

## Chih-i's Meditation on Evil

NEAL DONNER

T'ien-t'ai Chih-i (538-597) is best known as the founder of the T'ien-t'ai school. He is also famous for his classification of Buddhist doctrines in order of profundity and manner of exposition—a method for bringing order into the vast collection of Buddhist scriptures which had been translated into Chinese in the previous four hundred years. Aside from his enormously influential doctrinal works, however, he was the first Chinese to produce extensive treatises on meditation, thus ending the Chinese dependence on translations of Indian meditation manuals. The Indian manuals were all from the Hīnayāna branch of Buddhism, with the result that their theoretical foundations were not in agreement with Chinese (or any) Mahāyāna. Chih-i's meditation treatises broke new ground by providing the Buddhist community in his own culture with expositions of meditative techniques that were firmly grounded in Mahāyāna thought. He also structured and organized the different methods far more comprehensively than had yet been done, so that in the realms of both theory and practice he became the great systematizer of Chinese Buddhism, a rôle which has been compared to that of Aristotle in Greek philosophy or Aquinas in Christian thought.

The meditation on evil is one of several types of meditation expounded in the *Mo-ho Chih-kuan* (Great Calming and Contemplation),<sup>1</sup> which is the greatest work of Chih-i and his definitive statement on Mahāyāna "perfect and sudden" meditation. Though the great majority of the meditation methods in this work are founded on Chinese versions of Indian Buddhist scriptures (Hīnayāna meditation manuals, the *Great Treatise on the Perfection of Wisdom*,<sup>2</sup> the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sutra*,

and others), the systematization and interpretation of them according to Mahāyāna principles of wisdom was Chih-i's own creative contribution to the development of Buddhism. As a consequence, this text became the standard meditation treatise for the T'ien-T'ai school of Buddhism in China as well as the Tendai school in Japan.

From the Mahāyāna point of view, Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna differ in their approach to meditation because the Hīnayānists drew an ontological distinction between (1) the realm of suffering, or ordinary phenomenal life (samsara), and (2) the realm of enlightenment, mystical realization, or absolute reality (nirvana); whereas Mahāyāna understood the two as ontologically identical, teaching that absolute reality is present and attainable in every aspect of one's daily existence. Hence Mahāyānists refer to Hīnayāna as dualistic (but not in the sense of the mind-body dualism of Sāṅkhya or Cartesian philosophy) and consider themselves to be monistic. The consequence for meditation is that while the Hīnayāna response to the impure factors of the world—sensuality, sickness, death, impermanence—is to cultivate aversion to them, Mahāyāna meditation attempts to “see through” the evil and the impure to discern its inherent (though mind-obscured) perfection.

The *Mo-ho Chih-kuan* is theoretically made up of ten chapters, but actually it contains only seven.<sup>3</sup> The first chapter is presented as an abbreviated version of the projected ten chapters. The systematization of meditation methods which it employs differs from the plan of the later chapters, however, as it is based on the four bodily positions to be assumed during meditation: (1) sitting, (2) standing or walking, (3) alternating between the two, and (4) ad libitum. By comparison, the main body of the text is not based on these four *samādhis* but on ten mental states or attitudes (“modes”) as counterposed to ten objects of contemplation (making one hundred subject-object relationships, the majority of which are discussed in detail).<sup>4</sup>

The meditation on evil is not found in the later chapters but only in the opening synopsis. Specifically, it is included in the fourth or ad libitum *samādhi*, along with meditation on the good and meditation on what is neither good nor evil. The fourth *samādhi* or program of religious practice is usually called the “neither-walking-nor-sitting *samādhi*” to distinguish it from the first three: the “constantly sitting *samādhi*,” the “constantly walking *samādhi*,” and the “half-walking-half-sitting *samādhi*” (that is, alternating between walking and sitting). It goes by two other names: the “*samādhi* of following one's own thought” (*sui tzu-i san-mei*, also understood as meaning “optional,” “discretionary,” or “ad libitum”) and the “*samādhi* of awakening to the nature of thought” (*chüeh-i san-mei*). Unlike the other three methods, this *samādhi* is practicable

even outside the meditation chamber, for the only essential prop for the meditation is one's own mind. Though the meditation on one's evil thoughts is formally only a third of the practice, it epitomizes Mahāyāna doctrine. The meditations on the other two aspects of mind, the good and the morally neutral, may be understood by reference to this Mahāyāna perspective on evil.

It will be clear by now that the evil which is the object of the meditation is that evil which resides in the self, not that in the external world. Chih-i always presupposes that the mind is fundamentally enlightened; the defilements of the mind (*klesās*) are relatively adventitious and in their basic nature are simply misperceived factors of enlightenment. He is here in agreement with the view general to Chinese Buddhism (a view which he helped to define) that enlightenment is the natural state of humanity. It is in the meditation on evil that the Mahāyāna approach to meditation taken by Chih-i is revealed most clearly, for the task set before the practitioner is to confront his own impure nature in its every manifestation and transmute it directly into purity (implying a change in his own awareness, not in any hypothetical realm of "fact" or "reality," except insofar as the change in his awareness leads to a different way of his being in the world).

Entering into evil thoughts and impulses in order to understand them and thereby become liberated from them carries with it, however, the danger of becoming contaminated by them instead, a problem to which Chih-i devotes a great deal of attention. In what follows I examine the specific method which Chih-i advances for the meditation on one's own evil thoughts and the caveats he appends to guard against the descent into immorality.

#### THE FOUR PHASES OF THOUGHT

Underlying Chih-i's work is the assumption that thought should try to view thought in an act of pure introspection—not to impose control directly but to reach an intuitive understanding of its own nature. The understanding to be attained is defined in terms of realizing the merely provisional validity of the linguistic category "thought," a negative noetic act which produces, or is identical to, the positive insight into the ground upon which this figure, this category of "thought," is projected. This ground, Ultimate Truth or Reality, suffuses the figure until they are one, as the monistic philosophy of Mahāyāna Buddhism must teach.

Each thought appears in four phases or times: This notion is similar but not identical to the traditional Abhidharma analysis of the four stages in the existence of an individual dharma (arising, persisting,

changing, perishing). In Chih-i's analysis a thought first does "not yet exist" and finally is "finished existing." One may say from the subjective viewpoint that this is "not-yet-thinking, about-to-think, thinking-proper, and thinking-completed." Chan-jan, the T'ang commentator to the *Mo-ho Chih-kuan*, notes that to contemplate only the first and the fourth phases is the method of certain practitioners of *dhyāna*, those who negate the intellectual faculty altogether. He may be referring to certain Ch'an practitioners. Chih-i argues (in a time before the appearance of the Ch'an school in China) that although thoughts are nonexistent in these two phases, yet there is a sense in which thoughts (or mind)<sup>s</sup> both exist and do not exist. The relationship between the two senses of *hsin* is the same as that between a person and his actions. Mind *must* exist in some sense for religious practice to have any point. Chih-i therefore opposes explicitly both those who uphold the unchangeability (eternality) of mind as well as those who uphold the simple nonexistence of mind. Change, and therefore enlightenment, would be impossible if mind were either absolutely existent or absolutely nonexistent.

### MEDITATION ON GOOD THOUGHTS

Evil thoughts are defined in relation to good thoughts, so it is best to digress here with an explanation of what the latter are considered to be and how they are to be meditated upon. The category of the Six Perfections (giving, morality, forbearance, exertion, meditation, wisdom) provides the framework. Any thought whose essence is primarily one of these six qualities is a "good" thought. In contemplating such an act of mind one associates it with any of the six senses (the five plus mind itself as the organizer of sense data) and any of the six actions (standing, walking, sitting, lying down, speaking, being silent). Since these twelve (called the Twelve Items) are all applicable to any of the perfections, one derives 12 times 6 or 72 possible meditations to be applied where appropriate. Chih-i gives details for only some of these meditations, since the others may be understood by reference to them. In the perfection of giving, for example, one internally renounces vision and the object of vision, perceiving that the visual consciousness that derives from them is neither external, internal (because caused), eternal, nor absolutely nonexistent. Moreover each of the four phases of an act of visual consciousness (not yet seeing, about to see, seeing proper, and seeing completed) is incapable of being apprehended. Introducing the four phases into the meditation multiplies the units of meditation to 4 times 72 or 288. The true perfection of giving is to realize the emptiness of giver, recipient, and gift. Thus one gives (while being visually aware of the giving) knowing that all three

are empty; otherwise it would not be the *perfection* of giving. Yet "emptiness" also involves avoidance of the attribution of absolute *nonexistence* to any of these three elements.

At the level of the Perfect Teaching (most profound of Chih-i's series of four levels of interpretation of Buddhist doctrine, the others being the Tripitaka or Hinayāna, the Shared, and the Separate teachings), one understands that the attribution of existence and the attribution of non-existence, as well as their simultaneous assertion and their simultaneous denial, are all efforts to describe the same (ultimately indescribable) ultimate reality, whether of individual phenomena or of the collectivity of phenomena (the "world"). Not to dwell in any of these interpretations while giving is the "featureless giving," the highest form of meditation. When the Three Truths of Chih-i (empty, provisionally existent, and the mean encompassing these) are applied to the meditation in this way the units of meditation multiply to 288 times 3 or 864. These may be practiced in any of the traditional Ten Destinies (from hell-dwellers to Buddhas—modes of reincarnation or degrees of spiritual development), yielding 8,640 units. And finally each perfection has six aspects, according to which of the other perfections (including itself) combines with it, for the Six Perfections, at the level of the Perfect Teaching, perfectly suffuse each other—each is inseparable from the others just as a single variety of incense which has been mashed into a ball with five other kinds is inseparable from them. Thus the meditation includes 51,840 units, from which the practitioner may select according to his need and opportunity. The complexity of Chih-i's thought may be seen by the fact that in order to represent graphically the whole array of possibilities (perfections × perfections × items × destinies × phases × truths) a six-dimensional space would be required.

#### WHAT IS EVIL?

Evil is defined as the opposite of the Six Perfections: avarice, immorality, anger, laziness, mental distraction, and stupidity. These vices may be conveniently styled the Six Antiperfections, the first five coinciding to a remarkable degree with five within the Christian category of the Seven Deadly Sins: avarice, lust, ire, sloth, and intemperance. (Stupidity on the Buddhist side, and pride and envy on the Christian side, do not correspond, however.)

Chih-i's T'ang-dynasty commentator Chan-jan identifies two levels of evil in the Perfect Teaching. At the relative level, evil is whatever is not in accord with the Perfect Teaching; at the absolute level, evil is being attached to the Perfect Teaching itself. The latter is the most rarefied

form of evil; Chih-i does not concern himself with it in detail except to say:

To achieve the realization that evil things are not evil, that everything is Ultimate Reality, is to achieve the Way of the Buddha through practicing the Non-Way—but to develop an attachment to the Way turns the Way into the Non-Way. [T 46.17b]

The exposition focuses in fact on desire (immorality), first of the Six Antiperfections, as the paradigm for all forms of evil.

Chih-i must next show that there is no contradiction between evil and the Way. Even if evil is constantly present in one's mind, good will always be found somewhere within it, for every element of existence is present in every other: There are Buddhas in hell and there is evil in Buddhas, for the Ten Destinies perfectly interpenetrate. (This dictum became the basis for the controversial theory of Evil in the Buddha-nature developed in the T'ien-t'ai school in later Sung times.) In fact for laypeople who live constantly amid evil phenomena there may be no opportunity at all to meditate upon the Six Perfections, and it is therefore that selfsame evil which they employ as an object of meditation. As Chih-i puts it, "Evil does not obstruct the Way." He gives a series of examples from scripture to illustrate this idea, including (1) Angulimālā, a murderous bandit who killed 999 people in moral obedience to his teacher's command; (2) a prince who employed wine (contrary to Buddhist rules for laypeople) to make his guests happy; (3) a queen who appeared perfumed and adorned (also contrary to proper modes of conduct) before her king to please him, and also secretly and mendaciously countermanded the king's order to kill his cook (knowing as she did that he would regret his command later); (4) a prostitute who enticed men to herself in order to expound the dharma to them; and (5) the case of Devadatta, the Buddhist Judas, who (as the *Lotus Sutra* states clearly) will also attain enlightenment eventually. To sum up the principle:

If amid evils there were nothing but evil, the practice of the Way would be impossible and people would remain forever unenlightened. But because the Way *is* present even amid evil it is possible to attain saintliness even though one may engage in the Antiperfections [for example, even Buddhist monks can be angry]. [T 46.17b]

Moreover the Way does not obstruct evil, although this is not so relevant for the present meditation. The relationship between the two is analogous to the relationship between light and dark in empty space. A material substratum is necessary in order for either to become manifest; without this substratum their interpenetration is unimpeded, and even

with a substratum both are fully present, at least at the level of potentiality.

### THE METHOD

The general approach for meditating on evil is described by Chih-i as follows:

If a person has by nature a great number of desires and is seething with contamination, so that despite his efforts to counter and suppress them they continue to increase by leaps and bounds—then he should simply direct his attention wherever he wishes. Why? Because without the arising of the antiperfections, he would have no chance to practice contemplation. [T 46.17c]

He goes on to give a pregnant simile for this process:

It is like going fishing. If the fish is strong and the fishing line weak, the fish cannot be forcibly pulled in. Instead, one simply lets the baited hook enter and get caught in the fish's mouth, and depending on how close the creature approaches, allows it to dive and surface freely. Then before long it can be harvested from the water.

The practice of the contemplation of the antiperfections is the same. The antiperfections are represented by an evil fish, and contemplation is represented by the baited hook. If there were no fish, there would be no need for hook or bait: The more numerous and large the fish are, the better. They will all follow after the baited hook without rejecting it. These antiperfections will similarly not for long withstand the attempt to bring them under control. [T 46.17c]

The meditation on evil thoughts is as multidimensional as the meditation on good thoughts, but it is presented with somewhat greater complexity. The first stage is to realize the emptiness of each thought, and the meditation is focused on this exercise. Both the provisionality and its conformity to the Three Truths must also be realized thereafter, however.

In order to realize the emptiness of each evil thought ("thought of desire"), the emptiness of each of the four phases of desire must be apprehended; and for that to take place one meditates upon the transition from each phase to the next. Chih-i goes into detail only for the transition between the first and the second phases, leaving the others to be understood by analogy.

Assuming that the second phase arises ("about to desire"), then what is the status of the first phase ("not yet desiring")? There are four possibilities: the first phase perishes (is nonexistent), does not perish (is existent, not nonexistent), both, or neither.



Let us take the first case, in which the first phase *perishes* in order for the second phase to arise. Do these two events coincide or not? For them to coincide would involve the contradiction of arising and perishing occurring at the same time. The commentator Chan-jan indicates this could be equivalent to saying that in order for light to come into being the lamp which produces it would have to be destroyed, a clear absurdity. What if the two phases do not coincide? This would involve supposing that events come into existence without a cause; in this case, as Chan-jan comments, flames could come into being spontaneously without originating from something like a lamp, and we could have cheese without milk. This too is absurd.

Secondly, we consider that perhaps in order for the second phase to arise, the first phase does *not* perish (exists). Again, do these two phases, both of them "existing," coincide or not? If they coincide, they are both in existence at the same time and "there would be no limit to the origination [of new entities],"<sup>6</sup> for there would then have to be a "nonexistent not-yet-desiring" which preceded the "existent not-yet-desiring," and this would by the same logic not yet have perished at the moment of the arising of the "existent not-yet-desiring." With such an infinite regression there could never have been a time when the desire was completely nonexistent. Thus they cannot coincide. What if they do not coincide? Then, as in the cheese-and-milk case mentioned above, there would be no cause for the arising of the second phase and entities could arise anywhere, anytime, causelessly. Thus they cannot *not* coincide.

Thirdly, perhaps in order for the second phase to arise, the first phase both perishes and does not perish. But Chih-i says:

If the second phase arises from the *nonperishing* of the first, there would be no need for the simultaneous perishing of the first. How could such an indeterminate cause produce a determinate effect? Even if the perishing and the nonperishing of the first phase were the same in substance they would differ in their fundamental nature; while if they were different in substance there could be no relationship between them. [T 46.18a]

Chan-jan adds:

If the first phase is both existent and nonexistent by the time the second arises, we have opposite causes producing the same effect. These opposites could not even coexist, much less work together to produce a common effect. [T 46.206c]

Finally, what if in order for the second phase to arise the first phase neither perishes nor does not perish? To consider this question, Chih-i introduces the idea of the locus of the event:



Is the locus of this double-negated first phase existent or nonexistent? If existent, then how can we say it is doubly negated? If nonexistent, how could non-existence be capable of producing anything? [T 46.18a]

This completes the contemplation on one aspect of the transition from the first to the second phase, in which the second phase was held constant ("arising") and the first phase was run through its four alternatives according to the tetralemma. The arising of the phase of about-to-desire is therefore incapable of being apprehended, and as a phenomenon it has been emptied.

In considering the transition from the first to the second phase, it remains for us to analyze the possibilities with the second phase held constant at "not arising" and the first phase run through four alternatives, then with the second phase held constant at "both arising and not arising," and finally with the second phase held constant at "neither arising nor not arising." This yields sixteen possibilities in the transition between the first and the second phase of the moment of desire. In every case it is a matter of seeking the later phase in the earlier and being unable to find it. The other three transitions—from the second to the third phase of desire, from the third to the fourth, and from the fourth to the first phase (of a new moment of desire)—may be considered in similar fashion. Thus in all there are sixty-four transitions, all of which are shown to be empty—that is, unthinkable (*acintya*).

If this all seems senseless or needlessly complex, one must keep in mind that it is a model of the false, not of the true, and also that, according to Chan-jan, it is specifically intended for those of dull mentality.<sup>7</sup> Bright individuals should be able to realize at a single glance that the development of a desire is incapable of being apprehended by discursive thought. It is the foolish who find this kind of exercise necessary (but "foolish" here means those lacking intuition, not those of meager intellect). The result of this mind-wracking cogitation on the origin of desire is not that the practitioner reaches a rational solution but that, intellectually exhausted, he is forced to admit the impotence of his rational processes to give a coherent account of what he knows through common sense is obviously taking place: the arising of desire in the mind. Once he has reached this realization, the desire is completely emptied of substantiality for him and loses its power to affect him. This is what Chih-i calls the "baited hook."

One may also contemplate which sense-object gives rise to the moment of desire, as well as which mode of activity it is associated with (these are the Twelve Items referred to above). Thus if it arose in association with the seeing of form, then with which of the four phases of seeing of form

(not yet seeing, about to see, seeing proper, seeing completed) was it associated? Likewise for the other eleven items.

One may further contemplate what the purpose of the desire is. Desire is broken down into the traditional Ten Destinies: The desire may have been to break the moral code, to acquire dependents, on up to the most exalted desire (which is still a desire and hence an antiperfection): the desire for the Buddha's dharma.

One understands therefore that while the desire is unthinkable, and there can be neither desirer nor desired, yet the desire takes place in a mysterious way (corresponding to the second of the Three Truths, provisionality), and its ultimate nature, its dharma-nature, is between the two (the third truth).

None of the Three Truths can obstruct the others, contradictory though they may appear to be. If the antiperfections (the provisionally existent) could obstruct the dharma-nature (and thereby prevent beings from attaining enlightenment), for example, the dharma-nature would be destroyed—but it is by definition eternal and incapable of being destroyed. Conversely, the dharma-nature or Ultimate Reality cannot obstruct the antiperfections, for we see all about us antiperfections appearing in their provisional aspects:

Know therefore that the antiperfections are identical with the dharma-nature. When an antiperfection arises, then the dharma-nature arises with it; and when the antiperfection ceases to be, the dharma-nature also ceases. [T 46.18a]

Chan-jan comments here:

The dharma-nature itself neither comes into being nor ceases to be, but [at the level of relative truth] varies its aspect with the object being contemplated. At the level of Ultimate Truth, however, neither antiperfection nor dharma-nature exists, and *a fortiori* neither of these comes into being nor ceases to be. Whoever has understood this can view desire as identical with the dharma-nature. [T 46.208b]

This brings us to the central theoretical claim made by Chih-i, expressed in a statement for which he is justifiably famous: "Mental defilements are identical to enlightenment." That is, *klesas* are identical to *bodhi*. There has been some doubt among modern scholars whether Chih-i had adequate scriptural foundation for such a sweeping dictum. Does it not represent an original departure in Chinese Buddhism and a modification of the Indian tradition? But Chih-i supplies the sutra text on which he bases his statement:

Desire is identical to the Way, and the same is true for anger and stupidity. Thus the whole of the Buddha's dharma is contained in these three dharmas.

But if one should seek enlightenment apart from desire, one would be as far from it as earth is from heaven. [T 46.18b]

Translating directly from the sutra (which is the *Chu-fa-wu-hsing-ching*, the *Sarva-dharma-pravṛtti-nirdeśa*, in the Chinese translation of Kumārajīva), the text reads:

Desire is nirvana, and the same is true for anger and stupidity. Thus there are countless dharmas of the Buddha in these three. Whoever distinguishes desire, anger, and stupidity (from nirvana or the Buddha's dharma) is as far from the Buddha as earth is from heaven. [T 15.759c]

Desire, anger, and stupidity are the category known as the Three Poisons, the most basic defilements (*kleśas*), which subsume all of the other varieties. Chih-i's scriptural foundation would thus seem to be adequate, and the text on which he bases his dictum had been current in China for nearly two centuries by the time he gave the lectures from which the written form of his treatise, the *Mo-ho Chih-kuan*, was derived. The modern scholar Ando Toshio includes the foregoing sutra with the *Sūrangama-samādhi Sutra* and the *Vimalakīrti* (both frequently quoted by Chih-i) as one of the scriptures that explicitly declared, before the time of Chih-i, the identity between antipodal categories like the defilements and enlightenment or sexual misconduct and the Buddhist Way.<sup>8</sup> Ando explains that these texts thereby invited misinterpretation and misuse to the extent that many Buddhists understood their doctrines as a simple eulogy of evil ways and thus exposed the *saṅgha* to anti-Buddhist persecution and morality campaigns. Fully aware of the dangers this doctrine presented, however, Chih-i includes moral discipline and purification as essential preliminaries to the contemplation of evil;<sup>9</sup> he also goes on in his present discourse upon the meditation on evil to present caveats for the practice of this meditation. We shall deal with these caveats below.

That desire (and all *kleśas*) and enlightenment are ontologically identical is a commonplace in the scriptures of Vajrayāna Buddhism. (In the *Sarva-rānasya-nāma-tantra-rāja*, for example, translated in the Sung dynasty, it says: "The Three Poisons of worldly desire, anger, and stupidity are identical to the realm of the *tathāgata*."<sup>10</sup> As can be seen, however, this is not a new theoretical departure; it is in complete agreement with the monism of the *prajñā-pāramitā* sutras and has, moreover, been stated explicitly by various nontantric texts. Chih-i supplies a series of quotations from the *Vimalakīrti* as well which buttress the assertion: "By following the Non-Way, a bodhisattva achieves the Buddha's Way."<sup>11</sup> Chih-i next quotes: "All animate beings are already identical to the features of enlightenment, so they cannot further attain it; they are already identical to the features of nirvana, so they cannot further attain extinc-

tion [nirvana].” This sentence is based on a passage from the *Vimalakīrti* which reads in Kumārajīva’s version as follows:

If Maitreya attains supreme, perfect enlightenment, then all animate beings should likewise attain it. Why is this? Because all animate beings are marked by enlightenment. If Maitreya [bodhisattva] attains extinction, then all animate beings should likewise attain it. Why is this? Because the Buddhas all know that every animate being is ultimately quiescent and extinct; being marked by nirvana, they do not further attain extinction.” [T 14.542b]

We may concede that Chih-i’s quotation represents the sense of the *Vimalakīrti* here. Two further *Vimalakīrti* quotations are given by Chih-i at this point:

To those who are haughty, the Buddha preaches that separation from carnality, anger, and stupidity is what is called liberation. But to those who lack haughtiness, he preaches that the nature of carnality, anger, and stupidity is the same as liberation. [T 14.548a]

and

All the defilements are the seeds of the *tathāgata*. [T 14.549b]

The “haughty ones” clearly refer to the Hīnayāna, which makes a radical distinction between defilements and enlightenment.

#### CAVEATS

Following his discourse on each of the preceding three *samādhis*, Chih-i appends an “exhortation” in which he waxes eloquent on the benefits of the meditational practice he has described, encouraging the practitioner to engage diligently in it. After this fourth of the Four *Samādhis*, however, an essay of cautionary advice and warnings takes the place of the usual exhortation to practice. Although the “neither-walking-nor-sitting” *samādhi* contains sections on the contemplation of good and of neutral thoughts, it is clearly the contemplation on evil thoughts which requires an admonition to replace the usual call to action.

The problem is this: How can this ultimate teaching of the absolute identity of opposites, a doctrine which in effect teaches that evil and good (let “good” be interpreted as nirvana) are the same, be reconciled with the self-evident need for moral behavior in the world? How can this doctrine be prevented from degenerating into a perverse and antinomian affirmation of evil? Indeed, it is clear that Chih-i feels it *has* been so misinterpreted in the past. In every age (for this dharma is held to be eternal) there have been those who understood such a teaching as a simple eulogy

of evil ways. In the relatively recent past (for Chih-i) there were the monkish libertines of North China who called down upon their heads the Northern Chou persecution of Buddhism (A.D. 574-577). Chih-i unquestionably is advancing the view that it was immorality among the Buddhist community which brought on the persecution (whereas many modern scholars emphasize the foreign origin of the religion as the major factor which made it vulnerable).<sup>12</sup> There may have been, he says, some monks who, in practicing and teaching the abandonment of moral restraints,

did succeed to a small extent in concentrating their minds and in gaining a weak understanding of emptiness. But they take no cognizance of their listeners' faculties nor life circumstances and do not penetrate to the sense of the Buddha's teaching. They simply take this one dharma and teach it indiscriminately to others. Now once they have taught it to others for a long time, it may happen that one or two [of their disciples] gain some benefit; but this is like insects accidentally producing legible characters by their random gnawing on a tree. They then take this as proof and say their evil doctrine has been verified. They call other contrary teachings lies and laugh at those who observe moral prohibitions and who cultivate the morally good, saying the teachings of such people are not the Way. Expounding nothing but this pernicious doctrine to others, they cause a host of evils to be committed everywhere.

Now when blind and sightless disciples, who are unable to tell right from wrong and are dull of mind and heavily burdened with defilements, hear such preachings, they act out their lusts. Submitting faithfully and obediently to this teaching, they all discard moral prohibitions. There is nothing wrong that they fail to do, and their sins accumulate as high as mountains. At length the common people are brought to hold the moral precepts in as low esteem as so many weeds. As a result, the king of the land and his ministers exterminate the Buddha's dharma. This noxious tendency has penetrated deeply, and even now has yet to be rectified. [T 46.18c-19a]

As if there were still any doubt about his opinion of such interpretations and such behavior, Chih-i attributes the fall of the ancient Chou dynasty (1122-256 B.C.) as well as the Western Chin dynasty (A.D. 265-316) to the rise of immorality, buttressing the assertion with quotes respectively from the *Shih-chi* and the *Chin-shu* official histories. In the latter case it was Juan Chi (A.D. 210-263), one of the famous Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, who led the immoralists:

[He] was a gifted person who wore disheveled hair and let his belt hang loose. In later times the children and grandchildren of the nobility imitated him, held that only by engaging in mutually shameful conduct with servants could one achieve naturalness (*tzu-jan*), and called those who vied to uphold the rules of conduct "country bumpkins." [T 46.18c-19a]

The misapplication of an essentially true doctrine is further illustrated in the *Mo-ho Chih-kuan* by this amusing story taken from Chuang-tzu:

Take for example [the story of the famous beauty] Hsi Shih. Once she was stricken with a mental illness and took such delight in grimacing and groaning that even the hundred hairs of her eyebrows all grew contorted. Yet it served only to enhance her beauty. The other women in the neighborhood, being ugly from birth, imitated her grimaces and groans but only grew so loathsome in appearance that the poor moved far away and the rich closed their gates, the fishes who dwelt in grottoes dove deeper yet, and flying things escaped into the heights. [T 46.18c-19a]<sup>13</sup>

The fact is that such people have seriously misunderstood a fundamentally true doctrine. As long as we continue to make distinctions, we are barred from Buddhahood; but if we fail to make distinctions, we are incapable of decent behavior and plummet further from Buddhahood than ever. Clearly there is a paradox here—but as the nature of Ultimate Truth is by necessity paradoxical, this should not be a crippling difficulty. Part of the answer may be found in Chih-i's distinctive doctrine of the Three Truths, already referred to here, in which the fact that things (and thoughts) are empty does not prevent them from being provisionally real. Hīnayānists penetrate to the unreality of things (by analyzing them into their component dharmas), bodhisattvas push further to realize their provisional validity (for they act in the world for the salvation of all beings), and Buddhas fully reconcile the two poles, seeing (as we might put it) that the two viewpoints are as opposite sides of the same diamond, or, one is tempted to add, like the particle and wave theories of light in modern quantum physics, each being valid in the proper context.

The doctrine of the Three Truths means among other things that the need to recognize the oneness of things does not abrogate the need to recognize the distinctions which obtain within this oneness. The solution which Chih-i applies to the problem of immoralist interpretations of Mahāyāna monism can be regarded as one of many possible applications of his doctrine. The point is that it is incumbent upon the teachers of the dharma to make careful distinctions in the capacities of their listeners, just as the Buddha himself did (according to Chih-i's famous system of doctrinal classification known as the Four Dharmas of Conversion or the Four Teachings: Tripiṭaka, Shared, Separate, and Perfect). The Buddha promulgated the teaching that evil and good, desire and the Way, are identical both because it is the ultimate truth and because beings who are immersed in evil have nothing but evil at hand to elevate themselves above evil. (It must be borne in mind that in these contexts desire is understood as the prototype of all other forms of evil.) But the Buddha



does not expound this doctrine to those who are unable to understand that it does not exclude the equally valid doctrine that evil and good are quite separate. It is above all to those of keen intellectual faculties who are yet burdened with mental defilements that the Buddha expounds such a doctrine, while the foolish who are relatively pure receive only the teaching of the avoidance of evil and the affirmation of good, as if these were truly separate from each other.

The text makes clear that it is nothing short of criminal to ignore the differences in the capacities of listeners, teaching but a single doctrine to all. (For a modern example of the results of such a practice one might recall the foolish distortions to which the teachings of Marx and Locke have been subjected in the twentieth century.) Chih-i, living in a time before even the printing press existed, much less the electronic media, could assume that if only the will were there, it was possible to prevent the foolish from hearing this powerful, but by the same token dangerous, doctrine of the identity of evil and good, desire and enlightenment.

The aim of the Buddha, and thus of every teacher who transmits his dharma, is to save beings from suffering, and there are cases when he must use the strongest medicine available. It is, says Chih-i, as in the case of a seriously ill child whose parents give it the traditional yellow dragon potion (derived from human excrement) in a desperate attempt to save his life:

Though it scores the teeth and makes him vomit, if the child takes it, it will cure his sickness. [T46.19b]

But if such a potion is used, it must be with great care:

One ought to provide oneself with plain hot water to supplement and neutralize it. [T46.19c]

In this case, the "plain hot water" is the caveat which has followed upon the prescriptions for the meditation on evil. Similar caveats should by implication accompany the ultimate teaching whenever it is expounded to listeners whose capacity for understanding it properly is doubtful. Otherwise it is better not to say anything at all.

## NOTES

1. *Mo-ho Chih-kuan*, T 46.1-140.
2. *Ta-chih-tu-lun*, T 25.57-756.
3. Scholars disagree on why the last three chapters (and part of chap. 7 as well) were never expounded to conform to the outline of the whole work. The traditional explanation, still accepted by many, is that Chih-i simply lacked time to complete the series of lectures upon which his scribe and major disciple Kuan-

ting based later written versions of the work. This was because the summer *varṣa* period (of A.D. 594) had drawn to a close and the monks had to resume their normal duties. The Japanese scholar Sekiguchi Shindai holds to the contrary that since the projected final chapters deal with especially exalted stages of spiritual development, Chih-i, who did not feel that he had himself attained such heights, chose to concentrate instead on the lower stages of the path. See Sekiguchi Shindai, *Tendai Shikan no Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1969), pp. 54–63.

4. Leon Hurvitz outlines both the system of four (the Four *Samādhis*) of chap. 1 and the system of 10 times 10 from the rest of the work, but here we shall deal only with part of the fourth variety of meditation found in the synopsis: the ad libitum *samādhi*. See Leon Hurvitz, *Chih-i (538–597), Melanges chinois et bouddhiques* 12 (1960–1962): 318–331.

5. Chih-i must use the same character, *hsin*, both in the sense of “thoughts” (or “thought”) and in the sense of “the receptacle of thoughts,” that is, mind.

6. T 46.18a.

7. T 46.207c.25.

8. Ando Toshio, *Tendaigaku-ronshū* (Kyoto: Heirakuji shoten, 1975), p. 276.

9. See, for example, the twenty-five preliminary “expedients” of chap. 6 of the treatise, as given in Hurvitz, *Chih-i*, pp. 320–321, or in Dwight Goddard, ed., *A Buddhist Bible* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 441–463, as part of a translation of Chih-i’s *Lesser Calming and Contemplation (Hsiao Chih-kuan)*.

10. T 18.537c.28.

11. T 14.549a.

12. See, for example, Kenneth Ch’en, *Buddhism in China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 186–192.

13. Pieced together from *Chuang-tzu*, chaps. 2 and 14.