
Graham PARKES, ed., *Heidegger and Asian Thought*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987, 282 pp., US\$25.00.

In 1924 Heidegger considered an invitation to spend three years in Japan “under very favorable conditions” (see *Dilthey-Jahrbuch*, 4, 1986–87, p. 165). Had he accepted, the rich Greco-German harmonics of his later thought would have been diluted, and we might have a more flexible and dialogal thinker, one far more serviceable for the philosophical interaction of East and West. Nevertheless, Heidegger’s regrounding of Western thought in a contemplative apprehension of the world and his searching critique of the limits of the metaphysical tradition provide an indispensable bridge toward the other “great beginnings.” To use this bridge two conditions must be met. First, our thought must be attuned not only to the matter itself (*die Sache selbst*) underlying what Heidegger writes but also to the *Sache* of the oriental texts which seem to resonate with his (those of Taoism and Zen in particular). Otherwise our reading of both is blind and can result only in sterile comparativism. The present volume does not always avoid comparativist *désinvolture*: “Past karma and fundamental ignorance are, as it were, the fundamental fact for human existence. This corresponds to the very same fundamental fact [!] that both the concealment of Being and the revealing of beings are equiprimordial” (p. 184); “The Tibetan text is thus a recollection of the history of Being [!] as an errant, wayward, and fallen modality of human mobility” (p. 261). Second, in light of such contemplative engagement, we should attempt to discern between what is living and what is dead in the thought of Heidegger. It seems unnecessary to encumber the East-West dialogue with Heidegger’s unconvincing notions of the gods and the holy, with his hopes of an eschatological reversal of the

technological alienation of thought from being, with the more rigid aspects of his "history of being", or with that *caput mortuum* of his thought, the *Ereignis* (at least insofar as it is presented as the name of the essence of being). Heidegger's own glorification of Nietzsche's "eternal return of the same" reflects his proneness to fall for such grandiose delusions, and his own coy communication of the notion of the *Ereignis* may well be modelled on Nietzsche's coyness about the eternal return as celebrated in the 1937 lectures (Nietzsche 1961, vol. I). It might not be ill-advised to apply the hermeneutics of suspicion systematically to Heidegger's thought, so as to excavate its most viable and promising paths from the abstractionism and the element of neurotic insistence with which they are overgrown.

The present volume is rich in anecdote and provides a valuable overview of the state of the debate between Heidegger and Asia. It shows how Heidegger's critique of metaphysics has in principle brought to an end efforts to understand the deepest philosophies of the East in metaphysical terms and cleared the horizon for an encounter in which the simplicity and otherness of Taoist and Zen discourse can be properly appreciated, and in which texts such as those of Vedanta, often dismissed as "mystical," can be understood anew as works of "thought". But it also reveals that a decisive breakthrough has not occurred. No substantive and coherent debate between Heidegger and any Asian tradition is at present in progress. The Kyoto school has not got beyond a schematic critique of the early Heidegger in light of the notion of absolute nothingness. That Japan has produced sensitive contributions to Heidegger scholarship does not constitute a fusion of traditions, even when references to Zen are found helpful in bringing into focus Heidegger's account of the relation between speech and silence, for example (see the essay of Tetsuaki Kotoh here).

The comparisons with Taoism drawn here by Pöggeler, Parkes, and Stambaugh can appeal to a fragmentary effort of Heidegger himself (as recounted by Paul Shih-yi Hsiao). They represent some progress beyond Chang Chung-yuan's rather disappointing effort to present Taoism in Heideggerian terms (1975; his *Creativity and Taoism*, 1963, was far fresher). Parkes's essay is presented in semi-dialogical form, an experiment that does not come off. He seeks pre-established, hidden harmonies between the Heidegger of *Sein und Zeit* and the Taoist masters we first find him quoting three years later, for example the agreement between the analysis of *Zuhandenheit* and "the Taoist insistence that any thing is what it is only in relation to other things" (p. 113), and the faintly Taoist resonance of the work's brief reference to "nature in an original sense." "The idea of unusability serves a function in Heidegger comparable to the role of uselessness in *Chuang-tzu*, insofar as it makes us pull back and contemplate the surrounding context and thereby lets us see the perspective

ground of Nothing against which every being presents itself" (p. 121). Heidegger discovers authentic selfhood by letting the self "shatter itself against death." "This idea corresponds to the Taoist notion that if one can 'empty out' the self, then *tao* will naturally work (and play) through one in the form of 'the daemonic' (*shen*) or, more generally, as 'power' (*te*)" (p. 127). The trouble is that such correspondences are so vague. Might not a search for sharp differentiations between Heidegger and Taoism—between *Gelassenheit* and *wu wei* for example—be hermeneutically more fecund? Stambaugh discusses the later Heidegger for whom "thinking is a kind of 'waying' through which the Way, *Tao*, comes to presence" (p. 85). The affinities she discovers between Heidegger and Taoism hardly go beyond truism (e. g. Taoism is basically outside the categories of Western metaphysics). Pöggeler undercuts such musings by asking "whether Heraclitus and Lao-tzu are not for Heidegger mere constructs by means of which he articulates his own thinking" (p. 66). A penetrating discussion of Heidegger in light of Taoism or of Taoism in light of Heidegger would seem to require a far deeper understanding of Taoism than these scholars possess. For all its precise and reliable exegesis of Heidegger and the prudent and informative tenor of its discussions, this volume leaves one with the feeling that the twain—Heidegger and Asian Thought—have yet to meet.

REFERENCES

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