

Daoist Resonances in Heidegger

Exploring a Forgotten Debt

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Thoughts on the Way: *Being and Time* via Laozi and Zhuangzi

Graham Parkes

The true nature of things loves to hide.
Heraclitus

— Prologue

Time: Evening of October 9, 1930; after Heidegger's public lecture "On the Essence of Truth"
Place: The house of a Mr. Kellner, in Bremen, north Germany
Topic: Whether one can truly put oneself in another's place
Occasion: An impasse in the discussion

HEIDEGGER [*turning suddenly to the host*]:

Herr Kellner—would you please bring me the *Allegories of Zhuangzi*?
I should like to read something from them.

[*Mr. Kellner leaves the room and reappears with a copy of the Martin Buber edition*¹]

HEIDEGGER [*turning to chapter 17*]:

Zhuangzi and Huizi were standing on the bridge above the Hao river.

"Look at the minnows swimming around," said Zhuangzi. "That's how fish are happy."

"You aren't a fish," said Huizi. "So how do you know the fish are happy?"

"You aren't me, so how do you know that I don't know the fish are happy?"

"Not being you, I don't know about you. But I do know that you're not a fish, and so you can't know the fish are happy."

* This chapter is reprinted as it originally appeared in 1987, aside from changing Wade-Giles romanization for Chinese terms to Pinyin, inserting Chinese characters where needed, adding the volume numbers of the *Gesamtausgabe* for Heidegger's German works, and correcting the occasional error or typo.

“Let’s go back to your initial question. When you said ‘How do you know the fish are happy?’ you asked me the question already knowing that I knew. I knew it from my own happiness at being up above the Hao.”

[Later]

MR. PETZET [*aside*]:

With his interpretation of this story Heidegger is unexpectedly getting through better than with his difficult lecture, which to many people still remains obscure. Whoever is still in the dark about the essence of truth, reflection on this Chinese tale will show him Heidegger’s position on it.²

* * *

HEIDEGGER:

*The essence of truth is freedom ... Freedom reveals itself as the letting-be of beings ... as letting oneself into what-is.*³

Introduction

“*Being and Time* is a way and not a shelter. Whoever cannot walk should not take refuge in it. A way, not ‘the’ way, which never exists in philosophy.”⁴ Heidegger did not publish the text of his enigmatic lecture on the essence of truth until 1943. Three years later he spent the summer working with Dr. Hsiao from Taiwan on a translation of parts of the *Laozi*.⁵ But it is not until the late 1950s that he makes any reference to Daoism in print. In the lecture “The Principle of Identity” he mentions “the Chinese *dao*” in the same breath as the (Presocratic) Greek *logos*.⁶ Two years later, in *Underway to Language* (1959), in which he gives the first and only account of his engagement with philosophers from Japan, he offers a brief discussion of the idea of “Dao” in “the poetic thinking of Laozi.”⁷ Professor Chung-Yuan Chang reports that when he visited Heidegger in Freiburg in 1972, the latter produced a German translation of the *Zhuangzi* about which he was eager to ask questions and engage in discussion.⁸

What were the grounds for Heidegger’s interest, stretching over almost half a century, in a philosophy as ardently alien to Western thought as Daoism? Can we find any predisposing factors, and any elements in Heidegger’s thinking prior to his contact with Daoist ideas that would suggest a “pre-established harmony” between them? And what would be the point of engaging in a comparison of the two philosophies? *Harmoniē aphanēs phanerēs kreittōn*, says Heraclitus. The hidden harmony is deeper, the invisible connection stronger, the inconspicuous correspondence more interesting than the apparent. The parallels between Heidegger’s later work and Daoist ideas are so striking that they have already prompted comment.⁹ The concern here will be rather with *Sein und Zeit*, where the areas of similarity are obscure and—assuming that its writing antedates the author’s contact with Chinese thought—where influence is unlikely.¹⁰

Such a comparison points up some hitherto overlooked themes in Heidegger's early work that have a remarkably Daoist tone to them, rendering comprehensible why he should soon have found Daoism and Zen so congenial. It may also bring into relief some features that are only vaguely limned in the texts of the Daoist thinkers. Counter to the tendency of some of the secondary literature to exaggerate the differences between Heidegger's early and late work, a tendency exacerbated by viewing only the later writings as poetical and in harmony with Asian ideas, the present comparison will support Heidegger's assertions of the essential unity of his thought throughout its many phases. Above all, parallels demonstrated between his early "pre-contact" work and a non- and anti-metaphysical philosophy from a totally different historical and cultural situation lend considerable weight to Heidegger's claim to have succeeded in overcoming the Western metaphysical tradition.

A reading of Heidegger's and the Daoists' texts together makes apparent the extent to which, in philosophy, the form of what is presented constitutes the content. A foundational paradigm of content being embodied in form is the Platonic dialogue. Had Plato wished to convey "his philosophy," in the sense of setting forth his ideas about the nature of reality, he would have written discursive treatises. Because he was more concerned with prompting people to question for themselves, with inducing them to follow and make the *way* of thinking (which Heidegger calls *Denkweg* and the Daoists *dao*), to undergo the experience of going over the same topics again and again, of mis-taking highways for by-ways, of losing track of the way altogether, ending up—amazed—in cul-de-sacs and blind alleys through following at the heels of that Protean guide and master of the *aporia*, Socrates: he wrote dialogues. And given that Plato consistently wrote himself out of these dialogues, the question arises: what is his position? Where do we find his own views? To say that they are expressed in the speeches of Socrates is too simplistic. Many of the views expressed by interlocutors other than Socrates are eminently reasonable for a person to hold at that stage of inquiry—and some are surely views that Plato himself once held. To the extent that there is such a thing as Plato's position on a certain topic at a certain stage of his thinking, it is to be found *between* (one of Heidegger's favorite prepositions) that of Socrates and those of the other participants in the conversation, generated out of the tension of the opposing views presented.

Although discursive prose is not entirely inappropriate for writing on the early Heidegger alone, a comparison with the writings of Lao-Zhuang calls for a somewhat different form. Some kind of dialogue would be apposite, since Heidegger published two of his most fascinating pieces in the form of dialogues—and one might have expected more, in view of his predilection for spoken dialogue as a medium of instruction.¹¹ Further, the perspectivism of Daoist philosophy makes the dialogue an appropriate medium of explication, especially since the *Zhuangzi* consists largely of conversations and altercations. However, dialogue need not be overtly dramatic, as in Plato. The interlocutors in what follows are not *dramatis* but rather *cogitatoris personae*, representing tendencies within a single individual—and especially within one engaged in thinking about Heidegger and comparative philosophy. Their three voices, which are distinguished typographically (standard type, italic, and sans serif), represent different perspectives on certain issues common to the Daoists and Heidegger.

二 Dialogue

Fragmentary Beginnings

Although everything happens according to the *logos*,
men behave as though they do not understand it, both
before they have heard it and after hearing it.

Heraclitus 1

My words are very easy to understand and put into
practice, yet no one in the world can understand or put
them into practice.

Laozi 70

It is for good reason that Heidegger mentions *dao* 道 in the same breath as the Presocratic *logos*. A major ground for his openness to Daoist ideas is his becoming attuned early on to reading comparable texts in the form of fragments from the Presocratics. Of particular relevance in this context would be the writings of Heraclitus, the Western thinker closest in spirit to Daoism and to whom Heidegger ascribes the deepest understanding of Being.¹² The texts of the two great Daoist classics, though written somewhat later than the fragments, occupy a place in the history of East Asian thinking comparable to that of Heraclitus's work in the West. The impact of Lao-Zhuang was of course initially much greater, giving rise to one of the foremost schools of Chinese philosophy, and subsequently constituting a major force in the development of Zen Buddhism. Some of Heraclitus's ideas entered the Western mainstream through Plato, though they were largely overwhelmed by the latter's grander metaphysical concerns. Heraclitus continued, however, to be a fascinating figure exerting a mysterious and appropriately intermittent and sporadic influence throughout the development of Western thought, until Hegel's treatment (of the Presocratics in general) ended a period of relative neglect. Since then, interest in him has been further reanimated by Nietzsche and Heidegger—not to mention the numerous poets who have been inspired by the fecundity of the fragments.

The form of Heraclitus' text is especially congruent with that of Laozi's, both being woven from pregnant utterances couched in an archaic language rich in allusive power and interspersed with lacunae of obscurity. Though the patchwork of the *Daodejing* may have a somewhat more cohesive unity, a greater proportion of the fragments of Heraclitus come from a single hand than the verses attributed to Laozi. But stylistically they are remarkably similar in their blending of the arcane and the oracular, the gnomic and the poetic.¹³

Granted some elective affinity between Lao-Zhuang and Heraclitus, there is nevertheless something perverse about comparing the two major classics of Daoist thought, with their inimitably terse and poetic styles, with—of all of Heidegger's works—Sein und Zeit. The prose SZ, though hardly as hard on the reading ear as the English translation, Being and Time, is somewhat ponderous and far from poetical.¹⁴ In contrast to the "book of five thousand characters" (as the Laozi is sometimes called), which must rank

amongst the most profound of the world's short philosophical texts, and to the episodic and fragmentary texture of the Zhuangzi, the length and architectonic complexity of SZ are formidable.

In the attempt to highlight "Daoist" ideas in Heidegger's masterwork, the writing of which antedates not only his contact with Asian philosophy but also his more prolonged meditations on the thought of Heraclitus and Parmenides and Anaximander, the following reading will indeed have to wrestle constantly with the book's distinctly un-Daoist style. There will be a constant tension between the effort of sober exegesis of a hard and serious text and the temptation to escape to the later Heidegger, where language is granted far freer play and the resonances with Daoist ideas are clearly audible. As the interpretation is pulled away from close textual analysis it may do occasional violence to the text. But given Heidegger's idea that ontological interpretation and the analysis of Dasein must essentially be acts of "violence" (*Gewaltsamkeit*),¹⁵ it is remarkable how little violence SZ has elicited from interpreters in this present age of deconstruction (of which the idea of *Destruktion* in SZ is a precursor). And for a text that happens to take the hammer as a paradigm of things we encounter in our everyday dealings with the world, a wrench or two here and there won't hurt.

The first and major task is to engage in a fairly close reading of part A (secs. 14–18) of the third chapter of SZ, which establishes several themes crucial to the development of the text as a whole. The arguments of these sections also adumbrate the primary topics of our comparison: those of nature, utility, uselessness, nothing, and death—and the possibility of authentic existence. The Epilogue will entertain a few of these themes with reference to the works of the "middle period."

Man models himself on earth, earth on heaven, heaven
on the way, and the way on what is naturally so.¹⁶

Laozi 25

One of Heidegger's major criticisms of traditional Western ontology is that it overlooks what he calls "the worldness of the world" (*die Weltlichkeit der Welt*), what it is about worlds that makes them worlds. The task of the third chapter of SZ is to remedy this deficiency by an analysis of the phenomenon of *Welt* by way of an examination of the being of the everyday *Umwelt* (environment). Heidegger begins by remarking that traditional ontology has taken as its primary theme "things of nature" rather than "things invested with value" (63).

*It is precisely Heidegger's treatment of this issue in early work that threatens to derail the comparison with Daoism. A salient feature of SZ is that it gives remarkably short shrift to the world of nature. The entire analysis of the phenomenon of "world," and the concomitant criticism of traditional ontology, is based on the notion of *Zuhandenheit* ("to-handness").¹⁷ Heidegger's phenomenology of the ways we customarily relate to things in the world simply assumes that we treat them as "to-hand" (*zuhanden*), viewing them from the perspective of utility, and relating to them in terms of what we can do with them.*

The Daoist view—on the conventional understanding of Daoism—could be characterized by the injunction: "Be natural."¹⁸ A central dictum in Daoism speaks to the

unity of the human and nature (tian ren he yi 天人合一), suggesting that humanity's problems stem in great measure from becoming separated from tian. To bring one's being into harmony with dao, one should re-align oneself with the way of heaven, the dao of tian, natural dao. A comparable understanding of nature is totally lacking in Heidegger—at least in the early work. Moreover, Daoism is so radically against anthropocentrism and so roundly condemns the utilitarian perspective that Zhuangzi in particular is renowned for his extolling of “the usefulness of being useless.” The Daoist would consider SZ to be informed by a hopelessly utilitarian and instrumental view of human being, and would discern in the text a program justifying the violation of the earth in the name of technology. One might even say that Heidegger's misdirected zeal over certain political issues in the early thirties was prefigured by his excessive enthusiasm several years earlier concerning the possibilities of modern technology.

From another perspective, Heidegger's ideas about the phenomenon of world can be seen as an extreme literalization of Kant's attitude toward (knowing rather than utilizing) nature as expressed in the preface to the second edition of the Critique of Pure Reason (B xiii), where he writes that human reason

must not allow itself to be kept, as it were, in nature's leading strings, but must itself show the way ... constraining nature to give answer to questions of reason's own determining Reason ... must approach nature ... in the character of an appointed judge who compels the witnesses to answer questions he himself has formulated.

In the language of SZ: Dasein projects in advance a world, a horizon of possibility in terms of which things can make sense to us and thus appear as things. And this is for the most part a horizon of utility.

It is true that by the time of the essays the mid-forties Heidegger had turned things around (a consequence of the famous Kehre) and developed a view that was less anthropocentric. In the later work, the appropriate attitude toward the “thingness of the thing” is to let it suggest to us the best mode of approach. If we refrain from protecting a human horizon of world as the context or background against which to encounter things, we realize that things in a way generate their own worlds, and it is through those atmospheres that we should approach them. That is all quite harmonious with Daoism—but the later texts can hardly be adduced to show that Heidegger was pursuing these lines of thought prior to the “turning.”

To return to the topic of nature: it is hardly discussed at all in SZ. Hildegard Feick's Index lists only ten pages on which the term occurs.¹⁹ Moreover, the section for die Natur is entitled: “Nature as disclosed in for-sight (als umsichtig entdeckte) or as theoretically known,” which corresponds to Heidegger's characterization of being-in-the-world as concern for beings in the world as to-hand and on-hand. Even authentic Dasein, the being for whom “its own being is an issue,” relates to things in terms of their utility—as indeed it must, if it is to continue being. In general, for the Heidegger of SZ, nature is merely “discovered along with” the disclosure of the world of factual Dasein, and is thereby seen as something on- or to-hand.

If we look at the text, we see that Heidegger first broaches the topic of nature at the beginning of chapter 3, just before introducing the ideas of *Zuhanden-* and *Vorhandenheit*. The aim of the chapter is to elucidate the phenomenon of world, by considering the being of beings within the world:

Beings within the world are things, things of nature (*Natur-dinge*) and things “invested with value” (“*wertbehaftete*” *Dinge*). The thingness (*Dinglichkeit*) of these things becomes a problem; and insofar as the thingness of the latter depends upon nature-thingness, the being of things of nature, nature as such, is the primary theme. The fundamental character of things of nature, of substances, is substantiality.

(63)

This is Heidegger’s account of the viewpoint of traditional ontology, and an approach which he thinks can never on its own disclose the phenomenon of world. He is critical of the tendency to interpret this phenomenon on the basis of nature as determined by the natural sciences, which is already to see things in a particular and restricted perspective: “Dasein can discover beings as nature only in a definite mode of its being-in-the-world. This knowing (*Erkennen*) has the character of a definite de-worlding (*Entweltlichung*) of the world” (65). The “definite mode” he has in mind is presumably the taking of nature as something on-hand.

From Pen to Hammer

To-handness is the ontological-categorical definition of what-is, as it is “in itself.”

SZ 71

The next mention of nature occurs five pages later; but within these pages Heidegger introduces five key ideas—those of *Zeug*, *Verweisung*, *Zuhandenheit*, *Umsicht*, and *Vorhandenheit*—which are relevant to our topic. He calls what we immediately encounter in our everyday dealings with things *Zeug* (68), a word so basic in German that it is almost impossible to translate, especially since it occurs in a variety of compounds.²⁰ He gives as examples writing utensils (*Schreibzeug*), sewing equipment (*Nähzeug*), tools (*Werkzeug*, literally: “work-thing”), vehicles (*Fahrzeug*: “travel-thing”), and measuring instruments (*Messzeug*). *Zeug* basically means “things” or “stuff,” and in Heidegger’s usage more specifically “something for such-and-such an activity or use.” The primary feature of *Zeug* is that there is never just one of it: “*Ein Zeug ‘ist’ strengenommen nie.*” A piece of equipment can be what it is only with reference (*Verweisung*) to other equipment: “writing materials, pen, ink, paper, blotting pad, desk, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, the room.” The context is primary: these items do not present themselves individually and then make up a totality; rather, the room as a whole is what we immediately experience—and not “in a geometrically spatial sense, but as a ‘living-utensil’ (*Wohnzeug*)” (68).

This theme corresponds to the Daoist insistence that anything is what it is only in relation to other things, that a particular is entirely dependent on its context. In fact Zhuangzi makes this point with specific reference to the idea of utility, in terms similar to those Heidegger uses to describe *Verweisung*, emphasizing that usefulness is nothing absolute but is always relative to a context. In the “Autumn Floods” chapter, Ruo of the North Sea says: “A battering ram is good for smashing down a wall, but not for stopping up a hole, which is to say that it is a tool with a special use” (ch. 17, *IC* 146–7). In the language of *SZ*, the battering ram is “something ... in order to” destroy a city wall; it has a “reference” to the entire relational matrix of sieges and fortifications. In filling a small hole the battering ram would be—because of its great mass, which suits it ideally for demolishing something firm—with respect to something fluid entirely useless.

This “relational dependence” of usefulness is made even clearer by the realization that what is useful depends for its utility on what is not being used. This point is exemplified by a passage from the Outer Chapters which invites us to contemplate our relationship to the earth, the ground on which we stand and walk. Zhuangzi is speaking to Huizi:

“In all the immensity of heaven and earth, a man uses no more than is room for his feet. If recognizing this we were to dig away the ground around his feet all the way down to the Underworld, would it still be useful to the man?”

“It would be useless.”

“Then it is plain that the useless does serve a use.”

(Ch. 26, *IC* 100; cf. ch. 3, *IC* 62)

A piece of ground does not *an sich* support anything (at least not anything locomotive); the abyss is, as in Nietzsche, always already “there.” It provides support only in relation to something to-hand—in this case: to-foot—that is not being used, but offers the *possibility* of being used. Thus, Heidegger characterizes the “in-itselfness” (*An-sich-sein*) of the to-hand as being founded upon the phenomenon of world. An implement has its possibilities only as long as it participates in a relational matrix.

That passage from *SZ* in which Heidegger coins the neologism *Wohnzeug* is reminiscent, by the way, of one of the few discussions of “equipment” in the *Laozi* (ch. 11), which makes the point that a room can be used as a “living-utensil” only if it includes emptiness in the form of space between the walls, and within them in the form of windows and doors.

Let us not get carried away by notions of emptiness until we have understood the more prosaic reality of pens and paper. There is a danger of reading into these sections of SZ something (or nothing) that is simply not there. In characterizing the way of being tools or equipment Heidegger is doing precisely that: he is not making a universal ontological statement about the ultimate nature of things.

But he nevertheless does want us to see the thing of use as a paradigm for things in general—especially since the purpose of his discussion here is to elucidate the phenomenon of world.

And if we continue to follow this elucidation, it will lead us back to our original topic: nature. The scene changes from study to workshop, as Heidegger goes on to

argue that no mere observation of a hammer, nor theoretical contemplation of it, can lead to a genuine understanding of its being.²¹ Its “to-handness” can be appreciated only if we grasp the hammer in its being by picking it up and using it. “Hammering itself discovers the specific ‘handiness’ (*Handlichkeit*) of the hammer. The way of being of *Zeug* is *Zuhandenheit*” (69). Heidegger calls the hammer’s “to-handness” its *An-sich-sein*, its “being-in-itself”: we need to return to the paradox (which has generally gone unnoticed) generated by this unusual use of *An-sich-sein*. In dealing with things as to-hand we see them in the context of a network of “in-order-to’s” (*Um-zu*)—the pen is something “in-order-to” make marks on paper—and so Heidegger calls this kind of vision *Umsicht*, or “for-sight.”²² Having stressed that for-sight does not grasp the being of what is to-hand explicitly in any kind of thematized understanding, and that we most fully understand its being by handling it, Heidegger then remarks on its most peculiar feature—namely, that when a thing of use is optimally fulfilling its function it *withdraws*. “What is peculiar about what is immediately to-hand is that it simultaneously withdraws in its to-handness, just in order to be properly to-hand.”²³

Heidegger goes on to remark on another feature of our dealings with things as to-hand: that our attention is directed not so much to the tool itself as to the work we are engaged in. For example: when writing, our attention is focused not on the pen but rather on the-words-appearing-on-the-page. He points out that the work always carries with it a reference to a further possible use, to other people as possible users—and also to nature. “Through using tools ‘nature’ is also discovered, ‘nature’ in the sense of natural products” (70).²⁴

He goes on to distinguish three possible ways in which things of nature can be encountered.

But nature must not be understood here as what is merely on-hand—nor as the *power of nature* (*die Naturmacht*). The wood is forest, the mountain is quarry, the river is water power, the wind is wind “in the sails” ... It is possible not to see the being [of nature] as to-hand, and to discover and determine it simply in its pure on-handness (*Vorhandenheit*). This cognizance of nature misses it as something which “stirs and strives,” overwhelms us, captivates us as landscape. The plants of the botanist are not the flowers of the hedgerow, the geographically determined “source” of a river is not the “spring in the ground.”

It is clear from this passage that *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit* do not refer to two set classes of things but rather to two different ways in which things can be encountered. A hammer can be to-hand or on-hand, depending on the mode of our concern with it—practical or theoretical. And the same is true of a tree, or the wind, or any other natural phenomenon, depending on whether our concern is to utilize it or investigate it scientifically. (For example: a botanist who does pull-ups from the bough of a tree on his day off is treating it as *Zeug*, as something for exercising with, taking it as something to-hand, rather than in his usual working mode as something on-hand.)

However, the passage implies that there is a third way of relating to things of nature, which is to understand them—the flowers of the hedgerow and the source in the ground—as manifestations of the “power of nature.” Heidegger goes on to talk

about how “environing nature” (*Umweltnatur*) is disclosed, though not explicitly as such, in our dealings with various kinds of *Zeug*, and then immediately embarks upon a discussion of *Zuhandenheit* without saying anything more about the third possible way of treating things of nature (71).

He mentions this third possible mode of being only once again, in a similarly off-hand manner, at the beginning of the section entitled “Reality and Care”: “The nature which ‘surrounds’ us ... does not, however, display the mode of being of the to-hand or the on-hand in the sense of ‘the thingliness of nature’” (211). But again the theme is left undeveloped and disappears, the subsequent references to nature having to do with the traditional ontological and scientific understanding of the natural world.²⁵

There is, however, a long and rather cryptic footnote in one of the 1929 essays which contains a further reference to nature. There Heidegger warns specifically against “[interpreting] being-in-the-world as commerce with things of use (*Umgang mit den Gebrauchsdingen*)”²⁶ and continues:

But if in the ... analysis of Dasein nature is apparently missing—not only nature as an object of the natural sciences but also nature in an original sense (cf. *SZ* 65f)—there are reasons for this. The decisive thing is that nature lets itself be encountered neither in the surroundings of the environment (*im Umkreis der Umwelt*) nor primarily as something *to which we relate* (*wozu wir uns verhalten*). Nature is originally manifest in Dasein in as far as the latter exists as disposed-attuned (*befindlich-gestimmt*) *in the midst of* what-is ... [It is only in the] full concept of *care* (*Sorge*) ... that the *basis* for the *problem* of nature can be attained.

Heidegger forgoes an investigation into “nature as an object of the natural sciences” (as something “on-hand”) because his concern is on a deeper ontological plane—with that projected horizon which determines in advance whether we see a given being as a natural thing, a possible tool or resource, an object of scientific study, or whatever. “Nature in an original sense” presumably corresponds to what was called “the power of nature” in *SZ*.²⁷ The next couple of sentences make it clear why the scientific or instrumental perspectives cannot see nature “in the original sense”—because it manifests *inside* us as much as outside. And yet, unfortunately, the analysis in *SZ* of *Stimmung* (mood) as an “attunement” of our being-(t)here²⁸ that is neither internal nor external gives no examples related to nature.

Such a study of the ways in which natural (including meteorological and physiological) phenomena condition the clearing of our being-here would be well worth while. Presumably the third possible attitude toward nature, being neither practical nor theoretical, is primarily aesthetic. Whereas to deal with manufactured things as to-hand is to disclose them as they are *in themselves* (*an sich*), to relate to natural things only as on/to-hand is not to discover “nature in an original sense,” is to fail to appreciate the “power of nature.” It is indeed disappointing that Heidegger failed to elaborate on the third way, in view of the misinterpretations that have arisen as a result of overlooking the two cursory mentions of it in *SZ*. He does, however, describe the appropriate attitude toward things of nature (and in general) in the essay from 1935 “On the Origin of the Work of Art.”²⁹

Uses of the Useless

“Now this talk of yours is big but useless, dismissed by everyone alike.”

Huizi to Zhuangzi³⁰

This talk about utility needs to be tempered by the consideration that one of the major thrusts the Daoists’ attack against anthropocentrism is a repudiation of the utilitarian view of the world. They are wary of most forms of discriminative consciousness, holding the value judgments that issue from them to be inherently one-sided and therefore distorting; but they particularly abhor the division of things into the instrumental categories of the useful and the useless. Along with the exhortation to a creative engagement with nature is their rather idiosyncratic praise of uselessness.

The theme is exemplified in the Inner Chapters primarily in stories concerning things of nature (including human beings) which reach an advanced age precisely through not being good for anything. Of trees that are useful to human beings Zhuangzi says: “So they do not last out the years Heaven assigned them, but die in mid-journey under the axe. That is the trouble with being stuff which is good for something” (ch. 4, IC 74). In the same chapter, Carpenter Shi encounters the gigantic old oak at the earth altar and says of it: “This wood is wretched timber, useless for anything; that’s why it’s been able to grow so old.” But shortly afterwards the holy oak appears to him in a dream and says: “Supposing that I had been useful, would I have had the opportunity to grow so big? You and I are both things ... and the good-for-nothing man who is soon to die, what does he know of the good-for-nothing tree?”³¹ Even granting Heidegger a kind of mitigated instrumentalist position, Zhuangzi’s emphasis on the “usefulness of being useless” is too prominent to allow a comparison on this topic to be viable.

It is true that one doesn’t find in early Heidegger a corresponding praise of usefulness *per se*, but he does appreciate the usefulness of the *unusable*—at least for the task of a phenomenology of “everydayness.” And in fact we have just reached the point in the text where Heidegger takes up precisely that issue.

At the beginning of section 16 Heidegger reminds us that the point of his investigation of things to-hand was to help elucidate the phenomenon of world. He had left himself (and us) in the *aporia* of trying to grasp the being of the hammer by using it—and then experiencing its withdrawal as soon as one starts. One is reminded of the Daoist dictum (*Laozi* 64): “He who grasps, loses it.” As a way out, Heidegger points our attention to three ways in which the *Weltmässigkeit* of the environment (*Umwelt*) announces itself: “conspicuousness” (*Auffälligkeit*), where a tool is unusable or a particular material unsuitable for the job; “obtrusiveness” (*Aufdringlichkeit*), in which the work is obstructed when a needed tool is missing; and “obstinacy” (*Aufsässigkeit*), where a tool is not unusable or missing but is irremovably “there” and in the way (73–4).

(There comes to mind here an example—which Heidegger, being an oenophile, would appreciate—of a situation in which all three features come together. At a picnic on a hot summer’s day we take out the carefully chilled bottle of wine—only to find that we’ve left the corkscrew at home. The cork, having been rendered un-to-hand,

announces itself as conspicuously immovable without the obtrusively absent corkscrew; while the unopenable bottle stands there as obstinately and tantalizingly un-to-hand—or, even more so, un-to-mouth. To push the cork *into* the bottle is a solution about which Heidegger would probably hesitate longer than Zhuangzi.)

Owing, then, to the peculiar tendency of what is to-hand to withdraw, for us to become aware of its being it must “in a certain way [lose] its to-handness.” There has to be “a disturbance of reference (*Verweisung*)” (74), “a *breach* in the relational context disclosed by our for-sight” (75). These gaps, disturbances, and interruptions in our ongoing dealings with things serve to illuminate the context in which all this activity has been taking place—and the phenomenon of world thereby “announces itself.”

To this extent the idea of unusability serves a function in Heidegger comparable to the role of uselessness in Zhuangzi, insofar as it makes us pull back and contemplate the surrounding context and thereby lets us see the perspective of utility *as* a perspective. This kind of consideration counters the tendency to exaggerate the differences between Heidegger and Zhuangzi by making the latter look overly “anti-” and the former overly “pro-instrumentalist.” There are, of course, from the thing’s point of view, definite disadvantages in being potential *Zeug* or “[good] for something.” But for the Daoists the problem is less with the standpoint of utility *per se* than with getting stuck in any single perspective. And surely Heidegger, with his emphasis on the “multi-dimensionality” of Being, would, just as much as Zhuangzi, pray with Blake that we be kept from “single vision and Newton’s sleep.”

The issue is exemplified amusingly in the exchange between Zhuangzi and Huizi concerning the large gourds the latter has been given. He ends up in frustration smashing them to pieces because they are too unwieldy to be used as water containers or dippers—“because they were useless” (ch. 1, *IC* 47). Zhuangzi’s response is that Huizi has been stupid in failing to see that he could have “[made] them into those big bottles swimmers tie to their waists and [gone] floating away over the Yangtse and the Lakes.” The point is not that the perspective of utility is inherently pernicious; the anecdote rather points up our tendency to become fixated in calculating and utilitarian modes of relating to things, rather than conducting ourselves “with a full view of heaven.” And even within the perspective of utility our vision tends, like Huizi’s, to be too narrow, our “for-sight” too short: being taken in by the customary ways of understanding things we become blind to their myriad possibilities. Because Huizi was fixated on putting the gourds to their conventional use by putting water in them, he could not see his way to putting himself on them and getting into the water instead.

Finally, if we look at the language Heidegger uses to talk about our relations to things to-hand, we’ll find that it’s much less aggressive than our objector’s neo-Kantian paraphrase (in terms of laying down in advance how things can be encountered) suggested.

The contrast between early and late Heidegger, between the supposedly aggressive instrumentality of *SZ* and the serene releasement (*Gelassenheit*) of the later writings, is indeed generally overdrawn—as we can appreciate if we go on to look at section 18. Inquiring after the worldness of the world, Heidegger asks: “How can world let things be encountered? ... What we encounter within the world has been ... freed in its being for concerned for-sight (*ist für die besorgende Umsicht ... in*

seinem Sein freigegeben) ... What does this prior freeing (*Freigabe*) amount to?" (83). This freeing, or release, takes place through *bewendenlassen* (letting be involved), which he characterizes as "to let something to-hand *be so-and-so* (*Zuhandenes so und so sein lassen*) as it already is and so that it can be so" (84). The double *so* here is significant: for-sight lets things be what they already are *and* as they can also be. Through the prior freeing of a being for being to-hand we help it come into its own. This is not a one-sided operation in which we unilaterally impose our will on things, but rather a reciprocal interaction. In forging a piece of metal into a knife, for example, the metalworker realizes a certain potential of that metal for sharpness, a potential it could never realize on its own. But the success of the work depends in advance on certain properties of the metal itself—since no amount of working on wood could ever achieve such sharpness.

It is true that at the root of the complex network of interconnections among things to-hand there is the ultimate *Worum-willen* ("for-the-sake-of-which") which informs the entire structure—namely, our concern for our own welfare. This means that we naturally look at things in the light of our concern for our own being, and so always "let things be encountered as to-hand" (86). That, for Heidegger, is simply a fact—Wittgenstein would say "form"—of life.

A Short Handnote

"Not too slow, not too fast; I feel it in the hand and
respond from the heart, the mouth cannot put it into
words, there's a knack in it somewhere which I cannot
convey to my son."

Zhuangzi 13

In line with the Daoist emphasis on being-in-the-world without being taken in by it, the models the *Zhuangzi* offers of people who are on to the *dao* are not sage-hermits who spend their lives meditating in isolation from the world, but are often artisans and craftsmen and others who have attained consummate mastery of certain psycho-physical skills—most of whom work primarily with their hands.³² Manual dexterity, smooth, graceful, and effortlessly responsive, is a sign that one's power (*de* 德) has become fully integrated. The idea behind many Daoist stories is that if one can disconnect discursive thought and respond from the wisdom of the body, the hands will do their own kind of thinking.

In the early forties, as he became more concerned with the idea of *Denken*, Heidegger alluded to its relations to the hand by calling genuine thinking a *Handeln*, or activity. He soon began to refer to thinking as a *Hand-Werk*, a craft—but literally a work of the hand.³³ Thinking with the hands rather than with the brain consists for Heidegger in the hand's "reaching and receiving, holding and carrying, pointing and gesturing." It is not surprising that he also mentions the hand's drawing (*zeichnen*), given his admiration for artists such as Cezanne and Klee for their thoughtful renderings of things and (their) Being.³⁴

“The gestures of the hand pervade the whole of language and in fact most purely when man speaks in being silent.” Heidegger surely has in mind here not only a language of gesture, but also the thinking that takes place in writing, the silent movements of the hand over the page. In writing, if one is fortunate to receive a block of inspiration, one then has to work somewhat as a carpenter works wood. From a rough draft the careful writer will make numerous passes over it as with a plane, smoothing out the rough surfaces and shaping the form of the whole.³⁵

It is true that Heidegger did not develop this theme until the later work; but if one looks at SZ “chirologically” one sees that a thinking of the hand, though not explicitly called such, runs throughout the text—in the descriptions of our everyday dealings with things as *zuhanden*. Not that our everyday activity is on a par with the accomplished Daoist’s, but perhaps authentic dealings with things, as described below, could be. In the words of Wallace Stevens, “it is a world of words to the end of it, in which nothing solid is its solid self.”³⁶

The exchange between Zhuangzi and Huizi about digging away the ground around where one is standing illustrated the usefulness of the unused (in Heideggerian terms, the dependence of utility on possibility). A related theme in Daoism is the interdependence of utility and emptiness, or nothing (*wu* 無).³⁷ Chapter 11 of the *Laozi* presents three kinds of thing: a cartwheel, a jug, and a room; and in each case the point is to show that these implements are only “to-hand” on the basis of an emptiness, a nothing, where there is a breach in the fullness of the material. “Thus what we gain is Something, yet it is by virtue of Nothing that this can be put to use.” Were there no hub at the center of the wheel, there could be no rotation; were there no hollow within the jug, it could not hold anything; and were there no openings in the walls in the form of windows and a door, neither light nor occupants could enter the room.

These verses offer in a way the inverse perspective on utility from the analysis in SZ. There the implement can be what it is only insofar as it stands out against a surrounding horizon of World; in *Laozi* the thing can function only on the basis of an emptiness *within* the implement itself. But in both cases the realization of a particular emptiness, lack, or non-being within the world conduces to a realization of the Nothing that is the ultimate (un-)ground of everything. Heidegger was later to write of a jug in a manner reminiscent of—and probably influenced by—Laozi, in the 1950 essay “Das Ding” (The Thing).³⁸ In both cases the jug (or wheel, or room) is to be taken as an image for the human being: were there in us no emptiness, we would not be able to be, as human beings, here (or there). In fact Heidegger remarked on the thing’s intimating its own nothingness as early as 1935:

Beings cannot, however, throw off the question-able thing about them that whatever they are and how they are—they also could *not* be. This possibility is not something we ... merely add in thought, but the being itself announces this possibility, announces itself as the being in [the possibility].

(EM 22, IM 29)

Let us go back for a moment to Heidegger’s discussion of the breakdown of our dealings with things to-hand. When something to-hand is missing, there opens up

“a *breach* in the relational context disclosed by our for-sight. For-sight falls into emptiness ...” (75). This is the first intimation of Nothing in SZ. Since in our everyday activity our concern is not with the implements themselves but with the work they are being used for, it is only when something goes wrong that the relational context which conditions and makes all such activity possible comes to light. Only through a break can we see the World—as that which conditions in advance all “what-for’s,” “in-order-to’s,” and other implemental relationships. This totality of the relational context, the world, is itself no thing: it is neither to-hand nor on-hand; but only thanks to this empty horizon can any implement, or thing, be what it is. But in “everydayness” we tend to lose ourselves in beings and fail to attend to that which lets them be—to the empty horizon of World, the background of Nothing against which every being presents itself as *not* nothing, that is, as something.

(This is the topic of the question with which *Introduction to Metaphysics* opens: “Why is there anything at all and not rather nothing?” Why? To what end? What’s the use of it all? The answer, insofar as there is one, would be: No reason, no ground—simply, World. Heidegger re-reads the principle of sufficient reason with an idiosyncratic change of emphasis: *Nihil est sine ratione*—nothing is without ground.)

We don’t encounter anything corresponding to the emptiness revealed through this break again until the sixth chapter of Division One, in the section that describes how *Angst* discloses “nothingness, i.e., the world as such” (187).

There is a key phenomenon in Heidegger to which nothing—or perhaps one should say, rather, “not anything”—in Daoism corresponds. Angst plays a pivotal role in SZ in the transition to authentic existence as described in Division Two. There is no trace of existential anxiety and the related phenomena of constriction and weird uncanniness (Unheimlichkeit) in the writings of Lao-Zhuang. The abyss of dao and the emptiness of nothing are contemplated with a calm serenity that is far from “the terror of the abyss” (der Schrecken des Abgrundes) of which the later Heidegger so eloquently speaks.³⁹

There does appear to be a major discrepancy here, a difference in tone and quality of affect. But when we look to the underlying views of the self which Heidegger and the Daoists inherit from their respective traditions, it may turn out to be more a difference in degree than in the nature of the (understanding of the) self itself. Both cultures began with a sense of the self’s open participation in the world, of a dynamic process of flowing and permeable boundaries. Shortly before the emergence of Daoism, the self had apparently begun to coagulate, as it were, around a core of self-interest. So that Confucius, in a spirit similar to that which moved Socrates, had to exhort his fellow men to “overcome the self” (*ke ji* 克己) by ignoring prospects of profit and gain, honor and reputation, and re-open the self, through the observant practice of sacred ritual (*li* 禮), to the matrix of relationships in which it essentially inheres. In the same vein the Daoists speak of “forgetting the self” (*wang ji* 忘己), such that “the utmost man has no self” (*Zhuangzi* 1).

While Socrates similarly abhorred self-interest and considerations of personal profit, power, and fame as motives for action, the resulting dynamics of the self were different—consisting in a gathering of the rational soul into itself so that it would not suffer dissolution after separation from the body at death. The idea of the self as

substance persisted as a central tenet of the Platonic/Christian tradition, culminating in the extreme coagulation of the *res cogitans* around the center of the ego in the philosophy of Descartes—and in the absolute separation of this substance from the radically different substance (*res extensa*) comprising the world. In spite of Nietzsche's attacks on the substantial conception of the self and his attempts to crack the hardened husk of the "atomic" soul, the idea of self which Heidegger was faced with was still far harder to "deconstruct" and far more abysmally separated from the world than that which confronted the Daoists. Hence the *Angst* when the center fails to hold and the construct begins to fall apart.

But the degree of proneness to Angst has to do not only with different understandings of the self but also with a concomitant difference in their understandings of the world. For the ancient Chinese the question of the possible meaninglessness of the cosmos simply never arises: the cosmos is inherently invested with meaning. There may be dispute amongst various schools as to the nature of its meaning, but—for the Daoists at least—the cosmos is an ordered whole. Not patterned from without by transcendent archai, nor heading purposively towards a pre-existent telos, but informed from within by the patterning they call dao.

The cosmic situation in which post-Copernican Western man finds himself after "the death of God" is indeed more alienating than the situation of the Zhou dynasty Chinese. The collapse of a structure that had given meaning to existence for over two thousand years was bound to occasion considerable psychical and spiritual turmoil. However, there is another side to the picture. The passage in which Heidegger writes of the terror of the abyss reads:

The clear courage for genuine anxiety guarantees the mysterious possibility of the experience of Being. For close by genuine anxiety as the terror of the abyss dwells awe. This clears and protects that realm of human being within which man dwells at home in the enduring.

The point he is making here is that *Angst*, as anxiety in the face of the abyss, and *Scheu*, as awe and wonder at there being *anything* at all, are two aspects of the same phenomenon. In the major discussion of *Angst* in the entire corpus (in "What Is Metaphysics?") the encounter with nothing is said to be pervaded by "a strange kind of peace" and "a spellbound calm."⁴⁰ But even though the terrifying side is not evident in Daoism, what *Angst* reveals does—as we shall see shortly—have a counterpart.

It might help to establish that point if we first take a quick look at the salient points from the discussion of *Angst* in *SZ*. That will also help us to appreciate better the analogy between the breakdowns described in section 16, in which breaches in the fabric of interconnections of things to-hand reveal what they are *for*, and the breakdown *par excellence* that is *Angst*, in which all our relations to things in the world are ruptured.

We learn from Heidegger's description in section 40 that "what anxiety is about is not anything within the world ... nothing of what is to- and on-hand"; and he speaks of the "obstinacy (*Aufsässigkeit*) of the Nothing and Nowhere within the world" that presses upon us in *Angst* (186), which turns out to be "the *possibility* of

what is to-hand at all, that is: the world itself" (187). The "nothing of what is to-hand (*dieses Nichts des Zuhandenen*)" is grounded in "the world as such," "the world as world," or—as he puts it in the second discussion of *Angst*, in Division Two—"the nothing of the world (*das Nichts der Welt*)" (343).

In this more global breakdown, things recede from us, and the hitherto unnoticed background (the empty horizon of World) comes to the fore and lets us see what it is all for: nothing. The full realization is then that the nothing of the world is also the nothing of the self. Wallace Stevens has expressed something like this: "Until the used-to earth and sky ... these men, and earth and sky, inform each other by sharp informations ... breaches of that which held them fast."⁴¹

The Issue of Death

Which of us is able to think of nothingness as the head,
of life as the spine, of death as the rump? ... He shall
be my friend.

Zhuangzi 6

For Hades and Dionysos are the same.

Heraclitus 15

Heidegger makes the connection between *Angst* and death in the Second Division, revealing the nothingness of world to be—since "Dasein is its world"—the nothingness of the self. His understanding of death as a constant presence within life rather than a state beyond and opposed to life is close to the Daoists'. Just as Heidegger emphasizes that "*our sight is too short* if life is made the problem *and then also occasionally* death is considered" (316), so Laozi remarks that "it is because people set too much store by life that they treat death lightly" (ch. 75).

But at first glance the Daoist perspective on death appears quite different from Heidegger's. Death is not a major theme in the Daodejing, and most of the references to it there have to do primarily with literal, biological death. Laozi has heard of "one who excels in safeguarding his own life ... for [whom] there is no realm of death" (ch. 50); and one gets the general impression the work that the sage has identified himself with dao in such a way that the encounter with death is of little moment. The issue figures more prominently in Zhuangzi, and Angus Graham has remarked upon "the ecstatic, rhapsodic tone" in which Zhuangzi writes on the topic (IC 23). As in Laozi, the prospect of death loses its terror because the individual has identified with the larger cycles of change which pattern the cosmos, and is thereby able to move into death as simply the next transformation in the endless series cycles that constitute dao.

In SZ on the other hand, the encounter with death in Angst and the appropriate response of total openness to that nothing of the self are crucial for both an existential and ontological understanding of our being here. The tones and the treatments are quite different: the Daoists' informed by a serenity tinged with wonder, a grave matter-of-factness tempered by traces of exultation at the prospect the next

transformation; Heidegger's weighted heavily toward Angst and grim resoluteness in the face the abyss.

When death is faced with equanimity, there are several possible background conditions. At one end of the spectrum, death has hardly become an issue, since the person's individuality is not yet sufficiently differentiated from the social group—as in the case of members of so-called “primitive” societies, for example. The prospect of death is terrifying only to the ego, to that part of the self which has come to experience itself as an entity separated from the world. To the extent that one is identified with the deeper layer of the self which is implicated in the procession of the generations, the prospect of individual death has less import—since there is no reason to suppose that the annihilation of whatever self there is will have any effect on the larger process in which it participates.

At the other extreme is an equanimity based on a belief in the immortality of the soul. In this case (of which the Socrates of the *Phaedo* would be a paradigm) the individual withdraws from the world of the senses, dis-identifies with the body, and identifies with the highest functions of the rational soul, which are universal and transpersonal. In the first instance there is no problem because the self is insufficiently concentrated to be self-aware, and in the second because it is so powerfully concentrated that dissolution appears impossible. Since for both Heidegger and Zhuangzi there is already an awareness of the self, the question is whether either of the views involves a regression to a state of “primitive” non-self-awareness, a simple acceptance of annihilation, a belief in transcendence and individual survival, or some further alternative.

There seems to be a difference between the Laozi and Zhuangzi on this point. The Daoists' emphasis on spontaneity and their praise of primordial naturalness might suggest that their ideal involves a total immersion in purely natural processes and a regression to a stage of quasi-primitive participation in the world, and some passages in Laozi which advocate “returning to the root” and reverting to “the uncarved block” reinforce this impression. Under these circumstances death would not be an issue, because there is not sufficient self-awareness or extension of consciousness beyond the present moment. On the other hand, the pre-dominance of Daoist imagery about wandering above and beyond the dust and grime of worldly affairs and their concern with not being bound by things (especially evident in Zhuangzi, ch. 6), taken together with the passages that seem to suggest that dao is at least in part transcendent to the world, inclines one to ascribe the Daoists' equanimity in the face of death to their having transcended the realm of life and death. Neither alternative, however, would characterize Heidegger's position.

That is true. But even though there is a sense in which both Zhuangzi and Plato view death as a transformation, their understandings are essentially different. In Daoism the movement of transformation is the opposite of the Platonic one: rather than centering the soul in preparation for the ascent to unity with the Absolute, one de- and ex-centers the self to allow it to merge in all directions with the formlessness of *dao*. To the extent that *dao* is “transcendent” it is transcendent to the individual as a particular, but it is wholly immanent in the world if we include in that the history of the race. And to the extent that the Daoists advocate detachment from the dust and grime of the world, this is to be understood as only a necessary stage on the way to a

reintegration with it. The “true man” (*zhen ren* 真人) has gone beyond mere unconscious participation in the world and also beyond transcendent detachment from it. He has reintegrated himself with the processes of change in such a way as to become “the helper of heaven” (*xiang tian* 相天). He is one “in whom neither heaven nor man is the victor,” who participates in the world-process with full awareness of its macrocosmic dimensions, “[opening] things up to the light of heaven.”⁴² If one insists on applying the categories of transcendence and immanence, one would have to characterize the Daoist position as one of “transcendence-*in*-immanence.” There is after all something paradoxical about Zhuangzi’s position on death, which Graham sums up well when he writes that Zhuangzi “seems to foresee the end of his individuality as an event which is both an obliteration and an opening out of consciousness” (IC 23).

Thus the Daoist attitude toward death, which helps one “forget” the self and allow it consciously to identify with the macrocosm, may not be so different from Heidegger’s existential conception of death as possibility. But rather than go further into this vast topic, let us focus on what kind of transformation of our dealings with things is effected by the confrontation with death.

An obstacle remains in the course of comparison concerning the incompatibility between Heidegger’s insistence that authentic existence continues to relate to things as to-hand and the Daoist idea of wuwei 無為. This idea of “doing nothing” or “non-interfering activity” appears to involve a broadening of one’s perspective(s) so that one is able to see things in “the full light of heaven,” and a forgetting of the self in such a way that one is open(ed) to respond to the movements of dao by spontaneously realizing one’s own particular de, or natural potential. Such a process seems quite foreign to the emphasis in SZ on grim resoluteness and self-assertion.

In the account of authentic existence in *SZ* Heidegger twice speaks of “letting the ownmost self act through one (*in sich handeln lassen*).”⁴³ One does this by letting the self “shatter itself against death,” so as to “give death the possibility of assuming power (*Macht*) over the existence of Dasein.”⁴⁴ This idea corresponds to the Daoist notion that if one can “empty out” the self, then *dao* will naturally work (and play) through one in the form of “the daemonic” (*shen* 神) or, more generally, as “power” (*de* 德). Angus Graham’s commentary on a passage from chapter 4 of Zhuangzi describes this phenomenon in terms remarkably similar to Heidegger’s: “Then the self dissolves ... The agent of his actions is no longer the man but Heaven working through him, yet paradoxically ... in discovering a deeper self he becomes for the first time truly the agent” (IC 69).

One of the factors which appear to vitiate the comparison with Daoism is in fact an artifact of the English translation of *SZ*. Macquarrie and Robinson’s choice of “resoluteness” for *Entschlossenheit* gives a misleadingly subjectivistic or “will-full” impression of what authentic existence is about. A better word for that essential precondition for authentic relations with things would be “openedness.” Heidegger constantly plays the term off against *Erschlossenheit* (disclosedness), describing *Entschlossenheit* as the authentic mode of the disclosedness of being-(t)here.⁴⁵ He makes it clear, however, that this openedness, far from distancing us from the everyday world, rather “brings the self precisely into the current concerned being with what is to-hand” (298). The difference between such openedness and the

“average” disclosedness is that the guiding *Umsicht* has a far wider temporal and spatial range. He calls such an “opened being with what is to-hand” in the current situation “the active letting-be-encountered (*das handelnde Begegnenlassen*) of what is *present* in the environment,” and “the undistorted letting-be-involved of that which in acting it grasps (*dessen, was sie handelnd ergreift*)” (326).

The key term here is “undistorted” (*unverstellt*). Heidegger’s view is that in general our perceptions and conceptions of things are conditioned by *das Man*, by “the way things have been publicly interpreted” (sec. 27). The culture has already set up the structures of meaningfulness and laid down in advance what and how things are. Thus, our everyday dealings with things are grounded in a *Worum-willen* (for-the-sake-of) that is inauthentic—usually in something equivalent to “for-the-sake-of-staying-alive.” However, the ultimate *Worum-willen* includes our uttermost possibility—death.

In inauthentic existence our understanding “projects itself upon what we are concerned with, upon what is feasible, urgent, indispensable in the business of everyday activity” (337). Understood temporally, we “come back to ourselves” from the things (to-hand) with which we are concerned—rather than from our “ownmost, irrelatable being-able-to-be” (337), which is the nothingness of our death. Authentic being-toward things to-hand operates in the “moment” (*Augenblick*), which is deeper and broader than the present “now.” “In openedness the present is not only brought back from its dispersal into the immediate objects of concern, but is held in the future and past too” (338). Heidegger then uses what is in the context of SZ an unusual word to characterize the authentic relation to things to-hand as experienced in the moment: *Entrückung*, or “rapture.” The term “moment” refers to “the opened, but held in openedness, rapture of being-(t)here by the possibilities and circumstances of the situation.” The idea of rapture is the more passive counterpart to the more active *ekstases* of temporality: to talk of “the raptures of future, past and present” (350) is to balance the ways in which we “stand out from” ourselves toward those horizons by pointing up the ways in which we are “transported” by them.

The closest thing we find to an explicit account in SZ of authentic dealings with things to-hand is in section 69(a). Heidegger begins by emphasizing again that authentic existence is still concerned with producing and using things to-hand (352). He reiterates that there is never some *one* thing to-hand but always a multiplicity of things to-hand in a context: the fact that one tool can be present and another, related one be missing underscores their belonging together.⁴⁶ This time around, in tracing the structural relationships involved in using tools Heidegger stresses the temporal aspects of “letting things be involved”: that we are always “ahead of” ourselves in dealing with what is to-hand, allowing the “what-for” (*wozu*) to guide our present activity, and at the same time retaining a sense of how the work has been going up till now and also of the present context. He goes on to say that “‘authentic’ wholehearted dealing with things ... dwells neither with the work nor with the tool, nor with both together” (354)—presumably since our awareness at all times pervades all three horizons of temporality.

This suggests that in authentic dealings with things to-hand we see through the network of equipmental relationships to the ultimate *Worum-willen* which gives them

meaning—the empty horizon of World and death. With one eye on Nothing, an ear open for the voice of stillness, and one foot always already in the grave, we let the hand be guided by the power of Being. So that when Heidegger says that “In order to be able—‘lost’ in the world of equipment—‘really’ to go to work and get busy, the self must forget itself” (354), he is speaking on two levels, referring both to the dissipation of the self into the world of its concern and to authentic dealings with things. In the latter, however, forgetting the self means opening it up to allow one’s actions to be guided by the authentic self, which, itself nothing, is one with the nothing of world:

If one takes everyday ideas as the sole measure of things, then philosophy is always something crazy (*etwas Verrücktes*) ... It constantly brings about a shifting (*Verrückung*) of standpoints and levels. In philosophy one often doesn’t know for long periods of time where one’s head is.⁴⁷

Granted that authentic existence as described in SZ is less aggressively manipulative—involving more “freeing” and “letting” and “releasing”—than it might first appear, the use of technology in relation to ecology still seems to force the parallels of the comparison apart. There are numerous passages in the Daoist texts describing a primeval condition of mankind living in simple harmony with the world of nature, and advocating a return to such a condition. Chapter 80 of the Laozi paints the (admittedly somewhat extreme) picture of a society in which people own such things as ships and carts—but make no use of them. In the first three Outer Chapters of Zhuangzi we find praise of a primal Utopia conjoined with a vigorous repudiation of technology and numerous denunciations of man’s interference in the course of nature. And then there is the famous episode (ch. 12) concerning the old gardener who contemptuously dismisses the idea of using a well-sweep—an ecologically respectable and respectful implement if ever there was one—as a substitute for laboriously watering his garden by hand.

The story of the well-sweep is at first puzzling, since the gardener’s rejection of such a benign labor-saving device seems uncharacteristically rigid and narrow—if he represents the Daoist position. However, a careful reading of the story makes it clear that the gardener’s objection is to the frame of mind that gives rise to calculating dealings with things, and which the use of technology in turn encourages, rather than to the products *per se* of this way of thinking.⁴⁸

But the important thing to understand is that the thrust of the technological examples in these chapters is primarily metaphorical. As Angus Graham puts it: “[The Primitivist] objects to people wanting to manipulate human nature as the potter molds clay rather than to the potter himself” (*IC* 186). As long as we don’t take these examples literally, the attitude of *Zhuangzi* toward technology does not appear especially negative (though its products are not treated with any great enthusiasm either).

Correspondingly, on the Heideggerian view, to take things as to-hand is not necessarily to manipulate or mis-handle them. It is quite possible to take advantage of the power of nature in a way that is quite compatible with the Daoists’ *wuwei*. In making use of the wind to propel a sailboat, for example, or of water to drive a mill-wheel, we can contribute to the wind’s and water’s being what they are “in themselves.” (The paradoxical nature of the *an sich* again.) In making responsible use of fire or in

using a tree for shade, we can, by bringing forth their appropriate possibilities, reveal those elements more fully in their being.

Heidegger would no doubt want to go further and say that the felling of trees for lumber to build a cabin could still be an instance of authentic use of the wood. The question is at what point the use of a natural thing as *Zeug* in such a way as to realize its possibilities with respect to human concerns begins to impinge overly on the unfolding of its possibilities when left to itself. Clearly the deforestation of an area of beautiful trees in order to mass-produce ugly furniture is something even the most social-utility-minded Heideggerian would not condone. At the other extreme there is no doubt that Heidegger would applaud a woodworker who himself seeks and finds the perfect tree for the chair he has in mind, and then proceeds to fashion it with thoughtful hands that respond to the uniqueness of the wood, so that its hidden beauty may shine forth to the fullest. One is tempted to say not just that the woodworker has helped the tree to become more fully itself, but has actually helped it to become more than itself.

There is a story along these lines in the *Zhuangzi* about the woodworker Qing, whose bell stand was so beautiful as to be “daemonic” (ch. 19, *IC* 135). After going into the forest to “observe the nature of the wood as heaven makes it grow,” he waits for “a complete vision of the bell stand” before picking his tree and going to work. He is sufficiently open to the daemonic to be able to describe his working the wood as “joining heaven’s to what is heaven’s”—by allowing the *de* in him, his natural ability, to respond to the *de* in the wood, its natural potential. It is characteristic, incidentally, of Daoism to prize especially a craft in which careful subtraction rather than skillful composition is the art.

The *Zhuangzi*’s view of the instrumental approach toward things can be summed up by citing a remark from one of the stories concerning Zhuangzi himself (ch. 20, *IC* 121). After commenting on the advantages to a tree of its not being good for timber, Zhuangzi, later the same day, on being asked which of two geese should be killed for dinner, replies: “The one that can’t cackle.” On being pressed by a disciple to say what his position really is, he responds: “I should be inclined to settle midway between being good for something and good for nothing.” This corresponds to the attitude toward technology recommended later by Heidegger in *Gelassenheit*: “the simultaneous Yes and No to the world of technology.”⁴⁹ However, the story finishes by suggesting that even more important than “[settling] midway between being good for something and good for nothing” is to loosen one’s ties to things altogether by “[refusing] to be turned into a thing by things.”

This admonition suggests a final interesting parallel between Heidegger and Zhuangzi. The latter plays on the noun “*wu* 物,” for “thing,” by using it as a verb, “to thing” (*IC* 185). Graham brings together a number of passages in which Zhuangzi talks of “thinging things” under the heading “Self-Alienation,” and compares the idea with Hegel’s notion of alienation and the tendency of people to “turn themselves into things by becoming identified with their possessions.” The comparison with Hegel is illuminating, but even more so is the parallel with a major theme in *SZ*—namely, that (existentially speaking) we misunderstand ourselves by “falling into” the things in the world with which we are concerned, and (ontologically) the Western metaphysical tradition has misunderstood the nature of human being by interpreting it as a being on a par with other beings, as something *vorhanden*, or on-hand.

Zhuangzi asks: “If you treat things as things and are not made into a thing by things [literally: ‘tinged by things’], how can you be tied by involvements?” (ch. 20, *IC* 121 and 185). Put in Heideggerian terms: “If you let things (to-hand) be involved in the context of the ultimate possibility of nothingness, and allow your own nothingness to keep you from understanding yourself as something either on- or to-hand, how can you be taken in (*benommen*) by things in the world?” Correspondingly, Zhuangzi’s “What things things is not itself a thing” (ch. 22, *IC* 164) would elicit immediate assent from Heidegger. It is true that it is not until the later Heidegger that we hear talk of “things thinging”; but it was not long after *SZ* that he began to say that “world worlds” (*die Welt weltet*) and “nothing nothings” (*das Nichts nichtet*).⁵⁰

≡ Epilogue

The Chalk Is Flightier than the Hammer

[The scene is Lecture Room 5 at the University of Freiburg, at the start of the summer semester of 1935. The course is entitled “Introduction to Metaphysics,” and the early lectures begin by considering the difference between Something and Nothing]⁵¹

HEIDEGGER [turning from the blackboard, a piece of chalk concealed in his left hand]:

What is needed is, without being seduced by over-hasty theories, to experience in whatever is closest things as they are. This piece of chalk here is an extended, relatively hard, gray-white thing with a definite form, and in and with all that a thing to write with.

[Places the chalk on the lectern]

Just as certainly as it belongs to this thing to be lying here, it belongs to it as much to be able to be not here and not so large. The possibility [*Möglichkeit*] of being drawn along the blackboard and being used up is nothing that we merely add to the thing in thought. It itself as this being is in this possibility, otherwise it would not be a piece of chalk as a writing instrument [*Schreibzeug*].

STUDENT B [*aside*]:

This must correspond to the being “in-itself” [*an-sich-sein*] or what is to-hand, in the account in *SZ*.

HEIDEGGER [*goes to the board and writes the word Möglichkeit*]:

Correspondingly, every being has in various ways this potential [*dieses Mögliche*] to it. This potential belongs to the chalk. It itself has a definite appropriateness for a definite use in itself ...

[Holds the chalk up between forefinger and thumb]

Our question should now first open up what-is [*das Seiende*] in its wavering between Notbeing and Being. Insofar as what-is with stands the uttermost

possibility of Notbeing, it itself stands in Being and yet has never thereby overtaken and overcome the possibility of Notbeing.

STUDENT A [*aside*]:

Didn't Laozi say that something and nothing produce one another, and that it's by virtue of nothing that something can be put to use?

* * *

[Six months later Heidegger is teaching a course on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which this early lecture is devoted to a more general consideration of what a thing is. He is discussing space and time, since what appears to make a thing the particular thing that it is, what seems to make it "this one," is that it occupies a particular place at a particular time.]⁵²

HEIDEGGER:

Initially we have the impression that space and time are in some sense "external" to things. Or is this impression deceptive?

[*Picks up a piece of chalk from the lectern*]

Let us take a closer look! This piece of chalk: Space—or rather the space of this classroom—lies around this thing ... This piece of chalk, we say, takes up a particular space; the space taken up is bordered by the outer surface of the chalk. Outer surface? Surface? The piece of chalk is itself extended; there is space not only around it but at it, or even in it; only this space is occupied, filled up.

[*Places it back on the lectern*]

The chalk itself consists inside of space; we even say [in German], it takes *in* [*ein*, "up"] space, encloses it by its outer surface as its inside. Space is thus not a merely external frame for the chalk. But what does inside mean here? How does the inside of the chalk look? Let us see. We'll break the piece of chalk in two.

[*Picks it up and breaks it in half*]

STUDENT B [*aside*]:

Is this the right way to go about it, I wonder? Didn't he suggest in his lecture on the work of art the other day that any way of approaching things that perpetrates an "assault" [*Überfall*] on them is bound to fail?⁵³

HEIDEGGER:

Are we now at the inside? Just as before we're outside again; nothing has changed. The pieces of chalk are somewhat smaller; but whether they're larger or smaller makes no difference now. The surfaces at the break are not as smooth as the rest of the outer surface; but that is also unimportant. The moment we wanted to open the chalk up by breaking it into pieces, it already closed itself off, and we can continue this process until the whole chalk has become a little heap of dust.

STUDENT B [*aside*]:

So that's what he meant in the other lecture by speaking of the mere thing's "holding itself back" [*Sichzurückhalten*] and being essentially "off-putting and closed off" [*das Befremdende und Verschlussene im Wesen des Dinges*].⁵⁴

STUDENT C [*who has been leafing through copy of Sein und Zeit, stops at page 69 and reads to himself*]:

"What is peculiar about what is immediately to-hand is that it simultaneously withdraws in its to-handness, just in order to be properly to-hand." I'm beginning to understand what he means by saying that a primary feature of what is to-hand is "self-withholding non-emergence" [*das ansichhaltende Nichtheraustreten*] (SZ 75). But now he seems to be extending this notion to apply to *all* things.

HEIDEGGER:

[We] were unable to find the space we were looking for inside the chalk, the space which belongs to the chalk itself. But perhaps we weren't quick enough. Let's try breaking the piece of chalk once again!

[*Repeats the routine*]

So where on earth does the inside of the chalk begin, and where does the outside stop?

Earth and World (from Chalk to Rock)

[The scene is a lecture hall in Frankfurt; the date: November 1936; the topic: "The Work [of Art] and Truth"]⁵⁵

HEIDEGGER:

The Greek temple [as a work of art] opens up a world [*Welt*] and sets this back on to the earth [*Erde*] Through the opening up of a world, all things receive their time and place, their farness and distance, their breadth and narrowness... . The earth is the forthcoming-sheltering ... the unimpressionable tireless-indefatigable ... the essentially self-closing ... which withdraws from any attempt to open it up and holds itself constantly closed.

STUDENT A:

Given Professor Heidegger's background, it's likely that the roots of these ideas of world and earth are in Presocratic thought and Greek myth; certainly the idea of world has become more concrete than it was in *SZ*. But I wonder whether he's been reading Wilhelm's translation of the *I Ching*, since *Welt* and *Erde* are strikingly similar to the primal powers represented by the primary trigrams of *yang* and *yin* lines respectively: *qian* 乾, "the creative," associated with the openness of heaven, and *kun* 坤, "the receptive," associated with the darkness of the earth.⁵⁶

HEIDEGGER:

What is the earth, that it thus attains what is unconcealed? The stone is heavy and manifests its weight. But while its weight weighs on us, it at the same time refuses any penetration into it.

[Proceeds to ponder the heaviness the stone as he did the space within the chalk in the earlier lecture]

STUDENT C *[aside]*:

So we have the same situation as with trying to comprehend the being of what is to-hand. Contemplate the hammer in a detached and objective manner and you'll never grasp it in its being. Pick it up and hammer with it and it withdraws. Feel the weight of the stone in your palm and its heaviness remains somehow mysterious. Try to get to the inside of it by smashing it and the fragments pose the same enigma—plus you've lost the stone. Put it on the scales and you can no longer feel the weight. Subject it to molecular analysis and you lose the stone again. There seems to be a certain "earthiness" to all things, from hammers to rocks.

HEIDEGGER:

The earth thus lets every penetration shatter against it. It lets every merely calculative pushiness turn into a destroying.

STUDENT D:

This reminds me of a discussion I heard recently between Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr on the topic of "complementarity." One of them pointed out the impossibility of determining the position of every atom in a cell without killing the cell.⁵⁷ Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle" suggests that the exclusively *yang* 陽 power of "world" is unable unequivocally to open up the secrets of the *yin* 陰 power of "earth." And it seems that Heidegger is advocating something close to what Zhuangzi calls the "ultimate *yin* [which unravels things]" approach for when the going gets tough and the inquiry deep (*Zhuangzi* ch. 3, IC 62–3).

HEIDEGGER:

All things of the earth, and earth itself as a whole, flow together in reciprocal harmony. But this confluence is not a blurring. Here flows the stream—resting in itself—of distinguishing, which distinguishes everything present in its presence. Thus there is in each of the self-enclosing things a similar not-knowing-itself.⁵⁸

STUDENT D:

This is rather uncharacteristic language for Professor Heidegger. It sounds a lot like Daoism—with overtones of Chinese Buddhism—in which the oneness of all things similarly maintains distinction within non-difference. It's in chapter two, I think, that Zhuangzi says something to the effect that "The Way interchanges [apparently opposite] things and deems them one ...

All things, whether forming or dissolving, in reverting interchange and are deemed to be one.”

HEIDEGGER:

World and earth are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated ... The world as the self-opening tolerates no being closed off. But the earth inclines as the sheltering to envelop and encompass world within itself. The opposition of world and earth is a contention [*Streit*] ... [which is different from] discord and dispute.⁵⁹

STUDENT F [*aside*]:

I keep being reminded of Nietzsche’s distinction between the forces of the Apollinian and the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Taken as very general perspectives on the world, or world views, or projections which create worlds, the Apollinian attitude, with its penchant for openness and distance and light, seems analogous to the power of world, while the Dionysian, with its more feminine darkness and closeness and blurring of borders, would correspond to the power of earth.

HEIDEGGER:

The contention is not a rift [*Riss*] as in the tearing open of a mere gap, but is rather the interiority of the belonging-to-one-another of the contenders. This rift draws the opponents together into the origin of their unity from a single ground ... The *Riss* does not let the opponents burst apart, but brings the opposition of measure and border into a unitary outline [*Umriss*].

STUDENT A [*looking at the taiji 太極 symbol (Figure 1.1) he has been drawing in his notebook*]:

Since *Riss* means “line” as well as “rift,” it could also refer to the line between the *yin* and *yang* in the *taiji* symbol and the outline [*Umriss*] bounding them. And since Heidegger further characterizes the *Riss* as the image of the primordial contention of truth as the opposition between revelation and concealment, it would correspond to *dao* as the “single ground” of the origin of the unity of *yin* and *yang*.⁶⁰

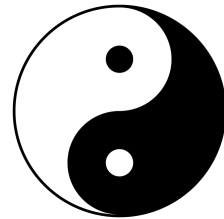


Figure 1.1 *Taiji* symbol.

HEIDEGGER:

[The issue of truth could not even come up] if the unconcealment of what-is had not exposed us to that clearing into which all beings stand and from which they withdraw ...

This clearing ... this open middle is not surrounded by what-is, but the illuminating middle itself surrounds—like Nothing, which we hardly know—all that is.

Every being that is encountered maintains this strangely ambiguous presence, in that it always simultaneously holds itself back in concealment ...

In this way, self-concealing Being is illuminated.⁶¹

LAOZI:

The Way is empty, yet use will not drain it.
 Deep, it is like the ancestor of the myriad things.
 Abysmal, it only seems as if it were there.
 I do not know whose son it is.
 It images the forefather of the Gods.⁶²

ZHUANGZI:

The myriad things have somewhere from which they grow but no one sees the root, somewhere from which they come forth but no one sees the gate. Men all honor what wit knows, but none knows how to know by depending on what his wits do not know; may that not be called the supreme uncertainty?⁶³

STUDENT A [*waking up after having dozed off briefly*]:

It seems as if I was just sitting at the feet of a Chinese sage. Something to do with the myriad things' entering into and withdrawing from unconcealment?

[*Looks down at his notebook where someone has transcribed a few lines from the Zhuangzi*]

"While we dream we do not know that we are dreaming, and in the middle of a dream interpret a dream within it; not until we wake do we know that we were dreaming. Only at the ultimate awakening shall we know that this is the ultimate dream."⁶⁴

Was I just dreaming that I was listening to Lao-Zhuang? Or is this all Professor Heidegger's dream? Or shall I wake up to find a butterfly dreaming it was in a lecture theatre? Is *this* what Zhuangzi means by "the transformations of things?"

Notes

- 1 Martin Buber, *Reden und Gleichnisse des Tschuang-Tse* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1921), 62.
- 2 The scenario is based on the account given by Heinrich Wiegand Petzet in Günther Neske (ed.), *Erinnerung an Martin Heidegger* (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1977), 183–4, and in his book *Auf einen Stern zugehen* (Frankfurt: Societäts-Verlag, 1983), 24.
- 3 "Vom Wesen der Wahrheit," in Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken* [GA 9] (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1967), 81–3; David F. Krell (ed.), *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 125–7.
- 4 Martin Heidegger, *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 64.
- 5 The *Daodejing*, attributed to Laozi, is the better known of the two great works of philosophical Daoism, the other being the anthology known as the *Zhuangzi*. For the former I have used D.C. Lau (trans.), *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (London: Penguin

Books, 1963), and also Guying Chen, *Lao Tzu: Text, Notes and Comments*, trans. Rhett W. Young and Roger T. Ames (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Centre, 1977). A revised translation by Professor Lau, based on the Ma Wang Tui manuscripts, has been published in a bilingual edition under the same title (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1982). In quoting from the *Zhuangzi* I shall refer to the chapter number and also to the partial translation by A.C. Graham, *Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), henceforth abbreviated as *IC* followed by the page number. Professor Graham's seems to me the philosophically most insightful of the extant translations, and is furnished with an illuminating commentary. It also has the great virtue of retaining intact the crazy patchwork texture of the text, rather than distorting it by smoothing it out into a seamless whole.

Both the *Zhuangzi* and the *Laozi* are anthologies compiled by a succession of editors. The traditional view used to be that Laozi was an older contemporary of Confucius, but Professor Lau argues convincingly in appendix 1 of his translation that it is doubtful whether Laozi was in fact a historical person at all, and that the text probably dates from as late as the third century BCE. Of the thirty-three extant chapters of the *Zhuangzi*, which appear to date from the fourth, third, and second centuries BCE., the first seven, known as the "Inner Chapters," are thought to come from the same hand—that of Zhuang Zhou (*Zhuangzi*), who flourished probably around the end of the fourth century BCE.

- 6 Martin Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz* [GA 11] (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1957), 25; Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 36.
- 7 Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* [GA 12] (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1959), 198; Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 92.
- 8 Chung-Yuan Chang, "The Philosophy of Taoism according to Chuang Tzu," *Philosophy East and West*, 27.4 (1977): 409–22.
- 9 Chung-Yuan Chang has done the most work on the comparison with Daoism—though he focuses almost exclusively on the later Heidegger: see, in particular, *Tao: A New Way of Thinking* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975). There is, however, the danger in working exclusively with the later writings that their poetic style, because it admits of freer interpretations, also allows greater possibility of distortion in the interests of comparison.
- 10 Since nobody has yet looked at the work of the middle period from the comparative point of view, the epilogue will play with excerpts from works published shortly after *SZ*, up to the second book on Kant, *Die Frage nach dem Ding: Zu Kants Lehre von den Transzendentalen Grundsätzen* [GA 41] (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1962), which is based on lectures given in the winter semester 1935–6; English translation by W.B. Barton and Vera Deutsch, *What Is a Thing?* (Chicago: Regnery, 1967). Martin Buber's edition of *Zhuangzi* was published in 1910, so Heidegger may well have read it before authoring *SZ*. However, given how wary he was of assimilating philosophical influences—and especially in the case of a philosophy couched in a language so alien to his mother tongue—any comparable themes discovered in the works of the few years following his first exposure to Asian thought will still be of significance.
- 11 "Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit: Aus einem Feldweggespräch über das Denken" (1945), in Martin Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1959), and "Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache" (1954) in Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*; English translations in John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund (trans.),

- Discourse on Thinking* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), and *On the Way to Language*. Both dialogues were based on actual conversations, but were considerably re-worked by Heidegger. The Heraclitus seminars conducted with Eugen Fink (*Heraklit*) were published in the form of a dialogue but are closer to transcripts than something written by Heidegger himself. In the *Vorbemerkung* to *Einführung in die Metaphysik* Heidegger writes (presumably without having said it): “What has been spoken no longer speaks in what has been printed.” Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1953); English translation by Ralph Manheim, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959)—hereafter abbreviated as *EM* and *IM* respectively.
- 12 A comparison of the ideas of Heraclitus and Lao-Zhuang would be a fascinating study in its own right. For a sketch of fruitful areas of comparison between Daoism and a late Western scion of Heraclitus, Nietzsche, see Graham Parkes, “The Wandering Dance: *Chuang Tzu* and *Zarathustra*,” *Philosophy East and West*, 33.3 (1983): 235–50.
 - 13 Heidegger’s intuition that the *logos* of Heraclitus and the *dao* are comparable is on the mark—and to examine the similarities between the two ideas could be an illuminating instance of explicating *obscurum per obscurius*. The fragments concerning the cyclical transformations of the cosmic elements have obvious counterparts in Daoist cosmology, and Heraclitus’ understanding of the mutual interdependence of opposites and the relativity of all perspectives harmonizes closely with the thought of *Zhuangzi*. A thorough comparison would examine the deeper implications of such comparable utterances as the following (the numbers of Heraclitus’ fragments are preceded by H, and the chapters of *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi* by C and L respectively): H50, C1; H102, C2; H111, L2; H88, C6; H61, C18; H103, C17/27; H40, L81; L40.
 - 14 The language of *SZ* is undeniably innovative, though few of the neologisms are elegant. The text is characterized by a multitude of subtle interconnections and word plays, some but by no means all of which have been pointed out by Macquarrie and Robinson in their footnotes. The language also has powerful “body” which has gone largely unnoticed by commentators.
 - 15 *Sein und Zeit* [GA 2] (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967), 311; *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 359. Cf. also *SZ* 327: “Acts of violence are in this field not capriciousness but rather a necessity grounded in the issue itself.” References to *SZ* will be given hereafter in the body of the text simply by way of the page number (the pagination of the German edition is given in the margins of the Macquarrie and Robinson translation). All translations from the German are mine.
 - 16 In *SZ* (65) Heidegger writes: “Even the phenomenon of ‘Nature’ in the sense of the Romantic conception of nature can be grasped ontologically only from the conception of world.”
 - 17 The terms *das Zuhandene* and *das Vorhandene* defy elegant translation. In an attempt to preserve something of the simple similarity of these terms they will be rendered as “[what is] to-hand” and “on-hand” respectively. Heidegger emphasizes in his use of *das Vorhandene*, which is a common word in German, the connotation of “objective” or “neutral presence,” whereas he uses *das Zuhandene* so much as a technical term that it comes close to being a neologism. In both cases it is important to retain the “hand” of the original German in view of the philosophical import of the somatic metaphors in *SZ*.

- 18 The problem of the natural in Daoism is compounded by the fact that there is no single term in Daoist vocabulary that corresponds exactly to our word “nature” in the sense of the natural world. The one that comes closest is *tian*, or “heaven”—especially when it occurs in the compound *tiandi* 天地, meaning “heaven-and-earth.” Two relevant terms that are distinctively Daoist are *zhen* 真, meaning “genuine, authentic, true,” and *ziran* 自然, meaning “spontaneous activity” or, more literally, “self so-ing.”
- 19 Hildegard Feick, *Index zu Heideggers “Sein und Zeit”* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1968), 63. (Omits one of the more important references—SZ 362.)
- 20 Macquarrie and Robinson opt for “equipment,” which has the advantage that it catches the primary feature of *Zeug* which is that there is no such thing as “a” single, isolated “equipment.”
- 21 It is not clear why Heidegger changes his example from writing utensils to hammers, since he could make all the same points about handiness, and make them more vividly, with reference to his immediate activity of using a pen to write the text of *SZ*. Perhaps Nietzsche’s enterprise (made explicit in the preface to *Twilight of the Idols*) of “philosophizing with a hammer” is a subliminal influence here—though his penchant for percussing idols with a hammer “as with a tuning fork” is exercised in the workshop of traditional philosophical ideas and ideals.
- 22 Heidegger repeatedly remarks that most of our everyday activities are carried out without any theoretical reflection or thematized understanding, but rather in the light of a “pre-ontological understanding” based on *Umsicht*. While Macquarrie and Robinson’s choice of “circumspection” for *Umsicht* has the virtue of being a straightforward translation of the German word, it fails to reflect the distinctive meaning Heidegger gives to the term. They are right to note that “Heidegger is taking advantage of the fact that the prefix ‘*um*’ may mean ‘around’ or ‘in order to’” (footnote 2 on page 98 of *Being and Time*). Heidegger does want to emphasize that *Umsicht* involves peripheral rather than sharply focused vision (and in this sense it corresponds to the “soft focus” and global appreciation of the entire situation that is the precondition for Daoist spontaneity). But, especially when talking about inauthentic everydayness, he lays much more stress on the meaning “in order to”—to emphasize that in the light of *Umsicht* we see and understand things in terms of what they are “for.” For this reason “for-sight” would be an appropriate translation (even though the German word is not a neologism), especially if we can hear in it an overtone of the understanding of future possibilities. Far from conveying a sense of circumspection, the term suggests a certain confidence in dealing with things that is grounded in our pre-ontological familiarity with how they work. As long as the hammering is going well, one’s hand can pick up more nails without one’s having to look over at the can in which they are stored.
- 23 *Das Eigentümliche des zunächst Zuhandenen ist es, in seiner Zuhandenheit sich gleichsam zurückzuziehen, um gerade eigentlich zuhanden zu sein* (SZ 69). This is reminiscent of Zhuangzi’s remark that “When one has the proper shoes one forgets one’s feet” (ch. 19).
- 24 Compare with SZ 63: “Nature is itself a being which we encounter within the world and is discoverable in various ways and on various levels.”
- 25 Toward the end of the book Heidegger takes up the topic (in the passage overlooked by Feick) of the *a priori* “mathematical projection of nature” that is the prerequisite for modern scientific discovery—a theme he was to develop fully in the second book on Kant in 1935–6.

- 26 “Vom Wesen des Grundes,” in *Wegmarken*, 51; English translation in Terrence Malik (trans.), *The Essence of Reasons* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 80–3.
- 27 The particular passage Heidegger is referring to on SZ 65 says that even the “Romantic conception of nature” must be understood on the basis of the concept of world. Be that as it may, it is nevertheless strange—in view of the traditional interest in nature on the part of German philosophers from Kant through the *Naturphilosophen* and up to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche—that Heidegger discusses it so little in *SZ*. This would have been more understandable had he been an insensitive city-dweller, but his love of living close to the land is well known—and evident from the content of his later essays.
- 28 There is a danger in the common (and well-justified) practice of leaving the term *Dasein* untranslated, that the reader may simply mouth the German term, forgetting that *Dasein* is always mine, yours, ours. While *Dasein* is an ordinary word for “existence,” Heidegger made it into such a special term that there is some justification for rendering it by the written neologism “being-(t)here.” While not a particularly attractive word to look at (and difficult to pronounce), it has the advantage of conveying the ambiguity of the German primal syllable *da*, which means both “here” and “there.” To write “being-(t)here” and say “being here and there” invite us to hear the “here” and “there” both spatially and temporally: “here/now” (anywhere) and “there/then” (any other time future or past).
- 29 Martin Heidegger, “*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*,” in *Holzwege* [GA 5] (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1972)—subsequent references will be abbreviated *UK* and followed by the page number in *Holzwege*; English translation in Albert Hofstadter (trans.), “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975)—hereafter *OWA*. Any impression that the proper attitude toward things is merely technological is quickly dispelled by this essay, a major concern of which is to describe a way of relating to things that is quite different from taking them as to- or on-hand. The work of art, whose essential nature cannot be appreciated if it is taken as an implement or an object of scientific investigation, is to be seen here as a paradigm of things in general. The “Epilogue” will point up the distinctly Daoist tone to what, for Heidegger, is the appropriate attitude to the work and the thing.
- 30 Heidegger would add: “Philosophy is not knowledge which one ... could apply and calculate the usefulness of. However, what is useless can still be a true power.” Heidegger, *EM 7, IM 10*.
- 31 *IC 73*. There are four passages about useless trees in chapter 4 (*IC 72–5*), one at the end of ch. 1 (*IC 47*), and another in ch. 20 (*IC 121*).
- 32 Aside from the well-known story of Cook Ding, the adept carver of oxes, in the Inner Chapters (ch. 3, *IC 63*), there is the wheelwright Pian of chapter 13 (*IC 139–40*), the buckle forger in chapter 22 (*IC 139*), and the stories of numerous woodworkers and other artisans collected in chapter 19 (*IC 135–8*). Several consummate swimmers the human counterpart to the many fish that swim through the *Zhuangzi*—play roles as models for our behavior. (Heidegger would no doubt want to include skillful skiers.)
- 33 “Nachwort zu: ‘Was Ist Metaphysik?’” in Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, 106; Martin Heidegger, *Was Heisst Denken?* [GA 8] (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1954), 51; English translation in J. Glenn Gray (trans.), *What Is Called Thinking?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 16. This is *besinnendes* as opposed to *rechnendes Denken*, sensitive and meditative rather than calculative thinking. This is comparable to the distinction

- in *Zhuangzi* between *lun* 論, a kind of “sorting” which “evens things out” rather than ranks, and *bian* 辯, which denotes the kind of thinking that discriminates between opposites and weighs alternative courses of action. (See Graham’s discussion of these two in *IC* 12.)
- 34 See Otto Pöggeler’s discussion of Heidegger’s interest in these artists, *supra*; and see also his book, *Die Frage nach der Kunst: von Hegel zu Heidegger* (München: Alber, 1984).
- 35 This suggestion may appear to contradict Heidegger’s saying in almost the next breath, then writing on the next page, that “Socrates is the purest thinker of the West. Therefore he wrote nothing” (*Was Heisst Denken?* 51–2; *What Is Called Thinking?* 16–17).
- 36 Wallace Stevens. *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), 345. Stevens apparently knew little about Heidegger and less about Daoism. However, sometimes he simply seems to say it better than anybody else.
- 37 Emptiness—whether of things, the self, or of *dao*—is a major theme in Daoism; see Graham Parkes, “Intimations of Taoist Themes in Early Heidegger,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 11.4 (1984): 353–74.
- 38 “Das Ding,” in Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* [GA 7] (Pfullingen: Verlag Günther Neske, 1967); “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*—hereafter *PLT*.
- 39 “Nachwort zu: ‘Was Ist Metaphysik?’” in *Wegmarken*, 103. While there are no extended discussions of death in later Heidegger, the topic retains a central position: as “the shrine of nothingness” death is still our sole access to Being itself (*VA* 177; *PLT* 200). The only substantial treatment in the later work is in the essay on Rilke, “Wozu Dichter?” where Heidegger elaborates a position aligned with Rilke’s, regarding “Death and the realm of the dead [as belonging] to the totality of beings as its other side” (*Holzwege*, 279; *PLT* 124).
- 40 Heidegger, “Was Ist Metaphysik?” in *Wegmarken*, 32–4; *Basic Writings*, 102–5.
- 41 Stevens, *Collected Poems*, 441.
- 42 Ch.19, *IC* 182; ch. 6, *IC* 85; ch. 2, *IC* 52.
- 43 *SZ* 288 and 295. It is significant that the word Heidegger chooses for the operation of the authentic self (*handeln*) has “hand” as its root.
- 44 *SZ* 385 and 310. The only mention of “joy” (*Freude*) in *SZ* occurs, significantly, in this context of giving death power over one’s existence (310). Heidegger speaks later of the necessity of letting death become powerful in one’s being (*den Tod in sich mächtig werden* [lassen]) so that one can experience one’s fate historically (384).
- 45 *SZ* 297. At the same time he characterizes the disclosedness of world as “the release (*Freigabe*) of the current involvement-totality of what is to-hand.”
- 46 This time Heidegger presses the point home by playing on the word *zu*, “[in order] to”: “This simply shows that what is to-hand belongs to something else to-hand (*Darin aber bekundet sich Zugehörigkeit des gerade Zuhandenen zu einem anderen*)” (353).
- 47 Heidegger, *The Question about the Thing*, 1.
- 48 As Angus Graham remarks: “The ‘Primitivist’ writer is unrepresentative, as we imply by giving him that name” (*IC* 185). Cf. his comments on the well-sweep story (*IC* 186).
- 49 This “simultaneous Yes and No” actually constitutes “releasement towards things (*Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*)” (*Gelassenheit*, 23; *Discourse on Thinking*, 54).
- 50 In “The Origin of the Work of Art” and “What Is Metaphysics?” respectively.
- 51 The year 1935–6 was a particularly productive one for Heidegger. The lecture notes from two courses from that year were published as two of his best books, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* and *Die Frage nach dem Ding*, and lectures given outside the

- university during that period were published as his most extended meditation on the work of art, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes.” Heidegger’s words are taken from *EM* 23, *IM* 30.
- 52 For the rest of this section, Heidegger’s words are taken from *FD* 14–16.
- 53 *UK* 14–21, *OWA* 25–32.
- 54 *UK* 21, *OWA* 32.
- 55 All Heidegger’s words from here on are taken from the second and third sections of *UK*.
- 56 Richard Wilhelm, trans., *I Ching: Das Buch der Wandlungen* (Düsseldorf: Diederichs, 1970). Wilhelm’s translation of the *I Ching* with commentary was first published in 1923. The translation of his translation by Cary F. Baynes, *I Ching: The Book of Changes* (Princeton: Bollingen Series, 1967), then became the definitive edition in English. The distinction between *Erde* and *Welt* also corresponds to Schelling’s distinction between *Grund* and *Existenz* (ground and existence) as articulated in his essay on Human Freedom (1809). Heidegger devoted a semester’s course to lectures on this text in 1936, which have been published as *Schellings Abhandlung über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* [GA 42] (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1971). The reciprocal relationship between *Grund* and *Existenz* together with a number of related ideas in Schelling’s essay has a remarkably Daoist tone to them, independently of Heidegger’s interpretation. An interesting comparison of Schelling’s thought with Daoism and Tian-tai Buddhism can be found in Bruno Petzold, *Die Quintessenz der T’ien-Tai (Tendai) Lehre*, ed. Horst Hammitzsch (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1982).
- 57 Heisenberg recounts a conversation from the early thirties in which Bohr says, “In principle, we could probably measure the position of every atom in a cell, though hardly without killing the living cell in the process. What we would know in the end would be the arrangement of the atoms in a dead cell, not a living one” (Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Beyond* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 111). It is interesting that in another conversation with Bohr the following year Heisenberg mentions the Chinese idea of *dao* (see page 136).
- 58 *So ist in jedem der sich verschliessenden Dinge das gleiche Sich-nicht-Kennen* (*UK* 36, *OWA* 47). The final phrase is ambiguous. Albert Hofstadter takes the *Sich* as plural rather than singular, and so translates it: “the same not-knowing-of-one-another.” While this reading is grammatically possible, it seems to go against the sense of “reciprocal harmony” just mentioned. Things have sufficient self-enclosing tendencies to keep them from merging into total undifferentiation—but presumably could not flow together in reciprocal harmony if they did not know each other at all.
- 59 *Streit* is difficult to translate here, since Heidegger specifically dispels connotations of “strife” and “struggle.” He probably has in mind Heraclitus’ notion of *polemos*—since he mentions fragment 53 earlier in the essay (*UK* 32, *OWA* 43) which has in any case a very Daoist ring to it.
- 60 The comparison *Welt/Erde* and *yang/yin* prompts a further reflection. Just as the latter are so primordial that they operate as powers in the human psyche as well as in the cosmos as a whole, so world and earth might also be thought of in regard to the distinction between consciousness and the unconscious in depth psychology.
- 61 *Dergestalt ist das sichverbergende Sein gelichtet* (*UK* 44, *OWA* 56).
- 62 *Daodejing*, ch. 4.
- 63 *Zhuangzi* 25, *IC* 102.
- 64 *Zhuangzi* 2, *IC* 59–60.

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