

Revisiting the Concept of Being: A Comparative Analysis of Heidegger and Eastern Philosophical Thought

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Abstract

This research aims to revisit the concept of Being (exists) through a comparative approach between Martin Heidegger's philosophy and Eastern philosophical thought, particularly the Vedanta and Taoist traditions. Heidegger, in his work Being and Time, criticized Western metaphysics that forgot the question of existence (Seinsfrage) and proposed an existential understanding of Being through Dasein's concept. In contrast, Eastern thought has traditionally emphasized the non-dualistic and intuitive dimensions of existence, as reflected in the concept of Brahman in Vedanta and Dao in Taoism. This study uses the qualitative literature review method with a philosophical hermeneutic approach to examine the ontological and epistemological structures in both traditions. The results of the analysis show that despite coming from different cultural and linguistic contexts, Heidegger and Eastern thought share similarities in criticizing the objectification of reality and emphasizing the subject's existential involvement in uncovering the meaning of Being. These findings open up spaces for dialogue across philosophical traditions and offer an alternative perspective to a more holistic and transcendent ontological understanding.

I. Introduction

The concept of being is one of the most fundamental and oldest themes in the philosophical tradition (Roussev, 2018). Since pre-Socratic times, the question of what it is has been at the center of the reflection of philosophers, from Parmenides who stated that "what exists exists and what does not exist does not exist", to Plato and Aristotle who developed ontology as a major branch of philosophy. In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states that the first philosophy is the science of "being qua being"—that is, the science of discussing Being insofar as it is Being, not as something related to a particular form, quantity, or substance (Matthew, 2020; Sigurðsson, 2016). This view places Being as the epistemological and ontological foundation of all forms of knowledge and existence. Thus, Being is not only a theoretical object, but also a center of orientation in understanding reality, truth, and the relationship between humans and the world (Hwang, 2024).

However, as modernity has evolved, the question of Being has undergone a shift and even an obscuration, especially in the tradition of rationalism and positivism that place more emphasis on the empirical and functional aspects of reality (Maraldo & Philosophy, 2019). Martin Heidegger, in an attempt to revive this discourse, criticized what he called the "forgetting of Being" (*Seinsvergessenheit*) in modern Western philosophy. He argues that the Western metaphysical tradition has focused too much on entities (beings) and ignores the fundamental question of Being itself (Hart, 2018). Through an existential-phenomenological approach, Heidegger reintroduces the importance of understanding human existence (*Dasein*) as an entrance to explore the meaning of Being. The relevance of this discourse is not only theoretical, but also existential, because it concerns the way in which human beings exist in the world and understand themselves authentically (Faruque, 2017; Clark, 1977).

The Western philosophical tradition since the Ancient Greek era has dominated the way of thinking about reality and existence, but it is often limited to substantial ontological aspects (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2020). Classical and scholastic philosophical thought, such as those developed by Plato, Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas, tend to view Being as an attribute of an entity that can be classified and defined. This understanding develops within the framework of essentialist metaphysics that places Being in a fixed and stable hierarchy of entities. This approach continued to dominate Western philosophical thought until modernity, which then emphasized the aspects of rationality and objectivity in understanding the world, while the basic question of the meaning of Being began to be neglected (Kelimeler, 2014).

Martin Heidegger came up with a profound critique of this tendency through his work *Being and Time* (1927), which marked an important turning point in Western ontological discourse. He states that Western philosophy has experienced *Seinsvergessenheit*, that is, forgetting the question of Being itself (Heidegger, 1962). According to Heidegger, most previous philosophers focused more on beings than on exploring the existential and primordial meaning of Being in its entirety. By introducing the concept of *Dasein* as a mode of human existence capable of questioning and understanding Being, Heidegger shifted the metaphysical debate from external entities to an understanding of existence that is existential, temporal, and tied to human experience. This approach shows the dominance of Western philosophy in reformulating the question of Being, but at the same time opens up opportunities to compare it with non-Western approaches that are more intuitive and transcendent (Leung, 2020; Burik, 2018).

Eastern philosophy, which includes traditions such as Vedanta (India), Taoism (China), and Buddhism, offers a distinctive approach to the question of existence (Clark, 1977). Unlike Western philosophy which tends to be analytical and discursive, Eastern philosophy emphasizes an intuitive, contemplative, and holistic approach to understanding reality. In Vedanta for example, existence is understood through the concept of Brahman—an absolute reality that is unlimited, unchanging, and transcends sensory perception (Ukwuoma, 2023). The Atman, as the deepest essence of the individual, is ultimately inseparable from Brahman, signifying the non-dualistic view that the supreme reality is one and indivisible (Radhakrishnan & Moore, 1957). Meanwhile, in Taoism, Dao is understood as the basic principle of everything that exists; it cannot be explained rationally, but is only experienced through harmony with nature and ego release (Simeonov et al., 2017).

The difference in epistemological and ontological frameworks between East and West is reflected in the way these two traditions understand the relationship between subject and object (Purino, 2020). If in Western philosophy—especially in the post-Cartesian tradition—knowledge is often associated with the separation between the knowing subject and the known object, then in Eastern philosophy, the attainment of true knowledge is actually achieved by overcoming this dualism (Becker, 2018). In Buddhism, the concepts of *anatta* (non-self) and *voidness* (emptiness) challenge assumptions about a fixed existence or essence of the self separate from the world. Thus, existence is not seen as a fixed substance, but rather as an ever-changing and interdependent process (Nagarjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*). This approach invites deep reflection on the boundaries of language and conceptual thinking in understanding Being, which is very different but still relevant for expanding ontological horizons in global philosophical discourse (Gao & Chung, 2023).

The concept of Being has been widely studied in the framework of Western philosophy, especially through the thought of figures such as Parmenides, Aristotle, Descartes, and Heidegger. However, the dominance of such Western perspectives not only limits ontological horizons, but also tends to ignore the alternative possibilities of understanding existence that have long flourished in the non-Western philosophical tradition (Tan & Bao, 2024). Given the complexity and depth of the meaning of Being as a basic category in philosophy, a cross-tradition approach that is dialogical and reflective is needed. This kind of approach can not only open up space for a more inclusive and transcultural understanding, but it also allows us to identify the epistemological limitations of each tradition in addressing the same ontological questions differently (Hall & Ames, 1987).

The urgency to revisit the concept of Being is also closely related to the challenges of the contemporary world, where existential crises, alienation, and fragmentation of meaning are becoming increasingly real. In this context, the merging of the Heideggerian approach that emphasizes Dasein as an existence that questions the Being, with Eastern views such as the concept of Voidness in Buddhism or the Dao in Taoism, can expand the reflective and existential horizons of man in understanding his existence in the world (Lau, 2016). Through cross-tradition synthesis, the study of Being is not only limited to abstract philosophical discourse, but also a concrete and transformative practice of meaning in life. Therefore, revisiting Being is not just a historical or academic project, but a profound effort to unite different views in order to achieve a more complete ontological understanding that is relevant to today's human reality (Robinson, 2008).

Research by Mayra Rivera (2015) in *Poetics of the Flesh*, which highlights the limitations of modern Western ontology and proposes the need for ontological approaches that are plural, embodied, and non-representational. This idea is in line with the Eastern philosophical approach that places existence as a direct experience that is inseparable from the body, consciousness, and reality. Moreover, in the context of Indian philosophy, Wilhelm Halbfass (1988) in *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* examines the dialogue between the Vedanta tradition and Western thought, and shows that fundamental questions of existence have come to the fore in both traditions, albeit through very different expressions. Therefore, these studies not only provide a theoretical basis for comparative studies, but also open up opportunities to reconstruct ontological frameworks that transcend Western-centric boundaries.

Research by Graham Parkes (1987) in *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, which explores the resonance between Heideggerian concepts such as *Dasein* and *Sein-zum-Tode* and ideas in Taoism and Zen Buddhism. Parkes emphasizes that

despite coming from different cultural and linguistic contexts, Heidegger's existential approach to existence has a close affinity with the way Eastern philosophy understands *Being* as a direct experience that transcends conceptual representation. These findings suggest that openness to dialogue across traditions can enrich ontological understanding in a more profound and integral way

2. Research Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a philosophical-comparative analysis method, which aims to examine the concept of Being in two major traditions: Martin Heidegger's thought as a representation of modern Western philosophy and key teachings in Eastern philosophy such as Taoism and Mahayana Buddhism. This method is carried out through textual and hermeneutical studies of Heidegger's primary works, particularly *Sein und Zeit*, as well as Eastern classical texts such as Laozi's *Dao De Jing* and Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. The analysis is carried out by highlighting the ontological categories used in each tradition, as well as their views of existence, absence, and subject-world relations. The analysis procedure is carried out in two stages: first, a systematic conceptual elaboration of the understanding of Being in each tradition, including its historical and epistemological context. Second, a comparative stage was carried out to identify similarities, differences, and dialogical possibilities between the two frameworks of thought. This research is reflective and interpretive, with a philosophical-critical orientation, so that the expected result is not an absolute synthesis, but an enrichment of the contemporary ontological horizon. The validity of the research is maintained through argumentative consistency, the use of authoritative references, and openness to the complexity of meaning inherent in each philosophical tradition.

3. Results and Discussion

The Concept of Being in Martin Heidegger's Thought

Martin Heidegger was one of the most influential philosophers of the 20th century, especially in reconstructing the discourse on *Being*. In his monumental work, *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Heidegger stated that the question of the meaning of existence had been ignored by Western philosophy since the time of Ancient Greece. He emphasized that philosophy has been trapped in the discussion of entities (beings) for too long, but forgets to examine the meaning of Being itself, namely existence as existence (*Sein als Sein*) (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger criticized the Western metaphysical tradition from Plato to Descartes which tended to view Being as something fixed, fully present, and definable through ratios. For him, such an approach led to *Seinsvergessenheit* (forgetting existence). Thus, Heidegger sought

to challenge the foundations of classical metaphysics and pave the way to "fundamental ontology" as a new way to understand existence in a more authentic and historical way (Lamichhane, 2024).

The central concept in Heidegger's philosophy is *Dasein*, namely human existence that has a unique ability to realize and question its existence. *Dasein* is not understood as a metaphysical subject as in the Cartesian tradition, but as an "being-in-the-world" (*In-der-Welt-sein*), which is always in a historical and relational context (Kahteran, 2017). *Dasein* became a starting point for Heidegger in understanding Being, because only through *Dasein*, Being can be revealed (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger emphasized that human existence is temporal, and therefore, the understanding of Being must also be viewed through the dimension of time. *Dasein* is always moving in the time horizon: the past (*gewesen*), the present (*Gegenwart*), and the future (*Zukunft*). Authentic existence occurs when *Dasein* realizes his throw into the world and his death as the most personal possibility. Thus, Being is not static, but dynamic and historical (Abergel, 2023).

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Heidegger's thought reopened the horizons of ontological thought that had long been closed by traditional metaphysics. By focusing on *Dasein*, time, and the hiding of the Being, Heidegger marked a paradigm shift from representational ontology to existential ontology. This thought is influential not only in philosophy, but also in hermeneutics, literature, theology, and even Eastern philosophy, both of which emphasize the direct experience of existence (Cucu & Lența, 2023).

The Concept of Being in Eastern Philosophy

The concept of existence in Eastern philosophy is often understood holistically and non-dualistically, in contrast to the Western philosophical tradition which tends to be analytical and categorical (Bilimoria, 2012). In the Taoist tradition, for example, the concept of *Dao* or *Tao* describes the fundamental principles that are the source and origin of all things, as well as dynamic processes that are not defined in a fixed way. *The Dao* is not a fully conceptually grasped entity, but rather a reality that is constantly flowing and transforming, showing that existence is a unity between the manifest and the invisible (Kirkland, 2004). Thus, Being in the context of Taoism

emphasizes the connectedness and balance between everything in the cosmos, where the existence of the individual is in harmony with the whole of nature.

Eastern philosophy in general offers a holistic approach to the concept of existence, in contrast to the Western philosophical tradition which is more likely to separate subjects and objects, as well as focus on essential identities. In the Eastern tradition, existence is seen as an inseparable unity between the individual and the universe, as well as between phenomena and transcendent reality (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2020). The concept of Being is not seen as a fixed substance that can be defined separately, but as a dynamic process that is constantly changing and interrelated (Sharma, 2006). In Taoism, *the concept of Dao* is central to understanding Being. *Dao* is not a concrete entity, but rather a cosmic principle that is unspoken and transcends duality. Laozi in *Dao De Jing* describes *Dao* as the origin of everything that exists but cannot be fully understood by the human mind. Thus, Being according to Taoism is something that is constantly flowing, connecting the visible and the hidden in a cosmic harmony (Kirkland, 2004).

In Mahayana Buddhism, the concept of existence is explored through the teachings of *śūnyatā* or emptiness. This teaching denies the existence of a fixed entity or an independent substance. Existence is understood as an interdependent phenomenon (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which means that all things are born, exist, and become extinct in an interrelated network of cause-and-effect (Simeonov et al., 2017). This perspective challenges the notion of essential identity and encourages the understanding that existence is relative and temporary (Williams, 1997). The philosophy of Advaita Vedanta in the Hindu tradition emphasizes the principle of non-duality (*Advaita*) as the core of the understanding of Being. According to Advaita, the ultimate reality is *Brahman*, a universal consciousness without duality, which is the only true existence. The phenomenal and individual worlds (*Atman*) are considered to be virtual manifestations (*Maya*) that are inseparable from Brahman. Thus, the Being in Advaita is the absolute unity behind all diversity and the illusion of separation (Radhakrishnan & Moore, 1957).

One of the important aspects of Eastern philosophy is its emphasis on direct experience and the practice of meditation as a way to understand existence. In contrast to Western philosophy which tends to be rational and conceptual, the Eastern tradition emphasizes that the essence of Being cannot be fully understood through words or logic, but must be experienced directly. Meditation, contemplation, and other spiritual practices become the main methods to unlock a deeper and transcendent understanding of existence (Wilber, 2000). In the context of epistemology, Eastern philosophy often rejects the dualism between subject and object that underlies modern Western philosophy. Knowledge is not only seen as an accumulation of rational data, but as liberation from ego attachment and the illusion of separation. Thus, the understanding of Being is also transformational and requires a change in consciousness, not just intellectual reasoning (Forman, 1990). The thought of Being in Eastern philosophy opens up a new dimension in cross-

cultural dialogue, especially in the face of existential challenges and crises of meaning in the modern world. An Eastern perspective that emphasizes harmony, impermanence, and the direct experience of existence can complement a more analytical Western approach. Thus, comparative studies and synthesis across philosophical traditions are important to broaden the horizons of ontological and existential understanding of humanity (Deutsch, 2011).

The Contribution of Cross-Tradition Approaches to the Understanding of Being

Ontological enrichment can be achieved through a reflective synthesis approach that combines and reflects ontological views from various philosophical traditions. By opening up a critical dialogue between Western thought (Purino, 2020), such as Heidegger, and the more holistic tradition of Eastern philosophy, the study of ontology becomes more dynamic and contextual. This approach not only expands the understanding of the concept of Being, but also allows the discovery of new perspectives that can answer the limitations of one tradition with the strength of another tradition (Kärkkäinen, 2010). This reflective synthesis bridges the dichotomy that has been splitting philosophy into separate and enriching the dimension of existence in a more inclusive way. The context of globalization and cultural plurality opens up great opportunities to develop transcultural ontologies that are inclusive and relevant to different socio-cultural contexts. Transcultural ontology seeks to respect epistemological and ontological diversity, while building a common understanding of Being that is not exclusive to a single tradition. This approach emphasizes the importance of historical, social, and cultural contexts in shaping ontological meaning, so that it becomes a more responsive foothold to diverse human needs and experiences (Mignolo, 2009).

In the modern era full of uncertainty and fragmentation of values, the philosophical study of Being has become very relevant to respond to the crisis of meaning and existence experienced by individuals and society (Becker, 2018). A deep ontological understanding can help build a solid philosophical foundation for the search for the meaning of life, identity, and the connection between humans and the environment. Cross-tradition synthesis allows the emergence of new ontological narratives that provide hope and direction in the face of alienation, nihilism, and social disintegration that are rampant in the contemporary world (Taylor, 1989). Ontological enrichment through inter-tradition synthesis directly supports a more meaningful and productive intercultural dialogue. By understanding and appreciating the fundamental differences in the concept of Being from different traditions, cross-cultural dialogue becomes not only an exchange of information, but also a transformation of consciousness that opens up space for harmonious coexistence and collaboration. This approach challenges ethnocentrism and opens up the possibility of building a global community based on respect for ontological diversity (Habermas, 2001).

An expanded understanding of Being through reflective synthesis also has

implications for the formation of a more responsive and inclusive global ethic. Transcultural ontology provides a philosophical basis for ethics that respects diversity, promotes social justice, and encourages shared responsibility towards fellow human beings and the environment (Tan & Bao, 2024). This is important in the face of global challenges such as climate change, inequality, and intercultural conflicts, where a shared understanding of existence and humanity is the foundation for meaningful collective action (Appiah, 2006). Overall, the development of transcultural ontology through reflective synthesis between philosophical traditions not only enriches conceptual understandings of Being, but also paves the way for a more adaptive philosophical response to the challenges of the times. This approach has the potential to strengthen intercultural dialogue, enrich philosophy education, and underlie an inclusive global ethic. It is hoped that this study can be an intellectual foundation for the creation of a more civilized and sustainable world society in the face of the complexity of modern existence (Malpas, 2012).

Similarities and Ontological Convergence of the Concept of Being

Heidegger in Western philosophy emphasized Being as the basis of existence that precedes all entities (*Sein vor Seiende*), a concept that leads to a deep existential understanding of the meaning of existence (Heidegger, 1927). In parallel, the Eastern philosophical tradition—as in Advaita Vedanta and Taoism—views existence as a fundamental reality that transcends duality and phenomenal differences. Both highlight a fundamental ontological reality, albeit using different terminology and reflective methods. One of the main ontological convergences between Heidegger's thought and Eastern philosophy is the emphasis on the unity between subject and object in the experience of Being (Lau, 2016). Heidegger introduced the concept of *Dasein* as an "being-in-the-world" that rejects the Cartesian dualism between subject and object, so that Being is understood as ontological openness. Similarly, the Zen and Taoist traditions highlight the intrinsic connection between man and the universe, negate the strict separation between actors and objects, and promote intuitive consciousness that is one with reality (Suzuki, 1959; Heidegger, 1927).

In addition, both prioritize direct or contemplative experience as a path to understanding Being. Heidegger rejected the understanding of Being solely as an abstract concept and pushed for an existential phenomenology that focused on *Dasein*'s authentic experience (Ito, 2023). Similarly, Eastern philosophy places meditation, contemplation, and spiritual practice as the primary means of uncovering the essence of existence that cannot be fully revealed through rationality or logical discourse (Wilber, 2006). This experience is key in opening up the horizons of ontological understanding that goes beyond the subject-object duality. Other similarities that can be found are a critical attitude towards traditional metaphysics and reductionism in understanding Being. Heidegger criticized Western metaphysics for focusing too much on ontic entities and categories, thus forgetting the fundamental question of Being itself (Heidegger, 1927). In contrast, Eastern philosophy also tends to reject rationalistic and dogmatic approaches that

limit the reality of existence to rigid definitions, but instead make room for a more holistic and intuitive understanding (Nishitani, 1982).

This convergence indicates that the concept of Being does not belong solely to a philosophical tradition, but rather is a universal theme that can be explored and enriched through cross-cultural dialogue (Roussev, 2018). This recognition of ontological similarities opens up opportunities for synergy in the study of contemporary philosophy, which can broaden horizons and break down the narrow boundaries of the hermeneutic tradition. Thus, the study of Being becomes an important means of building intellectual bridges between West and East, as well as responding to the need for a holistic and comprehensive existential understanding. However, despite the many similarities, fundamental differences remain, especially in the epistemological and sociocultural aspects. Heidegger places great emphasis on individual existence and the limitation of time as the primary dimension of Being, whereas the Eastern tradition tends to see Being as a transcendent reality that overcomes the duality of time and space (Sigurðsson, 2016). These differences suggest that ontological convergence is not a form of obscuration of tradition, but rather an opportunity for critical dialogue and the enrichment of more complex and comprehensive concepts. regarding similarity and ontological convergence, the concept of Being invites philosophers to transcend the boundaries of tradition and build an inclusive and reflective understanding (Hwang, 2024). By bridging Heidegger's thought and Eastern philosophy, ontology can be expanded not only as a theoretical study, but as a reflective practice that gives meaning to human existence in a plural and global context. It has also become an important foundation for the development of a more open, dialogical, and humanistic contemporary philosophy (Malpas, 2010).

4. Conclusion

From the results of this study it can be concluded that despite coming from different cultural and linguistic contexts, Heidegger and Eastern thought share similarities in criticizing the objectification of reality and emphasizing the subject's existential involvement in uncovering the meaning of Being. These findings open up spaces for dialogue across philosophical traditions and offer an alternative perspective to a more holistic and transcendent ontological understanding. Significant ontological similarities between Martin Heidegger's thought and Eastern philosophy. Heidegger with his existential approach places Being as the basis of authentic human experience, while the Eastern tradition, through various teachings such as Advaita Vedanta and Taoism, views Being as a fundamental reality that transcends duality and phenomenal boundaries. This convergence enriches ontological understanding by integrating the reflective and contemplative perspectives of both traditions, while challenging the dominance of narrower Western metaphysical approaches.

Furthermore, this cross-tradition study opens up opportunities to develop a more inclusive, transcultural, and contextual ontology in the face of the crisis of contemporary meaning and existence. This approach of inter-traditional reflective synthesis not only broadens philosophical horizons, but is also relevant in intercultural dialogue, philosophical education, and the development of global ethics responsive to the complexities of the modern world. Thus, revisiting the concept of Being through this comparative lens is an important contribution in deepening and broadening the insights of contemporary philosophy.

4. Conclusion

From the results of this study, it can be concluded that international cooperation, through intelligence exchange, legal harmonization, extradition, and technical capacity building of law enforcement officials, makes a significant contribution to strengthening the effectiveness of anti-terrorism law enforcement. However, challenges in the form of differences in political interests, domestic legal constraints, and state sovereignty issues are still the main obstacles. This study recommends strengthening inclusive cooperation mechanisms based on respect for international norms as a strategic step to deal with the dynamics of terrorism threats globally. Thus, international cooperation is not only a tool of law enforcement but also a key element in terrorism prevention strategies.

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