 2 (1991): 1–30, to argue that this load is seen as one that transcends the framework of families or other small groups and impinges on all human beings, if not all beings, and thus reflects a social universalism that seems characteristic of late Han dynasty times.

⁴¹ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 182.550.

⁴² See *ibid.*, 185.565.

⁴³ See *ibid.*, 188.576.

mountains or crack rocks as this would reach plants and trees and cut up flowers and hurt branches. When you apply a metal knife to fill the market stalls, stem and root both perish. Then the mother [earth] is angry and makes it known to the father [heaven], who will show no concern for a man's years of life. Men must wait for a plant to provide on its own and then take what is withered and fallen off and not long lasting. This is to follow the regular course. Heaven and earth live long. If a man looks for vitality how can he allow his lack of self-restraint to have an impact on later generations? A knowledgeable man may not offend against prohibitions but might in person suffer damage from others. One must allow things to fully mature and not take anything that is young and present it to others for food or their life may be shortened.⁴⁴

Another broadly environmental concern relates to what we could term recycling. Here the authors of *wei* material put traditional considerations to good use for their own purposes of argumentation:

When all is at the right place there is immediately more than enough to eat. New food and old food that has been spread out and become a bit rancid depend on each other. How can we forget this? . . . Heaven makes a family with valuables lend to the poor and thus give away the old to attract the new. So life can be brought to perfection and be transmitted to sons and grandsons.⁴⁵

From the examples we have looked at, men who seek life are morally good. When we read *wei* material from the perspective of social philosophy we must conclude that the authors divide society into good and evil men and that those who seek life as instructed by their teachings

⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, 187.572. Cf. also Yu, *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 423–424. Celestial Master material includes a wide range of environmental concerns, cf. for instance section 61 and Hendrischke, *Scripture on Great Peace*, 258–266.

⁴⁵ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 188.574.

are good. The life-seeker's values and motivation are new but good and evil are for him still largely the same terms that everyone can identify. The authors stress certain aspects of good conduct and add certain details but make no aggressive attempt to redefine goodness in opposition to general understanding.⁴⁶ Seeking life strengthens elements of good conduct. It does not replace them. However, when turned around, the relationship between the two is less simple. The question is whether people can be morally good without seeking life. The answer to this has practical consequences. If they can't, then people who follow a *dao* of life need new social institutions to do so. Historically speaking, this seems to have been the answer and the early Daoist congregations that were set up in the second century C.E. were the consequence. We will get back to this point.

Salvation from Death

This is not the title the authors of *wei* materials gave their project or a term they would use. However, the term covers their message. What the authors call seeking life was for most of their audience aimed at salvation from an early, premature death; it was postponing rather than avoiding it. Only a selected few could expect that by seeking life they would prepare themselves for gaining immortality. Thus the project covers different stages of strengthening life. These stages include, at the top end, the ascent to heaven in broad daylight or liberation by means of the corpse, two departures from earthly life that figure prominently in Daoist hagiographic lore. These stages are accessible only to someone who has left worldly customs behind. The material at hand is interwoven

⁴⁶ Such "general understanding" is reflected in the use of good (*shan* 善) and bad (*e* 惡) in the *Lun yu*, as for instance 13.24, where the good in a village are separated from the bad, or 12.19, where it is proposed that a ruler by being good will rule over people who are good.

with narrations about such a religious professional who will on death be offered a position in the celestial bureaucracy. This figure does not come with a name or other distinctive marks and we cannot be sure that the narrations refer to one and the same person. It is, however, tempting to suppose that this is the case and that we are here introduced to a person's conversion and gradual transformation from human being to spirit.⁴⁷ The narrations carry a strong protreptic message. The central figure suffers from the doubts and fears that readers or listeners will recognize as their own. The figure also moves with great decisiveness and meets with great success, thus suggesting that there is hope. This is juxtaposed with accounts of evil men who turn to unlawful activities, leave their parents without support, have children whom they leave parentless, and die in the wilderness without being entombed.⁴⁸ The great-peace corpus contains no other narrative elements, which is striking when we consider the important role religious traditions tend to attach to concrete figures when introducing values, virtues or exemplary behavior and practices.

The central figure's religious career starts with the realization that he has little life left. Frightened by this thought he turns to heaven, acknowledging and regretting his misdeeds and promising change. We read repeated accounts of his conversion.⁴⁹ Afterwards he conducts himself as someone seeking life:

⁴⁷ For these narrations see sections 179, 180, 182, 183, 184, 197 and 198. For the argumentative aim of this paper it is of little relevance whether the different stages of a religious career that the texts describe focus on one identical figure or on a number of different persons. The authors' interest is in the religious experience of this figure or these figures, not in their individual characteristics. However, when discussing the lack of filial piety a person's family situation is crucial and here the authors tell the story of one person's family life, see Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 200.617–619 and above note 21.

⁴⁸ See sections 194 and 200 and above note 47.

⁴⁹ Cf. above note 17.

Therefore he overcomes his fierceness and turns into a considerate and refined person. He reforms what is evil in him, holds onto all that is good, finds a place for it deep inside and sets it up in the heart. Spirit of the Heart: “Under instructions from heaven's heart I am in charge of this man's heart. Should I fail or omit the slightest event of good or evil, another spirit will appear in no time and take up reporting.” These words make the convert even more distressed. He does not yet know auspicious from inauspicious signs and is therefore in fear of being placed in the realm of the cohorts of evildoers. Day and night he thinks of himself, not knowing where he is to be placed. He therefore does not dare give rise to any intention that is not good: “I beg the host of spirits to be lenient. Allow me to reproach myself. Should I not make use of your warnings I will not reject being punished.”⁵⁰

The spirits who are in charge of observing his conduct acknowledge an unusual seriousness and report to Celestial Lord who, after some hesitation, sends Great Spirit to observe and instruct the convert:

Celestial Lord commissions Great Spirit, saying: “This man is filled with self-reproach. He regrets trespassing. He does not offend prohibitions. Let's be lenient. Should he later on prove to be no good it will not be too late to lay hold of him.” Listening to what the spirits are saying, the convert utters long sighs day and night. He is in fear that his sins have not all been done away with, that he will forever be somewhere not under the impact of *qi* of Great Yang, and find himself placed in the realm of the cohorts of the dead. He is more and more confused about what to do. He has not yet fully understood the instructions he has received. When at leisure he investigates himself and renounces the load of his sins through confession to the spirits of heaven, earth, the four seasons and the five

⁵⁰ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.528.

phases. Celestial Lord listens and asks these spirits to reflect for themselves.⁵¹

Great Spirit is impressed and arranges a meeting between the convert and Celestial Lord. Celestial Lord promises the man a position in the celestial bureaucracy and commands spirits to free him from the load of evil that he has inherited, as have all human beings. Spirits initiate the makeover of his physical appearance. So transformation is under way. The label is celestial transformation (*tian hua* 天化) or great transformation (*da hua*). Spirits also help clear bureaucratic hurdles and provide for the man's earthly livelihood while he awaits his ascent.⁵²

The convert's success is said to result from supreme goodness.⁵³ This becomes manifest in his attitude to Celestial Lord and the spirits under the Lord's control. His attitude is that of an ideal subject who acts as if the maintenance, if not the increase, of inferiority and humility were central to his salvation. His conduct is marked by unending gratitude for the gift of life. As the authors put it, almost jubilantly, a man who enjoys being in view of the sun, the moon, and the stars can only be grateful.⁵⁴ His gratitude is expressed by close attendance to

⁵¹ See *ibid.*, 179.528, following after the passage quoted at note 50. The translation follows Yu, *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 392, who in the last sentence reads *siwei* 思惟 “to reflect” instead of allowing the new sentence to start with *wei*, as do the other editions, based on the consideration that an introductory *wei* is a stylistic feature of *wei* material.

⁵² On this topic see Espeset, “Criminalized Abnormality, Moral Etiology, and Redemptive Suffering.” The topic demands a paper in its own right. The material seems to leave unclear on purpose, as one could argue how much authority or power Celestial Lord has in regard to modifying a believer's predestined fate and the detailed accounting procedures that determine death and afterlife.

⁵³ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 182.549, 182.551 and 182.554: *Taishang shanren* 太上善人 and *Taishang shan zhiren* 太上善之人.

⁵⁴ See *ibid.*, 194.598.

precepts and restrictions. He would never dare act according to his own devices and therefore demands more precepts from heaven, to make sure. He is careful to always assume that he has erred and to confess and deeply regret his trespasses, just in case. He fully accepts the spirit informants who are active in all parts of his person, will never object to the negative reports they might pass on, right or wrong, and will always try to be on good terms with them. He is good. To be evil is, as we have seen, to not accept heaven's bestowal of life and to refuse to offer thanks.⁵⁵

The convert's decisive quality is what we may call his faith. The following passage dwells in detail on the characteristics of this state of mind:

A person who promotes the good (*jin shan* 進善) and seeks life takes joy in responding to heaven's intention. This brings about longevity. Fixing his eyes on the affairs that are run by heaven up above he says: "I am already in a process that heaven will bring to perfection. I have been shown texts (*wen* 文) on the extension of life. There are transformative changes in my physical appearance to bring its vital spiritual energy (*jing shen* 精神) to perfection. There is more brightness around me (*guang jing* 光景) from day to day. I have no time to be idle." This is what a person is like with a heart intent on the good (*you xin zhi shan* 有心志善) who does not forget to repay the mercy he has received from heaven. When would he ever be resentful or idle, even for a moment? He is filled with severe self-reproach and is glad to be human. Leaning on heaven and looking up to it, he can achieve results. He knows heaven's prohibitions. This allows him to keep harm away while quickly attracting the good. He never opposes spirits and other numinous beings. He follows the good when he sees it. He has never shunned self-reproach. When confessing sins he always sticks to what is

⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, 179.525.

right. He keeps heaven's intention in mind and never dares to feel secure or in doubt by his own initiative. [But] keeping in mind to do good and fully comprehending heaven's intention,⁵⁶ he has ample knowledge and there is no room for doubt. By reproaching himself and confessing sins, day after day, he obtains good fortune and full support. He will undergo celestial transformation and then be out of danger.⁵⁷

That is, he will not die. This achievement does not result from any independent action other than complete submission to heaven's will. Salvation from death is the reward for a religious attitude.⁵⁸

The Grateful Believer

Conversion results, as we have seen, from personal insight and decision. It is not caused by group or family pressure. The authors of *wei* materials propose that individuals are in charge of their own course of action and are in fact often characterized by doing their own thing in an aggressive manner:

⁵⁶ With Yu, *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 448, *tian zhi* 天知 is corrected to *zhi tian* 知天.

⁵⁷ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 197.606, following the punctuation of Yu, *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 448, with the exception of finishing the convert's direct speech after *jie shi* 解時. For Yu, this and the next paragraphs are direct speech. Wang suggests correcting the introductory *yue* 曰 to *ri* 日, although the character would be rather out of place. The main problem with Yu's understanding is the use of "qi" 其 in *cheng qi jing shen* 成其精神. It is here translated as if referring back to *xing rong* 形容. There is more confusion in regard to the use of *qi* in this passage, as the *qi* in *si nian qi yi* 思念其意 must be expected to refer to heaven, if we rely on the context; cf. also Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.539, where *qi yi* 其意 must refer to heaven, and where the *Taiping jing chao* reads *tian* instead of *qi*. The Chinese translators follow Wang.

⁵⁸ Yuet-Keung Lo investigates this issue in a wider context, see "Destiny and Retribution in Early Medieval China."

Men in general do things based on plans that have nothing in common. Each person does things in his own interest. By insulting or offending they all want to gain profit from others. The others in turn do not want to provide them with profit.⁵⁹

As it is up to the individual to make plans, he should make plans that agree with seeking life. He should, for instance, discard the advice of soothsayers and instead be guided by belief in heaven's words.⁶⁰ A believer will submit his own will to that of heaven because he is grateful. In this context the term "faith" (*xin* 信) is used frequently, as for instance: "Heaven and earth repay faith by showing their brilliance."⁶¹ However, the term is used in both directions: "Heaven has faith in someone of exceeding goodness and honors him"⁶² or "When would heaven ever have faith in a man with two hearts?"⁶³ Celestial Lord follows heaven's example: "Celestial Lord has faith in a man with heart who promotes the good (*jin shan*)."⁶⁴ The relationship between believer and Celestial Lord resembles that between men in orderly earthly hierarchies. It includes, we imagine, fear when we consider the real-life model but remains within a reliable framework that largely excludes the elements of probing and temptation that in other religious set-ups are meant to prove the depth of a believer's faith.⁶⁵

So to understand the believer's attitude we will not look at his "faith" as such but at how he is expected and intends to prove grateful.

⁵⁹ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.526.

⁶⁰ See *ibid.*, 197.609.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*, 188.576.

⁶² See *ibid.*, 182.555.

⁶³ See *ibid.*, 180.545.

⁶⁴ See *ibid.*, 197.608.

⁶⁵ Celestial Master material has a rare example of spirits probing a person; see *ibid.*, 152.414.

The main term for this is *bao*, which is again used reciprocally, as heaven repays faith (*bao xin* 報信) or responds (*bao ying* 報應).⁶⁶ When we compare the believer with “the vulgar people,” the first point of distinction is that the believer feels indebted. Foolish men do not see things in this way.⁶⁷ Moreover, the believer is under the impression that what he has received is more than he will ever be able to repay, which strengthens his submissiveness and initiates continual self-accusation and confession. As heaven’s bookkeeping is depicted as quite thorough, the believer remains deeply troubled by being unable to create a balance between what he has received and what he can give. This lack of balance is raised often in his dealings with Celestial Lord and Great Spirit. When facing heaven the believer is even more at a loss. To achieve merit is one option, as heaven is expected to repay men with merit.⁶⁸ Merit is created by actions that follow the path of seeking life. To give gifts is not an option. The issue is taken up by the believer when he asks Great Spirit how to thank him and whether precious objects might not be the right thing. They are not.⁶⁹ Great Spirit comes up with two answers. One is

⁶⁶ See *ibid.*, 179.534. What is characteristic of *wei* material is not that attention is paid to the term *bao* but that the reciprocity here envisaged is between men and heaven. For the general understanding of the term *bao* see Yang Lien-sheng, “The Concept of *Pao* as a basis for social relations in China,” in *Chinese Thoughts and Institutions*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 291–309.

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, 179.525.

⁶⁸ See *ibid.*, 187.573.

⁶⁹ See *ibid.*, 179.530–532 and 179.540–542. This issue is taken up at 200.616 (punctuation Yu, *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 455): “Since heaven feeds on *qi* of vital efflorescence (*jing hua* 精華) it is not in its nature to need the things that people lay out when they pay thanks. Heaven values their intention. But they do not remember how celestial *qi* that has been brought to perfection provides them with food. There are some people who know that this is not the way to repay heaven. They undertake the task through their person.”

that the special tuition and guidance the believer enjoys are merited and that Great Spirit is only following the rules when he promotes someone who deserves it. We will get back to this. The other answer is more interesting and is set out within a dialogue between Great Spirit and the believer, his disciple (*sheng* 生):

Disciple: You have opened up and explained a great deal. I am of the same sort as all men. The only apparent difference is that you have made me start thinking. This is mercy that is too heavy to bear. How should I make it up to you?

Great Spirit: Thinking comes from within. You repay me by the eagerness of your thinking.

Disciple: For my part I don't know how to give a present to a superior. Although heaven itself has rare and precious things that are very attractive, I was thinking of presenting you with another thing. Now I hear your injunction that eagerness in thinking is something that can truly be submitted. Words are not just what is exchanged by mouth. They are of value. I am truly thinking about it, day and night, and would not dare be idle.⁷⁰

Here Great Spirit suggests an “eagerness” (*fafen* 發憤) that, according to the *Shi ji*, Confucius claimed as one of his own attributes. In the translation by Gladys and Po-hsiang Yang the passage reads:

Another time the duke of Ye asked Zi Lu his opinion of his master, but Zi Lu did not reply. When Confucius heard this he said, “Why didn't you tell him, ‘He is a man who never wearies of studying the truth, never tires of teaching others, but who in his eagerness forgets his hunger and in his joy forgets his bitter lot, not worrying that old age is creeping on’?”⁷¹

⁷⁰ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.530.

⁷¹ See *Shi ji* 史記, 47.1928 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959); Gladys and Po-hsiang Yang, *Records of the Historian* (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1974), 16.

This points to the complexity of repaying heaven. It must come from the innermost heart, as the authors of *wei* material might put it, and can only be done with the full amount of goodness a person is capable of:

Let us look at someone of great goodness (*qian you da shan* 前有大善). He acts in agreement with heaven's heart and intent and moves close to its side. [Then] evil *qi* does not come up as it does not dare show itself and he prolongs life without ever becoming exhausted. This is mercy that is hard to repay. It is repaid not with rare and precious objects. To cleanse one's heart, return to integrity, be truly faithful and never turn one's back on what one has said is what is meant by repayment. Do you know what is meant by repayment? To know the good as good, to receive faith and be faithful—this is how a man lasts long. Moreover, one must be clear about it, without harboring any doubts. Let us look at a man with faith (*qian you xin ren* 前有信人). His personal longevity is unlimited. He is transformed into a spirit or other numinous being. This is all sufficiently prepared. Honorable service has been rendered. You know about this? Therefore, virtuous men and knowledgeable gentlemen are able to move upwards. Heaven truly loves them. They do not have any reports written on them.⁷²

These passages show that the authors see goodness as situated in attitude rather than in deeds. Here the great tradition of Chinese ethics is at work and there is also a resemblance to the faith that other religious traditions see as the believer's main characteristic. The believer's attitude is said to be the reliable basis for reciprocity. While the material is produced too carelessly to allow one to risk over-interpretation of isolated passages, it is reassuring that the last quotation suggests an analysis of the believer's mindset that roughly agrees with the points raised in this paper: he is of high moral standing and has faith.

⁷² Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.542.

The issue of gratefulness is summarized comprehensively in the following speech which Great Spirit addresses to the believer:

It is not I who has shown mercy. Why should you talk of repayment? You must be clear about what is well known. It is necessary to repay by having faith and to be sincere and sorrowful in one's confessions. That is all. Then the host of spirits will certainly protect you and not permit perverse spirits to become active. Therefore,⁷³ pay serious attention to what you say and put the good ahead in your statements. There must be faith in what is conveyed in writings and nobody must turn their back on what a man like you, who puts his heart into promoting the good (*you xin jin shan* 有心進善), has to say.⁷⁴ Day and night, heaven in person sends spirits who protect you. There should no longer be any doubt.⁷⁵

This speech contains several points that deserve attention. One is that the believer is “with heart” (*you xin* 有心) set on what he is doing, which we will get back to. Another is that he avails himself of knowledge. Knowledge is a well-established component of Chinese moral philosophy and the authors of *wei* materials draw on it without further explanation.⁷⁶ For them, only men who know will understand their obligation to heaven and draw the correct conclusions. Knowledge makes them grateful as well as prescient. Great Spirit puts it in direct terms with the aim of reassuring the believer:

It comes from what you know. Know the good and you will be good (*zhi shan*

⁷³ With Yu, *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 449, *zhi* 致 is corrected to *gu* 故.

⁷⁴ The text reads *shan jin* 善進. This is corrected to *jin shan*, a phrase used frequently in *wei* material.

⁷⁵ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 197.608.

⁷⁶ Cf. Mengzi's cluster *ren* 仁 (benevolence), *yi* 義 (rightness), *li* 禮 (ritual awareness), and *zhi* 智 (knowing) as essential human qualities, in chapters 11 and 13.

xing shan 知善行善), know faith and you will be faithful, know loyalty and you will be loyal, know obedience and you will be obedient, know filial piety and you will be filial. [Then] evil will have no means to come again to the fore.⁷⁷

The believer knows. What he knows may not be known widely but it is not concealed behind a veil of mystery.⁷⁸ The term includes, as we have seen, foreknowledge. From his knowledge of the past and of correlative structures he understands events that are yet to happen.⁷⁹ Knowledge divides the believer from non-believers or, as the authors put it, the vulgar people.

The term “with heart” (*you xin* 有心) occurs frequently in *wei* material but rarely in other parts of the corpus. It can function as a verb as in “with a heart set on the good” (*you xin shan* 有心善) or “with a heart set on promoting the good” (*you xin jin shan* 有心進善)⁸⁰ and adverbially as in “with all his heart he thinks of searching for life” (*you xin nian suo sheng* 有心念索生).⁸¹ The term can also function as an adjective, with “conscientious person” being a reasonable English equivalent for *you xin zhi ren* 有心之人.⁸² The term “with a will” (*you zhi* 有志) is used similarly to *you xin* and with a similar meaning. *Wei* material sections, in particular section 180, use “with heart and will” (*you xin zhi* 有心志) and *you xin* almost as synonyms.⁸³ Whenever the terms

⁷⁷ See *ibid.*, 179.540.

⁷⁸ In other parts of the corpus the Celestial Master insists that he conveys all he knows to his followers and that they should spread the message; see for instance *ibid.*, 62.130.

⁷⁹ See *ibid.*, 180.544, 188.573 and 190.582 as quoted at note 28.

⁸⁰ See *ibid.*, 197.607–608.

⁸¹ See *ibid.*, 179.526 and see Yu, *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 390, for punctuation.

⁸² This points in the direction of *you xin* and *you xin ren* 有心人 as “with a sense of justice” for which *Hanyu da cidian*, 6.1145, refers to Tang dynasty and later sources.

⁸³ See also Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 197.607–608, where *you xin zhi shan zhi ren* 有心志善之人 and *you xin shan zhi ren* 有心善之人 refer to the same person.

occur, heart and will are only depicted as being activated for a good cause. There is no trace of the *Shi jing*'s use of *you xin* for "having something on one's mind."⁸⁴

The term confirms the dominant position that is attributed to the heart in conducting one's life and the running of human affairs.⁸⁵ Within the body, the heart is the place for control, just as the spirit that is situated in the heart reigns over all other body spirits.⁸⁶ The following passage calls the believer to whom we have been introduced the "man with heart." Even Celestial Lord finds this man's self-control praiseworthy:

The man with heart is supreme. He is under all circumstances in control of his intentions ("heart"), is stable and circumspect. It is always his aim to be deemed faithful by those above.⁸⁷

Self-control results in coherence. The conscientious person "does not go back on what he has said."⁸⁸ For him outside and inside, or thinking, speaking, and acting, are all one.⁸⁹ According to Wang Chong such a person should

⁸⁴ James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 4 (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), 342, song 198.

⁸⁵ See I. Robinet, "xin," in F. Pregadio, *The Encyclopedia of Taoism* (London: Routledge, 2008), 1100–1102.

⁸⁶ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 180.545: "It is said that heaven sends Spirit of the Heart to reside in a man's belly. The spirit remains in sight of heaven from the distance and sounds are heard in both directions." The Controller of Fate, when present in a human being, is also situated next to the heart, see *ibid.*, 187.572.

⁸⁷ See *ibid.*, 184.561.

⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, 197.607, where Great Spirit tells the disciple: "Celestial Lord wants to be able to promote the good. Someone with heart, as you are, who does not go back on what he has said (*you xin bu wei yan* 有心不違言) is just such a person."

⁸⁹ See *ibid.*, 179.527, punctuation following Yu, *Taiping jing zhengdu*, 391: "Doing evil puts a load on your own person and on no one else . . . Deeds must follow words. Thoughts must not be separated from the heart. Separate them and you incur a loss that you cannot again make good. Once you belong to the same cohort as do demons, how can you remain vigorous? By thinking of life you obtain it. This is well known."

have social and political impact.⁹⁰ Personal excellence must be translated into position. The authors of *wei* material agree. They depict the man with heart as a teacher who will propagate ritual instructions that matter.⁹¹ They enlarge his social standing by the following catalogue of attractive attributes:

Now the man with heart is supreme. He is knowledgeable in all respects: in what he teaches, in his conduct, in his undertakings, in what he promotes, in his explanations, his words, his achievements, his movements. His heart is not restricted to what is inside. He always thinks about loyalty, faith, piety and sincerity.⁹²

Such a characterization stresses responsibility and consequences. The fact that prescience is one of his attributes—from knowing his own heart he knows heaven's heart—adds to his leadership qualifications.⁹³ When we read on from the passage just quoted we see that this leadership is specialized. The man with heart is what we may define as a religious leader:

He has merit in regard to heaven, accumulates [good] deeds and ties together years of life. He has never yet been found idle or forgotten the mercy that he has received. He always keeps in mind his desire to live. He

⁹⁰ See *Lunheng*, chapter 80 “Ding xian 定賢,” where it is argued that his good heart is the most important characteristic of a man of worth, as translated by A. Forke, *Lunheng*, part 2, 148: 故心善，無不善也；心不善，無能善。心善則能辯然否。然否之義定，心善之效明，雖貧賤困窮，功不成而效不立，猶為賢矣。 A man of worth is capable of leadership.

⁹¹ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 196.606: “This has already been written down in antiquity but offences have not ceased. Before the coffin is entombed there must be no sacrifice. For this reason we should now make the texts public and rely on the man with heart to explain their meaning in writing. There must be no doubt in regard to what the writings say.”

⁹² See *ibid.*, 184.559.

⁹³ See *ibid.*, 197.608: “Being with heart you naturally understand what Celestial Lord intends (*xin yi* 心意).”

has obtained assistance from all high-ranking spirits and does not dare put the lot he has received on display. His heart is always perturbed. Never is he self-satisfied.⁹⁴

“With heart” is the label that points to the religious professional:

When we look at a man with heart he does not pay attention to vulgar affairs. It is his desire to get on with seeking life. Therefore, his heart brings forth only what spirits have announced. A man with heart and will (*xin zhi* 心志) can discuss matters with assistant officers.⁹⁵ They see in him integrity and faith. A man without heart and will pays attention to popular opinion: one must eat and search for profit; one dresses to keep warm and takes meals to be full; polite observances and expenses come in the wake of each other; being in service one becomes impoverished and exhausted. Considering himself to be eminent and enlightened, he thinks nothing of heaven’s innermost heart [“belly and heart”]. His conduct is far from being pure and simple, and yet he wants to seek *dao* and aims to live long. This is exactly why he will not get what he seeks. The crimes are quite heavy and there is hardly any chance of forgiveness. This is known to you, isn’t it?⁹⁶

The authors do not equip the conscientious person with specific worldly glory. However, in the celestial bureaucracy he is in charge of files that list what heaven has given and has received in return.⁹⁷ This task allows the man with heart to have an impact on the afterlife of others. He is, one could put it, thus positioned between heaven and humankind, although the

⁹⁴ See *ibid.*, 184.559, following the passage quoted at note 92.

⁹⁵ The “assistant officer” *cong shi* 從事 was head of a provincial governor’s locally recruited team, see de Crespigny, *A Biographical Dictionary of Later Han to the Three Kingdoms*, 1228.

⁹⁶ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 180.545f.

⁹⁷ See *ibid.*, 179.533.

authors do not seem to make much of this.

In the following passage the authors take a more analytical approach and explain in more detail how the success of the man with heart stems from characteristic qualities of the heart as being man's central organ. Social role and moral virtue are said to be functions of the heart, for epistemological reasons. This is explained by Great Spirit in an address to the believer:

Being a man with heart you are supreme, and yet you must conduct yourself properly. You seek to obtain heaven's weighty precepts, injunctions and prohibitions. Being yourself knowledgeable, you basically understand things clearly on your own.⁹⁸ You can analyze the principle. Why should we teach you precepts? Make use of your heart to aim at the heart. There is indeed no ego involved in this. From what is up above you prognosticate what [will take place] down below. In all affairs you yourself know what dominates them. Now a man with heart ranks supreme, is a close associate of heaven, and is trusted by heaven's spirits. But you must control your heart's intentions and remain fearful that you may forget something. As for the rest, work hard to spread widely what you know in your heart and don't forget what you have said. A knowledgeable man may have undertaken a lot of analysis but be in fear that at times it is not as he has said. Why should he be in doubt about being frank? If such a man has heart he thinks about his faults. Every day he keeps in mind what comes before and what follows afterwards. Longevity develops from within the self, in correspondence with the heart of Celestial Lord. The rest is just a few precepts.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ See Liu Zuguo 劉祖國, "Taiping jing suo jian Dong Han shiqi de xinci xinyi" 太平經所見東漢時期的新詞新義, *Shangqiu shifan xueyuan xuebao* 商丘師範學院學報 24.8 (2008): 111–114 for the use of *liao* in *liao xiao* 了曉.

⁹⁹ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 184.560–561.

This sums it up: the believer's understanding is comprehensive and he spreads his insights. This, however, does not make him independent or self-assured. The heart is a multilateral tool of communication. By activating it the believer can reach out to others and get his point across. However, this point must not originate with him. The heart is also the receptacle for heaven's will and by activating it in this respect the believer avoids the danger of self-reliance.

The authors see self-reliance as evil. The reason they give for this is that men are mortal and therefore not to be relied on: "As the life (*ming*) that we have received has a time span how could it be that we exist on our own?"¹⁰⁰ Self-reliance is at odds with the submissiveness that characterizes the believer. Moreover, it can help to encourage resentment, which is another serious evil:

A man [without faith] has no use for what other people say. Instead, he looks with evil intention upon them. He has no use for remonstrations but intends to rely on himself. Such a man has no knowledge more profound than the raising of animals. If this is the case, how can he arrive at reproaching himself for the load of his sins? Thinking day and night of the doings of others, he does not remove the load that he has amassed by his conduct. So what is there for him to resent and complain about? In person he is depraved indeed, he does not reckon up his own faults, acts recklessly and not as he should, shows disrespect for the great instructions and relies instead on his own counsel. He is the one who is shortening his life. What has he to resent and complain about?¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ See *ibid.*, 182.550, and compare the full quotation at note 41. The disciple also says of himself that he is in need of spirits to advise him on how to interpret heaven's will, see *ibid.*, 184.560. This attitude may stem from his modesty as it is said elsewhere that his heart is in direct contact with that of heaven.

¹⁰¹ See *ibid.*, 182.550.

Since all misfortune is heaven-sent punishment, it is always deserved and must be accepted.¹⁰² Strict commands to avoid resentment run through all layers of the great-peace corpus. Typically, Celestial Master passages warn against creating situations in which someone might feel resentment.¹⁰³ In *wei* material the believer is simply told that he must never feel resentment and must in particular refrain from accusations against heaven, spirits, or worldly authority.¹⁰⁴ When things go wrong he has no other choice but to confess wrongdoing, regret it, and continue to accuse himself, in despair and in panic. The authors of *wei* material praise his fearful attitude, his constant worries and even his lack of sleep and ease.

The believer's virtues are confirmed when we see him in action. He has little interaction with human beings since gratefulness is due to heaven rather than men. Anxiety and hope are directed towards Celestial Lord, Great Spirit, the Spirit of the Heart, and officials in the celestial bureaucracy. They are his partners in seeking life. Celestial Lord is an almost ideal ruler. He is benevolent, responsible, never capricious and allows Great Spirit to engage him in rather open discussions which can make the Lord change his mind. Great Spirit is Celestial Lord's assistant and as such has the qualities of an excellent official. The believer is under his protection and receives reassurance:

Don't worry about not obtaining the longevity that is granted by heaven. It

¹⁰² This point is important enough to be approached often and from different angles. The following passage is quite matter of fact: "Good and evil conduct is what a man arrives at on his own. How can he resent being accused of it?" See *ibid.*, 194.598.

¹⁰³ See Hendrischke, *Scripture on Great Peace*, 53.

¹⁰⁴ That feeling wronged can cause problems is well documented in the provisions Daoist ritual has for dealing with such feelings, cf. P. Katz, *Divine Justice. Religion and the Development of Chinese Legal Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009), 82–104.

is not only decided by me, Great Spirit. The host of spirits say it is good. If it is a man with heart, the host of spirits are concerned and are intent on finishing it all in detail, with no other thought.¹⁰⁵

His spirit contacts treat the believer as one of their own, share information with him, exchange precious objects, and give advice. The adept makes sure to converse with senior figures among them, for instance section heads, in order to learn how to express himself correctly.¹⁰⁶ The texts report a number of conversations in direct speech, most of them with the believer as listener or discussant. In other words, the relationship between the believer and his spirit contacts follows patterns that are well established in the realms of political administration and education.

There is one point in the believer's career where his future is at risk, through no fault of his own. We are told that he has been promised by Celestial Lord that he will be saved from death in a most spectacular way and will ascend to heaven in broad daylight. But how can this be, he wonders, considering the stuff his body is made of? The spirits assure him that special dietary instructions, therapeutic exercise and other practical help will be at his service. A more fundamental point is his share in *cheng fu*, that is, in the evil humankind has created and is creating.¹⁰⁷ This amounts to a load that is inherited and passed on. How can the believer rise to heaven carrying such a load? Celestial Lord declares that due to the believer's personal merit the load is being lifted

¹⁰⁵ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 197.609. For more details on dealings between Celestial Lord and his subordinates see Espeset, "Criminalized Abnormality, Moral Etiology, and Redemptive Suffering." Great Spirit is an experienced teacher, see Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.530.

¹⁰⁶ See Wang, *Taiping jing hejiao*, 179.524. It is a privilege for spirits to speak to the believer directly rather than make use of writing (*shen wen* 神文), see *ibid.*, 179.533.

¹⁰⁷ See above note 40.

and that spirits have been instructed to do so. So, full of hope, the believer prepares himself for ascension. The process takes a few years. Closer to the day of his departure the problem of *cheng fu* pops up again as minor spirits have not done what they were told to do. Great Spirit reports to Celestial Lord:

This man is more and more distressed and exhausted and afraid that he will not maintain himself. He understands that it was Celestial Lord's intention to have something discarded that has not yet been discarded. As this is not yet discarded the man is afraid that things are not as it was said they would be.¹⁰⁸

This makes the superhuman world look much like the human world, only the stakes are different. We have seen that the believer's new religious persona retains certain virtues that moral philosophy has set up for a good person.¹⁰⁹ He may be oriented towards new values and cultivate new attitudes but his conduct is still recognisably good. There is a similar resemblance between the world he leaves behind and the new world of spirits he is about to enter.

Conclusions

This paper has presented values, virtues, beliefs and moral prescriptions

¹⁰⁸ See *ibid.*, 179.534.

¹⁰⁹ The good person envisaged in *wei* material has, for instance, important points in common with the person whom Wang Fu 王符 (fl. 150 C.E.) would recommend for government service. Wang Fu starts his discussion of this issue by quoting the *Zhuangzi* and mentions "self-cultivation" *xiu shen* 脩身 and "prudent conduct" *sheng xing* 慎行 as well as "to love the good and loathe the evil" *hao shan ji'e* 好善嫉惡, see *Qian fu lun* 潛夫論, chapter 14, "Shi gong 實貢," as translated by M.J. Pearson, *Wang Fu and the Comments of a Recluse* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1989), 127.

that are seen to differ in weight according to the context of the argument presented. Religious devotion and respect for social obligations, the aim of personal salvation, and an interest in society's well-being all play a role. The value of life and the command to be grateful prevail, as does the belief in heaven. This creates a discourse where standard moral virtues, like the habitual practice of self-cultivation, remain in place as a means to intensify the service the believer feels he owes heaven. Traditional virtues are not seen to be in conflict with a theist orientation, as heaven is said to cherish and expect them in human beings. The believer is someone who would—out of fear of heaven and in hope of personal immortality—be benevolent, filial, righteous, courteous and obedient. To compare the authors of *wei* material, who, judging from their style of writing, came from the fringes of Chinese culture, with early Christian thinkers is even more risky than are most comparisons but the two share a set of issues each had to resolve and both arrived at similar solutions, using similar methods. The religious practitioners did not aggressively oppose prevailing values, accepted virtues and established norms. They integrated many of them and added to their attractiveness, they would argue, by promising new rewards to those who respected them. However, the highest rewards were reserved for the believer. His belief in heaven would initiate a process of personal transformation that would lead to salvation from death. In order to prove their point the authors of *wei* material use traditional methods of philosophical argumentation, for instance correlative thinking, dialogues and reference to the past and to personal experience. They also use revelations. The many dialogues, despite their worldly style, must be seen as belonging here since spirits are the main participants in them.

The authors of *wei* material develop coherent moral guidelines. The result is a distinct set of beliefs with detailed suggestions for a personal lifestyle and some suggestions for social organization. These beliefs

include a strong salvific promise. They are also comprehensive, impinging on personal, social, and political life worlds. They could well be the basis for the formation of actual congregations of believers. However, the material at hand is not written on this basis. The authors do not defend a new religion, they only suggest alternative ways of thinking.¹¹⁰ They frequently warn against ignorance (*yu* 愚) and occasionally against charlatans who mislead men. These admonitions are directed against competitors in the growing world of alternative beliefs, practices and movements rather than against the tradition of moral philosophy. The authors hardly ever mention elements of standard education and refrain from bringing up any direct objections to their message. This precludes the chance to hear from them whether they consider that without belief in heaven a person can actually be called good.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ For the formation of early religious congregations, see T. Kleeman, “Authority and Discipline in the Early Daoist Church,” *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* 2 (2010): 37–64.

¹¹¹ Cf. D. Stephen Long, *Christian Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 19–23.

《太平經》的宗教倫理：求生

芭芭拉·亨德施克

摘要

本論文的研究對象是《太平經》中的部分經卷，其中沒有提到「天師」而通常以「惟」字開頭，筆者將稱之為「惟」文本 (wei material)，並將它們當作一個連貫的文本層加以考察。目前為止，它們很少受到學術界的關注。在此，筆者試圖從中提煉出一些觀念和術語，以展現這個文本層哲學思想的特點，其中所蘊含的一套價值觀和道德準則雖然零散卻頗具特色。《太平經》的佚名作者極其看重「生命」，並宣稱追求生存是人類最重要的活動，包括竟其天年、延命增壽，甚至達到超越肉體生命的界限，從死亡中解脫。因為天定人年命，因此求生也包含了對上天賜予生命的感恩。人可以通過宗教儀式將其謝意訴諸於文字，同時遵守道德行為準則，而這些行為準則正是本文的討論重點，它們與當時已有的倫理準則是相通的而不是對立的。順天而行之人即是善的，他們自律、慎重、有合作精神、孝順、忠誠及順從，還有「至誠」，並禁止自恃和怨恨。《太平經》的作者認為追求長生可以為社會及個人帶來益處，信徒出於對死亡與天怒的畏懼，意識到遵守道德規範的重要性，從而有助於社會的安定與和平。本文以描述性為主，大量利用「惟」文本中的敘述性成分，其中描寫了真人從皈依至白日飛升為天官的經過，這些敘述以真人、神人、天君之間的會話形式進行。

關鍵詞：《太平經》、宗教倫理、求生、至誠之人、天君