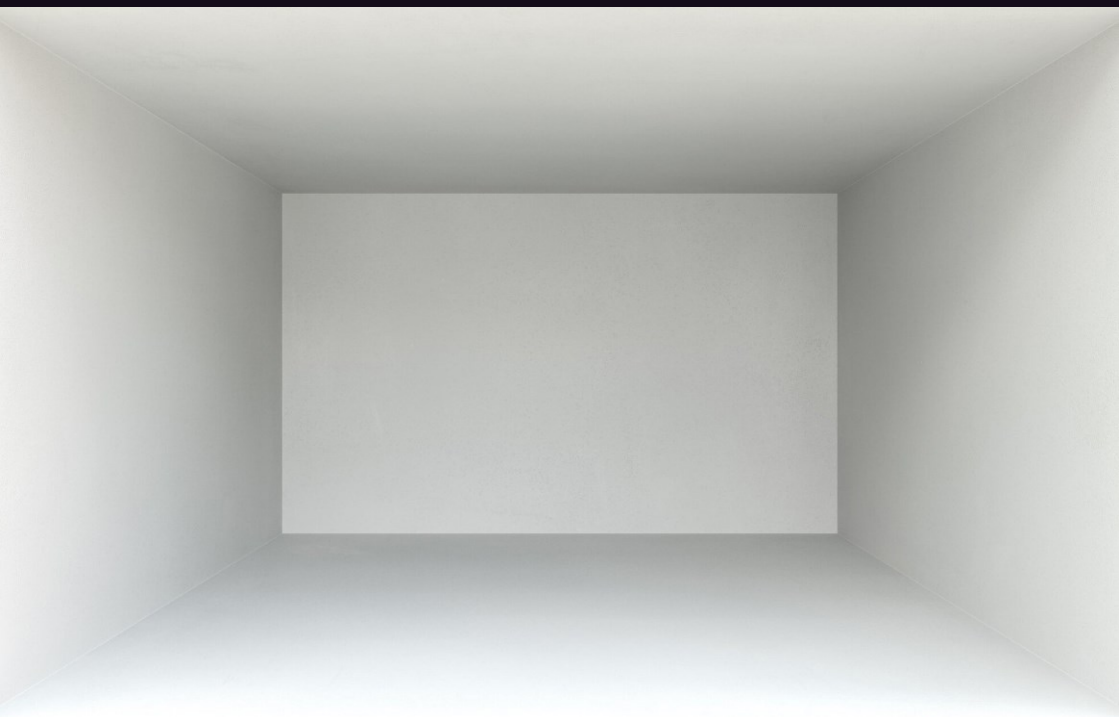


Does Nothingness exist?

A Cross-Continental Dialogue



Program and Book of Abstracts from the Conference

International conference hosted by the Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, co-organized by the International Society for Chinese Philosophy (ISCP) and the European Association for Chinese Philosophy (EACP)

Held at the University of Ljubljana on May 17-20, 2024

Edited by Severin Lorenčič



FF

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
Faculty of Arts



**Program and book of abstracts from the conference »Does Nothingness Exist? A Cross-Continental Dialogue«
Ljubljana, 2024**

Editor: Severin Lorenčič

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Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts,
University of Ljubljana

Does Nothingness exist?

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Ljubljana, May 17-20, 2024

Edited by Severin Lorenčič

Venue: Main building of the University of Ljubljana, Kongresni trg 12, 1000
Ljubljana, Assembly Hall (Zbornična dvorana)

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Introduction

Does Nothingness exist? A Cross-Continental Dialogue

**An International Conference hosted by the
Department of Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts,
University of Ljubljana**

**co-organized by the International Society for Chinese Philosophy
(ISCP) and the European Association for Chinese Philosophy (EACP)**

May 17-20, 2024

Almost nothing exists when it comes to dialogues between scholars and philosophers, trained in Western and Asian philosophies respectively. But this significant nothing, which speaks for itself, could be transformed into a meaningful something, which becomes a beacon of existence in the distinctive milieu of Ljubljana. Right, in Ljubljana, a place that defies easy categorization as a city or a town, residing somewhere in between. Hence, it stands as an ideal setting to delve into the realms of the in-between, at the crossroads of Asian and European thought, where nothingness and existence converge and diverge.

Our dialogues, controversies, and discussions are framed by a paraphrase of Hans Küng's famous question, "Does God exist?". This rephrased inquiry spawns several sub-questions. If we ponder "Does Nothingness exist?" we are compelled to explore "If not, what is the reason?" and "If so, how and why?". Is nothing actually the contrary of being or is it, in fact, its sine qua non? What is the connection between nothingness and existence, and how do they correspond to the concepts of absence and presence? Can we presuppose that nothing is not a presence that we can directly encounter but an absence that we must acknowledge?

Given that these modes of thought have deep-seated origins in both Western and Asian philosophy, the concept of nothingness presents a valuable

opportunity to foster dialogue between these traditions. Therefore, this symposium endeavors to combine voices from the East and West, nurturing an awareness of each other's existence, affirming that the Other holds a significance far beyond mere nothingness.

Our discussions of the concept of nothingness will extend beyond the absence of inherent meaning in life; we will also explore its role as the fundamental ontology of our existence. Furthermore, we will engage in a radical questioning of the concept of "ultimate truth" in relation to our fleeting existence, including a critical examination of the fundamental nature of change in our impermanent world. In doing so, we contemplate nothingness as a potential source of both the self and the world. As we grapple with the age-old question of how to traverse the path from nothingness to being, it becomes evident that we are inevitably drawn back to the question of existence itself. Additionally, we delve into the intricate relationship between nothingness, freedom, and imagination, while also probing the confines that inhibit this state of liberation. And in the midst of our philosophical musings, we might ask ourselves and each other a tantalizing question: can nothingness define itself through an "in-the-world existence," simultaneously shaping and negating the very world it inhabits?

In this conference, we aim to explore the bottomless depths of nothingness. We want to uncover fresh intuitions within the fuzzy realms of the in-between, reshaping our perspectives on the enigma of existence itself. However, regardless of the outcome, our dialogues will transcend borders and challenge conventions, serving as a reminder that in the quest for understanding, nothing is as it seems.

Opening Speech

Dear esteemed adventurers into the profound abyss of Nothingness,

It is with genuine excitement and a warm heart that I welcome you to Ljubljana, a city of rare balance between the dignity of a capital and the warmth of a small town. As we gather in this charming city, its streets and vibrant cultural life set the stage for the stimulating discussions we're about to initiate. Ljubljana's unique character makes it the perfect place for our voices to be heard and for ideas to resonate. Hence, I trust that within our gathering, every whisper will be heard, and no idea will be too vast for us to explore and value deeply.

I am equally pleased to welcome you to the University of Ljubljana, a beacon of knowledge and tradition in Slovenia. Founded in 1919, it holds the distinction of being the first higher education institution to adopt Slovenian as its official language of instruction and study. It is the oldest and largest university in the nation, with a distinguished history that reaches back over five centuries. Its history began in the 16th century with the founding of the first Jesuit higher education institution in Ljubljana, an era when Latin language dominated the academic discourse, embodying the rich educational heritage of Europe. From these historical roots, the University of Ljubljana has grown into a prestigious institution, blending tradition with innovation. Today, it serves as a pivotal academic and research center, offering a diverse spectrum of faculties, institutes, and research opportunities across various disciplines, from the humanities and social sciences to the sciences, engineering, medicine, and arts.

This conference has drawn together a diverse group of thinkers and scholars, all united by our fascination with the concept of nothingness and its philosophical relatives like emptiness, absence, and non-existence. The mosaic of perspectives gathered here promises a rich tapestry of discourse, transcending the confines of language, culture, and discipline. Envisioned as a dynamic polylogue that wanders through continents and cultures, our goal is to transcend the conceptual divides between the West and Asia, weaving together European, Chinese, Indian, and Japanese philosophies, alongside disciplines such as Sinology, Japanology, and Indian Studies. Although the response from scholars primarily trained in Western philosophy has been disappointingly limited, we are heartened by the participation of the most open-minded among them. We are confident that their involvement will facilitate a fruitful exchange of knowledge, ideas, and insights, significantly enriching and broadening the perspectives of everyone involved.

In our intricately connected global community, the practice of philosophical dialogue, free from the limits of geography, cultures, or disciplines, plays a crucial role like never before. Amid the pressing threats of global crises, including

the dire consequences of climate change, mass migrations, conflicts, and the unequal distribution of wealth, intercultural dialogue stands as a beacon of hope. It paves the way to meaningful solutions that transcend the limitations of individual countries or cultural viewpoints. It calls for an embrace of intercontinental exchange and solidarity. Embracing the concept of nothingness, in this context, goes beyond choosing a theme; it becomes a philosophical mandate. It beckons us to empty our minds and hearts, to nullify our inherent biases and dismantle our barriers, enabling us to truly listen and learn from one another.

As we kick off this conference, I am filled with anticipation for the discussions, insights, and connections that will emerge. Let's embrace this opportunity to engage with the concept of nothingness in a way that broadens our understanding and brings us closer as a community of thinkers.

Welcome to Ljubljana, where I hope our time together will be as enriching and engaging as the topic that has brought us here.

Jana S. Rošker

Conference Program

FRIDAY, MAY 17	
16:00-16:30	Welcome addresses by Sašo Jerše, Luka Culiberg, Selusi Ambrogio and Ann A.Pang-White ; Opening speech by Jana S. Rošker
16:30-17:30	KEYNOTE SPEECH 1 (Chair: Jana S. Rošker) Graham Priest: Wu (無): Paradox and Emptiness
17:30-18:00	Discussion
18:00-20:00	Reception – Standing dinner

SATURDAY, MAY 18	
9:00-11:00	PANEL 1: FROM HEGEL TO HEIDEGGER AND BEYOND (Chair: Tara Peterzell) Gregor Moder: To Begin with Nothing Niels Weidtmann: "The bird flies »like« a bird:" Nothingness reigns in the heart of every single being Tzu Chien Tho: Tho Tzuchien: Localization and Incompleteness: Mathematical ontology in Badiou and the Yijing
11:00-11:20	Tea and Coffee break
11:20-13:20	PANEL 2: CLASSICAL CHINESE PERSPECTIVES ON NOTHINGNESS (Chair: Marko Ogrizek) David Chai: Liezi's Meontological Cosmogony Fabian Heubel: Without Nothingness: Transcultural Reflections on Way and Being John Makeham: Two Confucian Critiques of Nothingness: "There is No Nothingness" and "The Doctrine of Emptiness is Devoid of a Foundation"
13:20-14:50	Lunch
14:50-16:50	PANEL 3: NOTHINGNESS: RELATIONAL SEMANTICS AND META-PHYSICS (Chair: Téa Sernelj) Tomomi Asakura: Nothingness and the Determination of Meaning Rafal Banka: Nothingness of Dao in the Daodejing: A Mereological Interpretation Lisa Indraccolo: The Fullness of Emptiness - On <i>wú</i> 無, quantum foam, and the meta-physics of nothing in early Chinese thought
16:50-17:10	Tea and Coffee break
17:10-18:10	KEYNOTE SPEECH 2 (Chair: Jana S. Rošker) Eric T. Nelson: Laozi's Nothingness, Zen Emptiness, and Heidegger's Turn from the Nothing to the Clearing
18:10-18:40	Discussion
19:00	Dinner

SUNDAY, MAY 19

<p>9:00-11:00</p>	<p>PANEL 4: KYOTO SCHOOL: SOME PROS AND CONTRAS (Chair: Tamara Ditrich)</p> <p>Lehel Balogh: A Personal Encounter with Nothingness: The Kyoto School's Views on Self-Transformation, Emptiness, and the No-self</p> <p>Hashi Hisaki: Zettai-mu 絶対無: The "Absolute Nothingness" or the "Unlimited Openness"? In the topos of Nishida's philosophy with the principle of "Absolute-Contradictory Self-Identity"</p> <p>Jana S. Rošker: From Fundamental Absence to Absolute Nothingness: Sublating Nishida Kitaro's and Wang Bi's Meontologies</p>	<p>PANEL 5: CONFUCIAN APPROACHES TO NOTHINGNESS (Chair: Yang Xiaobo)</p> <p>Marko Ogrizek: A Fear of Nothingness and Emptiness in the Teachings of Itō Jinsai</p> <p>Tea Sernelj: Modern New Confucians on Nothingness and Non-being: Interpretation by Fang Dongmei and Cheng Chung-ying</p> <p>Selusi Ambrogio: Nothingness as The Place of Cosmic Creativity and Life. A Dialogue on the Coincidence of Nothingness and Infinite between East and West</p>
<p>11:00-11:20</p>	<p>Tea and Coffee break</p>	
<p>11:20-13:20</p>	<p>PANEL 6: ZERO AND LESS THAN ZERO (Chair: Selusi Ambrogio)</p> <p>Olga Markič: Zero and Nothingness</p> <p>Tamara Ditrich: The notions of zero, absence, emptiness, and nothingness: a Theravāda Buddhist perspective</p> <p>Hans Georg Moeller: "We Believe in Nothing, Lebowski." On the Advantage of Nihilism for Life</p>	<p>PANEL 7: CONTEXTUALIZING THE JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY OF NOTHINGNESS (Chair: Hashi Hisaki)</p> <p>Tara Peternell: Nothingness and Death, an Ontological Dialogue Between the Kyōto School and Heidegger</p> <p>Yang Xiaobo: "Nothingness" Under the Possible Worlds Theory</p> <p>Janko Lozar Mrevlje: A Bit More Ado about Nothing</p>
<p>13:20-14:50</p>	<p>Lunch</p>	
<p>14:50-16:50</p>	<p>PANEL 8: BEING AND NON-BEING (Chair: Fabian Heubel)</p> <p>Andrej Ule: A Brief Inquiry into Being and Nothingness</p> <p>Panagiotis Thanassas: Non-Being and Truth in Parmenides</p> <p>Luka Perušić: Nothingness, Freedom, and Morality</p>	<p>PANEL 9: THE NEVER-ENDING NOTHINGNESS (Chair: Hans Georg Moeller)</p> <p>Mario Wenning: Nothing for Children: On the Never-ending Story</p> <p>Wu Huiling: Discussion on "Dao (道)" and Nothingness in the Zhuangzi</p> <p>Xia Kejun: How to Use Nothing: Re-generation of World in Nancy, Heidegger and Daoist Philosophy</p>
<p>16:50-17:00</p>	<p>Closing remarks</p>	

17:00-18:20	Organized sightseeing in Ljubljana or individual and free pursue of nothingness
18:20-19:40	Dinner
20:00	Theatre Performance (Frog in the Well)

MONDAY MAY 20

Trip to Postojna cave, Predjama castle, Hrastovlje and Piran

Conference Panel Time Allocation and Structure:

Each panel lasts two hours (120 minutes), with each speaker having 40 minutes. This time is divided into:

- Presentation: Approximately 25 minutes
- Q & A: Approximately 15 minutes

Location: Main building of the University of Ljubljana, Kongresni trg 12, 1000 Ljubljana, Assembly Hall (Zbornična dvorana)

All events will take place in this main building.

*Keynote speeches and plenary panels (Panel 1, 2, and 3):
Assembly Hall (Zbornična dvorana)*

Double panels:

Panels 4, 6, and 8: Assembly Hall (Zbornična dvorana)

Panels 5, 7, and 9: Hall of Rectors (Dvorana rektorjev)

Summaries of Keynote Speeches

無: Paradox and Emptiness

Graham Priest

City University of New York, USA, University of Melbourne,
Australia and Ruhr University of Bochum, Germany

Nothingness is a tantalizing concept. It appears in the thinking of many major philosophers—East and West—where it plays a profound role in their view concerning the nature of the world (that is, the beings that constitute it). However, nothingness is implicated in contradiction and paradox right from the start. It is something and, well, nothing. This talk has three themes. The first is the role of nothingness in Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy. The second is the paradoxical nature of nothingness. The third is a mereological account of the nature of nothingness which does justice to the paradox. Though the themes are distinct, they are interconnected in important ways, as I will show.

The talk has three main parts. In the first, I will briefly track the development of thinking about nothingness in Buddhist philosophy. This concerns the distinction between conventional and ultimate reality. We start with the highly influential Indian Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna (fl. 1st or 2nd c. CE). He argued that everything is empty (*śūnya*). That is, everything depends for being what it is on other things. Ultimate reality itself (*śūnyatā*) is ineffable. When Buddhism goes into China, it meets the indigenous philosophy of Daoism. According to this, there is an ineffable principle, *dao* (道) which is nothing (無). 無 gives rise to the phenomenal world of beings (有). The Buddhist conventional/ultimate distinction then becomes identified with the Daoist 有/無 distinction. Subsequent Buddhist thinking is much concerned with understanding nothing. For example, we find the Sanlun thinker, Jizang (吉藏, 549--623), constructing a complex hierarchy of involving the 有/無 distinction. And the notion of absolute nothingness (*zettai mu*, 絶対無) plays a fundamental role in the Zen-influenced thinking of Nishida Kitarō (西田幾多郎, 1870--1945). In the whole tradition, nothingness is a deeply paradoxical notion, both something and no thing, both effable and ineffable.

In the second main part of the talk we will look more closely at this paradox. Making it clear that the paradox is not simply the result of confusion, I will give a theory of nothing as the mereological fusion of no things. This allows

one to prove that nothing is both some thing and no thing. It hence delivers a dialetheia: a statement that is both true and false.

In the final part of the talk I will introduce another object, the polar opposite of nothing, namely everything. This is the mereological fusion of all things. That notion is then used to tie the three themes of the talk together. First, it can be shown that one may characterize nothing, equivalently, as the complement (absence) of everything. This provides a second proof of the fact that nothing is both some thing and no thing. Next, using the notion of everything, it can be shown that the paradox of nothingness, though it may not be a standard paradox in the history of logic, has the same structure as many more familiar paradoxes---and specifically, paradoxes of self-reference, such as the liar paradox. Hence, it belongs to the family of inclosure paradoxes. These are paradoxes that arise at various limits (of all truths, all sets, etc). In the case of the paradox of nothingness, this is the limit of all objects. Third, we will see how nothing and everything are mutually dependent objects. Taking everything, as we may, as conventional reality, then shows that conventional and ultimate reality are mutually interdependent. This validates the important Buddhist claim of the emptiness of emptiness: that even ultimate reality is empty.

Graham Priest is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, Boyce Gibson Professor Emeritus at the University of Melbourne, and International Research Fellow at the Ruhr University of Bochum. He is known for his work on non-classical logic, metaphysics, the history of philosophy, and Buddhist philosophy. He has published over 300 articles (in nearly every major philosophy and logic journal) nine monographs (mostly with Oxford University Press), and many edited collections. Further details can be found at: grahampriest.net.

Nothingness, Emptiness, and the Clearing: Heidegger in intercultural Perspective

Eric T. Nelson

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong

Heidegger's thinking has been interpreted as asserting the primordially of presence (*Anwesenheit*) and a monistic primacy of being and its sense over beings. It is this Heidegger that has been depicted and criticized as an archetypical European philosopher obsessed with being in confrontation with an exclusively Occidental tradition of metaphysics. The present paper will reconsider this narrative and its implications by tracing a significant alternative tendency in Heidegger's thinking from an intercultural perspective. I will trace how this distinct direction emerged in his discussions of nothingness, absence, darkness, hiddenness, and mystery in 1929-1930 and was most fully expressed in his repeated discussions of two Daoist texts, the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*, and his dialogue with a Japanese interlocutor. Heidegger, as a phenomenological thinker, repeatedly experimented with diverse interpretive models throughout his works and explicitly questioned assumptions made in previous works. Two lectures from 1929-1930 in particular challenge the metaphysics of presence reading. His 1929 lecture on metaphysics, which he himself later perceived to be intertwined with East Asian thought, emphasized how nothingness and negativity were not merely derivative or secondary to being and positivity. They needed to be phenomenologically encountered and thought in their own senses. The phenomenological demand to describe originary presence (Husserl's *ursprüngliche Präsenz*) led Heidegger to the question of that which was not presence and to (at least momentarily) consider that nothingness rather than being was the fundamental question. While Carnap argued that Heidegger's nothing was merely the reification of negation, Heidegger contested both metaphysics and anti-metaphysical positivism for reifying positivity to which all negation must be reduced. In his later postscripts and notes to this lecture, nothingness functions as the condition of the ontological difference between beings and being, as his thinking increasingly transitions from an individuating existential nothingness to a generative nothingness and to the clearing (*Lichtung*). The initial Bremen lecture of the "Essence of Truth"

(1930), which was followed by his recitation from the *Zhuangzi's* happy fish passages at a dinner party, contained direct and indirect Daoist references in relation to how the play of darkness and absence, and varieties of hiddenness and mystery, cannot be reduced to light and presence. While Heidegger typically focused on being's presence as upsurge and sway in the 1930s, he returned to these two Daoist texts and the language of mystery (Geheimnis) and release-ment (Gelassenheit), which he associated with them, in the mid-1940s. It is in this context that emptiness becomes the condition of presence and uselessness of usefulness in his recurrent analyses of *Daodejing* 11 and the *Zhuangzi*. Likewise, in his Japanese dialogue that revolves around images of emptiness and absence drawn from Japanese sources, it is absence that gathers remembering and presence. In his later writings, the emptiness of the clearing structures his image of the fourfold and allows for the thing to appear in its own priority and sense. These and other examples reveal how Heidegger's dialogues with East Asian sources shaped a key thread and model of his thinking and, more importantly, indicate a radical alternative to prevalent illusions that negation must be reduced to affirmation and being and nothingness to givenness, positivity, and presence.

Eric S. Nelson is Professor of Philosophy at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. He is the author of *Heidegger and Dao: Things, Nothingness, Freedom* (Bloomsbury, 2023), *Daoism and Environmental Philosophy: Nourishing Life* (Routledge, 2020), *Levinas, Adorno, and the Ethics of the Material Other* (SUNY Press, 2020), and *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early Twentieth-Century German Thought* (Bloomsbury, 2017). He also edited *Interpreting Dilthey: Critical Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) and has published numerous articles and book chapters on Chinese, German, and intercultural philosophy.

Abstracts

Nothingness as The Place of Cosmic Creativity and Life. A Dialogue on the Coincidence of Nothingness and Infinite between East and West

Selusi Ambrogio
University of Macerata, Italy

In this speech I try to create a dialogue between the Neoconfucian philosopher Zhang Zai and lesser-known philosophers of the Renaissance – as Nicholas of Cusa, Charles Boullès, Giordano Bruno, etc. – on the coincidence between nothingness and infinite. While it is well-known that Chinese philosophy devotes much of its energies to debate nothingness, emptiness and infinite, the common understanding of Western philosophy supposed that the whole of this tradition maintains the “horror vacui” of the Greeks. Contemporary interpreters of Chinese philosophy often suggest the incapacity of the West to cope with these concepts. If it is mostly true that nothingness is not at the centre of ancient and modern philosophy (with clearly some exceptions), during the Renaissance and at the dawn of the scientific revolution, this topic was pivotal and largely debated.

What makes this East-West dialogue fascinating is that, on both sides, emptiness/nothingness is seen in a chain with the infinite producing the coincidence of them. The views we will discuss and put into dialogue do not see nothingness as a mystical or anti-rational notion but as an ontological and physical concept, necessary to the vitality of the chain of beings. This entails a relevant ontological and social consequence. Since emptiness does exist and coincide with the infinite, there is a rupture with any hierarchy of beings based on their presumed perfection (i.e., closeness to the infinite or origin). Therefore, as we will argue, it is emptiness that makes all beings within nature full of potentiality and equally valuable.

Selusi Ambrogio is an Assistant Professor of Chinese Philosophy and Literature at the University of Macerata (Italy). President of the European Association of Chinese Philosophy (EACP, 2021-2025) and member of the editorial

board of *Asian Studies* (University of Ljubljana). He publishes on Intercultural Historiography of Philosophy, Contemporary New Confucianism (i.e. Mou Zongsan), Philosophy of Nature, Cross-cultural philosophical relations between China and, Contemporary Chinese theory of Narratology. He is the author of *Chinese and Indian Ways of Thinking in Early Modern Historiography of Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020). He was appointed together with Dawid Rogacz (University Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań) by Bloomsbury editor as General Editor of *Chinese Philosophy and its Thinkers: From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (3 vols, 60 chapters over 70 contributors), publication planned for Oct. 2024.

Nothingness and the Determination of Meaning

Tomomi Asakura

University of Tokyo, Japan

The notion of nothingness is used in the context of Japanese philosophy as the ultimate determinator of both meaning and fact although Nishida Kitarō's arguably "Eastern" semantico-ontological scheme is hardly followed nor implemented by contemporary philosophers. Here I attempt to explore the possibility of the thesis that nothingness determines meaning by arguing for the ways primary intensions become determined against the background of self-awareness of nothingness. It is often emphasized that the notion of nothingness aims to prohibit the hypostatization of semantic determinator from occurring as the grammatical subject of a proposition; however, it also intends to allow and promote the subject's reflection on determinators by the variable and ever-deepening degrees of self-awareness, which implicates the transcendence beyond the realm of "mere meaning." This idea of variable self-awareness further leads to a certain type of metaphysics which has the bold claim that nothingness self-determines fact. A similar scheme is found in Mou Zongsan's theory of the infinite mind, and this striking similarity is previously considered ontological due to the fact that these East Asian philosophers draw on the same Sinitic Buddhist tradition. In contrast, I argue that this type of scheme is primarily semantical, not metaphysical by its nature.

Tomomi Asakura is professor of philosophy at the University of Tokyo (Graduate school of arts and sciences). He has published many articles on metaphysical topics, Kyoto School philosophy, New Confucianism, and the history of metaphysics. He is the author of *'Higashijia ni tetsugaku wa nai' noka: Kyōtō-gakuha to Shinjuka* (No Philosophy in East Asia? The Kyoto School and New Confucianism, 2014), *Gainen to kobetsusei: Supinoza tetsugaku kenkyū* (Concept and Singularity: A Study of Spinoza, 2012), and *Kotoba to sekai ga kawaru toki: Imi-henka no tetsugaku* (When Words and World Change: A Philosophy of Meaning-Change, 2024).

A Personal Encounter with Nothingness: The Kyoto School's Views on Self-Transformation, Emptiness, and the No-self

Lehel Balogh

Hokkaido University, Japan

Authenticity as an ethical ideal—as well as a general non-moral objective towards which the modern self is being directed—has featured increasingly prominently in western societies during the past two centuries, despite the salient fact that no one really knows what authenticity means. Standard characterizations of this highly elusive notion refer us habitually to the divergent ideas of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre, although the contemporary usage of the term seems to have more in common with the descriptions of self-actualization and self-realization emblematic of the existentialist-humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Whereas the definition of authenticity is far from clear-cut, it is, nevertheless, evident that it supports the individual to become affirmative of its own self. The ideal appears both as a theoretical principle and as a practical maxim that encourages the expansion of the self, alongside obtaining the quality of personal autonomy and self-reliance, with the end-goal of becoming “truly” oneself. But is this the only viable account that can be conceived of the ideal of authenticity? Isn't there a differing interpretation out there, a different kind of authenticity, which could challenge the established understanding of this concept? The philosophies of Nishida Kitaro, Tanabe Hajime and Nishitani Keiji hold the key to this inquiry. In my presentation I propose to investigate how the Kyoto School philosophers' reflections on emptiness, nothingness, the self, and the transformation of the self, could offer a feasible—and arguably preferable—alternative to the customary interpretation of authenticity as self-enlargement.

Lehel Balogh, PhD is a Hungarian philosopher and scholar of religious studies, currently a DX Fellow of Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan. From 2012 to 2017 he taught philosophy and ethics at Kyungshung and Gyeongju Universities in South Korea. In 2018 he won the JSPS postdoctoral fellowship of Hokkaido University, and moved to Sapporo, Japan, to conduct research on the practical utilizations of the philosophical concepts of emptiness and nothingness

in Japanese psychotherapies. His main research interests include comparative and cross-cultural studies in philosophy and ethics, the philosophy of psychiatry and psychotherapy, and East Asian religions and ethics. He is a regular contributor to the Religious Studies Review of Rice University, where he is also the sub-editor for Japan.

Nothingness of Dao in the Daodejing: A Mereological Interpretation

Rafal Banka

Jagiellonian University, Poland

This presentation is based on my mereological reconstruction of the Daoist metaphysical system, as presented in the Daodejing. Accordingly, I conceptualize the fundamental dao and you relationship as a relationship between Unrestricted Composition (for any entities, there is a composition that they make) and Restricted Composition (what is entity is determined by finite composition rules) respectively. This conceptualization, among other things, allows to address the reason and a way in which dao is described as wu—nothingness or non-being. In my presentation, I will show that dao as ultimate reality in Daoist metaphysics is not an ontological nothingness and discuss how this “nothingness characteristic” can be mereologically reconstructed. I will focus on two plausible interpretations of dao—in terms of afore-mentioned Unrestricted Composition and Mereological Nihilism (according to which there are only mereological simples that do not have parts and are not parts of any complex entities). I will also discuss how the nothingness aspect of dao can be viewed from a stuff ontology perspective, which questions the ontological standing of parts as discrete particles.

Rafal Banka has received his PhD in Philosophy from Jagiellonian University. He has worked at Jagiellonian University, University of Oxford, and Trinity University. His areas of research include Chinese and Western comparative philosophies (metaphysics, aesthetics, methodology). He has been PI of two grants: “Mereological Reconstruction of the Metaphysical System in the Daodejing” (funded by the European Research Council), and “Li Zehou’s Aesthetics as a Form of Cognition” (funded by the National Science Centre of Poland). He has published among others in *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, and *Philosophy East and West*. His book *Cognition and Practice: Li Zehou’s Philosophical Aesthetics* was published in July 2022.

Liezi's Meontological Cosmogony

David Chai

Chinese University of Hong Kong

Daoism is famous for its anecdotes about the limitations of human knowledge and our inability to comprehend the manifold nature of reality using said knowledge. In this presentation, I will focus on a passage from chapter 5 of the Liezi that outlines how nothingness muddies the boundaries between what is limited and limitless, exhaustible and inexhaustible, in order to support Daoism's claim that the Ultimate (the Dao) defies temporal and spatial categorization. More importantly, the Liezi reinforces the notion that equanimity in life is only attainable once one stops clinging to notions of before and after, have and not have, and so forth. Nothingness, in other words, defies its immateriality by facilitating the emergence of the material and its endless changes.

David Chai is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Prof. Chai is the Series Editor of *Daoism and the Human Experience* (Bloomsbury Academic) and his research focuses on ancient and medieval Chinese philosophy, aesthetics, and metaphysics, phenomenology, and comparative philosophy. His recent works include *Reading Ji Kang's Essays: Xuanxue in Early Medieval China* (2022) and *Zhuangzi and the Becoming of Nothingness* (2019). He is editor of *Daoist Resonances in Heidegger: Exploring a Forgotten Debt* (2022), *Daoist Encounters with Phenomenology: Thinking Interculturally about Human Existence* (2020) and *Dao Companion to Xuanxue [Neo-Daoism]* (2020).

The notions of zero, absence, emptiness, and nothingness: a Theravāda Buddhist perspective

Tamara Ditrich

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia and University of Sydney, Australia

This paper investigates four significant concepts in ancient Indian discourse, namely zero, absence, nothingness, and emptiness, discussing their presentations, interrelatedness, and differences within Theravāda Buddhist premises. It briefly introduces the origins of the notions of absence and zero in the earliest records of ancient Indian linguistics (and subsequently in mathematics), which likely influenced the structural presentation of cognition in Theravāda Buddhism. The main focus of the paper is the pivotal role of absence in the Buddhist soteriological path, encompassing as it does the development of moral virtues which are largely expressed as absences, and meditation which is about the cultivation of absence of unwholesome mental factors. According to the Theravāda teachings, it is through the increase of specific absences and the reduction of mental factors that the highest states of meditative absorption are reached. The highest absorptions involve meditative focus on infinite space and infinite consciousness, followed by a direct experience of nothingness which is perceived as completely empty and void of any phenomena. Nothingness is consistently presented as a more advanced and refined stage than that of infinity. However, the Buddhist critique of such a state of nothingness (experienced as oneness with nothing) is that it still involves perception, and so remains an experience within the sphere of change and impermanence. Hence, already the earliest texts of the Theravāda Buddhist tradition state that final liberation is reached only in a state beyond perception, this is when the ultimate emptiness is revealed. The Buddhist tradition thus positions *nirvāṇa*, the ultimate emptiness, as the very foundation for deep transformation of consciousness which, as argued in this paper, can be viewed as an ethical perfection. In summary, the paper explores how, in the Theravāda Buddhist project, absence is the pivotal condition for experiences of infinity, nothingness and, ultimately, the emptiness of *nirvāṇa*, the latter being the essential condition for liberation from all delusions and views, even from the notion of emptiness itself.

Tamara Ditrich has held research and teaching positions in several universities in Australia and Europe in the areas of ancient Indian religions, philosophies, and languages. She is currently Professor in the Department of Asian Studies, University of Ljubljana, and a Research Associate in the Department of Indian Sub-Continental Studies, University of Sydney. In the last decade, she has dedicated a large part of her research to Buddhist textual studies, mainly investigating the *Theravāda Pāli Canon* and its commentaries. She has an extensive record of publications, has received a number of national and international research grants, and has been an active member in many international research associations and editorial boards of research journals.

zettai-mu 絶対無: The “Absolute Nothingness” or the “Unlimited Openness”? In the topos of Nishida’s philosophy with the principle of “Absolute-Contradictory Self-Identity”

Hisaki Hashi

University of Vienna, Austria

This presentation focuses on the philosophy of Nishida Kitarō (1875-1945) and his basic concept: *zettai-mu* 絶対無. Translated word for word, “absolute nothingness.” From a semantic point of view, this indicates “unlimited openness.” An irrefutable truth, an origin of truth; similar terms are: the absolute in the philosophy of idealism; *the One* in Plato; *God* in a monotheistic religion; dharma in Buddhism as the lawful order of truth, *dao* as the origin of all things in Taoism, etc.

How these concepts can be identified as “absolute,” “authoritative,” and “origin of all things” with no fixed substantialization of any things are various misunderstandings and misinterpretations around this circle. In the case of Nishida, the first philosopher of modernity in 20th century Japan, there are misinterpretations in several respects. Because this philosophy emerged from a cultural-historical debate between East and West, there is an invisible “cross-cultural dimension” inherent in every term of Nishida.

Suppose one ignores the influences of Buddhism in the external appearance of the terms of Kant, Hegel, and Aristotle in Nishida’s works. In that case, the *interpreter is misled* because the relationship between *subject* and *object*, *being* and *nothingness*, the *absolute* and the *relative*, etc., is often focused differently, and derived differently from Western philosophy.

The absolute *mu* (nothingness, meaning “openness”) is now *no* “indeterminacy” in a supersensible transcendence or mysticism, but is everywhere existent and open, both in the intellectual and in the real ontic: A foundation that makes any truth possible, albeit without a personable being “God” as a creator.

On this basis, an otherness to understanding the “contradiction” and the “I as bodily existence with consciousness” also unfolds. This lecture also explains

a life surrounded by contradiction and its overcoming using Nishida's term "absolute-contradictory self-identity (*zettai mujun-teki jiko dōitsu* 絶対矛盾的自己同一)."

Hisaki Hashi, Dr. phil./Ph.D.: Since 1995, Professor Hashi Hisaki has been teaching at the Department of Philosophy, University of Vienna. In 2003, she was awarded the habilitation for all areas of philosophy, receiving the title Univ.-Doz. (Dr. habil.), which signifies a legally authorized professorship at the University of Vienna. In 2021, she became a Professor of Philosophy at the Graduate School for Social Research (GSSR) within the Polish Academy of Sciences, holding a visiting professor status. In 2008, she founded the "Verein für Komparative Philosophie und Interdisziplinäre Bildung" (Association of Comparative Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Education), known as "KoPhil" in Vienna, and has since served as its CEO. Her accolades include the Theodor-Körner-Prize awarded by the Republic of Austria in 1999/2000, and the Prize for Comparative Philosophy in Tokyo by the Association for Comparative Philosophy in 2005. She has also contributed extensively to the field through numerous publications: <https://philosophie.univie.ac.at/institut/mitglieder/mitarbeiterdetailansicht/user/hashih4/inum/1097/backpid/52846/> (Website: [https://ucris.univie.ac.at „hashi”](https://ucris.univie.ac.at/„hashi))

Without Nothingness: Transcultural Reflections on Way and Being

Fabian Heubel

Academia Sinica, Taipei, Taiwan

There is an ongoing debate in contemporary Chinese philosophy about whether there is a word for being in Chinese, how to translate being into Chinese, and whether it makes sense to speak about ontology in the Chinese context. My response to this debate and some related problems starts from the history of translations of the Laozi.

Since the 19th century of *yǒu*/有 and *wú*/無 have been frequently translated as Sein/being and Nichtsein/non-being. Consciously or unconsciously, Laozi's philosophy has thus been short-circuited with that of Parmenides, who is regarded as the pre-Socratic philosopher who unfolded the language of being and non-being/nothing in ancient Greece. What has emerged in this context (in modern Western but also in modern Eastern discourse on Daoism) can be understood as tendency towards a "Greek interpretation of the Laozi" (以希臘解老) that historically corresponds to another highly influential tendency towards reading the Laozi through the translation of a foreign language, namely the "Buddhist interpretation of the Laozi" (以佛解老). To translate *wú*/無 as non-being or nothingness and speak of a Daoist philosophy of nothingness thus seems to be a paradigmatic case of a transcultural and translanguing development that bears the characteristics of hybrid modernization.

But what understanding of ancient Greek philosophy has dominated the "Greek interpretation of the Laozi"? What presuppositions are at work in connecting *yǒu*/有 and *wú*/無 in the Laozi to being and non-being in Parmenides? With regard to the widely accepted "Greek interpretation of the Laozi" it seems ironic that both thinkers, Laozi and Parmenides, meet in the critique of nothing/nothingness. From the perspective of a philosophy of the way, it seems highly problematic to translate *wú*/無 as non-being or nothingness. *Wú*/無 thus is not a nothingness that could be contrasted to being, but rather a moment within being. Accordingly, in contemporary Laozi studies, *yǒu*/有 and *wú*/無 (now translated as without/being-without and with/being-with) can be understood

as two moments of the way (dào/道). In the words of Mou Zongsan, they constitute the “double character of the way” (道的雙重性).

When the way and being are understood in this sense, there is no nothingness outside of being that could be ontologically differentiated from being: Laozi’s philosophy of the way is “without nothingness” (wúwú/無無), or there is an ontological difference within being, not between being and non-being/nothingness. This seems to be also true for Parmenides’ philosophy of being. But while Parmenides very much insists to describe the way of being as one and exclusively as one, Laozi interprets the way as one and double in itself. In this he seems to come close to Heraclitus and his “great saying”: “the εν διαφερον εαυτω (the One differentiated in itself/das Eine in sich selbst unterschiedne)” as Hölderlin puts it. Heraclitus’ understanding of being, which is in itself counterturning (gegenwendig) and thus has a double character, structurally corresponds to the double character of the way in the Laozi.

Moreover, a philosophical examination of the modern tendency towards a “Greek interpretation of the Laozi” that reconsiders Heidegger’s readings of Parmenides and Heraclitus seems to arrive at the necessity to internally connect both of them in order to develop a coherent interpretation of either the (Greek) being or the (Chinese) way.

In my discussion I will try to argue that in ancient philosophy (whether Greek or Chinese) an understanding of being emerged that in itself is counterturning, to which non-being/nothingness can no longer be opposed, because it is a being that in itself differentiates into being-without and being-with or without and with (無有).

Fabian Heubel is a Research Fellow at the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy, Academia Sinica, Taipei. His main research interests include classical and modern Chinese philosophy, Western interpretations of Chinese philosophy, Critical Theory, contemporary German and French thought, aesthetics and philosophy of art. Recent Books: 2020 *Gewundene Wege nach China. Heidegger-Daoismus-Adorno*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, Academia Sinica, Taipei; 2021 *Was ist chinesische Philosophie? Kritische Perspektiven*, Hamburg: Meiner; 2021 何乏筆 (Fabian Heubel), 《修養與批判：跨文化視野中的晚期傅柯》 (Self-cultivation and Critique: The Late Foucault in Trans-cultural Perspective), 新北市：聯經。2024 *Schlucht und Atemwandel. Zu einer Philosophie des Weges*. Berlin: Matthes&Seitz (forthcoming).

The Fullness of Emptiness – On *wú* 無, quantum foam, and the meta-physics of nothing in early Chinese thought

Lisa Indraccolo

Tallinn University, Estonia

The concept of *wú* 無 plays a central role in early Chinese thought, and especially in the Daoist philosophical tradition (Chai 2019; Bai 2008; Liu & Berger 2014). The term has often been (mis)translated as “void” or “nothingness,” as if it represented absolute emptiness, and the absence or lack of some-thing. However, such translations convey the misleading idea that *wú* would be ‘nothing,’ meant as the totalizing experience of the absolute absence of (any form or manifestation of) ‘being’ (Graham 1959; Cheng 2009). *Wú* is neither void nor empty or barren, and least of all static. It is a vibrant cradle filled of creative potential that contains within itself in nuce and in potency everything that may be. Everything that exists in the world eventually emerges from *wú*, which functions as a sort the source of everything, the “primordial broth” that generates both living and non-living things (Indraccolo, forthc.). The present paper problematizes the concept of *wú* keeping into account its creative potential, proposing a reading of its nature and ‘potential energy’ by adapting and drawing from the theory of ‘quantum foam’ (Wheeler 1955; Cahill 2003), i.e. the theoretical fluctuation of space-time due to the continuous, ongoing process of creation and destruction of subatomic particles of matter and antimatter. As the paper aims is to show, not only does “nothingness” exist in the Chinese tradition, it is also full.

Lisa Indraccolo is Associate Professor of Chinese Studies at Tallinn University, Estonia (2020–). She earned her Ph.D. (2010) from Ca’ Foscari University of Venice with a thesis on the early Chinese “sophistic” persuader Gongsun Long. She gained several years of research experience at the University of Zurich, where she was appointed as postdoc research fellow (2011–2020) and also actively participated in the activities of the interdisciplinary research cluster URPP “Asia and Europe.” Her main research interests include early Chinese thought, with focus on “Masters texts” and Warring States philosophical literature; Classical Chinese rhetoric, paradoxes and language jokes; structural

patterns of early Chinese texts; conceptual and intellectual history of premodern China, also from a comparative perspective; and early cross-cultural encounters between China and Japan. She is currently Vice President of the European Association for Chinese Studies (EACS) and affiliated member of the Zurich Center for the Study of the Ancient World (ZAZH).

Two Confucian Critiques of Nothingness: “There is No Nothingness” and “The Doctrine of Emptiness is Devoid of a Foundation”

John Makeham

The Australian National University and La Trobe University, Australia

In discussing the idea of “nothingness,” Wittgenstein’s “family resemblance model” is a useful heuristic device to bear in mind when drawing comparisons across different languages, different cultural and philosophical traditions, and different temporal periods. For example, the Chinese term *wu* 無 has been translated into English variously as “non-being,” “non-existence,” “formlessness,” “nothing,” “nothingness,” and “not having.” (This list is not intended to be exhaustive.) Each of these translations can claim some correspondence with *wu* in specific contexts but it is unclear to me that any one alone should be deemed definitive. Again, it is a family resemblance model that underscores the relationship between *wu* and the Chinese Buddhist term *kong* 空 used to translate the Sanskrit term *śūnyatā* (emptiness) in Buddhist texts. (Indeed, in Chinese translations of certain Mahāyāna texts, *śūnyatā* was rendered as *wu* by some translators and as *kong* by others.) My discussion will focus on two concepts that also qualify as members of a family sharing certain common resemblances with “nothingness”: *taixu* 太虛 (Supreme Vacuity) and *kong* 空. Specifically, my analysis will examine Zhang Zai’s 張載 (1020-1077) concept of *taixu* in the context of his critique of Laozi’s 老子 (trad. 6th cent. BCE) concept of *wu* and Buddhist notions of emptiness, and Xiong Shili’s 熊十力 (1885?-1968) critique of the Mahāyāna concept of *kong*. In doing so, I will show how Zhang and Xiong each established their critiques of nothingness and emptiness on the basis of their own conceptions of the non-duality of *ti* 體 and *yong* 用. In the case of Zhang Zai, my focus will be his representative work, *Zheng meng* 正蒙 (Rectifying the Ignorant); and for Xiong, my focus will be his 1958 publication, *Ti yong lun* 體用論 (Treatise on Reality and Function), which Xiong considered to be his most important philosophical achievement.

John Makeham is Professor Emeritus at both La Trobe University and The Australian National University. He has also held academic positions and visiting professorships at the University of Adelaide, Chinese University of Hong Kong, National Taiwan University, and Victoria University of Wellington. His research specialization is in the intellectual history of Chinese philosophy. He has a particular interest in Confucian thought throughout Chinese history and in the role played by Sinitic Buddhist thought as an intellectual resource in pre-modern and modern Confucian philosophy. He is series editor of the Brill book series, *Modern Chinese Philosophy*, and one of the editors of the new Brill book series, *East Asian Buddhist Philosophy*.

Zero and Nothingness

Olga Markič

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

The concept of zero has a rich history and is associated with several cultures and religions. Zero was first used as a placeholder in the positional system which allowed to determine the value of a symbol in a string of numbers due not only to its shape but also to its position. For example, to mark the difference between one (1) and ten (10) in a base ten system. But using it as a placeholder was not itself a number. It was first in India, by the mathematician Brahmagupta (598-668 CE), that zero was not used merely as a placeholder, but as an independent number. Zero (śūnya) was given the status of a number that could be manipulated within arithmetical operations. Nevertheless, it has a paradoxical nature. As Robert Kaplan wrote in his book *The Nothing That Is: A Natural History of Zero*, “Names belong to things, but zero belongs to nothing. It counts the totality of what isn’t there.” (p. 37). In this paper, I will discuss two approaches to tackle this paradoxical nature. The Greek (and later Western) philosophers who were not willing to accept zero, nothing, void, and infinity, and Indian philosophers, particularly Nāgārjuna and the Mādhyamika school, who employed the concept of śūnyatā (emptiness, relativity) and provided a way to understand zero.

Olga Markič is a professor of Philosophy at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. She lectures various courses at the Department of Philosophy and the Joint Interdisciplinary Master’s Program in Cognitive Science (Mei:CogSci). Her primary research interests include the Philosophy of Cognitive Science, Philosophy of Mind, and Logic and Theory of Argumentation. She recently co-authored a book with Toma Strle titled *O odločanju in osebni avtonomiji* [On Decision-Making and Personal Autonomy] (2021).

To Begin with Nothing

Gregor Moder

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

The process of knowledge, as Hegel insisted against Kant, should not be thought of as an asymptotical, never quite finished attempt to grasp the truth in knowledge. Instead, any kind of knowledge is only possible on the condition of its completeness, that is to say, on the condition that it is actual knowledge that needs no external guarantees for its validity, that it is presuppositionless. This means, as paradoxical as it may sound, that knowledge must be considered not only as a process, but also as a process with an absolute end, and with an absolute beginning. This talk will focus on several images of the beginning that Hegel recalls discussing this idea: the beginning of the history of philosophy in the East, the beginning of logic with pure being, and the beginning of all philosophy with Spinoza. The claim is that the beginning with nothing requires a deliberate evacuation, an empty stage where nothing can take place. In other words, there is a kind of nothingness required before one can begin with nothing.

Gregor Moder is a Senior Research Associate in the Department of Philosophy of the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and a Visiting Fellow in the Department of English at Princeton University (Spring 2024). He is the author of *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity* (NUP: 2017), *Antigone: An Essay on Hegel's Political Philosophy* (FDV: 2023, in Slovenian), and a co-editor of the monograph on *The Object of Comedy* (Palgrave: 2020). He is currently co-editing a monograph on *The Ethics of Ernst Lubitsch* (forthcoming with Rowman & Littlefield in 2024).

“We Believe in Nothing, Lebowski.” On the Advantage of Nihilism for Life

Hans-Georg Moeller

University of Macau, Macau

This presentation will defend the often-maligned nihilist position in philosophy. Based on a variety of disparate sources, including early Chinese Daoism and contemporary social systems theory, nihilism will be presented as an existential attitude that prevents over-commitments to ideological, religious, moralistic, or metaphysical beliefs and therefore contributes to psychological and social ease. This position, it will be argued, aligns with a certain kind of nihilism in Nietzsche’s writings notwithstanding his explicit rejections of (other kinds) of nihilism.

Hans-Georg Moeller is a Professor at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Macau. He authored numerous books including *Profile Yourself: Identity after Authenticity*, *Genuine Pretending: On the Philosophy of the Zhuangzi* (both with Paul D’Ambrosio), *The Moral Fool: A Case for Amoralism*, and *The Radical Luhmann* (all with Columbia University Press). He is content creator of the YouTube philosophy channels *Carefree Wandering* and *Philosophy in Motion*.

A Bit More Ado about Nothing

Janko Lozar Mrevlje

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

The lecture sheds light on complex conceptions of nothingness as explicated by Hribar, Slovenian Heidegger-inspired phenomenologist, and Hisamatsu, Japanese Heidegger-inspired Zen Buddhist philosopher. Following this comparative analysis, and shifting attention to the relationship between being and nothingness, the lecture ventures an attempt at arguing in favour of a certain advantage of nothingness over being.

Janko Lozar Mrevlje, Ph.D., is Professor of Philosophy at the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. His main research interests include nihilism, the crisis of European rationality and phenomenology of attunement. He has published several scientific articles and four monographs in Slovene: *Lingering Joviality* (2011), *Phenomenology of Attunement* (2012), *Nietzsche through Nihilism* (2015), *Nietzsche and Heidegger: towards Attunement* (2016).

A Fear of Nothingness and Emptiness in the Teachings of Itō Jinsai

Marko Ogrizek

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Itō Jinsai stands out as one of Edo-period Japan's most influential thinkers. His interpretation of Confucian philosophical notions introduces a fresh perspective on Confucian teachings, marked by a return to the study of classical Confucian texts—a concept he termed “Study of Ancient Semantics” (古義學). Jinsai's intellectual pursuits are focused on the study of Confucian ethics, with a central theme being a critical rejection of certain aspects of Song Neo-Confucianism, particularly Zhu Xi's teachings. Jinsai views these elements as foreign to the Confucian way, contending that they originated from Buddhism and Daoism, presenting a language and practice distinct from the Confucian tradition. However, I will aim to show that Jinsai's critical opposition is not rooted in simple conservatism. At the core of Jinsai's philosophical endeavours lies a profound resistance to language and practice rooted in the concepts of nothingness or emptiness, which, for Jinsai, are not only incompatible with the Confucian ethical project but in many ways antithetical to it.

Marko Ogrizek is a research assistant at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Born in 1984 in Kranj, Slovenia, he studied Philosophy and Japanology at the University of Ljubljana, with exchanges at the University of Gunma and the University of Tsukuba, Japan. As a junior researcher, he earned his Ph.D. in 2021 with a dissertation on the philosophy of Itō Jinsai, the Edo Period Japanese Confucian scholar. His primary research interests encompass Confucian ethics and Japanese Confucianism. In these areas, he has published several academic papers and chapters in monographs.

Nothingness, Freedom, and Morality

Luka Perušić

University of Zagreb, Croatia

There is little to be found in philosophy about the figures of interaction between morality and nothingness, especially with regard to nothingness *qua* nothingness. The canon often treats nothingness either as the groundless basis of action that is transformed into a specific framework of volitional agency, or as an evocation of its thinghood by a specific moral disposition that leads to willing the nothingness as a particular, more-than-nothing thing. In most cases, however, it is specifically linked to freedom – it constitutes freedom, initiates freedom or is itself freedom.

Some paradigmatic examples in the Occident are Sartre, who sees it as freedom “forcing human beings to make itself instead of to be” (Sartre 1984, 440), Nietzsche, who either speaks of it as something from what human being leap from through freedom (e.g. BGE §21), or equals it with death in his critique of ascetic morals built on Christian discourse (e.g. GM III §28), Kierkegaard, who finds nothingness to be a source of dread which is “freedom’s reality as possibility for possibility” (CD §5), and Heidegger, who tried to re-introduce it back into the discourse as constitutive to human freedom by being the nothing rooted in the human condition, by which freedom manifests as “the condition of possibility of the disclosure [manifestness, unconcealment] of the Being of beings, of the understanding of Being” (GA 31:303). Similarities to the presented paradigm are also found in theories where nothingness is not mentioned but can be aligned to certain aspects of discussed phenomena, including Kant’s theory of constitutional duty, Schmitt’s theory of sovereign, or Arendt’s and Foucault’s theory of workforce transformation. With the incorporation of nothingness into the discourse on freedom, morality then appears as an emergent of freedom, in which intention and action affirm order in opposition to nothingness, and, in turn, impose moral, even existential imperatives on subjects, defining the levels of their autonomous humanness and enforcing responsibility on them. The more human we are, the less the nothingness should participate in our being.

Three significant objections can be raised against these philosophical explorations. First, against the lack of a comprehensive analysis of nothingness *qua* nothingness, second, against the idea of imperative enforcement, and third, against the fundamental axiom that there is freedom. I will focus on the third objection and discuss the question of *does nothingness exist?* by examining the interaction between morality and nothingness under the assumption that freedom is an impossibility.

Luka Perušić is an assistant professor at the Department of Philosophy of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Zagreb. He is the managing editor of *Synthesis philosophica* and *Filozofska istraživanja*, international journals devoted to philosophy, integrative thought, and interdisciplinarity, founder of the Croatian Association for Scientific Communication, and has been a participating independent expert in policies for the matter of science, technology, and ethics. His approach to (bio)ethics is from a cosmological perspective and thus presupposes metaphysically grounded systematic integration of knowledge cores across cultures and disciplines. He is currently working on expanding resources for the integrative study of technology, nature, and play, and projects contributing to understanding artificial intelligence and the fourth industrial revolution.

Nothingness and Death, an Ontological Dialogue Between the Kyōto School and Heidegger

Tara Peternell

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Within prevalent philosophical thought the terms nothing, nothingness and emptiness are too frequently taken to convey the same meaning. No clear division is drawn between them and in most instances, they carry negative connotations. This view is rather different in Buddhist discourse; nothing is not nothing in the sense of pure negativity or simple negation, but an active, dynamic force that complements the doctrine of dependent origination. My primary undertaking will be to clarify this terminological confusion, beginning with the comparison of *soku-hi* logic and ontological difference as they manifest themselves through nothingness. Secondly, I will tackle the problematic of Being and emptiness on the basis of Nishida and Nishitani's three-fold topological structure of nothingness. I will then compare their stance on the subject with Heidegger's and claim that the latter's nothing is inextricably bound to relationality with Being, thus falling into the trap of substantiality as being-and-nothingness, whereas the Kyōto school avoids this conflict with being-or-nothingness. Mortals encounter the most extreme degree of self-overcoming when faced with their inherent mortality. Heidegger confronts this existential phenomenon through being-towards-death, whereas Nishida regards the conflict with death as the most profound locus of self-consciousness, situated within the *basho* of absolute nothingness, a place of becoming and perishing, *shōmetsu*, the surpassing of which commands the eradication of one's self. Lastly, having established the relationality between the triad of nothingness, Being and death I shall provide an answer to the foundational question of my inquiry, that being, if the musings of these philosophers are common in nothing or have nothing in common.

Tara Peternell is a PhD student at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana. In her research she focuses on East Asian philosophies in the scope of which she predominantly explores Buddhism, its link to the emergence of the Japanese Kyōto school of thought and the relation of both to the present

leading currents of Philosophy. Her recent contributions deal with topics in epistemology as well as aesthetics, with an emphasis on figures such as Nishida Kitarō and Kuki Shūzō. She is also the editor-in-chief of a recent double issue of the Philosophical Marathon journal.

From Fundamental Absence to Absolute Nothingness: Sublating Nishida Kitaro's and Wang Bi's Meontologies

Jana S. Rošker

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

This presentation aims to explore the existence of absolute Nothingness within the Daoist framework. The inquiry will revolve around an imagined dialogue, juxtaposing the ideas of Nishida Kitaro and Wang Bi through a contrastive analysis employing the transcultural sublation method. While Nishida asserted that his philosophy was underpinned only by Zen Buddhism and Western philosophy, we will illuminate the frequently overlooked but profoundly influential role of Chinese Daoism in shaping Nishida's concept of nothingness. It is no coincidence that Nishida himself appeared to be unaware of this Daoist influence. I believe that this oversight constitutes a flaw not only in Nishida's work but also in its common reception. By comparing Nishida's and Wang's respective conceptualizations of a dynamic (or "moving") present, I will demonstrate that both theories depict time in a similar way, i.e. as emerging from the intimate "translocation" of reality. On this basis, this analysis challenges Nishida's simplistic view that the Chinese (or Daoist) concept of nothingness is limited to the idea of non-being, which constitutes a simple opposition to being. Instead, I aim to show that Wang Bi's concept of original nothingness or fundamental absence (*benwu* 本無) can be aptly compared to Nishida's concept of absolute nothingness (*zettai mu* 絶対無).

Professor **Jana S. Rošker**, studied Sinology and obtained her PhD degree at the Vienna University. She is the first Slovene Sinologist, co-founder and long-standing Head of the Department of Asian studies at the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). She is chief editor of the journal *Asian studies* (<https://journals.uni-lj.si/as>), president of the *International Society for Chinese Philosophy* (ISCP), and the founder, first president and honorary member of the *European Association of Chinese Philosophy* (EACP). Her recent books include (2023) *Humanism in Trans-civilizational Perspectives: Relational Subjectivity and Social Ethics in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, Springer; (2023) *Confucian Relationism and Global Ethics: Alternative Models of Ethics and Axiology in Times of Global Crises*, Brill; and (2021) *Interpreting Chinese Philosophy: A New Methodology*, Bloomsbury.

Modern New Confucians on Nothingness and Non-being: Interpretation by Fang Dongmei and Cheng Chung-ying

Téa Sernelj

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The presentation delves into the philosophical analysis of the concept of Nothingness or Non-being (*wu* 無) as proposed by Modern New Confucians Fang Dongmei (1899-1977) and his disciple Cheng Chung-ying (b. 1935) within the framework of their interpretation of Chinese metaphysics.

Fang Dongmei interprets the Daoist notion of Nothingness as the ultimate reality, dynamically generating all existence where the Dao plays a dual role: progressively, fundamental Nothingness within Dao gives rise to the Being of all forms, while regressively, immanent Being relies on the Nothingness of transcendental Dao for its proper functions. Fang also illustrates how Wang Bi's creative and innovative interpretation of Nothingness profoundly influenced and shaped Chinese Buddhism.

Cheng Chung-ying's conception posits that *Yijing* metaphysics focuses on being and becoming, while Laozi's metaphysics centers on Non-being and being. In the *Yijing*, the *Dao* serves as the integrating force for continuous change and transformation, whereas in Daoist metaphysics, the *Dao* integrates Non-being and becoming. Cheng asserts that in this context, the *Dao* is conceptualized and explained as Non-being, serving as the primary source of every existence and an essential factor in describing reality as a whole. In Cheng's interpretation of Laozi's metaphysics, Non-being is considered more primary than existence, as it is unrestricted and boundless in terms of space, time, power, and creativity. It possesses the unique ability to bring out the actuality of things in a manner that surpasses the capabilities of any specific being or existence in general.

Téa Sernelj is an associate professor of Sinology at the University of Ljubljana. She earned her Ph.D. from the same university in 2018. She expanded her knowledge at Nankai University in Tianjin, Yanshan University in Qinghuangdao, and at the Center for Chinese Studies in Taipei. Her research interests

encompass classical and modern Chinese aesthetics, as well as Modern New Confucianism. She is author of two monographs and numerous academic papers and book chapters. Currently, she is leader of two research projects: *Confucian Revival and Its Impact on Contemporary East Asian Societies through the Prism of the Relationship between the Individual and Society* (ARIS J6-50202) and *The Problem of Freedom, Humanism and the Human Subject in Intercultural Perspective: Europe and Taiwan* (CCKF RG001-N-23).

Non-Being and Truth in Parmenides

Panagiotis Thanassas

National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece

In my talk I will suggest that in Parmenides the Way of Truth is nothing but the formulation of a contradictory relationship between Being and Non-Being. This means that the Way of Truth not only includes Non-Being, but that it would not exist at all if Non-Being were not to belong to it. This proposal goes hand in hand with an overall hermeneutic approach that challenges another common-sense view which can be found in almost every philosophical encyclopedia; this view sees Parmenides as a philosophical apostle of monism. Contrary to this widespread opinion, in the past 25 years I have claimed that Parmenides was, in fact, a champion of dualism, that his poem is full of dual structures, and that this poem revolves around the axis of a dualistic methodology. When the goddess continually proclaims the paradoxical, impossible possibility of Non-Being, she does so fully aware of its function as a necessary constituent of the concept of Being.

Panagiotis Thanassas is a Professor of History of Philosophy at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Born in 1967 in Patras, Greece, he studied Law in Athens and Philosophy in Tübingen, where he received his Ph.D. in 1996 with a dissertation on Parmenides. He has taught at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (2003-18), at the Universities of Tübingen, Heidelberg, Cyprus, and Munich (LMU, *Vertretungsprofessur*, 2015). His research interests focus on Greek philosophy (Pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle), German Idealism (Hegel), Heidegger, and Philosophical Hermeneutics. He is a fellow of the *Alexander von Humboldt Foundation* and has also received fellowships from IKY, Evangelisches Studienwerk “Villigst”, DAAD, DFG, and Princeton University (*Stanley J. Seeger Visiting Fellow*, 2019). His work has been published in journals such as *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, *Review of Metaphysics*, *Journal of Philosophical Research*, *Zeitschrift für Philosophische Forschung*, *Rhizai*, *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, *Gnomon*, *Rhizomata*, *Philosophische Rundschau*. See also <https://thanassas.gr/en>.

Localization and Incompleteness: Mathematical ontology in Badiou and the Yijing

Tho Tzuchien

University of Bristol, UK

Alain Badiou's project for a mathematical ontology offers a means to think being separated from the traditional metaphysical constraint of oneness/unity imposed by the Parmenidean-Platonic tradition. This is a project that operationalises the void (rather than the "one") as a localisation of the relation between being and thought. In the unfolding of this relation, mathematical ontology also localises the relation of the subject in being through the incompleteness of coherent mathematical structure. Incompleteness is therefore presented not as a fault of structure but as its positive determination. In the three volumes of *Being and Event*, Badiou offers three different approaches to this concept of localisation. This presentation gives a sketch of how these three different approaches interact on and through the mathematical structure. This network of perspectives will then be applied to the concept of localisation within the permutational cosmology offered by Wang Bi' 王弼 (226–249CE) interpretation of the Yijing. This comparison will allow us to consider the relevance of incompleteness in ontological traditions beyond the Parmenidean-Platonic ones.

Tzuchien Tho is a philosopher and historian of mathematics and physics. He is currently working on questions about causality in 18th century physics, focusing on the development of analytical mechanics. He is also currently working on issues related to Badiou's mathematical ontology, the philosophy of algebra, Leibniz reception in the 20th century, and epistemological methods of history. He currently teaches at the University of Bristol. Previously, he has been affiliated with the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht (NL), the École Normale Supérieure in Paris (Rue D'Ulm), the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (Berlin), Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, the Institute for Research in the Humanities (University of Bucharest) and the University of Milan.

A Brief Inquiry into Being and Nothingness

Andrej Ule

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

I wonder how to approach the questions of being and nothingness when they are posed to us in all seriousness. In cultural and philosophical history, several conceptions of being and nothingness and several ways of solving these questions have appeared.

We can find six main paths: The Eleatic (Parmenidean) path of the identity of being and thought, sceptical reticence in opinions (points of view), open confrontation with contradictions and paradoxes, recourse to non-classical logics, wonder at the fullness of being, which excludes any nothingness, and the path of spiritual insight into the mysterious interweaving of Being and Nothingness in everything we do, think and say.

Prof. **Andrej Ule** (1946) studied mathematics and philosophy at the Faculty of Sciences and the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana. He achieved a Ph.D. (1981) in philosophy at the University of Ljubljana. He got in 1982-3 the Humboldt grants for the study of logic and theory of science in Munich, at the Institute for Logic, Theory of Science and Statistics. He was a professor of analytic philosophy and philosophy of science at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Fields of interest: philosophy of logic, philosophy of language, epistemology, philosophy of science, comparative philosophy. He published cca 200 scientific articles and many books about logic, the philosophy of science, the philosophy of language, epistemology, and comparative philosophy.

“The bird flies »like« a bird:” Nothingness reigns in the heart of every single being

Niels Weidtmann

University of Tübingen, Germany

Whereas in the age of nihilism, nothingness is experienced in the shattering of metaphysics and is consequently understood essentially in terms of negation, in Heidegger’s thinking it takes on an ontological meaning. Not only is Being with a capital ‘B’ dimensionally distinct from the individual being, but also Being itself only “is” by simultaneously withdrawing itself essentially. Being “is” not (does not exist) but is “given” or, more correctly, is “given by itself” without therefore being absorbed into that which “is given”. Heidegger attempts to grasp such being given in withdrawal as the “event” (das “Ereignis”) of being. With Heidegger, we could therefore claim that nothingness reigns at the heart of Being. What is strange, however, is that the individual being seems to remain untouched by the withdrawal of Being itself. It is true that the individual being can only encounter and appear in the “time-play-space” (“Zeit-Spiel-Raum”) opened up by the event, but as something encountered in this way it threatens to obscure the essence of Being, which lies in being given in withdrawal, rather than bringing it to experience itself. The interplay of Being and nothingness in the event thus threatens to sink to a mere “condition of possibility” of appearance with regard to the individual being. On the other hand, there is the East Asian experience of “suchness” (“So-Sein”), which experiences the fullness of reality in the everyday, precisely because nothing is what it is but only ever like it is. The individual being refers, so to say, to its own Being which is not different from the individual being, though. This “in-difference”, which is the source of all reality, is in itself “nothing.” In my contribution, I would like to take up the hint East Asian thought gives us to the indistinguishability of the individual being and Being with a capital ‘B’ and show that nothingness does not only reign in the heart of Being, but also in the heart of every single being. The individual being produces its own Being in the first place by not being what it is, but by becoming what it is only in the interpretation of itself. If it ceases to interpret itself, its Being ends. Thus, the individual being does not appear in a previously opened “time-play-space” of the event but creates its own space of

meaning by continuously interpreting itself. It “is” only itself by setting itself apart from itself and thus not being itself. “The bird flies »like« a bird,” a Zen saying goes, otherwise it crashes.

Niels Weidtmann is director of the *College of Fellows - Center for Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Studies* at the University of Tübingen. He studied philosophy, politics and biology in Würzburg and at Duke University in the U.S.; PhD in philosophy (Würzburg), habilitation in cultural theory (Tübingen). He has held visiting professorships in Vienna and Kyoto. Since 2019, he is president-elect of the *Society for Intercultural Philosophy*. His research interests include intercultural philosophy, phenomenology and hermeneutics, structural philosophy, and philosophical anthropology. Latest books: *One World Anthropology and Beyond. A Multidisciplinary Engagement with the Work of Tim Ingold* (together with Martin Porr; Routledge 2023); *Analogie. Zur Aktualität eines philosophischen Schlüsselbegriffs* (together with Dietmar Koch and Alina Noveanu; Alber 2023); *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Aufgaben, Wege, Dimensionen* (Francke 2016).

Nothing for Children: On the NeverEnding Story

Mario Wenning

Loyola University Andalusia, Spain

The talk reconstructs the figure of “the nothing” in Michael Ende’s famous 1979 novel *NeverEnding Story* and its 1984 cinematic adaptation by Wolfgang Petersen. After tracing Buddhist and Daoist elements in the story’s depiction of the force threatening to swallow up the fictive world *Fantastica*, the talk centres in on the figure of the child and a conversation between Atreyu and the Gmork concerning the transformation of people into “beautiful, stupid or clever lies” when passing through the nothing.

Mario Wenning is a Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University Andalusia. His work focuses on critical social and political philosophy as well as aesthetics from an intercultural perspective. Recent publications include the coedited volumes *The Human-Animal Boundary* (Lexington, 2018, 2021), *Environmental Philosophy and East Asia* (Routledge, 2022), *The Right to Resist: Philosophies of Dissent* (Bloomsbury, 2023) and *Intercultural Philosophy and Environmental Justice between Generations* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

Discussion on “Dao (道)” and Nothingness in the Zhuangzi

Wu Huiling

Fu Jen Catholic University, Taipei, Taiwan

This paper delves into Zhuangzi’s perspective on the “Dao” (道), considering it as a fundamental entity in metaphysical debates. Zhuangzi frequently employs the terms “Xu” (虛) and “Wu” (無) when referring to the “Dao,” leading to its common translation as “Nothingness” by various scholars. This translation raises intriguing philosophical inquiries, such as “Does Nothingness exist?” and “Does Dao exist?”. Zhuangzi himself described the Dao as embodying affection and sincerity while being actionless and formless (夫道，有情有信，無為無形). This interpretation lends an air of ambiguity to the concept of “Dao.” To clarify this ambiguity, this discussion is structured around three key questions: (1) “Does Dao exist?”; (2) “Is the Dao knowable or cognizable?”; (3) “Is Dao synonymous with Nothingness?”. This paper posits that the central inquiry revolves around the Dao’s knowability or cognizability, as this aspect is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the Dao in all three dimensions. The exploration is further enriched by Zhuangzi’s assertion that the Dao “can be handed down but not taught” (可傳而不可受), providing a nuanced perspective on its transmission and perception.

Huiling Wu holds the position of Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy at Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan. She earned her PhD from the Graduate Institute of Philosophy at National Central University, Taiwan, in 2015. From August 2016 to August 2018, she was a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Philosophy of the National Taiwan University. Wu specializes in Daoism and Chinese philosophical methodology, with a keen interest in the thought patterns of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Her latest research focuses on Zhuangzi’s concept of “Zhi” (知), exploring themes of knowledge, ignorance, cognition, and the unknown.

How to Use Nothing: Re-generation of World in Nancy, Heidegger and Daoist Philosophy

Xia Kejun

Renmin University of China, People's Republic of China

The Globalization make the world un-world [immonde], The world has lost its capacity to form a world, nihilism has become reality, how the new world possible? If in Christianity it is God's creatio ex nihilo, but in Jean-Luc Nancy's deconstruction, this nihilo is not Nothingness, but the growth of "nothing", This making (sense) from Nothing give is coming from nothing, and meaning, emerging from nothing, allows the world to appear as a nothing-of-given and as without-reason. The nothing itself, rather nothing growing [croissant] as something. the generation of nothing and things, in a space that happens in the a-reality, that is, the openness of the world, not outside the world, but the openness of the world itself in nothingness, and the openness of the passage, which forms the condition of possibility of the world. Nancy's understanding of the world is somehow connected to Heidegger's way, in that late Heidegger's, things as things is the giving of emptiness, and this giving occurs so that emptiness remains empty, and so that heaven and earth, human and gods can play with each other in it. Heidegger's understanding is influenced by Chinese Daoism, and this is the ontological difference between the Daodejing's "what is there is good and what is nothing is used", The use of nothing needs to be made possible through letting; it is only in letting (Gelassenheit) that margin place (Spiel-Raum) is possible, this location is associated with natural geography, and it is by returning to the protection of nature that a new world can take place.

Xia Kejun is a philosopher, art critic, and curator born in 1969. He pursued his studies at the University of Freiburg in Germany and the University of Strasbourg in France. Currently, he holds the position of Professor in the School of Liberal Arts at Renmin University of China in Beijing. With a prolific career, he has authored more than a dozen works, all centered around the key concept of "Useless." Notable titles include "A Waiting and Useless Nation – Zhuangzi and Heidegger's Second Turn," "Useless Theology - Benjamin, Heidegger, and

Derrida,” and “Useless Literature - Kafka and China.” In his work “Chinese Philosophy and Contemporary Aesthetics,” Xia engages in profound dialogues between Zhuangzi or Daoism and prominent Western thinkers such as Heidegger, Benjamin, Kafka, and Derrida. This endeavor aims to foster cross-cultural philosophical exchanges, elevating concepts like “Useless” (Wuyong), “Chora” (Xu), and “Remnant” (Yu) to the forefront of contemporary philosophy.

“Nothingness” Under the Possible Worlds Theory

Yang Xiaobo

Zhejiang Yuexiu University, People’s Republic of China

In my perspective, nothingness cannot truly exist, as any attempt to assert its existence inadvertently objectifies it, thereby transforming it into a form of existence. True nothingness remains unobjectified, serving as a foundational basis for the emergence of existence. I perceive this nothingness as an array of boundless latent possibilities. The Daoist assertion that “existence derives from nothingness” (有生於無) can be comprehended through this lens. Possibilities can be likened to what Wittgenstein describes as states of affairs, each representing a configuration of objects. However, this configuration is inherently contingent. Contingency, known as “wu chang” (無常) in Chinese, resides at the nexus of existence and nothingness. While traditional metaphysics has predominantly focused on necessity, I advocate for a shift towards contingency. To me, the enigma of the world lies not merely in its existence, as Wittgenstein proposed, but in the realization of this existence. From this viewpoint, I challenge David Lewis’ notion of the real existence of possible worlds. I find myself aligned with Saul Kripke’s perspective that possible worlds, envisioned as counterfactual situations, are anchored in the real world. The world we experience is both an independent entity and a construct perceived through our senses. Life’s meaning, I believe, is discovered in our interactions with the world’s continuously evolving tapestry. It is through these interactions that we encounter what Kripke identifies as contingent a priori and necessary a posteriori truth.

Yang Xiaobo is currently a professor at Zhejiang Yuexiu University in Shaoxing, China. He earned his PhD from the International College of Chinese Studies at East China Normal University in Shanghai, China, in 2013. Between September 2011 and September 2012, he pursued studies as a visiting PhD student in the Asian Department at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Additionally, from March 2022 to March 2023, he conducted research as a visiting scholar in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. His research interests encompass a wide range, including the

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