

The Metaphysics of Creation in the *Daodejing*

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Abstract. This paper offers an original interpretation of the *Daodejing* 道德經 as containing a distinctive account of creation. In my reading, the *Daodejing* envisions the creation of the cosmos by Dao (1) as a movement from the absence of phenomenal forms to phenomenal forms and (2) as a movement from nothingness to existence. I interpret creation as a unique metaphysical operation that explains how (1) and (2) are possible. The paper is organized into two sections. First, I introduce the distinctions between the lack and presence of phenomenal forms (§1.1) and between nothingness and existence (§1.2), using them to map the distinction between Dao and the created world. Then, I propose my account of the *Daodejing*'s metaphysics of creation (§2.1) and elaborate on its connection with the previously drawn distinctions while answering a potential objection (§2.2). I conclude with some considerations about the connections between the *Daodejing*'s view of creation and its soteriology.

Many religious traditions share a commitment to some ultimate reality of spiritual significance: a personal God for Abrahamic religions, Brahman in Hinduism, and Suchness in some forms of Buddhism.¹ In this paper, I understand the term “creation” minimally: a metaphysics of creation is any theory that explains how ultimate reality is responsible for the existence of the cosmos. Of course, different traditions develop different versions of such a theory. For example, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* adopted by personalistic theists differs from that of creation as emanation. According to the former, an omnipotent personal God creates the cosmos by bringing it into existence out of sheer nothing (Copan and Craig 2004: ch. 4; Swinburne 2004: 49-50). According to the latter, the cosmos flows out of divine reality (Oakes 1992; see also Longenecker 2022).

Scholarly language to talk about creation is far from being fixed. Lloyd Gerson (1993), asking whether the doctrine advocated by Plotinus—commonly described as a theory of emanation (Armstrong 1937)—is, in fact, a theory of creation at all, seems to be using “creation” as a synonym for “*creatio ex nihilo*” (see also Zimmerman 2013). Moreover, the very notion of *creatio ex nihilo* has been conceived in a variety of ways (see Burrell et al. 2010; esp. Fatoorchi 2010), and to complicate things further, some people take the doctrines of *creatio ex nihilo* and emanation to be compatible (e.g., Soars 2021). What matters for us is that there are different options when it comes

¹ For a general treatment of the concept of ultimate reality, see Scheffenberg (2016) and Diller (2021). For references to treatments of God, Brahman, and Suchness as ultimate reality, see Leflow (2012), Gupta (2020), and Zappulli (2023).

Metaphysics Of Creation

R Bogdan



Metaphysics Of Creation:

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