

Monothematic Block: Heidegger, Daoism, and Intercultural Thinking Today

Introduction

Since the 1990s, there has been growing scholarly interest in Martin Heidegger's relation to Asian philosophy, particularly to traditions such as Daoism and Zen Buddhism. An important question in this context is the extent to which Heidegger's philosophy was indebted to Asian sources. After all, it is well known that Heidegger's dialogue with Buddhist philosophy began as early as 1922 with the arrival of Tanabe Hajime and Kuki Shuzo in Freiburg and that his first recorded engagement with Daoist texts can be found in his 1930 "Essence of Truth" lectures. Nevertheless, the relative paucity of direct references to Asian philosophers in Heidegger's collected works, including the recently published *Black Notebooks*, make the task of assessing direct or indirect influence a complex and increasingly contested one. Indeed, despite his decades-long relationship with Tanabe Hajime, for example, Heidegger refers to him only once in the *Gesamtausgabe* (GA 12). Not surprisingly, scholarly accounts of Heidegger's East Asian "debt" thus range from the robust to the deflationary, the credulous to the skeptical.

Another important question in this context is a metaphilosophical one about the best way to approach comparative and intercultural philosophy as such. While early Anglophone scholarship was largely confined to a "compare and contrast model" that rarely went beyond historiographical analysis, this approach has come under increasing critical scrutiny, motivating a turn towards alternative approaches exemplified in the works of scholars such as Eric S. Nelson, Stephen Angle, Hans-Georg Moeller, and Steven Burik. This, in turn, suggests that the question of Heidegger's relation to Asian philosophy is not merely "antiquarian," but systematic.

As such, the aim of this short monothematic block is to critically re-think Heidegger's relationship to East Asian modes of thought – with a focus on Daoism – and, in the process, disclose fresh ways of approaching comparative

and intercultural philosophy and yield insights that can be fruitfully applied to pressing ethical and political issues. The papers included in this issue each address different facets of this relationship and arrive at conclusions that push the boundaries of current scholarship in important ways.

Eric S. Nelson's paper re-thinks and complicates the predominant narratives regarding Heidegger's concept of being by showing how his 'overcoming' of metaphysics is indebted not only to his radical reinterpretations of Parmenides and Heraclitus, but also to his engagement with East Asian sources such as the *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi*, and his dialogue with a Japanese interlocutor. This evolution consists in the rejection of the traditional privative understanding of nothingness implied in the opposition between presence and absence, being and nothingness, in favour of an ontological-constitutive account of nothingness whereby absence, emptiness, hiddenness, and mystery essentially belong to being. This, in turn, opens the path for the emancipatory understanding of nothingness as releasement, a topic that is the focus of Capra's paper. In sum, Nelson provides a rigorous and nuanced account of the how East Asian philosophy informed Heidegger's thinking of being, while preserving essential differences between them, e.g. between a generative-meontological and constitutive-ontological account of nothingness.

It is possible to claim that Steven Burik's contribution radicalizes Nelson's refusal to adopt the common tendency in comparative philosophy to "fuse" Heidegger's thought to East Asian sources, which inflates the influence of the latter and leads to claims of "copying" or "stealing" by the former. Against scholars such as Reinhard May and Graham Parkes, Burik argues that while resonances between Heidegger's thought and Daoism exist, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain claims of a strong influence or debt due to the recently published *Black Notebooks*, which contain only 33 brief mentions of Asia (out of 5,500 pages). Hence, there appears to be little indication of any hidden or unacknowledged debt to East Asian thought, as claimed by May. So given that Heidegger's interest in East Asian thought appears to be much less robust than originally thought, Burik proposes that comparative philosophy stands to learn more from an engagement with Heidegger than from his engagement (or lack thereof) with Asia. In particular, he defends Heidegger's account of *Auseinandersetzung* as a non-dialectical mode of engagement with difference and otherness that provides a compelling alternative to the typical compare-contrast approach to comparative philosophy that remains as a holdover from substance metaphysics.

Finally, Rudi Capra's paper takes some fruitful overlaps between Daoism and Heidegger's philosophy as a point of departure for critically reflecting upon the alienating potential of AI as evidenced by the example of the AI-generated, international bestselling book *Hypnocracy*. According to Capra, Daoism and Heidegger share a core commitment to a critical-reflexive approach to technology that challenges its narrow instrumental construal, rather than rejecting it wholesale. From this perspective, *Hypnocracy* is not simply another instance of the mindless perpetuation of technological alienation and manipulation. Rather, it also represents a free and "playful experimentation" with AI, one that goes beyond its mere instrumental function to shed critical light on the alienation itself, thereby disclosing the possibility of a transition from danger to salvation and alienation to freedom.

In sum, the papers in this monoblock open, in their own distinctive ways, fertile lines of inquiry that have important implications for our understanding of Heidegger's oeuvre, its relation to East Asian thought, for how we approach comparative philosophy, and for questions of alienation and emancipation in a digital age. In the process, they show that an engagement with non-Western thought and scholarship cannot remain confined to the field of comparative philosophy but must inform Heidegger studies from the ground up.

I would like to conclude by thanking the Editor-in-Chief of *Filozofia*, Jon Stewart, for the opportunity to put together this monothematic issue and to Eva Dědečková and the entire editorial team for their assistance from start to finish. I am also grateful to the contributing authors for their original, thought-provoking interventions that complement each other in productive and unanticipated ways.

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