Environmental Philosophy and East Asia

This book explores the contributions of East Asian traditions, particularly Buddhism and Daoism, to environmental philosophy in dialogue with European philosophy. It critically examines the conceptions of human responsibility towards nature and across time presented within these traditions.

The volume rethinks human relationships to the natural world by focusing on three main themes: Daoist and Eurodaoist perspectives on nature, human responsibility towards nature, and Buddhist perspectives on life and nature. By way of discussing East Asian traditions and European thinkers, this collection reveals that the impact of humanity on the environment is shaped not only by distinctive modes of economic production but also by cultural beliefs and practices. Representing a unique constellation of environmental and intercultural philosophy, the contributions present systematic approaches to the global need for cultivating environmental responsibility across cultures and generations to address the political, ethical, and aesthetic challenges arising from humanity’s transformative impact on the natural world.

Presenting a critical re-evaluation of human relationships to the natural world in dialogue with East Asian traditions, this will be a valuable resource for students and scholars of Philosophy, Environmental Studies, and Asian Studies.

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Political Theories in East Asian Context
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Political Theories in East Asian Context aims to shed light on the essential theoretical issues spanning East Asia by situating them within cross-cultural frameworks that attend both to the particularity of East Asia as well as the potentially universal patterns arising from East Asia’s current issues that can be studied for the global prosperity. It reconsideres issues like historical reconciliation, nationalism, multicultural coexistence, political leadership, republicanism, and regional integration, with a view to opening the discourse of particular issues to a wider theoretical horizon. Including intellectuals in the field of political science, history, ethnic studies, sociology, and regional studies, this interdisciplinary endeavour is a deliberative forum in which we can reflect on ethical problems facing East Asia in the global era.

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Environmental Philosophy and East Asia
Nature, Time, Responsibility

Edited by Hiroshi Abe, Matthias Fritsch and Mario Wenning
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Editors’ introduction

Hiroshi Abe, Matthias Fritsch, and Mario Wenning

Introduction to the research network “Nature, Time, Responsibility”

The present generation, it is no exaggeration to say, faces unprecedented inter-generational and environmental challenges. To address them, a concerted effort on the part of a global civil society is called for: one that draws on dialogue among and across the many cultures that make up the currently living generations. At a time in which humanity is increasingly interconnected economically, technologically, and politically, as it confronts new environmental challenges—which, from climate change to pollution and species extinction, are unhindered by national borders—contributions to possible solutions are best borne by a truly intercultural and dialogically achieved consensus. An agreement that is based exclusively upon self-interest easily falls apart and is often insufficient to convince individuals in different cultures, especially when it concerns changes at the level of day-to-day life. Ongoing support for solutions and, at times, for drastic measures, ought to be embedded in different life-worlds with their own histories, languages, norms, and cultural experiences.

This, in a nutshell, is the impetus behind the research network “Nature, Time, Responsibility” (NTR) and its presentation of this volume. The motivating purpose of the network is to research responsibilities to the future and nature from a platform that brings different philosophical traditions into dialogue. Led by Hiroshi Abe (Kyoto University, Japan), Matthias Fritsch (Concordia University, Montreal), and Mario Wenning (Loyola University Andalusia), NTR promotes sustained dialogue on the topic of moral, legal, and political responsibilities to future generations and to nature across time. The urgency for this exchange of ideas stems first and foremost from the threats associated with the current environmental “crisis” (if that is still the right word—for doubts about this, see Latour 2017) ranging from global heating and deforestation to ocean acidification and the sixth mass extinction, as well as the associated environmental injustices: injustices that affect, above all, the global poor and future generations, both overlapping and more distant. But it also derives from the necessity to include different cultures and their cultural and philosophical traditions in addressing these injustices, so as to avoid, as far as possible, cultural
one-sidedness and misunderstandings (for instance, about what “nature” means and how humans are situated in it), and in order to explore the resources of different traditions for better concepts that might help us forge an overlapping consensus among global traditions.

NTR began its operations in 2011 and since then has organised a number of major symposia (above all: NTR 1, Macau, China, 2013; NTR 2, Kyoto, Japan, 2016; NTR 3, Munich, Germany, 2018; NTR 4, Beijing, 2018; NTR 5, Zhuhai, China, 2018; NTR 6, Montreal, Canada, 2021). These conferences facilitated in-depth, cross-cultural, comparative-philosophical dialogue among more than 40 researchers from different countries and continents. Apart from the present anthology, NTR has guest-edited one special journal issue with papers drawn from its inaugural conference in 2013 (Journal of Comparative Philosophy 5:2, 2014). In 2017, NTR was awarded the Humboldt Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiative from the German Alexander-von-Humboldt Foundation. With the help of the Humboldt-Award and other sources, NTR has organised the exchange of student and postdoctoral researchers across the network and is planning further conferences.

NTR’s previous conferences and collaborative projects brought together a distinguished international array of scholars across the social sciences and humanities (predominantly philosophers) to address a concern that affects us all. We believe this investigation is important and timely because the causal and moral responsibilities of humanity to nature and to distant times only increase with our extended powers to affect both, while the risks associated with the consequences of human action—consequences that often exceed the possibility of practical control and local confinement—only augment. Irreparable environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, and climate change confront us on a daily basis with moral questions about responsibility, nature, and time. To understand and meet our responsibility is to rethink these concepts at an intercultural and interdisciplinary level where there is the possibility of securing global support through dialogue. It is in this spirit that the present volume draws from the network’s previous events to bring together eleven original contributions, written and chosen specifically in view of the various connections between nature, responsibility, and temporality that are informed by East Asian Perspectives and which interweave back and forth between each other as the thread that binds together, and guides us through, the different chapters of the book.

Accordingly, the chapters discuss responsibilities for nature and the nature of responsibility; the temporality of responsibility and responsibility for other times, especially future times and people; and the nature of time and the time of nature.

**Responsibility**

Concerning responsibility for nature, many ecologists, biologists, and environmental philosophers agree by now that non-human nature possesses some
moral “value.” But there is disagreement as to what kind of value this is and dispute about its scale and scope, especially in regard to the question of whether or not it is derivative of human valuation. We hope that the discussions presented here shed new light on these issues by bringing together researchers from different traditions, disciplines, and cultures and by connecting their reflections on non-human value to the very nature and time of human responsibility.

But responsibility in this context also concerns future people. In fact, these two vectors of responsibility—responsibility towards nature and towards future generations—may be more tightly and more necessarily intertwined than is commonly acknowledged. To be sure, the present generation is connected to future people, partly in terms of causal reach, in that many of our actions today affect the generations that follow, and partly in terms of an often-neglected factor that could be called biological and cultural generativity (McAdams and St. Aubin 1998; Feiler and Wade-Benzoni 2009) or fecundity (Levinas 1969), in that they are “our” children’s children, they are of us. But beyond causality and generativity, the present and future generations share life-supporting conditions, such as languages, traditions, institutions, and of course the natural “environment.” We suggest two conclusions can be drawn from this. First, a crisis in the globally shared condition and environment—nature in particular—speaks to a need for collaboration among or across the more particular and regionalised backgrounds of cultures, languages, and institutions. Hence, climate change calls for intercultural dialogue and comparative philosophising, as practiced in this volume. This criss-crossing of the intra-generational and the inter-generational further implies that the timelines within which the unique characteristics of different cultures and “nations” emerge and consolidate themselves are not short. Going sufficiently far backwards and forwards in time, particular peoples and cultures interact, are transformed by these interactions, and occasionally merge with (or divide from) one another, through migration, commerce, cultural exchange, biological reproduction, and other forms of contact. The peculiar presence of past and future generations in each time and place places a question mark over particularism, nationalism, and narrow-mindedness. The dubious claim that philosophy was born in Greece, for example, forgets—as Marx pointed out in regard to the African sources of Plato’s Republic—the Egyptian and other non-European sources of ancient Greek philosophy itself (Yoyotte 1969; Rutherford 2016), also thereby making it easier to neglect different forms of philosophising, the world over (van Norden 2017).

Second, the biosphere is of course a dynamic, changing ensemble of ecosystems, hence the link between time and nature; but in no way does this entail disregard for the biosphere as the condition of human life that is shared by generations throughout exceedingly long timeframes. On the contrary, obligations to nature intersect with responsibilities to future generations and vice versa. That is why moral responses to environmental destabilisation may be well expressed in normative relations among generations. Without pre-judging the moral worth of nature, sustaining the environment is morally demanded for the sake of future generations (Gardiner 2011). In fact, it has often been
suggested that sustainability and sustainable development can best be phrased as demands of intergenerational justice (Holland 1999; Habib 2013). As defined by the Brundtland Commission, sustainable development “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987, 53). And yet, discussions of sustainability tend to devote too little attention to a thorough examination of theories of intergenerational justice (Gosseries 2008, 62). Intergenerational ethics and politics can serve as a critical focal point in the ongoing environmental crisis, not only because of the apparent and stark injustices to future people but also because the concern for descendants promises to bring together a broad cross section of the global public. While environmental activists and ecologists tend to accept the non-instrumental value of nature, policymakers and economists, as well as the wider community, often assume a more anthropocentric and humanist standpoint. To these variances, we have also to bring, as suggested, cultural differences in response to questions concerning the very fundamental ideas of what nature is, of how human beings are intertwined with it, and of what normative status it holds. Care for future people may be able to bypass resulting disagreements to do with protections for nature. However, responsibility to our successors generates familiar ontological problems that span from the non-existence challenge and poor epistemic access to problems of interaction and world constitution (Gosseries 2010; Fritsch 2018, chapter 1). These problems raise the question of the relation between time and responsibility.

**Time**

The nature of time and the time of nature are central to addressing environmental destabilisation. One way to see this is to return to the question of intergenerational justice. Standard approaches to this treat future people as a “problem of extension” (e.g., Rawls 1996, 20ff.). Such extensionism assumes intragenerational relations as the core feature of justice and privileges the presence of contemporaries. Yet other approaches abstract from the overlap among generations, thereby denying both its centrality and the asymmetrical relations of care that it necessitates (infancy, old age). The neglect of generational overlap, as well as generic approaches (e.g., including future persons in the category of the human) and dehistoricising treatments (for instance, imagining a legislative meeting of generations outside of history), abstracts from the role of time in social relations (Fritsch 2018). Overall, then, the temporality that separates and links generations is often seen as a problem for morality. By contrast, one may wonder whether generational temporality—that we are born of others before us and necessarily leave the world to other living beings after us—should not be seen as central to an account of the human condition. In fact, many of the world’s cultures engage in ancestor worship of some sort and see relations to previous and subsequent generations as important to their self-understanding. Intercultural philosophising should thus investigate the role of generational time in conceptions of human identity.
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Similar considerations regarding constitutive relations and the role of time within them could be advanced in relation to nature. The fashionable notion of the Anthropocene, understood as the claim that human activities now amount to an earth system impact of geological proportions, registers a double shock: that human beings are massively dependent on natural conditions such as the climate, and that these conditions are not stable in the background, but are changing over time, in part in response to human activities. This poses with renewed urgency the question of how we should understand not only the naturalness of the human but also the time and mobility of nature. Indeed, some have suggested a second Copernican Revolution: to be sure, the earth is moving around the sun, but it is also internally on the move in natural history (Serres 1995; Latour 2017; Nail 2021). Here, too, one may hope that intercultural dialogue can help to forge appropriate conceptions of time and nature.

Nature

Given all of this, it follows that the account of individual, social, and historical time we presuppose or accept will affect our responsibilities both to nature and to future people. What precedes us comprises the nature that sustains us and the presently living, as well as our ancestors who worked on this nature and so prepared our arrival. The fact that the responsiveness of the present generation to past generations and to their responsibilities to distant future people passes by way of conserving the natural environment may, thus, not be accidental but, rather, reveals the nature and time of responsibility itself. But, as we just saw, nature is itself a dynamic ensemble of ecosystems whose historical variability means that we must link it to time. In order to survive, generations must build new ways of thinking and living, more in harmony with the structure or principle of the ecosystems in which they live. A trans-cultural engagement with alternative conceptions of the temporal processes exhibited by nature promises a productive enrichment of our understanding of the relationship between human action and ecosystems.

The linkages between nature, time, and responsibility, then, tie together the chapters of this volume, some of which are devoted to a more detailed treatment of some of the resulting issues. These eleven chapters themselves, previously unpublished, are written by an international body of established and emerging scholars from many different areas, including Asian philosophy, ethics, ecocriticism, comparative philosophy, and aesthetics, while maintaining an intercultural focus on contributions from Western and East Asian traditions, in particular Daoism and Buddhism.

East Asia and environmental philosophy

While environmental crises are increasingly global in scope, they manifest themselves to a disproportional degree in East Asia. This holds true at the level of contributing factors (the depletion of natural resources and the increase of
CO₂ and greenhouse gas emission) and perhaps also in terms of suffering from the effects of global warming and the depletion of the natural habitat. The accelerated economic developments in China, Japan, and Korea during recent decades are likely to continue in what, based on current projections, promises to be an “Asian Century” (Khanna 2019). East Asia, and especially China as the single largest producer of CO₂ emissions, should thus be a significant topic for theoretical as well as practical approaches to environmental destabilisation. Even if China is increasingly presented as a “systemic competitor” by liberal democratic countries, there is a consensus that significant progress towards sustainability requires collaboration across different political divides. East Asia, which is home to one-fifth of the global population, is likely to experience the impact of global warming in terms of rising sea levels, hurricanes, droughts, and desertification, to a larger degree than some other regions. It is thus crucial for NTR to pay particular attention to this region from both diagnostic and potentially therapeutic perspectives. Only when one engages with East Asia in a culturally informed manner, is it possible to contribute to the institutional as well as economic reforms necessary for achieving environmental sustainability. Such reforms are required for cultivating cultures of responsibility that are capable of working together towards preserving the natural habitat, with and among increasingly interconnected East Asian societies and at a global level (Lee, Pollitt and Fujikawa 2019).

The impact of humanity on the environment varies in ways that are shaped not only by modes of economic production but also—and to a significant degree—by cultural beliefs and practices. Thus, it is only fitting to turn to, compare and engage with distinctive cultural background patterns of East Asian societies to address the prospects for coming to terms with the challenges posed by climate change and other irreversible transformations of the natural habitat (Meinert 2013). Reflections on the relationship between nature, time, and human responsibility have been widespread in East Asian traditions of thought for at least two and a half millennia. To give just one example, the Chinese tradition of philosophical Daoism correlates the temporality of responsible human action to that of cosmic or natural time. The legendary ancient Chinese philosopher Laozi claims: “Man takes his law from the Earth; the Earth takes its law from Heaven; Heaven takes its law from the Dao. The law of the Dao is its being what it is.” 人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然 (Laozi 1981, 25).

The two final characters, ziran 自然, which are translated as “what it is” by James Legge, can also be translated as nature, natural, or self-so. Nature, here, does not refer to some principle other than the Dao but, rather, to the way Dao is and the way it develops independently through natural processes. These processes operate in ways that are distinct from linear conceptions of time as one finds them in the various European traditions. How ought we to understand this self-development of nature with which the form of our thinking and acting should accord? This question leads us to a consideration of human action as responding to the time of nature, understood as the self-temporalisation of Dao, the governing principle of humanity and the cosmos.
Reflecting upon the cultural preconditions that have contributed to East Asian conceptualisations of the interrelation between human responsibility, temporality, and nature, a distinctive prevalence of notions of cosmic harmony becomes apparent. Within classical Chinese belief, humans are taken to be the mediating link between the quasi-natural domains of heaven (tian) and earth (di), while all three are dependent upon the guiding principle of the Dao. The assumption of a harmonious interconnectedness of humanity and the cosmos is expressed, in different forms, in the three institutionalised traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. Yet, the spectrum of cultural beliefs and practices regarding the environment significantly exceeds these three officially recognised traditions. Folk religion, in particular, continues to be vibrant in East Asian societies. Complex and regionally diverse conceptions of spiritual ideas and practices draw on an animistic ontology. The cosmos has not entirely succumbed to the processes of disenchantment but continues to be inhabited by spiritual forces and entities. The belief in the existence of nature ghosts, for example, is widely shared in East Asian societies. In China, it is common to find small altars outside or near the entrances of even the most modern buildings. The practice of offerings to the local Earth God (tudi shen) is widespread. Japan has a rich tradition of nature deities associated with Shintoism. The existence of folk religion in rural as well as urban spaces coincides with the assumption of strong intergenerational bonds. Human beings look back on long lines of ancestors and give rise to new generations. In addition to ancestor worship and a corresponding ethos of filial piety, the focus on nurturing future generations has been particularly pervasive in those East Asian civilisations shaped by a strong Confucian influence.

The traditional belief in cosmic harmony, the spirit world, and intergenerationality is a connecting feature across East Asian societies that have tended to escape the narrow conceptual and ontological framework presupposed by Western scholarship and its long-established tendency to recognise only those phenomena that are sufficiently similar to Anglo-European philosophical and religious traditions (Harrison 2021).

In terms of the response patterns to adverse developments in the environment, one can, at the risk of overgeneralisation, identify a priority of conceptions of spiritual transformation and resilience in East Asian societies. Classical Chinese philosophical traditions, for example, have emphasised the need for humans to adapt to changing environments rather than adapting the environments to pre-existing ideas (Valmisa 2021).

One feature that contributes to the difficulty of conceptualising the cultural background conditions of East Asian approaches to the environment is the degree of transculturalisation processes in East Asia. The degree of cultural diversity and amalgamation in East Asia is at odds with models that take cultures to be independent and homogeneous entities. The three institutionalised traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism that figure prominently in East Asian cultural history have influenced each other significantly and have been interconnected with folk religions. In addition, the receptivity of East
Asia to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam has a long history dating back at least to the cosmopolitan centres of intercultural exchange along the Silk Road during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) and the arrival of primarily Jesuit missionaries during the sixteenth century. Moreover, the influx of social and political ideologies such as liberalism, conservatism, and Marxism have been part of a complex tradition of transcultural reception and transformation, especially since the opening up of Japan and China to Europe and North America from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. These processes of transculturalisation have contributed to the coexistence of a variety of overlapping—and at times contradictory—beliefs and practices in East Asian societies that defy homogenising and essentialising reconstructions (Johnson 2017).

The present volume aims to reassemble and engage with the constellation of environmental and intercultural thought in East Asia and to contribute to the dialogue between East Asian and European philosophical traditions. From a methodological perspective, the chapters build on earlier attempts to bring together comparative East–West philosophy and environmental philosophy (Callicott and Ames 1989; Callicott and McRae 2014) and previous attempts to focus on the environmental dimensions in the specific traditions of Buddhism (Payne 2010), Daoism (Girardot, Miller and Liu 2015), and, to a lesser extent, Confucianism (Tucker and Berthrong 1998).

In addition to focusing on the contributions of the traditions that have originated in East Asia and their relationship to ideas and philosophers in the European tradition, the chapters also present systematic approaches to the global need for cultivating environmental responsibility across generations to address the political, ethical, and aesthetic challenges arising from humanity’s transformative impact on the natural world. And so, reaching towards each other across the warp and weft of the volume as it extends between cultures and traditions, the chapters engage with questions of nature, time, and responsibility while falling into three broad parts: (1) Daoist and Eurodaoist perspectives on nature, responsibility, and critique; (2) Buddhist perspectives on freedom, life, and nature; and (3) rethinking the responsibility towards nature. Let us now turn to summarise the individual chapters.

**Overview of the chapters**

**Daoist and Eurodaoist perspectives on nature, responsibility, and critique**

We enter Part 1 of the volume with a text by David Chai on “The Role of Nature in the Huang-Lao Silk Texts.” In his chapter, Chai shows how the Huang-Lao Boshu (Huang-Lao silk texts, discovered in 1973) constitute a significant development of the Daoist tradition in regard to the Daoist classics. While the mystery of Dao, the cosmogony of the One-and-Many, and the fourfold (i.e., Dao, heaven, earth, and humanity) also appear in the Huang-Lao silk texts, it is characteristic of these texts that the constancy of Dao and heaven takes the place of the mystery of Dao. Furthermore, the texts show how
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nature guides us as the fundamental principle for the conduct and governance of human society. From this, however, it does not follow that the silk texts attempt to de-naturalise nature or, as some modern scholars believe, furnish only a Legalist-inspired theory of natural law and morality. Pointing out that in Huang-Lao’s metaphysical portrayal nature is an inherent part of Dao, Chai demonstrates that the author(s) of the texts intended to restructure the naturalistic cosmology of classical Daoism. With this, Chai ultimately leads us to a new concept of the Daoist sage, pointing towards a notion of political responsibility, which belongs to the Daoist wisdom of living in accordance with the “way.”

Following Chai’s exposition on Daoism and the possibilities that Daoist wisdom holds for a positive transformation in relations between humans and nature, Mario Wenning, author of Chapter 2 “Eurodaoism and the Environment,” tempers the reader’s expectations to the level of a “joyful melancholy.” He observes critically how, within recent debates in environmentalism, the classical Chinese tradition of Daoism has often been used as a mere projection screen. Borrowing the term “Eurodaoism” from the contemporary German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, Wenning shows how Daoist-inspired notions of cosmic harmony serve as an imagined complement to what is perceived as the environmentally destructive consequences of the mainstream culture of modernity. Moreover, Wenning demonstrates that the recent reception of Daoist motifs, as part of a Eurodaoist revival, reflects a long trend of importing Eastern wisdom to the West that has persisted for at least the past hundred years. In this context, he argues for the need to work critically through the stereotyped adaptations of classical Chinese traditions as a counter-culture to European modernity and to reconsider explanations of the global environmental crises that allegedly discover their root cause in “Western” values. Such crises, Wenning finds, call for a self-reflective transcultural approach. All parties are encouraged to reflect critically upon motives and presuppositions when engaging in intercultural dialogue, so as to avoid reductive wishful thinking and the pitfalls of projection—most particularly since, as Wenning suggests in the words of Peter Sloterdijk, “One would have to be a Daoist to bear the insight that Daoism will not help us either.”

Cautioned by Wenning against the problematic promise of simplistic solutions, we turn to Chapter 3, “Heidegger’s Dao and the Sources of Critique,” by Matthias Fritsch. Here we find a detailed and nuanced discussion of Heidegger’s account of the source of normativity in the context of his “originary ethics,” the fourfold, and the role of the notion of “way” in the critique of technology. Fritsch argues that in his early account, Heidegger locates the source of normativity in the stretching-out of human existence between thrownness and death, but this is revised so that in Heidegger’s later account, it is found in the relation between the claim or call of Being (Anspruch) and the corresponding (Entsprechen) letting-be and dwelling of the human being. Fritsch shows how in each case the source of normativity in difference and temporal non-coincidence is decisive: because Dasein is not one with itself it must take over its being in an ongoing manner. Tracing the manner in which the middle-voice relation
between disclosure and response is increasingly characterised as a path or way that eventually leads Heidegger to the famous references to Laozi’s *Dao*—as the way (*Weg*) on which Dasein finds itself placed by being’s movement (*Bewegung*) of disclosure—Fritsch distinguishes different levels of normativity. On this basis, he argues that, although Heidegger might overreach its normative potential, his account can nonetheless be developed so as to play an important role in the critique of the extractivist and resourcist relation to the earth, which, for Heidegger, characterises capitalist modernity.

We then turn to the final chapter of Part 1, “How to Inhabit the Best of All Possible Worlds? Leibniz’s Philosophical Optimism in the Age of Environmental Crises,” by Sabine Baldin. Emphasising the significance of Leibniz’s philosophical optimism in the face of multifarious environmental crises and extrapolating his call to conscientious thinking, Baldin investigates parallels between Leibniz’s conception of the relationship between humanity and god, on the one hand, and humanity and nature on the other. In Leibniz’s view, she argues, thought ought not to be guided by sound reasoning alone, and yet it can only show itself to be reasonable by considering its consequences and choosing its conclusions accordingly and responsibly. Baldin shows how Leibniz’s optimism assumes an ethical and a pragmatic dimension precisely when it considers the overwhelming odds of destruction should pessimism be taken as the governing principle of human thought and action. Finding that Leibniz’s optimism can be regarded as pragmatic and constructive in that it encourages a postponement of judgement, Baldin explores ways in which Chinese thought—in particular Daoism and Confucianism, in which Leibniz was well versed—infuences, and runs parallel to, Leibniz’s philosophy. Refusing to be overwhelmed by the appearance of evil and destruction, Leibniz invites his reader to ask how the present situation, however dire, could be or become the basis for the arrival of a much greater good than would otherwise have been possible. In this way, Baldin argues that the interplay between Leibniz’s optimism and his account of the role of final causes in human reasoning points directly to ways in which a Leibnizian perspective encourages us to direct thoughts and efforts towards the response we might be able to give to the current global crises. Concluding with reference to Leibniz’s monadism in dialogue with Pauline Phemister’s reading, Baldin determines that care for nature must be understood as a necessary and indispensable act of care for oneself.

**Buddhist perspectives on freedom, life, and nature**

Turning thematically from Daoism to Buddhism, Part 2 of this volume begins with Hiroshi Abe’s chapter “What is Oriental Liberalism?,” which explores the Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani’s conception of “Oriental liberalism.” Focusing on its key feature, namely, freedom, as both freedom from the world and freedom within the world, and noting that by the term “Oriental” Nishitani primarily means “Japanese,” Abe raises three questions: (1) What is the Japanese view of freedom? (2) According to this view, how are we humans
related to nothingness? and (3) How is “freedom as both freedom from the world and freedom within the world” possible? In response to the first question, Abe shows that the Japanese view of freedom can be formulated as “freedom to be onozukara” (which can be translated as “from oneself”). To the second question, Abe gives two answers. Elaborating on the concept of jinen (written in part with the same character as onozukara and read in modern Japanese as shizen, meaning nature) found in the works of Japanese Buddhist monk Shinran (1173–1263), Abe argues that non-objectifiable jinen requires our best endeavours to receive its natural power as appropriately as possible. In contrast, Abe shows how the Japanese philosopher Kitarô Nishida, interpreting Shinran, emphasises the need to maximise our own power until we exceed its limit and reach concurrence between our self-power and the other-power of jinen. Concerning the third question, Abe demonstrates that it is what Nishida calls the “absolutely contradictory self-identity,” based on his late “logic of place,” that makes this concurrence possible.

Chapter 6, “Emptying Ecology: Chan Buddhist Antinomianism and Environmental Ethics” by Eric Nelson, is the second contribution in this part of the volume. Nelson unfolds the implications of the Chan Buddhist conception of emptiness (both as discourse and as praxis) for an ethics that, un governed by norms or principles, points towards the dereification and liberation or “releasement” of nature, both living and inanimate. Confronting recent critical Buddhist scholarship that has focused on the historical dimensions of Chan Buddhism as a potential ideological source for practices of fixation and domination, and challenging what he sees as a dubious essentialism that renders practice ethically insensitive and unresponsive to others, Nelson argues that among the potential merits of Chan Buddhism is the capacity to call into doubt not only fixed and reified structures but also its own self-objectification. What can appear in Chan Buddhism to be scepticism, iconoclasm, and antinomianism is recast by Nelson as the very source of the ethical to the extent that scepticism not only destroys conventional morality and immorality but also enacts an ethos of responsiveness through exposing itself to its own groundlessness and freedom. Thus, in uncovering this potential for critical self-reflection in Chan Buddhism, Nelson takes up the thread of the Buddhist dialectics of self-and other-power, which we have seen elaborated in the previous chapter. In demonstrating that Chan ethics should not be thought of as a virtue ethics of self-perfectionism and self-mastery, but rather as an ethics of encounter or an ethics of responsiveness, Nelson’s chapter carries rich overtones of the “other power within oneself” that opens the way to spontaneous, compassionate relations with the environment, without the need of ontological foundation.

Masataka Furusho contributes the third and final chapter of Part 2 with reflections on “Modification of Life Awareness and Its Poetic Expressions in Japanese Literature.” Asking why it is that in living our lives we are moved to question their meaning, Furusho turns to Dilthey’s notion of a pre-reflexive awareness, or “Innewerden.” Dilthey claimed that every psychic act on the part of living beings can include an awareness of itself so that the perceiving subject
and that which is perceived are thereby undifferentiated from one another. But in the case of human self-awareness, there is a modification so that the subject can, as Furusho puts it, be “caught unawares.” Furusho examines the way in which the loss of pre-reflexive awareness of one’s own life and its re-emergence in self-consciousness expresses itself in some classical texts of Japanese poetry. Analysing poems from the classic anthology Kokinshū (compiled in the tenth century) and poets like Saigyō (twelfth century) or Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902), with painstaking attention to etymological detail, Furusho argues that the recurrent lyrical phrase “Inochi narikeri” (such is/was life) can be interpreted as an expression of the advent character of our life when the pre-reflexive awareness of the fact of our lived existence suddenly re-enters consciousness. In drawing to his conclusion, Furusho extends the thread of self- and other-power that is a primary motif of this part, by inviting us to think the awakening of awareness of life as a “hetero-affection” and by showing how the experience, poetically expressed as “Inochi narikeri,” ultimately points to life as an “inner other.”

Rethinking the responsibility towards nature

Part 3 of this volume opens with a critical reflection by Thomas Buchheim on Kant’s conceptualisation of freedom and the law of natural necessity, titled “In Spite of Nature and With Time: Freedom and Responsibility. Two Kantian Spells and Their Possible Refutation.” From a certain vantage point, this chapter can be read as a “Western” foil to the earlier chapter by Hiroshi Abe, which shows us how, through the concepts of onozukara and jinen, nature and freedom can be understood within the Japanese Buddhist tradition as being inextricably linked. In contrast, Buchheim shows how Kant’s concept of transcendental freedom implies that human agents are in themselves not part of the natural world and its law-laden structure. Therefore, Kant’s solution for the “antinomy of freedom” is to declare that everything governed by the “law of natural necessity” is mere appearance and to locate human freedom within a realm beyond that of nature. Buchheim proceeds by challenging Kant’s concept of freedom in terms of a contemporary understanding of the laws of nature and the ways in which they conjoin and interact. Buchheim argues that Kant’s acceptance of the idea of consistent and continuous, or “thoroughgoing,” natural necessity is due to his reliance on two dubitable premises: the first, described as “modal enforcement,” is that individual events are necessitated by natural laws; the second, described as temporal homogenisation, is that all events occur successively within the same temporality. Buchheim leads us to the conclusion that the alleged antinomy of nature and freedom is subtended by these premises, which, under the pressure of critical interrogation, yield to new possibilities.

The second article of the final part is titled “The Person-Affecting Claim, Non-Identity Problem, and Future Generations,” written by Rui Han. Han starts with an exposition of what is known as the “levelling-down objection” to egalitarianism. An important topic in the field of distributive justice, the
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levelling-down objection builds on upon the “Person-Affecting Claim,” which maintains that for a given situation to be of greater harm or benefit than its alternatives, it must be of greater harm or benefit to someone. Han shows that the validity of this claim is undermined by the “non-identity problem” raised by Derek Parfit, which suggests, given the uncertain identity of future generations, that a situation may still be held to be good despite it harming the interests of some person or people. In response to Parfit, Han argues against the non-identity problem and in defence of the Person-Affecting Claim. Through moral examination and detailed comparison of two contrasting policy models—that is, “enjoy now” versus “think about tomorrow”—she brings this theoretical problem to the question of the depletion of natural resources in present-day China. Showing ways in which the interests of future generations are being sacrificed by and for the sake of the present generation, Han highlights a conflict between economically motivated, short-term thinking and the Confucian commitment to the long-term continuation of the family line. In conclusion, finding that transgenerational responsibility towards future generations places a moral claim upon the present generation for a committed, sustainable development strategy, Han shows how her rebuttal of the non-identity problem may provide some reinforcement to the specifically Eastern concern for descendants.

Ryosuke Ohashi continues the investigation of the concept of responsibility with his chapter titled “The Deep Layers of Responsibility or Anti-Nature in Nature.” Finding that the humanist notion of responsibility has been internalised by Western modernity as one of its most basic values, Ohashi argues that the severity of the situations confronting the world today indicates that, nonetheless, only the most superficial and perfunctory aspects of responsibility have been recognised. Thus, he continues, sincere and profound reflection on the very notion of responsibility is warranted. Questioning the extent to which “responsibility” can be taken as a self-evident ethical criterion, Ohashi’s considerations encompass a plurality of voices that coalesce to expose a conceptual problem of philosophical as well as linguistic dimensions. As he shows us, the English word “responsibility” comes from the verb “respond,” and the responding subject is “I.” Yet, as Ohashi points out, the term “sekinin”—as the most widespread Japanese translation of responsibility—suggests that the primary subject of responsibility is not “I” but “being-in-the-world,” so that the measure of my own behaviour is in fact the voice of the world. This again also touches upon the theme of the inner other as seen in the previous part of this volume: for Ohashi, sekinin and the notion of the inner other intersect to reveal a deeper layer of meaning concealed within the notion of “responsibility” as it is commonly understood in everyday life. Through a detailed discussion of Dostoevsky’s “Crime and Punishment,” Ohashi suggests that this deeper layer can be grasped in terms of what he calls the “anti-nature in nature itself.”

Lastly, the closing chapter to this volume is by Zhuofei Wang and is titled “Corporeality in an Ecologically Oriented Aesthetics of Nature.” Wang understands aesthetics to be a general theory of sensual perception as Alexander
Gottlieb Baumgarten first defined it in the eighteenth century. From this viewpoint, aesthetics is primarily concerned with what Gernot Böhme describes as the “corporal and sensual experience of a person who is situated, lives, works and moves in a particular bit of nature.” Situating herself in the context of New Phenomenology, Wang shows that for such a concept of aesthetics of nature, the role of corporeality in the interaction between human beings and nature calls for close attention, since, as she argues, human beings are always and already embedded in nature together with their different modes of perception and sensory experience. Wang proposes that by espousing the idea of corporeality, the ecologically oriented aesthetics of nature can methodologically distinguish itself from environmental studies in the field of natural science. Where the natural sciences usually concentrate on the factual existence of natural objects, which obey natural laws that can be investigated by means of quantitative and/or experimental methods, Wang finds that, despite its cognitive value, this approach is inadequate for the purpose of (re-)creating a balanced relationship between humans and nature. Accordingly, she explores ecology from a corporal perspective, focusing on ways in which we experience nature in terms of atmosphere, to show how affective experience of nature integrates human conditions and environmental qualities, as well as cognition and sensuality.

Having reached the end of the book, the editors of this volume hope that the multifaceted discussions of the various themes presented in its chapters will inspire new insights and provide the reader with the means by which to engage in intercultural dialogue and to respond to the global challenges humanity faces in the twenty-first century.

Note

1 Marx wrote in Capital vol 1: “Plato’s Republic, in so far as the division of labor is treated in it as the formative principle of the state, is merely an Athenian idealization of the Egyptian caste system, Egypt having served as the model of an industrial country to others of his contemporaries, for example, Isocrates. It retained this importance for the Greeks even at the time of the Roman Empire” (Marx 1990, 488–89; see Stephens 2016 for a detailed defence of Marx on this point).

References


Part 1

Daoist and Eurodaost perspectives on nature, responsibility, and critique
1 The role of Nature in the Huang-Lao silk texts

David Chai

Introduction

In an earlier work of mine, I argued that classical Daoism (i.e., Daodejing 道德經, Zhuangzi 莊子, Liezi 列子) does not view Nature as a remote or distinct aspect of reality but one that is connected to the mystery of the Dao, the cosmogonic one, and the fourfold of the Dao, heaven, earth, and humanity. The Huang-Lao silk texts (Huang-Lao Boshu 黃老帛書) that were discovered in a cache of works unearthed in tomb 3 at Mawangdui 马王堆 (Changsha, China) from 1972 to 1974 differ from those of classical Daoism in many regards, but perhaps the most notable aspect is that the notion of mystery common to the Daodejing and Zhuangzi is replaced by the constancy of the Dao and heaven. Additionally, Nature is now spoken of in explicit terms, unlike the generalities seen in the works by Laozi and Zhuangzi, such that its cycles, processes, patterns, and standards become the guiding principle for the conduct and governance of human society. This last aspect has led a number of scholars to classify the Huang-Lao silk texts as Legalist in bearing.

However, as Tu Weiming points out, “characterizing the Huangdi texts as Legalist documents is as misleading as referring to the Laozi as a military book” (Tu 1979, 107). We can also agree with Tu when he writes:

Huang-Lao contains several apparently unrelated but actually fully integrated philosophical concepts: a cosmological vision of the Dao as the primordial source of inspiration; an administrative technique, based on the principle and model of the naturalness of Dao; a concern for the cultivation of penetrating insight, so that a king could reign without imposing his limited, self-centred view on the order of things originally manifested in nature; and the necessity of attaining a kind of dynamic balancing in order to ensure a steady flow, as it were, of the political system as a mirror image of the cosmos.

(Tu 1979, 108)

What is lacking in Tu Weiming’s assessment, and in subsequent studies by Anglophone scholars, is a sustained examination of the character and operation of Nature itself. It is true that the silk texts not only advise the ruler
how to govern according to the principles of Nature, but they also reveal a veneration and knowledge of Nature that is used to quell human ambition in order to return the world to a state of unity. By showing what Nature meant for the author(s) of the silk texts, this chapter will argue that their injecting it with more realist terminology does not violate the spirit of Daoism; rather, it was a necessary evolution from the more fantastical writings of earlier figures to ensure Daoism’s continued existence into the Han dynasty and beyond.

Nature in pre-Qin Daoism

Before we begin our examination of Huang-Lao’s portrayal of Nature, a brief recap of the classical understanding is in order. I will not recount all of the scholarly discussions that have occurred over the past two decades; rather, I will merely outline the arguments I made in my earlier work. First and foremost, scholars writing about Nature in the Daodejing and Zhuangzi tend to utilise a handful of descriptions: ziran 自然 (naturalness), wuwei 無為 (non-action), and tiandi 天地 (heaven and earth). The problem with these terms is that they are motivated by our human perspective and are thus unidirectional. This is why scholars writing about the classical Daoist vision of Nature extract from it an ethical bearing, a socio-political model of governance, and a beauty of sublime magnitude, but little else. The reason, I argued in my earlier work, is that these scholars were unable to transcend the heaven-earth dyad and explore the vast universe that the Dao takes as its abode. In other words, Nature has been consistently regarded as a realm bound to humanity’s awareness of it, regardless of whether we envision ourselves to be within or beyond it:

The truth of Nature, as both an abstract concept and as the objective material of heaven and earth, is that it is so much more than a descriptive state of reality: it is an emotionally aesthetic plenum in which the great variety of life buzzes and whizzes past in a never-ending stream of vitality, struggle, and decline. Nature is the anthropocentric materialization of Dao’s non-anthropocentric potentiality, a totality that is in constant flux and yet, it never loses its balance or harmony. The truth of Nature is that it does not need the likes of humanity to persist and indeed, it has become ever more distant from Dao because of us, but this does not mean that Nature is sick and in need of curing.

(Chai 2016, 266)

We can lend credence to this interpretation by citing a passage from chapter 31 of the Zhuangzi:

The Truth is that which is received from heaven. By nature it is the way it is and cannot be changed. Therefore the sage patterns himself on Heaven, prizes the Truth, and does not allow himself to be cramped by the vulgar.
The stupid man does the opposite of this. He is unable to pattern himself on Heaven and instead frets over human concerns. He does not know enough to prize the Truth, but instead, plodding along with the crowd, he allows himself to be changed by vulgar ways and so is never content.

真者，所以受於天也，自然不可易也。故聖人法天貴真，不拘於俗。愚者反此，不能法天而恤於人，不知貴真，祿祿而受變於俗，故不足。

(Watson 2013, 276; Guo 1997, 1032)

In order to harmonise with Nature, Zhuangzi says, we must first harmonise with the Dao, and in order to do that, we must optimise our knowledge of both its mystery and its oneness with the cosmos. The mutual dependency between the things of the world and the world itself, and between the world and that which extends beyond it, was laid out by Laozi in chapter 25 of the Daodejing. When applied to the concept of Nature, we can say that

man dwells in Nature but depends on the earth for sustenance, while heaven nourishes the earth and together, they are borne of Dao. This is the [Daoist] fourfold; a mystery of conjoining, becoming, and flourishing whose propensity for quiescent tranquillity guarantees that one element will never usurp the others.

(Chai 2016, 271)

Dao’s embeddedness in the world thus acts as the source of its own naturalness and is why it is taken as the epitome of what we refer to as Nature.

Nature in the silk texts

Mirroring the Daoism of Laozi and Zhuangzi, the Huang-Lao silk texts view Dao to be the proper way (zheng dao 正道) of the universe: “The way, therefore, in which he who grasps the Dao observes the world . . . sees the correct Dao and accords with the principles” (Yates 1997, 101; Chen 1995, 245). From this simple statement, we can see that following the ordering principle of the Dao provides us with a comprehensive vision of the world. According to Randall Peerenboom, the author(s) of the silk texts advocated a naturalism that was heavily imitative (Peerenboom 1993, 30) and correspondence based (Peerenboom 1993, 32), and thus can be depicted as a form of foundational naturalism (Peerenboom 1993, 38). These descriptions might be true of the texts as a whole, but they are too restrictive when applied to the silk texts’ understanding of Nature. One must remember that Daoism is not about imitating Nature because of what it is, does, or represents; rather, as was argued in my earlier work, Nature is but one of several realms in which the Dao is imbued in things and so the more closely we observe Nature, the more we will be able to harmonise with the Dao.
Unlike classical Daoism, Huang-Lao employs a fair number of technical terms and phrases to explain the Dao’s ordering principle (li 理). What is interesting is that a fair number of them use the concept of heaven (tian 天) and time (shi 時). In the case of the former, we see: “participate in heaven’s ordering of things” (can yi tiandang 参以天當), “strive for heaven’s natural ordering” (zhong tianli 中天理), “abide by heaven’s constancy” (xun tianchang 循天常), “accord with heaven” (yin tian 因天), and “exhaust heaven’s limit” (jin tianji 盡天極). In the case of temporality, we find: “adhere to the four seasons” (shun sishi 順四時), “follow heavenly time” (yin tianshi 因天時), and “accord with time” (yin shi 因時). When it comes to abiding by the Dao or the ways of Nature, the silk texts say: “adhere to the Dao” (shun dao 順道), “grasp the Dao” (zhi dao 執道), “adhere to natural ordering” (shun li 順理), and “examine names and natural ordering” (cha mingli 察名理). However, individuals who do not do so are said to: “turn their backs on heavenly Dao” (bei tian zhi dao 倍天之道), “lose the Dao” (shi dao 失道), “lose natural ordering” (shi li 失理), “disobey natural ordering” (ni li 反理), and “disobey forms” (ni xing 反形).

We can classify the above using five broad terms: models (fa 法), measures (du 度), patterns (ze 則), natural orderings (li 理), and forms and names (xing-ming 形名). The aforementioned terms are not unique to Huang-Lao but are derived from the Daodejing and Zhuangzi. Here are a few examples:

Man takes his models from earth; earth takes its models from heaven; heaven takes its models from the Dao; and the Dao takes its models from the Natural.

人法地, 地法天, 天法道, 道法自然.

(Lynn 1999, 96; Lou 2009, 64)

Heaven and earth have their great beauties but do not speak of them; the four seasons have their clear-marked regularity but do not discuss it; the ten thousand things have their principles of growth but do not expound them.

天地有大美而不言, 四時有明法而不議, 萬物有成理而不說.

(Watson 2013, 178; Guo 1997, 735)

Above, it takes its model from the roundness of heaven, following along with the three luminous bodies of the sky. Below, it takes its model from the squareness of earth, following along with the four seasons. In the middle realm, it brings harmony to the wills of the people and peace to the four directions.

上法圓天以順三光, 下法方地以順四時, 中和民意以安四鄉.

(Watson 2013, 269; Guo 1997, 1022)

Rites and laws, weights and measures, the careful comparison of forms and names—the men of old had all these. They are the means by which those
Role of Nature in the Huang-Lao silk texts

below serve those above, not the means by which those above shepherd those below.

禮法度數，形名比詳，古人有之，此下之所以事上，非上之所以畜下也．

(Watson 2013, 103; Guo 1997, 473)

Perfect music must first respond to the needs of man, accord with the reason of heaven, proceed by the five virtues, and blend with spontaneity; only then can it bring order to the four seasons and bestow a final harmony on the ten thousand things.

夫至樂者，先應之以人事，順之以天理，行之以五德，應之以自然，然後調理四時，太和萬物．

(Watson 2013, 110; Guo 1997, 502)

When put into the language of Huang-Lao, we are told: “Heaven holds the One, brightens [the Three and determines] the Two, establishes the Eight Regulators, puts into practice the Seven Models

天執一，明三，定二，建八正，行七法” (Yates 1997, 81; Chen 1995, 180). If we unpack this numerical cosmology, the number one refers to the Dao, the number two refers to the Dao’s darkness and brightness (i.e., Yin and Yang), the number three indicates the heavenly bodies (i.e., sun, moon, and stars), the number seven stands for the properties of the three heavenly bodies, while the number eight signifies the regulators of the temporal and spatial nature of the seven models. The seven models are explained thusly:

Heaven holds the One and uses it to brighten the Three. That the sun faithfully emerges and faithfully reenters and that North and South have poles [are the epitomes of measures. That the moon faithfully grows and faithfully] dies, that advance and retreat have constancy, are the epitomes of enumeration. That the serried stars have number, but do not lose their ranks, is the epitome of faithfulness.

天執一以明三，日信出信入，南北有極，度之稽也。月信生信死，進退有常，數之稽也。列星有數，而不失其行，信之稽也．

(Yates 1997, 81; Chen 1995, 180–81)

Regarding the eight regulators, we are told that:

If heaven brightens the Three in order to determine the Two, then one will be dark and the other bright . . . If [heaven] determines the Two in order to establish the Eight Regulators, then the four seasons have regularities, movement and quiescence have their positions, and outside and inside have their locations.

天明三以定二，則壹晦壹明，壹陰壹陽，壹短壹長。天定二以建八正，則四時有度， 動靜有立，而外內有處．

(Yates 1997, 81–82; Chen 1995, 181)
Knowing that the four seasons obtain their measure (du 度) as a result of the eight regulators and seven models, the only numbers missing from the cosmological development of Nature are five and six. Within the silk texts, the Canons (Jing 經) contains a chapter entitled “five regulators” (wu zheng 五正) which states: “When the Five Regulators have been published, use them to supervise the Five Brightnesses 五正既布，以司五明” (Yates 1997, 113; Chen 1995, 292). What these regulators are is not specified. However, if we consult chapter 8 (du wan 度萬) of the Heguansi 鶴冠子, they are listed as: transformation of spirit (shen hua 神化), governance by ministries (guan zhi 管治), governance by instruction (jiao zhi 敎治), governing by accordance (yin zhi 因治), and governance by affairs (shi zhi 事治). Regarding the number six, the “discourse” (lun 論) section of the Canonical Models (Jingfa 經法) text speaks of “six handles” (liu bing 六柄): observation (guan 觀), discourse (lun 論), movement (dong 動), revolution (zhuan 轉), change (bian 變), and transformation (hua 化). The first pair belongs to the sage ruler, the second pair is the domain of heaven, while the final pair is ascribed to earth and the myriad things that inhabit it. To grasp the ordering principle of the Dao thus requires mastering the six handles.

In light of the Dao’s undifferentiated wholeness, its harmony with the cosmos cannot be disrupted. The same cannot be said, however, for humanity’s relationship with heaven. Rather than merely imitating heaven and emptily repeating its cyclical patterns, one should mirror the virtue of heaven, making it one’s own. In the eyes of the silk texts’ author(s), there is no one whose need to do this is greater than the ruler. By governing their domain as heaven governs the earth, the Daoist ruler assimilates the human and natural realms into an indistinguishable unity of cooperation and mutual benefit. Taking heaven qua Nature as its guide, the silk texts argue:

That the four seasons have regularities is the principle of heaven and earth. That the sun, moon, stars, and constellations have number is the main thread of heaven and earth. That three seasons are for coming to completion and achievement and one season is for punishment and killing is the Dao of heaven and earth. The four seasons are timely and fixed, they do not fail and do not err. They constantly have their laws and models.

四時有度，天地之理也。日月星晨有數，天地之紀也。三時成功，一時刑殺，天地之道也。四時而定，不爽不忒，常有法式。

(Yates 1997, 95; Chen 1995, 222)

It should be apparent by now that Nature operates independently of human society. This is not to say that human beings are excluded from natural processes and chains of influence; rather, we live in blindness to their presence, resulting in our confusion and suffering. Perhaps Huang-Lao’s view is too critical of human failings, an attitude first pronounced by Laozi’s famous declaration in Chapter 5 that “heaven and earth are not benevolent and treat the myriad things as straw dogs 天地不仁，以萬物為芻狗” (Lynn 1999, 60; Lou 2009, 13). The author(s) of the silk texts also note that “heaven possesses brightness and does not grieve that the people are in darkness . . . earth has its [resources]...
and does not grieve that the people are poor 天有明而不憂民之晦也 . . . 地有財而不憂民之貧也” (Yates 1997, 165; Chen 1995, 452). Such being the case, the norms of heaven preclude human consent and yet humans are very much subject to them. Whether it be the four seasons, the alternation of day and night, the beginning and ending of life, or the hardship and success things experience on a daily basis, the operation of heaven qua Nature is unfailing in its presence and measured in its action.

The difference between the classical Daoist portrayal of Nature and what we have seen thus far in the Huang-Lao silk texts appears to be predominately rooted in the latter giving an expanded role to heaven while diminishing the input of the Dao found in the former. Take, for example, the following:

夫地有山有澤，有黑有白，有美有惡。地俗德以靜，而天正名以作。靜作相養，德虐相成。兩若有名，相與則成。陰陽備物，化變乃生.

(Yates 1997, 117; Chen 1995, 300)

There is no mention of the Dao here, despite the presence of Yin and Yang. Indeed, in pre-Qin works such as the Zhuangzi, Yin and Yang never appear in the same sentence with Dao, only heaven and earth. In the Daodejing, Yin and Yang appear together only once in chapter 42, and their appearance is after the world had already been created. While Yin and Yang are connected to the cosmological milieu of the Dao, their creative power is felt in the realm of heaven and earth alone. When the silk texts thus speak of mountains and marshes, these are not merely examples of two different micro-worlds; they symbolise some of the various ways in which Yin and Yang are manifested: rock and water, high and low, dry and wet, thick and thin qi 氣, and so forth. What is more, black and white, beautiful and ugly, and so on, are also pairings derived from the Yin-Yang dyad. Taken together, they comprise the virtue of the earth, and because the earth passively receives the virtue of heaven, it remains silent.

Heaven, on the other hand, models itself after the Dao; since the Dao’s disposition is to act spontaneously, the implication for all things on earth can be devastating. Thus, the Yang power of heaven is not isolated from that of Dao but is a necessary counter-balance to the Yin power of the earth. This system of mutual completion and self-transformation gives rise to life’s creation and demise. In this way, the movement and brightness of the sun and moon are reflected in the movement and brightness of the four seasons, and these are echoed in the unending changes things go through in their daily existence. This patterning of heaven and earth, and the changes occurring therein, is
neither arbitrary nor random but an embodiment of the oneness pervading the world before it was disrupted by humanity’s invention of names and moral standards:

For the explanation of the One, examine into heaven and earth; for the principle of the One, apply it to all within the four seas.

一之解，察於天地。一之理，施於四海.

(Yates 1997, 135; Chen 1995, 352)

Additionally:

Heaven is Yang and earth Yin . . . All that is Yang is modelled on heaven. Heaven values the correct . . . All that is Yin is modelled on earth. The potency [of] earth is to be peaceful, gentle, correct, and quiescent. It settles the tally of softness first and is good at giving and not contending. This is the rule of earth and the tally of the female.

天陽地陰 . . . . 諸陽者法天，天貴正 . . . . 諸陰者法地，地之德安徐正靜，柔節先定，善予不爭，此地之度而雌之節也.


What ties humanity to the natural world is not our ability to lord over it; on the contrary, Huang-Lao warns us of Nature’s indifference to our darkness and poverty. These are not literal attributes but, in accordance with pre-Qin Daoism, indicators of spiritual wantonness and separation from the way of the Dao. So long as we adhere to the ways of the Dao and follow its natural tendencies, our rootedness in the world will not be forsaken. Emulating the quiet simplicity of earth, we have only to be receptive to heaven’s activity. Knowing the constancy of the Dao, therefore, the temporal and spatial changes occurring around us on a daily basis will not be enough to block our access to its life-giving power:

When each of the Seven Models matches its name, it is called a “thing.” When each thing [is fitted with the Dao], it is called “Principle.” Where Principle is situated, it is called [Compliance]. When some things do not fit with the Dao, it is called “Losing Principle.” Where Losing Principle is situated, it is called “Opposition.” If Opposition and Compliance each mandate themselves, then preservation and destruction, rise and decline can be known.

七法各當其名，謂之物。物個合於道者，謂之理。理之所在，謂之順。物有不合於道者，謂之失理。失理之所在，謂之逆。逆順各有命也，則存亡興壞可知也.

(Yates 1997, 83; Chen 1995, 185)

The term “disobey” (ni 逆) is used in two senses in the Huang-Lao silk texts: cosmologically, as in the aforementioned passage, and as an admonishment of
the ethically-deprived ruler. The latter case is famously known via the Huang-Lao political doctrine of *wenwu* 文武 (civil-military). What is interesting to note, and which marks one of the more important advancements over pre-Qin Daoism, is that *wenwu* is also used to describe the behaviour of heaven and earth. Disobeying the ordering principle of heaven is thus no different from disobeying the social norms of one’s kingdom in that both work to weaken and fragment the harmonising power of the Dao. Just as Yin and Yang, heaven and earth, the sun and moon, and so on operate in tandem, the same is also true for *ni* and *shun* 順 (accordance):

If movement and quiescence are not timely, and sowing and planting miss the appropriate factors of earth, [then] the Dao of [heaven] and earth is opposed. If ministers do not treat their lord affectionately, and inferiors do not treat their superiors affectionately, and if the hundred clans do not treat their affairs affectionately, then the principles internal to the state are opposed. The locus of opposition is called a “Dead State”: attack it. The reverse of this is called “compliance”; where [compliance] is situated is called a “Living State”: nourish a living state. If opposition and compliance have principles, then facts and falsehoods are meticulously.

動靜不時, 種樹失地之宜, 則天地之道逆矣。臣不親其主, 下不親其上, 百族不親其事, 則內理逆矣。逆之所在, 謂之死國, 伐之。反此之謂順, 順之所在, 謂之生國, 生國養之。逆順有理, 則情偽密矣。

(Yates 1997, 85; Chen 1995, 196)

The analogy being drawn here is that Nature is not solely to blame for the downfall of human society; if anything, Nature forewarns us of the impending violence, not in the moralistic way spoken of by Confucius or Mencius but via visible signs of imbalance between Yin and Yang. Without proper precaution, humanity tips the scales into the realm of excess. What is also apparent in the aforementioned passage is an almost proto-scientific approach to verifying natural phenomena, making it rather different from the onto-cosmology pervading pre-Qin Daoism. If there is one thing we need to bear in mind, it is that Nature is to be taken as the model for human life-praxis, governance, and cohabitation with all other sentient and non-sentient things. This explains why the sage plays such a critical role in safeguarding the balance between what humanity does to the world and what we do to each other in response to the unending challenges Nature puts before us:

Heaven and earth have no private bias, the four seasons do not cease. Heaven and earth are positioned, and so the sage performs his tasks. Should he exceed the limit and fail to make [the correspondence between his actions and heaven and earth], heaven will send down calamity. Should man conquer heaven by force, take care to avoid and not face him. Should heaven in turn conquer man, follow and march with it. If you are bent in
front and stretched behind, you will inevitably reach the heavenly limit and not monopolize the heavenly success.

天地無私，四時不息。天地立，聖人故載。過極失當，天將降殃。人強勝天，慎避勿當。天反勝人，因與俱行。先屈後信，必盡天極，而毋擅天功。

(Yates 1997, 57; Chen 1995, 84–85)

While the aforementioned challenges are directed at keeping humanity in balance with heaven and earth on a moral level, they do nothing for humanity's onto-cosmological bond. In other words, the Huang-Lao silk texts rightly call attention to the interconnectedness of heaven, earth, and humanity; however, as a work inspired by Daoism, it cannot overlook the centrality of the Dao. By embracing the Dao, the sage ruler makes the spirit of Nature his own and does not depart from it; by embodying the spirit of Nature, the sage ruler roots himself in the Dao and does not injure it. This is the natural holism of Daoism, as illustrated in the following passage:

If he does not treat heaven as heaven, then he loses his spirituality; if he does not value earth, then he loses his roots. When he does not follow [the measures of the four seasons], the people suffer. If he does not fix the positions of inside and outside, and does not respond to the transformations of movement and quiescence, then affairs will be in disarray on the inside and his initiatives will be in disarray [on the outside. When the Eight] corrections are all lost. . . [If he treats heaven as heaven, then he acquires his spirituality; if he values earth], then he gains his roots. When he follows the [regularities of the] four [seasons] . . . the people do not . . . suffer. If he [fixes the positions of the] outside [and inside, and responds to the transformations of movement and quiescence, then affairs] are achieved on the inside and initiatives are successful on the outside.

不天天則失其神。不重地則失根。不順四時之度而民疾。不處外內之位，不應動靜之化，則事窘於內而舉窘於外。八正皆失，與天地離。天天則得其神。重地則得其根。順四時之度而民不有疾。處外內之位，應動靜之化，則事得於內而舉得於外。

(Yates 1997, 81; Chen 1995, 177–78)

Treating heaven and earth appropriately (or not) is not an attempt by the author(s) of the silk texts to coerce people into behaving unnaturally; on the contrary, the message is a consistent call to uphold the inherent oneness of the world by stripping away those normative values and systems of human society that weaken and ultimately destroy our ability to partake in the Dao's unity. No matter if we are discussing the silk texts' doctrine of statecraft, self-cultivation, or in the case of this chapter, Nature, the thread binding them together is the mystery of Dao. This mystery, as I argued in my earlier work, is but one of the three levels of reality within which Nature is realised (the others being the One-and-Many, and the fourfold). The Dao is hence the life conduit of the
world, the root of all heavenly orderings and earthly measures, and is why the silk texts arrive at this penetrating conclusion regarding humanity's dependency on the Dao:

Now a hundred words have a basis, a thousand words have their essentials, and ten thousand [words] have their generalities. The multitude of the myriad phenomena all pass through a single hole. Now if he were not a Corrected Person, who could control them? He must be a Corrected Person! For then he is able to grasp hold of correction to correct the incorrect, to lay hold of the One and use it to know the many; to expel what is harmful to the people and support what is appropriate for them. In the total collectivity, he preserves the One and possesses the same ends as heaven and earth: then he can know the calamities and good fortune of heaven and earth.

夫百言有本，千言有要，萬言有總。萬物之多，皆閲-空。夫非正-人也，孰能治此？罷彼必正人也，乃能操正以正奇，握一以知多，除民之所害，而持民之所宜。抱總凡守一，與天地同極，乃可以知天地之禍福。

(Yates 1997, 136; Chen 1995, 352)

Huang-Lao’s contribution to the concept of Nature

At the start of this chapter, I briefly recounted the primary arguments I offered in an earlier study for the need to revise current approaches to the Daoist concept of Nature. The result of overlooking the element of Dao’s mystery and the fact that Nature extends from the One to the many, and of ignoring the participation of nothingness, is that the fourfold of Dao, heaven, earth, and humanity ceases to be a unity, and this in turn gives rise to a stunted vision of Nature’s breadth and depth. Although classical Dao-ists such as Laozi and Zhuangzi offered a remarkable picture of the natural world, their vision lacks the descriptive detail of the silk texts. Furthermore, whereas the classical account of Nature seems fantastical at times, that of the silk texts is staid and uninspiring. The Huang-Lao author(s) merely provide information of the pragmatic sort, resulting in a text—perhaps a symptom of its time—that lacks the spiritual enrichment found in earlier works. Be that as it may, and even though the silk texts were never designed to be doctrinal works on Nature, they nevertheless contribute to our understanding in five ways.

First and foremost, the silk texts restructure the classical cosmology of Dao, non-being, and being into Dao, Yin and Yang, and the heavenly bodies of sun, moon, and stars. As mentioned earlier, Yin and Yang are absent in the *Daodejing* and they do not appear alongside Dao in the *Zhuangzi*, although their connection is intimated. That the silk texts establish a direct correlation between them is a notable feature:
Heaven and earth, Yin and Yang, the [four] seasons, the sun and moon, the planets and constellations and cloudy vapors, the wrigglers that walk and the crawlers that move, and the plants that grow roots, all take their life from the Dao but they do not decrease it. They all return to the Dao but they do not increase it.

天地陰陽，四時日月，星辰雲氣，蚑行蟯動，戴根之徒，皆取生，道弗為益少；皆反焉，道弗為益。

(Yates 1997, 175; Chen 1995, 474)

What the aforementioned passage and those cited earlier also indicate is a more intimate familiarity with the heavenly bodies than what is seen in earlier works. Once again, the Daodejing cannot be a source as it lacks the words “stars” (xìngchén 星辰) and “moon” (yuè 月); while it uses the word “sun” (rì 日), it is taken in the temporal sense of “day.” Turning to the Zhuangzi, the situation is reversed: not only do all three terms appear together, but they are also used in the same cosmological sense as those appearing in the silk texts, as the following passages illustrate:

Heaven and earth hold fast to their constant ways, the sun and moon to their brightness, the stars and planets to their ranks.

則天地固有常矣，日月固有明矣，星辰固有列矣。

(Watson 2013, 104; Guo 1997, 479)

Therefore the ghosts and spirits kept to their darkness, and the sun, moon, stars, and constellations marched in their orbits.

是故鬼神守其幽，日月星辰行其紀。

(Watson 2013, 110; Guo 1997, 504)

I will have heaven and earth for my coffin and coffin shell, the sun and moon for my pair of jade disks, the stars and constellations for my pearls and beads, and the ten thousand things for my parting gifts.

吾以天地為棺槨，以日月為連璧，星辰為珠璣，萬物為齎送。

(Watson 2013, 286; Guo 1997, 1063)

The author(s) of the silk texts, having surely read these quotations, took the Zhuangzi’s allegorical adoption of the heavenly bodies and repackaged them into a literal model of natural patterning for the purposes of statecraft. In other words, the Zhuangzi used the sun, moon, and stars as metaphors for the Dao’s ubiquity and embeddedness in the myriad things of the universe; however, the silk texts avoid language that might be misconstrued and so they concretise these other-worldly objects, linking their divine power directly to the moral virtue of the sage king. Seen from this cosmological perspective, Nature’s oneness comprises the two primal elements (Yin and Yang) and extends to the realm of the three heavenly bodies (sun, moon, and stars). These three levels of Nature are quite abstract and hard for ordinary people to comprehend; hence,
the silk texts introduce the seven models and eight regulators for clarification. This is the second notable contribution of the Huang-Lao definition of Nature.

The third aspect of the silk texts’ theory of Nature is its coinage of the “six handles.” The term bing 柄 appears only twice in the Zhuangzi and not at all in the Daodejing. The author(s) of the silk texts seem to have been inspired by the Heguanzi, particularly Chapter 5 (huanliu 環流) and its discussion of the upper three stars comprising the handle of the Big Dipper (doubing 斗柄) constellation. We might explain the logic of three stars becoming six handles in this way: humanity observes the stars in heaven from our abode on earth whereupon we discuss their nature and significance. The first two handles are thus the domain of the sage ruler, for he is the only person capable of expounding the profundity of the cosmos. The second pair of handles moves from discourses on the mysterious to their translation into maps of knowledge. With said maps in hand, the sage ruler studies the movements of these stars to predict their cycles and patterns of activity. With this knowledge, he can familiarise himself with the grand-scale details of the heavens in order to better appreciate the minute-scale events occurring on earth. With the third and final pair of handles, we can unite the macro and micro views of heaven and earth into a holistic system of change and transformation: holistic in that the adjustments things go through from their inception to their passing are continuous and concurrent manifestations of the Dao, which is why the silk texts ascribe them to the myriad things on earth.

It must be noted that said ascribing does not exclude heaven, for as we just saw, the cycles and patterns of heavenly activity bear directly upon that of earth. In this way, heaven and earth qua Nature exist in a symbiotic relationship whereby the Yin of one affects the Yang of the other, and vice-versa. Without the ability to utilise all six handles simultaneously, the ordering principle of the Dao will forever be beyond one’s grasp. Thus, when the sage ruler gets hold of the first two handles, he cannot but also get hold of the other four; six handles come together as One, and such oneness is none other than the mystery of the Dao.

To see the fourth advancement of the silk texts’ notion of Nature over that of classical Daoism, we can turn to the correlation between ordering principle and accordance. While classical Daoism frequently speaks of the models of heaven, earth, and Dao, the term “accordance” was used to describe a person’s behaviour, not in relation to these models, but in terms of whether it was in accordance with, or a violation of, social norms, one’s inborn nature, and so forth. The silk texts, however, do the opposite: the mark of a morally good person depends on whether or not they accord with the ordering principle of Nature. On this point, the silk texts might be understood as espousing a Confucian view of heaven, particularly as voiced in chapter 17 of the Xunzi 荀子, where people’s fortunes, both good and bad, are directly or indirectly subject to heaven’s will. Certainly, the silk texts’ language of accordance and disobedience contributes to this reading. However, to follow and resist the Dao is not to enact a moral claim but, rather, to be aligned with the notion of naturalness (ziran 自然). When things disobey the Dao, they are obeying artificial lines of knowledge and behaviour designed to manipulate and suppress natural models of living. To accord with Nature is to harmonise with it,
to partake in its oneness such that humanity no longer views itself as being beyond its processes. Huang-Lao recognised the operation of natural laws in the universe and argued that human laws must emulate them if we are to maintain a relationship of equanimity with our surroundings. To persist selfishly, however, is to lose the ordering principle of Nature in that either we no longer accommodate ourselves to the changes occurring in the world and the reciprocity of said changes, or we are unknowing participants in nearly all of them. And so, to embrace the ideas that to accord with Nature is to receive its nourishment, and that to work to undermine its inherent network of self-sustainability will result in its ruin, is to embrace the doctrines that are worked on by the sage and disseminated to the people of the world.

The fifth development of the silk texts concerns the sage. In a notable recasting of the sage’s role in the world, the silk texts hold him personally responsible for the well-being of state and people alike. Classical Daoism vehemently argues that the sage should abstain from politics and hide himself from those who would take advantage of his extraordinary knowledge of the world and its inhabitants. It would seem—again due to the influence of Confucianism, and perhaps Legalism—that the passivity of the classical Daoist sage is no longer sufficient for the author(s) of the silk texts, hence he was given a more active role in the world. Indeed, the Daoist sage has a vested interest in seeing the widespread adoption of his values. However, these values are not ethically or politically motivated but are rooted in a cosmological holism that abrogates human-centric approaches to living in the world. Owing to this, the sage of the silk texts follows that of the earlier classical works in adhering to the thread of the Dao that weaves itself through the temporal, spatial, and physical constitution of heaven, earth, and the myriad things therein.

Taking the aforementioned five points into consideration, what conclusions are we to draw about the Huang-Lao conceptualisation of Nature compared to that put forward by Laozi and Zhuangzi? Is the Huang-Lao call for humanity to be more actively invested in the natural world a step in the right or the wrong direction? By stripping Nature of its own mysteriousness, does Huang-Lao not run the risk of removing the only element beyond human manipulation? These are all legitimate questions, but we must bear in mind that Chinese philosophy does not grow in isolated bubbles; it builds upon and modifies the ideas and arguments of previous generations of thinkers. Thus, for Huang-Lao to establish its relevancy, it could not appropriate the words of classical figures unaltered; similarly, appropriating classical Daoist terminology would not excuse the author(s) of the silk texts for misrepresenting the original intention of these foundation texts.

What our study reveals is a body of work striving to satisfy two needs: the social–political and the spiritual–philosophical. The Legalist component of the texts, which we did not discuss, covers the former, while the Daoist component addresses the latter. One must ask, however, in what way does this two-pronged approach benefit Nature? We see numerology at play with the six handles, seven models, and eight regulators, but does this help us to better appreciate the natural phenomena of the world? In a way, yes. Knowing the regularities of the heavenly bodies, the interplay between Yin and Yang, and heaven and earth, and knowing that disrupting the balance and harmony between them
will inevitably result in disaster—how can such knowledge fail to educate the people and reform their ill-gotten ways? To lose the ordering principle of the Dao is the worst thing that can happen to humanity. For Huang-Lao, recognition of this entails several smaller ordering principles, as opposed to the classical period's singular, and some might say, ungraspable doctrine of Dao. Doing so not only offers a more palatable solution, it situates the operation of Nature on a level that does not make ordinary people feel insignificant and hopeless.

Holding the ruler personally responsible for the well-being of his state and its citizens, the Huang-Lao texts give Daoism an air of personalism it was previously reluctant to reveal. Whereas the classical texts found the idea that the fate of the world lies in the hands of the ruler abhorrent, the author(s) of the silk texts dress this ruler *qua* sage in Confucian garb, making him the world's teacher. This might prove beneficial to human society, but, surely, it would be of no real service to Nature. True, the sage has conjoined in oneness with the natural world and fully embodies the principles grounding its cycles and patterns; however, living in harmony with our surroundings is a collective activity and should not fall to the sage alone to guide the rest of us on how to rid our lives of material wantonness and intellectual blindness. On this point, the silk texts come up short compared to the classical argument that the sage never openly leads others but remains in the shadows, never purposely advises others but allows them to reach decisions on their terms.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the Huang-Lao silk texts succeed in continuing the classical Daoist vision of a natural world in which humanity is utterly at the mercy of heaven and earth. By laying bare the variegated components that comprise what we call Nature, the Huang-Lao author(s) were not purposively trying to de-naturalise it by associating its regulatory movements, and the repercussions of disrupting them, with human laws; rather, it appears to be a conscious effort to demonstrate the fact that human and animal societies are no different when seen from the collective perspective of the Dao. To repeat the line quoted at the beginning of this chapter, “in grasping the Dao one observes the world, sees the proper Dao, and abides by its ordering principle.” The proper Dao spoken of here is not the Dao of humanity but that of a universe in which humanity occupies only a tiny part.

Although the silk texts paint a highly detailed picture of the universe, its depth can be completely contained in a simple circle, one that is both literal and metaphorical. We have the wholeness of the One, the primal elements of Yin and Yang (two), the sun, moon, and stars (three), the four seasons, five regulators, six handles, seven models, and eight regulators. From the One, we proceed to eight, but eight takes us back to the One. Amongst these stages of transformation and growth, wherein lies humanity? The case could be made that we exist at the level of the five regulators and six handles; however, we are powerless to affect them in that the remaining levels belong to the domain of the Dao. In other words, our position in the cosmic hierarchy of things is smack-dab in the middle. There are events and processes preceding our
existence that we can do nothing about, and there are events and processes that occur after our existence that we are likewise unable to alter. The lesson to be learned, Huang-Lao would say, is no different from that of classical Daoism: embrace the ordering principle of the world and follow along with its changes. How can anyone argue with this?

Notes

1 See Chai 2016.
2 The silk texts, whose authorship is unknown, are estimated to have been written in the middle to late Warring States period (the owner of the tomb in which they were found, Li Cang 利蒼, died in 168 BCE). Their titles are as follows: Jingfa 經法 (Canonical Models), Jing 經 (The Canon), Cheng 稱 (Designators), and Daoyuan 道原 (Original Dao).
3 Given that this chapter is devoted to the silk texts’ concept of Nature, their historicity and connection to Legalism will not be discussed. The reader is encouraged to consult the following works: Chang and Yu 1998; Chen and Sung 2015; Chen 2008; Feng 2017; Peerenboom 1993; Tu 1979.
4 See Chai 2016, 259n2 for a list.

References

2 Eurodaoism and the environment

Mario Wenning

The renaissance of environmental Daoism

The classical Chinese tradition of Daoism has been a projection screen for environmentalists. Daoist-inspired wisdom serves as the imagined antidote to what is perceived as modernity’s tendency to exploit and destroy the natural habitat. The most recent wave of interest drawing from the Daoist classics Daodejing and Zhuangzi builds on a long trend of importing wisdom traditions from the East into the West. Despite emerging in significantly different historical conditions that preceded climate change and the mass extinction of species, Daoism has been reactivated as a proto-environmentalist school of thought with direct applications for fostering sustainable forms of inheriting, cultivating, and bequeathing planet earth. Together with other “Eastern” traditions, Daoism is thereby being dislocated from the East and reborn as part of an oriental renaissance in the West (Schwab 1984). Built upon the assumption of an organic cosmos of which humanity forms just one part, the Daoist conception of holism appears as a non-European resource or spiritual tool for the purpose of constructing an environmentally conscious counter-image to that of nature as merely the raw material for unlimited exploitation. The hope is that, if extended beyond the ivory tower of academe, an environmentally friendly, Neo-Daoist culture would learn to re-think—as well as to re-feel—the natural cosmos. It would cultivate a sense of timing by “knowing when to stop” (Daodejing 32) and thereby re-establish a harmonious mode of being in the world (Raphals 2001; Goldin 2005; D’Ambrosio 2013).

While the more recent revival of classical Chinese philosophy in China has been predominantly focused on Confucianism and Buddhism, and only to a lesser extent on Daoism, the situation is reversed in the Anglo-European world formally known as “the West.” Daoism’s continuing popularity is both a noteworthy and a peculiar phenomenon. Various versions of occidental “Daoisms” have been developed in academia and flourished in esoteric subcultures for at least the past hundred years, if not since the first wave of Eastern philosophies began to take hold of the western imagination during the sixteenth century. This “Eurodaoism”—to use a term originally coined by the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk—is a hybridised adaptation of Eastern wisdom that has

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Mario Wenning
gained a foothold as a counter-culture to what is perceived as the destructive consequences of Western modernity. Are the various versions and generations of “Eurodaoisms,” as Karl-Heinz Pohl (2003) has argued, a mere “toy of the Zeitgeist”? Does the reinvention of “foreign” values say more about the increasing nihilism of the West? Does the adoption and consumption of culturally exotic food for thought perhaps even continue the colonial exploitation of foreign cultures that is one of the darkest chapters of modern European history? To answer these provocative questions, it seems important first to clarify what kind of toy Daoism is and in what games it has played a significant role.

Ever since the Daoist fervour of the 1920s in Germany, thinkers including Buber, Keyserling, Heidegger, and Jung have interpreted Daoism as a corrective to the attempt to master nature. An exotic tradition of a utopian longing that reaches us from a distant past, Daoism presented an image of nature that was more than a mere resource to be used and exploited for human purposes. Ernst Bloch, the defender of the principle of hope with a liking for musicological metaphors, summarises the ancient attraction of a Daoist vision of nature free of human mastery: “An unsentimental world rhythm does not require a master. For Laozi, nature itself is such an old culture that it does not need to pretend to be a master” (Bloch 1985, 1449). More recently, Daoism has also entered the *Zeitgeist* of academe, where it echoes around the ivory tower as scholars of Chinese philosophy interpret Daoism from an environmental perspective (Girardot, Miller and Liu 2001; Nelson 2009; Goldin 2005). In their “philosophical translation” of the *Daodejing*, Hall and Ames attribute an “ecological sensibility” (Laozi 2003, 100) and “ecological consciousness” (101) to the authors of the Daoist classics. James Miller has praised Daoism as “China’s Green Religion” (2017) and emphasises its contributions to the quest for sustainable solutions to the environmental crisis.

But the reception of Daoist classics in the West has not been limited to academia. Daoism has become an integral part of the Western collective imagination after the Beatnick, Hippie, and New Age counter-culture movements during 1950s and 1960s in North America (Keruac, Snyder, Watts). Euro- and Americano-Daoism has served as the imagined complement to a one-sided form of predominantly Western rationality that has been perceived as patriarchal, as dominating forms of otherness, and, in consequence, as destroying internal and external nature. Understood in this way as a fundamentally aggressive attitude, Western rationality has been seen as the expression of a combination of science, technology, and the related heritage of a Christian conception of man as the master over nature. In addition to other new spiritual imports, Eurodaoism has filled the void left open by the vanishing of institutionalised religion; at the same time, along with the broad expansion of science and technology, Christianity and its lingering influence—persisting even under conditions of (post-)secularity—have taken the blame for the growing environmental crisis.

Already in 1967, Lynn White had identified the phalanx of science, technology, and a secularised Christian culture as being responsible for the ecological
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White's pessimistic diagnosis is that “more science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one” (1206). The first route, the discovery of a new religion, tries to avoid repeating the patriarchal assumption of a creator God, replacing it with matriarchal visions of the receptive, cosmic mother. It has not been at all uncommon for Daoism to be conjured up as a surrogate faith that, free of a Christian God of mastery, promises a soft planetary revolution of consciousness in harmony with mother earth. As one example of these religious or spiritual interpretations, Alan Watts—an Anglican theologian by training and the author of the influential *Dao: The Watercourse Way*—announces a Daoist solution to humanity’s problems that would give rise to a new age of Aquarius. Arthur Danto recollects in *Upper West-Side Buddhism* the fascination that Buddhism has had not only for him but for an entire generation of New York artists and intellectuals:

> By finding and following the Way, everything can be achieved without effort. That was the secret promise of politics, of art, of writing—a knowing effortlessness in which the object and the agent collaborate to achieve a mutual fulfillment. . . . This idea had great appeal for me; it was a way of being religious without adhering to an official religion.

(Danto 2004, 51)

Despite identifying Christian causes of the environmental crisis, Lynn White cautioned against abandoning one’s inherited culture—which in his case was Christianity—and against the simplistic import of mirror images from what he perceived as a pernicious form of Christianity from East Asia that, in his view, had motivated the Beatnick embrace of Zen Buddhism. White suggested that, from a Western perspective, an internal critique and reformulation of Christianity points in an important direction. He does not state explicitly what is objectionable about appropriating foreign traditions but seems to presuppose that internal cultural critique can be more effective than importing a new tradition that does not itself have deep roots within the host culture and may therefore lack the capacity to become widely accepted and politically efficacious.
In addition to questions concerning the attribution to Daoism of an environmental consciousness, the further matter of whether an ancient Chinese tradition is capable of addressing contemporary problems also warrants some attention. Obviously, the authors of the Daoist classics were not, and could not have been, aware of climate change and other pressing environmental crises. As Goldin has put, “We cannot ask thinkers of the past to help us with issues that they themselves never imagined.” But, he goes on to qualify this reservation, stating that “nevertheless, we may still be inspired by the Zhuangzian ideal of an enlightened person who lives in harmony with the external world” (Goldin 2005, 83). In what follows, I will explore how any such inspiration might be conceptualised so as to avoid falling short of the distinctively new challenges it must confront today.

Modernising Daoism

After introducing the various motivations and challenges that have given rise to the Eurodaoist discourse, I would like to suggest that a hybrid approach to Daoism has the possibility to be both meaningful and inspiring. This approach reconstructs Daoist insights, but, rather than adopting the tradition uncritically, Eurodaoism builds on the experiences of modernity. The rise of Eurodaoism and Americano-Daoism correlates with the general dissatisfaction with, and radical self-critique of, Western modernity.

Environmentalist movements in a “Western” context ranging from deep ecology to ecofeminism have often drawn on Daoist motifs (Clarke 2000, 81–89). Together, the conception of a spiritually infused cosmos and the emphasis on the interconnectedness of the human body and the world extend a platform from which to reconsider humanity’s place in the natural world. The recovery of Daoism has played a significant role in the imagination of alternative forms of ecologically-sensitive practices that align with a concern for sustainability. Contemporary Daoism draws on the matriarchal notion of the earth as giving birth to and nourishing life (yangshen). Passivity and receptivity are seen as alternatives to those forms of activism and instrumental domination that have contributed, albeit inadvertently, to the exploitation of the natural habitat. The evidence of proto-environmentalist motifs in the Daoist classics is indeed striking. Immersive forms of acting without acting (weiwuwei) promise a way to step outside or beyond the compulsive motor of a self-destructive modernity that is propelling the ceaseless degradation of the ecosphere. While other central dimensions of Daoism such as its cosmology or conception of sages (shengren) and enlightened human beings (zhiren) tend to be viewed as rarefied topics for sinology and erudite scholarship of one kind or another, Daoist environmental thinking is supposed to provide socially relevant ancient answers for the most pressing contemporary environmentalist problems.

No doubt part of its multifaceted appeal rests on the productive opacity of Daoist texts. The difficulty begins with translating and disambiguating central concepts. Even the translation of terms such as “nature” and “naturalness” is
anything but straightforward or obvious (with a list of possible candidates that includes ziran, tian, wanwu, hundun, xin, or even Dao). Paradoxically, this productive opacity allows for the reinterpretation and application of Daoist ideas to crisis tendencies such as global warming or the decrease of biodiversity, even though the classical Daoist authors of the Daodejing and the Zhuangzi were obviously, themselves, unaware of any such issues.

Such games of the imagination are not problematic in themselves. They signal the attempt to think beyond one’s given cultural repertoire. In contrast to radically new ideas and practices, which either have never existed or have existed only in the utopian imagination, the reflection on cultural alternatives that either (1) are considered to have already existed or (2) in fact continue to exist in reality (even if under different cultural conditions) only adds to the possibility of their re-creation or further cultivation. The politics of imagining progressive forms of environmental thought and practice in traditional Chinese culture is not at all unique to the West and its attempt to rethink humanity’s place in the world. It is far from uncommon for such intercultural visions to be premised on some simplistic conception of a binary East–West divide. Tu Weiming, to take one prominent example, blames Western modernity and its exclusive focus on instrumental rationality for the influx of destructive ideologies such as Marxism to China. Tu, who was born in Taiwan and spent much of his academic life at American Universities before becoming the director of Beijing University’s “Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies,” prognosticates the dawn of a new axial age and suggests that New Confucian humanism can provide the spiritual foundation of an “environmental civilisation.”

There are two objections one can level against Tu's critique. First, it is surprising that he singles out Confucianism given that historically, like Christianity, Confucianism has always emphasised the superiority of humans over nature, and second, one might ask why the descendants of Confucian civilisation have not fared particularly well from an environmental perspective. The term “environmental civilisation” has recently been picked up in political documents and speeches. While one finds references to ancient sources advocating a harmonious relationship to nature and a turn away from instrumental rationality, current policies in the People’s Republic of China reflect a rather different approach based on geo-engineering—as is demonstrated, for example, in the construction of the three gorges dam and the recent launching of artificial moons in urban areas to cut energy consumption and also to increase the hours of productivity. Interestingly, the East, and China in particular, is engaged in a process of an accelerated modernisation or “Westernisation,” while the “West” tries to think itself back into an imagined Eastern world in which the main task is to transition from the fetish of progress to post-growth societies. In terms of environmental consciousness, it is thus the West that strives to cultivate an ethos of ecological living in terms of a return to simplicity, while the East adopts a geoengineering approach that aims to solve the environmental crisis by moving forwards. In many respects, China is now one of the global leaders in the quest
for technical solutions in areas such as electromobility and renewable energies. The significance of this global reversal of cultural dynamics that are in part driven by the visualisation of and communication with an imagined other—or, rather, the import of imagined ideas of this imagined cultural other—is all but clear.

According to Tu, the conception of *tianrenheyi*—the view that humanity and heaven forms one harmonious whole—should once again replace the view that the cosmos is “a collection of senseless matters to be manipulated and abused” (Tu 2013, 2001): a view which, according to him, has been imported from the West. The goal of re-establishing a “sympathetic resonance” (Tu 2001, 246) between heaven, earth, and men is presented as an alternative to “modernization within an Enlightenment frame” (Tu 2001, 252). For Tu, the latter is equivalent to “secularization, rationalization, and development at any cost” (Tu 2001, 250). The alternative anthropocosmic vision of the harmonious unity of heaven and men is supposed to replace the pernicious, imported mindset of the Enlightenment.

As Heiner Roetz has argued, against contrastive views such as those propagated by Tu Weiming, the opposition of China and the West that we find being perpetuated on both sides of the aisle rests upon a myth.1 Rather than allowing for a differentiated engagement with the complexity of Chinese and European traditions, “the narrative of a binary East–West antagonism in terms of harmony vs. disharmony with nature appears to be much too simplistic on either side” (Roetz 2013, 26). With regard to classical Chinese traditions, binary conceptions threaten to engulf the complexity of competing conceptions of nature, including those that do not subscribe to the allegedly ubiquitous organic unity of humanity and nature. Confucianism, in particular, emphasises, in Li Zehou’s words, that “Human beings from start to finish are the lords of nature, and the human subject is always superior to the natural object.” The Daoists were critical of the Confucians and believed that the preaching of humanist values would lead to a narrow-minded nepotism, to hierarchy and, with regard to the environment, to a misguided anthropocentrism and speciesism. Indeed, they presented an early version of ideology critique against an overly moralistic approach, which they saw as a symptom of, rather than a solution to, a civilisational crisis. This is most clearly expressed in poem 38 of the *Daodejing*: “When the Way is lost, then there is Potency. When Potency is lost, then there is Humaneness. When Humaneness is lost, then there is Rightness. When Rightness is lost, then there is Ritual.” Applied to the discourse on environmental responsibility, this paradoxical passage suggests that this same discourse could be part of the expression of the environmental crisis rather than its solution.

On the Western side, the reductive view of an exclusively instrumental conception of rationality and the corresponding conception of nature ready to be exploited ignores the potential of pro-environmental movements in the European tradition, such as the Christian view of the world as a sacred creation represented, for example, by Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of ecologists,
who attempted to re-establish a community of species. One may also think of Rousseau’s notion of a return to nature and the romanticised attempt to realise Rousseau’s project by poetic means.

More problematically, the binary view of an East–West divide performs a theoretical self-contradiction. It presents classical traditions as an antidote to the malaise of instrumental modernity and thereby instrumentalises these very traditions. They are being rediscovered as “theoretical resources” in the battle against the pervasive tendency to treat the earth as a mere resource. Should the turn to classical traditions such as Daoism thus be dismissed? Rather than throwing out the Daoist baby with the bathwater, let me now turn to an alternative and largely forgotten episode of the renaissance of Daoism as environmentalism.

**Eurodaoism revisited**

Let us return to reflect on the project of Eurodaoism. This unusual conceptual marriage requires some explanation. The term “Eurodaoism” (*Eurotaoismus*) was introduced by the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk in 1989 (Sloterdijk 2020). A hybrid monster, this metaphor creates a certain sense of estrangement. Dao is supposed to be the core metaphor of classical Asian traditions. Why then the prefix “Euro”? It remains unclear what the Eurodao refers to: “The Eurodao that can be spoken off is not the real Eurodao,” Sloterdijk muses. It is the conceptual anomaly that invites the reader to imagine more than to think. However, the hybrid term also invites the reader to be critical of simplistic borrowings from other cultures. A self-identified outcast of the Frankfurt School tradition of critical theory who draws on philosophy, literature, and cultural studies alike, Sloterdijk performs an opening up or hybridisation of critical theory towards the East. In a provocative fashion, he argues that critical theory was not developed in Frankfurt, but, if at all, in Freiburg (Heidegger) and in ancient China (Laozi).

While the affinity between Heidegger and Daoism has been observed on numerous occasions, the potential for a hybrid construction of a critical Daoism of being-in-the-world has not been adequately acknowledged—mainly because critical theorists yet have to undergo the postcolonial turn but also because Sloterdijk’s knowledge of Eastern sources is highly selective. Sloterdijk’s Eurodaoist manifesto was written in the aftermath of the “warning catastrophe” of the Three Mile accident near Harrisburgh in 1979 and the nuclear disaster of April 1986 in Chernobyl. Eurodaoism points to an alternative mode of ecological thinking that draws on ancient Chinese traditions and reinterprets our being-in-the-world as a continuous arrival rather than a running-towards-death. The Eurodaoist acknowledges that acting human beings are essentially in the middle rather than in the beginning or end of what is going on. Revisiting Eurodaoism is thus highly relevant to our guiding task of rethinking the relationship between nature, time, and responsibility from an intercultural perspective.
The Eurodaoist imagination distinguishes itself from the unidirectional idealisations of Eastern wisdom as a mere toy. In a “philological flirtation” and a culture of “Asiamania,”

the West imagines itself to be in a sunken East and channels Asian antiquity as a master model of culture for life in the present, it is searching for possibilities of a future for itself within a foreign past. . . . Today’s Asianizing Renaissance similarly delves deep into old Eastern worlds of wisdom to create pathways towards the new, the unprecedented, the inaccessible for late modernity, whose corruption seems threatening, if not entirely incurable. For many, Asia is the cipher that offers shelter to a concept of the inconceivable.

(Sloterdijk 2020, 25)

Sloterdijk is critical of the practice of referring unreflectively to terms such as “Dao” or “wuwei” and employing them as “magic formulae” that promise more than the adopted theoretical framework can live up to. In spite of the danger of naively “importing holistic fast food” (Sloterdijk 2020, viii) from an imagined Eastern antiquity, Sloterdijk suggests that a different modality in the opening up of thought to the East might give rise to some alternative form of critical theory and a revised conception of modernity. There is a critical hermeneutics of creatively imagining the cultural other that should not be dismissed unconditionally and that could prove to be a valuable productive force. For an updated version of modern Daoism after the Enlightenment, a Daoism 2.0. as it were, only the critical path remains open. Unconditional pleas for nonaction (wuwei 無為), unlearning (wuzhi 無知), and a detachment from desires (wuyu 無欲) are hardly sufficient when it comes to responding to the ongoing planetary self-destruction in a responsible way. Rather than toying with Daoism as an easily available resource that offers solutions for the problems of global modernity, radical Eurodaoism consists in a reflective plea for a non-revolutionary halt to the unlimited mobilisation of the planet. This hybrid paradigm breaks with the rigid opposition of East and West, on the one hand, without drawing on abstract and supposedly global values, on the other. The idea of total revolution is replaced by local interventions. The rebirth of the spirit is conceptualised as an oriental renaissance of what is old, without thereby abandoning the new.

Eurodaoism as self-reflective and self-critical Daoism stands in the tradition of self-critical cosmopolitanism. Sloterdijk draws on the German term “Erdenhürg” (citizen of the earth, or earthling): a term that is usually reserved for newborn infants. It resonates with the prominence of the metaphor of the child and the virtue of childlikeness in the Daodejing. Eurodaoism reflects an East-West terrestrial ethos of always again arriving into the world, acknowledging that, as the German proverb has it, we are sitting in the same boat while the tides keep on rising (Sloterdijk 1993).

Sloterdijk was one of the first to acknowledge what critical theorists, following Hartmut Rosa, have diagnosed as an acceleration totalitarianism: modern
societies can only produce stability by perpetuating the increasingly destructive dynamics of acceleration (Rosa 2013). The acceleration of technologies, the accelerated movement of goods, information, and people, as well as the acceleration of human life-worlds and crises threatening humanity’s existence, are all necessary to sustain social cohesion. Acceleration harbours disastrous consequences not only for the ecosystem but also for our being in the world, which resembles the traditional Marxist conceptualisation of alienation in that the stresses created by accelerated life-worlds detach us from these life-worlds, thereby detaching us from other people and from our own potentials. Yet acceleration is not, in itself, the problem. Rather, it is heteroacceleration and heteromobility—acceleration that is experienced as being detached from and opposed to human beings’ natural modes of temporal flourishing—that creates a systemic pathology. In its typically enigmatic form, the *Daodejing* suggests that an increase in the speeding up of life’s processes might well be paid for by the loss of one’s standing in the world. In the words of Laozi (24): “He who stands on his tiptoes does not stand firm; he who rushes does not walk” (企者不立；跨者不行).

As I have argued elsewhere, the Daoist conception of life and cosmic rhythm offers a promising antidote to the modern dynamics of acceleration (Wenning 2018). A life in rhythm with the social and natural pulse of its environment denotes the achievement of self-, intersubjective-, and world-relationships. The turn to rhythm as a mode of temporal fulfilment avoids the Scylla of a decelerated standstill and the Charybdis of the attempt to beat acceleration by going ever faster. The classical Daoist texts emphasise the importance of living according to the naturally recurring seasons, and of not interfering by making the spring into the summer, the summer into the autumn, or engaging in some other untimely or counter-rhythmic imposition.

Sloterdijk reconstructs Daoism in terms of what he calls a “critique of political kinetics.” The theory of movement and transformation serves as the background for a critical theory of mobilisation. The imperative of modernity to establish and retain stability by way of increased acceleration transforms the world into an industrialised wasteland. The pathology of increasing acceleration and mobilisation at a standstill cannot be met by a call for another planetary revolution, even were any such revolution to come from the East. Modern politics is a steadily increased production of the illusion of unavoidable urgencies that are met with new and urgent responses. Such a shrinking of time can only be resisted by a two-dimensional approach: a critique of the logic of acceleration and a dynamic practice responsive to different temporal patterns that are prefigured by natural rhythms. Sloterdijk’s manifesto summarises the critical potential of Eurodaoism to counter the heteronomy of modern acceleration heteronomy with a call for an anti-revolutionary but nonetheless radical critique:

A critique of historical reason must therefore ultimately mean a critique of eschatological reason: that is, at the same time a critique of time-conceiving
thinking, aim-thinking, anticipatory reason which imagines the end states, dramaturgical reason which stages the world process in a final act as it is written—in short, critique of the history-making reason that leads to the mobilization of the planet.

(Sloterdijk 2020, 137)

Sloterdijk’s plea for such a thinking does not specify in what sense it will draw on Daoist insights and how they are to be transformed within modern thought processes.

After Nature

In what sense is critical or reflective Daoism different from uncritical forms of Daoism? First, a self-critique of Daoism has to lay bare the normative contradictions and blindspots inherent in Daoist conceptions of the relationship between the Dao, nature, and the place of humanity in relationship to them both. One corrective concerns the critique of instrumental reasoning that we find in the Daoist classics. That there are modes of instrumental reasoning in Daoism is something that tends to be overlooked. The promise that inactivity will inevitably lead to getting things done, for example, is itself an instrumental (albeit sophisticated) strategy. Rather than a critique of instrumental thinking, some versions of Daoism utilise a critique of strategic approaches to the world as the more successful tactic. To take one example, the promise of longevity and of the protections afforded to the Daoist sage from (what are often harmful) encounters with nature in the form of wild animals is a central preoccupation of classical Daoist literature. Among the primary concerns of the various protagonists of Daoist stories is their defence against the threats of nature, including premature aging and preying animals such as the giant magpie. A modern form of Daoism in the critical theory tradition would have to distinguish those aspects of Daoism that subvert such modes of instrumental thinking for the sake of mere self-preservation. It needs to expose critically the (all too frequently) covert instrumental promises that have been a driving force of some Western adaptations of Eastern insights.

A second critical corrective to traditional Daoism that I can only allude to here concerns the view that although nature, or at least healthy relationships to nature, have existed in the past they no longer exist now. Starting with the Daodejing, there are accounts of past forms of a blissful historical stage of little-developed small-scale communities where human beings flourished in rhythm with the Dao (Daodejing 80). For a modern form of Daoism, such primitivist myths of the fall are hardly convincing. They are built around one-sided idealisations of an allegedly harmonious civilisational stage without any credible explanation as to why the decay came about or whether the alleged harmony would be as desirable as it may seem.

Indeed, there is a utopian strain in Daoism that is devoted to what Sloterdijk calls a second form of passivity (Sloterdijk 2020, 4). On this account, the ethos
of naturalness, *ziran*, is not a return to our initial passivity with regard to the powers of nature and the fatedness of Dao, but rather a chosen and emerging naturalness—one that is achieved once one has moved through the stage of modernisation that fulfils the demand for deliberation and justification. In an analogous moment, Nietzsche speaks of a “naturification” (*Vernatürlichung*) (Nietzsche 1988, 529) of a person of culture. By extension, a modern Daoist has no need to embrace the hollow promise of a return to nature but, instead, pursues questions such as “what would cities have to be like were they to be grown by nature?” or “what would be required for a reflective life lived according to natural rhythms?” Such a reflective approach to nature and naturalness acknowledges that nature appears to moderns always as a pre-formed epi-nature. It has always already been mediated by culture.

Far from idealising civilisational processes, Daoism derives from the insight that nature is encountered as epi-nature: as the boat about to sink or the spaceship about to explode, in part because of human mobilisation strategies. The acknowledgement that for Daoists humanity is “after nature” distinguishes Daoism—or at least Eurodaoism—from the naïve conception of a life restored to an imagined state of harmony with nature, beyond deliberation and responsibility. Humanity is *after nature* in the double sense of lacking any possible access to nature as a pure, uncivilised, or unhumanised form, and of pursuing the retrieval of some lost form or mode of naturalness, even if within civilisation.

Radical Daoism has given up ties to any rescue device consisting of a planetary change of consciousness. Its claims to rationality endure in its insistence on ironic madness: “one would have to be a Taoist to endure the insight that even Taoism can’t help us anymore.” It is this joyful melancholia that is fore-shadowed in the Daoist teaching of always already having arrived too late and of being in a middle that foregoes closure (Wenning 2012). The founding myth of Laozi as having lived in the womb of his mother for eighty years before being born speaks to this notion of an ancient yet ever-nascent wisdom. It symbolises the aging that is constitutive of every feeling of being born. Every living being is being born too late on a planet whose population has reasons to panic. Modern human beings panic, because there is a realistic possibility that they will not be remembered and the ancient procession from generation to generation will draw to a close. Yet, they never experience this end, but only intermediary endings.

**Open questions**

At a diagnostic level, we may ask whether instrumental reasoning and acceleration are indeed the only, or even the major, contributors to the environmental crisis. Scholars have long diagnosed the beginnings of environmental deterioration in prehistoric times. What then might be the reason for the lack of harmony between humanity and nature? Incidentally, the Daoist text *Huainanzi* already mentions that population growth and a resulting shortage of resources triggered processes of deforestation for the purpose of increasing agricultural production.
So-called prehistoric people already played a role in bringing about irreversible changes to the environment by burning forests, increasing settlements, and contributing to the extinction of animal and plant life through fishing, hunting, and monocultures. No doubt modernity has contributed to the intensification and acceleration of these destructive processes, through population growth, the rise of consumer culture, and the increase of ever more destructive technologies, but it is not the sole or even the main originator. To blame modernity, let alone “Western modernity,” is to give easy answers to complex problems.

This is not to suggest that the ideas of classical wisdom traditions such as Daoism are without value when confronting the environmental crisis. However, the deeper point to be retrieved from the coexistence of seemingly nature-friendly philosophical beliefs and an objective or real-world environmental crisis is that what people say and think about nature might not correspond to the way in which they act within and towards nature. Environmentalism has often been the ideological superstructure of moderately well-off people in developed countries who, statistically speaking, also happen to have had the largest ecological footprint in recent centuries. There is a need for an environmentalism for and of the poor (Martinez-Alier 2004). We have not yet discovered meaningful ways to translate existing knowledge into sustainable forms of practice for large strata of the global population. A form of ideology critique would be needed to expose the mismatch between theory and practice. The critique of value discourse one finds in the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* would be a good starting point for such a project. The authors of these classical Daoist texts warn against the insufficiency of delivering conscience pleasing but otherwise ineffective appeals to responsibility in the name of cultivation and moral progress. The most perceptive critique of efforts to help nature at the expense of nature is, perhaps, presented in the story of *hundun* in the *Zhuangzi* (see also Goldin 2005). *Hundun* is the chaotic ground of the universe, sometimes also translated as nature:

The emperor of the southern sea was called Swoosh. The emperor of the northern sea was called Oblivion. The emperor of the middle was called Chaos. Swoosh and Oblivion would sometimes meet in the territory of Chaos, who always attended to them quite well. They decided to repay Chaos for his virtue. “All men have seven holes in them, by means of which they see, hear, eat, and breathe,” they said. “But this one alone has none. Let’s drill him some.” So each day they drilled another hole. After seven days, Chaos was dead.

*(Zhuangzi 2009, 7, 15)*

Despite their best intentions, Lickety and Split killed chaos/nature, the host that had treated them so well. The story does not present a viable account of how one should treat the natural environment responsibly, but a negative depiction of how at least some attempts to do so could lead to devastating consequences and destroy the very thing they seek to save. “One would have to be a Taoist to endure the insight that even Taoism can’t help us anymore.”
Notes

1 Roetz writes “We have a much more differentiated and complicated constellation, then, with regard to the causes and solutions of the ecological crisis, than the East vs. West dichotomy suggests. There is no simple ‘Eastern’ message on how to overcome the problems that mankind is facing. How to keep the price of civilisation payable is a challenge to all cultures. Wherever you go, man, the ‘stray of evolution,’ has yet to find the right measure” (Roetz 2013, 72). Concerning the discrepancy between environmental attitudes and contradictory practices, see also Tuen, I-fu 1968; Wu 1972 critically engages with the methodological assumptions behind the Western search for Chinese wisdom.

2 Sloterdijk only quotes occasionally from the Daodejing and does not draw on the Zhuangzi or other Daoist texts.

3 The term “warning catastrophe” goes back to contributions to ecological debates by Rudolf Bahro und Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker. It designates a catastrophe that will translate the existing knowledge of future dangers into the belief that future dangers will in fact occur unless relevant precautions are taken. The occurrence of an educative warning catastrophe thus ideally brings about the transition from conscious awareness of looming disaster to political action that prevents the disaster from occurring.

4 Sigurdsson 2021 distinguishes adaptive from resisting approaches to acceleration. On his account, a conception of ritual practice is strengthened by a Neo-Daoist or “dark learning” (xuanxue 玄學) approach to ritual. Daoists such as He Yan 何晏 and Wang Bi 王弼 emphasise spontaneity and naturalness (ziran 自然) while resisting dogmatic interpretation of fixed sets of virtues and rituals that came to dominate the Confucian tradition. Sigurdsson proposes to critically rethink ritual performance in a modern age characterised by acceleration.

References


3 Heidegger’s Dao and the sources of critique

Matthias Fritsch

Introductory remarks

I begin by noting that I am not a scholar of Daoism and do not read the fascinating source texts (the Daodejing and Zhuangzi) in the original. Rather, I am looking at Daoism from Heidegger’s perspective, seeing what use he makes of “way” and “dao” in reference to the critical understanding of what he calls technology. My goal is not to contribute to our understanding of Daoism; nor am I doing what I think is standard work in “comparative philosophy” in the sense that it customarily seeks to establish lines of “influence” or to present resonances, resemblances, parallels, and analogies, in this case between Heidegger and Daoism. My goal is more focused: I am interested in the conceptual work carried out for Heidegger by the notion of dao, of way in the sense of the non-enduring “mother of heaven and earth” (DDJ25, Kim 2012, 231; see also Ames and Hall 2003, 210), in accounting for the normative source of critique and, in particular, the critique of technological modernity.

There is a recent burgeoning of comparative-philosophical scholarship on Heidegger and Daoism. This literature has brought to light the frequency and significance of Heidegger’s references to Daoism over the course of his career. Many scholars now consider some of Heidegger’s key ideas and texts from 1944 to 1957 to carry out a dialogue—largely implicit, but at times explicit—with East Asian thought, including the two foundational texts of Daoism, the Daodejing and the Zhuangzi (Mehta 1967; Stambaugh 1987; Pöggeler 1987; Parkes 1987, 2012; Jung 1987; May 2005; Nelson 2004, 2014, 2019; Ma 2006, 2015; Zhang 2009; Storey 2012; Choong-Su 2017; Davis 2020; Huntington 2020), prompting some to go so far as to speak of a “Daoist turn” in his work (Nelson 2019). A brief overview can serve as an introduction to my discussion.

Heidegger’s conversations with East Asian texts and scholars had been underway since the early 1920s, yet some claim they had waned in the mid-1930s—the time during which Heidegger associated his philosophy with his unorthodox version of National Socialism. As Bret Davis points out (Davis 2020), while Heidegger seems to have rejected biological racism, his views were reprehensibly anti-Semitic and ethnocentric, as in his 1936 concern with “the protection of the European peoples from the Asiatic” (Heidegger 1993, 31). In

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the late 1930s, however, after his fall-out with the Nazi regime, his interest in East Asian philosophy was to resurface, perhaps as a result of contact with the Kyoto School philosopher Keiji Nishitani, who studied in Freiburg between 1937 and 1939, and whom Heidegger invited to his home at the weekends to teach him about Zen (Davis 2020, 163). In his 1953 Science and Reflection, Heidegger argues that to understand the contemporary age dominated by science and technology, we must return to the Greeks that we might better prepare for “the inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world” (GA7, 41/QCT 158).

When it comes to Daoism, Heidegger seems to have been particularly interested in the notion of *wuwei*, often translated as “non-doing” or “non-coercive activity,” and *dao*, today usually rendered as “way.” As Davis puts it,

Daoism’s critique of willful artifice and call for a return to natural and non-coercive action (*wuwei 無為*) accord with Heidegger’s critique of the “will” (*Wille*) and his alternative comportment of “releasement” (*Gelassenheit*) introduced in Country Path Conversations [1944–45]. Moreover, Heidegger’s notion of “path” or “way” (*Weg* . . . clearly reverberates with the central Daoist notion of *dao 道*.

(Davis 2020, 162)

At the conclusion of the Conversations, Heidegger cites a passage from the *Zhuangzi* on “the use of the useless” (*wuyong zhi weiyong*), rendered by Heidegger as *die Notwendigkeit des Unnötigen* (the necessity of the unnecessary) (GA77, 239; see also 220, 234, 237–38), where Heidegger claimed elsewhere that the “useless” or “the unnecessary” “is what I mean by ‘Being.’” (Heidegger 2008, 187, cited in Davis 2020, 167; see also Van Brakel 2014).

A year after composing Country Path Conversations, Heidegger endeavoured to co-translate the *Daodejing* (Hsiao 1987). Some scholars even suggest that Heidegger’s central rewriting of being as the fourfold (*das Geviert*)—a central name in his later work for the unconcealment that allows things to appear at all—rests on an interpretation of certain passages from the *Daodejing* (Cheng 2014). For instance, DDJ 25 reads “Way-making is grand/The heavens (*tian*) are grand/The earth is grand/And the king is also grand./Within our territories/There are four ‘grandees’/And the king occupies one of them./Human beings emulate the earth/The earth emulates the heavens/The heavens emulate way-making/And way-making emulates what is spontaneously so (*ziran*)” (DDJ 25; Ames and Hall 2003, 115). Heidegger writes in “The Thing”—an essay that some (May 2005) have suggested carries out a veiled conversation with Daoism and that ends by referring to “way” (GA7, 187/PLT 184): “Earth and sky, divinities and mortals being at one with one another of their own accord belong together by way of the simpleness of the united fourfold” (GA7, 180 /PLT 177). Keeping three of the four, Heidegger would have interpreted *dao* as divinities, or simply replaced it.

The crucial status of the notion of “way”—the focus of my remarks here—for Heidegger’s later thought can hardly be overestimated. Three of Heidegger’s
post-war book titles (and many more titles of essays and lectures beginning in 1937 and extending to 1967) refer to the notion of “way” (Weg), the notion that most prominently, scholars argue, carries out the dialogue with Daoist classics. The English titles do not always connote this, so it may be useful to list them briefly here:

- Holzwege (Off the Beaten Track, collecting essays 1935–46, published 1950)
- Wegmarken (Pathmarks, collecting essays 1919–1961, first published in German 1967, with Heidegger’s foreword elaborating the title)

- Also, as his motto for the Gesamtausgabe (Collected Works), Heidegger chose “ways, not works” (Wege, nicht Werke; GA1, 437–38)

We find explicit references to dao/way in The Thing as well as in Identity and Difference (GA 11, 45/36), where Heidegger claims that dao, like logos, is a “guiding word” that cannot be translated (see Polt 2015). Another reference can be found in the long essay “The Nature of Language”, which I will take as my primary point of reference here. I begin by citing my translation of a longer passage from this text, as it seems to me to encapsulate crucial elements of the notion of way/dao and its relation to the source of normativity. I add a few parenthetical remarks to help prepare my interpretation in the following:

For mindful thinking, the way belongs to that which we call the region [die Gegend]. To give a hint, as that which counters [das Gegnende] the region is the clearing that sets free [freigegebende Lichtung], a clearing in which that which comes to light reaches the open [das Freie] at the same as that which conceals itself. The freeing and sheltering character of this region lies in this way-making movement [Be-wëgung; NB Heidegger’s hyphen and the trema, presumably added to flag the etymological relation to Weg, which I seek to capture by adding “way-making” as an adjective], which yields those ways that belong to the region. Thought sufficiently, the way is that by which we reach—which lets us reach—what reaches out for us by summoning us [was uns gelangen lässt, und zwar in das, was nach uns langt, indem es uns be-langt; belangen also means “to hold responsible or liable,” even “to sue or prosecute”].

The region is first a region in that it engenders ways. The region moves in ways [Sie be-wëgt, makes ways]. We hear the word “movement” [Bewëgung] in the sense of: first of all giving and founding ways . . . [By contrast to “moving” in the sense of change of place], “moving” [Be-wëgen] here means: to endow the region with ways.

The word “way” probably is a primordial word [Unwort] of language that addresses itself [promises itself: sich zuspricht] to the mindful human being [dem sinnenden Menschen]. The guiding word in the poetic thinking of Laozi is Dao and “properly” means way . . . The Dao could be the way
that moves everything [der alles be-wégende Wég] . . . the way that draws everything onto its path. All is way.

But of the way which is to lead us to the source of this possibility [the possibility of undergoing an experience with language], it was said that it leads us only to where we already are. . . . The way allows us to reach what summons us [was uns be-langt, so what holds us responsible], in that domain where we are already staying. Why then, one may ask, still find a way to it? Answer: because where we already are, we are in such a way that at the same time we are not there, insofar as we ourselves have not yet expressly [or properly] reached [noch nicht eigens erlangt] that which summons our being [was unser Wesen be-langt].

(GA 12, 186–87; OWL 91–92; translation significantly modified).

As we can see in this passage, the movement of the way concerns us, summons us, and holds us responsible. According to Heidegger, as a primordial word of language, dao or way addresses and promises itself to us as language itself speaking to the human being. In contrast to a human being initiating the use of language as an instrument of communication, the idea of language's address or promise (Zusage or Zuspruch) finds its most condensed formulation in Heidegger's famous claim, in On the way to language, that “language speaks” (GA12, 11–13, 16–17, 26–30, 243–44/PLT 188–91, 194–95, 203–7, OWL 111, 134.) It is this idea in the cited passage that I want to explicate as the source of normative critique. What does dao have to do with responsibility, with normativity, and thus with the possibility of critique? I will try to address this by treading perhaps more familiar ground, discussing the source of normativity first in the call of conscience in Heidegger’s Being and Time and then in what Heidegger calls the address (Zuspruch or Zusage) of language and the claim (Anspruch) of being.

**Being and time on the source of normativity**

According to Being and Time, the being of Dasein is characterised by Sorge, or the care for its being, not merely in the sense of survival but in the sense of questioning its being and the meaning thereof. For Heidegger, as various commentators have determined, Dasein cares for and is committed to its being because, otherwise, not even instrumental attitudes can work for it, for they presuppose that Dasein is trying, precisely, to be something: e.g., a carpenter (see Haugeland 1998, 2000; Crowell 2013, 28–29, and his comparison with Korsgaard 1996). Care results from Dasein finding itself thrown in a world in which it cannot but care for or take care of things (Besorgen) and others (Fürsorge). To determine Dasein as being-in-the-world is to say that Dasein’s understanding and activities are inseparable from the affordances of the world into which it is thrown. That is why the world is not a container “in” which human beings happen to be placed as if they could be what they are outside a world to which they do not, in their very being, belong.
Heidegger determines care as “being-ahead of itself (in the world) . . . in already-being-in . . . as being-next-to (and being-with-others)” (GA2, 260/196; §41). In projecting “itself” upon possibilities provided by a preceding world, Dasein is always outside and ahead of itself; for this reason, to speak of “self-care” is a “tautology” for Heidegger (GA2, 256/192; §41). As being-ahead of and transcending itself towards world, Dasein is always in the mode of coming back to itself from its taking care of things and others, and, thereby, from its being-thrown into a pre-comprehended, projectively understood world. (It would also be coming back from its “being-from-others,” as Lisa Guenther’s felicitous phrase, building on Cavarero, put it; Guenther 2008.) Thrown into the world, Dasein’s projects, no matter how innovative and ownmost, draw upon a background that is always already disclosed to it in a pre-ontological understanding—a disclosure that, as Heidegger will stress later, is linguistically structured.

That is why we can say—though Heidegger will stress this more in his later work—that Dasein’s projects of action, speaking, and understanding can be understood as responses to a given world into which we are born, and with and against which we continue to be, to act, and to speak. Dasein is thus “stretched out” (erstreckt) between thrownness and project (Geworfenheit and Entwurf), which means between world and self, between birth and death, and also between different generations indicated in this twofold temporal-historical reference. When we speak of Dasein “itself” or just a “self,” then, we must be taken to mean an ongoing movement that responds to its non-coincidence by seeking to return to itself. It is this movement of attempted return that Heidegger calls “care.” Care is the being of Dasein as a being that cannot but care for itself precisely because it is not one with itself from the beginning. Care consists of four interplaying elements—thrownness (Befindlichkeit), projective understanding (Verstehen), discourse (Rede), and falling (Verfallen; see §44)—of which we can see the incompletable movement between thrownness and project, as key to the source of normativity. Thrown into a world that is not of its choosing, this world nonetheless provides the possibilities that Dasein—as this very being-in-the-world—projects as its own, thereby re-launching a self that cannot ever be settled (Raffoul 2010). Given its non-coincidence with itself, Dasein must seek to return to a relaunched “itself” that consists in exposing itself to things and others in the world. Dasein has to be on the move.

The relation between Dasein and the Da or world into which it is thrown, and from which its projects and possibilities take off, is thus one of differential belonging. World is no exterior container in which Dasein is placed. Rather, the world in being-in-the-world, the very Da in Da-sein, is difference, and it is this difference or non-coincidence that gives rise to Dasein’s need to be on the move, mobile (bewegt), put on its way (Weg) towards the locality where it is and the world to which it belongs.

That is why Being and Time already (though rarely) speaks of the “characteristic on-the-move-ness of thrownness” [or, even more literally, the “character of on-the-way-ness”: Bewegtheitscharakter der Geworfenheit] (GA2, 237; translated
by Macquarie and Robinson as “thrownness has . . . the character of movement,” 223, §38). In Being and Time, this “being-on-the-move” (mobility, movedness: Bewegtheit, see also GA2, 461, §68) is ascribed to human existence, and it is associated with falling and inauthenticity: thrown into the world, Dasein picks up its movement in losing itself in the “turbulence” of the world (see §38), stretched out between birth and death as well as between the world and its authentic, “null” self. Dasein must be on the move because it is not one. Thus, normativity emerges with difference and, as Being and Time stresses, with nullity (see esp. §58).

**Human existence as “being-on-the-way”**

Later in his work, Heidegger found it misleading to make human existence the starting point for the ontological inquiry into being. Instead, he emphasized the anteriority of being and its calling. Along with this change came a transformation of responsibility from the priority of Dasein’s solicitous interrogation (sorgendes Fragen) of being to affirming being and its address. In the Country Path Conversations, for instance, Heidegger suggests that questioning depends on a prior responding that is not itself a response to a question. In approaching the question of being as a question from the very outset, as in Being and Time, the questioner “does not truly know to where he is under way” [unterwegs]: she would already have lost her way (GA77, 24/CPC 15). To find the way to the question of being demands, it seems, that one allows oneself to be put on the way by being. With the later Heidegger, post-Being and Time, Dasein is not first of all questioning being but addressed by being and its “granting saying” (Zusage) in language—a language that now precedes Dasein to call it into being. In the context of his famous “originary ethics” (ursprüngliche Ethik, in Letter on Humanism, published in Wegmarken, GA9, 356/PM 271), Heidegger argues that being gives a task to Dasein: being demands of Dasein an originary, non-voluntary affirmation of being as well as of language as the “house of being” (GA9, 313, 333, 358–59/PM 239, 254, 274). He calls this demand the claim (Anspruch; GA9, 313, 319, 358–63/PM 239, 243, 272–75), the comforting word or promise (Zuspruch; GA12, 170, 185/OWL 76, 90; see also GA12, 67, 75; GA7, 150, 164—translated at PLT 146 as “primal call,” then at PLT 159 as “summons”), the promise or command, bid or behest (Geheiss, Verheissung; GA12, 23, 26–30/PLT 204, 203–7, GA9, 360/PM 273, where “Geheiss” is translated as “gathered call”; see esp. also the essay “On the Question of Being” in GA9, 408, 424), the vow, or granting saying of being (Zusage; GA12, 165–66, 169–70, 174/OWL 71, 76, 79–80; see also translators note, OWL 78).

And indeed, this is what “The Nature of Language”—the text in which we find the reference to Laozi cited earlier—tries, above all, to show. This extended essay begins by formulating its goal as “undergoing an experience with language” (see Kovacs 2011); towards the end of the essay, as we saw in the long passage cited earlier, this goal becomes equivalent to finding the
way within being’s region. We take the human being to speak, but in fact, we
speak only by responding to the prior speaking of language itself—a speaking
that claims and addresses us (Anspruch). We respond to the opening address
and comforting word of language (Zuspruch), or the granting saying (Zusage)
of being. If language is the “house of being” (GA9, 313/PM 239)—that is, if
the disclosure or “worlding” of the world is structured linguistically from the
beginning—then it is language itself that speaks, however counterintuitive that
may sound. In “The Nature of Language,” Heidegger links this claim once
more with corresponding, with Ent sprechen: “Language speaks. The human
being speaks to the extent he [sic] corresponds [or speaks back] to language.
This corresponding is listening. It hears because it belongs to the promise of
stillness.” [Die Sprache spricht. Der Mensch spricht, insofern er der Sprache entspricht.
Das Ent sprechen ist Hören. Es hört, insofern es dem Geheiß der Stille gehört.] (GA12,
30/PLT 207, translation modified).

The human being belongs to a linguistically pre-structured world first of all
by listening to its call. And indeed, this sense of elemental belonging—of being
thrown into a preceding-exceeding element beyond our control—as the source
of normativity is perhaps most accessible in the aspect of language, although
it is not limited to language. The play on Sprache and Entsprechen (language
and corresponding) is matched by the play on Hören and Zugehören (listening
and belonging, see also Letter, GA9, 316/PM 241). We can pose questions,
even questions regarding language itself, only by using and thus already mov-
ing within language. In this sense, the affirmative response to, or correspond-
ing with, language, would be prior to speaking and to questioning language.
Similarly, we can ask after being only by already dwelling within it. As we will
see, to find our way to being depends upon the way-making of being.

But of course, despite the “priority” we just asserted, language does not
speak without speakers, and being does not address without addressees. After
all, if being is the fourfold, the mortals are one of its four next to earth, sky, and
divinities.5 I would say that the crucial idea is still, as in Being and Time, that it is
the very difference, the ek-sistence of being, that issues the call.6 Accordingly,
humans can be what they are only in this relation to an apparent outside—
being, the world, the fourfold—that is in fact their very “essence,” their most
“interior.” The opposition of inside-outside thus loses its pertinence along with
the subject–object dyad. The human being “ek-sists” and “stands out into” the
world.7 Humans are not just given but must be (set) on the move to be what they
are in the process of becoming.

Along these lines, we should note the difference of accent between the
earlier and the later formulations of movement and way. The later Heidegger
finds Being and Time’s being-on-the-way-ness of Dasein misleading, for it
suggests that, while Dasein is thrown into a world that is not of its making,
world is still first and foremost the result of Dasein’s projection: the human
being projects a horizon of intelligibility within or against which alone enti-
ties show up. In the Country Path Conversations (from the mid–1940s), Hei-
degger seems to see his own earlier notion of the projected horizon as too
continuous with the idea of the transcendental horizon that is so prevalent in modern philosophy, especially in Kant. (And indeed, \textit{Being and Time} has often been seen as a very Kantian book, e.g., by Gadamer. In the \textit{Conversations}, Heidegger names as privileged examples of the modern horizon Leibniz’s monad.\textsuperscript{8} Kant’s transcendental subjectivity, and Nietzsche’s perspectivism, all of which would be subjectivistically reformulating the Platonic forms, according to which entities appear in light of the “aspect” or \textit{idea}; GA77, 97–98/CPC 63.) In the 1927 \textit{Basic Problems of Phenomenology}, Heidegger recalls his claim in \textit{Being and Time} that time is the “transcendental horizon of the question of being” and repeats that fundamental ontology is “transcendental philosophy,” but stresses that here, “transcendental” is not to be understood in a Kantian sense without further ado (GA 24, 460–61/BPP 323–24). In the Nietzsche lectures of the late 1930s, he appears to criticise \textit{Being and Time} as too “hermeneutic-transcendental” in contrast to thinking in terms of the history of being (GA6.2, 415).\textsuperscript{9}

In the \textit{Conversations}, Heidegger stresses that the transcendental horizon overlooks, not the fact that the things encountered in the horizon are not of human making, but the fact that the horizon itself is not just a human projection. The transcendental idea overlooks that which permits the horizon to be horizon in the first place, which the “wise man” in the first country-path conversation calls “the open” (GA77, 112/CPC 72). Accordingly, the transcendental horizon is only that one side of the open that is turned towards us but is not the open itself. The open is further characterised as the region (\textit{die Gegend}) that comes towards us (\textit{entgegen-kommt}). Running together “coming toward us” and “region,” Heidegger then names this open region—that comes not from us but towards us—\textit{das Gegnet}, a neologism that literally means “that which encounters us” but is translated by Davis as “open-region” (GA77, 114/ CPC 73). As the “region of all regions,” the open is the “whiling expanse” [\textit{die verweilende Weite}]: that is, the time-space in which things can come to presence for a while, interrelated with other things and the whiling expanse but resting within themselves.

Region here does not name something that surrounds the human being at the centre and is thus not the “environment.” It comes from elsewhere and, as “the other side” of our horizonal thinking, \textit{withdraws} from us in the very coming towards us. Thus, when before it was Dasein that was “on the move” or “on the way,” we can now say that it is the open expanse, the region, that is characterised by an ontological movement as putting on the way: it goes or comes towards (\textit{entgegen gehen}) the human being while going or slipping away (\textit{entgehen}). Being “itself” is a movement (\textit{Be-weg-ung}, literally, a way-ing or way-making) that is instigated by at least three differences:

\begin{enumerate}
\item The difference between coming and going, that is, putting forth (the thing) and withdrawing (being as an interplay of opening and closing, being and nothingness, presence and absence, or what in our aforementioned passage is called the “freeing and sheltering character of the region” that lies in the
“way-making movement,” the movement that makes ways in the region—
un-concealment or disclosure).

(2) The difference between the four of the fourfold (earth and sky, mortals
and the divine messengers), whose movement Heidegger characterises as a
“mirror-play” (GA7, 181–83/PLT 177–78).

(3) The difference between the fourfold itself and the thing it holds forth, thus
the ontico-ontological difference between being and entities, and there-
fore, between foregrounded thing and backgrounded world (or horizon
and its other side).

If Dasein belongs to being, and being is neither comforting nor stable but
differentially way-making movement, then the hold of this belonging lies pre-
cisely in the putting-on-the-way and being-on-the-move.

The dao leads to where we already are

It is this movement or way-making of being that Heidegger addresses in the
passage on the Daodejing (cited earlier from On the way to language). If you recall,
that passage begins by introducing the clearing of being as “the region” [die Gegend]
to which the way belongs, and whose “freeing and sheltering” (i.e.,
un-concealing and concealing) lie in a “way-making movement” [Be-wëgung].
The region, then, is not static but dynamic: it “counters” [das Gegenende] by
coming toward, and its clearing of a time-space in which entities can appear
is called a movement, translated by P. Hertz as a “way-making movement” to
render explicit the link in German between “Weg” (way) and “Bewegung”
(movement). For the same reason, presumably, Heidegger inserts a hyphen and
adds a trema on the “e”: Be-wëgung.

We should note here that Roger Ames and David Hall, the eminent scholars
of Chinese philosophy, also translate dao as “way-making” in their “philosophi-
cal translation” of the Daodejing.10 Making ways responds to dao as “the discern-
ible rhythm and regularity of the world as it unfolds around and through us”
(Ames and Hall 2003, 54). As in Heidegger’s account of Weg, Ames and Hall
think that the sense of dao as an already-laid pathway is derived from a more
originary “process” meaning (116) that names “the sea of our lived experience
as human beings, with its cadence, continuities, and disjunctions” and that
is subject to “ineluctable force of circumstances” (114). As such, this process
meaning is resistant to the familiar dichotomies of subject versus object, active
versus passive, or determined versus undetermined (114). While human beings
belong to the rhythm of the world, the philosophical meaning of dao names an
“unfolding process” (115) that, as “underdetermined” and thus pregnant with
opportunity, invites humans to make or find their way (116). As Heidegger
would put it, human way-making responds to the ways of being, where neither
exists without the other.

Despite the suggestion of a path already mapped out between given points or
a mere change of place, against which Heidegger warns explicitly in the long
passage cited earlier from “The Nature of Language,” we notice the appeal of the notion of way for what Heidegger wishes to think here.

(1) First, a way (Weg) implies movement (Bewegung), as Heidegger’s German highlights, and travelling along the way may re-make it, ongoingly, and each time differently.

(2) Further, a way is an inscription that marks out, but only in a context, a region to which it belongs. Unlike a boundary line, which suggests a static demarcation, its marking does not simply divide and encircle but adumbrates a dynamic movement that makes the region first of all a region: no way without a region, but also, no region without ways. (As we learned a moment ago, no speaker without preceding language, but also no language without speaker, no address of language without addressee.)

(3) Third, the notion of way permits a differential and dynamic thought of inhabiting and of spatial belonging. By travelling along a path, one comes to belong to the region but only by being moved and moving. The movements of experience and the ways of life respond to affordances in the region to which they belong. Elsewhere, Heidegger draws on the stream or river to think about the interplay of movement and belonging. In his 1942 Hölderlin lectures The Ister, the river is discussed as being both a place of dwelling and a meandering movement that Heidegger calls “The locality of journeying and the journeying of locality” [Die Ortschaft der Wanderschaft und die Wanderschaft der Ortschaft] (GA 53, the title of para. 7/HHI 33). Similarly, the notion of way combines inhabiting and thus belonging to a region, as well as mobile displacement, that is, being emplaced and displaced at the same time, in the same place. The Hölderlin lectures also speak of “becoming homely in being unhomely” or “uncanny” [das Heimischwerden im Unheimischsein] (GA53, the title of para. 20/HHI 115), where the unhomely or uncanny recall the nullity of Being and Time and the withdrawal of being, the Versagen (failure, misfire, breakdown, withholding, literally a mis-saying) of the Sage or granting saying of language (GA12, 173, 210ff./OWL 81, 142ff.). Hence, Heidegger’s claim in “The Nature of Language,” reminiscent as it is of Being and Time’s discussion of the hermeneutic circle, that we need to find the way to where we already are, again and again.11

(4) Finally, if the ways are not pre-given and carved in stone, but always to be made anew and without ever starting de novo (for there is no way without region), then ways do not guarantee arrival at a destination. Despite the talk of belonging, wandering is always to some extent a way-making without an external standard of success, and so it remains in errancy (beirrt, Irrweg: GA7, 187/PLT 184). If the way does not lead to a destination, it is because we are already in the region where the way leads. We can belong to the region only in difference from it, and this difference calls on us to find the way in the region.
As the *Daodejing* claims (as it seems to me) that *dao*—as the source of the difference between heaven and earth—gives rise to the manifold of particulars (DDJ25, Kim 2012, 231; see also Ames and Hall 2003, 210–12), Heidegger thus stresses the role of differences in the ontological mobility, the play of sky and earth, human and divine messengers (the fourfold) that allows particular things to be. By way of its differential mobility, being is a making of ways within the region. And for Heidegger, in exhorting or summoning us to find the ways to where we already are, this mobility or way-making—which is not initiated by humans—also thereby holds out the promise of such ways. Right after his references to Laozi and the *Daodejing*, Heidegger writes that “Of the way which is to lead us to the source of this possibility [of undergoing an experience with language], it was said that it leads us only to where we already are” (GA12, 187–88/US 199/93). Where the stated goal of “The Nature of Language” is to undergo an experience with language as the “house of being,” this experience is then developed as a listening to the prior address and promise of language, while moving away from the idea of the human being as the originator of speaking. Thus, finding a way means, first of all, experiencing the claim of way-making being upon us, and thereby, with Heidegger’s play on words, experiencing hearing and belonging (*hören* and *gehören*; GA12, 30/PLT 207; GA7, 220/EGT 66) to being as the worlding of the world, or the fouring of the four. The movement we traced between thrownness and project, and later between claim and corresponding, as well as between the granting saying of language and our listening, is for Heidegger also one of movement and way, or *dao*.13

Albeit cited earlier already, allow me to revisit the last part of this passage:

> The way allows us to reach what summons us [and holds us responsible: *was uns belangt*], in that domain where we already are. Why then, one may ask, still find a way to it? Answer: because where we already are, we are in such a way that at the same time we are not there, because we ourselves have not yet expressly [or properly: *eigens*] reached that which summons our being [*insofern wir jenes, was unser Wesen belangt, selber noch nicht eigens erlangt haben*].

(GA12, 188/OWL 93; translation modified)

This comment about finding a way to where we already are prompts us, in the final section, to reflect a little more on this source of responsibility. For now, let us elaborate on these relations between way, difference, and claim. As “the way that moves everything” (see again the long citation earlier), being puts the mortals on their way, that is, it demands of them that they be on the way, find their way. (We may be tempted to say here “find the way,” and I believe [see below], that Heidegger seems to succumb to this temptation at times, but as a play of differences, the singular would likely be out of place.) The originary demand to let being be, to correspond to the claim of being and the granting saying of
language, can also be phrased in terms of the way: find your way by (expressly) responding to the way (of being). Normativity emerges for Heidegger as mortal responsibility in the interplay of dao as way-making and dao as responsively finding one’s way in the un-concealed region. The way is that which, as Belang (summons, concern, interest, pertinence), both moves and concerns us, and thus “demands” [verlangt] that we reach or find paths (gelangen) to, and in response to, the way-making being to which we belong and which transforms us towards it (GA12, 186/OWL 91). Normativity can then be described in terms of the way: in responding to the disclosure of the open region, mortals are claimed for their belonging to the way-making region. The way makes of mortals a movement towards their being; they are on the way towards being, whether they know it or not.

However, mortals never arrive at the goal, for, as indicated, being is a play of differences. Here, way needs to be thought ontologically, not ontically as a line between a starting point and a destination. Understood thus, way must be divorced from the idea of arrival, unless we mean arriving where we already are. Instead, way needs to be associated with movement in a region that is itself not fixed, but mobile, dynamic, and never fully measurable and surveyable: part of its movement is precisely the foregrounding of things against a non-human and receding background as that which moves towards us from the other side. Only if we think way as a way-making that responds to a differential and mobile “regioning” can we grasp its connection with normative critique: for it is precisely because we are never—not now nor ever in the future—at our destination, because we are differentiated in a play of differences, that the way can move us to move in a region where we already are. And just as the movement cannot come to an end, so the normativity of the way cannot be stilled or fulfilled. It precedes and exceeds us, even if it also depends on us. Thus, it cannot, at this not-just-human level, be subject to the demand (often claimed to be Kantian) that “ought implies can.”

Before I say more about this normativity in the final section, we should pause to take note of the historico-political importance of these references to differential belonging. Philosophers from Habermas to Levinas have decried, for good reason, Heidegger’s philosophical nationalism and provincialism and the troubling proximity between his stress on belonging to the earth and the Nazi ideology of “blood and soil” (Habermas 1989; Levinas 1990). In the discussion of the way, however, we encounter a different note, and we should register the resulting ambiguities. Belonging to being means dwelling in an “unhomely” or “uncanny” play of differences, and this re-conception of belonging is presented in open dialogue with ancient Chinese texts. This is why the references to the Daodejing and the Zhuangze (Zhuangzi 2007) are important, not only for their content but also because they upset the idea of home as German, ancient Greek, Indo-European, or Occidental. For Heidegger, a critical understanding of Occidental modernity, it seems, calls not only for a confrontation with ancient Greek sources to which Heidegger at times claims, spuriously, some special German affinity, triggering the well-known accusations of an
archeo-teleology according to which wrestling with technological modernity requires repeating the Greek beginning more “inceptively” (Derrida 1987; Caputo 1988, esp. ch. 6). Rather, Heidegger’s philosophical critique of modern technology also draws on ancient Chinese Daoism, which in turn raises the worry of an eclectic, almost consumerist appropriation of Eastern mysticism for reimagining harmonious relations with nature (Sloterdijk 1989, Wenning, in this volume). I hope it has become clear that my reading of Heidegger’s way stresses both its conceptual integrity independent of fast-paced appropriations and its inflection of harmonious belonging with nullity and difference.

Normative critique

In closing, I want to say a bit more about the resulting normativity and its possible relation to critique. For Heidegger, as we saw, we are already on the way given by the region and called for by being. Because the normativity of the claim of ontological movement has always already put us on a path that is constitutive of our being, it cannot be the case that I refuse the claim as I might a specific, binarily coded norm. If I am asked not to lie, it is because I could; here, however, the demand to correspond to being and dwell in its way-making region could not be refused, for, as we just heard, we are always already there, put on the way by the region of being—otherwise there would have been no disclosure, no being-in-the-world. What normative motivation could move us to get where we already are? If correspondence and being-on-the-way are necessary and happen anyway, then what do we gain for a “critical phenomenology” or a “critical ontology” by insisting upon it? Is there any critical potential in this “daoist” normativity?

Focusing still on Heidegger, I want to answer this critical question in three ways. First, while the normativity is there always already, Heidegger suggests, in the passage last cited, that it calls on us to correspond to it more properly or more expressly—and in the distinctions packed away in this “more” lies the critical force. The normativity in effect asks us to recognise our being or essence as claimed by the way-making region, and this, one might say, can be done in better or worse ways. Before moving further, I pause briefly to highlight the crucial question of whether this expanded normativity necessarily depends on the value of the proper. One might understand this first point as being calling on us to fit into a pre-given essence or human nature. This essence could then even be binarily coded, such that we either do or do not fit. In his many writings on Heidegger, Jacques Derrida in particular has taught us to regard the proper, the authentic, and the essential in Heidegger with great suspicion (Derrida 1987, 1993). I do not doubt that at least at times, Heidegger overreaches the normativity of corresponding and way-making, and that the notion of the proper human essence often plays a dubious role in this.

However, one can also stress and mobilise what Heidegger says about difference against the proper, for as Heidegger knows well, with difference comes change, a plurality of forking paths, and futural openness to the unknowable
and the unmasterable. As we heard, this non-human openness encounters the human world from the “other side” that has no fixed essence, local region, or pre-given path. Thus, given the highly charged questions in Heidegger’s work regarding nationalism, native soil, philosophical proximity to allegedly world-historical beginnings, the home and the foreign, the Occident and the Orient, and so on, how we navigate these values of the proper and its differential constitution will have significant consequences, even as regards the very reading of an ancient Chinese text by a European scholar.

In a larger project, I will return to the question of the proper and the home. Here, perhaps it will suffice to indicate that if we stress difference and mobility on the way, there is room for the normativity to ask us to be vigilant with respect to our very location in a differentially constituting, four-folding region that gives ways of being only by way of differences between opening up and foreclosing. The normative could be read as asking us, above all, to recognise our “essential” location in the differential play of earth and sky, human and non-human, between light and darkness. The being to which the way-making region calls us is named by Heidegger our “essence” in the temporal and verbal sense he gives to *Wesen*, often translated as “essencing.” The verbal sense recalls that, exposed to nothingness and nullity, human existence is on the move between thrownness and projection, both of which respond to a way-making region.

In *Being and Time*, the call (there, the call of conscience) says primarily “be your being as thrown project”; that is, open up to given possibilities, in their very indeterminacy, as your own potential. In the 1950s, and in part as a result of the dialogue with the Daoist classics, the normativity claims us to be our being by letting the world be, a world to which we belong and without which we could not be what we are. But the demand now is to listen to being, to inhabit the interplay of world and earth, so as to appropriate our being and let the inappropriable be by belonging to the fourfold. Thus, the normative force and the critical potential lie in the demand to better understand our ontological constitution, and a normative fault would lie, not in failing to live up to a given (binary) norm, but in misrecognising this constitution. Seemingly human initiatives must be understood as responses to a world and a language preceding and exceeding the supposed initiator. We can start projects in the world only by responding to, and thus belonging to, the world as given or opened up in advance. As the end of *The Thing* puts it, we are called on to take “a step back” so as to be “vigilant” (*wachsam*) regarding the belonging to the fourfold (GA7, 183/PLT 179), when in fact our building and dwelling has always already received its directives from the fourfold (GA7, 161/PLT 156).18

Accordingly, Heidegger distinguishes at times between hearing the call, paying attention to it, and responsibly transforming one’s conduct in view of heeding the call expressly. Critique emerges with the crucial differences between hearing the call as call (*Hören* rather than *Überhören*), paying attention to it (*darauf achten*), expressly appropriating (*eigens übernehmen*) it, and unfolding (*Entfalten*) the call or voice of being (*Stimme des Seins*) (GA11, 20/WP 77–78).
That Heidegger deploys the normativity in this way can be verified by a brief look at his famous work, “The Question Concerning Technology.” The essay presents enframing (Gestell) as a historical mode of being or disclosure that claims humans (just like being’s *Anspruch, Zusage, Zuspruch*), but it does so by withdrawing itself in such a way that humans follow the call without recognizing it as call. This makes it difficult for them to understand, first of all, that they are responding rather than initiating. In enframing, withdrawal backgrounds chances to better hear the call, to unfold the claim more fully, and above all to heed the concealment in all unconcealment, the withdrawal of beings from human disposition and mastery. And here, too, Heidegger uses the language of the way, for he introduces the dangers of technology by speaking of enframing putting humans “on the way” of disclosing entities technologically and primarily in view of their disposability (GA7, 26–27/QCT 26).

The critical potential of the normativity in question then lies in the demand to recognise the claim of enframing (to challenge-forth entities and forces) as a claim in the first place. Taking a “step back” (GA7, 182/PLT 178), we should see (or rather, hear) that in challenging-forth, we are in fact doing the bidding of enframing. Indeed, the essay begins by discussing the need to find a way into a free relation to technology and finds that this freedom lies in opening our existence to technology’s essence, that is, in experiencing it, first of all, as claiming us to challenge forth beings and other humans (GA7, 7/QCT 3). Later in the essay, Heidegger introduces the idea of technological enframing as a historically specific mode of being and its attendant limits, as well as dangers, by saying technology “sends” us on its way (*auf den Weg bringen, schicken*). This way-making of being can thus be called a sending (*Geschick*) of the history (*Geschichte*) of being (GA7, 25/QCT 24). (The notion of “way” thus resonates throughout later Heidegger’s thought of the history of being.) However, he argues, one of the particularities of enframing’s sending us on the way, and of us “thus being on the way” (*also unterwegs*, GA7, 26/QCT 26), is that it hides its own way-making.

More specifically, it occludes the way-making region that comes towards us from the other, the non-human side, and thus leads us astray into thinking and acting as if the human world were only of our own making, as if humans encounter in the world only that which is of human hand. *Avant la lettre,* Heidegger then criticises, on the basis of this ineluctable normativity, one of the features of what some today call the Anthropocene. In Heidegger’s view, the idea of the human being as only ever encountering itself is characteristic of modern nihilism and human projectivism. Nihilism first reduces all physical being to mere matter and blind forces, thereby denying things their own coming forth, and then re-values nature selectively by projecting human values onto it. This value subjectivism gives rise to the illusion that, wherever they look, human beings encounter only themselves. As we have seen, his critique of this nihilistic subjectivism insists, *grosso modo,* on human responsiveness to the way, or the *dao:* humans exist only “in the realm of an address” [*Zuspruch*] (GA 7, 28/QCT 27).
To recognise ourselves as put on the way by being’s sending and regioning is thus to experience ourselves as “taken into a freeing claim” [befreiender Anspruch] (GA7, 26/QCT 26). Again, then, questioning technology is finding a way to it, and that means recognising that we are already sent on its way and find ourselves in its region to which our way-making responds. The region precedes and addresses our modern ways. The first step is to experience our responsivity to being’s affordances. We can then unfold and elaborate this experience by recognising both its dangers and, as with the critical strategy of Nietzschean and Foucaultian genealogy, the historical specificity, and thus contingency, of enframing’s mode of way-making. Indeed, Heidegger’s critique of enframing refers to a second danger, namely, that enframing drives out all other modes of revealing (GA7, 28; QCT 27). By contrast, hearing the call in technological revealing as permits us to see that another way is possible in principle.

The normativity in question can thus be analysed on three levels: on the first, all humans are claimed by being (including the most ruthless homo faber); on the second, we hear the claim of being in enframing, while on the third, we do not only hear it but also pay attention and unfold the claim further. The crucial normative difference is that between what we might call non-attentive corresponding (Level 1), attentive corresponding (Level 2), and appropriate-responsible comportment (Level 3), that is, an “unfolding comportment” taken over as our responsibility in response to the claim both to correspond and to find our way in the region of the fourfold. Generally speaking (we will elaborate later), critique emerges, not merely with the claim that being places upon us but also with its demand to be heard and unfolded on subsequent levels.

In our enframed times, the first critical potential of the normativity of world disclosure consists in moving from Level 1 to Level 2 and on to Level 3. Because we are all in the call, and constitutively so, it calls on us to hear it expressly, unfold it, and appropriate it responsibly. Enframing challenges the human being to challenge forth beings—including the human being—into their constancy and availability, but it is essentially ambiguous (GA7, 34/QCT 33) in this, and this ambiguity permits the normativity we have been tracking to gain a foothold for critique. Enframing claims human beings to master the earth—to consider themselves, as The Thing puts it, the unconditioned ones (die Unbedingten) rather than as die Bedingten (the conditioned ones or, literally, “the be-thinged ones,” that is, those always thrown into the midst of things; GA7, 183/PLT 178). Yet this claim (as well as enframing’s disclosure of entities as ready to hand and disposable) still stems from being as un-concealment, claiming us as “mortals” to dwell poetically: that is the “saving power” (das Rettende) of technology (GA7, 34/QCT 34). In this ambiguity of the call of enframing lies the second critical potential of the normativity we have been teasing out. The ambiguity in the call hinges on the difference between disclosure of things as disposable or storable and disclosure as an interplay of presence and absence or withdrawal, where the latter is said to be required for the former.

It is not, then—and this is how Heidegger is often (mis)understood, by friends and foes alike (Guzzoni 1980; Marx 1983; Edwards 2005)—that the
call of being comes in two distinct forms, as it were: the technological and the fourfold. That would put us in the position to choose, and the sceptic would rightly ask why we should hear it as the fourfold, rather than as the bidding of enframing. An answer would have to call for critical norms likely not drawn from the “ethical” ontology itself. It is better, though also not yet sufficient, to recognise—as Sonia Sikka does in her recent, excellent account—that enframing is still a revelation of being (Sikka 2018, 106). Rather, on my reading, the universal and constitutive normativity on Level 1—which in our time is, on Heidegger’s view, predominantly not heard at all, thus making it possible to conceive of ourselves as “masters of the earth” (GA 7, 152/PLT 147)—asks us, not only to hear the call but also to hear it more expressly, and thus to elaborate it as the call of being in its interplay with difference and withdrawal. While we need not speak here of a “teleological” impetus towards Heidegger’s richer account of non-technological worlding (as Taylor 2005 does), this elaboration, I think, is precisely what Heidegger’s account of the “fourfold” is meant to accomplish. This account of the worlding of the world unfolds the claim of being as the fourfold claim to save the earth, to receive the sky as sky, to await the divinities as divinities, and to guide (geleiten) our own nature as mortals, which consists in being capable of a “good” death (GA 7, 151–52/PLT 147–48; see Edwards 2005 and the very detailed account in Mitchell 2015). Just as every object, no matter how mass-produced, can—and should—be grasped as a “thing” (albeit one whose “thinging” and “worlding” have been muffled), the technologically enframed earth can and should be understood as brought forth by the fourfold.

This brings us to the second way in which this normativity can gain critical purchase. As indicated, the claim of being emerges only with difference (in Being and Time, between thrownness and project; later, between thing and world as “ontico-ontological difference” as well as between the four of the fourfold and the freeing and sheltering movement of the way). To fail to hear the claim of being is also to overlook this source of human activity and of coming to presence in difference, and that with difference comes withdrawal and absencing. As a result, things are not “objects” available at our disposal. Rather, they withdraw to the “other side” of human projection, as we heard. Things retract in belonging to the mirror-play of the fourfold that we cannot get behind and grasp fully, as if from the outside. Responding in a listening way means recognising not only our ontological constitution but also that there is “mystery” and “nothingness” in the ways of worlding. The danger is to see being primarily as presence—as availability, manipulability, disposability of resources, and so on—or, in other words, to focus on beings and to miss or even dismiss the process of emergence into presence, which also includes absencing.

This second critical potential, then, suggests that hearing the call of being even in enframing entails greater humility before the unmasterability of the earth and its differential mirror-play in the fourfold. However thin these indications, perhaps this is what not only “attentive listening” but also “responsible
comportment” entail. Hearing the claim of enframing as a claim opens the chance of hearing it also as a claim from being in its constitutive interplay with nothingness and mystery. This claim can then re-awaken us to the possibilities beyond enframing—and this brings me to my concluding link between Heideggerian normativity and critique.

Third, the critical potential of Heideggerian normativity, while not future-directed along progressive, linear lines, also lies in opening up new possibilities for worlding, for what Niklas Kompridis has called possibility-enabling practices (2006). As we heard, Heidegger’s critique of enframing is concerned that enframing drives out all other modes of revealing (GA7, 28; QCT 27). The address of being, precisely by playing differentially with absence, can re-awaken us to new possibilities for world disclosure, and re-open potentiality for being beyond the technological enframing (not, perhaps, unlike the way the singularising claim of death in Being and Time opens possibilities for being beyond the “they”). We are called upon to imagine a different world, and to prepare for the movement of disclosure sending us on a different path, a new opening, perhaps connected to a crisis, which for us today would seem to be, above all, ecological in relation to economic and political inequalities, calling for resituating the human being on earth. As Kompridis notes, critique in modernity cannot be thought without a sense of crisis, and so not without the call for a new beginning (2006, Part One).

We should note, then, that the levels of normativity that I identified presuppose each other (Level 3 presupposes 2, which presupposes 1). But that is not at all to say that Levels 2 and 3 cannot affect Level 1. In fact, much of Heidegger’s “preparatory thinking” is oriented towards a redisclosure of being beyond enframing, though of course he does not think we, the co-respondents, could get behind the claim of being and refashion it according to our designs. On the other hand, it is also not the case that being’s way-making and our way-finding are separable like subject and object, as if we were merely passive recipients. Here, in fact, the claim of the differential fourfold calls on us to think beyond the subject–object divide, for instance, in the middle voice (see Scott 1988, 1990; Llewelyn 1991). When Heidegger says, in the lengthy passage with which I began, that “all is way,” we should not misunderstand this as saying that there is only one, pre-given way for all, from some “entity” named being or the fourfold. As a process emerging in ontico-ontological difference, the movement of way-making is precisely no entity and no superior will.

Further, way is not given but withholds, and so must be re-made. A path is an inscription that belongs to a region, but the region also needs paths to gain contours. As discussed a little earlier, the marking-out of the way is unlike any hard boundary that severs and demarcates but is, rather, a fluid, dynamic movement which—not only in but also as our tracing of its contours—is the simultaneous granting of the region as a region and of our belonging to it as way.

Thus, thinking beyond subject–object dualism, paying attention to the claim of the way, assuming it, and unfolding it in our comportment is bound to alter the way-making disclosure itself. To understand preparatory thinking as
a passive, even quietist, waiting divulges the dualistic metaphysics of passive object and active subject. Hearing the call as the differential, unmasterable play of difference in the fourfold belonging to earth, we may induce and contribute (though not unilaterally produce) a re-disclosure. Our current crises, in conclusion, call on us to understand that a different world is possible.

Notes

1 I thank Jing Hu and Rebecca van der Post for comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

2 See GA13, which contains the essays *Wege zur Aussprache* (1937); *Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit. Aus einem Feldwegespräch über das Denken* (1944/45); *Der Feldweg* (1949); *Holzweges (Dem künftigen Menschen . . .“) (1949). Beyond GA 13, see the book *Gelassenheit* 1959, which contains a part of the first dialogue posthumously published as *Country Path Conversations* (now GA 77).

3 On “*heissen,*” see esp. GA8, 120–22, where Heidegger links the word to “*be-wegen*” as “bringing on the way” in the sense of letting something come forth, and to *Zuspruch* and *Zusage,* which he translates also as “*Verheissung*” (promise).

4 Note the many different translations of this word in PLT (see earlier text). After having translated *zusagen* and *Zusage* in a variety of ways, the translator of “*The Nature of Language*” comments that “*Zusage* as used here by Heidegger exceeds the meaning of the translation ‘grant.’ *Zusage* is a *Sage,* a *Saying*” (OWL 78).

5 We can try to solve this conundrum of an address that is prior to and yet not without addressee by stressing the middle voice; see Scott 1990; Llewelyn 1991.

6 See esp. GA12, 29/PLT 206, where it is the difference between world and thing, between being and entity, that calls the human being to correspond to it.

7 A note in Heidegger’s *Handexemplar* of the *Letter on Humanism* regarding this “standing out-into” [*Hinausstehen*] determines it as difference: “Plato’s *Doctrine of Truth* first edition, 1947: ‘Out’: into the ‘out’ of the ‘out of one another’ of the difference (the ‘there’), not ‘out’ out of an interior” (GA9, 324/E249).

8 Heidegger argues that “the horizontal character of representing and thus of striving was first clearly seen and said by Leibniz in his doctrines of mirror-being, of the concentricity of world-being, and of the eye- and view-point of the monad” (GA77, 97/62; cf. Leibniz, *Monadology*, paragraphs 50–60).

9 For a detailed discussion of Heidegger’s critical transformation of transcendental argumentation, see the collection of essays in Crowell and Malpas 2007. My stress on difference and nullity resonates well with Pippin’s contribution to this collection (Pippin 2007).

10 Ames and Hall justify the translation of *dao* as way-making as follows: “Etymologically, the character *dao* is constructed out of two elements”: *shu* “foot,” and hence, “to pass over,” “to go over,” “to lead through” (on foot), and *shou* meaning “head”—hair and eye together—and therefore “foremost.” The *shou* “head” component carries the suggestion of “to lead” in the sense of “to give a heading.” *Dao* is used frequently as a loan character for its verbal cognate *dao,* “to lead forth.” Thus, the character is primarily gerundive, processional, and dynamic: “a leading forth.” The earliest appearance of *dao* is in the *Book of Documents* in the context of cutting a channel and “leading” a river to prevent the overflowing of its banks. Taking the verbal *dao* as primary, its several derived meanings emerge rather naturally: “to lead through,” and hence: “road, path, way, method, to put into words, to explain, teachings, doctrines, art.” At its most fundamental level, *dao* seems to denote the active project of “moving ahead in the world,” of “forging a way forward,” of “road building.” Hence, our neologism: “way-making.” By extension, *dao* comes to connote a pathway that has been made, and hence can be travelled. It is
because of this connotation that *dao* is often, somewhat problematically, nominalised by translating it “the Way” (Ames and Hall 2003, 113).

11 In its discussion of interpretation and method (or way of proceeding), *Being and Time* famously claims we should not seek to get out of the hermeneutic circle but enter it in the right way (GA2, 203/195, §32). In the *Dialogue on Language* (also in OWL), Heidegger confirms he abandoned the term “hermeneutics,” but it is also clear, as Malpas has argued (1997) that this is not so much to reject the circularity. On the sense in which hermeneutics (and hermeneutics as way) remains a central element throughout Heidegger’s thinking, see von Herrmann (1993).

12 I think it is fair to read DDJ25 as grasping the difference between heaven and earth as the difference that opens all differences between the “myriad things,” the manifold of particulars. *Dao* is named the source of this difference but not a source that is one with itself and thus prior to difference, for it is explicitly said that the way is not “unchanging” or “enduring,” and not nameable, not itself a part of language. As Ames and Hall point out in their commentary on this chapter, there is no undifferentiated beginning prior to and independent of the process named *dao* (Ames and Hall 2003, 212). Elsewhere, they note that it is misleading to suggest that the *Daodejing* offers a cosmology, for while there is an account of the world and its origins, the Greek “cosmos” suggests a unity or totality absent here (Ames and Hall 2003, 38).

13 The Afterword to “The Thing” explicitly associates “way” and corresponding (*Entsprechen*) as well as listening: “Everything here is Way of a corresponding that examines as it listens. Way is always in danger of becoming error. To go such ways demands practice in going [Alles ist hier Weg des prüfend hörenden Entsprechens. Weg ist immer in der Gefahr, Irrweg zu werden. Solche Wege zu gehen, verlangt Übung im Gang]” (GA7, 187/PLT 185–6). For an argument that this passage should be read as continuing the conversation with the *Daodejing*, despite the fact that it does not speak of *dao* (though it uses “way” without definite article), see May 2005, 51.

14 Kant writes: “The action to which the ‘ought’ applies must indeed be possible under natural conditions” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A548/B576; p. 473). Elsewhere: “For if the moral law commands that we ought to be better human beings now, it inescapably follows that we must be capable of being better human beings” (Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:50, 94). But see Stern 2004 for other Kant passages, disallowing a strong principle “ought implies can.”

15 For this reason, there cannot be, as Werner Marx’s attempt to think Heidegger further suggests, a “‘right’ correspondence [‘richtiges’ *Entsprechen*]” and a “false listening to the address [falsches Hören auf den Zuspruch]” (Marx 1983, 58). Bernhard Waldenfels is right to respond by saying that “a ‘false’ corresponding [‘unrichtiges’ *Entsprechen*] would be like an untrue truth” (Waldenfels 1994, 580). Being contains no measure for us, no gift of a given *nomos* by which we can lead our lives on earth—though we still have to measure, to decide, and to calculate for critique. So we must ask, does not the absence of an ontological *nomos* obvert any normative, critical force, to the extent the latter requires some opposition between right and wrong? As I will suggest, we may be put on a more productive path if instead of a “false listening” we speak of an unattentive one.

16 It is difficult to see how even the most explicit (and seemingly demanding) normativity at what I will call Level 3 could give us specific norms (“laws and rules”) for a critical “originary ethics,” as Heidegger, however, seems to think. In the *Letter on Humanism*, we read: “only so far as the human being, ek-siting into the truth of being, belongs to being can there come from being itself the assignment of those directives [Zuweisung derjenigen Weisungen] that must become law and rule [Gesetz und Regel] for human being. In Greek, to assign is *nemein*; *nomos* is not only law but more originally the assignment contained in the dispensation of being [die in der Schickung des Seins gehemmte Zuweisung]. Only this assignment is capable of enjoining [verfügen—see also the Fug in the Anaximander Fragment] humans into being. Only such enjoining [or jointure] is
capable of supporting and obligating [zu tragen und zu binden—to carry or bear and to bind us]. Otherwise all law remains merely something fabricated by human reason [nur das Gemächte menschlicher Vernunft—as I mentioned at the beginning, we need to hear here the link to Macht, power]. [However] More essential than instituting rules is that human beings find the way to their abode in the truth of being. This abode first yields the experience of something we can hold on to" (GA9, 360/E273–4). It seems to me that Heidegger here, in insisting on what he calls the nomos of being, overestimates the difference between attentive listening to being and the kind of (now popular) moral constructivism that may, with the help of human reason, propose laws and norms for living together justly on earth. Heidegger's overly strong contrast between dwelling in being and human reason is not only helped by his important critique, recalled at the outset, of the subjectivism and projectivism of values, which sees all value as merely the product of human construction (Farin 1998). Rather, the strong contrast is also, I think, supported by his faith that once we find ourselves (back) in the truth of being, where we belong and have been given our place and our station in life—that is, once we are able to reclaim our proper human “dignity” (see Letter)—we will receive the rules we need from this very belonging, from “being itself,” as Heidegger says (see earlier). While we should recall here Being and Time's worries about a calculative normativity that demands constancy of a being that is essentially an open potentiality for being, we should be equally surprised by Heidegger's invocation of such law and rules that would come from the correspondence or jointure of being and humanity—especially if this jointure, as Heidegger often reminds us, remains so puzzling, so difficult to think, and thus perhaps, at least for now, only accessible to a few great thinkers with the trained ear to hear being's call.

17 As Davis puts it: “It is highly significant that Heidegger's interest in the Daoist classics is rekindled precisely during his turn away from understanding the relation between human being and being in violent and voluntaristic terms, namely in terms of a militant bringing to a stand of the overpowering onslaught of being, and his concomitant turn toward understanding this relation in terms of a non-willful releasement (Gelassenheit) to a letting-be (Seinlassen)” (Davis 2020, 167).

18 Similarly, at the end of . . . poetically man dwells, Heidegger writes: “For dwelling can be unpoetic [that is, technical] only because dwelling is poetic in essence” (GA7, 206/PLT 225)—that is, even unpoetic dwelling dwells poetically, “in essence.”

19 Indeed, the withdrawal in every revealing also affects the call of being itself, for as we just heard, we can above all fail to hear the call as call. We usually don't expressly hear language speaking or being claiming us, and if this recalls BT's falling into everyday inauthenticity, in the 1950s, the call of being remains linked to withdrawal, the Zusage to a Versagen, that is, a refusal of saying and a failure of communication (see US 186, 194). This withdrawal of the source of normativity gives rise, then, to a second critical potential: the call is not unilaterally accessible (i.e., humans cannot, merely of their own accord, make themselves hear it) because world disclosure is a finite backgrounding withdrawing even as it foregrounds the thing.

20 As Heidegger puts it, again in The Question Concerning Technology: “the unconcealment in which everything that is shows itself at any given time harbors the danger that the human being may miss the unconcealed and may misinterpret it [die Unverborgenheit, in der alles, was ist, sich jeweils zeigt, birgt die Gefahr, daß der Mensch sich am Unverborgenen versieht und es mißdeutet]” (QCT 26/GA7, 27; translation modified—I read “versieht” as “miss,” not as “quail”).

21 Thus, by understanding us as addressed by being, by hearing the claim of enframing as a claim, and indeed as the claim of the fourfold, we open the chance of also hearing it as a claim from being in its interplay with absence, withdrawal, and the nothing. As the Letter puts it, hearkening back to the language of nullity in BT and the 1929 “What is Metaphysics?,” “Nihilation unfolds essentially in being itself [Das Nichten west im Sein selbst], and
not at all in the existence of the human being” (GA9, 360/273). Sometimes Heidegger in fact says that it's the withdrawal itself that calls or pulls (specifically) human beings into their “essence” as the guardian of being as disclosure (humans as der Zeigende, GA7, 135, esp. in “Was heisst Denken?/What calls for Thinking?”). Humans are called to show that there is concealment in unconcealment. Further, given that earth—that is, in the 1935 Origin of Work of Art—is also discussed as a way of manifesting withdrawal, we can say that when Heidegger writes that the call of the fourfold is to save the earth, then the call is above all to manifest hiddenness and thereby let beings be, that is shine forth in their own.

Kompridis distinguishes two (not as I did earlier, three) levels of normativity; he calls them (too binarily and rationalistically, I find) “pre-reflective” and “reflective disclosure” (2006, 34), where he understands (reductively, I think) the latter as “redisclosure”: what is normatively preferable, on this reading of Heidegger that seeks to link up with Habermas, are disclosures that “more fully and generously create the conditions for reflective disclosure” as opposed to “bad disclosures” that “create conditions that obscure their own status as disclosure” (35). Given that, he argues convincingly, power and domination depend on certain ways of pre-reflectively grasping an inherited world and its conditions of intelligibility, changes to domination demand a reflective disclosure that opens up new horizons for understanding. Social relations, esp. of inherited oppression, crucially depend on conditions of intelligibility, which critique must not only find ways of rejecting on the basis of certain forms of normativity, but must also be able to re-disclose and re-imagine. Here, it seems to me that Kompridis is right when he claims that Heidegger “neglected to coordinate the question of how we might transform our relation to our pre-reflective understanding of the world with the question of how we might transform our relation to one another. Put another way, he failed to connect the normativity of disclosure with the normativity of intersubjectivity” (Kompridis 2006, 188). That is why I think an important path forward from Heideggerian normativity can be found in Levinas (1969), and esp. in Derrida, whose work in general, I think, tries to combine (but less reductively) the two normativities Kompridis mentions.

References

The Daodejing is cited as DDJ followed by the chapter number and the page reference to Ames and Hall 2003 and/or Kim 2012, Laozi 2001.
Heidegger's Dao and sources of critique


Introduction

It is easy to misunderstand Leibniz’s famous claim that we live in the “best of all possible worlds” (1989a, 39). The apparent prevalence of suffering, injustice, and random cruelty affecting life on earth was used in Voltaire’s Candide to launch what, on the surface, looks like a refutation of Leibnizian optimism; yet, while satirising its popular (per)versions, Candide ultimately failed to refute Leibniz’s natural philosophy (Arthur 2017, 99). Unfortunately, however, it has become almost commonplace to take Leibniz’s notion of the “best of all possible worlds” to be at best a thought experiment and at worst a deluded, impracticable fiction. Candide’s underlying assumptions aligned with the dominant tenets of European enlightenment philosophy to the extent that today, few people any longer believe in a benevolent nature—much less a benevolent nature sitting in for a providential God. We can feel comfortably superior to Leibniz’s particular brand of optimism, which is centered on natural law of this kind, since we no longer believe that nature is part of an inherently balanced or benevolent system.

(Gopnik 2005)

Pessimism is relatable, perhaps even compelling—especially to readers in our own age of large-scale environmental destruction. But is it helpful? Or might there be some benefit to considering, and perhaps experimentally applying, an optimistic outlook? Might Leibniz’s optimism, in particular, offer alternative ways of thinking and acting which could help us to find less destructive means of interacting with our natural environments? These, in short, are the initial—and rather pragmatic—questions that have motivated the present inquiry. The “Enlightenment heritage of nature-culture dualism, mind-body splits, and human exceptionalism” has been a prime target of ecocriticism (Petersen 2013, 9). And it is especially in its opposition to the dominant strand of enlightenment thought—in the vein of Locke, Hobbes, and Descartes—that Leibniz’s

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texts could be of essential importance for ecocriticism since he “completely disagreed with these advocates of the mechanical theory” (Arthur 2017, 99). “Despite the gulf that separates his philosophy from the modern evolutionary perspective,” Leibniz’s “insights and distinctions have been rediscovered by contemporary biologists working in the modern synthesis of evolution, natural selection, mutation, molecular biology and speciation” and his reflections, as Arthur observes, are of “surprising contemporary relevance and profundity” (2017, 80). One might argue that this is in more than a strictly scientific sense. Hence, this chapter investigates possible ways in which Leibniz’s philosophical optimism might be of relevance and value for readers today in the midst of ever-deepening and multiplying environmental crises.

The first part of this chapter is dedicated to exploring central arguments of Leibniz’s metaphysical and natural philosophy in regard to “the best of all possible worlds” and the ways in which evil is explained and encompassed therein. The second part will focus on the role of perception and the postponement of judgement, which Leibniz considers crucial to the process of responding to “apparent” evil. Leibniz’s reception of Chinese thought plays a central role in this regard, leading to various considerations to do with the potential benefit of adopting a general optimism in the face of apparent evil. The third and final part engages with Leibniz’s notion of the radical isolation of the monad and reflects upon Pauline Phemister’s understanding of the relevance of Leibniz’s thought to environmental ethics.

The potential ecological impact of considering this the best of all possible worlds

A “popular doctrine in the 1720s,” Leibniz’s stance, as Lloyd Strickland elaborates, soon fell out of favour, and not—as popular myth would have it—because the carnage and destruction of the Lisbon earthquake had converted Europe to a sober, pessimistic outlook. Rather, as Strickland convincingly argues, “the idea that optimism was devastated by the Lisbon earthquake is a commentators’ fiction that has become accepted wisdom not through sheer weight of evidence but through sheer frequency of repetition” (Strickland 2019, 1). Rejections of Leibniz’s optimism in the first half of the eighteenth century followed a list of common arguments:

that optimism destroys God’s freedom, that in any case a better world was possible (namely one without sin and pain), and that the world of today is not the same as the one God created in the beginning on account of it now containing sin and suffering following the fall (11).

Beyond such common objections, the fact that Leibniz fell almost completely out of favour can be attributed in large part to commentators’ “slender grasp” of the matter (17). Already, in 1741, Samuel Formey (quoted in Strickland, 17) wonders “How many adversaries have risen up against Leibniz’s best world
and Wolff’s chain of things without having understood what these philosophers meant by that, and by attributing ideas to them which they never cease to disown?” “Ignorance of key details of Leibniz’s doctrine resulted” as Strickland observes “in a number of caricatures of it that were every bit as grotesque as that which Voltaire would draw in *Candide*” (Strickland, 17). In fact, as Peter Kivy convincingly argues, *Candide* “does not and cannot constitute a successful *reductio ad absurdum* of Leibniz’s view.” Nonetheless, this is where countless textbooks still, today, position *Candide’s* lasting “literary value [as] a ‘classic’ of modern European literature” (Kivy 1979, 211).

Taken as a refutation, *Candide* is not successful: “nothing that happens or is said in the book succeeds in logically ‘refuting’ the Leibnizian” (Kivy, 212). Kivy explains that Erich Auerbach and John Butt, among others, have noted that Voltaire’s is at best a “polemic attack” upon either the metaphysical optimism of Leibniz’s idea or “its popular perversions” (212). As Kivy demonstrates, it is not possible to refute, logically, the grounds for Leibniz’s optimism in the sense of exposing them “to be logically inconsistent,” because “Leibnizian optimism does successfully, irrefutably show that one can consistently (although improbably) believe God is omnipotent, God is omniscient, God is good, in face of all the unmerited pain and suffering in the world” (217). Even though this is merely a “possible compatibility,” it “stands beyond refutation,” Kivy concludes, because “all things considered, how could we prove that this is not the world with the least amount possible of unmerited pain and suffering, since, *ex hypothesi*, we can never consider all things” (217). Kivy then suggests that Voltaire’s *Candide* was “never intended” to refute Leibniz’s philosophical optimism but rather to “confound” the Leibnizian by overwhelming him “with the palpable pain and suffering in the world, in the hope of straining his belief system to the breaking point” (219):

In other words, when we are brought face to face with the immensity of pain and suffering in this world . . . we are asked to believe that almighty power, all-seeing intellect, and holy will cannot have made a world more perfect in any respect than the charnel-house in which we live. This is the whopper the Leibnizian must accept, as *Candide* so forcefully impresses upon us.

(Kivy 1979, 223)

Pointing out the immediacy and immensity of suffering is, according to Kivy, an effective way of deterring the Leibnizian optimist from the understanding that any evil that occurs is the least degree of evil possible. The palpable existence of unmerited pain and suffering in the world, however, does not provide the grounds for a “formal *reductio ad absurdum* of theistic optimism, although it does present the theist with the not inconsiderable problem of accounting for the seeming moral imperfections of what he must believe is a perfect universe.” Optimism then, according to Kivy, is “a difficult position to hold, but not a logically contradictory one” (219). For our present inquiry, then, the following
questions arise: (1) what could be the potential (ecological) benefit of holding such a difficult position? and (2) what are its main commitments?

The first obvious ecological benefit of optimism is consolation, and the impetus and resolve to look for those solutions that are not merely possible but that are likely to occur, given that this is a planet created by a benevolent and reasonable deity. The emotionally therapeutic function of optimism is already palpable in Jean Jacques Rousseau’s response to Voltaire: “This optimism which you find so cruel yet consoles me amid the very pains which you depict as unbearable” (Rousseau 1997, 233).

Yet, Leibniz understands optimism not merely as a just response to the (generally good) way in which things are: he considers it to be an integral component of things being the “best possible,” as we shall see in what follows. Leibniz’s doctrine is, then, as Strickland claims, an example of “a priori reasoning in the pre-Kantian sense of reasoning that runs from cause to effect, for it is from a consideration of the nature of God alone (cause) that Leibniz infers that this must be the best world (effect)” (Strickland, 3). But it can also be understood in terms of final causation or, as contemporary theoretical physics calls it, “end-directed optimization” and “equipollence of cause and effect” (Arthur 2017, 101). Leibniz was familiar with Descartes and Spinoza’s treatment of “final cause,” yet, as Arthur points out, held a very different view towards it, understanding each machine as being “defined in terms of its final cause,” while “in his optics he had shown that it is possible to construe end-directed actions” (100).

The concern with “final causation” in Leibniz must be set within the context of Leibniz’ account of space and time. As Edward J. Khamara observes:

The central thesis of Leibniz’s relative theory of space and time concerns their ontological status: it asserts that they are, as Leibniz put it, “relative beings,” in that their existence is parasitic upon the existence of things which we ordinarily regard as their occupants. Thus if there were no material bodies, there would be no space; and if there were no events or processes, there would be no time.

(Khamara 2006, 2; italics original, bold emphasis added)

Especially in his correspondence with Clarke, Leibniz understands time as a sequence of events and space as an order of objects, with neither time nor space being able to subsist without their occupants. Leibniz develops his notion of final cause with reference to Snell’s and Fermat’s discovery of refraction—or, in other words, the fact that light travels along a path that follows the principle of least time and, apparently, “knows” projectively the point of its arrival by seeming to determine the shortest way to its destination. Leibniz applies this observation to the human experience of time and believes that “the present is pregnant with the future and . . . there is a strong interconnection between things no matter how distant they are from one another, so that someone who is sufficiently acute could read the one from the other” (Leibniz 1989e, 195).
The future is, in a way, already here; but in the present, we can train our understanding and align our will to make better choices. As Leibniz puts it:

However, although our choice *ex datis*, with respect to all internal and external circumstances taken together, is always determined, and although, for the present, we cannot alter our will, it is true, nevertheless, that we have great power *with respect to our future volitions*, by choosing to be attentive to certain objects and by accustoming ourselves to certain ways of thinking. In this way we can accustom ourselves to resist impressions better and have our reason behave better, so that we can contribute to making ourselves *will what we should*.

(Leibniz 1989e, 195; emphasis added)

Knowledge can be present in us in both clear and obscure ways, and since, in Leibniz’s view, even the future already exists, it is possible to receive some intimations of it. Leibniz encourages us to think partly in terms of final causes which describe the purpose of actions but also in terms of retro-causation, or the ways in which future horizons direct ongoing or past actions and phenomena. In terms of altering our behaviour towards the earth’s ecosystems, we may, in the midst of ongoing catastrophes, still choose to consider inventions, solutions, and concerted efforts as heralding and promising that genuine workable solutions will be found. We can view the tragedies of the present as reasons to resign, or we might instead look for intimations of a future without overfishing, disposable plastics, and fossil fuels. Perhaps there is an environmentally reconciled future for humanity, simply because it is not yet impossible to conceive of such a thing.

Thought and will are changeable and reason can be trained to “behave.” In regard to Leibniz’s optimism, the importance of the conscious adjustment of thought to what is reasonable cannot be overestimated. The way that humans see the world is not just an inconsequential happenstance. Throughout the *Discurso on Metaphysics* and the *Theodicy*, Leibniz insists that, in itself, the way in which we see both the world and the divine has consequences. In section 2 of the *Metaphysics*, Leibniz wonders about the *effect* of thinking about God either as a despotic force of will or as a principle of reason and goodness:

Thus, in saying that things are not good by virtue of any rule of goodness but *solely by virtue of the will of God,* it seems to me that *we unknowingly destroy all of God’s love and all his glory.* For why praise him for what he has done if he would be equally praiseworthy in doing the exact contrary? Where will his justice and wisdom reside if there remains only a certain despotic power, if will holds the place of reason, and if, according to the definition of tyrants, justice consists in whatever pleases the most powerful? Besides, it seems that all acts of will presuppose a reason for willing and that this reason is naturally prior to the act of will.

(Leibniz 1989a, 36; emphasis added)
In this as in many other instances, Leibniz insists that within human cosmology and ontology, the conclusions we arrive at with regard to understanding existence bear a great potential for construction and destruction. He does not so much ask whether God can be construed as a tyrannical principle but what good would come out of such an understanding. In a parallel way, ecocriticism discovered the potential harm inherent in various divergent means of apprehending nature. Bryan L. Moore, for example, in his *Ecology and Literature: Ecocentric Personification from Antiquity to the Twenty-first Century*, remarks that “it matters greatly whether a stretch of old growth forest is called timber or a nature reserve, a commodity or ‘lordly monarchs proclaiming the gospel of beauty like apostles.’” Moore observes that to conceive of the earth as living in literature is to “create a sort of barrier against its destruction” (2008, 11). This also touches upon the question of ethics and human responsibility. In the following passage from Leibniz, the way we construe the relation between mankind and God is parallel to the way we construe mankind’s relationship with nature:

Some even have gone so far as to say that God acts thus indeed; and on the plea that we are as nothing in comparison with him, *they liken us to earthworms which men crush without heeding as they walk, or in general to animals that are not of our species and which we do not scruple to ill-treat*. I believe that many persons otherwise of good intentions are misled by these ideas, *because they have not sufficient knowledge of their consequences*. They do not see that, properly speaking, God’s justice is thus overthrown. For what idea shall we form of such a justice as has only will for its rule, that is to say, where the will is not guided by the rules of good and even tends directly towards evil? Unless it be the idea contained in that tyrannical definition by Thrasymachus in Plato, which designated as just that which pleases the stronger. Such indeed is the position taken up, albeit unwittingly, by those who rest all obligation upon constraint, and in consequence take power as the gauge of right. But one will soon abandon maxims so strange and so unfit to make men good and charitable through the imitation of God. For one will reflect that a God who would take pleasure in the misfortune of others cannot be distinguished from the evil principle of the Manichaen, assuming that this principle had become sole master of the universe; and that in consequence one must attribute to the true God sentiments that render him worthy to be called the good Principle.

(Leibniz 2010, 85; emphasis added)

Thinking is evaluated by Leibniz initially on the basis of whether it comes to logically valid conclusions, but he finds the question of whether it has good or harmful consequences to be one of equal importance. Thinking has the power to overthrow God’s justice, precisely at that moment when His justice is understood to be despotic, Manichaen. Whatever we take to be governing existence will have bearing on our conduct and the power to manifest our life experience in radically different ways. Thus, in Leibniz’s view “one must attribute to the
true God sentiments that render him worthy to be called the good Principle” (Leibniz 2010, 59). In turn, the active attribution of “sentiments” to the governing principle is necessary for humanity to become “good and charitable in the imitation of God” (Ibid.). If, on the other hand, we were to conceive divine justice on the basis of the kind of justice we dispense to other species of animals, the consequence would be dire. For, in observing the habitual violence that humans enact upon animals, and in using such violence as the blueprint for constructing universal, divine justice, humans would unwittingly spawn a despotic principle and would thereby establish brute force or power as the ultimate gauge of what is right.

Leibniz, here as elsewhere, is concerned with the effect and outcome of thought. How we think about the world has an effect upon how it appears to us and, thus, on how we conduct ourselves within it. Hence, it is important to develop a philosophy that does not infer the governing principles of reality from observation of human behaviour. Leibniz in fact suggests that we go against the appearance of things. In his essay On the Ultimate Origination of Things, he writes:

But, you ask, don’t we experience quite the opposite in the world? For the worst often happens to the best, and not only innocent beasts but also humans are injured and killed, even tortured. In the end, the world appears to be a certain confused chaos rather than a thing ordered by some supreme wisdom, especially if one takes note of the conduct of the human race. I confess that it appears this way at first glance, but a deeper look at things forces us to quite the contrary view. From those very considerations which I brought forward it is obvious a priori that everything, even minds, is of the highest perfection there can be.

(Leibniz 1989c, 153; emphasis added)

This commitment to the belief that everything is shaped by the highest degree of perfection is crucial. Cecilia Miller’s view (2016, 179) that “the emphasis in Leibniz would best be viewed not as optimism but as Stoicism in the midst of dreadful circumstances” can only be followed to a limited extent. As opposed to ancient stoicism, as well as the stoicism of Leibniz’s contemporaries, Leibniz’s position is based on a unique metaphysics in which goodness and perfection are of fundamental importance. In its unobservable entirety and in all its functioning principles, the universe is marked by the highest possible degree of perfection; and it is for this reason that judgement—especially pessimistic judgement—is to be viewed critically.

The place and function of evil within the “best of all possible worlds”

In his Dialogue on Human Freedom and the Origin of Evil (1989b), Leibniz admits that evil is an undeniable ingredient of the world. It is a “conditional necessity”
and should not lead us into the trap of the “sloth’s syllogism” of the ancients, namely, the apology for bad action, inaction, or “laziness” (112). Leibniz urges that “Since we know nothing of what is foreseen, we should do our part without pausing over the useless question as to whether success is foreseen or not” (113), and maintains that “a future sin can be prevented if a man does his duty” (112). Leibniz ascribes the origin of evil to the fact that all existent things are bounded and hence “participate in nothingness,” which, “entering into the composition of things,” makes all existing things “limited” and thereby

Figure 4.1 Leibniz’s Perfect Square.
Leibniz views the squares (fine lines) and diagonals (bold lines) as incommensurable. However, each square cannot fail to produce a diagonal, which then brings forth a further square twice the size of the original one.
Source: Created by the author
“lacking an infinity of perfections” (114). He explains this point with reference to geometry: a perfect square cannot include its diagonal, the diagonal is incommensurable with the square, yet, when we think of it as the side of a new square twice as large in size we can view it as the reason or occasion of its emergence.

Squares and diagonals exist, just as there are firm and infirm minds inclined to good conduct or evil. In both cases, the diagonal or the infirmity/evil is “not an evil that God can fail to produce.” It is an inevitable by-product of the good. Hence, for Leibniz, it is crucial that we “must believe that God would not have allowed sin nor would he have created things he knows will sin if he could not derive from them a good incomparably greater than the resulting evil”5 (1989b, 116; emphasis added).

Leibniz’s optimism is based on the decision to view evil as bound to judgement: minimal, incommensurable, yet unavoidable and transitory. He wearyingly remarks that when “people encumber their minds with considerations of fatalism,” they are often “diverted from a good resolution or a necessary duty” (1989a, 43). Optimism is obviously not meant as a waiver for posterity: it is not meant to make slight of individual suffering or even the catastrophic collective suffering of genocide and habitat extinction. Rather, in Leibniz’s formulation, it is operative within a framework of ethics in which just action is of the utmost importance and the good principle is to be emulated, even if the good of present circumstances remains hidden or opaque.

The problem of evil, in contrast to suffering, is a problem of “apparent evil” in Leibniz:

Needless to say, we are not, like God, omniscient; and that is why for us, and not for God, there is apparent evil. God sees in every particular, why and how every instance of unmerited pain and suffering is the least possible, all things considered; but we cannot . . . So we are in thrall to an illusion. How can we liberate ourselves?

(Kivy, 216)

Leibniz then suggests a “Gedankenexperiment:” evil is apparent in the same way in which a stick, half immersed in water, appears to be bent but would appear to be straight if pulled out of the water. However, within the natural flow of life, “we are never actually in a position to be able to pull sticks out of water,” since we do not have hindsight or an omniscient view that could tell us how and why this set of circumstances is the most benign and ultimately most beneficial option among all things possible (Kivy, 216). Instead, “the recipe for dispelling the illusion is taught us by our perfectly ordinary experience of things ‘working out’—of apparently unalloyed misfortunes revealing themselves in the event to be blessings in disguise” (Ibid.). Kivy here rephrases one of Leibniz’s key statements concerning human judgement in the Theodicy: “We know . . . that often an evil brings forth a good whereto one would not have
attained without that evil” (Leibniz 2010, 129). To illustrate Leibniz’s point further, Peter Kivy provides an example of a person driving to the airport and experiencing a flat tire and consequently missing a plane. Learning later that this plane crashed, the person will revise their original judgement and consider themselves supremely fortunate. This need to postpone judgement in the face of insufficient knowledge or overview in the midst of constant change is, in fact, a central component of Daoist philosophy.

**Leibniz and Chinese thought**

In his book *Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light* (2004), Franklin Perkins does not provide an extensive exploration of the philosophical repercussions that Chinese philosophy had on Leibniz’s thought, but he shows clearly that, through reading translations by, for example, Longobardi, Ricci, and Sainte Marie, Leibniz had as good a grasp on Chinese thought, that is, Daoism and Confucianism, as anyone in seventeenth-century Europe may have had.⁶ Albert Ribas considers the *Discours sur la théologie naturelle des Chinois* (Discourse on the natural theology of the Chinese), which Leibniz wrote at the very end of his life and around the time of his correspondence with Clarke, as “an attempt by a European thinker to approach Eastern thought” (Ribas 2003, 64). Ribas observes a “doctrinal correlation between Leibniz’ refutation of Newtonian physics and his engagement with the ‘natural theology’” inherent in Chinese thought. Lamenting the weakening of natural religion in the West in the Clarke correspondence pertaining to his considerations on China, “ultimately Leibniz tries to prove that this natural theology of the Chinese is in accordance with the natural theology of Christianity. This is the general sense of the *Discours*” (67). According to Ribas “Leibniz identifies himself with what he believes to be the Chinese concept of the First Principle” (Ibid.), since, rejecting Newton, Leibniz instead conceives a dynamic principle which governs existence. Ribas argues that:

all the aspects of Chinese thought that have troubled and confused Western interpreters (such as Li as the First Principle, or the confusion between spiritual and material substances) are precisely those valued by Leibniz. Leibniz rejects the schema that conceives matter as something inert to which activity must be externally induced, that is to say, the schema “inert matter/external motor.” Activity is an internal principle; it is a force that subsists; it is what, in the most modern terminology, we call energy, and we understand that it preserves itself. Thus, force is to bodies what spiritual substances are to matter; an adaptation, a harmony is established between the two orders, an adaptation that is assured by God. Therefore, it is not necessary to conceive the action of God as that of a monarch that interferes daily in the activity of his subjects.

(Ribas 2003, 75)
Leibniz explores the intricate relationship between what he understands to be *Li* (the first principle) and *Qi* (energy bound up in matter) and thus engages in the same quest for a dynamism that is so prominent in his refutations of Clarke’s Newtonianism:

> With respect to that which is passive in them, all things are composed of the same prime matter, which differs only by the forms which motion gives it. Also, all things are active and possess Entelechies, Spirits and Souls only by virtue of the participation of the *Li*, i.e., the same originative Spirit (God), which gives them all their perfections. And matter itself is only a production of this same primary cause. Thus everything emanates from it as from a central point. But it does not follow from this that all things are different only by virtue of accidental qualities: as, for example, the Epicureans and other materialists believed, admitting only matter, figure and movement, which would truly lead to the destruction of immaterial substances, or Entelechies, Souls and Spirits.

(Leibniz 1977, 88)

*Li*, or the first principle, is basically viewed as a state of order, or of balance, which can get lost either apparently or temporarily, but is soon restored and overall retained even if the individual embodied experience does not always allow us to perceive it:

> What the eyes discover in the painting, the ears discover in music. Indeed, the most distinguished masters of composition quite often mix dissonances with consonances in order to arouse the listener, and pierce him, as it were, so that, anxious about what is to happen, the listener might feel all the more pleasure when order is soon restored, just as we delight in small dangers or in the experience of misfortune for the very feeling or manifestation they provide of our power or happiness, or just as we delight in the spectacle of ropewalkers or sword dancing for their very ability to incite fear, or just as we ourselves laughingly half toss children, as if we are about to throw them off. (It was also for this reason that when Christian, King of Denmark, was still an infant, wrapped in swaddling clothes, an ape carried him to the edge of the roof, and then, while all were in distress, the ape, almost as if he were laughing, put him safely back into the cradle.) On that same principle, it is insipid to always eat sweet things; sharp, acidic, and even bitter tastes should be mixed in to stimulate the palate. He who hasn’t tasted bitter things hasn’t earned sweet things, nor, indeed, will he appreciate them. Pleasure does not derive from uniformity, for uniformity brings forth disgust and makes us dull, not happy: this very principle is a law of delight.

(Leibniz 1989c, 153)

It might not be immediately apparent how Leibniz’s dynamism, in combination with his version of Chinese philosophy, relates either to his metaphysics
Leibniz’s philosophical optimism

or his conception of inhabiting the best of all possible worlds, but the conclusion soon becomes apparent: if there is a “prime form” which manifests in constant motion and change between apparent good and apparent evil, it is crucial to withhold or at least postpone judgement based on immediate, limited viewpoints. There is no direct evidence of Leibniz having read the famous Daoist parable recorded in the *Huainanzi* 18.7 (淮南子), which encapsulates the belief not only that good and evil events do not follow each other but that it is impossible for humans either to judge which is which or to predict their consequences and contingencies. However, the central lesson in the story of 塞翁失馬，焉知非福 (Sài wēng shī mǎ, yān zhī fēi fú/an old man at the border fortress loses a horse, but wasn’t it a blessing?) is that it is hard, if not impossible to see (其變難見也) whether an event betokens good luck or bad luck. In most popular versions of the story, the farmer losing his horse is pitied by his neighbours on behalf of his bad luck and congratulated as the horse returns with a wild steed in tow; he is pitied as his son, trying to ride the horse falls and breaks a leg, and congratulated as the son, due to his injury, avoids being drafted into the military and consequently killed. The quintessential wisdom of the story thus exclaims a general observation of the mutability of the appearance of circumstances and warns against the insertion of judgement:

故福之為禍, Gù fú zhī wèi huò, Good fortune becoming calamity
禍之為福, huò zhī wèi fú, calamity becoming good fortune
化不可極, huà bùkě jí, their transformations are limitless
深不可測也, shēn bùkě cè yě, so profound, they cannot be fathomed

(*Liu 2015, 729*)

Withholding judgement in the face of the constant transformation of the appearances of fortune and unfathomability embodies a form of the daoist *WuWei* (無為)—or non-exertion of action—which can also be translated as “no conscious action” or “non-set purpose” (*Liu 2015*). Stating that “the form of the term wuwei is negative” Xiaogan Liu asks “What is the object the term negates?” while mentioning, in response, Laozi’s conception to which the following imperative is central: “In all his acts the sage should conform to Dao, the natural pattern of things, and refrain from introducing human intervention” (*Ibid., 82*). The story of the old man losing his horse is in essence an introduction to this “natural pattern of things” and hence it enlightens, and encourages one to refrain from the forceful insertion of judgement.

I mention this story at length because it has direct implications for our understanding of Leibniz’s optimism and his thoughts on the appearance of evil. Peter Kivy points out Candide’s error when he reduces optimism to “the passion for maintaining that all is right when all goes wrong with us” (217). Kivy suggests that

we need only read “apparently wrong” for “wrong” to see that this depiction, in its way, is as accurate as it is funny. It must be the passion of the
Leibnizian to dispel the “illusion” of evil with his paradigm, his recipe, just as it must be the passion of the Parmenidean to dispel the “illusion” of motion.

(Ibid.)

However, concluding in the spirit of the Dao, Kivy notes that “neither optimism nor pessimism, for that matter, can be ‘refuted’ by confrontation with the world.” For, as he observes, the optimist’s

“recipe” for dispelling the “illusion” of evil is a double-edged sword, serving equally well as a “recipe” for dispelling the “illusion” of goodness, since, just as it is logically possible that every cloud has a silver lining, it is also logically possible that every silver lining has a cloud (223).

Yet, beyond confrontation with the world, optimism and pessimism can be confronted with the principles of reason. While postponement of judgement helps dispel the thrall of apparent evil, Leibniz demands of thought that it be committed to reason and reason in turn for him is founded in a metaphysical system. Pursuing destruction, for Leibniz, is incommensurable with reason, and thus reason assumes an ethical and a pragmatic dimension precisely at the point when one considers the overwhelming odds of destruction should one allow reason to run unchecked. For Leibniz, God has complete knowledge not just of what is but also of all times simultaneously, and he always makes the best and most suitable, most rational choice.9 Humans, although infinitely less gifted with vision and reason, nevertheless also choose and act according to inclinations resulting from what they think is best and most suitable. These inclinations and tendencies have been placed within us: “We are always and infallibly led to what strikes us the most,” he says in his Letter to Coste, On Human Freedom (195). To apply this notion: if we choose what is bad or harmful, especially when it comes to environments, we do so because we assume it is reasonable and advantageous—even if the benefit is short-lived or purely selfish. For example, even the decision to cut down a large percentage of rainforest and drive entire species to extinction is made by someone who believes it to be reasonable and good to do so within the framework of an underlying system of knowledge and values. This for Leibniz is not all bad news since faulty judgements and harmful inclinations can be remedied by a constant expansion of knowledge, by improving the *ars judicandi* and *inventendi* (judging and discovery). Ohad Nachtomy points out that for Leibniz, within an intelligible reality reduced to causal connections, “there is no room for values, morality and rational deliberation” (Nachtomy 2011, 161). One must strive to look ever deeper and remove obscurity and confusion. “Therefore,” as Leibniz tells us, “the soul must guard itself against deceptive appearances (*les surprises des apparences*) through a firm will to reflect and neither to act nor to judge in certain circumstances except after having deliberated fully” (Leibniz 1989a, 61; emphasis added).
Leibniz’s philosophy is committed to helping those in search of a defence of optimism with evidence that, essentially, all is well. “As those who have worked in the sciences know,” everything, including immaterial substances is, as he proposes, “directed so as to approach an end more and more, as asymptotes do. And although we sometimes slip back, as do lines that turn away, the advance must finally prevail and win” (Leibniz 1989d, 192). Moreover, this gives us the greatest amount of suspense because “we delight in small dangers or in the experience of misfortune for the very feeling or manifestation they provide of our power or happiness, . . . as we ourselves laughingly half toss children, as if we are about to throw them off” (1989c, 153).

Are we perhaps unconsciously creating environmental disasters because we would like to manifest unprecedented degrees of delight in our own power and happiness as we solve them? In any case, seeing things positively is a task, no less than a duty, for Leibniz. Thus, while “the Love of God Requires Our Complete Satisfaction and Acquiescence with Respect to What He Has Done,” Leibniz tells us that “we must act in accordance with what we presume to be the will of God, insofar as we can judge it, trying with all our might to contribute to the general good and especially to the embellishment and perfection of what which affects us or that which is near us” (1989a; emphasis added). Strictly speaking, we are affected by everything in the universe, albeit largely at the level of unconscious petits perceptions, to ask how this situation could be the ground for the arrival of a much greater good than would have been possible without it? In this way, our thoughts and efforts are directed towards the responses we might be able to give to the current crises and put us in a state of mind in which it is possible to envision improvement towards greater goodness, greater knowledge, and better concerted efforts. It is not just that Leibniz’s philosophy is compatible with an ecological ethics: it demands it.

**Considering the monad optimistically—a brief response to Pauline Phemister’s *Leibniz and the Environment* (2016)**

Leibniz’s relevance to the current ecological crises has been variously discussed. In her 2001 article *Leibniz and Ecology* and in her more recent 2016 monograph titled *Leibniz and the Environment*, Pauline Phemister summarises the scholarly argument and observes quite rightly that Leibniz has not escaped the attack levelled by ecosophers and ecocritics at the Enlightenment in general, and at Descartes, Hobbes and Locke in particular, even though—and this forms an important pillar of her argument—Leibniz offers much to current environmental philosophy precisely because he disagrees with enlightenment thought on fundamental issues that have direct bearing on the ways in which nature and humanity have been understood. While “Spinoza’s monism and panpsychism have provided positive inspiration to ecophilosophers convinced of the interconnectedness of all things in nature and the intrinsic value of everything in nature, Leibniz has not fared so well,” she reminds us (Phemister 2001, 239).
She admits that “Leibniz’s philosophy does appear to be wanting” in regard to the central claims commonly espoused by deep ecology and ecophilosophy. The first of these is the law of inter-connectedness, which Barry Commoner has called “the first law of ecology,” (1971, 16), while the second holds that “the universe does not exist for the sake of humans and [that] the concerns and needs of non-human creatures need to be taken into consideration as we decide our policies and future courses of action” (Phemister, 240). Phemister sets out to re-examine the charges of isolationist independence/anthropocentrism and, reading them in the context of Leibniz’s broader theory of substance in the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, she comes to the conclusion that “their intention is sometimes the reverse of what the casual reader might suppose” (240).

Leibniz’s Principle of Sufficient Reason, his insight into the role of final causes in our decision-making, and his strong conviction of the ultimate responsibility of reasonable creatures for the effects of their actions, are important moral and metaphysical positions that complicate the picture of a destructive modernism originating with Descartes and his followers. (Phemister 2001, 240)

However, Phemister contends that in the face of the extreme independence and “windowlessness” of each monad, or each perceiving individual, “a present day Leibnizian might argue that it really does not matter whether the biosphere is destroyed or maintained.” As she continues:

> In the universe as Leibniz conceived it, no creature physically affects any other. Instead, all living things merely co-exist in a pre-established harmony. And, were the harmony to break down, its collapse would pass undetected and, indeed, undetectable by any created being. There can be no ecological crisis in a world of such essentially isolated and independent individuals. (Phemister 2001, 243; emphasis added)

The question here arises as to whether Phemister actually needs to expound on connection and expression in order to find Leibniz’s ecological relevance, or whether it would also be possible—and perhaps even more fruitful—to take seriously the windowlessness of the monads and the idea of the solitude of each substance constituting its own enveloping world, complete with all impressions of others. For, I would argue, even if it might at first appear counter-intuitive, it is precisely in this radical aspect of Leibniz’s conception that we can, perhaps, find an alternative to the egocentric conceptions of the human self which ecophilosophers have tried to tackle since the 1960s and well into the fourth wave of ecocriticism of the last decade. For Leibniz, the universe is composite and multiform but not like a single city (or reality) viewed from millions of different vantage points (or embodied beings); rather, it is “multiplied as many times as there are substances” (1989a, 42). All substances “depend[s] on God, who preserves them and who even produces them continually by a kind of emanation”
Leibniz’s philosophical optimism

(Ibid., 46). And as all things come from god, our perceptions are “always true,” while “it is our judgements that deceive us” (Ibid., 47). “Each substance is like a world apart, independent of all other things, except for god.” Thus, “all our phenomena that is, all the things that can ever happen to us, are only consequences of our being.” Phenomena happen in “conformity with our nature . . . in conformity with the world which is in us” (Ibid.). In consequence “nothing is supernatural to it [our nature],” because we include in it “everything that it expresses, for our nature extends everywhere, since an effect always expresses its cause” (Ibid., 49), “for our soul expresses god, the universe, and all essences as well as all existences” (Ibid., 58), even though we have the bad habit of thinking of our soul as if it received certain species as messengers and as if it has doors and windows.

At a superficial glance, we might conclude that this is a form of solipsism or ego-inflation which, on the part of humans, could only foster harmful responses towards nature: attempts at conceiving all unity are often dismissed as grasping for totality. Yet, I would argue, the opposite is the case. The rampant egotism that currently expresses itself in the destruction of ecosystems comes from the very opposite Lockean conception of a clearly bounded subjective human self, vis-à-vis an exterior objective reality that is essentially inferior and can be used as a mere resource. We have decided that it is reasonable to exploit it, eat it, deface it, reduce it to a commodity, and fill it up with toxins or trash precisely because we consider it other-than-ourselves, mute, and incomprehensible.

It is here that Leibniz’ bold and provocative conception opens up alternatives that are worth considering. If every phenomenon around me is essentially my substance, then the grass and the insects and the birds that chase them and the toxic landfill and Fukushima are all part of me. As Leibniz insists, it is not possible to be happy in the midst of miserable people—nor, we might add, in environments in distress. I will tend to the grass as I tend to my toenails: and not assuming, just because I cannot presently feel their suffering directly in the confines of my body, that I should treat them with disregard.

If there is nothing but the soul and god, and if all other substances could disappear without the soul noticing, this would perhaps create not less but more incentive to establish happiness and to do one’s duty—because doing so could, in a strict sense, be considered an act of self-care (which paradoxically is the ecocentric view which the founding fathers of environmentalism wanted to reach). Leibniz confirms, in his Metaphysics and elsewhere, that “we are quite safe,” and that we can only be affected by God or ourselves. This sense of safety, finally, can serve as a source of confidence for decisive action.

For today’s reader, taking up Leibniz in the presence of continuous, unfolding environmental disasters on a global scale, it is precisely the power of conceiving the world that is at stake. In the face of mass extinction, loss of habitat through economic greed, climate change, and mass migration, it may appear even harder to believe in this world as the best of all possible worlds, but it might at the same time be more important than ever that we reclaim the power to conceive it this way, to rediscover our love for this afflicted planet,
to embrace it—as well as our own participation and life—as part of divine perfection rather than as a temporary affliction. Optimism is a reasonable and pragmatic choice, not because inhabiting the best of all possible worlds is an inevitability or an irrevocable self-fulfilling prophecy, but because it requires intellectual and moral effort by individuals using their faculties to find the best solutions possible and to give the maximum care to the best possible planet in its current, apparently afflicted, state.

Notes

1 “I also believe that Snell, who first discovered the rules of refraction, would have waited a long time before discovering them if he first had to find out how light is formed. But he apparently followed the method which the ancients used for catoptrics, which is in fact that of final causes. . . . That is what, I believe, Snell and Fermat after him (though without knowing anything about Snell) have most ingeniously applied to refraction. For when, in the same media, rays observe the same proportion between sines (which is proportional to the resistances of the media), this happens to be the easiest or, at least, the most determinate way to pass from a given point in a medium to a given point in another. And the demonstration Descartes attempted to give of this same theorem by way of efficient causes is not nearly as good. At least there is room for suspicion that he would never have found the law in this way, if he had learned nothing in Holland of Snell's discovery” (Leibniz 1989a, 55).

2 In the Discourse on Metaphysics, Leibniz deduces from the existence of the idea of a perfect being that since perfection includes existence “god exists by necessity if he is possible. It is indeed a prerogative of divine nature, one that surpasses all others, that divine nature needs only its possibility or essence in order actually to exist, and it is precisely this that is called ens a se” (1989a, 56).

3 Glenn A. Hartz makes a lucid argument for animals as aggregates, having a body and a soul: “An animal persists forever—its dominant monad shedding its current organic body and taking on a new one—unless annihilation was in its plan or ‘complete concept.’ . . . “Evidence of the full substantial status of brutes is evident again in a passage from 1712: ‘A substance is either simple, such as a soul, which has no parts, or it is composite, such as an animal, which consists of a soul and an organic body’ (C 13/PW 175). In 1714 he adds that ‘Each monad, together with a particular body, makes up a living substance’ (PNG 4). And a few sections later there is this: ‘Not only souls, but also animals cannot be generated and cannot perish’ (PNG 6). In these texts, souls and animals are equally substances, fully and unproblematically on a par” (Hartz 2007, 157). Although no such argument is made by Hartz, it would be desirable to discuss the ethical implications of Leibniz’ ontology and from this vantage point consider its possible repercussions on human behaviour towards animals.

4 Leibniz assumes that evil is a quasi-mathematical given of existence, as it “arises from the very essences or natures of created things; for the essences of things are eternal, even though things aren't. It has always been true that three times three is nine and it will always be so. These things do not depend on God's will, but on his understanding. For example, essences or properties of numbers are eternal and immutable, and nine is a perfect square, not because God wants it to be so, but because its definition entails that it is, for it is three times three, and thus it is a result of the multiplication of a number by itself. God's understanding is the source of the arc imperfect, one can only blame their limitation on their boundaries, that is to say, the extent of their participation in nothingness” (1989b, 113–14).

5 Leibniz's recourse to geometry in order to explain the progressive and dynamic relation of good and evil is noteworthy: “Here it is: isn't it true that if the order of things or divine wisdom required God to produce perfect squares, then God, having resolved
to do this, couldn't fail to produce incommensurable lines, even though they have the imperfection of not being able to be expressed exactly? For a square cannot fail to have a diagonal, which is the distance between its opposite angles. Let us push the comparison further, and let us compare commensurable lines with minds who sustain themselves in their purity, and incommensurables with less regulated minds who then fall into sin. It is evident that the irregularity of incommensurable lines arises from the very essence of figures, and must not be imputed to God; it is even evident that this incommensurability is not an evil that God can fail to produce. It is also true that God could have avoided it by creating, not figures and continuous quantities, but only numbers or discrete quantities. But the imperfection of incommensurables has been paid back with even greater advantages, insofar as it was better to allow them to occur so as not to deprive the universe of all figures. It is the same with minds less firm in sustaining themselves, whose original imperfection arises from their essence, which is bounded in accordance with their degree. Their sin, which is only something accidental or contingent (though it is grounded in their essence, without, however, resulting from it as a necessary consequence), arises from their will; and the incommensurably greater good that God knows how to derive from this evil comes from his infinite wisdom, and led him not to exclude them from existence, nor to prevent them from sinning. This he could have done, by using his absolute power, but it would, at the same time, have overturned the order of things that his infinite wisdom chose” (1989b, 116).

6 “I propose for further examination the view that Europe owes to Chinese organic naturalism, based originally on a system of ‘correlative thinking,’ brought already to brilliant statement in the Taoist philosophers of the—3rd century, and systematised in the Neo-Confucian thinkers of the + 12th, a deeply important stimulus, if it was not more, in the synthetic efforts which began in the 17th century to overcome the European antinomy between theological vitalism and mechanical materialism. ‘Organic naturalism,’ a vision of a complexly interrelated, self-organizing world which reconciled ‘theological vitalist idealism’ and ‘mechanical materialism,’ would run from Daoism to li xue Confucianism, and then through Leibniz to Hegel, Engels, and Whitehead” (Perkins 168).

7 “Since the Chinese called their li a circle, that is, the circle of taiji that integrated yin and yang, li coincided with the Western way of speaking of god as being a sphere whose center was everywhere and whose circumference was nowhere. . . . By citing the neo-Confucianist philosopher of the Song dynasty. Xi Zhu’s thoughts, Leibniz interpreted li as the quintessence of things and inferred that . . . it should have been conceived as the ‘prime form.’” (Hui Zou 91)


9 See, for example, p. 194 of Leibniz’s Letter to Coste, On Human Freedom: “God has chosen from an infinity of possibles that which he judged most suitable. But once he has chosen, we must confess that everything is included in his choice and that nothing can be changed, since he has foreseen and regulated everything once and for all, for he would not regulate things by bits and pieces. Consequently, sins and evils, which he has judged permissible in order to allow greater goods, are included in some way in his choice. It is this necessity that we can now attribute to things to come, a necessity which we call hypothetical or consequential, that is, necessity based on a consequence of the hypothesis of the choice made.”

10 Leibniz insists that “indeed, nothing can happen to us but thoughts and perceptions, and all our thoughts and our future perceptions are no more than consequences, albeit contingent, of our previous thoughts and perceptions. Hence, if I were capable of considering distinctly everything happening or appearing to me at the present time, I would be able to see therein everything that would ever happen or appear to me. This would not fail, but would happen in any case, if everything outside me were destroyed and only God and myself remained” (1989a, 54).
References


Leibniz’s philosophical optimism

Part 2

Buddhist perspectives on freedom, life, and nature
5 What is oriental liberalism?

Hiroshi Abe

Introduction

What are the philosophically inevitable challenges faced by the modern world as a whole—a world in which Western culture has become so prevalent? In a short essay of 1942, My Views on “Overcoming Modernity” (‘Kindai no Chôkoku’ Shiron), the Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani argues that these challenges lie in “rebuilding the very foundation of worldview formation as well as initiating a new self-aware formation for man” (Nishitani 2008, 53). According to his analysis of the historical root of these challenges—namely, the beginning of modernity in post-Renaissance Europe—“post-Renaissance man can be described as confronted with the fundamental difficulty of how to understand himself, as he was situated between three divided paths of worldview formation” (Nishitani 2008, 52) that were in basic conflict with one another: the Reformation, the Renaissance, and the birth of natural science. The splitting of the foundation of worldview into these three independent movements can be explained, in Nishitani’s view, in the following way:

Religion in the Reformation involved at bottom the absolute negation of the world and humanity, for it centered on God as absolutely other to world and man. . . . According to the standpoint of natural science, however, the natural world was governed by mathematical and physical laws. Furthermore, man was grasped at the same level as other creatures (for example, the theory of evolution), and animate creatures were grasped at the same level as inanimate ones. . . . In contrast to humanity’s absolute negation as set forth in the religion of the Reformation, natural science was indifferent to humanity. Third, the Renaissance and humanism represented the standpoint of humanity’s absolute affirmation. . . . These standpoints can also be described, respectively, as focusing on God, the world, and humanity or the soul.

(Nishitani 2008, 52)

As clearly stated here, the foundation of the western worldview is split apart by three distinct attitudes towards humanity—the attitudes of the reformation,
natural science, and the renaissance, that is, absolute negation, indifference, and absolute affirmation, respectively. Hence, what arises in Nishitani’s essay as a central concern is

the question of how the standpoint of religion, from which the absolute is to be grasped in its demand that humanity be negatively transcended, can provide a space of free play to both the standpoint of the humanities . . . in its total affirmation of humanity and the standpoint of science in its indifference to humanity, while at the same time unifying this free play.

(Nishitani 2008, 53)

In responding to this question, Nishitani conducts a thought experiment: he asks himself what would remain of us should we detach from ourselves the body as a physical object and the mind as a psychological object. This experiment results in the following observation:

It can be said that nothing actually remains. In this remainderless site, however, something in fact does remain. . . . We may call this the standpoint of subjective nothingness. Despite this name, however, it does not mean “nothing.” Rather, it signifies that which cannot be objectively apprehended as “being” in the manner of things.

(Nishitani 2008, 54–55)

To the extent that this remainder cannot be objectified, it is characterised as “nothingness”; but for Nishitani, it is also “true subjectivity.” Reflecting upon this true subjectivity, Nishitani proposes—in answer to his fore-mentioned question—that it is “Oriental liberalism” that enables the integration, within religiosity itself, of natural science and the humanities. This concept of Oriental liberalism consists in the idea of “freedom for both freedom from the world and freedom within the world” or “freedom for both world transcendence and world immanence” (sekai-chôetsu to sekai-naizai eno jiyû). As Nishitani elaborates:

True subjectivity goes beyond thing and mind, however, and appears as their negation. . . . This subjectivity involves the absolute negation and transcendence of both the body and its natural world and the mind and its cultural world. Here there is the freedom of religiosity that is absolute freedom from the world. . . . True subjectivity appears within all of our subjective actions, beginning with looking and listening. . . . When we . . . become aware of our true self, such awareness comes to us inseparably from both the body and its natural world and the mind and its cultural world. Conscious mental activities likewise remain unchanged here. It is simply that we become aware of these activities not as the working of the conscious self but rather as that of the subject as nothing. . . . This is why the absolute negation of everything, including culture and science, can at
What is oriental liberalism?

Once turn to absolute affirmation. . . . Freedom from the world can in and of itself turn to freedom within the world.

(Nishitani 2008, 55–56)

Whether Nishitani’s conception of Oriental liberalism still contributes something useful to the aforementioned “challenges” obviously depends on how far and in what way we, as his inheritors, can develop it philosophically. For this purpose, I believe, we must expose it to three basic questions:

1. Since, for Nishitani, the term “Oriental” generally means “Japanese,” we must ask: What is the Japanese view of freedom? We need some background on the Japanese idea of freedom, which could help us better understand Nishitani’s conception.

2. According to this view of freedom, how are we humans related to the nothingness?

3. How is “freedom for both freedom from the world and freedom within the world” possible?

Hence, this chapter consists of three parts. In the first, I give an overview of human freedom from the Japanese vantage point. In the second, taking the medieval Japanese Buddhist monk Shinran (1173–1263) as an example, I respond interpretatively to his teachings on the question of what is required of us in our relationship to the non-objectifiable—or what he calls *jinen*. And in the third, I turn to the interpretation of Shinran’s theory by Kitarō Nishida (the founder of the Kyoto school of philosophy) in order to elucidate his account of that which enables us to be free from and within the world.

**Freedom to be onozukara**

Here I would like to address the first of the three basic questions. Let me begin by introducing a personal experience of mine. As a fresh-faced newcomer to Germany who was not yet able to speak German well, I went to a restaurant, where, on the menu, I found what I took to be a marvellous option, namely, “Bier alkoholfrei.” You see, I mistook this German word to mean “all-you-can-drink beer,” though of course, as I know now, it means “alcohol-free beer.” How greatly disappointed I was to learn the truth!

Looking back on how I understood things at that time, it seems to me that I almost certainly had a Japanese way of thinking. In Japanese, people say, “Osake-niwa-fujiyû-shiteimasen,” which could be literally translated as “we are not unfree—that is to say, we are free—to drink as much alcohol as we want.” And, again in this context, there is even a borrowed English term in common usage in Japan, namely, “free drink,” which, in its Japanese coinage, implies that the price will not change no matter how many drinks you have. In short, then, I misunderstood the expression “alcohol-free,” because I confused it with the pseudo-English word in Japanese, “free drink.”
This trivial experience gave me the hypothetical idea that freedom for Japanese people means “freedom to” rather than “freedom from.” Indeed, as far as I know, this hypothesis can be supported by a variety of different usages of the Japanese word corresponding to freedom: *jiyū*. However, peculiar to some traditional usages of this word is the idea that freedom requires us to be self-less or forget ourselves. The following passage from the Japanese Samurai-warriors’ code of chivalry *Hagakure* (written circa 1716) offers a typical example:

The way of Samurai (*bushidō*) is found in death. If you must choose either to die or not to die, you should die quickly. . . . People must think you are mad, but not shameful, even if you die uselessly. This is what those who follow the way of Samurai do. Every morning and evening, you should die again and again. If you always live as the dead, then you have the freedom of a mastery of martial arts (*budō ni jiyû o e[n]*).

(Yamamoto 1974, 220)

As we see in the first half of this passage, the notion of death signifies “passing away”; but in the second half it takes on a rather different inflexion to suggest “dying to oneself” or “self-lessness.” In Japan, this view of death, the view that understands death as “ego death,” is connected with human freedom by Zen Buddhism as well as the Samurai moral values. To give an example, the tanka-poem composed by Shidō Bunan, a seventeenth-century Zen master, represents the ideal of life as follows:

We should do anything we want to do by totally becoming the dead, while we live. (*Ikinagara shibitotonarite narihatete omoinomamani sunuwazazoyoki.*)

If this is the case, then a question arises: what kind of view of “freedom to” is reflected in such linkage between freedom and self-lessness? I think it is helpful, here, to turn to a Japanological study by the Kyoto School philosopher, Shūzō Kuki. In his treatise *Nihonteki Seikaku* (The Japanese Character), Kuki writes:

Nature as “[arising] from oneself” (*onozukarana shizen*) is significant for the Japanese moral ideal. Japanese people do not like anything done on purpose but think highly of something that occurs from itself. They think it is not until their ethical deeds are done naturally that their morality is brought to completion. In this regard, the Japanese are different from the European. European ideology often considers nature to be opposed to freedom, whereas in Japanese practical experience there is a tendency to understand that nature and freedom inseparably fuse into one. Free is whatever gushes from itself naturally. If something results from strict and cunning reason, it is not free. . . . It is characteristic of Japanese morals not to distinguish freedom from nature but to ideally identify the field of moral with the horizons of life.

(Kuki 1981, 276–77)
In this passage, Kuki argues that Western philosophy and Japanese thought are strikingly different in terms of their views on the relationship between freedom and nature. In his view, Western philosophy generally contrasts human freedom with nature, which is ruled by natural necessity or natural laws. Naturally, we should espouse such an oversimplified interpretation of the Western view of freedom with at least some degree of caution. Nevertheless, it is worth giving Kuki’s claim due consideration in so far as it can, quite aptly, be applied (for example) to Kant’s insistence that:

A rational being has two points from which she can consider herself. . . . First, insofar as she belongs to the world of sense, under laws of nature (heteronomy); second, as belonging to the intelligible world, under laws that are independent from nature and not empirical but grounded solely in reason. . . . When we think of ourselves as free, we transfer ourselves into the world of understanding as its members.

(Kant 1911, 452–53)

For Kant, “freedom is a mere idea the objective reality of which can in no way be presented in accordance with laws of nature” (Kant 1911, 458).

In contrast, Kuki maintains that from the Japanese vantage point human freedom should be harmonious with nature. But what does nature mean, from a Japanese perspective? Let me address this question by clarifying the Japanese word that corresponds to “nature”: shizen. Although nowadays this word is the Japanese equivalent of “nature,” it was only in the 1890s that the term first appeared as a noun (cf. Yanabu 1982, 136). Prior to this—as can be shown in Japan’s leading eighth-century anthology of poetry, Man’yôshû (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves), and the first lexicon of Western philosophy Tetsugakuji’i (Dictionary of Philosophy) to appear in Japan in the 1880s—the term shizen had been used, for well over a thousand years, as an adverb or adjective. In other words, shizen originally implies “naturally” or “natural.” This suggests that the term primarily denotes neither beings nor a certain region of beings (such as the natural environment) but rather something’s natural way of being, no matter what that thing is.

Furthermore, as already shown in Man’yôshû, the term shizen also has a more traditional reading, which is onozukara—the literal translation of which would be “from oneself.” What does this mean? Masao Maruyama, the Japanese historian of Eastern political thought, tells us that “the Japanese word onozukara cannot be well defined as a thing’s specific essence. Rather, the idea of natural becoming or appearing from oneself is central to this word” (Maruyama 1998, 407). As explained here, “onozukara” denotes the way something comes spontaneously into being.

In short, the Japanese idea of nature as onozukara signifies something’s natural way of arising from itself. In this sense, onozukara (or shizen) cannot be objectified nor hypostatised. With this in mind, I would like to return to Kuki’s claim (earlier) that, to the Japanese way of thinking, human freedom harmonises
with nature. As I see it, Kuki’s view implies that there is a general belief among Japanese thinkers that we cannot be free until we become self-less and correspond exactly to nature in the sense of onozukara. To put it another way, as Kuki understands it, Japanese thought conceptualises “freedom to” as “freedom to be onozukara.”

Let us content ourselves with this rough sketch for the first main question and deal with the second main question in the next section.

**Shinran on the human freedom to be open to jinen**

With reference to the second question, I believe that the work of Master Shinran—who is known as the founder of Shin Buddhism—is particularly deserving of close attention. In broad brush strokes, Shin Buddhism rests upon three foundational pillars. First, Amida Buddha (formerly known as Hōzō Bosatsu) made and eventually fulfilled 48 vows as a result of his infinitely long period of meditation and Buddhist practice. Second, in his attainment of the vows (in particular, the eighteenth vow) Amida Buddha ensures that all beings are released from this world of suffering to enter his “pure land” (jyōdo), or the land of ultimate bliss. Third, even those so finite and weak that they could never hope to attain enlightenment through the rigours of practice may reach the pure land by reciting the sacred name of Amida Buddha (nenbutsu)—not by placing confidence in their own merits and abilities, but by holding firm faith in the absolute power of his great and compassionate wisdom, which is tariki, or “other-power”: a power altogether other than our own.

This rough sketch of Shin Buddhism is rather too brief to elucidate the most significant aspects of Shinran’s thought, so I would like to turn to a brief essay from his last years, *On Realization, Name and Nature qua Truth as such* (Gyakutoku Myōgō Jinen Hōni Shō). The essay is inserted at the end of the volume of verses *Hymns on the Right, Semblance and Last Dharma-Ages* (Shōzōmappo-wasan) and is often regarded as the quintessential summary of his teachings.

In this text, the term *shizen* (自然) or “nature,” which Shinran reads as “jinen,” plays a vital role. What is “jinen” for him? This is what he tells us:

As to the [compound] word jinen, I understand “[arising] from oneself” (onozukara) by [the first word] ji. It has nothing to do with what a person engaged in Buddhist practices manages (hakaranai). It suggests “causing the person to do so and so” (shikarashimu). [The second word] nen means “causing someone to do such and such.” It has nothing to do with what a practicing Buddhist manages, because it derives from [Amida] Buddha (nyonai)’s vow.

(Shinran 1969a, 220)

In this passage, Shinran emphasises that we cannot do anything solely through our own management or efforts; rather, we are caused to act by jinen or the natural working of Amida Buddha and should realise that, in reality, we are self-less
in doing whatever we do. Nevertheless, it does not follow from this that we are completely without a capacity for self-direction as if we were merely Amida Buddha’s puppets being tugged about by strings. On the contrary, Shinran says: “You should realize that the other power [than ours] entails [your] intention to intend nothing (tariki ni wa ginaki o gitosu)” (Shinran 1969a, 221). Here he uses the term gi (義), which I would like to translate as “intention.” Should my translation be apt, then what does this puzzling expression “the intention to intend nothing” imply? In this context, it is worth noting that a letter from Shinran in his last years provides us with a helpful commentary on “gi.” In the volume of letters Mattoshô (Lamp for the Latter Ages), he explains as follows:

The word gi corresponds to “the word of [one’s own] management” (hakarau kotoba). What a practicing Buddhist manages (hakarai) counts as her gi [or intention], because she does it within her self-power (jiriki).

(Shinran 1969b, 64)

I believe this commentary by Shinran himself allows us to identify the notion of “gi” with “management” in his sense. If this is the case, we could probably paraphrase the aforementioned quotation—that is, “the intention to intend nothing”—by saying “managing without managing.” Needless to say, we must carefully distinguish this sort of management from a totally passive attitude which manages nothing at all, since “managing without managing” requires us to be seriously engaged in a special kind of spontaneity that enables the fluid ongoing adjustment of ourselves to Amida-Buddha’s natural working.

As we have seen, the jinen in the meaning of Shinran denotes the natural working of Amida Buddha. However, this definition still lacks precision. As Shinran continues:

Supreme Buddha is formless. Because he is formless, he is called jinen. . . . I have been taught that “Amida Buddha” is an initial [tentative] name for the supreme Buddha for the purpose of informing us that he is formless. Amida Buddha is a means to tell us the mode [of the supreme Buddha] as jinen.

(Shinran 1969a, 222)

What Shinran tries to bring to our attention here is that we must not hypostatise Amida Buddha, because he does not exist as a certain independent entity. In this sense, we cannot say that jinen is the non-objectifiable natural working of Amida Buddha. Rather, we should think of Amida Buddha as this very “working” itself. And, what Shinran calls jinen is nothing other than this sheer, formless power.

From the discussion so far, we have seen the way in which Shinran understands human freedom to correspond to jinen. In my interpretation, this term refers to a passive state of human existence that liberates us from our ego-centred attitude and enables us to be open to the pure self-generated “working”
beyond us. Yet, at the same time, *jinen* has an active character in that it demands of us our best endeavours to receive other-power and thereby maximise our “passivity” in the sense of Shinran’s notion (discussed previously) of “intention to intend nothing.” Thus, Shinran thinks of human freedom as spontaneous receptivity. I think this is the very reason why his volume of verses *Hymns of the Pure Land Masters* (*Jyôdo-kôsô-wasan*) stresses the pivotal role of our self-power in entrusting ourselves to the other-power:

> Once we have realized with a firm belief that we are inherently self-centred and ridden on the power of the primal vow, this other-power will cause us to completely abandon our impure way of being and to prove the eternal bliss of the Dharma-nature.

(Shinran 1969a, 113)

**Nishida’s Shinran interpretation**

But this then raises the question of how we can transform our everyday sense of autonomy into the special attitude that is needed to optimise our receptivity. It would seem that such a radical conversion could not arise from within ourselves, so long as we are self-“managing” and bound by our self-power. At the same time, it would be an error to maintain that this conversion comes from other-power; for this would entail our being *already* receptive to the other-power and therefore not in need of conversion—we would in fact be pre-converted.

In my view, Nishida’s interpretation of Shinran gives us helpful guidance here. He unfolds Shinran’s idea of “nature qua Truth as such” (*jinen-hôni*) in the following way:

> What Shinran understands by the notion of *jinen-hôni* is quite different from nature in the sense of Western philosophy. It does not mean that we are driven by an impulse to pamper ourselves. . . . It ought to imply that we do our best no matter what we deal with. It should contain our limitless endeavor. It is far from a mere laissez-faire attitude. However, it requires us to realize that our endeavor is in itself not attributed to ourselves but occurs due to something which causes this endeavor to occur from itself. . . . Moreover, we have to think that Shinran’s *jinen-hôni* neither moves us from outside nor from inside but envelops us. On the contrary, we ourselves are located in it. This relationship between *jinen-hôni* and us is a case of what I call “absolutely contradictory self-identity” (*zettai mujyun teki jiko dôitsu*).

(Nishida 1988e, 369)

If I am not mistaken, Nishida tries to show that whenever we make every possible effort to do something, this effort is made by us and derives from *jinen*’s
power to cause everything to occur from itself at the same time. In other words, when we are engaged in something with all our strength and summon up even the last drop of our resolve, this is certainly our own strength in every sense, but, at the same time, it is not only our own. On these occasions, such concentrated energy is more than the power of the self, whether this self is aware of it or not, because nature (in the sense of jinen or onozukara), which serves as the basis of the self, unexpectedly joins forces with it if it is at the apex of its own effort. I believe this situation is what we already understand more or less, when we say: “Heaven [onozukara’s power] helps those who help themselves [the self who does its best].”

Returning, then, to the problem raised at the beginning of this section, as to how we might transform our everyday stance, what does Nishida teach us? According to my interpretation, his solution would be that we need no conversion from the habitual, self-oriented attitude to the careful exercise of maximising our passivity. On the contrary, if we affirm and radicalise our own efforts to such an extreme that we ourselves become lost in doing our very best and in this way become self-less—or to put it another way, if we overcome our self-centred attitude, so to speak, from within—then our self-power can, perhaps surprisingly, work together with the other power of jinen (or onozukara).

Here it is worth mentioning that our own effort, or our immanent self-power, gives us freedom within the world, while the transcendent other-power of jinen makes us free from the world. If this is the case, I believe we may now bring the question of how our own power can coincide with the working of jinen to the third main question this chapter posed at the outset—the question of what makes “freedom for both freedom from the world and freedom within the world” possible. Given the equivalence of these two questions, I hope that a broad outline of Nishida’s later philosophy might help us to formulate a response to the latter because, as the aforementioned quotation shows, Nishida clearly understands Shinran’s jinen as something which “envelops” us and in which—from the viewpoint of his later thought on “place” (basho)—we are “located.”

Nishida compares nature (shizen or jinen) with what he calls the historical world (rekishiteki sekai) (Miki and Nishida 2007, 51), which he conceives as “the world whence the self came into being, where it works and whither it will go away” (Nishida 1988c, 512). For Nishida, however, the historical world means more than the life-world in which we are always already embedded, because, unlike the latter, the former is characterised by its “absolute being of place (basho)” (Nishida 1988d, 403).

What does he mean, however, by the notion of “absolute being of place”? In an essay entitled Place, Nishida insists: “Beings must be located in something [other than themselves]” (Nishida 1988a, 208). In more concrete terms he argues: “Acknowledging something to be should imply supposing a place where it is located” (Nishida 1988a, 241). The point is that, for him, “to be” (aru) means “to be located in” (oite aru). If this is the case, the proposition “S
is $P$” can be translated into “S is located in $P$.” What does such an apparently useless paraphrase suggest? Nishida says:

For instance, various colors are located in the general idea of color. This general idea can be identified with a place where different colors are located. . . . The copula of the judgment ‘red is a color’ entails that the particular is located in the universal and the latter is a place of the former. (Nishida 1988a, 225–26)

As shown here, by means of the aforementioned paraphrase, Nishida interprets the proposition “S is P” to mean that the predicate (or the universal) is a “place” where the subject (or the particular) is located—although this predicate itself (as, for example, the idea of colour) can be located as a subject in a more fundamental place (e.g., idea in general) and so forth. What does he intend by this interpretation? I believe the following passage most directly expresses his central idea. “What is determined as a subject is considered to be the self-determination of the predicative universal. . . . We can regard all beings as the self-determination of placewise-being (bashoteki $u$)” (Nishida 1988d, 383). The implication of this is that in contrast to Aristotle, who famously defines the true substratum as that which is an ultimate subject and cannot become a predicate of anything else, Nishida takes the most fundamental place to be the predicate (or the predicative universal) into which all particular subjects can be subsumed as its self-determinations.

Briefly, the absolute being of place implies the fore-mentioned way of being that features the historical world (or nature as $jinen$): the way of being that enables it to contract to individual subjects in accordance with its own self-determination. In other words, “each of us was born as the . . . place’s self-determination” (Nishida 1988c, 507) in this very historical world, just as individual subjects are located in and respectively represent the predicative universal. However, given that we all are modifications of the place or the historical world, we might then wonder how each of us can be this particular irreplaceable individual which, unlike a stereotypical duplicate, is never reducible to the universal? In this context, it is noteworthy that Nishida also finds the historical world to be “the world of individuals” where, as unique beings, individuals determine themselves, respectively, by virtue of their reciprocal determinations (cf. Nishida 1988b, 305–7). Hence, according to Nishida, the self-determination of the historical world (or $jinen$) does not lead to the uniformity of its manifestations but implies, rather, our self-determination as individuals through our mutual interactions. Moreover, as cited earlier, Nishida contends that this nexus between $jinen$ and us can be explained by what he characterises as “absolutely contradictory self-identity.” Here a question of most crucial importance for the present discussion arises: how does the notion of absolutely contradictory self-identity elucidate the relationship between $jinen$’s other-power and our self-power?

In order to clarify this, I would like to quote a well-known verse from the Gospel of John: “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth
alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24, KJV). Let us compare *jinen* to the grain of wheat dying in the earth, and compare ourselves as individuals to a harvest from this single grain. On the one hand, the self-sacrificing grain (let us call it G1) is not identical with all other harvested grains (let us call them G2, G3, and so on) each of which is individually distinct from the other. This difference or disharmony, which can be expressed as G1 ≠ G2 ≠ G3. . ., corresponds to what Nishida means by the “absolutely contradictory” relationship. Then, on the other hand, G1 is incarnated and reflected in G2, G3, and so on by negating itself and transforming itself into them. Thus, despite—or rather because of—the contradictory relationship between G2, G3, and so on, G1 establishes its “self-identity” through them. This parable of the grain of wheat suggests the following: we “see the other at our own foundation” (Nishida 1988f, 155) while encountering *jinen*’s other-power in the depth of our self-power. At the same time, we also “see ourselves in the absolutely other” (Nishida 1988f, 155) through our self-awakening—a self-awakening that realises the self-power of every individual as the self-determination of *jinen*’s other-power. In this way, I hope to have shown that this altogether brief explanation might also furnish a reply to the third main question that this chapter sought to address.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have interpreted Nishitani’s inspiring conception of oriental liberalism, focusing especially on its key feature: freedom for both freedom from the world and freedom within the world. In particular, we have tried to reply to the three basic questions mentioned earlier. To summarise, as to the first question, we have shown that the Japanese view of freedom can be formulated as “freedom to be *onozukara.*” To the second question, we have two answers. According to our reading, Shinran argues that non-objectifiable *jinen* requires us to be open to receiving its natural power passively and as appropriately as possible while relinquishing our ordinary, self-centred attitude. In a contrasting interpretation, Kitarô Nishida emphasises the need to maximise our own power until we exceed its limit and find concurrence between our self-power and the other-power of *jinen*; it is what Nishida calls the “absolutely contradictory self-identity” that makes this concurrence possible and thereby, in regard to the third question, shows us how freedom, as “freedom for both freedom from the world and freedom within the world,” is indeed possible.

**Note**

1 An example from *Man’yo-shū* (Nakanishi 2019, 184–85):

> “山辺乃 五十師乃御井者 自然 成錦乎 張流山可母” (*yamanoheno ishinomi’iwa onozukara naremishikio harenuyamakamo*)

Another example from *Tetsugakuji’i* (Inoue 1881, 57):

> “Natural 合性、自然、天真
> Nature 本性、資質、天理、造化、宇宙、洪鈞、万有”
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6 Emptying ecology

Chan Buddhist antinomianism and environmental ethics

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The Question of Chan/Zen Buddhism

*Introduction: the trouble with Zen*

Chan or Zen signifies meditative practice (*dhyāna* in Sanskrit) and designates the East Asian transmissions that prioritise meditative practice. To start with contemporary Japanese controversies before turning to the Tang era, Zen Buddhism (*Zen Bukkyō*) has recently received serious critique (in both the hermeneutical and the social-political senses of criticism). Legitimate historical and conceptual questions have been posed, as its historical self-narratives and moral and political sensibilities have been contested and deconstructed in East Asian and Western scholarship. Deep worries regarding its interpretation of reality as self-nature and buddha-nature (the functioning of awakening) manifesting itself in the myriad things have led to questions about the character of Zen as a genuine form of the Buddhist dharma.

A prominent advocate of critical Buddhism (*Hihan Bukkyō* 批判仏教) Hakamaya Noriaki (袴谷憲昭) made the provocative claim that “Zen is not Buddhism” in the early 1990s, in *A Critique of the Zen School* (*Zenshu Hihan*) (Swanson 1993, 135; 1997, 19). He differentiated genuine Buddhism as a “critical philosophy” from the Japanese ideology of direct experience. Zen had distorted Buddhism from a critical philosophy into a radical yet hollow topical rhetoric. Hakamaya claimed that his criticism did not encompass Chinese Chan Buddhism. Subsequent scholarship radicalised his thesis as it problematised the entire history and *ethos* of diverse yet interconnected Chinese Chan, Korean Seon, Vietnamese Thiền, and Japanese Zen teachings.

Zen’s troubles have multiplied as recent critical accounts contest its philosophical presuppositions, its history as mythological, its rhetorical devices and strategies as uncritical, and its complicity with power, hierarchy, and inequality. Zen Buddhist complicity with and radical engagement in the form of “Imperial Way Zen” (*kōdō Zen* 皇道禅) on behalf of Japanese imperialism, militarism, and nationalism is perhaps the most vivid example deployed to diagnose structural problems with Chan/Zen as such, in the writings of critical Buddhism and also in works such as Brian Daizen Victoria’s *Zen at War* and

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Zen War Stories (Victoria 1997, 2003; see also Ives 2009). Victoria’s two books offer a global assessment of Chan and Zen transmissions as essentially antinomian, based on its twentieth-century Japanese uses and misuses. He describes its amoral and antinomian ethos as a basic deficit that has been deployed to legitimate state-coercion and violence (Nelson 2017, 221–23).

Critical Buddhist scholarship extended the deconstruction—as Bernard Faure described it (1994, 1996)—of the aura of Zen to earlier forms of Chan Buddhism, by undermining the retrospectively reconstructed narratives of its mythic Indian origins and formation through iconoclastic teachers and teachings during the Tang era. Two examples clarified in the current contribution are: (1) the images of “wild” iconoclastic Chan masters such as Mazu Daoyi 馬祖道一 (d. 788) and Linji Yixuan 臨濟義玄 (d. 866 CE)—a figure portrayed as using variations on Zhuangzian strategies and vocabulary such as the genuine person without rank (wuwei zhenren 無位真人)—have been repeatedly reimagined and stylistically radicalised since the Tang dynasty (Jia 2006; Poceski 2015; Welter 2008); and (2) the rhetoric of radical spontaneity, non-duality, immediacy, directness, and emptiness, associated with the Hongzhou 洪州 and Linji Chan styles, has ethically and socially destructive antinomian and nihilistic consequences—a concern that was posed earlier against the feared anti-moral consequences of the mysterious learning literati and their “pure conversations,” and which was raised during the Tang era by the Chan-Huayan Buddhist monastic scholar Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780–841).

Recent critical work is concerned with (1) an essentialist reification of things in the teaching of an intrinsic buddha-nature (tathāgatagarbha) or self-nature (svabhāva) (two related yet distinct concepts) in all things, which would appear to contradict the Buddha’s teaching of no-self and emptiness and (2) a seemingly opposite worry of the destructive consequences of an antinomian and nihilistic teaching of emptiness. In the present chapter, I navigate this dilemma by articulating the Chan Buddhist concept of emptiness as a practice of emptying that has significant implications for an ethics without norms and principles, including the undoing of fixed Buddhist principles and practices characteristic of Mazu and Linji, and an environmental ethics that empties and dereifies “nature” for the sake of the releasement of living and non-living things.

Given the perils of the ethically problematic reification and essentialism of words and practices, in which one no longer hears or responds ethically to others, one aspect of Chan Buddhism is that not only can it be used as an ideological source for fixation and domination, as recent critical Buddhist scholarship reveals, but it can place these—and specifically its own self-fixation and reification—into question. Chan attempts to enact and place into practice the emptiness articulated in Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā that undoes falsifying conceptions (viparyaya) and hypostatisations (prapañca). The apparent ethical skepticism and antinomianism of Chan Buddhist discourses, informed by Madhyamaka and Daoist sources, can serve as a point of departure for—instead of the nihilistic oblivion of—the ethical, insofar as it shapes an ethos. Its scepticism does not merely destabilise or negate conventional morality and conventional
immorality. It is the performatively enactment of a way (i.e., \textit{dao as ethos} and life-praxis) through the exposure to the emptiness of form as self-emptiness.

Such historical and philosophical considerations will lead to reflection upon an ecological comportment and the practice of emptying and encountering as part of more appropriate, ecologically oriented cultures of nature without the ideological fixation of nature that is part of its domination and destruction.

\textbf{Killing the buddha on the way}

Followers of the way, if you want insight into dharma as it is, just don’t be taken in by the deluded views of others. Whatever you encounter, either within or without, slay it at once. On meeting a buddha slay the buddha, on meeting a patriarch slay the patriarch, on meeting an arhat slay the arhat, on meeting your parents slay your parents, on meeting your relative slay your relative, and you attain emancipation. By not cleaving to things, you freely pass through.

道流，爾欲得如法見解，但莫受人惑。向裏向外，逢著便殺。逢佛殺佛，逢祖殺祖，逢羅漢殺羅漢，逢父母殺父母，逢親眷殺親眷，始得解脫，不與物拘，透脫自在。

(\textit{Linji yulu} 臨濟語錄, CBETA T47 N1985: 500b21–25; Kirchner and Sasaki 2008, 236)

This statement ascribed to Linji in \textit{The Recorded Sayings of Linji} is still able to shock readers: slaying the Buddha contradicts the proper reverence owed the Buddha as the transmitter of the dharma and seems to advocate a violence that is incompatible with his teachings. The focus of this negation of worldly and Buddhist authorities is on not being taken in by them and achieving a form of emancipated freedom (\textit{toutuo zizai} 透脫自在). The statement has contributed to the modern interculturally constituted aura of Zen as a radical rejection of authoritarian power for the sake of self-realisation. This image of Linji, and Zen, has been repeatedly constructed and reconstructed since his lifetime, in East Asia and global modernity, to emphasise a radical freedom that constituted the authority and orthodoxy of this teaching and lineage.\textsuperscript{7}

Moreover, the notorious images of violence and destruction can be better interpreted as indicating profoundly Buddhist practices in response to their conventionalisation and reification that the classic Chan masters are portrayed as contesting. Another later passage in the \textit{Linji yulu} clarifies the language of murder and iconoclastic destruction—namely, the five heinous crimes (\textit{wu wujian ye} 五無間業, \textit{pañcānantarya}) of classic Buddhism—as indicating practices of emancipation that unfixate fixations and empty reified constructs of beings: (1–2) killing the father and mother means overcoming the locus of arising and extinguishing and coveting in non-attachment; (3) killing the Buddha on the path suggests the freedom of pure non-thinking; (4) the destruction of the sangha means seeing through the conditionality of the passions; and (5) the destruction of scriptures and images is a practice of emptying (\textit{jiongran wushi} 迥然無事) in which causal relations, the mind, and the dharmas are disclosed as

The provocative figure of Linji has been portrayed as radicalising earlier Chan deconstructive tendencies. In the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch (Liuzu Tanjing 六祖壇經), the quasi-mythical Huineng 惠能 teaches awakening through non-abiding and is depicted as contesting the idealising perfectionist fixation of the pure mind in Yuquan Shenxiu 玉泉神秀 through emphasising the free-flowing mobility of thoughts and things: “dao must flow or circulate freely (dao xu tongliu 道須通流)” (Wang 2003, 68; Nelson 2017, 247). This free anarchic or dao-archic flow is blocked through conceptual and practical fixations.

Youru Wang noted that “The entire Linji Lu is full of the spirit and energy of deconstruction and self-deconstruction” (2003, 79). “Killing the Buddha,” and other iconoclastic declarations ascribed to Linji, contest the conventional and Buddhist understanding of precepts, principles, and rules to be merely applied and followed. They aim at (to adopt an expression from the Zhuangzi) becoming a genuine person without rank or status (wuwei zhenren 無位真人) since external social conventions of rank and status undermine the genuineness of the way. One can question the extent to which Linji’s “killing the Buddha” metaphorically challenges appeals to authority without insight and to which his “genuine human without rank,” as self-erasing, contests deeply hierarchical and unequal societies for reasons of awakening and responsive compassion.8

As recent historical research into the monastic and social-political contexts of Chan and Zen has illustrated, their strange and shocking linguistic strategies about morality challenge conventional understandings of the ethical, including—self-critically—Buddhism itself. Still, this does not necessarily entail the absence or negation of the ethical in the sense of endorsing or advocating the immorality or nihilism that some detractors fear.9 Linji’s announcement about killing the Buddha, the patriarch, and one’s parents is intended to shock and disorient the listener into awakening rather than to advocate its literal practice. In Linji’s discourses, the “true human without rank” breaks with the hierarchy and conventionality of society and thereby becomes capable of a spontaneous compassion and responsiveness. The emptiness of things disclosed in aporetic and shocking exchanges is not itself a positive or final explanation but a means to dismantle fixed and reified structures, awakening receptiveness to the disclosure and singular event of the thing itself in its suchness. Consequently, the amoral and nihilistic readings ignore the manifold adaptations of the classic Buddhist concept of the “fault of annihilation” in Tang era Chan sources (Shengyan 1999, 56). Such accounts inadequately address the worldly and ethical character of awakening in Chan Buddhist portrayals (James 2004).

This preliminary sketch of deconstructive communication and enacting emptiness, which are suggestive for the category of “nature,” provokes questions concerning the character and adequacy of Linji’s strategies: does this radicalised language leave us without an ethical measure or standard? Does it legitimize a plurality of contradictory ethical and anti-ethical comportments and practices? What dao or ethos could it possibly suggest as a therapeutic critical
model and skilful means (upāya) for responding to contemporary ecological crisis-tendencies?

False rhetoric or emancipatory model? Chan antinomianism and anarchism

Chan’s antinomianism problematic

There is a more widespread problem of antinomianism in Chan/Zen transmissions that needs more nuanced consideration: it is not only a modern or recent critical concern or one that applies only to a modern nationalistic form of Zen Buddhism. Criticisms of what is now categorised as “antinomianism” and “nihilism” belong to the Chan tradition itself as well as its non-Chan Buddhist and Neo-Confucian critics: an early indirect expression of such concerns (which critiques non-duality without identifying its potential antinomian consequences) can be explicated in the response of Guifeng Zongmi to the Hongzhou lineage of Chan, associated with Mazu, from which Linji’s Chan is descended through Baizhang Huaihai 百丈懷海 (720–814) and his teacher Huangbo Xiyun 黃檗希運 (d. 850) (Broughton 2012, 18).

Chan Buddhism has been depicted as “iconoclastic, anti-institutional, antinomian, and subitist” (Adamek 2007, 253). These interrelated categories emerged from Christian and modern Western discourses such that one can genuinely pose the question of their appropriateness in premodern East Asian contexts and discourses. For instance, what is “antinomian”? “Antinomian” arises from the Greek expression ἀντί νόμος, which comes to signify “against the law.” This meaning emerged as a polemical, abusive term in Christian debates, as it was employed against advocates of the absolute priority of faith who were seen as undermining conventional ethical norms and laws. Buddhism lacks the same conception of faith, law, or the rejection of the law in the name of faith. Scholars have nonetheless identified affinities in Chan’s “strange words and extraordinary actions” (qiyan jixing 奇言畸行) such as shouting, the use of the stick and the whisk, and its focus on single-minded practices to the extreme of overturning conventional norms and the Buddhist precepts themselves. These are not simply unconventional ways of expressing the conventional, at least in the period of their radical employment. They seek to go more deeply into the heart of the matter itself through paradoxical, tautological, and poetic “living words” (shengyu 聖語) and the great doubt (dayi 大疑) that defixates the self in ways that conventional practices and teachings cannot accomplish (Wang 2003, 175–82).

The category of antinomianism appears to capture specific gestures of Hongzhou style Chan Buddhism. It appears insufficient insofar as Chan endeavours to realise in practice (rather than in a subjective disposition of absolute faith) an emptiness immanently operating in things themselves that is more fundamental either than norms and principles (nomos) or the opposition to them (anti). However, antinomianism returns here in a specifically un-
anti-ethical form if it means, as Jinhua Jia remarked, that the buddha-nature “can be identified with the all activities of daily life, whether good or evil” (2006, 79).

The irreverent, amoral, and anarchic forms of Hongzhou Chan practice encountered opposition as they developed at the same time as they were increasingly integrated by becoming conventionalised, fixated, and established as orthodox in the Linji school during the Song and subsequent eras. The history of the development of paradoxical ways of speaking from the encounter dialogue (jiyuan wenda 機緣問答) between the master and the student to the formalisation of the kōan (gong’an 公案) and its meditative and ritual practices indicates this process of simultaneous radicalisation and deradicalisation of Tang era Chan: such as, for example, later forms of meditation focusing on basic keywords or the critical phrase (huatou 話頭) and kōan practice as a ritualised performative enactment.10

Two critics of radical Chan Buddhism: Zongmi and Jeong Dojeon

Two instances of the antinomian problematic and critical response to Chan Buddhism can be found in Tang era China and early Joseon era Korea. First, Guifeng Zongmi was a significant scholar and patriarch in both the Chan and Huayan 華嚴 lineages of Buddhism, and his interpretations would play important roles in later Chinese and Korean debates between Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism (e.g., Muller 2015).

Zongmi criticised Daoist generative nothingness (wu) and naturalness (ziran) in light of the Buddhist teaching of karmic causal conditioning. He warned of the negative antinomian moral consequences in his Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity (Yuanren lun 原人論) in which he endeavoured to integrate the three prevailing families of teachings (sanjiao 三教) and demonstrate the hierarchical superiority of Buddhism over the rival teachings of Confucianism and Daoism (Gregory 1995, 80–104). All, he noted, are “determined by particularizing karma of previous lifetimes and not by spontaneous naturalness” (Ibid, 203). The three teachings each aim at according with the times and responding to things (suishi yingwu 隨時應物) (Ibid., 74). Daoism and Zongmi’s Sinicised Buddhism aim at a free interthingly responsiveness (yingwu) to be achieved through their respective ways of enacting emptiness. Yet, even at its best, the Daoist way is only partial, undermining its own innermost aspirations according to Zongmi’s critical portrayal. It is the Buddhist analysis of the nexus of causal-ity, directive and particularising karma, and morality that makes the crucial difference leading to the genuine anarchic or unrestricted responsiveness discussed in Daoism as the Buddha freely responds to all beings and their plight without any conditions (yingxian wuqiong 應現無窮) (Ibid., 206). It is the responsive attunement to what is as it is reinterpreted in relation to the Buddhist dharma that alone can genuinely attain it. Zongmi’s understanding of karmic causalities and entanglements would offer a different perspective than Daoist autopoietic or ziranist naturalness for environmental philosophy.
Interconnected issues of karmic causality, morality, and spontaneity arise in Zongmi’s interpretation of the Hongzhou style of Chan that shares a number of affinities and problems with Daoism. He critiques it in a number of philosophical ways without identifying it with radical iconoclasm, antinomianism, and anti or im-morality. This interpretation, along with surviving Tang sources, indicates that the Tang version of Hongzhou Chan is not as radical as its later Song era depictions (where they are used to legitimate an orthodox establishment) as well as Zongmi’s carefulness in assessing a related, different lineage of Chan Buddhism. Zongmi expresses concerns in his letter to the official and Buddhist literati Pei Xiu 裴休 (791–864) regarding whether the Hongzhou prioritisation of the “ordinary mind” undermined the disciplined pursuit and cultivation of the mind in the Buddhist path. Maxims such as “ordinary mind is the way” (pingchang xin shi dao 平常心是道), “this mind is the Buddha” (shixin shifo 是心是佛), and “no mind, no Buddha” (feixin feifo 非心非佛) were attributed to Mazu. These statements signify: “no intentional creation or action, no right or wrong, no grasping or rejecting, no terminable or permanent, no profane or holy (無造作,無是非,無取捨,無斷常,無凡無聖。) . . . all these are just the way: walking, abiding, sitting, lying, responding to conditions, and handling matters (只如今,行住坐臥,應機接物,盡是道。)” (Jia 2006, 123). It means here in this moment the non-dual enactment of ordinary everyday life. The dao (i.e., the dharma) needs no cultivation (dao buyong xiu 道不用修) as everything is and culminates in dao (jin shi dao 盡是道).

Zongmi has such assertions in mind when he remarked in his letter that: “Present-day Hongzhou’s just saying that every type of passion, hatred, precept [holding], or concentration [samadhi] is the functioning of the buddha nature fails to distinguish between the functioning of delusion and awakening, perverted and correct” (Broughton 2012, 98). If the everyday mind already is the way in its delusions and passions, and everything (things and states) is an expression of the function of buddha-nature (the tathāgatagarbha or nexus or matrix of the Tathāgata), then the distinctions necessary to Buddhist (non-awakening and awakening) and ethical (wrong and right) practices are lacking: “Passion, hatred, friendliness, and good are all the buddha nature. What distinctions exist?” (Broughton, 98).

Zongmi contests the Hongzhou lineage’s presupposition that the mind-nature of the world as it is, in its suchness/thusness (zhennu 真如, tathātā), occurs without words and cannot be ignorant or foolish such that discrimination and judgement are unnecessary: “This is like a person who just discerns that wetness from beginning to end is undifferentiated but does not realise that the merit of supporting a boat and the fault of overturning it are widely divergent” (Broughton, 99). As Broughton notes, Zongmi criticised the antinomian breakdown of distinctions between “precept holding and precept breaking,” “mental concentration and mental distraction,” “perverted views of reality and correct views,” and “merits and faults” (Ibid., 18). Consequently, as a partial and self-defeating form of Buddhist teaching, Hongzhou is, according to Zongmi, still “near to the gate of all-at-once awakening”; yet, unlike his own
Heze lineage (菏澤宗), standing at "the gate of step-by-step practice [Hongzhou] makes the mistake of completely deviating from it" (Ibid., 100).

Hongzhou has one-sided understandings of buddha-nature and emptiness in Zongmi’s analysis which, some argue, infects later understandings of Zen Buddhism. In the context of the Tang period, Zongmi expresses in this letter a worry about antinomianism in the moderate form: that is, if everything is true or pure just as it is in its non-dual suchness, then all ethical and Buddhist distinctions, judgements, and spiritual endeavours will be undercut. It will be later commentators and critics who will conclude that the Hongzhou and Linji lineages advocate radical anti-conventionalism and iconoclasm that entail the destruction of religion, morality, and the ethical life of the community.

This line of criticism became a key element of the Neo-Confucian critique of Chan and Buddhism as a whole. Thus, in the early Joeson era in Korea, the Neo-Confucian politician and anti-Buddhist polemicist Jeong Dojeon (1342–1398) composed critiques of Buddhism, culminating in his Array of Critiques Against Buddhism (Bulssi Japbyeon 佛氏雜辨, more literally “Discerning Miscellaneous Buddhist Nonsense”) to which the Seon Buddhist monk Gihwa 己和 (1376–1433) answered in his Exposition of the Correct (Hyeonjeong non 顯正論).13

Referencing The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment (Yuanjue jing 圓覺經), a popular text in Chan circles on which Zongmi and Gihwa both composed commentaries, Jeong remarked that Chan advocates claimed that “goodness is none other than this mind, and you cannot use mind to cultivate mind. Evil is none other than this mind, and you can’t use mind to eliminate mind.” The consequence of this ethos was that “the practices of disciplining oneself against doing evil, and endeavouring to cultivate one’s goodness disappeared.” Chan Buddhists claimed: “Even lust, anger, and ignorance are divine practices; one loses the way by regulating one’s behaviour through observance of the precepts.” Jeong concludes: “Regarding themselves as having avoided falling into the pit of entanglements, having released themselves from bondage and cast off the fetters, they arrogantly abandon themselves, ignoring the norms of social order.”14

Zongmi contended that Chan non-dual practices need not entail the absence of ethical distinctions (i.e., wholesome, shan 善, kuśala and unwholesome, bushan 不善, akuśala) that he perceived to be operative in Hongzhou Chan. Gihwa laments both the loss of “practices of disciplining oneself against doing evil, and endeavouring to cultivate one’s goodness,” and those who assert that “lust, anger, and ignorance are sacred practices.” Such practices are all the more entangled in believing that they have been overcome. Gihwa adopts the Zongmi model by justifying the specifically ethical character of Chan Buddhist practices, distinguishing between two forms of Buddhist ethics: (1) a basic shallower rule-oriented practice of following precepts and (2) a non-dual practice of the six perfections (liudu 六度, pāramitā) that are intertwined with the fundamental Buddhist teachings of interdependent origination (yuanqi 緣起, prābhāsyamūtpāda) and emptiness of a fixed intrinsic self-nature.
This model potentially indicates ways of addressing charges of antinomianism and another way of engaging questions of an appropriate and responsive comportment in an age of deeply rooted and systematic ecological and environmental crisis. On the one hand, crisis-conditions require a social-political behaviour; on the other hand, they call for a radical transformation of the current destructive culture of nature intimated in practices of emptying constructs and prejudices until emptiness is itself emptied—or of defixation and dereification—and of the opening of the encounter in the extreme deconstructive and self-deconstructive tendencies of Hongzhou-Linji Chan that its subsequent established forms have used for a variety of purposes.  

Ordinary mind as the way: beyond nomos and antinomos

Victoria and others have identified antinomianism as the primary problem of Zen Buddhism that can be extended to other forms of Buddhism insofar as they contest dualistic categories of good and bad, right and wrong, and so on (Victoria 1997, 2003). Victoria is concerned with modern Japanese Zen, yet Mazu-Linji lineages are thought to be primary exemplars of anarchic and nihilistic antinomianism. The following discussion indicates how historically problematic this conclusion is. Hongzhou Chan offers an alternative conception of ethics as a free ethos in the midst of the world signalled in Mazu’s “ordinary mind is the way.” Chan has been critiqued as an inauthentic and heterodox incarnation of Buddhism. However, it is deeply attuned with Buddhist teachings and practices of emptiness, non-duality, and awakening as an awakening in and to the world. Examples of Chan radicalism are indicative of environmental philosophy insofar as ecological cultures of nature call for a therapeutic awakening of humans in and to their crisis-ridden environing worlds.

A philosophical and ecological reimagining of Hongzhou Chan, in conjunction with the salutary critical clarifications of their Chan critics Zongmi and Gihwa, allows for a more adequate and nuanced interpretation of the antinomian problem. Based on these brief accounts of Zongmi and Gihwa, there should be no “antinomian” destruction of ethics or morality. Does the radical Chan of Mazu and Linji merely destroy ethics or, rather, indicate a more primordial situation of encounter and response? This nexus of issues leads away from the more crucial issue of how one should comport oneself vis-à-vis sentient and insentient beings.

Furthermore, following the ethical radicalism of Mazu and Linji, the questions concern its further completion and perfection as a non-dual ethos of the ordinary “imperfect” mind in the midst of the incompletion and imperfection of the world. Linji accordingly describes how one does not find Mañjuśrī (the bodhisattva of wisdom) on sacred Mount Wutai (五台山), but rather in one’s own present functioning and activities. This statement is not so much a rejection of the “other-power” (tariki 他力)—to refer to a generally deployed yet inadequate opposition—of the bodhisattva, and his virtues and perfections, for the sake of “self-power” (jiriki 自力) and self-perfection; it is the other-power
within the self, the happening of perfection within a life perceived as lacking such perfection (Davis 2014, 433–47).

Returning to the initial question posed at the commencement of this chapter, it is not so much the ostensive radical antinomianism but the conventionalism and adaptation of ordinary social customs in Chan Buddhist historical formations that illuminate their social-political functions. Critiques of the political deployments of Zen as “unethical” are anachronistic given the mythic character of the unrestricted radicalism of Chan lineages. Given the patterns of conventional monastic and social morality and politics that Chan rhetoric presupposes, it is unconvincing to argue that Chan entails antinomianism in the sense of being the negation of social and ethical life. The emptiness of good and evil entails not doing evil. *The Sutra of Complete Enlightenment* admonishes its readers to abandon good and evil in treating all with virtue, that is, the virtuous and non-virtuous alike, without breaking the precepts (Shengyan 1999, 56–57).

Moreover, concerns regarding the radicalness of Chan are empty. The drastic rhetoric of Hongzhou-Linji teachings points towards the turning point in the experience of awakening that occurs through the monastic context and Chan Buddhist ritual behaviours, including those that provoke the question of the meaning of the ritual and insight into its emptiness. Such “radical strategies” are typically not understood in traditional contexts as “radical” in the sense of overturning conventional morality and politics in everyday life. Nevertheless, they do point towards critical models of transformation to be reimagined and redeployed in the present.

The deployment of anti-religious (i.e., the holy and sacred) and anti-ethical (i.e., precepts and principles) language in Chan discourses challenged conventional patterns of behaviour and thought in a limited domain even as they reconfirmed them at large. The aporetic ethics of Chan Buddhist discourses appear tamed in their wider social context and consequences. While the standard literature frequently opposes antinomianism with morality, understood as a system of fixed rules and conventions, antinomian, iconoclastic, and subitist moments are part of a larger fabric of monastic and lay education, practice, and self-cultivation. The fideistic language of “antinomianism” could be replaced with what other authors have described as an ethos of aporia, paradox, and tension (Nelson 2017, 219–21).

Emptiness (kong) can be understood as enacted in ritual practices of emptying that reveal the way in which things, others, and oneself can be encountered in their suchness just as they are (zhenru 真如, tathā). The practice of emptiness, including its own self-emptiness (kongkong 空空), is enacted through a variable multiplicity of Chan linguistic and behavioural strategies and provocations. These practices challenge conventional morality and religion in the rhetoric of Chan Buddhism to the extent that they point towards the encounter and accord with (renyun 任運) things and conditions in their suchness. Through the defixation and destructuring of ordinary mind through disharmony for the sake of awakening the ordinary mind (as the genuine mind
Emptying ecology

without fixed position or rank) to its own functioning, even “killing” the Buddhist soteriological path as conventionally understood and the aporetic ethics of “killing the Buddha” in Linji Chan, point practitioners towards the ordinary mind and—modifying the classical Chinese notions of reciprocal resonance or response (ganying 感應) through disorienting events of dissonance—its openness for encountering and responding (yìng 應) to the myriad things in the midst of the world.

To what degree does the present reimagining of Hongzhou and Linji Chan entail a different experience of nature and an environmental ethos and enactment of emptying and encountering that is significant for more appropriate ecologically oriented ways of dwelling and cultures of nature as critical models that contest practical and ideological fixations of nature and the natural?

Towards a Chan Buddhist ecological ethos

Chan ethos and moral theory: undoing perfection and virtue

When you meet buddhas, you speak to buddhas; when you meet ancestral teachers, you talk to ancestral teachers; when you meet arhats, you talk to arhats; when you meet hungry ghosts, you talk to hungry ghosts. Everywhere you go in your travels through the various lands you teach and transform sentient beings without ever departing from this one moment of mindfulness. Wherever you are the pure light extends in all directions and the myriad phenomena are one suchness.

一剎那間，透入法界，逢佛說佛，逢祖說祖，逢羅漢說羅漢，逢餓鬼說餓鬼。向一切處，游履國土，敎化衆生，未曾離一念。隨處淸淨，光透十方，萬法一如。

(Linji yulu 臨濟語錄, CBETA T47 N1985: 498b10–13; Cleary 1999, 21; Kirchner and Sasaki 2008, 192)

In this quotation, Linji is not only depicted as addressing the iconoclastic destruction of the reification of Buddhist images and words. He is also—and more fundamentally—encountering and addressing them in a more genuine way through emptiness or the enactment of responsiveness through enacting emptying. What, if any, are the ecological and environmental implications of the ethos and praxis of encountering through emptying in the records ascribed to Mazu and Linji (figures repeatedly reimagined in subsequent depictions) interpreted in relation to Zongmi’s clarifications and Gihwa’s differentiation of the ethics of precept or rule-following and a comportment of enacting emptiness?

Various scholars maintain that Zen ethics is best described as a form of aretaic virtue-ethics that emphasises cultivating specific pāramitā (perfections, characteristics, or virtues) such as wisdom and compassion, and one’s character and “way of life” as a whole (James 2004, 34–36; Ives 2013, 541–72). The virtue ethical paradigm corresponds to Gihwa’s morality of precept-following and a comportment of enacting emptiness.
Chan imperfectionist ethics. It emphasises the self—instead of its emptiness in no-self (wuwo 無我)—and the self’s character and virtues—instead of the non-duality of perfections and imperfections. Consequently, it inadequately recognises how the Chan ethos is enacted as a relational other-oriented disposition in which perfections and virtues are not cultivated and realised for the sake of the self but rather in loving kindness, compassion, and generosity towards sentient beings in general, as well as towards nature as an asymmetrical and non-identical interactive relational whole in the context of which the singular being is recognised and cherished in their moment of life without being sacrificed to a monolithically understood biocentric and organismic whole. This Chan ethic suggests an altered environmental ethos that is significant for therapeutically fostering a more appropriate ecological culture.

Classical Aristotelian perfectionist virtue ethics is a popular way of interpreting South and East Asian philosophies. It is a problematic means for interpreting Chan ethics and environmental ethics. It focuses on the moral self-cultivation and the mastery of the aristocratic citizen and householder. Chan Buddhism articulates an ethically oriented biospiritual cultivation—which can be taken as an exemplary lesson and model for environmental philosophy—that contests the self, its mastery, and its socially defined virtues in a condition of homelessness and openness that allows the responsive encounter between beings without rank and status. The undoing of rank and status, the equalising of things in Zhuangzi and Linji, allows things to come forth and be encountered in their own suchness and self-so-ness.

The aretaic virtue ethical model would then be inappropriate for Chan Buddhist ethics, and also by implication for a more appropriate and responsively attuned environmental ethics, to the extent that: (1) moral practices and virtues are necessary for yet do not exhaust the path; (2) habits, customs, and traditions motivate, but are neither the goal nor a final court of appeal; and (3) aretaic ethics is complicit with inter-human social domination and the human domination of nature through the hierarchy and elitism of ethical perfectionism.

In contrast to the perfectionist models of virtue and mastery, the imperfectionist and egalitarian Chan ethos of the freedom of the ordinary mind is an ethics of encounter between beings that prioritises non-coercive responsiveness to others in relation to loving-kindness, compassion, and generosity. Such an exemplary ethos and model differs from the virtue ethical and perfectionist self-concerned care of the self and the forced imposition of its own paradigmatic ideal of perfection onto the world. Without reified and coercive moralistic norms, “perfection” is only disclosed in the living imperfection of things and genuineness in ordinary common life. Accordingly, echoing the no-merit, no-name, and no-self statement from the first chapter of the Zhuangzi (“至人無己，神人無功，聖人無名”), the semi-legendary Bodhidharma reportedly told Emperor Wu of Liang (梁武帝) that there is no merit, no self, no sacredness (wusheng 無聖), only vast emptiness (kuoran 廓然).
An environmental ethos of emptiness and encounter

Alternative ways of elucidating Chan ethics are required that do not impose Western conceptual models onto it and an alternative to Buddhist virtue ethics that is more deeply rooted in the dialogical ethical implications of “encounter” in Chan-Zen transmissions. Of particular significance are: (1) the “encounter dialogues” and (2) encounters with natural phenomena such as animals, plants, mountains, waters, and landscapes. A Chan ethos of encountering and responsiveness towards sentient beings and “nature” as a whole is constituted in being experientially exposed to and encountering others, things, and oneself.

In contrast to reducing natural things to their instrumental use and exchange, according to dominant models of instrumental rationality and universal exchangeability, the prospect arises of encountering and responding to things in their alterity and singularity by disorienting the individual and social constructs, and by recognising them in the intrinsic or immanent character of their interdependent uniqueness. It is a responsive attunement to things, without reifying non-action, as described in a statement attributed to Mazu: “Responding to things, [the dharma-body] manifests itself in [many] shapes like the reflection of the moon in water. It functions constantly without establishing a fixed root. It does not exhaust action nor does it cling to non-action.”19 This signifies a responsive functioning without fixation.

Chan’s ethical and environmental implications can be articulated in relation to Zongmi’s Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity. While Zongmi states that wisdom is to know the human, and illumination is to know oneself, the ultimate is to allow the source or root (ben 本) to function in the mindfulness that consists of being awakened by and tracelessly responsive to the suchness or as-is-ness of others and things or “freely manifesting oneself in response to things without any bounds” (Yuaren lun 原人論, CBETA T45 N1886: 707c27, 708a02, 710c24; Gregory 1995, 66, 206). The comportment of Chan as an awakening responsiveness to things and others in their alterity and singularity, immanently within the encounter itself, is a model for the ecological encounter that is lacking and systematically undermined in contemporary environmental crisis conditions.

Comparable to Zongmi before him, Gihwa in his work Hyeonjeong non suggestively reconceived in a proto-ecological direction the Confucian notion of benevolence or humaneness (ren 仁) as the comprehension of the mutual affinities, resonances, and interconnectedness unfixing the dualistic binary boundaries between self and other, civilised and uncivilised, as well as human and non-human animal life (Gihwa, HBJ 7.223b15; Muller 2015, 104).20 It remained inadequate inasmuch as allowing violence towards and the killing of life can never accomplish life’s nourishment. In contrast to narrowing benevolence to the human that he identified with Confucian or Ruist teachings, Gihwa narrated how his own awakening and conversion from Ruism to Buddhism happened in encountering animal suffering. Gihwa’s problem with
Ruism might have an answer in heterodox Neo-Confucianism, itself informed by Buddhism. Still, it presents a real challenge to its typical forms. Gihwa did not see an answer in the Ruist paradigm. He interconnects Buddhist awakening with an ethos of nature, maintaining that genuine awakening only begins when all creatures are perceived as sharing in the same sufferings and possibilities of illumination (Gihwa, HBJ 7.219b4).

Given the continuing prevalence of views and practices (including ecological ones) that reify natural phenomena and that reduce the natural world to a background for human activity and self-realisation or natural phenomena to instrumental objects of exploitation defined exclusively according to human desires and projects, there is a particular salience in being reminded that there can be more to life than human desires and projects, as well as in being challenged to consider the reality that human responsibility extends beyond communication with and obligations to other humans—even as compassion and responsibilities for humans ought not to be abandoned, as humanist critics of biocentric holism and radical posthumanism fear, for the sake of anti-humanism or in the name of saving an unaffected and untouched nature that neglects the injustices and suffering of humans along with other sentient beings.

Chan biospiritual models of awakening are exemplars for a therapeutic ecological awakening and for cultivating a more adequate culture that can embrace elemental and wild nature. The Chan interactive responsive model of immanent awakening does not only concern the human agents who are engaged in it but addresses and is addressed by natural phenomena. A number of Chan encounters famously or notoriously involve animals such as foxes, dogs, and cats; often metaphorically and figuratively, yet also in ways that reveal basic questions about animal and thingly life (Heine 2016, 239–58).

Tang era Chan and subsequent Zen models of encountering and the encounter dialogue, in the asymmetry and reversibility of master and student, monk and layman, and so forth, are intriguing examples of how to encounter and experience natural phenomena. These also help to contextualise the role of nature and its images in classical Chan discourses. All life—from buddhas to wriggling things—partakes in Nirvanic nature. Chan can extend then the ethical circle to encompass all life as a reflection of the inherent yet empty buddha nature in all things. The encounter with natural phenomena can be interpreted in the context of affective sensuous encounter and resonant response (ganying 感應), which can also be understood more reductively as stimulus and reaction. This correlational nexus, as in the image of Indra’s net promoted in China in Flower Garland (Huayan 華嚴) teachings, describes both the asymmetry and non-identity between unique singular beings and their basic equality and symmetry in each having its own self- or buddha-nature as a functioning without a fixed self, essence, or root (zixing 自性, svabhāva).

Given the deconstructive and naturalising (in an expansive non-reductive sense that prioritises things instead of an explanatory method and technique) tendencies detectible in Hongzhou/Linji Chan sources, we should consider: to what extent can there be a non-instrumental recognition of natural phenomena
and dynamic interactive wholes without an underlying conception of identity, essence, or substance? Chan discourses have emphasised the most ephemeral and fragile phenomena in ways that have shaped the East Asian natural aesthetics. Examples extend from the blossom and leaf to the dewdrop. Just as each dewdrop distinctively reflects the moon, each moment is singular and an expression of the entirety of the dynamically transforming non-identical and non-uniform whole, and each being has its own worth and significance in and through itself and in relation to others.\textsuperscript{22}

**Deconstructing nature, emptying ecology**

**Unfixing the barriers between things**

To study the way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be awakened by all things. To be awakened by all things is to remove the barriers between oneself and others (Tanahashi 1995, 70).

In this well-known quotation from the *Genjōkōan* (現成公按, “Actualizing the Fundamental Point”) Dōgen Zenji 道元禪師 (1200–1253), the Japanese Sōtō lineage (曹洞宗) Zen master, is undoing the fixated separation not only between self and others but also, as his writings on natural phenomena such as the *Mountains and Waters Sutra* (*Sansui kyō* 山水經) reveal, between the human and the natural. The dismantling of the barriers between self and other described by Dōgen does not aim at mystical or metaphysical unity; it concerns the ethical relationship in which the self is no longer privileged over the other, as self and other are no longer unconditionally differentiated. The destructuring and removal of barriers is not mere absorption and participation in being; it is the possibility of an ecological life-praxis of Buddhist compassion (*cibei* 慈悲) for the suffering samsaric world.

The self-generating self-manifesting of things is evocatively formulated in Dōgen’s works such as in his discussion of the self-blossoming of the world as it is and in its suchness, or of the liberation and non-abiding of things as an abiding in their own phenomenal expression (Tanahashi, 98).\textsuperscript{23} This is not only an ontological but also a fundamentally ethical claim of how one encounters and, in the encounter, relates and responds to natural phenomena. This encountering requires practices of emptying fixations of language and the self. Such Buddhist praxis is self-deconstructing in contesting Buddhism’s own self-reifications. Our own practices and prejudices are placed into question to practice genuine compassion and generosity. The spontaneity of giving without calculation or expectation, according to Dōgen, is appropriately the most fundamental of the perfections (*pāramitā*), since nothing else can more thoroughly transform the comportment of the mind (Ibid., 45).

In Chan discourses, one can learn from and become like the natural world—from the uncarved block to the flow of the river—and natural entities have a communicative and ethical role as teachers, models, and exemplars. These
lessons can be taken up in purportedly mundane existence. Dōgen portrays how the monastic chef (tenzo 典座) calms the anxious troubles of their duties and obligations in an attuned mindfulness attentive to the tiniest transient grain of rice (Tanahashi, 50, 59). Mindfulness is more response-able, to adopt a phrase from Donna Haraway, than calculative and moralistic conceptions of responsibility (Haraway 2013, 71). The conception of responsibility, and the ideologies formed around it, is the fixation and limitation of a more originary, unrestricted circulation, communication, and responsiveness.

Buddhist discourses cannot then merely be an issue of the care of the “self” to the exclusion of others in focusing on polishing the reified images of the self and the pure mind in self-cultivation. This model is repeatedly rejected in Chan/Zen texts as a form of gradual enlightenment that continually dusts off the mirror (the self) without seeing the lucidity of things (by breaching the barriers of the self). Awakening is not constituted by or through the self, much less its own “self-power.” It transpires through the self and its constructs and fixations, being exposed to, being opened up to, and encountering others, things, as well as itself in the free anarhic circulation of dao. This co-arising self is the “genuine self” or “self-nature” of the ordinary mind: that is the responsive functioning without fixed roots or foundations.

The links between Buddhist emptiness with compassion and responsiveness are key to its being practiced as an ethos. There have been regressive and progressive deployments of Buddhist emptiness in modern East Asia that call for a more nuanced and critical engagement with it. Han Yongun (韓龍雲) (1879–1944), for instance, illuminates an encounter with Buddhist emptiness altogether different than its ideological uses in Imperial Japan. Often called by his penname Manhae 萬海, Han Yongun was a modernising poet of the eros of the beloved (nim 님), a democratic socialist and anticolonial activist, and a Seon monk and monastic reformer who perceived an emancipatory potential in emptiness. In his reading of the Flower Garland Sutra (Huayan Jing 華嚴經), in particular, Manhae interprets emptiness as a meditative, poetic, and social-political practice, as mind is becoming embodied material form and form is becoming mind in mutual aid and compassion. In his political writings, emptiness consequently entailed and called for acting on equality as well as mutual interdependence. In his poetry, still widely read in Korea, he unfolded a poetics of emptiness in which emptiness operates as the space of erotic love, devotion to his oppressed people, and altruistic compassion. In this context, Buddhist self-emptiness contests and potentially unfixes the inequalities and hierarchies imposed upon persons.

**Dwelling within self-empty nature**

Buddhist therapeutic discourses and embodied practices of emptying indicate ways of dismantling the illusions of self-power and the mastery and domination of nature. Turning away from constructed barriers and relying on the “other-power” in things and nature as a whole is another way of expressing
the recognition of the priority of things that is necessary for more ecologically nurturing and sustainable cultures and political economies of nature that should be thought in the singular plural rather than as a static monistic unitary one or as a relativistic incommensurability that does not recognise the shifting and transforming circulation and communication between things.

In this contemporary world, suffering from increasingly catastrophic climate chaos and environmental devastation, and the corresponding decreasing quality of life for sentient beings, even as the availability and quantity of products and services expand at an incredible pace in privileged classes and regions, one could well wonder whether a way of life and thought developing in South and East Asia and advocating self-awakening and nurturing care for things and compassion towards sentient beings can address the anxiety and complexity of current environmental crisis-tendencies and predicaments.

Undoing fixations of self, society, and nature and emptying ecology of its ideological fixations does not entail their insignificance or an attitude of uncaring indifference. It is, rather, the releasement that allows encountering and attuned responsiveness with, as well as nurturing compassion for, the myriad things that dwell in and make up our shared dependently originated and elemental interthingly body of life and environmental nexus.

Notes

1 Note that the present chapter includes and adopts the Chan Buddhist parts, without the Daoist ones, of chapter 6 of Nelson 2020a, 119–38.
2 For accounts of Chan’s philosophical dimensions, see Wang 2003; Wright 2000.
3 The role of war is not only problematic in East Asian Buddhism. Compare the analysis of violence in Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism in Nelson 2009, 199–233.
4 See Jia 2006; Poceski 2015; Welter 2008. The exact phrase “genuine person without rank” does not occur in the Zhuangzi. Spiritually cultivating oneself without regard to rank or position is mentioned in the miscellaneous Zhuangzi chapter 28 “Abandoning Kingship” (rangwang 讓王).
5 On charges of essentialism and substantialism, see Stone 1999, 159–88.
7 On the text’s early formation, see Welter 2008.
9 A noteworthy example is discussed by Poceski 2005. Poceski examines how the ethical and monastic presuppositions adhered to by even the famously iconoclastic Hongzhou School.
11 Gregory 1995, 203.
12 Jingde chuan deng lu 景德傳燈錄 (Records of the Transmission of the Lamp), CBETA T51 N2076: 445a05 and 444a01. On Hongzhou Chan’s historical context, see Jia 2006, 67–82.
13 Original texts and translations of these texts are available in Muller 2015. On the controversy between the Neo-Confucian Jeong Dejeon and the Buddhist Gihwa, see Nelson 2016, 447–62.
14 See Jeong’s “Critique of the Buddhist Notion of Hells” criticizing vulgar popular karmic beliefs in comparison with elite Chan anti-morality, in Muller 2015, 82.
Both aspects are considered in detail in part 1 of Nelson 2020b. On dereifying strategies, see Wang 2003, 78.


On according with conditions (renyun) in Hongzhou Chan, see Wang 2003, 77–78.

“應物現形，如水中月，滔滔運用，不立根栽。不盡有為，不住無為。” See Jia 2006, 124.


On Dōgen, Zen, and the elemental and the wild, see Wirth 2017.


On Dōgen and contemporary ecology, see Wirth 2017.

**References**


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Questions about life and life awareness

According to Socrates, “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Plato 2002a, 38a5–6). Ironically, however, some people are forced to see their lives as unworthy of living precisely because they are self-examined. As long as it is unexamined, life is undoubtedly lived as univocally worth living, but it can be seen as unworthy of living if it is brought under self-examination. “It is not living but living well which we ought to consider most important” (Plato 2002b, 48b). This ancient call of Socrates is by no means obsolete. The human being is an essentially peculiar creature who is not satisfied by merely living, and in the quest to live well can, like Kierkegaard’s desperate man, “will to be rid of oneself” (Kierkegaard 1983, 20).

Human life should be understood in terms of a possible split between living well and merely living; and this split is, we might say, what human nature is all about. In this chapter, I interpret some philosophical and Japanese poetical texts to explore a specific modification of our life awareness that underlies this splitting of human nature. The problematic split is connected with the self-examination of our life. In examining my life, I might arrive at questions such as: what is the meaning of my life? what is the point of being alive? what is it to live a life? However, we have to consider the simple fact that such questions can only be asked as a form of self-examination. In other words, questions about life can come from nowhere else but life itself. We do not ask a question from the outside of life but from the inside. In the midst of the facticity of being thrown into our lives, questions about life originate from within a kind of awareness of our own life; however, at the same time, we must admit that simply being aware is not sufficient for these questions to be raised. Rather, the questions arise from modifications in awareness that prevent awareness from getting settled into itself.

That the awareness of one’s own life could be quite different can be read in the contrast between the two excerpts that follow. The first, taken from one of the well-known sutras of early Buddhism, describes how practitioners settle themselves into the awareness of their own lives. The art of carefully settling oneself into the awareness of life has been passed down in tradition as one of the essential Buddhist meditation practices.

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Modification of life awareness

Herein, a monk who is forest-gone or gone to the root of a tree or an empty place, sits down cross-legged, holding his back erect, arousing mindfulness in front of him. Mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out. Whether he is breathing in a long breath, he comprehends, “I am breathing in a long breath”; whether he is breathing out a long breath, he comprehends, “I am breathing out a long breath”; whether he is breathing in a short breath, he comprehends, “I am breathing in a short breath”; or whether he is breathing out a short breath, he comprehends, “I am breathing out a short breath.”

(Discourse on Mindfulness 1959, 124, translation modified)

The second is a quotation from a novel written in 1909 by the modern Japanese writer Sôseki Natsume (1867–1916). In this text, too, the protagonist—a man—is acutely aware of his own life; in this instance, however, his awareness does not stop there but is combined with an uneasy preoccupation with the possibility of death:

It had become a habit with him lately to listen to his heartbeat while lying in bed. As usual, the pulsation was calm and steady. With his hand still on his chest, he tried to imagine the warm, crimson blood flowing leisurely to this beat. “This is life,” he thought. Now, at this very moment, he held in his grasp the current of life as it flowed by. To his palm, it felt like the ticking of a clock. But it was more, it was a kind of alarm that summoned him to death. If it were possible to live without hearing this bell—if only his heart did not measure out time as well as blood—then how carefree he would be! How thoroughly he would savor life! But—and here Daisuke [the protagonist] shuddered involuntarily. . . . Although he lived in sound health, there were instances when his consciousness awakened to the indisputable fact of his being alive as a near-miracle of good fortune.

(Natsume 1978, 1–2, emphasis added and translation modified)

In order to consider the meaning of this sense of anxiety, it is important to clarify what it might mean to be aware of one’s own life. Each one of us can become aware that “I am alive” through breathing in and out or feeling the beating of one’s heart. However, in Heideggerian terms, although the pure fact that “I live and have to live” shows itself, nonetheless “the ‘whence’ and the ‘whither’ remain in darkness” (Heidegger 1962, 173). Finding himself in this sort of naked “thrownness,” our protagonist takes the “indisputable fact of his being alive” for “a near-miracle of good fortune,” which may disappear at any moment.

In the following section, I would like to discuss the background of the disparity between these modes of life-awareness.

Modifications of life-awareness and its poetic expressions

We find some suggestions in W. Dilthey’s concept of “Innewerden,” which can be translated as “reflexive awareness.” At the end of the nineteenth century,
Dilthey attempted the construction of a system of philosophical epistemology in which the following fact was taken as a fundamental starting point: “Every psychic act can include a reflexive awareness of itself” (Dilthey 1989, 339). In other words, seeing something can include being aware of seeing it, hearing something being aware of hearing it, and so on. According to Dilthey, what is characteristic of this “reflexive awareness” is that “the subject is not at all separated from what is perceived.” Such “self-sameness [Selbigkeit]” is a human being’s most intimate experience of themselves. Although this sense of oneness with oneself can only be experienced first hand and is resistant to being fully expressed in terms of concepts, it is of immeasurable significance for every act of thinking and understanding. Only on the basis of this self-sameness can I feel myself as a person, have any character whatsoever, and be consistent in my thoughts and actions. Interestingly, Dilthey has also described this significant “reflexive awareness” as “self-feeling” (Selbstgefühl), which can be regarded as “the foundation of what we call life as such” (Dilthey 1989, 338–39).

This concept of “reflexive awareness” can be considered complementary to what Kant refers to in his *Critique of Pure Reason* as “pure apperception.” The point here is that “Innewerden” is a sort of pre-reflective awareness that precedes any reflective or self-conscious awareness and forms the basis of the Kantian apperception of “I think.” As is well known, Kant writes:

> The *I think* must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me.

(Kant 1998, 246; emphasis added)

The “I think” is an act of self-interpretive reflection that comprehends everything represented in me as being represented by me. If blooming flowers are seen outside the window now, self-consciousness or reflective thinking must accompany this seeing: “I am the one who sees the flowers. Those are what I see here and now.” Of course, such consciousness does not always accompany our representations explicitly, but “must be able to accompany” them insofar as they are “my representations.” Dilthey’s *Innewerden*, on the other hand, is something more primordial that precedes the accompaniment of this self-consciousness. It is also an awareness, but a pre-reflective awareness in which “the subject is not at all separated from what is perceived.”

I want to argue that the accompaniment of the Kantian “I think” modifies the nature of this primordial life-awareness in the Diltheyan sense. By comprehending the whole of representation as my representation, the “I think” gives the field of representation a kind of private or individual, personal character. Supported by the “I think,” each one of us perceives the present field of perception as something that can be recollected and recounted later to others—as “what I perceived.” In this way, each of us is constantly collecting subjects for our own life story, which others will never know unless we tell them.
If I am viewing cherry blossoms now, the blossoms themselves are not private, of course. The flowers are blooming in the world, not in my mind. I can enjoy the flowers together with my friends. However, at the same time, I am aware that this lived experience of sharing the beauty of the flowers can later be recalled in solitude as an experience of my own past. In this way, what belongs to the world and what belongs to one’s own experience become separated from each other.

The primordial self-same awareness of life still remains in the background. If flowers in bloom are seen outside the window now, their “being seen” as such can be purely and directly enjoyed. This enjoyment of an auto-affective reality can in itself prove that “I” am alive now; in other words, the very present life of “mine” attests itself in this auto-affective feeling; but, through the modification of awareness of life, “I” begin to understand this attestation in terms of contingency. Even though I am certainly viewing the flowers here, I know that it is not necessarily me who sees the flowers. In its very self-attestation, life implies that it is but fleeting. In the face of the appearance of the world, I perceive myself as a being who has appeared here and will eventually disappear.

In the history of Japanese poetry, we find many examples expressing this sort of life awareness. Here, I want to present some masterpieces of Japanese tanka (literally “short poem” of 31 syllables with a syllabic pattern of 5-7-5-7-7) by the modern poet, Shiki Masaoka (1867−1902):

Saogami no/wakare kanashi mo/kon haru ni/futatabi awan/ware naranaku ni
Ah, sad to part/from Goddess Sao,/in the spring to come/it will not be me/who meets her again.

Ichihatsu no/hana saki-idete/waga me ni/wotoshi bakari no/haru yukan to su
The roof iris/opens its buds/before my eyes,/the last spring/begins to fade.

(Shiki in Beichman 1986, 101)

These verses were written by Shiki from his own deathbed, while suffering from severe spinal caries caused by tuberculosis. With “the last spring,” the poet means that it is the last chance for him to enjoy his favourite flowers. He understands this spring as the last season when “the roof iris/opens its buds/before my eyes,” implying that next spring, the flowers will open their buds again “before your eyes” without my presence. It should be noted here that there is a double perspective at work in this short verse: on the one hand, the poet sees the present flower-scape “before my eyes” from an auto-affective, first-person perspective; on the other hand, it is from a particularly detached and sober viewpoint that he understands the approaching end of this first-person perspective to be his fate. In this way, the agony of dying so young is entrusted to the recurrent cyclical movement of nature, in which flowers come into bloom and wither repeatedly, with or without the poet.
Such self-feeling of one’s own life, with a foretaste of its transience, is one of the most beloved themes in classical Japanese poetry. In the Imperial Anthology, compiled at the beginning of the tenth century, we can read the following exemplary tanka verse, composed by an anonymous poet.

Haru goto ni/hana no sakari wa arinamedo/aimimu koto wa/inochi narikeri.

Each spring the blossoms/reach their brilliance once again/but seeing them so/we are reminded that to/watch them together is thanks to our life.

(Kokinshû 1984, 76, translation modified)

**Emotions and contingency and advent character of life**

I believe that we have gained some clarity as to what kind of modification our life awareness can undergo. We have noticed several points. The primordial auto-affective awareness of life can be modified to become a self-conscious awareness that understands itself as a contingency. The feeling that “I am alive” is self-evident in every outer and inner experience of “my” own; however, this unencumbered awareness can always be accompanied by the consciousness that it is not necessary “for me” to be alive now. The “I” could have passed away long ago, and the “I” could cease to exist at any time. The “I” just happens to be alive now.

Nevertheless, we should probably draw a further distinction between several different self-conscious ways of being aware of life. There seem to be different modes of emotion or affectivity among them. As previously mentioned (cf. the section on “Questions about life and life awareness”) the protagonist of the novel felt himself to be intruded upon by his awareness of his own mortality, so that: “if it were possible to live without hearing this bell [of the heartbeat]—if only his heart did not measure out time as well as blood—then how carefree he would be!” To put it plainly, we may conclude that he is feeling Heideggerian “Angst” in facing the possibility of his death. In another of Heidegger’s terms, he suffers from the “burdensome character” of existence (Lastcharakter des Daseins) in which the pure fact that he lives and has to live shows itself, although “the ‘whence’ and the ‘whither’ remain in darkness” (Heidegger 1962, 173). However, the self-conscious awareness of life can express itself in quite different ways, as already discussed. The poet who faced the approaching end of his first-person perspective could release his anguish into the cyclical movement of nature that survives his death. Furthermore, the ancient poet could also appreciate with gratitude the great fortune of being alive in the passing moment to enjoy nature.

In order to better understand these emotions, which differ from the Heideggerian “Angst,” I suggest examining the classical Japanese poetic phrase “Inochi narikeri.” First of all, let us reconsider the example of the verse mentioned earlier:

Haru goto ni/hana no sakari wa arinamedo/aimimu koto wa/inochi narikeri.
Each spring the blossoms/reach their brilliance once again/but seeing them so/we are reminded that to/watch them together is thanks to our life.

While seeing the spring blossoms, the awareness of our being alive takes us unawares; we are unexpectedly reminded of the fact that we are alive. This fact of life is so self-evident that we have forgotten it, yet the sight of the blossoms now reminds us that it is all because of life itself. “Inochi narikeri” literally means “such is life” or, more accurately, “such was life;” however, it does not mark past tense but denotes a sudden awareness of what has been unknown or forgotten. Life, which has been happening “out of my mind,” has now unexpectedly come “into my mind.”

The following tanka verse by the twelfth-century poet Saigyô is a masterful depiction of the unexpected awareness of one’s own life, including “Inochi narikeri.”

**Composed when travelling to the eastern provinces**

*Toshi takete/mata koyubeshi to/omoiki ya/inochi narikeri/Sayononaka yama*

Did I ever imagine/I would make this pass again/in my old age?/Such is life Sayononaka Mountain (Saigyô in Stoneman 2007, 582).

In his apt interpretation of this verse, Jack Stoneman makes a lucid comment:

Sayononaka Mountain, in present-day Shizuoka Prefecture, was a difficult pass along the Eastern Sea Road. This poem was composed on Saigyô’s second trip to Michinoku and refers to his amazement at being able to cross Sayononaka some forty years after his first trip. The key to the poem lies in the fourth line, translated here as “Such is life!” *Inochi* refers to the poet’s life or lifespan, but it can also mean “fate” or “destiny.” Long life is remarkable when one assumes that life is fleeting and insubstantial. (Stoneman 2007, 582)

I would also like to add that the key to an in-depth interpretation of this poem lies in the contrast between “omoiki ya” (did I ever imagine?) and “inochi narikeri” (such is life!). The classical Japanese language often used two different auxiliary verbs to indicate past tense, *ki* and *keri*. Saigyô uses “*ki*” asking himself: “did I ever imagine?” (omoiki ya)? while he uses “*keri*” to express his discovery of the unexpected duration of life, saying “inochi narikeri” (such is/was life!). The reason for this careful choice of words is that the former auxiliary verb (*ki*) indicates that the matter in question is in the speaker’s clear memory or recollection, while the latter (*keri*) does not necessarily mark tense but suggests that something unknown or forgotten has come into the present consciousness. “Inochi narikeri” (such is/was life!) expresses that a duration of life, which had been unfolding “out of my mind,” has come “into my mind” as something like my destiny, whereas the rhetorical self-question “omoiki ya” (did I ever
Imagine?) will assure that this adventitious coming of life was really out of the intention of my mind.

“It is generally believed,” explains Haruo Shirane, “that keri comes from . . . verb ku, “to come,” which combined with the . . . verb arī, “to be,” to become ki-ari (to come and to exist)” (Shirane 2005, 74). Based on the same etymology, Susumu Ōno claims that “keri,” originally as “ki-ari,” means something has now come from one’s “outside” to “inside” (Ōno 1978, 140–41; 2011, 472–73). Life has always already been “present” for each one of us, but in spite of—or rather because of—this nearness life conceals itself, by and large, behind or out of “my mind.” When, by chance, this life comes out of this concealment and into one’s mind, this amazing advent of life (inochi) is admired with the word “keri”: therefore, “Inochi narikeri” (such is/was life!).

We may also conclude that what appears as the advent-character of life is just another aspect of the simple truth that the awakening of life-awareness must lag behind life itself. In this awakening, we realise the facticity that we have already been alive, and we cannot circumvent this naked thrownness. However, it usually remains unnoticed as a tacit unthematic background of our thinking and everyday practices. Therefore, in the moment of awakening, we must accept this facticity as something that comes from outside our thinking mind. It can also be argued that what matters here is no longer mere self-feeling, but a sort of hetero-affection, because it is not the mind itself, but life as inner other that moves our mind, makes us aware of life, and sometimes calls each of us to reflect on the course of our lives. “I was born a human and have lived to this day, but what was my life all about?” Generating such a question, the hetero-affection is disquieting and does not always allow us to settle easily in life awareness.

Japanese poets lived their lives in recognition of the teaching that “death arrives unexpectedly and swiftly.” However, this undeniable wisdom only makes sense when combined with another fact, namely, that the duration of our lives and the formation of our memories are also “unexpected” happenings or graces for each of us. Probably, this “unexpectedness” out of the scope of our mind is the deepest motivation for us to question and think about life.

Notes

1 Dilthey argues that “without this immediate reflexive awareness, the self as object could never come to know itself as one with the self as subject” (Dilthey 1989, 340). The English translators make a helpful comment that the “reflexive” here means the “self-given,” and it is to be distinguished from the “reflective” that means “given to thought.” “Reflexive awareness in its most basic sense is an immediate pre-reflective mode of self-givenness in which the dichotomies of form and content, subject and object characteristic of reflective consciousness do not yet exist” (Dilthey 1989, 247n, also 26–27). We cannot go into the complex problem of their historically-effected consciousness here, but it is reasonable to say that Dilthey’s argument was conceived in the same vein as that of later phenomenologists who came to focus on the pre-reflective things that make reflective thought possible. For example, Heidegger’s claim that affectivity precedes reflection seems to be an attempt to reinterpret in other terms the same thing that Dilthey was trying to say. In Being and
Time, Heidegger argues that “only because the ‘there [Da]’ has already been disclosed in affectedness [Befindlichkeit] can immanent reflection come across [vorfinden] ‘Experiences [Erlebnisse]’ at all” (Heidegger 1962, 175, translation modified).

2 These tanka poems of Shiki were originally published in his newspaper column Bokujū Itteki (A Drop of Ink) dated May 4, 1901. “Sao” is the Japanese goddess of spring.

3 Cf. Yoshida, Kenkō. Tsurezuregusa (Essays in Idleness) written in the 14th Century. See especially its sections 59, 74, 137, 155.

References


Part 3

Rethinking time and human responsibility towards nature


8 In spite of nature and with time

Freedom and responsibility. Two Kantian spells and their possible refutation

Thomas Buchheim

Introduction

In the following chapter, I will focus on two key topics of this volume *Nature Time Responsibility*, namely, the concepts of *nature* and of *time*. In so doing, I will examine both the relation between these ideas and the way in which they function as prerequisites for the possibility of human responsibility and freedom. Arguably, the most influential philosophical attempt to keep the possibility of human freedom and responsibility strictly apart from *nature* and *time* is that made by Kant. In his well-known “Kritische Beleuchtung” in the *Critique of Practical Reason* he writes:

If, then, one wants to attribute freedom to a being whose existence is determined in time, one cannot, so far at least, except this being from the law of natural necessity as to all events in its existence and consequently as to its actions as well; for, that would be tantamount to handing it over to blind chance. But since this law unavoidably concerns all causality of things so far as their existence in time is determinable, if this were the way in which one had to represent also the existence of these things in themselves then freedom would have to be rejected as a null and impossible concept. Consequently, if one still wants to save it, no other path remains than to ascribe the existence of a thing so far as it is determinable in time, and so too its causality in accordance with the law of natural necessity, only to appearance, and to ascribe freedom to the same being as a thing in itself.

(KpV V, 95; English trans., 2015, 77 f.)

If our very existence was, so to speak, temporal or in the successive order of time then, according to Kant, we could not have freedom. That is, our actions would be fully subject to the necessity of nature—unless the entire realm of natural necessity turned out to be mere appearance. This, Kant argues, would allow for a conception of ourselves as free beings who, however, would exist apart from nature and time. As a consequence, this conception of ourselves
would be inaccessible to theoretical inquiry, availing itself, exclusively, to a form of practical certainty.

Of course, Kant’s way out of the *aporia* of freedom is not without argumentative rigour and philosophical elegance. It does, however, run into severe difficulties that make our uncritical acceptance of it virtually impossible today. Kant’s solution seems to imply that even though we are living beings we do not really originate from nature, for nature in Kant’s picture is inextricable from time and necessity. Rather, we would have to have emerged from some non-natural source of which we ourselves could have no possible knowledge. There are several reasons not to accept this proposition. First, modern evolutionary theory suggests otherwise: all life in its manifold shapes and forms arises from the realm of nature. Second, Kant’s solution seems to commit us to placing outside of time that which we typically think of as “free.” In this way, our will and our actions could have no temporal structure, nor could they change over time or even happen in time. To avoid inconsistency, one would therefore have to assume some type of non-temporal, moral disposition behind appearance that one could thereby qualify as “free.” Upon closer examination, this commits us to the idea that we have freedom neither of will nor of action, insofar as each is considered to be real within time and to have temporal features and implications. In this picture, we are free only and exclusively towards a changeless attitude behind the veil of appearance.

**The illusion of one uniform, all-encompassing causal necessity of events grounded in a conjunction of the relevant laws of nature**

It is worthwhile taking a closer look at the arguments by which Kant tries to incline us towards the idea that human freedom is incompatible with the temporality of nature.

First, I would like to understand better what Kant means when he speaks of “the law of natural necessity as to all events,” from which, as beings of nature and of time, we could not therefore be excluded. What is *this law* about, of which Kant speaks in the *singular*? I assume that it is another expression for Kant’s conviction that whatever happens in nature, and therefore in time, is subject to rule-governed necessity or a law of nature. Departing from a Humean understanding of natural laws, this means that *all* events take place in accordance with the relevant initial conditions and, *ceteris paribus*, follow a necessity grounded in natural laws.

At first glance, it seems as if there is no difference between speaking of *the* law of natural necessity as to all events and of a *conjunction* of *all* natural laws for every single event—that is, of a multitude of coordinated natural laws. I do, however, believe that it is not accurate to speak of one single natural law. Rather, one should address a specific set of laws that necessitates a corresponding set of events without necessitating the unconstrained totality of all events. In what follows, I will elaborate this thesis and argue its case by showing that
Kant’s argument for an overarching necessity for all events is based on question-
able premises.

A natural law is valid only in relation to cases that were intended in the for-
mulation of the law. Outside the realm of those relevant cases that are understood to be legitimately connected by a particular law, the law is, I take it, not valid. It is not the laws that bring about the cases to which they apply and for which they stipulate a law-governed connection to a particular result or behaviour under particular circumstances. One can also say that natural laws should not be seen to be unconditionally prescriptive but, rather, descriptive: identifying lawful connections in nature always already presupposes certain descriptions that depict the flux of occurrences in a way that carves out those features of reality that are relevant for the respective law. (The Formulation of Newton’s laws, for instance, presupposes a certain way of describing reality in terms of mass, force, velocity, and so on.)

This leads us to four plausible assumptions about the applicability of natural laws to any specific case, as well as to the totality of events within nature:

(1) Natural laws relate states or bundles of states of entities to one another, either structurally or according to temporal succession.

Therein they follow a pattern, such that events or states unfold in ways that are dependent upon the relevant, initial conditions and in accord-
ance with an invariably valid natural law. This is to say that the laws of nature are not exclusively concerned with the succession of events or states; they can also relate to the structure and the connection of states or bundles of states.

(2) The scope of a valid natural law neither includes the background conditions under which this law is applicable nor covers the causal history that produced these condi-
tions in the first place.

It is perfectly possible to regard a natural law (such as the differential equa-
tions describing the way Mars orbits around the sun) as valid without having any knowledge of the events that made this sort of law applicable in the first place. A solar system, as Nancy Cartwright (1997) once put it, is a “nomological machine” (65) that generates the conditions under which the laws used to describe such a system are applicable. A term like “gravity” would hardly have significance were it not for those systems that generate the conditions under which the respective laws are applicable. What natural laws do not include is the formation of “nomological machines” that engender the conditions under which these laws apply.

(3) Natural laws predict what necessarily happens if an event of a certain type occurs. They stipulate a pattern under which events occur (if they occur). But never, by themselves, do they predict the occurrence of particular events.

Whenever natural laws are supposed to govern a causal connection, there must be a minimal spatiotemporal contiguity between the events so structured. At the same time, the conditions that produce such
contiguity are not themselves subject to the applicable laws that explain patterns of individual occurrences. Thus, it is entirely possible that the contiguity relevant for natural laws to be applicable in a given case, as well as these laws themselves, arise from completely different sources.³

(4) *Any given individual event in real nature contains more descriptive circumstantial features than those which make a particular law applicable to explain what is going on in a given case.*

If it seems plausible to assume that any given individual event contains more descriptive circumstantial features than those which make a particular law applicable to explain what is going on in a given case, we cannot be certain *a priori* whether or not one of the features we ignore in a certain case is causally relevant for the outcome of a series of events. For instance, does the incidence angle at which the sunlight hits the football player’s eye matter for the outcome of a certain header? For sure, the player’s movement and its effect on the ball will not violate any natural law. But it is far from obvious whether or not the laws governing the incidence of light on the human eye are part of a complete explanation of this process.

If we accept the validity of these four propositions, we can make the following observation about the evolution of natural laws: natural history does not just consist in chains of cause and effect, but in events that themselves produce novel laws and, thus, enable new cause-and-effect chains.

*By novel states of affairs,* I mean states of affairs that are not pertinent to the currently stipulated laws of nature. The drop of temperature immediately after the *Big Bang,* for example, can be described as a state of affairs that leads to the initial formation of certain particles (protons and electrons and their conjunction into hydrogen and helium molecules, and so on). For these newly formed particles, certain natural laws are valid that were of no relevance to the previous plasmatic state of matter. Other examples of novel states of affairs might be the generation of heavy elements in stars or the formation of amino acids as a foundation for organic life. For such *novel* states of affairs, *novel* laws are valid and these relate to a *novel* level of structure within matter. This is why, as mentioned earlier, I call such occurrences *structure producing events* (SPEs).

Within the universe or within nature, SPEs can be subject neither to the laws of a previous level of structure nor to those of the resulting level of structure. But this is not to say that SPEs are some kind of “non-causal events,” or that they occur in some completely lawless fashion that renders them inexplicable. Rather, one should hold on to the proposition that every event happens in accordance with the appropriate initial conditions and follows some invariably valid natural law. Therefore, it seems that a SPE occurs in accordance with some type of “higher level law” and, as such, falls beyond the scope of the natural laws governing the *previous* level of structure; at the same time the SPE
engenders novel states of affairs which, in turn, will inevitably obey novel, and altogether different, natural laws.

Now, wherever SPEs occur—and by the best evidence of science our universe seems to be such a place—the conjunction of all natural laws turns out to be much more complicated than anything that Kant's appeal to the “the law of natural necessity as to all events” (i.e., “Gesetz der Naturnotwendigkeit aller Begebenheiten”) would suggest. The conjunction of all laws would have to refer to groups of states of affairs that are located on different levels of structure and hence follow different types of natural laws. I showed earlier that law-governed connections are not unquestionably equivalent to the sum of all relevant causal conditions in the appropriate contiguity by virtue of which a particular event occurs under the relevant circumstances. Furthermore, we have seen that the connection between relevant circumstances and the law-governed occurrence of an event does not itself guarantee or engender the presence of these relevant initial conditions as such. Consequently, and fully in line with the complete law-governed structure and function of nature, the causes or principles for events that occur according to the laws of a higher order of structure can, at the same time, provide causal explanations for the occurrence of events on a lower level of structure.

Let me illustrate this with an example. Think of an individual person who, when in the context of a group and given relevant conditions, behaves according to a certain law and thus according to a specific pattern of behaviour. Here the same causal conditions necessitating this specific pattern of behaviour are at the same time causal conditions for the occurrence of events at a lower level of structure, namely, at the level of this person’s brain states. At this lower level of structure, it is these brain states that necessitate exactly those events that the matching bodily behaviour demands. Such a person’s behaviour is governed by the higher-level laws in so far as she supports the overall tendencies of the group (for instance, to exclude certain individuals from the group.) At the same time, the intention to support the group results in a neural activity that, in turn, result in actions governed by laws at the lower level. (For instance, physical actions directed against the excluded individuals.)

Given that the law-governed behaviour of this person is causally grounded on the higher level of structure belonging to her actual faculties and capabilities; and given further that these conditions also provide causal constraints for her neural system to engender brain states leading to a corresponding bodily behaviour—given all this, this person would still have different options for behaviour despite the fact that her behaviour within a group (one could also speak of her “swarm behaviour”) is governed by natural laws that are invariably valid on all relevant levels of structure.

As long as “natural necessity” derives its modal status exclusively from the consistent and continuous validity of an unspecified number of different natural laws for all the pertinent features of events on various levels of structure in superposition, there is no reason, in general, to reject the assumption that different behavioural options are compatible with certain principles of
voluntariness in regard to the law-governed reduction of these options favour-
ing one definite course of action.

Rather, the simultaneous complexity of law-governed connections on dif-
ferent levels of structure suggests that certain occurrences or groups of occur-
rences (for example, those that constitute a person’s behaviour) combine the
laws of different levels in such a way that free decisions can reduce the manifold
causal principles of behaviour to one definite course of action. Note that this
allows one to maintain that other behavioural options would have been real pos-
sibilities for one and the same person. Such a model of reduction towards a defi-
nite course of action could therefore provide for a compatibilist account of free
decision-making that is fully in line with the idea of nature as being completely
law-governed. For, as I have argued, the causes for the occurrence of events on
a lower level of structure—such as the brain state responsible for the movement
of a person’s arm—can in turn be subject to laws on a higher order of structure
governing the corresponding higher-order complexes of behaviour.

In light of these considerations, the concept of a “law of natural necessity as
to all events” turns out to be modally unspecific when it comes to certain com-
plex, individual cases that, despite their complexity, do in fact occur within the
realm of the law-bound or within the conjunction of all natural laws.

Natural laws do not necessitate individual events. What they govern is rather
a complex web of law-governed connections across different levels. This web
reconciles alternative possibilities at a certain level of complexity with a defi-
nite course of events or actions, in terms of the details of what happens. The
outcome of a series of events does not violate any natural law, but at the same
time, it is not simply a necessary result of the conjunction of all natural laws
involved. The overall accordance of any specific event with natural laws does
not amount to an inner necessity or inevitability of this event. Once we aban-
don the (implausible) assumption that individual events are necessitated by nat-
ural laws, it is entirely possible that a given series of events could have taken a
different course, while this alternative outcome could still be within the range
of unaltered natural laws, albeit on different “levels” of reality.

The temporal homogenisation of everything that happens
into one successive order of atomised events

With this in mind, let us now take a look at another passage from Kant’s Cri-
tique of Practical Reason that belongs to the same systematic context. It is as well
known as the passage quoted earlier, and I also take it to be equally uncon-
vincing in its argument for the idea that human freedom is non-temporal and
demands a reduction of nature to mere appearance:

Now, if one takes the determinations of the existence of things in time
for determinations of things in themselves (which is the most usual way
of representing them), then the necessity in the causal relation can in no
way be united with freedom; instead they are opposed to each other as
contradictory. For, from the first it follows that every event, and consequently every action that takes place at a point of time, is necessary under the condition of what was in the preceding time. Now, since time past is no longer within my control, every action that I perform must be necessary by determining grounds that are not within my control, that is, I am never free at the point of time in which I act. Indeed, even if I assume that my whole existence is independent from any alien cause (such as God), so that the determining grounds of my causality and even of my whole existence are not outside me, this would not in the least transform that natural necessity into freedom. For, at every point of time I still stand under the necessity of being determined to action by that which is not within my control, and the series of events infinite a parte priori which I can only continue in accordance with a predetermined order would never begin of itself: it would be a continuous natural chain, and therefore my causality would never be freedom.  

\( (KpV, 94\ f.;\ \text{English trans.},\ 77) \)

This passage shows that Kant not only relies on the plausibility of the idea of nature as fully law-governed but also draws upon surprisingly strong premises that are much less convincing.

It is easy to see that Kant directly links the continuous succession of time to the objective succession of events. He thereby draws the unwarranted inference that the passage of events bears the same fine-grained structure or pulse of succession as time itself. Without giving due consideration to the complexity of interlaced levels of structure, this conflates the general law-governed dynamic of all events with the idea of an inner necessity to the succession of events. But this, I object, does not follow from the much weaker—and plausible—premise that the occurrence of events is governed by specific and relevant laws.

We have already seen that very different types of events and their various temporal workings can occur in one and the same entity, despite their belonging to different levels of structure and, therefore, corresponding to different types of natural laws. Contra Kant’s assumption, this allows for us to maintain governance over our own behaviour within the realm of nature and time.

Let me illustrate this idea further. Think of a swimmer who, instead of swimming actively in one direction, enjoys floating passively with the current of a river. But then she comes to a bifurcation and realises that the left fork in the river leads towards a thundering waterfall while the right fork winds its way steadily into the distance. It takes little effort—just a few, light swimming strokes—to direct her floating towards the right-hand fork. True, these swimming strokes will have to occur in time; but would you therefore qualify them as “beyond our command”? Would it not have been equally possible for our swimmer to keep her eyes closed and entrust herself carelessly to the current? And could this not have led her right into the thundering abyss of the waterfall? And finally, could she not have intensified her swimming strokes in order to reach the riverbank and then reflect whether she prefers “abyss or pleasure”—or none of the two?
Having said this, I consider it far from obvious that the temporal or causal succession of events is intrinsically linked to the question of whether or not certain occurrences in the passage of events are beyond our command. To be sure, if every river was surging so that we could not, with all our powers, resist the maelstrom of events, then nothing that we do could be qualified as self-governed. Kant seems to think of all the little currents within ourselves in terms of bundles of individual micro-currents. Each of these, according to his view, is pushed from past to future by inner necessity, without their paths ever crossing or their structures intermingling. Each one of us drifts with the current as a discrete bundle of atomistic partial events that, at any given point in time, have no connection to each other. Instead, each of us is swept along as a solitary bundle. To me, this seems to be a highly implausible picture.

Furthermore, the view that I have just sketched would suggest that all muscular micro-tensions and neurophysiological processes in my brain must be thought of in terms of cascades of isolated successions, such that nothing remains of the real and, as a matter of fact, empirical “natural entity” (Naturding): no river, no person, no awareness, no swimming, no precaution, nothing but the external “push and pull” between particles, quarks, and electrons. Yet even these do in fact form overarching structures. Type difference matters, even at the level of quarks. After all, the present state of a given thing or person does contribute to the development of the things that happen to it or to them—even though past states are, without any doubt, also relevant for this process. What then motivates Kant’s assumption that when the causal determinations of an entity are somehow related to past events, we cannot qualify this very entity as free? Obviously, he assumes this in order to place man beyond the reach of time and nature.

There are two unstated premises in Kant’s argument, and it is these unstated premises that lead him to the conclusion that self-governed action is impossible within nature and time. Premise 1 states that the conformity of all events to the laws of nature implies the inevitability and inner necessity of the succession of events. I call this the modal enforcement of events through natural laws.5

Premise 2 assumes an atomistic theory of events, which are held to follow each other without building any overarching structures of a temporally extended presence. According to this theory, all events are bundles of elementary events that are entirely causally determined by past events and pushed into the future. That is, the causal relevance of a given entity does not entail any intersections or overlapping structures between such events. Consequently, none of the solitary events that together make up a given entity could ever have any governing power over any other solitary event at any given moment in time. I call this temporal homogenisation.6

But in reality, there do indeed seem to be such intersections and overlapping structures of events that follow different patterns and occur at different levels of structure. The temporal succession of events within the universe, so to speak, blurs events into smudges. It seems odd to address things such
as the life of an individual person in terms of atomistic events. Rather, one should speak of a complex time-bridging thread or string of a single, ongoing event that is stretched out in the present and that allows for causal interlinking between events at any given moment within its own stretch of time. As I proposed earlier, the law-governed structure and dynamic of events do not rule out this account. Consequently, there is no reason to assume that present events or events in the near past would be beyond our command in general. Finally, it does not follow from their being law-governed that the succession of events necessarily occurs in exactly the way it does. Rather, the lawfulness of nature is to be understood in terms of a complex structure that allows for the assumption that individuals, while equipped with different behavioural options by virtue of their causal determinations, are nonetheless able to reduce these manifold options into one single path of action by means of free choice.

Coming to my conclusion, I would like to return to the interrelatedness of the concepts of NTR, and freedom. In contrast to Kant, I see nature and time as enabling freedom and responsibility rather than ruling them out. It is the very lawfulness of nature that makes it possible to form reliable and complex structures at different levels and within different temporal successions, including the possibility of a stretched-out present. Only in such complex law-governed and temporal structures, does it become possible for a given entity to attain at least some governance over certain events contributing to its present state without collapsing into its supposedly atomistic and innumerable elementary events. Therefore, responsibility is only possible within the law-bound realm of nature; it is the very possibility of stretching our present beyond the moment that renders us responsible for our actions.

Notes
1 I want to thank Leonard Weiß M.A. for his translation of the German paper into English, done with great linguistic and philosophical expertise.
2 See: Nancy Cartwright, Where do laws of nature come from? “It is capacities that are basic, and laws of nature obtain—to the extent that they do obtain—on account of the capacities; or more explicitly, on account of the repeated operation of a system of components with stable capacities in particularly fortunate circumstances. Sometimes the arrangement of the components and the setting are appropriate for a law to occur naturally, as in the planetary system; more often they are engineered by us, as in a laboratory experiment. But in any case, it takes what I call a nomological machine to get a law of nature” (65).
4 Modern theories of natural laws typically remain absolutely neutral regarding the modal status of natural laws: differential equations neither allow for alternative possibilities regarding a given series of events nor do they necessitate that these events occur in exactly the way they did in fact occur in any particular case.
5 Against this I have put forth the idea that natural laws only govern the general pattern under which individual events occur, while the individual events themselves may be subject to laws at entirely different levels of description.
6 In contrast to that view, I have tried to show that the temporal distribution of different modules of lawful connections can vary immensely. Think of the temporal expansion of my awareness of the present, the time it takes to actualise a capacity of mine, or to process the perceptual input I receive, and so on. The specific way in which such modules interact at a given point in time is not itself governed by a natural law.

References

Introduction

The contemporary discussion about distributive justice has been dominated by egalitarianism, a doctrine that favours a more equal distribution of material goods rather than a less equal one. Among egalitarian theorists, however, there is no consensus with regard to the appropriate degree of equality or its justification. Generally, egalitarians uphold the view that equality is intrinsically good and should therefore be defended for its own sake; but they differ from one another on the question of how equality should be weighed against other values. At one end of the spectrum, there are egalitarians who argue for an absolutely equal distribution and see this as the basis for any conception of justice. Not surprisingly, such an extremist egalitarian position has met with many challenges. The most important of these is the Levelling-Down Objection, which is based upon an anthropocentric principle known as the Person-Affecting Claim. This claim has aroused the interest of many theorists, including Derek Parfit. In a well-known response to the claim, Parfit articulates the Non-Identity Problem, that is, the problem of the uncertain identity of future generations. This chapter will discuss the Person-Affecting Claim and Non-Identity Problem and will relate the implication of this discussion to the question of sustainable development strategies in the real world. This chapter raises objections to the non-identity argument and emphasises, instead, our obligation for future generations.

The chapter has five sections. The first and second sections introduce the Person-Affecting Claim and Non-Identity Problem, and their roles in the Levelling-Down Objection to egalitarianism. The third section discusses at length the moral wrongness of the non-identity argument. The fourth section builds upon the suggestion of the second section that the needs of future generations, despite their uncertain identities, must not be ignored or compromised, and relates the theoretical discussion to the real situation of sustainable development in today’s China. The final section concludes the chapter as a whole.
The Person-Affecting Claim

The question of how to justify the egalitarian position is certainly of great importance when egalitarianism becomes the mainstream doctrine in distributive justice. Egalitarians hold that equality is intrinsically valuable and therefore morally desirable per se. Among the many challenges to the egalitarian position, the Levelling-Down Objection is perhaps the deadliest. According to this objection, equality is not of moral value because it may necessitate a downwards move that reduces all to the same level, even where this is not in fact good for any person or people, or is even, perhaps worse for some. An accidental fire, for example, may burn down the properties of the better off, placing them on an equal footing with the worst-off. But, as the Objection suggests, an equal outcome of this sort cannot be good for anyone. Nonetheless, there are a number of different egalitarian positions in regard to the Objection. A telic egalitarian will still hold that equality is good in itself, regardless of whether or not it is good for anyone (Parfit 2000, 87). To a telic egalitarian, a world in which all are blind in both eyes is better than a world in which half the people are blind in one eye. Departing somewhat from the telic egalitarian, the deontic egalitarian thinks this kind of equal outcome is good in one respect but may not be good all things considered (Parfit 2000, 88). She or he thinks of equality as only one of the relevant values in such cases of moral concern. Both telic and deontic egalitarians are susceptible to the Levelling-Down Objection, while the deontic egalitarian must also defend the view that equality is in fact a moral value.

The Levelling-Down Objection is predicated on a widely held claim, the Person-Affecting Claim, which may be stated in the following way:

\textit{The Person-Affecting Claim:} A situation cannot be worse (or better) than another if it is worse (or better) for no one.

(Parfit 2000, 114; Temkin 1997, 248)

The Claim embodies a moral idea that has been fundamental within the Western anthropocentric tradition since the Renaissance. People count, and, because people are of importance, moral principles should be those that show equal concern and respect to each one of them. Evidently, this idea underlies the Person-Affecting Claim and justifies its wide prevalence in disciplines from the humanities to the social sciences, even though it is not always stated explicitly. For example, the \textit{pareto optimal} situation in economics is defined as one in which no party’s lot could be further improved without worsening that of another. A \textit{non-pareto optimal} situation, in which the lot of one party could be further improved without worsening that of another, is considered inefficient and therefore worse. This human-centred claim is the basis of John Rawls’s famous Difference Principle. Despite its strong egalitarian tendency, the Difference Principle allows some inequality between the better off and the worse off. By way of justification, Rawls argues that the kind of inequality permitted by the Difference Principle will improve the benefit level of all while maximising
the benefit to the worst-off members of society (Rawls 1999, 266). If no one is worse off under the Difference Principle, there seems to be no reason to oppose it. Evidently, the Person-Affecting Claim is also implicitly invoked in this justification for the Difference Principle.

**The Non-Identity Problem: a challenge to the Person-Affecting Claim**

Despite its strong appeal, the Person-Affecting Claim is not without challenges. In his essay *Future Generations: Further Problems*, Derek Parfit (1982) voices scepticism about the validity of the Person-Affecting Claim, raising the Non-Identity Problem as a central objection.

The Non-Identity Problem has been formulated in a number of different ways by the various theorists who have entered the debate. One such formulation is illustrated in Figure 9.1. In this version, Generation A is considering two policies to do with natural resources and future generations. Under the Enjoy Now Policy, people will have children immediately and will deplete the various natural resources through their current usages. The outcome of this policy is B: they themselves would fare better, but their children would fare far worse. Under the Think About Tomorrow Policy, these same people delay having children for a few years and conserve their resources. In this instance, the result would be C: they would fare slightly less well than they do now, but their children would fare as well as they do.

For most people, moral intuition would direct us to choose the Think About Tomorrow policy. Parfit, however, suggests that such a choice is not in line with the Person-Affecting Claim, suggesting that there are two assumptions in this case. The first is the uncertain identity—or, using Parfit’s term, the non-identity—of the children in each scenario. The children born in scenario C

![Figure 9.1 Two Policy Scenarios.](source: Created by author)
will be different people from those born in scenario B, given that they will be conceived at different times, from different sperm and ova, and will consume different resources. They will also be raised by older and wiser parents, meet different teachers and classmates, find different jobs, and so on. The second assumption is that one cannot harm anyone who is not born. A woman who refrains from sex for a month does not harm any of the millions of people who might have existed had she instead had sex and conceived. In a similar vein, by choosing one scenario, Generation A cannot harm those who are not born in the other. It then seems, as is argued by Parfit, that no one would be worse off under the Enjoy Now than under the Think About Tomorrow policy, given these assumptions. The parents are not worse, since they fare better in B than in either A or C. The children in B do not fare more badly either since they themselves would not be born if Generation A were to choose the Think About Tomorrow policy. Nor would the children in C be worse off, since they would not exist under the Enjoy Now policy. On the other hand, if the Think About Tomorrow policy is adopted, there will be someone for whom things would be worse, namely, Generation A, the parents. Parfit therefore argues that unless the Person-Affecting Claim is revised (if not rejected), it will not direct us to choose a policy that accords with our moral intuition in this case.

The Non-Identity Problem seems counter-intuitive, but remains slippery to handle. On the one hand, it seems incorrect to reject the Person-Affecting Claim as a valid moral principle. On the other, it must be admitted that Parfit has at least presented a limited and fairly specific range of cases in which the Person-Affecting Claim may not apply. These are cases where future generations are involved and, particularly, cases where the identity of future generations remains undefined, changeable according to the choice of policies. The following section will look into this Non-Identity Problem of future generations and see whether it amounts to an invalidation of the Person-Affecting Claim.

The moral wrongness of the Non-Identity Argument

Ethical discussions to do with the Non-Identity Problem concentrate on the moral reasons against choosing a policy that would sacrifice the well-being of future generations for the sake of the present generation, and how those reasons relate to the Person-Affecting Claim.

One immediate question that arises in response to the Non-Identity Problem is that of whether a life that is not worth living is always better than non-existence. In the formulation of the Non-Identity Problem that we have just seen, the two parties involved are the present and future generations whose life prospects will differ according to the policies that are chosen. There is no problem concerning the parents since they remain the same people and it is easy to compare how well or badly they would fare under different policy scenarios. But when it comes to their children, the question arises of how to compare their life prospects. The children born in one scenario do not exist in the other, and Parfit suggests that no matter how low their level of well-being is in
one scenario, it is always better than their non-existence in the other scenario. Thus, the level of well-being of the children in B is held to be better than in C where, due to their non-existence, their well-being is held to be zero. But if Generation A has depleted the natural resources to the extent that their children in B are left with barely enough for survival, then why should the hellish life of these children, with such a low level of well-being, still be held to be better than their non-existence? Any life will have some well-being, but to enjoy some well-being is different from enjoying sufficient well-being for a life that is worth living. A hellish life is one in which pain and suffering exceed happiness, resulting in a negative amount of well-being, and it is in this sense that the life is not worth living. It is even worse than non-existence. It is therefore problematic to assume that the low life prospects of the children under the Enjoy Now Policy should be understood as always being better than non-existence.

One approach to solving the Non-Identity Problem focuses on the obligations of the present generation. For any case of procreation, it is generally assumed that parents have an obligation to protect their children from harms, and that not to fulfil such an obligation is morally wrong (Noggle 2019, 582). The depletion of resources by parents such that their children’s lives will be greatly compromised—especially when an alternative policy is available that can provide a much better life prospect for their children at little cost to themselves—amounts to the dereliction of parental obligation and, therefore, a reason not to choose the Enjoy Now Policy.

This is similar to a situation wherein a parent deliberately conceives a child who she knows will have an incurable disability. Whether the child sees his life as worth living or not, the parent has failed her obligation of guarding her child against harms if she could have avoided this situation without difficulty. Such a moral obligation does not depend on the child’s willingness to waive that obligation. It is possible that the child may still enjoy his life despite the disability and may waive his claim against the parent, given that his very existence depends on the parent’s decision not to fulfil their obligation to their child. Yet what is important here is not whether the parent’s obligation can be waived by the child. The act of deliberately forfeiting one’s moral obligation manifests a defective moral attitude, which sees moral obligations as things to be evaded whenever they are inconvenient. Such a defective attitude, which is independent of any wrong that might be done to the child, is incorrect (Noggle 2019, 598). The parent’s knowing decision to disadvantage her own child is therefore morally wrong, even if the child waives any or all objection to it.

This brings us to a second approach that centres on the rights of future generations. A number of philosophers have argued that the Non-Identity Problem can be solved by appealing to the rights of children. Children have a right to—and therefore a claim on us for—natural resources (Magnusson 2019, 580–96). This claim could be articulated in sufficientarian or equalitarian terms (Meyer 2018). Sufficientarians hold that all children are entitled to a minimal standard of decency, though it is difficult to determine how such a standard could be drawn without being arbitrary. Egalitarians contend that future
persons place a claim upon us to leave equally valuable shares of resources to them. These rights are valid even if the children’s identities are uncertain. They will therefore be wronged if the present generation fails to meet their obligation to conserve adequate resources for them.

A third approach centres on T. M. Scanlon’s contractualism (Scanlon 2000). On the contractualist view, what matters is whether a principle can be justified to each particular individual. One wrongs another person if one treats the other in a way that is unjustifiable to them. According to the contractualist view, the Person-Affecting Claim can be explained in terms of the reasons given by the agent and the person affected by the agent’s action. We can recast the relationship between present and future generations in contractualist terms. The principles of resource distribution must be justifiable not only to the present generation but also to posterity. It would be morally wrong were the principles in question to fail this requirement for mutual justifiability, as, for example, in the case of the Enjoy Now Policy in the Non-Identity Problem which cannot be justified to the children though it can be justified to the parents. The contractualist approach can avoid the Non-Identity Problem, since what counts there are those reasons that can be accepted by future generations, whatever actual identities they have. But to undertake an exhaustive identification and evaluation of all such reasons among all parties promises to be a difficult and complicated job so that the contractualist approach must surely lead to a highly complex process of reasoning between the present and future generations.

Besides the approaches based on obligations, rights, and interpersonal justifiability, some have also tried to provide an impersonal solution to the Non-Identity Problem and to bypass concern for any particular person or people. Is it possible to show that an act can be wrong even if it makes things worse for no existing or future person? It has been proposed that utilitarianism has resources with which to explain wrongdoings that are impersonal in this way. Traditional utilitarianism includes both the total form (totalism) and the average form (averagism), which determines the goodness of a moral principle according to the total or average utility it can generate for a society. If by waiting a few years to have children and by conserving resources parents could have produced children better off than, but non-identical to, the children that they actually produce, both totalism and averagism will find what the parents do to be wrong (Singer 2011, 107–19). This is because both viewpoints maintain that a world’s value and, indirectly, the permissibility of the choice that brings about that world, is determined on an aggregate basis: the utility of all individuals who do or will exist in a given world are simply added up to determine the value of that world. Other things being equal, the world brought into being by the Think About Tomorrow policy will be better than a world generated by the Enjoy Now policy, in terms of the total or average utility. On this utilitarian view, an evaluation of the two policies can be done with little regard to how a particular person’s level of well-being is affected.

The utilitarian approach seems to show that a moral principle could, at least in part, be impersonal. Both totalism and averagism can provide a reason as
to why, in the Non-Identity Problem, we can judge the moral rectitude of a principle without considering whether it makes things better or worse for any particular person. In comparison with the Enjoy Now Policy, the Think About Tomorrow Policy will certainly not make the parents fare any better. Neither will it make things better for the children, since the particular children born under this policy do not exist in the alternative scenario. Yet a comparison of the total and average utility produced under the two policies will provide a reason why the Think About Tomorrow policy is the right choice. But although utilitarianism initially seems to be a good approach, it runs into further problems. For example, totalism immediately generates what Parfit calls “the repugnant conclusion” (Parfit 1987, 381–90), which will be discussed later. Averagism makes certain inroads into the Non-Identity Problem but seems to disallow an additional happier-than-average child to be brought into existence if it so happens that the prior generations had especially wonderful lives (Parfit 1987, 381–90; Feldman 1995, 192–93). These two forms of utilitarianism also face challenges based on considerations of justice, fairness, and equality.

The repugnant conclusion entailed by the totalist form of utilitarianism has also been discussed by Parfit (2017). The repugnant conclusion says that “compared with the existence of many people whose quality of life would be very high, there is some much larger number of people whose existence would be better, even though these people’s lives would be barely worth living” (Parfit 2017, 153). This is implied by totalism, which maintains that there is a certain way in which it would always be better if more people were to exist who would together, therefore, have a greater total sum of benefits. The repugnant conclusion simply means, in line with totalism, that it is better to have an increased population with what is therefore a greater total utility, even where the average utility per person is very low. The conclusion seems repugnant because there seems to be little that is good in an extremely populous world in which the level of utility in everyone’s life would be so close to zero. Parfit suggests that in order to find a better solution to the Non-Identity Problem, we should combine the totalist concern for aggregate utility and the averagist concern for individual utility. He therefore proposes a Wide Dual Person-Affecting Principle, which holds that “one of two outcomes would be in one way better if this outcome would together benefit people more, and in another way better if this outcome would benefit each person more” (Parfit 2017, 154). But Parfit seems to have blurred the distinction between person-affecting and non-person-affecting principles, and more importantly, his Wide Dual Person-Affecting Principle does not offer any indication as to how to prioritise or compromise the aggregate and individual concerns when they are in conflict.

Besides all these various approaches to the Non-Identity Problem, it seems there is still one more way to analyse it which has not yet been thoroughly discussed. Let us suppose that children could have been born in either the Enjoy Now or the Think About Tomorrow scenario, and face either an actual or a hypothetical situation. Although it is assumed that children born under the two policies are non-identical, it is also true that if they were born in the
other scenario, they would have faced the same situation as the actual children born there. The more sensible and reasonable way to compare the long-term outcome of policies, it seems, is to compare the children's situation in one scenario, not with their non-existence, but with their hypothetical situation, in the other. If so, then it will be obvious that their hypothetical situation in the other policy scenario is the same as the real situation of the people who are actually born there. Thus, the children that exist in B would hypothetically face the same situation in C as the children who are actually born there, and vice versa. It is more sensible to compare the level of well-being of children in B with their hypothetical level of well-being in C, rather than with their non-existence there. Similarly, the level of well-being of children born in C should be compared with their hypothetical situation in B. If comparisons are made in this way, it is not difficult to see that the future generation, whoever they are, will fare far better under the Think About Tomorrow policy than under the Enjoy Now policy. They will enjoy a higher level of well-being, as high as that of the parents, and the great improvements in children’s life prospects outweigh a small loss of the well-being on the part of the parents. Thus, the Think About Tomorrow policy emerges as the better choice.

Future generations and sustainable development

The discussion so far indicates that the uncertain identity of future generations should not be taken as a reason for us to choose policies that encourage the depletion of resources by the present generation. It seems that the Non-Identity Problem is not unsolvable. This does not necessarily mean that the Person-Affecting Claim is thereby affirmed, but that there may be other moral reasons that can show where or in what way the Non-Identity Problem is wrong. These would certainly have many implications for the Levelling-Down Objection to equality. That, however, is a topic that cannot be explored here in any way that would do it justice. Instead, in this last part of the chapter, I will bring the theoretical discussion to a real-life situation in order to see how our investigation into future generations is relevant to the issue of sustainable development in the actual world.

Sustainable development, as a concept, was formally raised in 1997 in Our Common Future, a report by the World Commission on Environment and Development headed by the former Norwegian Prime Minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, which elicited an immediate and active response from many countries and brought environmental concerns directly to the political sphere. In this report, sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland 1987, 16). In the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, sustainable development—as a new conception of development—gained widespread acceptance. Thereafter, it became the focus of many important international documents and was also extended to the national laws of both developing and developed countries.
But a close look at reality shows that the idea of sustainable development has met with many difficulties in its implementation. The main difficulty lies in the conflict between economy and environment. It has become clear that despite sustainable strategies being formulated and supported by laws and policies, they have been put aside whenever the economy was struggling. Whenever there was a recession, people would revert to the older strategies for stimulating economic growth, without concern for whether such economic development could be sustainable in the long term. The conflict between economic growth and environmental conservation is especially evident in industries that generate a high level of pollution. For these traditional high-pollution, high-energy-consumption industries, the implementation of sustainable strategies would certainly cause a decrease in the anticipated profit, hence the highly motivated resistance to any such changes among these industries. Early forms of resistance taken by these industries were direct, such as explicit objection to environmental laws, evasion of supervision, or unlawful discharge of pollutants. But this has given way to a more hidden and destructive form of resistance in the form of greenwashing.

To greenwash is to use green public relations or green marketing deceptively, so as to promote the perception that an organisation's products, aims, or policies are environmentally friendly. The companies who greenwash may pretend to follow the requirements of sustainable development, without making any real, substantive changes in their production. They may even pollute or destroy the environment under the guise of environmental conservation. For example, a long-term investigation has disclosed the greenwashing behaviours of various transnational corporations such as Honda Motor and Chevrolet Oil, while it has also emerged that the Clean Air Act promoted by President George W. Bush is in fact a greenwashing law. It claims to strengthen measures for cleaning the air, but within certain industries, it actually facilitates economic gain through air-polluting practices.

Yet the conflict between economy and environment must be faced if the long-term existence of humankind on this planet is to be assured. As the discussion about the Non-Identity Problem shows, there are reasons—both intuitive and theoretical—as to why it is wrong to deplete resources and to place future generations at a disadvantage. But the relationship between environmental conservation and economic development does not have to be one of mutual exclusion. There are possibilities for the two to be compatible with one another. Ecological economy, for example, is one good way to coordinate economic interests with preservation of the ecological system: economic development must conform to ecological laws and become part of the ecological system if it is to be sustainable.

The purpose of sustainable development is to integrate the needs of future generations as part of our own considerations. The rapid growth of population and the expansion of economy in the modern world have aggravated the depletion of resources and the pollution of air, water, and soil, causing serious environmental degradation. If this trend is not curbed, the whole ecosystem will break down and humankind, as one part of it, will also face a terrible destiny.
The shortage of clean drinking water in the southwestern part of China is a good example. Due to the lack of effective laws and inadequate governmental supervision of environmental protections, pollution became intensive, leading to extreme weather and natural disasters. During 2010–2012, a serious drought lasted for three consecutive years in the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and Sichuan. Tens of millions of people lacked adequate clean drinking water and found themselves on the cusp between life and death. In Yunnan province alone, the drought spread to thirteen cities and ninety-one counties, affecting 6.32 million people among whom 2.4 million were short of drinking water (Wang, Wu and Chen 2017, 14).

The behaviours of prior generations are certainly relevant to a drought on such a scale as this. To prevent such catastrophes from happening in the future, the needs of future generations must be taken into consideration when the present generation plans its own economic consumption and development. This is also a matter of justice for future people. The idea of transgenerational justice was first raised by John Rawls, who holds that the next generation is entitled to a share of natural resources equal, at the very least, to that of the previous generation (Rawls 1999, 16). This is meant to emphasise consistency in the transgenerational interests of the human race, and should not be interpreted as indicating merely a competitive relationship between generations. In effect, injustice will only occur between generations when society develops in an unsustainable or self-destructive way, with posterity laid victim to the selfishness of the present generation.

Sustainable development has already become the mainstream theory and strategy for development in today’s world. The fact that the identities of future people are uncertain is no reason for us to ignore their needs or to compromise their life prospects. No matter who they are, they are our descendants who will bear the consequence of whatever policies we pursue today. There are reasons to justify our moral intuition for attending to their well-being, especially in China and other East Asian countries which emphasise the Confucian idea of carrying on the family line. Not only should individuals care about their own children, but the country as a whole should incorporate this idea into its own laws. Only when natural resources are not unduly tapped and the environment not polluted to an irreversible degree can human development be sustainable. Future generations have claims upon us, whoever they are.

**Conclusion**

This chapter attempts to analyse the Person-Affecting Claim and Non-Identity Problem, and, in so doing, emphasises our obligations to future generations. We, as the current generation, must weigh the consequences of our conduct, consider the effect it might have on our posterity, and scrutinise possible alternatives. Rawls suggestion, of simply passing onwards a just society with reasonable savings for future generations, may not be enough. To ensure a good life...
for them, we may also need to strike a balance between the liberty of the individuals that comprise the present generation and the conservation of natural resources for future generations. This suggests that a sustainable development strategy should be adopted if we do indeed want to fulfill our obligation to future people.

References


10 The deep layers of responsibility or anti-nature in nature

Ryosuke Ohashi

The collision between responsibilities

Responsibility is an enduring humanistic concept that has been well and thoroughly inculcated in the modern human consciousness. Over time, humanism has become almost a catch-all slogan for ethical notions of human rights, humanity, the human person, and so on. However, humanism has been criticised from a variety of viewpoints, including the philosophical, religious, and social, and so although enduring humanistic commitments such as responsibility, conscience, duty, and so on have been broadly taken up as everyday, common-sense values within modern society, humanism itself cannot be regarded as an unassailable or sacrosanct position. So far, the legacy and the significance of these various humanistic commitments have evaded critical interrogation. But among the main problems of the humanist worldview is its “anthropo-centric” or “ego-centric” tendency, for, despite its many positive aspects, this tendency can undermine the crucial value of responsibility ascribed by humanism to the anthropocentric ego. This chapter attempts to shed light on the deeper layers of the concept of responsibility and, in so doing, it asks whether, or to what extent, responsibility can be apprehended as a self-evident ethical criterion; for when we consider the crises now unfolding within the real world, it seems all too often that the term has been taken up in only its most superficial aspect.

Now the sceptical view of any such reflection might sustain that responsibility is simply a matter of our being aware of it and of our putting it into practice. And there is no doubt that argument for the sake of argument accomplishes nothing and can even be a self-defeating exercise. A sobering example of this comes to us from Nazi Germany where, to mobilise mass support and cement his dictatorship, Hitler railed against academicism, publicly condemning it as inaccessible, ivory tower elitism. Southwestern neo-Kantianism, of which Heinrich Rickert was the leading voice, was far from immune to these arraignments. Rickert’s philosophical series Beiträge zur Philosophie (in English: Contributions to Philosophy) was forced out of existence. Though this was clearly an unforgivable oppression by a dictatorial regime one can nonetheless maintain that, in its overriding preoccupation with the minutiae of cognition theory, Rickert’s school inadvertently left itself vulnerable to such oppression. During
this same period, Martin Heidegger had begun writing his own notes under the same title, *Contributions to Philosophy (Beiträge zur Philosophie)*, published first in 1989 and then again in 1994 (as the 65th volume of the works of Heidegger). Whether or not he was aware of the fate that met Rickert’s series *Beiträge zur Philosophie*, it seems that Heidegger’s work was its replacement (Ohashi 2009).

However, the imperative to question the concept of responsibility—hereafter shortened to Responsibility, with an uppercase R to differentiate it from responsibility simpliciter—in its scope and meaning does not arise from within the insulated walls of academe: it is imposed upon us by the reality of the planet we all inhabit. Suppose, for example, that person A and person B, each with their own, strong sense of responsibility, are compelled by their differing views to confront one another. Responsibility as understood by person A, that is, Responsibility A, collides with responsibility as understood by person B, that is, Responsibility B. Where such confrontation is between nations or states, rather than individuals, the scope of potential conflict increases radically. And here we find that the collision between Responsibilities A and B is due to discord not only in the political realm but also in the juridical, the ethical, the religious, and so on. In these cases, the word “responsibility” might well be adopted across the board, even where the understanding of its content differs from one side to another and from one context to the next. Both responsibility and justice become feral concepts, roaming around without any master. In the context of religion, the problem is especially deeply rooted such that, in extreme cases where the hostile collision of Responsibility A with Responsibility B leads to the killing of one party by the other, it is not infrequently that justification for murder is sought in terms of dogmatic notions of heresy.3

Turning, then, to the question of murder. What does responsibility for murder mean? And in what way could such responsibility be taken? Any legal responsibility would be taken and fulfilled on the part of the murderer, were he or she to be sentenced to some kind of penalty. But regardless of judicial sentence, the life of the victim is irrevocable. If responsibility means the reinstatement or restoration of a life, then there is no possible way for it to be exercised. Furthermore, in case of revenge motivated by resentment or grudge, the circumstances would be context-dependent and intertwined with whatever sense of ethics or religion had come to be ingrained in the understanding of those involved.

In Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, the protagonist Raskolnikov is sentenced to eight years of penal servitude: a harsh penalty, perhaps, but one that is nonetheless powerless to restore life to the moneylender that Raskolnikov had murdered. In its English translation, the title of Dostoevsky’s novel is *Crime and Punishment*. In a similar vein, in one of its German translations, it is *Verbrechen und Strafe*. Yet, there is an alternate German translation, *Schuld und Sühne*, which in English means *Guilt and Atonement*.4 The only Japanese translation, *Tsumi to Batsu*, corresponds more closely in meaning to this latter version. If murder is understood at the level of the law, then the English and the first-mentioned German translation of the title are appropriate. But at the level
of the religious or the ethical, the latter German translation and the Japanese are better suited. It is also worth noting here that the requisite responsibility that applies in the former case does not necessarily conflict with that which applies to the latter. Each speaks to a different dimension of the very meaning of the word.

The difference between the English word responsibility and the Japanese word Sekinin

From the aforementioned description, it turns out that the word responsibility can yield a range of different meanings that fluctuate in pragmatic response to a political, ethical, or religious context. Does this mean that the concept is entirely context-dependent and therefore completely diffuse and decentralised in its meaning? Or, might it be possible to find some fundamental concern subtending and circumscribing the diffusion of different meanings that could furnish a single, stable vantage point for critical reflection? One possible candidate is the following: responsibility is always a passion for being with others; or, in short, responsibility is simply the relation with others. Would such a formulation be too banal? Perhaps, if what is meant by “others” is other humans (in French: *autrui*). But if the term also encompasses other things (*l’autre*), then the notion of “others” must be re-examined. And, in fact, such re-examination is needed when, for example and as is now the case, energy resources are dwindling, so that the most pressing concern has become the relation of human beings not only to other humans but also to other entities such as minerals, vegetables, and animals. Further, when reflecting upon the question of self-responsibility, the concerned subject of responsibility does not face someone or something outside himself or herself but, rather, is “itself as the other in its own self” (e.g., Nishida 1979, vol. 6, 379, 380, 386). Here again, some reconsideration of the notion of the other is needed.

The English word “responsibility” comes from the verb “to respond.” The responding subject is the “I” which has its own ego. The “I” can become the subject of egoism, but it can also express itself as a person, in the sense of Kantian ethics. In this way, there is the possibility for the “I” to overcome egoism, for the person is not a means but a purpose, the “kingdom of ends in themselves.” As a person, the human being has the duty to do something for the sake of others and to behave according to conscience. The person is the “proper self” (in Kantian terms: *das eigentliche Selbst*). And, as it is the subject of morality, it must also be the subject of responsibility.

In addition, the other as the other ego (alter ego) must also be regarded as a person. Since responsibility is a relation to those others who are persons, it is essentially a personal relation with the other.

This humanism of the person is the fulcrum of such value as is attributed to personhood—value which, in modernity, has come to be encapsulated in the notion of dignity. Yet, in the world beyond the “I” or proper self, political confrontations and cultural and religious conflicts reveal, all too often, a
deeply rooted inhumanity, while our deep-seated intuitive knowledge speaks to us from the inner world of the self of something dark and demonic in the depths of the human spirit that is capable of breaking through the humanistic persona to hold sway over the behaviour of human beings. And so the “ought” (in German: *Sollen*) is retained by the “proper self” but as an eternal ideal that is never fully realised. We might see that in the depth of the human soul, a humanistic sensibility is properly basic while finding that an inhuman nature is also present. This demoniac side of human nature was among Dostoevsky’s great insights. But it was Kant (1956) who saw that, where human nature is concerned, radical evil and radical good are equi-primordial tendencies. This raises the question of whether humanism harbours, and at the same time conceals, the ultimate egoism, in that it perceives everything as being for the sake of human life. Egoism, then, would be a form of anthropocentrism. This anthropocentric egoism is, of course, a source of positive energy for human improvement and is thoroughly permeated by the spirit of self-sacrifice: it should not be discounted as purely negative. Nonetheless, it never departs from the anthropocentric schema in which everything is for the sake of human society. In this way, the humanist notion of the person (or proper self), bound by duty and responsibility towards what is ever the human other, seems to legitimate the destruction, for the sake of human life, of the living environment of non-human others—of animals, of nature—that is driving the current environmental crisis.

In contrast, the Japanese word *sekinin* holds a nuance that differentiates it in important ways from the modern conceptualisation of responsibility with which it tends, lexically, to be conflated; and it is the further implications of this nuance that have motivated this chapter. Seki means reproach, claim, demand, charge, and so on, while nin means task, obligation, duty, and so on. Thus, *sekinin* means that even before I respond to this or that thing, I am already burdened with such claim, blame, charge, or reproach. English expressions such as “taking responsibility,” “position of responsibility,” “sense of responsibility,” and so forth, can easily be translated into Japanese as “sekinin wo toru,” “sekinin-no-aru tachiba,” “sekinin-kan,” and so on. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the English word responsibility means that “I” first respond to the thing, which lays claim to me, blames me, charges me with this or that task or duty. In contrast, in the case of *sekinin*, it is the others who blame me first and present duties to me. Responsibility in the sense of *sekinin* invokes the *vox populi*, where “populus” encompasses not only human beings but also all things in the world. Sekinin is the voice of the world. The primary subject of this responsibility is not *my* “I” but the “I” that exists before “my I,” that is, the “I” that is thrown into the world. To use the formulation of Martin Heidegger, it is Being-in-the-world. Before I am the “I” that is the personal subject of responsibility and is answerable to the question of right and wrong, I am a being-in-the-world for which the voice of the world, the eye of the world, the suggestion of the world, and so on are the measure of my behaviour. Independently from the question of moral value, right and wrong, the subject of *sekinin* can be understood as being-in-the-world. None of this excludes the possibility
that being-in-the-world is conceived in a spiritual-religious sense as the “I-less I” or “non-ego.”

It is important to note that for Kant the person is “the proper self” and not a mere egoistic “I,” while for Husserl, the “I” is the transcendental ego, or the intersubjectivity, that transcends solipsism. Thus, it must be possible to find in these accounts some way to approach the pre-egological dimension of the “I.” Such an approach would involve our becoming open to the vantage point of the non-human other.

The suggestion to be drawn from the earlier is that a deeper layer of meaning is hidden in the matter of responsibility, as it is generally understood in everyday life. The following section will argue that close attention to this deeper layer will give some glimpse of how to apprehend the collision of, or contradiction between, these different responsibilities.

Responsibility as a temporal self-determination of the world

In what follows, I am turning to sekinin as a mode of being-in-the-world in order to focus on the “world” that is implied therein. This world is not the aggregate of passive, inert, and material things, but life-world, cultural world, historical world, political world, and every action within these various worlds is a “world-locality” in which each world opens. An action is always the event of forming a relation with other persons or things. The human being is always located in the midst of things and is, therefore, being-in-the-world, even though this is usually forgotten. Phenomenologically constituted, perception—as Merleau-Ponty tells us—“occurs from the midst of things” (1964, 19). In Selfidentity and Continuity of the World (Sekai no jiko-dôitsu to renzoku), Kitarô Nishida says something similar about action: it occurs as “the self-determination of the world” (1979, vol. 6, 26).

What insight can be derived from this? First of all, we can infer that an action always has a temporal modality, such as was done, do, or will be done. Every action is a forming of relations with others in the past world, present world, or future world into which I am thrown.

This enables us to draw a second inference that penetrates the deeper layer of Responsibility. For although Responsibility—as we saw in the previous section—can be broadly understood as “relation with others,” the further nuance that characterises sekinin shows this relation with others to unfold as the temporal self-determination of the world.

Every action in the past world is somehow present as a past action within the present world: and not merely present but present as a burden or blame originating from an irreversible action in time. Now a judgement in a court of law is, specifically, an order for legal redress. But with the fulfilment of a court order, responsibility is taken only in the juridical sense. In other words, responsibility itself is not exhausted by the exercise of its juridical aspect.

In Crime and Punishment, Raskolnikov maintains that the existence of the old woman from whom he borrowed money is a social evil. Accordingly, and
believing that his studies would be of eventual benefit to society, he determines
that it is right to kill her and to finance his studies with her money. On the one
hand, he is aware of some sort of guilt; but on the other hand, he cannot really
understand that he did something wrong. Sonya, however, insists that Raskol-
nikov should prostrate himself in the public park and confess to the murder.
He does so and surrenders himself to the police. And yet he does not quite
understand why his action, the killing of the old lady, was evil.

Sentenced to eight years imprisonment Raskolnikov is committed to a penal
colony where he is overcome by pain and regret that he had not committed
suicide. With regard to the temporality of his soul, this means that he extends
backwards through time which is, ordinarily, irreversible: he is assuming the
burden of the past within the present and inhabiting irreversible time as revers-
ibility—something which is impossible for the measurable or physical time in
the material world. Kant defines “conscience” as the ability to say that “one
could have refrained from that” (Kant 1928, 114). What appears in this revers-
ibility of time is the temporal movement of time “from today to yesterday, from
yesterday to today” (Dōgen 2006, 100). It is being, freed from irreversible time.

How should one consider the temporality of Raskolnikov’s present world?
There is a splitting of his self into the one who blames and the one who is
blamed. Raskolnikov becomes a burden to himself. He is claimed by his own
existence: burdened by the other, who is no longer the murdered moneylender
but the other within the own self of Raskolnikov. His response to the claim, the
blame, the reproach to himself, and therefore his assumption of responsibility for
himself, moves him within his own present. This present, with an inner dynamic
borne of the division and contradiction that it holds within itself, cannot be given
in physical time. It is a movement “from today to today” (Dōgen 2006, 100).

Now it might seem as if Raskolnikov’s present world is strictly an inner
world, present to him alone. But, in fact, this is no inner or personal “pre-
sent,” insulated from the outside world, but the present of the penal colony
under Russian law, the present of the spiritual climate of Russian orthodoxy
(that is embodied by Sonya), and the present of Russian society in a time of
deep poverty and suffering. The temporal movement “from the present to the
present” in Raskolnikov’s inner world is but the present of the present Russian
world into which he is thrown. But he is not aware of this world aspect of
his existence. He attempts to close himself off, and this closed inner world is
thereby divided.

Only he can open himself up; but for this, he needs guidance, which is
to come from the existence of the other, that is, from Sonya. Dostoevsky’s
description shows that for Raskolnikov, Sonya is the other within his self, while
at the same time being closer to him than he is to himself. Near the very end
of Crime and Punishment Sonya comes to the workplace of the penal colony to
visit Raskolnikov, and sits by his side:

They wanted to speak, but could not. Tears stood in their eyes. They were
both pale and thin; but in their sickly, pale faces already glimmered the
dawn of a renewed future, of perfect resurrection to a new life. . . . He felt
it completely with the entirety of his renewed being and she—well, she lived only in his life!

(Dostoevsky 2019, 379)

Dostoevsky does not describe the causal process of how and in what way this moment unfurls. The emergence of a full resurrection is the last scene of *Crime and Punishment*—a scene in which the dawn of a newly restored future radiates forth to light up the present world. This means that responsibility for tomorrow is taken today. The subject that takes responsibility is not the “I” but *being-in-the-world*, which is no longer the “I.” The fact that Raskolnikov murdered the old woman never vanishes, but he bears this fact and takes the burden of the blame, not as a burden from outside but as the burden of the other in himself. In becoming unified with this other he goes back into the otherwise irreversible time of the past. The condemnation and the blame of the past burden him as before, but in confronting them and internalising them with sincerity, he is no longer constrained by them. A marvellous dimension opens up here: Raskolnikov accepts his sin and at the same time he is forgiven it. This could be called *rebirth*. Biologically speaking, it is impossible that a living thing is reborn after its death. But, in the miraculous dimension of restoration and resurrection, earlier, this impossible rebirth does indeed happen.

Rebirth does not occur only in the religious dimension as it does for Raskolnikov. We remember catastrophes from the past, which can be neither forgotten nor fully repaired in the present world. Thus, in a certain sense, we return to the past so that although this return does not and cannot happen in the physical world, the present world is burdened by the past. Yet, as the *other in the own self*, this past is now an element of the present world, and so is freed from being a *burden imposed from without*. The burden is borne but at the same time forgotten as a burden.

One who has reached the outer limits of distress—the outer limits of the burden that can be borne—might reject the aforementioned view on the basis that it fails in any way to mitigate an anguish that can be neither ignored nor forgotten. That it is a right to state one’s position in this way does not, however, mitigate against the aforementioned view, which in no way promises some miracle of relief or absolution. It maintains only that *no burden can burden itself*. In becoming the *self* of one’s burden, one lets one’s burden be as it is. This “letting” (in German: “die Gelassenheit”) is the sense of *forgetting* the burden in the midst of assuming it.

The temporality of the past and the present is as discussed earlier. But what about the temporality or temporal mode of the future as it pertains to the question of responsibility? Let us take the “future ethics” of Hans Jonas as a starting point. One can regard future ethics as responding to the claim of the future world upon the present world. This responding is responsibility for the future world and it is thus that Jonas conceptualised the task of taking responsibility for the next generation (Jonas 1984). With Jonas, we could say that the matter of future ethics is settled when we, in the present world, feel called to respond
to the future world. This feeling burdens the present world. Yet, the moment it moves on to the future, the burden is no longer something given merely from outside but from the outer world that is an element within one’s own self. It is the own burden carried by the own world. The world itself is moving from the present to the future and from the future to the present and is reborn every moment.

The problem is that this moving of the world is not always smooth but, rather, afflicted by division, conflict, agony: in short, it is afflicted by the contradiction within itself. This raises one more point for consideration, bringing us to the last step of the reflective process.

**The deep layer of responsibility or the anti-nature in nature itself**

The temporal structure of responsibility described earlier should not be taken as some kind of diffusion of meaning into an infinite past and an infinite future. Such a diffusion would be a crisis—it would be the loss of self. In his treatise on time, Augustine refers to this crisis as *distentio animi*. Augustine describes how the past is contained within the memory of the soul, the present in the intuition of the soul, and the future in the expectation of the soul, as three distinct modes of the soul. Yet, there is a problem here that remains unaddressed, namely, that if my soul is structured as mentioned earlier, my soul will be diffused through an endless past and an endless future, which is nothing else than a crisis of the soul. This soul re-converges with itself through faith in God as the supreme soul.  

It is helpful here to recall the time theory of the Zen-master Dōgen in his *Shōbōgenzō*, and, in particular, the chapter *Being-Time*. The concept of Being-time means that every being is temporal—is in fact time—and every temporal mode is also a mode of being. On the one hand, Being is situated within irreversible time but, on the other hand—in a way that bears similarity to the time theory of Augustine—Being moves freely from today to yesterday, from today to today, and from tomorrow to today. Dōgen calls this movement of our temporal existence the “curriculum of Being-time” (*uji-no-kyôryaku*).  

If we suppose that the theory of time for Augustine and the curriculum of time for Dōgen indicate the basic principle of time and being, then it seems necessary to take our reflections one step further if we are to examine this principle in relation to the most urgent situations that confront us today. This further step involves focusing on the scope and origin of *anti-nature*, which is immanent in human nature and also in nature in general.

In the Christian theological tradition, this is framed as the problem of the origin of evil. In the history of philosophy, it has been explored within the framework of so-called irrationalism. However, the key point is not an antithesis to rationalism. The breadth and power of human rationality and reason must be fully acknowledged. But the problem here is that there is a layer of anti-reason in reason itself. I would like to end by sketching out this concern
that becomes visible through these reflections upon the temporality of responsibility. In what follows, I would like to describe only the fundamental points.

At first, we pay attention to an action pursued in the past. The world of yesterday claims, reproaches, and burdens the world of today and hence requires the latter to respond. The action in the past, accompanied by its negative consequences, exists as the “other” in the present world, as the constitutive element of its own existence. The identity of the self of the world thus contains the “other” within it. The principle of identity says the identity “$A$ is $A$” is always the same. But the other within the self says “$A$ is $A$,” but $A$ contains non-$A$ within it. It is the non-identical identity.

This insight into the non-identical identity of the self is significant for the task of understanding the situation in which different responsibilities collide with each other, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

The locus of these collisions, as they become visible, is always the present. This is no mere “now” but, rather, a mode of the curriculum of time. When this present is replete with the feeling of happiness then, perhaps, Responsibility is not consciously recognised. When a certain claim or reproach of the past burdens the present, and the burden is felt like an arrival not from without but, rather, from within the subject—be the subject an individual, a society, or a nation—then a division occurs in the subject. This expresses the non-identical identity. This self-identical nature of life means that nature, in this sense, is not an unchangeable substance but a generative process unfolding through the passage of time. In this process, something can be brought forth within this self-identical nature, which does not coincide with the nature itself, but rather negates it. One could compare this processual identity with the relation of parent and child, who, in their very competition with one another, demonstrate their belonging to the same family line. What brings this contradictory self-identity about can be called the “anti-nature in nature itself” (Ohashi 2014, 2020).

From the perspective of temporality, self-identity proves itself to be contradictory self-identity. In this way, the aforementioned collision between responsibilities does not, ultimately, remain an external problem between the subjects of responsibilities. It is, primarily, rooted in the subject itself. It changes, and yet endures, through the passage of time. This occurrence of anti-nature in self-identical nature is to be understood as the deeper layer of responsibility.

This deeper layer necessitates a turn in the horizon of the thinking within which an ethics of responsibility can emerge. It was suggested earlier that such a turn is the turn away from the viewpoint of the subjective “I” towards that of “being-in-the-world.” Because anti-nature in the nature of a person is that of being-in-the-world, the inner conflict of a person reflects, in herself, the world into which she is thrown. Remember that Raskolnikov’s present world is composed not only of his own personal and spiritual elements but also of the present of the penal colony under Russian law, of the Russian orthodoxy that is embodied in Sonya, and of Russian society as a whole. If each of these
present worlds, as being-in-the-world, is honest and earnest but subjected to its own contradictory self-identity in form of the anti-nature in its nature itself, then the upshot is a collision of responsibilities. This collision can in fact be an honest and earnest existential struggle through which a genuine development of history can but does not always follow.

An example can again be taken from Hans Jonas, who has a specific, concrete concern in mind: the future of humankind. His future ethics, which strives “to do something for the next generation,” urges that we adopt appropriate measures now for the sake of generations to come. This necessitates a confrontation with one’s own finitude. Jonas’ formula is: “Do it, because you can.” But this already suggests that one can be confronted with limit situations in which one cannot do anything, as was the case in Auschwitz. There are two dimensions to Jonas’ thought: the first is the “rational metaphysics” described in The Imperative of Responsibility (Jonas 1979, 45) which, Jonas claims, is free from any reliance upon religion; the second is religious and it appears in response to limit situations like Auschwitz, where the human being cannot act, and only God can give hope. This is the theme of Jonas’ essay: The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice (1987). But the God to whom Jonas refers in that work is a God who keeps silent in the face of misery on earth. Theologically, this silence is the consequence of Zimzum, (in the Caballa), according to which God, after creating the world and everything in it, entrusted all responsibility to human beings. Thus, the question arises as to whether, for Jonas, the notion of God and the notion of the human being form a circle that spins on the spot without actually going anywhere or accomplishing anything. For Jonas, the responsibility of human beings and the responsibility of God stand in relation to each other as a kind of collision: each side ascribes responsibility to the other side. Because the “other side” is the other within each side in a limit situation, the subject of a future ethics must lead to a self-contradiction, which exists within the inner sphere of the person as well as between the many overlapping worlds to which the human being belongs. And, so long as one can speak of the responsibility of God for the world, God belongs to the world as his creation.

The contradictory self-identity of being-in-the-world, or the anti-nature in nature, is the deepest layer of the problem of responsibility and requires a turn of the horizon of thinking.

Notes

1 An overview of the history of the concept of humanism since the Renaissance, as well as the history of various critiques in the nineteenth and twentieth century, is provided in: Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie, Bd. 3, Basel 1979 S. 716 ff., Humanität und Humanitas. Recent reflections are collected in: Adrian Holderegger, Hg, Humanismus. Sein Kritisches Potential für Gegenwart und Zukunft, Basel 2011. Nida Rümelin attempts a re-evaluation of humanism in Digitaler Humanismus, 2018, in which he reflects on the possibility of ‘human’ artificial intelligence. Martin Heidegger’s Brief über den Humanismus, in: Martin Heidegger Gesamtausgabe, vol. 9, Frankfurt a. M., 320 f, gives a philosophically fundamental critique of humanism that may well be unsurpassed in its treatment of the essence of the human being.
These condemnations can be found in Adolf Hitler: *Mein Kampf* (ed. Munich 1943, 480). The number of copies of this piece of propaganda that were in circulation should be taken into account. As of the end of the Second World War, the manuscript had a print circulation of twelve million copies. But after the war, the State of Bayern in Germany that held the copyright of the manuscript suspended publication and designated it a forbidden book. In the year 2016, as the copy right expired, the State decided to publish the script with philological critiques and some explanations. The author found one of these copies at the library of Ryūkoku University when he was teaching there. Its history indicates the peculiar character of this script.

For example, recall the awful news of the recent past concerning a captivated soldier burned by ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Lebanon). ISIL later issued a statement to justify the killing according to their particular interpretation of Islamic doctrine. Some Islamic theologians rebutted the statement immediately. Though it is clear which side was right in theological terms, the problem remains that ISIL performed the execution while being convinced of their own religious belief.


For the terms “autrui” and “l’autre” in relation to the question of “the other,” see the author: *Phänomenologie der Compassion. Pathos des Mitseins mit den Anderen*, Freiburg i. Br. 2018, above all chap. 1 in part 1: Die ‘Fernähe’ der Anderen, as well as chap. 2 part 2, Die ‘Höhtiefe’ der Anderen.


The Kantian expression “the proper self” (das eigentliche Selbst) in *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, in “Kants Werke. Akademie Textausgabe” vol. IV, Berlin 1968, 85 and 88, has not been drawn into the research done on Kantian philosophy. But if the Buddhist thought of “honrai-no-jiko” (the proper self) is brought into comparative analysis, a dialogue between Kantian philosophy and Buddhist thought must ensue.

The concept of the “alter ego” was first explored by Husserl in his work *Cartesianische Meditationen, V. Meditation: Husserliana*, vol. 1, The Hague 1973, 130 f. Husserl provides further reflections on this *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass, Dritter Teil: Husserliana* vol. XV, 1929–1935, The Hague 1973. Kant, however, treated the “person” in the singular form, such that some further consideration is necessitated in regard to the person in the plural form. The further step from “egology” to “alter ego” does not take place without difficulty. The notion of Einfühlung (in German: empathy) that Husserl introduced in addressing the problem of the “other” was controversial, raising the question of if, and how, any such empathy, as the feeling of a subject, can reach the radical alien-ness of the other. This is discussed by the author on p. 287 of his book (Ohashi 2018) with reference to the critics of Michel Henry.


The term “world-locality” (German: der Welt-ort) is taken from Nishitani’s philosophy and is discussed in the author’s book (Ohashi 2018). The original Japanese reads: Kyokusho-sekai.

“que la vision est prise ou se fait du millieu des choses” (Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, 19).

“In diesem Betracht nun kann das vernünftige Wesen von einer jeden gesetzwidrigen Handlung, die es verübt, ob sie gleich als Erscheinung in dem Vergangenem hinreichend
bestimmt und sofern unausbleiblich notwendig ist, mit Recht sagen, daß es sie hätte unterlassen können” (Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, 114).

13 The German text reads: “von heute zu heute ereignishaft verlaufen.”

14 See Augustinus, *Confessiones*, Liber undemus, XXIX. The author tried to compare this view with the view of Dôgen (see p. 5 of this chapter) in a seminar *Der Zeitbegriff des Zen-Meisters Dôgen in besonderer Berücksichtigung der Zeitlehre von Aristoteles, Augustinus und Heidegger*, during the winter semester 2010/11 at the University of Vienna, and later again in a seminar with the same title at the University of Cologne during the summer semester 2011.

15 With this term, Dôgen describes a ‘reversible’ movement of the experience of time.


17 Schelling’s insight into the Ungrund as the groundless ground of the reason, as described in his treatise on the essence of the human freedom (see note 16), was perhaps the most important account of the irrationality of rational reason. The social theorists and philosophers of the Frankfurt School pointed out the suppressive essence of instrumental reason. See Horkheimer, and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Frankfurt a. M. 1944. They described how Odysseus, the very incarnation of instrumental reason, wants to hear the song of the sirens, and as a strategy to do so, he arranges for his men not to be able to listen to the song and only to obey his orders.

18 A discussion of this spinning on the spot of the two dimensions in Hans Jonas’ scripts can be found on p. 353 of the author’s book (Ohashi 2018).

References


11 Corporeality in an ecologically oriented aesthetics of nature

Zhuofei Wang

An ecologically oriented aesthetics of nature: motif and problem

As a field of philosophical aesthetics, the aesthetics of nature is based on different philosophical approaches, concepts of nature, and reflections on the position of man in nature, and is devoted to the aesthetic dimension of the various relationships between man and nature. In the second half of the twentieth century, the aesthetics of nature gained new significance and aroused great attention among aestheticians from various cultural circles to become, next to art theory and everyday aesthetics, one of the most important aesthetic fields.1 The reasons for this are partly the now omnipresent debate about the modern dichotomy of man and nature in the industrialisation process and partly the ensuing environmental problems and ecological dangers. In this sense, aesthetics has to revise fundamentally the traditional determining factors of the relationship between man, nature, and environment. Unlike the anthropocentrically oriented conception of the western philosophical tradition, which understands man as the measure of all things and the centre of the world, contemporary aesthetics of nature primarily manifests an ecologically oriented feature. It takes the embedding and the reintegration of man in nature as the focus of attention and thus has a moral-practical significance innately associated with respect for nature.

Looking back at the research approaches in the aesthetics of nature so far, it can be maintained that they often reduce their perspective to an aesthetic assessment of natural beauty and so fall back on the viewpoint of traditional aesthetics of judgement (in a Kantian sense). One consequence is that many studies stay on a metaphysical level and thus contribute little to the re-cultivation and re-naturing of the environment in a modern, urbanised, and industrialised society. In order to develop an ecologically oriented aesthetics in the context of the contemporary environmental discussion, it is necessary to ask more pointedly than before: to what extent can the traditional approach of the aesthetics of nature be theoretically re-formulated so that the perspective of traditional aesthetics of judgement, predominantly fixed on the experience and reflection of natural beauty, can be avoided?
The ecologically oriented aesthetics of nature envisaged in my chapter makes use of an understanding of aesthetics as a general theory of sensual perception (Aesthetica) as it was first expounded in the eighteenth century by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762) and is nowadays endorsed by aestheticians who are giving great attention to the broad range of human sensual experiences. It is not concerned primarily with the question of the beauty of natural objects and its experience by man, but rather and foremost with the corporeal and sensual experience of a person who is situated, lives, works, and moves in a particular realm of nature (Böhme 1989, 12)—a realm that, given present conditions, is at least partly denatured, partly cultivated, often destroyed and scarcely habitable any longer. Environmental problems in this sense mean that perilous changes in nature caused by human intervention will strike back at us so that the relationship between man and nature is sensually disturbed.

Within such a concept of the aesthetics of nature, it may be important to emphasise the physical embedding of man in nature more insistently than in the traditional aesthetics of nature. As far as the significance of such research is concerned, the contemporary German aesthetician Gernot Böhme (1937–) has been explicit: people live in the world primarily in the form of flesh and blood. Only when they experience environmental destruction and catastrophe at the level of their own body can they really attach great importance to the present ecological problems (Böhme 1989, 9). According to this view, various modes of physical experiences in the natural environment should be highlighted. In this context, the role of corporeality in the interaction between man and nature has increasingly become the focus of attention.

**Corporeality**

In terms of the revision of the aesthetic relationship between man and nature from a corporeal dimension, the approach of the *New Phenomenology* (Neue Phänomenologie) was to provide important inspiration. This theory was developed by the German philosopher Hermann Schmitz (1928–) in the 1960s. Following the general approach of phenomenological studies, the New Phenomenology concentrates on what happens in the phenomena themselves. In contrast to the classical phenomenology developed by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) which, within the framework of the philosophy of transcendental subjectivity, emphasises the dependence of knowledge on the acts of consciousness, the New Phenomenology regards the preconscious realm as the basic layer of self-perception and world experience. On this basis, this theory aims to reset the focus on the content of bodily perception and its peculiar spatiality and dynamics. Special attention is paid to the relationship between causes and states of bodily phenomena.

The primary object of the New Phenomenology is the *felt body* (Leib). Here, the felt body is differentiated from the *physical body* (Körper). Usually, the physical body is the object of the natural sciences. Various parts of the physical body (eyes, ears, mouth, nose, tongue, etc.) have fixed positions, constant distances...
between each other, and distinct sensory functions (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, etc.) (Schmitz 2009, 76). Contrary to the stable sensual schema of the physical body, the structure of the felt body is variable. Essentially, the felt body is not limited to a single sensory domain but is, rather, the locus of interaction between different sensory domains, characterised by synaesthetic effects, such as warm red, cool blue, bright orange, and fresh green. In this sense, the felt body forms the fundamental tone of all sensory activities. It frees itself from the domination of the principles of position and distance and is able to coordinate, simultaneously, different sensuous elements. We can experience this corporeal structure instantaneously, but it is difficult for us to confirm its exact location. In this regard, the felt body reveals a predimensionality (Prädimensionalität) (Schmitz 1998, 16), namely, “a primordial spatiality that only envelops itself in that space, but is itself one with the being of the felt body.” Thus, “We knew that to be a body is to be attached to a certain world. However, our felt body is not first in a space, rather becomes a space” (Merleau-Ponty 1974, 178).

Although the felt body and the physical body are differentiated in the New Phenomenology, their interdependence is not ignored. On the one hand, the physical body cannot continue to exist after the end of life. On the other hand, bodily perception is mostly inseparable from the physical substrate. The expressions of felt body are fundamentally characterised by constriction (Enge) and widening (Weite). For example, exhalation and inhalation manifest themselves primarily in the rhythm of the up and downs of the chest and abdomen. The bodily-sensed spatiality and temporality thus correspond to the rhythm and dynamics of physical movement. The new phenomenological understanding of the relationship between the felt body and the physical body is based, in part, on a physiological approach. In traditional Chinese culture, the felt body and the physical body are considered fundamentally inseparable, first and foremost because both are imbued with Qi (氣). As a life force permeating all things and all beings, Qi also plays a vital role in human birth, aging, disease, and death and has a regulatory and protective effect on both the felt body and the physical body. In the chapter Knowledge Rambling in the North, by Zhuangzi (莊子. 知北遊), the role of Qi in human life and death is described as follows: “The human life depends on the collection of Qi; once Qi gathers, life emerges; once Qi dissipates, life disappears.” Human life and death result from collecting and dispersing Qi. Gathering the Qi creates the visible hair, skin, bones, and various organs, as well as the invisible corporeal sensations and feelings. For this reason, Daoists attach great priority to the protection of this life force and consider this to be a life-sustaining measure. The intertwined nature of the lived body and the physical body can also be seen in the structure and meaning of the Chinese character for body: 身體 (Shen Ti). 身 or Shen on the left means a living and felt body that is closely related to the developing life. 體 or Ti on the right consists of two parts. The left part represents the skeleton, namely, the visible and tangible body shape. The right part refers to the ritual container, which symbolises an orderly body structure. It can therefore be seen that in the Chinese context, corporeality is
considered the visible and invisible composition of human wholeness. With regard to the invisible interior aspects, the polar relation to the visible exterior elements is always taken into account. In light of the earlier, the Chinese perspective would provide important inspiration for today’s phenomenological exploration of corporeality.

From the perspective of the New Phenomenology, the perception of the self and of the environment is essentially *bodily communication*. The main characteristic of bodily communication is that the essential elements of an event, namely, fact, problem, and operation, do not occur one by one but occur simultaneously, thus forming an indivisible whole that combines multiple meanings together (Schmitz 1998, 31, 33). For example, if someone’s leg is bitten by an insect, he can immediately scratch the irritated area with his hand. Although he has little time to calculate the precise distance between the hand and the bitten part, his action may nonetheless be accomplished with complete accuracy. In this way, communication is established between two seemingly unrelated parts of the body (Schmitz 2009, 77). Meanwhile, bodily communication between people occurs almost everywhere in daily life. Many, if not all, of us are familiar with the way in which, on crowded sidewalks, eye contact between pedestrians facilitates the immediate selection of the right route for avoiding collisions (Ibid., 39). With respect to the communication between people and things, Schmitz often cites the example of accident avoidance. When a driver slams on the brakes to avoid collision with another vehicle, there is an urgent need for him to grasp in a single instant all the relevant elements—the facts, the problems (the risk of collision and the danger that may beset its avoidance) as well as the solutions—and, then, to react quickly and effectively (Ibid., 48).

So we can see that bodily communication pervades nearly every sphere of life. It can occur between body parts, between people, between people and other creatures, or even between people and inanimate objects. In other words, *where there is body, there is body communication*.

Frequently, in body communication, what we perceive is something that cannot be grasped independently by single organs. This includes not only the inner moods that flow through us holistically, such as pleasure, excitement, anger, dizziness, nausea, exhaustion, but rather the quasi-objective atmospheres that surround us. Etymologically speaking, *atmosphere* refers to gaseous mass emanating from celestial bodies and surrounding them; and later, as the layer of air around a planet, the gases enveloping a planet or a star, and especially the aerial envelope of the earth (Schultz 1996, 454). Within the framework of aesthetics as a general theory of human perception, the diversity of life experiences has become the focus of aesthetic research. This aesthetic transformation challenges the art-centred understanding of aesthetics in the modern Western context that led to a narrowing of the aesthetic field to vision and sound. Against this background, the concept of atmosphere has gone beyond the physio–meteorological field and is increasingly moving into the foreground of aesthetic research. As the primarily perceived object, atmosphere refers to an experience sphere in which human situation and external conditions are
brought corporeally together and are pervaded by a specific emotional quality. In this connection, particular attention should be given to the following aspects:

(1) As sensuous reality, atmosphere is essentially experienced corporeally. As the access to atmosphere, corporeality contributes to a situation where, on the one hand, the meaning of atmosphere is conveyed in a sensuously ascertainable, holistic manner and, on the other hand, atmospheric manifestations are variable, unpredictable, and uncontrollable. Here, two further points should be noted: (a) although the experience of atmosphere is based upon individual corporeality, it may have the same meaning for several perceivers in the same situation because of the quasi-objective qualities of atmosphere, as well as the common bio-physiological, socio-cultural, and psychological structures of the perceivers in question. In this case, atmosphere is communicable. (b) It is also possible that due to disparities among the various subjective factors (personal disposition, individual experience, educational level, and so on), different perceivers do not experience the same atmosphere. This means that the atmospheric effect may vary according to subjective conditions.

(2) The experience of atmosphere does not belong to a single sensory domain, but to a holistic, pre-differentiated area that is characterised by synaesthetic effects. Arising from the interaction between different senses (sight, hearing, touch, flavor, smell, etc.), synaesthesia makes possible the experience of a particular object in an intermodal way. Moreover, atmosphere provides the basis for further modes of perception, such as the categorising perception which aims at identifying and differentiating the individual elements of the objective world (Haubl 1998, 74). Starting from this point, further levels like objects, materials, forms, contours, colours, and so on can be analytically distinguished (Böhme 2013, 48).

(3) Despite the diversity of atmospheric phenomena under different circumstances, a particular atmosphere radiates a single emotional quality, pervading the entire space. Correspondingly, we always use an adjective to describe its character—as, for example, a cheerful landscape, a depressed market, or a comfortable hotel. John Dewey describes this single quality as “pervasive.” In his opinion, a situation consisting of multiple factors usually has a quality which merges the various different factors into a coherent whole, thus lending the situation a single characteristic (Dewey 1931, 93). Furthermore, this single quality is not constant and unchangeable, but finds itself in a dynamic process composed of different phases—emergence, strengthening, weakening, and disappearance.

According to the New Phenomenology, atmosphere cannot be grasped from a distancing and reflective perspective. Instead, it concerns something that is directly experienced in a holistic way and that triggers affective engagement. This means that atmosphere is only ascertainable when the experiencing individual is affected emotionally. In the context of modern western scholarship,
the humanities have given priority to visible and touchable things. Against this background, too little attention has been paid, overall, to those atmospheric phenomena that are invisible, untouchable, and unmeasurable but can be experienced anytime and anywhere.

**Aesthetics of nature from a corporeal dimension**

Since the end of the nineteenth century, the approach taken by traditional epistemology, which viewed corporeality as an obstacle to rational cultivation and evaluated it from a belittling point of view, has been called into critical examination. Modern phenomenology of the body (an outstanding representative of this field is Merleau-Ponty) has opposed the control and domination of reason over sensual perception and has devoted itself to the significance of corporeality for life experience. In this respect, the New Phenomenology represents the contemporary continuation of modern phenomenology of the body. With a highly practical orientation, the principles and methods of this theory have been widely applied to research areas such as philosophy, ethics, law, anthropology, theology, and aesthetics.

At the beginning of this chapter, I pointed out that current research in the aesthetics of nature continues to espouse an idea of natural beauty and ultimately remains within the confines of the conventional approach based in and around aesthetic judgement. How, then, can the New Phenomenology contribute to the transformation of this approach?

**Being located in environments**

According to traditional sensory physiology, perception follows a stimulus-response model, which is based on two phases: first, the stimuli of physical and chemical qualities, such as smell, colour, material, light, sound, and so on, and second, the reception of stimuli by respective sensory organs. In this way, perception is taken as the recording of individual sensory organs in response to respective physical stimuli. Correspondingly, the structure of the subject–object relationship is characterised by external stimuli and sensory responses.

In contrast, corporeally oriented aesthetics leads to a new understanding of perception. Here, perception is the fundamental sensual state in a given environment, which links two aspects to each other—when a person is in a particular environment, he simultaneously feels the condition of the environment in which he is located. In this sense, corporeal experience is the sensual experience of presence. People are thus inextricably connected to the natural environment. And this connection is essentially aesthetic. Accordingly, the aesthetic discussion goes beyond the question of whether or not nature is beautiful, or imparts a sense of beauty to us, to pay closer attention to “the fact that nature influences our own feeling of being there (Befinden) through our sensibility” (Wang 2014). In this regard, Arnold Berleant’s concept of aesthetic engagement would provide a point of contact. According to Berleant, “aesthetic appreciation is active perceptual engagement . . . always with a perceptual focus”
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(Berleant 2012, viii). As an alternative to the Kantian aesthetic notion of disinterestedness that focuses on a contemplative, distancing attitude towards artistic experience and thus leads to the separation of appreciators and artworks, aesthetic engagement concentrates on immersive participation in the appreciative process, which encompasses the contextuality of art experience, the complete range of perceptual involvement, and the interplay of different sense modalities. In this way, aesthetic engagement prioritises a holistic, multisensory approach to understanding aesthetic experience that is essentially “perceptually active, direct, and intimate” (Berleant 2013). From this perspective, the aesthetic value lies neither in artworks nor in their appreciators but, rather, in the interactive processes between artwork, art appreciator, and environmental factors. Berleant further points out that the approach of aesthetic engagement corresponds not only to contemporary artistic innovations but also to “the pervasiveness of aesthetic perception of all regions of experience” (Berleant 2012, vii).

The corporeally oriented aesthetics opens up multisensory access to nature. The body—primarily the felt body—embeds the human being, together with his multifarious modes of perception and sensory functions, in the natural environment, so that the human is not primarily a rational being independent of the world but a corporeal being embedded in the world. As the intersection between the self-experience and the experience of the surroundings, the body forms an immediate, sensual connection between humans and their environment, which basically determines their state of being-in-the-world. The ecoaesthetic meaning here is primarily characterised by the integration of corporeal state and environmental conditions. As a result, an infinite range of perceptual possibilities, such as cheerful, inspiring, serious, melancholic, oppressive, awesome, and so on, enter into the field of aesthetics. In this regard, it seems a pointless effort to try to use a single aesthetic model, oriented towards a specific ideal of beauty, to frame the various sensual possibilities in nature.

**Atmospheres of nature**

In corporeal experience, nature meets us, first and foremost, atmospherically. The prerequisite for perceiving a natural atmosphere is a full immersion in the environment. Therefore, the kinds of natural scenes that we experience, such as seasons, day and night, sunshine, wind, rain, thunder, or lightning, are not purely objective things but are atmospheric phenomena that can only be grasped through a co-present corporeal being. In this sense, what we feel is not nature itself, but nature for us, as Böhme points out,

> it is atmosphere that brings the human situation (Befinden) and the quality of environment together. From this view, we can affirm that external nature has a certain atmosphere in which we live. At the same time, this atmosphere makes us feel good or not.

(Wang 2014)
The concept of natural atmosphere challenges the traditional approach to aesthetics based on “thing” ontology. According to thing ontology, the actual being is a thing, a substance or something between the substances (Böhme 2001, 55). Differences between things are characterised by their objective qualities like size, shape, weight, temperature, texture, colour, and so on. A good example of this can be found in Kantian aesthetics, which is dedicated to the forms of things. Flowers, insects, or birds, as discussed by Kant, essentially belong to the collection of things (Böhme 2001, 69). The domination of thing ontology led to a situation in which little attention was paid to the interaction between sensory perceptions, feelings, and environmental factors and which thereby ignored the fact that the so-called purely objective world is an abstract entity possessing countless spatiotemporal possibilities for its manifestation. In fact, our relationship with the environment in a specific place and at a specific time exists primarily in a sensually perceptible way, and this existence is, essentially, atmospheric. On this basis, more attention should be paid to the immediate sensual experience of objects in the here and now.

Take a rainbow as one example: from the perspective of the natural sciences, the rainbow is undoubtedly a physical object whose information is passively absorbed by human organs. However, this point of view neglects the interaction between the objective qualities and the subjective conditions. In this case, the manifestation of the rainbow cannot be independent of the position of the observer. Furthermore, the same rainbow may manifest itself differently for several adjacent observers, because of their bio-physical, psychological, and spiritual disparities. On this point, it is worth mentioning Olafur Eliasson’s installation work *Beauty* (1993). Using a Fresnel lens, water, nozzles, hose, foil, wood, and pump, the artist created a glittering rainbow in a dark room. Because of refraction, the forms of appearance of the rainbow were dependent on the positions of viewers. Even adjacent viewers were unable to see the same rainbow. For Eliasson, the perceptual process is part of an artwork. With this as his starting point, “the primacy of the viewer’s body, along with his or her perception, position and orientation” (May 2003, 18) occupies the central position of his works. As Eliasson emphasises, in connection to *Beauty*, “if the light doesn’t go into your eyes, there’s no rainbow” (Grynsztejn 2002, 14). That is to say, the completion of the artwork is inseparable from its audience’s participation, “for without the viewer(s) and their subjectivity, the works are vacated” (May 2003, 19). Moreover, there are always mutual interactions between environmental qualities themselves so that the impact of a certain quality on the senses should be considered in conjunction with the context as a whole. For example, the various atmospheres of the weather are co-generated by association with non-weather environmental factors. The atmosphere of autumn is characterised by the falling of colourful leaves, by ripe fruits, and by bare trees. Although these elements are not meteorological, their generative contribution to the atmosphere of autumn should not be underestimated.

In terms of the structure of natural atmosphere, three dimensions should be highlighted.
The relationship between the atmosphere of nature and affective involvement has become a prominent issue for aesthetic research into the atmosphere. Affective involvement concerns an emotional state that is simultaneously linked with the experience of the presence of space and substance, as well as that of the presence of the body. If a feeling is always connected with the perception of a particular environment, then this is largely characterised by an emotional reaction to this environment. Take the weather as an example. The weather plays a significant part in our daily life. When people meet each other, they often exchange information about weather conditions: it is warm or cold, bright or cloudy, windy or calm . . . Weather is “a subject that shapes the script of everyday life, . . . a subject that touches everyone” (May 2003, 22). The development of technology has led to a situation wherein the sphere of the cultivated environment is being incessantly expanded. In this connection, the weather might be taken as an exception among natural objects and phenomena, for the reason that it is still difficult, today, for human beings to predict weather conditions with any real precision or to control weather events and processes. Thus, despite various problems of climate change, the weather still shows the limits of human capability and reminds us that not each and every aspect of the natural world is under our control or can be changed at our will. The relationship of the perceiving subject to weather conditions essentially exists in a sensually discernible manner. And this sensual connection is usually characterised by a specific correlation between emotions, moods and meteorological phenomena. This means that weather conditions are constantly and affectively experienced by the perceiving subject. Weather changes may cause mood fluctuations and exert certain impacts on the rhythm and the preservation of our daily life. Even in the scientific observation of weather phenomena, the affective factors also participate in observational behaviour, although this usually happens unconsciously. In this sense, Böhme points out that the weather as a totality is primarily affectively accessible (Böhme 2011, 157).

In corporeal-affective experience, the weather manifests itself in an atmospheric form. The atmosphere of the weather opens up a huge, emotionally toned space that impacts the perceiving subject. It affects the mind, influences sensitivities, and evokes feelings. Thus, given that it affects us emotionally, the weather can be taken as the state of our environment as a whole (Böhme 2011, 153). Usually, descriptive words such as strong wind, dense clouds, thick raindrops, heavy rain, and warming sun are used in everyday language to characterise the affective effects of the atmosphere of the weather, which can be either positive or negative. Fresh air is pleasant and relaxing. Sunny weather gives a safe and comfortable feeling. In serene weather, when the sun is shining, one feels energetic and well balanced. By contrast, in adverse weather conditions, and especially when there is little light, a life-sapping and hostile atmosphere spreads. In humid weather, one feels tired and sleepy. For some people, the gradual encroachment of twilight easily evokes negative moods. In this case,
they feel disoriented or even threatened. From these descriptions, the weather emerges not merely as a natural event, but as a basic hue of our environment. Moreover, there are many different ways to experience the atmospheres of the weather, and each different way can evoke different emotions, moods, and feelings. Take the experience of a rainy atmosphere as an example: the atmosphere experienced when walking in a heavy downpour is obviously not comparable to that experienced when enjoying the same rainy landscape through a window. The former can be helpless and powerless, while the latter can be pleasant and exciting. According to Saito, the experience of the weather is characterised more by individualisation, as it varies in content and degree from person to person, situation to situation (Saito 2005, 158). In this regard, there is no privileged position for experiencing any particular weather atmosphere (Saito 2005, 161).

Cognitive dimension

In general, observation of the atmosphere of nature focuses on the relationship between corporeal-affective states and natural conditions, in order to transcend the scientifically oriented approach of natural research. However, some studies focus on the pre-reflexive level of the atmospheric experience of nature so that the cognitive dimension is largely excluded. For instance, Stolnitz compared the interest of meteorologists with that of aestheticians in relation to weather phenomena. He wrote:

A meteorologist is concerned, not with the visual appearance of a striking cloud formation, but with the causes which led to it. . . . the aesthetic attitude “isolates” the object and focuses upon it—the “look” of the rocks, the sound of the ocean, the colours in the painting.

(Stolnitz 1960, 35)

For Stolnitz, meteorological research is associated with practical considerations. It aims to illustrate better the impact of weather conditions on people’s livelihood and well-being. In contrast, such practical concerns are largely absent from research into the aesthetic consideration of weather phenomena, where priority tends to be given to the aesthetic properties of weather events such as colour, light, sound, or shape.

It is true that cognition and aesthetics belong to different realms of value. Aesthetic value is based on perception, while cognitive value is conceptual. However, this does not mean that the two areas are completely incompatible in the aesthetic experience of an object. According to Stefan Majetschak, expert or professional knowledge can help reveal new aspects of an aesthetic object so that we can better understand it. For instance, expert knowledge may draw our attention to the fact that in a piece of music a sequence of tones can be perceived as an introduction; in a poem, the verses as a melody; or, in a painting, the human figure as a portrait of the patron or benefactor (Majetschak
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2018, 43). Saito stressed that conceptual considerations can modify, transform, or amplify our experience of sensual surfaces (Saito 2005, 162). From this perspective, sensory-affective and cognitive factors are also interwoven in the atmospheric experience of nature. An example of this is the atmospheric experience of cumulus clouds. The intensity of the wind determines the shape and structure of the clouds. In this context, the sensuous manifestation of clouds represents the movement and power of the air in and around them. With this information, it is possible for us to participate appropriately and more fully in the atmospheric experience of cumulus clouds.

Currently, some studies are paying special attention to the impact of cognition on the way in which we experience natural events atmospherically, in order to challenge the view that the cognitive approach is irrelevant to the aesthetic experience of nature. According to Mădălina Diaconu, the emphasis on knowledge and, in particular, the knowledge of science in the aesthetic experience of nature, promotes a critical distancing from spontaneous aesthetic responses (Diaconu 2017, 65). Cognition has enough power to inhibit or even block spontaneous affective reactions to assumed natural beauty. Even seemingly insignificant information can, from this perspective, completely change the feel of a natural scene (Diaconu 2017, 64). Tonino Griffero holds a similar viewpoint. As he proposes, the natural perception of the weather can be filtered out by the ideas and evaluations of the perceiving subject. In this sense, atmospheric perception is at least partially cognitively permeable and not completely deterministic (Griffero 2014, 137).

Besides scientific knowledge, the aesthetic appreciation of natural phenomena is also closely linked to socio-cultural, ideological, religious factors or personal experiences which can modify the ordinary sensation of natural objects and reveal their unusual sensual aspects. Here, smog can be mentioned as one example. As a complex issue of environmental concern, the phenomenon of smog can be observed from several perspectives such as politics, law, and ethics. In this context, relevant knowledge plays a significant role in our atmospheric experience. When we are aware that smog results from the emissions of pollutants and has a harmful effect on our health, the basic tone of the seemingly romantic foggy atmosphere changes. It is no longer linked to a pleasant feeling but becomes integral to critical reflection on its possible hazards and harmful consequences. In this case, cognitive as well as moral factors are inherent in the atmospheric experience of smog.

**Socio-cultural dimension**

From a corporeal perspective, the diversity of atmospheric experience of nature is at the centre of an ecologically oriented natural aesthetics. The relationship between atmosphere, perception, and action is thus not limited to an individual sphere but is, rather, influenced by socio-cultural factors, since the associated lifestyles and cultural elements lay the foundation for the aesthetic experience in a civilised society. From this point of view, Majetschak emphasises that “the
aesthetic qualities that we rightly ascribed to a thing in our aesthetic judg-
ments are to a large degree a function of the items of knowledge about its
historical identity, about its ‘where, by whom and why,’ within a cultural frame-
work” (Majetschak 2019, 277). The actions of perceiving individuals in the
same socio-cultural context can correspond to each other and eventually form
a common style. Each atmosphere tends to be related to a certain style of action
which can be found in all perceivers under the same socio-cultural conditions
(Thibaud 2003, 289). Similarly, the atmospheric experience of nature is not
limited to the domain of the individual but tends to be related to respective
traditions and values and is reinforced by specific historical and cultural frame-
works. Since, as embodied or physical beings, humans exist primarily within a
certain socio-cultural framework, the atmospheric experience of nature largely
represents the fusion of natural and socio-cultural conditions. One example of
this is the design of the garden atmosphere. Naturalness is the motif of a Dao
garden. Because of this, the original features and structures of the various ele-
ments, such as hills, stones, plants, trees, ponds, and rocks, should be preserved
as much as possible. Any artificial elements such as architecture, bridges, and
paths should harmonise with those natural elements. In this way, everything
looks as if it was created naturally so as to form a simple, harmonious atmos-
phere. Obviously, the principle of the Dao Garden is opposed to that of the
baroque garden. In a baroque garden, the original forms of natural objects are
usually greatly altered, with trees and bushes being pruned and sheared into
various geometric forms. From a European point of view, these artificial forms
are more beautiful than those elements that grow naturally. Thus, it can be
stated that the creation of the atmosphere of the garden depends not only on
objective arrangements of plants, flowers, paths, water scenes, sculptures, and
architectural compositions but also, rather, on symbolic systems of meaning
that are culturally and socially mediated.

Aoki wrote: “We experience nature under the strong influence of the cul-
ture to which we belong, rather than appreciate nature in an unmediated way”
(Aoki 2013, 143). It was not until the eighteenth century that the theme of
nature became increasingly important in aesthetic theories and practices in
Europe. Thanks to the efforts of British designers and theoreticians, the appre-
ciation of natural landscape became an artistic activity aimed primarily at the
educated classes. At that time, philosophers and artists began to pay attention
to wild nature such as the Alps, which had long been considered desolate
and ugly. In particular, Kant’s aesthetic theory of nature and Goethe’s Italian
journey revealed the sublime and majestic atmosphere of the wilderness. As a
result, nature was no longer taken to be the opposite of human civilisation but
a cultural construction influenced by factors such as human behaviour, society,
and history. The experience of nature thus encompasses a variety of possibilities
that are developed through socio-cultural practices.

The influence of socio-cultural conditions on the natural atmosphere can be
better understood through artistic representations of nature. Under the influ-
ence of the subject-oriented concept of natural aesthetics, one of the main
goals of modern European landscape painting was to turn nature into a landscape from the perspective of a reflective subject. In this case, the atmospheric components that are radiated from the picture show the power of the subject and often have a sublime meaning. One example is Caspar David Friedrich’s *The wanderer above the mists* (1818). The lines spread out in a soothing way and stretch off into the distance. Far away on the horizon, the mountains lie blurred in the thick haze. And the sky seems to merge with the earth. Fog and mountains reflect the interplay of invisibility and visibility, whose effect might be comparable to that of emptiness and fullness in Chinese landscape painting. Nevertheless, the compositional technique and perspectival orientation of Western painting still play a role. The wanderer in the foreground of the picture turns his back on the viewer. In this way, his view of nature and also his attentiveness towards nature are highlighted. The high-towering human figure, which blocks the view of the landscape lying behind it, conveys a romantic aspiration based on the idea of sublime.

In comparison with European painting, traditional Chinese painting took a different route. The genre mentioned here is primarily literati painting that was developed around the sixth century and reached its peak between the tenth and the twelfth centuries. For the motif of literati painting, the harmonious representation of the human–nature relationship played a decisive role. The Chinese literati were eager to rid themselves of burdensome daily affairs and to lead a reclusive life, in order to achieve individual freedom and independence. One consequence of this was their gradual intoxication with the natural world which, at that time, had barely been influenced by the processes of civilization. In their eyes, untouched nature (hills, valleys, streams, rocks, and so on) had a higher aesthetic value than artificial products. Against this background, landscape painting was considered one of the most effective ways to present a harmonious atmosphere between mankind and nature. In a Chinese landscape painting, the human figure could be a hermit, a traveller, or an angler in some small vessel. These human figures were either the ideal images of the literati living in seclusion, or even their self-portrait. The sharp contrast between the reduced-scale human figure and the enlarged natural scene conveys the impression that the human being is fundamentally part of nature. In this sense, there is nothing but nature.

An example of this is *A solitary temple amid clearing peaks* (晴巒蕭寺圖, Qingluan Xiaosi) by Li Cheng (李成), from around the middle of the eleventh century. With sometimes generous, sometimes fine brushstrokes, a range of ink nuances as well as various lines, this painting presents a winter mountainous landscape in North China. Towering mountains, naked trees, cascading waterfalls and moving travellers create a peaceful and yet dynamic atmosphere. Since the field of vision is limited by the huge wall of mountains, a certain uneasy effect occurs. It is difficult to determine from which perspective this painting was created. In fact, it shows a spatial structure in which, as the angle of viewing changes, the individual components shift perspectively so as to overlap one another. This results in a comprehensive and sustained natural lifeworld that
provides not only more space for new discoveries and expressive possibilities but also an atmosphere that allows viewers to enjoy lasting pleasure.

In literati painting, the concept of change (Yi, 易) holds a central position. Here, change has nothing to do with the power of the Creator but concerns a continuous transformation that ensures the continuation and constant renewal of life. Based on this, the world is seen as a great continuum of life that contains endless modifications. Beauty is not the focus of traditional Chinese aesthetic practices but is regarded only as one of the aesthetic effects. The reason why an object is aesthetically praised is, above all, that it reveals a phenomenal reality which, from a process-oriented point of view, is constantly transforming from the invisible to the visible and thus providing infinite pleasure due to its enormous diversity. Against this background, Chinese painters attach little importance to bright sunny weather. Rather, the diffuse atmosphere of adverse weather events (fog, rain, snow, wind, and so on) is the preferred subject, for the reason that ambiguous contours of objects reveal a process in which everything is in transition from the invisible to the visible. Take Early Spring (Zhao Chun Tu, 早春圖) of Guo Xi (郭熙) (1072) as an example. This work does not concentrate on precise imitation of what was seen but portrays the process of nature. The synergy between ink and brush creates a visible world. Exactly at this moment, the in-between occupies a central position. Through the brushwork, the painter focuses on the polar elements (fullness and emptiness, presence and absence, emergence and disappearance, and so on), which are in constant interaction with each other and correspond to the continuous transformation of the natural process. In this way, life and movement are brought to the forefront of aesthetic experience.

Conclusion

In espousing the concept of corporeality, the ecologically oriented aesthetics of nature has been able to argue, convincingly, a methodological distinction from natural science-oriented eco-disciplines. Since the nineteenth century, ecology has been considered primarily as a subdiscipline of biology in terms of the interrelationships among organisms as well as between organisms and environmental factors. Such studies concentrate primarily on the factual existence of natural objects, which obey their own natural laws and can be investigated by means of quantitative and/or experimental methods. Although this approach to nature undeniably has its own cognitive value, it nevertheless appears to be inadequate when it is the matter of (re-)creating a balanced relationship between humanity and nature. The concept of corporeality places the interrelationship between the human senses and the surrounding environment at the forefront of aesthetic research. Now, the focus is on understanding the human environment primarily as something which must be experienced corporeally. Accordingly, the following questions move into the foreground: in which environment are we located? and how do we sensually identify our situation in this
environment? Obviously, a shift towards such questions would contribute more effectively to the development of ecological consciousness.

Notes

1 In my article Naturästhetik, an overview of the contemporary development of natural aesthetics in the English, German and Chinese circles is given (see “Naturästhetik,” in Handbuch Umweltethik, edited by Ott, Konrad, 142–47. Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag 2016). In the German-speaking research context, the “Tutzinger Manifest für die Stärkung der kulturellästhetischen Dimension Nachhaltiger Entwicklung” (Tutzinger Manifesto to Strengthen the Cultural-Aesthetic Dimension of Sustainable Development) (available at www.kupoge.de/ik/tutzingermanifest/) is worth mentioning. The manifesto is the result of the Conference on the Aesthetics of Sustainability held in the Evangelical Academy of Tutzing from April 20th to 22nd 2001 and organised by Martin Held, Director of Studies at the Academy, and Hermann Pfitze, President of German Society for Aesthetics. Pioneer research outside the German-speaking area that is in line with the aims of the Tutzinger Manifesto includes environmental and ecological aesthetics. Environmental aesthetics first developed in Englishspeaking countries in the 1970s. In this respect, the paper published by Ronald Hepburn (UK) “Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty” played a vanguard role. Arnold Berleant (USA), Allen Carlson (Canada), und Yrjö Sepänmaa (Finland) are among the foremost researchers in this field. Ecological aesthetics was introduced in the 1990s by Chinese researchers and since then has been the focal point of Chinese aesthetics research. Many of its central elements are influenced by the traditional Chinese principle of the unity of heaven and man (Tianren Heyi, 天人合一). Aestheticians believe that the state of ecological balance, which concentrates on a dynamic and harmonious relationship of non-human and human nature, represents the highest level of the aesthetic relationship with nature. Since 2002, ecological aesthetics has taken on greater meaning, that is, it has transcended the biological framework and now influences, among other things, social, cultural and intellectual life. The ideas of Fanren Zeng (曾繁仁) are at the heart of this. In his opinion, ecological structure is not only biological, but also social, cultural, economic, psychological etc. Accordingly, ecological aesthetics understands itself as a theory of existential philosophy in line with ecological principles.

2 Correspondingly, the term “body” which is used in this article, should be understood primarily in the sense of felt body.

3 An exception is phantom pain. Here bodily feeling occurs in the absence of a limb.

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