INAUTHENTIC DASEIN AND ITS RELATION TO A "CHINESE-LIKE 'CONSTANCY'"[1]

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Abstract:
It has long been theorized that Heidegger's idea for Dasein was highly influenced by the Chinese notion of the Dao. This is due to a misinterpretation on behalf of Heideggerian scholars and others of what the Dao represents. In fact, Heidegger, in explicating what he thought to be "the most extreme inversion of φύσης-ουσία [*phusis-ousia*]," made this equal to "Chinese-like '*constancy*,'" which is the basis of the Dao. Taking what Heidegger interpreted *phusis* to be (derived from Aristotelian metaphysics and an assumption of pre-Socratic thought) as a process of unconcealment from continuing re-concealment which signals a kind of "truth" of being [*phusis*], *that* which calls for constant presence is inauthentic Dasein, rather than authentic Dasein. In other words, Heidegger's idea of what inauthentic Dasein calls for could be explained within Aristotle's system as equal to aiming to replace phusis with the know-how of τέχνη [*techne*]. The Dao, as rightfully understood and utilized by the master craftsman and the Sage, is accessible, constant, and knowable. This could not be in more opposition to Heidegger's notion of *phusis*.

Key words: Metaphysics, Heidegger, Dasein, Daoism, Laozi.

1. Introduction

It has long been theorized that Heidegger's idea for Dasein was highly influenced by the Chinese notion of the Dao (May 1999; Parkes 1987). How-ever, Heidegger, in explicating what he thought to be "the most extreme inversion of φύσης-ουσία [*phusis-ousia*]" (Heidegger 1939, 236), made this equal to "Chinese-like '*constancy*,'" which is the basis of the Dao. Taking what Heidegger interpreted *phusis* to be (derived from Aristotelian metaphysics and an assumption of pre-Socratic thought) as a process of unconcealment from continuing re-concealment which signals a kind of "truth" of being [*phusis*], *that* which calls for constant presence is inauthentic Dasein, rather than authentic Dasein. In other words, Heidegger's idea of what inauthentic Dasein calls for could be explained within Aristotle's system as equal to aiming to replace *phusis* with τέχνη [*techne*] (*phusis* here would be associated with *being* as originally thought of, by way of Heraclitus: "Being loves to hide itself.").

If this replacement is done, what *phusis* is, "the origin and ordering of change, such that each thing that changes has this ordering within itself" (Heidegger 1939, 230), is no longer available; its replacement is a constant "know-how in dealing with things" (Heidegger 1939, 231) and this know-how would not be associated with Dasein but rather with the outside "they". Effectively, this would be Dasein not being conscious of its possibilities, because it is the "they" who decide its trajectory. This inauthentic Dasein could be seen as calling for the constancy of the Dao, for the Dao is defined as the stuff and pattern of the universe that is predetermined and knowable to sages and master craftsmen alike. One can attain the Dao by having an excellent

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[1] M Heidegger (1939) On the being and conception of φύσης [*phusis*] in Aristotle's Physics B, 1. T Sheehan (trans). Man and World 9(3) (August, 1976): 236.

grasp of its "know-how," its workings, which could be gained through practice and keen awareness of the outside natural world. The Being of the Dao is thus the constant structure of what is, absent of any notion of Being that is conscious of its own possibilities to change (authentic Dasein).

How did the misconception of connecting Heidegger's system of being with the Dao come about? Following Heidegger's attempt[2] to translate the *Dao de jing*道德經, a work attributed to Laozi, and one explicit mention of Daoism in one of Heidegger's later writings,[3] an overly sentimentalized and speculative correlative version has come about, one that has been perpetrated by scholars who in trying to better understand Heidegger's notions and with a general lack of understanding of the tenets of Daoism have in effect erected an inverted "straw man" argument that welds together two disparate notions in order to validate the one.

It may be that Heidegger had genuinely wanted to find some kind of deep connection between Dao-

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[2] Only a tenth of the relatively small work *Dao de jing* was ever translated into German by Heidegger, and all of this was done during the summer of 1946, with the help and collaboration of Paul Shih-yi Hsiao. Hsiao had translated the work into Italian from Classical Chinese, and it is from the Italian translation that they then both worked off of. From: PS Hsiao (2001) Heidegger and our translation of the *Tao Te Ching*. In: R Polt , G Fried (eds) A companion to Heidegger's *Introduction to metaphysics*. Yale University Press, New Haven, London, pp 93–101.
3 M Heidegger (1959) On the way to language. PD Hertz (trans). Harper and Row, New York, 1971, p 92:

The word "way" probably is an ancient primary word that speaks to the reflective mind of man. The key word in Laotse's poetic thinking is *Tao,* which "properly speaking" means way. But because we are prone to think of "way" superficially, as a stretch connecting two places, our word "way" has all too rashly been considered unfit to name what *Tao* says. *Tao* is then translated as reason, mind, *raison*, meaning, *logos*. 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. Perhaps the mystery of mysteries of thoughtful Saying conceals itself in the word "way," *Tao*, if only we will let these names return to what they leave unspoken, if only we are capable of this, to allow them to do so. Perhaps the enigmatic power of today's reign of method also, and indeed preeminently, stem from the fact that the methods, notwithstanding their efficiency, are after all merely the runoff of a great hidden stream which moves all things along and makes way for everything. All is way.

Note: The word "Tao" is equivalent to "Dao". The spelling "Tao" comes from an old way of representing Chinese phonetics that is no longer generally used.

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ism and his system, hence his brief study of the *Dao de jing*. However, outside of any superficial confabulation, a connection cannot be viably made. Taking how Sheehan has represented an inaccurate depiction of Dasein, that Heidegger had rejected (Sheehan 2001, 270 ft 52), as a further confirmation that Daoism would be an ill-fitted paradigm:

> In the literature this bifurcated view— *Dasein* on one side, being on the other— has generally taken two forms, with their apposite narratives…(2) the still popular "Big Being" story, according to which Being Itself, lying hidden somewhere beyond our ken, occasionally pulls back the veil and reveals Itself to properly disposed human beings—who in our days are, almost exclusively, paid-up Heideggerians (Sheehan 2001, 10).

This description of an inaccurately represented Dasein is actually an accurate description of the Dao, which is that which is hidden to most, but "reveals Itself to properly disposed human beings," in effect a highly exclusionary "being" with regards to showing itself, *always* persistent and pervasive in all living and non-living things.

My aim here is to further demonstrate how the Dao is discordant with Heidegger's notion of authentic Dasein. As implicated in authentic Dasein, Heidegger's notion of *phusis* is the key to unraveling faulty connections to the Dao. This will explicate how inauthentic Dasein would actually be a better fit to the Daoist tenets of constancy and pervasiveness, for inauthentic Dasein seeks and basks in constant presence, projecting it when it is not there, even in itself.

Regarding Heidegger's initial exposure to Daoism, it is possible that he could have read the Daoist work *Zhuangzi*, via a German translation by Buber in 1921, before writing *Being and Time*. However, there is no definitive evidence to that effect, either in Heidegger's reading, or application, of any Daoist principles in *Being and Time*. As a result, my analysis here is based off of Heidegger's thought following the so-called "turn" in 1935, with his lecture, as put down in *Introduction to Metaphysics* (Heidegger 1953 [1935 lecture]). This is also the taking-off point of those who connect Heidegger with Daoism, and where *phusis* starts to play an important role. I interpret the "turn" in the same way as Sheehan has (Sheehan 2001, 13-14), *that is* that it is not a turn in Heidegger's thought, but rather a functional turn that

was manifested in the newly elaborated process of the opening up of Dasein.

2. The process of opening that is *phusis*[4]

Interpreted by Heidegger, *phusis* is a process of coming to presence, and does not name a presence or being of any kind. This "emerging-abiding sway" (*das aufgehend-verweilende Walten*), this process of disclosure, of unconcealment is described by Sheehan as within Heidegger's system as follows:

> …the being of entities is implicitly some form of the presence of entities: not merely their presence-to-themselves or their presence-out-there apart from human beings, but their *presence to and availability for possible human engagement*—their humanly specific ("ad hominem") givenness and accessibility. In this implicit phenomenological sense, the being of entities is their ability to be of concern to human beings, that is, to be significant, understandable, usable. Thus, in what follows, the term "givenness" always means "humanly specific givenness"… φύσης [*phusis*] refers to the givenness of entities (Sheehan 2001, 7).

This *phusis*, as "givenness", is not constant, but rather a disclosure that is impermanent and unforeseeable. It is when the being of entities are open to the world that authentic Dasein is possible, and the form of the process of this openness is *phusis*. Heidegger viewed *phusis* as a kind of *truth* (ἀλήθεια, also understood as the state of being evident, and unconcealment), not in the sense of correctness or propositional thinking, but rather as a process of disclosure by which the being of entities "can become manifest or appear in the world" (Guignon 2001, 52).

As interpreted by Heidegger, this *truth* is located in the process of disclosure itself and not within any being itself. Heidegger was not very clear in distinctly explaining how the process of disclosure

would be brought about. According to Guignon, this process would be as a result of an interplay between Dasein and Being, which he associates with "a previous manifestation of *polemos* [πόλεμος] that is circulating in the world at a particular time" (Guignon 2001, 53; Schoenbohm 2001, 151). What the process of disclosure would disclose of an entity could perhaps be many truths, representing many different aspects.

There is also a sense of a "naming force" that the word *phusis* has, in that the force of language and words, and thus according to Heidegger, of thought, calls it out as the process of disclosure, of process of opening that it is (Scott 2001, 26-28).[5] However, what kind of opening is the process of *phusis* concerned with?

The opening associated with the process of *phusis* is connected to Dasein. According to Sheehan:

> For Heidegger the verbal emphasis in "Dasein" falls on the second syllable of Da-*sein*, "*being* the open." The point is that the open is what we "have to be" (compare *zu-sein*). But human beings do not "open up the open" by their own subjective powers. Rather, the open is "thrown and pulled" open (*geworfen/ereignet*), "drawn out" in such a way that, within the open*ed*, the availability of entities occurs. This "open*ed*ness" is what Jean Beaufret had in mind when he interpreted *Dasein* as *l'ouverture*, and it is the meaning we intend when we render this key term as "openness" (Sheehan 2001, 8).

Phusis names the process by which the opening occurs, and it is this which human beings do not have control over. In effect, human beings do not have control over *truth* in the world.

2.1 The Dao and phusis

Before I contrast the Dao with *phusis*, I provide below a brief, relevant summary of how the Dao was represented in early Chinese thought.

The two works of Daoism that Heidegger had come across, the *Zhuangzi* and the *Dao de jing* happen to be the most widely known of Daoist works.

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4 My focus here is on *phusis*, rather than Ereignis, to get at Heidegger's original basis for Ereignis that was derived from the pre-Socratic and Aristotelian notions of *phusis*, rather than Heidegger's more developed (for his needs) and integrated version of Ereignis. Also, those who connect Heidegger with Daoism usually do so via the notion of *phusis*, and not Ereignis. See: Sheehan (2001), 14, for more detail on how "Ereignis was almost—but not quite—envisioned by the early Greek thinkers."

5 Scott further claims that "*Phusis* thus appears in Greek language and thought not primarily as something observed in 'nature' but as the power of language and thought to give things to appear" (Scott 2001, 28). This is a highly debatable point that I will not address here.

There are other early Chinese works that include Daoism as a major influence, such as the *Huainanzi*, but many of these to this day have either not been translated or have only had some partial translation. This is mainly due to the difficulty of translating these works from the original Classical Chinese language, which is notoriously frustrating, time consuming, and many times, indeterminable.

Although the representation of the Dao differs a little between the *Zhuangzi* and the *Dao de jing*, the differences are one of degree, rather than "substance". In the *Zhuangzi*, the common man as possible master craftsman, whether it be as a cook, woodmaker, fisherman, or other kind of craftsman, has the capability of understanding and embracing the Dao (although these occurrences would be relatively rare), while in the *Dao de jing*, it is only the Sage, a rare man of extreme ability that can do so; all others do not have this capability and have minor, shadowy and totally indeterminable experiences of the Dao, and are "condemned" to live an ignorant and almost animal-like existence, finding solace in creature comforts.

It is the interpretation of the Dao as shadowy, obscure, and unfathomable that is its most famous, and usually its only known characteristic, yet this interpretation is only reserved for and refers to those human beings that have no capability of piercing through the Dao to see its true structure.

The passage below from the *Dao de jing* exemplifies the exclusivity of those who have access to the Dao:

> When the man of highest capacities hears Dao
> He does his best to put it into practice.
> When the man of middling capacity hears Dao
> He is in two minds about it.
> When the man of lowly capacity hears Dao
> He laughs loudly at it (Laozi c2005, 193).

In the *Zhuangzi*, nature, with man as an interwoven component, is more stressed, while in the *Dao de jing*, the sage, as an extraordinary man, seems to be able to rise above all others and above ordinary nature to be able to get a kind of birds-eye view of things-in-themselves, having the capability of peering to a thing's constant essence to capture it for his own use and manipulation. This aspect is especially important since it is now understood that the *Dao de jing* was probably written with the idea of ruling in mind, as a handbook of how rulers could effectively control the masses to avoid uprisings. This is a far reach from earlier interpretations from Western scholars of the early-to-mid 20th century who believed that the writer of the *Dao de jing* had a kind of spiritual gentleness in mind.

Some characterizations from the *Dao de jing* of what the Dao is comprised of and its nature include: "It is from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang" (Laozi c2005, 141); "For truly Being and Not-being grow out of one another" (Laozi c2005, 143); "The Way is like an empty vessel that yet may be drawn from without ever needing to be filled" (Laozi c2005, 146); "Dao never does; yet through it all things are done." (Laozi c2005, 188); and "Dao gave birth to the One; the One gave birth successively to two things, three things, up to ten thousand (everything)" (Laozi c2005, 195)."

Basically, according to the *Dao de jing*, in the beginning of time, something came out of nothing, but now there are "somethings", not nothing, and the Dao comprises both the origination point of nothing and the "somethings" that now exist. These "somethings" are the constant and balanced essences of all living and non-living things in the universe across time, and also the determinable essences of happenings or events (also interpreted as situations) through time.

In this way, by gaining insight of the Dao, either the master craftsman (in the *Zhuangzi*) or the Sage (in the *Dao de jing*) could discover the optimum way with which to approach entities and situations. The key to be able to do this is the constancy of the essences that are embedded in the Dao.

A particularly famous passage from the *Dao de jing* is:

> We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel;
> But it is on the space where there is nothing that the
> Usefulness of the wheel depends.
> We turn clay to make a vessel;
> But it is on the space where there is nothing that the
> Usefulness of the vessel depends.
> We pierce doors and windows to make a house;
> And it is on these spaces where there is nothing that the
> Usefulness of the house depends.
> Therefore just as we take advantage of what is, we should

Recognize the usefulness of what is not (Laozi c2005, 155).

It is clear that this passage has to do with the relationship of enclosed, contained space to the usefulness of what this kind of construction could produce, and what is not stressed here is the notion of an abstract and empty void. Yet, a notion that Heidegger had in his essay "The Thing" regarding a jug was that "the vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that it holds" (Heidegger 1971 [1950 lecture], 210). Though Heidegger does not mention Daoism here whatsoever, arguments have been made that this is what he was intimating. However, his viewpoint is far from the Daoist spirit of the passage.

Many of those who associate Heidegger's concept of being with the Dao make it equivalent to Heidegger's notion of *phusis* (Pöggeler 1987, 55-56), while some others connect the Dao with the pre-Socratic idea of λόγος [*logos*] (which they then connect to *phusis*) (Parkes 1987, 106), and still some others with Heidegger's notion of "original nothing" (*nihil originarium*) (Yao 2010, 81; May 1999, 21-34).

However, it should now be clear that any of these interpretations would be faulty with regards to the Dao. For, the following characteristics of the Dao are incompatible with these notions: 1) The Dao holds the constant essences of things (while *phusis* is a process of unconcealment, and this is followed by concealment, on an ongoing basis); 2) There is no early Chinese notion of the Dao as a *logos*-type "entity"; the Dao is that which is "nameless" (Laozi c2005, 141) and prior to language; and 3) by insisting that the Dao is just the "original nothing", the "somethings" (the essences of things and situations) that it now contains is completely ignored.

Additionally, the exclusivity of those rare, capable few who are able to access the Dao (without any effort) is in deep contrast to Heidegger's concept (and hope and trust) that authentic Dasein would be open and available to all those that were willing to be open to it, and that the capability (if worked and acted upon) of being open to it would be available to everyone (though the actual "opening up of the open" is not within our human power).

2.2. The Dao and inathentic Dasein

The connection between inauthentic Dasein and the Dao, the "Chinese-like '*constancy*'" I had referenced on the first page, can now be made. Since authentic Dasein is that which is open to *phusis*, the

process of unconcealment that inevitably leads back to concealment (and unconcealment and concealment again, that cannot be foretold or planned for), is not concerned with nor seeks out constant presence. That which is inauthentic Dasein requires and seeks constant presence, thus not being open to the process of *phusis*. Additionally, inauthentic Dasein surmises that constant presence always *is* (including within itself), and that it is here-and-there for the searching.

The master craftsman of the *Zhuangzi* and the Sage of the *Dao de jing* who access the Dao are able to do so on a consistent and constant basis. They are able to access the Dao because they have exceptional and rare capabilities of perception to see beyond the shadowy veil of the Dao. All those who fall beneath this "bar" of capability would not be able to access the Dao and would experience it as indeterminable and falsely changeable. This system is therefore a two-tiered system that is comprised of the "Haves" and the "Have-nots".

The parallel that can be made here to inauthentic Dasein is that inauthentic Dasein searches and believes in constancy, constancy that could accurately be represented as the Dao. Inauthentic Dasein fancies itself to be exceptional. Ironically, this would curtail its possibilities since it was not interested in change, passing off its power to the "they" who would then be in charge of dictating its life.

2.3. Conclusion

It is a misinterpretation of what the Dao represents that has driven some Heideggerian scholars and others into believing that the Dao could be positively associated with Heidegger's conception of being. In connecting the "Have-nots" to those who have an understanding of the true nature of the Dao, they have misconstrued the Dao's characteristics as shadowy, undeterminable, and unstable. Contrary to this, the Dao, as rightfully understood by the master craftsman and the Sage, is accessible, constant, and knowable. This could not be in more opposition to Heidegger's notion of *phusis*.

In this way, inauthentic Dasein could be seen to be closely aligned with the concept of the Dao. Its belief in a structure of constant presence belies the notion of authenticity and *truth*.

3. Epilogue

It is my hope that in the future more scholarship is devoted to clearing up the differences between Daoism and Heidegger's body of work concerning

being. What is needed are far more scholars of early Chinese philosophy who dare to cross over from their discipline into the "wild forests" of continental philosophy, in order to get a wider and fuller understanding of the world, both past and present. Before this happens, the segmentation and limited nature of their horizons will undoubtedly keep them rooted, passive, and stagnant as they stand.

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