A Complementary Comparison: F.H. Bradley's 'The Absolute' and 'The Dao' in Laozi's Daodejing: A Holistic, Harmonious and Encapsulating Approach

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A Holistic, Harmonious and Encapsulating Approach

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Introduction

The Absolute and the *Dao*, although coming from different cultures, are both harmonious ways of viewing reality. This harmonious view leads to the aim of this thesis, this being twofold. Firstly, to provide a method, by means of example through the use of two philosophical traditions, as an approach to do intercultural metaphysics. Secondly, to argue that such a method ought to be done through a holistic, harmonious and encapsulating approach. This holistic, harmonious and encapsulating approach will be, moreover, emphasised through the analysis of the Absolute and the *Dao*, respectively. Both the Absolute and the *Dao*, in likewise manner, encompass such attributes. The method of complementary comparison entails that each tradition will be analysed through three pillars, focusing on the attributes of both the *Dao* and the Absolute. This is done so as to not argue for any approach to be the favoured outlook on metaphysics. Which is why it is not the aim to provide with a detailed description of how each tradition 'functions' in its entirety. A specific focus will be made on the aspect of how 'ultimate reality' ought to be approached, as seen through each tradition, in the Absolute and in the *Dao*. In the first chapter the Absolute will be analysed and in the second chapter, the *Dao*. The third chapter will provide the complementary comparison, however, firstly an introduction will be made to both traditions.

The work of F.H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, was written in 1893, during a period in which idealism was one of the dominant traditions within European academic philosophy. This clarifies Bradley's approach to idealism, writing with the intent for the Absolute to be a refreshing new take on the tradition. While simultaneously arguing against predecessors and contemporaries.[1] Bradley's explanation of the Absolute will be analysed, through three pillars, as it is of the essence to investigate which attributes are assigned to the Absolute. As such, it will become clear how the Absolute can be supplied to a complementary comparison with the *Dao*, resulting in an approach to intercultural metaphysics.

The Daodejing, or *Dao De Jing*, or also known as the *Tao Te Ching*, is a poetic and dense (in numerous ways)[2] work from Ancient China. The ascribed author, Laozi, is arguably fictional

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[1] This thesis is not a defense for Bradley's theory as a whole, which is why argument against Bradley, and counterarguments in return, will not be discussed here as that discourse lies outside the scope of this paper.

[2] i.e. philosophically, religiously, morally, politically etc.

and the text is perhaps a composition of several authors. This complicates its exact time and place of creation but it is believed to have been written in The Warring States Period[3] (403-221BCE). Yet it, arguably, started as an oral tradition before it was written and subsequently canonised into one text.[4] This means that the intent of the *Daodejing* (DDJ) could perhaps be seen as a way to see reality in a different light than through the eyes of aggression and war. Its central theme or goal can be argued for from various interpretations and points of view, which is why the collaboration between the reader and the DDJ is significant in any reading.[5] In this chapter, a metaphysical reading will be applied and the *Dao* will be analysed from this point of view, through three pillars.[6] These three pillars will, thereafter, be analysed in a complementary comparison alongside the three pillars of the Absolute.

What will be seen as the result, in the third chapter, is how both the Absolute and the *Dao* show attributes of being holistic, harmonious and encapsulating. Furthermore, by aligning each pillar with one another, it becomes clear that an approach to metaphysics ought to be done with these same attributes in mind. When this is done, no tradition is placed over and above the other and these traditions are not simply compared and contrasted. The aim is to provide the possibility to discourse in an intercultural setting. Both the Absolute and the *Dao*, can be argued as to truly encapsulate reality, and by complementing one another, providing an approach to intercultural metaphysics.

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[3] A period where Ancient China was split into different states that were at war with each other, vying for power and control.

[4] Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing: "Making This Life Significant": A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 14-16.

[5] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 20-21.

[6] This is not to claim that this is the way the *Dao* ought to be seen, it is merely how the *Dao* will be approached in this paper.

1. The Holistic Absolute in F.H. Bradley's Appearance and Reality

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The Absolute as a Metaphysical Approach

Francis Herbert Bradley wrote, what may be considered, his *magnum opus, Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (AR), first published in 1893. Although not the first to write on Absolute Idealism, Bradley's theory on the Absolute was widely influential and distinct from other theories and interpretations of the Absolute by contemporary scholars.[7] This chapter will not highlight such differences or other approaches to the Absolute, nor defend Bradley's arguments in favour of his Absolute above that of others. Rather, three aspects or pillars regarding Bradley's theory of the Absolute, as an approach to metaphysics, will be thoroughly analysed in order to detail the holistic and harmonious nature of the Absolute as ultimate reality. Instead of a full analysis of Bradley's theory, these three pillars will be presented as sufficient for the sake of a complementary comparison with three pillars of the *Dao* in the *Daodejing*. Further critiques on and issues of Bradley's Absolute Idealism will therefore not be included within the scope of this chapter, as it is not of the essence to hold this tradition as the one true theory. Bradley's Absolute belongs to the British Idealists of the 19th and 20th Century. Which is why it is a specific tradition from a specific culture, which nevertheless, has been, and remains, influential in contemporary analytic philosophy.[8]

1.1.2 The Attributes

The Absolute, as an encompassing, holistic and harmonious true reality, will be analysed as pertaining such attributes in the first pillar of this chapter. In introducing the Absolute, we see in AR that:

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[7] Although Bradley admits to having been influenced by Hegel, Bradley criticises fundamental aspects of Hegel's Absolute throughout AR. Other influential idealist theorists consist of Green, Bosanquet, Schopenhauer and Kant, yet Bradley's Absolute is distinct from their approaches.

[8] Predominantly seen as philosophical traditions coming from the English speaking part of Europe/North-America/Australia.

> "There is but one Reality, and its being consists in experience. In this one whole all appearances come together, and in coming together they in various degrees lose their distinctive natures."[9]

The loss of distinctive natures details how, ultimately, there are no separate entities in the Absolute. However, all reality comes together in a holistic and harmonious way. True reality is therefore not to be considered as something fundamentally distinct from our apparent experienced reality; the Absolute encompasses all in its totality.

The second pillar will consider how through a critique on relations, the critique detailing contradiction in all relations, our supposed assumptions on reality are but those of appearance and thus not ultimately real. The Absolute is not capable of entertaining any characteristic which is contradictory in nature. This is so, as the Absolute is considered whole and harmonious in its unifying of all reality. Appearances are also to be included in the Absolute's encompassing unity. How appearances can still inhere within the unity of the Absolute, while holding such characteristics of contradiction, will be discussed in the next pillar.

The third and last pillar of this chapter will introduce Bradley's theory of degrees of truth and reality. This pillar will not only show how appearances, with all its contradiction, can be encapsulated within the Absolute, it will also be made clear how false statements are never truly false. There are simply degrees in further deviation from the one ultimate truth of the Absolute. Furthermore, although much is to be said of the attributes of the Absolute, complete knowledge of the Absolute is not something that is attainable through the language of, any theory by or any thought of any person, respectively. There are, as it were, still some epistemological constraints on what we can actually thoroughly know or comprehend of the Absolute.

These three pillars are therefore to be considered fundamental points in discussing the Absolute as a metaphysical tradition. This analysis is a preliminary step of one distinct philosophical tradition, which is thereafter (in chapter three) to be, in complementary fashion, compared to a metaphysical reading of a tradition from a different culture entirely: that of Daoism, as seen through the *Daodejing* with a particular focus on the *Dao*. As such, these two

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[9] Francis H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 455.

metaphysical readings will be shown to present a holistic, harmonious and encapsulating approach to reality. In seeing their complementation of each other, it will be argued that metaphysics through an intercultural philosophical lens ought to be pursued with this holistic, harmonious and encapsulating manner in mind and, furthermore, in complementing further traditions from other cultures, not favouring one above the other.

1.2 The Holistic and Harmonious Attributes of the Absolute

1.2.1 Introduction

Although, indeed, there is necessarily a limitation to our knowledge of the Absolute, which will be analysed later on, this does not entail that there are no statements to be made on the attributes of the Absolute. In this section, three attributes, that can be concluded by means of reasoning, will be analysed in order to detail how we can come to conclude any such attribute. The first attribute is its unifying essence, or in other words, its holistic encapsulation or its inherent 'One-ness'. The second is the nature out of which the Absolute exists. The third is negatively that there cannot be any contradiction in the Absolute, which positively translates to it being harmonious.

1.2.2 The Absolute's Holistic Encapsulation and 'One-ness'

Out of the attributes of the Absolute, the one that is of the most fundamental essence is its holistic encapsulation or 'One-ness', as we can see when Bradley writes that:

> "...[all] reality in the end belongs to nothing but the single Real...in the Absolute no appearance can be lost. Each one contributes and is essential to the unity of the whole."[10]

All reality thus belongs to the single Real, the single Real being another description of the Absolute. This shows the encapsulation and the magnitude of the Absolute; each appearance is a contribution within the entirety and within the holistic nature of the Absolute. Moreover, this attribute is taken as fundamental due to this being a philosophical conclusion not only reserved for the Absolute Idealism of Bradley, but one that reoccurs in other philosophical traditions from diverse areas of the world.[11] Put another way, the Absolute must contain every

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[10] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 456.
[11] This thesis shall but focus on two of the many holistic encounters within philosophy. Further research aims to encompass more holistic encounters, for a more inclusive intercultural metaphysics.

single appearance, but not in the sense that each appearance is equal to another. We shall see later on that there is a degree of difference in truth. Nevertheless, not all appearance is equal and every appearance is fundamentally part of the Absolute. No single entity is perfect yet together, all is encapsulated in one total and unitary perfection as the Absolute.[12] It must be noted that the Absolute is indeed all its appearances but also something more; for the Absolute to only be its appearances would make the Absolute a trivial composition of parts. Indeed, the Absolute is not merely an arrangement of parts, for then there would be plurality in its essence, when it is essentially one and unitary.[13] This unitary and perfect encapsulation, as encompassing all that there is, can also be described as its 'One-ness', it being a single holistic reality, the Absolute. This does not detail too much information about what the Absolute actually 'is', in a sense of what entity it could be. It nevertheless gives the important description that there is 'nothing' which does not fall inside the scope of its holistic nature, it includes all.

1.2.3 The Essence of the Absolute

Another important aspect to detail is the nature out of which the Absolute exists. This attribute will permit some more concrete information on what the Absolute is made up of. Bradley explains the nature of existence of the Absolute to be experience; he argues for this through the thought experiment that one cannot find any piece of existence without it being encountered through experience.[14] In other words, any conceivable piece of existence can only be conceived through experience, this being related to any of the senses, for, if one were to not speak about, think of, smell, touch, see, taste or hear any existent, one cannot fathomably conceive of said existent. Despite that there are, arguably, more senses, at least discussed in contemporary psychology, any sense is only conceivable as one conceived through experience. Initially, Bradley does not immediately take this to mean that sentient experience is all that can be real; sentient experience is, at first, described as the only thing of which we can be sure it to be real.[15] However, later on we will see that, due to the critique on relations, Bradley will admit to detail sentient experience as that, exclusively, out of which

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[12] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 487.
[13] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 489.
[14] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 145.
[15] William J. Mander, *An Introduction to Bradley's Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 132-133.

reality can consist of. As Bradley sums: "Sentient experience, in short, is reality, and what is not this is not real."[16] Yet, although the Absolute consists of sentient experience, it is something that transcends the common sense experience and reflection upon this through thought. Which will be explained in the following subsection in Bradley's critique of relations.[17] Thus far, the Absolute is attributed with being holistic or all encapsulating and being made up of sentient existence. In other words, all reality is to be considered as one whole without distinct diversity. However, this does not mean that, in our experienced reality, it has no utility to consider such distinctions (but more on this later). All reality is, ultimately, consisted out of sentient experience.

1.2.4 Impossibility of Contradiction Leading to Harmony

Apart from the first two attributes of the Absolute that have been reasoned, consisting out of sentient experience and it being holistic and all encompassing, the Absolute cannot be something that is contradictory or that is not self-consistent. It would be highly counterintuitive to claim that what is ultimately real contradicts itself or is not in harmony, for, how could existence contradict its own fundamental aspect?[18] Therefore, in a positive manner, another attribute of the Absolute that we can reason is that it must be harmonious. Bradley indeed emphasises the harmonious and unifying aspect of the Absolute when he states that:

> "The bewildering mass of phenomenal diversity must hence somehow be at unity and self-consistent ; for it cannot be elsewhere than in reality, and reality excludes discord. Or again we may put it so : the real is individual. It is one in the sense that its positive character embraces all differences in an inclusive harmony."[19]

This unity and holistic essence is, in actuality, fundamentally concluded out of the critique on relations, for plurality would entail relation and we shall shortly see how relations do not hold. In this manner, Bradley argues that there can be no such thing as a particular entity distinct from another. As we shall see in the following section, it is contradictory for any distinct entity to not hold any relation to another distinct entity. Which is why the Absolute

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[16] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 144.
[17] Mander, *An Introduction*, 135.
[18] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 140.
[19] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 140.

must be a single whole and thus holistic, harmonious and all-encompassing.[20] Since distinct and plural entities would hold contradiction and, as we have seen, the Absolute cannot be contradictive; in conclusion, this recaptures the 'One-ness' of the Absolute. The three attributes are thereby accounted for: the Absolute being made up of sentient experience and its holistic and encapsulating 'One-ness'. The Absolute, furthermore, is harmonious and non-contradictive.

1.3 The Critique on Relations

1.3.1 Introduction

The critique on relations starts with the assumption, according to Bradley, that what is real cannot be contradictory. Something that exists, but contradicts its own existence, is a nonsensical notion. In this manner, Bradley investigates relations and comes to his critique by searching for the actual definition of a relation. For, a relation is not equal to some object or thing so it must be some sort of attribute or quality.[21] Moreover, relations cannot be seen separate from qualities, for, how could one see a quality distinct from the object of which it is a quality? There must, therefore, be a relation between the quality and the object, and the same goes for relations, for a relation is a quality of an object. Thus, relations are to be seen as contradictory for one cannot define relations without using qualities, and one cannot define qualities without using relations, which leads to an infinite regress and hence the contradictory notions in its definition.[22]

1.3.2 In Search of a Definition for Relations

The conclusion of contradictory relations results then, from when one tries to define what a relation, as a concept, actually consists out of. Bradley tells us that there are two ways of defining a relation. On the one hand, you could see it as something inhering within a certain existent (or object); on the other hand, you could see it as something external to said certain existent. If the relation were to be seen as something external to what it is relating, as such, something that is independently real, then, there would need to be a relation between the

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[20] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 143.
[21] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 20.
[22] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 25-26.

relation and to what it is relating to, and this would go on *ad infinitum*.[23] As such, a relation, as a quality, is not some separate existing thing, so then it must inhere as a quality within the existent.

This leads us to relations within existents and, again, there are two ways of continuing the search for definition. Either the relation is equal to the existent in which it inheres, or it is something different. If it is equal, then we have lost the actual relation, for it would then simply be some existent and not the relation (as seen before). Yet, if the relation is something different to the existent, then we must have another relation, to relate the relation to the existent and this would, in repeated fashion, go on *ad infinitum*.[24] Bradley describes the latter phenomenon as some sort of duality in the definition of the relation:

> "Hence the qualities must be, and must *also* be related. But there is hence a diversity which falls inside each quality. It has a double character, as both supporting and as being made by the relation. It may be taken as at once condition and result, and the question is as to how it can combine this variety. For it must combine the diversity, and yet it fails to do so."[25]

This means that the relation would continue in its function as to be a relation, yet simultaneously also function as some particular existent individually. This entails that it would also need some other quality to show its distinction from the existent itself, and this, again, would need another relation to relate this other quality to the relation itself and so forth, leading to infinite regress.[26]As such, it is impossible to find a definition for what a relation is without it leading to infinite regress and thus not being contradictive. In this manner, Bradley has exhausted all options for finding a definition for relations. Since every kind of definition leads to a contradiction, the final conclusion must result in relations being impossible."[27]

1.3.3 Impossibility of Plurality

From this deconstruction of relations, it follows that there cannot be a distinction, or plurality, of separate existents; as evidently concluded toward, qualities cannot be taken separate from relations. As Bradley details that:

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[23] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 21.
[24] William J. Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 106.
[25] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 31.
[26] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 31.
[27] Mander, *British Idealism*, 106.

> "You can never, we may argue, find qualities without relations. Whenever you take them so, they are made so, and continue so, by an operation which itself implies relation. Their plurality gets for us all its meaning through relations ; and to suppose it otherwise in reality is wholly indefensible"[28]

Plurality receives its meaning through relations in such a way that, what distinguishes one individual existent from the other, is its separate qualities. If relations cannot be ultimately real (due to no sustainable definition) then qualities can also not be ultimately real. This would mean that what separates individual existents from one another, the qualities seen as relations, cannot be real. It must follow, according to Bradley, that distinction of individual existents are also not real. Another way of describing this is that what may be considered as obvious, is that relations do not make sense if there are no separate and distinct existents for relations to relate to. However, Bradley sees the opposite as obvious in likewise manner; distinct existents cannot be distinct individually from one another if there are no relations that separate the one from the other. Therefore, distinction presupposes relations and relations presuppose distinction.[29]

In this manner, by concluding relations as contradictory and hence not ultimately real, qualities in itself must also not be ultimately real. As such, plurality cannot be ultimately real as distinct and differing qualities are necessary for plurality to hold. Therefore, what is ultimately real, the Absolute, cannot be a plural reality but must be consisting of but one reality without distinctions. Argued for through a deconstruction of the definition of what a relation could be, any conclusion leads to infinite regress and hence to be considered contradictory. The answer itself necessitates the question explained; a definition of the relation needs to be related back to the relation, and hence not only leads to infinite regress but also begs the question. Relations have been thoroughly, and in reasonable manner, proven to be contradictive and cannot be seen as inhering any attribute of the Absolute.

1.3.4 Further Linguistic Consequences

All appearances encapsulated within the Absolute are thereby done so without relations. Although this seems counterintuitive, this actually tells us more about our way of thought. Thus we see that, through the critique on relations, the whole system of separation and union

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[28] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 26.
[29] Mander, *British Idealism*, 105.

is also critiqued, which is the whole relational scheme that characterises our way of thought and perception of reality.[30] This is why Bradley describes all perceived reality as mere appearance and not ultimate reality. Ultimate reality, the Absolute, must therefore be a holistic unity without relational qualities. Our perceived reality, as appearances, is but a misplaced conception or perception of reality. Perceived reality is merely taken out of context from its holistic ultimate nature, yet, nevertheless regarded as if it were the real and independent reality.[31] If all phenomena are therefore rejected as real, what then is true or false? Is our perceived reality but a lie? If all is not real, how then is there a real Absolute? To answer these questions, Bradley introduces us to his theory of the degrees of truth and reality.

1.4 The Degrees of Truth and Reality

1.4.1 Introduction

Prior to going into depth to what this theory holds, it must be stated that the Absolute, in its holistic and all-encompassing aspect, is to be considered the ultimate perfection. As such, naturally, free of any degrees; as there cannot be any more or any less than perfection.[32] Moreover, it is indeed necessary that the Absolute is considered perfect in this sense, for if the Absolute were any less than perfect, then it could be considered not to be harmonious. Seeing that it has already been shown that the Absolute cannot pertain any contradiction, if there would be different degrees of truth or reality in its essence, then it would be possible for there to exist contradictive degrees of truth in comparison to one another. Thus, as the Absolute is harmonious in the sense that there is no contradiction, there cannot be varying degrees of reality and truth. Furthermore, various degrees would mean a multitude in existence and, as we have analysed in a previous sub-section, the Absolute does not include plurality in its 'One-ness'. The Absolute is considered holistic and encapsulating as one unifying reality, which means that a plurality or multitude in varying degrees of reality and truth is not accommodated in the sense of particular distinctions.

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[30] William J. Mander, *The Unknowable: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) 280.

[31] Mander, *British Idealism*, 116.

[32] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 360.

1.4.2 Varying Degrees in the Realm of Appearance

Therefore, the nature of the degrees of truth and reality must be found in experienced reality, or as the realm of appearance, also to be described as what we perceive to be reality. In the words of Bradley himself, we find an accurate description to what the degrees stand for in:

> "There will be no truth which is entirely true, just as there will be no error which is totally false. With all alike, if taken strictly, it will be a question of amount, and will be a matter of more or less."[33]

All truth and error are always, in comparison to the Absolute, never fully true and neither fully false. As each statement reflects some relation to appearances, it cannot be fully true. This is due to the fact that all statements, insofar as a statement must be brought about through language[34] and since all language is always used in the realm of appearance, it follows that any statement, whether true or false, belongs to the realm of appearance. Some statements are but more true in relation to other statements, and other but more false, also in relation to others. Bradley explains that in order for something to be completely true, it would need to be inherently harmonious and free of contradiction. Through the critique on relations we see that this is not possible; to reach ultimate truth, the Absolute, each statement would need to be rearranged to free itself of contradiction. As Bradley states that:

> "The truth and the fact, which, to be converted into the Absolute, would require less re-arrangement and addition, is more real and truer. And this is what we mean by degrees of reality and truth."[35]

The degrees thus entail that, when a statement is produced, it can never be fully true in itself inherently. It is, first and foremost, always more or less true in relation to other statements. Naturally, there are relations involved, which necessitate inherent contradictions and are, therefore, not ultimately true (as this is reserved for the Absolute). Moreover, any statement is thereby in a degree, more or less true than another, relative to the perfectness of the Absolute. An implications that arises from this, is that we can never acquire pure and full knowledge, including pure knowledge of the Absolute. This would mean the Absolute to

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[33] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 362.
[34] This is also assumed for a statement not uttered but kept in thought, for in order to even think of a statement one can only do this by means of a sentence, in any of the many languages.
[35] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 364-365.

have ineffable qualities, which in one degree is true. However, why this does not entail a paradox and why we can detail at least some attributes to the Absolute is for, at least to some degree, that there is some truth involved. Merely not completely so, in the sense of it not to be the final word (in other words in limiting it to such a statement). This means that these attributes that have been discussed of the Absolute are simply more true, or true in a higher degree, than perhaps any other statement, yet still not entirely equal to the Absolute. Following similar reasoning, it must also be discussed why there cannot be outright falsehoods, or pure error, either.

1.4.3 Epistemological Constraints

What we have thus far seen within the degrees of truth and reality is that we can never really accurately describe the Absolute. We can merely suggest towards it, in such a profound manner that we cannot even entertain complete true thoughts about it. This also means that we do not construct proper falsehoods regarding the Absolute; in degrees, some statements are simply more true or false than others.[36] To put pure error into perspective as to why it cannot exist, is for if it did, this would mean that there is an existent of which its qualities must be distinct from the Absolute, and as we have seen, distinction cannot hold in the holistic nature of the Absolute. All appearances are, in some manner, also a part of the Absolute, in a unified and whole manner, a part of its content. As such, even errors are a part of the whole integration within the Absolute.[37] The answer to such questions as 'if all is false, how is the Absolute related to appeared reality' and 'is all perceived reality but a lie', we see in the degrees of truth and reality, that when appearances lose more and more of its perceived reality, the closer it comes to the Absolute, to absolute truth and perfection. In this way the Absolute is both identified with the appearances but also distinguished from them, it is all included in a holistic way.[38] To quote Bradley when he summarises this aspect:

> "Existence is not reality, and reality must exist. Each of these truths is essential to an understanding of the whole, and each of them, necessarily in the end, is implied in the other. Existence is, in other words, a form of the appearance of the Real."[39]

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[36] Mander, *An Introduction*, 154-155.
[37] Mander, *British Idealism*, 116.
[38] Mander, *An Introduction*, 152-153.
[39] Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, 400.

Again, the emphasis on the holistic nature of the Absolute is displayed, encompassing all appearances, those appearing more true and those appearing more false. True absolute perfection lies within the Absolute that is the whole. Once more, in regarding epistemological constraints, we cannot fully comprehend the Absolute through complete true statements. This also means that it is not the case that we cannot know anything whatsoever. We can know in a manner of degrees, simply not the whole encompassing and holistic essence of the Absolute in its entirety. Simultaneously, we also do not refer to the Absolute with pure falsehoods, one statement is simply, in comparison, more false than another. Seeing that all is encompassed within the Absolute in a unified and harmonious manner, in the sense of the Absolute in its 'One-ness', all appearance is furthermore also part of that which is encompassed. All statements are considered to be more true or more false in comparison to one another, and never fully true nor fully false compared to the full perfection of the Absolute. This also explains why we cannot fully grasp how the Absolute encompasses all in a united sense, instead of merely being in possession of a multitude of plural entities. The Absolute in its 'One-ness' encapsulates all, in a holistic and harmonious manner.

1.5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter it has become clear which attributes of the Absolute, argued for by Bradley, are possible to reason. Insofar as it is the highest degree of knowledge we can entertain while limited to the realm of appearance, or within perceived reality.

The first pillar analysed in what manner the Absolute is all-encompassing, or encapsulating in a unified way; which sees the attribute of the Absolute in its 'One-ness'. Furthermore, it became clear that the Absolute must consist out of sentient experience. The third attribute of the Absolute is that it must be harmonious due to there not being any contradiction involved in the nature of the Absolute.

The harmonious attribute of the Absolute if further detailed in the second pillar, as it is made evident why contradiction is a part of perceived reality (or experienced reality or the realm of appearance). Contradictions are a part of appearance and not the Absolute, and this is reasoned through an approach to discovering the actual definition of relations. This results in a critique on relations, as relations are fundamentally contradictive and do not offer any

final definition that can hold on its own. Thus we see that, as our way of regarding reality is fundamentally done so through relations, actual reality must be something other than how we perceive it. This is why the Absolute is something beyond our realm of appearance. Yet we must not see perceived reality as something separate from the Absolute, as we have seen that the Absolute encapsulates all in its holistic, harmonious way of 'One-ness' as sentient experience.

How this apparent difficulty of all reality as encapsulated in one, yet perceived reality as inherently contradictive and therefore not as actually 'real' but as appearance, is analysed in the third and last pillar. Here we see through a theory of a degrees of truth and reality that the Absolute is in fact perfect, in the sense that it is beyond the scope of any degrees and that it encompasses all. Perceived and experienced reality, as appearance, is thus always in a manner more true or more false, only in relation to other statements on truth and reality. Appearances are therefore never fully true yet also not fully false. This is how the Absolute is one, as we cannot fully understand or pertain true knowledge of the Absolute, but at the same time still know something of it.

In the end, this approach to metaphysics as what true and ultimate reality is, is done so in a holistic, harmonious, encapsulating way. This is seen through the Absolute in its 'One-ness' and as existing out of sentient experience. We can entertain some sort of knowledge, but cannot argue in knowing all in proper detail. This is how we have epistemological constraints without the limitation of paradoxical ineffability.

2. The Harmonious *Dao* in Laozi's *Daodejing*

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The *Dao* as a Metaphysical Approach

The *Daodejing* (DDJ), thus composed somewhere between 403-221 BCE, is an ancient text that provides a multitude of possible interpretations. As such, the relation between the reader or interpreter and the text is crucial to any understanding or analysis.[40] In this way, the reader gives their own interpretation dealing with the complex and dense material, which consequently gives rise to limitations yet also advantages, considerately. The DDJ, consisting of 81 chapters, encompasses its extensive scope of subject matter, and in this chapter, a metaphysical reading will be developed and applied. This metaphysical reading will revolve around analysing the DDJ's (arguably) central concept consisting of 'the *Dao*', at times translated as 'the Way' or also as 'Way-making', yet further translations also having been applied such as 'path'.[41] It will, further on, also be shown to be known as 'the One'; a harmonious and holistic encapsulation.

2.1.2 The Attributes

In further argument, in favour of this metaphysical reading, the following chapter will be divided into three sub-sections, or as it were, pillars. Through these pillars the specific reading of the *Dao*, as a metaphysical 'entity' will be detailed. These pillars will, subsequently (in chapter 3), also be used for the methodology of complementary comparison, where every pillar is analysed alongside the three pillars of the Absolute. Every pillar will take use of two chapters of the DDJ from which this philosophical and metaphysical reading will become apparent.

The first pillar will reveal the *Dao* as a harmonious concept, as 'the One'; its 'One-ness' is shown to be detrimental in its foundational and (limited) definition.[42] This 'One-ness' or attribute consisting of being 'One' will be made apparent. This will be done through an analysis and interpretation of some of the chapters of the DDJ, as seen through this specific,

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[40] Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds. *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 11.

[41] Joel J. Kupperman*, Classic Asian Philosophy: A Guide to the Essential Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 114.

[42] Limited, due to the *Dao* not entirely being able to be defined through language, in other words due to its ineffable qualities.

metaphysical, reading and interpretation. It will, thereby, be made clear that this interpretation perfectly aligns with the harmonious aspect of the *Dao*. The *Dao*, indeed, also seen as to be holistic. This harmoniousness, furthermore, results from the cyclical essence of generation, sustaining and returning to, of the *Dao*, which will also be discussed.

The second pillar will detail the attributes of the *Dao*, demonstrating what seem to be contradictory definitions, but actually detail its harmoniousness. By analysing this, it will become clear that contradictions are actually to be seen in a different light. These seemingly contradictory aspects, through the constant use of oppositional terms for the *Dao*, will be seen to be fundamentally essential to any concept of the *Dao*. It, moreover, is the case that these opposites are not contradictive. The use of opposites are there to show the nature of language to be inherently limited and thereby not sufficient enough to, in an ultimate way, define the *Dao* definitely. As such, this shows some ineffable qualities, which will be expounded on in the next pillar.

The third pillar will bring forth its epistemological constraints, specifically detailing further implications to 'actual' truth in relation to 'reality'. It will become clear that language is not the appropriate medium to describe the *Dao*, although language is our only means of possible definition. Hence its ineffable qualities, but this does not mean, however, that we cannot use language for any description of the *Dao* whatsoever. Since language is our only tool, it will be seen that language is merely our most adequate description possible, even if the *Dao* is beyond linguistical definition. These ineffable qualities of the *Dao* will, moreover, result in ineffable qualities of actual truth, at least as related to experienced reality, and that aspect will be detailed further on.

Therefore, these three pillars will all work up together in detailing the holistic, harmonious and encapsulating aspects or attributes of the *Dao*. In doing so, these three pillars will, in chapter three, be seen as to complement the three pillars detailed in chapter one, of the Absolute. This will show that although each philosophical school of thought arose from different cultural, traditional, geographical and historical setting, the holistic and harmonious nature of each, in both their 'One-ness' respectively, to be, indeed, world encompassing. This includes and moves beyond any constraints from different perspectives, towards an intercultural approach to metaphysics. This approach ought to be done through a holistic, harmonious and encapsulating manner.

2.2 The *Dao* – The Harmonious One

2.2.1 Introduction

In describing and translating the *Dao* as the 'One', this unifying harmoniousness encapsulated into 'One', is different from what contemporary 'European/North-American/Australian' scholars would identify as one reality behind or transcendent to appeared and experienced reality as one Being or Reality.[43] Instead, on the onset we should regard this as the 'One' that generates and sustains the reality as we know and experience it, which we shall discuss later on.[44] Furthermore, the harmoniousness, in a holistic sense, seen in the *Dao,* is that from the moment of cosmological creation, reality is ever expanding. However, at its greatest extent, reality finds itself returning towards this initial 'begin'-state of the *Dao*. As such, the *Dao* is continuously generating and returning to its primal source in a cyclical, spontaneous and creative way, and we shall see more on this in the forthcoming chapter.[45]

2.2.2 The 'One-ness' of the *Dao*

To see the *Dao* in its 'One-ness', we turn to the first half of chapter 14, where we read that:

> "Looking and yet not seeing it
> We thus call it 'elusive.'
> Listening and yet not hearing it
> We thus call it 'inaudible.'
> Groping and yet not getting it
> We thus call it 'intangible.'
> Because in sight, sound, and touch it is beyond determination
> We construe it as inseparably one.
> As for this 'one'—
> Its surface is not dazzling
> Nor is its underside dark.
> Ever so tangled, it defies discrimination"[46]

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[43] A.C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (La Salle, Ill: Open Court, 1989), 222.

[44] Laozi, and D. C. Lau, *Tao Te Ching* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 16.

[45] N.J. Girardot, *Myth and Meaning in Early Taoism: The Theme of Chaos (Hun-Tun)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 55-56.

[46] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 118.

When looking at the first six lines we get a glimpse of the contradictive terminology which, throughout the DDJ, is continuously used. This will be returned to later on in the next sub-section. Furthermore, these same lines are summarised in the conclusion that the *Dao* is beyond our experiential reality, in the sense that we cannot see, hear, or touch it.[47] After which, we see clear usage of the *Dao* as styled as the 'One', which is related to it being beyond experiential reality. Furthermore, we also read some of its ineffable qualities, as the *Dao* is separate from discrimination (in the sense of one object as distinct from the other), but more on this later.[48] In seeing the *Dao* as the 'One' and as something undifferentiated or separate from discrimination, it still is the source for the 'differentiated' or 'discriminate' reality of our experienced reality. This is, as we shall see, one of the ways in which the *Dao* is unifying, holistic and seen as 'One'.[49]

2.2.3 The Generation of and the Return to the *Dao*

The last four lines of this same chapter in the DDJ give us some clarity on the generating and returning aspect of the *Dao*:

> Hold tightly onto way-making in the present
> To manage what is happening right now
> And to understand where it began in the distant past.
> This is what is called the drawstring of way-making.[50]

These first two lines show us that the *Dao* as 'way-making' is ever generating in the present, whereas the last two lines show us where experienced reality originates.[51] The *Dao* is the beginning, and at the same time also the generating and enduring condition of the present;

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[47] We see this more clearly detailed in D.C. Lau's translation of, as he titled it, the Tao Te Ching in:
"What cannot be seen is called evanescent;
What cannot be heard is called rarefied;
What cannot be touched is called minute.
These three cannot be fathomed." (Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 70)
[48] Again, in D.C. Lau, the relation between the foregoing three unfathomable qualities of the *Dao* and its 'One-ness' becomes more clear through:
"And so they are confused and looked upon as one," (Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 70)
[49] Csikszentmihalyi and Ivanhoe, *Aspects of the Laozi*, 163.
[50] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 119.
[51] In Lau for further clarity:
"Hold fast to the way of antiquity
In order to keep in control the realm of today.
The ability to know the beginning of antiquity
Is called the thread running through the way." (Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 70)

moreover, these lines also indicate that it is possible to identify and return to this state of origin, signifying the unifying and cyclical 'One-ness' of the *Dao*.[52] This provides the motivation to see the *Dao* in its 'One-ness' as generating, returning and sustaining experienced reality, while it all still remains harmoniously encapsulated by the *Dao*.

2.2.4 Further Implications of the 'One-ness'

Moreover, we see further, and repeated usage of the *Dao* as 'One', in the first six lines of chapter 39 of the DDJ, which also details the importance of this 'One-ness':

> "Of old there were certain things that realized oneness:
> The heavens in realizing oneness became clear;
> The earth in realizing oneness became stable;
> The numinous in realizing oneness became animated;
> The river valleys in realizing oneness became full;
> The lords and kings in realizing oneness brought proper order to the world."[53]

Thus we see that in realisation of 'One-ness', all reality can reach its furthest extent or potential. This is made clear when every fundamental aspect of experienced reality, in their realisation of 'oneness' could reach their full potential. This 'oneness' is, naturally, the sustention of the *Dao*. This is how we see the *Dao* in its sustaining aspect, that without it, no full potential or realisation can take place. It is also detrimental in the aspect for, after the furthest extent is reached, all returns to the *Dao*. Indeed, we must not forget that, as we shall see in the following lines from the same chapter, that the return to the *Dao* and understanding that 'the beginning' is what we shall return to, is what underlines one of the attributes, being that of the 'One-ness' of the *Dao*:

> "Thus for something to be noble it must take the humble as its root;
> For something to be high it must take the low as its foundation…
> The highest renown is to be without renown.
> They do not want to be precious like jade,
> But common like stone."[54]

This is a good introduction to, what will be analysed in the next pillar, as to be the use of opposites in the DDJ, more specifically in the use of definition through opposites. This is done to give a description of the *Dao*. The beginning is, therefore, the 'humble', the 'low' and

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[52] Girardot, *Myth and Meaning*, 49.
[53] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 176.
[54] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 177.

'without renown', this realisation is thus necessary in order to reach the fullest potential. To be 'common like stone' instead of 'precious like jade', can, arguably, show the return that is awaiting everything that is, in the cyclical and harmonious 'One-ness' of the *Dao*. It will become clear that the usage of the 'noble' in relation to the 'humble', the 'high' to the 'low', and the 'highest renown' with 'without renown' are but a few great examples of the harmony of the *Dao*, these being the usage of opposites as seen throughout the DDJ. Again, the apparent influence of contradictions is highlighted throughout this passage, likewise as through the entire DDJ, yet it is in the following that we shall analyse this. From which its harmoniousness will be made clear.

2.3 The Opposite in the *Dao*

2.3.1 Introduction

In the chapters of the DDJ to come, we shall see the importance of apparent contradictions, in actuality, the necessity of opposites. Not only are these fundamental in the understanding of the *Dao*, it is also in a different light that we need to regard these contradictions. This is due to the nature of opposites seemingly being contradictive to one another. However, the *Dao* shows us that these are merely two sides of the same coin; opposites seem contradictive, yet it will become clear that one term necessarily entails the other extreme, and as such, opposites actually entail each other instead of contradicting one another. What will, therefore, become clear is that language has to be seen in a broader way than its apparent limitations would make it seem. Seemingly contradicting opposite extremes are, in actuality, in harmony with one another, within the term itself, but more on this later.

2.3.2 The Broad Inclusion of Opposite Terms

One example of this becoming apparent, is already seen when regarding the nature of reality, as it returns to the *Dao* in its state of beginning. As time lapses, all that reaches its extent or fullness eventually 'weakens' itself to return to its supposed 'opposite', an example is that all that lives eventually dies (the opposites are: full of life and eventually the unyielding event of death).[55] What was once full of strength and life eventually is reduced to growing old or 'weak' and eventually death occurs, fulfilling the cyclical return to the *Dao*. As this is,

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[55] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 43.

indeed, a cyclical occurrence, it is thus, in continuous repetition, that life then is generated from the *Dao*. As such, this furthermore emphasises the holistic, harmonious and encapsulating attributes of the *Dao*.

As we see early on in chapter 2 of the DDJ, opposites as 'experienced' contradictive terms are, in reality, necessarily included in one another, in:

> "As soon as everyone in the world knows that the beautiful are beautiful,
> There is already ugliness.
> As soon as everyone knows the able,
> There is ineptness.
> Determinacy *(you)* and indeterminacy *(wu)* give rise to each other,
> Difficult and easy complement each other,
> Long and short set each other off,
> High and low complete each other,
> Refined notes and raw sounds harmonize with each other,
> And before and after lend sequence to each other—
> This is really how it all works."[56]

The first four lines adequately show how opposites are not contradictive in nature but entail each other; for when the 'beautiful' is regarded, what is thus not beautiful incorporates 'ugliness'.[57] Likewise with the 'able' and the 'inept', so these terms are not mutually exclusive but actually are already implied in the usage of the concept itself. Thereby, once more, disclosing the holistic cyclical 'One-ness' of reality and in its incorporation in the *Dao*. The cyclical generation and returning is also displayed through the apparent opposites of 'determinacy' and 'indeterminacy'.[58] These giving rise to each other, also reiterate the cyclical aspects of the *Dao* in its generation and returning. Thus, it shows the necessity of opposites, instead of these being contradictive of each other. The usage of opposites throughout the other lines indeed indicate the actual harmony expressed, but nevertheless unavoidable, through both 'extremes'. This also details the implications of endless cyclical encapsulation, which goes to show that definitions of terms are far more broad and encompassing than traditionally assumed for language, but more on this later. The explicit use of the word

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[56] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 93.
[57] In Lau this is less clear:
"The whole world recognizes the beautiful as the beautiful, yet this is only the ugly; the whole world recognizes the good as the good, yet this is only the bad." (Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 58)
[58] This point is made explicitly clear in Lau:
"Thus Something and Nothing produce each other" (Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 58)

'harmonize', moreover, indicates the necessary use of opposites, in this case through the 'refined notes' and 'raw sounds', once more detailing the importance of harmony as one of the attributes of the *Dao*. In the second last line, we also see the 'before' and 'after' lending 'sequence to each other', once more, indicating the cyclical nature of the *Dao*. This, furthermore, expresses the harmonious and holistic attributes of the *Dao* in its 'One-ness'. The last line merely emphasising, repeatedly how this is how one ought to regard the *Dao*.

2.3.3 The Necessity of Opposites

In chapter 40 of the DDJ we see, furthermore, not only the usage of, but the explicit necessity of opposites. Simultaneously we see also the importance of the cyclical harmony in the *Dao*:

> "'Returning' is how way-making (*dao*) moves,
> And 'weakening' is how it functions.
> The events of the world arise from the
> determinate (*you*),
> And the determinate arises from the
> indeterminate (*wu*)."[59]

The distinct usage of 'returning' and 'weakening' as attributes of the *Dao* signifies, again, how the return to unity or 'One-ness' is fundamental. It is, in a sense, ensuring the nondifferentiation of all things, and as such, in a sense, 'equal', in detailing the eventual harmony that is encapsulated by the *Dao*.[60] The 'movement' as 'returning' as it is described for how the *Dao* 'moves' is indeed the cyclic activity that occurs in experienced reality[61]. How what is 'weak' develops into something 'strong' (full of life) and eventually returns to what is 'weak' as seen through the function of the 'weakening'. However, from the *Dao,* life redevelops into the 'strong' as a continual and endless cycle, one in harmony.[62] The purposefully usage of words like 'weak' and 'weakening' as defining descriptions for the *Dao* are, by means of example, what is meant by the use of opposites as describing the *Dao*. For how can that which is the beginning, and that which generates all experienced reality, that which sustains experienced reality, and that to which all experienced reality returns to, be

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[59] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 179.
[60] Csikszentmihalyi and Ivanhoe, *Aspects of the Laozi*, 109.
[61] Yet in Lau the continuous cyclical motion is not as evident:
"The myriad creatures in the world are born from
Something, and Something from Nothing." (Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 101)
[62] Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 25.

considered 'weak'? It seems counterintuitive, but this can be seen as extremely suitable for introducing the realisation that language does not entail, appropriately, all that there is to be said of the *Dao*. Seeing, as was detailed earlier, opposites are necessarily inherent into each term. In describing the *Dao* with terms such as 'weak' or 'weakening', it simultaneously also shows the *Dao* to be 'strong' or 'strengthening'. This, moreover, details epistemological constraints on language, but we will see this further in the next pillar.

After these insightful, and extremely dense first two lines, we see more specifically how the 'events of the world' or experienced reality is generated by the 'determinate' and that again by the 'indeterminate' which is, ultimately, all generated by the *Dao* (as seen earlier). Here it is significant, though, that the seemingly 'opposites' 'determinate' and 'indeterminate' are necessary also for experienced reality. Once more indicating the cyclical essence of the *Dao*. Indeed, through means of opposite terminology, such as 'determinate' and 'indeterminate', in actuality, entail the harmonious 'One-ness' of the *Dao*. That which is determined or not, will lead us to the following pillar, which will show us the epistemological constraints on language. As such, conceptions of truth as what can ever be determinate or indeterminate will hence also be shown as ineffable in actuality, but more on this in the following.

2.4 Epistemological Constraints and Truth

2.4.1 Introduction

In the previous pillar we saw an introduction to language, that when it is used to give a definition, it is not necessarily a static and limited definition. Rather, it must be a more fluid and broad conception. Thus, language or definition or 'names' so to speak do not mean to signify the actual 'essence' of an actual 'entity' or 'subject' in the experienced reality. It should, preferably, be seen as an adequate description. Hence the possibility of, and the recurring usage of opposite terms as a description, as each entails the other and neither offers a definite definition, but merely an adequate description.[63] Which is also why we continuously see the use of opposites throughout the DDJ.

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[63] Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 222.

2.4.2 The Limited Scope of Language

The implication of this, is that the essence of the *Dao* itself is also beyond the scope of language, at least beyond definite definition. This further results to that the *Dao* is unknowable (as in, the essence is not ultimately knowable). Accordingly, what generates experienced reality and sustains it, is ultimately not something we can fully know or understand, which would result in truth also being ineffable.[64] This, furthermore, also explains how the *Dao* is to be seen as indiscriminate. As we saw earlier, that the *Dao* is not to be compared to experienced reality, as the *Dao* cannot be experienced through the senses. Truth, thereby, being ineffable is the result for when that which generates and sustains experienced reality is ultimately ineffable and beyond description through language, then that which we would claim to be true,[65] cannot entertain anything beyond the same ultimate ineffable qualities. Yet it is also not the claim that we cannot know anything at all, as we will see in the following.

2.4.3 Limitations of Knowledge

This is indeed what we can postulate when we see that epistemological constraints are immediately put forth in the DDJ, in chapter 1:

> "Way-making (*dao*) that can be put into words is not really way-making,
> And naming *(ming)* that can assign fixed reference to things is not really naming.
> The nameless *(wuming)* is the fetal beginnings of everything that is happening,
> While that which is named is their mother.
> Thus, to be really objectless in one's desires is how one observes the mysteries of all things,
> While really having desires is how one observes their boundaries.
> These two—the nameless and what is named— emerge from the same source yet are referred to differently.
> Together they are called obscure.
> The obscurest of the obscure,
> They are the swinging gateway of the manifold mysteries."[66]

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[64] Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 20.
[65] Any statement, belief, thought or concept etc. that is supposed to hold any 'true' relation towards experienced reality.
[66] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 90.

Here we see, in the first four lines, an excellently provided use of more examples of opposites in order to detail, not only the ineffable quality of the *Dao*, but also how the *Dao* is indeed holistic, harmonious and encapsulating. For when the *Dao* is put into words, as such, being called the *Dao*, it in actuality is not really the *Dao*. This seems contradictive but it describes how language is not sufficient enough a tool to ultimately detail the essence of the *Dao*. Furthermore, the 'naming', in other words, the assigning of language to experienced reality, as it says is not really 'naming'. This is due to the nature of any term inherently and simultaneously also describing its opposite. Therefore, assigning one term to the *Dao*, is not really efficiently assigning one term, which is also why the use of opposites is continuously applied when language is used for descriptive purposes of the *Dao*. The use of 'fetal' and 'mother' once more detailing the cyclical essence of generation and returning, the 'nameless' and the 'named' indeed providing with cryptical references, which, with further emphasis detail the ineffable qualities of the *Dao.*

This first chapter, furthermore, immediately details several aspects that have been discussed earlier. Such as, that the *Dao* intrinsically inhibits ineffable qualities (real 'way-making' not being defined by words), and also as experienced reality to be generated from and sustained by the *Dao* (the 'nameless' and the 'named' emerging from the same 'source'), yet still perceived as 'obscure' ('the obscurest of the obscure').[67] Thus, the *Dao,* as 'obscure', shows how it is beyond our actual knowledge, describing its ineffable qualities. However, as discussed earlier, the application of a 'name' and thereby generating at least some sort of knowledge is still relevant in the sense that it is as close to an 'adequate description' as language, in its limitations, can offer.[68] In ascribing the name of 'the *Dao*' to the *Dao*, regardless of its ultimate inadequacy, it must be taken into account that it is not some existing

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[67] In Lau this is put in clear words in his translation of chapter 1:
"The way that can be spoken of
Is not the constant way;
The name that can be named
Is not the constant name.
The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth;
The named was the mother of the myriad creatures." (Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 57)
[68] Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, 16.

reality or essential definition 'behind' experienced reality. Rather, there is the endless circular (generating and returning) motion of experience that is encapsulated in the *Dao.*[69]

This would further mean that knowledge, insofar as our limited notions of language give us knowledge, is of the sort of unprincipled knowledge. The kind of knowledge that does not provide with discrimination between one and the other, as is seen in the 'objectless in one's desire' to be the 'observing' of 'the mysteries of all things'.[70] Seeing that to be 'objectless' would, thus, not be to ascribe language to the *Dao*, even if it seems necessary in order to discuss the *Dao*. As such, one can only ultimately fathom the *Dao* as above and beyond language, although, still, the *Dao* is holistic, harmonious and encapsulating. Not as an entity separate from experienced reality, but truly as 'One'. The 'manifold mysteries' thus detailing the ineffable qualities of the *Dao*.

2.4.4 Further Constraints on Language

That there are strong epistemological constraints on language, also become clear in reading the first three and the last five lines of chapter 32:

> "Way-making (*dao*) is really nameless (*wuming*).
> Although in this unworked state it is of little consequence,
> No one in the world would dare to condescend to it…
> …But once names have been assigned,
> We must also know when to stop.
> Knowing when to stop is how to avoid danger.
> As an analogy to describe way-making in the world:
> The small creeks flow into the rivers and seas."[71]

Again, it is clearly put forward that the *Dao* is to be seen as 'nameless'. In other words, its ineffable qualities are distinguished which, as discussed before, seem paradoxical in the sense of 'nameless' still being a 'name' through language. Yet calling the *Dao* 'nameless' amongst others, as we have seen (e.g. 'obscure', '*Dao*', 'way-making') indicates the constantly fluid nature and cyclical motion of the *Dao*, which is why it is suitable to constantly give different 'names' and descriptions. Even if none of these alone would ever be sufficient in its description, so some ineffable quality remains.[72] This is also indicated through that once

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[69] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 28.
[70] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 56.
[71] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 161.
[72] Csikszentmihalyi and Ivanhoe, *Aspects of the Laozi*, 104-105.

'names' are given ('have been assigned'), 'we must also know when to stop', for the 'danger' would be in undermining the effectiveness of 'names' or 'language' as 'adequate descriptions' as discussed earlier. Granting a certain 'name' would result in some sort of knowledge, yet this knowledge would be purely assigning familiarity; not in the way that 'naming' would imply knowledge in the sense of control or power and applying ultimate distinction in experienced reality.[73] The last analogy of the *Dao* as 'the small creeks flow into the rivers and the sea' is elegantly indicating the generative and sustaining qualities of the *Dao* without applying a fixed distinctive 'name'. Moreover, the use of water seems most applicable when regarding the cyclical nature of water; ever returning and ever developing.

2.5 Conclusion

In concluding remarks, it must, firstly, be noted that the interpretation given of the DDJ in this chapter is by no means meant to signify the final definition of Daoism nor meant to indicate any 'proper', 'ultimate' or 'final' reading of the DDJ. This chapter aims at providing a metaphysical reading of certain chapters in the DDJ, in doing so analysing the *Dao* as seen through said chapters.[74]

This analysis has produced an interpretation of the *Dao* through three pillars of explication. The first pillar saw the harmonious unity of the *Dao*, its 'One-ness'; not in the sense of one reality or entity over and above or transcending experienced reality, but in the *Dao* as the 'beginning' from which experienced reality is generated from and sustained by in the present. Yet it also details the cyclical nature of all 'returning' to the *Dao*. In this impression, all is encapsulated by the *Dao*.

The second pillar detailed the recurring usage of seemingly contradictive occurrences of opposite terms. Nevertheless, it became clear that each term actually entails its opposite within its own definition; in the application of one term, the lack of it or the opposite of it is already implied. Thereby showing that opposite terminology in definition does not show contradiction, instead, it shows how the *Dao* unifies all and in its 'One-ness' encapsulates all terminology, in that ultimately, there is no static definition but fluid motion.

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[73] Ames and Hall, *Daodejing*, 60-61.
[74] Chapters (by order of appearance): 14, 39, 2, 40, 1, and 32.

The third pillar introduced the epistemological constraints in the *Dao*, namely how an ultimate truth is not actual. The *Dao,* ultimately, is ineffable, yet this does not signify that there is not to be had any knowledge whatsoever. The usage of language through the 'names' and 'naming' of the *Dao* and of experienced reality is a kind of knowledge. This knowledge is to be seen as 'adequately descriptive' in a 'familiar' way, but in no means in a definite, static or controlling manner. These qualities interconnect with the other two pillars and together indicate the encapsulate, harmonious, ineffable, unifying *Dao* in its 'One-ness'.

3. A Complementary Comparison: Towards a Holistic and Harmonious Metaphysics

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 A Complementary Comparative Approach

The fruitful investigation and analysis of the previous two chapters have led to the culmination of the aim of this thesis, to be discussed in the current chapter. The aim is to, by lead of example, detail an approach to an intercultural approach to metaphysics. This approach is a comparative approach between two philosophical traditions through a complementary lens. It will be put forward that an intercultural approach to metaphysics ought to be done with a holistic, harmonious and encapsulating frame to reality. This frame is of the essence, so that no tradition from a particular culture or hegemony takes precedence. Neither one of both traditions discussed at length in this thesis will be placed over and beyond the other. The possibility of creating a space for such discourse in the search of an intercultural metaphysics is, furthermore, one of the goals. Due to the scope of this thesis, the traditions implemented within this comparative analysis have been limited to but two of the many available traditions.[75] Emphasis must be placed, again, on that neither one tradition in this thesis is favoured over the other, as it is of the essence to be inclusive.[76]

Intercultural philosophy must take as fact that 'Western' hegemonical thought cannot be the centre of philosophy, and the concurrent fact must be seen as a centre coming from a diverse perspective.[77] Moreover, neither must the centre or point of view be from a different cultural perspective; it must stand that there is room for invitation from different perspectives. The claim is, thus, for metaphysics to be all-inclusive, in the sense that it is holistic, harmonious and encapsulating.[78] Therefore, although this thesis argues for a philosophical method of complementary comparison, it is also not the aim to claim the sole and ultimate answer to

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[75] For future studies the addition of other philosophical traditions (no matter from which culture) are imperative.

[76] Franz Wimmer, "Intercultural Philosophy: Problems and Perspectives," *Atti/Proceedings CIRPIT-Univ. Siena – Roccella Jonica,* (2012) 117.

[77] Angela Roothaan, "Intercultural, Transcultural, Cross-cultural – Why We Need All Three Of Them," *Polylog. Zeitschrift für interkulturelles Philosophieren* 40, (2018) 70.

[78] Ram A. Mall, "Intercultural Philosophy: A Conceptual Confliction," *Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies* 1, (2014) 70.

any metaphysical approach, as inclusivity is paramount.[79] As will be seen throughout this chapter, we cannot posit possessing ultimate and final knowledge. The only knowledge that is possible is knowledge with certain constraints.

3.1.2 The Method

The method for intercultural philosophy as seen through a complementary comparison is done through the analysis of three pillars. Three pillars of, in this case, two traditions with different contextual backgrounds that are each analysed. This was done in the previous two chapters. The culmination of which, leads to the complementary comparison at hand. Each pillar will thus be placed alongside another with the aim to find how each pillar from both traditions, together, complement one another. Thereby shaping a metaphysical view to reality that can be acceptable in an intercultural setting. As such not one tradition is favoured over the other, but it is the aim to bring them together and complement one another. In this way, analysis is done, from the onset, with the aim in mind to bring one another together. As such, rigorous study of each aspect is fundamental. It is the reason, why, for future studies, similar must be done with other traditions. This would result in creating a more inclusive holistic, harmonious and encapsulating intercultural approach to metaphysics.[80]

The first pillar thus assembles certain attributes seen in both the Absolute and the *Dao*, respectively, and both will be seen to complement the other. Here we find that, not only is common ground found, but no matter what 'name' is given of reality, reality as such ought to be considered as holistic, harmonious and encapsulating. Whether or not the actual essence of this reality is sentient experience or something that is ineffable; later on, such epistemological constraints will be discussed.

The second pillar sees how such a harmonious view, although arrived at in different means, again, complement each other. A critique of relations and the inclusion of the opposite within

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[79] Seeing as that this thesis is written by a European/Australian student following an intercultural study, it cannot be excluded that certain conclusions or points of view could quite possibly be influenced by such context. Regardless of the amount of study into intercultural philosophy and philosophy from different parts of the world. Therefore, no hard claim on the ultimate answer is intended; merely an argument in favour of such an approach.

[80] Other traditions might offer a valuable take through 'interconnectedness', detailing once more, the holistic and harmonious attributes of encapsulated reality (no matter if appeared or postulated). E.g. Yoruba or Ubuntu traditions, nevertheless, for now, this is outside the scope of this thesis.

a term are not incommensurable or totally divergent from each other. In fact, it will be seen that they complement one another.

The third pillar concludes that both traditions complement each other on the subject of epistemological constraints. The degrees of truth and reality entail that one cannot assume ultimate knowledge on the Absolute, but that neither does one have false or no knowledge whatsoever of the Absolute. The ineffability of the *Dao* does not entail the *Dao* to be completely beyond our capabilities of knowledge. It merely shows that ultimate understanding is not fathomable due to the epistemological constraints of language.

Through these three pillars it becomes clear that an intercultural philosophical approach to metaphysics, in a complementary comparative manner, at least as seen through these two traditions, ought to be holistic, harmonious and encapsulating.

3.2 Holistic, Harmonious and Encapsulating Attributes

3.2.1 Introduction

This first pillar will aim at investigating in which manner some of the attributes of the *Dao* and the Absolute can be regarded in a complementary comparative manner. This is done in order to display some of the fundamental aspects of each. In doing so, we will see how these attributes can lay the foundation of in what manner an intercultural approach to metaphysics ought to be done. However, this is not a claim of this to be the only rigid and fixed approach, as we shall see later on. In describing these attributes, it will become clear that a foundation can be laid out, starting from the following.

3.2.2 Holistic Attributes

Therefore, in beginning with the *Dao*, the *Dao* gives us, as we have seen, a construct in the creation of the universe. The universe is, accordingly, ever expanding yet ultimately also returning and the cycle continuously repeats itself. It is in this sense that the *Dao* is holistic, that it generates and sustains reality. The *Dao* is also fundamentally cyclical, as the return to its beginning is what subsequently occurs when the expanding reality has reached its utmost extent or development. It's holistic essence is, thus, also to be seen in the *Dao*'s classification as the 'One', as its cyclical 'One-ness' encapsulates all that is. The Absolute is also defined as holistic, in the sense that its 'One-ness' encapsulates all reality. The Absolute does this in a

way so that it contains all reality, but not as a composition of different particular distinctions. The Absolute, is thus unifying in its encapsulation. The *Dao*, in like manner, is also unifying in that it is encapsulating in a cyclical framework. Thus in complementing each other, the *Dao* and the Absolute, both as 'One' in their 'One-ness', can truly be seen as, together, inhering a fundamental unifying presence, albeit in cyclical and encapsulating context. In other words, the complementary element is such that the 'One-ness' contains all, but not as a composition, and that it is 'One' in its cyclical nature. Thus, both complement each other, although in their own respect intrinsically 'One', as holistic and encapsulating. In completion, together, they indeed function as fully holistic and encapsulating, in inhering all that there is, and simultaneously detailing the generation and sustention of reality.

3.2.3 Ineffable Attributes

Furthermore, ineffable qualities of the *Dao* are seen when the *Dao* is styled as being beyond experiential reality and separate from discrimination. We see experienced reality as generated from this indiscriminate and unobservable quality of the *Dao* and sustained by it fundamentally. The essence of the Absolute, in this sense some sort quality, is the Absolute as sentient experience but not limited to any one type of phenomenological experienced sense. This essence of sentient experience is more as all experience encompassed together as a broad unifying concept. Here, descriptions of the *Dao* and the Absolute seem to diverge, however, in actuality, there is yet a complementation possible. This will be dealt with in more detail in the third pillar, when we analyse epistemological constraints and ineffable qualities of both the Absolute and the *Dao*, respectively. The complementarity applicable here is in seeing that where the *Dao* is separated from experienced reality, the Absolute, although described as sentient experience, is still also to be taken distinctly from experienced reality. However, for both the Absolute and the *Dao*, it would be erroneous in detailing either as distinct entities separate from perceived reality as an entity. It would do well to keep in mind that in each, in their holistic essence, still encapsulate all that there is. Therefore, the complementary element of the holistic nature of their 'One-ness' still holds. Thus, in complementary fashion, both are distinct from yet also encapsulating experienced reality.

3.2.4 Harmonious Attributes

Last but not least of the attributes of both the *Dao* and the Absolute, is their harmoniousness. The Absolute in its description as harmonious comes from the sense of

contradiction, to be labelled as an impossibility, when regarding ultimate reality. As reality contradicting itself would seem highly counterintuitive, and as such, not suitable for the Absolute. The *Dao* is also regarded as harmonious due to the nature of its generating and sustaining experienced reality; there is harmony in a way that the cycle of expansion and returning are ever recurring. Both the *Dao* and the Absolute show in more detail how and why the harmony is, as such, an attribute of each in the following pillar. Regardless, in this first pillar that details the attributes of both the *Dao* and the Absolute, the harmoniousness of each doubtlessly complement each other. It does so through their encapsulation of the unified and holistic reality as a whole. Despite arrived at in slightly diverging manners, the harmony in fact arises in similar fashion. Through the use of opposing elements in the *Dao*, we have seen that this inadvertently entails that contradiction is not of the essence within the *Dao,* rather that harmony arises. In the case with harmony through generation, sustaining and returning, the Absolute would, in similar fashion, necessarily need to accommodate for such aspects in its holistic 'One-ness'. This is so as all needs to be encapsulated and that would mean that the Absolute also incorporates such aspects as generation, sustaining and returning of experienced reality. Both the Absolute and the *Dao* thus encapsulate all reality in a holistic, harmonious manner in their 'One-ness'. Therefore, they complement one another through their harmoniousness, in the sense that the lack of contradiction is a part of their essence. They also do so in their inhering of experienced reality, and its generation, sustention and facilitation of the return. Moreover, both are, in some fashion, distinct from experienced reality yet encapsulate it simultaneously, which shows us how one ought to regard a metaphysics of reality.

3.2.5 Concluding Complementarious Remarks

These complementary aspects of both the Absolute and the *Dao* are not to be seen as merely aligning one reading and interpretation of one text next to the other. What is done here is not simply to be regarded as some aspects to be similar to the other and in detailing different ways of reaching these conclusions. Here we can see that in their holistic, harmonious and encapsulating aspects or qualities they in fact complement each other. Together, through their properties, it becomes clear how an approach to metaphysics ought to be regarded. One might argue that it is also due to these qualities that such an approach is possible. Were one approach to singlehandedly claim to be the only answer in a more strict

and rigid way, then it would, in likewise manner, only be possible to compare and contrast these two as two different metaphysical approaches. However, indeed, as fundamentally inhering holistic and all-encapsulating attributes, they can each be seen as to be capable of completing one another. To call this method a comparison is only such due to the descriptive nature of language. It is not as simple as only comparing and contrasting different qualities of the *Dao* and the Absolute to one another. It is done in a complementary manner for an intercultural approach to metaphysics.

3.3 The Critique on Relations and the Opposite in Terms

3.3.1 Introduction

The second pillar will analyse how apparent different approaches, nevertheless, result in complementary conclusions. We have seen that the *Dao* does not, on the onset, outright deny contradictions. Whereas it is clearly demarcated by the Absolute that contradiction cannot hold. The *Dao* is, however, also seen as to not hold contradiction. Which is why we will see the complementarity to be beneficiary, regardless of each their approach to harmony. It will, in the following, become clear how the harmoniousness of both the *Dao* and the Absolute complement each other. Furthermore, in emphasising the harmonious aspect, it gives further strength as to why an intercultural approach to metaphysics ought to be done in such a way.

3.3.2 Contradiction and the Opposite

As we have seen previously, the Absolute cannot hold contradictions and this is a fundamental aspect of the Absolute. In this way it is made distinct from experienced reality or the realm of appearance. Although distinct from experienced reality, the Absolute nevertheless still encapsulates all reality, including that of the realm of appearance. Through its nature of 'One-ness' and its holistic and harmonious attributes. The *Dao*, as we have seen, does not hold contradictions either, although not in the same sense as the Absolute. Clearly, opposites are used continuously throughout the chapters of the *Dao.* What has since come forth from the analysis, is that this eventually leads up to the lack of contradiction in the nature of the *Dao*. The contention against contradictions is of importance for the Absolute. For the critique on relations contains the conclusion that relations, no matter how one defines them, necessarily consists of contradictions. The consequence of this is, arguably, that our entire

way of perceiving reality, through thought or experience, is also necessarily contradictive. This is why the Absolute is not conceivable in appeared reality.[81] In the *Dao* we see that the use of opposites is fundamental throughout the chapters in the *Daodejing*. This may, at first, seem like that contradictions are embraced within the *Dao*. However, the *Dao* as the beginning, generating all that there is, we see that thus life and strength are created and thereafter sustained by the *Dao*. Once life reaches its fullest extent it naturally 'weakens' and eventually death occurs, thereby returning to the original state, this being the *Dao*. This cycle repeats itself which is why, indeed, the *Dao* is holistic and harmonious in its 'One-ness' and encapsulation. This is why, initially, it seems that contradiction necessarily takes place, for life and death and weakness and strength are all opposites. However, the actuality of the matter states that far from being contradictory, this actually shows us the inclusiveness of the *Dao*. The *Dao*, per definition and in its essence, contains both opposites, seeing that opposites are merely two sides of the same coin and that opposites actually entail one another.

Therefore it looks like that the Absolute and the *Dao* seem to diverge here. Yet, in fact, they still complement each other. The critique of relations as necessitating contradictions within the realm of appearance thus, on a positive note, supports the harmonious notion of the Absolute. The use of the opposite, instead of containing contradictions, also supports the notion of harmony in the *Dao*. Since one term contains the opposite in its essence, this translates to the *Dao* as encapsulating all and is thereby also in harmony. Which means that there is no contradiction in the essence of the *Dao*. Thus, in complementation of each other, we see that a contradiction in relations can be supported by the opposite being inhered in any term. The critique on relations constitute harmony in the Absolute and contradiction in experienced reality. In the *Dao*, terms contain the opposite in its definition, which indicates that language used in experienced reality cannot in absolute terms describe the *Dao*.[82] Thereby confirming that harmony remains in the *Dao* since it contains and encompasses both opposites and more, the totality of reality. In terms of complementation, relations being contradictive, and terms inhering its opposite in definition, in fact, amount to the same conclusion, that of the harmoniousness and 'One-ness' of both the *Dao* and the Absolute,

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[81] It must be stated, however, that this assumed consequence is not necessarily the acclaimed way all persons are required to perceive reality. How one perceives experience might differ according to other traditions, respectively.

[82] Hence certain ineffable qualities of the *Dao*.

respectively. These different methods can therefore be seen to provide complementation to one another in supporting their harmoniousness. A critique on relations and the use of oppositions are thereby complementary in the sustention of harmony.

3.3.3 Opposite Definitions Leading to Harmony

Moreover, in further analysing the critique on relations, we see that Bradley constantly implements either one extreme or the other in his search for a definition for relations. In one way this reminds us of the usage of either one opposite or the other. This usage of opposing elements in his search for a definition of relations demonstrates that Bradley could see opposites being held as possible answers for a definition. Repetition of the results is inessential, as we have indeed seen that the result, repeatedly, concludes in the admonition of relations as contradictory. In the *Dao* we also see the continuous repetition of opposites when defining the *Dao*, which leads to show that language is inadequate in ultimately defining the *Dao*. While not necessarily detailing that language or opposites are hence contradictory, the other result is the conclusion of the *Dao* being harmonious and in a way ineffable due to its distinctness from experienced reality. This is naturally inherent within language and therefore inherent within a duality of opposites in defining terms. Thus, in complementary comparison, we see that, eventually, both conclusions reached from the critique on relations and the use of opposites lead to the essence of harmony in both the Absolute and in the *Dao*. This is why we can see that a harmonious approach to metaphysics ought to be applied, as both traditions complement each other in maintaining a harmonious definition of the Absolute and the *Dao*, as encapsulating ultimate reality.

3.3.4 The Critique and the Opposite Leading to 'One-ness'

Another factor that becomes essential through the critique on relations is the consequence that it holds in experienced reality. For, while furthermore detailing contradiction inhering in relations, Bradley simultaneously introduces the notion that relations are not to be seen as separate from qualities. As qualities are essential in distinguishing one particular distinct entity from another, a critique on relations inadvertently also becomes a critique on the plurality of existents. This eventually leads up to the point that the Absolute, being ultimate reality, is 'One' in its nature and essence. The *Dao*, as indeed discussed, in entertaining ineffable qualities is likewise considered 'One'. Although not due to a critique on a plurality of existents, it nevertheless is made clear that reality, in returning to the beginning, to that which

generates and sustains reality in its essence is 'One', in its encapsulation of the entirety of reality. The use of the opposite is there to remind us that the *Dao* is harmonious in its essence. Therefore, in complementation of one another, we see again that the critique on relations and the use of opposites reach to the same conclusion, that of the harmonious 'One-ness' of both the *Dao* and the Absolute. Taken together and to complement one another, both opposites and contradictive relations lead to 'One-ness'. The Absolute, in containing a critique on plurality and the *Dao* through its continued encapsulation of reality, therefore, complement each other. This complementation results in an onlook of 'One-ness' that can be concluded from different approaches. Moreover, both the *Dao* and the Absolute detail the harmony in their unifying encapsulation, how all falls within 'One'. A holistic and harmonious unifying 'One', free of contradiction and opposites.

3.4 Epistemological constraints

3.4.1 Introduction

Last but certainly not least, is the third pillar, which is (just like the other pillars) of the utmost importance in the final step of the complementary comparison. This is due to the epistemological constraints that are essentially demonstrated in both traditions. Here, some of the doubts on truth, language and range of knowledge will be seen to complement one another, from both traditions, in a rather compelling manner. Eventually, this leads up to show the limitations of our possibility in defining reality. This further underlines that neither tradition, nor a complementary conclusion taken from both, are used to detail the ultimate and only answer possible. This produces an approach of how one ought to regard any metaphysics; but one taken with care in order not to emphasise the importance of language.

3.4.2 Linguistic Constraints

In the *Dao* we see that the language used in experienced reality is not to be taken as to entail a static and rigid pure definition. It is rather to be seen as the most adequate description at hand. The Absolute, before going in depth in the degrees of truth and reality, is portrayed as being perfect. It is perfect in such a manner that it ought to be regarded as above and beyond any degree of truth or reality. This perfection of the Absolute relates to its incapability of containing contradiction. Furthermore, varying degrees inhibited in the Absolute could

result in a multitude or plurality in the Absolute. However, as we have seen, the Absolute in its encapsulation inheres all in its 'One-ness' and harmony; yet this does not mean a plurality in varying degrees exist within the Absolute. As the Absolute is distinct and different from experienced reality. The *Dao* is also to be seen as separate from experienced reality, in the sense that it does not entail discriminated distinctness or plurality. The *Dao* in its linguistical most adequate description is thus of a more fluid and broad conception.

In a complementary comparison we see that both the *Dao* and the Absolute are to be seen as something different from experienced reality. To what extent our language can fully describe this, will indeed be seen not to be as straightforward as one might believe it to be. Immediately we see where to start, with the *Dao* in its non-rigid but fluid definition, and the Absolute in its perfect distinction excluded from, yet still encapsulating degrees of truth and reality. Both are more than what can be merely described as through language. In complementation, we see that care is needed in seeking definitions to reality through language. Although not detailing language as fundamentally erroneous. This further entails that our actual capability of pure epistemological analysis on a metaphysical approach to reality, is not one to be considered as claiming to produce the final answer. Rather, as an approach, that this view ought to be taken as a way to guide our search for a final metaphysics. Most certainly in an intercultural perspective, as the view ought to be holistic, harmonious and encapsulating yet simultaneously not one that ought to produce the ultimate resolution.

3.4.3 Constraints on Truth

Moreover, in the degrees of truth and reality, it becomes clear that truth and error, as inhered within experienced reality, are never to be taken as fully truthful nor as fully erroneous. Instead, all are to be taken as merely exhibiting a higher or lower degree of truth and error. Such a theory would thereby result in an epistemological constraint. This epistemological constraint is such that any statement made within language, this arguably being one of the predominant manners one would produce any statement, cannot fully entertain a full truth nor error in an epistemological sense.[83] The *Dao*, with its ineffable

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[83] This could be seen as rather complicated for such fields such as physics, however, indeed in regarding Theoretical Physics, as but one example, we already see that any answer is not as fully conceivable as sustaining a pure truth in every scenario or in every way of doing an experiment (under all circumstances).

qualities, subsequently also results in ultimate truth to be ineffable, or at least not as a fathomable possibility within the constraints and limitations of language. As is additionally seen when the *Dao* is described as obscure, which can be seen in the light of the *Dao* as ineffable, it to be obscure from language.

Likewise does this become clear when it is stated that 'naming', as in the assigning of language that is supposedly defining a fixed reference to entities, is not really what is meant by 'naming'. The assigning of language is merely what is its most adequate description. Language cannot fully refer to a fixed substance of the sort that thereby entails a 'true' nature in a rigid sense. This is, naturally, emphasised by the fluid and circular cycle that the *Dao* in its essence generates, sustains and is what it all returns to. Through a complementary lens of comparison, we thus see that both the *Dao* and the Absolute contain an epistemological constraint in a manner through which language cannot provide an ultimate truth statement. Both traditions result in the claim that actual and ultimate knowledge is an ineffable quality.

The consequence of this is that a proper metaphysics cannot, by nature of language (through which any metaphysics would be given), proscribe a final and complete rigid answer as to what reality really is. The emphasis must therefore be aimed at a holistic and harmonious approach to metaphysics, rather than aiming at a final result of a metaphysical analysis. Especially so within the scope of the necessity of intercultural philosophy for our global world today. As is so succinctly described in chapter 1 of the *Daodejing*, that one ought to be 'objectless' in one's desire and observance. This is in relation to the emphasis of the approach as opposed to the emphasis on the conclusion. Which means that the final result ought not to be the actual aim of metaphysics. Rather we ought to regard the approach in its holistic and harmonious encapsulation as how we can (in limited possibility) observe the 'mysteries of all things'. Through the eyes of the degrees of truth and reality, we can only know by nature of a degree, but never claim to fully comprehend in the sense of ultimate understanding or ultimate attainment of epistemological concepts.

3.4.4 Final Complementary Remarks

In complementary comparative fashion, both the Absolute and the *Dao* complete each other in their encapsulating essence, yet this essence is not truly or ultimately describable through language. Both the *Dao* and the Absolute carry ineffable qualities, although not symbolising the conclusion that we cannot know anything at all about any attributes. We can

indeed postulate both their holistic, harmonious and encapsulating manner in their 'One-ness'. In our analysis, we see that they complement each other in this sense and in their ineffability. As such, an intercultural approach to metaphysics, is one to be seen in an entirely new light. Traditionally, a metaphysical analysis would argue for one particular worldview of reality, whereas, as has been thoroughly displayed, such a view is not what is portrayed in this paper. In this fashion, it has been argued that any language is not adequate enough a tool for the task of displaying a final answer. All that is to be done is aimed in the direction of a holistic and harmonious approach in an encapsulating manner. Attributes of both the *Dao* and the Absolute, in their 'One-ness', encapsulation, harmony and holisticness, show how an intercultural approach towards metaphysics can be done. Without favouring one approach over the other. Far from claiming this to be the ultimate answer, it is aimed at, by means of example, detailing a method and approach to intercultural metaphysics. The goal is to open a space for such philosophy to be done, and as such, with future studies in mind, to detail similar positions from other points of view in an inclusive and encapsulating manner.[84]

3.5 Conclusion

In final remarks, this last concluding chapter has had its focus on, not only on how a methodology ought to be done, but has by lead of example actually been done. This chapter focused on a complementary comparison through a holistic, harmonious and encapsulating approach towards an intercultural metaphysics. As such, it has not been the aim to argue for this approach to be the only and final approach that must be implemented to any metaphysics. It is simply through this approach that a complementary analysis can be applied to two traditions, that of the Absolute by Bradley and a metaphysical reading of the *Dao* in the *Daodejing* by (arguably) Laozi. Through this manner, a positive and enriching approach can be implemented towards intercultural metaphysics. A metaphysics, arguably, best suited within a holistic, harmonious and encapsulating framework.

The complementary comparison consists of an analysis through three pillars detailing several aspects of both the Absolute and the *Dao*, respectively. The first pillar saw the

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[84] Insofar as the possibility provides for such a study and probability of traditions to be harmoniously complemented by comparison.

attributes of each to be holistic, harmonious and encapsulating. Resulting in, for both traditions, that these attributes are thereby best suited for an approach to ultimate reality. The *Dao* and the Absolute, in their own respective manner, account for ultimate reality and thus can, together, be seen as to complement such an approach.

The second pillar saw how, each in their own way, arrive at the conclusion of the harmoniousness of both the *Dao* and the Absolute. Thereafter, it was shown that this harmonious attribute of both the *Dao* and the Absolute are each essential in, not only their own traditions, but also fundamental in the search for an approach to intercultural metaphysics. Thereby showing that a harmonious approach to intercultural metaphysics necessarily involves a harmonious framework that encapsulates in a complementary manner.

The third pillar detailed, how both the *Dao* and the Absolute inhere epistemological constraints. This results in ultimate and final claims to truth, through language, not to be fathomable within experienced reality. Hence, both the actual characteristics of both the Absolute and the *Dao* far outreach language and the scope of experienced reality. Nevertheless, this does not mean we cannot know any attributes. These known attributes are holistic, harmonious and encapsulation through their 'One-ness'. This results in further complementation that an intercultural approach to metaphysics is not to be seen as result-driven, nor as the ultimate answer to how metaphysics should be done. The emphasis is placed on the manner how one ought to approach such a metaphysical investigation. This approach to be seen as being a holistic, harmonious and encapsulating one.

Conclusion

In final conclusion, through the deep analysis of both the Absolute and the *Dao*, as done in three pillars, it has become clear what some of the attributes of both are. These attributes are their holistic, harmonious and encapsulating aspects. This furthermore results in their 'One-ness' through their encapsulation of all reality, not as a distinct entity, which is the composition of different aspects of experienced reality, but as a harmonious and holistic inclusion of reality.

Each analysis, first of the Absolute and second of the *Dao*, has been done through three pillars, each pillar detailing and explaining the necessary attributes of both the Absolute and the *Dao*. Both have also been seen to inhere ineffable qualities, as language is a tool for describing reality based on experienced reality. This results in language as, ultimately, not sufficient enough to give a final description of both the Absolute and the *Dao*. This does not, however, mean that we cannot entertain any knowledge on both. It means that language is to be seen as our most adequate approach to both, yet in a limited fashion, which details the epistemological constraints that we have.

Lastly, by analysing and interpreting the texts of the Absolute and the *Dao*, subsequently, the next step was to apply a complementary comparison. This was applied, in order to not favour one tradition over the other while at the same time providing with a space for discourse in an intercultural setting. This setting aims to be open and inviting for future studies and invites a variety in viewpoints and interpretation. What has been argued, nevertheless, is that such an approach to intercultural metaphysics ought to be done through a holistic, harmonious and encapsulating manner. This manner is the result from the analysis of both the *Dao* and the Absolute, which through complementation of each other, further underlines the approach that ought to be taken.

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