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# LOGOS AND DAO REVISITED: A NON-METAPHYSICAL INTERPRETATION



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Where can I find a man who has forgotten words, so I can have a word with him?

Zhuangzi (Watson 2003, p. 141)

Why another article on *logos* and *dao* 道? Is it not the case that enough scholars have looked into the similarities between the term *logos* and the notion of *dao*? Although it may seem so, I will argue that when another perspective is employed, *logos* and *dao* might fruitfully be compared on a different level from the one used by most of these comparisons. In this essay I will argue first that in many instances the approach of some of the scholars who have compared *logos* and *dao* has been one-sided and has mostly consisted in a comparison of these two key notions that has sought to portray both notions as denoting some kind of metaphysical principle underlying the processes that make up our world. Second, I will provide an alternative to this approach to *logos*, and consequently to *dao*, using Heidegger's interpretations of *logos*. I will then show that the Daoists' intentions for the term *dao* compare well with Heidegger's views, and argue that such a non-metaphysical interpretation is much closer to both Heidegger and Daoism. I end by arguing that reinterpretations of classical notions such as offered here can provide a valuable resource to comparative philosophy, in the sense that Heidegger's way of reading Heraclitus, and Heidegger's work in general, offer a viable alternative approach to comparative thinking that does not succumb to the metaphysical inclinations inherent in so much of the Western tradition, and as such could coalesce with the largely non-metaphysical tradition of classical Chinese thought and provide avenues for further comparisons.

## Introduction

The ancient Greek notion of *logos* has been a longtime favorite among comparative scholars looking for a term to translate *dao*. After all, there are, at least on the surface, similarities between the two notions: both can mean 'speaking', 'discourse', or 'language', and both refer to some kind of pattern or regularity in the world. Also, both *logos* and *dao* seem in a way 'desirable'. In early Western thought we are taught by Heraclitus to listen not to him but to the *logos*, and in classical Chinese thought 'having' *dao* means that one has reached the highest possible goal in life.

Comparisons of *logos* and *dao* have more often than not resulted in understanding both notions as transcendental or metaphysical principles. In religious studies,

such comparisons or translations of *dao* as *logos* or even as 'God' are commonplace, since they both seem to have to do with the word bringing order, and with a higher transcendent being or guiding principle having provided the word. Such comparisons have overflowed to comparative philosophy, thus reinforcing and perpetuating the idea that Daoism is about some transcendental metaphysical entity or principle inadequately named *dao*.<sup>1</sup> An example of this kind of comparison is Thomas Leung, who, seeking to understand *dao* as the underlying ultimate process or ultimate truth, and *logos* as the ultimate order of things, accordingly finds many connections between the two: "The changing world is a process following some forms or order. The *Tao* and *Logos* are those kinds of order. . . . Both describe the ultimate reality of the world as infinite within the finite or eternity within the flux of changing. . . . Both identify the human heart-mind or soul with the ultimate reality" (Leung 1998, p. 144).

Although the extent to which Leung subscribes to it is unclear, what is clear is that *dao* and *logos* seen in this way have a definite metaphysical tone. An even clearer example can be found in Benjamin Schwartz, who speaks of Daoism as "a kind of speculative meditation . . . on the nature of *Tao* that seems to parallel later Neoplatonic meditations in the West on the nature of the *Logos*" (Schwartz 1975, p. 65). More recently, Ashok Gangadean has argued that

it becomes apparent that the vast spectrum of diverse cultural and philosophical narrative attempts through the ages to name and express "What is First" converge on the same Primal Infinite Source. For example, the discourse of TAO in classical Chinese thought is one magnificent attempt at "First Philosophy"—the enterprise of developing a grammar and narrative to express the most fundamental Reality. (Gangadean 2004)

Interpretations such as these, assuming that we are all looking for that elusive 'First Philosophy', or 'First Ground', have inadvertently set up an understanding of *logos* as indeed qualifying as such a metaphysical ground, or Reason, and this is also the standard interpretation of *logos*. As such, many comparative philosophers have thankfully taken the parallel that Schwartz propounds and found ways of inserting the metaphysical values associated with this traditional understanding of *logos* into Daoist philosophy. For example, Yü Ying-shih has argued that "If the 'Idea of the Good' has made Plato the father of 'otherworldliness in the west,' then Chuang-tzu on account of his conception of *Tao* in the 'realm beyond' also deserves to be called 'the father of otherworldliness in China'" (Yü 1985, p. 175).<sup>2</sup> If it is generally accepted that Confucius and the ensuing Confucian tradition are not metaphysical in their core teachings, then it seems that many commentators have understood the Daoist tradition, which is after all in large parts a criticism of Confucianism, to entail a definite metaphysical slant, not unlike the Western tradition, but usually seen as too 'mystical' to count as 'real' metaphysics.<sup>3</sup>

Sticking to such a traditional metaphysical explanation of both *logos* and *dao*, we might indeed perceive similarities. When one starts with the intention to understand both *logos* and *dao* as metaphysical principles or first grounds, similarities will naturally ensue, since such metaphysical principles inevitably share similarities that

make them metaphysical principles in the first place. And there have been many philosophers in both Western and Asian traditions who, while not necessarily being comparative scholars, nevertheless have understood either *logos* or *dao*, or both, in this way.

### *Different Logos, Different Dao*

Although we all know that at least within the Western philosophical tradition a total escape from metaphysics may be impossible, and Heidegger (but also, for example, Derrida) acknowledges this,<sup>4</sup> I will show that when comparing Daoism with Heidegger's ideas on *logos* we find a very different understanding of *logos* that is not metaphysical in nature, in other words an interpretation where *logos* is not seen as a principle that stands above and in some way governs the world as we know it. And further, such a non-metaphysical understanding of *logos* as Heidegger will show us can be fruitfully compared with a similar non-metaphysical interpretation of *dao*. We can safely say that Laozi and Zhuangzi did not have to agitate against a metaphysical tradition in the first place, as Heidegger had to. Yet I will argue that in their reaction to the Confucian and Mohist traditions against which they did agitate, a number of relevant similarities to Heidegger's non-metaphysical approach can be found. The result, I venture, is a similar kind of thinking in Heidegger and Daoism. I thus wholeheartedly agree when similarities between the two concepts of *logos* and *dao* are noted, but I think the similarities are different, and by giving a different interpretation, based on textual evidence, I try to put both Heidegger and Daoism in a different light.

A notion of caution should be inserted here. I am by no means arguing that the Confucian tradition against which most of the Daoist thinkers agitated was a metaphysical tradition in the sense that I understand the Western tradition to be. There is general agreement that this is not the case and that the classical Chinese thinkers were working with a set of background assumptions sufficiently different from those thinkers in the Western history of philosophy. Yet I will argue that Zhuangzi's thought shares enough characteristics with Heidegger to warrant a close comparison. One may definitely say that Heidegger was trying to think in a non-metaphysical way in reaction to the dominant metaphysical tradition of Western philosophy, but the fact that Zhuangzi was thinking in a non-metaphysical way did not arise out of a genuine need to overcome a metaphysical opponent. Yet whichever way we label it, my intention is to make clear that regardless of their respective backgrounds, both thinkers are after a way of thought that is squarely located in this world, opposed to dualism, and that has no need for metaphysical principles. In what follows, Heidegger's reinterpretation of Heraclitus should also be understood in this way. We shall see that Heidegger argues that Heraclitus was not a metaphysical thinker in the first place, since the particular form of metaphysics that we are discussing here did not arise until Plato.<sup>5</sup> This reinterpretation of Heraclitus by Heidegger can show us some very interesting things about the possible connections between the early Greek thinkers and the classical Chinese thinkers. Such connections are based

on understanding both the pre-Socratics and the classical Chinese thinkers as non-metaphysical.

To come back to the comparison, one of the first and obvious similarities (in any comparison of the two notions) must be that both *dao* and *logos* seem to have a double meaning. Both can, in broad ways, be said to mean 'speaking', 'discourse', as well as to refer to some kind of 'ground' or 'grounding'. And both Heidegger and the Daoists seem to see another kind of double meaning in the words: for Daoism there are individual *daos* and a bigger *Dao*. And Heidegger perceives Heraclitus to be talking about a human *logos* understood as attempting to get in tune or in line with the bigger *Logos* (Heidegger 1994a, pp. 296–329). My use of capital letters here should not confuse us into believing that we are reifying the terms into substances or anything like that. Before we draw such hasty conclusions, it might be best to first delve into the similarity in terms of language that seems apparent in how Heidegger and the Daoists understand *logos* and *dao* respectively, followed by a deeper explanation of what Heidegger thinks *logos* is and what the Daoists think *dao* stands for.

### *Logos and Dao as Experience with and of Language*

Since *logos* and *dao* both mean 'discourse' or 'speaking', we must consider how both Heidegger's *logos* and *dao* point to a different understanding of language. Heidegger, Laozi, and Zhuangzi have all argued against the commonsense notions of language and its possibilities, against its literal interpretations, yet I think none of them have argued against language per se. This is vital for my point since I think that in comparative philosophy, and thus in the understanding of such terms as *logos* and *dao*, language is an integral and vital part of our way of understanding. Yet the metaphysical way of understanding has a specific view on and use of language. Heidegger and Daoism both put forward a different idea of language that challenges metaphysical notions of presence, of reference and representation.

The importance of language lies exactly in the fact that it is our vehicle for thinking, but that metaphysical (or Confucian) language prohibits certain ways of thinking and tends to make artificial distinctions. It is thus not a question of leaving the vehicle behind (this would really be another form of metaphysics where we think we have some overarching principle outside of language), but of understanding how it functions, what it does and can do, while fully inhabiting the various possibilities that languages afford us. As Heidegger says:

What if the language of metaphysics and metaphysics itself, whether it is that of the living or of the dead god, in fact constituted, as metaphysics, that limit which prevents a transition over the line, i.e., the overcoming of nihilism? If this were the case, would not crossing the line then necessarily have to become a transformation of our saying and demand a transformed relation to the essence of language? (Heidegger 1998, p. 306; italics in original)

Aside from the fact that this quote (rightly, I think) suggests that nihilism is only a function and problem of still thinking within the confines of the metaphysical tradi-

tion, it also means that we should leave behind language as the discourse of representation. We should no longer talk *about* the world in propositional statements, but rather return to the language of Saying (*Sage*), which speaks *from* Being. Yet Heidegger is well aware that all language, including his own, is subject to the restrictions and dangers inherent in language:

[T]he word itself already reveals something (known) and thereby conceals that which should be brought into openness in thoughtful Saying. This difficulty cannot be removed by anything; indeed, even the attempt to do so already means the failure to appreciate all Saying of Being. This difficulty must be undertaken and understood in its essential belonging (to thinking Being). (Heidegger 1989, p. 83; my translation)

Language might be considered an obstacle, yet it is a necessary obstacle and as such a possibility of which we must be aware, and which we must not shun to employ to its fullest. What we must seek to get rid of, if that is at all possible, is a one-sided view and use of language, in favor of a much more encompassing view.

A similar understanding of language is readily found in Daoism. The *Zhuangzi* especially is full of messages of a similar kind, like the passages in chapter 2 that regard the acceptability or non-acceptability of propositional language as superficial and wrongheaded and claim that following *dao* overcomes this duality by not adhering to fixed representational schemes. Following any fixed representational or propositional scheme “obscures” or “hides” *dao* by installing artificial ideas of right and wrong.<sup>6</sup> Ames and Hall, commenting on chapter 23 and the suspicion of language in the *Daodejing*, put a similar view across:

The philosophical problem that provokes the Daoist mistrust of language lies in the possibility that a misunderstanding of the nature of language has the potential to promote the worst misconceptions about the flux and flow of experience in which we live our lives. There is an obvious tension between the unrelenting processual nature of experience and the function of language to separate out, isolate, and arrest elements within it. (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 113)

Heidegger and the Daoists are extremely aware of this tension and of the necessity of language, and in their own way argue for an opening up of language to its own possibilities, rather than remaining in its limited metaphysical field. Language is not denied, but a certain idea and use of language, the metaphysical or propositional and representational use, is denied dominance and superiority over other avenues. This is why it is usually said that *dao* is ‘nameless’ or ‘cannot be named’. No halting or arresting of the process, be it the metaphysical propositional way or the Confucian ‘naming’ and ‘rectification of names’ way, can do justice to the process.

Let me substantiate this with an example. I would like to reinterpret the first chapter of the *Daodejing* according to J.J.L. Duyvendak’s interpretation, which conceives of *dao* as the process of change. As he says, *dao* “is not a First Cause, it is not a *Logos*. It is nothing but the process of change and growth” (Duyvendak 1954, p. 9). Although ‘*Logos*’ here is obviously used in the metaphysical sense, and not according to Heidegger’s reinterpretation, this quote still shows us that the metaphysical

principle is denied. The difference in the translation by Duyvendak (especially of the character *chang* 常) with standard readings is substantial,<sup>7</sup> as it makes for a different reading. It is very different whether you say, in the standard version, “the *dao* which can be spoken of is not the constant *dao*” or whether you take seriously Duyvendak’s translation, which has “the Way that may truly be regarded as the Way is other than a permanent Way” (Duyvendak 1954, p. 17). It is the ‘other than permanent’ aspect of this interpretation that brings to it a decidedly non-metaphysical ring. The theme of constancy and especially the way in which it is interpreted can reveal a metaphysical inclination toward seeing *dao* as an unchanging guiding principle behind the myriad things, whereas seeing *dao* as the process of change itself proposes to undo that metaphysical idea. The standard version seems to suggest that although not effable, there is indeed a constant and eternal way. Duyvendak’s suggestion is that what can be considered as *dao* is not a permanent thing.

Duyvendak’s translation has the further merit of making good sense of the parallel structure of the first twelve characters of chapter 1 of the *Daodejing*, and we know that the form of the Daoist classics is important in understanding meaning, in that poetry and verse have definite functions. If names are not constant, and the whole Daoist tradition suggests that we should indeed see language as provisional, then what is the point of speaking of the ‘Real’ or ‘constant’ name? There is no such thing. And if we follow the parallel structure, then the same thing would go for *dao*. Since *daos* are not constant, there is no reason why there should be an overarching constant *dao* other than the whole process of *wanwu*, or the myriad things.

The differences between these interpretations show that a different translation can easily import a way of thinking that is foreign to the text translated. Heidegger was well aware of this, and in my opinion this is what informs his particular readings of the ancient Greeks. With this I turn to Heidegger’s interpretation of *logos*.

### *Heidegger’s Logos*

It is imperative to notice first that Heidegger himself did not attempt to translate *dao* with *logos*. Heidegger was content with the more traditional ‘way’ as translation, since this term was an important one in much of his own work.<sup>8</sup> He even called his *Gesamtausgabe* “*Wege, nicht Werke,*” or “Ways, not works”.

But let us start with an attempt to understand clearly what Heidegger means when he speaks about *logos*. If we do so correctly, then there will be a definite connection between ‘way’ and *logos*. Heidegger spends a lot of time in his *Heraclitus* volume explaining that only in the metaphysical way of seeing things with its idiomatic logic can *logos* be thought of in its capacity as ‘reason’, ‘proposition’, or ‘rationality’. It is only in that particular history that such an interpretation could have come about.

But originally, *logos* means something else. Heidegger thinks of *logos* as how Being functions as ground, in the sense that Being grounds beings, but also in the sense that beings ground Being:

Being becomes present as *logos* in the sense of ground, of allowing to let lie before us. The same *logos*, as the gathering of what unifies, is the “Ἐν [Ἔν]. . . . The *logos* grounds and gathers everything into the universal, and accounts for and gathers everything in terms of the unique. (Heidegger 1974, p. 69)

It is apparent that Heidegger wants to understand such a ground not as a metaphysical principle but as consisting of the interplay between beings coming together in being different, in more process-oriented ways. To see this, we must note that Heidegger connects *logos* to a host of other pivotal words, such as ‘gathering’, ‘Saying’, ‘*Auseinandersetzung*’, ‘*polemos*’, and ‘clearing’, and we will only get a good grip on the term if we follow these connections. In *Vorträge und Aufsätze* Heidegger reinterprets λόγος (*logos*) from the Greek verb λέγειν (*legein*, to gather, to say) as “the Laying that gathers” (*die lesende Lege*) (Heidegger 1994b, p. 208; 1975, p. 66), thinking with this term that which consists of gathering together and letting things be in letting them lie before us:

Thus is Λόγος named without qualification: ὁ Λόγος, the Laying: the pure letting-lie-together-before of that which of itself comes to lie before us, in its lying there. In this fashion Λόγος occurs essentially as the pure laying which gathers and assembles. Λόγος is the original assemblage of the primordial gathering of the primordial Laying. Ὁ Λόγος is the Laying that gathers [*die Lesende Lege*], and only this. (Heidegger 1994b, pp. 207–208; 1975, p. 66)

This gathering laying, is connected by Heidegger to ὁμολογεῖν (*homologeïn*) (Saying the same), which

occurs when the hearing of mortals has become proper hearing. When such a thing happens something fateful comes to pass. Where, and as what, does the fateful presence [come to pass]? Heraclitus says: ὁμολογεῖν σοφόν ἔστιν Ἐν Πάντα, “the fateful comes to pass in as far One All.” (Heidegger 1994b, p. 210; 1975, p. 68)<sup>9</sup>

Begging your pardon for the potentially confusing translations of Heideggerian jargon, which is even worse in English than it is in German, the point is clear enough. Heidegger thinks that when we are attuned to (properly hearing) *logos*, we will understand that one (is) all and our saying will be in tune with all that is. But Heidegger warns us that we should not superficially take this as ‘all is one’, or ‘one is all’. Ἐν Πάντα is the same as *logos*; it is the gathering of all into one gathering. It is not a matter of making all different things into one, but *homologeïn* is understood as *Einverständnis*.<sup>10</sup> This means agreement with, accordance with, and as such can be taken to mean that rather than seeing everything as one, we should see everything as being different, but in accordance. This is what Heidegger thinks Heraclitus means by ‘listening to *logos*’: Being attuned to the belonging together, the gathering of differences in their accordance.

In *Holzwege* Heidegger also translates *logos* as ‘gathering’ (*Versammlung*) (Heidegger 1994c, p. 327). In his typical idiom Heidegger tries to release *logos* from



its metaphysical translations, such as reason, ratio, or even God. While Heidegger retains the idea that *logos* means 'saying' or 'speaking', 'discourse', he offers his other interpretation as something even more or at least equally originary. Doing so he brings the connection between language and *logos* to a deeper understanding. *Logos* can then be interpreted as the discourse that gathers things together, while letting them be what they are in their difference. This is the discourse that is in tune with Being, with how things are. This *logos* was what the ancient Greeks lived in—their language was alive in this way—but they never thought through this situation themselves. As Heidegger says:

Ὁ Λόγος, thought as the Laying that gathers, would be the essence [*Wesen*] of saying [*die Sage*] as thought by the Greeks. Language would be saying. Language would be the gathering letting-lie-before of what is present in its presencing. In fact, the Greeks *dwelt* in this essential determination of language. But they never *thought* it—Heraclitus included. (Heidegger 1994a, p. 220; 1975, p. 77)<sup>11</sup>

With this Heidegger tries to urge us into another idea and usage of language. In the dialogue with the Japanese thinker in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* he perceives language as 'Saying' (*Sage*). Although Saying and *logos* can be read in close proximity to speech, for Heidegger the essence of language lies as much in being silent and listening as it does in speaking. In this way *logos*, this Greek word that was wrongly translated into the Latin 'Ratio', or rationality, would actually mean 'Saying', understood as a kind of showing that lets things be. In Heidegger's words, "The oldest word for the rule of the word thus thought, for Saying, is *logos*: Saying which, in showing, lets beings appear in their 'it is'" (Heidegger 1971b, p. 155). So *logos* is connected to a *certain form* of speaking, speech, or, better even, a certain way of using language that would do justice to the way things are. For example, instead of saying that man is the rational animal, we can change this (inadequate) translation of *zoon logon echon* into: man, the animal that inherently has *logos*, the discourse that lets things be seen as they are. Seen together with the earlier notion of *logos* as 'gathering', humankind in its deepest reality is *dia-logos*, dialogue, and this dialogue Heidegger understands as *Auseinandersetzung*, a term I will refer to later.

What Heidegger thinks with *logos* as 'gathering in letting be' should not be understood as a metaphysical principle guiding all things. 'Gathering' is first of all not to be read as a noun or substance; it is not 'a' gathering, even less 'the' gathering. This word should be read much more in a gerund or verb-like sense, as it hints at a temporal phenomenon, a process rather than a static principle. Seen in this way *logos* would then mean (as a sort of preliminary definition) 'temporary and ongoing gathering of things in their difference through language'. In other words *logos* would show 'how things hang together'; it would show how things are laid out with respect to each other. *Logos*, then, is very much a relational idea, where the most important feature lies in gathering seemingly unrelated things, events, and ourselves into a more originary unity, while not dissolving differences. *Logos* shows how things are related to each other, and lets things show themselves as such.

We should be mindful here of other words in Heidegger's vocabulary like *Auseinandersetzung* and *das Selbe*, 'con-frontation' and 'the same', respectively, to realize how this gathering together and letting be of differences can go together. Heidegger more than once explicitly related *logos* to what he calls *Auseinandersetzung*, or con-frontation, or πόλεμος (*polemos*). One instance where he does so is in his reinterpretation of Heraclitus. Heraclitus is well known for having allegedly said in fragment 53 that "war is the father of all things." Or so the tradition goes. Heidegger thinks that this interpretation is mistaken or at least one-sided. There is again a more originary way of looking at the fragment, which starts with πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστὶ. Heidegger translates: "Con-frontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) is indeed the begetter of all (that comes to presence)" (Maly and Emad 1986, p. 41).<sup>12</sup> This already signals a substantial difference from normal translations, but even more important is the continuing sentence, which is usually left out in normal translations: ". . . πάντων δεβασιλεύς," which Heidegger translates as "but (also) the dominant preserver of all" (ibid., p. 41).<sup>13</sup> Looking at this translation we can see that Heidegger is far from trying to say that 'war' is the father of all things, but rather says that con-frontation, as *Auseinandersetzung*, is the begetter and keeper of all things. Since confrontation and *Auseinandersetzung* both imply the interplay of different things, this difference and the interaction of differences become extremely important.

Elsewhere Heidegger explicitly names *polemos* as 'clearing' (*die Lichtung*) (Heidegger 1994a, pp. 269; 1975, p. 119), making it resonate with one of the key terms of his later thinking. So exactly what is it that this *Auseinandersetzung* implies? What Heidegger means by *Auseinandersetzung* is an encounter of the Self and the Other, but we must first learn to let go of the assertively polemical connotations that often accompany the word confrontation, or, rather, read them in a different way. We have already seen that Heidegger thinks of *polemos* not just as polemic; it is really the difference that is meant also by 'clearing' (*Lichtung*), which can be understood as the opening that provides for the unconcealment of things. The starting point and the end point of an *Auseinandersetzung* must be difference. *Lichtung*, or clearing, is originally an open space in the woods where light is being let in. That opening is only such because of the trees that surround it. Thus the understanding is that the two opposites of the difference must always work together, are always already connected in some vital way.

This is where Heidegger's understanding of *das Selbe* (the same) can be of help. We should avoid trying to make things identical (what Heidegger calls *das Gleiche*), but we should treat them as being similar in a different way, which translates Heidegger's idea of the 'same' (*das Selbe*). As he says: "But the same is not the merely identical. In the merely identical, the difference disappears. In the same the difference appears . . ." (Heidegger 1974, p. 45). The 'same' is not some metaphysical construct; it is not an overarching concept, but only functions because of difference. This is how the 'same', *homologein*, and *logos* are connected. *Logos* then consists of the gathering of things in their difference through attuned discourse. It denotes a unity that is made up solely of the interplay of differences. As Heidegger puts it:

The same never coincides with the equal, not even in the empty indifferent oneness of what is merely identical. The equal or identical always moves toward the absence of difference, so that everything may be reduced to a common denominator. The same, by contrast, is the belonging together of what differs, through a gathering by way of the difference. We can only say “the same” if we think difference. (Heidegger 1971a, p. 216)

This means that Heidegger’s thought should not be understood as a form of dialectics. The important difference is that the movement or interplay of differences is never superseded in an overarching synthesis. The play of differences does not move toward some goal; it just moves. *Logos* traditionally stands for constancy, permanence, rationality, and eternal principles, but we have now seen that Heidegger understands *logos* as *polemos*. This means that difference and the interplay of differences is constitutive for any constancy, which would be relative to this more ordinary play. Con-frontation or *Auseinandersetzung* is the more ordinary ‘begetter’ of things. In connection with this he says, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*:

Thus Being, *logos*, as the gathered harmony, is not easily available for everyone at the same price, but is concealed, as opposed to that harmony which is always a mere equalizing, the elimination of tension, levelling. (Heidegger 2000, p. 141)

*Logos* in Heidegger’s view is not about reducing differences, but about celebrating or embracing them. Being happens only in the interplay of differences, and *logos* and *polemos* are exactly that kind of ‘gathering’ of differences.

To give another illustration of what I am trying to get at, we must remember that the star was Heidegger’s favorite light metaphor. The star is light, but light *in* darkness, arising out of darkness. Stars are only visible when it is dark. And the *Lichtung* is only such in the surrounding darkness. Thus, the *polemos* or *Auseinandersetzung* between dark and light, between different forces, is more important to Heidegger than the metaphysical focus on light. In other words, Heidegger stays true to the idea that unconcealing only happens within concealing. And it is this ongoing process between unconcealing and concealing that he tries to convey with the word *logos*. In the *Introduction to Metaphysics* he puts it in the following way: “Confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) does not divide unity, much less destroy it. It builds unity; it is the gathering (*logos*). *Polemos* and *logos* are the same” (Heidegger 2000, p. 65).<sup>14</sup>

*Logos*, together with *Auseinandersetzung*, *aletheia*, *physis*, and other such key-words from the ancient Greek language, are most important to Heidegger. There are numerous places where he speaks of these ancient Greek terms in their relatedness, going so far as to say they are the same. *Logos* is *polemos*, is *aletheia*, is *physis*, is *moira*. These are all interrelated and eventually point to that which cannot be spoken of as a being, that is, Being. As Heidegger says:

[T]he Λόγος which Heraclitus thinks as the fundamental character of presencing, the Μοῖρα which Parmenides thinks as the fundamental character of presencing, the Χρεῶν which Anaximander thinks is essential in presencing—all these name the Same. In the concealed richness of the Same the unity of the unifying One, the “Ev, is thought by each thinker in his own way. (Heidegger 1975, p. 56)<sup>15</sup>

*Logos* and *Auseinandersetzung* are, in Heidegger's way, really the 'same', since both focus on the coming together of differences in their differing. Relating this back to comparative philosophy, in this way self and other are always already related in a fundamental way, because "only where the foreign is known and acknowledged in its essential oppositional character (*Gegensätzlichkeit*) does there exist the possibility of a genuine relationship (*Beziehung*), that is, of a uniting that is not a confused mixing but a conjoining in distinction (*Unterscheidung*)" (Heidegger 1996, p. 54; German added). It is thus a matter, as Florian Vetsch mentioned, not of seeing another culture as a "sum of learnable data" (Vetsch 1992, p. 80; my translation) that you can then take home, but of learning to see another culture as a living, historically moving, open-ended totality, which is not readily at one's disposal, but always open to renewed conversation.<sup>16</sup> This is also a part of the *Auseinandersetzung*. In this way the relation between different cultures is then literally a never-ending story. *Logos* is really continuous *Auseinandersetzung*, *polemos*, because it is in this way that our 'Saying' would be most in touch with the way things are.

For my purpose here, which is comparative, it is also vital to fully understand the complexity of the relation between the 'own' or 'homely', and the 'other', 'foreign', or 'unhomely' (*unheimlich*) as it unfolds in Heidegger's *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*. Heidegger's idea of a self is not about a mere appropriation or incorporation of the other. The other as other is not to be overcome in this way; it is the encounter that matters, so that "the law of the encounter (*Auseinandersetzung*) between the foreign and one's own is the fundamental truth of history" (Heidegger 1996, p. 49; German added).

This perennial encounter is exactly what certain poets' works show us, especially Hölderlin's. As Heidegger says in a section on the *Antigone* in *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*: "What is worthy of poetizing in this poetic work is nothing other than becoming homely in being unhomely" (Heidegger 1996, p. 121). And elsewhere in the same volume on Hölderlin he says that "The appropriation of one's own is only as the encounter (*Auseinandersetzung*) and guest-like dialogue with the foreign" (p. 142; italics in original, German added). Note that the encounter in these passages is always the *Auseinandersetzung* that has been discussed.

To conclude this rather lengthy deliberation on *logos*, Heidegger relates *logos* to other terms such as 'clearing', 'Saying', *Auseinandersetzung*, and *polemos*, and through this reading offers a possibility for seeing *logos* as a different kind of grounding that is really not the same as it is understood in traditional metaphysics, because it consists in finding a discourse suitable for letting things be in their relations to other things, in focusing on the interplay of things rather than on their essentiality. This means that difference and the interplay of differences is constitutive for any constancy, which would be relative to this more originary play. Con-frontation or *Auseinandersetzung* in dialogue is the more originary 'begetter' of things. It is this difference that grounds, that gathers things together in their originary relatedness. Connected to this understanding of the processual nature of the world and of ourselves, Heidegger in *On the Way to Language* says the following, after having denounced the superficial translations of *dao* and our superficial understanding of the word 'way': "Yet *Tao*

could be the way that gives all ways, the very source of our power to think what reason, mind, meaning, *logos* properly mean to say—properly, by their proper nature” (Heidegger 1971b, p. 92). Rather than understanding such a statement as pointing to a metaphysical or transcendental principle, Heidegger perceives *logos* not as making things identical, but as bringing forth a unity that binds everything together, and it does so through what he calls the ‘proper’ use of language. In relation to this we can think of another of Heidegger’s key terms, *Ereignis*, or the ‘event of appropriation’. Such events of appropriation of things are really only possible through language, where everything comes into its own by being related to everything else. As such, according to Heidegger, *Ereignis* “can no more be translated than the Greek λόγος or the Chinese Tao” (Heidegger 1974, p. 36). What is needed is a different understanding of language.

### *A Non-Metaphysical Understanding of Dao*

I now want to turn to Daoism. I will argue that we can find similar ideas in Daoism, especially in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Daodejing*. In chapter 6 of the *Zhuangzi* one of the provisional names for *dao* is offered as “Peace-in-Strife” (Watson 2003, p. 79). A. C. Graham translates the characters as “[a]t home where it intrudes” and the following sentence as “[w]hat is ‘at home where it intrudes’ is that which comes about *only* where it intrudes into the place of something else” (Graham 2001, p. 87). In Wing-tsit Chan’s translation the characters read “tranquillity in disturbance” (Chan 1963, p. 196). Behind each of these translations lies a similar idea: only within and through the process of change can there be found a relative stability, so that again this stability is only a function of the more originary play of differences. *Dao* is the name for this relative stability, and in this context Hall and Ames argue:

The experience of *dao* is of something without borders. There is no sense of the unity of the world, no feeling that “all things are one.” The fundamental sense of things is of “this” and “that.” Only thises and thats exist as discriminable items. Where a Daoist celebrates her oneness with all things, the meaning of “oneness” is “continuity” with other things, not “identity.” (Hall and Ames 1995, p. 233)

So in ways similar to Heidegger’s understanding of *logos*, *dao* is also not concerned with making things identical, but with bringing things together in their difference. As a Daoist, one should reflect how things are. As the *Book of Changes* tells us: “The successive movement of yin and yang constitutes the Way (Tao)” (Chan 1963, p. 266). Similarly, in chapter 62 of the *Daodejing* we hear: “Way-making (*dao*) is the flowing together of all things (*wanwu*)” (Hall and Ames 2003, p. 173). The way the world unfolds is as a continuous cycle of processes generated by conflicting forces. Yet seeing these forces purely as opposite is inherently flawed, as they eventually belong together, and can only function because of this togetherness.

And seeing such dynamics as something we should oppose is equally counter-productive. Rather than go against the processual nature of the world, the *Zhuangzi* argues that we should embrace it:

Go side by side with the sun and moon,  
Do the rounds of Space and Time.  
Act out their neat conjunctions,  
Stay aloof from their convulsions.  
Dependents each on each, let us honour one another.  
(Graham 2001, p. 59)

In this way, Daoism also promotes the same thoughtful acknowledgment of being in the world that Heidegger seems to suggest. This can also be glanced from a number of chapters in the *Daodejing* (specifically 25, but it can also be read in 34, 42, and 62) that seek to portray *dao* as the unchanging whole of change. Within this whole, things are always reversing, returning, growing, and degenerating, and this is the sense in which *logos* necessarily entails *polemos*, especially if we relate *logos* to the notions of concealing and unconcealing. As such, *dao* is similar in that it is also considered to be the workings of these *yin-yang* forces.

Graham Parkes already noticed a striking similarity between the Daoist *yin-yang* dichotomy, or rather dynamic, on the one hand and the notions of ‘strife’ (*Streit*, *polemos*) in Heidegger on the other (Parkes 1984, p. 361). In Heidegger’s world such a view is put across in the following way: “*Strife (Streit)* is essential being (*Wesung*) of the ‘in-between’ (*Zwischen*)” (Heidegger 1989, p. 265; my translation, italics in original, German added). Such an understanding of ‘strife’ is nothing other than the *logos-as-polemos* perspective we have already encountered, which also portrays Heidegger’s unconcealing and concealing relationship. Reminiscent of this is the Daoist pair of *you* 有 and *wu* 無. As chapter 2 of the *Daodejing* tells us: “Determinacy (*you*) and indeterminacy (*wu*) give rise to each other” (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 80). Anything determinate, or, in Heidegger’s terms, any being (*Seiendes*), only arises out of indeterminacy, or Being/Nothing. This interplay between *you* and *wu* is really all there is, and there is no need to postulate some metaphysical principle behind it. The interplay just is spontaneously. The same idea of spontaneity and following the interplay of differences that we see in the coming and going of things can be read in various chapters of the *Daodejing*, for example chapters 16, 25, and 40. To me this is what makes *logos* and *dao* comparable. Both notions focus on following the ‘logic’ of the interplay of different things on the one hand and the temporal structures of arising and decaying on the other. Or, as Zhuangzi says:

The Way is without beginning or end, but things have their life and death—you cannot rely upon their fulfillment. One moment empty, the next moment full—you cannot depend on their form. The years cannot be held off; time cannot be stopped. Decay, growth, fullness, and emptiness end and then begin again. It is thus that we must describe the plan of the Great Meaning and discuss the principles of the ten thousand things. The life of things is a gallop, a headlong dash—with every movement they alter, with every moment they shift. What should you do and what should you not do? Everything will change of itself, that is certain! (Watson 2003, pp. 104–105)

There is nothing other than continuous transformation, and humans are no exception to this transformation; neither are humans somewhere outside this process, nor is

there an overarching principle behind it all. The regularity *in* the process is not something other than the process.

A similar passage where Zhuangzi puts this idea forward is the following:

Joy, anger, grief, delight, worry, regret, fickleness, inflexibility, modesty, willfulness, candor, insolence—music from empty holes, mushrooms springing up in darkness, day and night replacing each other before us, and no one knows where they sprout from. Let it be! Let it be! (Watson 2003, p. 33)

There really is no reason to think that we should be asking for a guiding principle that would be directed to some end. Instead we should just let the process run its natural course:

Then the four seasons will rise one after the other, the ten thousand things will take their turn at living. Now flourishing, now decaying. . . . At the end, no tail; at the beginning, no head; now dead, now alive . . . [,] its constancy is unending, yet there is nothing that can be counted on. (Watson 1968, pp. 156–157)

The Alpha-to-Omega teleology typical of Western thinking and conducive to an invention of a ‘First Cause’ or ‘origin’ that would see *logos* as a metaphysical principle that can be ‘counted on’ is absent in most classical Chinese thought, but especially in Daoism, because *dao* as the process itself does not aim at anything, and its ‘constancy’ is nothing more than constant change. To follow the *dao* would then be nothing else than to be able to follow the ever changing equilibrium between *yin* and *yang* forces, something which can also be read in chapter 11 of the *Zhuangzi*, where the “dark and mysterious gate” (Watson 1968, p. 120) associated with *dao* is exactly the passage from *yang* to *yin* (and of course this passage is reversible). Or again in chapter 42 of the *Daodejing*, where *dao* is also understood as the continuous balancing of ever changing *yin* and *yang* sides.

### Logos, Dao, *Relationality*

As we have seen, Heidegger explained *logos* as ‘discourse’ and the fundamental meaning of discourse as “letting something be seen” (Heidegger 1962, pp. 55–56). Seeing how a ‘letting-be-seen’ always, as unconcealment, contains concealing, we can understand *logos* as the discourse that lets things be seen as the interplay of unconcealing and concealing. As such, *dao*, which is similarly translatable as ‘discourse’, is also a letting things be seen as they are in their relationality to what they are not. In a different, but related way, Heidegger explains the related concept of *physis* as *Fuge*, *Fügung* in the sense of Harmonia.<sup>17</sup> Heidegger’s translation of Fragment 8 of Heraclitus is the following: “Das Gegen-fahren ein Zusammenbringen und aus dem Auseinanderbringen die eine erstrahlende Fügung” (Heidegger 1994a, p. 145). Translation of this Heideggerian jargon is difficult: “The reciprocal play a bringing together, and from the distinction the one shining jointure” would be my loose translation. Heidegger understands *Gegen-fahren* as the play of differences, which is at the same time a bringing together of differences as well as a distinguish-

ing of differences, understood from the idea of 'jointure', which is nothing else than the space between things filled up by their necessary interaction—in other words, *Auseinandersetzung*. Difference and jointure belong together, though in a non-hierarchical way. This way of thinking is also found in Daoism. The title of the second chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, "The Sorting that Evens Things Out," explains how sorting out can be seen as both differentiating and equalizing (*qi* 齊), which we can then read in comparison to *Auseinandersetzung* or *Das Selbe* (the 'same').

So *logos* and *dao* are discourse, and both are impermanent structures that we need and live by. Chad Hansen has argued extensively for seeing *dao* more from its linguistic connections. *Dao* is guiding discourse; it is speaking, signaling, leading. Both notions convey the idea that we are actively participating in the construal of the world and our place in it. As Heidegger says: "Thinking cuts furrows into the soil of Being" (Heidegger 1971b, p. 70). Or in the words of Hansen: "to understand the notion of a *dao* or a *way* is to see the continuity between road-making, path-marking, drawing a map, or writing a list of directions" (Hansen, in Mou 2003, p. 212). Both the Daoists and Heidegger are extremely aware of the shortcomings of their respective societies' current views of language, and both try to redirect us toward a different understanding of language that would take us closer to our world. This indeed constitutes a similarity between them, but there is also a divergence between Heidegger and Daoism here. The Daoists do constantly remind us of the provisionality of language, but Heidegger seems to believe at least that some fundamental words have something extra (this was also part of Derrida's criticism of Heidegger). While the Daoists seem perfectly happy with the way things are, one cannot help feeling that, for Heidegger, there is more at stake. He does suggest that words such as 'Being' do or could have some fundamental import. Maybe this is exactly that point where Heidegger remains chained, although minimally, to the metaphysical tradition, whereas Daoism was never wedded to such a tradition in the first place.

However we understand this, *logos* and *dao* are discourse, and that means they are our dialogue with the world. If there is any similarity, then it is in the idea that we must start to listen to what is, and not try to dominate the conversation by imposing artificial structures on it. As such one could perceive a similarity between the metaphysical tradition of the West and the Confucian tradition. Both, although with ultimately different goals, seek to impose artificial ways upon the world, whereas Heidegger and the Daoists seek to undo this imposition. In connection to this, Zhuangzi says quite clearly that it is wrong "To wear out the daemonic-and-illuminated in you deeming them to be one without knowing that they are the same" (Graham 2001, p. 54). Here I find a striking resemblance to Heidegger's earlier assertion that the 'same' and the 'identical' are two very different things. We deem things to be one, but instead we should be realizing they are the same. Whereas for others the world of change seems in need of overcoming, Heidegger and Zhuangzi find in the world of change and difference all they require for understanding and appreciating our existence.

Both Heidegger's Heraclitus and Daoists, then, suggest an attunement to what is larger than mere beings, without that larger 'thing' becoming a metaphysical prin-



inciple, and they consequently advocate some way of thinking that accords rather than imposes. Such a form of responsiveness that Heidegger and Zhuangzi proclaim is not devoid of meaning, but is ultimately a form of responsibility: to follow the injunctions to let things be as they inherently are. As such, *dao* can be understood as the workings of different forces, and that is the sense in which *dao* is transformation, and in which *logos* necessarily entails *polemos*.

Taking one step further we could apply these findings to the idea of comparative philosophy itself. My interpretation involves a different way of reading and writing. Language in comparative philosophy is special; it is extremely important since we are dealing with multiple languages and multiple functions of these languages and thus with different views. Here, especially the idea of 'belonging-together-in-difference' with which Heidegger translates τὸ αὐτὸ, or 'the same', *das Selbe*, which we have already encountered, cannot be stressed enough in relation to comparative philosophy. This is exactly what I understand Heidegger's strategy in comparative philosophy to be about: to treat different cultures as belonging together through difference and diversity. And to find the discourse or language appropriate to bring out these differences in dialogue is the real challenge of comparative philosophy. We should always be on guard against imposing ideas through language, and this means that on the one hand we should treat language with the utmost respect while on the other hand we must not hesitate to exploit and widen languages to the fullest to make them speak to us.

We have known for some time now that the classical Chinese thinkers had largely different background assumptions. For example, it is now commonplace to state that there is no real creator entity in classical Chinese thought, and that the metaphysical notions of 'Being' and 'Nothing' are largely absent as well.<sup>18</sup> The assumed equivalents *you* and *wu* rather mean 'present' and 'absent', or 'having' and 'not-having'. Most of the classical Chinese assumptions fit in more with a process-oriented worldview than with one that is based on a metaphysical and onto-theological one. As such, we would be well off to be more careful when interpreting concepts such as *dao* in familiar metaphysical ways. Maybe a non-metaphysical reading as presented here is more relevant to classical Chinese philosophy, and such considerations can also lead us, like Heidegger, to reassess our own most important notions, like *logos*, and, equally important, might give us resources to understand better the Chinese philosophical tradition, which is generally conceived as non-metaphysical in the sense that I have described. The strategy I have taken can lead us to a more positive assessment of the similarities of classical Chinese thought and the classical Western thought of the Presocratic thinkers. As such, the general understanding that the history of Western philosophy is largely metaphysical might be right from Plato onward, but that would mean there is a whole field of inquiry and comparison waiting between the Presocratics and classical Chinese thinkers. It is my sincere belief that the so-called postmodern thinkers (in which I include the likes of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida) and their approaches to the Presocratics can offer particularly suitable alternative strategies of reading the Chinese classics.

## Notes

- 1 – In what follows, I shall use a rather narrow understanding of ‘metaphysics’ that consists of this particular kind of thought that aims at understanding the world through non-material and transcendental principles of the ‘first ground’ type, in full awareness that the term ‘metaphysics’ covers much more than just this.
- 2 – Quoted from Hall and Ames 1998, p. 153.
- 3 – Although the term ‘metaphysics’ itself has a long history and is complicated to narrow down, Derrida’s following definition reasonably describes metaphysics the way I am using it here:

The enterprise of returning “strategically,” ideally, to an origin or to a “priority” held to be simple, intact, normal, pure, standard, self-identical, in order *then* to think in terms of derivation, complication, deterioration, accident, etc. All metaphysicians, from Plato to Rousseau, Descartes to Husserl, have proceeded in this way, conceiving good to be before evil, the positive before the negative, the pure before the impure, the simple before the complex, the essential before the accidental, the imitated before the imitation, etc. And this is not just *one* metaphysical gesture among others, it is *the* metaphysical exigency, that which has been the most constant, most profound and most potent. (Derrida 1988, p. 236)
- 4 – See, e.g., his ‘Überwindung der Metaphysik’ in Heidegger 1994b, pp. 67–95.
- 5 – As such, Heidegger’s thinking on the Presocratics has always insisted on seeing them not as imperfect precursors to the metaphysical tradition, but as mostly non-metaphysical thinkers in their own right. The name Presocratics is already a misnomer that assumes we can understand the earlier thinkers by reference to the later ones. It is such misunderstandings that Heidegger sought to overcome, and the same thing applies to my arguments here.
- 6 – See *Zhuangzi* chapter 2, in Watson 2003, pp. 34–36; Graham 2001, pp. 52–53; Chan 1963, pp. 182–184.
- 7 – Herrlee Creel, in his reading of the first chapter of the *Daodejing*, disagrees that it is substantial. See Creel 1983, p. 302.
- 8 – See, e.g., Heidegger’s *On the Way to Language* (Heidegger 1971b, p. 92).
- 9 – See also Heidegger 1994a, p. 251.
- 10 – See *ibid.*, pp. 250–251.
- 11 – “Ο Λόγος wäre, als die lesende Lege gedacht, das griechisch gedachte Wesen der Sage. Sprache wäre Sage. Sprache wäre: versammelndes vorliegen-Lassen des Anwesenden in seinem Anwesen. In der Tat: die Griechen *wohnten* in diesem Wesen der Sprache. Allein sie haben dieses Wesen der Sprache niemals *gedacht*, auch Heraklit nicht” (italics in original, German added to translation).

- 12 – The German original from *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Heidegger 1953, p. 47) goes: “Auseinandersetzung is allem (Anwesendem) zwar Erzeuger. . . .” (translation modified from Maly and Emad 1986, p. 41).
- 13 – In German: “allem aber (auch) waltender Bewahrer” (Heidegger 1953, p. 47).
- 14 – Heidegger added this comment in parenthesis in the 1953 edition.
- 15 – In German, in Heidegger 1994b, p. 371:
- der Λόγος, den Heraklit als den Grundzug des Anwesens denkt, die Μοῖρα, die Parmenides als den Grundzug des Anwesens denkt, das Χρεῶν, das Anaximander als das Wesende im Anwesen denkt, nennen das Selbe. Im verborgenen Reichtum des Selben ist die Einheit des einenden Einen, das “Ev von jedem der Denker in seiner Weise gedacht.
- 16 – See Vetsch 1992, p. 81.
- 17 – See Heidegger 1994a, pp. 141–147.
- 18 – See, e.g., Hall and Ames 1995, p. 11.

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