



Heidegger and Taoism on Humanism

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For a long time now, all too long, thinking [like a fish] has been stranded on dry land. -- Heidegger

Fish thrive in water, man thrives in the Way [Tao]. -- Chuang Tzu

This essay will mainly deal with two issues: (1) What distinguishes Heidegger's thinking on the essence of man from all traditional humanistic views? (2) What is the relation between Heidegger's perspective of human nature and the Taoist one? To do this, however, it is necessary to lay bare the distinctive meaning of "Being" for Heidegger and "Tao" for Taoism.

I. Heidegger's Criticism of Humanism and Metaphysics

In the "Letter on Humanism" (1946), to answer Jean Beaufret's question "How can we restore meaning to the word 'humanism'?", Heidegger writes: "This question proceeds from your intention to retain 'humanism'. I wonder whether that is necessary." [i] This radical attitude, similar to that of his views, regarding "logic", "ethics", "epistemology", etc., is based on a judgment that "Every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the ground of one". [ii] For him, every humanism, whether Roman, Renaissance, Marxist, Sartrean or Christian, has its philosophical root in Platonic/Aristotelean metaphysics, which is the beginning of the technical interpretation of thinking. All kinds of humanism, no matter how they may have looked different, share one basic view about the most universal essence of man. That is, "Man is considered to be an animal rationale." [iii] Heidegger does not question the correctness of this definition within its conceptual context. Rather, he criticizes it for its being conditioned by metaphysics. Now, therefore, the crucial question becomes "What is metaphysics for Heidegger?", as well as, "Why is defining man as 'rational animal' metaphysical?".

In one sense, Heidegger's whole career of "thinking" may be seen as a continuous effort to distinguish pure thinking from metaphysics, although in his early writings, this effort appears as "the laying of the foundation of metaphysics". [iv] (In this paper, "metaphysics" is used in accord with the terminology of Heidegger's later works.) For our purpose, to know what metaphysics means for him is the first step to understand his thinking and his attitude

towards humanism. In the "Letter", Heidegger writes,

Metaphysics does indeed represent beings in their Being, and so it thinks the Being of beings. But it does not think the difference of both. Metaphysics does not ask about the truth of Being itself. Nor does it therefore ask in what way the essence of man belongs to the truth of Being. [v]

This paragraph gives us a useful clue to understand properly Heidegger's saying that "metaphysics persists in the oblivion of Being". [vi] Metaphysics does think Being of beings, and therewith tries to distinguish Being from beings. But it does this only in terms of representing beings in their Being. "Representation", therefore, is for Heidegger the metaphysical way of thinking Being.

In this representational perspective, the Being (of beings) is a "ground" or "principle" that "brings beings to their actual presencing." [vii] For this reason, "The ground shows itself as presence". [viii] This presence, which makes the presence of beings possible, may be asserted to be universal, unchanging, autonomous, and self-identical; but still, it is something "present-at-hand" (vorhanden) that can be handled by concepts. That means, it can in turn be re-presented as, say, Platonic "Form", Aristotle's and Descartes' "substance", or Hegel's dialectic mediation of the absolute Spirit. Therefore, the presence of Being under this category is not essentially disparate from the presence of beings. Both can be defined, thematically posited, and talked about as either object or subject, without necessarily "undergoing an experience with language". [ix]

This is also the reason for Heidegger's criticism of humanism. Someone may raise the question: by defining the essence of man as "rational animal", man has been clearly distinguished from other creatures and beings. Heidegger's answer would be: this differentia, the "rational" or "ratio", is correct enough to distinguish man from other beings in, say, anthropology, if our aim is only to "set him off as one living creature among others in contrast to plants, beasts, and God". [x] But it is not primordial enough to let us understand the essence of man, and distinguish man ontologically from others. In other words, what Heidegger opposes most vehemently is "the manner of metaphysics" [xi] as conceptual positing and classification, which does not merely forget the truth of Being, but also forget this forgetfulness by believing that it has achieved a correct definition of man.

II. Heidegger's Perspective of Being and Man as Dasein

What, then, is Heidegger's own thinking on Being as such, that is said to be "more rigorous than the conceptual"? [xii] Certainly, it must be non-representational in the sense that the understanding of Being and man's essence cannot depend on any conceptual distinction, such as that between universal and particular, changeable and unchangeable, subject and object, spirit and matter, or soul and body. Being is not the presence more abstract and thus "higher" than that of beings. The problem then is, without such a conceptual hierarchy, how can Heidegger still say "Being is the transcendens pure and simple"? [xiii] This is, to my judgment, the key point for understanding Heidegger's thinking as a whole. Heidegger writes:

The rigor of thinking, in contrast to that of the sciences, does not consist merely in an artificial, that is, technical-theoretical exactness of concepts. It lies in the fact that speaking remains purely in the element of Being and lets the simplicity of its manifold dimensions rule. [xiv]

"The element of Being", compared to the water in which thinking like "a fish" originally live, [xv] indicates an ontological horizon that is expressed in the "Letter" as the "open

region" (das Offene)[xvi] or "the openness of Being" (das Offenheit des Seins). [xvii] Heidegger holds, "The self-giving into the open, along with the open region itself, is Being itself." [xviii] The "speaking", occurred in the paragraph cited above, signifies an essential connection of language with the open region, since "language is the house of Being which comes to pass [ereignet] from Being and is pervaded by Being". [xix] The "simplicity [das Einfache] of its manifold dimensions", then, manifests the "topological" character [xx] of this region. He states, "The Oneness [das Einzige], that the thinking wants to attain and for the first time tries to articulate in Being and Time, is that of simplicity". [xxi]

Whenever Heidegger comes to express his own thinking, his discourses are full of topological and "ecstatic-horizontal" [xxii] terms and metaphors, such as "free space", "openness", "region", "horizon", "Situation", "house", "clearing", "disclosing", "dwelling", "building", "pervaded", "standing-out", "Being-ahead-of-itself", "gathering", "the aroundness of the environment", "ready-to-hand", etc. He almost never positively uses such terms as "subject (versus object)", "mind", "sense data", "logic", "idea", "epistemology", "ethics", and even "philosophy", whose meanings have been already packed by metaphysics. He always tries to uncover the original meaning of a term by identifying its topological etymology, such as "standing-out" (ecstasis) for "temporality", "letting-something-be-seen" for "logos", "uncoveredness" for "truth", "circumspection" for "seeing", "ready-to-hand" for the mode of "Being-in-the-world", "projected Being of Dasein" for "understanding", etc. Why is it so? The basic reason is, for Heidegger, Being itself, as non-conceptual as it is, can be understood to be nothing but an ontological horizon-region that appropriates between and beyond all conceptual dichotomies. Being itself cannot be a perceptible being, nor the form of perception; neither is it a category or substance. It must rather be "what" is between them and lets them belong together, so as to bring them into their own.

In his interpretation of the first edition of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, Heidegger pays special attention to what Kant says about the third and more original faculty of soul: the transcendental imagination, which for Heidegger indicates a horizontal dimension scarcely recognized by metaphysics. It is this third and mediating dimension that makes the other two, i.e. the forms of intuition (space and time) and the categories of understanding, belong together. The "pure image", being both transcendental and non-conceptual, is "time"; not (merely) as the form of intuition, but as the ontological horizon that allow the two (the forms of intuition and categories) to encounter. Kant is in the first edition compelled into this dimension by the demand of thinking. However, he drops most of his discourses on it in the second one, due to the fear that this strange dimension will threaten the superiority of subjectivity and his conceptual way of doing philosophy. Heidegger, however, find an affinity between this "transcendental imagination" and his own approach. In Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics (1929), he interprets the ecstatic dimension as an open horizon that is the transcendence in true sense:

Ontological knowledge "forms" transcendence, and this formation is nothing other than the holding open the horizon within which the Being of the essent [being] is perceptible in advance. Provided that truth means: the unconcealment of [Unverborgenheit von] ..., then the transcendence is original truth. But truth itself must be understood both as disclosure of Being and overtness [Offenbarkeit] of the essent. If ontological knowledge discloses the horizon, its truth lies in letting the essent be encountered within this horizon. [xxiii]

Transcendence is in itself ecstatic-horizontal. [xxiv]

The transcendence of Being for Heidegger is not representational or conceptual, but "in itself ecstatic-horizontal". Therefore, Being should be comprehended only as an ultimate horizon, "pure and simple". It is not a horizon of someone's view, just as Being itself is not a Being of beings. For this reason, Heidegger in "Conversation on Country Path about Thinking" (1944-45) proposes "region" (Gegend) in the sense of "horizon as such". We read,

Scientist: ... You say that the horizon is the openness which surrounds us. But what is this openness as such, if we disregard that it can also appear as the horizon of our representing?

Teacher: It strikes me as something like a region, an enchanted region where everything belonging there returns to that in which it rests. [xxv]

Obviously, this region or pure horizon, similar to Kant's "transcendental imagination", is intimately related to "space" and "time". However, it should not be understood as a spatial and temporal container or frame in which beings take their positions indifferently. [xxvi] Rather, the pure horizon is spatial and temporal in the most original sense; i.e., it opens, gives, and projects the ek-sistential space and time for every being. [xxvii] It is never a space and time present-at-hand, but in itself ecstatic-horizontal. [xxviii] That just means, it has to be uncovered, disclosed, and maintained, not by someone else, nor by a representable "itself", but in a way described to be "the primordial 'outside-of-itself' in and for itself". [xxix] Heidegger calls such a non-representable "round dance" or "mirror-playing" [xxx] "hermeneutic circle" in *Being and Time* and later, in *Time and Being* [note the mirror-playing of the two titles], the "Appropriation" (Ereignis). The Appropriation, into which "Being vanishes", [xxxi] is what Being as a pure horizon means. Heidegger writes,

What lets the two matters ["Being" and "time"; the latter is known as the true meaning of Dasein's Being ("care")] belong together, what brings the two into their own and, even more, maintains and holds them in their belonging together--the way the two matters stand, the matter at stake--is Appropriation. [xxxii]

The Appropriation, bearing a striking affinity to the Buddhist doctrine of "dependent origination" and the Taoist originating-returning "Way" (Tao), is the natural conclusion of a horizontal thinking. Non-representational, non-dualistic and non-substantial, Being has to stand "outside-of-itself" but still "in and for itself". This is possible only in a horizon or region, that is essentially appropriating. That means, there must be a being that is not ontologically different from the pure horizon (openness) of Being (Sein) but still, because of its status as a being, leaves "room" and "space" for this hermeneutic dance and appropriating game. This being can only be a "Da-sein" (there-being), who possesses nothing representable but the opening "Da" as the disclosedness of Being. To Heidegger, therefore, man is ultimately a Da-sein whose essence is no other than disclosing and guarding the horizontal Being appropriationally through temporality and language. He writes in *Identity and Difference*, therefore:

The event of appropriation [Ereignis] is that realm, vibrating within itself, through which man and Being reach each other in their nature, achieve their active nature by losing those qualities with which metaphysics has endowed them. [xxxiii]

It is this appropriational realm that saves man and Being from both metaphysical conceptualization and nihilism, and enables them to reach each other and thence achieve their (hermeneutically) "active" nature. "Thus Appropriated, man belongs to Appropriation." [xxxiv] Furthermore, because truth for Heidegger also means the uncoveredness of Being as pure horizon, man, as Dasein, "is in the truth". [xxxv]

In this light, the essence of man is not the representational Being that distinguishes conceptually man from other beings, but a hermeneutic Appropriation of the horizontal Being; through which, a "world" is always ecstatically disclosed. "World", therefore, is not the sum of all beings but a horizontal-regional "circumstance" projected from Being through Dasein and can never be caught up by metaphysical thinking. Man is distinctive not because of the "higher" position he occupies in the hierarchy of conceptual classification, but due

to his horizontal "nearness" to Being. For man, "Being is the nearest", [xxxvi] and the nearness is his home, "that-which-regions". [xxxvii] It is necessary to express man's essence in the terms of distance and direction, such as "nearness", "projection", "ahead-of", "to", "toward", etc., because man belongs to the appropriational region, and so "is a creature of distance." [xxxviii]

In Heidegger's later writings, "language", in the place of "temporality" for early Heidegger, is "the house of Being" where man dwells in.

For language is the most delicate and thus the most suspectable vibration holding everything within the suspended structure of the appropriation. We dwell in appropriation inasmuch as our active nature is given over to language. [xxxix]

Language in this light is primarily not the system of signs representing what are present-at-hand, but that through which man is claimed by Being and, in turn, Being disclosed to man. "[L]anguage alone brings what is, as something that is, into the Open for the first time". [xl] Due to the appropriational relation among language, Being and man, "the widely and rapidly spreading devastation of language, [i. e., "language surrenders itself to our mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of domination over beings" [xli]], ... arises from a threat to the essence of humanity". [xlii] The original mode of language, therefore, is not statement or proposition, but the non-representational ways of Saying, e. g., poetry as "a thinking experience with language". [xliii] Primarily, man does not use language as a communicating means; rather, man is man because he dwells in and belongs to language.

From all said above, it is clear that for Heidegger, more original than Being of beings, man as rational animal, language as a communicating means, time and space as the forms of intuition, and categories as the forms of thinking, there are Being as such, man as Dasein, language as the house of Being, region as appropriating horizon, and hermeneutic thinking. The formers belong to metaphysical and traditional humanistic views, and the latter are the distinctive features of Heidegger's thinking that is ecstatic-horizontal through and through.

III. Tao and Taoist Perspective of the Essence of Man

It has been known that Heidegger, beginning from the early stage of his career, bore an unusual interest in Taoism. [xliv] "Tao" is the only eastern philosophical term occurring in his published works and, in one of the two occurrences, compared to Greek "logos" (in original sense) and his central insight "Appropriation". [xlv] Now, the question becomes: is Heidegger's thinking on Being and man really comparable to and even to certain extent influenced by "Tao" and Taoist understanding of the essence of man? My answer is a definite "yes!". In the following, nevertheless, I will concentrate mainly on the thinking connections between the two rather than the factual.

1. Tao

The original meaning of "Tao" in Chinese is "way". However, no later than the period of Warring States (475-221 B. C.), "Tao" had obtained the derivative meanings such as "dredging and opening a river", "teaching", "method", "principle", and "saying".

In metaphysical tradition, "Tao" is interpreted, e. g. by Fung Yu-lan, as "an all-embracing first principle" or "the invariable law of Nature", [xlvi] the highest for a conceptual

thinking. However, Heidegger presents a different understanding of "Tao" in his essay "The Nature of Language":

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" [eigentlich, authentically] 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 [as the highest principle].

Yet Tao could be the way that gives all ways, the very source of our power to think what reason, mind, meaning, logos properly [authentically] mean to say—properly by their proper [eigenen, own] 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, ... All is way. [xlvi]

Here we see that Heidegger wants to retain the "authentic" (eigentlich) and topological meaning of Tao: Way, and to resist conceptualizing it into such metaphysical terms as "reason", "mind", "meaning", and "logos" (as a principle). He does this by releasing the "way" from its "superficial" and linear mode. In fact, it is his intention to open the way, and let it return to its primordial sense: an ontological Region and "source" that "gives all ways". With this, he makes a guess that "the mystery of mysteries[xlviii] of thoughtful Saying", i. e., "the mode of Appropriation", [xlix] "conceals itself in the word 'way', Tao". It is clear that for Heidegger, Tao is comparable to the regional Appropriation and vice versa.

To my judgment, Heidegger's understanding of Tao is essentially "closer" to the original meaning of "Tao" than any metaphysical interpretations. Tao, as the Way, is ontologically regional-ecstatic rather than conceptual and linear. It is "transcendental" due to its appropriating midst rather than abstract highness. In the first chapter of Lao Tzu, for instance, Tao is said to be the Way between "being" and "non-being", "the nameless" and "the named". [1] In the perspective of Tao, "the two" are appropriationally "the same". This sameness is not a logical and thus in this case meaningless identity, but the "deep and profound" region (hsüan), which, as mentioned above, is often carelessly translated as the "mystery". "Hsuan", however, literally means "dark due to the deep depth (of water or air region)", and therefore, is properly translated by Chan as the "deep and profound", beyond what conceptual thinking can ever reach. It seems "void", "silent", and "dark". But due to its ontological regionalness, it is "where the origin [the nameless] and the mother [the named] come from". [li] Later in the history, Taoism is also called "the learning of hsuan" (hsuan hsueh) because of the regional and appropriating essence of Tao.

"Hsüan" is, however, merely one of the numerous "images" of Tao in Lao-Chuang (i. e., Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu). Lao Tzu calls such images (hsiang) "the Image(s) without object" (wu wu chih hsiang)[lii], used to show the regioning and appropriating character of Tao. Among them, we find, for example, "ch'ung" (the blending voidness)[liii], "hun" (merging, blending) [liv], "hsü" (the productively objectless and vacuous)[lv], "water"[lvi], "wind"[lvii], "the weakest and softest"[lviii], "da" (the Great)[lix], and "ch'i" (air, breathing, vital force, and the dynamic region of Tao)[lx]. The basic functions of the ecstatic images are: on the one hand, to show that Tao is formless, non-conceptual, and thus can never be caught up as an object in any sense; on the other, to manifest that Tao is so close to man and this world, that it can be nothing but a hermeneutic purification and opening of the spatial, the temporal, and the Saying; i. e., a pure and regional Image. For example, the "Great" (da), which appears frequently in Lao-Chuang, means the regional nature of the ultimate that is "essentially bigger" than any representable object, not just the bigness in length or volume. Furthermore, due to the regional trait of Tao, the Chinese thinkers find it

unavoidable to use the "spatial" as well as the "temporal" words in primordial sense to characterize Tao non-conceptually. We read in one of the most important chapters of Lao Tzu:

There was something undifferentiated [hun, merge by blending] and yet complete. / Which existed before heaven and earth. / Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not change. / It operates everywhere [chou hsing, moves circularly] and is free from danger. / It may be considered the mother of the universe. / I do not know its name, I call it Tao. / If forced to give it a name, I shall call it Great [da]. / Now being great means functioning everywhere. / Functioning everywhere means far-reaching. / Being far-reaching means returning to the original points [fan]. Therefore Tao is great. / Earth is great. / And the king [wang, the man belonging to the greatness of Tao] is also great. / There are four great things in the universe, and the king is one of them. / Man models himself after earth. / Earth models itself after Heaven. / Heaven models itself after Tao. / And Tao models itself after Nature. [lxi]

Tao, accordingly, is the Great region which exists everywhere and moves circularly, i.e., to be far-reaching ecstatically and therewith returns "to the original points". For this reason, the Great Tao is "soundless and formless" to ordinary ears and eyes. Still, it is not categorical. Earlier than the formal beginning of time when heaven and earth is created, it exists, or in Heidegger's terminology, ek-sists. Lao-Chuang frequently use such kind of temporal and spatial descriptions to demonstrate not only that Tao is more than time and space as the forms and frames of objects, but more important, that it is the most original temporal and spatial, blendedly merging [hun] into one complete region. Tao therefore is Great, and all beings, such as man, earth, and heaven, whose essence is opened to Tao, are also Great. Consequently, man, earth, and heaven "model" themselves after Tao and Nature. "Nature" (tzu jan) here certainly does not signify the sum of beings, but the most original and natural--the appropriating Region. Man dwells in Tao; therefore, he dwells in the natural Region (Nature). Lao Tzu declares,

What is most full [da ying, the Great fullness] seems to be empty [ch'ung, the blending voidness]; But its usefulness is inexhaustible. / What is most straight [da chih, the Great straightness] seems to be crooked. [lxii]

Chuang Tzu says, referring to Tao, speech (saying), and humanity (jên): "Great Tao [or Saying] has no appellation. Great speech does not say anything [representational]. Great humanity (jên) is not human (through any special effort)."[lxiii] In the Great, metaphysical limitations and identifications melt away. For this reason, when speech becomes Great, it Says nothing representational; rather, as the last chapter of Chuang Tzu manifests, it Says "in strange terms, in bold words, in far-reaching language", and therewith gives "free play to man's thoughts". [lxiv] The same is true for "humanity" (jên), the central term of Confucianism. When humanity becomes Great, it does not depend on conventional moral rule and our conceptual cognition (chih), but "loses" itself into the Great region of Tao.

Furthermore, chapter 25 of Lao Tzu also evinces the round or recurrent "motion" of the Great Tao. Tao is never a linear regulation but signifies a skillful and hermeneutic mirror-playing: "returning to the original point" in terms of "being far-reaching" and "functioning everywhere". For this reason, the fortieth chapter of Lao Tzu says: "Returning [fan, or reversion] is Tao's motion." [lxv]

In light of this, to render "ch'ang tao" in the first verse of chapter 1 of Lao Tzu as "eternal Tao" is not an appropriate translation. This verse is often put like this: "The Tao (Way) that can be told of is not the eternal [ch'ang] Tao." [lxvi] "Ch'ang" literally means "invariable" and "ordinary". But Lao Tzu gives this term a special meaning, in agreement to the "returning motion" of Tao. In chapter 16, "ch'ang" is said to mean "returning to its destiny" (fu ming) or "returning to its root" (kui kên), which presupposes a "standing-out

into the world" indicated as "All things come into being". [lxvii] Ch'ang is essentially the "returning" that belongs to a hermeneutic circle. So, "To know ch'ang is to be enlightened". [lxviii] In another chapter, we read, "To know harmony [hê] is ch'ang. / To know ch'ang is to be enlightened." [lxix] According to Lao Tzu, the "harmony" (hê) is achieved by blending (ch'ung) the two opposites. It is said, therefore, in chapter 42: "The ten thousand things carry the yin (the passive pole) and embrace the yang (the active pole), and through blending or evaporating (ch'ung) them into ch'i (the regional and air-like force), they achieve harmony (hê)". [lxx] For all these reasons, it is apparent that for Lao Tzu, "ch'ang" primarily signifies the appropriating and regioning motion of Tao, rather than the substantial "eternal". It is better, therefore, to translate the first verse of chapter 1 ("Tao k'e Tao, fei ch'ang Tao") as: "The Tao (Saying, Way) that can be taoed (said of, wayed) is not the appropriate Tao (Saying, Way)". The "appropriate", certainly, is intimately related to Heidegger's "Ereignis".

2. Man

From what has been said above, it is quite clear that for Taoism, man models himself after earth, heaven, and finally Tao and Nature. Humanity lies primordially not in man's conceptual essence but in the Great, regional, ecstatic, and appropriating Tao. It is said in chapter 18 of Lao Tzu, therefore:

When the great [da] Tao declined, / The doctrines of humanity (jên) and righteousness (i) arose. / When knowledge and wisdom appeared, / There emerged great hypocrisy. / When the six family relationships are not in harmony, / There will be the advocacy of filial piety and deep love to children. [lxxi]

Chuang Tzu compares the thinking entangled in metaphysical humanity with the fishes stranded on the ground:

When the springs dry up and the fish are left stranded on the ground, they spew each other with moisture and wet each other down with spit—but it would be much better if they could forget each other in the rivers and lakes. Instead of praising Yao [a sage emperor according to Confucian standard] and condemning Chieh [a wicked king in Confucian judgment], it would be better to forget both of them and transform [hua, meld or evaporate] yourself with the Way [Tao]. [lxxii]

The great water ("rivers and lakes", "springs") in this paragraph is the image of the horizontal Tao. It is the natural "home" and "house" of the "fishes"—man and his thinking. Leaving or alienated from this ontological region, man and thinking would be like the stranded fishes. No matter how they strive to save themselves from nihilation or nihilism with moral, metaphysical, and even divine concepts and entities, as the fishes "spew each other with moisture and wet each other down with spit", they are in a situation that is much worse than that in which "they could forget each other in the rivers and lakes". Fishes "forget" each other in great water, since the water region is the closest to them. They are fishes because of dwelling in the water. Similarly, men can "forget" the conceptual distinctions and classification in Tao because Tao is the Great region where men naturally dwell in and thus become their own. Therefore, we read in Chuang Tzu again:

Fish thrive in water, man thrives in the Way [Tao]. For those that thrive in water, dig a pond and they will find nourishment enough. For those that thrive in the Way, don't bother about them and their lives will be secure. So it is said, the fish forget each other in the rivers and lakes, and men forget each other in the arts of the Way [Tao]. [lxxiii]

The Taoist emphasis that the essence of man is "greater" than man himself, however, does not lead to the theist conclusion that there must be a substantial and personal God who creates and control the destiny of man. Neither does Taoism conceptually deny the possibility of divine existence. Lao-Chuang only makes it clear that Tao is too primordial and Great to be confined to any god. [lxxiv]

The best personality for Taoism is not a deity but a man who perfectly merges into Tao and thus can appropriately "wander" (yu) in and with Tao and ch'i. The conceptual discriminations that alienate inauthentic men from Tao have been melted away, and therefore the perfect Taoist is an "authentic or true man" (chên jên) in every sense. In the following, I am to cite some paragraphs out of a long description of True Man in chapter 6 of Chuang Tzu, and put my own comments in the brackets.

What do I mean by a True Man? The True Man of ancient times did not rebel against want, did not grow proud in plenty, and did not plan his affairs. [Just follow the appropriating movement of Tao.]... His knowledge was able to climb all the way up to the Way [Tao] like this.

The True Man of ancient times slept without dreaming and woke without care; [A perfect harmony with Nature.] he ate without savoring and his breath came from deep inside. The True Man breathes with his heels; [A description of a master of ch'i kung (breathing exercise) who is able to integrate himself into the air-region (ch'i) of Tao.] the mass of men breathe with their throats. ...

The True Man of ancient times knew nothing of loving life, knew nothing of hating death. [Because in Taoist perspective, as presented in chapter 22 of Chuang Tzu, "Life follows upon death. Death is the beginning of life. Who knows when the end is reached? The life of man results from the convergence of the vital fluid [ch'i, the air-like force and region of Tao]. Its convergence is life; its dispersion, death. ... / Therefore all things are One. ... The world is permeated by a single vital fluid [ch'i], and Sages accordingly venerate One". (Giles translation. p.210. Italics mine.) He emerged without delight; he went back in without a fuss. He came briskly, he went briskly, and that was all. ... This is what I call not using the [representational] mind to repel the [horizontal-regional] Way, not using man to help out Heaven ["Heaven" is another name of Tao in Chuang Tzu, in contrast to the humanity in conceptual sense. In chapter 5, we find: "Puny and small, he sticks with men. Pervaded and Great, he becomes his Heaven alone!". (My translation. Cf. Burton Watson's, p.71).]. This is what I call the True Man. [lxxv]

Because the True Man perfectly "appropriates" with Tao and Heaven, even his appearance and "state of mind" (Befindlichkeit) is essentially connected with the rhymes of Nature.

Since he is like this, his mind forgets; his face is calm; his forehead is broad. He is chilly like autumn, balmy like spring, and his joy and anger prevail through the four seasons. He goes along with what is right [yi harmonious] for things and no one knows his limit. [lxxvi]

This is a man in harmony with both Heaven and the dusty world:

Therefore his liking was one and his not liking was one. [Because all his "liking" and "not-liking" come out of the single ch'i and Tao's Region.] His being one was one and his not being one was one. In being one, he was acting as a companion of Heaven. In not being one, he was acting as a companion of man. [Only when his acting is completely ecstatic-horizontal, i.e. "The acting without (distinguishable) action" (chapter 63 of Lao Tzu), the True Man can achieve the Oneness of "being one" with "not being one".] When man and heaven do not defeat each other [i.e., eliminating the conceptual demarcation between them], then he may be said

The Taoist True Man is quite close to Heidegger's "Dasein" in authentic sense, especially exposed in the first two chapters of Division Two in Being and Time. Both True Man and Dasein in authentic mode can sense the ek-sistence of Tao or Being, and, by "the regioning essence of thinking"[lxxviii], understand (or stand-out-into) the non-representable and soundless tidings of the appropriating Region.

IV. The Comparison of Heidegger with Taoism

It is beyond any doubt, from what have been presented and discoursed above, that Heidegger's thinking on Being and man bears some intimate relation to Taoist perspective of Tao and man. Based on the comparisons made in previous discussions, I am to give a summary of the affinity between the two and also point out some difference.

1. For both Heidegger and Taoism, the essence of man cannot be truly caught up by any conceptual devices, but found in dwelling in the ecstatic and "Great" region—Being or Tao, like fish dwell in water, and birds fly in air.
2. Being and Tao, is essentially "more" or "greater" than beings and the Being of beings that can be represented or spoken about. But the key point here is that, what is "more" with Being and Tao is itself not a higher substance of abstract principle. Its "Greatness" lies in its "nearness" to man as an all-embracing (mediating), horizontal, and hermeneutic Region.
3. The Region is not reducible to the space and time as the forms of perception, but, as "the enabling [das Vermögen]"[lxxix], it is the spatial and temporal in ontological sense. That is, in terms of it, man obtains and appropriates his ek-sistent space and time. The essence of man is always "ahead of" and "greater" than man himself as a rational animal. Chuang Tzu, therefore, characterizes the Region as:

Tao has sensibility [ch'ing] and responsibility [hsin, tidings], but no (causal) action and no form. It may be understood but cannot be received (as an object). It may be experienced but cannot be seen directly. It is its own source, its own root. Before heaven and earth, it has been there by itself from all times. It gave spirituality to spirits and God; it gave birth to heaven and to earth. It is above the zenith but it is not high. It is beneath the nadir but it is not low. It is more ancient than the highest antiquity but is not regarded as long ago. [lxxx]

Obviously, the Tao, being temporal and spatial non-formally, can be best understood as an appropriating Region rather than anything representable and metaphysical.

4. Being and Tao as the essence of man, therefore, are more original than any divine personality, either spirits or God. Due to this natural and horizontal attitude, Taoism became the cradle of Chinese sciences and technology. [lxxxii]
5. For both, "understanding" Being and Tao is quite different from conceptual and epistemological cognition. It is rather a process of getting rid of representational mode of knowing and therewith disclosing the Region into our "thrownness". Lao Tzu says:

The pursuit of learning is to increase day after day. / The pursuit of Tao is to decrease day after day. / It is to decrease and further decrease until one reaches the point of taking no action. / No action is undertaken, and yet nothing is left undone. [lxxxiii]

"Decrease" here means to play down the conceptual manner of thinking, i.e. the "inappropriate metaphysics" that discriminates subject from object, thinking from action. [lxxxiii] In this way, the regional essence (Tao) of man is uncovered and, without interfering Tao's regioning, "nothing is left undone".

For Heidegger, the primordial "understanding" as the projection of Dasein is always ahead of thematic cognition; as shown in the usage of a tool "ready-to-hand", the circumspection of concern, state of mind, hermeneutic interpretation, care, anxiety, Being-towards-death, the voice of conscience, resoluteness, temporality, and the poetic language experience. Similarly, Lao-Chuang manifest:

Great knowledge is leisurely and at ease (or all-embracing and extensive), whereas small knowledge is inquisitive (or partial and discriminative). Great speech is simple (as in simple taste) whereas small speech is full of details. [lxxxiv]

The Great knowledge is "leisurely and at ease", because it "rides on" the regional Tao and ch'i; the small knowledge is "inquisitive" since it, like a fish stranded on the ground, loses its horizontal origin. The same is true for Great and small speech. Quite contrary to a popular but one-sided view, that Taoism wants to eliminate all language experience and keep a firm silence, what Lao-Chuang distrusts is merely the "small" speech that, in Heidegger's words, "surrenders itself to our mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of domination over beings". [lxxxv] For Taoism, only when "the original speech is covered [yin], there is a distinction between right (this) and wrong (that)". [lxxxvi] Man can and primordially must speak non-representationally and artistically. As Chuang Tzu shows in many chapters, techne originally is what makes man enter into rather than alienates him from Tao. Taoism and Heidegger appreciate the artistic way of saying and acting, and regard the technological mode of speaking and thinking as a degeneration. They find it necessary to use the pure images and non-representative but senseful speech to make the understanding of Being or Tao possible, since such usages open a free space in which only, the pre-conceptual thinking can be unfolded.

6. Both Heidegger and Taoism criticize the humanism that is based on certain metaphysical or moral standards rather than the ecstatic Region. For Taoism, both Moism and the degenerated Confucianism become the victims of their prejudice. They view the pure and non-representable Tao through their moral and utilitarian standards, and therefore, know merely "the Tao (way) of beings", such as the Tao of cultivating personal lives, of regulating families, of bringing order to states, of universal love, etc. They know nothing about Tao as such.

Based on all these facts and analyses, it is quite secure to say that Heidegger's interest in Taoism is never arbitrary and accidental, but selected and concerned with the deep, if not the deepest, dimension of his thinking. Certainly, we can easily find differences between the two. For instance, for Heidegger, man, as the Dasein "Being-in-the-world", is necessarily involved into both authentic and inauthentic modes of ek-sistence. To Taoism, however, it is at least possible for man to become a complete authentic or True Man. Also, Taoism did not emphasize so seriously the special positions of temporality and language in disclosing and maintaining the ontological Region. Considering the huge distance and disparity between the two cultures and languages, we should say that such diversities are just natural and unavoidable. The remarkable thing here is, rather, why a western twenty-century thinker, who was so deeply absorbed in finding the true meaning of western philosophy, was greatly fascinated by an ancient Chinese thinking that occurred more than two thousand years ago.

Notes:

[i].Martin Heidegger: "Letter on Humanism", Basic Writings, trans. David F. Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p.195.

[ii].Ibid., p.202.

[iii].Ibid., p.202.

[iv].Cf. M. Heidegger's Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, trans. James S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965).

[v].M. Heidegger: Basic Writings, p.202-3.

[vi].Ibid., p.224.

[vii].M. Heidegger: "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking", in Basic Writings, p.374.

[viii].Ibid.

[ix].M. Heidegger: "The Nature of Language" (1957), On the Way to Language, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p.57 f. Italics mine. Here the "experience" signifies a hermeneutic one.

[x].M. Heidegger: "Letter on Humanism", Basic Writings, p.203.

[xi].Ibid., p.203.

[xii].Ibid., p.235.

[xiii].M. Heidegger: Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p.62. Also in Basic Writings, p.216.

[xiv].M. Heidegger: "Letter on Humanism", Basic Writings, p.195.

[xv].Ibid., p.195.

[xvi].Ibid., p.214, p.229, p.234.

[xvii].Ibid., p.229.

[xviii].Ibid., p.214.

[xix].Ibid., p.213.

[xx].Heidegger says in his poem (1947): "But poetry that thinks is in truth the topology of Being. / This topology tells Being the whereabouts of its actual presence". Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p.12.

[xxi].M. Heidegger: Basic Writings, p.212. The translation is modified according to German edition, "Brief über den Humanismus", in Wegmarken (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), Gesamtausgabe, vol. 9, p.333.

[xxii].Cf. Being and Time, p.19, p.418. Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, p.123. The

Basic Problem of Phenomenology, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 267.

[xxiii]. M. Heidegger: Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, p. 128. The italics were missing in Churchill's translation. Refer to M. Heidegger: Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik (Verlag von Friedrich Cohen in Bonn, 1929), p. 117.

[xxiv]. Ibid., p. 124. The italics are added according to German edition.

[xxv]. M. Heidegger: Discourse on Thinking, trans. J. Anderson & H. Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp. 65-66.

[xxvi]. Heidegger in Being and Time discourses this issue at length.

[xxvii]. Heidegger writes in The Essence of Reason:

Transcendence can be understood in a second sense, still to be clarified and explained, namely, as signifying what is unique to human Dasein—unique not as one among other possible, and occasionally actualized, types of behavior, but as a basic constitutive feature of Dasein that happens prior to all behavior. Of course, since human Dasein exists "spatially," it can, among other things, spatially "surpass" a spatial boundary or gap. Transcendence, however, is the surpassing that makes anything like existence and thereby movement in space possible in the first place. (M. Heidegger: The Essence of Reasons, trans. Terrence Malick (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), pp. 35-37.)

[xxviii]. The word "ecstatic" is the adjective of "ecstasis", a word adopted by Heidegger from Greek and meaning "standing outside". See the translator's note in Being and Time, p. 377.

[xxix]. Being and Time, p. 377. This is a phrase used by Heidegger to characterize "temporality" as the horizon for understanding Being.

[xxx]. M. Heidegger: "The Thing", Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 180.

[xxxi]. M. Heidegger: Time and Being, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 22.

[xxxii]. Ibid., p. 19.

[xxxiii]. M. Heidegger: Identity and Difference, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 37.

[xxxiv]. M. Heidegger: Time and Being, p. 23.

[xxxv]. M. Heidegger: Being and Time, p. 263.

[xxxvi]. M. Heidegger: "Letter on Humanism", Basic Writings, p. 210.

[xxxvii]. M. Heidegger: Discourse on Thinking, p. 82. "Now authentic releasement consists in this: that man in his very nature belongs to that-which-regions, i.e. he is released to it".

[xxxviii]. M. Heidegger: The Essence of Reasons, p. 131.

[xxxix]. M. Heidegger: Identity and Difference, p. 38.

[xl].M. Heidegger: "The Origin of the Work of Art", Poetry, Language, Thought, p.73; or Basic Writings, p.185.

[xli].M. Heidegger: "Letter on Humanism", Basic Writings, p.199.

[xlii].Ibid., p.198.

[xlili].M. Heidegger: "The Nature of Language", On the Way to Language, p.83.

[xliv].Cf. Heidegger and Asian Thought, ed. Graham Parkes (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), pp.47-154.

[xlv].M. Heidegger: Identity and Difference, p.36.

[xlvi].Fung Yu-lan: A History of Chinese Philosophy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), vol.I, p.177; Fung Yu-lan: A Short History of Chinese Philosophy (New York: The Free Press, 1960), p.97.

[xlvii].M. Heidegger: On the Way to Language, p.92.

[xlviii].It is very possible that Heidegger got this phrase from the first chapter of Lao Tzu, where "hsuan chih you hsuan" is usually translated as, in English, "more mystical than the most mystical" that is "the gate of all subtleties". (Cf. A Translation of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching and Wang Pi's Commentary, trans. Paul J. Lin (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, 1977), p.1.

[xlix].M. Heidegger: "The Way to Language", On the Way to Language, p.135.

[l].See A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, trans. and comp. Wing-tsit Chan (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), P.139.

[li].The comment of Wang Pi (226-249 A.D.). In A Translation of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching and Wang Pi's Commentary, p.4.

[lii].Lao Tzu, chapter 14. Cf. Chan's translation.

[liii].Lao Tzu, ch.4, 42.

[liv].Lao Tzu, ch. 14, 15, 25, 49.

[lv].Lao Tzu, ch. 3, 5, 16. Chuang Tzu, ch. 2, 4.

[lvi].Lao Tzu, ch. 8, 34, 43, 61, 66, 78. Chuang Tzu, ch. 6, 14, 19.

[lvii].Chuang Tzu, ch. 1, 2.

[lviii].Lao Tzu, ch. 10, 36, 43, 76, 78.

[lix].Lao Tzu, ch. 16, 25, 34, 35. Chuang Tzu, ch. 1, 2, etc.

[lx].Lao Tzu, ch. 10, 42. Chuang Tzu, ch. 2, 4, 6, etc.

[lxi].Lao Tzu, ch. 25. Chan's translation. A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p.152-3.

[lxii].Ch. 45. Ibid., p.161.

[lxiii].Chuang Tzu, ch. 2. A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p.186.

[lxiv].Chuang Tzu, trans. Herbert A. Giles (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961), p.321. Minor alteration with the translation.

[lxv].Paul J. Lin's translation. p.77.

[lxvi].Chan's translation. A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p.139.

[lxvii].A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p.147.

[lxviii].The tenth verse of chapter 16 of Lao Tzu.

[lxix].Chapter 55 of Lao Tzu, verse 8 and verse 9. My translation. Cf. A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p.166.

[lxx].My translation. Cf. A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy, p.160

[lxxi].A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p.148.

[lxxii].Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), ch.6, p.76.

[lxxiii].Ibid., p.84. There is a paragraph in Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism", that most probably has its origin in this saying of Chuang Tzu. One sentence of this paragraph has been cited at the very beginning of this paper. Heidegger writes:

Being, as the element of thinking, is abandoned by the technical interpretation of thinking. "Logic", beginning with the Sophists and Plato, sanctions this explanation. Thinking is judged by a standard that does not measure up to it. Such judgment may be compared to the procedure of trying to evaluate the nature and powers of a fish by seeing how long it can live on dry land. For a long time now, all too long, thinking has been stranded on dry land. Can then the effort to return thinking to its element be called "irrationalism"? (Basic Writings, p.195)

Heidegger wrote the "Letter" in November, 1946, about three months later than his cooperation with a Chinese scholar, Paul Shih-yi Hsiao, to translate Lao Tzu into German. (See Heidegger and Asian Thought, pp.98-100) He must have had an active Taoist state of mind when writing the "Letter".

[lxxiv].Lao Tzu, ch. 4. Chuang Tzu, ch. 6. Burton Watson's translation. p.77.

[lxxv].Burton Watson's translation. p.74. Italics mine.

[lxxvi].Ibid., p.74.

[lxxvii].Ibid., pp.75-6.

[lxxviii].M. Heidegger: Discourse on Thinking, p.74.

[lxxix].M. Heidegger: "Letter on Humanism", Basic Writings, p.196.

[lxxx].Chuang Tzu, ch. 6. A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p.194. With some changes in the translation.

[lxxx].Cf. Joseph Needham's Science & Civilization in China (Cambridge University Press, 1954-), vol. 2. And, Colin A. Ronan's The Shorter Science and Civilization in China: An Abridgement of Joseph Needham's Original Text (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), vol. 1, pp.85-113.

[lxxxii].Lao Tzu, ch. 48. A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p.194.

[lxxxiii].M. Heidegger: "Letter on Humanism", Basic Writings, pp.193-4.

[lxxxiv].Chuang Tzu, ch. 2. A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p.180.

[lxxxv].M. Heidegger: "Letter on Humanism", Basic Writings, p.199.

[lxxxvi].Chuang Tzu, ch. 2. Cf. A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p.182.

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