CHAPTER 22

UEDA SHIZUTERU

The Self That Is Not a Self in a Twofold World

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My father taught at Kōya University and also presided over a temple on Mount Kōya. Once, when I was already living in Kyoto, I returned home for the summer holidays. I was around 30 years old and, as a postdoctoral adjunct lecturer, did not yet have a steady job. So I spent my days in my father's office which was located on the ground floor of the University library's splendid prewar four-story building. For lunch I returned to our temple by way of a small mountain path behind the library. It was not only a shorter way than going through town but, much to my liking, was also a narrow path through the standing trees with no trace of anyone to be seen.

One day, I encountered a dog on this mountain path. That happened only once during all those years. I saw this dog coming towards me, but the path was too narrow for more than one man to walk on . . . . I felt somehow awkward and the dog also averted his eyes when we tried to make room and squeeze past one another. Then, after seven or eight steps I felt struck [by a feeling], stopped, and turned around only to find my eyes meeting those of the dog who himself had stopped and turned around. I was surprised and he also gave the impression of feeling slightly unsettled. He looked to the ground and hesitatingly trotted off. Before long, he had vanished down the slope of the mountain path.

Even now I see him before me with his self-conscious expression. And each and every time I see him it strikes me: The one I met that day I had not taken to be a dog at all.

— *Kodachi ni te* (“Among the Trees”)

UEDA Shizuteru, born in 1926, is generally regarded as the main representative of the Kyoto School’s third generation and one of the most stimulating and influential thinkers of contemporary Japan. His academic research focuses on questions from the fields of modern philosophy, East Asian Buddhism, and Christian religiosity. But, as the epigraph suggests, there is more to his work than detached analysis: he is a suggestive and imaginative essayist as well as a distinguished lecturer. In his books, essays, and talks, he manages to integrate the experiences of an eventful life with a wealth of philosophical knowledge and understanding, as well as compassionate insight into the human condition.

Ueda graduated in 1949 from Kyoto University’s Faculty of Philosophy under the guidance of Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990), who may well be said to be the defining influence on Ueda’s thought. Ueda then spent the years between 1959 and 1963 at Marburg University in Germany, where he wrote his doctoral dissertation in the field of religious studies.[1] After returning to Japan, he was professor first of German language and literature and later, succeeding his mentor Nishitani, of religious philosophy at Kyoto and Hanazono Universities. He has published extensively[2] on topics such as Christian mysticism, especially that of Meister Eckhart (1260–1328); Buddhism, especially Chan/Zen; philosophy, especially that of Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945); and on the philosophy of language and the phenomenology of spiritual experience, especially as depicted in classical Zen texts such as the *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures*.[3]

There is another facet to his life, however: a steady religious practice that both underlies and informs Ueda’s academic career. He is, as his own evocative reminiscence quoted here relates, the son of a Buddhist priest at Mount Kōya in Wakayama prefecture. However, unlike his upbringing in a temple household belonging to the esoteric Shingon denomination of Japanese Buddhism might suggest, Ueda’s religious inclinations lie elsewhere, namely with the meditative introspection of Zen Buddhism. He has spent long years training as a lay practitioner at Shōkoku Zen monastery in the city of

Kyoto, where abbot Kajitani Sōnin (1914–1995) bestowed upon him official acknowledgment of his awakening (*inka shōmei* 印可証明). Ueda continued his religious praxis at Shōkoku monastery until 2017: he presided over a meditation group of lay practitioners to whom he also lectured regularly on the Zen Buddhist canon. He passed away just before this volume was published in 2019.

In this chapter, I examine the thought of Ueda Shizuteru with special reference to his conceptualization of self and world. On our way through Ueda's treatments of Descartes's philosophical meditations, Heidegger's existential analysis, and Zen phenomenology, I will demonstrate that his work posits the interdependency of philosophical analysis and spiritual practice and is concerned first and foremost with an existential transformation of the human subject. Ueda's work therefore also calls into question any rigorous distinction of academic disciplines in favor of a living and practicing philosophy.

With and Against Descartes: Meditations on the Self

Small essayistic pieces such as the one quoted at the beginning of this chapter are widespread in Ueda's writings and often follow a certain pattern: he portrays some perplexing everyday experience that casts doubt on the basic assumptions we usually have as to our identity, our everyday lives, the world we live in, and the way we function in our multiple roles. Furthermore, in such situations, it becomes apparent that our conception of the world and our place within it is at best preliminary, at worst fundamentally flawed.

We invariably misrepresent and misconceptualize our self and the world we live in—to Ueda, this observation is neither a mere academic exercise nor is it dogmatic in nature; it is meant rather as a sober diagnosis of the existential situation that pervades our everyday lives. Ueda agrees with Heidegger when he defines moments in which our ambitions fail, our expectations remain unfulfilled, or in which we face human frailty and mortality as

moments of existential angst from which there can be no easy escape. Then, we are confronted with a ubiquitous insignificance that renders the images we have of ourselves and the self-assumed roles we play in our worlds invalid and leaves us with the question: “Who am I?” Or, to rephrase the question in terms better suited to philosophical analysis: “What is the self?”[4]

Indeed, this question is pivotal to Ueda. To provide an answer, he suggests, it is necessary to return to and start anew from the—phenomenologically speaking—most basic stuff available to us: experience.

When discussing the nature of experience, we usually rely on a dualistic conception of subject and object: someone experiences something, and the observer makes sense of the observed in a hermeneutical act. (This dichotomy claims validity even in the case of purely internal experiences in which we experience different parts of ourselves.) The sovereign subject standing over and against an external world of objects finds its paradigmatic philosophical formulation in the work of René Descartes (1596–1650).

In his quest for truth, Descartes arrived at a rigorous application of methodical doubt, which intends to strip away everything that can in any way be doubted in order to finally leave only that which is absolutely certain.[5] This certainty, somewhat counter to our initial, intuitive expectations, he found in the perceiving subject itself. Because although it may be argued that error and deceit remain possible, especially in perception, even if that should be the case, we can be certain that there must be something that perceives, errs, and is deceived. That something can be none other than the self. Since every one of these processes is located within the subject’s mind and its cognition, Cartesian certainty takes the form of the cogito: “I think, therefore I am.” Descartes thus formulates an answer to Ueda’s question of “What is the self?” The self is the cogito; that is, the thinking subject around which every kind of world—be it reality or fantasy—takes place.

For Ueda, this answer is insufficient. Granted, the “cogito ergo sum” is an “extreme and powerful answer,”[6] the pervasive plausibility of which allows for the human dominance of nature through technology, progress in the sciences and arts, and the steady growth

of material wealth. That these come at a price is a truism that hardly needs elaboration, but it should be emphasized that the problematic nature of a dualistic and antagonistic conception of the human being versus his world begins, for Ueda, at the level of the basic experience of the self. According to his analysis of the Cartesian subject, its defining attribute is the recursive character of its cognition: the "I think, therefore I am" leaves unmentioned, and its deceptive simplicity and superficial clarity obfuscate, the fact that it is in itself a thought process. Unabridged, the phrase actually implies: "I think: I think, therefore I am." In its basic structure Descartes's argument is circular in nature. It aims to prove the certainty of thought on the basis of thought itself: "I think (cogito B) that I am because I think (cogito A)." Seen from this perspective, Cartesian analysis does not arrive at certainty at all, which by now is effectively left out of the equation, but at a solipsistic entanglement of the self in its own cognition. As Ueda puts it in no uncertain terms: Thought thinking itself "comes to realize that thought itself [cogito B] is more certain than the 'I think, therefore I am' [cogito A] that had been discovered as something certain. Thought is not satisfied with discovering truth but has the tendency to hyperbolize itself, as that which discovered truth, into truth as such."[7] Then, "the absoluteness of an absolute existence that has its ground in itself and thus is the ground of everything existing . . . metastasizes onto the side of the human subject"[8] in an act of false apotheosis. In the end, the thinking self comes to realize itself as the basis not only of its own existence but of existence as such. The self is then taken as sufficient cause for self and world, and the Cartesian formula may be verbalized as a closed circle: "I am because I am."

According to Ueda, this narcissistic megalomania is unacceptable for several reasons. For one, it puts subjects in competition with one another over the position of absolute existence or, more radically, effectively negates the possibility of any other subject in addition to one's own self. Even more problematic for Ueda is this view's hermetic structure: by shutting out everything that is not the self, no room whatsoever is left for experience as the most fundamental constituent of human existence.

The Layered Self: A Nishidaean Dynamism

In opposition to this recursive conception of self, Ueda understands experience—in the strict sense of the term—to be a primordial dimension underlying the Cartesian cogito. As such, it must constantly elude the framework of subject/object or self/world. Primordial experience is not yet differentiated into subject and object but constitutes an open whole. It is on the basis of this dimension that the possibility of discursive reflection arises only as a secondary development.

It is well known that in his debut study, *Inquiry into the Good* (1911), Nishida's ambition was "to explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality."[9] The key term in this programmatic statement is, of course, "pure experience"—a term adopted from the writings of William James (1842–1910). The concise description Nishida gives for pure experience is equally well-known and oft-quoted: "The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound, for example, is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgment of what the color or sound might be."[10]

Ueda takes up Nishida's definition in a twofold manner: on the one hand, in the role of the exegete, he explains and illustrates it with concrete examples.[11] In this function, he points out that primordial experience is "pure" precisely because it is not yet "contaminated" with the rift between subject and object. Contrary to our everyday perspective and Cartesian analysis, the subject/object dichotomy is not a precondition of experience but a product of the spontaneous self-unfolding of an underlying experiential unity. It is only on this basis that poetic speech and conceptual thought become possible. These, in turn, then relate to primordial experience and, in the process, regularly misinterpret its self-unfolding in the terminology of a subject/object dualism.

On the other hand, Ueda speaks as a creative philosopher in his own right when he points out that the phrasing of Nishida's ambitious project—"to explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the

sole reality"—itself mirrors the self-unfolding structure of pure experience.[12] The experiential fact (*koto* 事: "pure experience") unfolds into self-awareness and primal articulation (*koto* 言: "pure experience [is] the sole reality") and is developed further self-consciously into a principle of philosophical reflection ("to explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality").

Ueda specifies primordial experience as that in which "the framework of subject and object, in which consciousness was enclosed, is broken through, opening up a [field of] disclosedness."[13] Consciousness at that point is, in the most radical sense, a factual consciousness in which observer and fact are as yet undifferentiated. Ueda sees instances of such experiential phenomena in spiritual communion and meditative immersion as events of pure awareness that form the basis of the subsequent advent of self-awareness.

Out of this event arises spontaneous articulation by way of *poiesis*, an "Ur-Satz" or primordial phrase. Words begin to structure the original undifferentiated disclosedness: the self becomes conscious not *as* pure experience (that would be a conceptual contradiction), but *of* pure experience as an initial fracture of the primordial experiential union. This speech act is truly poietic in the sense of the most fundamental creativity.[14] The language of the poet and the sage (and perhaps also the madman), inspired by mystic communion, deep meditation, or transcendent inspiration, belongs here. Although an initial differentiation between subject and object becomes gradually visible, this is not yet reflective consciousness.

In the subsequent act of conceptualization, in the formulation of a "Grundsatz" or philosophical principle, subject and object stand over and against one another in the way Descartes found them to be and in the way we are used to them. It is only from this perspective that we are able to reflect back on the process by which we went from immediacy through elementary poietic expression on to the dichotomy of everyday consciousness. The development then comes full circle: by way of abstraction, analysis, and synthesis, philosophical reflection is initiated, which Ueda defines as "the self-objectification of pure experience."[15] The centripetal movement in which the self-development of pure experience reflexively

reappropriates itself thus complements the centrifugal impulse of articulation and conceptualization.

At the same time, philosophical reflection opens up the possibility of seeing these three dimensions as intimately related to one another: they are phases in the process of the self-unfolding of pure experience. For this reason, Ueda characterizes them as a "dynamic connection that makes up the layering of (1) awareness, (2) self-awareness, and (3) understanding self and world."[16] Descending through its own formative layers, the everyday self eventually reaches the unbroken facticity of pure experience. It discovers its own ground in a disclosedness that carries the latent seeds not only of the self, but also of the world—in an as-yet undiscriminated and unarticulated self/world-complex.

But, if this is the case, our initial question as to the nature of the self must also pertain to the place of the self in its world and, per extension, to the world as such. This is to say that the self is always a self within a certain world and, as such, a "being-in-the-world." And to Ueda, "being-in-the-world" encompasses the mystical or spiritual dimension of pure experience as well as the reflective or philosophical dimension of a self/world hermeneutics. For this reason, he posits the necessity of religious insight to complement philosophical speculation and establishes Zen as the experiential paradigm: "Zen is the penetration into the origins of the self's self-awareness, whereas philosophy, as an ordering and unifying apprehension of the world, is the self-awareness of the world in which the self is located."[17]

The Twofold World: Totality of Involvements and Nothingness

On the one hand, Ueda often adopts Heidegger's locution and speaks of human being as "being-in-the-world" (*sekai-nai sonzai* 世界内存在). On the other, he asserts: "First and foremost, we understand (or rather misunderstand) the world and the self in a

prejudiced way in that we find ourselves within the world."[18] How can we resolve this apparent contradiction?

In the preceding paragraphs, we have established that the self in its basic structure is constituted by a dynamical movement between experience, articulation, and reflection. Seen this way, "self" in the everyday usage of the term is too simple, too unambiguous to be left unqualified. As we have also already indicated, the world derives from the same source as "the self"; namely, the disclosive unity of primordial experience. It might therefore seem prudent to afford it the same reservations as "the self," and, indeed, it comes as no surprise that for Ueda "world" also has a twofold structure.

Ueda follows Heidegger in defining the world as a "totality of involvements":[19] human existence within the world, our *Dasein*, enables us to relate to other beings, attribute them significance, and disclose them in the context of the world. We understand ourselves and the things of our world in terms of this involvement, but the world itself remains beyond the grasp of such existential comportment. Only in moments of anxiety is our everyday worldview fundamentally upset; only then does the totality of involvements slip away into nothingness; only then, as beings are "nihilated" and fall from view, does the world as such become visible. It is revealed as enveloped and permeated by nothingness, and, out of this nothingness, the totality of involvements becomes possible: "On the one hand, nothingness lets beings as a whole slip away in the manner of 'having no support in anything'; it exposes Dasein to nothingness and indeed sends it adrift into nothingness. But, on the other hand, nothingness conversely makes human being possible in that it is [only] by transcending beings as a whole that human being can relate to beings."[20]

Thus, every kind of human existence not only finds itself immersed in the world as totality of involvements, but also emplaced in the world as nothingness. Being and nothingness form a complementary unity that renders the world essentially ambiguous. "World" is always already a twofold structure in which a self is surrounded by being as well as by nothingness. This implies that "our existence is a twofold 'within.' "[21]

Let us approach the matter from yet another angle. Drawing on Nishida's theory of "locus" (*basho* 場所), Ueda employs the term "world" in the sense of a plurality of loci.[22] Every locus is multivalent with regards to time and space: I am writing this sentence late in the afternoon on a kitchen table in my home, not too far from the Oktoberfest chaos, and in an out-of-the-way corner of the Milky Way's Orion arm some billion years after the Big Bang. In relation to each of these definitions, I understand myself differently and choose different interpretations of my role within a specific locus: as family member, university lecturer, Munich resident, and so on. In this sense, "world" is more than a mere container in which beings may (or may not) find their place. Rather, it is the constantly shifting totality of spatially, temporally, functionally, and relationally specific loci. "World," then, is the locus of all loci. That being the case, the question arises: what is the locus of the world? The answer cannot simply be that it has no locus, because it would be unintelligible to say that the world does in fact exist, but it does not exist anywhere. Neither can we "specify" or "define"—in the precise senses of these terms—the locus in which the world exists because then the locus of the world would have to be part of the cumulative totality of loci and thus, paradoxically, be subsumed in the term "world" as well. It follows that the locus of the world defies verbalization, let alone definition, and can only be referred to as a conceptual nothing. Nishida therefore called it "the locus of absolute nothingness" (*zettai-mu no basho* 絶対無の場所), yet Ueda often prefers "empty expanse" (*kokū* 虚空). The twofold world, then, is the totality of loci and, simultaneously, the openness that surrounds and pervades them.

The Elusive Ox, or the Dialectics of Self and World

The twofold nature of both self and world has profound consequences for the task that Ueda sets for his philosophy. The most distinctive trait of his thought may be the epistemological and

existential paradigm shifts it requires of us. Such shifts are clearly at issue in his interpretation of the *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures* (*Jūgyū-zu* 十牛図).[23]

The *Ox-Herding Pictures* developed as a kind of handbook for Zen students in China roughly during the twelfth century. The work as it is most commonly known today consists of ten pictures with commentary in prose and poetry (in both Chinese and Japanese). The pictures—with the significant exception of numbers eight, nine, and ten—show a young herdsman in the process of searching for, catching, and bringing home the ox that had escaped him; all but one of the plates depict landscapes and natural surroundings; all of them are set in a circular frame.

Although there is vast room for interpretation, we will follow Ueda's working hypothesis that the young herdsman symbolizes a Buddhist practitioner in his quest for enlightenment. The ox, consequently, stands for the awakening the student is striving for. Yet because, according to Zen Buddhist doctrine, awakening happens solely by achieving insight into the reality of one's own self, the ox in fact symbolizes nothing other than the self—albeit an aspect or dimension that is radically different from the one symbolized by the herdsman. For this purpose, Ueda introduces the distinction between the true self and the delusional self: our everyday self is deeply entangled in the unwholesome passions that form the matrix of existential anguish, and it is only possible to free oneself from anguish and unwholesome entanglements by seeing through the delusions of the self. Thus, the de(con)struction of our everyday self becomes the primary concern on our way to our true self.

The *Ox-Herding Pictures* depict precisely this process. Although the young herdsman initially gives the impression of having lost something important, he basically does not yet have any idea of what to look for and where to look for it. Only in the second picture does he become aware of the ox's footprints "along the riverbank and under the tress." Ueda sticks with the classical interpretation of this passage when he interprets it as symbolizing the encounter with religion as a set of doctrines that teach the imperfection of human existence and the necessity of aspiring to spiritual maturity. Or, in more Buddhist terms, one has started to read canonical scriptures,

commentary literature, or even begun to converse with a Zen master —all these unmistakably point one in the right direction, but the actual searching has yet to be undertaken by oneself.

Surprisingly early in the *Ox-Herding* series, insight into one's true self is symbolized: already in the third picture the herdsman catches a glimpse of the ox. The practitioner has by now not only learned second-hand about a fundamental self, but also has actually witnessed its existence. This is as yet but a tentative and partial fulfillment of the search because the texts make it very clear that, if given even a single moment of leniency, the ox will run off again. The various depictions of this stage also express the preliminary and precarious quality of the experience: the ox is shown either beckoning the herdsman from the far shores of a river with no obvious way to cross the water or dashing away from the herdsman's rope with all its speed.

After a hard chase, the herdsman succeeds in throwing a rope around the neck of the ox and tries with all his might to stop it from breaking away once again, while the ox refuses to yield and threatens to escape if given the chance. The tension between the antagonists reaches its climax in the fourth picture, where the rope is taut and seems to be on the verge of breaking. The original self has, so to speak, been acquired for the time being, but still the danger, even the probability, remains that the practitioner strays from the path and suffers a relapse into his inauthentic self. This tension dissolves to a certain degree in the fifth picture. The rope is hanging loose, even though it may not be entirely unnecessary just yet. The herdsman quietly leads, the ox obediently follows. A self-integration has taken place, and the ambiguity of the self, its inner fracturedness or alienation from itself, seem to have been resolved.

The spiritual quest apparently begins to draw to a close in the sixth picture, where there is no longer any tension whatsoever within the self. In perfect harmony, the ox is treading along a set path, while the herdsman is casually playing the flute on its gently swaying back. Everyday self and true self have been harmonized with each other to the extent that the two seem to be more united than separate. The union of the self is taken one step further in the seventh picture. The ox is nowhere to be seen: it has merged with the herdsman and

leaves not a trace behind.[24] Subject and object of the search, self and awakening have become one; not just theoretically—as in the Buddhist teachings—or allegorically—as in the *Ox-Herding Pictures*—but experientially. According to Ueda's interpretation, however, this is not yet the conclusion of the search: each and every stage of practice contains specific hazards, and, in the present stage, the enlightened practitioner runs the risk of taking his enlightenment as the ultimate achievement, as what is most valuable in and of itself. Such presumptuousness implies the danger of relapsing into a sublated form of the same deluded attachments from which he had struggled to free himself since the first picture. An awakening from awakening, a practice at once immanent to and transcendent of practice, is necessary. Otherwise this seventh picture is nothing but "elevated self-indulgence."[25]

The *Ox-Herding Pictures* may seem intuitively understandable and compelling up to the sixth, maybe even the seventh picture, but the final three pictures pose formidable hermeneutical challenges. Ueda's exegesis is based on the assumption that pictures eight, nine, and ten are no longer stages in a developmental process, but rather interrelated aspects of what Ueda calls the "dynamic trinity"[26] of the true self.

The first seven pictures are a constant, ever-deepening negation of the everyday, delusional self in disciplined spiritual practice (relative negation). This negation itself is then negated in the eighth picture (absolute negation), in which nothing at all is depicted. Our self is shown, in the words of Nishitani Keiji, to be "an existence that has become one with what is not existence at all. Ceaselessly passing away, and ceaselessly regaining its existence, it trembles above nihility."[27] The danger in this stage is to fall into a static condition of nihilism; that is, of taking emptiness to be a kind of "negative substance."[28] In order to avoid this crucial error, Ueda argues that we must understand absolute negation in terms of a "pure movement in two directions at the same time: (1) The negation of negation in the sense of a further denial of negation that does not come back around to affirmation but opens up into an endlessly

open nothingness; and (2) the negation of negation in the sense of a return to affirmation without any trace of mediation."[29]

Although the absolute negation symbolized by the eighth picture remains in effect, an affirmation is now layered on its basis: the ninth picture with its blossoming flowers and flowing stream symbolizes the affirmation of being that complements the negation of nothingness. But, as the quotation just given indicates, it would be a mistake to interpret nothingness and being as counterparts of equal ontological status: just as the ninth picture presupposes the disclosing framework of the eighth (more on this topic later), being is neither self-sufficient nor absolute, but rather a function of the creative negativity of nothingness. And the reaffirmation of being through the negation of nothingness becomes possible only in the relational dynamics of the true self—a fact that is emphasized in the tenth picture, which brings us full circle. In this final picture, we see a herdsman in friendly conversation with a pot-bellied and good-humored older monk,[30] but a transformation has taken place. The herdsman we knew from the start of the picture series has grown beyond himself: it is he who is the old monk, a bodhisattva who now in turn inspires the quest for the true self in another young herdsman.

Together, the final three pictures thus form an intelligible set: negation and affirmation relate to one other dynamically and constitute the bodhisattva's play (i.e., a practice beyond practice, a pure, ludic, compassionate activity that goes beyond all dualistic divisions, such as that of means vs. ends or subject vs. object). The bodhisattva's self is not actually itself anymore but, as Ueda formulates it, a "self that is not a self" (*jiko narazaru jiko* 自己ならざる自己). Whereas the eighth picture illustrates the radical negation of the self as a culmination of spiritual praxis, the ninth depicts the concrete reality that is "not the self," with the tenth returning once again—in the double sense of herdsman and bodhisattva—to a "self."

If we read the picture series against the grain and start from the back, it immediately becomes apparent that picture nine has always been the setting of each and every one of the pictures (excluding the

empty circle). From the willows and pines to the grasses on the riverbanks and the full moon, the *Ox-Herding Pictures* take as their locus the landscapes and environs of the natural world. If we further expand our perspective with regard to the eighth "non-picture," we become aware that, without exception, every single picture is set within the frame of the empty circle. This layering of the specific locus of each individual picture onto its natural surroundings, and furthermore onto the underlying nothingness, is a strikingly apt illustration of Ueda's conception of the self that is not a self within a world that is twofold.

This interpretation throws new light on the question of soteriology: The fact that the self of the tenth, the natural environs of the ninth, and the framing nothingness of the eighth picture are ever present in the series suggests the possibility of a shortcut to the "trinity of the true self." In a way, even in the first picture, numbers eight, nine, and ten are already included. So why would we need to bother to run the full gauntlet and take upon ourselves the painstaking process of getting hold of our ox? And, indeed, the breakthrough to our true self is ever at hand, as the prose commentary to the first picture indicates: "Intrinsically [the ox] has never been lost, so what need is there to go in pursuit?" Whether stepping out of delusion and into truth is necessarily the product of a gradual process or whether it happens suddenly in the blink of an eye is a question that remains. What is clear is that Ueda's interpretation of the herdsman and the ox, far from being merely a scholarly exercise, is meant to suggest that our very existence can, and indeed should, be transformed through religious practice. It is primarily in this soteriological sense that Ueda's is a philosophy of religion.

On the Use of Searching: Toward a Critical Appraisal of Ueda's Thought

Ueda Shizuteru's philosophy has been aptly characterized by Mori Tetsurō: "Its originality lies in its theory of 'being in the twofold world,' which we may characterize as an intriguing encounter of Nishida's 'locus of nothingness' with Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world.' "[31] Yet, given the considerations just described, we may specify that Ueda's thought aims less at describing the way human existence is related to the world in which it takes place than it is at communicating the necessity of an existential and epistemological shift in perspective. Insofar as such a shift in perspective involves soteriological claims, his philosophy is clearly rooted not only in ontological analysis but also, and perhaps even more importantly, in a religiously informed practice. In fact, Ueda explicitly integrates ontological analysis and performative spirituality. The epistemological shift he writes of brings about an existential conversion that shatters the delusional patterns of our everyday selves and sets us on the way of pursuing our ox. Ueda's philosophy thus presents us with a task: to discover the true self as that which lies at the foundation of both self and world and yet, at the same time, transcends these.

Religion, understood as an attempt to systematize such a spiritual path, is emphatically affirmed and yet is not Ueda's central concern. His own affiliation with Zen Buddhism remains beyond doubt throughout his work and clearly informs his critical analyses of other philosophies and religions. It is, after all, having such a firm foothold in a specific tradition that arguably renders a transconfessional and intercultural encounter meaningful in the first place. This is evident in Ueda's work on Eckhart in particular and Christian mysticism more broadly: although he attributes an astounding profundity to the insights of these Christian thinkers, and although in his interpretations he takes great pains to do justice to the complexities of their thought, Zen's (or more generally Buddhism's) superiority is consistently maintained. It is invariably the notion of the "negation of negation" that underlies this conviction. Whereas Eckhart in the end remains, for Ueda, attached to a conception of the nothing of the Godhead—however subtle and contourless it might be—Zen, he contends, breaks through all figures of transcendence and leaves behind even the Nothing of the mystics and negative theologians.[32]

In terms of the development of his thought through the many decades of his work, Ueda seems to have found his religio-philosophical center very early, and he never strayed from it. There is no trace whatsoever of a "Kehre," a Heideggerian turn (such as one finds in Nishida as well as in Tanabe and, in some respects, even in Nishitani). Ueda's work consists of the constant unfolding—in multiple directions throughout his essays and his studies on mysticism, on philosophy, and on religion—of an unshakable conviction as to the twofold or two-layered nature of both self and world, as well as the fundamental inseparability of these layers.

Ueda's philosophy is thus not merely a set of theses and speculations governed by the laws of logic and rational comprehensibility. Such is only one aspect of what really concerns him. For Ueda, philosophy is a genuine quest for understanding and insight, not just a mundane accumulation and assessment of information. Its claim is less to immediate plausibility than to transformative power, and it is meant to be reenacted and experienced by his readers. Ueda proposes to us that philosophy, in the end, is a soteriological undertaking that concerns what it actually means to live and to die as a self that is not a self in a world that is twofold.

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[1] Ueda 1965.

[2] The *Eastern Buddhist (New Series)* has published several English translations of essays by Ueda, the most important of which are to be found in the bibliography to this chapter. His broad oeuvre in Japanese has been mostly gathered in the twelve volumes of *Ueda Shizuteru shū* [The Ueda Shizuteru Collection] (Ueda 2001–2004) and in the five volumes of *Tetsugaku korekushon* [Philosophical Collection] (Ueda 2007–2008). Many of his articles written in German have been gathered in Ueda 2011*c*. Quotations in this chapter’s notes from *Ueda Shizuteru shū* (Ueda 2001–2004) will be abbreviated as USS.

[3] Numerous translations and commentaries in Western languages exist, the most widespread English translation being Kakuan 1957. A more recent translation along with a commentary by Zen master Yamada Mumon is also available (Yamada 2004). See Section 4 for an overview of Ueda’s exegesis of the *Ox-Herding Pictures*.

[4] See in particular Ueda 2000 and Ueda 2011*c*.

[5] See René Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy,” in *Philosophical Essays: Discourse on Method; Meditations; Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, translated by Laurence J. Lafleur (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964).

[6] USS vol. 10, 189.

[7] USS vol. 10, 87.

[8] USS vol. 10, 86.

[10] Ibid., 3.

[11] See Ueda 1991.

[12] See, most recently, Ueda 2006.

[13] Ueda 1991, 250.

[14] See Ueda 2011*b*.

[15] Ueda 1991, 252.

[16] Ibid., 250.

[17] Ibid., 253.

[9] Nishida Kitaro, *An Inquiry into the Good*, trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), xxx.

[18] USS vol. 9, 28.

[19] See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); and Martin Heidegger, "What Is Metaphysics?" in *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, translated by David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

[20] USS vol. 9, 32.

[21] Ibid., 36.

[22] See especially "Jikaku no basho: Zettaimu / shi-zen / nin-gen" [The Locus of Self-awareness: Absolute Nothingness, Natural Being-of-itself, Human Betweenness], in USS vol. 6, 245–278.

[23] See USS 6, as well as Döll 2005.

[24] The *Ox-Herding Pictures*' symbolism is far from perfect: it could be argued that it seems improbable that the true self would run away from the everyday self's spiritual quest. Also, if and when integration takes place, it seems that it should be the herdsman (our everyday self) that dissolves into the ox (the true self). Ueda takes note of these issues; see USS vol. 6, 104–107.

[25] USS vol. 6, 130.

[26] Ibid., 246.

[27] Nishitani Keiji, *Nishitani Keiji chosakushū 10: Shūkyō to wa nani ka* [The works of Nishitani Keiji, vol. 10: What Is Religion?] (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1987), 6; Nishitani Keiji, *Religion and Nothingness*, translated by Jan van Bragt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 4, translation modified.

[28] USS vol. 6, 182.

[29] Ueda 1982*a*, 160–161.

[30] The older monk resembles Hotei (Ch. Budai) who, according to legend, was a Chinese monk during the Tang dynasty (618–907). He is popularly remembered for the sack from which he gave alms to the poor and presents to the children (hence his name, which literally translates as "Sack of Cloth"), his ever-present

laugh (hence his nickname, “Laughing Buddha”), and his refusal to take up abode anywhere permanently. Especially in the Chan/Zen tradition, he was understood as a personification of playful nonattachment and an incarnation of the future Buddha, Maitreya. In Japanese popular religion, he is considered to be one of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune.

[31] Mori Tetsurō, “Zen-Bukkyō to Kyōto gakuha: *Jūgyū-zu* kara mita Kyōto gakuha no basho-ron” [Zen Buddhism and the Kyoto school: The Kyoto School’s Theory of Locus as Seen from the *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures*]. *Kyōto sangyō daigaku Nihon bunka kenkyū-jo kiyō* [Newsletter of the Research Institute of Japanese Culture at Kyoto Sangyo University], vol. 7/8 (2003), 20.

[32] See Ueda 1965, 145–169; and Ueda 1982*a*.