

Reflections on Incongruent Names, Including the Name “Best Essay,” in Response to Respondents

Paul J. D’Ambrosio¹; Hans-Rudolf Kantor²; Hans-Georg Moeller³

We are very happy to have this opportunity. In what follows we respond to the respondents individually. The first section is in response to Professor Goldin, and authored by Paul D’Ambrosio; the second is in response to Professor Wawrytko, and authored by Hans-Ruolf Kantor; the final section is in response to Professor Geaney—this and the short conclusion are authored by Hans-Georg Moeller.

1. I’d like the Fish Please

In responding to Professor Goldin’s comments we would like to begin with a few remarks about the general discourse on “labeling” and “names” he is echoing.

Due in some ways to the growing influence of what is called “analytic philosophy,” as well as a general sensitivity and heightened anxiety about what is considered “offensive,” both of which are especially prevalent in American culture, philosophy professors have sought to sharpen the accuracy of their language. Generally speaking, this is, of course, not a bad thing. Many gross generalizations and broad misunderstandings result from inaccurate language. The problems associated with these issues are perhaps amplified in our field as comparisons between West and East, or “Chinese,” are notoriously impossible to narrowly pinpoint. Indeed, we can become as particular as we would like, and still there is not end in sight. There is, in some sense, no such thing as “Chinese thought,” “Chinese tradition” or even “China.” Yet in another sense it is quite impossible not to speak or even think this way. The question is of achieving a balance—or *jing-quan* 經權 to use (“Chinese”?) philosophical terminology. Indeed, language itself is a matter of constructing balances.

Evolutionarily (cladist) speaking there is no such thing as “a fish.” Or, to put it more accurately, either nearly everything is a fish, or nothing is. Nevertheless it makes plenty of sense to speak of “a fish” and distinguish it from a “cat” or a “human.” But again, from an evolutionary (cladist) approach, either they are all fish or none of them are fish.

¹ Institute of Modern Chinese Thought and Culture and Department of Philosophy, East China Normal University, 500 Dongchuan Road, Minhang District, Shanghai, China

² Graduate Institute of Asian Humanities, Huafan University, Taipei, No 1, Huafan Rd, Shihding Dist, New Taipei City 22301, Taiwan

³ Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Macau, Room 4112, Faculty of Arts and Humanities Building E21, Avenida da Universidade, Taipa, Macau, China

Where we draw the lines depends as much, if not more on *how* we are talking about something rather than just *what* we are talking about. On the airplane it is probably pretty safe to be asked “would you like the fish” whereas at a biology conference one might want to be more careful talking about “fish.”

In philosophy we ought to follow similar guidelines. It makes plenty of sense to talk about “Western” and “Eastern” thinking in some contexts, even while those labels immediately evaporate under closer scrutiny. After all, the push in the “West” has been to offer more classes on “Eastern” thought (which promotes diversity)—and that makes sense.

In an undergraduate course on “comparative philosophy” we do, and should, use terms such as “Eastern,” “Chinese,” or “Daoist” much more broadly than in a graduate seminar on “selected topics in Daoism.” But, in either case the term “Daoism” is incongruent—and this is precisely what we argued in our paper. The label “Daoism” is certainly diverse. We had hoped that this would be sufficiently clear from our paper where we introduce a historical development and distinguish different forms of Daoism in early China (*Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*) and in the Wei-Jin period (*Xuanxue*) none of which we depicted as representing “Daoism” as a whole or as a “true” Daoism as opposed to a “false” one. In other words, we did not attempt to use “Daoism” as a congruent name. As we argue in our article, names are often, or even always, (necessarily) incongruent. The label “Daoism” is no exception.

Diversity itself is, we cannot help but note, defined as “the condition of having or being composed of differing elements” or else “an instance of being composed of differing elements or qualities.” That is to say, diversity entails appreciating incongruity. It is what including “preferred pronouns” on name tags and having “gender neutral” bathrooms boil down to: incongruity. The thinking behind these recent phenomena is as follows: This classification or label does not fully reflect who or what I am. Or, my “actuality” does not match my “name.”

The label “Daoist philosophy,” too, as Professor Goldin points out in the title of his response, indicates diversity. In our paper we follow Wang Bi who uses the term *dao* 道者 or “Daoist” to refer to the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Indeed, many scholars, both in the Wei-Jin period, and throughout the history of Chinese thought, have used “Daoism” in precisely this way. But there are many other ways to use the term. As Professor Goldin aptly demonstrates, even “Daoism” is not a congruent name. There is no actual static referent to which “Daoism” points to for once and for all. Livia Kohn’s “Daoism” is not the “Daoism” we discuss in the paper, and perhaps neither is the “Daoism” Professor Goldin would use. And, to generalize yet again, *dao* 道家 or Daoist philosophy is clearly not *dao* 道教 Daoist religion, and yet both are often referred to as “Daoism.” At the risk of being repetitive, the “Daoism” we use in an undergraduate class “Introduction to Chinese Philosophy” is not same as the “Daoism” in our graduate courses “Selected Topics in Daoism” or the “Daoism” of our “Wei-Jin Xuanxue” classes.

According to Professor Goldin, *The Scripture of Supreme Peace* (*Taiping jing* 太平經) should also be counted as “Daoism.” This is not what Wang Bi references when he uses *dao* 道者, but it is undoubtedly “Daoism” for others. As mentioned above, our paper, too, refers only to “certain strands within Daoism (as found in *Laozi* 老子 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子).” We could agree with Professor Goldin’s encouragement “to abandon [our] characterization of this counterdiscourse as ‘Daoist.’” But we cannot but note that doing so would simply mean to dismiss the term as more or less useless, rather than indicating that “Daoist,” like many other terms used in philosophical discourses, such as “Christian” or “Marxist,” is a term that includes incongruent and diverse ideas and practices. Incongruity, for us, does not equal uselessness. “I’d like the fish please.”

We agree that, as Professor Goldin states, “anyone familiar with the extensive hierarchy of Celestial Master Daoism will be nonplussed by statements like [and here he quotes our paper] “a good Daoist will avoid accepting official positions” (D’Ambrosio *et al.* 2018: 310). And Professor Goldin continues “Good Daoists have been accepting official positions for centuries.” We would remind Professor Goldin, however, that when our claim is read in its entirety, we are clearly restricting our argument to particular passages of the *Zhuangzi* only, and not making claims about a “Daoist sage” in general. As with all language, context counts. Pull a clip out of its context and you can do almost anything with it—that’s how plenty of hilarious YouTube montages are made. However, if our sentence is read in context then it is quite obvious that we refer to very specific forms of Daoism. In the paragraph in question, we actually wrote:

Many famous narratives in the Zhuangzi point out how a Daoist sage, rather than becoming a nameless and formless political ruler, is instead immune to the seductiveness of honorific names and ranks. As much as possible, a good Daoist will avoid accepting official positions, and, in particular, free him- or herself from the desire for a social reputation.

Clearly, are not speaking of “Daoism” in general—then again, no one ever could.

As Professor Goldin correctly states, the *Zhuangzi* contains a good number of *appropriate* names. Congruent names are, however, not the same as appropriate names. Rejecting the total psychological and physical commitments required in “living up to one’s name” does not forfeit all use of “appropriate” language.

Broadly speaking, our present response has actually already been anticipated by Professor Goldin himself:

By now it should be clear that my critique hinges on the range of corpora that one is prepared to accept, and I anticipate that D’Ambrosio *et al.* will respond along the lines of “This is not what we meant by ‘Daoism.’” But here I have a final point: it is not just that “Daoism” includes more than *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*; rather, even in the case of *Laozi*, the authors are hewing to one hermeneutic line and ignoring all others.

And again we cannot but totally agree. Professor Goldin’s final point is even more basic than his first. Of course we were, just as everyone *necessarily always is*, privileging not only certain texts, but certain readings of those texts. No one in academic seems to seriously dispute this anymore, as even most undergraduates come well equipped with this argument. Professor Goldin is correct to point out that, generally speaking, our readings of the *Laozi* are much more in accordance with Wang Bi than the *Hanfeizi* or *Huanglao* interpretations. And we are very glad to have made this obvious in our article. This was precisely the historical trajectory we set out to discuss.

We should also mention another slight correction related to Professor Goldin’s comments. We did not intend to ask readers to accept one range of corpora as “Daoism.” In other words, we did not wish to say “the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Xuanxue*, this is what we want you to consider as ‘Daoism.’” In fact, we intended precisely the opposite: “By ‘Daoism’ we are referring to *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Xuanxue*.” The distinction here is what allows more exacting language to exist alongside everyday uses. It is what allows us to understand that either nearly all animals are fish or none are fish, and to still order fish at a restaurant. And it is what allows the *Laozi* to speak constantly of an ineffable *Dao*.

The final paragraph of Professor Goldin’s response reads:

As is typical of traditional Chinese thought, the foregoing survey, albeit brief, has uncovered a diversity of perspectives. D’Ambrosio *et al.* are justified in reading a certain type of skepticism about language as a reaction to the confident, perhaps overconfident, discourse of “rectifying names,” but it is misleading to label that reaction “Daoist.” This would be like focusing on a feature of Christianity found in some of its many branches (say, clerical celibacy), and calling it “Christian” without qualification.

Professor Goldin’s point is slightly paradoxical. Like us, he appreciates an early Chinese attempt to counter a “perhaps overconfident” rectification of names, but then he seems rather confident to pursue a rectification of the name of “Daoism.”

Additionally, this argument is problematic because it suggests that we used the term “Daoism” “without qualification” in our essay—which we did not. The term can only be understood in the exact manner we purposively contextualized it. What is more, the argument implies that we should either “qualify” such terms as “Christian” or “Daoist” to such an extent that they lose their incongruity and eventually become congruent, or not use them at all—that is to say, again, rectify names. So, for example, instead of “Daoism” we would use something like “by Daoism we mean ideas that we, Paul D’Ambrosio, Hans-Rudolf Kantor, and Hans-Georg Moeller, generally attribute (mostly through unspoken consensus) to certain passages of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* based on our readings of interpretations given by Wang Bi and Guo Xiang for the sake of writing this current article in the Fall of 2016 and Winter and Spring of 2017.” Though that too might not be enough.

We also believe that terms such as “Daoist” or “Christian” should be “qualified” or “specified” or “contextualized” in academic writings as much as this is possible and proper in the framework of one’s argumentation—which we think we sufficiently did. We certainly think that such terms can be used *appropriately*. However, we do not believe that proper academic specifications magically transform incongruent names into congruent ones. As we argue in the paper, we do not think names are, or necessarily need to be, congruent. Incongruities remain, no matter how much we specify or contextualize. Daoist texts, as long as they operate with names, remain just as incongruent as Christian texts, or texts by any Paul—Saint, Goldin, D’Ambrosio or otherwise. The point is not to eventually specify this incongruity away but to analyze it critically and to deal with it in a reflected and appropriate way.

This illustrates the very point we sought to make in the paper: Names are not, and cannot be, congruent with actualities. After all, either everything or nothing is a fish.

2. Having Views or Not?

Professor Wawrytko focuses her concern on finding the contiguous thread which, in the field of philosophy, might lead us beyond the divides of East and West, ancient and postmodern, Confucianism and Daoism/Buddhism, as well as task-driven and stimulus-driven modes of attention rooted in different parts of our brain. For me, a dilettante in neuroscience but student of Buddhist doctrine, the realm of non-duality and sense of incongruity has grown in terms of complexity after studying this well informed account. However due to various limitations, I must focus my response on a single issue selected from this abundance of inspirations.

According to the account in the review, one of the most relevant key concepts in Chinese Buddhist philosophy is what Professor Wawrytko calls “view of no view”. Similar expressions have already been raised by other author in reference to and context with Indian Madhyamaka

thought (Westerhoff 2008, 183-199). Indeed, Nāgārjuna’s ideas, as well as Indian Prajñāpāramitā doctrine, did play a very crucial role in the formation of the exegetical traditions in China, which led to the establishment of the East Asian Buddhist schools and the philosophies they developed.

Even the earliest strata of Buddhist texts which are partly incorporated in the transmission of the *Nikāya-suttas* in Pāli and also in the *Āgama-sūtras*, preserved in Chinese, record those discourses of the Buddha in which he dismisses views about all types of speculative content and further gives the advice to cultivate a mental attitude distanced from fixed viewpoints with regard to what we today might call metaphysics (Fuller 2004, 34-47). In what follows I would like to add some clarifying remarks regarding what is at stake when we relate the discussion about incongruity in Chinese Buddhist philosophy to the concept of the “view of no view”.

This expression, whose meaning for the Professor Wawrytko is so central to Chinese Buddhist thought, points at the discrepancy between the manner in which we look at things and what they turn out to be in reality. The observation of such discrepancy is part of our daily life experience, and Buddhist doctrine derives from this its conclusion that all suffering is rooted in our views about things.

Hence, the meaning of “view of no view” implies that any view we have about things prevents us from seeing things in the way they really are. Therefore, we must terminate all views about them. This culminates in the view that is empty of any view, so that we can truly see all things. To substantiate that sense of the “view of no view” and to provide some evidence from the primary sources, Professor Wawrytko quotes Thomas Cleary’s translation of a verse from the Chinese version of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. Indeed, Cleary’s translation and interpretation of this verse seems to support exactly that sense of a view which nullifies all views in order to truly see all things: “No view is seeing, Which can see all things; If one has any views about things, This is not seeing anything.” (無見乃能見，一切真實法，於法有所見，彼則無所見; (*Avataṃsaka-sūtra*, *Dafangguang fo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 T09, no. 278, p. 442, c27-p. 443, a7).

The verse appears in the discussion about a type of seeing which the sūtra ascribes to the “clear and pure dharma-eye” (*qingjing fayan* 清淨法眼). The long text of this scripture repetitively enumerates the list of ten different types of eyes, which account for ten levels of seeing, the lowest of which corresponds to what is called “*rouyan*” (肉眼)—the eye which is made of flesh perceiving only physical forms (*se* 色). Although what this eye sees is identical with that which it is made of, it does not truly see what its objects really are. It is exactly this that is revealed to “the clear and pure dharma-eye,” which is capable of seeing what is real and true in things, which is their emptiness (*kong* 空).

However, does the verse really mean that the seeing by virtue of the clear and pure dharma-eye is the seeing of all things? According to our understanding, the opposite is true: what the clear and pure dharma-eye sees is what is real and true in things, which is emptiness, and this implies not seeing any thing, not to mention all the things. Moreover, the notion of eradicating all views in order to truly see all things is nothing but the view, or the assumption, that there really are views that can and should be eradicated. Hence, emptiness, as it is implicated in the sūtra verse, deconstructs even that view.

But how does the verse describe the manner in which we might evade such blind spot, that is, the trap of making a commitment to a certain view, while exercising non-commitment to all views? Is the clearness of the pure dharma-eye really a state of seeing cleared from all views? Using the character “*jian* 見,” which could be interpreted in both the verbal and the nominal

sense, the Chinese sūtra verse in fact speaks about “seeing” rather than “views.” This might be relevant insofar as “seeing” is more dynamic than “view.” “Seeing” allows for alternating or circulating between different views, or for the constant replacement of views through other views without attachments or commitments to any one of them, while the view of no views terminating all views seems to restrict itself, undermining such dynamic momentum. Not committed to any view, the dynamic seeing of the clear and pure dharma-eye is not restricted by a certain view; therefore it allows for all. If no one of them is really obstructive to its seeing, it does not need to separate from any view.

To further expand on that meaning and interpretation, first I would like to propose another translation of this verse, which differs from Cleary’s understanding in terms of syntax and meaning: “Not to see is what enables one to see (無見乃能見) all that is true and real in things (一切真實法), [because] what one has seen in things (於法有所見) is not something one has [really] seen (彼則無所見).”

The first phrase in the verse talks about the capability of seeing (能見) the dharma of all that is true and real (一切真實法, in my translation: “all that is true and real in things”), which is emptiness, as indicated at the beginning of the whole passage. But Thomas Clearly does not translate “true and real” (*zhenshi* 真實), only saying “Which can see all things”. This changes the meaning expressed in Chinese, because from the subsequent part of the verse we learn that “all things” exactly is what cannot really be seen—they are empty, there is not really something that can truly be seen—seeing all things is not really or truly seeing something.

Hence, unlike Thomas Clearly’s understanding, I would suggest to read the last phrase as a predication of the agent of seeing, who/which is represented by the character “*bi* 彼,” while the following character “*ze* 則” indicates an adversary connotation, namely that this agent only seems to have seen something (*you suojian* 有所見), wherein she/he (*bi* 彼) in fact has seen nothing (*wu suoja* 無所見). Thomas Clearly, however, understands “*bi* 彼” as referring to the act of seeing (“This is not seeing anything”), which is syntactical justifiable, but the meaning that this translation implies does not really fit the context.

Realizing that seeing things is not truly seeing something real, “not to see” indeed is to be capable of seeing what is real and true in things, thus “not to see” is awareness of incongruity in any of our views. If we do understand the verse from the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* in that manner, Professor Wawrytko’s quote is indeed a helpful illustration for what we refer to as “incongruity” in our article.

In order to describe more precisely what this verse predicates about having views, I would prefer the term “sublation of views” to “view of no view,” because the clearness of the “pure dharma-eye” does not imply a real abolition, eradication, termination, or discontinuity of views. “Clear and pure dharma-eye” indicates the realization that what is not true or real in our views, beliefs, perceptions, thoughts or mental attitudes is what cannot really be appropriated, nor is what we can withdraw from, as it just is what does not really exist.

Hence, the intent to terminate all views might actually backfire and turn into a misleading inversion, in which we mistake the unreal for real. Paradoxically and ironically enough, only if we abstain from the intent to eradicate all delusions, might we come close to what is true and real. To see incongruity to such a paradoxical degree in all views is what allows for a certain sense of non-duality, as we have described in the section on Sengzhao in our article. The “dharma-eye” is clear and pure not in the sense of having removed all views but rather in the sense of not being committed to any of them, even to the view of no view. This does not mean its

seeing cannot resort to any of those views (including the view of no view); to the contrary, there is no single certain view that can obstruct its seeing. Yet the crucial point is: the view of no view turns into an obstacle of seeing what is true and real, once the eye is committed to that very view.

Again, “not to see” expresses the realization of incongruity in our views without really eliminating any one of them in our seeing. But this has the invalidating effect of debunking all misleading effects of them on our cognitive habits and conduct, which validates the heuristic relevance of them in making us see the very way we truly exist in this world of falsehood and illusion. In an ambiguous or paradoxical sense, sublation of views (realization of incongruity) consists of both invalidation as well as validation of what we observe.

We agree that “view of no view” could mean exactly this, but endowed with our understanding of incongruity we should also be aware of the ambiguity that, at the same time, this expression could be mistaken for an inversion of the same meaning—namely the commitment to the view of terminating of all views. Instantiating awareness of the ineradicable blind spot in our seeing (awareness of incongruity), “not to see” (*wujian* 無見) implies seeing that there is not really something that can be terminated, once the clear and pure eye is capable of seeing all that is true and real in things. “View of no view” in the misleading sense (the view of terminating of all views) undermines the sense of incongruity which we tried to evince in our examination of Sengzhao’s interpretation of Buddhist doctrine and also in the discussions about the *Zhuangzi* and Xuanxue thoughts.

Furthermore, in the Chinese Buddhist canon, there actually is a parable which recounts in an ironical way how the Buddha deconstructs the misleading sense of the “view of no view,” revealing its blind spot. It is the narrative about the former master of the Buddha’s eminent disciple Śāriputra. This master is the Brāhman Dīrghanaka, to which the Chinese *Da zhi du lun* 大智度論 (*Mahā-prajñā-pāramitopadeśa*), recounting this parable, refers with the two characters “*changzhua* 長爪”. This literally means “long claw” or “long fingernail” and implicitly criticizes the mental attitude of this Brāhman from the Buddhist point of view. According to the narrative, Dīrghanaka made the vow not to cut his fingernails until he will have been beaten by any other opponent in debate. By means of his very appearance, “Long Fingernail” expresses a haughtiness which runs counter to the meaning of right conduct rooted in Buddhist insight into truth and humbleness.

Long Fingernail’s confidence in his invincibility is based on the strategy to never pose an argument which would entail his adherence and commitment to any viewpoint so that he is undefeatable, while any opponent who challenges Dīrghanaka and claims to be able to point out the flaw of having no view inevitably finds himself in the position of defending any view. This makes every opponent for him vulnerable to refutation, because the direct reverse of having no view is the view of upholding any view (tantamount to defending any view), but obviously not all views are always true. Given this strategy, Dīrghanaka is confident that he can deconstruct any view, as none of his opponents can prove that, under these circumstances, his position or view is true. Each one has already lost before the debate begins. Knowing this, Dīrghanaka becomes prone to uninhibited pride which further urges him to express the self-construed image of his own superiority in such a brassy and blatant way. All this also makes him neglect his obligation to be a master and example of conduct in front of his disciples and all ordinary persons.

After having then learned that Śāriputra had disowned him to become a disciple of the Buddha, Dīrghanaka visits his opponent to challenge him in debate. However, the outcome of this encounter is that he experiences his own defeat two times. Unaware of the performative

contradiction of the view of no view, Dīrghanaka tells the Buddha that he does not adhere to any teaching and does not adopt any view; the Buddha points out that this already amounts to adopting a view. However, it is the second defeat which really unsettles Dīrghanaka’s self-confidence. After Dīrghanaka has countered with the statement that he even does not adopt the view of no view, the Buddha responds: “If you do not adopt any dharma (teaching), including even this view, [which amounts to not adopting non-adopting], then nothing exists that you can adopt [in order to become a master], which makes you indistinguishable from all ordinary persons. So, what is the point of your self-esteem, and what is it that generates your pride?” (*Mahā-prajñā-pāramitopadeśa*, *Da zhi du lun* 大智度論 T25, no. 1509, p.61, b18-p. 62a28).

Realizing his second defeat, Long Fingernail becomes a student of Buddhist doctrine.

In an ironical way, “Long Fingernail” accounts for the Buddhist observation that nothing but badly groomed claws, continuing to be harmful tools for greediness and further grasping, have grown out of this cognitive attitude (view) of having no views. The parable illustrates the sense of incongruity which even extends to the view of no view. But, as the reviewer correctly points out in her account, because of all these paradoxes inextricably linked with such a sense of incongruity in our views, the view of no view must entail the sense of non-duality in order to avoid falling prey to its inherent blind spot.

3. Subverting Names to Subvert a Regime of Sincerity

To begin with, I would like to thank all of the three eminent scholars who shared their thoughts with us and discussed our essay from their own perspectives—perspectives that turned out to be very different from one another. It is not only a rare honor to have one’s work discussed in detail by a number of esteemed colleagues, but also an interesting experience to be surprised by the disclosure of resonances that one has unintentionally evoked in them. This surprise will probably be mutual when we in turn respond to their responses.

Since I know very little about the discourse and issues informing Professor Wawrytko’s remarks, I will leave it to my co-authors to address them. To Professor Goldin, I will only say that I am very glad to see that he identified a number of Daoist sources that agree with what we regard as a mainstream position in early China: the view that names and what they designate are or ought to be congruent. He specifically points out that “early Daoist documents such as *The Scripture of Supreme Peace* (*Taiping jing* 太平經) affirm (...) that revealed scriptures perfectly denote ultimate reality,” and he is certainly right about this. In this way, the picture of historically and philosophically diverse strands within Daoism (as found in *Laozi* 老子, *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and *Xuanxue* 玄学) that we outlined in our essay is substantially broadened.

In her paper, Professor Geaney focuses on the philosophy of names or naming (*ming* 名) in early China with a special emphasis on the *Zhuangzi*. Her main point is to stress that names were generally conceived of as “mobile” rather than as “static,” and she analyses a number of text passages in detail to support this point. She states that names in early China function as “being in motion followed by stopping ‘in’ or ‘at’ something.” It remains difficult for me, however, to understand exactly what this means and how it relates to what we regard as the incongruity—and not the “mobility”—of names. Furthermore, Professor Geaney disagrees fundamentally with our understanding of names (*ming* 名) in Chinese philosophical text as—not always, but often—indicators of social roles. According to her this is a “misleading”

interpretation. What is more, she implies that we do not have an adequate understanding of social roles to begin with. Thus, the basic assumption of our essay, namely that there was a mainstream position in early China demanding that names should be congruent with what they designate, and this particularly so when they designate social roles, does not find Prof. Geaney's approval. Consequently, she cannot really engage with the main hypothesis developed in our essay, namely that an alternative discourse on incongruent names emerged, spanning over centuries and holding that names do not, or cannot, be fully congruent designations.

Our conception of social roles is taken from Erving Goffman's classical study *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956). Furthermore, Paul D'Ambrosio and I like to use Lionel Trilling's concept of "sincerity" to describe an understanding of human identity as based on committing oneself—that is one's behavior and one's feeling and thinking—to pre-established social roles. In short, this technology of identity supposes that, for instance, one's gender, one's profession, one's ethnicity, and one's place in a social hierarchy are not contingent social constructs, but rather mandated assignments (by, for instance, natural, divine, or ancestral powers) that one needs to cohere with in order to become truly human and achieve selfhood. The idea that names and what they designate are congruent rather than incongruent supports this basic social and psychological "regime of sincerity." Within a regime of sincerity, "names" are social and political designations, and not merely words. Their function is to establish, sustain, legitimize, and enforce certain hierarchies and structures. They are tools of a social discipline and used in political, legal, and economical practices. Importantly, they also function on a psychological level and demand emotional and intellectual devotion. In short, such "names" as "daughter" or "mother" are not merely taken to mark nominalist distinctions from, for instance, "son" or "father," but demand behavioral and mental submission. This is, specifically in an early Chinese context, what the doctrine of a congruity between names and actualities concretely meant in real life.

Some early (and contemporary) Confucians morally celebrated and aesthetically ornamented a regime of sincerity (in the family, for instance) and supported it with a dogmatic insistence on the congruity between names (such as role designations within the family) and actualities. They portrayed this congruity as a tool to achieve social harmony and personal cultivation. The *Zhuangzi* made use of other philosophical resources, as found, for instance, in the *Laozi*, to subvert—often humorously, since humor is itself performative incongruity—that at times brutal regime. This subversion operated on at least three levels:

- 1) Psychologically. The doctrine of the correspondence between names and actualities fosters conceit and low self-esteem. In case of a prestigious or hierarchically elevated role, one is not only encouraged but expected to develop feelings of entitlement. Given, for instance, the clearly patriarchal nature of the early Chinese "regime of sincerity," males are not only invited, but trained to feel superior to women in many respects. They can only enact their "leadership role" appropriately if they internalize it to a certain extent. Vice versa, women will be enticed to emotionally embrace their subordinated role status by, for instance, feeling shame when acting in a way that is generally considered shameful for women such as, for instance, not giving birth to a son. To counter such role-based congruity cultivation, the *Zhuangzi* often highlights the incongruity between a person's feelings and role-expectations and thereby invites readers to distance themselves emotionally from "names" and question their binding nature.
- 2) Socio-politically. Honorific names and titles in early China typically indicated power structures. However, the fantasy names of many protagonists in stories in the *Zhuangzi*, many of which seem to have satirical and parodic connotations, cannot be easily identified as indicators

of social power. Moreover, in the *Zhuangzi*, some characters who are known as moral exemplars in other texts can appear as “robbers,” and apparent “robbers” may appear as moral exemplars. Such carnivalesque inversions open up room for a critical dissociation from socio-political ideologies and question the often highly moralistic nomenclature and ethical vocabularies that express them.

3) Ontologically. Cosmological, mythological, philosophical, and religious vocabularies also tend to be revealed as incongruent in the *Zhuangzi*. A beginning turns out not to be a beginning, and an end is no end. A founding myth, like the myth of Hundun 混沌, only explains destruction, and the performative illustration of the “cultivation of life” (*yang sheng* 养生) by “Butcher Ding” (*pao Ding* 庖丁) is in effect a gory and grotesque slaughter. Thereby, the incongruity of dominant “master narratives” and their vocabularies is demonstrated.

Conclusion: The Incongruity of the Name "Best Essay"

It is not only useful to be reminded of the incongruity between names and actualities under conditions of a regime of sincerity. Today, in our “age of prolificity” where profiles manifest identity in almost every social sphere—ranging from social media and academia to businesses, and politics—such a reminder can be equally worthwhile. An academic “best essay” title for instance, may easily foster unhealthy feelings of entitlement in those who eventually get one, and unproductive feelings of worthlessness or spite in those who do not. To distance oneself from such feelings—to which we tend to give in only all too easily—will enable one to intellectually distance oneself from a “name,” or a profile, and to see the incongruities that come with it.

A “best essay” award has numerous concrete social functions, but to really identify a “best essay” is hardly one of them—especially not in the absence of any specific criteria for being “best” or at least “better” than others. Such an award, among other things, may make certain academic trends or scholarly fashions visible. This is useful for everyone in the field and provides a certain direction. The award raises the profile not only of the awardees, but also of the organization or the journal that issues the award. It increases visibility, it signals “excellence,” and it creates ties between the journal and those who form the jury and who compete in the selection process. On a very small scale, such mutual “name-making” mechanisms apply to a best essay award just as they apply on a much bigger scale, for instance, to a Nobel Prize. And they are not limited to prize competitions. Throughout society, names, titles, and profiles, along with the social hierarchies and power divisions they indicate, and along with the opportunities and pathologies they create, flourish as much in today’s world as they did in early China.

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Erratum

The article “Incongruent Names: A Theme in the History of Chinese Philosophy” published in *Dao* (2018) 17:305-330 contained a number of errors.

P. 320 “(jiaoyan 教言)” is incorrect and should be: “(yanjiao 言教)”

P. 320 “(viprayāsa; diandao 顛倒)” is incorrect and should be: “(viparyāsa; diandao 顛倒)”