

Dual and non-dual ontology in Sartre and Mahāyāna Buddhism

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Abstract.

This paper examines Sartre's dualistic ontology in the light of the non-duality asserted by Mahāyāna Buddhism. In the first section, I show, against the objection of Hazel E. Barnes, that Sartre and Buddhism have comparable theories of consciousness. The second section discusses Steven W. Laycock's use of Zen philosophy to solve the Sartrean metaphysical problem regarding the origin of being for-itself. This solution involves rejecting the ontological priority of being in-itself in favor of the Buddhist understanding of interdependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*) and emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Finally, I explain how this aspect of Buddhist thought is consistent with Sartre's ontology, thus making an acceptable solution. This consistency is possible if we understand Sartre's ontology as provisionally true in a sense gleaned from the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra schools of Indian Buddhism, which were influential to the formation of Zen philosophy.

Introduction

This paper is a cross-cultural discussion of Sartre's ontology and that of Mahāyāna Buddhism. While Sartre is known for his dualism of ontological regions, being in-itself and being for-itself, Mahāyāna Buddhism is known for its ultimately non-dual ontology. The exchange between Sartre and the Mahāyāna has been begun by other scholars, most notably Hazel Barnes and Steven Laycock, both of whom refer specifically to Zen Buddhism, a Sino-Japanese development within the Mahāyāna. In this paper, I continue the discussion, starting from what I consider to be their most significant statements on the topic. In response to Barnes, I will demonstrate that Sartre and the Mahāyāna are similar in respect to non-egology and non-thetic self-consciousness. Then, building on Laycock's work, I explore the possibility of a non-dual ground underlying Sartre's duality of ontological regions. My strategy for dealing with the Mahāyāna understanding of consciousness is to turn to the Indian Yogācāra school, where an explication of the nature of consciousness was a central concern. The question of non-duality will be dealt with through an application of the Mahāyāna understanding of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), another feature of Zen thought which is derived from Indian Buddhism. "Emptiness" was an important concept for both the Yogācāra and the

Mādhyamika schools. This reference to Indian Buddhist philosophy ensures that the results of this study will not be applicable to Zen alone, but to all forms of Buddhist thought that utilize the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka philosophies in their conceptual underpinnings.¹ Without denying the differences between Sartre and Buddhism, I arrive at a kind of synthesis through provisionalizing Sartre's dualistic ontology in Mahāyānist fashion.

I. The comparability of Sartre and Mahāyāna Buddhism

To combat a once prevalent tendency to overstress the similarity between the viewpoints of Sartre and Zen, Hazel E. Barnes has done the important job of pointing out some significant differences, primarily in her book, *Existentialist Ethics*.² I quote Professor Barnes:

Two things distinguish the Zen view from the existentialist. First, the Zen doctrine does not differentiate between the idea of the Self as complex entity and the immediate self-awareness of the individual consciousness. Second, it does not allow for a psychic separation between consciousness and the object.³

Sartre, as we know, makes a distinction between the complex self which is the personal Ego, a creature of reflection, and the non-positional self-consciousness which accompanies every positional consciousness of an object. When the interpreters of Zen discuss the Ego, it is often unclear whether they mean the same entity which Sartre refers to as the Ego, or whether they mean the self-consciousness which Sartre holds to exist in nonreflective experience. The second difference pointed to by Professor Barnes, that of the "psychic separation between consciousness and the object," is related to the first, in that for Sartre, the non-thetic self-consciousness includes an implicit awareness of this "psychic separation," of consciousness' not being the object which it intends. This second difference is a complex issue, which I will discuss at length in the second and third parts of the paper.

I will respond to the first difference by referring to some of the tenets of Buddhist philosophy developed in India. Although Zen, or Ch'an, which developed in China about a thousand years after the time of the historical Buddha, is marked by its emphasis on meditation practice, the philosophical systems developed by the Indian Buddhists are not rejected, but merely set aside as a possible hindrance to this practice. Discursive thought is often not helpful in reaching the Zen goal of Satori. Nonetheless, the complex and often systematic thought developed by the Indian Buddhists is a part

of the philosophical underpinning of Zen, as of all extra-Indian Buddhist developments. Thus, without denying the great part that China's own Taoist tradition played in the formation of Zen, particularly in the latter's unique manner of expression, we are justified in referring to Indian Buddhism in our discussion of Zen philosophy.

To find the roots of Zen's rejection of the Ego, we must go back to the most primitive layer of Buddhist thought, that which is attributed to Śakyamuni Buddha himself. Here we find the rejection of the terms *ātman*, *puṅgala*, and *puruṣa*, all of which mean "self," whenever they are used in "any theory which posits a real, permanent self or person as the agent behind action or the subject of experience."⁴ This rejection of the self is similar to Sartre's rejection of the Ego as the center of consciousness, which he developed in *The Transcendence of the Ego*,⁵ and which he maintains in *Being and Nothingness*.⁶ The Buddhists did not, however, in the manner of Sartre, explicitly affirm the Ego as a creature of reflection, but were content to let it lay where it fell, as a non-existent.

The rejected Ego was replaced, in Buddhist thought, by the five aggregates (*skandhas*), which were: form (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā*), karmic formation (*saṃskāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna*). Together, these make up the totality of experience. Without dwelling on these, I will discuss just enough of the Buddhist theoretical development to resolve the issue of self-consciousness. Since consciousness, in early Buddhism, is a momentary process, the problem arose concerning the continuity of the individual across such lapses as dreamless sleep and certain meditational concentrations in which ordinary consciousness was left behind. The Theravāda, the lone survivor of the non-Mahāyāna schools, have their own theory, that of the *bhavanga*, an unconscious life-continuum.⁷ But as we are here concerned with Zen, I will discuss the Mahāyāna development called *ālayaviññāna*, or storehouse-consciousness, and the related concept of *manas*, as they were developed by the Yogācāra school. These concepts are delineated in an early form in the Lankāvatāra sutra, which is one of the foundational texts for Zen Buddhism.⁸ We will see from the functions of these two aspects of consciousness, that Buddhist philosophy has included non-thetic self-consciousness in its model.

We should note at this point that Sartre's understanding of the non-thetic self-consciousness grew in complexity as Sartre's thought developed from *The Transcendence of the Ego*, where he introduced the concept, to *Being and Nothingness*, where it remains a central concept in his thought. In the earlier work, the non-thetic self-consciousness is simply consciousness' quality of being self-manifesting, or implicitly aware of itself as consciousness while being explicitly aware of an external object. In *Being and Nothingness*, this

concept retains the meaning of consciousness' implicit awareness of itself, but the "itself" – that is, consciousness – has been given a more intricate interpretation by Sartre. Consciousness is now understood as a unity of temporal ekstasies, which means, for Sartre, that it exists in all three temporal dimensions at once.⁹ In its implicit reflexivity, consciousness is aware of itself as a temporal being. Every consciousness is haunted by a temporally continuous Self. Although this Self remains a detotalized totality – never achieving objective existence – it functions as a kind of temporal *gestalt*, giving unity to the life of consciousness through *haunting* it with enduring values. This haunting refers to the implicitly meaningful context within which the thetic object appears. The haunting as such belongs to the non-thetic self-consciousness.

Much as Sartre focuses on consciousness as the central aspect of human existence, the Yogācāra school of Buddhism devote much of their discussion to consciousness, so that they have received the name, Vijñāna-vāda (Consciousness school). In Buddhist thought, consciousness is of six kinds, corresponding to the six sensory domains of visual, audial, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental. Each of these has a definite object and may be said to be a thetic consciousness. The Yogācāra were explicit that each consciousness has the characteristic called *svasaṃvedanā*: self-manifestedness. This corresponds to the simpler form of Sartre's non-thetic self-consciousness. But the Yogācāra, taking their cue from the Lankāvatāra sūtra, have added two more types of consciousness to these six, namely *manas* and the storehouse-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*), to total eight types.¹⁰ The storehouse-consciousness, as already mentioned, grew out of the need within the tradition to account for the continuity of the individual's experience. It is so named because it stores, metaphorically speaking, "seeds" (*bījas*) or impressions from experience which function as the interpretive basis for future experience. The "appropriations, states, and perceptions" of the storehouse-consciousness are not themselves fully conscious, though neither are they unconscious.¹¹ The storehouse-consciousness is sometimes referred to as the "root-consciousness," (*mūla-vijñāna*) because unlike the six sensory consciousnesses mentioned above, which are momentary, the storehouse-consciousness, through its function of storing the "seeds," is responsible for the temporal continuity of experience. With this Yogācāra development, Buddhist thought becomes consistent with the phenomenological insight into the temporalizing activity of consciousness.

The concept, "*manas*," did not originate with the Buddhists. In the Upanisads, *manas* "has the function of combining and separating, or synthesis and analysis," as well as "the function of knowing pains and pleasures."¹² In early Buddhism, its meaning is similar: '*manas*' is used to refer to any consciousness which causes a subsequent mental consciousness.¹³ In other words,

manas is a reflective act of consciousness. With the Yogācāra, ‘*manas*’ takes on a new meaning.¹⁴ It becomes the “always reflecting,”¹⁵ at once identified with the whole of consciousness, and distinguished from the six sensory consciousnesses and the storehouse-consciousness.¹⁶ *Manas* mediates between the sensory or thetic consciousness and the storehouse-consciousness. The seeds from the storehouse-consciousness enter the present experience due to the functioning of *manas*, in a process called “evolution of consciousness” (*vijñāna-parināma*), and further impressions are planted in the storehouse-consciousness as seeds in a process called “perfuming” (*vāsanā*). In this way, despite the absence of an ego in their model, the Yogācāra have accounted for the temporal continuity of an individual’s experience. The evolution of consciousness from “seeds” is similar to Sartre’s understanding of consciousness’ being haunted by the Self which has been formed by past choices.

Thus the Yogācāra model of consciousness includes, in addition to the six sensory consciousnesses, which correspond to Sartre’s “thetic consciousness,” both of Sartre’s meanings of the non-thetic self-consciousness. The simple one, *svasaṃvedanā* or self-manifestedness, and the one which reflects not just the momentary consciousness, but the Self as temporal *gestalt*. This latter idea is covered by *manas* and the storehouse-consciousness. We should be clear that these Buddhist concepts are not identical in meaning to the Sartrean ones to which I have aligned them. A closer look would reveal significant differences between the Buddhist and Sartrean conceptual systems.¹⁷ Their place in the Yogācāra system is enough, however, to demonstrate that the Buddhists do make the distinction denied them by Barnes. The conception of Ego which Sartre has rejected is similar to the *ātman* and related ideas which are rejected by Buddhism. The immediate self-awareness of the individual consciousness is captured by the concept of *svasaṃvedanā*. And further still, the Yogācāra development of the eight-*vijñāna* system – that is, the six sensory consciousnesses plus *manas* and the storehouse-consciousness, show that they had developed a complex notion of consciousness’ being the origin of temporal continuity through a process comparable to Sartre’s notion of haunting.

The conceptual schema used in the Yogācāra descriptions of consciousness is taken from the Lankāvatāra, a sutra which, as we have seen, was of utmost importance during the formative period of Zen Buddhism in China.¹⁸ On the continuing significance of the Yogācāra theory for Zen, historian Heinrich Dumoulin states that, “when Zen masters attempt to offer their students a psychological explanation of the process of enlightenment they generally return to the teaching on the eight consciousnesses.”¹⁹ Hence we are justified in referring to the Yogācāra theory in our discussion of Zen psychology.

II. The Metaphysical Origin of Being For Itself

Having cleared this up, we are in a position to look at Steven W. Laycock's paper, "Nothingness and emptiness: Exorcising the shadow of God in Sartre."²⁰ This is Laycock's second paper focused on engaging the thought of Sartre with that of Zen.²¹ The paper deals with the second difference between Sartre and Zen which Hazel Barnes has pointed out, Sartre's "psychic separation between consciousness and the object" which is apparently not to be found in Zen. But unlike Barnes, who defends Sartre in opposition to Zen, Laycock has affirmed Zen as a cure for the "ontological schizopathology"²² which results from Sartre's ontological dualism. But Zen cannot come to the aid of Sartre until the rigid acceptance of the separation between consciousness and its object is abandoned. "The therapy we propose . . . is, once for all, to reject the presumption that, while 'all is clear and lucid in consciousness . . . the object with its characteristic opacity is before consciousness.'"²³ After briefly examining Laycock's work, I will explain why the rejection of this tenet, which is clearly ontological in origin – not merely psychological, as the term, 'psychic separation' would suggest – does not necessitate a rejection of the whole of Sartre's ontology in *Being and Nothingness*.

"God," for Sartre, is the synthesis of the two ontological regions, being in-itself and being-for-itself. God is a being which is identical with itself, yet which is consciousness. For Sartre, such a synthesis is impossible because consciousness cannot be identical with itself. The presence to itself which we have discussed above by the name, 'non-thetic self-consciousness', implies non-identity with self, a "virtual separation" or "detachment."²⁴ Unlike being in-itself, which "is what it is," being-for-itself or consciousness "is what it is not and is not what it is."²⁵ In other words, the identity relation may apply to the object of consciousness, but never to consciousness as distinguished from its object. This difference between the in-itself and for-itself, which makes their synthesis impossible, is what Laycock calls "the shadow of God."²⁶ It is important because human reality, or the for-itself, determines itself as a lack in relation to this impossible synthesis. As Laycock puts it, "the négativité which is the absence of God 'summons and demands the appearance,' the presence, of God. The summons goes unanswered."²⁷

Laycock has found in Zen the means for exorcising the shadow of God. For Zen does not aim at the synthesis of in-itself and for-itself which Sartre considers to be impossible. No school of Buddhism could aim for the realization of this "self as substantial being," as Sartre calls it.²⁸ Rather, as Laycock interprets it, Zen aims for the "matrix of Being"²⁹ prior to its split into in-itself and for-itself. Zen masters have sometimes called this "the original face," which Laycock glosses as "that which is prior to the advent of consciousness, prior to the advent of the distantiating affirmation of self, with its inevitable,

and inevitably dissatisfying, severances.”³⁰ To express this Zen realization in Sartrean terms, Laycock calls it the “ni-en-soi-ni-pour-soi (the neither)” which correctly opposes it to the impossible synthesis which is “the both.”³¹ Thus, in realizing the original face, which is a state ontologically prior to the division of reality into in-itself and for-itself, the shadow of God is removed.

The problem is that Sartre did not accept “the neither,” Laycock’s “primordial womb” which has given birth “at once” to the “distinct but inseparable ‘twins’ ” of in-itself and for itself.³² Sartre’s phenomenological method discloses only the in-itself and the for-itself with their fundamentally different modes of being. Thus if we consider the totality formed by the two, “the concept which would not be cleft by an hiatus,”³³ Sartre feels we are considering an ideal being. Sartre identifies this being with the self-cause (*causa sui*) which is the for-itself’s original project of being. As this ideal integration or synthesis is taken to be an impossibility, Sartre judges it better to consider the pure in-itself, which can be considered apart from the for-itself without abstraction, as the ontologically prior existent. For Sartre, it is the in-itself which has “decompressed” or nihilated itself to bring about the for-itself.³⁴ To be sure, the in-itself, like the original face of Zen, is non-dual, but it is also a “total plenitude” of being. Its fullness is so complete that “there is not the slightest emptiness in being, not the tiniest crack through which nothingness might slip in.”³⁵ It has no reference outside of itself, and does not depend on the for-itself for its being.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, by contrast, ontological non-duality is expressed, not as being, but as *śūnyatā*, emptiness. This term does not refer to an absolute non-being – the Void – but rather signifies the merely phenomenal nature of the subject-object division, both sides of which originate interdependently. As declared in the Heart Sutra, a fundamental Mahāyāna text, “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form,” which means, among other things, that neither being nor non-being is ontologically prior or independent. If there is a non-dual reality underlying the perceived duality, it cannot fall on just one side of the fence. It must ultimately be beyond even the concepts of “being” and “non-being,”³⁶ or at least have room for both. Having found this difference between Buddhism and Sartre, it becomes clear that in order to use Zen to exorcise the shadow of God from the Sartrean world, the ontological priority of the in-itself over the for-itself must be rejected. Laycock has taken the necessary step by replacing the “in-itself” in this context with a concept gleaned from Anaximander, the “*apeiron*,” meaning the “boundless.”³⁷

We must be clear that it is not merely to make Sartre consistent with Zen that such a move is called for. If so, Laycock’s paper would be of limited importance for Sartre scholarship. It is, rather, of great importance because, using Zen (and Anaximander), Laycock has solved an internal problem in *Being*

and *Nothingness* which Sartre himself calls a “profound contradiction.”³⁸ If the in-itself, in its total fullness of being and utter identity, were prior to the for-itself, why should it give birth to the for-itself? Sartre says that “*everything takes place as if* the in-itself in a project to found itself gave itself the modification of for-itself.”³⁹ This is indicated by the facts that: 1) the for-itself is the only way the in-itself could found itself, presence to self being a necessary facet of the self-cause; and 2) “consciousness (or the for-itself) is in fact a project of founding itself; that is, of attaining to the dignity of the in-itself/for-itself or in-itself as self-cause.”⁴⁰ Yet it is absurd that the in-itself would form the project of founding itself, because “it is through the for-itself that the possibility of a foundation comes to the world.”⁴¹ This means that before the advent of consciousness, the in-itself “would have to be already consciousness,”⁴² which is a contradiction. Sartre leaves it “up to metaphysics to form the hypotheses which will allow us to conceive of this process,”⁴³ while he himself, through limiting the scope of his project to ontology, leaves us with the “everything takes place as if.”

But it is unfair to the metaphysician to make her or him begin from a manifest contradiction. Fortunately, Laycock has found a solution to the problem by substituting the *apeiron* for the in-itself in this pre-dual reality. It is, then, not the in-itself which decompresses into the for itself, but the *apeiron*, which, while not consciousness in the ordinary sense, is also not a plenitude of being with no room for the nothingness necessary for there to be consciousness. Neither is it the synthesis of in-itself and for-itself which has been rejected by Sartre. It is, rather, the process of interdependent origination (Sanskrit: *pratīya-samutpāda*) as conceived in Buddhism which gives birth to the duality of in-itself and for-itself. Why this process should have begun, as asked from the metaphysical standpoint, remains an unanswerable question. The details of the process itself, traditionally divided by the Buddhists into twelve linking factors (Sanskrit: *nidānas*), is beyond the scope of this paper.⁴⁴ But since I have, following Laycock, offered the Buddhist approach as a solution to a Sartrean problem, I will explain how the Buddhist non-dual conception of reality can be applied to Sartre without abandoning Sartre’s insights. This will be done with reference to both the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism.⁴⁵

III. Provisionalizing Sartre’s Ontology

How is it that the acceptance of the *apeiron* or non-dual reality does not necessitate a rejection of Sartre’s division of reality into the two ontological regions, in-itself and for-itself? The answer is that Sartre’s dual ontology describes the ontological situation of ordinary consciousness. The underlying

non-duality described by the Buddhists is not characteristic of ordinary experience, although it is considered to be the ultimate truth (Sanskrit: *paramārtha satya*). The Mahāyāna understanding of ultimate truth, which is contrasted with the truth of worldly convention, was well-expressed by the Madhyama-ka, the other Buddhist philosophical development from India which greatly influenced Zen.⁴⁶ The idea is that human beings live much of their lives within a pattern of dualistic constructs based on linguistic and other conventions. The truth of this type of experience is referred to as the truth of worldly convention (*samvṛti satya*). The truth of worldly convention is necessary to linguistic communication, including the expression of Buddhist teachings. Yet it is recognized within Mahāyāna Buddhism that such truth ultimately blocks off a clear experience of the non-dualistic truth of ultimate meaning (*paramārtha satya*). The truth of ultimate meaning is considered ineffable, but can be pointed to from within the limits of worldly convention. Thus, there are two perspectives one may take on the nature of reality: the worldly and conventional, which is characterized by duality, and the ultimately meaningful, which is non-dual.

Conceptually, Mahāyānists have utilized the concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) to express the ultimately non-dual nature of reality. “Emptiness” has had a vital influence on the Zen understanding of reality.⁴⁷ Emptiness signifies, for the Mādhyamika, the lack of self-nature or essence inherent in all things. It signifies the importance of the negative in Mahāyāna ontology. However, emptiness is not a purely negative concept, for this lack of self-nature is recognized to be that which allows for the process of interdependent origination to occur. Far from being nihilists, the Mādhyamika takes its stand on “the middle path that is beyond the extremes of existence and non-existence.”⁴⁸ “Emptiness” is thus the primary Buddhist equivalent of Laycock’s “*apeiron*.” Both of these concepts refer to the nature of reality ontologically prior to the distinction between being and non-being, or, in Sartrean terms, between being in-itself and being for-itself.

The Yogācāra school also accepted the concept of emptiness, as well as the idea that from different perspectives, reality would appear as either dual or non-dual. The Yogācāra discuss emptiness in relation to their three nature theory. According to this theory, there is a constructed nature (*parikalpita svabhāva*) in which reality appears in a dualistic manner. Opposing this is the perfected nature, which is non-dual. Mediating between the two is the interdependent nature, which refers to the aforementioned process of interdependent origination.⁴⁹ Emptiness is applied to the three nature theory through the background theory of the “three non-natures.” According to this theory, the fundamental characteristic of each of the three natures is itself without self-nature (*niḥsvabhāva*). It is due to this absence of self-nature

or intrinsic being within the three natures that their convertibility is possible. When the duality that characterizes the constructed nature is seen to be empty, the non-dual perfected nature is recognized, in which “the emptiness which is ever present manifests itself.”⁵⁰ This “revolution” (*parāvṛtti*) takes place on the basis of the interdependent nature. The latter nature is also empty, because, as the Mādhyamika had shown, interdependent origination and the absence of self-nature are necessary concomitants. Thus the Yogācāra, while the form of their theoretical construction differs from the Mādhyamika, are consistent with the latter in their recognition of emptiness, and the multiple perspectives this allows one to take on the nature of reality.

The possibility of taking two distinct perspectives on the nature of reality, one dualistic and one non-dualistic, can be applied to the Sartrean ontology. While the *apeiron* is always there, “the very ‘ground’ beneath the fence”⁵¹ which separates the ontological regions, it takes some digging to remove that fence. Sartrean phenomenology, although it takes the important step of removing the Ego from the center of consciousness, does not dig deep enough to recognize the full consequences of this step. Nevertheless, the discovery that the ground beneath the dualistic fence extends to the boundless non-duality does not preclude that it still supports the fence on its surface. In Mādhyamika terms, this surface reality is described by the truth of worldly convention. In the Yogācāra system, it is shown how the duality characterizing this surface level is brought about from the depths of the interdependent nature. In all cases, duality is admitted as the characteristic phenomenology of ordinary, unenlightened experience, but is ultimately negated by the all-encompassing emptiness.

Having shown how both dual and non-dual ontological thought can be accepted by admitting of different levels or perspectives, we must now relate this understanding to the problem of consciousness, as understood by both Sartre and the Mahāyāna. In traditional Zen style, the Yogācāra theory will be used to explain the relationship between consciousness and enlightenment.

As we know, the Sartrean non-thetic self-consciousness contains an implicit awareness of the separation of consciousness from its object, which corresponds to his ontological duality. Similarly, Buddhist philosophy contains, in the Yogācāra notion of “*manas*,” a functional equivalent of the non-thetic self-consciousness. But, for the Yogācāra, this is a provisional description of consciousness. *Manas* functions with the storehouse consciousness and the senses to bring about a dualistic experience of reality, but this experience may be radically altered through meditation practice. When this practice reaches consummation, the function of *manas* is halted, leaving only the underlying non-dual reality of the storehouse consciousness. Ordinary, dualistic consciousness, as it has been described by Sartre, and provisionally described by

the Yogācāra, is radically altered when the non-dual ontology is realized in experience. The new consciousness would appear to be a direct intuition of reality without even the slightest reflexive movement. As Dumoulin points out, “there is much that suggests an identification of Zen enlightenment with conversion (*parāvṛtti*)” as discussed by the Yogācāra.⁵² The interdependent nature, as the basis (*āśraya*) which converts between the dualistic and non-dualistic experiences, is none other than the storehouse consciousness,⁵³ whose evolution the Yogācāra identify with the process of interdependent origination.

My concluding discussion concerns the feasibility, within the Sartrean framework, of this radical alteration of consciousness. Let us look at Sartre’s own statements. First of all, he writes, in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, that the subject-object duality “is purely logical” and must “definitively disappear from philosophical preoccupations” if ethics is “to find its bases in reality.”⁵⁴ For Sartre, this statement meant a rejection of the Ego as subject. In his developed ontology, as we have seen, being for-itself is always related to being in-itself, but being in-itself is non-relational. In pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism also, the Ego was rejected, but the being in-itself (Sanskrit: *svabhāva*) of phenomena remained. This position was overcome by the Mahāyāna, who emphasized the selfless nature, at the ultimate level, of phenomena (Sanskrit: *dharmanairātmya*) as well as of consciousness. Both sides of the phenomenal duality arise interdependently. Being in-itself as an independent reality can be similarly overcome in Sartre by moving to the underlying non-duality discussed above. The features of the in-itself – identity, transcendence, perspectival infinity – remain at the phenomenal level.

Secondly, Sartre states in *Being and Nothingness* that “presence to itself . . . represents the primary upsurge”⁵⁵ of the for-itself’s doomed project, the quest for the in-itself/for-itself. He writes that it is this attempt at self-foundation which results “in the radical separation of being and the consciousness of being.”⁵⁶ In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre was pessimistic about the possibility of abandoning this project, which seems to be an essential characteristic of the for-itself. But if we consider his statements about the absolute freedom of human beings, and his existentialist motto, “existence precedes essence,”⁵⁷ under a more optimistic eye, then this possibility ought to be open. It will not, as we have conceived it, result in the increased anguish of a for-itself which flees the in-itself and itself, as in Sartre’s conclusion to *Being and Nothingness*. The change in consciousness discussed in this paper is not the affirmation of the for-itself as “the nothingness by which the world exists,”⁵⁸ but the intuitive realization of the interdependent nature of both in-itself and for-itself. While Sartre himself did not take this position, his philosophy belongs to the present generation of philosophers to reinterpret in a way that

is found to be compelling for philosophical reasons. The non-dual ground is compelling because it overcomes the “profound contradiction” which Sartre has left to metaphysics in its task of “unifying the givens” of his ontology.

Notes

1. The influence of these schools extends to Tibetan Buddhism as well as additional Chinese and Japanese sects.
2. Hazel E. Barnes, *Existential Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).
3. Barnes, p. 260.
4. Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 87.
5. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*, trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Noonday Press, 1957).
6. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).
7. Wit Wisadavet, *Sartre's and the Buddhist's Concept of Man* (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1963), p. 14.
8. D.T. Suzuki states, “the undeniable fact remains that the Lankāvātāra was the book handed by Bodhidharma to his first disciple Hui-k'ê as the sutra containing the essential teachings of his school.” *Studies in the Lankāvātāra Sutra* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1930, rep. 1972), p. 90.
9. For an excellent account of the change in Sartre's position, see Phyllis Berdt Kenevan, “Self-Consciousness and the Ego in the Philosophy of Sartre,” *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. P.A. Schillp (La Salle: Open Court, 1981), pp. 197–210.
10. In relation to Sartre's less analytic approach to the description of consciousness, these may be viewed as aspects rather than types of consciousness.
11. Vasubandhu, “Thirty Verses,” *Seven Works of Vasubandhu*, trans. Stefan Anacker (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), p. 186.
12. P.T. Raju, *The Philosophical Traditions of India* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971), p. 63.
13. Stefan Anacker, translator's introduction, *Seven Works of Vasubandhu*, p. 60.
14. Anacker, p. 61.
15. Vasubandhu, “Thirty Verses,” *Seven Works*, p. 186.
16. Vasubandhu, “A Discussion of the Five Aggregates,” *Seven Works*, pp. 71–72.
17. For such a look, see Chapter II of the author's dissertation, *Two Versions of the Non-substantial Self: Sartre and Yogācāra Buddhism Compared* (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Buffalo, 1995), pp. 73–141.
18. See note eight, above.
19. Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History vol. 1, India and China* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 53. Cf. also p. 35.
20. Steven W. Laycock, “Nothingness and emptiness: Exorcising the shadow of God in Sartre,” *Man and World* 24 (1991) pp. 395–407.
21. The first one is, “Sartre and a Chinese Buddhist Theory of No-Self,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 9 (1989): pp. 25–42.
22. Laycock, “Nothingness and emptiness,” p. 402.
23. Laycock, “Nothingness and emptiness,” p. 402, has quoted Sartre from *The Transcendence of the Ego*, p. 40.
24. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 124.
25. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 100 et passim.
26. Laycock, “Nothingness and emptiness,” p. 398.
27. Laycock, “Nothingness and emptiness,” p. 397.

28. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 140.
29. Laycock, "Nothingness and emptiness," p. 405.
30. Laycock, "Nothingness and emptiness," p. 404.
31. Laycock, "Nothingness and emptiness," p. 406.
32. Laycock, "Nothingness and emptiness," p. 405.
33. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 792.
34. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 133.
35. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 121.
36. Nāgārjuna, founder of the Mādhyamika school, writes, "The teacher (Buddha) has taught the abandonment of the concepts of being and non-being." Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyama-kakārikā* Ch. XXV, K. 10, trans. Kenneth Inada (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1970), p. 156.
37. Laycock, "Nothingness and emptiness," p. 406.
38. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 789.
39. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 789–790 (Sartre's italics).
40. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 789.
41. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 789.
42. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 789.
43. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 790.
44. For a discussion of the twelve nidānas in relation to Sartrean metaphysics, see Heyman, *Two Versions*, Ch. III, pp. 142–217.
45. While these schools became opponents during the later period of Indian Buddhist scholasticism, there is no evidence that this was the case during their early development. It is this earlier development that is being considered here, and which exerted the influence on Zen Buddhism.
46. A third Indian development that influenced Zen Buddhism was that expressed by the Avatamsaka sutras, regarding the interpenetration of all things. This received philosophic systematization in China with the Hua Yen school. The Avatamsaka sutras do not negate the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, however, but rather "presuppose the work of the two main philosophical schools of Mahāyāna." Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism*, p. 46.
47. For an example of effective use of the Madhyamaka "emptiness" in the clarification of Zen philosophy, see T.P. Kasulis, *Zen Action/Zen Person* (Honolulu: Univ. Press of Hawaii, 1981), pp. 16–28.
48. Nagao, "Buddhist Ontology," *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra: A study of Mahāyāna Philosophies* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1991), p. 157.
49. Nagao, "Buddhist Ontology," *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra*, p. 183.
50. Nagao, "Buddhist Ontology," *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra*, p. 185.
51. Laycock, "Nothingness and emptiness," p. 406.
52. Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism*, p. 53.
53. Nagao, "Connotations of the Word Āśraya (Basis) in the Mahāyāna-Sūtrāṅkara," *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra*, p. 79.
54. Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, p. 105.
55. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 789.
56. Ibid.
57. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. Philip Mairet (London: Methuen, 1948), p. 28.
58. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 797.