

Evocative Words: The Poetic Thinking of Martin Heidegger and Daodejing

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to investigate what kind of connections and similarities can be found between the post-*Kebre* Heideggerian philosophy and the ideas of the Daodejing. The analysis will focus on how Heidegger's inclination to the poetic language and his rejection of the language of metaphysics find resonances with the allusive saying and the opposition to the declarative language present in the Daodejing. Furthermore, it will be examined how the Daoist ideas can contribute to Heidegger's attempt to start a "new beginning" for philosophy, possible only by using a language radically different from the metaphysical one, i.e. the evocative language of poetry. Through the examination of the Heideggerian and Daoist positions, this essay also proposes a further reflection on the relationship between poetry and thinking, and its implications for philosophy.

KEYWORDS

Heidegger, Laozi, Daoism, Language, Poetry

Introduction

This paper addresses Heidegger's and Laozi's reflections on language and examines how the two thinkers deal with the difficulties in expressing an idea that cannot be conveyed through the traditional use of language without betraying its authentic nature. To give a hint of the genuine nature of Being or Dao, both Heidegger and Laozi resort to the poetic language, characterized by evocative and allusive words, as the most effective way to express those fundamental ideas that transcend the limits of language itself. This essay aims to show, through the analysis of Heidegger's and Laozi's experiences with language, that poetic language should not only be regarded as a higher form of declarative language, often confined to the sphere of mere artistic expression, but as a form of language that discloses valuable theoretical opportunities for the philosophical thinking. The analysis will start by highlighting that

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both Heidegger and Laozi recognize – in their most relevant works *Sein und Zeit* and the *Daodejing* – the impossibility of conveying the meaning of Being or Dao through the traditional use of language. The second section will show how both authors resorted to a poetical use of language to convey genuinely those concepts, highlighting the aspects that make this form of language more suitable for their philosophical purpose. Finally, this essay will demonstrate that poetic language plays a decisive role in promoting the philosophical thinking that meditates on fundamental ideas.

Recognising the Limits of Traditional Language

As is well known, Martin Heidegger was one of the most influential European philosophers of the 20th century, who devoted his philosophical thought primarily to the investigation of the fundamental concept of Being. In his most representative work *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger marks a fundamental difference between beings and Being, between entities and what allows beings to be, namely the “ontological difference”, the cornerstone of his philosophy. According to Heidegger, the Western philosophical tradition, which coincides with the history of metaphysics since Plato, has failed to recognize the ontological difference, mistakenly identifying Being with a type of ultimate being, such as *causa prima*, *logos*, *idea*, or substance. Consequently, this failure led to the forgetting of the meaning of Being as such. Therefore, Heidegger undertook the task of recovering the question of Being (*Seinsfrage*), aiming to think Being in its authentic nature. However, as it emerges from the *Letter on Humanism* (1947), the third section of the first part of *Sein und Zeit*, which originally focused on this theme, remained unpublished, as Heidegger found it impossible to undertake the attempt to discuss the concept of Being as such with the resources offered by the Western philosophical tradition. The problem lay in language, rooted in the metaphysical tradition that failed to adequately answer the question of Being (Heidegger 1946, pp. 327-328). To fulfill this task, Heidegger saw the need to find a different and more adequate language to express his turn (*Kehre*), which consists in abandoning the traditional way of conceiving Being from the perspective of the subject (*Dasein*), in order to think of it in its authentic nature.

A similar perspective on language can be found in the *Daodejing*, one of the classics of Chinese Daoist thought. According to the tradition, the text was composed around the 6th century BC by Laozi, a legendary figure who served as an archivist at the court

of the Zhou dynasty (1045-221 BC); however, scholars argue that the text was composed between 250-200 BC (Andreini & Scarpari 2007, p. 23). The main purpose of the *Daodejing* is to give an account of the concept of Dao without betraying its authentic nature. Dao – often translated as “the Way” – is the process of reality that generates reality itself through the alternation of the forces of *yin* (阴) and *yang* (阳). Therefore, the Dao can be considered the origin of reality in the Daoist tradition. However, unlike the Greek and Judaic idea of the origin placed at the beginning of time and space and often regarded as transcendental, the Dao is an immanent processual principle and can be conceived as the spontaneous way in which things come together in their constant transformations. Given its processual and ever-changing nature, the Dao is unfathomable and elusive: therefore, it cannot be expressed through declarative language and definitions. In Chapter 1 we read: “The Tao² that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao./ The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name” (Laotze 1891, p. 47). Words establish differences, so they are intrinsically limited and partial. In this sense, they represent an impediment to the comprehension of the true nature of the Dao, which on the contrary is ever-changing and all-encompassing. Therefore, Laozi faces the same issue as Heidegger: how is it possible to convey through words a philosophical idea, which is radically other with respect to things, without betraying its authentic nature?

From these remarks, it emerges that the meditation on fundamental ideas, which are at the root of a philosophical system of thought, directly involves a reflection on language. Given its defining nature, language can refer only to things *in reality*. When one tries to give an account through words of what is the very principle that *founds reality* and, therefore, also the language we use to explore and define reality itself, language meets its limits: fundamental and all-encompassing concepts such as Being or Dao cannot be regarded as things, and transcend the scope of language, undermining its logic. This is the core issue that Heidegger and Laozi, each one in their own way, highlight in their works. Their philosophical reflection on the core ideas of their thinking cannot be separated from their meditation on the theme of language and, in particular, from their pursuit of a form of language able to express those foundational concepts.

² “Tao” and “Dao” are different romanisations from Mandarin Chinese that refer to the same concept. The former belongs to the Wade-Giles romanisation system, coined in the 19th century, while the latter belongs to the more recent *Hanyu pinyin*, a romanisation system developed in the 1950s. There are also other romanisations of the names “Laozi” and “Daodejing”, which are written in pinyin. Except for quotations and titles, the pinyin romanisation will be used throughout the essay.

Saying Without Defining: The Evocative Power of Poetic Language

Before examining what kind of linguistic forms and strategies Heidegger and Laozi employ to express Being or Dao, it is important to first focus on their perspective on language. As Heidegger affirms in the *Letter on "Humanism"* (1947): "Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell." (Heidegger 1998, p. 239). Language and Being are so deeply intertwined in Heidegger's perspective that he calls language the "house" of Being. In this house, in language, human beings are at home, living constantly immersed in it. Dwelling in this house, then, they have access to Being and can experience it in its revealing. In *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1953), talking about the translation of the Greek word *physis* into the Latin word *natura*, which represents the first stage of the alienation from the essence of the original Greek word, Heidegger affirms:

But now we leap over this whole process of deformation and decline, and we seek to win back intact the naming force of language and words; for words and language are not just shells into which things are packed for spoken and written intercourse. In the word, in language, things first come to be and are. For this reason, too, the misuse of language in mere idle talk, in slogans and phrases, destroys our genuine connection to things (Heidegger 2014, p. 15).

Language and things maintain a fundamental relationship, for it is through the naming force of language, in the first place, that things come to be. A common thread binds together language, things, and Being, and it only manifests itself through the authentic evocative power of words. This intimate relationship between language and things remains inaccessible to the logic of traditional language, which reduces words as mere "containers" of the meaning that we use in our spoken or written communications. In this way, words are conceived as tools, limited to what they explicitly communicate, and deprived of their evocative force.

Heidegger's whole meditation on language aims at rekindling this intrinsic evocative power of words, in order to have an authentic experience of things, and Being. This evocative force constitutes the very essence of language, and it belongs to the poetic word: "Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and appearance. [...] Language itself is poetry in the essential sense" (Heidegger 2002, p. 46). In fact, "poetry" comes from the Greek *poiesis*, which means "to produce" or "to bring to light what is concealed": in one word, "to unconceal". Language is thus, in its essence, *Dichtung*, poetry, since it unconceals beings

and brings them to light. Contrary to the defining and declarative language of metaphysics, which reduces Being (*Sein*) to being (*Seiende*) by objectifying it, and “from which there hardly resounds a call any longer” (Heidegger 2001, p. 205), the poetic – or *poietic* – language focuses on the creative and evocative power of words, and, free from the limitations of the defining language, lets things manifest themselves for what they are. Poetry, then, is not just a form of language, but it is the most essential and the most capable form of expressing Being in its genuine nature, in its revealing through letting things be as they are. Poetry, together with thinking, is a form of *saying*, in which the mutual belonging of Being and language manifests itself. Since poetry and thinking share this affinity, they both move in the nearness of each other:

The nearness that brings poetry and thinking together into neighborhood we call Saying. Here, we assume, is the essential nature of language. “To say,” related to the Old Norse “*saga*,” means to show: to make appear, set free, that is, to offer and extend what we call World, lighting and concealing it. This lighting and hiding proffer of the world is the essential being of Saying (Heidegger 1982, p. 93).

The essence of language is Saying, it is a “saying” which at the same time means “showing”, and it brings together both thinking and poetry by virtue of their mutual correspondence with it. Saying shows “what we call World”, things as a whole: in this sense, language does not stop at the mere declarative function, it is not a mere communication tool that provides words as labels for things, but is rather a way, a portal that shows and gives access to things in their essence. Meditating on this original and mutual belonging of Being and language is proper to the essential Saying, thinking and poetry:

The oldest word for the rule of the word thus thought, for Saying, is *logos*: Saying which, in showing, lets beings appear in their “it is”. The same word, however, the word for Saying, is also the word for *Being*, that is, for the presencing of beings. Saying and Being, word and thing, belong to each other in a veiled way, a way which has hardly been thought and is not to be thought out to the end. All essential Saying hearkens back to this veiled mutual belonging of Saying and Being, word and thing. Both poetry and thinking are distinctive Saying in that they remain delivered over to the mystery of the word as that which is most worthy of their thinking, and thus ever structured in their kinship (ivi, p. 155-56).

As Heidegger further highlights here, because of the dominance of the language of metaphysics, the co-belonging of Saying and Being has hardly been thought of. Meditating this co-belonging of Saying and Being, which still resonates in the old word *logos*, the word endowed with creative power, is the authentic way to expe-

rience Being through language: instead of reducing and exposing Being in an arbitrary definition, Saying, language in its essence, lets Being show itself spontaneously in its authentic nature. Heidegger's critique of the language of metaphysics finds some aspects in common with the Daoist theory of language that emerges in the *Daodejing*. The issue concerning language and the idea of Dao is addressed in Chapter 1, thus highlighting the relevance of this theme for the entire thought expressed in the classic Daoist text:

道可道，非常道。 / 名可名，非常名。 / 無名天地之始； / 有名萬物之母。 / 故常無欲，以觀其妙； / 常有欲，以觀其徼。 / 此兩者，同出而異名， / 同謂之玄。 / 玄之又玄， / 眾妙之門。

The Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao./ The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name./ (Conceived of as) having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth;/ (conceived of as) having a name, it is the Mother of all things./ Always without desire we must be found, if its deep mystery we would sound;/ But if desire always within us be, its outer fringe is all that we shall see./ Under these two aspects, it is really the same; but as development takes place, it receives the different names./ Together we call them the Mystery./ Where the Mystery is the deepest/ is the gate of all that is subtle and wonderful (Laotze 1891, p.47).

There are several interpretations of the word *dao* (道), which occurs three times in the first line. The first occurrence can be interpreted in a literal sense as “the Dao (道) that can be considered, and thus recognized as Dao (*ke dao* 可道), is not the constant, eternal Dao (*fei chang dao* 非常道)”. However, since Dao can be translated with “way, path”, the same line can be interpreted also as “the Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao”, as James Legge translates it. Dao conceived as “way, path” may be further interpreted as “the way of coming together of phenomena in their transformations” or as “the path that guides human actions”, therefore as a method or doctrine. Moreover, Dao can also be translated as “to say”: in this case, the line would change to “the Dao that can be spoken of, is not the eternal Dao” (Laozi 2018, p. 3). Despite the various ways in which this line can be interpreted, all the interpretations converge on a single aspect: every attempt to reduce the Dao to a determined idea or thing, by trying to give a complete account of it through words, is doomed to failure. Words are indeed partial and limited, unable to genuinely convey the unconditioned and ever-changing nature of Dao. As we read in the following verses, the Dao, as “the Originator of Heaven and Earth”, is “without name” (*wuming* 无名), nameless

and undefined. Names (*ming* 名), in fact, possess a defining and partitive function that breaks the uniformity that characterises the nature of Dao and they generate all things of reality through a process of differentiation from the dimension of Dao as such. The defining logic of words only works when applied to things, which are also partial and limited, while it proves itself ineffective and misleading when attempting to give an account of the Dao. Names are inherently partial not only because of their limited scope, but also because they convey a narrow point of view on reality. Moreover, Chapter 1 of the *Daodejing* draws a close parallelism between names and desires (*yu* 欲), since names are never neutral but reflect the arbitrary and subjective criteria of the culture in which they develop and of the people who make use of them (ivi, p. 3). As Chad Hansen well summarises:

There is a quite elaborate theory of language in the Tao Te Ching. It presupposes first, that language and names mark distinctions (usually dichotomous ones); second, that the distinctions involve attitudes, desires, choices, purposes, and ultimately action; and third, that names and valuations attached to them are conventional – as is all language and all learning. There is nothing constant, invariant, or ultimate in the conventional practices. Not only do names arbitrarily mark certain distinctions; the distinctions themselves are merely a result of the social practices fixing a name's use. Finally, nothing in the Tao Te Ching requires explanation by means of definitions, universals, concepts, ideas, or senses (Hansen 1983, p. 73).

Using language as a means to interpret reality leads to a narrower and partial perspective of reality, which conceives things as self-subsistent, objectified and clearly defined by the names arbitrarily imposed on them. Reality is ordered through clear definitions and subdivisions, contradictions are rejected, and words, reduced to their functional purpose of conveying a clear and unambiguous meaning in discourse, can only express the “motionless” (Jullien 2008, p. 66). This is not only different, but the exact opposite of the authentic and everchanging dimension of Dao, which is free from every limit or imposition, even those of names or tangible forms, and from which things arise and depend.

Given the difficulties that the declarative language poses to express the Dao in its authentic nature, the *Daodejing* resorts to a peculiar form of language that breaks the limits of logical correctness and frees the word from the bounds of the unambiguous meaning imposed by the definition. Rather than expounding the Dao in a clear definition or a rigorous dissertation, the allusive language of the *Daodejing* gives hints of it for the reader to perceive it in a glimpse of sudden enlightenment. As we read in Chapter 14: “Its upper part is not bright,/ and its lower part is

not obscure./ Ceaseless in its action,/ it yet cannot be named,/ and then it again returns and becomes nothing./ This is called the Form of the Formless” (Laotze 1891, p. 57). Or in Chapter 22: “The partial becomes complete;/ the crooked, straight;/ the empty, full;/ the worn out, new./ He whose (desires) are few gets them;/ he whose (desires) are many goes astray” (ivi, p. 65).

As can be seen from these examples, the *Daodejing* resorts to several figures of speech, such as paradoxes, anaphoras, formulas, repetitions, and parallelisms, to hint at the Dao in its authentic nature. This is a form of language that is similar to what we call poetry. Through these figures of speech, the allusive language of *Daodejing* breaks with the declarative language, rejecting the argumentative construction of discourse and refusing to follow the rules of logic, allowing contradictions to explode. In this way, words, freed from the limits imposed by the correctness of logic and emptied of their partial meanings, are able to allude to a reality that transcends their limited scope. By referring to the Dao as that which is at once partial and complete, crooked and straight, empty and full, the *Daodejing* allows us to grasp it as that dimension that embraces opposites and their alternation in the constant and, at the same time, ever-changing transformations of phenomena. Words are no longer constrained by definitions, but open up and empty themselves of their definitory and unambiguous meaning to allude to a reality greater than themselves. To describe the function of each chapter of the *Daodejing*, we can turn to the image and the philosophical meaning expressed in Chapter 11: “Clay is fashioned into vessels;/ but it is on their empty hollowness, that their use depends” (ivi, p. 54). The words and verses of the *Daodejing* abandon their limited and partial characteristics to become similar to empty vessels that let the Dao manifest itself in them.

This analysis has shown that in order to genuinely account for concepts such as Being or Dao, which possess a nature other than that of things, both Heidegger and Laozi resort to a creative and evocative language, the language of poetry, regarding logical and definitory language ineffective and even misleading for their purpose. The only way for words to hint at a dimension that transcends the realm of things is to recognise their finitude, and, by withdrawing themselves, make room for a greater meaning that exceeds their partial and limited scope.

“What Words Leave Unspoken”: Stepping Back into Silence and Advancing Towards the Essence.

From what has emerged from our analysis so far, Being and Dao subvert our normal relationship with language to the point of imposing a paradoxical demand on us: that of freeing the word of the signifying function, so that it can better hint at the authentic nature of Being or the Dao. The word thus gradually withdraws into silence, and reticence (*Verschwiegenheit*) becomes its characteristic feature. Far from being a negative aspect that marks the impossibility of any discourse, reticence gives the word a new role, placing it in a logic quite different from that of traditional language. As Steven Burik highlights “The German *Verschwiegenheit* has similar connotations to hiding and concealing. [...] Concealment in Heidegger of course has no negative connotations, it is part and parcel of reality and closely related to the German *bergen*, securing or preserving or salvaging” (Burik 2022, p. 206).

Heidegger gives us further insight into this theme in his essay *The Nature of Language*, meditating on Stefan George’s poem *The Word* (1919). Here, the poet sings of a “wonder” he brought with him from a distant land and of his sadness at learning that there is no name that can describe it. However, his renunciation does not result in a complete loss:

The prize escapes him nonetheless. Indeed. But it escapes him in the sense that the word is denied. The denial is a holding-back. And here precisely it comes to light how astounding a power the word possesses. The prize does in no way crumble into a nothing that is good for nothing. The word does not sink into a flat inability to say. The poet does not abdicate the word. It is true, the prize does withdraw into the mysterious wonder that makes us wonder. This is why, as the preamble to “The song” says, the poet is still pondering, now even more than before: he is still framing an utterance, fitting together a saying, otherwise than he did before. He sings songs (Heidegger 1982, pp. 88-89).

Withdrawing into silence, the word does not disappear into mere non-sense and the poet does not remain speechless. With its reticence, the word calls the poet within its domain and stimulates him to think even more than before. The word that withdraws itself causes us to think, since it gives “what is properly worthy of thought” (*Ibidem*), it gives Being. This is the true evocative power of the creative word, and what seemed a paradox finally acquires meaning. The word turns out to be a hint, a sign that stimulates us to think further, to progress along the path of what is properly worthy of thought, be it Being or Dao.

According to Heidegger, certain words play a fundamental role,

as they can guide us more than others to what is worthy of thought. They are keywords such as *logos*, *aletheia*, *Ereignis*, and, along with them, the word “Dao”. The poet meditates on the word that withdraws itself by thinking poetically, setting himself on the way towards the neighborhood of thinking and poetry. The way that, as we read in *The Nature of Language*, “belongs in what we here call the country or region [...], where all that is cleared and freed, and all that conceals itself, together attain the open freedom” (ivi, p. 91). Along with his meditation on the word “way”, Heidegger quotes Laozi’s keyword: “Dao”.

The word “way” probably is an ancient primary word that speaks to the reflective mind of man. The key word in Laotse’s poetic thinking is *Tao*, which “properly speaking” means way. But because we are prone to think of “way” superficially, as a stretch connecting two places, our word “way” has all too rashly been considered unfit to name what *Tao* says. *Tao* is then translated as reason, mind, *raison*, meaning, *logos*. Yet *Tao* could be the way that gives all ways, the very source of our power to think what reason, mind, meaning, *logos* properly mean to say – properly, by their proper nature. Perhaps the mystery of mysteries of thoughtful Saying conceals itself in the word “way”, *Tao*, if only we will let these names return to what they leave unspoken, if only we are capable of this, to allow them to do so. Perhaps the enigmatic power of today’s reign of method also, and indeed preeminently, stems from the fact that the methods, notwithstanding their efficiency, are after all merely the runoff of a great hidden stream which moves all things along and makes way for everything. All is way (ivi, p. 92).

Heidegger calls Laozi’s thinking “poetic thinking”, recognising in it the same way of proceeding as “poetic thinking” that Heidegger himself considers necessary in order to approach Being in its authentic nature. He refers to Dao as a “keyword” of Laozi’s poetic thinking, assigning it the same rank as other keywords of his philosophy, such as *logos*, *Ereignis*, *aletheia* (Heidegger 1994, p. 125). European translators have translated the word “Dao” in several ways, such as “reason”, “mind”, “meaning”, “logos”:³ all

³ “Vernunft, Geist, Raison, Sinn, Logos” (see M. Heidegger, ‘Das Wesen der Sprache’, in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, von Hermann F. W. (ed.), GA 12, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 1985, p. 187). Heidegger may have found these translations of “Dao” in the following texts: regarding the translation of Dao as “Vernunft”, see G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Moldenhauer E., Michel K. M. (eds.), Bd. XVIII, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt a. M., 1971, p. 145, and G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion I*, Moldenhauer E., Michel K. M. (eds.), Bd. XVI, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt a. M., 1969, p. 321. Regarding the translation of Dao as *logos* or *reason*, see Abel-Rémusat’s translation, the first European academic translation of the *Daodejing*: “Ce mot *Tao* ne semble pas pouvoir être bien traduit, si ce n’est par le mot *logos* et par ses dérivés, dans le triple sens de *souverain être*, de *raison* et de *parole*, et aussi pour exprimer l’action de *parler*, de *raisonner*, de *rendre raison*” (see Abel-Rémusat J. P., ‘Mémoire sur la vie et les opinions de Lao-Iseu, philosophe chinois du VIe siècle avant notre ère’, in *Histoire et mémoires de l’Institut royal de France*, tome 7, 1824, p. 24). Hegel quotes Abel-Rémusat and his translation of Dao as *logos* in *Vorlesungen über*

these translations capture some aspects of the meaning of Dao, but they do not grasp it in its entirety, nor do they succeed in completely overlapping the concept of Dao. As Heidegger puts it, Dao can be the *Weg* that all *be-wäg*, the source that allows us to think what reason, mind, meaning, *logos* mean in their essence. If we “let these names return to what they leave unspoken” (Heidegger 1982, p. 92), if we let them return into soundlessness, back to whence they were granted (ivi, p. 108), we then let emerge “*the mystery of mysteries of thoughtful Saying* that probably conceals in the word ‘Dao’”. Thus, as it happened with the poet’s renunciation of the word, which does not result in nonsense, but it lets “an ‘is’ arise where the word breaks up” (*Ibidem*), these keywords, if they go back to soundlessness, can be thought more essentially.

It is precisely the thinking that takes a step backwards, out of the realm of metaphysics and of the oblivion of Being, that leads us to the realm of the “event of Appropriation”, to “one’s nature of essential thinking, ‘which essentially belongs to the openness of Being’” (Chang 1974, p. 140). This backward movement is what characterizes the movement of the Dao: in chapter 40 of the *Daodejing* we read: “The movement of the Tao by contraries proceeds;” while in chapter 48: “He who devotes himself to learning (seeks) from day to day to increase (his knowledge); / he who devotes himself to the Tao (seeks) from day to day to diminish (his doing)” (Laotze 1891, p. 83, p. 90). Through backwards movement it is possible to approach that state of uniformity and spontaneity that characterises the Dao and understand it in its genuine nature. The thinking that takes a step backwards, paradoxically, advances. It advances towards that essential and inexhaustible source from which it originates, and through which it constantly renews itself.

Conclusion

Through this analysis we have seen how both Heidegger’s and Laozi’s reflections on the question of how to authentically communicate Being or the Dao follow a very similar path, developing a reflection on the use of language. Meditation on such fundamental concepts is possible through poetic thinking, insofar as it is endowed with an evocative power capable of transcending the limits imposed by traditional language and hinting at a reality that

die Geschichte der Philosophie (p. 146). Regarding the translation of “Dao” as *meaning* (*Sinn*), see Wilhelm’s translation of the *Daodejing* (Laotse, *Tao Te King: Das Buch des Alten vom Sinn und Leben*, transl. by Wilhelm R., Eugen Diederichs Verlag, Jena, 1911, p. 3).

is essentially different from all those things or beings that can be comprehended in a definition. Paradoxical as it may seem, it is precisely the word that withdraws itself, that empties itself of its unambiguous meaning and becomes evocative, that prompts us to meditate and stimulates us to think more and more. On the contrary, it is when we obtain the exact definition or word we were looking for that the process of our meditation stops. The language, and thinking along with it, that takes a step backwards is the truly essential one, capable of reaching the inexhaustible root from which it springs and meditating on which it is able to constantly renew itself. As it is written in chapter 78 of the *Daodejing*: “Words that are strictly true seem to be paradoxical” (ivi, p. 120), whereas in fact they lead to what is properly worthy of thought.

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