

Three Comparative Studies by LI Yi, FANG Weilin and Leyli ALEKSANYAN

Part One

“To Have” or “to Be”: Way of meaning and being

—Fromm’s encounter with Lao Zi and Meister Eckhart

LI Yi

(Faculty of Literatures, Wuhan University, P. R. China)

Abstract: In *To have or to be*, Erich Fromm postulated the being mode as the true structure of existence, in contrast to the having mode as an psychological *ill-being*. In a perspective whose underlying orientation was Freudo-Marxism, he opted for an eclectic approach with religious sources, such as Meister Eckhart. This paper points out that this alternative between the two modes could be better understood upon a discussion about meaning and being. To the extent of *being as becoming* instead of traditional ontology as mainstream, Fromm abolished meaning of having mode based on the alienated humanity, even rejected meaning per se beyond being, thus meaning would be nothing but a human self-definition through *the unfolding of his powers, by living productively*. Fromm’s suggestion would be very meaningful when we are just trying to reconcile our being within some meanings (axiology, view of fact, etc.); however, his attempt to interpret the fear of dying as a mere illusion of losing possession, came to the end of death as meaningless, which could not restore the original meaning of being especially after its fragmentation in the disenchanting world nor escape from nihilism. It is pity that his wide vision of religious thoughts merely brought a reductionistic way for supporting his rational humanistic standpoint. Through a comparison centered on *obedience, detachment and oneness*, it can be clearly seen that there exists a huge divergency between Eckhart’s theocentrism and Fromm’s radical humanism; that means the latter benefitting from the former according to his own theoretical predilection erased the fundamental disparity of precondition; Lao Zi’s strategy of meaning could be another frame of reference different from the western ontology. Through a comparison with Eckhart and Lao Zi in their very way of meaning, this essay attempts to indicate their metaphysics (especially by negative way) have been solidly based upon Godhead or Dao offering an infinite ground of eternity for generating human meaning whereby the corrupted humanity could be wholly transcended through self-negation so that a new life within the new meaning can be.

Key Words: Having mode; being mode; meaning; ontology; eternity

Author: LI Yi, MA in Anthropology, Université de Lorraine, France, Ph. D. candidate, Faculty of Literatures, Wuhan University, Address: Luojia yayuan Building 10 (Jiechen meiyu), Shucheng Road, Hongshan District, Wuchang, Wuhan City, Hubei Province, P. R. China, 430072, Tel: +86 15102735217, Email: theologieli@163.com.

This essay intends to illustrate a theme on *having* and *being* proposed by Erich Fromm in his book *To Have or to Be*. He is not the first who proposed it but who linked up with many thinkers whose thoughts are far from one another, such as Buddha, the Hebrew prophets, Jesus, Master

Eckhart, Sigmund Freud, and Karl Marx^[1], seemingly being summoned to commit themselves to this great subject: a *New Science of Man* and the *New Society* with the *Being mode*—the hope of human being which only flashed in the history, for instance, the thirteenth century—“between the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance^[2]”; and in this corrupted capitalist society, the conversion from *Having mode* to *Being mode* would be the only future. Our task, certainly, could not necessarily manifest the panorama of this utopian assumption, which seems too optimistic about the humanity in today’s world. Instead, we will concentrate on an insight into his underlying orientation and clarify the limitation of his way of evoking religious sources, compared with the (negative) way in Meister Eckhart who is frequently quoted and in Lao Zi whose name appears only as one of the three precepts in the beginning. The latter put in our comparison, is not only because he is closely linked with the Zen—a fusion of Daoism and Buddhism, one of the Fromm’s favorites as well, but rather because his negative way (*Wu*) is aimed at *Having (You)*, not as the opposite of *Being* which concerns the ontology—a radical metaphysics in the tradition of western philosophy. As the greatest thinkers on *nothingness*, Lao Zi and Eckhart offer two pure perspectives, springing from Dao and God.

Lack of space forbids a comprehensive comparison about their thoughts, but we shall concentrate the discussion on their ways of meaning and being in a metaphysical and ontological horizon.

1. Fromm’s underlying orientation of the two *fundamental modes* and his blended but reduced way

Unlike the famous question of Hamlet “To be, or not to be; that is the question”, Erich Fromm postulated in this book published in 1976, his twilight years in Switzerland, a conception with the exclusive alternative in spite of the interrogative form of its title “To Have or to Be?”. Through his demonstrations and argumentations, Fromm embraced the latter without hesitation nor reservation. Therefore, for him, the question of Hamlet was converted as “To escape from having and always to be, there is no question”.

Just like what he said in foreword: “this book follows two trends of my previous writings”—*selfishness* and *altruism*^[3], by implementing this opposition, he elaborated two corresponding modes—*having* and *being*, which were based on his judgement of the “two basic character orientations^[4]” in humanity. The distinction between having and being had impressed him for many years, and his quest was focused on its “empirical basis in the concrete study of individuals and groups by the psychoanalytic method”, and along with the conception “love of life” and “love of the dead”, what he saw “represents the most crucial problem of existence^[5]”.

[1] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: Continuum, 1976), 33.

[2] *Ibid.*, 114-115; during this period in which Meister Eckhart lived, Fromm believed that “Indeed, had European history continued in the spirit of the thirteenth century, had it developed the spirit of scientific knowledge and individualism slowly and in an evolutionary way, we might now have been in a fortunate position.”

[3] *Ibid.*, xix.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*, 14.

He admitted that this distinction was his starting point, and carded briefly the origin of the terms^[6]. Then he compared the differences in terms of epistemology and experiencing between having and being, and respectively defined *what is* having or being mode by explaining why humankind rather rely on the former (psychoanalysis); for the purpose of refraining from radicalising the latter mode to the extent that human being could live without having anything, he differentiated *existential having* from *characterological having*^[7]. So he clarified it was having mode that formed the opposite of being, and one should not *have* (in mind) for one's living. Fromm continued to further his differentiation by enriching the content of being mode with religious sources (Jewish, Christian and Buddhist) until he would have reached the end of this book; a new man and a new society. So distinctively and eclectically, Fromm accomplished his conception of *being* since a long time. Although this author had "long been out of fashion^[8]", his point of view is very enlightening. Within this part, we are not about to discuss the reason why Fromm got cold reception during recent years; instead, we're highlighting how his eclectic but radical humanistic position blended but reduced the religious sources, which will provide a basis for comparing with the negative way in Lao Zi and Eckhart, cited also in this book of Fromm. Let us begin with exploring his underlying orientation.

Before Fromm's era came, Heraclitus and Hegel had overrun Parmenides and Plato and the scholastic "realists^[9]", along with the metaphysics concerning ontology—*being* as *becoming* overwhelmed by *being* as *permanence*, which made room for the empirical and scientific mode of view, until "a naturalistic materialism" prevails today^[10]: "empirical anthropological and psychoanalytic data demonstrate that *having and being are two fundamental modes of experience, the respective strengths of which determine the differences between the characters of individuals and various types of social character*^[11]." Then Fromm laid bare the back of his theory: "But when we start out with the reality of human beings existing, loving, hating, suffering, then there is no being that is not at the same time becoming and changing. Living structures can be only if they become; they can exist only if they change. Change and growth are inherent qualities of the life process^[12]." The way Fromm took for granted as human reality was based on becoming and changing in terms of being, whose original meaning as judgement had openly and legally been replaced by a certainty confirmed through scientific experiments and collective/individual experiences.

Then for Fromm, *to be or not to be*, this classic question of Hamlet, because of the *inexistence* of

[6] *Ibid.*, 13-23.

[7] *Ibid.*, 70.

[8] John Rickert, *The Fromm-Marcuse debate revisited*, in *Theory and Society* 15: 3 (May 1986), 351; & Kieran Durkin, *The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), introduction.

[9] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), 21: "As George Simmel has pointed out, the idea that being implies change, i. e., that being is becoming, has its two greatest and most uncompromising representatives at the beginning and at the zenith of Western philosophy: in Heraclitus and in Hegel. The position that being is a permanent, timeless, and unchangeable substance and the opposite of becoming, as expressed by Parmenides, Plato, and the scholastic 'realists', makes sense only on the basis of the idealistic notion that a thought (idea) is the ultimate reality."

[10] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 28: "But today, for instance, when a naturalistic materialism is not only on offer, but presents itself as the only view compatible with the most prestigious institution of the modern world, viz., science; (...)"

[11] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), 14.

[12] *Ibid.*, 21.

God and the mortality of humanity, has been converted as *Only to be, becoming and changing for a better being*; life is worth living only if we opt for the right way (mode); *not to be* equivalent only to death, is nothing but the utmost limit, a *thorough* nothingness out of being nor meaning. The unique alternative—being mode—nothing more than living and experiencing really mattered, with caution against the corruption from the illusion of possession—having mode—leading to death. Different from those traditional ontologists, Fromm's concern of being revolved around *well-being* or *ill-being*, *normalcy* or *pathology*, instead of such an ontology in pure speculative way as beingness and nothingness. That means his notion of being, seemingly more concrete and practical, but without entire framework of meaning articulated with being, merely as the opposite of that of having—a mode of alienation, an illness, which relied upon the normalcy of well-being, such a broad topic.

Since the having mode was nothing than an ill-being to avoid—another term of no-being, withal, the theism was counted as another corrupted way related with (*irrational*) *authority*—authoritarian structure (having mode), the noetic opposition-oriented steered the *being mode* as nonauthoritarian structure^[13]—an exclusively meaningful atonement (oneness) against diversity as sin^[14]. In these opposite relationship through a linguistic way, the reconciliation between being and meaning obtained a profound interpretation: a meaningful being leads to the real life by a nontheistic way^[15] which seemingly made a substantiated response to this series: “For the nature of knowledge, whether scientific or ontological, consists in reconciling meaning and being. And being signifies nothing other than the actualization of potentiality, self-realization which keeps in tune with the transformation^[16].” This explanation could be counted as a proclamation for the real base of humanistic paradigm of (well-)being, or a self-definition (auto-affirmation) of humanity in today's prevailing opinion; but as for Fromm who concentrated on the revelation of the selfish and ideological alienation might painstakingly keep distance from sinking into this danger even by receiving, to the extent possible, a diversity of traditional thoughts, including those religious both western and eastern.

On consideration of Fromm's open mind good at borrowing ideas from religious sources, it would not be difficult for him to realise the great danger of the modern ideologies. We can see it clearly the sensibility within his mind against the slavery of all forms, visible or invisible; meanwhile, that moulded his eclecticism and his *peculiar mixed way*^[17]. His readers would encounter so many thinkers and their thoughts, although they were profoundly far apart from one another. The wide field of view brought him a comprehensive involvement in many domains and made it possible that a diversity of thoughts was seemingly under his command, certes, through a certain simplification within his perspective, which we could constate it from his thought and a broad range of quotations. This can be attributed to his transboundary academic backgrounds: rabbinical education (in early times as the only child of Orthodox Jewish parents), then double studies in sociological and

[13] Cf. *ibid.*, 101, 133, 166.

[14] *Ibid.*, 100-101.

[15] Cf. *ibid.*, 49, 126, 133, 164.

[16] *Ibid.*, xvi.

[17] Erich Fromm, *Fu Luomu Zhuzuo Jingxuan—Renxing, shehui, zhengjiu*, 《弗洛姆著作精选——人性、社会、拯救》, Huang Songjie 黄颂杰主编, Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1989), (preface) 2.

psychoanalytic fields. Compared with those radical atheists, Fromm could still benefit from his *religious-philosophical* position, intentionally or unintentionally, to avoid being a severe unconscious ideologist. Like the most humanists, he did treat *Freedom* as the supreme value and how it was corrupted by the authoritarianism of those ideologies, in connection with his social psychology, especially in his early book *Escape from Freedom* whose acknowledgement mentioned his open inspirations from theology, with Calvin's *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*^[18]. Benefiting from the theological sources which rendered him the insight into those ideologies, he did have a wide range of assimilation of different thoughts, but he maintained also his “radical-humanistic psychoanalysis^[19]”. Amongst the great thinkers, Fromm valued most Marx and Freud^[20] as “one of those rare thinkers who are trying to link together Marx and Freud in the spirit of the European humanistic tradition^[21].” The book *To Have or to Be* which seems rather philosophical, though, whose title does not reflect directly the eclecticism of his interests just like his other three books—*Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950), *Art and Loving* (1956) and *Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism* (1960)^[22], was still anchored deeply into his consistent predilection: “deals with an empirical psychological and social analysis of the two modes of existence^[23]”.

Fromm rejected the view “*that the economic base mechanically generates the ideological superstructure*”; meanwhile, “no one did more to circulate the views of Marx's Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts than Fromm, presenting a Marx who was clearly not a mechanical materialist^[24]”. He rejected to reduce Marxism to an *economic base-oriented* ideology, in the same way, he indicated that the social economic structure was just a condition of the development of human personality, which was totally different from the subjective economic motive. Besides, he admitted that pursuing fortunes is not the crucial motive of human conducts but just special need of some cultures. The different economic conditions could mold the character of hating or disregarding the material wealth^[25]. Fromm rejected to reduce all human phenomenons to an economical essence; whereas, he did carry out a double standard between what concerned Marx and the religious sources, because of the castration towards religious citations endorsed for his perspective of looking at the interfluvial between these two modes. For instance, those quotations about Buddha were nothing more than an abstract recapitulation, such as “the Buddha is the hero who leaves all possessions”, or “the Buddha teaches that in order to arrive at the highest stage of human development, we must not crave possessions^[26].” There were no buddhist words cited, just a highly principled summary which made a blend like a square tenon for a round mortise. Although Jesus was invoked with the citations from

[18] Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, (Guoji wenhua chubangongsi 国际文化出版公司, 2002), translated by Liu Linhai, (preface) 2.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] *Ibid.*, 2.

[21] Maric, M., 1967; Review Fromm, E.: *The Heart of Man. Its Genius for Good and Evil* (1964a, English), In: *Praxis*, Vol. 4 (No. 4, 1967), 596.

[22] Rubén Gallo, *Freud's Mexico: Into the Wilds of Psychoanalysis*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: the MIT Press, 2010), 339.

[23] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), xix.

[24] Joan Braune, *Erich Fromm's Revolutionary Hope: Prophetic Messianism as a Critical Theory of the Future*, (Sense publishers, 2014), 7.

[25] Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, translated by Liu Linhai, (Guoji Wenhua Chubangongsi, 2002), 12.

[26] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), 13.

the Bible, Fromm's interpretations simply consisted in conceptualizing these famous words for use of supporting his own point that the Christ was in favor of the being mode instead of the having mode: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" (Luke 9:24-25). Fromm gave no further explanation. A half truth is not a truth. This would not be a hypercriticism because in this sentence Jesus mentions the relationship between possession (gain) and the life which are both intimately related with Fromm's theme here. Fromm slid over the key of Jesus's teaching—the eternal life from Christ that is wholly distinguishing from his *being mode* based on the mortality but decorated this instruction as an adage for his own use. Let us not to go into what Jesus veritably means in his Jewish background nor theological extension—Fromm should have been better qualified than us —, simply think about the different agents: Jesus declares He Is (Be) Life but human just temporarily *has* life, how it could be equal when some certain of the latters advocate everyone (including the other) for not having in the same way! Fromm's neglecting Christ as the Life per se (for His sake) did not realise that his *imitation* or *innovation* of religious sources regardless of personal relationship God-man would once more bring the human being into the circumstances of slavery in case of a practice: a group of people would brazenly deprive another of their possessions just in the name of a *great* ideal, which has unceasingly been occurring in human history.

It seemed that Fromm's religious citations merely consisted in drawing a universally convincing conclusion as mental prescription, so it is no wonder that he invoked them in a blended but reductionistic way. His radical secular standpoint impeded the formation of any holistic religious view of human being, neither the *God-man* relationship in Christianity nor the detachment from the emptiness as ultimate Reality in Buddhism. Instead, following Marx and Freud whose thoughts had been long influenced by those humanists before them, all problems of humanity (sin in Christian terms, bitterness in buddhist sense) were reduced to the alienation (of private possession) or to the mental domain (subconsciousness) or their blend, which consisted in circumventing the latters in order to build his ideal of *new society and new man*, through "*reduce the mode of having and to increase the mode of being*"^[27]. That reminds us of *religion of humanity* proposed by Auguste Comte. But different from Marx and Freud who depreciated religions, Fromm positively opted for a paradigmatic transformation: "Returning to our main thesis: Being refers to the real, in contrast to the falsified, illusionary picture. In this sense, any attempt to increase the sector of being means increased insight into the reality of one's self, of others, of the world around us."^[28] That would be decisive for him; however, it resembles a sort of *Esperanto* in psychosocial domain, an artificial blueprint.

"There is no meaning to life except the meaning man gives his life by the unfolding of his powers, by living productively." This quotation from *Man for Himself: An Inquiry Into the Psychology of Ethics* (1947) manifests Fromm's view of meaning of life: its self-definition by human being (living). The very purpose of Fromm is to free humanity from the alienated authoritarian

[27] *Ibid.*, 103.

[28] *Ibid.*, 81.

ideologies; however, that he alleged no meaning to life risked becoming another meaning to life. From Marx to Fromm, we can clearly see that after the abolition of *God* by materialism, how the latter opened wide to nihilism—one could define oneself. How to balance the self-definition against the underlying right meaning of *unfolding of his powers by living productively* which negates other meaning (at least of the having mode) as meaningless? If we further mention of the death of each living, similar to the meaninglessness of each meaning, Fromm said no meaning for any death and fear of dying is nothing but illusion of losing (possession)^[29]; but how to explain martyrs dying for their ultimate meaning within a diversity of faiths? Didn't Fromm himself eulogize it as “being, giving, sharing^[30]”? They commonly believe the meaning of their faith will survive their own life. Rather, explain that as some meaning is larger than being; nevertheless, how about meaning reduced to smaller than being? How could it be a good response to the desire of having possession or even eternal life? The death of being is not the worst, but is that of meaning. Meaning must cover being. Meaning for mind (soul) is equivalent to air for body; even the outer space human can give meaning, how could he refrain from interrogating that of death? For freedom of humanity by opposing against the irrational (alienated) authority of meaning, Fromm spared room for no-authority but human reason at all costs; whereas he didn't prefigure adequately a more and more disorder and irrational epoch after him.

Furthermore, according to Fromm's explanation, since all meanings are merely produced by mankind that consists in unceasingly becoming, there must be some unchanging principle out of humanity, as many philosophers have been trying, such as the above example. It is then overburdened for the human subjectivity itself that needs certainty to make everything its being as it is whereby there is no any fact (fixed meaning) guaranteed. The absence of the ultimate axiology left the reality gloomy, neither idealism nor materialism can bridge this gap. They categorize religious phenomena as if they could obtain insight into the *nature* of all religions; meanwhile, they themselves are nothing more than ideologies whose transcendency is based on the nature of humanity; in idealism, idealizing being in the perspective of meaning; in materialism, materializing those privileged meanings as (the true meaning of) being per se. But the question of the two is far from being fully answered.

The incoherence of integral meaning has been dissimulated by being diluted into specialization, while the threats of fragmentation have been always there; from a fact/value distinction (rupture), all remaining to humanity is nothing than values (gods)^[31] without supreme authority, then we witness a world of no meaning (nihilism). Since Fromm rejected the traditional ontological way—being as unchanging rather than changing, the tropism of his theoretical framework was articulated with the aspects empirical, physical, susceptible to being verified by means of experiments—a material orientation way. In compensation for the lacuna left by the absence of metaphysics^[32], he

[29] *Ibid.*, 102-103.

[30] *Ibid.*, 116: “The martyr's characteristics are being, giving, sharing; the hero's, having, exploiting, forcing.”

[31] Max Weber propose a theory of value spheres which outlines a project of institutional polytheism, each ordered around a ‘god’.

[32] The introduction of this series of books manifested also this tendency of inversion: “Energy and matter in whatever form they may manifest themselves are transtemporal and trans-spatial and are therefore metaphysical.” This term has been used for something which already transcends the full observation but susceptible to catering for the modern scientific taste. Cf. Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), xvi.

upheld those idealised principles such as *freedom* in a humanist way—his similarity to Marx; his dissimilarity to Marx; the *metaphysical domain*—the opposite of the *physical* was turned into the *mental* domain belonging to psychology, as well as a positive attitude towards the necessary (nontheistic) religion^[33]. No one would willingly be attached to the things that look unreal. Fromm did stake what he attributed to (the ultimate) *reality* for this denial of a *personal God* as seemingly *irrational authority*. Axiomatic is the *reality-oriented* intuition which is nothing but deep-seated faith, although the empirical sense plays a role in connection with the external world on surface layer. According to the synergy of underlying faith and empirical observations, a judgement could be so diversified that the fact a Buddhist believes, for instance, is quite different from a Marxist. However, nothing would hinder someone's proposing a *Buddhist communism*, in an idealistic mind, like Fromm who combined Buddha with Marx even Freud in some links which he believed exist. There would be reasonable when Fromm linked together the alienation of Marx and the mental pathology of Freud for conducing to the debouchment from the having mode (love of the death) into the being mode (love of life), whose combination appeared to be convincing; whereas, these three humanistic theories could never break through the framework of secular mortality; no matter which mode, man dies—each life is doomed to reach its end even more sorrowfully to someone if he had been a well-being granted by himself but still had to face death which must bring this meaning no meaning. Based on radical humanistic position (mortality), Fromm's eclectism between mental orientation and material determinism could not essentially solve the problem of *ill-being*. According to his description, having mode is undoubtedly a corrupted way of experiencing (being) mode; but what if the latter was incapable of satisfying a so-called *well-being* in vital termination either? The mortality seems bearable merely because its unexceptional equality within everybody, not because it itself is bearable, especially helpless for the meaningless living and dying. Although Fromm was not a nihilist, his being mode would come to a nihilistic ending. No one will reject a life with uncorrupted ideas (goodness, wealth, happiness, etc), which makes death unbearable, unhealingly painful for each termination of beautiful life in the survivors's eyes. Besides, for the issue of eternity, there would be also a rooted irreconcilability between Fromm's standpoint and Buddhism which consists in detaching from life and death^[34]. That means those buddhist notions extracted for those secular contexts would wither from their root. The (ultimate) reality these modern thinkers apprehended has been quite different from the ancient ones, which means, in such a world *disenchanted* but still fraught with *gods* (values seemingly individualistic but nihilistic in root), the relationship meaning/being has been unprecedentedly in tension; to begin with self-definition, to end with disillusion.

In *To have or to Be*, Fromm presented a mixed or reduced way in his paradigm; while opting for an eclectism on religion, he merely accepted a humanistic religion without *God* or *idols* as authority^[35], which left a huge divergence from those institutional religion within their traditional

[33] Cf. *ibid.*, 109-110: "This chapter deals with the thesis that social change interacts with a change in the social character; that 'religious' impulses contribute the energy necessary to move men and women to accomplish drastic social change, and hence, that a new society can be brought about only if a profound change occurs in the human heart—if a new object of devotion takes the place of the present one."

[34] 佛学在于“了脱生死” (Buddhism emphasizes in “getting off life and death”).

[35] Cf. Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), 110-111.

features. In view of his theoretic predilection, he would not take account of the Christian ontology identifying God as Being, nor Christ as Verb (Intellect), like in Master Eckhart. It appeared to him that both metaphysics and ontology in the traditional sense, as well as those conventional religions labelled with *irrational authority* did not matter, sometimes as the opposites of what he asserted with a mantle of reason. Although his book is classified in category “ontology”, the whole book didn’t even refer to the term *ontology* for once, except the only mention of the introduction of the series of *World perspectives*^[36]; as for metaphysics, this word appeared only twice in his writing: in *skeptic* terms. His examples mentioned——Buddha, Eckhart, Marx and Schweitzer, were mixed for catering this reduced interpretation, a “remarkable kinship” of their ideas; their “radical demand for giving up the having orientation”, “insistence on complete independence”, “metaphysical skepticism” and “godless religiosity” as well as their “demand for social activity in the spirit of care and human solidarity^[37]”. Considering the absence of quotation, Fromm explained it as “these teachers are sometimes unconscious of these elements^[38]”. We won’t further every points mentioned, just their “metaphysical skepticism” in order to expose his mixed but reduced way. He did blend the (radical) negative way with (metaphysical) skeptic way, as well as ignore their own faith: Buddha’s negative way aimed at the formed and affectionate world, instead of doubting whether there was a real world——he had his undoubted belief upon *Tathātā*; the material dialectics of Marx consisted in rejecting a metaphysical worldview, he gave no doubt about the latter; the *love* conception of Schweitzer consisted in replacing a personal God with a universal principle, influenced by the humanitarian position which denied Jesus’s divinity; regarding Eckhart, in spite of his negative way and suspicion of heresy misunderstood as sceptical and antiauthoritarian, on the contrary, he frequently persuades those skeptics to have (deeper) faith in God, so it would be absurd to speak of his anthropology without mention of his solid ontology based upon the Christian faith and a theology of the Trinity, which will be discussed later.

For as much as *to have* or *to be* implies the question of meaning and being, in this perspective, we will see Lao Zi and Master Eckhart offer their insights into this theme.

2. The metaphysics of Wu (in connection with You) in *Dao De Jing*

“The way to do is to be.” This alleged Lao Zi’s maxim which appears as the first in dedication of the book *To Have or to Be* even puzzles the Chinese readers. Until we know the corresponding sentence^[39] in the Chinese version, it reminds us of a point of Martin Heidegger with regard to language as the *House of Being*: “the European people probably dwells in an entirely other house

[36] *Ibid.*, copyright page & xvi.

[37] *Ibid.*, 132-133.

[38] *Ibid.*, 133.

[39] Chapter 37 (Arthur Waley): “道常无为而无不为”; “Tao never does; yet through it all things are done.” <http://terebess.hu/english/tao/waley.html>.

from the East Asian people^[40]”. It’s not difficult to find how distinct the conception of being and having in Chinese is from that in western context; it is quite a noetic-linguistic question. However, Fromm was not much preoccupied with the contextual differences while blending religious sources quoted in which he found the similarities in the perspective of being mode, he was more likely to cite them as inspiring sayings. Fromm indicated that the “‘to have’ was a deceptively simple expression” which appeared later than “it is to me” in many languages, for instance, in Hebrew (*jesh li*)^[41]. In *Exodus* (3;14), *Ehyé asher ehyé*; then in the Christianity, God as Being and the foundation of all beings was identical to the ontology in the theology of the Church fathers.

However, in Chinese context, it would be difficult to find a consensus that there was a *Chinese ontology* in a noetic-linguistic sense. According to Western norm, *being* (*Shi*) appears never to be conjugated with all things (*Wanwu*); otherwise, we speak of having (*You*). Correspondingly, the opposition of being/no-being (nothingness) is expressed as that of *You/Wu* in Chinese, which could offer a different thread of thought.

As an isolating language, Chinese is a language which revolves around verbs rather than those inflexional languages. In this sense, Chinese could be an ideal language in Fromm’s horizon^[42], although he had known nothing about its very nature. That blocked or interrupted, to some extent, *Shi* used as a noun. In philosophical translation, we have to convert *Shi* (being) into *Cunzai/Cunyou* (existence) which already discounts a *You/Wu*-oriented metaphysics^[43]. Probably to Fromm’s surprise, such a verb-oriented language could still accentuate *You* instead of living (being), thus a paradigmatic element of language is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition. That doesn’t mean the linguistic element is not important. Inspiringly, Fromm linked together amongst economic, political, linguistic and religious elements, but it was fatal that he excluded the traditional metaphysics and ontology as well as the theological source in its adequate way because of his prejudice against any dogmatic way. Though it was reasonable for him to discover the undogmatic aspect of Jesus, the Church fathers or Eckhart, a simple opposition could not help either. We will discuss the latter point within the part of Eckhart. Now within Lao Zi, there will be a noetic-linguistic pathway of meaning compared with Fromm. The negative way to Dao or to God was probably out of Fromm’s horizon. His great theme on having and being was rather conditioned to his view formed by Marx and Freud, by whose theories he interpreted the religious phenomena and then deepened the theme or universalized his reasonableness through quoting the religious sources. Perhaps we could affirm a similarity between Fromm and Lao Zi in the depreciation of having; in most cases, *You* has a negative meaning in *Lao Zi*; but it is a superficial impression.

Without the Christian essential underpinning as the truth faith as well as the authentic foundation of reason, the framework of Fromm with regard to meaning and being would even not

[40] “Vor einiger Zeit nannte ich, unbeholfen genug, die Sprache das Haus des Seins. Wenn der Mensch durch seine Sprache im Anspruch des Seins wohnt, dann wohnen wir Europäer vermutlich in einem ganz anderen Haus als der ostasiatische Mensch.” Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe I. Absteilung: Veröffentlichte Schriften 1910 – 1976* Band 19 *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, (Vittorio Klostermann Frankfurt am Main, 1985), 85.

[41] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), 19.

[42] Cf. *ibid.*, Part One I & II.

[43] Just like Yin and Yang or Yinyang, *You* and *Wu* or *You/Wu* are/is two words within one undifferentiated conception. Cf. “故有无相生 (For truly, Being and Not-being grow out of one another)” (§ 2) Waley’s translation.

transcend this Chinese thinker of 2500 years ago, because of the former's Daoist orientation and negative way aimed at humanity; Dao as basis of humanity is better than material as foundation, because the former is natural oneness exempt from the differentiation of subject-object dichotomy, the latter which regains *theoneness* only in practice is doomed to narrow the human existence articulated with meaning and being as a whole^[44]; otherwise, the latter who negated all theist religions (*God as irrational authority*) but affirmed *Freedom* as human nature as well as his outlook of becoming which consisted in making the futurity as exception—out of human nature as a consistent *Adam*, had been destined to view those subsequential changes as qualitative difference, which is the underlying reason that he believed through humanity himself, there would be a new man and a new society in future. We can see the underlying influence that Christ is the *Late Adam* over Fromm's even Marx's conception, but what they sought has sunk into the old man over and over again in the belief that "we can change humanity by ourselves". In that sense, Lao Zi is so wisely meditating on Dao in a negative way in order to return to the Origin, which initiated the Chinese metaphysics in a natural way, in spite of his "refusal to be 'foremost of all things under heaven'" (§ 67). In the non-linguistic orientation of Chinese, Lao Zi's negative way which consists in suspending the affinity between language and meaning declines the adhesion of meaning to words; meanwhile, the western way of telling *being* and *no-being*, such a question like "*Dao* exists or not" or "whether this or that makes sense or not" had long been out of Chinese horizon. Instead, for Lao Zi meaning and being are just intuitive, no need for differentiation. As a result, we have had an opposition between *You* and *Wu*; no idea could be exempt from opposite categories, but there had been still subtle distinctions rendering a huge noetic divergence between the spiritual Greek and Chinese descendants afterwards.

Some experts such as Xiao Yaman who indicates the phenomenon that primary *Shi* in ancient literature had been applied as a collocation only in divine sense^[45] which means there had probably been an ancient period when *Shi* in archaic Chinese religiously played a role of *ontology* as embryo, until in *Lao Zi*, the appearance of *Shi* (about 70 times in the popular versions) was used as the structures leading a sentence, which rendered *Shi* a function word. What *Lao Zi* offers is a rather negative way to access *Dao* as the *ultimate reality* or as the *absolute truth*—if we borrow the western terms; however, within a different way in a disparate noetic-linguistic context, that reminds us of the disadvantages of the so-called being structure; susceptible to sinking into (paradigmatic) finiteness which measures *being* as something or even an object. Compared with being, having is seemingly less limited in nature that is not the very concern of having. Nevertheless, having and being are not only opposites in this sense, but also in mutual transformation; from being into having as well as from having into being. For instance, the structure of *there be* brings the emphasis on being (existence), *having* on possession can also be applied for the non-living as subject. There is also the common opposite of being and having; nothing(ness). To emphasize the having expression deceptive could not remove humanity of the perspective that the life is in nature a gift directly given by parents

[44] The fragmentation of meanings, the diversity as sin mentioned by Origenes (101) also cited by Fromm, is a (partial) unconsciousness in modern society, less acceptable in traditional society whose meanings were more integral.

[45] Cf. Xiao Yaman (肖娅曼), *Chinese Primary shi (是) is a Pronoun of Rightness: A Study on shi (是) in Early Western Zhou Bronze Inscriptions and Hymns in The Book of Songs*, (Research in Ancient Chinese Language, 2011, 1, no. 90), 47.

and then will be lost in some day. In other words, the appearance of having expression in languages shows, to some extent, the reality of life (being); an only expression of being could not help but inversely would not suffice, that's why the expressions of having have late appeared and been developed.

Fromm understood being in three different ways: *as a copula*; *as the passive, suffering form of a verb*; *as meaning to exist*^[46]. And he claimed the third, which shows his attempt of escaping from those non-favors. Nevertheless, what one endeavor to circumvent according to one's position (faith and orientation) result in a narrowing of sense, even leaving a back door for its returning; *fortiori*, one's circumvention is just the very meaning of judging right from wrong. Fromm didn't even realize that, as a result of his discard of metaphysics, he lost the very essence of ontology, which made his *being mode* unrooted, despite his seeming citation of linguistic and religious sources. That could not be a same mistake of Lao Zi; without resorting to an *ontology*, though, there is a basis deeply rooted in Dao by negative way.

The sentence cited by Fromm in his book is originally expressed within a negative way in Chinese, quite different from its English translation in an affirmative form. The litotes of this kind in *Dao De Jing* is just a regular one in view of the negative expression as the style of the whole book. The highly frequent use of negations is the peculiarity of this most famous Chinese metaphysical book, not only in the ancient Chinese literature^[47], but also amongst most philosophical books. The very purpose of this phrasing is designated by the author himself: "Straight words seem crooked" (§ 78); "In Tao the only motion is returning" (§ 40); "That can follow things back—All the way back to the Great Concordance" (§ 65); even at the very beginning in the order of those popular versions, the author points out the linguistic limitation: "The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way" (§ 1). The most negations—litotes—consist in negating the human word whose capacity is insufficient of speaking of the Unvarying (Eternal) Way. François Jullien, expert of both Greek philosophy and Chinese thought, compares two accesses to the ultimate meaning in his book *Detour and Access, Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece*. Our essay is confined to his treatise about Lao Zi: "The Great Image has no form or how to indicate the ineffable^[48]". In this part, we approach *You* through its opposite *Wu* in Chinese context.

François Jullien introduces the strategy of the undifferentiation of meaning as the major feature in *Lao Zi*: "Là où la stratégie de l'indirect est d'emblée requise, c'est face à l'absolu."^[49] Although the question of the *absolute* (meaning) seems not so close to the Fromm's concern, no analysis could lay its basis out of this, *a fortiori* to the theme having and being. To some extent, Jullien indicates the arcane truth in this strategy of meaning: *Wu*—harmonising undifferentiation (*Indifférenciation harmonisante*) and *You*—differentiating actualisation (*l'actualisation différenciante*^[50]). So *Wu* consists in evacuating from which is both particular and concrete, or even in keeping meaning as a

[46] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: Continuum, 1976), 20-21.

[47] Cf. CHENG Shi (程实), DING Yun (丁贇), *The reason that the high frequency in use of the negative word 不 and 无 in Lao Zi*, in *Journal of Liaoning University of Technology (Social Science Edition)*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Apr. 2013, 44-45.

[48] François Jullien, *Le détour et l'accès : Stratégies du sens en Chine, en Grèce*, (Grasset, 1995), 351-387.

[49] *Ibid.*, 351.

[50] *Ibid.*, 359.

process instead of a *reality* as reification. Through the negative way, Lao Zi escapes from being abstracted or concretized, universalized or individualized, which enables him to avoid sinking in the conceptual opposition to the maximum extent. That's because "it is within undifferentiated Fond (Chaos) that the slightest actualisation never ceases drawing its capacity^[51]".

In the second chapter of *Laozi*, there are six oppositions mentioned. The author doesn't painstakingly shift all negative categories with all positive elements, because he knows that the humanity itself is the part of problem: "It is because every one under Heaven recognizes beauty as beauty, that the idea of ugliness exists. And equally if every one recognized virtue as virtue, this would merely create fresh conceptions of wickedness." (§ 2) How could we escape from the problem if we ourselves are the core of the fatal problem? So the author's intention is nothing but keeping human from his acting on *his own initiative*, that is why Dao has long been seen as *natural law*—some objective rules to imitate. In this sense, a seeming objectivity that Fromm emphasized would be quite close to Lao Zi's tone; nevertheless, the understanding of Dao as *natural law* is merely a paradigmatic modern interpretation. For the author of *Dao De Jing*, the best way is keeping the spoken meaning from corrupting in the lost of opposition while actualizing senses attributed by humanity. He would not like to sink into all kinds of oppositions as a conceptual trap of meaning, but to point out the Sage's way, just like the second half of Chapter 2.

Certainly, in front of the ultimate meaning, the normal logical way doesn't work adequately. Each profound thinker will locate his *singularity* of meaning—the very one which could escape from all conceptual oppositions but as the underlying exception. It is no other preoccupation of the ultimate meaning that lays bare the veritable basis of one's conceptual system. To Fromm, it is the radical humanistic standpoint and man just for himself (human being itself^[52]). Lao Zi, certainly, would not be supposed to oppose this anthropocentric orientation, the related opposition would otherwise be his own trap; nevertheless, that doesn't mean Lao Zi would be a humanist who insists upon a humanistic standpoint in any active sense. To him, only Dao (Eternal Way) is the ultimate reality, not in an opposite manner against humanity but within a negative way in order to bring those who don't know actionless activity (*Wuwei*) into the Dao-oriented consciousness.

Lao Zi's predilection for *Wu* has nothing to do with the western nihilism which consisted in proclaiming "no meaning of this world and our life", but consists in returning to the Origin without meaning forced in which being could be glimpsed in its undifferentiated meaning. In Chapter 10, there is a series of questions asked, in synergy with the negative way: "Can you keep the unquiet physical-soul from straying, hold fast to the Unity, and never quit it? Can you, when concentrating your breath, make it soft like that of a little child? Can you wipe and cleanse your vision of the Mystery till all is without blur? Can you love the people and rule the land, yet remain unknown? Can you in

[51] Cf. *ibid.*, 359-360. Translated from French.

[52] Fromm's interpretation of love consisted in pointing out that self-love and other-love (loving neighbour) are not contradictory, which should be a mutual inclusion of each other. Whereupon, he accused Luther and Calvin (even Kant) of opposing the conception of these two. Based on his own taking-for-granted, Fromm reconciled the two into the humanity-oriented ground. However, since his eyereach excluded the God-man relationship for real, he could never understand how reliably and deeply Luther and Calvin found their anthropology upon christological theology, unlike man for himself such a hollow notion disowning the relationship with the Supreme Being. As the Image of God, the Christian Gospel endues human being with incomparable identity, even the human sin can not disqualify this status.

opening and shutting the heavenly gates play always the female part? Can your mind penetrate every corner of the land, but you yourself never interfere?" These questions calmly challenge the worldly normal humanity for non-opposability of life: about mind-physical state, self-cleansing, ruling, obedience before Divinity, real reflection of everything. The following suggestion mentions "Rear them, but do not lay claim to them. Control them, but never lean upon them". (§ 10) It seems to arrive at a consensus with Fromm whose insight into having is aware of alienation—claiming possession and leaning upon it. For Fromm, *to be* means to exist, live, to experience; *to have* means *staying in possession within mind*, he might not think this opposition would have another version in China: just living without having (in mind), which could be seen as a coincidence.

However, this intersection which passes by one point then continues to diverge considerably. In Chapter 33, "But only what stays in its place can endure. When one dies one is not lost, there is no other longevity." In the modern studies, the last sentence of *Lao Zi* has been interpreted as "a real longevity (long life) is no other than everlasting spirit (meaning)". Whereas, the first sentence mostly reveals this reductionistic explanation: only staying in its place (being) endures. A metaphor reveals its integral meaning without being divided into literal or figurative senses. In Lao Zi's era, there had not been so many abstract words but more resort to those concretes, which inversely rendered less limited when being is articulated with meaning. If the first sentence were linked with the *Psalms* 90: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations", we would know only those who will have never lost God (Dao for Lao Zi) live forever, therefore the veritable longevity is just for the one who is never lost even when one dies. Here, *lost* in Chinese is *Wang* whose meaning, in one way, the opposite of possession. That signifies death (no-being) is equivalent to lose one's life. Certainly, it is in a negative way^[53], but it consists in denying human common sense: because of Truth concealed by varying humanity, it should resort to a series of (moderate) negations.

The negative way within *Wu* in synergy with Dao-tropism brings Lao Zi with the insight into an original holistic view, different from that of Fromm who intended to do so but with only a pattern of conversion based on his essentially radical humanism, he went no further not only in having, but also in being. Fromm, though proclaiming freedom, was not as free as Lao Zi in conversion between meaning and being, because there were still adhesions of meaning to favorable words, such as *being*, *living*, *reason*, etc. Compared with Lao Zi, Eckhart arrives at an even much higher level in a more complicated context, an utmost perfection of detaching from artificial entanglement of reconciling meaning and being but into the very singularity of the oneness (unicity) of Godhead.

The key to this problem is not whether which orientation or conversion adopted in human level, but on a basis that humanity can completely lay upon in both meaning and being. Lao Zi's expression consists in stopping where we are to prevent sinking into deeper concealment; we will see in Master Eckhart who, though considered as a mystic, radicalize instead the revealment both in nothingness and in beingness.

[53] Chapter 33 in *Lao Zi* (Waley's translation): 不失其所者久。死而不亡者寿。

3. The ontology by way of nothingness in Master Eckhart

In Fromm's very book, Meister Eckhart was mentioned many times, almost as the representative of true Christian spirit susceptible to being quoted for the former's demonstration on being instead of having, as well as his *nontheistic position*. There are some extracts: "Master Eckhart—the concept of God tends to be that of the One, the 'Godhead' (the No-thing^[54])"; "Mysticism, culminating in Master Eckhart, played a decisive role in this antiauthoritarian humanistic movement... Ideas of a world religion or of a simple undogmatic Christianity were voiced by many Christian thinkers; even the idea of the God of the Bible became questionable^[55]."

There were supposed to be some evidences supporting Fromm's opinion; Eckhart's thought about oneness and his suspicion of heresy by papal bull *In agro dominico*. And Fromm valued Eckhart as "the greatest representative and deepest and most radical thinker of German mysticism" affected "those seeking authentic guidance to a nontheistic, rational, yet religious, philosophy of life^[56]". If we point that it was not from Eckhart's very motive, Fromm would go on to insist that he himself could have been even "unconscious of his nontheism^[57]" as a pioneer for human freedom against the ecclesiastic authorities. As an important spiritual source, Eckhart did inspire many great thinkers as well as influence the formation of some modern conceptions, subjectivity, dialectics, nihilism, atheism, etc. His readers, certes, can absorb within their own perspectives, so can Luther, Milton, Pascal, Schelling, Hegel, Nietzsche, Kandinsky, Heidegger, Jung, Balthasar, Lacan, Derrida^[58], as well as Fromm. However, there is such a great divergence within Eckhart's eternal Christian ontotheology and *becoming* as the modern presupposition identified by Fromm. It is noteworthy that Fromm believed the future would become better or at least in a carrefour of option, within the faith based on the evolutionistic view. This outlook posits there have always been something entire new from the old, which means everyone who has the similarities in some standard would be counted as the basis of the reality bespeaking the very future which has been envisioned. Different from a pure historical determinism, Fromm's view of futurity expressed by his *alternativism* about prophetic-messianic view^[59], manifests the influence from the vicissitudes of his epoch when, after great disillusion of humanity through the two World Wars, mankind didn't firmly believe the brighter tomorrow, compared with Marx's times. However, there could be still a belief, as we mentioned above, Fromm believed meaning only given by humanity, which is made a *fact* that there is always a qualitative difference between men—leading to a radical nationalism, or based upon structure of existence—an orientation of internationalism which consists in presupposing a changeable humanity but defined by a qualitative gap between good and evil, unalienated/

[54] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), 36.

[55] *Ibid.*, 114.

[56] *Ibid.*, 49.

[57] *Ibid.*, 133.

[58] Cf. *Encyclopédie des mystiques rhénans d'Eckhart à Nicolas de Cues et leur réception*, (Édition française par Marie-ANNE VANNIER, Éd. Cerf, Paris, 2011)

[59] Joan Braune, *Erich Fromm's Revolutionary Hope: Prophetic Messianism as a Critical Theory of the Future*, (Sense publishers, 2014), 147-148.

nonalienated and alienated^[60], normal and morbid, so on and so forth, a series of oppositions of modern axiology.

Fromm did undervalue his essential difference with Eckhart. This great disparity lies in ontology rather than that of historical context. Mainly by three points——obedience, detachment and oneness, we will illustrate Eckhart's anthropology within negative way, so that Fromm's lost and failure would be better manifested.

Firstly, with regard to obedience whose opposite is authority, is Eckhart a real antiauthoritarian? In the very book of Fromm, this author discussed about *sin and forgiveness*^[61], of which the former was clearly identified “as disobedience” (caused by the authoritarian character)——the having structure^[62]; the concept of sin for Fromm, could almost be interpreted by the alienation of authority rooted in *having* mode. It is reasonable for Fromm to connect Eckhart's thought of detaching from everything with his being structure, despite this being mode quite different from Eckhart's ontology; however, it was totally mistaken to identify Eckhart as an antiauthoritarian. We don't indicate whether he obeyed the ecclesiastic authorities but his very thought of obedience.

In *Entretiens spirituels*, Master Eckhart postulates: “La vraie et parfaite obéissance est une vertu supérieure à toutes les vertues ; nulle oeuvre, si grande soit-elle, ne peut se réaliser ni se faire sans cette vertu ; et une oeuvre, si modeste, si insignifiante soit-elle, est plus profitable quand elle est accomplie dans la véritable obéissance. . . Prenons une occupation quelconque, aussi humble que nous voudrions ; la véritable obéissance nous la rendra plus noble et meilleure en tout... l'obéissance ne trompe jamais, elle ne commet point d'erreur, car elle ne néglige rien de bien. L'obéissance n'a jamais à s'inquiéter, aucun bien ne lui manque^[63].”

From this passage, Eckhart presents the supreme virtue——obeying God, which is by no means equivocal. The rare basis of Fromm is Godhead as “the *No-thing*” which, perhaps, left a *nontheistic* impression to his readers. In the view of his historical materialism, it could be explained as “Eckhart did not predict such a humanistic movement, but in his thought there had been the seed”. However, it was no doubt that this perspective neglected Eckhart's outlook as a whole.

At the beginning of *Living Without why: Meister Eckhart's Critique of the Medieval Concept of Will*, John M. Connolly says frankly: “Ironically, the most fascinating idea for me——Eckhart's advice to ‘live without why (or will)’——is itself intimately connected to his decidedly original notion of obedience^[64].” And his reference source is same as Fromm's——J. Quint's translation. His very monography on this theme presents the intimate link between obedience and *living “without a why and wherefore (sunder warumbe)”^[65]*, which opposes almost entirely against Fromm's viewing Eckhart as antiauthoritarian.

Certes, that doesn't mean Eckhart rejects the reason itself; veritably, according his

[60] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), 74.

[61] *Ibid.*, 97-101.

[62] Cf. *ibid.*, 99.

[63] *Traité et sermons*, traduction et présenté par Alain de LIBERA, (Éd. Flammarion, Paris, 1995), “Introduction”, 77.

[64] John M. Connolly, *Living Without why: Meister Eckhart's Critique of the Medieval Concept of Will*, (Oxford University Press, 2014), ix.

[65] Matthew Fox, *Meister Eckhart: A Mystic-Warrior for Our Times*, (New world library, Novato, California, 2014), 80.

understanding of identifying God as Word^[66], he does value the intellect even more than being in his sense. For him, there is no contradiction between obeying God and being rational; on the contrary, obeying God is rational, which renders proper everything in its order recognized by reason. His *no-why* consists in rendering unto obedience within reason toward God. His complete obedience means a thorough basis for will and reason deeply rooted in Godhead—the only original and ultimate Unicity of Authority and Reason. Eckhart inherits Augustin and develops his *intellectus fidei*, an intelligence of the Christian faith^[67].

Fromm opposed the human (mature) reason against the *God* (as a symbol of irrational authority). The human “reason” before forbidden fruit had merely been counted as “*prehuman* situation^[68]”. However, he ignored that before the Fall, man had been by no means ignorant of anything; quite the contrary, Adam named every animal, even in the very moment in which Eve judged the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise” (*Genesis* 3:6), which does mean that her intelligence had been already given (had). Whereas, those rational humanists such as Fromm have otherwise thought that the very judgement and deed marked the birth of *real* human reason, which leads to conclude it was the forbidden fruit, or rather, the human’s independence from God that made human a real mature human being within a (seeming autonomous and neutral) reason as the very *luminous sign*. Certes, this could be the most favorable explanation for unbelievers; it is the truth for them and to a great extent it has been a consensus; but it is far from being incontrovertible.

To judge right or wrong is per se an authority. The opposite of reason is neither irrationality nor the (irrational) authority but another reason within its authority. All human conflicts are likely from lack of reason thus men have to obey an irrational authority; instead, they are from another reason preoccupied with its authority, compellingly or permissively. So, an effective disobedience has happened only within another superior or another authority (theodicy, justice, rationalism as authority), even the most insane revolt has to assert its righteousness. The reason has in nature its authority, the authority within its reason. Unlike the sensibility which consists in taking in anything as a whole instead of painstakingly seeking the difference, the reason consists in dividing and distinguishing this from that; but a sound reason is always conjugated with its basis—its very apodictic authority. Fromm had his own worldview of rational authority mainly enlightened by Marx and Freud; just because of this underlying foundation, while using the Jewish-Christian sources, he ignored that in the *Genesis* it is God who firstly divided the light from the darkness, good from evil (or just affirmed good), then the distinction admittedly belongs to human reason, which implies humanity as the image of God; necessary for humanity to hinge upon the its original, which forms both affirmation and negation of human reason; for obeying God, human reason is righteous and

[66] in principio erat ens et deus erat ens. Eckhart points out that John does not say, “in the beginning was a being, and God was a being.”

[67] “Le Thuringien trouve, en effet, chez saint Augustin un précurseur qui a développé un *intellectus fidei*, une intelligence de la foi, en mettant en perspective la culture de son temps au prisme de l’Écriture qu’il lit et relit, comme son prédécesseur, afin de faire ressortir la nouveauté du christianisme.” Cf. Théophylon-2016 XXI-Vol. 1, pp. 40.

[68] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), 100.

powerful over all other beings; for disobeying God's authority, the rationality will be negated in many ways. What human could imagine or interpret is insufficient to rely on^[69], which is always limited and conditional; it is inspiring that Eckhart proposes the unconditional obedience without a why, which renders unto Godhead as absoluteness what is absolute.

The next point that Fromm quoted Eckhart is the latter's famous *detachment* (*Gelassenheit*). However, as the former's purpose, the perspective was put towards *no having*: "Master Eckhart taught that to have nothing and make oneself open and 'empty', not to let one's ego stand in one's way, is the condition for achieving spiritual wealth and strength^[70]." "The person who wants nothing is the person who is not greedy for anything; this is the essence of Eckhart's concept of nonattachment^[71]."

No having drawn from Eckhart's detachment, though reasonable, is less pertinent than in the terms of *no being*. However for Fromm, no being could nearly be equivalent to no existing, nothing but dying or death without any meaning. In theological illumination, the having mode based on mortality, was made the *scapegoat* for the human's failure of sin in both having and being mode. Fromm was unaware of his narrowing sense of humanity. He quoted Eckhart: "Thus we say that a man should be so poor that he is not and has not a place for God to act in. To reserve a place would be to maintain distinctions. *Therefore I pray God that he may quit me of god*". He explained that "Eckhart could not have expressed his concept of not having more radically^[72]". The Eckhart's mention of *poor* concerns both *he is not* and *he has not*, is in his (*me-*)*ontotheological* sense whose meaning is quite different from Fromm's terms. When Fromm quoted Eckhart as "People should not consider so much what they are to *do* as what they *are*...^[73]", he neglected what Eckhart means is an ethic position based on the Christian ontology, but interpreted as two meanings: psychological sense and being as life, activity ... productivity. He used them for supporting his opposition to the behavioristic views as well as being as the opposite of having, of ego boundness and egotism. He made Eckhart's "going out of oneself" a mentalistic interpretation^[74]. By eliminating the absoluteness and eternity of oneness of Being, Intellect and One, the relationship between soul and Verb, breakthrough of soul in Godhead, Fromm made Eckhart his spokesman by narrowing his metaphysics and ontology within the psychological meaning linked with being.

Herein, we can't unfold the Eckhartian originality *Esse est Deus*, which implies God as the (larger) ground of being by rendering God as predicate of being; but just clarify what Eckhart implies is that being is not the utmost norm of everything, but God is the measure of the being of everything as being per se. Furthermore, Eckhart also emphasizes *Deus est Intelligere* through his exegesis of Gospel according to John. Ian Alexander Moore indicates that "Eckhart is also willing to use the term 'being' for God here, so long as it is not taken in the sense of created being... We must,

[69] Tertullian proposes that "I believe because it is absurd" by which he sees the Cross of Christ can't be from human's imagination.

[70] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), 13.

[71] *Ibid.*, 50.

[72] *Ibid.*, 52.

[73] *Ibid.*, 53.

[74] Cf. *Ibid.*, 53-54.

then, read *puritas essendi* as also referring to a higher sense of being... Note again that Eckhart speaks of the purity of being that is in God. He does not say: ‘God is pure of being’ or ‘God is without being.’^[75]” Briefly, we can perceive how sublime Intellect, God rather than *being* are in view of Eckhart; it is God’s Intellect that gives meaning to all beings including human, *no-being* of God is supposed to express that God is out of the category of any being, or as the *pure Being* of all beings—he doesn’t take the Thomistic way. So the detachment consists in letting God be (and have a place as well as act) in human’s soul and being; man has to give no-being (without mention of having) for himself, but uniquely for Godhead. Biblically, this is also imitating Christ’s kenosis. And for arriving at this end, we should get rid of everything, not only of what we have (in mind), but also of what we are, until we dwell in the *litte Castle* whereby Godhead and soul belong to each other. Man shall watch over the entryway of heart only for God.

It seems that Eckhart intentionally cuts off the common connection between men, with the nature, even with human ego. If we borrow a term of theatre, it could be counted as an *alienation/estrangement* effect (*Verfremdungseffekt*) which, by analogy, seems a stage only for roles Godhead and His beloved soul; the audiences even stage sets are excluded as nothing. Whereas, alienation or estrangement is by no means a positive sense for Fromm who advocated living equally in connection with others so that we could, as altruist, give ourselves meanings by the unfolding of his powers and by living productively. Certes, there was no meaning for Fromm to obtain in Eckhart’s sense: *loving God and letting Him in* should only be understood and converted as *loving others* by a rational humanist who excluded apodictically God as being. From a humanistic reason, there’s no wonder that Eckhart was used for supporting a seemingly similar opinion from very different outlook and motive. “One might even go so far as to say that, with this move, Eckhart anticipates modern subjectivity and German idealism, if not, as Hermann Ley has claimed, atheist materialism^[76].” The God as *Nothingness* is totally different from nothing as nothing. Fromm misunderstood Eckhart’s *Gottheit* as *Nothingness* by thinking that Eckhart had a nontheistic and antiauthoritarian orientation which emphasized the humanity and his independence.

Finally, we discuss the oneness valued by both Eckhart and Fromm.

Although it consists in tending towards oneness as the only truth, in neotic-linguistic way profoundly rooted in humanity, man has to divide the unicity while thinking according to his seemingly presuppositionless standpoint. For Fromm, the ultimate Reality was nothing but the material being, meaning was uniquely given by human being. Then his division of the oneness as matter consisted in distinguishing those who conformed to the (preset) matter or not. In the perspective of ignoring God as meaning and being per se, the religious meanings had to be converted into the structure of existence in human nature. He believed that the success of humanity consisted in being insofar as it *reduces the mode of having and to increase the mode of being*^[77].

Nevertheless, based upon *being as becoming*, would those principles of negation posited be included in which had been doomed to be negated, firstly as meaningless then no being, insofar as

[75] Ian Alexander Moore, DEUS EST INTELLIGERE-ESSE EST DEUS; *Eckhart and the Problem of Ontotheology*, *Forthcoming in Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 1 (2017).

[76] *Ibid.*

[77] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), 103.

they could be practised in Fromm's structure of existence as such, if yes, forget it, because the mode of being is just becoming what it is not—perhaps having mode, as it was before; if not, those principles become the opposite of themselves—not supposed to become what they were not, so they become unbecoming principles of becoming—the material dialectics halts while turning into its opposite as exception. Without mention of so many difficulties when this principle is put in practice, even Fromm had thought of society which “is not made up of heroes^[78]”, there would still be a great challenge to overcome for his ideal of new man and new society, granted that they were all *heroes*, a great man has his great danger.

It can be seen that the problem of Fromm doesn't consist of dialectic negation—every great thought facing the impasse of reason, but of its incomplete negation of humanity as well as his lack of self-negation. Compared with Marx, Fromm is more acceptable because of his eclecticism capable of syncretizing those different thoughts^[79]; however, the most decisive divergence between Fromm and Eckhart is whether the Intellect (the ability to reason) per se is *eternal* in sense of both meaning and being, whereby the oneness could only be reasonable and realisable.

For Fromm, since human being is mortal, the possession is just illusion, the word “be-long” is just an empty promise, we shall not possess anything in mind. But for most people, they who equally know the inevitable death prefer living in a way of possession, if not, who could make up for their lost after their death? For Eckhart as Christian, the *presupposition* is quite different; according to God's revelation, man who isn't made mortal will have given everlasting life (human being has no end with a beginning); or expressed within Life per se, man (soul) *has* eternal life. All his theological theses are in the meaning of eternity. Because of this, we can/shall not so care about possessing our own property, as well as we can enjoy with everything we have temporarily and eternally together with others for God's grace. We enjoy everything in God and see God's glory through everything. If it were not for real, Apostle Paul states then we can do anything we want, “for tomorrow we die^[80]”. Kantian deontological ethics that we could also perceive in Fromm, is a hard duty, a principle of morality, which partially upheld the human conscience, without caring about the very need for love and reward deeply-seated in humanity; besides, we have to admit that the motive in human mind is quite a dimension superior to other's judgement or control. That renders his being mode a kind of idealistic advice just for a few conscious people; if they compel others to obey, a new alienation will be forthcoming. Certes, in Fromm's eyes, an *eternal* life seems irrational, supernatural even superstitious. However, the eternity of being (life) guarantees having is a real possession, which does mean God and man possess each other^[81] rather than for things; referring to the mention of Boethius in *Consolation*, “So let us consider the nature of eternity, for this will make clear to us both the nature of God and his manner of knowing. Eternity, then, is the complete, simultaneous and perfect *possession* of everlasting life.^[82]” And this definition of eternity which links up together with possession, is the foundation stone of understanding of life for Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart

[78] *Ibid.*, 98.

[79] *Ibid.*, 133: “For instance, Eckhart is usually unconscious of his nontheism; Marx, of his religiosity.”

[80] I Corinthians 15:32.

[81] *Psalms* 16:5: “The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup; thou maintainest my lot.”

[82] Cf. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/eternity/>.

in their era.

No one could make reappear the beginning of the cosmos and human life. Those who don't believe the eternal life, in consideration of the way they view the being and the origin as a mere historical *fact*, instead of as a *single-dual* divine and human dimension, do miss the very essence. An eternal life, out of a horizon of posteriority, is only offered within a vision of priority, then its secular identity will be regained: from present to forever. And the priority, which is supposed to come first in history, through Jesus Christ as coming late is presuppositionless by nature; what is transcendent is unforeseen from humanity. Life is not existing for purpose of its dying until death—not necessarily by reasoning but by intuition. Only by this faith, human can acknowledge that the Life (being) is resurrected by the Truth (meaning) identical with the Life as both per se and origin. Then how could it be possible that the human common reason, beyond its capacity of knowledge, denies the Meaning (Truth) in Its self-generating? Fromm's rational authority^[83] asserting the no-existence of its unknown is nothing but irrational and arrogant, though it could offer a few artificial interpretations, such as those of Fromm who explained the eternal life as “possession of property constitutes the fulfillment of the craving for immortality^[84]”. Then he could not really know Eckhart's ontotheology, it would be no wonder that he missed the opportunity to face then resolve his taking-for-granted *oneness* but in fact an incoherent disunion of meaning with respect of being.

Eckhart's meontological approach to God can be only understood in the eternal dimension for both meaning and being; “The Godhead hovers [*di gotheit die swebt*] in itself and is all things to itself. Therefore God [*got*] and his divinity [*gotheit*] are above everything that the creature as creature has comprehended or ever shall comprehend. (⋯) Now when the soul has gone out from her created being [*wesens*] and from the uncreated being in which she finds herself in the eternal image, and has entered the divine essence [*gotlichen natur*] where she cannot comprehend the kingdom of God and where she knows that no creature can enter the kingdom of God, then the soul discovers herself, goes her own way and never seeks God; and thus she dies her highest death⋯. [T]his spirit is dead and is buried in the Godhead, for the Godhead lives as no one other than itself. ^[85]”

This beautiful and mystic passage far apart from the modern taste of fact can perfectly answer to Fromm misunderstanding from Eckhart's perspective. Eckhart's *ground without ground* (*grunt ohne grunt*^[86]) is fully conjugated within the God of Trinity, the Creation, detachment, an anthropology profoundly based upon the Christian faith; the death in Godhead is the highest death of soul (humanity), in the deepest uncreated *ground without ground* shared with Godhead, the unicity of them is permanently in the very *singularity*, so there is no need for seeking God while Godhead and humanity are one. This oneness even beyond the union God-man could not be considered as a support for Fromm's antiauthoritarian standpoint, but within the absolute obedience (detachment) let

[83] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), 31.

[84] *Ibid.*, 67.

[85] Jostes, Franz, ed., *Meister Eckhart und seine Jünger: Ungedruckte Texte zur deutschen Mystik* (Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1895), 95; Davies, Oliver, ed. and trans. *Meister Eckhart: Selected Writings* (London: Penguin, 1994), 247-248.

[86] All our perfection and all our blessedness depends upon our breaking through, passing beyond all createdness, all temporality and all being, and entering into the ground that is without ground. (Walshe, 2008, sermon 80).

Godhead be in soul. Such a death of humanity is the very Eternal Life of humanity along with all everlasting beings in God.

Eckhart, as the most scholastics, despite his subversive theology proposing that all beings (the created) are a total *nothing* perhaps against Aristotelian-Thomistic mainstream, would nonetheless have stood in his very medieval context. In a noetic linguistic way, we view it as a response for Fromm's concerning analyses, Eckhart identifies Christ as Verb, humanity as adverb, besides Being as God: "...à côté du Verbe, il doit être un adverbe. (...) Puissions-nous être en tout temps, nous aussi, un adverbe de ce Verbe, avec l'aide de Dieu, de ce même Verbe et du Saint-Esprit ! Amen."^[87] Eckhart's comprehensive ontotheology transcends the limits of space and time, which is a treasure inspiring Fromm; but it's not easy for the present world to really understand this great theologian's thought, although in such a secular age, those believing in eternal life are probably underestimated, then a real oneness of the Life per se (relationship between God and man) has lost the focus in the academic view.

* * * * *

Through a comparison on the ways amongst Fromm, Lao Zi and Eckhart, we have understood whether it is concerning a paradigm which consists in the auto-affirmation based on a radical apprehension of *being* in humanistic sense, or rather in the negative way of human's self-denial toward the Divinity whose pure and double affirmation provides the ultimate foundation of the being of humanity^[88]. In the meaning of humanity, Fromm upheld his rational altruistic humanism that needs a thorough self-negation rather than just in the terms of structure of existence^[89]; but it is practical only when the human's ego is based upon another larger ground which can't be the material world given by human meaning. Through observing the material world, humanity could merely build a diversity of principles contradicting one another. Fromm and many other humanists have endeavored to reconcile the meaning and being, because they rejected Jesus as the incarnated God; otherwise, as Fromm did, the kenosis of Christ was explained as a *well-being* character.

No matter how Fromm insisted on the irreconcilable opposition between meaning and being as well as reason and authority, the fact emphasized as ground of argument——(fear of dying) death must be admitted, which means his being mode incapable of solving this fundamental reversal of life and death——life *dies* but death *lives* (*exists*). Compared with the proclamation of Jesus Christ identifying himself as "the way, the truth, and the life" (*John* 14:6), in Fromm's theory, meaning and being can not mutually convert in radical sense; all phenomena of being could not totally transformed into meaning——at least, death and having mode are meaningless; on the other hand, unlike the Biblical assertion from soul to body, those humanistic meanings are disabled from making being (new life), his theory was nothing more than interpretative reconciliation of the two, not their

[87] *Traité et sermons*, traduction et présenté par Alain de LIBERA, Éd. Flammarion, Paris, 1995 (1re éd. 1993), p. 280.

[88] In the sense of non-humanistic position, Lao Zi within his Dao-orientation could share with Eckhart.

[89] Although in *The Art of Loving* he mentioned the view that loving others is loving oneself, it is still an underestimation of the reality of human conflict; without the eternal life, his calling for being a martyr of the vacuous *human being*——an abstract notion is nothing but a nobody, too susceptible to being used for serving the ideologies.

original oneness, although he emphasized it as the nature of being structure time and again^[90]. His assuming quotation of Epicurus along with Buddha, Jesus, the Stoics and Eckhart^[91], was rather likely to establish with authority a law to stipulate *no need for fearing death* in a philosophical way—a *reasonable* consolation. The humanity was hopelessly reduced and its ineffable deepest helplessness was attributed to a seeming insight, but truly covered with a good-looking scholar's *wisdom*. Just like any other *rational* position which consists in replacing the faith, the fear that the formers attempt to suppress, transfer or transform by reasonable sound interpretations is nothing more than being concealed, sometimes likely to disappear; whereas, in case of any doubt or being overturned, the fear of death must lead to a deeper despair, especially while facing the meaninglessness of life—the ultimate death. To lose faith in authority is disillusion; to lose faith in reason (rational authority), same disillusion; the history since 19th century has seen the *God's* death (meaning as Truth) that precedes human death (from inside to outside). A being with the meaning only produced by this or that man is nothing more than a self-consolation; a meaning without promise of life nor integral vision of being is nothing but reduced to nihilism in radical terms.

In the Bible, we can see those seemingly paradoxical meanings; however, because God is the Truth per se, the supreme meaning which determines every meaning, so the human meaning, no matter that of being or of having, can be regenerated in God's revelation through a sound reason after the Fall. In Eckhart, such a reason can be clearly perceived. Anchored deeply in the Word of God, his dialectic thought completely takes in all those seemingly paradoxical meanings, even including the entire negation of humanity through obedience, detachment to reach the ground without ground of the divine oneness in the eternal sense. It has been provoking controversy because of this absolute tone. Abusing the name of the absolute causes many problems; nevertheless, lacking or denying the absolute is nothing but to lead toward all sorts of arrogations.

Because Fromm didn't believe in eternity, his underlying view of the absolute is *being as becoming* whereby a world of meaning was fraught with uncertainty, scepticism, even ridiculous for naming what is this but not that if we thoroughly carry out the principle of becoming in an unceasingly varying world, then would his insistence on the being mode make any sense? So Fromm has to reconcile this huge disparity. Probably unconsciously, he appreciated Eckhart in a way of the humanistic conversion, by leaching out the those seeming *ridiculous* meanings, those *irrational* dogmas and *delusion* of the miracles. If we put aside the decisive role of faith which consists in articulating being within meaning, Fromm's suggestion according to his view of *fact* is in nature an attempt to rebuild a *new* humanity based on a corrupted humanity in both senses of meaning and being. In this sense, Lao Zi is so sage that he opts for dwelling in Dao, instead of dreaming about a new man or new society. Eckhart believes profoundly in his God who has been making a new humanity and new world. After humankind has undergone those miseries caused by corrupted humanity through all kinds of social practices and experiments, this inside vision has been still inspiring and the faith sounds much more reasonable.

[90] As for Christianity, the disillusion of the faith and of the world has been occurring every day, unbelievers and believers alternating in different regions within all kinds of peoples; the eclectic theory of Fromm had been limited to academic circle.

[91] Erich Fromm, *To Have or to Be*, (London & New York: continuum, 1976), 102.

Today, we can constate that to a certain extent, Fromm's ideal of being mode has been realised in some individuals, those living in the meanings they give themselves rather than following the common trends of having as well as the major authorities. Nevertheless, this world is still fraught with bouleversements, the vast majority of mass have been unaware of their blindness of possessing—the alienated structure of existence in Fromm's sense; meanwhile, their emptiness is full with all sorts of contingent meanings. He was not an optimist who just intended to embrace the bright future; between the two possibilities, he foresaw the worse one—the humankind would be sinking deeper and deeper into greed. The Christianity has long revealed the worst situation of humanity and the best Salvation for the world.

It is so precious that Fromm sought such a way of being for a bright human future; however, what he and we could do is just reconciling our life within meaning. As nobody is born aware of who he/she is just like the humanity unaware of his *Origin*, the Christianity envisions that a new man and a new kingdom entail being made in the similar way this existing world and we have been already created, whereby the meaning as Truth makes all beings be.

2017/7

中文题目:

“有”还是“是”:意义与存在之途——当弗洛姆径遇老子及埃克哈特大师

李宜, 武汉大学外国语学院文学学院博士研究生, 法国洛林大学哲学人类学硕士, 地址: 武汉市武昌洪山区书城路珞珈雅苑十栋(杰晨美寓), 邮编: 430072, Telephone: +86 15102735217, Email: theologieli@163.com

提要:在《占有还是生存》一书中, 埃里希·弗洛姆提出存在模式与占有模式: 前者作为真正的生存结构, 与作为一种心理意义上之不幸的后者两相对照。其视角以弗洛伊德—马克思主义为潜在导向, 选取折衷进路, 辅以宗教资源, 比如埃克哈特大师。本文指出, 探讨意义和存在可以更好地了解这两种非此即彼的模式。弗洛姆舍传统本体论之主流而取存在即变化为前提, 因占有模式是基于人性之异化而将之摒弃, 他甚至拒绝意义本身可以超越存在, 因而意义就仅限于人的自我定义, 唯有展开其自身的力量、高效地生活才谈得上意义。在我们试图以某些意义(价值论或事实观等)调和我们的生活的时候, 弗洛姆的建议会很有意义; 然而他企图通过把将亡之恐惧描述为一种纯粹的失去拥有之幻觉, 简单地把死亡归结为无意义, 这种解释无法重新恢复存在原先的意义, 特别是在意义已经碎片化的祛魅世界中, 也无法逃脱虚无主义的命运。弗洛姆具有广博的宗教思想的视野, 而他却仅仅化约式地运用这些思想作为支持其理性人本主义者的立场, 就足令人惋惜了。通过围绕顺服、超脱以及纯一性的比较, 可以清晰地看出埃克哈特的神本主义与弗洛姆的极端人本主义的巨大分歧: 这意味着后者仅根据其理论偏好从前者那里获取灵感, 却抹去了前提的根本差异; 而老子的意义策略则可作为另一不同于西方本体论的参照系。通过埃克哈特和老子自己的意义路径, 本文试图指出他们的形而上学(尤其是通过否定路径)是坚实地建筑在神性或道所提供的无限深广的永恒的根基之上的, 藉此亦是在此永恒根基之中, 堕落的人性可以在自我否定中全然超越焕发新意, 而人可在此新意义中重获新生。

关键词: 占有模式; 存在模式; 意义; 本体论; 永恒性