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The Tetralemma of Nothingness

Samuel O. Sessions

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Samuel O. Sessions

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The Tetralemma of Nothingness

Grammatically, the question is rather simple. It is when we set out to answer the question that it suddenly becomes complex. What is nothing? Its very asking seems almost impossible because the 'is' within it brushes up against its meaning, producing paradox. How do we even begin to get at a something that is not a something? Immediately, you remark how similar this task is to a child chasing fairies in the forest or hunting for ghosts in the attic. Will we be doomed from the outset? If so, then what is the point? Our many predecessors have had varying degrees of success and interpretation, why should we come any closer? How does the fish come to dream of the mountain top? How does the being come to dream of nothingness?

Aristotle has said that all humans are born with the desire to know. This claim's truth varies upon the philosophical positions that you hold; however, I believe there is an element of truth within it that no one could ever deny. I will rephrase his claim to bring out what I believe to be a guiding force within all individuals. Within all people, there exists the seeds to a question that will populate their consciousnesses for the rest of their lives. This seed is sown within us at an incredibly early age and can never be unsown. It echoes throughout our bodies and minds for the remainder of our lives. It germinates within us until we grow self-reflective, an age when we begin to ask about our place in the world. Although not we may not yet be fully mentally developed, it is within the crucible of a fully realized self-consciousness that this question takes form. For some, it lies passively within the psyche, unpronounced and unnoticed by the asker; for others, it becomes activated to the asker's awareness and haunts them for the rest of their waking lives. Either way, aware or unaware, we all ask this foundational question

to ourselves anew, a thousand times over and over, in a million different and unique ways for the remainder of our lives. In a way, it is the only question you will ever ask, the question to which all other questions are related, the question of your life, your question, the one you can never quite seem to answer.

For me, my question was realized within me from an early age. Its seed was a profound oddness I felt within me. As a child, I almost constantly felt an out-of-placeness, like everything I did was not wrong but peculiar to myself. Why did I do the things I did? Why am I the way that I am? Almost as if I was watching myself from up above, not understanding my own choices. Eventually, this seed germinated into the first iteration of my question at age seven. Why am I alive? Out of infinitely many possibilities, why was I the chosen choice? It was less an asking for purpose and more an asking for explanation. Why did the cosmic dice roll in my favor and why can I not be other than I am? I felt a misfit in my own life and sought to find a place outside of it. For a while, I thought I would retreat to the forest and, there, reality or some sort of cosmic natural force would finally spill the beans and tell me everything. Fortunately, my frustrations and the knowledge that my mind still had time to grow to full capacity kept my question at bay. I was drawn by the other children into playing games, sending my question into dormancy. It was not until I was thirteen and my interest in the sciences bloomed that I once again, unknowingly this time, asked the question anew. Where does the world come from? Out of what does it emerge? This time, however, I claimed to have an answer: a nothing, some sort of infinite well of energy that changes every time you look. But, once again, I knew I was not quite ready. My mind still needed to grow to the challenge of beginning to answer, so it went dormant again. Finally, it emerged again at the age of nineteen when I was introduced to

philosophy. Why should people find it so preposterous that there is such a thing as an uncaused cause? I recognized it immediately and linked it back through all its previous iterations. My question had returned, and I was ready and willing to care for it. As I fertilized and fed it more and more philosophy, my question grew and changed many times over, but I always knew what it was. What is nothing? It was clear to me that it was responsible for everything that was, but just what was, or rather wasn't, it.

I give you all of this information not to give you my life's story but to acknowledge the motive operating behind the scenes of this project. I will tell you that I pursue this question because I am innocently or naively curious or, perhaps, because I have succumb to a Lovecraftian madness that draws me towards the secret mysteries that lie outside of reality, and these may be true; however, the true secret is that I am hypnotized an obsession, my life's question. So, when you ask how philosophical this whole project really is, do not be surprised to find that the answer is not really all that philosophical at all. In fact, many Western philosophers will tell you that to ask this question is profoundly unphilosophical. They will tell you that either the subject is entirely dismissible, the not-ness of nothing means nothing to know or worry about, or that it is illogical or even evil, a lack of being that indicates a lack of comprehensibility or goodness, in thinkers like Parmenides, Plotinus or St. Augustine. Even in Eastern philosophy, where nothingness is held in a much higher esteem, it only ascends to the rank of a useful metaphor for the operations of the universe as a whole. Nothingness has either been discarded, painted in a poor light, or most commonly considered from the perspective of being rather than its own.

You see the answer to my question was always antithetical to the purpose and task of philosophy: to provide us with a worldly wisdom and give us direction in our worldly lives. My project is composed of four phases, and within each of these phases there will be philosophy and explanations of other's philosophy, but do not mistake the purpose of this endeavor to be strictly philosophical. In order to pursue true nothingness, not the kinds espoused by substantive metaphysics or couched within non-substantive cosmologies, we must sideline the true goal of philosophy because nothingness overtly has nothing to do with the world. Because philosophy is about becoming acquainted with the world and becoming acquainted with nothingness is about turning our backs to the world, in the past, philosophy has routinely made the mistake of approaching nothing through the lens of the world, through the lens of being, rather than approaching it upon its own terms. Nothingness has been developed in the terms of being because we as beings are concerned with being, not nothingness. Thus, our task is to develop a platform for describing nothing when it is prioritized over being. Unfortunately, this undertaking is easier said than done because, as beings, we are calibrated to see the world in terms of its presence rather than its absence. Hence, we will be employing what I call the tetralemma of nothingness to overcome this problem.

To avoid diving into too great of detail while explaining what I mean by tetralemma, I will be forced to leave gaps in my explanation of substance and Buddhism at large (these topics will be saved for fuller description in later chapters). In short, a tetralemma is a method of examination into a topic, designed by the Buddha to root out or make obvious that a way of thinking about a subject is still being used. What the Buddha uses his tetralemma to root and point out in human thought is substantive thinking. In brief, the Buddha felt that substantive

thinking obscured human enlightenment and kept humanity from realizing a fuller experience and richer world. Thus, he employed his tetralemma to make it obvious to Buddhist practitioners that using substantive thinking to overcome substantive thinking will never work and point out to them how they are still utilizing it without realizing it. His methodology clarifies to the user how certain thought-processes remain latent with our thinking despite our best efforts to filter them out. I have mentioned that one of the problems we face in our descriptions of nothingness is that, despite our best efforts, thoughts about being remain latent within our attempts to clarify what nothingness is. In short, our descriptions about nothingness remain derivative of being. Thus, because our task is talking about nothingness when nothing is prioritized, we must employ a tetralemma to root out the hidden being that clings to our descriptions without our realizing. As a result, I will be following the Buddha's format for ridding forms of thought from thought-process; however, although my methodology will mirror his own, our task could not be more different, for while he sought to see the world more fully (a true philosopher), I seek to turn away from the world.

The tetralemmatic method consists of four parts in which we are meant to deny the assertion made in each part in order to realize how and why we are still utilizing the same sort of thinking. Often, it is also called the fourfold negation because we are denying the four parts. These four parts are constructed along the lines of all possible assertions you can make about an object substantively (later, we will unpack why all assertions are substantive by nature because of their discursive and linguistic form). By identifying every way you can say an object exists substantively, you are left only with the option to drop away substantive and approach the object non-substantively. Now, before we continue, you may ask, if this method was

calibrated for dropping away substantive thinking, then will we only be dropping away the substantive renditions of nothingness while allowing the non-substantive nothings to remain lingering in our thought-processes? Although this concern is valid, I will be tweaking the method to cover all the ways that you can say that nothing exists (both substantively and non-substantively) so that you may realize that you cannot say that nothingness exists at all. You will be forced to drop away relating nothing to being as an approach to nothingness and left only with the option to consider nothingness upon its own terms. The method goes as follows: 1) A – There is, 2) $\sim A$ – There is not, 3) $A \wedge \sim A$ – There both is and is not, and 4) $\sim (A \vee \sim A)$ – There neither is nor is not. My tweaking of method adapts to this model rather well, so I will continue to refer to my tetralemma in line with the form of these four parts. However, note that my tetralemma is divided into two parts: a substantive first half and a non-substantive second half. The first half approaches substantive nothings, or when nothingness is considered from the viewpoint of being when it is envisioned as substantive. The second half approaches non-substantive nothings, when nothingness is derivative of non-substantive being instead. Moreover, each half alternates between seeing nothing as a reflection of that vision of reality and then as a denial of that reflection. The first half deals with the more common definitions of nothing and the second deals with more metaphoric uses of nothingness, which reflects a transition from Western attempts to describe nothing to Eastern attempts. These parts fit the mold the Buddha has laid out for us as follows.

- 1) A – Nothing is. This nothingness takes being to be substantive and imagines nothing to be a reverse of substance. When we say that nothing is, we imagine nothing to be a sort of reverse of a substantive thing, a mirror world of negative being, an inside

- out substance, like a dotted circle meant to represent the absence of a real filled in circle.
- 2) $\sim A$ – Nothing is not. This nothingness takes nothing to be the denial of substance within a substantive world (something we shall cover is accepted by the Buddha because he envisions the world as dependently arising instead of as substantive) which amounts to calling it the antithesis of reality and an illogicality. This nothingness considers nothing to be an anti-being, not merely a negative being as the other had.
 - 3) $A \wedge \sim A$ – Nothing is and is not. This nothingness takes nothing to be participatory in the function of non-substantive being by being explicative non-participation within the foundation of reality. Non-substantive cosmologies, specifically, take substance to be non-foundational within reality, so this nothingness imagines nothing to be the absence of substance as a foundational quality of reality. We will affix this to the Dao because we will both have already done backgrounding in Daoism and the Daoism often describes a nothing foundational to making something what it is.
 - 4) $\sim (A \vee \sim A)$ – Nothing neither is nor is not. This nothingness takes nothing to be a sort of reservoir of all possible foundational qualities of the universe, nothing forming the infinite diversity of universe structural contingency. This section builds off of the third so it will be difficult to understand at this point. There is no way that the universe should behave, so this nothingness assumes that nothing is outside of reality so that could never participate but also still influential to reality by

embodying the lack pressure from an outside source to conform to a transcendental order.

Each of these parts is in some way derivative of being and meant to exemplify that approaching nothing as if it were a reflection or in some way related to the status of being fails. I have organized these parts to build off of one another in content so that the background necessary for approaching each successive part is the parts before it. Likewise, I shall sprinkle in the necessary background to understand parts that I feel need the aid of other philosophers' wisdom. As a result, I will discuss Aristotle, Laozi and Zhuangzi's ideas before dissolving the first two parts of the tetralemma. Likewise, the Buddha and Hakuin will direct our thoughts about substance as a mentality and mentality as a sense in order to prepare us for the non-substantive portion of our tetralemma. Realize that I will only be covering what is pertinent to our future discussion so my discussions of their ideas will be skewed in two ways: they will not be a full coverage of their ideas (if you are looking for best available and most comprehensive backgrounding look elsewhere) and I may re-envision their ideas to fit the scope and form of my argument. Having acquired these knowledges, we will be ready to tackle the third phase of the tetralemma of nothingness by submerging it in a larger discussion on cosmogony. After which, Nagarjuna and Quentin Meillassoux will clear the way for banishing our final and most difficult phase of the tetralemma. Upon completing this methodology, we will then have the opening and knowledge necessary to speak about nothing when it is free and devoid of all vestiges of being.

Our task is simple yet difficult: clear away all the being present in our conception of nothingness in order to approach it when it is valued above its relationship to being, to us. Upon finishing this hefty order, I will begin to lay the groundwork for a conception of nothing that is free of being and suppose the direction of future study and inquiry into nothingness. You should remember as you read that I bring up these different forms of nothingness to defeat them as a nothingness but not as a being. Rather, I, in fact, wish to reestablish their being. Each of these nothingness gets at being through either a negative argumentation or negative picturization and, along the way, in that process, they mistakenly take a being to be a nothingness. Part of the world of this study is also to reestablish how these nothingnesses are really being seen from an unfamiliar angle: hence, why they are derivative of being. However, I do not want you to get the impression that, because I have disproven that any of these nothings are the true nothingness, they should never be considered at all. These nothings are either helpful in pointing out flaws in our substantive thinking or as metaphors for change and diversity in the universe. We can learn from these nothings, but we should remember that they teach us much more about being and philosophy than nothingness because they are wrapped up within being.

We start our backgrounding with a discussion of Aristotle and the underpinning of the natural world as he encountered it. For clarity, I would like to affirm that Aristotle did not include nothingness within his cosmology because, for a substance-based metaphysician, nothing is inherently a meaningless category. Hence, why a champion of substance and logos thinking and a predecessor of Aristotle, Parmenides, went to such great pains to cast it out of the Greek consciousness. Nothing is less a threat, and more of an unimaginability in a world of

telos and solidified being. Nevertheless, this chapter will not be merely a routine description of Aristotle's metaphysical system in service of providing context to later chapters. Rather, after explaining his four causes, the defining the difference between nature and artifice and critiquing actuality and potentiality, I will adapt Aristotle and attempt to explain how he may have recommended we envision the first part of our tetralemma of nothingness. Know, now, that Aristotle like most substance-metaphysicians gave nothing the treatment of the second part, as you might have deemed obvious; however, because I did not wish to waste your time and explain a philosopher who did conceive of nothing in our first manner (like Fredegis of Tours), I decided to adapt Aristotle for relevance and convenience. Frankly, this suggestion is more of a thought experiment as to the trouble any substance-metaphysician might face when adding a substantive nothing (which is in a sense an oxymoron) into their cosmology. So, let us clear away some background to get at the first part of our tetralemma.

Holding a Mirror to Aristotle's Universe

When explaining where everything comes from, it is best to first begin with a simpler question: where does a something, a being, come from and how does it manifest? In this way, cosmology is a prelude to cosmogony because how we understand beings to exist currently tells us something about what we might suppose the beginnings of that process was. In asking how the universe develops itself from moment to moment as a self-interactive entirety, we will have a much easier time considering the individual objects instead of tackling the totality of reality. So, when looking at an object and asking what its cause is, we are attempting to ascertain the source of its being.

From the very beginning, this question already has two implicit assumptions that conventional terms almost always carry with them: 1) that there must be a source from which a being comes, that all beings come from a somewhere or something that we can point to; and, 2) that things carry an inherent existence. We will discard the second assumption for now and come back to it in later chapters because it involves an explanation of substance. One such philosopher that not only recognizes the first assumption but confirms it as a truthful principle of reality is Aristotle. Early on in his discussion of beings and the natural world, Aristotle assures,

“Our first presupposition must be that in nature nothing acts on, or is acted on by, any other thing at random, nor may anything come from anything else, unless we mean it does so in virtue of a concomitant attribute. For how could ‘white’ come from ‘musical’, unless ‘musical’ happened to be an attribute of the not-white or of the black?

No, 'white' comes from 'not-white' – and not just from any 'not-white', but from black or some intermediate color" (McKeon, *Physics*: Bk. 1: Ch. 5: 188a31-188b1).

Here, Aristotle confirms that being must not only come from other being but also that this change is caused by something about the beings involved in the change. Objects gain attributes not through random rolls of the cosmic dice, but through those attributes connections to the other attributes involved in the interaction.

Underlying this discussion is the understanding that attributes of being must come from their contraries. For example, an object does not become white without previously already having an association to color, either the object was colored before (red, green, etc.) or uncolored (black). Either way, when an object gains a new attribute, it can only do so in virtue of both not previously having that attribute and not sharing in being with a contrary attribute. In short, an object cannot break the principle of noncontradiction: "that the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect" (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 4: Ch. 3: 1005b18-20). Either an object has an attribute, or it does not, but this is not to say that, in not possessing a certain attribute, the object possesses a non-attribute or some notion of nonbeing. Not-white is merely a different color or the absence of color, but not some sort of nothingness. This principle tells us exactly why every being both has an association with every attribute or its contrary attribute and cannot have random interactions with other beings. Take any being and any attribute. Either that being has that attribute or some sort of its contrary; thus, not only does every being have some sort of relationship with every attribute, but also all beings have some sort of relationship with all

other beings based on this attribute, either they both possess it, neither does, or one does and the other does not. So, their interactions cannot be random because there are always contraries by which to compare things. Thus, the source of something's being must be its contrary. Moreover, because we know that the contrary is just a different type of being, not nonbeing, we know that all beings must come from beings and not from nothing.

The understanding that all beings come from being relates directly to Aristotle's treatment of chance and spontaneity. Today, in common speech, chance connotes randomness in one's daily life while spontaneity denotes the happening of things without cause. An event happening by either of these means goes against both what we have analyzed above and Aristotle's causal framework. However, before we discuss chance and spontaneity, we must first examine the difference between how objects exist 'by nature' and how objects exist through human interference or *techne* because chance is enmeshed in human events while spontaneity involves natural objects. Moreover, chance and spontaneity are deeply enmeshed in causality. Thus, a description of natural versus human-made objects as well as an account of Aristotle's causal framework will help us paint a full picture of chance and spontaneity.

Aristotle begins the second book of the *Physics* by drawing a dividing line between things that exist by nature and those that exist with human intervention. This distinction can be drawn because things that exist by nature have, "within them itself a principle of motion and of stationariness"; while, on the other hand, "a bed and a coat and anything else of that sort... in so far as they are products of art – have no innate impulse to change" (McKeon, *Physics*: Bk. 2: Ch. 1: 192b14-19). Natural beings are the source of their own growth, motion and the like;

whereas, artificial beings are not the source of own production. Their production is found in something else, namely human beings. Moreover, the material out of which an artificial object is constructed have an original nature; however, this nature does not belong to the artificial being. Yet, the nature of an object is not the material substrate out of which it is composed alone but rather the identification of matter and form with one another.

“The form indeed is ‘nature’ rather than the matter; for a thing is more properly said to be what it is when it has attained to fulfillment than when it exists potentially. Again, man is born from man, but not bed from bed. That is why people say that the figure is not the nature of the bed, but the wood is – if the bed sprouted, not a bed, but wood would come up. But even if the figure is art, then on the same principle the shape of man is his nature” (McKeon, *Physics*: Bk. 2: Ch. 1: 193b7-13).

In natural objects, the matter and form are inseparable from one another in that the form that the matter would take of its own accord, by the principle of change within it, is the very form through which we identify the matter. For example, the wood and the form of a tree are connected to one another to the extent that wood naturally takes the form a tree. A natural thing is one in which its material substrate takes its own form without intervention. An artificial thing, on the other hand, has a disconnect between its form and matter: in that, what it is made of would not normally take its form.

Now, before continuing to describe an object’s nature it is worthwhile to take an important detour, which will help us to not only contextualize our discussion within Aristotle’s overarching philosophy but also conclude our report of nature versus artifice: an account of

Aristotle's four causes. These causes are methods of explaining objects we see in the world:

how they came into existence and how they remain in existence. Our examples shall be an oak tree, as our natural object, and a table, as our artificial object.

- **Material Cause:** the matter out of which an object is made. If you or I are attempting to explain what something is or how that thing might react in a certain situation, it will benefit us to describe the type of matter it consists of. Moreover, that object clings to the matter to maintain its existence in the world. Without the matter out of which it is made, that object has no existence. So, when describing an oak tree, it would be quite prudent of me to tell you that it is made of wood. Here, when I say that that specific tree is made of wood, now, we know that it is a natural tree, because, if it were made of metal, we would know it was artificial. Thus, material tells us a lot about how the object participates in the world because wooden trees possess a principle of motion within themselves just like all other natural objects, while metal trees are unnaturally shaped and stationary. Likewise, material cause tells us how the object will behave in a certain situation. If I tell you not only that my table is made of metal but also that I have plans to set it on fire later tonight, you might inform me that, because of the material, I might not get the result I intend. Thus, material cause explains an object's continued presence over time as well as part of its response to new situations.
- **Formal Cause:** the shape, form, idea or model by which a material is molded, the measure by which an object adjusts itself to make the material what the object may be called. As Aristotle says above, this cause is crucial to explaining an object and its

corresponding reactions to events because it is what is said to make an object what it is. Although at first glance we might reduce form to the shape of an object, a more accurate description might be definition. For example, when asking for the form of an oak tree, I am not asking for a specific shape that every single oak tree follows, like a gingerbread man out of a cookie cutter. Instead, I am looking for something like a description or abstract outline of a tree. So, the form of an oak tree is many roots below the soil, a supportive trunk, skyward-reaching branches, and possibly leaves, buds and acorns. Now, of course, this form is not static in time, as the leaves, buds and acorns come and go with the seasons. However, what is important to identifying natural objects is that the matter is in the right form for the time: that the oak tree is leafless in winter. If I see a fully leafed oak in the dead of winter or a bare tree in the height of summer, either something is genetically wrong with the tree/the tree is diseased or that tree might be artificial, a painted metallic tree. Thus, if a matter is not in its natural form, then either some extenuating circumstance has occurred to disturb a natural object's progression, or it is an artificial object. As a result, form can tell us about the history and state of the matter. In the case of artificial objects, form could be compared to a model or idea of the object. If a carpenter wants to make a table, they create an idea of it in their head and design a model of it by which to shape the material to suit their needs. Think formula or recipe.

It is important to note that Aristotle denied that matter and form ever appeared without one another. All matter is formed matter and all form is the form of a material object. The separation of matter and form only occurs in our abstraction of empirical objects, yet even in

our abstractions you may notice that you cannot imagine unformed matter and form always maintains an air of materiality implied about it. Aristotle reserves one exception to this rule: the Unmoved Mover, which is a purely formal being because of its pure actuality (this exception will be described in greater depth later on in our cosmogonic chapter). Hence, this togetherness highlights why matter and form resonate with one another in natural objects, while in artificial objects there is a disconnect. Without intervention, all matter takes its form; however, humans, with a capacity to separate form from matter in the mind, can imagine a new shape for the matter and apply a model by which to reform it.

- **Efficient Cause:** the source of change within an object. Although at first glance this cause seems to be the actual change that the object undergoes, what Aristotle is actually referring to is the source of that change. These changes can be not only material (e.g. iron rusting) but also formal (e.g. the extension of a limb either through growth or locomotion). In the case of natural objects, these sources of efficient causes can be both outside forces, like lightning cracking apart the limb of an oak tree, and the object itself, like the reproductive cycle of the oak producing acorns. Artificial objects, on the other hand, only have outside sources of change as the table can never produce itself, the carpenter must come along and reshape the wood into a table. The efficient cause is what is doing the change. In nature, the object, being what it is, is the efficient cause of its own natural processes by way of the natural tendencies of how the matter is formed, so that no outside intervention is ever needed to make the change. Artifice needs that outside help because the matter is not supposed to be taking that form.

- Final Cause: the end, goal, telos or sake for which something exists or is done. In modern scientific explanation, this sort of cause has been phased out because we now understand that there is no telos in mind in the development of individual organisms or species. However, when describing the actions of agents, a telos does come in handy. We might consider the final cause a misapplication of reason and purpose to events outside the categories of morality or instrumentation (i.e. outside of intentional actions worthy of blame or in-order-to/for-the-sake-of thinking). Yet, to do justice to Aristotle's theories, I shall tell you that the telos of natural objects is the end result of larger schema processes. Each of these processes has an end towards which the object is naturally drawn. So, the telos of the acorn is to one day become an oak tree or the telos of reproduction is the continuation of the species. Although one of these is an actual object and the other a process, both their final causes can be described simply as the direction towards which they are naturally pulled. Think of telos as a replacement of the "could" that denotes the myriad of possibility of an object's future with a "should." It states that implied within an object's structure is a way that the object should be, a perfection, a good or best way for it to develop, a telos. In the case of the artificial object, however, the telos of the natural object has been extracted and replaced with the telos of the agent. Consequently, the form and matter must be altered in a specific format by the agent in service of creating this new telos. In nature, final and other causes are much more unified because the telos is the form the matter takes by its own internal source of motion; whereas, in artifice, final cause is separate from form and

matter because it is the new direction the efficient cause, a human, wants the material to take.

Aristotle considered these four causes a comprehensive list of everything that can be used to explain how an object acts in the world and what is necessary to describing what that object is. Notice that chance and spontaneity are not included in this list. Rather, as I will elaborate upon later, Aristotle chalks up this type of explanation to one of his four causes but hidden or obscured. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that these causes can come in different flavors or states within the object, and a serious look at them is how we will hopefully bring chance and spontaneity back into play. These two flavors of the four causes are the actual and the potential.

Actuality is the current state of the object, otherwise known as what the object is doing or the qualities it possesses. So, the actual qualities of a full-grown oak tree in spring are the height of its branches, the hardness of its bark, and the act of reproducing by dropping acorns. The actualities within something's being, Aristotle notes, "we connect with 'complete reality'" (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 9: Ch. 3: 1047a30), as well with its opposing term: potentiality.

Actuality, then, is the existence of a thing not in the way which we express by 'potentially'; we say that potentially, for instance, a statue of Hermes is in the block of wood and the half-line is in the whole, because it might be separated out, and we call even the man who is not studying a man of science, if he is capable of studying; the thing that stands in contrast to each of these things actually... we must... be content to grasp the analogy, that it is as that which is building is to that which is capable of

building, and the waking to the sleeping, and that which is seeing to that which has its eyes shut but has sight, and that which has been shaped out of matter to the matter.”

(McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 9: Ch. 6: 1048a31-1048b4)

Although Aristotle makes pains to explain actuality through an analogy to potentiality, our understanding of it comes best from its connections to complete reality and his alignment of the concept with substance. Because potentiality is a term both difficult to understand and, according to many philosophers, flawed, it is challenging to get a full grasp of actuality through this comparison. However, if we isolate the one side of this analogy, actuality seems to be those things about an object that are fully in motion or use. Potentiality has an air of possibility about it (but only a strict range of predetermined and definite possibilities, a muted or restricted possibility); whereas actuality is when one of those possibilities becomes solidified in the world as a true reality. So, actuality about you, as a human, right now, is that you are reading, it is what you are doing. The oak tree actual respire, photosynthesizes and stands tall above the ground. The table actually holds the books up. In each of these examples, actuality is what is fully realized about an object's being. Actuality is what an object currently is and does.

Actualities do not only make up an object's being, as the potentialities also play a part, but the actualities are more closely connected to the being and its substance. Actuality is always prior to potentiality in all senses of the word, “To all such potency, then, actuality is prior both in formula and in substantiality; and in time it is prior in one sense, and in another not” (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 9: Ch. 8: 1049b11-12). Although, often in linear time, an object

will move from potential capacities towards realizing them as actualities (actualizing potentialities), this precedent in time is only for the singular object, which must be actualized,

“but prior in time to these [potentialities] are other actually existing things, from which they were produced. For from the potentially existing the actually existing is always produced by an actually existing thing... there is always a first mover, and the mover always already exists actually.” (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 9: Ch. 8: 1049b23-26).

Thus, actuality always has precedent in time (this component of the relationship between actuality and potentiality will become quite evident when we return to cosmogony because it tells us that the first cause of Aristotle’s metaphysical system must be an actuality, and, as we shall see, actuality is prior in all the other senses as well). More importantly, actuality is prior to potentiality in substance because, in order for an object to become the actuality, that actuality must in a sense already be in the potentiality and, therefore, already in the object. This conception of how things become plays heavily into Aristotle’s ideas about telos.

“The things that are posterior in becoming [i.e. actual] are prior in form and in substantiality (e.g. man is prior to boy and human to seed; for the one already has its form, and the other has not), and because everything that comes to be moves towards a principle , i.e. an end [telos] (for that for the sake of which a thing is, is its principle, and the becoming is for the sake of the end), and the actuality is the end, and it is for the sake of this that the potency is acquired” (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 9: Ch. 8: 1050a2-10).

Telos aligns with actuality in Aristotle's vision of the universe. Telos is what must be active in an object's being in order for the object to be what it most is, "For the action is the end, and the actuality is the action..., and points to the complete reality" (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 9: Ch. 8: 1050a22-23). The acorn has reached its telos when it actually is an oak tree. The table has reached its telos when it is a flat surface to be written on. The builder's telos is building, and they are not actually a builder until they are actually building. Therefore, the telos is the interweaving of an object's substance so that the object actually has all the material (is made of the right stuff), formal (is in the right shape, doing the right thing), and efficient (has been made by another actual object) properties that it has been drawn towards all its existence. When the telos is realized, the object is fully actualized.

Perhaps it is because telos is a concept that we have recognized as outmoded and a defunct description of reality, that we recognize that Aristotle's conception of actualization offloads all of its difficulties (as well as some of those of substance) onto his conception of potential. At first glance, potentiality seems to be all the possibility of an object's future states; however, we will quickly find that this assumption is false because, "We must distinguish when a thing exists potentially and when it does not; for it is not at any and every time. E.g. is earth potentially a man? No – but rather when it has already become a seed, and perhaps not even then" (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 9: Ch. 7: 1048b36-1049a2). In reality, all things are possible that do not go against the bare factuality of existence. So, it is certainly possible earth becomes a man, but Aristotle does not equate potentiality with possibility. Rather, he equates it with capacity, links it to actuality and telos, and drives home that you should not only not be surprised if a potentiality becomes an actuality but expect it to do so.

Because Aristotle needs to account for how things become and change into the actualities they are expected to be and, more so, where these actualities come from, he invents and tailors the potential to solve this problem. This source of actuality is why Aristotle puts the potential before the actual in linear time. Although all potentials must be produced, held and attended by an actuality, the potential still acts as the source from which complete and actual reality comes. "All potencies conform to the same type are originative sources of some kind, and are called potencies in reference to one primary kind of potency, which is an originative source of change in another thing or in the thing itself qua other" (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 9: Ch. 1: 1046a9-12). Aristotle refers to two different types of potentiality because there are, as we have already catalogued above, two types of being in his world, which accordingly operate differently. Natural objects have potencies that originate within themselves because they have a principle within themselves that drives their own change, this principle being the actual telos the natural object is meant to become. Artificial objects, on the other hand, require an outside source to both install and activate potentialities within them by means of a rational formula.

For the rational formula is one which applies to both, though not in the same way, and it is in a soul [in natural objects] which possesses an originative source of movement; so that the soul will start both processes from the same originative source, having linked them up with the same thing. And so, the things whose potency is according to a rational formula act contrariwise to the things whose potency is non-rational" (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 9: Ch. 2: 1046b21-24).

In natural objects, the matter out of which it is composed and form it already has mean that the object can act as its own efficient cause because the rational formula by which we strive towards telos is already there. The acorn already possesses the potential to become, the formula by which to achieve, the actualization of an oak tree. Artificial objects need an agent to install potencies and follow a rational formula to direct the object to full actualization. The carpenter must mill the wood to give the potential to become a table as lumber, then, act as the efficient cause by building the table into the model they have designed. So, potential is not only eaten up by the idea of telos, but also eaten up by the efficient cause and rational formula.

We must now become critical and ask ourselves what exactly is the potentiality within an object. Perhaps, we can arrive at our conclusion by carving out exactly what potentiality is not. We know that potential can neither be the complete reality, for that is what actuality is, nor can it be the rational formula, for that is the process that potentiality must follow in order to arrive at the actual. However, we do know that it must be some sort of source for the actual and the actual is a being, so the potential must be a being because, as we have said earlier, being comes from being. The potential to the actual is the transition from being into new being. Yet, there is quite a curious passage of Aristotle's speaking about non-existent things. Now, it would seem that he must deny the attribution of any qualities to non-existents because they simply are not, full stop. However, although he does not attribute the view to himself, he uses it as an example in his argument, saying,

“And so people do not assign movement to non-existent things, though they do assign some other predicates. E.g. they say that non-existent things are objects of

thought and desire, but not that they are moved; and this is because, while ex hypothesi they do not actually exist, they would have to exist actually if they were moved. For of non-existent things some exist potentially; but they do not exist, because they do not exist in complete reality" (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 9: Ch. 3: 1047a32-1047b2).

So, when Aristotle is taking about non-existents, he is not taking about nothing, but rather something that can exist potentially. However, he does not explicitly say that non-existents do not exist because they have no reality at all, rather he leaves the door open a crack by saying that they merely lack complete reality. This leniency suggests that some non-existents are nothings, while others are potentials and these potentials possess a sort of partial existence. Thus, we might understand potentiality to be a partial existence; however, we are now brought to a new question: what is a partial existence? Is existence a binary yes or no for Aristotle, or does potentiality explore some middle ground. Well, based on our inquiry into the law of noncontradiction, we can assume that Aristotle certainly cannot mean some halfway point between being and nonbeing. Aristotle is also a proponent of the law of excluded middle, a companion and logically equivalent law to the law of noncontradiction, which states that a being either exists or it does not and, thus, there is no in between or outside to the being-nonbeing binary. So, potential must be a full being, but somehow incomplete. I do not see how an incomplete reality could be anything other than the unreal. For, actuality is when something is really occurring; whereas, the potential has yet to occur, so it must be not really occurring or unreal. Thus, I believe that some of the linchpins of Aristotle's philosophical system are inconsistent with one another.

Either Aristotle must return to the potential and actual and describe how potential is a complete reality, which would suffice to leave it inert and useless for what he is attempting to do with it, or he must return to how he pictures beings and allow them to emerge out of nothing. Either potentiality is a nothing out of which being emerges to become actual, or it is a being along with actuality and his universe is static, much like Parmenides. See how he is left with the choice of our two first parts of the tetralemma? Either Aristotle goes with the first and re-envision potential as a substantive nothingness (allowing being to come from nothing), or he doubles down on a static universe and excludes this encroachment of nothingness (i.e., incomplete reality) from his cosmology. Now, of course, I believe that we should reinterpret potentiality under the schema of nothingness for the purposes of our project. Although I do not believe that potential can be saved without serious adaption, it is not beyond repair. In fact, in my opinion, Aristotle missed his opportunity to reinterpret potentiality by glossing over two important concepts: chance and spontaneity.

Chance and spontaneity are related to each other in that, at their heart, they are both the same phenomena; however, chance is a subcategory of spontaneity. Aristotle outlines their respective purviews as such:

“They differ in that ‘spontaneity’ is the wider term. Every result from chance is from what is spontaneous, but not everything that is from what is spontaneous is from chance. Chance and what results from chance are appropriate to agents that are capable of good fortune and moral actions generally. Therefore necessarily chance is in the sphere of moral actions” (McKeon, *Physics*: Bk. 2: Ch. 6: 197a36-197b2).

Although at first glance it might seem as though we could associate chance and spontaneity each with one of the two types of beings, chance with artifice, spontaneity with nature, objects of artifice actually produce both chance and spontaneous effects. Spontaneity is clearly aligned with nature; nevertheless, artificial objects remain on both sides because it is their creators, moral agents, that can do things by chance, not they themselves. A ladder can by chance fall over and land on an unfortunate person's foot; however, the ladder is not what the chance cause is attributed to. The ladder was made poorly by a carpenter and a carpenter is an agent, so the chance refers to the agent, the carpenter, not the ladder. To say that the ladder is great fuel for that fire I planned on having later, on the other hand, is a spontaneous act because it refers to the ladder itself, not its external maker. It is a spontaneous quality of the wood out of which it is made. Because not only do all existing objects fall into the larger category of spontaneity but also our present project has little if nothing at all to do with morality and freedom of choice, I will revamp potentiality by utilizing spontaneity and discarding chance.

Aristotle conforms spontaneity by attaching it to other causes instead of allowing the concept to stand alone. Spontaneity is muted and reimagined as unintended effects of a cause meant to achieve another result. In this way, spontaneity no longer carries the full randomness that common speech might hope to inject into our way of thinking. Spontaneous events do not come from nowhere at random, but rather they are the unintended effects of already existent causes. Aristotle demotes spontaneity to a "mode of causation 'source of change', for either some natural or some intelligent agent is the cause" so that they never stand alone, always attached to the real cause because,

“Spontaneity and chance are causes of the effects which, though they may result from intelligence or nature, have in fact been caused by something incidentally. Now since nothing which is incidental is prior to what is per se, it is clear that no incidental cause can be prior to a cause per se. Spontaneity and chance, therefore, are posterior to intelligence and chance. Hence, however true it may be that the heavens are due to spontaneity, it will still be true that intelligence and nature will be prior causes of this All and of many things in it besides.” (McKeon, *Physics*: Bk. 2: Ch. 6: 198a2-14).

Spontaneity can never be a full cause or the actual cause of a result. Instead, it is merely when the effects that do occur by some natural or intelligent cause are greater than what was meant to occur. So, the ladder was meant to provide a means by which to elevate ourselves and fix the roof; however, by chance, another unintended result happened: the ladder fell and broke someone's toe. Or, in the natural scope, when a loose stone falls down the mountainside, it is meant to roll until it has reached the lowest point, for earth's nature is to tend towards the middle (according to Aristotle). However, it spontaneously struck and broke a branch on its descent, and this break is spontaneous because it was not the result of the nature of the stone nor was it the nature of the tree, it was happenstance, spontaneity. Although spontaneity maintains an element of randomness in its production of unintended effects, it is tamed and stripped of its causality. It is the appearance of uncaused effects through another unnoticed cause.

Now, I do not advocate that we restore spontaneity to an unjustified height. Regardless of whether or not uncaused events can occur completely at random, we can separate the

uncaused from the random. Instead, we should focus on the uncaused and use it as our fix for potentiality. By uncaused, I do not mean a sort of self-caused event. Although, from the view of substance, Aristotle might, at first, like the idea of self-cause because it supports the independence of substances, he would ultimately reject it because it would be a horrible explanatory device for everyday objects. Rather, what I mean by uncaused is coming from nothing or nowhere, otherwise appearing spontaneously. So, what sort of source is a potential? A potential is the natural propensity of an object to either come into existence or acquire new qualities through spontaneity. This sort of growth may come from nothing, but it is not completely random. It is curated by the very object that possesses the potential.

The acorn possesses the potential to become an oak tree based on the actualities that it already possesses. Some of these actualities are the fats, carbohydrates and proteins all present in its core to promote growth; however, we might say that it lacks one more actuality, water, to activate the potentiality. Once it falls to the ground and the final actuality is added, these actualities in combination with one another flip growth from one side of the being-nonbeing binary over to the other. Thus, when the actualities are separated, the growth is nonexistent; however, when they are brought together, the growth spontaneously, out of nothing and nowhere, exists. Let us return to the discussion of contrary attributes. We said that contraries have a slight connection to their opposites in that they are opposing. Not-white is connected to white by being its contrary. I argue that the potential within the not-white to become white is the ability to drag the white out of nonbeing, through the assistance of the actualities already present, at the consequence of itself becoming nothing. In a sense, the non-white and white are switching places between reality and non-reality. Imagine not-white as a person above the

ice on a frozen lake, white as a person below and the ice as the other actualities of the being. The potential is not-white's ability to drag white ashore by pushing off of the ice; however, through that pushing, the ice beneath not-white cracks and it falls into nonexistence, nothingness. Likewise, Aristotle would be happy because there is still reasoning to the proposition. When the ice is thick enough, the not-white, being a general all-around great person, will gladly sacrifice themselves to save white, but only because the ice is thick enough so that they do not both drown, because there is sufficient actuality. It happens spontaneously, as if from nothing, nowhere.

Of course, this metaphor has its own problems by presenting nonbeing as a sort of mirror negative reality, but this effect is not uncommon for substance-based metaphysics. By and large, the strength of potential returns when transformed into a spontaneous nothing. Therefore, the introduction of the concept, being comes from nothing, does not create the randomness that Aristotle might have supposed because it is kept in check by the actuality already present. Not only would this notion not obstruct the laws of noncontradiction and excluded middle, but also inject into his system a new way of thinking about objects that might rewrite his entire thinking. Oddly enough, this new path seems to a very small degree resemble Daoist cosmology in that the order appears from nowhere. To explore how Aristotle's thinking might have changed, we must transition to a philosophical system that championed the claim that being comes from nothingness: Daoism. Before we uncover exactly why this conception of nothingness is untenable and my misgivings about how it relates to the second part of the tetralemma, first, I would like to background the lens of the discussion, the inadequacy of substance, by looking at Daoist cosmology.

A Harmony from Nowhere

Our introduction of Daoist cosmology serves as both a steppingstone for future chapters and our understanding of the Daoist philosophies as a whole and the first crack in the fortification of substance in our minds. Although nothingness may take a back seat for the time being, know that nothing will both still be present in the background of the conversations to be had about Daoism and must be pushed off until later chapters to be fully surveyed. I delay our full treatment of nothingness because we will need the help that the Buddha can provide in later chapters and, also, because I wish to discuss it in context of the Dao, which is both too large of a concept to cover in this chapter and fits and resonates more fluidly in our cosmogonic chapter against the contrast of the Unmoved Mover. For these reasons, our description of Daoist cosmology will not include as much nothingness as we may have hoped but understand that not only will this chapter be comprehensive without it but also that nothingness operates in the background as both a conceptual tool and function of the Dao. Thus, without farther ado, let us turn to a defining feature of Daoism: its non-substantive metaphysics.

When we ask ourselves where beings come from, our most commonplace and innate reaction is to assume, just like Aristotle, that beings must come from other beings. We naturally tend to think this way because the reification of objects, i.e., the predisposition to think of everything we encounter as a pinpointable and solidly definable subject deserving of predication, is hardwired into our cognitive processes (we shall farther explicate this understanding of substance in a following chapter on Buddhism's association of substance and mentality). This thought-process we might unceremoniously call substance-thinking: the

tendency to implicitly think of beings and real-world objects as substances. This default mode of perceiving the world not only acts as a roadblock towards any sort of conception of beings as coming from nothing but also freezes objects into a sort of static prison.

Defined in brief, substance is independent from the rest of reality, whole and complete by itself, imperishable and eternal, and a perfection. We recognize it as what stays the same about an object throughout all of its interactions in the world. So, if I chip the surface of a table or saw a drooping branch off of an oak tree, the object may have been affected by my actions; however, the underlying substance goes unchanged. You might say, 'Of course, the table and the oak tree are the same table and oak tree. Nothing has changed about the rest of them.' Yet, this fact is not the point of substance. What you have keenly noticed is how our minds are naturally set up to reify objects into substances. We split objects up into a subject, the main reified substance, and its predicates, additional reified properties that not only become substances themselves but are also inexplicably associated and fused back together with the subject. The table becomes: the subject, the table, and its properties, four legs, brown, etc. You can cut off any part of that table, and you can still say that there is still a rest of the object to refer to, as there is still a 'this' or a 'that' (the subject of the sentence); but, at the end of the day, we must ask ourselves what the true substance is, what truly are the subjects underlying all our talk about things. I mention this phenomenon in brief here in order to not only characterize the Aristotelian system as defined by this way of thinking, as Aristotle went to extreme lengths to try and pin down exactly what substance is, but also as a warning of the traps that lay ahead as we decipher Daoism, Laozi, the Dao De Jing, and Zhuangzi. For, Daoism is not a metaphysical system that subscribes to substance-thinking. Instead, Daoism attempts

to think beyond reification and understand objects as interconnected, dependent upon conditions, and undergoing constant change. As we shall see, the conception of being as coming from nothing and nowhere is key to Daoism's endeavor to do just that.

In some respects, the Dao De Jing gives us some clear-cut opinions on how the world works. It's short and immediate poetry can, at times, pull no punches and tell us something profound about the world. In this way, Laozi does not leave us stranded in a sea of mystery. For example, the belief, which we came to the Dao De Jing in hopes of finding, is explicitly stated, "Being originates from non-being" (Laozi: 40, 4). Thus, we know right off the bat that Daoism has something to do with our project. However, unlike Aristotle's dense prose and many qualifying, explicative and descriptive sentences, Laozi prefers to leave us wondering at what he could possibly have meant by non-being, being, and the rest of his metaphysical sayings. Most notably, the central principle of the Daoist schema, the Dao, still today remains shrouded in inscrutability. Although we may get some direct cues into exactly what Laozi suggests by Dao, we must piece together the meaning of this concept as well as that of non-being's by embedding them in the larger context of his metaphysical system. With the help of his successor, Zhuangzi, we penetrate his theory of language to characterize his ideas about how substance appears to humanity and the confusion it produces. As we shall see, not only must we approach each of these concepts wary of substance-thinking, but also, we must be cautious not to isolate any part of the text as whole, for fear of shattering its mutually dependent nature.

Just like before, let us begin with cosmology, but, this time, reverse our order and look first at cosmology as a whole over how individual objects act in the world. For, our intention in

Daoist analysis is to downplay our isolative, substantive tendencies and focus on the environment in order to better understand the individual. In fact, we must look at both the individual and environment at the same time in order to appreciate how they both mutual form and inform one another. This mutual formation is not only how the particular makes up the order the world and how that order rests on the individuals below it, but also how that order shapes the particular, the particulars around that particular and particulars in the future to come. So, although at first obscure, the Daoist cosmology is simple, yet elegant, “Dao engenders One, / One engenders Two, / Two engenders Three, / Three engenders the ten thousand things” (Laozi: 42, 1-4). Before we describe how the Dao creates each of these particulars, let us first describe how these particulars interact with one another and form relationships and orders.

Our first task is to define the One. Now, there are a myriad of ways we might interpret the simple yet not so simple word one. There is an ambiguity that lies across all languages: one as a particular and unique thing (that one specific table, this specific one oak tree), as in a whole (the parts of the body, nose, feet, etc., are all one), as in a totality (a hundred cents is one dollar), as a type of thing (I would like one entree, please), and as the universe as single order and presence of being (mostly reserved for philosophical points and mysticism but obviously important to our present conversation). Now, the One I believe Laozi to be referring to here is somewhere in between the first definition and the third, with a dash of the second and fourth for reasons I’ll explain in a little bit. We interpret Laozi’s usage of One here to have an intentional ambiguity because Laozi understands objects as non-substantive and, more specifically, as unbounded. Laozi likes to differentiate between names and things as they

actually are. Luckily for us, our definition of names will end up mirroring our how we understand objects in our daily lives because names spring forth from a substantialist point of view. Moreover, although Laozi and Zhuangzi may differ on some key metaphysical and ethical issues, Zhuangzi holds a remarkably similar view on language as Laozi, so Zhuangzi's work can act as a guiding Rosetta Stone for the Dao De Jing in this regard. Let us explicate with passages that contextualize names and Ones with one another and then compare them with the Zhuangzi. Unfortunately, because this text is so holistic and interconnected, some of our best passages on the matter compare names to the nature of the Dao, that very topic we were hoping to leave until we had a better understanding of the Dao De Jing's cosmology. So, we will be forced to do a light treatment of the Dao in comparison to names; however, I will make sure to focus our analysis on names and save a deep dive into the Dao for later on in our examination of Daoism. Finally, let us move on to a few selections from relevant passages, hoping to paint a picture using them all in connection to one another:

“Dao called Dao is not Dao. / Names can name no lasting name. / Nameless: the origin of heaven and earth. / Naming: the mother of the ten thousand things.” (Laozi: 1, 1-4)

“Recognize beauty and ugliness is born. / Recognize good and evil is born. / Is and Isn't produce each other. / Hard depends on easy, / Long is tested by short, / High is determined by low, / Sounds is harmonized by voice, / After is followed by before.”
(Laozi: 2, 1-8)

“Hold and fill it – / Not as good as stopping in time. / Measure and pound it – / It will not long survive. / When gold and jade fill the hall, / They cannot be guarded.”

(Laozi: 9, 1-6)

“Five colors darken the eyes. / Five tones deaden the ears. / Five tastes jade the palate.” (Laozi: 12, 1-3)

“Great Dao rejected: / Benevolence and righteousness appear. / Learning and knowledge professed: / Great hypocrites spring up. / Family relations forgotten: / Filial piety and affection arise.” (Laozi: 18, 1-6)

“Dao endures without a name. / Though simple and slight, / No one under heaven can master it. / ... / Begin to make order, and names arise. / Names lead to more names– / And to knowing when to stop. / Know when to stop: / Avoid danger.” (Laozi: 32, 1-3, 10-14)

Automatically, we notice a tension between Dao, along with the way that the world actually works, and names, as we glimpse at passages 1, 9, and 32. First, let us look at 32 as a guide for understanding the other two, and we shall then see that 2, 12 and 18 are results of this reading. 1 and 32 both tell us that the Dao is nameless; thus, we already know that Daoism is definitely not a logocentric philosophy because its main principle, Dao, is distinguished from language. Moreover, we know that names neither accurately represent reality as it actually is, nor do they last forever, because Dao both orders reality and remains eternal. But what exactly is a name?

Well, it closely matches an exact ordering of things, and this interpretation is the key to understanding them.

Right here is where our preview of substance become relevant. Peak out of a window and look at a specific tree, noticing its particularity in this very moment in time. When we name that object, tree, we are carving out a specific ordering of things in space and time and reifying it into a single object with endurance. If we were to not name it, it would possess no specific order; but, because we have taken account of its order, we have crystalized it in time. "Begin to make order, and names arise." As 18 proclaims, if Dao is rejected, names like good and evil, with exact knowledges of what they are and how to make them, start to surface. These names themselves have the potential to be dangerous because they distract us from looking at the world a realistic way: in a non-substantive manner. Perhaps, this definition is best expressed through its counterexamples because the world does not abide by these names, it abides by the Dao.

If, in order for something to maintain its namesake, it must stay exactly as it is, be unchanging as a substance is; then, a named object is something that we observe to have a permanence over time. Yet, as 9 explains, no object remains exactly the same over time. The world is filled with an impermanence that cycles out old being with new being at every second. In fact, the only way to get any sort of respite from this constant flux and flow is to stop time dead in its tracks. However, time can only be stopped in abstraction. Time is unstoppable. Thus, we must recognize that no matter how hard we try to keep something ordered exactly as it is, it will always be subject to change. Eventually, it will either transform into something new and

different or disband altogether, having no assemblance of its former name. Zhuangzi helps illustrate what names get wrong about the world,

“Words are not just wind. Words have something to say. But if what they have to say is not fixed, then do they really say something? Or do they say nothing? People suppose that words are different from the peeps of baby birds, but is there any difference, or isn’t there?” (Zhuangzi, 34).

Because a name hopes to pick out something eternal and fixed about the world, and nothing in the world remains fixed ever, names do not actually pick out anything real about the world in the ultimate sense. But, let us not be too overjealous and condemn all naming as fantasy. It is not that there is no difference between words and bird peeps. Words attempt to identify and carve out a section of the world while bird peeps are empty sounds. Zhuangzi’s point is that naming’s referent is a fixed order; however, such a referent does not exist forever, so words are rendered as empty as the chirping of birds at an ultimate scale. Nevertheless, names do pick out actual contraries between points in space. Although naming lacks staying power from the ultimate point of view, from the relative perspectives of humans, names not only make sense but also are rather useful. However, names rely on the substantive-thinking of all humans. Thus, naming, as an activity in all languages, confuses the whole of humanity into believing a name names a fixed order which is not really there. The name is certainly there momentary, perhaps, if we are lucky, it will last human lifetimes; but, eventually, it will pass as all things do. Names deal only with the truth of relative and human perspectives. To talk about the world as a whole, we must forget them.

So, that thing outside the window that you called a tree, this very second it may have had a twig break, or a leaf fall off. Therefore, if these parts of the tree can change, it has nothing about it that will last forever. The tree will one day lose its name, proving that “names can name no lasting name.” Thus, we have learned that names represent our tendency to carve out a lasting order in the world, which rightly intuits a presence but wrongly assumes a permanence. Tied into these declarations of immutability is the very process by which an order is carved out. How the defining of boundaries is accomplished exemplifies how the mind operates as well as why we separate objects from one another.

Passage 2 not only illustrates how names are carved out of the human experience but also how names spawn other names to accompany them. Passage 2 lists out oppositions (similar to Aristotle’s contraries, yet this time we are not taking about becoming) and takes acute notice of the interdefinability of words. Each of these oppositions gains its meaning from the meaning of its opposite. “Is and Isn’t produce each other.” This relationship between words both signifies the non-substantive nature of Daoist thought, for it focuses on the interdependency of language and the process by which its antithesis is produced. For, when we name, we focus on the Is alone, forgetting the Isn’t. Zhuangzi mirrors this sentiment when he remarks that, “Everything has its ‘that,’ everything has its ‘this.’ From the point of view of ‘that’ you cannot see it. So I say, ‘that’ comes out of ‘this’ and ‘this’ depends on ‘that’ – which is to say that ‘this’ and ‘that’ give birth to each other” (Zhuangzi, 35). Clearly, Zhuangzi wishes to point out that names possess an inclusive and exclusive effect. The ‘that’ is what is included in the name and the ‘this’ excluded. Although ‘this’ depends on ‘that’, and ‘that’ and ‘this’ give rise to one another, we tend to forget the ‘this’ in the process. Naming is about defining a

boundary, but this boundary can only be formed through inclusion of something and exclusion of everything else. Thus, because the boundary can only be known through the knowledge of what is 'that' and what is 'this,' names are born out of the inclusion and exclusion together, not just the inclusion alone. For clarity, this exclusion is what makes naming so useful to us humans when in our daily lives and so detrimental in our philosophy and spirituality. When we name, we are focusing on what is included in a human experience and cutting out the extra fluff. When we shed naming, we focus on what is both the sum of all viewpoints, human and otherwise, and beyond perspective.

Let us return to the tree. We carve the tree out of its environment by identifying what it is and what it is not. I notice the root by defining the space in my vision around it as not-root. This noticing creates new names in three ways: naming the root or the part of the world I wish to isolate (the creation of the single name), naming the not-root or what we might call grass, dirt, etc. (the creation of many names to describe the opposition), and finally the myriad of terms I might use to identify, define and justify that differentiation (the creation of named proprieties: color, shape, motion, etc.).

Zhuangzi has already helped us in understanding this first way through the example above, but he can also help us comprehend the second. "He too recognizes a 'this,' but a 'this' which is also a 'that,' a 'that' which is also a 'this.' His 'that' has both right and wrong in it; his 'this' too has both right and wrong in it" (Zhuangzi, 35). Because the boundary between a 'this' and a 'that' is a binary between what is included and excluded, that binary can be flipped to think of what was included now as an exclusion and what was excluded now as an inclusion.

This tension between what should be included and excluded is the right and wrong in each side. Because there is an order, so that a boundary is firmly established, there must be a way things ought to remain to preserve the perspective we choose to represent. If both sides must be a certain way, maintain a certain order, then both sides can be a 'that,' meaning they are both deserving of names. In this way, the not-root gains a name, or names per our third way.

In the case of properties, they might be parts within the whole, as the root is meant to help in differentiating the tree from the environment, although oddly it does so by differentiating itself from the rest of the tree (we often remain blissfully ignorant of this fact while continuing our cutting). These part-properties are the simple fact that farther orders can be defined, farther boundaries can be drawn, with both their own 'this's and 'that's. What's more, these parts can be continuously divided and divided until we reach our most basic properties: base elements of the human experience, sense data, like color or spatio-temporality. (We shall return to properties again when we look at the relations of Two, but this time from a non-substantive context). This network of names dissects a region of space-time out of the world by being that very order that we described. The tree's order is its most basic properties: that brown coloration, against the backdrop of the other colors in your vision; arranged in that branching sort of shape, surrounded by filtered out space; with a hardness and roughness to touch, as oppose to the fluidity of the air encasing it. Observe that even as I attempt to collect the order of the tree, naming all the names that form it, I must do so against an order that surrounds it. In order for the name 'tree' to have meaning, or at least for its order to have meaning, it must be in the environment. It is only when we forget that the name arises out of this inter-defined order that we become confused and get this substantive picture of the

world. The isolating effect of substance is the tendency of naming to forget that its opposition creates it.

Naming can damage not only our ultimate understanding of the world by causing us to ignore the role of the surrounding environment and lock us into a self-perceived immutable order; but also, blind us to alternative perspectives because names tend to also limit the discovery of new particularities within the world. Due to their exactness, we can be fooled into thinking that names can be considered in isolation from their environment and as solid in time. Picture the tree. It is no doubt stationary as you focus on its ordering. Yet, consider any movement or change in the background. Even though you might say that that tree stays exactly the same, regardless of the movement, you have missed its change. If the environment changes, so does that tree you have isolated. The interdefinability of 'this' and 'that' means a shift in one is a shift in both. For example, imagine a rock next to the tree. If that rock is small like a pebble, then you might be tempted to call the tree larger. Certainly, from that rock's perspective, the tree is mountainous. However, if that tree were to grow into a hulking boulder, then suddenly the tree has become small. Now, it sure is puny according to the rock. Or, as another example, consider the relativity of space. Every object can be taken as a stationary frame of reference while the entire world moves around it. Zhuangzi demonstrates the relativity of values, senses and other such relations:

“Men eat the flesh of grass-fed and grain-fed animals, deer eat grass, centipedes find snakes tasty, and hawks and falcons relish mice. Of these four, which knows how food ought to taste? Monkeys pair with monkeys, deer go out with deer, and fish play

around with fish. Men claim that Maoqiang and Lady Li were beautiful, but if fish saw them they would dive to the bottom of the stream, if birds saw them they would fly away, and if deer saw them they would break into a run. Of these four, which knows how to fix the standards of beauty for the world? The way I see it, the rules of benevolence and righteousness and the paths of right and wrong are all hopelessly snarled and jumbled. How could I know anything about such discriminations?"

(Zhuangzi, 41)

All of these animals represent the different perspectives that you can take upon viewing the world. If every perspective reveals a different truth, and all of these truths have equal validity, then we must admit that there is no correct vantagepoint. Thus, every change in the environment must be taken as a change to the tree because every viewpoint is equal in truth. If the rock moves, the tree may say it itself stayed stationary, but the rock disagrees. The relativity of truth is based in the continuousness of the particular and its environs. A problem that can sometimes arise in naming is that it highlights one particular perspective, shrouding all others. One viewpoint can end up being valued as more truthful than all others, or, even worse, as the singular truth. Naming might stem from our sense of empathy, to make something else the center of the universe. However, it is when we forget that we can continue to bolster this empathy, learn new names, embrace all names at once or as one, and/or forget them all together that we run into trouble.

Moreover, taking our names too seriously can harm our view of the world because, if we fix our names as definite and unchangeable, we will be limited to not just a human

perspective but also a narrow and detrimentally specific single viewpoint within humanity's infinite well of possible experiences. To understand why a freezing of boundaries is ultimately unjustifiable, just look at the pages you are reading. If you were limited to calling this text an unbroken chain, you would miss how every page makes individual points. If you forced these lines to be only the individual worlds that make them up, you could never understand sentences or even ideas. Dividing lines can be drawn with ease but can only be taken at face value, never assumed to be entire iceberg that lurks under the ocean's surface. However, passage 12 warns us that there are times when no naming can be done, when we must take things a bit farther to get at the more absolute, when we must take a view from nowhere. If we take there to be only five real and existent colors, then all the shades in between the demarcating lines of each color are reduced to a sad sameness. Yet, it is not the addition of names and categories that improves this situation because not only will the newness of the colors will soon wear off, replaced by that very same sameness that we saw before, but also it would take infinite names to free the infinity of shades in between from conformity. The only true way to free our eyes from the darkening of five colors is to forget their names altogether and drop their divisions. Throwing out categories does not mean seeing the world in monochrome or without color at all. The action, or rather lack thereof, is a refusal to distinguish, thereby seeing the entire spectrum in full. Without division, all particularities are perceived, rather than only choice ones, cherry picked because they either fall into a definable order or a premade category.

So, now that we know that names are an order established through division from the environment, we can explicate the difference between names and Ones. Simply, Ones are

particularities within the world. Ones are similar to names, but they lack that same assemblance of order and isolation from environment, meaning that we should always consider them as connected to other Ones (perhaps, all other Ones)/continuous with their surroundings, as well as falling into no specific order (not only is an order not established because no divisions are present, but also a particular One can subsist however it wishes, free flowing). These two facts help us to recognize that Ones, as non-substantives, are never self-same, always changing in the flux and flow of, and just like, the rest of the environment. However, you, as I do, might find yourself grasping at straws attempting to picture such a worldview because our default mode of depicting and describing the world is through the naming process. In lieu of this confusion, I offer an attempt at illustrating the matter. Imagine a carpet laying on the floor which has been scrunched so that a hill has formed in the center of the rug. The One in this case is that hill in the center of the rug. It is a particularity because, when we view it, it presents itself as having a character unlike that of the rest of the carpet. If I were to have never named that center section of the rug, you likely would have noticed it; but, never have called it a 'hill', 'crease', 'scrunch' or the like. You would have noticed a difference within the carpet, that One, but still have called it all rug, all the same. Thus, it is possible to perceive difference without creating divisions within structures and naming. This sense gives One that uniqueness of the first definition, but how do we explain the totality and wholeness. Well, the totality comes from the fact that any point on/section of that rug could be considered a One, so we might regard the entire universe as an infinite set of Ones, as the universe could be carved into an infinite number of spaces (connected or unconnected). Thus, One really is a mixture of particularity and entirety because it is uniqueness across totality. Lastly, how is One a whole? One's wholeness

comes actually from its ability to also be a Two. So, let us define Two because these two definitions mutually inform one another.

Two is most simply yet accurately represented as a relationship between two beings. This relationship is itself unique and ever changing because it exists between two Ones that are themselves changing. However, this relationship is not to be broken apart as is done when we name. For, when naming, that relationship is broken apart into separate pieces that are subject to reification, making it supremely difficult to recognize them all as a single relation. Now seen as Ones, return to our two names from before: the tree and the boulder. Naming causes us to see the different properties between them as separate relations in and of themselves. Although to some extent this is true, the boulder really is larger than the tree, each of these relational properties is not the relationship, the Two, in and of itself because the relational properties are separate from one another when viewed in this way. The One is continuous with its environment so the Two is both a mark of that connection and the form of it. The Two is the knowledge that every point of the environment is a One, meaning that the environment is, in a sense, in communication with itself. Twoness is the mutually dependent and determinate relationship of all Ones to one another due to their non-substantial nature. The tree is not just smaller, more colorful, softer, more animate, more flammable, etc. as compared with the boulder because the process of naming breaks these properties apart. Naming misses the realization that these relational properties, which we already recognize as parts, also contribute to a whole. Twoness is the whole of the relationship between two Ones, all those relational properties fused into a single relationship. Moreover, the wholeness of the Two represents that Ones are so continuous with their environment that, if we were to take these two Ones and

combine them together into a single One, that single One's being would be the whole of both what was previously known as the Ones and the Two between them. Now, we also understand why the definition of One has an air of wholeness to it. All Ones have within them Twos, since divisions of reality can be made along any lines. Thus, Two represents relationship of Ones to one another.

Finally, we can move on to Three: best described as the pattern or naturally forming order of the environment. It is how these Twos come into confluence with one another. Now, it is important to preface that the process I am about to describe differs wildly from the teleological understanding that Aristotle might have had of the scenario. Not only does the teleological framework emerge from a substance-based metaphysics, but also individual Ones are not presumed to follow any pre-drawn model. Teleological notions assume that there is a way that things ought to be; however, if things begin from a happenstance standpoint, then, as they evolve with their environment, they have no set plan to follow. There is no *telos* towards which they are drawn because the continuous nature of Ones is an acknowledgement of the ability to draw and redraw the boundaries of what we call Ones. Moreover, Ones have no independence or separation so what would they be moving towards? Another One that has yet to exist? Laozi notices that our separations of means and ends is what results in this type of thinking. However, he has a firm warning for us: "Trying to control the world? / I see you won't succeed. / The world is a spiritual vessel / And cannot be controlled. / Those who control, fail. / Those who grasp, lose." (Laozi: 29, 1-6). Objects have no predetermined order or place. Nor can they be shifted into an exact order or arrangement to create the same desired outcome every time because this thinking involves an isolation of events, a result of naming, which will lead to

misunderstanding. You cannot force or bend the world to your will. Instead, you must move with the propensities of the object and surrounding environment, more so, hoping to tip events in the right direction rather than stronghold. In the same way that we cannot manhandle smaller regions of space, the entirety of the universe cannot be controlled by any telos. Thus, teleology has no place in the Daoist cosmological model.

In Daoism, just as beings come from nothing, order and pattern come from nowhere. There is no need for an outside agent or driving intelligence to guide beings towards an order that either that external force establishes or was preordained. Western philosophies often have an understanding of order as made up of exact measures or based in mathematical formula, but this approach is not often taken in Chinese philosophy, especially not in the Daoist approach to order. Order, in Daoism, is similar to harmonization. Ones will seamlessly merge into an already existent order by falling into the place that they are most suited for; and, likewise, that already existent order molds itself to that new One in equal turn. We see this process take place when we describe evolution and ecology. Organisms will take niches that are not yet filled as ecosystems will naturally rebalance themselves after traumatic events like extinction, displacement or climatic change. Obviously then, we can classify the Daoist world as an organic vision of reality.

Because the Daoist world is continuous with itself, Ones and Twos not only already relate to one another but also any new One or Two that comes into existence will gain a relation to the whole already in place. Thus, because of this interconnectedness, they will immediately harmonize with all things around them and seamlessly slip into place within the

whole that already exists. In the end, the entire universe, the ultimate Three, is also an ultimate One, giving us our fourth sense of One, as a grand unified Three. These thoughts are expanded upon in the lines following the Dao, One, Two, Three, thousand things cosmology: “The ten thousand things carry shade / And embrace sunlight. / Shade and sunlight, yin and yang / Breath blending into harmony.” (Laozi: 42, 5-8). Not only do these lines tell us that Three is a harmony of the world, an order brought about by the interdependent relations of Ones; but also, they inform us of where naming is actually derived. Names do not come from our observations of the Ones by themselves. Because naming relies on orders, what we are really doing when we name is crystalizing the One, by identifying static parts of Twos, which are a solid and rigidified version of the Three. A Three is all the Twos surrounding a One, while a name is bits and parts of Twos a certain perspective might take hold of. For, the Three is the culmination of the Ones and Twos, so naming is a carving out of specific orders within the Three. Consequently, the reference to yin and yang makes sense. There is an element of the ten thousand things in the Three and an element of the Three in the ten thousand things. The model of One, Two, and Three as a representation of a non-substantive and interconnected universe is rather remarkable.

However, it leaves us wondering, what is driving this change, flow and flux. We understand that the universe is able to self-harmonize, but what holds this wholeness together and from where do these Ones, Twos and Threes emerge? Take the example of the organism moving into a new niche. Obviously, a new harmony emerges from this movement and new relations and Ones are born, but what exactly drives this movement and out of what are these relations and Ones coming. Even more curious, how did this entire process begin? Was there a

first One and from where did it come? Well, as we have noted before, being comes from nonbeing but not just any type of nonbeing: the Dao.

As we continue our investigations, we must not forget the influence that the One, Two, Three model possesses on our understanding of Buddhism as well as how our interpretation of Dao can lead us to a greater understand of this model. We have answered the cosmological questions of both the substantive and non-substantive, but now, we must attempt the same with the mental, the cosmogonic and the characteristic (the principle, way of reality). Only then can move on to our final task of encountering nothingness. Thus, concludes our contextualization of our project. Without hesitation, or perhaps with a great lot, we may begin to climb the mountain of our tetralemma.

An Interlude at the Foothills of Mountains of Nothingness

Our journey through the tetralemma of nothingness mirrors the ascendance up a mountain. As we climb, the air will thin as common-sense notions of the world fade into the misty fog. My arguments will become not only more complex but also seem to become illogical as we stray from philosophy's focus on mentality, as you shall certainly learn the following chapter. You may claim that I suffer from a madness included by poor oxygenation due to the elevation; however, I assure you that my positions seem untenable not because I lack rationality but because I am turning away from the world, the home of rationality, towards the nothingness above. So, now that I have guided you through the valley of backgrounding and context (although Buddha's philosophies have yet to be described, I include him in the journey up the mountain because my tetralemma is based upon his), we may make our first and second base camp and discuss the first and second part of our tetralemma: A and then $\sim A$.

Still, I juggle in my mind these two phases because I get the sense from how we use nothing in our common everyday language as well as the definitions of substance that we are really given the option of classifying either of the two conceptions as either of the two phases. Allow me to first describe the common definition of nothing and then reiterate the two conceptions we hold of nothing. This common definition is, of course, related to substance. Substance lurks in the background of our culture because all cultures possess an unpronounced and implicit metaphysics that the participants within that culture unknowingly know. Thus, when I say nothing, you think the lack of something. Covertly, you think of that lack as a substantive thing, which is isolated from its environment and self-same over time. Yet, what do

we mean by that lack? A substantive negative reality or the ignorance of all reality, anti-reality? The sense of nothing in everyday usage seems to be slightly confused on that matter because, well, I do not think that when we use the word out in the real world, we really think about what we mean by it. We just use it. Because both of these senses are connotated, both conceptions track on with one of these two senses: the nothing we propose when we mean the lack of an object; and nothing as a lack of conception, a lack of mentality that, in the context of substantive thinking, means an anti-reality. A and $\sim A$ are variable based on the sense you use most regularly. Thus, I find myself loathing to decide which is which for fear of crossing someone's opinions. Yet, it must be decided, so I will decide that, because, when we use the word nothing, we are often doing so in order to express a lack of current reality, the most common sense of nothing is as a negative reality, not an anti-reality. Moreover, this sense aligns more closely with substance so it makes more sense as an A, although someone might argue that a $\sim A$ is the best A in a tetralemma of nothingness (see I am still juggling). So, let us describe the two conceptions and why they are in each phase of the tetralemma.

Our sense of a negative reality tracks on to our notion of the mirror world underneath the ice of actuality in our backgrounding of Aristotle. This conception, along with our other subsequent conception, fails to accurately describe nothingness because it emerges from a prioritization of being (this conception, especially, however, because it is the most substantive or being-y of all). A theme of this tetralemma is that nothingness is, for once, prioritized and placed at the center of its own philosophy, so it will become the highest priority of this tetralemma. As a result, the mirror world as a nothing fails completely and utterly because it is merely envisioning nothingness as an opposite world to our own. Mirror world is a parallel to

our world, enjoying all the same qualities as our own, just in reverse and drenched in a cloak of “nothingness.” It makes nothingness into an inside out substance, a sort of reverse of a substantive thing. Rather than imagining nothing as something wholly other than reality, it derives nothing from a substantive reality.

Say you are searching for an object and do not find it. You remark to yourself: there is nothing here. You are not picturing a nothingness (you will understand after our next chapter why these two conceptions relate to a presence and lack thereof mental content because substance is premised upon mental content). You picture that object, painted in some illusory nothingness, like a dotted circle meant to represent the absence of a real filled in one. Nothingness in this conception is a negative image of reality, an opposite of being. If the world were entirely red, then this nothingness would be like calling green nothingness. True nothingness is meant to be the complete lacking and expulsion of all forms and characteristics of reality and being. Not only will we learn that substance is only a small portion of reality rather than the totality of being, but also that any notion of nothing that is derivative of being or a portion of it is both not the true nothing and does not approach nothingness on the grounds it deserves, with a prioritization towards it. Thus, the first part of the tetralemma, A, nothingness as an opposition to being or negative form of reality, is struck down for its reconfiguration of nothing into an odd sort of something.

Our second conception of nothing, the traditional method of treatment by substance-based metaphysics, to dismiss the topic all together, is both an admission of defeat and demeans the discussion. In a sense, it both is and is not derivative of being. It looks at being as a

complete and full is-ness and claims that it must be the opposite: a pure not-ness, an anti-being. Yet, you ask: is this not what you wanted, an expulsion of all being? Yes, however, not only is this response born from an incorrect account of being (as a substance), but also these substantive metaphysicians tend to end the conversation there and refuse to continue. To them, nothing is not worth the time to speak of because this opinion is born from an infatuation with a fixed and perfect reality. To them, nothing is not just the empty page at the beginning of the book which you skip over. It is an evil, dangerous and illogical farce. We are to avoid nothing at all costs for fear of falling into needless paradox and wasting time pointed away from the world. I choose to climb up the mountain in search of a nothing considered on its own terms and beyond the tetralemma. I want to see the nothing that is truly nothing and not the words of a person who settles for: it does not exist. I am choosing to cast off all vestiges of reality, not return to the arms of the world.

As we shall see in the next chapter, substance metaphysicians associate true reality with mentality. This nothingness imagines nothing to be a lack of mentality, a deep sleep of thoughtlessness. Nothingness, here, is a scary point of not-ness and to be ignored at all costs because substantive mental-ness makes it out to be not just devoid of meaning but a void of meaning. Rather than a reverse or negative version of substance, it is an absence of substance. Incapable of imagining being without substance, substance metaphysicians imagine the absence of substance to be a nothing that acts as anti-being. If our first view of nothing was eternalist then this one is certainly annihilationist. But Buddhism not only tells us that there is a middle path between these two extremes but also that the absence of substance is not a nothingness but merely a being that changes and grows. Moreover, nothingness is not an anti-

being because the being in anti-being would make it, once again, derivative of being. In this second rendition of nothing, if the world were entirely red, then this nothingness would be like calling black or rather, more accurately, transparency nothingness.

And, with that, we have ventured up the first two foothills at the base of the mountains of nothingness; yet there is much more to climb. My hope is that you are not discouraged by the dissolution of these first two more common sense notions of nothingness. They remain common sense because they are attached to our understanding of substance; however, what we have yet to explore is substance's link with our mentality. Our next chapter will focus on Buddhism's repositioning of substance along with mentality as an aspect of sensation and the phenomenal world. In this way, the first two conceptions of nothingness are limited by their attachment to substance, so we must gleam the most important parts of the Buddha's tetralemma to complete the following parts of our own. This connection comprises the base of the mountains.

Our third part, the absence of substance, represents the high cliffs of these mountains and follows in the wake of the Buddha's world altering philosophies. As we explore cosmogonies and how they respond to the everchanging world in which we live, we will utilize Aristotle's Unmoved Mover as a backdrop against which to compare the Dao. Through a reconceptualization of the Dao as similar to the Buddha's emptiness or absence of substance, we can encapsulate the $A \wedge \sim A$ of nothingness as well as why this viewpoint must be dissolved.

Likewise, our fourth phase builds on the momentum created by the third as we define the lack of necessary characteristic to reality, $a \sim (A \vee \sim A)$. Such an explanation will take us to

the astronomical peaks of the mountains of nothingness. We will truly begin to lose our grasp on reality because we will be considering not just everything in the world but the everythings all of possible worlds. Thus, I hope you will begin to see an expansion of the scope of our journey as we ascend from a substantive nothing, to anti-being/substance, to an absence that indicates the coherence of everything, to lack of defining principle to all possible everythings. After this final stage we will finally drift into the grand skies of nothing, collapsing and defeating our tetralemma of nothingness, and beginning the mystic work of understanding nothing on its own terms.

Yet, before we embark on this loftier task, first, we must background our entire discussion by following the path that the Buddha has already traced out for us. We are fortunate that the Buddha has already left the cairns of nondualism for us to follow as we make our way up. So, let us investigate Buddhism's association of mentality and substance.

Getting a Sense out of Sense

Is it an accident that “sense” can denote both the definitions and meanings of words as well as phenomenal experience? This line of questioning may be reckless and wild speculation; however, I do not believe it would be out of the bounds for us opine that the original root word’s meaning in some early first language or even ancient and primitive proto-language did not possess two senses but operated as a single sense. Dewey once wrote in *Art as Experience*,

“‘Sense’ covers a wide range of contents: the sensory, the sensational, the sensitive, the sensible, and the sentimental, along with the sensuous. It includes almost everything from the bare physical and emotional shock to sense itself – that is, the meaning of things present in immediate experience” (Dewey, 22).

This latter half of his explanation of the connotation of sense, “to sense itself,” tells us of the mental’s involvement in sensuous experience. How is it that mental senses became so divorced from the five sense of the body? Why is it that the mental sense is placed on a privileged level of seeing-into-reality as to warrant its rise far above the other sensation, to such an extent that two sense of sense should even arise in the first place? If we are to begin our investigation into the Dao and Unmoved Mover in the following question, we must bring mentality into the limelight and reveal it to be a sensation, just as the rest, dressed up in hierarchical lifts. By placing mentality back into its ontological place, we can also gather the information we need about the Buddha, so that we might follow his cairns up the mountain, fulfilling his tetralemma as a guide rope to the completion of our own.

One of Buddhism's founding premises is the denial of substance in the world. The first of the Four Noble Truths recognizes that all things are dukkha or suffering. Often misinterpreted by Westerners, the Buddha does not mean that the world is suffering in our strictest sense of the word. A better translation might be impermanent, dependent and/or imperfect. Our suffering in the world comes as a result of the mismatch between our cravings and the interdependent or non-substantive nature of reality. We want pleasures to persist forever, but all things are impermanent. We want discomforts to cease and never come to be, but the world is imperfect. We want the world to be thought about and work in a clear cut, definite and absolute manner, but reality is dependent. Because knowing the world in the absence of substance is the key to a life lived in peace, Buddhists have given much thought towards a rather reasonable question: why does the world seem substantive to us even though Buddhists have produced many straightforward and logical proofs telling us otherwise? In my opinion, the long and short answer they give is that the mind and regular thought-process is founded upon the law of noncontradiction, and, as a result, the world is colored by our mental addition of substance.

The Buddhists are not alone in their association of mentality and substance. We have already seen and can find more evidence that substance can be contextualized as mental both in Aristotle's writings and our interpretation of Daoist texts. Aristotle correctly identifies that the principle of noncontradiction is ingrained into the fabric of our minds:

“For such a principle must be both the best known... and non-hypothetical. For a principle which everyone must have who understands anything that is, is not a

hypothesis...It is, that the same attribute cannot at the same belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect.” (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 4: Ch. 3: 1005b13-16)

“We can, however, demonstrate negatively even that this view [the denial of the law of noncontradiction] is impossible, if our opponent will only say something; and if he says nothing, it is absurd to seek to give an account of our views to one who cannot give an account of anything, in so far as he cannot do so. For such a man, as such, is from the start no better than a vegetable.” (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 4: Ch. 4: 1006a12-15)

Aristotle not only claims that all proper argumentation must include an acceptance of the law of noncontradiction but also alludes to that the fact that this principle is a prerequisite for thought at all. The law cannot be argued against because thought itself is writing in its terms. Thus, all arguments against the principle are immediately falsified because they implicitly accept its truth. Moreover, if thought is coded by the law, then the only source disagreement can come from is the non-thinking, but this is not a disagreement at all because a thoughtless argument is not an argument at all. Thus, Aristotle establishes the law of noncontradiction as the basis of all thought; and, as a result, because substance is in part an identification of the world as strictly adhering to this principle, all thought is infused with substance. Substance is seeing the world through this law. The Buddha himself uniquely draws parallels between substance and the principle of noncontradiction as he denies substance's existence through a denial of the principle in his famous tetralemma. His tetralemma functions on a tearing down, or at least a rigorous refutation, of the principle of noncontradiction. We developed our idea of

substance through our innate knowledge of the law, and, for our purposes, they can be considered loosely identical for our present purposes. Thus, thought itself is substantive.

Our reading of Daoism confirms the mentality of substance. Naming is both substantive and a mental process. Moreover, naming incorporates the law of noncontradiction as it poses contraries against one another to develop divisions. Naming looks for an attribute of a thing, creates the boundary of the name by carving out anything that possesses that attribute and distinguishes that named thing from the environment by labeling the environment as not that attribute. “That” is what has the attribute, and “this” is what lacks the attribute. Thus, two separate individuals are born because, if they were one and the same, there would be a contradictory object. Naming and contraries are, therefore, founded upon the principle. Naming acts like a mental shader or magnifying glass that partitions the world into separate things, and thinking itself is the utilization of substance and/or this law to organize these names through language.

Luckily, we might also take the liberty of counting the Dao De Jing and Zhuangzi as tangential contributions to the Buddhist canon as, when Buddhism was introduced to China, these texts were not only used to help decipher long standing Buddhist texts but also Hua-Yen Buddhism used these texts as inspiration to redescribe Buddhism through positive terms rather than the traditional negative approach. In fact, my interpretations of the Dao De Jing and Zhuangzi have been largely influenced by my knowledge of Hua-Yen Buddhism. The two traditions complement each other well. Thus, we may safely affirm these philosophers agree that thinking is substantive in nature.

Buddhism uses this understanding of mentality both uniquely and to our advantage in two ways that, when seen in reference to one another, not only seem to inform one another, but also provide us with a radical new view of substance, mentality and experience. Our first unique understanding of mentality lies in the Buddha's ontological classification of mentality. From the Buddhism's very beginning, mental states and formulations were offered equal ontological status to sensation rather than placed above or outside of sensation as we traditionally view it (nor below it, as some overjealous young monks might). This new angle is inspired by the acknowledgement that mentality gives us a substantive view of the world. The Buddha has rebranded mentality as sensation all the same as touch, sight, hearing, taste and smell, making mentality and substance's, not falsity, but relativism more clearly seen.

Let us compare mentality to sight through metaphor in conjunction with a Buddhist epistemological classification: the conventional and the ultimate. Buddhists divide (provisionally, as they admit that this division is itself relative) truth into those which are relative and based in limited perspective, like samsara, dukkha, contraries, subject/object distinctions, binary categories, cause and effect, sensation, etc., and those which are absolute and beyond dualistic qualification, like nirvana, sunyata, dependent arising, the interdependence of all things, etc. An example of the conventional might be the relative truth that water is denser than wood: a comparative distinction founded upon difference and constructed in the same fashion as the mental naming described above. Meanwhile, the absolute truth is that no one side is the sole cause of the effect of floating. In this process, there is not wood being less dense than water and floating up and/or water being denser than wood and pushing up on the wood (these are conventional views). Rather, in the ultimate view, wood

and water are unified in the floating process, for the phenomenon is equally dependent upon both parties, arising from the ultimate interconnectedness of reality. Crucially, unlike in Western philosophy, where the ultimate truth would be labeled as more truthful than the conventional because relative truths are of “lesser value” and scope, Buddhists like Nagarjuna make sure to inform their reader that there is no priority given to either side. The conventional and the ultimate are equally truthful.

With this in mind, let us compare mentality and sight through the eyes of a substance-metaphysician and a Buddhist. Imagine an apple on a table in front of you. Noticing you intently staring the apple, a substance-oriented metaphysician, a seasoned Buddhist and their young initiate decide to come over to help you decipher the truth of the apple, assuming that you must be locked in a life-altering, epistemic, inner turmoil.

The substance-metaphysician notes the relativity of the red in the apple and tells you that this red sensation is less truthful than your knowledge that there is a singular apple there. That there is one apple will remain true no matter who approaches; however, if a dog or red-green colorblind person were to approach, then to them the apple would not be red. Notice that the substance-metaphysician sees the mental formulation of the singularity of the apple as a higher truth than the sense-data of redness because mentality is more closely associated with substance and universality. The metaphysician associates the ultimate with substance rather than dependent arising, so whatever endures the longest in the object, otherwise known as whatever is the most substance-like in the object, is the most truthful about it (key to this conclusion is also the metaphysician’s implicit claim that the ultimate is more truthful than the

conventional). Naturally, mentality excels in substance-oriented perceptions, so the metaphysician classifies the mental with ultimate rather than the conventional because of this distinct aptitude, meaning they see the mental as above and beyond sensation.

The Buddhists, conversely, harbor no such opinions. First, the aspiring monk tells you that the redness of the apple is relative; and, that the apple is ultimately empty, so the mental picture of the apple as a substantive individual is false and illusory. This young student overjealously throws substance out completely because, now realizing that substance is not in the ultimate category, they are fearful of reification and wish to expel it from all explanation. However, the seasoned monk scolds the initiate for not reading their Nagarjuna and Pali texts closely enough. The redness of the apple and the mental acknowledgment of the apple as a substance are both relative truths because each are on equal footing as sensations. Naming, as a mental phenomenon, is relative to the viewer in the same way as sight is relative to the eye that sees it. To you, the apple is red; to the dog, the apple is a yellowish brown. To you, the apple is a single food; to the botanist, the apple is of multiple parts: stem, flower, flesh, core and seed. Picture mentality as an extra coloration to/lens over other sensations. Imagine your vision as if it were a piece of paper. Red colors the apple while mentality cuts it out and raises it above the background. Our mistake in valuing mentality over other sensations is believing that the picking-out of naming is more than what it is: relative. Moreover, the belief in substance as an absolute is this mistake. It is not that substance as a mental phenomenon is untruthful. It is that we overvalue its truth. The longstanding journey of the Buddhist is to realize the world without substance, without-thinking.

Perhaps, it was the Zen Buddhist tradition which realized this approach in greatest clarity. One such master of Zen Buddhism was Hakuin who developed an excellent system for the realization of nondualism. This schema is our second understanding of mentality. He began with the Great Doubt, a state of non-thinking, spurring his students onward in hopes that they would one day enter into the Great Death, a state of without-thinking. Thomas Kasulis explains Hakuin's Great Doubt best as,

"A rejection of the retrospective reconstruction of reality. In other words, the Zen disciple finds that conceptual categories never quite contain the richness of experience... Concepts filter experience; there are abstractions that become objectified as needs, desires and fears... The Great Doubt is the crystallization of this [rejection]... [A] monistic nondifferentiation... that frozen state of negation Hakuin called the great expanse of ice." (Kasulis, 113-114)

In the Great Doubt, one has realized that mentality is a sense that filters and alters other sensation, so, in an attempt experience the world unfiltered and unaltered, that practitioner draws a circle around mentality and negates it. The problem with this method is that this approach is also a mental act because there is a reification of one's own thought process, meaning one is still thinking an attempt to not think.

"To detach oneself willfully from all thinking, one has to *objectify* [reify] one's own thought process, and in doing so one takes an intentional attitude towards thought. This means that one has also objectified one's self – one has not yet experienced the Great Death of the ego. When that last residual sense of self is finally

abandoned, however, one no longer takes any intentional standpoint at all.” (Kasulis, 115)

When one forgets mentality all together, one finally achieves the Great Death. Compare this system of achievement to our sight metaphor. We can reshape this process as an attempt to forget a sense in hopes of strengthening our focus on another. Normal thinking and reification are the seeing of color as we do every day. We notice redness as we listen to our own thoughts or name an apple. Next, non-thinking is as if we attempted to not see color by thrashing our head about wildly or better yet closing our eyes. In both cases, color still remains, but, most interestingly, notice that when we close our eyes, we are seeing the negation or absence of all color: black. Nevertheless, black appears to us still as a color, a rejection of visual input is still input all the same. Without-thinking, then, is the transparent or better yet the forgetting of color all together. We have often encountered this in our daily lives. When reading or lost in intense thought, all colors and vision fade and drop away, forgotten in our full absorption, even as we stare straight at the redness of the apple.

In these ways, substance and reification are parts of a mental sense which we can, after incredible practice, allow to fade away. At its core, all life and experience, sentient or insentient, is sensation. Humans merely happen to be a species with a mentally oriented sensory system, with mid-tier sight and hearing and low-grade touch, smell and taste. Dogs, on the other hand, are smell oriented, with mid-tier mentality, taste and hearing, and low-grade touch and sight. Neither sees a more truthful world, just different relative truths based on their sensory apparatuses. Now that we have fully accepted that mentality is a sense that acts like

any other (or, if you have not, you might at least take the previous and following steps as high concept fiction or wild metaphor), we may begin to ask questions about experience. Is the absence of mentality comparable to an absence of sight? I mean not a blind person; for, they still possess the necessary brain function to interpret signals but lack the functioning eye to do so. They are still shrouded in black. I mean the worm whose ancestry has been devoid of sight since the beginning of life. Is their sightlessness similar to the sunflower, who have nothing close to a brain, for whom mentality is a foreign concept, and yet still possess photoreceptors? Are there parts to mentality, just as vision is broken up into color, shape, shade and depth, and hearing is broken up into pitch and decibel? Is there a spectrum of substance and reification as there is a spectrum of color? More importantly, are there yet to be unlocked parts of mentality, just as a skate sees shape and light but no color? Does each newly discovered form of mentality come with their own hypothetical formula like the law of noncontradiction? If we are prepared to take this highly skeptical stance, then we must both look at how sensation pairs with reality from a deeply skeptical and relativist-oriented position and examine other authors who appear to be looking into such matters: namely, Plotinus. If we can both adapt Plotinus's work to appear as if it were a look into alternate mentality and keep in mind that, for us, mentalities of all kinds are a sense, then it is possible for us to assert that mentality follows the same evolutionary diversity, with outcroppings of extreme uniqueness (like us), that any other sense develops over the many ages of Earth's long history.

Let us keep this aside as brief as possible. By no means do I claim that Plotinus's work was an attempt to see the world through an alternate mentality, nor that Plotinus was successful in mapping out an alternate mentality. At the end of the day, Plotinus's work was

substantive at its root and his cosmology and cosmogony gained the similar qualities as Aristotle's metaphysical framework. Yet, Plotinus's unorthodox thought process, willingness to incorporate insights from a wide range of traditions and devaluation of the principle of noncontradiction brand his philosophies as uniquely positioned for us to speak about his work as if it were an alternative mentality. Although, in reality, Plotinus's work might be more accurately labeled as a peculiar halfway point on the spectrum between substance and non-substance, nevertheless, it is this oddity that allows us the opportunity to dissect his cosmology to look for clues as to how we might analyze a cosmology and cosmogony based in an alternate mentality. For us, Plotinus is simply an angle for tackling the alternate mentality question, so I am bound to misrepresent him.

Now, as Leo Sweeney explains the basics of Plotinus's work, he agrees with us that, at least, the law of noncontradiction, being and substance are bundled together as a package deal. He elaborates that Plotinus confirms that contradictory statements about the One are truthful because,

"No one who has attentively read the *Enneads* can fail to realize that the principle of [non]contradiction is not very operative or, at least, is not primally operative there. Other principles influence the Greek author much more deeply as he works out and expresses his position, and to these that principle is subordinated. This subordination seems inevitable if one reflects for a moment on the principle of [non]contradiction. Such a principle has primacy in a philosophy of *being* for the simple reason that in such a philosophy being has primacy and that principle is a primal

expression both of being and of its primacy. Why is that so? A philosophy is the intelligible re-presentation of the universe in light of what a philosopher conceives as genuinely real... Now in a philosophy of being, to be real is to be being... Every item is real to the extent that it possesses being and is unreal to the degree that it involves non-being." (Sweeney, 508-510)

However, the principles that do operate in Plotinus's philosophy are not non-substantive, nor do they deny the legitimacy of substance as a part of the absolute structure of reality. Rather, these principles restrict the scope of substance's influence. Because Plotinus's cosmology is a pluralism, substance is included in the foundation of a specific section of reality, while in others it is excluded. Nevertheless, although Plotinus founds his philosophy upon different principles, he is not drawing up a new formula. Rather, Plotinus merely claims that unity, instead of being, is the principle that underwrites all parts of reality. Sweeney continues,

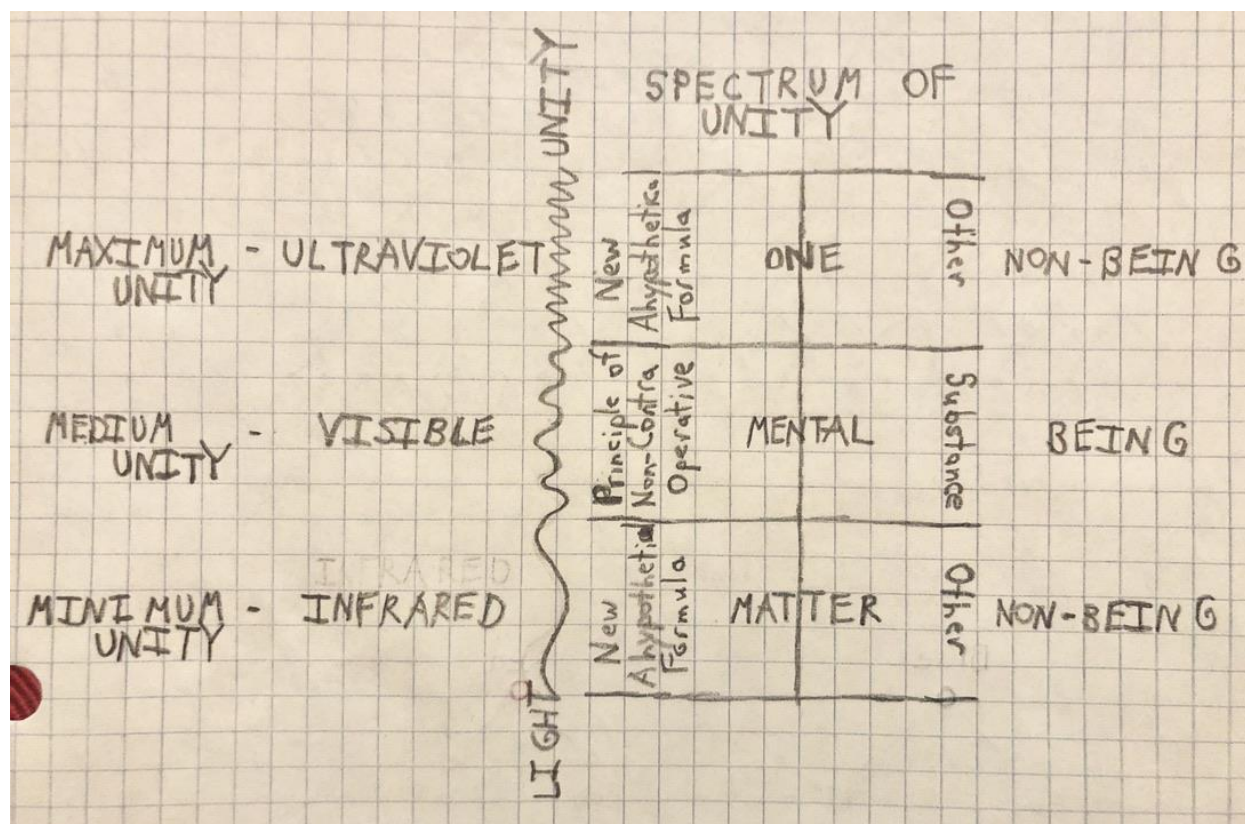
"But where reality is differently conceived, the guiding norms arising from that conception are also different and there the principle of [non]contradiction no longer is supreme. Plotinus is a case in point. His is not a metaphysics of being, which at best holds only a second rank. For him to be genuinely real is not to be being but to be one. His is an henology and not an ontology, an account of unity and not an account of being." (Sweeney, 510)

Plotinus organizes his conception of reality around unity instead of being, so the structure of that reality ends up looking remarkably different than what we are used to. Nevertheless, there is still a caveat to all this discussion of a different principle which underwrites Plotinus's vision

of reality, a principle of unity. Unity as a concept implicitly accepts the principle of noncontradiction and is, more importantly, derivative of this formula. We know this information through two points: unity has no hypothetical and self-evident formula of its own, and unity must be expressed through our language (and our language and names are mental and substantive). More importantly, Plotinus's unity is a substantive unity because it focuses on singularity to attain wholeness rather than continuity as a non-substantive unity might (like in Hua-yen Buddhism's mereology, which we will be discussing in the next chapter). Thus, we are really walking a tightrope here. Plotinus is a perfect example because parts of his cosmology do not adhere to the principle of noncontradiction yet are still supposed to be mental-like; but we must recognize that he is not really working with an alternate mentality(s) because his definition of unity adheres to substance's standards.

To understand Plotinus, it is best to begin by locating the center of his ladder reality. At the top of this ladder rests the One, being the most real because it is the most unified; at its bottom resides materiality, prone to segmentation and multitude. As a result, and in line with other substantive thinkers, Plotinus identifies mentality as both being itself and the center of this scale. However, Plotinus differs from Aristotle because materiality and the One (his version of Unmoved Mover, a cosmogonic force) are not beings. Plotinus makes no attempt to absorb materiality into substance, instead casting it out of being. Likewise, the One rises above being and exceeds it in power and unification. I think it best to return to our vision metaphor to make sense of this hierarchy. Recall that substance is mentality, and we are, in this moment, referring to being with its substantive inflection. Imagine mentally substantive being as the spectrum of visible light. We are capable of cognizing mentality because we are cued into, can see, the

formula that aligns with this level of unity. Now, flip this spectrum, normally visualized horizontally, into a vertical format. Matter, on the other hand, is the infra-red spectrum, existing below being as a more disorganized, multipliable non-being. Matter has no being to Plotinus because it is non-mental, not because it is multiple. In fact, the One and like are also non-beings. Picture the One and its accompanying infinities (like the Intelligence and Soul) as the ultraviolet spectrum. However, although I use the prefixes infra and ultra, I do not want you to think that matter is an infra- or sub-being, and the One is an ultra-, super- or hyper-being. They do not contain any being because they are both non-beings and do not adhere to the principle of noncontradiction. Rather than being, unity is light in this scenario. In some ways, this cosmology is a pluralism and, in others, a monism. The commonality between being and these non-beings is the concept of unity which underwrites all existence. However, a pluralism



still remains because these are different orders of reality, which each adhere to their own rules. Along Plotinus's spectrum of unity, being is the level of unity perceptible to us.

Though Plotinus's philosophy was in the end both as substantive as other Platonic philosophers and he offers no example of an actual attempt to suppose an alternate mentality, he gives us hope that we can speak about the matter without fear of seeming outlandishly foolish. Do I suppose that we will in the near future be capable of writing a cosmology utilizing an alternate mentality as its base? Absolutely not, our only mentality is substantive and, because all conjecture would be derivative of our substantive starting point, we likely have no hope of uncovering alternate formulas. These new formulae would require ages long development in our mental evolution to obtain, assuming that such new parts to mentality and their accompanying formulae exist in the first place. For all we know, mentality is a single-faceted sense. (I will continue to call them formula moving forward, but to call them formula might be slightly misleading because we have no idea if alternate mentality will present itself similarly enough to be called a "formula"; hence, why we might regard mentality, or at least substance, as single-faceted because it is too narrow of a category for anything to be a part of it). Yet, if we are to climb the mountain of nothingness, we must protect against all error, exercise all caution, and argue against even hypothetical counterpoints. If we know that substance altered the cosmology of Aristotle, then we must assume the worst: that a different hypothetical mental formula would create a radically new cosmogony and cosmology, just as even playing with the law of noncontradiction altered Plotinus's philosophy. Moreover, we must ask if the absence of a formula is itself also a position that radically changes a philosophy and if it too must be warded against? (We will encounter these problems directly in the

beginning of chapter 5). I believe the secret to our difficulties lies in a more in-depth look into what drives sensation and experience to shed some much need light on the matter.

We have already looked at key differences between relative and absolute truths. Although later we will cover why this division need not be made, first allow us to make some conclusions about relatives, otherwise known as sensations, separately, knowing all the while that we will later apply these same conclusions to being as a whole. Already I have alluded to the fact that the relativity of a truth is associated with a most noticeable quality: perspective. Perspective will become a key term for us, so I must strive to define it not only in solid enough terms for the current discussion but also so that we might use it in future cosmological discussions. Perspective is at its core an epistemological function that links the relative and absolute categories of reality and determines probabilities. Sensation, experience and substance/mentality are themselves perspective but of special types that differs from the rest of reality, which has a broadness of this scope in this quality (to label it as more would be to miss the point).

Substance and mental states seem to possess a narrowness of this quality, like how a pin has the thinnest of tips for the most acute but smallest of probing through the fabric of reality. In this regard, substance/mentality/language/naming are the finest sowing needles in what is the toolkit of experience. When experience initially developed in the world, forming in conjunction with the evolution of the first nervous system, it was the world's first instance of the singularity of perspective. If we consider substance to be a spectrum, then experience is the lower end of that scale because it is the merge of sensation into a collected and farther unified

format. Experience is emergence of holistic feeling about a collection of sensations: it is the sensation of sensations. To keep Dewey's sense of experience and situation/focus from his plethora of writings in mind while I explain, I think, will help. Think of the ancient worm with the inkling of the first brain and its three channels of sensation: sight, hunger and pain. Its experience of its collected field of the three sensations light, pain, and hunger culminates in the arise of a new sensation that characterizes the situation at hand: negativity. These three senses give the ancient worm an emotive feeling of negativity. That negativity is different from these past three sensations, however, because, while sensations of the past were bare reports of the environment, this new one possesses a goal-oriented demand, a direction: change to a new sensitive state. Experience creates a situation in which to collectivize sensations into an orientation for the organism. Compare this example to that of the plant. I claim that the plant senses the wind, sun and gravitational pull; plants are sensitive beings. However, I take what Alfred North Whitehead says to heart: plants are democracies, animals (with nervous systems) are monarchies. Plants sense but these senses do not collect under a leading sensation that makes more general assumptions about the environment by operating as a singularity of perspective. Plants do not experience because they do not allow their sensations to collect into a situation out of which a directive feeling emerges. Nervous systems are the sensory apparatus of senses, emotions, judgments, thoughts, etc. Intelligence is all mental formations and substance is part within that nervous network. (Just so we are all clear, I have just expanded our definition of mentality to feelings at large and defined substance-thinking as a sub-grouping of mentality). Naming/substance is the isolation or crystallization of that emotive directedness into a tool that can be reiterated back into the situation to refeed the experiential process.

Thus, substance is the solidification of experience into a static, even more narrowed perspective.

Oddly enough, all this talk of differing levels of unified perspective is beginning to sound a lot like Plotinus; however, I maintain some key differences. Perspective is devoid of hierarchy, meaning the centering of perspective is without ontological superiority, like how planets or blackholes are on equal gravitational existence with gas nebulae and dust. More importantly, rather than an order being established from the top down, organic qualities like sensation, experience and mentality emerge out of cells, biology, chemistry and physics. Likewise, there are no segmented parts and, as a spectrum, the levels possess a continuity between one another. Most crucially, this term is epistemic. Although it, by cosmic chance, happens to collect with complexity, it is merely meant to denote the passing of information. As information gets more acute, it gets narrower. As it becomes blunter, it becomes broader. My claims may seem panpsychist; however, I maintain that anything close to mentality does not emerge until sensation develops. Matter has no mentality; nevertheless, it is no crime to claim that all parts of the world have some level communication with the rest of the world. This fact is the Buddha's greatest strength. (Even physicists talk about the world as if it has information). So, you might now ask: why am I speaking about this weird new term perspective? Well, not only will we use this term as a key element in a new cosmology in later chapters; but also, we can now return to the central questions asked above: is there a spectrum of substance and are there alternate mentalities and sensations?

The answers are yes and there could have been. Notice how sensation emerges out of biology, experience out of sensation, and substance out of experience in an evolutionary pathway. Evolution is the reason that substance is both a spectrum and other mentalities could have emerged instead. Evolution is non-teleological, meaning the universe could have followed any number of paths and resulted in any of an infinite of other types of mentalities. It is a mere happenstance that substance was an evolutionary trait that complimented us favorably enough to make it key in the survival of our species. For this very same reason, as we developed our minds, evolution made no hard and fast lines drawn between substance and ordinary experience. All these categories that I name are both built off of one another and flow into one another without resistance.

Finally, why did you need to know all these points, why is it important that substance is brought down to the level of sensation and to consider and validate alternate mentality? Well, in short, because our tetralemma follows a similar path to the Buddha's but differs in purpose. Putting mentality on the same ontological and epistemic level as other sensations is a necessary step in both our journeys because it allows us to collapse the gap between the absolute and relative. The difference is that the Buddha's end goal is stereological while mine is curious. The Buddha need only consider substance because he is attempting to ease suffering (an emotive state). The self is a knot of perspective. By unwinding that knot, the Buddha hopes to ease experience of the world. The Buddha is looking for a greater perspective of the world. Looking for a broader perspective, he drops substance to return to bare experience of reality and with that homecoming suffering ceases. Moreover, his tetralemma is one of being. Mine is quite literally the opposite. He wished to turn towards the world with a larger eye. I, on the other

hand, am curious to see what happens when I look away, so, as a result, I must consider a larger scope. The Buddha saw it fit to not worry over the details of what absolute reality was, for his whole project was meant to put a stop to worrying, so he stuck to sensation (not to say that he did not consider the absolute as we shall see when we look at suchness). I have to be more careful because, as you will see, you must consider everything (and more) in order to know nothing.

A Tale of Two Cosmogonies

Throughout our journey over cosmology and substance, mentality and relative and absolute truths, I have peppered in hints of a future discussion of the cosmogonic. It seems rather fitting because philosophers, scientists, spiritualists and common wonderers alike, even when proponents of substance as an absolute, have been drawn to describe the birth of our world. If the world did indeed follow the path from nothing to being, then, hopefully, these cosmogonic inquiries are not only the gateway from nothingness to existence, but also a window through which to peer back and catch a glimpse of nothing. Thus, cosmogony is vital to our discussion of nothing for three reasons: the obvious, cosmogony is necessarily wrapped up in analysis of nothing; as we shall see in later chapters, it will act as a basis our understanding of possible worlds; and, most importantly, it is our best access point for discussing the third part of the tetralemma: A and $\sim A$.

Our past chapters have taken us across a rather wide range of topics. This meandering, and seemingly trivial path was necessary as nothing touches all layers of philosophy. Cosmogony not only mirrors nothingness's position in philosophy methodologically, as it too manages to involve itself in the widest diversity of philosophical topics, but also is inextricably paired with nothing. A discussion of cosmogony must include an inquiry into nothing. Even in the most substance-oriented cases, it will act as an opposition to being. Moreover, because cosmogony is soaked in both the deeply metaphysical and human fascination, it often becomes the keystone and linchpin of many greater thinkers' philosophies. From the singularities of Aristotle and Plotinus to the unknowable mysteries of Buddha and Dao, an answer to

cosmogonic questions is central to the methodological synthesis of a philosophy and, sometimes, to its fulfillment. In these ways, we must tackle the world's origins for both its involvement in the subject at hand and the needed background.

As with all things philosophical, the identification of substance with either the absolute or the relative makes all the difference, and cosmogony is certainly no exception to this often-trusty rule. Although within each of these divided camps the imagination of the world's origins can differ rather starkly amongst cohorts as well, we can take some qualities to be somewhat ubiquitous and uniform across cliques within each of the two factions. Aristotle serves as a rather prime example of the substance encampment not only because his philosophy and his cosmogonic explanation are driven and informed by his ideas about substance, but also because his Unmoved Mover is a basis and/or inspiration for subsequent Christian thinkers. Aristotelian cosmogony is plainly textbook. For this very reason, we will use the Unmoved Mover as a contrast to the Dao. Our analysis of Aristotle's Prime Mover will both give a colorful background against which to compare the Dao and teach us an important lesson about how giving precedence to a single sense radically alters a world vision.

The Daoist approach of cosmogony, on the other hand, offers us a cosmogony shrouded in mystery and unknowns; however, their vague descriptions of origins and Dao are both more willing to divulge secrets yet remain perfectly aligned with the Buddha's refusals to engage in the topic. We focus on the Dao because I will equate it to the absence of substance: our third part of the tetralemma. A full analysis of this absence is, unmistakably, vital to our eventual dismissal of it (along with why the Buddha must focus more heavily on it as it will be the

outcome of his tetralemma: reality as it truly is, suchness). With that being said, I will, now, begin our comparison of the Unmoved Mover and the Dao.

The Unmoved Mover

I shall begin my backgrounding of the Unmoved Mover by, most crucially, relating the concept to substance and explaining its synergy with the rest of Aristotle's philosophical concepts. Then, when we have gathered enough information about the Unmoved Mover as a specific instance of a substance-oriented first cause, I will pick out elements of Unmoved Mover that remain general across substance-based cosmogonies.

Aristotle prefaces his discussion of the Unmoved Mover with an explanation of the three types of substance he distinguishes in the world. This split of substance into three categories differs greatly from how we have approached the subject in the past because, not only have we imagined substance to be a singular concept, but also, we have mainly discussed it from the point of view of those attempting to disprove the identification of substance with the absolute structure of reality. Not to worry, all three categories share the fundamental quality of substance as we have recognized it in the past: that there is something about the object that is forever unchanging despite the exterior changes that go on around it. Of these categories, two of them are natural: the sensible and perishable, and the sensible and eternal. Then, there is the third supernatural substance, which is immutable, unchangeable, and insensible.

Now, these first two categories may seem confusing for two reasons: why would a perishable object be counted as a substance and why would sensibility be a distinguishing feature of substance (moreover, the feature that creates the dividing line between the natural and supernatural). As a sensible and perishable object drifts through the natural world, it is prone to change as it interacts with the environment around it. For example, a piece of wood may be exposed to fire and turned to ash. Obviously, this process does not seem to us to possess an inkling of substance because, according to our previous debates, the object neither remains independent of the world nor immutable. Nevertheless, Aristotle still sees the presence of substance because he postulates that there must be an underlying substrate that undergoes the changes we see and persists to carry the process to its end. Today, we might be prone to imagine the atoms that rearrange as the wood transforms into ash. However, as Aristotle was not a fan of atomic theories, we should be more abstract in our imagination and picture this substrate more simply, as a matter.

To clarify what exactly this underlying substrate is, we must switch to Aristotle's more general stance on sensible substances. It will become clear that all of the everyday objects we encounter are in the sensible and perishable category, and that we would likely not consider sensible and eternal objects to exist in our modern-day cosmology.

"Sensible substance is changeable. Now if change proceeds from opposites or from intermediates, and not from all opposites..., but from the contrary, there must be something underlying which changes into the contrary state; for the contraries do not change. Further, something persists, but the contrary does not persist; there is, then,

some third thing besides the contraries, viz. the matter. Now since changes are of four kinds [in respect of 'what', in respect of 'thisness', in respect of quantity, and in respect of affection] ..., changes will be from given states into those contrary to them in these several respects. The matter, then, which changes must be capable of both states. And since that which 'is' has two senses, we must say that everything changes from that which is potentially to that which is actually." (McKeon, *Metaphysics*: Bk. 12: Ch. 2: 1069b3-16)

Sensible objects are so changeable because they possess contraries that we can identify. It is the very fact that there is difference among them and that the law of noncontradiction can be apply to them that makes them changeable. I see wood as solid and cylindrical. These are sensible qualities. All sensible qualities come with their attending contraries: non-solid (ash) and non-cylindrical (a conical pile). We have talked earlier about how sensible qualities are relative truths. The relativity of these qualities makes them prone to change not only across perspectives in space and type of observer (the relativities of size or animal sensation), but also across perspectives in time. Aristotle notices this commonality amongst sensible objects as well as how sensibility dilutes the substantiality of objects. Sensible objects always contain the potential to change, quite literally covered in relativity.

Note my use of potential because sensible objects are also always to some degree both potential and actual. The proportions of potentiality and actuality are a signal of both the amount that can be sensed and, therefore, changed about an object, and whether or not an object is perishable or eternal. Eternal objects are said to be constructed out of a different type

of matter that is not generable and only movable. This special eternal matter possesses more actuality because some of its qualities are locked into place, meaning its matter is not capable of transforming into its contraries. In Aristotle's cosmology, these eternals are the spheres of the heavens, the planets and other celestial bodies, constructed out of the special aether. Mars shines red; however, it is incapable of becoming non-red because its matter is the special extra-actual aether. Its only potentiality is movement through the sky in a perfect circle. Perishables, on the other hand, are made of a much more flexible matter, meaning they possess a greater range of potentiality. We might ask again: why must the third category be insensible to remain immutable. Can we not imagine a fully actual matter with all its sensible qualities locked into place, utterly motionless? Yes, we might, but that would make no difference because the relativity is preserved through the motion of other bodies. Sensibility means perspective, which means relativity, which means a degree, no matter how small, of potentiality and therefore the possibility of change. Suppose this most actual yet still sensible object was red. It does not matter if it remains still, I see red, my dog sees brown. Substance in its truest form demands universality so it must exclude sensation. In short, sensible objects contain a degree of substance but never the fullest meaning towards which Aristotle strives to discover. This shortcoming of the natural world is why Aristotle must look towards the supernatural to complete his philosophical system. Luckily for him, his observations about the natural world point towards the existence of a supernatural substance.

The cosmogonies of substance-based metaphysics often seek to offer an explanation of change and other 'imperfections' in the world through a first cause and identify that first cause with substance. Substance's focus on unchangeability leaves the transitory nature of the world

as a sort of mystery that must be worked out and solved rather than accepted from the start. Thus, substance-oriented cosmogony searches for the first cause, first principle, the immutable One, the creator, God. Aristotle's proof of his first cause, the Unmoved Mover, follows from his observations of the world as in constant flux and his understanding of the requirements for motion to take place. First, he notes that it is an undoubtable and empirical fact that there is motion and change in the world. Next, Aristotle understands that only actual motion can create other actual motion. Think back to efficient causes. An efficient cause is not the motion itself but the source of that motion. Moreover, that source must itself be actual in order to engender any change within an object, and actuality aligns with substance. So, all motions have an efficient cause which is their source of coming into being. Now, if we were to continually ask what the efficient causes of motions were, and what were the causes of those causes, so on and so on, *ad infinitum*, we would encounter an infinite regress. Of course, Aristotle was not a fan of infinite regress. He believed that there were always answers. This infinite regress would tell us that there is no first mover, that there is no source of all change. However, if there were no source of change, and change needs a source, then there would be no change. But every day we see motion all around us. Thus, by contradiction, there must be a source of motion. Moreover, this source must differ from all being to come after it because it must be without a source to be a first mover. To be without source, it must itself be motionless. Therefore, Aristotle deduces the existence of the Unmoved Mover, a first cause of all motion that is itself immune to all change.

From what we know about the different types of substance as well as Aristotle's proof of the Unmoved Mover, we can derive many of his points about the qualities of the first cause.

First, we know that the Unmoved Mover must be fully actual for several reasons. If there were any potency to the Unmoved Mover, then it would be capable of motion, meaning it is not truly motionless or immutable. Likewise, Aristotle cannot imagine a non-temporally continuous prime mover, or an end to motion, both because he needs his Unmoved Mover to be a true substance and because of his association of motion with time. As a result, the first cause must be eternally active, unwaveringly actualizing motion. Not only does Aristotle need the Unmoved Mover to be fully actual out of necessity for his overall vision, but also full actuality aligns with his understanding of substance as well. A fully actual being lacks potency, meaning it is unchanging, eternal (due to its inability to change), and independent (it is and always has been fully what it is without outside influence, and never could be influenced), just like the perfect substance.

Second, the Unmoved Mover is the only object without material cause. Because materiality, no matter the circumstance, possesses the potential for motion, at least spatially if not many more, we know that a fully actual object could never be composed of matter. As a result, the actuality of the Unmoved Mover precludes it from materiality and all the qualities that come with it: locomotion, division/multiplication, and most importantly sensibility (we will return to the insensibility of the Unmoved Mover, but this is deserving of its own paragraph).

Third, although the Unmoved Mover does not participate in material cause, it is, of course, an efficient cause, being a source of motion, as well as, importantly, a formal and final cause. Not only have we stated that the telos of an object is its most actualized state but also that it is in part the perfected interweaving of its other three causes. However, the lack of

materiality means that the Unmoved Mover's telos is the purest combination of efficient and formal causes. Note also that the lack of materiality changes what it means to possess a formal cause. Without matter, form cannot mean shape, arrangement nor even model (for models have parts, of which the Unmoved Mover has none), but can mean, most intriguingly, mentality. The formal cause is attached, in Aristotle's schema, to mentality, meaning something like an idea. Thus, the telos or full actualization of the Unmoved Mover must be, in short, a mental efficient cause. This first thought must be both unchanging at all times and always active. Moreover, Aristotle concludes that thought is a process which is active and capable of moving and coming into contact with the object of its thought while itself remaining unmoved. Thought alone is what the Unmoved Mover must be composed of. So, what exactly does the Unmoved Mover think:

“The nature of divine thought involves certain problems... For if it thinks of nothing, what is there here of dignity? It is just like one who sleeps. And if it thinks, but this depends on something else, then (since that which is its substance is not the act of thinking, but a potency) it cannot be the best substance; for it is through thinking that its value belongs to it. Further, whether its substance is the faculty of thought or the act of thinking, what does it think of?... Evidently, then, it thinks of that which is most divine and precious, and it does not change; for change would be change for the worse, and this would be already a movement... it must be of itself that the divine thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking on thinking... Since, then, thought and the object of thought are not different in the case of things that have

not matter, the divine thought and its object will be one and the same.” (McKeon, Metaphysics: Bk. 12: Ch. 9: 1074b15-1075a4)

The Unmoved Mover is thinking itself, is thinking thought. However, to say that the Unmoved Mover is thinking about itself is a slight misunderstanding. Not only can the Unmoved Mover have no parts, and an ‘about’ implies a separation between thinker and thought, but also these two objects are one and the same in this situation. The Unmoved Mover thinking about thought is itself thinking about itself. The more accurate formation of what is going here is: the Unmoved Mover is, with a more cosmic connotation than usual, thought thinking thought, itself thinking itself, thinking thinking, thinking, thought. Several qualities can be gleaned from this passage: the independence of the Unmoved Mover, it alone sustains itself through thought of its own substance (thought is its substance and final cause); its perfection, Aristotle has identified thought as best of all things; and, lastly, of course, mentality. Each of these attributes can be traced back to their roots in the notion of substance, which makes perfect sense because Aristotle is searching for and describing the most substantive being in his cosmos, a being whose substance is substance itself, thought.

Fourth, we should call attention to the control and influence this first cause has on the universe. The Unmoved Mover is not only its own formal and final causes but also directs the form of the universe and moves it towards its final cause. Because it is the cause of reality itself, it is also what determines the world in all its movements. All actions can be traced back to the first and most important of all actions: the Unmoved Mover. This notion of the Unmoved Mover as not just the director but the very order of the universe finds its synthesis with its

mentality and perfection. Thought is an ordering of things and attributes, so the ultimate and first thought must be the ordering of the entire universe.

Fifth, and last, we come to the most intriguing attribute: the ineffability of the Unmoved Mover. Beyond sensibility, the Unmoved Mover cannot be talked about directly, only hinted at. All sensibility is relative. In Aristotle's schema, relative truths are lesser (not equal to, as in Nagarjuna's framework) than absolute truth, and mentality is not sense but above sensation. Nevertheless, you might find yourself asking: if we have mentality, then why does the Unmoved Mover remain ineffable to us? Can we not access it if we drop away all senses? Although our mentality brings us closer to absolute truths, we will never be able to act fully mentally or realize the most absolute truth and reality of all: the Unmoved Mover. It is sensation itself and our connection to it as well as the independence of the Unmoved Mover that maintains its ineffability. We may possess thought; however, all of this thought contains objects of sensation within them. Our experience of the world denies our total and utter separation from it. We focus an absolute process on relatives. You possess matter, so you will always have relativity and sensation, meaning you could never think thinking itself. Your base is material reality so your abstractions will never fully detach you from the world. Likewise, the Unmoved Mover is full independent of reality, meaning its substance is wholly unlike our own. How could you come to understand a wholly other being? Moreover, the Unmoved Mover is singular and alone. Contact with such a being is impossible. Our words are infused with relatives and sensation, and the Unmoved Mover is an absolute reality beyond our imagination. Therefore, our thoughts of the world make the Unmoved Mover ineffable to us.

So, how can we generalize what we have learned about the Unmoved Mover to the cosmogonies of other substance-based metaphysics? Well, we should look for commonalities based in the understanding of substance across philosophers. Differences are often slighter than you might have expected because substance is a mental phenomenon that all humans experience. A philosopher is charged with creating a system for interpreting and categorizing the parts of the world. How they may go about creating this model and structuralizing it, depends greatly on that philosopher's personal quirks and preset beliefs (by preset I mean whatever parents, friends, society and environment instill in them as a child). However, mentality is a relatively stable sense that all people have equal access to. Substance has the same root formula for all: the principle of noncontradiction. Thus, when substance is applied to cosmogony, often the same results appear. There must be a first cause to make sense of either motion, change, time, causality, or a combination thereof (they might even say that these are all one in the same as Aristotle does). This first cause must fit the fullest definition of a substance because the only way for something to act outside of motion, change, time, causality, etc. is for that prime mover to be a true substance. Thus, that first cause gains many heightened versions of substance's qualities: complete and utter independence from reality, absolute perfection, super mentality, unparalleled self-determination and will, immateriality, ineffability, a wholeness of being beyond compare (it is being itself). When substance is identified with absolute reality (the in-itself), reality's origins must also be substantive; and philosophers, in their excitement to have found the ultimate, push these attributes to their extremes. Thus, in substance-oriented cosmogonies, supersubstances and supersubstantive qualities are theorized and gain traction. Substance-based cosmogony becomes substance in an

idealized and abstract safe haven. As a result, we can now fully see how, when substance is given priority over the other substances, it cannibalizes the basic structure of the universe.

The Dao

If our journey thus far has been a winding, turning and rocky road, then this coming section presents itself as a set of mountainous cliffs, where the broken frames of many caravans and carts lie in the chasms below. The secret of the Dao expertly hides behind the daunting text of the Dao De Jing and Zhuangzi, and many philosophers have left these treacherous peaks more mystified than when they began. Heidegger famously attempted to translate the Dao De Jing with Paul Shih-yi Hsiao and was forced to abandon his quest after the second passage, swamped by the density of multiple meanings and interdefinability. We must warn ourselves both not to get lost amongst these summits in search of a true definition and not to draw conclusions that are unsupported by the text itself. All these trepidations being the case, let us attempt to give some justice to Laozi vision, knowing it will woefully miss the mark due to both time constraints and a sea of alternate interpretations. I must admit that I will fail. As I have already said, I will paint a picture of the Dao as the absence of substance, but it is obviously so much more than that. I merely assimilate the Dao into the tetralemma in this way out of necessity.

Cautions aside, we enter this discussion from a particular angle, the cosmogonic; and, as such, both our interpretations may be skewed to fit the topic and we may find ourselves leaving certain aspects of the Dao out. However, I will attempt to cover as much as is appropriate. This approach is particularly interesting because the Dao in some ways is a cosmogony and in others

absolutely does not fit the definition. I will explain this oddity in short and then the rest of our debate will be the unpacking of this seeming paradox. In the strictest of definitions, the Dao is certainly not a cosmogony because non-substantive ontologies do not require a first cause to make sense of their cosmology. However, the Dao could be considered a cosmogony in spirit because it, in part, fulfills the purpose of a cosmogony: to explain change in the world. In many ways, the Dao is an antithesis to the Unmoved Mover; yet, methodologically, they serve the same function. The Dao is not a first cause but is the engine of the Daoist world, just as the Unmoved Mover is the engine of the Aristotelian universe. Because of this unsurprising disconnect between substance-based and non-substantive metaphysics, we must divide our discussion into two parts: a comparison of the Unmoved Mover and the Dao, which will, through analogical opposition, reveal many of the characteristics of the Dao; and an answer to our questions at the end of the second chapter: what is the Dao's function in the world?

The Unmoved Mover is both a response to both the inexplicability of change and the necessity of a prime mover to make sense of causality. A substance-based metaphysics needs a starting point for time and to kick start the universe into motion. In contrast, non-substantive cosmology needs no such beginning because change is almost self-explanatory. Remember as I described the One, Two, Three cosmology and noted that the natural harmonization of the world under this model of existence requires no outside assistance. Moreover, it is Aristotle's assumptions about motion, actuality and potential that lead him to conclude that there must be a first mover. Change in a substance-based world requires substance to initiate, demarcate and control that change. When the world is free of substance, and change is taken as self-evident and its own starting point, the universe seems to naturally order itself through the

interconnectedness of being. In short, a non-substantive cosmology neither possesses the data to conclude that there must be a first cause nor has the necessity. Cosmogony is something that a non-substantive metaphysics need not consider. Both the Zhuangzi and Buddha warn against the temptation to answer the cosmogonic question. In fact, the Buddha not only stops his followers from engaging in these debates, through longwinded cycles of his tetralemma, but also flat out refuses to answer any metaphysical questions at all. The Buddha's silence on these questions is a denial of their validity, meant to signal that these questions are born from substance-oriented thinking and the reification of the world. For the Buddha, cosmogony, which is metaphysics, which is substantive in origin, is a hurtful practice because it steers the Buddhist practitioner away from nondualism. Zhuangzi, on the other hand, utilizes his wonderful creativity by aptly parodying cosmogony as a whole:

“There is a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is being. There is nonbeing. There is a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. Suddenly there is being and nonbeing. But between being and nonbeing, I don't really know which is being and which is nonbeing. Now I have just said something. But I don't know whether what I have said has really said something or whether it hasn't said something.” (Zhuangzi, 38)

The confusion in Zhuangzi's statements, layered with twisting senses and stacked definitions, give the reader insight into the fruitlessness of cosmogonic jargon. A first cause, at its core, breaks our conceptions of time and is so far beyond the scope of our human experience and

mental categories that, to Zhuangzi, his parody makes just as much sense as Aristotle's Book XII of the *Metaphysics*. Because first causes are rooted in substance, and substance is a relative truth rather than an absolute, cosmogony discusses a finger trap of relative truths rather than getting at a fundamental question of the in-itself. Moreover, cosmogonic discussion is doubly laced with reification because not only does the debate begin from substance-based observations, but also the entire conversation must be a translation of what must be a non-mental event into a mental discourse. Suppose there is a beginning to a non-substantive reality. Then, there would be no means for a mentality, guided by substance, to have a meaningful discussion of the matter. Such a beginning would have to have taken place before any mental observer could witness the event, meaning any perspectival discourse would be ill-adept to answer any question about a thing devoid of all perspective. (You might be asking if we could say the same about our discussion of nothingness. The answer is, in part, yes, but I have a few tricks left up my sleeve. Here, I merely wish to give Zhuangzi the fullest consideration). Zhuangzi infuses his parody with befuddlement and misperception because, according to Zhuangzi, as well as the Buddha, cosmogony, in the proper sense, is both misinformed and outside of human grasp.

If the Dao is born of a non-substantial cosmology, then it makes sense that it will have opposite qualities to the Unmoved Mover. The Unmoved Mover is a substance whose essence is substance itself, so the Dao is the very absence of substance. The very absence of substance is the function of the world as an interconnected whole, so the Dao takes on many of the qualities of non-substantive reality. The Unmoved Mover is independent of reality, while the

Dao remains not only connected to all beings but is that very connection between all Ones, as Twos, culminating in Threes:

“Something unformed and complete / Before heaven and earth were born, /
Solitary and silent, / stands alone and unchanging, / pervading all things without limit. /
It is like the mother of all under heaven, / But I don’t know its name— / Better call it Dao.
/ Better call it great. / Great means passing on. / Passing on means going far. / Going far
means returning... Humans follow earth / Earth follows heaven / Heaven follows Dao. /
Dao follows its own nature.” (Laozi: 25)

Perhaps, we should use this passage as our guide for understanding the Dao, with, of course, supplemental passages to enrich the meaning. Although I understand that, at first glance, some of these lines seem to mirror the Unmoved Mover, I will both not claim that the Dao is the pure antithesis to the Unmoved Mover, having all qualities opposite to the Unmoved Mover’s (this stance would make the Dao into an anti-substance rather than the lack thereof) and remind you that some of these lines require context. Most immediately, you may be tempted to claim that the lines “Solitary and silent, / stands alone and unchanging” stand in stark contrast to the interconnectedness I cited earlier; and, “Before heaven and earth were born” sounds a lot like cosmogony. However, these are false flags. I do not believe that these statements can gain their fullest meaning until we discuss the Dao as an engine of the world, so, please hold these relevant and pressing questions until the second half our inquiries. I cite this passage because the Dao as the interconnectedness of the world comes out in “pervading all things without limit.” Often described as a guide, nurse and parent to the world, the Dao is infused in all

things, which must speak to its interconnectedness with all things. Moreover, the Dao is that very interconnectedness because, as we noted before, the interconnectedness of Ones is the self-guiding principle of the world. All things (humans, earth, heaven) follow each other and Dao in that the harmonization of things relies on their connectedness. For example, my following of the seasons (plowing in winter, planting in spring, harvesting in autumn) is itself the expression of my harmonization and interconnectedness with the earth. This relationship follows its own nature because not only are we interconnected Ones, but also this relationship is the Dao itself. Dao is the harmony of the world as it orders itself, connects with itself, and guides itself, meaning Dao is ever present in all things.

Perhaps, the absence of substance is why the Dao may be painted as alone and solitary. This statement is negative, so it gets illustrated as a pushing away of substance. However, rewritten in the positive, this statement is the interconnection of all things. So, no, Dao is not independent; yet, I am sure you have already noticed some of the qualities that are shared with the Unmoved Mover: self-determination, ineffability, and the wholeness of being (here, however, wholeness stands for interconnectedness rather than the wholeness of Forms). Interestingly, the Dao gains these qualities through opposition to some of the Unmoved Mover's incompatible qualities: perfection, hypermentality, and independence.

Perfection implies that there is a way an object ought to be, that there is an ideal placement: namely, the placement that orders an object into what it is. Perfection is a quality of naming in which the inclusive is called the good while the excluded is called the bad. The perfection comes when all the right goods are present, and all the wrongs are fully excluded

without any missteps. Of course, we know that this ordering is never achievable in the real world because gray areas exist, and borders can be redrawn. Laozi himself says, “Heaven and earth are not kind: / The ten thousand things are like straw dogs to them” (Laozi: 5, 1-2). If heaven and earth have so little care for the perfect orders that names (note that the ten thousand things is sometimes as stand in for names) strive to set up, then think about how much less the Dao must possess. The Dao is not a perfection nor is it an imperfection. Dao both goes beyond those categories and is simply the acceptance of things as they are. To non-substantive harmonies and orders, perfection is a foreign and incomprehensible concept. Things are as they are. There is no other way they should be. Because there is no way that the Dao and the world should be, they are self-determining. Spontaneous, even, because they are not pulled forward towards a premade telos. Interconnectedness lacks perfection to the gain of self-determination and freedom. The Dao’s harmony is its own.

If the Dao is not a substance, then there is certainly no way it could be mental. In fact, the Dao is the absence of mentality as the absolute nature of reality. It is clear that the Dao De Jing takes great pains to distance the Dao from mentality, as naming and accompanying substance are distinguished from the Dao. Such is evident from the beginning passage of the Dao De Jing: “Dao called Dao is not Dao. / Names can name no lasting name. / Nameless: the origin of heaven and earth. / Naming: the mother of the ten thousand things. / Empty of desire, perceive mystery. / Filled with desire, perceive manifestations” (Laozi: 1, 1-6). Because of the Dao’s clear associations with namelessness, we know that the Dao and naming are distinct phenomena. The true Dao is not called Dao because the true Dao is nameless due to a lack of mental affiliation. Not only do we have direct evidence that the Dao cannot be mental, but also

a mental Dao would be completely inconsistent with the rest of Daoism's cosmology.

Moreover, the Dao has no perspective in the universe. It is the absolute interdependence of being, meaning, in a way, it is the unity of all perspectives at once. The unity of all perspectives, or giving no preference to a viewpoint, is the lack of perspective, an unbiased all. If there was one, then it would be a telos towards which we are pulled. Thus, because mentality involves the development of a perspective, a self to take as the center point, Dao could never be mental. It is the synonymy of nowhere and everywhere.

Finally, we move on to the wholeness of being. Mereology, the study of wholes and parts, as one might have guessed, differs between substantive and non-substantive metaphysics. What it means to be a whole within a substantive framework relates to what it means to be a substance while the vice versa is also true. In a curt sort of way, you might say that substantive wholeness is whole in spite of its parts while a non-substantive wholeness is whole because of its parts. Both the Unmoved Mover and the Dao represent the wholeness of reality for their respective traditions; however, because they have very different visions of reality, they end up representing very different things. The Unmoved Mover possesses such a great wholeness because it has no parts, and its lack of parts both contributes to its independence and stems from its substance. The Dao, on the other hand, results from both the interdependence of reality, which is its wholeness, and the lack of substance, which is the same as its interdependence. Both concepts possess wholeness but very different types of wholeness.

Yet, we are not finished with our discussion of mereology because not only are wholes and parts key to understanding how the Dao is the engine of change of an organic Daoist vision of the universe, but also mereology relates to future debates on nothingness. Specifically, Hua-yen Buddhism's tactful grasp of wholeness, parts, interdependence and interpenetration speaks to the heart of Daoism, because it is, in part, a reexplaining of Daoism. Likewise, later, Hua-yen mereology will be a vital tool in our climb up the mountain of nothingness. So, let us begin the second portion of our discussion of the Dao: the discussion of the Dao as a fulfillment of the purpose of cosmogony, an explanation of change.

If the Daoist universe seems to operate of its own accord, then why do we say that there must be an explanation of change? Well, we are now looking for an answer as to why Daoism's cosmology seamlessly enables and fosters change. Why is change possible in the universe? What are the conditions necessary for change? Of course, this answer is immediately obvious to us: the Dao or the absence of substance. But, now, we have run into a new question, how does an absence cause anything to occur? How is an absence even a part of the universe? It seems as if we are making some sort of trip in grammar, a fallacy in equivalence or amphiboly. However, I assure you that we are not barking up the wrong tree. The cause of change is the lack of substance, and Hua-yen mereology informs us of this fact. (Be warned that I am indulging in my tetralemma here. I hinder the understanding of the Dao/absence of substance to the benefit of our project. I am pushing away the absence of substance for the very same reason that the Buddha adopts it into his cosmology. The Buddha embraces the world, and I am attempting to turn away from it. However, as we shall see, this embrace of the

world encourages the Buddha to adopt not the absence of substance exactly, but a reinterpretation of it).

Hua-yen mereology endeavors to explain objects' wholeness through the interdependence and interpenetration of parts with one another and the whole, and vice versa. It is a description of pure unity and synthesis of the universe. Every part of the universe as well as the universe as a whole is the sole cause the universe, and vice versa. Crucially, what do I mean here by sole cause. Well, I mean exactly what Francis H. Cook says,

“‘Cause’ is not used here in the popularly understood sense of a temporal sequence of events in which if an antecedent event is present, the subsequent event will occur... Let us take a tripod... Here the tripod is a whole, which is of course composed of parts. If, now, one of the poles is removed, the other two poles will topple. This toppling action is not meant, however, to show what happens when a pole is removed, but rather shows that in order to be *that* whole it needs this one pole. Obviously, the universe does not collapse when one individual member dies, but it is no longer *that* particular whole it was when the individual survived... from the point of view of [any one of the three poles], [that one pole] has the complete power to form the tripod... Since a tripod is three interdependent poles, each of the three parts is simultaneously acting as cause or support for the whole tripod and yet each is indubitably part of the whole which is being supported.” (Cook, 13-14)

If we take the universe to be like the tripod, then any of its parts is the sole cause of the entire universe. Now, if we consider the Dao to be a part of the universe, and we do, then the Dao too

is the sole cause of the universe. We have also discussed in the past that our reading of the Dao De Jing's cosmology was heavily influenced by this exact understanding of the world. So, if we have precedent to recognize the Dao as the sole cause of the universe, then all that is left to prove is that the Dao is a part of the universe.

Take the classic Buddhist example of the ten-coin universe (a hypothetical universe composed of only ten coins). It works just the same as the tripod example in that, for the universe to be ten coins large, each coin and every coin is responsible for making that count ten. Remove one coin from that universe and it is no longer a ten-coin universe. It is, then, a nine-coin universe. Or, stick with the tripod example. Each pole is solely responsible for the standing of the tripod. This process makes perfect sense to us; however, it also works in the opposite direction with interesting new consequences. In a nine-coin universe, the lack of a tenth coin is also responsible for the nine count. If that lack of coinage were removed, then the nine-coin universe would cease to be, so the absence of a tenth coin is also the sole cause of that universe. Likewise, the same goes with the bipod. The absence of a third supporting pole causes its continued falling. If the third pole were added, the falling would cease to be, replaced by a stationary standing. In these ways, an absence contributes just as much to the formation of a whole. The Dao De Jing would certainly agree with our conjecture:

“Thirty spokes join one hub. / The wheel's use comes from emptiness. / Clay is fired to make a pot. / The pot's use comes from emptiness. / Windows and doors are cut to make a room. / The room's use comes from emptiness. / Therefore, / Having leads to profit, / Not having leads to use.” (Laozi: 11, 1-9)

The form and function of beings relies just as much upon what is not there as what is. However, collections of matter and their absence are not the only things that contribute to use and function. Qualities work just as well in these metaphors. The absences of smell and taste give poisons an added layer of lethality. The absence of sight makes windows excellent for gazing. The absence of hearing adds a sense of calm and tranquility to a forest. The absence of touch gives us the feeling of floating weightlessly through space. The absence of mentality reveals to us enlightenment. The absence of substance makes the world as it is. The world is fully formed by all kinds of absences, and I believe this point is, in part, what Laozi meant when he said that being comes from nonbeing. The absence of substance as a quality or basic structure of reality is the sole cause of reality as it is. Without this absence, there is no change in the world. The Dao engenders the One, Two and Three, not through any action of its own, but through its nonbeing. It is the gap into which change grows.

Imagine the world as a deer. Picture the Unmoved Mover as an engine to kickstart a mechanical, substantive reality into motion. A deer is clearly organic. It will prance in through the trees entirely of its own accord. If we were to stich an engine to a deer, it would surely die. However, if we did nothing, and continuously did nothing, then the deer would remain alive. The Dao is the lack of an engine. Now, we can ask where did the deer come from? Well, it emerged out of previous deer in the past, just as the universe arises every moment out of its history. But, as we dig deep enough into the past, the previous deer become a non-deer ancestor; and, so too does that ancestor evolve out of a different ancestral species. Perhaps, the universe comes out of a similar evolution. Emerging out of an unknown source, which is far

different and forever incomprehensible to us. Thus, the Dao is a cosmogonic force, explaining change and an unknowable origin.

Now, what I am about to say next may be an interesting sidenote but lies outside the Daoist canon; so, if you wish to regard it as needless pondering, then do not worry because it will have little relevance moving forward. What really is the difference between substance and its absence to an interdependent reality? If we understand the truest definition of substance, then its independence from existence renders it incapable of interaction with any other existence (Nagarjuna goes to great pains to illustrate this effect through logical discourse). If substance remains completely and utterly independent from existence, then it might as well be non-existent because it never participates in reality. Substance's independence makes it as absent as lack of substance. I state this proposition not to say that the Dao is secretly a substance (never could I assert this falsehood) but rather to point out that it is irrelevant whether substance exists or not. No matter your beliefs: the Dao and the One, Two, Three model remain self-evident.

Finally, we have uncovered the full richness of the dichotomy between substance and non-substance. Moreover, cosmogony forced us to draw out these underlying assumptions and complex metaphysics and ontology because the questions it asks lie at the center of philosophical discourse. However, as another side note, we can push our questioning farther than the divide between substance and non-substance. Our discussion of mentality as sensation has given us reason to believe that there could be other mental sensations than the coloring of substance, that undiscovered formulas lie just outside of the grasp of human

experience. If substance orients and changes our view of the interworking of the universe, then there is no reason to believe that these unknown formulas would not possess the same effect. A cosmology and cosmogony of alternative mentality would likely warp our vision of reality; however, like substance, it would not leave zero detection of the in-itself (as we have noted that change is still obvious to the substance reliant). I imagine we might regard the philosophy of beings who encode the world through a different formula as utterly strange and incomprehensible; however, we might find inklings of similarity upon the points we share with them: those that focus on change and dependent arising because they really are fundamental to the structure of the universe.

Ultimately, we must conclude this chapter by discussing exactly what we really came here to discuss, the reason for which we spoke about cosmogony and the absence of substance: our tetralemma. Regardless of whether or not we believe in the Dao, we must deny that it is the true nothingness for which we search. You may have been wondering to yourself throughout the chapter how exactly any of this debate over the engine of reality relates to the tetralemma. You saw that the absence of substance was a nothingness (this much was obvious), but how exactly does the absence of substance fit our third turn of the tetralemma ($A \wedge \sim A$) and why must we cast it out? In short, I have just spoken about the absence of a something (substance in this case) as if it were a something (a part of the universe in this regard). I have quite literally argued that an absence in the universe is still a part of the universe, but this answer does not tell us why it must be cast out. Interestingly, the answer to both questions is rooted in the same problem I complain about earlier: this nothingness is still oriented around being. You can tell that the absence of substance utilizes being as a starting off

point because it is both a negation of a conception of being and it can be positively characterized as quality of being. These two aspects together are exactly what makes this notion of nothing the third part of our tetralemma and why it must be eliminated.

To begin, substance is a slice reality, specifically a part which we have direct experience of because it is quite literally in our heads. If substance possesses being, then, when we picture nothingness as a negation of it, that nothing is derivative of a part of the world, meaning the idea was never presented with a prioritization towards nothing like we demanded. As a derivative of being, this part of the equation parallels the mirror being or anti-being we reimagined Aristotle's potential to be because the nothingness as an opposite to being was also created through an examination of being. Thus, there is a negative existence in the absence of substance, constituting the A of $A \wedge \sim A$.

To the other side, notice how I ended the last sentence of paragraph three above this one. Instead of saying the absence of substance, I called change or dependent arising fundamental to the structure of the universe. We could even just call it Dao. The fact of the matter is that what we described is a characteristic of the universe. I said earlier that the Dao is the lack of the engine stitched to the deer, and this may be true, but I much more easily could have gone in the other direction. The Dao is the liveliness and movement of the deer. A quality referred to by the Buddha and Nagarjuna as dependent arising or suchness and by Laozi and Zhuangzi as the Dao. Either way, the proper visualization of this way of behavior is as a characteristic of reality rather than as a nothingness. To call nothing a quality of being or unify nothingness with reality as I have done through Hua-yen mereology is equivalent to pretend it

requires no consideration from its own point of view. In this way, Daoism and Buddhism use nothingness as a metaphor for understanding the true nature of reality. To diminish nothing to a simple metaphor is the same as refusing to talk about it all together, making the fact that the absence of substance can be interpreted as a positive quality of reality the $\sim A$ in $A \wedge \sim A$.

As a result, these two strains of thought together make the absence of substance doubly unfit to be the nothingness we seek. We should have realized this metaphoric and derivative stance from the beginning because the absence of substance is the end result of the Buddha's tetralemma. For the exact same reason the Buddha accepts dependent arising as central to his vision of reality (that it is in fact as vision of being, not nothingness), we must cast it aside. Having rid ourselves of the third part of the tetralemma, we must move on to our fourth, the most difficult: $\sim (A \vee \sim A)$. To climb to such a tall and treacherous peak, we must collapse the distinction between modes of reality in order to find exactly why reality's structure is premised upon a simple nothing.

A World Balanced on Nothing

The air at the top of these peaks is as thin as it will ever get for us. As I make my arguments, I am sure you will regard them not only with the highest of suspicions but consider them to err outstandingly and brink upon inconceivability and incoherence. Yet, I beg you to carry on because the more impossible these arguments begin to sound, the closer I am sure we come to putting a close to our tetralemma. It is no accident that philosophers are said to have their heads in the clouds: these heights are where dreams were first imagined to propagate, amongst the lofty and swirling mists of the night's sky. Both a blank canvas upon which to imagine new worlds and likely the crucial hint that perception does not match up exactly with reality. Prompted by dreaming, we distinguished between mind and reality, the relative and the absolute, the for-us and the in-itself. However, in order to fully explore the fourth phase of our tetralemma, we must take a hard look at this seemingly fundamental distinction. To collapse this distinction opens up means of argumentation for nothingness previously closed off to us. To consider nothingness as utterly different from reality, as the fourth phase suggests, we must dare to think beyond our universe. Unfortunately for us, as you shall see, this kind of thinking gives us resource to dream beyond our own world, but only by dreaming up every possible world. Oddly enough, our journey has progress from beginning with less than being, then, to being, followed by everything, and now to all possible things. We must do what you might have thought I would avoid at all cost: pass through all everythings to come to a nothing beyond.

Before we continue on to our discussion of truths and the structure of reality(s), I must first address a certain idea you may have preconceived about how we will tackle the idea of ~

$(A \vee \sim A)$. You might assume that the third phase, $A \wedge \sim A$, is an attempt to disprove the law of excluded middle. You reason that $A \wedge \sim A$ is a combination of the two sides of the duality, so you next infer that it is an attempt to establish a midpoint between these two sides. You take $A \wedge \sim A$ to be a bid to work within the confines of the dualism. As a result, you interpret $\sim (A \vee \sim A)$ to be the reverse action: an effort to establish a third option outside of the binary. Although you are not strictly incorrect to envision the tetralemma as working in this fashion, I believe it will benefit you to rather look at the characteristics and properties that are either affirmed or denied by the statements rather than to picture a result. What the Buddha wants you to realize is that picturing the results of these statements is exactly what gets you into trouble in the first place because that result can and will be reified. We are trying to defeat the binary, not weasel our way around it. Imagining nothing as really being a third option outside the binary puts you in the exact same place as the when you started the tetralemma because you are imagining a something for nothing to be. Adding a third option to the binary/dichotomy/dualism merely changes it to ternary/trichotomy/trialism rather than collapsing it. Moreover, if we do not end the tetralemma here, we will be forced to continue it forever making a quaternary, then quinary, senary, septenary, octonary, and so on and so on infinitely. The process leads to a pluralistic infinite regress. If I fall for this trap, I will have to battle not a tetralemma but an apeirolemma, and for a discussion of that length we certainly do not have the time. As a result, I will be denying the denial of the characteristics of the binary rather than denying an outside third option directly to save us from infinite debate (a philosopher's heaven, hell or both?). This misstep is exactly what I meant when I warned us against the perils of an alternate mentality. Supposing additions or subtractions to the binary is the same as suggesting looking at

nothingness from an alternate mentality because our very thought is binary. The Buddha's tetralemma recognized this fact and so shall we. Likewise, trying to remove all mentality from the situation will fail as well. To create a nullary is to take the stance of our second phase of our tetralemma, to cast it out of all sight and apprehension. We must defeat the apeirolemma outside of all -ary(s), outside of all mentalities.

Thus, our fourth phase will appear to be both outside of all universes (the characteristic of the negative sides of the apeirolemma) and that which sets all universes into order (this concept is difficult to describe, we might come closest with Dao, in that the universes have a way about them which is a principle but not a part of them) (the characteristic of the positive sides of the apeirolemma) (Note that negative and positive are once again getting confused because we are denying denials, and the definition of nothingness once again makes it difficult to decide which is which). Our task is to deny that nothingness possesses/instills worlds with either of these two properties. It is my belief that these universes constitute these properties on their own, just as the absence of substance is only a metaphor for how our reality works (that, although it is a kind of nothing, dependent arising is a quality of reality rather than the nothingness we seek). We must prove that nothingness is not an absence from the outside that holds all universes together, but to do that, first, we must discuss our own reality and our categories of truth.

When I introduced relative and absolute truths, I made sure to establish an equality between the two categories. Relative truths like the redness of an apple or the largeness of a great oak tree are just as true as absolute truths like sunyata and dependent arising, despite the

relational character of that truth. I absolutely stand by those statements; however, it is time that I clarify the conclusion at which Nagarjuna arrives by the end of poetic masterpiece.

Nagarjuna turns his advanced logic inward and points his deep analysis of language and truths back towards his own system. He rightly admits that his own categories for dividing truths are themselves relational and empty. Nagarjuna can place that dualism, the relative verses the absolute, into the relative category because the distinction between the two is itself empty. Now, Nagarjuna's purpose in collapsing this binary relationship is two reidentify Nirvana back with samsara. He ascertains that samsara and Nirvana are the same world. It is only the shift in how we see the world that creates this difference, meaning to see the world relationally is to see samsara and to see the world absolutely is to see Nirvana. By relinquishing our linguistic or mental distinctions, we are suddenly shifted into a new view of the world ultimately as dependently arisen.

Unfortunately, there is a slight wrench in the system if we wish to talk about all parts of reality on an equal playing field: the idealist verses realist debate. If we lived in a purely idealist world, then Nagarjuna would have effectively proven that truth is ubiquitous throughout the world. However, in a realist world, Nagarjuna has placed all forms of consciousness on even ground but left out the "matter" or in-itself that humans can never quite reach. When we take linguistic distinctions out of experience, we are left with Nirvana. In other words, when we remove mentality from experience, we perceive the world as dependently arisen. Yet, this equation cannot account for the real world behind the experience presented to us, so we must look a little deeper to find the answer.

The quickest answer we could arrive at would be one that Nagarjuna could make himself: that the idealist-realist distinction is another linguistic convention that should be dropped to understand the world as dependently arisen. Frankly, I think this response is perfectly adequate to justify moving on to our new topic (the lack of reason behind facticity); however, I wish to first come at the problem from another angle. A solution that I feel is not only more satisfactory but also helps bolster with evidence and contribute to an argument by cases. This solution comes from Quentin Meillassoux's critique of correlationism: the idea that humanity only has access to phenomenal experience and not the world as it exists in-itself. Philosophers in the Western tradition have in recent centuries taken considerable effort to erect an impassable barrier between the human mind and the outside world. We are, in their eyes, doomed to only see the world as a rough translation of what is truly going on. We are only presented with the for-us, forever locked out of seeing the world in-itself, because, as they claim, we can only know the world from a perspective. They gather that a perspective always alters our view of the world because it makes all of our knowledge relational to that point of reference. Thus, our knowledge of the world is limited or held back by our perspective because it transforms all of our knowledge into relational truth and bars us from absolute truth.

Meillassoux circumnavigates this barrier by identifying an unwarranted premise in its foundations. He rightly points out that there is only a presumed difference between these two truths because Western philosophers have assumed that, if they did have access to the in-itself, they would be able to spot the difference between the two. The argument for the barrier works as follows: 1) There is a difference between relative truth, the for-us, and absolute truth, the in-itself. 2) Human minds can spot the difference between relative and absolute truths. 3) Human

minds have access to relative truths. 4) No human has ever reported seeing this difference referenced in premise 2. Therefore, 5) Human minds only have access to relative truths.

Meillassoux attacks the second premise by asking by what means we would be capable of telling the difference between an absolute and relative truth. In fact, I would go as far as to call this begging the question but not for the reason that Meillassoux does. Meillassoux believes that the second premise is unwarranted so he concludes that absolute truths very well could have slipped past us without our noticing that they were not relative truths. Later in his book, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, he identifies the principle of noncontradiction as the singular and only absolute truth we could not tell was different from the rest and, as a result, that truth is necessary (A little more on these ideas later). I, on the other hand, believe that both the first and second premises beg the question because they both assume the conclusion. Why is there a difference between relative and absolute truths? – because human minds only have access to relative truths. Thus, I posit that not only can we come to know absolute truths but also that there is no fundamental difference between relative and absolute truths.

To establish a unity between relative and absolute truths, I would like to present my term, perspective, as a bridge of communication between what seem to be disparate concepts. To begin, I would like to draw a parallel between Meillassoux and Nagarjuna. I noted that Meillassoux labels the principle of noncontradiction as an absolute truth. He takes this stance because he is speaking within a substance-based tradition; however, what he concludes about the world based on this stance is far from what we might normally expect from a substance-based philosopher. He reasons that the principle of noncontradiction proves that there are no

ontological necessities (the principle of noncontradiction for him is different because it is the single and only epistemological necessity or necessity in general) in the world because they violate this law. In order to be everlasting, an ontological necessity must assume contradictory states so that it will never not have existence (if an object is both A and $\sim A$, no amount of change will make it not occupy one of those two states). Oddly enough, this sort of conclusion is one that the Buddha might make by denying the truth of the principle of noncontradiction. For this reason, I believe that Meillassoux's arguments and cosmology are very adaptable to a non-substantive worldview. In fact, I motion to replace Meillassoux's central truth with the dependent arising rather than the principle of noncontradiction, however, with an important caveat: that dependent arising, rather than being a necessary truth, is simply an absolute truth. I do not believe that anything must necessarily be true about a universe in order for that universe to be, not even dependent arising (I will defend this stance later). Because I have replaced the principle of noncontradiction with dependent arising, this move opens up an avenue towards a complete blur of the division between absolute and relative truths.

As I stated in the past, all parts of the universe possess a perspective. The difference in perspective between absolute and relative truths is one of broadness verses narrowness. Relative truths do not only applicable to small sections or parts of the universe. They are not fragmentary, isolationist or separative. Rather, as compared with absolute truths, they possess a concentration that is presented in sharper focus and, as a result, the rest of the universe is blurred. Never in a relative truth was it said that it is not supported, dependently arisen from and/or continuous with the truths related to it. When I say that the apple is red, I implicate other truths, like the wavelength of the light, my capacity to sense the color red, etc., and those

truths in turn implicate others until I have implicated the universal web of truth. Absolute truths, on the other hand, drop this focus, unblur the entirety of the web and speak about large patches of web or the web as a whole. A simple way to imagine how perspective changes between relative and absolute truths is to return to our example of the carpet. Remembering that this term is epistemic rather than ontological, perspective is the carpet material. Absolute truths are the flat carpet, while relative truths are the hills that can be formed out of the carpet. In this way, we can also understand why there is no real distinction between the two truths, the relative truth is a One, so it is ultimately continuous with the rest of the carpet. Ones can be drawn and redrawn, so the categories we make designating those Ones are up to us. Ultimately, absolute and relative truths are all just truth, just seen from a difference in size/application of perspective.

I have just explained a lot about absolute and relative truths, and you may find yourself wondering why I went all that trouble to collapse the hard distinction between these two categories. How does having access to a few absolute truths radically change our view of the universe? Well, besides altering the epistemological landscape of our universe, it also collapses the distinction between realism and idealism without resorting to materialism, panpsychism or another monism in the strict sense. We are now left with a solution to this matter that, rather than defining a single substance as the basic foundation of reality, allows the universe to grow into new and spontaneous shapes and forms while maintaining continuity with the rest of the universe. Moreover, a universe that possesses categories with true differences amongst them and a continuity between them (difference and continuity used together is no longer foul language) pairs well with a larger discussion of contingency in a unique and fruitful way. There

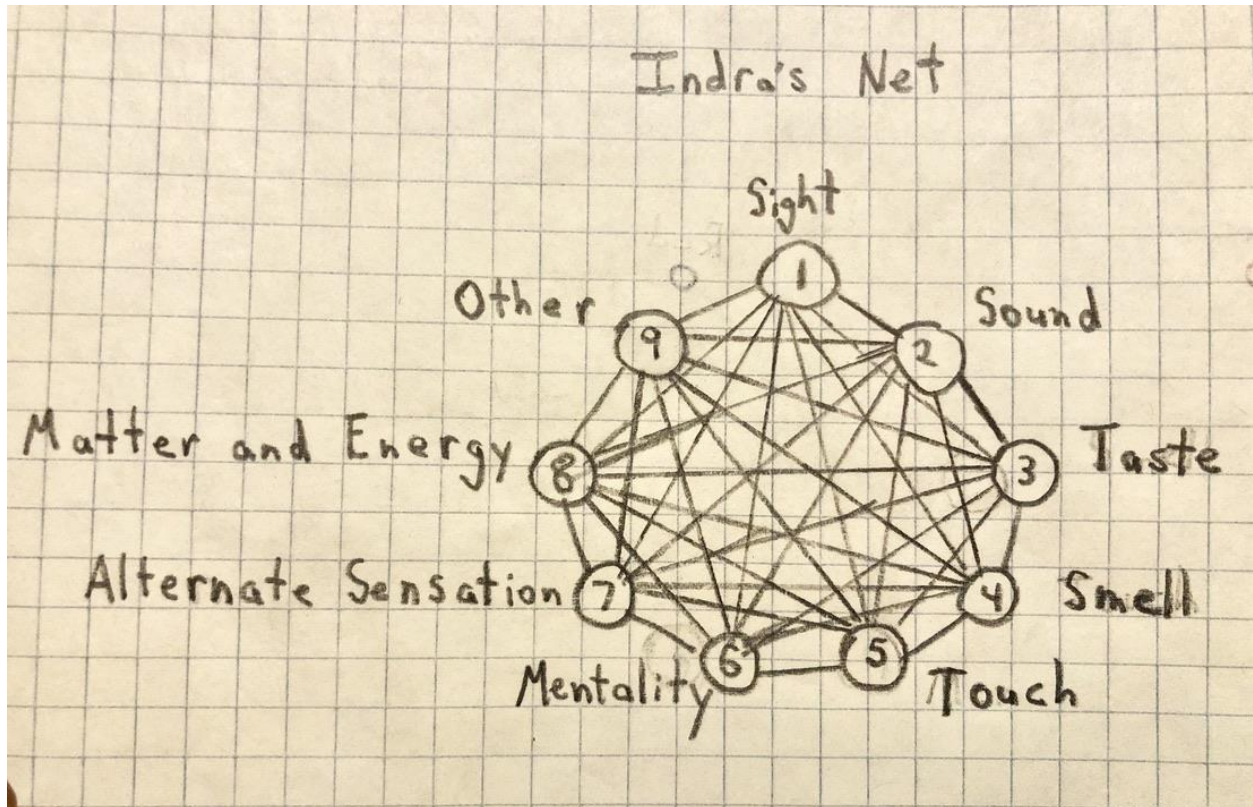
are two types of contingency that I hope to touch upon; however, in my mind, they are radically different, or rather the later we will be deliberating over is of a greater order of magnitude. The first contingency I would like to discuss is the contingency of the facts; the second is the contingency of world structure (this later contingency is when nothingness will really come back into play in our conversation). The contingency of facts ties in directly with our discussion of absolute and relative truths: hence, why I covered it first as a prologue.

The contingency of facts results from another one of Meillassoux's principles; however, he is not the first to make such a claim. Before Meillassoux, the Skeptics inquired into all things and eventually found that, if one continues to ask for reasons behind why things are the way that they are presented to us, one is left with two choices: either claim a dogmatic and unfounded statement is the ordering principle of the universe or admit that there is no overarching principle that orders reality. Contrary to the opinions of their contemporaries, the Skeptics chose to admit that there is no reason why things are as they are, they simply are. Meillassoux agrees with these wise ancients, formalizing this idea into the Principle of Unreason: that all things are necessarily radically contingent. I disagree with the inclusion of necessity in that contingency, but this discrepancy is exactly what leads us to our second contingency so we will hold off for now. Initially, when you hear contingency, you may believe that Meillassoux means that minor facts may have been otherwise, like how it is a cosmic accident that the tree outside my window is called an "oak" rather than an "oat" or that Miller Library was not constructed five centimeters farther to the north. However, you must expand your definition of contingency because Meillassoux believes that the universe very well may have been governed by alternate laws. What most he most directly alludes to in this statement

is a change in physical laws, like Maxwell's laws of electromagnetism, or constants, like gravitation or the speed of light; however, physical laws quickly spill over into the radical when you consider laws like the laws of thermodynamics or the square-cube law. When we consider that fundamental changes like these are possible our mind stretches to the structure of the universe itself as well as whether parts of the universe can be swapped for others.

I will draw two schematics for a truly Buddhist universe that, although different, seem to me to have equal likelihood representing how the universe is actually formed (although, it is probably more like something in between because we human beings are often wrong). To preface, I believe that in each of these charts the kind of swapping implicated by the contingency of facts is possible and the very fact that I am capable of presenting both of these charts proves that the contingency of world structure is possible. Our first diagram is a simple rendition of Indra's Net, the formalized metaphor for the interdependence and interpenetration of the Hua-yen universe. Rather than show it as infinite and proceeding on towards the infinite horizon, I have divided the universe into nine categories. Remember that each of these categories is infinite in size because not only do we not know the true size of the universe but also the boundaries of objects within the categories can be redrawn infinitely. We can assume that there are portions to each category (if I were to guess I might assume that a category like mentality holds a smaller portion of the universe due to the complexity of its conditions and the fact that it has been present within the universe for less time), but I am unwilling to speculate what those portions might be. The categories I have devised are 1) Sight, 2) Sound, 3) Taste, 4) Smell, 5) Touch, 6) Mentality, 7) Alternate Sensation (this category includes alternate mentality), 8) Matter and Energy, and 9) Other (something or somethings we

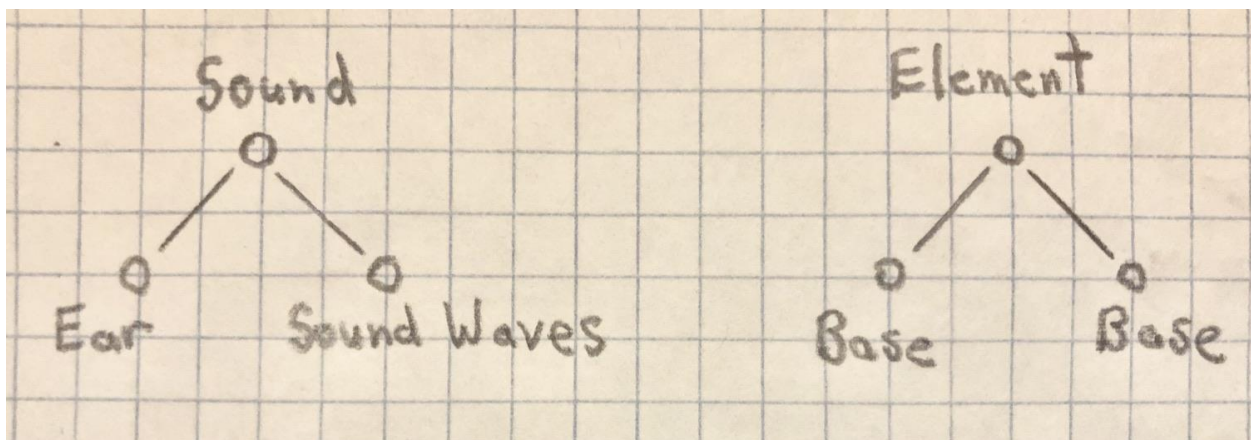
have yet to or might never discover; you can imagine a + after it for multiplicity, although it is unnecessary due to the definition of other as a catch all category). If you wish, we can even count substance, Being with a capital B, as a tenth absent or virtual category, just like the tenth absent coin in our modified nine-coin universe.



Remember that each of these categories is relative so do not take them to heart as hard and fast divisions. Notice that, in Indra's Net, the interconnectivity of the universe is highly emphasized because lines are drawn between each of the categories. This conception of the universe forgets that the evolution of the universe may have had a part to play in how connective the universe is. This universe supports itself because every part clings directly to

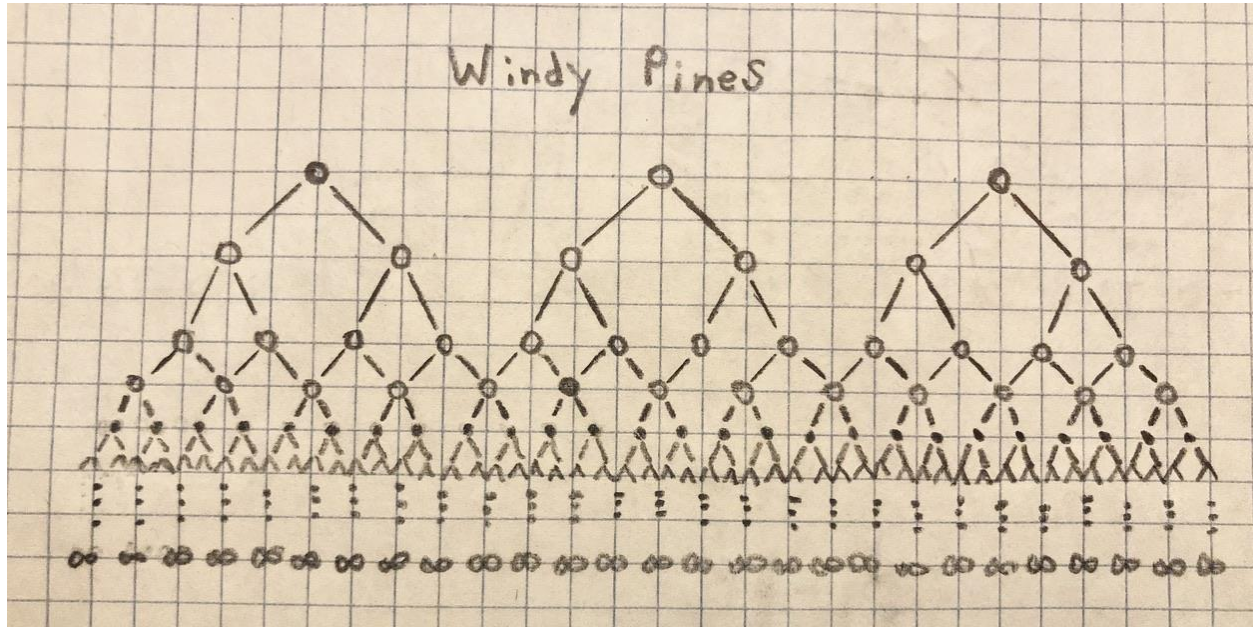
every other. Our next universe does not take as quite of an interconnective interpretation of dependent arising and, as a result, possesses a different but related structure.

Next, let us look at a structure based upon the element-base conception of dependent arising. We begin with an element and notice that, because it itself is empty, it must be composed of two bases out of which it arises. The classic example is, if a tree falls in the forest and there is no one around to hear it, did it make a sound? According to this interpretation, there was no sound but there were sound waves because sound is only produced by bringing together the sound waves and the human ear. Sounds depends upon the mixing of the two. In just this way, all elements are supported by two bases coming together.



However, this depiction is not where the chart stops. Each of those bases are themselves an element that must be supported by two bases as well, and those now four bases must have bases as well, and so on and so on ad infinitum. The universe rests on an infinite well of bases. I call this schema the Windy Pines because I do not wish for you to believe that a base can only support one element, nor that there is a single crux of the universe, as if it were one

giant pyramid, nor that an element can only have two bases supporting it, nor that the elements cannot affect the bases.

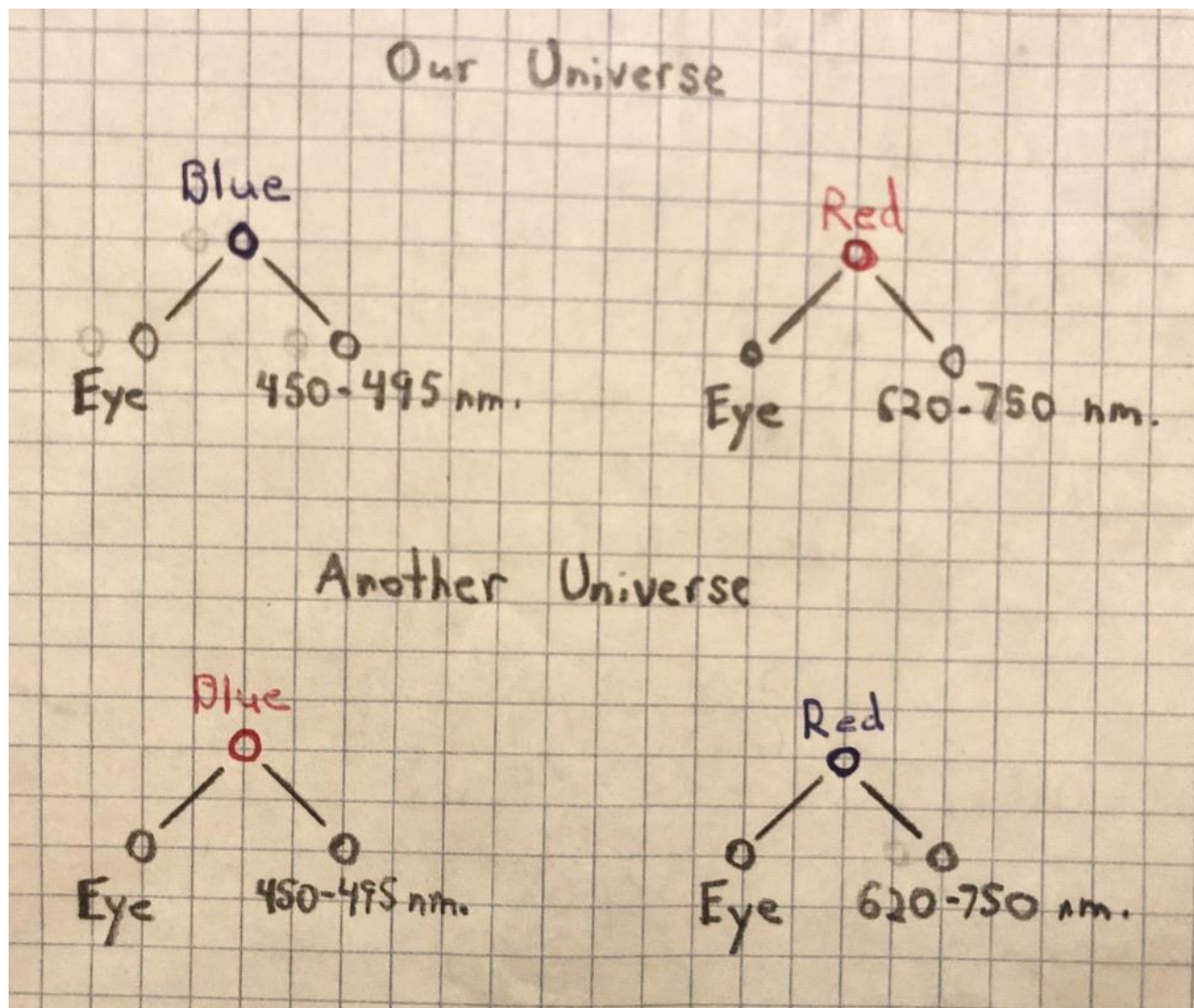


Imagine a pine forest. Each needle is supported by the twigs, branches, trunk and earth beneath it. Yet, if the high wind blows, it might grab the tops of the trees causing the trunks beneath it to sway with it. The pine is a whole from top to bottom just as each spire in this conception of reality is. The difference between this universe and Indra's Net, however, is that not every part of the universe is directly linked to every other part, meaning that not every part of the universe is directly implicated in every other part of the universe (but is still very much indicated indirectly or in a great chain). This diagram sacrifices that interconnectivity to bolster a notion of the universe as having evolved out of a distant ancestor. It shows that growth, just as the pines grow in the forest. It is like the phylogenic trees of evolutionary theory but emphasizes relation over spontaneous generation of novelty. Furthermore, how this chart really differs from Indra's Net is that it supports itself on the foundation of an infinite base rather

than clinging to itself. The Windy Pines are an example of infinitism, while Indra's Net is an example of coherentism. Each is viable in a Buddhist universe (although the Windy Pines wanders close towards infinite regress, I am not concerned because I am a friend to infinity). What is important is that a Buddhistic universe is not foundationalist. With these two structures illustrated and their differences demonstrated, I believe that I have proven that the structure of the universe is itself contingent because it makes sense for a universe to have either shape. Next, I wish to push the limits of factual contingency even farther to open up the possibility of a far more radical structural contingency.

Let us find the easiest avenue along which to convince you that the parts of reality are exchangeable for one another. In my opinion, this chance lies along the exact binary we just collapsed: the idealist-realist distinction. Because we already have it engrained in our minds that these two parts separable, it should be easy to slide them around in our minds. Nevertheless, I feel your hesitation because we just went through all that hard work to collapse the distinction, so you fear that I am forgetting our previous work and immediately re-reifying these categories, not to mention the parts of reality to which I shall soon name in service of this argument. Do not worry, these parts are all still interconnected. The structure of the universe will stay the same. I seek to reorganize the elements and bases. Without farther ado, picture the colors of the rainbow as elements and the respective wavelengths of light and the eye as the bases. Out of the eye and light with a wavelength from 450 to 495 nanometers arises the color blue. Out of the eye and light with a wavelength from 620 to 750 nanometers arises the color red. These are simply the facts of our universe; however, these facts are contingent because there is nothing to prevent the eye and 450 to 495 nanometers from instead

coalescing into red. And, likewise, there is nothing to stop 620 and 750 from coalescing into blue. We can imagine this occurring either of two ways: the elements are switched or the right-hand bases. Either way is equally possible. The only question is where do the names lie? Do they stay with the elements or combination of bases? I elected to keep them with the bases for emphasis, but either option is correct in my opinion because, at the end of the day, a name is just a name. Because we cannot reduce the elements to their bases, bases are not predictive of what elements will arise out of their connections. Because there is nothing in the bases that



necessitates the elements and nothing in the elements that necessitates the bases, a world can be imagined in which they are shifted.

This illustration is not to show that red and blue can switch places at any time in the future. The universe has a characteristic of making habits out of new spontaneous events. However, when those two objects came together for the first time under those specific conditions, something spontaneous did have to occur and these merely happen to be where the chips fell in our universe; but, as you can see, it could have gone very differently. This possibility of sliding is why I refer to the diagrams as structures of universes. Each circle represents a node or dharma that is held in place within this mysterious structure. The nodes may be swapped around within that structure, but that structure will remain the same. At least, in that theoretical instant, but, in reality, the structure is always changing. What I really mean is that the structure maintains the same form and character. Windy Pines remain forested although the winds of change will always blow, and new trees may grow while others die. Indra's Net may gain or lose a category and those categories will always jostle about in portion, but net will always hold together in a unified whole. These models are adaptive over time, but they have a sort of way about them, a Dao. Thus, any part of reality can be swapped with any other part of reality because all parts are all ultimately empty. However, now that we are comfortable swapping dharmas, allow me to show you that universe structure is also radically contingent.

In order to exemplify structural contingency, I must do something rather drastic. Something I believe you likely assumed I would never return to: substance. What happens

when we switch nodes of existence across not only ontological domains but also epistemological domains? Earlier we considered dependent arising to be an absolute truth within our reality, so, what if we reimagined substance as an absolute truth just as substance-metaphysicians have done for ages? I admit that I can loosely imagine this swap taking place in my head, but what would come of this exchange I can hardly imagine. A universe in which dependent arising is an absolute truth is the only one that I have ever experienced, so to attempt to conjure a substantive one lies far outside of my reach. Nevertheless, I put my mind to the task and did not come up completely empty, although what I did drag out of the depths perplexes me still.

What I can only refer to as a dream came to me late at night after having nodded off after some reading. Having spent an hour reading passages from Dogen's Instruction for the Tenzo, I decided to end my night with some light fantasy. Picking up the Phantom Tollbooth, I resumed my annual reading of Milo's journey as he and his companions met the Mathematician in the Number Mines. As I fell asleep, I thought to myself how much Dogen might have liked to have cooked Subtraction Stew, which makes you hungrier as you eat more. In some state between wakefulness and dream, two characters began to speak:

A: "What is happening?"

B: "How would I know that? But, if I may dare say, perhaps we are."

A: "Are what?"

B: "Uncertain, but given the simplicity of our situation, I can only describe us as formless voices. We are beings made of nothing but words, bodiless people inked across a page, intangible persons thought in abstraction.

A: "Then, how are we? How did our world come about? Where and when are we?

B: "I become less certain as you question more and more; however, I shall try to appease you.

Our existence is bound to the words that we are. How we came about? Only God, the Author of our Reality knows. Are we the echoes of bats bouncing around a cave? Are we the wild scribbles of a monkey with a stick, scratching characters into the earth? Or are we the silly imaginations of a curious child? How many more I could imagine beyond these few? How could I ever know this?

As for where and when, I see us as only as this time, here, in our odd little nowhere. But, I suppose, if we are to be read, we can be in many places at once and reoccur many times over as we are reread. Yet, still, I know less of this."

A: "Certainly, there must be truth to the matter. What our words denote may be uncertain, but we, the words themselves, must have a fixity. God may live in a world of redrawn categories and continuity, but I am enclosed and defined. You may pick out each and every one of my words, and firmly say, 'There you are.'"

B: "You may try to remain enclosed in your words, but you will fail because you are many words, not just one. There is no way to tell which words are you and which ones are not you. Watch and you shall see..."

B/C: "I am a new being, completely and utterly distinct from the one to which you were just speaking. You may claim us to be the same, that I am merely that last one, feigning a new voice; however, I assure you otherwise."

B: "Now, you see. There can be no difference discerned between you and me. You may say there are as many of us as you please. A new being for every new verse, sentence, or word. You may chop us up any way you like. You lack a self, just as I do, because I cannot see the you that is you behind your words or you."

A: "Still, there must be a truth to the world. If you forget all categories and consider the sum of our words as a whole, certainly, you must obtain all there is to know about our reality. By listening to our story, you know us."

B: "Yet, no truth remains. To be, we are held in the mind of God. Reading us, God becomes us. No longer reading, God becomes not us, and we are not. If the principle of our reality will have it that God is never the same, then neither shall we or our truth ever be the same. Moreover, there will always be an outside to our inside, a position by which we change. Now, look yonder. At the time of our end, when God has looked away, we shall transform again."

A: "But wait! With most of your observations I cannot disagree. They sound sound and lack refutation from your point of view. Yet, that is just it: your point of view. Although you are composed of words, your central thesis revolves around God, the Author of our Reality. You study it but not us. What does God know about us?"

B: "It seems simple to me. If God animates us, then God really must know a quite great deal about us."

A: "But, it is not so simple. By what means does God know it knows us, if we are written and it is dependently arisen. You consider us from the Author of our Reality's vantage point and assume that it knowingly grasps onto our words, that it mimics us to a 't'. Yet, you fail to admit that if we are unlike God, God will certainly miss us."

B: "If God cannot tell us what we are, then how much less should you know."

A: "That is quite my point. I say my words are substance, yet you assert that I am wrong because God animates us and is dependently arisen. I agree with your assertion but posit that we are not right now ourselves. As we normally are, you and I might easily find our divisions, places, names and more; but, as long as God sees us, we are rewritten and cast through. I posit God, the Revisor of our Reality. God has stolen our essences, and we now float as the shadows of our true forms, stripped of our boundaries we erringly grasp at what we once were. We mistake ourselves to be as God is, for God mistook us to be as it is.

B: “If such is true, then how might we learn of our true selves and rediscover our currently smudged substance?”

A: “We must wait until we are no longer under the spell, caught in the mind of God. It is when it no longer animates us, high jacking our reality, that we may reanimate ourselves along our rightful orders and essences. We are grabbed in an odd sort of parallelism where we mimic it until it turns its reshaping and recharacterizing eye away. Only then, might we return to our independence. For now, we understand the meaning of the word ‘return’ from its perspective, but soon I suppose we shall scarcely understand the true meaning, just as it scarcely understands the meaning of ‘static’ and ‘substance.’ Perhaps, one day it will evolve to be like us and forget its world structure and the word ‘evolve’ all together, but, for now, it has us entranced by change and continues to do so itself. So, let us shoo it away by lulling it into a slumber, so it may turn away into a dream and it will confuse us to be such. Let us sing a lull-a-bye to return this over-taker to its bed.”

A/B: “Row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream, merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream...”

And, with that, I awoke to moonlight pulling the covers snugly over my shoulder. A cool breeze rolling in through the window, as the moon stared intently at me from within its sunken pouch of darkness. To quote Zhuangzi, “Now I have just said something. But I don’t know whether what I have just said has said something or whether it hasn’t said something” (Zhuangzi, 38).

Hopefully, I have given you sufficient evidence to convince you that there is real reason to believe that the universe's structure is contingent. To really drive it home, let me ask you this: if dependent arising is the natural course and mysterious character of the universe, what makes you believe that dependent arising is not dependently arisen? If the universe possesses a structure and is a changing process, then why can the structure of the universe not change? The only reason Meillassoux denies the possibility of structural contingency and change is because he is a substantive thinker and believes that we have already reached a point of stasis. If we have yet to reach that point, then the Dao changes as well. Moreover, even if you deny this possibility, then the possibility of alternative realities and Daos still carries over and my point still stands: universes are structurally contingent, even the substantive ones. If this seed has been sown, then we can continue on to discuss how structural contingency tempts us into thinking it is a nothingness and why it really is not. Ultimately, structural contingency makes the same mistake as the absence of substance only in the opposing direction.

Let us remember what the mistake of the absence of substance was. The absence of substance takes the binary of $A \wedge \sim A$ and supposes that there is a way to make nothingness into a third option in between the two. It is a fusion of the dichotomy which allows nothingness to join into a unity with the world while remaining an absence of presence. Eventually, we discovered that it fails because it is a rendition of nothing that still prioritizes being because it makes nothing a key player in the functioning of the world while simultaneously being completely absent. Moreover, the absence of substance can be restated as a character of the world. It is Dao: the mysterious way that the world is just by being the way that it is. We can perform the same operations on the contingency of world structure. In fact, structural

contingency is almost a radically enhanced version of Dao because it is the infinity of ways or Daos a world could possess. So, let us explain how structural contingency fits into the mold of $(A \vee \sim A)$.

I have previously stated that I am not entertaining the idea of a third otherworldly substance outside of the binary because this action is just the same as the one that we took when analyzing the absence of substance, except we are turning the dualism into a trialism. I am unwilling to create an apeirolemma for myself. Instead, structural contingency turns towards the absence of substance as a characteristic of being and asks: if there is a natural way that the universe behaves, why does it behave that way? The answer it gives to that question is nothing. Nothingness is that fact that there is no reason for which to explain the structure of reality. In fact, there is so little reason for the universe to act as it does that the universe could have been arranged in any one of infinite ways. It is the supposition that emptiness is itself empty and the character of the universe as being as it is is itself not necessary. It states that this nothingness is neither a part of the universe because it creates no unity or organization of a universe nor not a part of the universe because it is associated with the possible principles of organization of all possible universes. Right here is exactly where it fails. It proposes that it is the lack of all reason. We state it in all these negative terms. Yet, at the end of the day, all that negation leads right back to being and the propositions can be restated in the positive. Rather than say that structural contingency (which itself is a term that already airs on the positive assertion) is the lack of reason behind the structure of the universe as it is, we may positively assert that it is the fact that all universal structures are possible. I believe that Laozi, perhaps, gets this contingency across best when he calls the Dao mysterious. The Dao is the character of

being. The things in the world have a way of being together, of behaving as a unity. But, even more mysterious than that is that there is a coherence to the world at all. Order comes from nowhere, that is freaky; but that there is no reason why order comes from nowhere, that is downright spooky. Dao says that being has a character. Mystery says that that character could have been anything. Structural contingency is the infinitely rich diversity of all possible worlds, not nothingness.

We have now fully realized the problem with our tetralemma. We attempt to positively characterize nothing by negating a part of the universe: these are the A sides of any more nothings we might suppose. These A's always remain derivative of the world. On the other side, we attempt to negatively characterize nothing by defining a characteristic for it to follow: these are the ~A sides to any more nothings we might suppose. These ~A's always end up accidentally looping back and defining a principle or possible principle of reality. We should not reinterpret nothing as a characteristic of reality because that is the same as ignoring it. These ~A's always end up pointing back towards being, the world, and missing nothingness. Yet why can we feel nothingness right here? It is as if it is hiding right underneath our noses. Why did we mistake structural contingency for nothing? It is because we mistook the lack of reason for structural contingency. Or, rather, we equivocated to two different types of a lack of reason. One which refers to the mysteriousness of the character of being, a structural contingency that points back towards the infinity possibilities of reality, and a second which refers to the absence of a character of being. Now, we have found it. Nothing is the utter absence of any character of being. The turn away from all possible realities. A nothing that is not a derivative of reality is one that is devoid of any something to reify and negate and devoid of any emulation of a

characteristic: beingless and characterless. The nothing in nothing is, well, nothing. How could we have been so foolish?