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Taoist Thought and Earth Ethics

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Abstract

Recently, earth ethics or environmental ethics has become a popular field of research. But there is lack of a cosmological and non-anthropocentric philosophical framework for earth ethics. In this essay we try to fill this gap by developing a Taoist framework. Starting with the later Heidegger's transformation of the four-fold, we will first of all clarify the essence of earth. After pinpointing the eco-ethical character of such an approach, we will show how a Taoist framework can be achieved by reactivating its fundamental principle that letting things return to their proper places. This should also deepen the exploration of the ethical implications of Heidegger's way of thinking.

Keywords: Taoism, Heidegger, earth ethics

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Whenever there is a discussion about Eastern and Western values, it is thought to be a provocative topic for people who are used to seeing a conflicting relationship between them. The recent famous example of this approach is the thesis introduced by Samuel Huntington. From a historical standpoint, in spite of Leibniz's great enthusiasm, there has been only little progress in the dialogue between Eastern and Western philosophies. In the past decade, mainly due to the economic boom in Asia, some scholars have proposed the thesis that in Asia, Confucian ethics should be identified as a functional equivalent of Protestant ethics for the rise of capitalism. But then would not the recent Asian economic flu rather have demonstrated the opposite to be true? In particular, this question has invited us to a new round of discussion on the so-called "Asian values." At this juncture, it is also good to think about the possibility of reactivating the strength of Eastern way of thinking.

Reflectively speaking, from an Eastern perspective, Western values have long been identified as a challenge. Particularly, according to conservative Easterners, the only way to save East values is to fight back the invasion of Western ones. On the other hand, in the Western academic world, Chinese values have been mainly treated as something outdated. Indeed, it is not surprising to come across a Western scholar who is strongly opposed to the possibility of a comparison between Eastern and Western philosophy. And, this is not to mention the fact that rarely would people in the West have tried to attack the problem of Eastern values from a "developmental" standpoint. On the contrary, from the Western perspective, Eastern values seem to have merely historical significance. That is to say, for many Western scholars, Eastern values have no future at all.

To be sure, such a sad situation in the meeting between Eastern and Western cultures is unbearable. In particular, in the

post-modern age, "openness to the other" should not remain merely a verbal slogan. It is definitely not easy to conduct a meaningful dialogue between Eastern and Western thinking. Even though the internet and e-mail have facilitated communication, the mental block in serious cultural exchange between these two sets of values is not so easy to break.

Though the main current in the Western academic world has, to a large extent, ignored Eastern values, there are some exceptions. Among this minority, the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger might be the most renowned. Despite the fact that Heidegger never explicitly discussed the relationship between his philosophy and Taoism, it is discernable that his later thinking was developed under influence of Taoism.¹ This connection is confirmed by the report written by one of his close friends, Heinrich Petzet. In his book, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger*, Petzet wrote, "I knew how highly Heidegger esteemed Lao-tzu." (1993: 181) In addition to this indirect philological evidence, it is philosophically arguable that Heidegger's later thinking has an essential affinity with Taoism. But in this paper, my primary aim is to show concretely how Eastern and Western values can meet in a fruitful manner through a Heideggerian appropriation of the Taoist way of thinking. In particular, in searching for a philosophical framework for earth ethics, it is interesting to explore the potential contribution of Taoism with the help of the later Heidegger's thinking. The possibility of developing a Taoist philosophical framework for earth ethics will also demonstrate its contemporary relevance. As a matter of fact, in the recent years earth ethics or environmental ethics has become a popular research field, and some scholars have also started to develop a

¹ Cf.: May, Reinhard (1996).

philosophical foundation for environmental ethics along a Heideggerian approach. In this sense, our investigation can be understood a continuation of such a path.

Mary Turker complained that the present development of earth ethics is still at an unsatisfactory stage, for it has failed to provide a viable philosophical framework. (1996, October: 1) According to Turker, such a framework has to be cosmological and not anthropocentric. In order to show in which manner one can develop a non-anthropocentric philosophical framework for earth ethics along the Taoist direction, I will employ Heidegger's thinking as a mediator. The viability of such mediation can be justified by the following considerations. First of all, in its historical development, Taoism did not elaborate a systematic theory of earth ethics. However, this fact by no means indicates that there is no ecological-ethical implication in the Taoist way of thinking. In fact, a typical Taoist ethical concern for the earth is clearly shown in the following saying of Lao Tzu: "Who can make the muddy water gradually clear through tranquillity? Who can make the still gradually come to life through the care of continued motion."² In parallel, as Bruce Foltz has shown, Heidegger's important treatise "...Poetically Man Dwells..." points to a philosophical foundation for a genuine environmental ethics.³ As we will see, this treatise of Heidegger has an affinity with Taoism. In particular, according to Heinrich Petzet, Heidegger's "conversation about the 'fourfold' took up Lao-tzu." (1993: 73)

² Cf.: Wing-tsit Chan (1963: 147). According to Paul Shih-yi Hsiao, these lines in the Tao Te Ching are Heidegger's favourite. Cf.: Paul Shih-yi Hsiao (1987: 100).

³ Cf.: Bruce Foltz (1996).

Moreover, Heidegger himself raised the question: "How do Eastern and Western thinking relate to each other?" (Petzet, 1993: 181) Generally, as Petzet reported, "Heidegger is of the opinion that the issue has to do with the role of the mediator. He himself holds to Lao-tzu." (1993: 182)

In the following part of my paper, I will start with an identification of some basic similarities between Taoism and Heidegger – particularly as they are found in "...Poetically Man Dwells..." (1971a: 143-161) Then on top of Bruce Foltz's work, I will clarify to what extent the Heideggerian way of thinking can help Taoism to develop a philosophical framework for earth ethics.

As I have pointed out in an earlier work, Heidegger's interpretation of Hoelderlin points to a hermeneutical application of Taoism.⁴ This possibility now can be more clearly seen in his posthumous publication: *Beitraege zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* which was written from 1936 through 1938.⁵ However, the writing of "...Poetically Man Dwells..." occupies a special status in his interpretation of Hoelderlin. For only in this work does Heidegger develop his interpretation of Hoelderlin which reminds us of the Taoist thinking on the essence of the earth. Especially, Heidegger here attempted to provide a new interpretation of Hoelderlin's phrase "poetically man dwells" in terms of a reinterpretation of the Taoist conception of the fourfold which includes the earth as a constitutive element. In general, Heidegger himself admitted that such a hermeneutical approach could be "dangerous": "We now even run the risk of intruding foreign thoughts into Hoelderlin's poetic words." (1971a: 218) But with those

⁴ Cf.: Wing-cheuk Chan (1998, October).

⁵ Cf.: Martin Heidegger (1989).

"foreign thoughts" Heidegger was able to develop his own insight. Surely, there is always risk in philosophical encounters. What we are now more interested in is to explore the essential affinity between Heidegger and Taoism – as it is shown in his interpretation of Hoelderlin's dictum: "poetically man dwells."

Early in this writing, Heidegger explicitly clarified the "ontological" as well as the "phenomenological" nature of Hoelderlin's speech of "the poetic dwelling of man." It is "ontological" because "When Hoelderlin speaks of dwelling, he has before his eyes the basic character of human existence." (1971a: 214) It is "phenomenological" because "the phrase 'Poetically Man Dwells' says: poetry first causes dwelling to be dwelling. Poetry is what really lets us dwell." (1971a: 214) According to him, Hoelderlin's poem invited us "to think of the nature of poetry as a letting-dwell." (1971a: 214) But how can we, as human beings, claim to arrive at the Nature of something? Heidegger's answer is simple: "Man can make such a claim only where he receives it. He receives it from the telling of language." (1971a: 214) To this extent, Heidegger claimed that "language remains the master of man." (1971a: 214) Accordingly, though dwelling is identified as the basic character of human existence, there is no danger in committing any anthropocentrism. But now what mainly interests us is rather Heidegger's urge for man to respect "language's own nature." According to our ordinary understanding, language is nothing but the means of expression. That is to say, language should serve man. Strangely enough, Heidegger maintained that "strictly, it is language that is speaking. Man first speaks when, and only when, he responds to language by listening to its appeal." (1971a: 216) But how is it possible to claim that language is the master of man?

If we turn to Taoism, we might find a way to clarify Heidegger's point. In Chinese, the word "Tao" has a double meaning: first, it means "way"; second, it means "speech". "Tao" as Being is also Language. Indeed, such a dual character of the Tao might also be reflected in the Heideggerian expressions like "Language is the house of Being" and "On the way to language." (Heidegger, 1977a: 193)⁶ This fact shows that only when we respect the intimate relation between language and Being/Tao that it is possible for us to recognize "language's own nature." So, when Heidegger said that "Language speaks" he meant at the same time "Being (=Tao) speaks". That is to say, for Heidegger, it is only when man responds to Being (=Tao) as language that he can speak. Such an "ontological" conception of language is totally different from our usual "instrumental" conception of language. It is true that there is no explicit textual evidence indicating to what extent Heidegger's later view on language was developed under the influence of Taoism. In Taoism one can nevertheless find a support for his thesis that language is the master of man.

Generally, the connection between Heidegger and Taoism is not wholly transparent. However, regarding the linguistic character of the Tao, his further explication of the way through which language "masters" human beings is quite typically Taoist in character. In order to see how this is the case, let us start with his concrete interpretation of Hoelderlin's poem, "...Poetically Man Dwells...".

First of all, Heidegger saw an implicit illustration of the configuration of the "fourfold" in lines 24 to 38 of Hoelderlin's poem "... Poetically Man Dwells...". These lines should provide us with a "dynamic" characterization of the fourfold. In

⁶ See also: Martin Heidegger (1971b); my stress.

particular, Earth, Heaven, divinities and mortals are now related to each other in terms of the "measuring" relationship. Interestingly, these lines of Hoelderlin's poem can be understood as a Western counterpart of the following famous saying in the Tao Te Ching: "Man models himself after Earth. Earth models after Heaven. Heaven models after Tao. And Tao models itself after Nature." (Wing-tsit, Chan 1963: 152) Besides replacing the king (who is the representative of man) in terms of man's mortality, the fundamental change is the substitution of the Tao by divinities. Since divinities in the Heideggerian sense do not necessarily refer to the Christian God, such a replacement might not create any serious difficulty. In fact, according to Lao Tzu, "Of old those that obtained the One: Heaven obtained the One and became clear. Earth obtained the One and became tranquil. The spiritual beings obtained the One and became divine. The valley obtained the One and became full. The myriad things obtained the One and lived and grew. Kings and barons obtained the One and became rulers of the empire. What made them so is the One." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 152) This indicates that Taoism also admits the divine and even speaks of the divine in plural. Generally, the Chinese word *fa* as a verb means to model. It can also mean "to take something as its measure". This possibility is clearly shown in the term *fa-tu* which means the measuring norm. If one interprets Lao Tzu's above statement in the way that man takes Earth as his measuring norm, Earth takes Heaven as its measuring norm, Heaven takes the Tao as its measuring norm, and the Tao takes Nature as its measuring norm, then one can also understand the reason why there are such modelling relationships among them. For example, it is mainly because Nature is the measuring norm of the Tao, the Tao should model itself after Nature.

As is well known, "the One" is a key concept in Taoism. In parallel, Heidegger spoke of "the One" in referring to

Hoelderlin's epigram in his poem "Root of All Evil": "Being at one is godlike and good; whence, then, this craze among men that there should exist only One, why should all be one?" (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 152) Here one could find his echo to the Taoist concept of the One. This indeed facilitates his linking of Being (Tao) to the divine. This certainly does not imply that god is just another name for Being/Tao. For god is at best an "item" among the four in the fourfold. Besides, as Heidegger noted, "the One" in this sense has to be understood as "an original being-at-one." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 152) Originally, Lao Tzu's saying that "What made them so is the One" implies that all beings originate from the Tao. This sentence should further point to the letting-be of things "in the distinctness of their nature."⁷ At this juncture, Heidegger's distinction between the same and the equal is helpful in clarifying such a paradoxical relationship between the One and the many in the Taoist context. He said, "It is in the carrying out and settling of differences that the gathering nature of sameness comes to light. The same banishes all zeal always to level what is different into the equal or identical. The same gathers what is distinct into an original being-at-one. The equal, on the contrary, disperses them into the dull unity of mere uniformity." (1971a: 218-9) If such a Heideggerian thesis is applied to the relationship between the One and the myriad things, one can reaffirm the pluralistic spirit of Taoism. Therefore, with Heidegger it would be more natural to reserve the Tao as the synonym for the One. That is to say, the Tao should be the oneness of the fourfold, rather than one of the fourfold. Accordingly, it is justified for the Heideggerian replacement of the Tao by divinities.

⁷ Martin Heidegger (1971a: 218). Though here originally Heidegger only addressed the relationship between poetry and thinking, this expression can be generalized to cover the thinging of all things.

In consequence of such replacement, Heidegger developed a different way in allocating a measuring relationship. For this he quoted again from Hölderlin's poem *Root of All Evil*: "Is God unknown? Is he manifest like the sky? I'd sooner believe the latter. It is the measure of man. Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells on this earth. " (1971a: 219) Clearly, for Heidegger, the sky is the first measure for man. However, since only when man lets the earth be as earth that he can dwell on the earth, the earth is also the measure for man. In this sense, Heidegger declared that "the poet, if he is a poet, does not describe the mere appearance of sky and earth. The poet calls, in the sights of the sky, that which in its very self-disclosure causes the appearance of that which conceals itself, and indeed as that which conceals itself." (1971a: 225) Seen a Taoist perspective, such a position is faithful to Lao Tzu's following thesis: "Use the light. Revert to enlightenment, and thereby avoid danger to one's life - This is called practicing the eternal." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 164) Heidegger's approach also helps us to understand why Lao Tzu has to insist that "The Tao which is bright appears to be dark." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 160) For, if there is a possibility of a total mode of unconcealment, then concealment would be excluded.

In addition, since man is an image of the godhead, the measure for poetry must be related to god as well. In answering "What is God?" Heidegger turns to Hölderlin again. But if Hölderlin's God is "unknown," then "how can that which by its very nature remains unknown ever become a measure?" (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 222; 224-5) As a response, Heidegger wrote, "The measure consists in the way in which the god who remains unknown, is revealed as such by the sky. God's appearance through the sky consists in a disclosing that lets us see what conceals itself, but lets us see it not by seeking to wrest what is concealed out of its self-concealedness, but only by

guarding the concealed in its self-concealment." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 223) Again, such a position reminds us of the Taoist thesis that "one aware of his brightness keeps to the dark." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 154) As a matter of fact, Heidegger also quoted this dictum in his work, *The Piety of Thinking*. (1976: 56) Furthermore, in the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu said, "To produce things and to rear them, [t]o produce, but not to take possession of them, [t]o act, but not to rely on one's own ability, [t]o lead them, but not to master them - This is called profound and secret virtue (hsuan-te)." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 144) One can discover that there is a correspondence between Heidegger's concept of concealed essence and the Taoist notion of profound and secret virtue. First of all, the etymological meaning of hsuan is dark. As pointed out by Wing-tsit Chan, "The word hsuan means profound and mysterious." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 139) That is to say, hsuan can well mean what is concealed. Moreover, according to Wing-tsit Chan's explanation, "Te ordinarily means moral character but in relation to Tao it means Tao particularized when inherent in a thing. The classical definition of it is to te (attain or be able to). Waley is correct in understanding it as a latent power, a virtue inherent in something and in rendering it as power. But power does not connote moral excellence which the word te involves. Both virtue and character seem to be better." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 790) As a result, te in the Taoist sense is basically a dynamic virtue. Likewise, the later Heidegger also developed a dynamic conception of essence. In particular, now essence is linked to coming to presence. (1977b: 30) Historically, on the way towards such a dynamic concept of essence, even in *Being and Time* Heidegger had already understood essence in terms of potentiality-for-Being (Seinkönnen). Exactly in this sense, he declared that Dasein's Essence is grounded in its existence. (1962: 152) So in terms of their dynamic character, one can also discern the correspondence between the Taoist concept of te (virtue) and

Heidegger's notion of essence. This can also be supported by Lao Tzu's following saying that "Deep and obscure, in it is the essence." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 150)

Furthermore, in "The Turning" Heidegger wrote, "The danger is the saving power, inasmuch as it brings the saving power out of its - the danger's - concealed essence that is ever susceptible of turning." (1977b: 42) One can well associate this sentence to the following dictum in the Tao Te Ching, "Always to know the standard is called profound and secret virtue. Virtue becomes deep and far-reaching, and with all things return to their original natural state. Then complete harmony will be reached." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 170) In this way, one can clearly discern that for Heidegger, like for Taoism, concealed essence or hsuan-te is "the measure against which man measures himself." (Heidegger, 1971a: 221)

Therefore, although at first glimpse one might not find the word measure in the Tao Te Ching, one can discover that the word standard in Chapter 65 of this text is indeed its corresponding term. At this juncture, one might be justified in claiming that Heidegger might have thought of Lao Tzu's standard as measure. Given Lao Tzu's thesis that the sage embraces the One and becomes the model of the world, it is natural for Heidegger to generalize the measuring relationship to cover all the four in the fourfold. More importantly, given that Nature is the supreme measure of the Tao, one can think of the later Heidegger's characterization of Being as Appropriation (Ereignis).

In addition to claim that "Thus the unknown god appears as the unknown by way of the sky's manifestness," (1971a: 223) Heidegger stated, "The upward glance passes aloft toward the sky, and yet it remains below on the earth. The upward glance spans the between of sky and earth. This between is measured

out for the dwelling of man." (1971a: 220) For him, "man dwells by spanning the 'on the earth' and the 'beneath the sky.'" (1971a: 223) Such an interplay between the "on" and "beneath" clearly reveals that man is "an earthly being." (1971a: 223) Moreover, the span gives rise to the "dimension". He also wrote, "The nature of the dimension is the meting out - which is lightened and so can be spanned - of the between: the upward to the sky as well as the downward to earth." (1971a: 220) This concept of "meting out" can well direct our attention to the following thesis of the Tao Te Ching: "Yet it is Tao alone which skilfully provides for all and brings them to perfection." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 160) As a matter of fact, the Chinese word tai etymologically means to give and to grant. Furthermore, Heidegger said, "We leave the nature of the dimension without a name." (1971a: 220) This statement can be well regarded as a paraphrasing of the following dictum of Lao Tzu: "Tao is hidden and nameless." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1971a: 160) In this way, we can discover that when Heidegger employed the term dimension, he aimed to address Being itself which is comparable to the Tao. Certainly, the term dimension has the advantage in more directly demonstrating the role of Appropriation (Ereignis) as the measuring norm.

Heidegger further pointed out, "Man's dwelling depends on an upward-looking measure-taking of the dimension, in which the sky belongs just as the earth." (1971a: 221) Accordingly, "earth is not earth without the measure of the heavens." (Bruce Foltz, 1996: 163) Like for the Taoists, Heidegger claimed that though man receives the measure from earth, "Man, as man, has always measured himself with and against something heavenly." (1971a: 221) Moreover, "The godhead is the 'measure' with which man measures out his dwelling, his stay on the earth beneath the sky." (1971a: 221) As a consequence, "This measure-taking not only takes the measure of the earth, ge, and accordingly it is no more

geo-metry."(1971a: 221) In this way, Heidegger provided us with a "dynamic" account of the interplay among earth, sky, divinities and mortals in the fourfold. To this extent, Heidegger's later thinking represents a transformation of the Taoist doctrine of the four-fold.

In pinpointing Heidegger's reading of Hoelderlin's poem, "...Poetically Man Dwells..." as Taoist in character, it is not my intention to claim that the later Heidegger simply stole the basic ideas from Taoism. For me this rather signifies Heidegger's "creative" dialogue with Taoism. In a more detailed manner, Heidegger's creativity in such a dialogue can be pinpointed as follows:

First, Heidegger deepened our understanding of the essence of earth. In his work, "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger also declared, "Earth is that whence the arising brings back and shelters everything that arises without violation. In the things that arise, earth is present as the sheltering agent." (1971a: 42) In short, "The earth allows coming-forth (Die Erde lasst hervorgehen)." (1982: 211) Clearly, earth in this sense "is not to be associated with the idea of a mass of matter deposited somewhere, or with the merely astronomical idea of a planet."(1971a: 42) So, as "mother nature", the earth is primarily the ground "on which and in which man bases his dwelling." (1971a: 42) On the other hand, it is "only insofar as man dwells on the earth and in his dwelling [that man] lets the earth be as earth." (1971a: 227)

Secondly, Heidegger explicitly introduced the thesis that "Poetry is a measuring."(1971a: 221) He insisted "poetry...to be conceived as a distinctive kind of measuring." (1971a: 224) He also claimed: "To discern this measure, to gauge it as the measure, and to accept it as the measure, means for the poet to make poetry." (1971a: 224) This being so, making poetry is not

just writing literature. Rather, it has primarily an ontological function. But how can the poet enjoy such a privileged status? For Heidegger, it is because "The poet calls, in the sights of the sky, that which its' very self-disclosure causes the appearance of that which conceals itself, and indeed as that which conceals itself." (1971a: 225) Although Lao Tzu claimed that "the sage embraces the One and becomes the model of the world," he did not assign to the poet the function of calling. It is only in Heidegger's writings that we can discover: "In the familiar appearances, the poet calls the alien as that to which the invisible imparts itself in order to remain what it is - unknown."⁸ Certainly, given the fact that Chuang Tzu also characterized Nature in terms of producing process (chaou-fa) as well as the music of heaven (t'ien-l'ai), one can say that Heidegger's characterization of measure as poetic and musical is still faithful to Taoism. (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 180; 197)

Thirdly, Heidegger urged us to protect the earth against the exclusive domination of "calculative thinking. " He warned us by pointing out that "This type of thinking is about to abandon the earth as earth. As calculation, it drifts more and more rapidly and obsessively toward the conquest of cosmic space... This type of thinking is itself already the explosion of a power that could blast everything to nothingness. All the rest that follows from such thinking, the technical processes in the functioning of the doomsday machinery, would merely be the final sinister dispatch of madness into the senselessness." (1971b: 84) Namely, "Technology drives the earth beyond the developed sphere of its possibility into such things which are no longer a possibility and are thus the impossible." (1973: 109) It is exactly such a realization that shows how Heidegger has made a contribution to earth ethics.

⁸ Martin Heidegger (1971a: 225); my stress.

Historically, Heidegger might have started to take Taoism seriously only in the early thirties. In fact, in *Beitraege zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, one also finds one of his early mentioning of Hoelderlin's name, whereby Heidegger for the first time spoke loudly of the "saving of earth" (*Die Rettung der Erde*). (1989: 412) Now from his own translation of Chapter 11 of the *Tao Te Ching*, one can also see more clearly how deep the Taoist influenced upon his hermeneutics of Hoelderlin. (2000: 43)

In regard to the question "How to save earth?" Heidegger wrote: "If it is a matter of saving the earth as earth, then the spirit of revenge will have to vanish beforehand." (1984: 225) That is to say, we have to stop "the desolation of the earth" (*Die Verwuestung der Erde*). (1973: 110) (1954: 95) But more importantly he said, "In saving the earth, in receiving the sky, in awaiting the divinities, in initiating mortals, dwelling occurs as the fourfold preservation of the fourfold. To spare and preserve means: to take under our care, look after the fourfold in its presencing." (1971a: 151) One can discover that even Heidegger's pondering of the "how" in the matter of saving earth has a strong Taoist flavour. Indeed, in the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu also told us, "the mother of the universe called it Tao. If forced to characterize it, I shall call it Great. Now being great means functioning everywhere. Functioning everywhere means far-reaching. Being far-reaching means returning to the original root. Therefore Tao is great, Heaven is great, Earth is great. And the king is also great." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 152) On the other hand, Heidegger was able to go one step further in insisting that it is only when man dwells poetically on the earth that the earth can be saved and that man can become great.

As is well-known, Heidegger had a very special conception of ethics. In Heraclitus, Heidegger declared, "Ethos

is the bearing within all the comportment that belongs to this abode in the midst of entities."⁹ In the "Letter on Humanism" he accordingly announced, "If the name 'ethics,' in keeping with the basic meaning of the word *ethos*, should now say that 'ethics' ponders the abode of man, then that thinking which thinks the truth of Being as the primordial element of man, as one who exists, is in itself the original ethics." (1977b: 234-235) In complying with this line of thinking, "Ethos means abode, dwelling place. The word names the open region in which man dwells." (1977b: 233) Consequently, as remarked by Bruce Foltz, "dwelling constitutes the primordial character of ethics." (1996: 167) But since only when man dwells "poetically" that practically the earth can be saved, "poetically man dwells" constitutes the most fundamental principle in earth ethics.

To be sure, as noted by Werner Marx, "in the 'Letter on Humanism' Heidegger expressly refused to give 'directives for our active life.'" (1987: 32) This indicates a limitation of the Heideggerian approach in the founding of earth ethics. Nevertheless, in clarifying the nature of earth as well as pointing out the general direction for saving the earth, Heidegger provided us with a general philosophical framework for earth ethics. In particular, as Foltz noted, most of the contributors to the field of environmental ethics thus far have left "the concept of 'environment' entirely unexamined." (1996: 172) However, one can now well bridge this gap by turning to Heidegger's later thinking. Especially, one can learn from Heidegger that "the 'surrounding' character of the environment must be understood with regard to the phenomenon of 'world,' that which in each case is 'already previously uncovered and from which we return to the entities with which we have to do [i.e., to entities within

⁹ Martin Heidegger (1979: 214). Here I follow Bruce Foltz's translation. Cf.: Bruce Foltz (1996: 168).

the environment] and among which we dwell [wobei wir uns aufhalten]." (Foltz, 1996: 172) In this way, as Hanspeter Padrutt pointed out, Heidegger's thinking brings us back to the primordial sense of the word "eco-logy" as "dwelling-saying" (Wohn-Sage).¹⁰ One could then agree with Foltz's thesis that Heidegger's thinking on "dwelling poetically upon the earth constitutes the possibility for a genuine environmental ethics." (Foltz, 1996: 173)

In claiming that the poetic measure can point to the saving of earth, Heidegger shows us a way to "reactivate" the spirit of Taoism in a creative manner. First, for Heidegger, it is important to see whether "the measure indeed permits things to 'come into their own' in any proper sense of what they might or should be." (1976: 133) Second, according to Heidegger, "poetizing is what first of all enables man to dwell on this earth, i.e., enables him to allow things to come into their own; but his poetic measure is always an opening up of and measure for things as they always already have been for us; finally, it is the opening up of measure for things as they might be for us... That is, things receive their space of possibility through the poetic work." (1976: 133) In short, in counter-balancing the desolation of earth through technology which essentially makes "the impossible" possible, "The reality of the art work generates the possibility of the possible."¹¹ To be sure, as Heidegger stressed: "Whether, and when, we may come to a turning point in our unpoetic dwelling is something we may expect to happen only if we remain heedful of the poetic." (1971a: 228) Such an idea of a

¹⁰ Cf.: Hanspeter Padrutt (1992: 33).

¹¹ Martin Heidegger (1973: 109); Martin Heidegger (1976: 134). The original citation comes from Adorno's *Aesthetische Theorie*.

turning point reminds us of Lao Tzu's thesis that "Reversion is the action of Tao." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 160) Furthermore, according to Heidegger, the poetry is the basic capacity for human dwelling. But man is capable of poetry at any time only to the degree to which his being is appropriate to that which itself has a liking for man and, therefore, needs his presence. Poetry is authentic or inauthentic according to the degree of this appropriation. (Heidegger, 1971a: 228) To this extent, Heidegger's concept of appropriation (Vereignung) could well help to pinpoint Lao Tzu's goal that "all things will transform spontaneously [chi fa]." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 158)

In sum, along the Heideggerian path one can develop a Taoist framework for earth ethics for the following reasons. First of all, the essential function of the measure in Heidegger's sense opens a way to expound the major idea of the Tao Te Ching: "Tao models itself after Nature." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1996: 152) This can also give rise to a re-appropriation of Kuo Hsiang's hermeneutical thesis that "according to Nature" means "letting things be and come to their own proper Topos."¹² More importantly, as Heidegger stressed, here topos is not to be confused with "space" in the physical sense. Rather, topos is connected with "the proper place of the presencing of a being (die Hingehoerigkeit der Anwesenung eines Seienden.)" (1982: 209) Indeed, "space" in the primordial sense "is something that has been made room for, something that is cleared and free, namely within a boundary, Greek peras. A boundary is not that at which something stops, but as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing." (1971a: 154) In this sense, "Space is in essence that for which room has been made, that which is let into its bound." (1971a: 154) Therefore, the reason why "man poetically dwells"

¹² Cf.: Wing-cheuk Chan (1992:132).

is crucial for the saving of the earth is that it is only when man is brought back to his own proper topos that he permits things to return to their own topos. At this juncture, one can well recall Chuang Tzu's famous fish-metaphor. According to Chuang Tzu, it is only when a fish is swimming in the river that it is free. Indeed, "swimming in the river" is the boundary with which the fish begins its presencing. (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 209-10)

As a matter of fact, according to Heinrich Petzet's report, after the lecture given in Bremen in 1930, in his friend Keller's home, "Heidegger began to recite the legend of the joy of the fishes... With the interpretation he offered of that legend, Heidegger unexpectedly drew closer to them than he had with his difficult lecture, which remained inaccessible to most of them." (1993: 18-9) As a result, like now "swimming in the water" is the boundary for the fish, "poetically dwells on the earth" is the boundary for man.

Finally, in *The End of Philosophy* Heidegger also declared, "The unnoticeable law of the earth preserves the earth in the sufficiency of the emerging and perishing of all things in the allotted sphere of the possible which everything follows, and yet nothing knows." (Heidegger, 1973: 109) This statement indicates in what way earth ethics is possible. At this juncture, it also points to a new way to attain Lao Tzu's goal that "Earth obtained the One and became tranquil." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1963: 159) More importantly, Heidegger's speech of the unnoticeable law of the earth clearly shows the non-anthropocentric character of such an earth ethical framework. In addition, his articulation of the fourfold clearly shows in what sense this approach is cosmological.

Philosophically, the basic spirit of the Taoist framework for earth ethics is expressed in the principle that "letting things be in their own places." Correlatively, poetry has a special role

to play because it can show us in a concrete manner where to find the proper places of things. It is only by listening to poetry that man is able to let all things return to their own nature and hence let himself return to his own proper location. To this extent, one can develop a new angle to appreciate Lao Tzu's idea that "Heaven is eternal and Earth everlasting. They can be eternal and everlasting because they do not just exist for themselves." (Wing-tsit Chan, 1996: 142) All in all, "to let be the self-emergence of phusis as well as the self-reticence of earth" constitutes the fundamental principle of the Taoist framework for earth ethics.¹³

Now one can see more clearly to what extent the necessity of earth ethics is already implied in Lao Tzu's thesis that "If the earth had not thus become tranquil, it would soon be shaken." (Foltz, 1996: 159) In brief, for Lao Tzu, tranquillity basically means the return of things to their roots. The Tao is basically the letting-be of such a return. Failing to see the Tao is "to act blindly to result in disaster." (Foltz, 1996: 147) From above we have seen in what way in employing Heidegger's thinking as mediation that a Taoist framework for earth ethics can be fully realized. Generally, one can witness here a concrete example which shows how fruitful a dialogue between Eastern and Western thinking can be, and at the same time find a paradigmatic case which reveals "how" to conduct such a dialogue.

¹³ Cf.: Bruce Foltz (1996: 175).

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道家思想與環境倫理學

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摘要

近年來環境倫理學成爲一門顯學，但是這門學科仍然欠缺一適切的哲學架構。而一適切的哲學架構必須是宇宙論式而非以人類爲中心。在提出一道家式哲學架構上本文試圖填補此一真空。

本文首先分析晚期海德格如何發展出一對道家之「四域」概念的解釋學應用，從而進一步釐清道家義「大地」的本質。其次、順著對海德格之倫理思想的定性，我們指出道家於何種方式上安立環境倫理學。這展示了道家並非只屬一純然過去的思想，而其「讓萬物回到其自身之分位」這一原則在當代仍可有相干性。而一般而言、這不但證明透過與海德格之對話來重建道家哲學之可行性，同時爲溝通東西哲學提供一個具體的新個例。

關鍵詞：道家哲學、海德格、環境倫理學

