

# A COMPARISON BETWEEN ZEN BUDDHISM AND PHILOSOPHY OF HEIDEGGER WITH REGARD TO DEATH, NOTHINGNESS AND BEING

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*Abstract: In the field of comparative studies regarding the history of philosophy some cases are perhaps more thought provoking and intriguing than others. I attempt to display and critically discuss here what I take to be one such case which involves two prominent perspectives in the context of the notions of death, nothingness and being: Zen Buddhism and the Heideggerian ontology. With regard to their commonality, it can be pointed out that they both refrain from taking emptiness (nothing) to be opposite to or disconnected from fullness (being). Moreover, they both refuse to view death as an event happening at a particular moment. At the same time, however, they do handle the concepts of “nothing” and “being” in remarkably different ways. The crux of my argument is that Heidegger, in a manner different from Zen Buddhism, brings to bear the interplay between disclosures of “nothing” and “being”. Furthermore, I maintain that we need to focus on his notion of “anxiety” to fully appreciate the difference in question here.*

## Introduction

Heidegger's philosophy is often regarded to be a perspective with certain notable commonalities with the Eastern thought. The Japanese thinker Masao Abe, to mention one prominent name who is interested in not only Buddhism and Taoism but also the Western philosophy, has put forward important ideas drawing attention to philosophical similarities precisely of this sort. In his article titled “Non-Being and Mu” he mainly indicates that Heidegger is a Western philosopher who takes *Nothingness* into consideration in a way rather similar to what one can find in various instances of the Eastern thought—especially in Buddhism (Abe, 1975, 192). To give one crucial example, we can point out that within the boundaries of both philosophies, temporality is conceived to be “circular”. While the traditional Western conception obviously takes time to be linear, Heidegger regards temporality as the meaning of Dasein's being. The circularity within Zen Buddhism, on the other hand, is seen to be embedded in the belief of *samsara* which signifies in Zen Buddhism not only its traditional meaning but also the condition of every moment in human life (Parkes, 1998, 85). In a nutshell, both within the thematic boundaries of Zen Buddhism and in the philosophy of Heidegger, the notion of “nothingness” is centrally located and admitted to have profound importance. Moreover, this concept, as well as the whole phenomenon of death, is centrally linked to his understanding of “Being”. We can notice at this point that Zen Buddhism and the philosophy of Heidegger handle the phenomenon of death in a very similar way, to wit, not as an event which will happen at a particular moment in life but as a phenomenon which is always present in, and blended with, life itself. Furthermore, as Parkes states in “Death and Detachment”, death does never mean the annihilation of life for Zen Buddhism but, rather, a

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reconfiguration of vital energies (Parkes, 1998, 85). On the other hand, Heidegger conceives death not as perishing but within the framework of his own existential-ontological portrayal of being human. In this picture, humans are characterized in relation with the notion of being-towards-death (*Sein-zum-Tode*) which, in a very fundamental way, indicates a central “truth” regarding *Dasein* and *Sein*.<sup>1</sup> Heidegger writes the following in *Being and Time*:

Being-towards-the-end has been defined as Being towards one's own most potentiality-for-Being, which is non-relational and is not to be outstripped. Being towards this possibility, as a Being which exists, is brought face to face with the absolute impossibility of existence. (Heidegger, 2001, 299)

The crucial point is that one (*Dasein*) existentially has a being (*sein*) which is oriented towards its own end. This also means that while arriving at one's consummated Self is impossible; one's being is a being towards its own consummated Self. Heidegger takes facing nothingness to be related to the special mood of *Dasein* named “*Angst*”. In “What is Metaphysics” (1998) he indicates that the condition of one's facing nothingness is that one is capable of being anxious. Furthermore, he contends that the condition of one's being anxious is that one has being that is held out into nothing (Heidegger, 1998, 88).

Within the framework of this paper, the Zen Buddhist notions of “*sunyata*”, “wondrous Being” and “death” will be introduced and clarified firstly. Second, the corresponding notions of the philosophy of Heidegger will be presented and discussed in a comparative fashion. At the end, I will maintain that their approaches to Nothingness and Being are not identical even though there are remarkable similarities between Zen Buddhism and Heidegger's philosophy with regard to their understanding of death and their way of philosophizing.

### I. Wondrous Being and *Sunyata* in Zen Buddhism

To begin with, “*sunyata*” is a Sanskrit notion which literally means “emptiness”. In Zen Buddhism, emptiness is not to be understood simply in relation to fullness. Rather it is regarded to be absolutely *identical with* fullness, and “nothing” to be absolutely *identical with* being. This non-relative truth is comprehended solely by a mind which is freed from all metaphysical presuppositions. In his article named “Non-Being and Mu the Metaphysical Nature of Negativity in the East and the West”, Masao Abe states it as follows:

Thus we may say that absolute negation is the absolute affirmation and absolute affirmation is the absolute negation. This paradoxical statement well expresses the dialectical and dynamic structure of *Sunyata* in which emptiness is fullness and fullness is emptiness. (Abe, 1975, 186)

This particular insight is gained by way of meditating as well as by listening and telling *koans* (i.e., paradoxical questions or anecdotes aimed at provoking listeners mentally and ultimately enabling them to cut loose from dependency on reason).

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<sup>1</sup> Here I will be concerned with the so-called “early” period of Heidegger's ontology, especially in the context of the notions of “beings” and “Being”.

Unless one attains a mental state freed from presuppositions such as linear understanding of time and logical rules, one cannot be said to grasp the reality. As a result of this process, Being and Nothing are revealed to the agent simultaneously. It is not the case that in Zen Buddhism emptiness is an “emptied” state of Being as dictated by common sense. When Zen Buddhists speak of “emptiness”, they mean *absolute emptiness* which is a result of the emptying process of emptiness itself. This obviously does not exactly fit into the traditional Western perspective on logic with its principle laws such as the laws of identity, non-contradiction and excluded middle. Zen meditations are geared towards suspending logical judgments as they ultimately lead one to grasp nothingness intuitively. One can discern such “non-logical” thinking through the following example by D. T. Suzuki. Here we read the conversation between Sekkyo and his monk:

Sekkyo asked one of his accomplished monks,  
 “Can you take hold of empty space?”  
 “Yes sir,” he replied.  
 “Show me how you do it.”  
 The monk stretched out his arm and clutched at empty space.  
 Sekkyo said: “Is that the way? But after all you have not got anything.”  
 “What then,” asked the monk, “is your way?”  
 The master straightway took hold of the monk’s nose and gave it a hard pull, which made the latter exclaim: “Oh, oh, how hard you pull at my nose! You are hurting terribly!”  
 “That is the way to have a good hold of empty space,” said the master. (Suzuki, 1964, 84)

Thus, Nothingness does not signify merely “no-thingness”, but it is very identical with Being which is also empty. In order to grasp the *truth* that ‘Being is simultaneously Nothing’; one needs to achieve the emptying process which comprises of *koans* and sitting meditations. Now let us pose the questions: What is the emptying process thus carried out? Is it realized on a being? The answer is negative. According to Zen Buddhism, it is not a being which is emptied but emptiness itself. Hence, it is not the case that through nothingness one faces Being; rather the fact of the matter is that one faces Being as Nothing and Nothing as Being. Namely, one simultaneously faces Nothing and Being as they are rendered one and the same phenomenon by the emptying process. This process demonstrates that there is no dualism between *mu* and *u*, even they commonly accepted as opposing forces. Abe indicates this point as follows: “True emptiness and Wondrous Being are completely non-dualistic; absolute *Mu* and ultimate reality are totally identical, although the realization of the former indispensable for the realization of the latter.” (Abe, 1975, 189). Sekkyo’s response to his monk exhibits this issue precisely. That is, he expects his monk to *have* something after he has taken hold of the empty space. This expectation reveals the difference between the Western and Eastern views on Being. In employing the term ‘Being’, Easterners understand what is called “Wondrous Being” which is identical to Emptiness or Nothing. Needless to say, this will sound entirely paradoxical to the rationally conditioned Western ears.

John Steffney argues that “Being is attained by virtue of absolute Nothingness, Being itself is transformed absolutely, and cannot be thought of in the way the West envisioned it, as being over against Nothingness, or even as Heidegger has envisioned it, as Being integral with Nothingness.” (Steffney, 1985, 97). With regard to the

Western thought, as I have exemplified through the fundamental laws of logic, if an entity does not exist, then we should speak of the not-being or emptiness of it. At this point, it may be interesting and beneficial to examine a rather atypical representative of the Western philosophy and bring to bear his approach to the matter at hand. This I will attempt later in the present paper. Let me first offer some remarks about the notion of death in Zen Buddhism.

## II. Death in Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism regards death in a way which is similar to its understanding of Being and Nothingness. Namely, death is not an event which one undergoes, in a moment within one's life. The Buddhist understanding of death is considered in connection with *anatman* (no-self), which is strictly related to the general Buddhist interpretation of the elements ('*dharma*' in Sanskrit) of beings within the world. All dharmas and energies are shared by every being in the world—which means that the status of human beings does not have a priority over those of other beings in the world. Furthermore, according to Zen Buddhism, the character of the existence is *anitya* which means that there is no permanency of beings. Dogen Kigen (1200-1253), one of the important Zen masters in Japan, expressed the idea of life's being fleeting as such: "life arises and perishes instantaneously from moment to moment."<sup>2</sup> (Kim, 1987, 198). Differently from traditional Buddhism, he does not deal with the arising-perishing process, life-and-birth referred to as *samsara*. His idea is that life and birth are happening simultaneously in every moment of life (Parkes, 1998, 85). In concordance with the relationship between Nothing and Being, the connection between death and life is not external. Death does not exclude life, and vice versa. Dogen states that "Although we have not left life, we already see death. Although we have not yet discarded death, we already meet life. Life does not obstruct death, death does not obstruct life." (ibid., 226). Another important Zen master Shosan regards, in a striking way, the *vital* energy as coinciding with *death* energy, the latter spreading to the entire universe. Accordingly, "death" which we take as tantamount to perishing does not actually imply the end of life. Instead, life is already death and vice versa: Dharmas do not vanish but they get reconfigured and dispersed to the universe at the moment of biological death. This, however, is always and already happening at every moment of life.

## III. Heidegger on Death and Nothingness: Similarities with Zen Buddhism

It would be correct to state that with regard to their understandings of death, the philosophy of Heidegger and Zen Buddhism do mostly agree. This principally springs from the fact that both philosophies understand time as *non-linear*. According to Heidegger, temporality is the essence of Dasein's Being. He states as follows:

The primordial ontological basis for Dasein's existentiality is temporality. In terms of temporality, the articulated structural totality of Dasein's Being as care first becomes existentially intelligible. (Heidegger, 2001, 277)

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<sup>2</sup> The important point is to keep in mind is that the expression "moment to moment" should not be conceived as in the Western understanding of time. In general, time is not understood to be linear but circular in Buddhist philosophy.

Namely, Dasein is existentially temporal, and it always makes the future present upon its past. As a *being-in-the-world*—which means that it is not possible to speak of Dasein apart from the world—there are pre-determined possibilities upon which one projects oneself as such towards its future. Hence, that which one makes present is rooted in the world in which one has been thrown into. In other words, one makes the future present; while all the possibilities of future come from the past. That is to say, one has already been thrown into a world in which there are already meanings, and in this sense the possible choices of this world have already “determined”. For instance, the possibility of being a ninja does not exist anymore in the 21st century. In a similar vein, one is not able to make present the possibility of being a samurai for the future. Terminologically, the future is one’s “not yet” which actually belongs to one’s existence. In case of death, it is not an event which does happen to one in a certain moment of life. Death belongs to one’s existence as its end; it is not the negation of one’s existence. Thus, awareness of death is inextricably entwined with one’s awareness of his own finitude. And considering time to be as circular does not mean that one’s self will end in a particular moment of the future. Rather, this means that since Dasein is a temporal being as such, it is already on the way to its end as making it present. Heidegger states it as follows:

Dasein is already its ‘not-yet’ and is its ‘not-yet constantly as long as it is, it is already its end too. The ‘ending’ which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein’s Being-at-an-end [Zu-Ende-sein], but a Being-towards-the-end [Sein Zum Ende] of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. (Heidegger, 2001, 289)

To understand death as being-towards-death is very similar to Zen Buddhism. Within Zen Buddhism, Shosan uses the notion of *shiki* as a fundamental notion which means “rouse death-energy” (Parkes, 1998, 86). Relating *shi* (“death”) and *ki* (“vital energy”) within one notion signifies that he does not understand death and life as they are excluding each other. Parkes states this idea as follows: “. . .since *ki* animates not just human beings but the entire universe, the dissolution of a living body signifies a reconfiguration rather than an extinction of vital energies.” (ibid.)

Although the meaning of death in this quote *prima facie* looks as if it is “the perishing of a living body”, for Buddhism death is not *an* event because of the abovementioned belief of *samsara*. That is to say, even though death is conceived to be signifying one’s perishing, it is not an end of one’s life at all. Death is already “familiar” to one since it is happening at every moment of one’s life. Dogen indicates it in *Shōbōgenzō: On Learning the Way Through Body and Mind* as the following:

Even before we have abandoned death, we are already encountering life in the present. Life is not one sort of thing, and death is not another, second sort of thing. Never does death stand against life: never does life stand against death. (Dogen, 1929, 499)

Hence, both of the philosophies under consideration here view life and death to be thoroughly interwoven. Now, at this point it may be beneficial to explore the ways in which the two perspectives are similar or different. Some commentators like Peter Kraus construed Heidegger’s concepts of Being and Nothing as quite similar to Zen’s understanding of Being and Nothing. Despite the initial plausibility of views of this

sort, the *prima facie* similarities do not imply that they are philosophically identical views. In the next section, I will try to elucidate why the Heideggerian understanding of Being and Nothing is *not* exactly the same as that of Zen, implying that Kraus's interpretations must be approached with caution.

#### IV. Heidegger on Nothingness and Being: Differences from Zen Buddhism

At the very outset of our treatment of Heidegger's notions of Nothingness and Being, we need to briefly talk about the concept of *anxiety*.<sup>3</sup> Heidegger uses the notion of anxiety as a condition of the possibility of being *authentic* Dasein.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the very notion of authenticity invites a discussion on the Heideggerian concept of *care*. Let us begin with the latter. Heidegger maintains that Dasein existentially and ontologically cares about both its own being and other entities within the world. The basis of existential care is the meaning of Da-sein which means *being there* or *being-in-the-world*. Heidegger indicates that the meaning of "in" originated in *innan*. The origin of *innan* is clarified by him as follows: "...in' is derived from 'innan'—'to reside', 'habitate', 'to dwell'. 'An' signifies 'I am accustomed', 'I am familiar with', 'I look after something'." (Heidegger, 2001, 80). Thus, according to Heidegger, 'I am' means that I have a kind of familiarity with the world, I dwell alongside the world; in other words, I care about worldly entities. He states that " 'Being alongside' the world ... is an existiale founded upon Being-in." (Heidegger, 2001, 80-81). Being of Dasein—Care—becomes visible to one in the case of the equipmentality of an entity is distorted or vanished. This "becoming visible" means disclosure<sup>5</sup> of *unreadiness-to-hand* in Heidegger's jargon. When unreadiness-to-hand gets disclosed, the purpose of using this equipment is endangered and hence, the meaning of the purpose itself is rendered visible too. Heidegger spells out the meaning of *unreadiness-to-hand* as follows: "[C]onstitutive assignment of the "in-order-to" to a "towards-this" which is embedded in one's existentially having the character of care, has been disturbed." (Heidegger, 2001, 105). Thus, when such "disturbance" happens, one is led to pay attention to various aspects of his actions that he never did before. But one's concerned being-in-the-world disappears in the case of one's being in the mood of *anxiety*. In this state of mind, the world in which Dasein dwells in or familiar with the entities for the sake of a certain purpose of its life is covered up and lost all signification of it. This means that what Dasein relates itself to is no longer there.<sup>6</sup> By way of the mood of anxiety which founded on the null basis of the world and its own being, Nothingness disclosed. At that point, neither the world one has been thrown into nor Dasein's own being bears any significance. In other words, this is the state

<sup>3</sup> "Anxiety" is Dasein's basic state of mind (mood) which has no mediation and discloses its own Being truly (Heidegger, 1998, 229).

<sup>4</sup> Both authenticity and inauthenticity belong to Dasein's own Being. Former means to choose itself and to win itself, in other words, to be true to its own self; latter means to lose itself in the average everydayness (Heidegger, 1998, 68).

<sup>5</sup> "'Disclose' and 'disclosedness' ... shall signify 'to lay open' and 'the character of having been laid open.' Thus 'to disclose' never means anything like 'to obtain indirectly by inference.'" (Heidegger, 1998, 105).

<sup>6</sup> 'No longer there' means that they are no longer intelligible to anxious Dasein. Furthermore, even spatiality is determined with regard to occupations of Dasein, i.e., if an entity has no meaning in my world, it is far from me regardless of how close it is located to me. I render entities closer with regard to my dealings in the world.

where there are no genuine meanings at all. Heidegger states this issue in “What is Metaphysics” as follows:

In anxiety, we say, “one feels ill at ease [es ist einem un-heimlich].” What is “it” that makes “one” feel ill at ease? We cannot say what it is before which one feels ill at ease. As a whole, it is so for him. All things and we ourselves sink into indifference. This, however, not in the sense of mere disappearance. Rather in this very receding things turn toward us. The receding of beings as a whole that closes in on us in anxiety oppresses us. We can get no hold on things. In the slipping away of beings only this “no hold on things” comes over us and remains. Anxiety reveals the nothing. (Heidegger, 1998, 88)

Through the disclosure of Nothing, through Dasein’s facing that there is no ground and no genuine meaning in the world one has been thrown into, what endures is solely Being. Entities within the world are disclosed as present-at-hand or ready-to-hand.<sup>7</sup> However, in the mood of anxiety, these two aspects of entities get covered up and the truth of their being null-basis is uncovered by anxious Dasein. Anxious Dasein becomes aware of that the disclosure of entities belongs to its own Being. As a result of this uncovering, one may—inauthentically—escape from the truth and fall into *Das Man*<sup>8</sup> or he may act upon it and lead himself to be authentic. Through the emptying force of nothingness, all inessential aspects of beings are *nihilated* and Being of beings only remains. The truth of that there is “no hold on things” becomes intelligible for anxious Dasein. Consequently, Being gets uncovered by way of the revealing of Nothing; and when receding from Dasein, nothingness becomes intelligible. If this is the case, does nothingness mean the negation of beings? Heidegger answers this question in “What is Metaphysics” and indicates that this is how we use this notion in everydayness and how traditional logic uses it. Of course, this usage is not the essential character of Nothingness, but it becomes possible by virtue of Nothingness (ibid., 86).

Furthermore, Nothingness belongs to existentials of Dasein. Heidegger clarifies this fact as follows:

We “hover” in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole. This implies that we ourselves — we who are in being — in the midst of beings slip away from ourselves. At bottom, therefore, it is not as though “you” or “I” feel ill at ease; rather it is this way for some “one.” In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold onto, pure Dasein is all that is still there. (ibid., 88)

From this quotation, the existential-ontological character of Dasein appears to be being there and be held out onto nothing. Anxiety makes one see the meanings of one’s existent world in its true nature: that the world is meaningless. This is an

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<sup>7</sup> *Vorhanden* in German literally means “before the hand” which signifies disclosure of being that is not at hand for any use. So, *Vorhandenheit* is translated to English as “presence-at-hand” and it refers to our theoretical engagement with beings. *Zuhanden* (“ready-to-hand”) denotes a disclosure of being with regard to its equipmentality. For Heidegger the latter notion is prior to, and necessary for, the former one.

<sup>8</sup> Heidegger uses the term ‘Das Man’ to mean “the They” referring to the average everydayness of Dasein. Actually, it is existential for Being of Dasein, and Dasein is most generally inauthentic since the web of meaning is constructed by the They.

indicator of the fact that there is always a sort of reciprocal relatedness in Heideggerian philosophy. When it comes to the relation between Nothing and Being, this kind of reciprocity especially comes to the foreground. As they do not conceptually precede one another, we can intuitively feel at this point that there is no radical difference between Buddhistic and Heideggerian approaches to Nothing.

However, differently from Zen Buddhism, there is an interplay between disclosures of Nothing and Being according to Heidegger. That is to say, by way of facing Nothingness, Being itself gets unveiled. This is an important point since it evidently conflicts with the above-mentioned claim of Kraus, viz., that Being and Nothing are identical for Heideggerian philosophy. And it may be beneficial for our purposes to dwell on the possible misconstrual we encounter here. Within the frame of Zen Buddhism facing Nothingness or Emptiness (*Sunyata*) takes place through Zen practices like breath meditations and koans, as indicated above. So it is evident that there *are* certain practices done by human beings in order to face Nothingness. On the other hand, according to the philosophy of Heidegger, there is no mediator in case of facing with Nothingness. In other words, any effort on the side of human existence is unable to achieve such a “facing”, meaning that Dasein cannot engender anxiety which makes possible its grasp of Nothingness. Furthermore, facing Nothingness brings about anxiety since one does not recognize that Nothingness and Being are identical phenomena. Rather, through facing Nothingness, one encounters Being which is *not a thing itself*. If one does not understand the relationship between them as “interplay” but, instead, as “identity”, one can easily miss the difference between Zen Buddhism and the philosophy of Heidegger.

Kraus maintains that the Heideggerian Nothing and Being are identical in *Death and Metaphysics* (Kraus, 1998, 106), on the basis of the following quote from “What is Metaphysics”:

“Pure Being and pure Nothing are therefore the same.” This proposition of Hegel’s (Science of Logic, vol. I, Werke III, 74) is correct. Being and the nothing do belong together, not because both — from the point of view of the Hegelian concept of thought — agree in their indeterminateness and immediacy, but rather because Being itself is essentially finite and reveals itself only in the transcendence of Dasein which is held out into the nothing. (Heidegger, 1998, 94)

Still, admitting the proposition “Being and Nothing are the same” to be *correct* does *not* imply that *they are identical*. This point can be elucidated by indicating that within the framework of Heidegger’s phenomenology, correctness is not an ontological notion. Rather, Heidegger adopts it as an *ontic* concept, that is, one that has to do with the level or aspect of mere factuality of beings that are. Obviously, in *Being and Time* Heidegger uses this notion not for the essential truth about an entity but rather in a more trivial sense. This is seen in the following quote: “...those entities which we encounter is not accidental, not an oversight which it would be simple to correct, but that it is grounded in a kind of Being which belongs essentially to Dasein itself.” (Heidegger, 2001, 133). That is why in the present context the philosophical difference between “ontic” and “ontological” matters substantially. The correctness of a statement about the sameness of Being and Nothing should not overshadow that from a more fundamental ontological perspective it is the “interplay” that clears the way for our current discourse on existence.



The aforementioned reciprocal relationship between Nothing and Being are conspicuously found in Heidegger's writing. The ground of the understanding of Being is Dasein's facing Nothingness which is rendered possible as Dasein is held onto Nothing—yet, this existential truth is concealed in everydayness. Dasein always tends to hold onto some *things* in its everyday life, but Dasein does not do it deliberately; instead it springs from the fact that Dasein is a being which existentially cares.

Besides, as it has briefly stated above, anxiety—the mood which appears in the case of facing Nothingness—cannot be produced purposely by Dasein; it breaks this everyday state which always makes Dasein a caring being “in a flash”. Heidegger clarifies this issue as follows:

Being held out into the nothing — as Dasein is on the ground of concealed anxiety makes man a place-holder of the nothing. We are so finite that we cannot even bring ourselves originally before the nothing through our own decision and will. So profoundly does finitude entrench itself in existence that our most proper and deepest limitation refuses to yield to our freedom. Being held out into the nothing — as Dasein is — on the ground of concealed anxiety is its surpassing of beings as a whole. It is transcendence. (Heidegger, 1998, 93)

Therefore, facing nothingness is embedded in Dasein's existential state of holding out into nothing which comes with anxiety for Dasein. Now, since according to Zen Buddhism Being and Nothing are identical, it appears that there is an issue, unlike what we see in the philosophy of Heidegger, about finding a place for the concept of “anxiety” in Zen. According to Zen Buddhism, one faces Nothingness *as* Being. This means that there is no interplay between Nothing and Being, in other words, they are exactly one and the same phenomena. On the other hand, within the framework of the Heideggerian philosophy, Nothingness is the passage to the disclosure of Being. In *Non-Being and Mu*, Abe shows how his path is different from the Heideggerian approaches to this issue by spelling out a “gate analogy” as follows: “[Facing with Nothingness is not] merely a gate to reach the hall of ultimate Reality. Instead, it in itself is the hall of ultimate Reality.” (Abe, 1975, 192). However, this difference does not mean that according to Heidegger Being is existentially primordial to Nothing. Instead, they are ontologically equiprimordial since being of Dasein which is the house of the Being, is the condition of the possibility of the disclosure of Nothing. On the other hand, the disclosure of Being necessitates being faced with Nothing, as indicated in the above quote. So, beings-as-a-whole is uncovered by Dasein by way of facing Nothing which belongs to the very nature of Dasein. As long as this circular existential precedence is correctly understood, one becomes capable of speaking of this gate analogy. On the other hand, one always tends to disregard the essential truth that there is some interplay between Being and Nothing since Being of beings remains hidden or shows itself in disguise (Heidegger, 2001, 59). If this interplay did not exist, then disregarding this fact would not be the case. In other words, if their relationship were an identity in the first place then facing Nothing could not uncover anything. Moreover, if this were so, there would exist no possibility to disregard that beings-as-a-whole has no genuine ground which means that falling into *Das Man* would be impossible since it is the outcome of this act of “disregarding”. Furthermore, if the relation is grasped as an identity, the result of facing it would be rather akin to Zen Buddhism, i.e., ended with a kind of peace, not in anxiety. As

Nietzsche claimed in the *Will to Power*, almost all philosophers in history have tried to come up with a truth which leads one to a peaceful and comfortable mental state instead of darkness due to unending questioning with no definite answers (Nietzsche, 1888, 248).

In my opinion, there is no rest or peace but a kind of phenomenological /existential “darkness” throughout the philosophy of Heidegger. In other words, since there is a fundamental interplay between Nothing and Being, one (Dasein) essentially is capable to be anxious. So, I am basically claiming that in the presumed case of their being identical, facing Nothing would exactly mean to face beings as a whole which is the case according to Zen Buddhism. This is precisely why facing nothingness is not burdened with anxiety in Zen Buddhism. But, according to Heidegger, it is possible to say that Being and Nothing have the same ground—that is, the *understanding* of Dasein. Therefore, there is a philosophical difference between having the same origin (while belonging together) and being totally identical.

### Conclusion

According to Heidegger, Dasein exists as an entity which has the ontological structure of “being towards death” which is also the ground of “constitutive state of Dasein’s potentiality-for-Being-a-whole.” (Heidegger, 2001, 277). Dasein as an entity, which is always ahead of itself, has never been a “whole” in its identity as Dasein. It could be a whole being when it is no longer Dasein, which means end of its being. The *dissimilarity* between Zen Buddhism and the philosophy of Heidegger, on the other hand, becomes conspicuous through the fact that Dasein exists as halfway between birth and death. Heidegger spells out this point as follows: “Thrownness and that Being towards death ... form a unity, and in this unity birth and death are ‘connected’ in a manner characteristic of Dasein. As care, Dasein is the ‘between’.” (Heidegger, 2001, 426-427). In addition, their difference can be found in the belief of samsara of Zen Buddhism. According to this, human nature and that of the universe cannot be understood apart. When one dies, one is dispersed to the universe and this is never an end but the beginning of a different sort of being.

I have maintained that the similarity between the philosophy of Heidegger and Zen Buddhism is quite striking at first sight. Yet, under closer scrutiny, one realizes that they actually employ the notions of Being and Nothing quite differently. Heidegger indeed seems to share with Zen Buddhism certain common insights regarding the concepts of Nothingness and Being. Furthermore, the importance of the Heideggerian philosophy within the history of philosophy is found in his remarkable step-back from the common traditional assumptions pertaining to the nature of philosophical inquiry in the Western world. Because of this step, the Heideggerian philosophy is commonly regarded to be akin to the Eastern thought, Zen Buddhism in particular. The fact of the matter, however, is that besides all these similarities, there are also crucial differences, which must be taken into account carefully before one jumps to premature or superficial conclusions.

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