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PROBLEMS OF COGNITION AND DEFINITION OF TAO

*"The path that can be traversed
is not a permanent Path"*

by Tao Te Ching List of literature

Annotation. Justice in society depends on a number of factors, including: the social system, the class composition of society, the level of economic development, government policy, historical and cultural traditions, demographic situation, etc. As society develops, the meaning and scope of the concept of justice develops, since each historical period gives it its own content. Man has been and remains a social being, continuing to build his special relationship with nature, its "gift powers", which underlies the development of the productive forces of society. However, predatory attitude towards nature is not acceptable, so predatory attitude towards other members of the human community. Both nature and society itself, with its social institutions, must be mutually inclusive. In Taoism, "action" is a form of resolving contradictions in society, as well as exacerbating them. The key point is the correspondence of the essence of the "deed" to the canons of Taoism, i.e., the order of nature and society.

Keywords: Taoism, Confucianism, law of nature, order of nature, deed, non-deed, justice, canons of Taoism

In the coordinate system of the Chinese ethnic group, a concept is a reference point, thanks to which abstract, initially ambiguous information is transformed into a completely concrete one. This forms such an epistemological and linguistic situation where the problem is dictated by conclusions based on a methodological analysis of such phenomena, which partly lie in mythology,

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therefore, they cannot be fully understood and investigated, because they are embodiments of mythologies. The time of the emergence of the rudiments of the Tao teaching is characterized as the time when China entered a dark era in its history – the era of the Warring States (Zhan-kuo). It was the time of the collapse of the Jin kingdom, which drew a line under the era of "Spring and Autumn" glorified by Confucius.

At this time of the end of the bloody Zhan Guo era, classical Chinese philosophy flourished, many flowers bloomed, and the struggle of the "hundred schools" broke out. Confucianism was the first to take shape, the infancy of which passed even before the beginning of the period of the Warring States. Then there were coins that taught about universal love and peace, legalists who advocate the omnipotence of the sovereign, based on the inviolability of draconian laws, natural philosophers who preach the doctrine of positive and negative forces (yin-yang) and the five primary elements, and other schools. One of them, and a very influential one, was Taoism (tao jia).

Taoism, which arose at this time, corresponds to the Chinese «Tao Jiao», which can be understood as the «Teaching of the Way.» In the future, this teaching will become an essential element of the native Chinese culture, not just Taoism. The term «Taoism» itself is a Latinized expression of the Chinese «tao te Jiang».

Chinese practice itself ambiguously attributed Taoism to a specific philosophical and religious teaching. For example, in the book «Mo Tzu», the term «tao jiao» was understood as Confucianism, and the «Tao» itself was interpreted as a Path of moral improvement and the principles of the rule of ancient wise sovereigns. In addition, the word "Taoism" is not used as a self-designation in any of the ancient Taoist texts and appears for the first time in the ancient Chinese historians Sima Tan, Sima Qian and Ban Gu as a designation of a bibliographic heading in their historical writings.²

² Ли Е.В. Нравственно-этические учения даосизма и конфуцианства // Oriental renaissance: Innovative, educational, natural and social sciences. 2022. № 26. С. 289-292.

However, the texts of the adherents of the Tao doctrine remained unknown for a long time until the early Middle Ages. The reason for this may lie in the fact that these texts belonging to Taoist practice were considered as strictly inaccessible to the uninitiated (profane), as esoteric, intended for the sophisticated intellectual elite due to the complexity of both presentation and understanding. Some excerpts from the Ten Questions should be given as an example:

«One who knows how to properly organize the pneumatic qi and has mastered the seed-energy (jing) attains the concentration of the unpredictable in himself, his seed is energy and spirit they overflow with vitality like a spring of water; he controls the sweet dew (gan lu) so that it gathers in his body; he drinks from the jasper spring and absorbs the spiritualized wine of the immortals into himself in order to gain permanence; he moves away from evil and turns good into his habit, and therefore his spirit takes proper shape. When practicing the way of controlling the pneuma, it is necessary to direct it to the extremities, then the seed-energy will not have any damage. Both in the upper and lower parts of the body, the seed—energy circulates everywhere.»³

«Filled with life, people above comprehend the principles of Heaven, below contemplate the norms of the Earth. Those endowed with abilities will certainly become inspired, perfecting the art of prolonging life. Therefore, they will be able to achieve liberation from their bodily form. Those who see the Great Tao are the Way. they soar to sky-high heights, reaching the Jasper City of the immortals above, spreading like water into the far distance, like a dragon they soar upward, they are lightning-instantaneous, but their powers are inexhaustible.... Wu Cheng-ziyi... was just such an immortal; Wu Cheng Tzu fully corresponded to the four seasons in his life, Heaven and Earth in their constancy served as his measure, Wu Cheng Tzu existed by merging his life and the transformation of the yin-yang

³ Needham J. Historian of Science as Ecumenical Man: A Meditation in the Shingon Temple of Kongosamai-in 金剛三昧院 on Koyasan // Chinese Science: Exploration of an Ancient Tradition. Cambridge, Mass., 1973.

forces. Having learned the immortality of yin-yang, Wu Cheng-tzu became just as eternal, and all men who have learned the Tao are like that too.»⁴

«If you do breathing exercises in the morning, both the pneuma and the body will strengthen, the seed and the pneuma will become like water that turns into ice, thus strengthening, and the years of life will last for a long time. The spirit will be in inner harmony with the body, the intelligent and animal souls of Hun yi will regally shine, the five receptacles will become strong and healthy, the face will become like jade and luminous, longevity will become the same as that of the sun and moon, and man will be endowed with the most perfect pneuma of Heaven and Earth.»

First, Taoist philosophical texts proclaim Tao, the Path, to be the ultimate foundation and supreme law of the universe. To answer the specific question: «What is Tao?» it is better to turn to the source itself – the author of the Tao Te Ching: «The knower does not speak, the speaker does not know.» Moreover, the author of Lao Tzu himself claims that this principle cannot be called at all, and he only «makes an effort» to call it Tao, that is, the Way.

This mysterious (xuan, miao) primordial principle of the world is at the same time the principle or pattern of both the whole world and each of its elements individually.

The Tao itself follows only its own nature, it is «such in itself» (tzu zhan), that is, it is self-natural and spontaneous. If we talk about human practice in its desire to follow the Tao, then it should be noted that Humanity has retreated from the Tao and, having lost the simplicity and naturalness of the true Path, has become carried away by false tricks and pseudo-scientific knowledge. The perfect sage follows the principle of «non-action", that is, non-violation of the natural order of existence and non-interference in the nature of things. Like Tao, it is self-natural and follows its own nature, not external and false conventions. Like a baby, he returns to the bosom of the Tao, the Great Mother of Heaven, and attains

⁴ Needham J. A Biologist's View of Whitehead's Philosophy // The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Ed. P. A. Schilpp. – Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1941. P. 241–271.

perfection and immortality. True government is based on simplicity and artlessness. It is necessary to abandon the cunning of false sages and return to unity with nature, discarding all the tricks of civilization, including writing, and the complexities of government.⁵

The perfect sage rules through «non-action,» and his subjects only know of his existence, but nothing more. Good and evil, beautiful and ugly, sleep and wakefulness, life and death are just conditional and relative concepts. True reality is one, integral and «holographic»: everything is present in everything, every part contains the whole and everything passes into everything.

The saint strives for complete unity, "one-bodiedness" with this whole and becomes divine and spiritualized — the whole world is his body, all the forces of the Universe are his chariots, he will not perish either when the whole world melts, or when the waves of the universal flood engulf the whole earth. Such a wise man is worth with one foot in the world of absence and silence of the super—existent Tao, and the other in the world of change and transformation. Reading these fragments gives some reason to believe that Taoism should be attributed to an extremely abstract philosophical and religious teaching, riddled with internal formal and logical contradictions. Therefore, it is not by chance that the most «dark» side of philosophical thought in China continued to remain in the works of Sinologists and Taoists. Nevertheless, if we proceed from the principles and canons of Taoism, then diseases, injustices, and imbalances in the distribution of benefits arise precisely from a departure in activity from the canons of Tao. As a result, the requirements of the canons of Taoism and «deed» should be understood as a dialectical substantive contradiction, which is the source and driving force of the development of man, society in their unity in nature and the human community. At the same time, «action» is a form of resolving a contradiction, removing its internal tension, which in fact will mean greater harmonization of the relationship

⁵ Needham J. A Biologist's View of Whitehead's Philosophy // The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Ed. P. A. Schilpp. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1941; Blue G. Joseph Needham's Contribution to the History of Science and Technology in China // United Nations University. — <http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu01se/uu01se0u.htm>. — 01.11.2006

between man, society and nature, the inclusion of man in the natural and social environment. As a result, Taoism as a teaching does not contradict the rules of formal logic.

If the foundation is true (the position of the canons), then the consequence is true, i.e. the result of human practice («deed»). If the effect of conditional categorical judgments is denied, then the basis itself is denied. But the principles and canons here are taken as the initial ones, assuming at the same time their truth. Therefore, it follows that human practice has violated the very canons of Taoism. As a result, the «deed», in accordance with the provisions of the canons, was transformed into an «act» that did not correspond to nature and the community. As a result, the requirements of the canons of Taoism and «deed» should be understood as a dialectical substantive contradiction that is the source and driving force of human development, society in their unity with nature and the human community. As a result, Taoism as a doctrine does not contradict the rules of formal logic, which follows from the basic postulate of formal (Aristotelian) logic.

If the foundation is true (the position of the canons), then the consequence is true, i.e. the result of human practice (deed). If the effect of conditional categorical judgments is denied, then the basis itself is denied. But the principles and canons here are taken as the initial ones, assuming at the same time their truth. Therefore, it follows that human practice has violated the very canons of Taoism. As a result, the «deed», in accordance with the provisions of the canons of the Tao, was transformed into an «act» that did not correspond to nature and the community.

In this case, Taoism appears as a logically rigorous teaching devoid of formal and logical contradictions, i.e., a strict scientific teaching. The conclusions that were previously drawn from the works of Taoists, from the teachings of the Tao te Ching, contradicted these canons, which undermined the theoretical value of the entire teaching of Taoism. and at the same time the practical value of the teachings of Taoism. For the first time, the dissertation study concludes that the principles of Taoism do not contradict the conclusions based on them. The whole theory takes on the character of a logically coherent holistic teaching, since Taoism

proceeds from the principles that underlie all subsequent conclusions. This is a consequence of the requirement to restore harmony between man and nature, man to other members of the community regarding humanization, justice in this case is fundamentally different from «non-action» (wu-wei), therefore it cannot be identified with «institutional crutches», which should be disposed of, since they do not follow from the very essence. These deviations, or «crutches,» become reality because people are engaged in their practical and spiritual activities, they are moving away from the Tao. ⁶

After all, it is obvious that if people did not interfere with nature, would not violate social harmony, i.e. would implement the principle of «non-action», then they would not harm either nature or the very social order of society. As a result, questions arise about the formulation of the most crucial concept of «non-action.» Man will always live in unity with nature and at the expense of nature, without disturbing its natural state or exploiting it, considering its natural gifts solely as a means of reproducing his own life. In this case, Nature continues to remain solely as a means, but not as an end and a means at the same time. Man has been and remains a social being, continuing to build his special relationship with nature, its «gift powers», which underlies the development of the productive forces of society. However, predatory attitude towards nature is not acceptable, so predatory attitude towards other members of the human community. Both nature and society itself, with its social institutions, must be mutually inclusive, which, according to Joseph Needham's theory, forms a new organic unity, or «organicity.»

Needham argues that human progress should be defined within the limits of cosmological, organic, and social development. It is necessary to accept as the law of existence "the principle of absolute equality and brotherhood, the search for justice everywhere for all human needs. Thus, J. In implementing the «organismic»

⁶ Needham J. A Biologist's View of Whitehead's Philosophy // The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. Ed. P. A. Schilpp. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1941; Needham J. (et al). Science and Civilisation in China. Volume 2. History of Scientific Thought. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956. – P. 302, 498; Needham J. Science and China's Influence on the World // Needham J. The Grand Titration: Science and Society in East and West. – London: Allen & Unwin, 1969.

approach in humanitarian research, Needham removes in a certain way the separation of the sciences and the spirit and the sciences of nature, thereby contradicting the dominant positivist ideas at that time. As a researcher of organic growth processes, Needham understood that the language of organization was superior to the restless debates between mechanists and vitalists. The inclusion of social and political institutions into an integral natural and social organism allowed J. Needham states that «the well-known laws of the transition from quantity to quality, the unity of opposites, and the negation of negation have all become general principles of scientific thought.» The laws of nature should be regarded as the basis for the evolutionary theory of nature, and his dialectical ideas correspond to the fact that «nature is full of obvious contradictory antagonisms and differences that are verified at a higher organizational level, which rather corresponds to the description of the future world order, using the concept of «world cooperative commonwealth». This leads to a conclusion about the positive aspects of Chinese civilization and its advantages over Western civilization. Chinese civilization is associated with a wise synthesis based on the ideological power of Confucian governance, and is an example of rationality, humanity, flexibility, tolerance, and strives for common well-being. Europe, on the other hand, is radically dysfunctional, suffering from split personality, schizophrenia of the soul, divided mind, spiritual pride, irrationality, ambivalence, violence, and an endless puberty of civilization. The research of J. According to Needham and his collaborators on science and civilization in China, this is not only a scientific project, but a foundation for combating a specific type of chauvinism, which is associated with the view that scientific rationality and technological development are the prerogatives of Western civilization. All this provides sufficient grounds for clarifying some of the key provisions of Taoism and the consequences that follow from them. Thus, it has been revealed that the principle of justice only outwardly contradicts the canons, although such a contradiction is not found in Confucianism. Moreover, the term «tao» itself should be left untranslated. The ancient grapheme consists of the elements «head» and «movement» and, accordingly, means «path».

But the concept of «tao» early became a technical term with philosophical and supernatural meanings. Needham suggests a way out in the introduction of this term by transliteration into European philosophical discourse. This actually means that the concept of «tao» should be understood as the order of nature. «... *for the Taoists, the Tao or Path was not the correct way of life within human society that the universe followed; in other words, the Order of Nature. The reasonableness of this scientific innovation is seen in the fact that the expression Order of Nature is a natural order, a routine order according to which events, actions, etc. occur.*»⁷

Needham correctly departs from the expression Law of Nature, since law is what prescribes or regulates, and order is what what is immanent in nature, which really successfully emphasizes the Taoist understanding of Tao as naturalness (自然, Tzu ran is a concept correlated with tao, an attribute of tao. Nevertheless, the question of the possibility of applying the concepts of order or law to the concept of tao remains open.⁸

The above allows us to conclude:

1. The traditional ancient Chinese understanding of justice, based on the Confucian understanding of collectivist values, contradicts the canons of Taoism. And if in the concept of Confucianism justice was inclusive in social life, then in Taoism justice was already considered as an "institutional crutch", which resulted from a deviation in the actions of a person, a community from the Tao. Therefore, the Latin expressions «*Rerum cognoscere causas*» (*to know the causes of things - Latin*) and «*Agere secundum naturam*» (*to act in accordance with nature – Latin*) should be understood as a natural rule of the essential nature of Taoism.

2. Since the social problems of the community arose as a result of «acts» (wei) that did not harmonize with nature, resulting in social problems, natural disasters that must be eliminated, this can be achieved by an «act» that neutralizes

⁷ Needham J. (et al). Science and Civilisation in China. Volume 2. History of Scientific Thought. – Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956.

⁸⁸ Киктенко В.А. Историко-философская концепция Джозефа Нидэма : китайская наука и цивилизация : (филос. анализ теорет. подходов) / В. А. Киктенко ; НАН Украины, Ин-т востоковедения им. А. Крымского. К., 2008. С. 125.

previously accumulated contradictions, being an act that is inclusive of nature and human inclusive the community. Thus, an «act» that conforms to the canons of Taoism in accordance with its modern understanding and interpretation becomes a form of resolving contradictions in society, i.e. the process of self-movement, the realization of dialectical contradictions.

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