

Undergraduate assignment feedback form

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Sage Lao Tzu's View of Earning and Investing

——Taking *The Treatise on Response and Retribution* as an Example

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Introduction

The Treatise on Response and Retribution is a canon that exhorts people to observe moral norms, to always stop doing evil and to practice good. It is also a standard for people to examine themselves. More important is that this book teaches the world about cause and effect, make it a guidance on how to live a happy life in current times of moral collapse and turbid confusion. *The Treatise on Response and Retribution* covers a lot of details of our lives, today I will start from a topic that is often discussed: earning and investing. Through Lao Tzu's attitude to money, we can further explore the essence of the whole book.

Lao Tzu's Teachings on Earning and Investing

	Ways to earn	Ways to spend	Mentality	Outcome
Recommend	walk the path of virtue and avoid the path of vice and evil; do not stray from what is proper; avoid committing offenses in secret, thinking that no one will know; prevent evil and encourage virtue; reserve for oneself little but give much	save those in danger and help those in need; show concern for the welfare of the lonely, widowed and orphaned; respect the elderly and care for the young.	harbor no thoughts of envy; feel joy at another's prosperity and empathize with the loss of other people; do not abuse favor bestowed and nor give with strings attached; do not regret what we have given others.	command the respect of men and earn the blessings of the heavens; demigods protect us; fortune and success follow us and disasters avoid us

Must Not do	harbor vicious thoughts and disregard our conscience; acting contrary to what is fair and reasonable; killing to seize property; using plots and schemes to seize another's position and public office; accepting bribes for the purpose of perverting the course of justice or misuse and misapplication of the law; to reduce another's benefits or fair share in order to bolster our own wealth and profit; to bankrupt another in order to seize their wealth; to unreasonably freeze or confiscate assets; be avaricious and forceful without compassion and reason; to secretly infringe on the rights of others; seize, rob, confiscate, extort and loot; amass wealth by foul, distasteful and illegal means; attempt to win promotion via stratagems and fraud; be corrupt and greedy for bribes ; deceive one's superiors; borrow without	buy or sell false titles and honors or to attain fame and win praise by fraud; indulge in excess revelry and luxury.	envy the rich and honorable; wishing for them poverty and disgrace; wish our creditors dead, so as to not pay them back; hate, vilify and curse those who do not acquiesce to our shameless demands; become arrogant and decadent when getting rich; regret after having given to charity.	be punished by having our wives and descendants bear surplus punishments after our death. The wives and children will either meet death or if that does not result; illness, poverty, misfortune, legal troubles, ill repute and the like will shadow them until the balance of justice is restored; persons who steal and rob are like those who eat diseased meat and drink poisoned wine to ease thirst and hunger. They may be full for a little while, but death will be the inevitable result.¹
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¹ B.S. Chung, (2014), *Treatise On Response And Retribution- New English Translation*, <https://archive.org/details/treatise>, 8 June 2022.

	intention to return or repay the use of false scales and weights; defraud by adulterating merchandise.			
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From these tables we can see an obvious law of cause and effect: earning in a proper way, spending money with an altruistic mind and treating others with generosity, by doing so, we will be loved by people and blessed by demigods, and then we get good results. But if we earn money in an improper way, spend them selfishly, and treat others with a mean attitude, then the outcome will be miserable and horrible.

One thing we should realise is that there is not only money invested in the world, but also conducts and mindset. Short-sighted investors are only concerned with the immediate interests of the next three or five years. They are busy picking companies, stocks, bonds and funds, anxious about how to make a steady profit without losing money, but can hardly imagine that any action right now in their daily lives will affect their future returns, or that if they make money in a proper way and carry out their business for selfless purposes, is a kind of investment that will bring them a greater return in the future. It is even more difficult to imagine that spending money for benefiting others is also an investment that will bring them a good return to their entire life. But this is true, this is what Lao Tzu teaches us, what the Chinese called accumulating Yin virtue 積陰德.

In addition, sincerity is important. If we do good things to help others but with great remorse in our hearts, or if we help others with an intention of seeking reward, such helps will not be of much benefit to our own lives, because these actions do not come from a sincere heart. Only when one acts sincerely, in accordance with the laws of cause and effect, and acts in accordance with nature, can one obtain good outcome. This is the natural law.

Everything We Do Matters

The concept of cause and effect, which is particularly emphasised in the book, like ‘ Fortune and misery do not happen at random and nor are they the result of chance or machinations’,² is in fact not confined to Taoism thought, but has been a mainstream education and a common sense for 5000 years among the Chinese. We can see many saints and sages in different era telling the same truth in Chinese history. Besides, truth is often universal, and it is therefore not difficult to find the same teachings in the classics of Western religions.

As the Bible states:

Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked.

(Psalm 37:16NIV)³

I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.

(Psalm 37:25NIV)⁴

² B.S. Chung, (2014), *Treatise On Response And Retribution- New English Translation*, <https://archive.org/details/treatise>, 8 June 2022.

³ *The Holy Bible*, (The Gideons International, 9999), P. 614.

⁴ *The Holy Bible*, (The Gideons International, 9999), P. 614.

They are always generous and lend freely; their children will be blessed.

(Psalm 37:26NIV)⁵

Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever.

(Psalm 37:27NIV)⁶

If you remain in me and my words in you, you may ask whatever you want and it will be given to you. (John 15:7 CCB)⁷

It seems to me that the last phrase expresses exactly what Lao Tzu called ‘fortune and success follow and disasters avoid them’. If one can act according to the natural law, do good things with goodwill, one is able to act what Confucius said that ‘I follow my heart’s desire without overstepping the line’,⁸ and to receive the protection of demigods and the support of all people. There is an excellent quotation from the book *Everything we do matters*:

‘We reap what we sow. Our lives today are the result of what we thought, said, and did in the past. What we think, say, and do today will, likewise, shape our future. If we harm others, we will be harmed. If we love others, we will be loved. If we have peaceful thoughts, we will have peace. Everything will come back to us full circle. Thus, everything we do matters.’⁹ I think this is a perfect explanation of the teaching of Lao Tzu about fortune and misery. If people could universally believe in the laws of cause and effect and act in accordance

⁵ *The Holy Bible*, (The Gideons International, 9999), p. 614.

⁶ *The Holy Bible*, (The Gideons International, 9999), p. 614.

⁷ *The Holy Bible*, (The Gideons International, 9999), p. 1135.

⁸ D. C. LAU, *The Analects*, (The Penguin Group, 1979), p. 63.

⁹ Wuling, *Everything We Do Matters*, (Chicago: Amitabha Publications, 2007), p. 4.

with it, then there would probably be few people to exploit the loopholes of law to rob goods in shopping malls like no ones there, not to mention other more serious and horrible crimes.

Conclusion

Confucius once said, ‘Wealth and rank attained through immoral means have as much to do with me as passing clouds.’¹⁰ This is not a pretentious reserve, but a heartfelt statement after truly understanding the truth of life and the universe. From the teachings of sages, we understand the truth of cause and effect and how to apply it, and of course, how to earn and spend money in a right way or better way, so that we can truly enjoy the fruits of our labour and investment. If we can do everything with a selfless spirit, always think for others, then we will receive true happiness in life and a long lasting blessing from the Heaven.

¹⁰ D. C. LAU, *The Analects*, (The Penguin Group, 1979), p. 88.

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