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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Tao And Logos

1. Tao and Logos: The Primordial Language of Philosophy (1991) (3)
2. Uprightness and Humanity: The Primordial Language of Tao (1991) (19)
3. Appropriation and Posturalization ; the Archaeology of Tao in Chinese Philosophy (1991) (27)
4. The Right Posturing ; The Meaning of Truth in the *I Ching* and the *Chung Yung* (57)
5. The Chinese Way to Language: From the Field – Being Perspective (1997) (70)
6. The Hidden Narrative of Field – Being in Chinese Philosophy: Preliminary Reflections (1999) (75)
7. Field – Being, Heidegger, and Eastern Thought (An Preparatory Outline) (2000) (84)
8. The Art of Appropriation; Towards a Field – Being Conception of Philosophy (2000) (97)
9. Centrality and Commonality: An Interpretation of the *Zhongyung* from the Field – Being Perspective (2002) (123)
10. In Search of the Quintessential; Towards a Field – Being Hermeneutics (141)
11. “Free Flow” as an Ideal of Exemplary Excellence; The Centrality of *Tong* 通 (Pervasive Penetration) In Daoist Cosmology and its Practical Implications (2007) (151)
12. Power Experience and Power Language in Daoist Thought—With Specific Reference to *Dao* and *De* (2008) (168)

The Middle Way

1. Signature Field – Being and the YiDao Tradition (189)
2. The Rounded Integrity of Field – Being—the Dao Tradition and the Tradition of Logos in the Spirit of the Wholesome Universal (I) (210)

3. The Rounded Integrity of Field – Being—the Dao Tradition and the Tradition of Logos in the Spirit of the Wholesome Universal (II) (221)
4. Signature Field – Being and the Dao Tradition (I) (232)
5. Signature Field – Being and the Dao Tradition (II) (254)
6. Signature Field – Being and the Dao Tradition (III) (268)
7. Signature Field – Being and the Dao Tradition (IV) (310)
8. Signature Field – Being and the Dao Tradition (V) (341)

Tao And Logos :
The Primordial Language of Philosophy
And Interpretations of Chinese
Philosophy From The
Field – Being Perspective

Lik Kuen Tong

1. Tao and Logos: The Primordial Language of Philosophy (1991)

The Tao gives rise to the One;
The One gives rise to the Two;
The Two gives rise to the Three;

The ten thousand things carry the yin (阴) and embrace the yang (阳),
balancing the vital force to maintain their harmony.

Tao Te Ching (道德经) 42

In Change there is the Great Ultimate which arise the Synplicate Duo. The Synplicate Duo gives rise to the Four Quadrants of Phenomena; the Four Quadrants of Phenomena give rise to the Eight Trigrams.

Great Commentary (of the I Ching (易经))

Jen Chih seng yeh chih: (人之生也直) The human person is born upright. ① In this famous Confucian saying, the word chih (直), which means literally straight (that is, not crooked or bent), is used of course in the figurative sense. What Confucius meant to say was that human beings are born with an inherent moral integrity: that they are by nature honest, sincere, true to themselves—in short, morally straight. By what does straightness literally understood have to do with moral integrity? What gives the word chih its metaphoric power? How do we account for the fact that in our languages these words designating straight or direct, upright or erect, right or correct, and soon are all intimately connected? ② Why, in particular, is the word “right” contained in the word “upright”?

The answer to the above questions is not far to come by: it lies in fact at the very heart of human experience—the very heart of both language and thought. These words and their cognates—forming what we may term the “straightness or chih family of signs” —are the greatest treasures in the sym-

① Analects, 6: 17

② Chih (straight/direct) and cheng (正义) (upright/erect) in Chinese are almost interchangeable, and both connote i (rightness/correctness). In modern Chinese the compound cheng - i (正义) means justice.

bolic mine of humanity, For what they collectively point to is no trivial, distant phenomenon, but is a reality that is nearest and dearest to us - a power in which we all participate and which in some sense is what we are. Just what this reality or power is hard to say. This power has been called Tao, Logos, or Brahman—among the many outstanding names humanity has given it. Since this power is that whereby each thing in the universe is appropriated in its ownness and in relation to every other thing, we shall call it here the “Appropriation.” Thus named, the Appropriation is by definitely the principle of individuation and the ground of relatedness. It is the Power that gathers all, unifies all, and transcends all. For there is nothing that is not in the grips of this power: whatever is or exists is appropriated in it and by it.

But the transcending power is also the immanent power; the Appropriation is never separable from the appropriated. Everything is internally related to itself (internal relation being the relation of whole to part) and externally related to other things. Its relation to the Appropriation consists precisely in the possibility of this two - fold relatedness. This most unique relation of things to the Appropriation we term the “synplicate relation.” It is definable as the “how” a being or thing is related to itself, to other beings or things, and to the Appropriation. We introduce the term “synplicate” (from Latin *syn*, together, and *plicate*, to fold, entangle, involve) here because the Power of Appropriation is in truth a self - enfolding power, whereby all appropriated beings and things are “implicitly” and “explicit” what is folded out. But what folds in must fold out. The unfolding or explicit is simply the other side of the infolding or implicit. The order of things then is a “synplicate order”^① founded on the dynamic interplay of these two “synplicit” moments—what in the I Ching is called the *liang - i* (两仪), or, aptly translated, the “Synplicate Duo.” In the philosophy of the = Ching, The unfolding express moment is The Creative (Ch’ien (乾)), the enfolding implicit moment The Receptive (K’un (坤)). The two moments are said to arise from the T’ai - Chi (太极) or Supreme Ultimate—which in the Tao Te Ching is called Tao.

Both Tao and T’ai - Chi name the synplicate order as well as the Power of Appropriation that sustains it. Everything in the universe is a perspective and a perspectivation of the synplicate order to which it belongs and in which it participates. By virtue of the synplicate power it inherits from Tao every being engages and posturalizes the synplicate order from its own standpoint. “Posturalization” is the form of participation; it is an expression of the synplicate power in the dynamics of activity and movement. Everything owes its integrity of existence to the posturality of its synplicate power. In the Tao Te Ching the meanings of pow-

① I am indebted to David Bohm for his notion of reality as a self - enfolding power. But I think “synplicate” is a more appropriate term than “implicate” to characterize this reality. For Bohm’s specific views on this approach see his *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

er, integrity and posturality are all captured in the word *te*. It is in virtue of its *te* that a thing constitutes a unique perspective of the universe and the posturalized reality unfolded in it. This unfolded reality as posturalized by the *te* of things is also one of basic meanings of Tao. But there can be no unfolding and understanding of reality apart from the posturality of human beings, in whom and through whom power is synplicated. Thus we find in the I Ching and Tao Te Ching—and indeed for that matter in the whole tradition of Chinese philosophical thought, the understanding of Tao is profoundly mediated in the language of “Mann” —the humanized reality.

Just what it is that lies at the heart of human experience, language and thought? Just what it is that is configured in the straightness family of sign? We answer: It is a record of the Appropriation mediated by the self – appropriation of human beings—or, what amounts to the same thing, a Graph of Mann.

Mann is the posturalized reality brought about and along by the emergence of “menn” —the milliard of men and women who have since time immemorial participated in the synplicate order of the Appropriation. Mann evolves as human beings or menn evolve. They know of no reality except as posturalized by them—a reality that will always be shaped, characterized and colored by the styles and idiosyncrasies of their participation. This humanized reality is understandable as an order of both Word and Force—that is, respectively, humanized meaning and humanized energy. Mann is the synplicate intersection of Word and Force, an an ordered manifestation of the self – enfolding, appropriating Power mediated in menn and through menn. Though wrought by menn, the humanized order is not exclusively of human – making; for implicit in Mann are the contributions of other things in Nature, the realm of the Appropriation from which human beings originally emerged. Although Mann is always more than menn, it would have no meaning and significance however apart from their involvement in Tao—apart from the way they participate concretely in the synplicate order of the Appropriation—what is ordinarily called “life.” Hence we shall speak of the “Life of Mann” as an expression of this intimate connection between Mann and human life. All philosophy (in the broad sense of the term) consists in the “double mirroring” of life and Mann in the Life of Mann. This double mirroring of the humanized reality is what we mean by “Graph.” To be more exact, “Graph” is the representation of the Life of Mann in the s of Word and Force. Human orientations are inextricably “graphical”; graphic language and thought are the essence of language and thought. Metaphysics as the culmination of graphic thought is based on the attempt to create the “Perfect Graph” which give menn a completely satisfied picture of themselves in their synplicate relation to the Appropriation. That is why metaphysical terms are mostly “homographic”: it is the same graph that fears simultaneous an image of the Appropriation and an image of menn. Such indeed is implicated in the homographicism of tao, logos, and brahman. It is the homographicism of the uprightalized menn.

“Uprightal” means pertaining to, proceeding from, or as a consequence of, menn’s uprightness. Menn are “uprightalized” in the sense that the upright posture in what primarily defines the way of their appropriation. Human beings moreover are “uprightalizers” to the extent that their “uprightality” is most decisive in the determination of their life and action, language and thought. Homographicism owe, its beginning to the uprightalization of menn.

When did the Life of Mann begin? It began in primordial times with the inception of uprightness—that is with the first act of appropriation (etymologically, to make one’s own) what human beings confer their “proper” (Latin, proprius, belonging to oneself, one’s own) humanity on themselves. This first species act of appropriation and self-humanization, to be enacted again and again by all “would-be” humans, is thus the most universal human ritual—the sacred rite of all rites—that celebrates commemorates at the same time the primordial inauguration of humanity and the birth of the humanized order. In classical Chinese thought—notably in the I Ching, this order is often referred to as san-t’sai (三才), that is, the three coordinate. Powers of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. Heaven, represented by Ch’ien, is the unfolding Power, Whereas Earth, symbolized by K’un, is the same Power in its enfolding implicity. Thus “Heaven-and-Earth” is just another name for the aymplcte reality of the Appropriation; and the humanization of Heaven-and-Earth in san-t’sai thus constitutes none other than the the meaning of Mann.

And the meaning of Mann was first established through the uprightalization of human being. This celebrated primordial-event is precisely what is recorded in the chih family of signs—in the graphic representations of world-opening language and thought. What is configured in the straightness family of signs is primarily the double-sided “Graph of Reality” —mirroring in the coincidentalness of Word and Force both an image of the uprightalizing human and an image of the synpicate order uprightally posturalized. Such is the language of tao, of logos, and of brahman—and of the other words and signs in the lexicon of graphic thought.

Graphicism arises when human beings have come to stand upright. The uprightalization of menn is indeed the origin of origins, the rightness of all rightness, for it is the beginning of both humanity and Mann.

“Upright” means vertically straight. What decisively matters for openness of the world is not just straightness (whose metaphysical importance we shall later explain), but straightness in the mode of verticality. Our understanding of straightness, first of all, is certainly not originated in a knowledge of the ruler, nor from an observation of the path of light propagations, but is derived at first from our intimate knowledge of our upright posturality—initially from the primordial experience we acquire as a young child in reenacting that primordial experience we acquire as a young child in reenacting that primary species ritual of human initiation; the process of learning and struggling to stand upright. Both

historically in the evolution of the human species and existentially in the life of an individual, these primordial times were indeed the most traumatic in the development of our humanity. All life begins with the trauma of birth, the initial act of existence. To “exist” (from Latin *exsistere*) is to emerge, to arise, to stand out—which in the primordial language of thought is what defines the meaning of “growth.” To “grow” in its primordial meaning is to emerge, to rise up, not just from out of the womb but also—and this is the more ?? to the bodily upright or erect position, that which marks human beings from the animals; the position which makes them human in the proper sense of the word. This original meaning of existence as referring to the primordial act of up – rising or up – growing is shared by the Chinese *seng* (生), the Greek *physis*, and the Sanskrit *brahman*.^① Now if by “primordial” we refer to the traumatic duration around the “inception of uprightness” (in historical or existential times), then we may describe as “pre – primordial” the whole antecedent background and conditions of life preceding the uprightal attainment of humanity. The transition from the pre – primordial to the primordial—that, we submit, is what “growth” originally signifies. The trauma of birth is not so much the trauma associated with the pre – primordial exit from the womb, but the trauma of existential “up – growing” pertaining to the appropriational awakening in the originative act of the primordial arising. It is the trauma that marks at once the differentiation of consciousness and the configuration of meaning—the trauma of world – openness and of the founding of Mann.

The human being in the position of uprightness—that is what in the Tao Te Ching is called the “One.” Originally, “one” is not a numerical concept, but a key term in the primordial cosmogony/cosmology. The “one” is the *t'ai – chi*, the arche or principle (from Latin *princeps*, first in rank) —the origin, beginning or source of things in the universe. When the child uprightalizer is first arising to the upright position, it sees other things rising up along with it. This primordial experience of the co – arising of uprightal humans and other things is what determines the basic meaning of cosmogony at the dawn of consciousness. “Heaven – and – Earth and I were born together; the ten thousand things and I are one.”^② In this well – known statement in the Chuang – tzu

① *Brahman* is derived from the Sanskrit root *br*, to grow. The word also means “to make great.” But “great” in the primordial sense is the same as upright. Hence *brahman* is the up – growing process issuing in greatness/uprightness. Most philologists agree that the original meaning of *physis* – as in the case of the Chinese *seng*—is to grow. But the primary sense of “to grow,” as we submit here, is to grow upright. Heidegger’s equation of *physis* with “being” or the process of *aletheia* (unhiddenness) is possible only on the basis of the more primordial, emergential interpretation of *physis* as up – growing, which has, unfortunately, escaped his attention. It is interesting that both *seng* and *physis* later gave rise to the objectified or physical sense of “nature.” Their primordial meaning had sunk into oblivion.

② Book of Chuang – tzu; “Discussion on The Equality of All Things.”

(庄子) is still preserved a most vivid record in the primordial philosophical language is basically a phenomenology of the originative arising and co - arising. It is a phenomenology of "ex - istence" in the primordial meaning of the word.

The Tao Te Ching says: "The Tao gives rise (seng) to the One; the one gives rise to the Two; the Two gives rise to the Three; the Three gives rise the ten thousand things." ① This no doubt is one of the most succinct statements of primordial cosmogony. Now if the One, as we have observed above, is what designates the uprightalizer in the attainment of uprightness, what then does Tao signify? And what do the "Two" and the "Three" refer to, respectively? In so far as Tao is concerned, the answer is obvious: it signifies the human person, the uprightalizer itself in its pre - primordial, pre - uprightal integrity. That, to be sure, is precisely what the author of the Tao Te Ching wishes to stress—and, for good reasons, as we shall see. Keeping in mind the original, "existential" meaning of seng, the statement that "the Tao gives rise to the One" should simply mean that the human uprightalizer has come to stand upright—which is none other than the primordial arising itself. What is represented in the signification of tao, as the Chinese script for the word so vividly suggests, are the most manifest and essential capacities or powers of the uprightal being: including, beside the capacity for up - growing, the capacities to walk, to act, to speak and to think—powers that can only be fully harnessed and developed after it has achieved its uprightal maturity. In its primordial meaning then, tao is simply the human uprightalizer who, having attained the status of uprightness, is able to see itself distinctly (that is, through the differentiation of consciousness) in relation to itself, to the world, and to the synplicate Power of Appropriation, thus leading and comporting itself in its uprightalizing thought, speech and activities. It is by virtue of the uprightalizing acts of human beings that the world opens itself as Mann, the humanized order and reality. That is why the word tao has finally come to mean "the way" —that is, the Way of Mann, of world - openness. It is worth noting that in the Tao Te Ching the Tao is also termed Ta (大), which means great, greatness, or the great. In Chinese metaphysics, furthermore, the term Tao is often interchangeable with T' ai - Chi, the Great Ultimate. And what to ta and t' ai - chi primordially designate? "Great" means in command of uprightness: the original graph for the Chinese character ta (great) is no more than a picture of an upright - standing human. Greatness or magnanimity (as the Greeks call it) primordially means simply the ability to stand upright, to walk upright, to see upright (the original meaning of "direct") —that is the first and most fundamental human virtue or excellence: what figures in the original meaning of the Chinese te and Greek arete. ② Great-

① Tao Te Ching.

② In the extremely intrigue graphic etymology of the word te, which deserves a full - length study by itself, is contained the ideas of upright growing, upright walking, upright seeing, and upright thinking—the basic components of human uprightality.

ness is the virtue or excellence of ownness, the magnanimity of what is “authentic” —the intrinsic quality of being one’s own; and our first experience of ownness is the ownness of our uprightness. To be “great” or “magnanimous” is thus to be a master in the management of uprightness, the position that allows humans to have a commanding view of their surroundings and to proceed from there to build through their perspective the uprightalized order of Mann. The Way of Tao or the Appropriation then is a synplicate order established by the “greatness” of the One—the excellence of the upright stance.

And what about the term t’ ai – chi? The word t’ ai is simply a variation of ta. Chi means ultimate limit or boundary, the point beyond which one cannot go. The compound T’ ai – chi thus means then ultimate limit of greatness, that is to say, of uprightness. And the ultimate limit of uprightness is simply the consummation of the primordial process of up – growing, when the child uprightalizer has finally come to establish firmly its upright posture, aligning itself vertically straight between heaven and earth. The uprightal limit or chi is the point of “logocentric integrity,” the point—as we shall later explain, at which the uprightalizer begins to assume the position and function of the “pivotal One” or “measuring center” of the world.

But first of all what is meant by “the One gives rise to the Two”? What does “two” stand for in that celebrated cosmogonic passage of the Tao Te Ching? Let us pursue further our uprightalistic train of thought. If “One” is not a number in the primordial language, neither is “Two.” We have established the One as the culmination or consummation of the uprightalizing process: the uprightalizer in its upright position is the One. This One is the origin of origins because it is the decisive beginning of both differentiated consciousness and world – openness. But there can be no differentiation without distinction and distance. This fundamental insight is what underlies the primordial meaning of the word “two.” The Two, in other words, is, generally and abstractly speaking, differentiation as such. To the primordial mind at the dawn of consciousness, differentiation is however no abstract matter but the most concrete affair—indeed a most traumatic, eventful event in which is instituted the openness of all openness and the beginning of all beginnings. For all differentiation commences from the primordial differentiation which witnesses not only the configuration of the world in the synplicity of energy and meaning but also the diremption of mind and consciousness, in the synplicity of language and thought. This primordial event of synplicate openness is what is meant by the “Two” And how did the Two first come about? It came about by the “emergence” or up – growing of the Tao to the position of Firstness—to the uprightness of the One. It is essentially a double – sided event which witnesses, on the one hand, the rise of differentiated consciousness from the up – rising body, and on the other the emergence of the up – rising body into differentiated consciousness. This double – sided differentiation is accomplished by a sequence of postural delineations: first the vertical delineation of “up” and “down” (or “above” and “below”) and then the

horizontal delineations of—— “front” and “rear” (or “forth” and “back”) and “left” and “right.” These three sets of rudimentary distinctions or pairs of relatedness have a special significance for our humanity, for they constitute at once the principles and the instruments whereby both the embryonic world – order and the embryonic mind are primordially configured and differentiated. The synplicate unity of the six directions, which in classical Chinese thought is called the “Sixfold” (liu – ho (六合)), is the “Frame of Firstness” forming the rudimentary coordinate system of reality. This rudimentary system of the Sixfold is formed like the figure of the cross, with the delineation of up and down forming the vertical axis and the lines connecting the four directions the horizontal axes. It is by virtue of this rudimentary Frame and the Four Quadrants axially divided by the “uprightal cross” (as we may so name it) therein that the milliard things——the sun, the moon, the stars, and so on——make their appearance, appropriated in meaning and in force and in the relativity of their respective positions within the Space of the Sixfold. That is why the uprightal cross has become not only a seminal symbol of humanity, but an emblem of the worldhood of the world. To be human is to bear the burden of the uprightal cross, the primordial womb of meaning, World and Mann.

But the Twosome is a contentious domain of being. Built with the Frame of Firstness and structured by the uprightal cross, the Two unfolds itself as a realm of dialectics, which first emerge for primordial menn through the synplicative tensions of “crossal” ——that is, vertical and horizontal——opposites mounted within the Sixfold. Since up – growing is essentially a skyward movement, the above and the below are the primary pairs of opposites, which in primordial thought is often represented in the language of Heaven and Earth. Heaven is the elevating power of the above, the power that pulls the uprightalizer towards the light of openness as well as towards the consummation of its own uprightal humanity. Earth, on the other hand, is the down – weighing power of the below which, however, is also the grounding and receptive power——the power that is associated with the “deuprightal horizontality” of birth, rest and death. But the skyward movement from the below is to be followed by sideward movements in the four directions: to be human means not only to rise up and maintain one’s verticality, but to participate in the “horizontality” of the uprightalized reality——the envioning affairs of active consciousness or waking life. The Two then, dialectically understood, is a crossal synthesis of the vertical and the horizontal powers. The Way of the Appropriation is defined primordially by the uprightal cross.

The One is the primordial One, the institution of verticality and the beginning of Mann. The Two is the verticalized order of relatedness established in and through the crossal Frame of the Sixfold. What then is the Three? How does the Two give rise to the Three.

Two and One make Three. The One that is added to the Two is no longer the primordial One, but the pivotal one: the uprightalizer has not only “institu-

ted" the world by virtue of its uprightness, but has begun to reign as its "measuring center" —as the moving pivot of the world. Thus both the Primordial One and the Pivotal One are implicit in the Two, which may be said to stand for the interval wherein the former has passed over onto the latter. The Two, one might say, is the crossal Frame without an active center. When the crossal Frame is activated by the ruling thought. Every graph in the primordial language is as much holographic as it is homographic: it relates, on the one hand, the microcosm to the macrocosm, or menn to the Appropriation; and, on the other, meaning to actuality—or the Word to the Force—in the wholeness of the appropriating Power. There is good reason to believe that logos in the primordial language is originally such a graphic term. We believe that in the primordial lexicon Logos is both a graphic image of menn and a name of the Appropriation. Its original meaning, furthermore, is to be sought not just in relation to the luminosity of aletheia, but also in relation to the efficacy of energeia—in particular, to the inherent dynamics of human posturality underlying the uprightalization of Mann as a synplicate order of Word and Force. Primordial menn think graphically, and Logos is one of the outstanding symbols in the graphicism of primordial thought. Thus understood, its basic homographic /holographic implications may be grasped under two general headings: art of reason and forms of rightness. Logos is the art of reason governing human posturality while referring at the same time to the principles of rightness that are explicable in accordance with it. Before the gathering of the sun, the moon, the stars, and so on, there is first of all the gathering of the above and the below, the right and the left, the front and the back in the formation of the Sixfold. And prior to the gathering of the Sixfold is the gathering of the various vital parts of the up – growing bodymind constitutive of the living, organic reality of the uprightal being. And all that is gathered is comprehended by primordial thought as homographic/holographic determinations of Power—that is, both as configurations of meaning and as polar tensions of energy and as configurations of menn and the synplicate order to which they belong. The art of reason then is in truth the Way of the Appropriation via the self – appropriation of menn. From the human standpoint, it is the art of self – mastery, self – organization and self – elevation. In order to appropriate to itself the ownness of its human uprightness, the young appropriator in the primordial process of up – growing must energy of the Pivotal One, the Two has become the Three.

The Three then is a moving coordinate system of the world. The milliard of things in the universe would have no meaning apart from their perspectivated appropriation in 手写 system of the Three. This is what is meant in the primordial language of the Tao Te Ching by the statement that "the Three gives rise to the ten thousand things." The "ten thousand things" are gathered or collected in their respective positions in the crossal system of the Sixfold. Is this perhaps what Heidegger had in mind in interpreting the original meaning of logos as "gathering" or "collecting"? (生)

Logos means: the power of Appropriation as the power of gathering. But there is no gathering prior to the primordial arising and co - arising, which, according to Heidegger, is what the Greek *physis* originally signifies. Hence for him both *physis* and *logos* are primordial names of Being, the Power of Appropriation that both gives rise and gathers. In so far as Heidegger is concerned, *logos* as the power of gathering is understood primarily in the sense of *aletheia*, that is, as a matter of disclosure or unhiddenness. The beings or things that have come to stand or appear in the light—the phenomena — are held together in the luminous order of Being. But the gathering of the Appropriation, as we see it, is as much a power of pro - creativity as it is a power of illumination. The configuration of meaning is not the same as the movement of energy. A devouring lion appropriated “in the light” (that is, as “meant”) is surely not the same as that lion appropriated in fact or in actuality. The former is a matter for the understanding, whereas the latter is a force or power to be confronted or dealt with, a matter to be acted upon: The lion is not just meaningful; it is actually there! This co - valence and co - incidentality of meaning and actuality in the synplicational unity of the power of Appropriation is precisely what is absent in Heidegger’s philosophy of Being. And yet this “holographic feature” of the Appropriation is, together with its “homographic feature,” what lies at the heart of primordial philosophical learn how to concentrate itself—to aim consistently at the goal and carry its actions and movements unswerving towards that goal; that is, to say, to be teleologically straight. It must learn the skill of balance and harmonization by resolving the dialectic tensions of the above and the below and by maintaining the central position against the tendency of inclining in any of the four directions. But above all it must learn to overcome and master itself. Logos, the art of reason i primordially acquired in the uprightalizing act, is thus an art of dynamic synthesis, involving the balancing and harmonization of polar tensions or opposing forces. But the energetic logos is inextricably intertwined with the aletheic logos: the application of the art of reason in the interplay and resolution of forces is guided in every step by the natural light of the instinctual bodymind, ultimately rooted in the tacit or inner knowledge of Power itself. Indeed it was by virtue of the instinctual light of the bodymind that the categories of rightness corresponding to the intrinsic principles of reason were primordially disclosed and subsequently became fixated in language. Consistency, balance, proportion, order, measure, moderation, self - discipline, and so on; — these principles of rightness, which have finally become the building blocks of human rationality and civilized virtues, are all grounded primordially on the nature of human posturality. In the context of Chinese philosophy, “rightness” is *i* (义), the “principles of rightness” *li* (理), whereas “art of reason” is one of the meaning of *tao*. The profound intimacy between the three terms is clearly seen in the energetic - aletheic affair of the primordial situation to which they owe their original signification. Why is it that both *tao* and *logos* have the meaning of saying or to say? Why is it that primordial humans tend to identify the power of

Appropriation with the power of speech? The answer is twofold. First, speech in primordial times was recognized as precisely an *energeic* – *aletheic* affair. And secondly, speech is where the art of reason and the forms of rightness are recorded and preserved. The power of Appropriation is identified with the power of speech in primordial times because it is primarily in and through the efficacious covalence of speech that the appropriating Power was felt, experienced and comprehended. Speech is the illumination of the Word and activation of the Force. It is by virtue of speech that the art of reason is in tune with the forms of rightness inherent in the nature of things and the Order of Mann.

Rightness is a profoundly interesting idea. It is a notion that lies at the intersection of morality, logic, aesthetics, epistemology, and metaphysics—indeed at the very foundation of all philosophical thought. For all philosophical thought is ultimately reducible to the thought of appropriation; and the thought of appropriation is in essence the thought of rightness. Every being or thing is an appropriation to itself; it is always right in its own right, appropriate in its own appropriation. The “thing – in – itself” is not a veiled reality like the Kantian noumena but is simply the thing itself in its own niche of appropriation, its own unique form of rightness. There is rightness of the good and rightness of the evil; rightness of the beautiful and rightness of the ugly; rightness of what is in the truth and rightness of what is in error. Behind the multiple valuations and contradictions of things forming the conflicting claims of individual perspectives, there is an intrinsic rightness—the rightness of appropriation or being as such that admits no contraries or opposites. It is the “rightness” of the “original face,” as the Zen master would put it, that we all are—that each thing intrinsically is. There really can be no saying for such rightness, for every saying or signification presupposes it; it is indeed this rightness itself.

And yet there exists an order of beings who have distanced themselves from the intrinsic rightness of things—beings who can no longer live rightness as rightness. It is an order of Being in which the “diremption” (from Latin *dirumpo*, to break apart) of rightness has become a rule, and the problematization and hence the negativity of appropriation a reality. Needless to say, this is the domain of the uprightal appropriator—the order of *menn* and Mann.

The order of Mann begins when human beings have come to stand, when they have come to equate rightness with uprightness. “When *te* (the rightness of uprightness) prevails,” says the *Tao Te Ching*, “the Tao (the intrinsic rightness of the Appropriation) is lost.”^① The equation of rightness with uprightness is the arche of civilized humanity. It marks the beginning of the epoch of metaphysics and of God, the uprightalized deity—a beginning that paves the way for humanity’s dominion on Earth. But the price of civilization is the “loss of Tao” and the “oblivion of Being.” For this reason the *Tao Te Ching* frowns upon the entire post – primordial enterprise of humanity and advocates a return or

① *Tao Te Ching*, 38.