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Daoist Resonances in Heidegger. Exploring a forgotten debt is an anthology edited by Professor David Chai and divided into three main sections: “*Revisiting Heidegger and Daoism*”, “*Existence and the Arts*”, and “*Language and Identity*”.

In the first contribution, “Thoughts on the Way: *Being and Time* via Laozi and Zhuangzi”, Graham Parkes highlights how key ideas from Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* resonate with the major Daoist texts, *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Heidegger’s conception of thing (*Zeug*) as something that is what it is thanks to its relationship with its context, and of to-handness (*Zuhandenheit*) as a property that can be appreciated while using the thing, bear resemblance to the Daoist conception of things as dynamic phenomena. The theme of the interruption of our usual activities with things, which allows the context behind these activities to emerge, resonates with Zhuangzi’s idea of *the usefulness of being useless*, expressed by the example of the old oak, which “lets us see the perspective of utility as a perspective” (p. 22). The theme of *being in the world* and the Heideggerian belief that “genuine thinking [is] a *Handel*, an activity” (p. 23) is similar to the Daoist intimate connection between thinking and wisdom of the body. Likewise, Heidegger’s conception of death, encountered in *Angst* and interpreted as a possibility, is close to the Daoist attitude

towards death, conceived as a means to forget the self, since both interpret death as “a constant presence within life rather than a state beyond and opposed to life” (p. 27).

In “Heidegger’s Daoist Phenomenology”, Jay Goulding argues that Heidegger, in accordance with Schelling, conceives Dao as an opening, a portal to nothingness: “Schelling gazes at Dao’s portal of nothingness; Heidegger *steps back* (*Schritt zurück*) and descends into its Void (*Leere*)” (p. 47). Goulding highlights that, in his fifty-year engagement with East Asian thinkers, “Heidegger arrives at four counter-positions to the Western spatialized, materialized world” (p. 47): through the concepts of there-being (*Da-sein*), the thing (*Das Ding*), the turn (*Die Kehre*), and apprehension (*Vernehmen*) he marks an opposition to the Cartesian subjectivity, the Euclidean space, the Aristotelian time, and the representational thinking (*Vorstellung*), respectively. Laozi’s thinking intertwines with Heidegger’s philosophical reflections on the Void: in fact, Heidegger’s examples of “the opening of the valley, the void of the cup, and the hollow of the shoes conjure up Laozi’s chapter 11 and connect to chapters 15 and 28. [...] The *dunklen Öffnung* [...] of the shoes, the temple, and the cup generate an oscillating, vibrating Void. Heidegger’s Void is not the passive Greek Void of emptiness but more akin to an active Chinese Daoist Void of creation” (p. 56).

Geling Shang, in “The Simple Onefold of Dao and Being: Reading Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Heidegger in Light of Interality”, investigates whether the Daoist notion of Dao (道) could legitimately represent the founding notion of the “other beginning” (*der Andere Anfang*) sought by Heidegger, as opposed to the “first beginning” of metaphysics, arguing that “Heidegger’s meditation on Being is more in tune with Lao-Zhuang’s notion of Dao than it is with the views of the ancient Greeks” (p. 103). Heidegger’s conception of Being *without being* resonates with

Lao-Zhuang notion of *jian* (間), *interality*, which is “the ensemble of all those other-than being phenomena of reality” (p. 104) and characterises the nature of Dao. The notion of *interality* represents a common ground for Daoist and Heideggerian concepts such as “Dao and Being, *wu* and Nothing, nature and *aletheia*, throughing and opening, interaction and *Ereignis*, middle and between” (p. 119).

While the first section focuses on the theoretical analysis of Daoist and Heideggerian ideas, the second section deals with the themes of existence and art.

In “Dao of Death”, Jason M. Wirth explores Zhuangzi’s acceptance of death, considered to belong to the Dao as much as life. This is the position of the sage (*shengren* 聖人), for whom “supreme happiness (*zhile* 至樂) includes the inevitability of death” (p. 128). In Heidegger’s view, death cannot be conceived as separate from its relation to *Dasein*: “in disclosing the future as an unsurpassable and nonrelational possibility, *Dasein* is exposed to its ecstatic temporality. This undoes the entanglement and tranquilization of the everyday (*Alltäglichkeit*), which enables our ‘constant flight’ from death, but it does not undo *Dasein* as the reference point from which death is confronted” (p. 129). On the other hand, Zhuangzi invites us to confront death not from our perspective as mortals, but starting from Dao itself.

Eric S. Nelson, in “Thing and World in Laozi and Heidegger”, emphasises three moments in which Heidegger’s philosophy of the thing develops: in the late 1920s, as it emerges from his auto-critique of *Being and Time*, Heidegger considers the thing instrumentally present, *worldless*, separated from human life. In the mid 1930s, Heidegger distinguishes between the “instrumental equipmental objectness (*Zeug, Gebrauchsding*), and the work (*Werk*)” (p. 142), emphasising the role of the artwork as it “can re-

veal the constitutive role of things in the thereness of human existence” (p. 143). Finally, in the late 1940s, he focuses on the event of the thing and on the releasement (*Gelassenheit*) of the thing in its own way of being itself, an idea that Heidegger derives from Meister Eckart and that resonates with the Daoist ideas of “*wuwei* 無為 (non-coercive responsive attunement) as a releasement of and responsiveness to self-happening (*ziwei* 自為) and self-transforming of the myriad things” (p. 143). In this way, Nelson argues, the thing “moves from the periphery of his [Heidegger’s] early phenomenology to the center of his confrontation with the environmental and existential destructiveness of the technological modernity” (p. 154), and the last moment of his reflection on the theme of the thing presents assonances with the Daoist ideas of “responsive attunement (*wuwei*) with ongoing transforming (*hua*) and self-soing (*ziran*) of the thing in Lao-Zhuang discourses” (p. 155).

David Chai, in “Zhuangzi, Heidegger, and the Self-Revealing Being of Sculpture”, employs the theme of sculpture as a common ground to establish a dialogue between Heidegger’s philosophy and Daoism. In many of Heidegger’s lectures and essays, resonances can be found with Daoist ideas on the theme of sculpture: in the lecture *The Thing* (1949), the image of the clay vessel recalls *Daodejing*, chapter 11, or in the lecture *What is Called Thinking?* (1951-1952), the image of “the cabinetmaker who brings forth ‘shapes slumbering within wood’” (pp. 163-164) recalls the story of woodcarver Qing in Zhuangzi, chapter 19. Among the essays centred on sculpture, i.e., “Remarks on Art, Sculpture, Space”, “The Origin of Art and the Definition of Thinking” and “Art and Space”, it is in the latter “that Heidegger argues [that] sculpture is ‘the embodiment of the truth of being in its work of instituting places’” (p. 164). Through this analysis,

Chai arrives at the conclusion that “Heidegger and Zhuangzi use sculpture as a beacon to locate authentic being in a world threatened by artificial untruths” (p. 164).

The third section focuses on the theme of language and identity in Heidegger and in Lao-Zhuang.

Daniel Fried, in “Rivers to the East: Heidegger’s Lectures on Hölderlin as Prolegomena for Daoist Engagements”, argues that although in Heidegger’s lectures on Hölderlin, namely the course delivered in 1934-1935 on both *Germania* and *The Rhine*, and the two courses delivered in 1941-1942 on *Remembrance* and *The Ister*, there is no explicit employment of Daoist ideas, “nonetheless, a close examination of Heidegger’s lectures can be useful for understanding his late turn toward engagement with Daoism” (p. 184). Considering his lectures on Hölderlin, the author highlights “those aspects of his argument that provide a methodological framework for the Orientalism that shapes his Daoist engagements” (p. 184), such as the encounter with an “Other”, that, rather than being a genuine event, serves the main purpose of enriching his own thinking.

Steven Burik, in “Thinking through Silence: (Non-) Language in Heidegger and Classical Daoism”, examines the understanding of nothingness and silence in Heidegger’s philosophy and in classical Daoism and their use of language via silence. While silence represents an important step to overcoming ordinary language and reaching a deeper understanding, the author intends to “challenge the idea that silence would be the endpoint of understanding and seek[s] to prove that ‘real’ understanding consists in an awareness of the necessity of using language” (p. 203): a language, however, that cannot be but provisional. In fact, just as Heidegger “was well aware of the provisionality of such so-called authentic words as ‘way’, *dao*, or *logos*, and points to what is left in silence by thinking through these words carefully” (p. 211), so too the

Daodejing and the *Zhuangzi* invite us to go through silence to redefine our approach to language in a more authentic way, keeping in mind the provisional nature of language (see p. 215, p. 218). The only way to deal with that provisionality is to adopt a “language of ‘deference’ [Ames and Hall 2001, p. 10] [...] which refuses the reification and substance thinking characteristic of classical Western philosophy” (p. 220).

Fabian Heubel, in “The Politics of Uselessness: On Heidegger’s Reading of the *Zhuangzi*”, analyses Heidegger’s interest in *Zhuangzi*’s *necessity of the unnecessary*, exemplified in chapter 26 and cited by Heidegger in the *Evening Conversation*, assuming that it “is interwoven with problems of identity-formation and a quest for self-awareness that characterize both contemporary Germany and contemporary China” (p. 226). He investigates whether, from this cultural encounter, “a double or perhaps even multiple cultural identity” (p. 227) emerges. The author underlines how Heidegger’s *Evening Conversation* brings *Zhuangzi* into dialogue with the Nazi ideology. Such a juxtaposition can be criticised, however, it can “contribute to China and her self-understanding, but also to provide valuable sources for dealing with dark and painful experiences of the present age in the West” (p. 232). The capacity of the Chinese classics to respond to crises or concerns arising in a different cultural context, such as the post-war crisis of Germany experienced by Heidegger, demonstrates their global significance, and, also, promotes new philosophical developments in the Chinese context (see p. 239).

Mario Wenning, in “‘We Have Been Schooled by the Cabin Haven’t We?’ Heidegger and Daoism in the Provinces”, analyses the similarities between “Heidegger’s provincialism and Daoist localism as another example of what may be perceived as a deeper philosophical parallel” (p. 244) and argues that “some proto-modern themes in

Daoism are revealed to be better equipped to address the question how to dwell today than Heidegger's anti-modern provincialism" (p. 244), since they "emphasize not only stillness, but also movement and the enabling features of transformation processes" (p. 254). From the depiction of the utopian village in *Daodejing*, chapter 80, a criticism emerges of the problems of the urban society, but also a positive idea of dwelling which "acknowledges the need for certain technologies while also cultivating a freedom from becoming enslaved by them" (p. 254). On the other hand, "[t]he hut epitomizes the aura of cultural provincialism that permeates Heidegger's writing" (p. 246), and "Heidegger's staged '*Bodenständigkeit*' comes across as an unwillingness to deliberate or engage with everything considered urban: technology, the media, and cultural diversity" (p. 247).

Although Heidegger never openly acknowledged the direct influence of Daoism on his thinking, there are several resonances between his and Lao-Zhuang's philosophies. This anthology provides a valuable analysis of these resonances, showing that the dialogue between these two traditions can be highly productive in deepening the understanding of their thinking. In addressing critically Heidegger's stance towards Eastern thought and the socio-political events of his time, some contributions widen the scope of this anthology by enriching the theoretical analysis with further reflections on the transcultural dialogue and Heidegger's contemporaneity.

Bibliography

Roger T. Ames, David L. Hall, *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu 2001

Useful links

<https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/daoist-resonances-in-heidegger-9781350201071/>