



Way and Being

Between Daoist and Pre-Socratic Approaches

International Seminar-Workshop

Institute of Philosophy,
Free University of Berlin

July 3-6, 2025

DAAD



FREIE
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Way and Being: Between Daoist and Pre-Socratic Approaches
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Organized by the Educational Network of the European Association for Chinese
Philosophy (EN-EACP)
and
The Chinese-Greek Philosophy Forum 中希哲學論壇

Organizers

Fabian HEUBEL 何乏筆 (Academia Sinica | Free University of Berlin)
Dimitra AMARANTIDOU 易冬蘭 (University of Macau)

The Seminar-Workshop

Way and Being: Between Daoist and Pre-Socratic Approaches is a seminar-workshop designed for students engaged in or interested in research opportunities within Chinese and/or Greek philosophy. The program includes presentations and discussions led by invited speakers on related topics. Additionally, students will have the chance to share and discuss their ideas with peers and speakers.

The Larger Context

In recent years, the Chinese-Greek Civilizational Dialogue, often referred to as the “Chinese-Greek Mutual Mirroring of Civilizations” (*Zhongxi wenming hujian* 中希文明互鑒), has been gaining significant momentum, bolstered by substantial political and financial support, particularly from China. This seminar-workshop aims to foster philosophical and critical engagement by facilitating dialogues between ancient Chinese and Greek sources within the context of contemporary philosophical discourses. We aspire to encourage discussions and research that go beyond cultural clichés and agendas, approaching classical studies with an awareness of the modern reconstructions of ancient texts in both Chinese and Greek traditions.

Philosophical Focus

Is there a connection between Daoist perceptions of the Way (*Dao* 道) and pre-Socratic approaches to Being (*to on tò òv/to einai tò εἶναι*)? Scholarly opinions diverge on this matter. On the one hand, a notable connection arises when we consider two highly influential concepts in modern Western and Chinese interpretations of pre-Socratic philosophy: the “unity of opposites” (*duili tongyi* 對立統一) and the distinction between “being and non-being (nothing)” (*cunzai yu fei cunzai/xuwu* 存在與非存在/虛無), especially in relation to Heraclitus and Parmenides, respectively. These themes have also been central in modern Western and Chinese interpretations and translations of the Daoist classics *Laozi* 老子 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子.

The attribution of the idea of the “unity of opposites” or a philosophy centered on struggle and conflict to Heraclitus is also a matter of debate. While Hegel emphasized the “unity of opposites,” other German thinkers, who valued the pre-Socratics but were critical of Hegelian dialectics, used different terms: Hölderlin spoke of the “harmonically opposed” (*das Harmonischentgegengesetzte*), Nietzsche referred to “converging opposites” (*zueinanderstrebende Gegensätze*), and Heidegger described the “counterturning belonging together” (*gegenwendige Zusammengehörigkeit*). These interpretations offer diverse approaches to understanding Daoist and pre-Socratic philosophy.

On the other hand, European thinkers have read both *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* in terms of “being” and “non-being/nothing” since at least the 18th century. The translation of *you* 有 as “being” and of *wu* 無 as “non-being” remains very influential, further developing the interpretation of Daoist philosophy as a “philosophy of nothingness” or “meontology.” At the same time, Chinese interpretations in the 20th century have largely used ontological terms to reconstruct and modernize Daoist philosophy. Additionally, some scholars take transcultural approaches to pre-Socratic and Daoist philosophies, allowing for discussions of Being in Daoism and the Way in pre-Socratic thought. Our seminar-workshop will explore these various approaches, emphasizing open discussion and mutual learning.

List of Speakers (in alphabetical order)

Dimitra AMARANTIDOU (University of Macau)

Chloe BALLA (University of Crete | KELKIP)

Petri BERNDTSON (Science and Research Center Koper, ZRS)

David CHAI (Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Helmut HEIT (Klassik Stiftung Weimar)

Fabian HEUBEL 何乏筆 (Academia Sinica | Free University of Berlin)

Thomas MICHAEL (Beijing Normal University)

Panagiotis THANASSAS (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)

WANG Qingjie 王慶節 (University of Macau)

HSU Chiayu 許家瑜 (Sun Yat-sen University)

Brook ZIPORYN (University of Chicago)

SCHEDULE

DAY 1 – Thursday July 3, SR 1 Seminarraum (Thielallee 43)		
16:00-18:00	Introduction by Fabian HEUBEL, Dimitra AMARANTIDOU, and Hans FEGER	
18:30	Welcome Dinner for All Participants Restaurant Miss Wu (Königin-Luise-Straße 71, 14195 Berlin)	
DAY 2 – Friday July 4, KL 32/123 (Habelschwerdter Allee 45 / Rostlaube)		
10:45-11:30	Chloe BALLA University of Crete	<i>Philosophical Activity as a Journey: From the Presocratics to Plato’s Dialogues</i>
11:30-12:15	Petri BERNDTSON Science and Research Center Koper (ZRS)	<i>Toward a Respiratory Thinking of Martin Heidegger and Heraclitus</i>
12:15-13:00	Brook ZIPORYN University of Chicago	<i>The Tyranny of the Good and the Suppression of the Indeterminate</i>
13:00-15:00 Lunch Break		
15:00-15:30	Vesna BARISIC Free University of Berlin	<i>The Distinction between Non-Being and Nothingness: On Parmenides in Plato’s Sophistes</i>
15:30-16:00	TANG Yiting 湯一汀 University of Chicago	<i>Like an Empty Place: On the Way to Khora Χώρα and Xu 虛</i>
16:00-16:30	Anastasia MEIMARIDI East China Normal University	<i>Conquered by Ambiguity: Ming 明 in the Qiwlun</i>
16:30-17:00 Break		
17:00-17:30	JIN Wenzhen 金雯珍 University of Vienna ECNU	<i>Ways of Persuasion: Dialectical Argumentation in Hanfei and Gorgias</i>

17:30-18:00	WU Baolin 吳寶麟 Minzu University of China	<i>On the Correspondence Between Ideal Music and Perfect Order (Li) in Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals: A Comparison with the Pythagorean School</i>
DAY 3 – Saturday July 5, (Habelschwerter Allee 30, Vortragsraum)		
9:30-10:15	David CHAI Chinese University of Hong Kong	<i>Melissus and Zhuangzi On the Existence of Non-Being</i>
10:15-11:00	HSU Chiayu 許家瑜 Sun Yat-sen University, Zhuhai	<i>Riddles, Paradoxes, and Transformation: Unity of Opposites in Zhuangzi and Heraclitus</i>
11:00-11:30 Break		
11:30-12:15	Dimitra AMARANTIDOU 易冬蘭 University of Macau	<i>Li Zehou and Heraclitus: Hidden (Dis)Harmonies</i>
12:15-13:00	Helmut HEIT Klassik Stiftung Weimar	<i>Early Greek Ways of Living Without Metaphysics</i>
13:00-15:00 Lunch Break		
15:00-15:30	Tyler NEENAN University of Chicago	<i>Hegel, Heraclitus, and Negativity in the Zhuangzi</i>
15:30-16:00	Patrycja PENDRKOWSKA Humboldt University	<i>The Chinese Translation of 'Sein, Nichts, Werden und Dasein' from Hegel's Lesser Logic as Rendered by He Lin</i>
16:00-16:30	WANG Yu 汪戔 Munich School of Ancient Philosophy	<i>Continuity, Discontinuity and Harmony: The Relationship and Boundary of Human and Animal in Ancient Greece and Early China</i>
16:30-17:00 Break		
17:00-17:30	Markus O'NEILL University of Vienna	<i>Language and Truth in Parmenides, Heraclitus, and Daoism</i>

17:30-18:00	Ben BIRKENSTOCK Chinese University of Hong Kong	<i>Self-Critical Critique of Preferences</i>
18:00-18:30	LIU Kedi 劉科迪 Renmin University	<i>Ontology of “Image” (xiang 象) and the Meaning of “Dao” in Chinese Philosophy</i>
DAY 4 – Sunday July 6, (Habelschwerter Allee 30, Vortragsraum)		
9:30-10:15	WANG Qingjie 王慶節 University of Macau	<i>Nihilism and Meta-Physics: The Interplay of “Non-Thing/Wu 勿” and “Thing/Wu 物”</i>
10:15-11:00	Thomas MICHAEL Beijing Normal University	<i>Comparing the Obscurity of Heraclitus and Laozi: A Heideggerian Perspective</i>
11:00-11:30 Break		
11:30-12:15	Panagiotis THANASSAS National and Kapodistrian University of Athens	<i>Parmenides in Freiburg: Varieties of the Question of Being</i>
12:15-13:00	Fabian HEUBEL 何乏筆 Academia Sinica Free University of Berlin	<i>The Double Character of Way and Being: Reflections on the Transcultural Entanglement of Chinese and Greek Philosophy</i>
13:00-15:00 Lunch Break		
15:00-15:30	KANG Hongyi (Yeti) University of Chicago	<i>Light and Darkness: Ontology and Transformation in Heidegger and Xiong Shili</i>
15:30-16:00	Alexey KRAVCHENKO Free University of Berlin	<i>Paradoxical Thinking (弔詭思想) as the Thinking of the Counterturning: How Does Heidegger Build a Bridge Between Presocratic and Daoist Philosophy?</i>
16:00-16:30	Alexander OUART Humboldt University	<i>The Ethics of Non-Action with Laozi, Heidegger, and Heraclitus</i>
16:30-17:00 Break		

17:00-17:30	LU Yutong (Doris) 路雨桐 Wuhan University	<i>The Way as “All Things Are One”: A Non-Metaphysical Comparison Between Daoism and Heraclitus</i>
17:30-18:00	Moritz HOFFMANN Free University of Berlin	<i>The Question of the Way in Anaximander and Heidegger</i>
18:00-18:30	Closing Remarks by Fabian HEUBEL und Dimitra AMARANTIDOU	

Speaker Abstracts (in order of presentation)

1. Chloe BALLA | University of Crete | KELKIP

Philosophical Activity as a Journey: From the Presocratics to Plato’s Dialogues

In his important study *The Route of Parmenides*, A.P. D. Mourelatos has drawn attention to the debt of Parmenides’s poem to the Homeric ‘motif’ of journey and to the vocabulary that is associated with it. Following Mourelatos’s lead, I propose to trace the motif of the journey or the way (Greek *hodos*, from which the word for method, *methodos*, is derived) in early/classical Greek philosophy, starting from the Presocratic tradition (Parmenides but also Heraclitus), taking into account its relevance to the original meaning of *theoria* as intellectual pilgrimage, and focusing on the importance of the ‘theme’ of walking (including ascending or descending, or the trips to the underworld) in Plato’s dialogues (notably in the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Laws*, but also in the eschatological myths).

2. Petri BERNDTSON | ZRS Koper

Toward a Respiratory Thinking of Martin Heidegger and Heraclitus

In my presentation, I will try to show how both Heidegger’s and Heraclitus’s thinking are connected with the experience of breathing. The starting point of my presentation will be Heidegger’s statement “Being is the aether in which the human being breathes” that can be found from his *Black Notebooks*. I will read these respiratory words in connection to Heidegger’s thinking of Being as I try to interrogate the intertwinings of thinking, Being, the aether, the human being and breathing. In my examination of these themes, I will especially consult Heidegger’s lectures on Heraclitus and Hölderlin. I also suggest that the study of Heraclitus’s fragment 112 could be fruitful if one wishes to examine the interrelations between thinking and breathing. In my brief interpretation of this fragment by Heraclitus, I will place my focus on its first word *σωφρονεῖν* (*sophronein*) and last word *ἐπαῖοντας* (*epaiontas*).

3. Brook ZIPORYN | University of Chicago

The Tyranny of the Good and the Suppression of the Indeterminate

This talk will inquire into the status and relationship of boundlessness, infinity, indeterminacy, purposivity and the Good, with reference to ancient Greek terms of art like *noûs* (νοῦς), *apeiron* (ἄπειρον), *telos* (τέλος) and *arché* (ἀρχή) on the one hand and ancient Chinese terms of art like *dao* 道, *wu* 無, *pu* 樸 and *qi* 氣 on the other, raising issues concerning the value of completion and incompleteness, the generativity or destructiveness of the indeterminate, and the roles of purposeful action, unchanging commitments, and definite truths. The question at hand, basically, is the relationship between indeterminacy and value, and contrasting ways of considering them to be either allied or opposed, or even to be synonyms or antonyms, in the two traditions. The evolution of these two contrary trends will be considered, as well as the consequences for constructing models of mind, intention, ethics, and ontology.

4. David CHAI | Chinese University of Hong Kong

Melissus and Zhuangzi on the Existence of Non-Being

Unlike Parmenides, who argues it is not possible to know “what is-not” (non-being, *to meon*), Melissus of Samos (470-430 CE) believes that non-being exists even though it is not a source of generation. The result is the famous Eleatic paradox: to take “what is-not” as not existing is to make it oppositional to “what-is” yet to speak of “what is-not” is to turn it into “what-is,” thus the two are not in opposition; however, since “what is-not” is spoken of as such, it must be distinct from “what-is.” For Parmenides, non-being is unthinkable and not an object in reality. Melissus, however, argues that while non-being cannot generate being due to the fact that “being was and will always be,” what exists prior to being, should there be such a thing, must necessarily be nothing. Although being is infinite and incorporeal, we speak of it using spatial and temporal concepts and so what is said of it is not its true, infinite form but a false representation that is divisible, changeable, and finite. When it comes to ancient Chinese Daoism, the Dao shares much in common with Melissus’s concept of being, including the idea that humanity cannot fully describe or know it. Where Daoism differs is its understanding of non-being. Non-being in Daoism is not an unknowable nothingness, a vacuous emptiness, or that which nihilates being; on the contrary, it plays a positive role in the arising, development, and returning of things and the means by which we experience them. Drawing upon the Daoist classic *Zhuangzi*, this lecture will discuss why Melissus’s rejection of the possibility of thinking about non-being is unacceptable to Daoism on the grounds that non-being is not the issue but our belief that it stands in opposition to being. Once we understand that being and non-being are mutually dependent and that their equilibrium effects our worldview, we can not only resolve the Eleatic paradox but do away with it altogether.

5. HSU Chiayu 許家瑜 | Sun Yat-sen University, Zhuhai

Riddles, Paradoxes, and Transformation: Unity of Opposites in Zhuangzi and Heraclitus

Both Heraclitus and Zhuangzi are renowned for their cryptic writing styles and their emphasis on the perpetual flux of all things. As both literary artists and philosophers, they employ enigmatic language and paradoxes that challenge binary oppositions, reflecting their profound engagement with transformation as a fundamental metaphysical principle. This engagement necessitates a dialectical unity of opposites, extending beyond cosmology to encompass human values, politics, governance, and existential conditions. Their stylistic choices—characterized by ambiguity, paradox, and non-linear exposition—not only express their philosophical principles but also demonstrate an intrinsic connection between linguistic form and intellectual content. By merging thought and expression, Heraclitus and Zhuangzi create an experiential mode of understanding, wherein meaning emerges through the reader's engagement with textual ambiguity. This paper argues that the parallels between Heraclitus and Zhuangzi are not merely coincidental but arise necessarily from their shared philosophical commitment to the unity of opposites. Unlike other dialectical models that resolve contradictions through synthesis, their thought suggests a dynamic interplay in which opposites remain in continuous tension yet sustain a unified whole. By foregrounding both their philosophical and literary strategies, this study explores the comparative framework for understanding how these two thinkers articulate a vision of a world in constant transformation, where opposites do not merely coexist but remain in a state of perpetual convergence and renewal.

6. Dimitra AMARANTIDOU 易冬蘭 | University of Macau

Li Zehou and Heraclitus: Hidden (Dis)Harmonies

Li Zehou's (李澤厚, d. 2021) philosophy of harmony (*he* 和) encompasses all aspects of existence, from the human body to the body politic and the natural world. Li contrasts Chinese harmony with Western concepts of justice, emphasizing emotional specifics over rational principles, and viewing harmony as superior to, but not exclusive of, rationality. Li's theory critiques classical Western philosophy for failing to appreciate harmony as the mutual inclusion of opposites (such as emotion and reason), instead viewing their relationship as one of strife. Consequently, Li dismisses Heraclitean philosophy—often seen as focusing on war (*polemos* πόλεμος) and harmony (*armonii* ἁρμονίη) as the unity of opposites in perpetual conflict—as part of the same inadequate Western paradigm. However, Heraclitus (Ἡράκλειτος, d. c. 480) represents a point of contention: while Li views him as an example of Western philosophy's shortcomings, Martin Heidegger sees him as a key figure to which Western philosophy should return. In examining these conflicting interpretations of Heraclitus's thought, I will explore various depictions of harmony in his work, drawing on readings that recognize the paradoxical nature of Heraclitean harmony. By focusing on the phrase “disagreeing with itself it agrees with itself” (*diaferomenon eoytoi omologeai*, διαφερόμενον ἑωυτῷ ὁμολογέει) and the imagery of the bow and the lyre in Fragment B51, I will draw on Heidegger's work on Heraclitus to argue that nuanced readings reveal dissonances as well as resonances between Heraclitus's and Li's visions of harmony.

7. Petri BERNDTSON | ZRS Koper

Toward a Respiratory Thinking of Martin Heidegger and Heraclitus

In my presentation, I will try to show how both Heidegger's and Heraclitus's thinking are connected with the experience of breathing. The starting point of my presentation will be Heidegger's statement "Being is the aether in which the human being breathes" that can be found from his *Black Notebooks*. I will read these respiratory words in connection to Heidegger's thinking of Being as I try to interrogate the intertwinings of thinking, Being, the aether, the human being and breathing. In my examination of these themes, I will especially consult Heidegger's lectures on Heraclitus and Hölderlin. I also suggest that the study of Heraclitus's fragment 112 could be fruitful if one wishes to examine the interrelations between thinking and breathing. In my brief interpretation of this fragment by Heraclitus, I will place my focus on its first word $\sigma\omega\phi\rho\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ (*sophronein*) and last word $\epsilon\pi\alpha\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu\tau\alpha\varsigma$ (*epaiontas*).

8. WANG Qingjie 王慶節 | University of Macau

Nihilism and Meta-Physics: The Interplay of "Non-Thing/Wu 勿" and "Thing/Wu 物"

Nihilism is fundamentally a metaphysical concept closely tied to human understanding, evaluation, and naming of "things." Through an etymological examination of the relationship between "Wu 勿" (non-thing/prohibition) and "Wu 物" (things/beings) in ancient Chinese philosophy, this article reveals that the metaphysical principles of "being arises from non-being" (*you sheng yu wu* 有生於無) and "mutual generation of being/non-being" (*wu you xiang sheng* 有無相生) describe a temporal correlation between concealment and manifestation within the "temporal-enduring Dao" (*Heng Dao* 恒道)—the ceaseless, rhythmic ground of cosmic becoming. This process evolves from the Dao's primordial state of "indistinct and elusive Wu 勿" to its manifestation as concrete things through differentiation and formation, akin to the butcher Ding's legendary dissection of an ox in the Zhuangzi. This constitutes the Dao's temporal-historical interplay and unfolding. Such an interpretation offers a new metaphysical perspective: things are not merely physical objects opposed to a mysterious Dao but emerge through dynamic interaction between form and formlessness. This interaction manifests the temporal-enduring Dao's natural-generative vitality (*sheng-sheng* 生生) and organic kinship (*qin-qin* 亲亲) through the Dao's cosmic cycle of generation, growth, flourishing, decline, and regeneration.

9. Thomas MICHAEL | Beijing Normal University

Comparing the Obscurity of Heraclitus and Laozi: A Heideggerian Perspective

Heraclitus's common epithet is "the Obscure" ($\delta\ \Sigma\kappa\omicron\tau\epsilon\iota\nu\acute{o}\varsigma$, *ho skoteinos*), and if Laozi were to have an epithet, it surely would be something similar. Still, the name "Laozi" already serves as an epithet, since "the Old Master" hardly is recognizable as a personal name, and it too conveys a tangible sense of the obscure. Martin Heidegger had much to say about Heraclitus's obscurity, and if he were less hesitant to discuss Laozi for

reasons concerning his own ideas about East-West dialogue, he could easily have said the same or similar things about him. Starting from an examination of Heidegger's notions about the Obscure and obscurity as applied to Heraclitus, this lecture draws a series of parallels between Heraclitus and Laozi, including the obscurity surrounding what Heidegger calls their "essential thinking," the obscurity of their writings, the obscurity of their language and their teachings, the obscurity of their persons, and it ends with a comparison of two vignettes, the first for Heraclitus and the second for Laozi, that more profoundly reveals the obscurity that surrounds them.

10. Panagiotis THANASSAS | National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Parmenides in Freiburg: Varieties of the Question of Being

Heidegger's philosophy of Being turns out to be, among other things, an appropriation of Parmenides. The publication of Heidegger's most extensive engagement with Parmenides (GA 35, 2012) offers us the opportunity to reassess this relationship. The aim of my approach is twofold: on the one hand, this relationship is to be used hermeneutically with regard to the philosophy of Parmenides himself; on the other hand, it is to be shown against the background of Parmenides that Heidegger's question of Being does not arise "out of nothing," but rather draws on important concepts made available in the history of philosophy. With regard to Heidegger's reading of Parmenides, my approach does not intend an external comparison or juxtaposition that would reveal 'similarities and differences' between the two philosophers; such superficial attempts rarely prove hermeneutically fruitful. Instead, I will attempt to show that and how Heidegger's question of Being seems to have been formed as a productive reprise of the philosophy of the Eleatic. The part of the lecture entitled "Zwischenbetrachtung" deserves thereby our special attention. After completing his reading of Anaximander, and before turning to Parmenides, Heidegger poses a series of questions that are of crucial importance to his own philosophical concern.

11. Fabian HEUBEL 何乏肇 | Academia Sinica, Free University of Berlin

The Double Character of Way and Being: Reflections on the Transcultural Entanglement of Chinese and Greek Philosophy

Parmenides's theory of Being is also a theory of the way or ways. It raises the question of whether there is only one way of being, or whether there is also a second way of non-being, or even a third way between the two. This opens up far-reaching and as yet little explored possibilities for comparative and transcultural readings of pre-Socratic and post-Socratic Greek philosophy. I argue that Lǎozǐ and Parmenides meet in the critique of nothingness. Expressed in the ontological language of the Lǎozǐ: Without and With, or Being-without and Being-with (無有), are two moments of the Way that constitute the "double character of the Way" (道的雙重性), as the modern Chinese philosopher Móu Zōngsān 牟宗三 puts it. Developing this understanding, I argue that Lǎozǐ speaks of the "double character of the Way" in the sense that the third Way is the only one that can be walked. However, the double character of the Way implies that this Way is double (or "double-headed") in the sense that the first and the second Way in Parmenides, the Way of Being (understood as With or being-with) and the Way of Non-Being or Nothingness (understood as Without or being-without), are preserved in the double character of the Way in a counterturning belonging together.

If this interpretation of the Way is related to Heidegger's interpretation of Being as counterturning to itself (*die Gegenwendigkeit des Seins selbst*), then there "is" nothing outside of Way or Being understood in this sense, no Nothing that can be opposed to Way or Being. However, while Parmenides tries to describe Being as one and exclusively one, Lǎozǐ interprets the Way as double in itself. In this he comes close to Heraclitus and his "great saying," as Hölderlin points out: "the εν διαφερον εαυτω (the one that differs in itself)". This will be the focus of my exploration of the philosophies of Way and Being in the writings of Lǎozǐ, Parmenides, and Heraclitus.