

ZEN IN HEIDEGGER'S WAY

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***Abstract:** I argue that historical and comparative analyses of Heidegger and Zen Buddhism are motivated by three simple ideas: 1) Zen is uncompromisingly non-metaphysical; 2) its discourse is poetic and non-rational; and 3) it aims to provoke a radical transformation in the individual, not to provide a theoretical proof or demonstration of theses about the mind and/or the world. To sketch this picture of Heidegger's thought, I draw on the two texts from his later work that command the most attention from commentator's seeking resonance with Zen, and discuss how his treatments of death, fallenness, facticity, and temporality in *Being and Time* square with Zen philosophy. Finally, I critique Heidegger's ambivalence about the possibility of overcoming language barriers and reticence to prescribe concrete practices aimed at triggering the profound shift in thinking he clearly believed Western culture to be so desperately in need of.*

IN THE INTRODUCTION to an edition of essays by D.T Suzuki, the foremost ambassador of Zen Buddhism to the intellectual West, William Barrett mentions an anecdote that has generated a significant amount of scholarship about Heidegger's connection to Buddhism. Barrett reports: "A German friend of Heidegger told me that one day when he visited Heidegger he found him reading one of Suzuki's books; 'If I understand this man correctly,' Heidegger remarked, 'this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings'" (Barrett, 1956, xi). The truth of this story is unverifiable and irrelevant, but Barrett considers its moral undeniable:

For what is Heidegger's final message but that Western philosophy is a great error, the result of the dichotomizing intellect that has cut man off from unity with Being itself and from his own being.... Heidegger repeatedly tells us that this tradition of the West has come to the end of its cycle; and as he says this, one can only gather that he himself has already stepped beyond that tradition. Into the tradition of the Orient? I should say he has come pretty close to Zen (Barrett, 1956, xii).

In the spirit of this controversial claim, and in light of a host of similar and possibly apocryphal anecdotes, many scholars have undertaken historical and comparative analyses of Heidegger and Asian philosophy (especially Taoism and Zen Buddhism) apparently on the gamble that where there is smoke, there is fire. The existence of this "fire" is predicated, I submit, on three simple ideas: 1) Taoism and Zen are uncompromisingly non-metaphysical¹; 2) their discourses are highly poetic and

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¹Of course, some may claim that there is an implicit ontology or metaphysics entailed by Taoism and Zen. In any case, it is safe to say that the two traditions take a pragmatic approach in which the drive toward metaphysics—in the sense of a theory about reality—is a hindrance that draws us away from the richness of experience.

decidedly non-rational; and 3) they aim to provoke a radical transformation in the individual that forever alters his comportment toward himself, others, and the world, not to provide a theoretical proof or demonstration of theses about the mind and/or the world. In this essay I will focus specifically on what role, if any, the Zen tradition plays in Heidegger's early and later thought, with occasional references to Taoist themes.

The exploration of the nature of the Heidegger-Buddhism connection project has, roughly, taken at least one of two paths: influence² or resonance. While the hunt for an esoteric reading of any thinker is at best dangerous and at worst foolish, we are obligated to approach Heidegger armed with his own hermeneutical principle of retrieve, which William Richardson describes thus: "to retrieve, which is to say what an author did not say, could not say, but somehow made manifest" (Richardson, 2003, 159). Dismissing the question of influence as moot and judging the evidence to be either indirect, inconclusive, or non-existent, commentators such as Graham Parkes have instead argued for a "pre-established harmony" between Heidegger's thought as a whole and core tenets of Taoist and Buddhist philosophy. This claim presupposes the accuracy of William Richardson's thesis that Heidegger's works constitute a coherent, unified whole — a thesis verified by Heidegger himself.³ Fashioning *Being and Time* as the last hurrah of metaphysics, the project whose residual metaphysics Heidegger came to recant, the argument for pre-established harmony sees in the existential analytic the fledgling formulations of a notion of selfhood and world that is quite alien to the Western tradition and rather congenial to Eastern thinking, a notion perhaps best described as nonduality. This residual metaphysics is repeated throughout Heidegger's works along the lines of the ontological difference between Being and beings, and constitutes an ambivalence over which scholars are still squabbling. This ambivalence, I hope to demonstrate, is demonstrated by Heidegger's reticence to prescribe any concrete practices for triggering the radical shift in thinking he labored to galvanize. Heidegger appears to warn us that blithely attempting to step outside of and transcend one's tradition, situation, and heritage, a prospect so tempting and even advantageous in today's world, might very well land us in even

²The search for direct influence is less often attempted, and with good reason. Few would likely object to the charge that Heidegger suffered from a chronic case of the so-called "anxiety of influence." If he was in fact influenced by Asian texts, he was even less bibliographically responsible towards them as he was towards his Western intellectual forebears. Even the most rigorous attempt to recover the "missing links" between Heidegger and the East — Reinhard May's well pleaded case for the "hidden sources" in the former's work — fails to turn up any evidence that would definitively indict the plaintiff. Despite a few off-hand remarks about Lao-Tzu and the Tao in his later works, the conversation with a Japanese inquirer included in *On the Way to Language*, his unfinished translation of the *Tao Te Ching* with Japanese Germanist Paul Tsiao, and occasional mentions of Taoism and Buddhism in correspondence, Heidegger says nothing about Asian texts and/or thinkers having a substantial affect on his thinking.

³See Heidegger's letter to Richardson in the Preface: "...even the initial steps of the Being-question in *Being and Time* thought is called upon to undergo a change whose movement corresponds to a reversal.... the basic question of *SZ* is not in any sense abandoned by reason of the reversal" (xviii). *Being and Time* is hereafter abbreviated as *SZ*.

greater inauthentic peril than we were beforehand. However, by circumscribing the limits of his tradition and designating which practices are off limits and which are not, Heidegger, I argue, ultimately reifies “the West.”

In other words, neither the branches of the Western Enlightenment (Rationalism from Descartes to Hegel and Romanticism from Rousseau to Nietzsche) nor the roots of Greek philosophy provided Heidegger with what he was looking for, and I suggest that Asian philosophy in general and Zen in particular offer a corrective in the way of *praxis* to the very lopsidedness of *theoria* that Heidegger labored to amend. To sketch this picture of Heidegger's thought, I briefly point out texts from both his early and later work that recommend comparison with key issues in Zen. First, I will draw on the two texts from Heidegger's later work that command the most attention from commentator's seeking for Eastern resonance. Second, I discuss how Heidegger's treatment of death, fallenness, facticity, and temporality in *SZ* squares with Zen philosophy. Finally, I submit a critique of Heidegger's aforementioned ambivalence about the possibility of overcoming language barriers and reticence to prescribe concrete practices aimed at triggering the profound shift in thinking he clearly believed Western culture to be so desperately in need of.

I. Two Dialogues

A. *The Nature of Thinking: “Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking”*⁴

It is easy to plumb Heidegger's later works and cherry pick passages that could have been plucked straight from the *Tao Te Ching*. The subtle, poetic flavor of this primary work of Chinese Taoism easily lends itself to later Heidegger's notion of “poetic dwelling.” Since both Taoism and Zen operate from a decidedly non-metaphysical comportment, and prefer poetic and paradoxical forms of expression that intentionally thwart logical analysis and discursive reasoning, it is easy to see why many scholars have been struck by their similarity to later Heidegger's experiments with language. Indeed, Otto Pöggeler, one of Heidegger's most able and respected German commentators, charges that the *Tao Te Ching* played a crucial role in the development of Heidegger's later thought (Parkes, 1987).

Be that as it may (or may not), the stylistic similarities between two thinkers or two philosophical systems can all too easily seduce us into passing over the real and irrevocable differences that force them apart. This is especially dangerous in Heidegger's case, since the recurrent character of his later attempts at reformulating the question of Being are aimed precisely at unseating the very notion of there *being* a master narrative, a complete system, a coherent body of doctrine. As David Loy observes: “It is not possible to discuss Heidegger's system because, like Nagarjuna, he has none. For Heidegger thinking is not a means to gain knowledge but both the path and the destination” (Loy, 1988, 164).⁵ All is always already way, and that seems

⁴Hereafter abbreviated as *CP*.

⁵David Loy, *Nonduality*, 164. I will return to Loy's comparison of Nagarjuna's and Heidegger's methodology in section 1B.

to be all that we are allowed to say about the matter — there can be no calculation or meaningful organization, sequence, or pattern to the various way-stations, moments, or thoughts that occur along the way. Reflecting on one of his own “moments” — *Being and Time* itself — Heidegger remarked: “I have forsaken an earlier position, not to exchange it for another, but because even the former position was only a pause on the way. What lasts in thinking is the way” (Dialogue, 1971, 12). Compare D.T. Suzuki:

All Zen’s outward manifestations or demonstrations must never be regarded as final. They just indicate the way where to look for facts. Therefore these indicators are important, we cannot do well without them. But once caught in them, which are like entangling meshes, we are doomed; for Zen can never be comprehended (Barrett, 1956, 21).

The Zen analogue to Heidegger’s notion of “preoccupation with beings” (*CP*) or “entanglement” (*SZ*) is *tanha*, popularly translated somewhat misleadingly as “desire.” A more proper rendering would be “attachment” or “clinging” to phenomena. To seize upon the flux and freeze Being/*Tao* in its tracks, to attempt to master, fix, or cling to it with language or logic, is, Heidegger believes, the mistake and miscalculation of Western metaphysics. Being just sort of “does its own thing,” and we are inexorably caught up in its sway. Our best bet is to release ourselves to this Being-process, not in the sense of demurring or “giving way” to it, but offering or ourselves up to it as servants. Two of later Heidegger’s works stand out due to their formal character: the *CP* and the *DL*. The dialogue is an ideal site for interrogating and pinning down the core of Heidegger’s later thought, and thus apprehending what kinship it may have with Taoist and Zen thought, because it is flexible enough to contain both rational and poetic discourse. That is, it suffers neither from the constraints of monologic — the metaphysics of subjectivity (inaugurated by Descartes and repeated by Sartre) laced within *SZ* that Heidegger eventually came to recant — nor from the vagary of poetic saying, yet provides a space in which both can have their say. Peter Kreeft usefully qualifies this as “a highly disciplined, exacting kind of poetry,” a kind of saying that, Heidegger thinks, is more rigorous than and indeed makes possible rational discourse itself (Kreeft, 1971, 521).⁶ In this section, I draw on these two dialogues in order to show the congruence of Heidegger’s later thought with some basic Zen tenets.

The *CP* is held between a scientist, a scholar, and a teacher. These three figures speak, respectively, for three basic compartments toward or from Being. The first is

⁶Peter Kreeft, “Zen in Heidegger’s *Gelassenheit*,” 542. Rational discourse in the form of mathematics or logic may very well excel at precision, exactness, and clarity, yet these qualities obtain validity *only within their proper domains*, that is, their validity claims are region-specific. In “What Is Metaphysics?” (hereafter *WIM?*) Heidegger writes: “No particular way of treating objects of inquiry dominates the others. Mathematical knowledge is no more rigorous than philosophical-historical knowledge. It merely has the character of ‘exactness,’ which does not coincide with rigor.” The rub is that Heidegger’s way of thinking is not a “particular way of treating objects”; nor is Zen (*Basic Writings*, 94).

the *Dasein* who is blind to the phenomenon of the world. This is the objectifying stance criticized in *SZ*, the monological Scientist curious about and transfixed by phenomena, asleep to his own unheeded intentional compartments to the world. The Scientist disenchants the world by dissecting it with analytical reason and foisting his own conceptual straightjackets on things with a view to seizing their "essence," and thus takes things, literally, only on his own terms. In Division II of *SZ* this compartment is described as "making-present."

The second compartment is the Scholar, who represents *Dasein* as awakening to and reflecting on the existential-ontological structures that govern its engagement with the world and, by rendering itself transparent to those structures, seizing itself in its freedom unto death, toward its ownmost end and ultimate possibility. This is the "authentic" compartment championed in Division II, which enacts a non-conceptual way of thinking and assumes a place in and towards Being, yet draws up short at the transcendental horizon of temporality. The "way in which ecstatic temporality temporalizes," what makes the projection of *Dasein*'s existence possible, indeed, whether and how "time manifests itself as the horizon of Being" is what calls for interpretation (Heidegger, 1962, 488). Yet interpretation, by definition, cannot overstep that very horizon, because meaning and sense can only be made and registered on this "side" of the temporal "border." The project to think toward being thus fails, and *Dasein* is cast back upon itself in its having-been, and this calls for a new approach. This is the state of the Scholar, who has pushed rational discourse to its limit, and is left wanting and waiting for some clue as to how to proceed on the way towards Being.

The third figure, that of the Teacher, embodies a disposition unrepresented yet certainly hinted at in *SZ: Gelassenheit*. Whereas the prior two positions were subjectivistic insofar as they thought *toward* Being, the Teacher endeavors to think *from* Being, to keep silent about and wait for the temporalizing of ecstatic temporality — here called the "regioning" of "that-which-regions" — but not in such a way as to be frustrated by the lack of an answer, to be stymied about failing to find the words or concepts with which to interpret or locate the meaning of Being. The Teacher's discourse is thus properly characterized as trans-logical.

Gelassenheit is not "giving up"; still less it is "cracking the code" of Being. As the translators note, "[*Gelassenheit*] is thinking which allows content to emerge within awareness, thinking which is open to content...meditative thinking begins with an awareness of the field within which these objects are, an awareness of the horizon rather than of those objects of ordinary understanding" (Heidegger, 1966, 24). More specifically, Heidegger is claiming that all thinking *necessarily* begins this way, and so a thinking that explicitly acknowledges this fact enjoys a more primordial relationship with Being, and therefore with thought itself. This necessity is neither logical nor causal, nor it is contained in the nature of a substance called "human being." Indeed, Heidegger makes it clear at the start that "the question concerning man's nature is not a question about man" (Ibid., 1966, 58). To go against this grain and attempt to calculate, plan, plot, represent, or frame Being in any totalizing manner is thus at once a perversion of both Being and thinking. This is surely why, as Peter

Kreeft points out, “Heidegger uses a word designating what Being *does* (“regions”) rather than what it *is*” (Kreeft, 1971, 543).

To be released toward things is to wait upon Being.⁷ “Waiting” itself is defined two ways in the *CP*. These two definitions are tightly bound to the two conceptions of time contrasted in *SZ*. The first is the ordinary practice of “waiting for” things, events, occasions, etc. This waiting toward things is grounded in a making present which neutralizes the future *qua* possibility by interpreting it merely within the narrow scope of the desires, goals, and objectives of the present, following the rigid dictates of the schedule, the calendar, or the scheme. This fixing of the future is at once the constriction of the present, robbing the present of its possibility and significance by interpreting the “now” as a solipsized point in a succession of nows that is separated from the object that Dasein awaits. The ecstatic structures are thus dissociated and/or repressed, Dasein disperses itself among and invests itself in its worldly entanglements, and it fails to hold itself together precisely by rushing around trying to fix and control things; Dasein is ready for nothing because it is trying to be ready for everything, foreclosing its possibilities by trying to plan for all of them. The structures of involvement delineated in Division I of *SZ* — the “for-the-sake-of-which,” the “in-order-to,” etc. — correlate roughly with this notion of “waiting for.”

The second definition of waiting, “waiting upon,” is practiced without the expectation of the fulfillment of an intention. Indeed, it is characterized by the lack of any such intention. This cessation of intentional relations is indicative of an erosion of any notion of a “subject” with will, desire, self-sameness, and a shift in the locus of identity and the seat of action towards Being and away from Dasein. As the Scholar remarks: “the relation between that-which-regions [i.e., Being] and releasement, *if it can still be considered a relation*, can be thought of neither as ontic nor as ontological,” only, adds the teacher, “as regioning” (Heidegger, 1966, 76).⁸ There is thus a shift in the language Heidegger uses to describe the matter of the conversation: not the “meaning of Being” (*SZ*) but the “nature of thinking.”⁹ To wait upon Being thus connotes service. The active connotations of freedom, authentication, individuation, and seizing one’s destiny that color *SZ* give way to more passive notions of serving, waiting, allowing, etc. Put differently: there is a shift in emphasis from existentiality to facticity, from man’s *projecting* to Being’s *throwing*.

Yet those so released are not merely “slaves” of Being. The Scientist observes that releasement “is in no way a matter of weakly allowing things to slide and drift

⁷The translator makes a qualification: “Waiting upon does not evoke Being, even though the suggestion is that if anything responded to such waiting, it would be Being” (Conversation, 23). The point here is that Heidegger does not mean to say that waiting upon automatically establishes some direct pipeline to Being—Being here denotes No-thing, that is, none of the objects that arise, linger within, and pass out of the clearing that is Dasein, none of the things that significantly register *as* things for and within Dasein’s concerned circumspection.

⁸*CP*, 76, my italics. I wish to emphasize how Heidegger here problematizes the language of “relation” between Dasein and Being, because the latter two notions are destabilized, their duality called into question.

⁹The nature of thinking, in turn, gives way to the nature of language. Note the shift, or drift, of the object of inquiry: from Being to Thought to Language. See the discussion of the *DL* below.

along,” and “lies beyond the distinction between activity and passivity” (Heidegger, 1966, 61). Heidegger is not condoning an ascetic denial of world and will along the lines of Schopenhauer’s pessimism; releasement is most definitely not a renunciation that “floats in the realm of unreality and nothingness” (Heidegger, 1966, 80). Similarly, Suzuki dismissed the popular view which identifies the philosophy of Schopenhauer with Buddhism. According to this view, the Buddha is supposed to have taught the negation of the will to live, which was insisted upon by the German pessimist, but nothing is further from the correct understanding of Buddhism than this negativism. The Buddha did not consider the will blind, irrational, and therefore to be denied; what he really denies is the notion of ego-entity due to Ignorance, from which notion come craving, attachment to things impermanent, and the giving way to egoistic impulses (Barrett, 1956, 157).

Anticipatory resoluteness still has a place within releasement: “one needs to understand ‘resolve’ as it is understood in *Being and Time*: as the opening of man *particularly* undertaken by him *for* openness...which we think of as that-which-regions” (Heidegger, 1966, 81). Again, we are not permitted to think of openness as something “out there” ontologically separate from Dasein, since we have been told explicitly that terms such as ontic, ontological, relation, and thing either no longer apply in the former sense, or no longer apply, period. The type of comportment Heidegger champions is thus active in so far as it calls for an adjustment in Dasein’s attunement, but not in the sense of operating upon any object in the world-horizon with a view toward engineering a different and desired state of affairs. Heidegger thus refers to it as a “trace of willing”; it is passive insofar as it holds itself steadfast in light of the knowledge that none of its actions can directly “get through” to Being and, more importantly, it ceases to resent or repress this inescapable fact (Heidegger, 1966, 51).¹⁰ As Peter Kreeft points out, a higher acting is concealed in releasement than is found in all the actions within the world.... Not only do we become supremely (though effortlessly) active as a result of releasement, but we must exercise the most strenuous activity in order to reach its inactivity, much as the Zen monk must beat his head against the stone wall of his koan with all his energy until his head splits and his brains spill out into the universe where they belong (Kreeft, 1971, 553).¹¹

¹⁰Compare this notion of a “trace of willing” to a well-known passage from Dogen’s *Genjokoan*: “To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by the myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.” Quoted by Loy in *A Buddhist History of the West*, 7.

¹¹Kreeft, 533. Below I will return to Suzuki’s admonition that we must not neglect the uncompromisingly masculine, Erotic, transcending aspect of this affair, and relate to early Heidegger’s phallic language of freedom, resolve, and authenticity, language which really is just jargon if not supported by a set of practices that bring forth and habituate the primordial experience that is repressed and forgotten by the They-self. Zen counsel’s the annihilation of the They-self, yet early Heidegger deems this impossible. Why? Because, as he later noted, his existential structuralism was too *static* and unyielding.

Heidegger is clear on this point: “Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery never happen of themselves. They do not befall us accidentally. Both flourish only through persistent, courageous thinking” (Heidegger, 1966, 56). On a similar note, Joan Stambaugh remarks that “Heidegger’s idea of *Austrag* (perdurance, sustained endurance) bears a striking resemblance to Dogen’s ‘sustained exertion,’ the ‘highest form of exertion, which goes on unceasingly in cycles from the first dawning of religious truth, through the test of discipline and practice, to enlightenment and *Nirvana*.’ These two related ideas both implicitly have to do with time” (Stambaugh, 1987, 285). American Zen *roshi* Richard Baker once remarked that *satori*, or enlightenment, is an accident, and that meditation makes one accident prone. Meditation (*zazen*) is the preparation, the work that renders the self receptive to *satori* but does not directly trigger it. Speaking about the notion of “waiting upon,” Kreeft notes: “Like a Zen master, Heidegger does not tell us what to do, only what not to do. And in response to the natural question complaining of the resulting disorientation, he intensifies instead of relieving the disorientation, again like a Zen master” (Kreeft, 1971, 535). In a crucial but qualified sense, there is a process of spiritual “development” in Zen, but it not a teleological process. Zen practice is not the cultivation of positive qualities or characteristics; it is not about conditioning, but about deconditioning — hence, what *not* to do. The Zen analogue of releasement is “non-attachment,” and its purpose is not to crush and stifle the thought-process, but to let all phenomena—sensory perceptions, emotional tensions, concepts, etc. — simply go, to liquidate one’s cognitive assets, to *exhaust* the discursive mind, and gradually cease to identify with any bodily (gross) or mental (subtle) “substance”, until the bodymind itself is “dropped.”

Before leaving the *CP*, it is important to mention the discussion of ego, experiment, and the Being-process contained therein. Heidegger’s end of philosophy is really just the end of philosophy *as* the mirror of nature,¹² the end of a conception

¹²Two passages from *WIM* powerfully drive this idea home: “If the power of the intellect in the field of inquiry into the nothing and into Being is thus shattered, then the destiny of the reign of ‘logic’ in philosophy is thereby decided. The idea of ‘logic’ itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning.” (105) Compare Suzuki: “[Zen] does not challenge logic, it simply walks its own path of facts, leaving all the rest to their own fates. It is only when logic neglecting its proper functions tries to step into the track of Zen [or, for Heidegger, tries to soberly and seriously dismiss the nothing] that it loudly proclaims its principles and forcibly drives out the intruder.” (21) “We can of course think the whole of beings in an ‘idea,’ then negate what we have imagined in our thought, thus ‘think’ it negated.” In this way do we attain the formal concept of the imagined nothing but never the nothing itself. . . , the objections of the intellect would call a halt to our search, whose legitimacy, however, can be demonstrated only on the basis of a *fundamental experience of the nothing*” (99, my italics). I want to emphasize that Zen, as Suzuki indicates, has a decidedly more “laissez-faire” attitude toward reason; it is only when reason purports to extend its validity claims beyond its proper sphere that problems ensue. Heidegger’s antagonism toward calculative thinking, I am claiming here, is somewhat exaggerated and fails to recognize the positive aspects of reason, aspects which, in fact, provide him with the space to sight his quarry.

of science that regarded itself as unconditioned but was actually, according to Heidegger, only a historical emergence:

Scientist: "When I decided in favor of the methodological type of analysis in the physical sciences, you said that this way of looking at it was historical.... Now I see what was meant. The program of mathematics and the experiment are grounded in the relation of man as ego to the thing as object." *Teacher*: "They even constitute this relation in part and unfold its historical character.... The historical consists in that-which-regions.... It rests in what, coming to pass in man, regions him into his nature" (Heidegger, 1966, 79).

Thus the "ego" and its project of measuring, classifying, and discovering the world *emerged* over time, yet it tries to burn its birth certificate and cover up its contingency by grounding itself in some transcendent Other.

Two passages from *WIM?* powerfully capture the relationship between reason and the nothing, the egoic and the trans-egoic, the logical and the trans-logical: "If the power of the intellect in the field of inquiry into the nothing and into Being is thus shattered, then the destiny of the reign of 'logic' in philosophy is thereby decided. The idea of 'logic' itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning" (Heidegger, 1977, 105). Compare Suzuki: "[Zen] does not challenge logic, it simply walks its own path of facts, leaving all the rest to their own fates. It is only when logic neglecting its proper functions tries to step into the track of Zen [or, for Heidegger, tries to soberly and seriously dismiss the nothing] that it loudly proclaims its principles and forcibly drives out the intruder" (Barrett, 1956, 21). Heidegger:

We can of course think the whole of beings in an 'idea,' then negate what we have imagined in our thought, thus 'think' it negated." In this way do we attain the formal concept of the imagined nothing but never the nothing itself... the objections of the intellect would call a halt to our search, whose legitimacy, however, can be demonstrated only on the basis of a *fundamental experience of the nothing* (Heidegger, 1977, 99). I want to emphasize that Zen, as Suzuki indicates, has a decidedly more "laissez-faire" attitude toward reason: it is only when reason purports to extend its validity claims beyond its proper sphere that problems ensue. Heidegger's antagonism toward calculative thinking, I am claiming here, is somewhat exaggerated and fails to recognize the positive aspects of reason, aspects which, in fact, allot him the space to sight his quarry.

Heidegger initially regarded this birth of the ego as a deliberate choice made by a particular culture yet, as Michael Zimmerman points out, he eventually came to abandon this view and saw the rise of calculative thinking as but another regioning of that-which-regions.¹³ This "Being-centric" view is operative as early as 1929 when

¹³ "Heidegger, Buddhism, and Deep Ecology," 247. Zimmerman writes: "While early Heidegger sometimes spoke as if the 'objectifying' tendencies of modernity were a result of humanity's tendency to conceal deeper truths, he later concluded that the objectifying scientific view did not result from any human decision or weakness, but was instead a proper part of the

Heidegger speaks in *WIM?* of “the direction from which alone the nothing can come to us,” and declares that “the nothing itself nihilates,” and that this is the basis of any affirmation or negation, i.e., any logical predication, on the part of humans” (Heidegger, 1977, 98, 103).¹⁴ Zen could not agree more with the latter part of this sentence, yet I need to point out a crucial difference. Heidegger approaches the emergence of the ego from what we might call its decidedly *phylogenetic* dimension — as a kind of thinking in whose grip the West has unfolded and by whose limitations its has been constrained. Zen, however, focuses on the ontogenetic dimension through a set of pointing out instructions that get the individual to realize and disarm the self-contractions, interpretative projections, and karmic patterns that distort his experiences of himself, others, and the world.¹⁵ Zen is concerned with acquainting the individual with the genealogy of his or her own ego and breaking the spell of self-separateness. Moreover, Zen would find later Heidegger’s tendency to ascribe agency to Being/Nothing itself as bizarre and as harboring a residual dualism.

B. The Nature of Language: “The Language Barrier” and “Planetary Thinking”

While Zen generally avoids philosophy — at least in its representational mode — and focuses on transformative practices, this is not to say that it has no philosophical heritage or support. If we were forced to distill a systematic Buddhist apologetics from the Eastern philosophical tradition that serves as the philosophical roots of Zen, it would probably be “negative dialectic.” The negative dialectic was put forth as a philosophical-pedagogical method by the second century Mahayana Buddhist thinker Nagarjuna, and it is the founding idea of Zen methodology to this day. Like Heidegger’s later writings, which scrupulously guard against any lapse into lazy metaphysical thinking by vigilantly reframing the question of the meaning of Being, negative dialectic is supremely practical in that it refuses to let any positive statement about the Absolute/Emptiness/Being stand and coagulate into a stale and rigid dogma, because the experience¹⁶ in question — *satori*, i.e., Enlightenment — is meaning- and content-less. I am referring to Heidegger’s nearly constant efforts to shift the terms of the debate to combat and dispel the forgetfulness that comes to obscure the originary experience of Being out of which metaphysics arises and by which it is possible in the first place. Richardson gives one such example: the effort to lay bare the foundations

technological disclosure of entities, a disclosure that was itself a dimension of the ‘destiny of being.’”

¹⁴*BW*, 98, 103. He clearly says that the nothing precedes and possibilizes “the negation and the not.”

¹⁵Of course, this is not to say that Zen is blind to the cultural baggage that constitutes a considerable swath of the fabric of one’s karmic inheritance. Zen highlights that stilling the mind allows one to awaken, for the first time, to the mad cacophony of idle talk babbled by the They-self.

¹⁶Strictly speaking, *satori* is not an experience, which presupposes a subject and an object, but rather the ground of all experience. It is interesting, indeed, that Heidegger renounces all such language having to do with “experience,” “consciousness,” the “I/Thou experience,” etc. He claims to have left this “metaphysical site” behind when he entered into the “hermeneutic relation of the two-fold.” That is precisely why phenomenology is left behind. *DL*, 36.

of ontology was called in the early years “fundamental ontology,” but after 1929 the word disappears completely. In 1949 we are told why: the word “ontology”...makes it too easy to understand the grounding of metaphysics as simply an ontology of a higher sort, whereas ontology of a higher sort, which is but another name for metaphysics, must be left behind completely (Richardson, 2003, 15).

As Zimmerman points out, Nagarjuna likewise feared that his message would be distorted into a “metaphysics of experience” and struggled to resist this reifying tendency: “Nagarjuna warned that conceiving of absolute nothingness as such a transcendental origin would lead to a metaphysics of sunyata and, inevitably, to a new kind of dualism” (Zimmerman, 1993, 253). Ken Wilber summarizes Nagarjuna's position: above all, for Nagarjuna, absolute reality (Emptiness) is radically Nondual (advaya) — in itself is neither self nor no-self, neither atman nor anatman, neither permanent nor momentary/flux. His dialectical analysis is designed to show that all such categories, being profoundly dualistic, make sense only in terms of each other and are thus nothing in themselves (Wilber, 2000, 719). Later, I will show how this so-called “apophatic” approach most certainly does not mean, however, that language is abandoned in Zen; fingers can and must be pointed, so long as they are not taken for the moon itself.

Consider Suzuki's account of the Buddha's own historical situation: At the time of the introduction of Zen into China, most of the Buddhists were addicted to the discussion of highly metaphysical questions, or satisfied with the merely observing of the ethical precepts laid down by the Buddha or with the leading of a lethargic life entirely absorbed in the contemplation of the evanescence of things worldly. They all missed apprehending the great fact of life itself, which flows altogether outside of these vain exercises of the intellect and the imagination (Barrett, 1956, 20).

Five words should be highlighted here: addiction, satisfaction, lethargy, absorption, and vanity. What is Suzuki portraying but an intellectually soporific climate of metaphysical abstraction and ascetic detachment that, shall we say, induced a collective forgetfulness of Being? This suggests that Heidegger's basic claims — whether about the status of the question of the meaning of Being in Western culture, the Being-process itself, or the nature of thinking/language — need not and cannot be confined and applied exclusively to the West.

In the “Letter on Humanism” Heidegger writes that “‘subject’ and ‘object’ are inappropriate terms of metaphysics, which very early on in the form of Occidental ‘logic’ and ‘grammar’ seized control of the interpretation of language. We today can only begin to descry what is concealed in that occurrence” (Quoted by Loy, 166). In the *DL*, Heidegger works to chip away at this Euro-/logo-centrism by making language itself the object of the dialogue, rather than “the meaning of Being” (*SZ*) or “the nature of thinking” (*CP*). The dialogue takes place between an Inquirer — Heidegger himself — and a Japanese Germanist whom we now know to have been Tezuka Tomio. The *DL* is based on a real conversation that took place roughly thirty years prior to Heidegger's reconstruction. In “An Hour with Heidegger,” Tomio recounts his conversation with Heidegger: “When I mentioned ‘the open’ as a possible translation of *ku* (emptiness) [or, in Sanskrit, *sunyata*]... [Heidegger] was pleased

indeed! ‘East and West,’ he said, ‘must engage in dialogue at this deep level. It is useless to do interviews that merely deal with one superficial phenomenon after another’” (May, 1996, 62).

Referring to previous discussions with one “Count Kuki,” Heidegger confesses: “The danger of our dialogues was hidden in language itself, not in *what* we discussed, nor in the *way in which* we tried to do so” (Heidegger, 1971, 4). The Japanese replies: “The language of the dialogue constantly destroyed the possibility of saying what the dialogue was about” (Heidegger, 1971, 5). The connection to Nagarjuna’s negative dialectic should be obvious. David Loy succinctly sums this up: “any theory of nonduality, if it is to retain the prescriptive aspect of the nondual philosophies, must be paradoxical and self-negating” (Loy, 1988, 176). Whether or not Heidegger’s thought can rightly be classified as “nondual,” a topic I will return to, is certainly problematic; as Loy notes, he certainly “affirms a paradox of thinking and no-thinking,” yet his focus on the “descriptive aspect” and failure to include a “prescriptive aspect,” as I will discuss below, is what ultimately sets him apart from the nondual traditions of Zen, Nagarjuna’s *Madyamika*, and Taoism.

One exchange in the *DL* details an actual historical example of how the metaphysical handicap of Western languages bungled the interpretation of Heidegger’s ideas. The Japanese asserts that “we in Japan understood at once your lecture [*WIM?*] when it became available to us in 1930.... We marvel to this day how the Europeans could lapse into interpreting as nihilistic the nothingness of which you speak in that lecture. To us, emptiness is the loftiest name for what you mean to say with the word ‘Being’” (Heidegger, 1971, 19). The “nihilistic nothingness” alluded to here is basically the “Sartrean” nothingness which Heidegger took to be a serious distortion of his work; indeed, the very title of Sartre’s magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*, is emblematic of this confusion. As William Barrett discusses in detail in his study of existentialism, *Irrational Man*, this crucial difference — between “nothingness” and “nothingness” — is very much the iron curtain between East and West” (Barrett, 1958, 233-4, 285). The passage quoted above also draws out a more general but hardly vague or insignificant point: Heidegger’s philosophy powerfully influenced the Japanese intellectual culture of the time, a culture thoroughly versed in and informed by the Zen Buddhist tradition.¹⁷ The Japanese have produced no less than seven translations of *Being and Time*.

It is worthwhile comparing Heidegger’s non-Western no-thingness with what Suzuki has to say about “emptiness” or *sunyata*, which he claims is one of the hardest words for which to find an English equivalent: “[*Sunyata*] is not a postulated idea. It is what makes the existence of anything possible, but it is not to be conceived immanently, as if it lay hidden in or under every existence as an independent entity. A world of relativities is set on and in *sunyata*.... The doctrine of *sunyata* is neither

¹⁷For a remarkably thorough account of the young Heidegger’s correspondence with prominent Japanese philosophers, such as Tanabe Hajime and Kuki Shuzo, all of whom were practitioners of Zen Buddhism, see Graham Parkes, “Rising Sun Over Black Forest,” *HHS*, 79-117. Parkes argues more compellingly than any other commentator that Heidegger was substantially influenced by Zen ideas as developed by members of the Kyoto School. His conclusion

an immanentalism nor a transcendentalism” (Barrett, 1956, 261). This is entirely consonant with later Heidegger’s abandonment of the language of “transcendence,” since this would imply some sort of “progress.” One cannot get “closer to” or “further from” *sunyata* via some process of intellection. Referring to a passage from *The Diamond Sutra*, Suzuki writes that Zen “means nothing less or more than a non-teleological interpretation of life” (Barrett, 1956, 265).¹⁸

While Heidegger admits that his naming of language as the “house of Being” was “clumsy,” he nevertheless maintains that “Europeans dwell in an entirely different house than Eastasian man,” and that “a dialogue from house to house remains nearly impossible” (Heidegger, 1971, 22).¹⁹ Heidegger’s position with regard to the possibility of “inter-house dialogue” is never made entirely clear, since, by this time, he has positively abandoned the allegedly metaphysical pitfall of attempting to occupy a definite position. This ambivalence over the potential overcoming of the language barrier is repeated in a message Heidegger sent to an East-West Philosopher’s Conference held in honor of his thought in 1969:

Again and again it has seemed urgent to me that a dialogue take place with the thinkers of what is to us the Eastern world.... The greatest difficulty in the enterprise always lies, as far as I can see, in the fact that with few exceptions there is no command of the Eastern languages in Europe or the United States.... [These doubts hold] equally for both European and East Asian language, and above all for the realm of their possible dialogue. Neither side can of itself open up and establish this realm (Quoted in May, 1996, 12-13).

In *The Question of Being*, Heidegger stresses that we are “obliged not to give up the effort to practice planetary thinking,” and that “there are in store for planetary building encounters for which participants are by no means equal today. This is equally true of the European and of the East Asiatic languages and, above all, for the area of possible conversation between them” (Quoted in Thompson, 1986, 235). As we saw above, in the *DL* Heidegger suggested to his Japanese counterpart — the *midst* of their conversation — that such a conversation is nearly impossible, yet here he proclaims that it is all but necessary. Heidegger’s skepticism over the possibility of trans-linguistic mutual understanding seems strange, especially since there are cases in which the Japanese clearly had a better intuitive grasp of his ideas than Western thinkers. Fencing off different language worlds as incommensurable is perhaps just as

¹⁸*Selected Writings*, 265. In the final section I will show how, despite shunning any notion of an Aristotelian teleology and its attendant substance metaphysics, or metaphysics of presence, Zen nevertheless has a conception of spiritual development, maturity, and authenticity. The crucial difference, I am claiming, between Zen and Heidegger is that the latter furnishes no intersubjective context by which the relative authenticity of persons can be legitimated. While are beings always already buddhas, they can fail to realize it. Zen supplies a technology through which that realization can be quickened, a tradition through which that insight can be handed down from mind to mind, a vertical, master-student relationship.

¹⁹*DL*, 5. Heidegger concedes to the Japanese that “Even the phrase ‘house of Being’ does not provide a concept of the nature of language.” (22)

dangerous as divvying people up according to a standard of authenticity/inauthenticity, because it naively treats “language worlds” as present-at-hand things, solipsized bubbles with clearly defined and impenetrable borders that develop in isolation from each other. Moreover, it is never made clear *how* such a transcendental insight can even be obtained by a being imprisoned *within* the confines of one such language world.

The Japanese in the *DL* — who, we must recall, actually bothered to undertake the task of learning an Occidental language — remarks that “while I was translating, I often felt as though I were wandering back and forth between two different language realities, such that at moments a radiance shone on me which let me sense that the wellspring of reality from which those two fundamentally different languages arise was the same” (Heidegger, 1971, 24). From this, Heidegger concludes that the Japanese did not seek to yoke both languages under a “general concept,” which would be precisely to try and draw one language — the Eastasian — under the rubric of another — he Occidental. In light of this, the two speakers agree that the “same” referred to above can only be “hinted” at. And though Heidegger’s “exacting poetry” is geared toward just such a hinting and is meant to thwart the metaphysical designs of such a “general concept,” he says at the outset of the *DL* that he desires “the assurance that European-Western saying and Eastasian saying will enter into a dialogue such that in it there sings something that wells up from a single source” (Heidegger, 1971, 8).

This lingering attachment to language is what demarcates Heidegger from Zen. As John Caputo points out,

The essential being (*Wesen*) of Zen is an experience which is translated directly, from mind to mind, from master to disciple. Language for Zen is like a finger pointing to the moon; it must be disregarded in favor of a ‘direct pointing’ without fingers, or words.... That is why where Bodhidharma says, ‘No dependence upon words and letters,’ Heidegger says that language is the house of Being: ‘Where words give out no thing may be’ (Caputo, 1986, 216).

There is certainly some truth to this, though I do not think the difference is as stark as Caputo maintains. For one thing, from the Zen perspective, to be *dependent* upon words and to *use* words are quite different things. Interestingly enough, Heidegger remarks in the *DL* that “language is more powerful than we,” indicating that so long as we trade in tokens of whose meaning, weight, and origin we are ignorant, we are dependent on language. Do we not then achieve a kind of liberation *from* and attain a new relationship *to* language once we have awakened to its limitations and strive after a more authentic saying? Zen masters employ not only abrupt and abrasive pedagogical techniques such as slapping a student’s face or hitting him with a stick, but also an enigmatic, elusive, dissonant grammar, something very much like an “exacting poetry.” From Heidegger’s perspective, as I showed above, the naming of language as the house of Being is not to be taken too literally, and the quote Caputo cites to bolster his claim could easily have been uttered by a Zen master, in the sense

that “no thing” denotes “emptiness” or “no-mind.” David Loy captures the Heidegger-Zen relationship more adequately:

Heidegger, if not a philosopher, is still a thinker, which the Zen student is not.... both affirm a paradox which might be called “the thinking of no-thinking.” But they emphasize different aspects of it. In meditation, one is concerned to dwell in the silent, empty source from which thoughts spring; as thoughts arise, one ignores them and lets them go. Heidegger is interested in the thoughts arising from that source (Loy, 1988, 175).

As we saw in the *CP* above, Heidegger thinks that Being *needs* human beings, and this claim recurs in the *DL*: “the word ‘relation’ does want to say that man is in demand, that he belongs within a needfulness that claims him.... Hermeneutically, that is to say, with respect to bringing tidings, with respect to *preserving a message*” (Heidegger, 1971, 32). This is what Heidegger calls the “hermeneutic relation of the two-fold.” Where Zen is content to let thoughts go, Heidegger labors to preserve them in some form. Yet Zen would also concede that defending, preserving and transmitting the *dharma* is the utmost responsibility of those who have realized it; after all, that is the essence of the *bodhisattva*, the awakened being who vows to remain in *samsara* until all sentient beings are enlightened. This sounds suspiciously like “bringing tidings,” even though the final “message” is always a stranger to words and a frank declaration of what is always already the case. Suzuki elaborates: “Zen would not be Zen if it were deprived of all means of communication. Even silence is a means of communication; the Zen masters often resort to this method....The conceptualization of Zen is inevitable; Zen must have its philosophy. The only caution is not to identify Zen with a system of philosophy” (Barrett, 1956, 260-1). Indeed, as Heidegger and the Japanese agree in the *DL*, to be silent about silence itself would be truly authentic saying. This is surely what they are after in defining “dialogue” as “a focusing on the reality of language,” alluding to the sense in which silence is a positive mode of discourse, perhaps even its primordial mode.

II. The Meaning of Being: Early Indications in *Being and Time*

In this section I briefly explore how four themes in *SZ* — death, fallenness, facticity, and temporality — relate to Zen. Though there is no direct evidence that Heidegger was significantly influenced by Eastern thought in his pre-*SZ* phase,²⁰ this does not rule out the possibility that his early formulations demonstrate what Parkes calls a “pre-established harmony” with basic Taoist and Zen ideas. Reinhard May makes the strong claim that Heidegger’s notion of thinking-poeticizing received its (“silent”)

²⁰Theodore Kisiel reports: “About the closest that the young Heidegger got to Eastern Religions would have been through the book of one of his teachers, Richard Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen*. Otherwise, Heidegger was so caught up in his own struggles with Christianity, personal as well as theological, that he gave scant attention to the East” (Personal communication by e-mail).

directive...*from ancient Chinese thought* — for metaphysics, so conceived, was never developed there. Being neither indebted to an Aristotelian logic, nor receptive to an ontology involving a subject-object dichotomy, nor, above all, being conditioned by any theology, ancient Chinese thought was completely remote from the assertion of “eternal truths,” which belong according to Heidegger “to the residue of Christian theology that has still not been properly eradicated from philosophical problematic” (Heidegger, 1962, 229).

While May’s claim is backed up by an impressive body of evidence, that evidence is largely circumstantial,²¹ and it therefore fails to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Heidegger was directly influenced by Eastern thought from the beginning. What are the elements that contributed to Heidegger’s novel conception of death, and where did he obtain them from, if anywhere? In the footnotes to H249 in *SZ*, which outlines the investigation of death, Heidegger encourages the reader to consult Dilthey’s and Simmel’s writings on death, and to “compare especially Karl Jaspers’ *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*...especially pp. 259-270.... Jaspers takes as his clue to death the phenomenon of the ‘limit-situation’ as he has set in forth — a phenomenon whose fundamental significance goes beyond any typology of ‘attitudes’ and ‘world-pictures’” (Heidegger, 1962, 495). We are to understand by this that the full import of the “limit-situation” exceeds the bounds of any psychology, and is only properly approached from an existential-ontological perspective, which cannot *itself* by the subject of a typology and/or conceptual schematization, since it is the *ground* of all such categorizing. Nevertheless, as Parkes points out, “the concern with totality, an experiential relation to death, and the idea of death’s ‘entering into’ experience figure importantly in the existential conception of death that Heidegger would elaborate in *SZ*,” and all of these components are contained in the cited passages from Jaspers. Moreover, on page 262 of the same work, Jaspers commences a brief discussion of the Buddhist conception of death, framing it, Parkes observes, as “thoroughly nihilistic and pessimistic — an account apparently influenced by the (rather unreliable) interpretations given by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche: ‘Death and transitoriness give rise in the Buddhists to a drive for the eternal reign of the peace of nothingness’” (May, 1996, 265). The Buddhist path, Jaspers claims, is essentially a death cult bent on renunciation, quietism, indifference, and pessimism.

There are two points we should note here: one, Jaspers commits the classic Western fallacy, misinterpreting Buddhistic nothingness in precisely the same way most of Heidegger’s European interpreters would misunderstand his treatment of the Nothing in *WIM?*; and two, at this early stage, Heidegger was already aware of an Eastern interpretation of death, albeit a misinterpretation, and was at this time engaged in forging his own conception, a conception without precedents in the Western tradition. As Parkes relays, it was precisely the originality of Heidegger’s approach to death and nothingness within the Western tradition that prompted Kyoto School member Tanabe Hajime to attend his 1923 lecture course entitled “Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity,” and pen the first commentary on Heidegger’s work

²¹Circumstantial in the sense of being dependent on certain probabilities, e.g., when Heidegger may have read Buber’s translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, or a book on Zen.

ever published (*HHS*, 82). “Heidegger,” Parkes reports, “had ample occasion to be impressed by the visitor from Japan, having gladly acceded to his request for private tutorials in German philosophy” at a time when his existential conception of death was still fomenting (May, 1996, 82). In light of these circumstances, Parkes wagers that since Heidegger had written on Jaspers’ idea of death as a *Grenzsituation*, and read his discussion of the Buddhist attitude towards death, it is probable that this topic came up in his conversations with Tanabe. And if it did, Tanabe would have explained to him that the attitude toward death of the later (Mahayana) schools of Buddhism [e.g., Zen] is...positive and life-promoting — just as their understanding of nothingness is by no means nihilistic (May, 1996, 85).

The point here is that this understanding of nothingness, which Heidegger would hint at in *SZ* via the existential conception of death and sketch more explicitly in *WIM*? two years later, is found in none of the Western sources from which he drew, but was all but obvious to a Japanese thinker with whom he was in close consort. Ultimately, it is not important whether we regard this as a matter of direct influence or independent congruence, but the similarity cannot be denied. Heidegger’s discussion of death is similar to the Buddhist conception of death in several respects; ultimately, however, is it markedly different. Heidegger writes that temptation, tranquilization, and alienation are distinguishing marks of the kind of Being called “falling.” As falling, everyday Being-towards-death is a constant fleeing in the face of death. Being-towards-the-end has the mode of evasion in the face of it — giving explanations for it, understanding it inauthentically, and concealing it (Heidegger, 1962, 298).

Earlier on in Division I, he defines this “falling” clearly: “Falleness into the ‘world’ means an absorption in Being-with-one-another, in so far as the latter is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity.” The translators are specific: “The idea is rather of falling at the world or collapsing against it” (Heidegger, 1962, 220). So far, Zen is in basic agreement. The majority of the time humans stumble through life, invest their energies and hopes in objects, and flee from themselves by pretending to be familiar with themselves. Humans become addicted to and entangled with substances, and begin to interpret their sustenance and even salvation exclusively in terms of them. For Buddhism, the basis of all suffering (*dukkha*), including the fear of death, arises from *tanha* — from clinging to, investing oneself in, and ultimately identifying with transitory phenomena, with entities in the world. Heidegger’s notions of fallingness, entanglement, and dispersal are nearly identical.

As such, the so called “Great Death” — the dissolution of the ego — is deferred, and the self contracts, attaches itself to passing phenomena, and opts to die less radical and less painful deaths as all of the entities it clings to pass away. The Zen analogue of falling is ignorance. Out of a perceived lack, humans hustle about trying to attain security, comfort, and stability by hanging onto what they wrongly perceive to be real, persisting, genuine objects. The so-called “cycle of birth-and-death” (*samsara*), stripped of its mythological connotations of reincarnation, actually means being dependent on both outward objects *and* the sense of self-separateness, the ego. This is what Zen calls the “co-dependent arising” of phenomena, the self-contraction

that immediately generates *karma*, the chains of causation and patterns of influence that induce suffering. *Karma* is the Zen analogue of facticity; it refers to the various circumstances into which people are thrown, the “debts” they inherit and the limits by which they are bound. As such, people interpret their death in terms of release from such bondage, that is, they hope to be reborn with a clean slate, purged of all concupiscence. So by identifying with their *karma* — their feelings of lack, desire, limitation, etc., all of which are erroneously tied up with birth — they create a conception of death, which entails a futural rebirth, etc., *ad infinitum*.

The way out of *samsara* is to realize that the cycle is an illusion that is projected when the self objectifies both *karma* and *nirvana*, birth and death, bondage and freedom. For Zen, birth and death do not primarily denote physiological events; indeed, these are derivative, in much the same way that Heidegger claims that there are inauthentic, derivative modes of interpreting death or “end”, such as “stopping”, “getting finished”, “perishing”, and “demise” (Heidegger, 1962, 289-292). As such, Zen agrees with Heidegger that an “existential analysis is superordinate to the questions of a biology, psychology, theodicy, or theology of death,” (Heidegger, 1962, 292) even though it has a very different idea of what properly constitutes an “existential analysis” and a conception of psychology that is very different from the Western one Heidegger is reacting to (Ibid. 292). For Zen, birth and death are epiphenomenal concepts that are generated by the consolidation of the ego.

Heidegger makes clear that to free oneself for death, to awaken from the dream fabricated by “the They-self” that blinds *Dasein* to its final possibility and represses it *as* a possibility, is to gather oneself together from out of one’s dispersion in worldly attachments and to concentrate oneself resolutely in anticipating death. This stance is “anticipatory” only with respect to Heidegger’s notion of “primordial temporality,” not toward death as a future “now” that will eventually “occur.” Heidegger also appears to claim that adopting either an optimistic or a pessimistic attitude toward death are equally repressive, since all of these latter stances fix death as an imminent, actual, forthcoming event-in-the-world, i.e., as something present-at-hand. This squares with Suzuki’s claim that Zen is neither an immanent pessimism nor a transcendental optimism. All of the inauthentic responses toward death, Heidegger claims, arise from treating death as an object, in which case fear, not anxiety, is the dominant state-of-mind. Fear is in all cases the repression of anxiety. And while each temporal ecstasis always comes together with all of the others, and though all of them are explicitly held together in the “moment of vision” or “authentic present,” Heidegger ascribes a certain primacy to the future: “Ecstatico-horizonal temporality temporalizes itself primarily in terms of the future” (Ibid., 479). Just as the inauthentic comportment toward death robs death of its significance and objectifies it, inauthentic temporality, governed by what Heidegger calls a “making-present,” represses the past and the future by treating them merely as receding and forthcoming “nows.” In both cases, *Dasein* must collect itself from its dispersion and absorption in its proximate concerns. This emphasis on futurity, possibility, and anticipation is what distinguishes Heidegger’s concepts of death and time from the Zen perspective.

Referring to the “within-time-ness” characteristic of inauthentic temporality, Heidegger claims that the “‘now’ is not pregnant with the ‘not-yet-now.’” That is, in

falling, we have uprooted ourselves from the “stretching-along” characteristic of authentic temporality; we orient ourselves merely in terms of the present instead of the future, which is to say, we *fail* to orient ourselves. Speaking from the Buddhist perspective, David Loy asks: “what if there is a ‘now’ which *is* pregnant with the ‘not-yet-now’?” He notes that Heidegger rejects the mystical notion of an “eternal now” on the grounds that it is derived from the traditional conception of time and is therefore a mere abstraction. Loy questions whether or not Heidegger’s alternative of authentic temporality is really adequate: The problem with both of Heidegger’s alternatives is that both are preoccupied with the future because in different ways both are reactions to the possibility of death; thus both are ways of running away from the present. Inauthentic existence scattered into a series of disconnected nows is “a fleeing in the face of death”; authentic life pulled out of this dispersal by the inevitable possibility of death is *more aware* of its impending death, but *still driven* by it. This means that neither experiences the present for what it is in itself, but only through the shadow that the inescapable future casts over it. What the present might be without that shadow is not considered in *SZ* (Loy, 1988, 15, my italic).

Heidegger would likely respond that Loy is simply lapsing back into inauthentic temporality by pointing to what the present is “in itself,” but this simply calls us back to Bodhidharma’s warning: “No dependence on words.” In short: I am suggesting that there are two kinds of “eternal now.” The first, criticized by Heidegger, is a “conceptual” eternity that is opposed to time and is indeed both derived from the ordinary experience of time and driven by death. This we might call “ego-” or “other worldly-” “eternity”; on this point, Buddhism and Heidegger are in complete agreement. The second kind, however, is what we have all along been calling *nirvana*. When Zen masters say that birth is no-birth, that death is no-death, they are neither kidding nor speaking metaphorically. The radical claim, to be verified only in experience by following the meditative injunction and checking one’s results in a community of the experienced, is that birth and death, that past, present, and future, all dissolve when the ego dissolves. One is no longer afraid of or anxious over death, not because one is resolved, but because one realizes that there *is* no-thing to be afraid of or over anxious over, and, more importantly, that there isn’t even *anyone* to be afraid or anxious. Moreover, this entails that the entire dualistic business of finding oneself stuck or thrown into a world with finite possibilities (an imperfect, “this-worldly” *samsara*), speculating an endless eternity out a feeling of desire/lack (an “other-worldly” heaven) and, finally, violently laboring to transcend the present by resolutely striding into the future, are all the desperate flailings of the ego trying to deny its groundlessness. In this way, we might say that through his treatment of death, fallenness, facticity, and temporality in *SZ*, Heidegger comes very close to Zen’s radical nonduality, yet draws up short. And though he later recanted the residual metaphysics of subjectivity that he came to believe encumbered *SZ*, even his later works bears the marks of a residual — though unmistakable — dualism. As John Steffney sums up: Although Heidegger’s attempt to think from Being, which became evident with his famous ‘turn,’ is admirable — the attempt to think from Being toward Dasein, not from Dasein toward Being — Zen would say that this reversal

would have to be further radicalized, for both the attempts to think ‘toward’ Being or ‘toward’ Dasein are equally dualistic (Steffney, 1981, 52).²²

III. Heidegger’s Ambivalence

This is why I have suggested throughout that no matter which way Heidegger happens to be turning, leaning, or thinking — toward Being or from Being—and no matter how he is framing his question—the meaning of Being, the nature of thinking, or the nature of language — he is unquestionably in transit, on the go, in between two radically different ways of understanding human existence. Though he clearly had some minimal exposure to Eastern thought even from an early point in his career before the composition of *SZ*, and probably was, as Pöggeler claims, significantly influenced by it in his later career, I conclude that he remains tethered, albeit tenuously, to Western thinking. In the *DL* he remarks that the transformation of thinking he envisions is to be understood as a movement from one site — that of metaphysics — to another — which, obviously, is left nameless. Heidegger is perpetually adventuring in the wasteland between these two “poles”; as Steffney puts it, “because he could not break—entirely—through the matrix of ego-consciousness with its inherent bifurcations, his thinking was never genuinely trans-metaphysical. It was at best quasi-metaphysical” (Steffney, 1977, 352).²³

While there are indications that he regarded the positive task of a dialogue between Western and Eastern thought — “planetary thinking” — as important and essential for the future, it appears that he was more concerned with the negative task of clearing away the calcified vestiges of metaphysics still enclosing the Western mind. One could even argue that they are two folds of the same task. In 1953, Heidegger wrote that “a dialogue with the Greek thinkers and their language...has hardly even been prepared yet, and remains in turn the precondition for our inevitable dialogue with the East Asian world” (Quoted in May, 1996, 103). Clearly, Heidegger wanted to make absolutely sure that such a dialogue would, as it were, not get off on the wrong foot.

In closing, I suggest three basic criticisms of Heidegger’s overall approach: Heidegger reifies “the West,” he neglects to provide an account of human development, and he refuses to prescribe any practices to cultivate the primordial experience of Being he clearly felt Western culture to be so desperately in need of.

²²Steffney, 52. I agree with Steffney when he claims that “Heidegger would not be willing to accept Zen’s absolute identification of man and Being, that he did not think beyond this ‘relation’ between man and Being,” (51) though Heidegger certainly *flirts* with crossing that border in the two dialogues treated in this essay. The thoroughgoing tendency in the later works is to hypostatize Being as some trans-personal super-agent that just sort of does its own thing, much like Vedanta’s notion of *lila*, “play.”

²³John Steffney, “Transmetaphysical Thinking in Heidegger and Buddhism,” 332. Steffney’s branding of Zen as “trans-metaphysical” is, of course, suspect. We might slightly alter it with more apt phrase, e.g., non-metaphysical, since Suzuki strictly prohibits the use of “transcendent” and “immanent” with regard to Zen, but the point should be clear.

The first can be traced to comments made in the famous *Der Spiegel* interview of 1966, in which Heidegger proclaimed that “a reversal can be prepared itself only from the same part of the world in which the modern technological world originated, and that it cannot come about through the adoption of Zen Buddhism or any other Eastern experience of the world....Thinking itself can only be transformed by a thinking which has the same origin and destiny” (Quoted in May, 1996, 8). In light of my discussion of the language barrier and planetary thinking above, it is unclear precisely why this “origin” is properly framed as ancient Greece, rather than “the same” from which language springs. By drawing this line in the sand, Heidegger sets up a rigid distinction between East and West that echoes throughout his later works. Zimmerman sums up this phenomenon:

In making such a distinction between East and West, Heidegger not only tended to downplay the impact of Eastern thinking on the German philosophical tradition, but also seemed to be thinking metaphysically in accordance with a binary opposition between ‘East’ and ‘West,’ an opposition that seems to privilege the West as the origin of the technological disclosure of things that now pervades the planet (Zimmerman, 1993, 251).

In short, Heidegger treats “the West” as something present-at-hand. However, Heidegger makes explicitly clear in the *DL* that he is not envisioning some sort of return to Greek thinking. It remains to be seen, then, in what sense we should approach his thinking as “Western.”

Zimmerman continues: “in calling for another beginning that would displace the Western metaphysical quest for the ultimate ground of things, Heidegger questioned the validity of the West’s claims to cultural superiority” (Zimmerman, 1993, 251). True enough, yet the deeper question is about superiority *per se*, which we might generally construe as the problem of “verticality” — of hierarchy, ranking, and teleology. Caputo’s poststructuralist reading of Heidegger wants to level the ontological playing field. Referring to Heidegger’s colorful ruminations on the destining of the West in ancient Greece, Caputo writes that there is a dream-like, indeed I would say Camelot-like quality...to this discourse.... when [Heidegger] talks about the transition to the end of philosophy to the ‘new beginning,’ then he gives way to the hope which is the other side of nostalgia. Thinking becomes recollecting and aspiring; time is a circle in which what comes about in the primordial beginning traces out the possibility of what can come again. Such thinking is nostalgic, eschatological, a higher-order, more sublated version of metaphysics.” “Derrida was quite right, I think, to delimit Heidegger’s talk about ‘authenticity.’ It is Platonic and politically dangerous to go around dividing people up into the authentic and inauthentic (Caputo, 1986, xxii-iv).

Zen agrees with the first criticism, but not with the second. Though I quoted Suzuki above as saying that Zen is a “non-teleological view of life,” this is not to say that it does not recognize *degrees* of spiritual development. Suzuki writes that it is impossible not to speak of some kind of progress. Even Zen as something possible of demonstration in one way or another must be subjected to the limitations of time.

That is to say, there are, after all, *grades of development* in its study; and some must be said to have *more* deeply, *more* penetratingly realized the truth of Zen.... This side of Zen is known as its ‘*constructive*’ aspect.... And here Zen fully recognizes degrees of spiritual development among its followers, as the truth reveals itself gradually in their minds... (Barrett, 1956, 364).

There is no “phallo-centrism” or “patriarchy” at work here, imposing some arbitrary standard or *telos* on an unsuspecting multitude; no vicious dichotomizing of people into authentic and inauthentic; no nasty elitism. On this matter, Zen is in complete disagreement with this de-mythologized version of Heidegger and the postmodern tradition that follows it. Heidegger fails to offer any account of human development because of his insistence in *SZ* that the *existentials* are “permanent” — i.e., facticity, untruth, inauthenticity, “the They”, etc., cannot be overcome. Since the existential categories smack of the same metaphysical foundationalism of, say, Aristotelian teleology, Heidegger abandoned the discourse of authenticity and existentiality, which is to say, he abandoned *structures*, period. Yet Zen allows that we cannot help but acknowledge what I would term “fluid” structures of the self²⁴ — referred to variously as *karmas*, *yanas*, *skandas*, sheaths, etc. — which certainly do coagulate and linger, yet which may ultimately be undone. And the more a person has sloughed off these inauthentic trappings, the more evolved, the more mature, the more developed he or she is said to be. This judgment, moreover, is made by a community of practitioners who have already, as it were, walked the path. Only in this very qualified sense are individuals deemed authentic or enlightened. Ultimately, for Zen, all humans possess buddhanature, yet they can fail to realize it, and it is this ignorance that creates the illusion of ignorant and enlightened.²⁵

This relates directly to Heidegger’s ambivalent relationship toward rationality and modernity. For example, near the outset of *SZ*, Heidegger repeatedly refers to Dasein’s pre-conceptual understanding of Being, the basic, average, everyday way in which people go about their business and pursue their worldly engagements within a background called the world which they rarely attend to yet tacitly assume in all of their dealings. That is, they either never stop to thematize Being, it never arises as an issue, or they actively repress its emergence, yet they would be unable to even be engaged in the world without some dim, pre-thematic grasp of Being. In the final paragraph of the treatise, however, Heidegger remarks that “Being has been disclosed in a preliminary way, though non-conceptually” (Heidegger, 1962, 488). While both the former and latter modes of disclosing Being are *non-conceptual*, there is a

²⁴While Zen characteristically pays scant attention to the psychological nuances of interior growth, the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition in particular has a rich and extensive vocabulary for discussing the various stages, levels, or waves of spiritual development.

²⁵Again, I want to make clear how this is not teleology. It is not the cultivation of a positive quality or characteristic inherent in people from birth, like the oak is “contained” as a potentiality in the acorn, and Zen practice is therefore not a matter of conditioning, habituation, or, as some Western psychologists have claimed, self-suggestion, but a matter of *de-conditioning* the very *basis* of all conditioning: the reified ego. In this sense, Zen has “development without teleology.”

substantial difference. The pre-conceptual is thoroughly in the sway of the ontic and entangled with phenomena, while the latter has conceptually reckoned with its own existence and realized the poverty of both the average everyday (pre-conceptual) and the rational-scientific (conceptual) compartments and been propelled to interpret its own being, and Being itself, in an entirely different yet still non-conceptual nature, that is, *trans*-conceptual. Richardson's attempt to thin this thicket does not lend much light: "Taken in its totality, Dasein is not a subject, but it is a self — a non-subjective, rather trans-subjective, or even pre-subjective self, sc. transcendence" (Richardson, 2003, 101). We are thus forced into speaking of Dasein as the "between," yet this dialogical cipher still moves within a notion of duality.

The attempt to get *back* to Being — to re-awaken to the forgotten meaning of Being, re-peat a heritage, re-tap some dormant reservoirs, to return to the roots and origins — that inheres in Heidegger's early *and* late work lends itself to the idea that the modern world, and the mode of cognition by which it was constituted, namely, monological reason or calculative thinking, is a great mistake, a collective entanglement with entities in the world, and that we should therefore seek to regress to some sort of pre-modern, pre-rational form of society. While there are a plethora of passages in both *SZ* and in later works such as the *DL* which contradict this Romantic, mythological reading of Heidegger, it is necessary not to overlook this very real ambivalence in his thought. This ambivalence, I think, derives from Heidegger's failure to differentiate the non-conceptual, the non-rational, the non-discursive, into its pre- and trans- modes. Michael Zimmerman, appropriating Ken Wilber's "pre-/trans- fallacy," notes that one must first *be* an ordinary egoic subject before existing authentically as the transpersonal clearing, within which something like 'personhood' can manifest itself. In other words, before one can become 'no one,' one must first be 'some one.' Recognizing the constructed nature of the egoic subject is possible only insofar as such a subject has been constructed in the first place (Zimmerman, 2000, 140).

Put differently: it is one thing to have mastered reason, experienced its inherent limitations and empty claims to totality and self-consistency, and transcended it, what Heidegger calls meditative thinking, or thinking *from* Being; quite another to have never bent oneself to its rule. The former is trans-conceptual thinking, the latter is pre-conceptual. The relevance of this strain in Heidegger's thought to Zen is crucial. Zen readily admits the bankruptcy of reason's attempts to calculate existence and treat entities as, in Kant's terminology, transcendentally real, or in Heidegger's parlance, as present-at-hand, yet this emptiness of phenomena is at once the emptiness of the *ego*. There is, for Zen, quite literally a world of difference between the pre-egoic — which is a jumble of drives, perceptions, and intentional compartments that have *not yet congealed* into a relatively stable self — and the trans-egoic — which, after attaining the sense of personal identity and assuming the notion of a soul substance persisting over time, confronts its own nothingness and transcends the illusion of a separate self. The space between is the very same rational-ego whose ignorance about its own being is deconstructed in *SZ*. However, Zen goes further than Heidegger in

denying what duality lingers in the subjectivist metaphysics of his early work and the ontological difference of the later works through the doctrine of *an-atman* (no-self).

The key difference is that Zen has an attendant set of psychophysical practices that train the mind.²⁶ This is a training regimen that has successfully been passed down for centuries. It has taken root and flourished in Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and American cultures. The nature of mind — “no-mind” — is directly communicated from teacher to student. The *sangha* is the intersubjective space in which this exchange takes place. The key here is that the process does not consist in the dogmatic imposition of a set of allegedly eternal truths, i.e., facts about the world, which belong to the domain of the mythos and the logos, apprehended through faith or reason. The individual is not asked to uncritically swallow the assertions of “the They,” but is instead invited to perform the experiment, to test his findings in a community of the adequate, and to confirm/refute those findings based on his own empirical research. Heidegger resists signing off on any such set of practices, because they seem to suggest a calculative, scientific, and technological kind of thinking that does violence to and covers up the mystery of Being, that commercializes and thus de-sacralizes a secret: “the program of mathematics and the experiment are grounded in the relation of man as ego to the thing as object” (Heidegger, 1966, 79). However, the truth of Zen is something to be experientially verified in the laboratory of one’s own awareness by performing the experiment called meditation. This is why Suzuki described Zen as a “radical empiricism” (Barrett, 1956, 140).²⁷

The overblown tendency to destabilize, unsettle, and disturb which permeates Heidegger’s work as a whole makes it all but impossible for any such healthy institutional incarnation or individual transformation to occur. This deconstructive tendency is so bent on the negative tasks of inverting stodgy hierarchies, delimiting conceptual binaries, liberating excluded middles and drilling holes through master narratives that it never *constructs* anything. It is hard enough handing “no-thingness” down, and harder still when one refuses to prescribe any methods by which to transmit it or to consider the legitimacy of “foreign” methods. Such is the world of difference between handing down no-thingness and passing on nothing.

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²⁶For an excellent discussion of this lacuna in Heidegger’s work, see David Levin, “Mudra as Thinking: Developing our Wisdom-of-Being in Gesture and Movement.” Levin himself, it is worth noting, is a long-time practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism.

²⁷Suzuki, 140: “If the Buddha could be said to have had any system of thought governing the whole trend of his teaching, it was what we may call radical empiricism. By this I mean that he took life and the world as they were and did not try to read them according to his own interpretation. Theorists may say this is impossible, for we put our subjectivity into every act of perception, and what we call an objective world is really a reconstruction of our innate ideas. . . . When therefore I say Buddhism is radical empiricism, this is not to be understood epistemologically but spiritually.”

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