

Ueda Shizuteru's Phenomenology of Self and World: Critical Dialogues with Descartes, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty

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No account of the Kyoto School is complete without reference to Ueda Shizuteru, the central figure in the School's current third generation. A direct student of Nishitani's and the successor to his academic post, Ueda is one of today's leading authorities on the philosophy of Nishida as well as an expert in Zen Buddhist literature. It was Ueda's original work on Christian mysticism—especially his comparative studies on Meister Eckhart and Zen—that first earned him recognition in the West, and his numerous publications illustrate how engaging in a critical dialogue with other patterns of thought and experience is essential to the formation of his philosophy.¹ This is apparent, for example, in his masterful interpretations of Otto Friedrich Bollnow and Martin Buber.² Ueda consistently manages to highlight and clarify the central issues at stake in the philosophies of his dialogue partners, while relating these to his own central concern with developing a phenomenology of self and world.

Ueda's philosophical standpoint is characterized (1) by a severe critique of the modern understanding of the self as subject; (2) by a logic of locus (*basho no ronri*) which he develops in reference to Heidegger's topological ontology; and (3) by an endeavor to lay a philosophical foundation for the soteriology of Zen practice.³ These three characteristics find their paradigmatic formulation in Ueda's core concepts of "being-in-the-twofold-world" and "self as not-self." Also crucial is his original understanding of the central Kyoto School notion of "absolute nothingness" or "absolute negation." Following Ueda's own accounts, we can give the following preliminary sketch of the core concepts of his thought (see USS 9: 22–23):

- The world is essentially and primordially a twofold world. The self always finds itself in a specific “world” (*sekai*), that is, in a concrete situation. But at the same time, this world is in turn located in an “infinite openness,” an “invisible *nihilum*” as the locus of all loci. And so the self and its specific world are surrounded and permeated by nothingness.
- In accord with this invisible twofold structure, Ueda formulates the notion of a “self that is not a self,” or more concisely, a “self as not-self.” Such a “true self” has its identity in constantly negating itself. Being within a specifically determined world, the aspect of “self” dominates; in nothingness, the aspect of “not-self” does. That being so, we can state that “the invisible twofoldness of the world is incarnated in a visible twofoldness” (USS 9: 22), insofar as the aspect of “self” is, in fact, visible.
- When the underlying deeper dimension of world and self is forgotten, the invisible twofold structure seems to collapse into a superficial onefoldness; the world is mistaken as being merely “the (specific) world,” the self as merely “the ego.”
- The position of authentic twofoldness then is usurped by fictitious dualities (subject/object, self/other, etc.), which are taken to be constituted by mutually independent substances. These fictitious dualities rule our everyday thought and conduct.
- When these illusions of duality and the underlying misconception of self and world are given up, that is, negated, the twofold structure of the world self-actualizes itself in the self-awareness of the self as not-self and as “being-in-the-twofold-world.” This transition from delusion to truth is the vector along which Ueda’s philosophy is projected. Negation, for Ueda, first and foremost holds soteriological possibilities.

This essay attempts to clarify these central concepts of Ueda’s philosophy by focusing on his dialogue with two major figures in modern European philosophy: Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger. These philosophers’ at-times strikingly similar criticisms of Descartes’s conception of the self will provide us with a starting point for our inquiry.

The first part of this essay (sections 1–3) is devoted to explicating Ueda’s concept of self, and it moves from the Cartesian cogito to Merleau-Ponty’s tacit cogito and finally to Nishida’s theory of pure experience and its spontaneous self-unfolding. The second part (sections 4–7) is concerned with Ueda’s conversation with Heidegger’s thought. The idea of being-in-the-twofold-world will emerge more clearly via an analysis of the concepts of world, noth-

ingness, anxiety, and releasement. The essay comes to a close with a look at the self as not-self and the dynamic structure of negation as the essential basis of the true self. Along the way, I will demonstrate how Ueda gleans elements of his soteriological phenomenology of self and world from his sympathetic yet critical and distinguishing dialogues with Descartes, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty.

The Self as Pure Reflection: Ueda's Critical Interpretation of Descartes's Cogito

Descartes posits an “actively pursued methodical doubt” (USS 10: 84) as the principle of his thought. By submitting to radical doubt not only that which appears doubtful, but everything that is in any way doubttable, he finally arrives at a fact which is supposed to be impervious to doubt. Descartes discovers this fact in the axiomatic truth of his own thinking:

Finally, as the same precepts which we have when awake may come to us when asleep without their being true, I decided to suppose that nothing that had ever entered my mind was more real than the illusions of my dreams. But I soon noticed that while I thus wished to think everything false, it was necessarily true that I who thought so was something. Since this truth, *I think, therefore I am*, was so firm and assured that all the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics were unable to shake it, I judged that I could safely accept it as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.⁴

I who doubt can only recognize myself to truly be (*sum*) in the fact of my own thinking (*cogitans*)—that is, as the one (*ego*) who doubts. Recursivity is thus the decisive characteristic of the Cartesian method. Not the existence of the self as such, but reflective thought is certain: “On the basis of the reflection of thought, the certainty of reflective thinking is discovered, and along with it the existence of the ‘I’ (‘I think’) as subject of reflective thought is proved for the ‘thinking I’” (USS 10: 86). Unabbreviated, Ueda claims, Descartes’s formulation should read: “I think (*cogito* B) that I am, because I think (*cogito* A),” or, “I think: I think, therefore I am” (USS 10: 87). Thought is in its foundation once more supported only by thought; thought tries to reach being, but in fact only revolves around itself in a *regressus ad infinitum*. Thought thinking itself “arrives at the admission that the discovering cogito is more certain than the ‘cogito ergo sum’ it had discovered as certainty. It does not stop at discovering truth but, as that which discovered truth, includes the tendency to elevate

itself to be truth as such" (USS 10: 87). In its cogito as pure reflection, the self discovers its axiomatic, indubitable foundation solely in itself. It is statically self-identical, and in this hermetical condition, this autistic self-enclosure, it cannot but become conscious of itself in the form of circular reasoning: "I am, because I am" or, more precisely, "I am I because I am I."

One might want to object to Ueda that Descartes was, in fact, not really interested in the existing individual, but rather in the theorizing subject. Then, Ueda's criticism would operate on a completely different level than that where the Cartesian argumentation was located. But Descartes, in fact, goes beyond his strictly theoretical considerations in order to show that also our everyday conduct (exemplified by perception) is based on reflection. In the *Second Meditation* he writes:

Finally, I am the same being which perceives—that is, which observes certain objects as though by means of the sense organs, because I do really see light, hear noises, feel heat. Will it be said that these appearances are false and that I am sleeping? Let it be so; yet at the very least it is certain that it seems to me that I see light, hear noises, feel heat. This much cannot be false, and it is this, properly considered, which in my nature is called perceiving, and that, again speaking precisely, is nothing else but thinking.⁵

With reference to this important passage, Ueda breaks down the Cartesian theory of perception into three parts: (1) "I hear a noise"—this sensation might be an illusion, a dream, or a hallucination. (2) "It seems to me that I hear a noise"—the abstraction of the direct sensation allows for certainty. It must be true that it seems to me that I hear a noise. Ueda terms this certainty, "semi-cogito." And (3), on closer scrutiny, this abstraction reveals itself to be thought: "I think (cogito) that I hear a noise." At this point, the subject has completely left the level of perception and has become indubitable in its rationality. Perception (and with it every event, every action) is a fact only insofar as it is thought (see USS 10: 89–90).

Descartes achieves consistency between theory and practice by subjugating every conceivable function of the subject to the cogito. The self exists by thinking, it understands itself as final reality within and based on its thought; it exists only insofar as it reflects.

I am, I exist—that is certain; but for how long do I exist? For as long as I think; for it might happen, if I totally ceased thinking, that I would at the same time completely cease to be. I am now admitting nothing except what is necessarily true. I

am therefore, to speak precisely, only a thinking being, that is to say, a mind, an understanding.⁶

In the cogito, Descartes links existence directly to thought. Solely the thinking existence *is*. Every other mode of being is dubitable; it may be a false conclusion or mere supposition, and thus in the end is to be devoured by methodical doubt. The world as such may be an illusion and can only become certain by being thought of by the self. Thus the self claims to be not only the basis of its own existence, but the basis of existence as such. The self thereby tends toward fulfilling all the metaphysical conditions of an absolute existence (even if Descartes's ego still requires the proof of God's existence to ground the existence of the world). As Ueda puts it, the absolute "metastasizes onto the side of the human subject" (USS 10: 86). But for Ueda that is only one side of the coin: In the perfectly autarkic solitude of the indubitable cogito, in which neither world nor others could exist as such, "hollowness spreads and before long even a reversal to nihilism occurs" (USS 10: 90).

The Self as Perception: Merleau-Ponty's Tacit Cogito

Merleau-Ponty refuses to acknowledge the ontological primordiality of the Cartesian cogito.⁷ In our living experience, perception (what Ueda calls the "semi-cogito") and action function together "in the body as mediator of a world"⁸ without having to be linked together by recursive reflection. For example, the actions of an experienced soccer player are not guided by his cogito's reflection but by his active perception on the playing field. "Perception" for Merleau-Ponty cannot be understood as the process of a subject receiving sense data, for it calls into question the very dichotomy of subject and object, self and world: The ball as well as the playing field in its totality are located along with the body of the player in a continuum of active perception. But this also means that our selves are variables of specific situations. The epistemological and ontological primacy therefore lies not with the reflexive cogito but with the activity of perception: "Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can.'"⁹

Before all reflection, before any philosophical endeavor, there has to be a "primordial I," "the presence of oneself to oneself, being no less than existence."¹⁰ This immediacy is neglected in the Cartesian cogito, which Merleau-Ponty calls the "verbal cogito" in light of its total dependence on the medium of language. The primordial I turns out to be the basis for this verbal mediacy in that it signifies a more fundamental perception: "Behind the spoken cogito,

the one which is converted into discourse and into essential truth, there lies a tacit cogito, myself experienced by myself."¹¹

However, the tacit cogito is in no way a substance antithetical to the reflexive cogito, but rather its complementary counterpart. Tacit and explicit cogito are mutually dependent:

though it is true that all particular knowledge is founded on this primary view [of the tacit cogito], it is also true that the latter waits to be won back, fixed and made explicit by perceptual exploration and by speech. . . . The tacit cogito is a cogito only when it has found expression for itself.¹²

Explicating this aspect of complementarity, Ueda writes: "If it was not for the 'verbal cogito,' the 'tacit cogito' would not have become a problem in the first place" (USS 10: 188). Nonetheless, there is a qualitative difference: Merleau-Ponty bases the explicit cogito on the tacit cogito and thus opens up previously unreachable depths for the total structure of the cogito.

To the question "What is the I?" Descartes's cogito, that is, the "*cogito ergo sum*," was able to offer an extreme and powerful answer. But we can state that the "tacit cogito" is preparing another answer of greater depth under the feet of Descartes. When we can sense the possibility of a pre-cogito (thus a "without ego") becoming apparent together with a silence—not a mere "tacit cogito," but the transcendence of [the tacit cogito's] wordlessness into [a primordial] "wordlessness"—the "tacit cogito" can point towards Nishida's "pure experience." (USS 10: 189)

By "wordlessness" Ueda is not referring to Merleau-Ponty's prereflexive cogito as counterpart of the explicit cogito; he is not talking about a self that at times renounces speech. Rather, he aims at a more primordial dimension of the self, which he finds in Nishida's theory of pure experience. And it is by means of the latter that he attempts to detach himself from the standpoint of subjectivity that still underlies Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Pure Experience: Nishida's Non-Dual Origin of Self and World

According to Nishida, "pure experience" is the dimension in which "there is not yet a subject or an object, and knowing and its object are completely unified" (IG 3–4). He illustrates this as follows: "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" (IG 3).¹³

Ueda stresses that Nishida does not rest content with simply claiming the possibility of such pure experience; he attempts rather to make it the origin and starting point of his philosophy: “I wanted to explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality” (IG xxx). In his own analysis of Nishida’s philosophy of pure experience, Ueda develops a framework of three interrelated layers.¹⁴

First, the event of true experience as such presents the concrete experiential dimension. There, “the framework of subject and object, in which consciousness was enclosed, is broken through, opening up a [field of] disclosedness.” This is an original fact (*koto*), namely, the awareness (*kaku*) that forms the “origin of self-awareness [*jikaku*]” (NKY 250).

Second, out of this experiential fact of awareness unfolds a primordial “self-articulation,” an “*Ur-Satz*” in the form of the “words of ‘self-awareness’ in which ‘pure experience’ becomes aware of itself” (NKY 250) and articulates itself. Nishida’s *Ur-Satz* here is: “pure experience is the only real reality.” This is the first reappropriation and mediating expression of that which was initially experienced existentially. Awareness and articulation of the primordial event arise from the undividedness of the event itself by means of a fundamental creativity. Here, we see ourselves confronted with an elemental poetic language (*koto*), found for example within the Zen tradition in its pointed couplets and sharp retorts.

Third, proceeding from originary immediacy and building on its elemental poetic expression, the philosophical dimension of the *Grundsatz* or philosophical principle is disclosed. By way of increasing abstraction, experience and self-awareness are made accessible through and beyond the intimately personal relation so that now the realm of discourse is opened up. In the process of a “self-objectification of pure experience” (NKY 252), the ego and the world come into being out of pure experience and its self-articulation. The methodological project Ueda inherited from Nishida—“I wanted to explain all things on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality”—leads invariably to a “self-understanding of the self as being-in-the-world” (NKY 252).

It is possible to retrospectively disclose the “spontaneous self-unfolding” of pure experience, the “dynamic connection that makes up the layering of (1) awareness, (2) self-awareness, and (3) understanding ‘self and world’” (NKY 250). The self¹⁵—in its initial appearance as Cartesian reflection, deepening into Merleau-Ponty’s self-perception¹⁶ and even further into the non-self of pure experience and the non-ego of Zen meditation—can retrace the self-

unfolding of itself by descending through its own formative layers and eventually reaching the unbroken facticity of pure experience.

Insofar as in pure experience self and world are not yet constituted in their illusory independence from one another, self-awareness discovers itself to be grounded in a field embracing not only the latent self, but also the latent world. The structure of this self/world-complex is what will concern us in the following sections of this essay.

World and Dasein: Heidegger's Critique of Descartes

Heidegger also finds profound difficulties with the structure of consciousness implied by the *cogito ergo sum*. Descartes's certain and unshakable foundation of all philosophy remains a mirage as long as the ontological status of the *sum* is not thoroughly clarified. But that is exactly what Descartes had not done: The "unexpressed ontological foundations of the '*cogito sum*'"¹⁷ still remain unexamined. Heidegger attempts to examine the "being" of the Cartesian *sum* as part of his fundamental ontology, and this project continues to determine his thought, as is obvious from the following quote from the "Seminar in Zähringen 1973": "subjectivity itself is not questioned in respect to its being; for since Descartes it has been the *fundamentum inconcussum*. In all of modern thought arising from Descartes subjectivity accordingly forms the obstacle to bringing the question of being on its way."¹⁸ The reason that Cartesian subjectivity not only ignores, but positively obstructs and forestalls the question of being, lies in the fact of its essential self-enclosure. This self-enclosure determines the "immanence" of all objects in consciousness: The moment I am conscious of something, it is present to me as the content of my consciousness; it is immanent to my subjectivity. Raising the question of being anew, by way of radically questioning the meaning of the *sum*, allows us to step out of the immanence of the *cogito* and to abandon the standpoint of consciousness. Thus, Heidegger calls the world as content of consciousness into question and locates the subject "*in the world* (which in turn is not immanent to consciousness)."¹⁹ He understands subject and world on the basis of existence (ek-sistence) and Da-sein (being-there).

In contrast to the immanence of consciousness that was expressed by the "being" in *being-conscious* [»sein« im Bewußt-sein], the "being" in *being-there* [»sein« in Da-sein] designates the being-outside-of. . . . The realm in which everything that can be called a thing can encounter [*sic*] as such is a district that gives room to

the possibility of this thing becoming manifest “out there.” Being [*Sein*] in being-there [*Da-sein*] has to preserve an “outside.” That is why Da-sein’s mode of being is characterized in terms of ek-stasis in *Being and Time*. Strictly speaking, Da-sein therefore means: being ek-statically there. Immanence is thereby broken through. Da-sein is essentially ek-static.²⁰

Freeing the self from its solipsistic immanence, Heidegger accords it a new position that is characterized by “being-in-the-world” and “Dasein.” The autonomous position of the subject is abandoned in favor of a larger frame of reference. And thus, in order to clarify the situation of the self, a phenomenologically sufficient description of the world is also necessary.

World and Nothingness: Ueda’s Interpretation of the Early Heidegger

Ueda calls our attention to two closely related aspects of the concept of “world” in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. First, insofar as we exist, we interact: “We exist by discovering ourselves within a disclosed locus, and from the start we exist by associating with others and relating to things within this locus. This relational totality is nothing other than our existence” (USS 9: 28). We disclose hermeneutically that which we encounter in a specific situation, that is, within a certain locus. Heidegger terms the space that renders this hermeneutical disclosure possible “the world”—whether disclosure takes place analytically by means of our “understanding” or intuitively and comprehensively by means of our “disposition” (*Befindlichkeit*). In its disclosedness the world is established as a sphere of significance; it is meaningful.

Second, according to Ueda, the totality of all loci within which we exist is called world: “If the inclusive disclosedness of the loci that contains the respective concrete loci within itself is called ‘world,’ then [it must be said that] from the start we can exist only by stepping out of ourselves toward the world. Dasein is in its fundamental structure ‘being-in-the-world’” (USS 9: 28). The disclosedness of the world thus unifies the two aspects of openness and understanding: The world is disclosed as an open space which we hermeneutically disclose by our ek-sistence. But as our innerworldly existences relate to other innerworldly beings (the entirety of which Heidegger in *Being and Time* calls our “totality of involvements”), for the most part our view of the world as such is obstructed. Nevertheless, we can catch a glimpse of the world as world in anxiety.

In anxiety, “the totality of involvements . . . discovered within-the-world is, as such, of no consequence; it collapses into itself; the world has the char-

acter of completely lacking significance.”²¹ In this anxiety-ridden lack of significance, everything within the world loses its meaning, and, “on the basis of this *insignificance* of what is within-the-world, the world in its worldhood is all that still obtrudes itself. . . . Being-anxious discloses, primordially and directly, the world as world.”²² Ueda explicates this thought as follows: “The ‘nothingness of the world’ (the insignificance), in which the disclosedness (significance) that constitutes the worldhood of the world submerges into nothingness, reveals the world as world” (USS 9: 30–31). In the nothingness of the world, then, one aspect of disclosedness—namely, understanding—is destroyed and solely the world in its own open disclosedness remains.

Therefore, in Heidegger the term “world” has a double meaning: On the one hand it designates the “world as relational totality of the connection of significances,” and on the other hand the “world as world revealed in the nothingness of the world” (USS 9: 31). The former world of significance is based on the latter world of nothingness, and yet Ueda will go on to question whether even these two together provide a sufficient account of the phenomenon of world. “The totality of beings as a whole (the world) that is spread open by the connection of significances constitutes . . . the disclosedness (meaningfulness) of the totality of involvements, and the totality (the world) that initially formed its basis is as such a totality limited by nothingness” (USS 9: 35). Accordingly, the meaningfulness of the world is given only insofar as nothingness permits it to be meaningful. The world reveals itself as being limited and conditioned by nothingness. “Although being becomes apparent as being within nothingness and as limited by nothingness, nothingness is at the same time concealed by the appearance of being. For, seen from being, nothingness is nothing more than nothing” (USS 9: 36). Following Ueda we may add: Solely out of nothingness is being in fact being. A more thoroughgoing inquiry into nothingness thus becomes necessary if we are to finally elucidate the phenomena of the world and our being-in-the-world.

Heidegger attempts such an inquiry into nothingness (or “the nothing”)²³ in his 1929 lecture, “What is Metaphysics?” The initial, naive as well as obvious attempt to question nothingness—“What is the nothing?”—falls abruptly into logical contradiction. For in this question, nothingness is posited as something; but nothingness, being nothing, is of course *not* a being. Yet for Heidegger, the question rather immediately gives rise to a doubt as to whether logic is really in a position to pass judgment on nothingness. That would only be the case if nothingness was subordinated to negation in the logical sense, that is, to “a specific act of the intellect.” Against this “reigning and never chal-

lenged doctrine of 'logic,'"²⁴ Heidegger is convinced that "the nothing is more original than the 'not' and negation."²⁵

Heidegger substantiates his claim by referring to the fundamental mood of anxiety, which he had discussed at great length in *Being and Time*. Anxiety is contrasted with other moods, for example with profound boredom, in which, precisely by our being led before "beings as a whole,"²⁶ nothingness is concealed. Furthermore, anxiety is distinguished from common fear. Whereas fear depends totally on its object, anxiety is characterized by the absence of an object. More precisely, anxiety does not simply lack an object; it is essentially impossible to determine its object. For in anxiety, all beings slip away: "We can get no hold on things. In the slipping away of beings only this 'no hold on things' comes over us and remains. Anxiety reveals the nothing."²⁷ Then, when beings as a whole slip away in anxiety, nothingness discloses itself.

However, in anxiety beings do not suddenly cease to exist, and no more are we able to voluntarily become anxious (and thus catch a glimpse of nothingness as such) by way of negating beings as a whole. Structurally speaking, beings obstruct our view of nothingness, and nothingness is revealed only when beings slip away in anxiety. Beings as a whole find themselves invariably before the backdrop of nothingness, which in its nihilation, its withdrawal, makes room for the being of beings: "The nothing does not merely serve as counterconcept of beings; rather, it originally belongs to the essential unfolding as such. In the being of beings the nihilation of the nothing occurs."²⁸

The withdrawal of nothingness opens up the space in which beings can be. Dasein can thereby relate to these beings in terms of its ownmost possibility of being: "since existence in its essence relates itself to beings—those which it is not and that which it is—it emerges as such existence in each case from the nothing already revealed. Da-sein means: being held out into the nothing."²⁹ Dasein's being held out into nothingness is the fundamental rendering possible of being-in-the-world. Dasein is, in its being held out into nothingness, first and foremost being-in-the-world. But then, Ueda concludes, nothingness is also characterized by a latent double structure:

On the one hand, nothingness lets beings as a whole slip away in the manner of "having no hold on things"; it reveals itself for Dasein and drives Dasein about in nothingness. But, on the other hand, nothingness inversely makes existence possible in that, by transcending beings as a whole, existence relates to beings. . . . We can say that the ambivalence of the world in *Being and Time* here becomes, with slight changes, the ambivalence of nothingness (nihilation). (USS 9: 32)

Fourfold and Releasement: Ueda's Assimilation of the Later Heidegger

Ueda accepts Heidegger's analyses as a step in the right direction.

"Dasein is within nothingness and within the world," or "The Dasein that is within the world is, by being within the world, at the same time within the nothingness within which the world is." . . . With Heidegger as a guide, it has become apparent that our existence is a twofold "within." (USS 9: 36)

At the same time, however, Ueda does not hesitate to offer a critique: Contrary to Heidegger's statements, anxiety is ultimately not able to disclose nothingness primordially and as such. While anxiety does permit the "inauthentic" self—absorbed in its everyday interactions and forgetful of being—to enter into a more profound dimension in which the nothingness of the world becomes apparent, anxiety cannot yet detach itself from this inauthentic mode of being. The nothingness revealed in anxiety is nothing more than the irruption of a still alien nothingness into inauthenticity. "The fact that the manifestation of nothingness is brought about by anxiety has its ground in nothingness, but more fundamentally it has its ground in the fact that we have forgotten nothingness" (USS 9: 37). A radical disclosure of nothingness thus cannot take place in anxiety. Moreover, "the fundamental ontology in which a transcendental character was in fact still retained, as well as metaphysics which questions nothingness on the basis of 'beings as a whole,' were not yet able to make the mutual belonging of being and nothingness as such the issue of their thought" (USS 9: 44). Therefore, Ueda demands a "fundamental turn in our relation to nothingness" (USS 9: 37). He finds this fundamental turn under way in Heidegger's later thought of "releasement" (*Gelassenheit*). It is to this idea that the next step shall take us.

Looking back, a more radical formulation of the idea of "being held out into nothingness" can be found already toward the end of "What is Metaphysics?" There Heidegger writes: "we release ourselves into the nothing, which is to say, . . . we liberate ourselves from those idols everyone has and to which he is wont to go cringing."³⁰ With Dasein's voluntary acceptance (*Sich-einlassen*) of itself as being conditioned by nothingness, the idea of releasement (*Gelassenheit*) is anticipated, and anxiety as the fundamental mood gradually yields to releasement. "From the anxiety disclosed in nothingness to the releasement that lets itself go into nothingness; from the nothingness of anxiety to the nothingness of releasement" (USS 9: 45)—in this movement Dasein and world step into their utmost possibilities. For in releasement, the human

subject is transformed into the “mortal,” and to “die means to be capable of death as death. Only man dies, and indeed continually.”³¹ At the same time, the invariably anthropocentric world of the “totality of involvements” is transformed into the “fourfold” world of earth and sky, divinities and mortals. In a released acceptance of their proper finite essence as “mortals,” human beings take part in the “mirror play” of this fourfold and surrender their presumed position of preeminence as “subjects.”

According to Ueda, when anxiety gives way to releasement, and the early “being-toward-death” is transformed into a “being-from-death,” there lies the possibility of a new disposition (*Befindlichkeit*): Releasement *beyond* anxiety reveals itself to be the moment in which “being able to die” proves to also genuinely entail “being able to live.” This willingness to die an “existential death”³² hints at a breakthrough beyond every kind of subjectivity, toward Ueda’s true self as not-self. But in Heidegger this breakthrough is not yet completely carried out, and thus his nothingness—even in its released form—is not the most fundamental nothingness Ueda is looking for.³³

“Being-in-the-Twofold-World” and “Self as Not-Self”: Ueda’s Standpoint of Zen

Ueda is aware of the resistance his method of reading Heidegger might evoke. Heidegger’s thought-path traverses a considerable time span and its complexity is impossible to reduce to any single term. Ueda nevertheless holds that his trans-chronological interpretation of Heideggerian “nothingness” is justified:

The fact that it is not impossible to consider together [the earlier and the later Heidegger’s thought] is illustrated in the fact that both include, each in its respective manner, a relation to nothingness. In this nothingness lies concealed the connection between the two. Of course, as we have already seen, they do not have the same manner of relating to nothingness. We might even say that it is not the same nothingness. These differences in respect to nothingness, however, make possible a synchronization [of Heidegger’s thought] with precisely this nothingness in question as its locus. . . . (USS 9: 47)

And Ueda ventures even further: His reading Heidegger under the aspect of “nothingness” is not only possible and justifiable as an interpretation, but more importantly it is *necessary* if one is to realize the truth of the matter at stake.

According to Ueda, in a layering of the “world” explicated in *Being and Time* with the later Heidegger’s “fourfold,” one upon the other, “the true shape of the world is disclosed for the first time” (USS 9: 28). Only then does a view become possible that was formerly obstructed by our constant forgetting of nothingness. “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” (USS 9: 36). Submerged—or as Heidegger would say, “fallen”—into our dealings with things within the world, we do not recognize the world in its essential twofold structure. But when we take up a position in nothingness, the actuality of the world becomes visible. This point is nicely summarized by Nishitani: “Our existence is an existence that is one with nonexistence; incessantly disappearing into nothingness, incessantly returning to itself, it oscillates over nihility” (NKC 10: 6; RN 4). In its totality, the world is a twofold one: (1) the world as the gathering of all loci; and (2) the world “within” nothingness, which thereby has to be acknowledged as the locus of the world, the ultimate locus of all other loci.

Accordingly, the self as being-in-the-twofold-world, in its true form, must be essentially ek-static. In contrast to the Cartesian cogito, we have already seen that the self cannot be simply and statically self-identical. The disclosure of world and the letting oneself go into nothingness—that is, the ekstasis into the interpenetration of world and nothingness—is only possible on the basis of the self negating itself. In this self-negation, the self-enclosed subjectivity of deluded self-certainty is abandoned.

For Ueda, this negation is of enormous consequence: Not only is negation a crucial element of the self, but negation itself possesses a reflexive structure. Negation has to negate itself. Out of simple self-negation then arises an absolute negation with a twofold structure, 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.”³⁴ The movement of stepping out of the self and into the twofold world is necessarily accompanied by a movement of returning to the self; and precisely in this double movement the true self turns out to be the “self as not-self.”

We are in a position now to define the main difference between Heidegger’s and Ueda’s conceptions of nothingness and negation: In Heidegger, negation is treated as one among many kinds of nihilating behavior, and by no means as the most fundamental nihilation. For Ueda, in contrast, negation

is not a subfunction of nothingness; negation is the action that necessarily results when nothingness takes place in self-awareness. In absolute negation, the true self corresponds to the twofold structure of the world. Through the self's self-negation, the unending openness of world/nihilicity is actualized, and in negation turning back upon itself, the concrete self manifests itself within a concrete locus, yet without losing touch with its "unground" of nothingness.

A deconstruction of the Cartesian concept of subjectivity has shown us that the true self cannot be simply self-identical. For Ueda, Merleau-Ponty makes an initial attempt at a more profound response to the question of the self, and, with his prereflexive cogito, he offers a pathmark pointing toward Nishida's thought. Yet the tacit cogito is unable to grasp (even the possibility of) the most fundamental layer of unfragmented unity. In that the self unfolds spontaneously out of pure experience, a phenomenology of self necessitates a phenomenology of world, since a pure experiential unity disallows an original differentiation between the two. Ueda's reflections on Heidegger's thought have demonstrated clear parallels to Ueda's thinking (above all the twofold structure of the world and the self's being-in), but have also revealed issues (namely, nothingness and negation) where Heidegger stops short of Ueda's aim.

Ueda's readings of Descartes, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger may at times appear questionable, especially when he rethinks their central concepts from his own point of view. This questionable nature of his readings, however, is counterbalanced by the enormous fertility and fresh authenticity of his original interpretations and critical developments. And this is one of the reasons his texts will continue to be found compelling, certainly by many existentially engaged readers if not by every specialist.

Ueda's relation to Nishida is somewhat different. He acknowledges Nishida's philosophy as the basis of his own thought, while attempting to pursue its implications more methodically. Pure experience provides him with an irreducible touchstone of reality, which he never once abandons. The whole of Ueda's thought is deeply rooted in and unfolds as the reappropriation of pure experience in Zen practice, and the ultimately soteriological character of his interpretations and critical dialogue with other thinkers locates him squarely within the tradition of Zen.

This essay has attempted to show how significant a critical dialogue with Western thinkers has been in the formation of Ueda's thought. Yet his intrinsic willingness to commit himself to dialogue—not only to philosophical

dialogue, but also to interreligious, intercultural, and interdisciplinary dialogue—is based precisely on the fact that Zen Buddhism is Ueda's constant touchstone. Indeed, for him it is ultimately from this standpoint of Zen that other standpoints are to be measured and evaluated.

NOTES

1. Ueda's numerous publications in Western languages include "Der Zen-Buddhismus als 'Nicht-Mystik' unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Vergleichs zur Mystik Meister Eckharts," in Günter Schulz, ed., *Transparente Welt: Festschrift zum sechzigsten Geburtstag von Jean Gebser* (Bern and Stuttgart: Hans Huber, 1965); "'Nothingness' in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism: With Particular Reference to the Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology," trans. James W. Heisig, in Frederick Franck, ed., *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School* (New York: Crossroad, 1982); "The Concept of God, the Image of the Human Person and the Origin of the World in Buddhism," in Peter Koslowski, ed., *The Concept of God, the Origin of the World and the Image of the Human in the World Religions* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001). For a study explicitly concerned with Heidegger, see "The Place of Man in the Noh Play," *The Eastern Buddhist New Series* 25, no. 2 (1992): 59–88.

2. See USS 9: 59–104 and USS 10: 101–23, respectively. All translations from foreign languages, unless indicated otherwise, are my own.

3. This characteristic is most explicit in Ueda's authoritative interpretation of the *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures*. See USS 6 and my *Wozu also suchen? Zur Einführung in das Denken von Ueda Shizuteru* (Munich: Iudicium, 2005).

4. René Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), 24.

5. *Ibid.*, 86.

6. *Ibid.*, 84.

7. For the following argument see the chapter titled "The Cogito" in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), esp. 398–404.

8. *Ibid.*, 145.

9. *Ibid.*, 137.

10. *Ibid.*, 404.

11. *Ibid.*, 403. Merleau-Ponty assures us: "This silent cogito was the one Descartes sought when writing his *Meditations*" (*ibid.*, 402), but we may doubt whether Descartes would have accepted perception—be it ever so fundamental—as the certain principle of his philosophy.

12. *Ibid.*, 404.

13. After a decade of intense practice, Nishida was apparently not fully satisfied with his experience and gave up at least the formal practice of Zen. Nonetheless, Ueda takes the *satori* of zazen to be the basis for the theory of pure experience; see USS 1.

14. For the following see also "Watakushi no shisaku: kenkyūreki ni sotte," in *Tōzai shūkyō kenkyū 4: Ueda Shizuteru-shi no shisō* (Nagoya: Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies, 2005), 4–20. Also see John C. Maraldo's critical comments

on the issue of language and pure experience in “An Unedited Recapitulation of the Problem of Experience and Language,” presented at the 1990 American Academy of Religion seminar on Process Thought in New Orleans, Louisiana.

15. For Ueda, the true, authentic self (*jiko*) contrasts sharply with the superficial ego (*jiga*), and correspondingly the common, objectifying self-consciousness (*ji'ishiki*) is shown to be a mere degeneration of self-awareness (*jikaku*).

16. It is noteworthy that Ueda's considerations seem to doubt whether the pre-verbality of the tacit cogito—as the point of greatest profundity in the compound structure of the reflexive and prereflexive cogito—could even claim the “fundamental creativity” that belongs to the *Ur-Satz*. Rather, the tacit cogito seems to be located somewhere between (2) and (3) and thus is only slightly more primordial than Descartes's semi-cogito.

17. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 46.

18. Martin Heidegger, *Vier Seminare: Le Thor 1966 1968 1969 Zähringen 1973* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 120.

19. *Ibid.*, 120.

20. *Ibid.*, 121.

21. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 231.

22. *Ibid.*, 231–32.

23. Martin Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” in *Basic Writings*, rev. edition, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1993). In the following, Krell's translation for *das Nichts*, “the nothing,” and the somewhat more commonplace term, “nothingness,” are considered to be interchangeable. The word “being” (*Sein*) has not been capitalized here.

24. *Ibid.*, 97.

25. *Ibid.* Heidegger continues: “Does the ostensible absurdity of question and answer with respect to the nothing in the end rest solely in a blind conceit of the far-ranging intellect?” (*ibid.*, 98). Heidegger's footnote from the fifth edition of 1949 specifies the blind conceit, rather, as “the certitudo of the ego cogito, subjectivity” (Martin Heidegger, “Was ist Metaphysik?” in *Wegmarken, Gesamtausgabe* 9 [Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976], 108). See above, for his critique of Descartes. Ueda's interpretation will suggest that the “rambling intellect” (this translation seems to do more justice to the original, *schweifender Verstand*) is opposed by calm releasement in which the “ostensible absurdity” is dissolved and nothingness becomes approachable.

26. Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 100.

27. *Ibid.*, 101.

28. *Ibid.*, 104. Nothingness becomes the cipher of ontological difference, since in nothingness the difference between being and beings is revealed. “The essence of the originally nihilating nothing lies in this, that it brings the Da-sein for the first time before beings as such” (*ibid.*, 103), and Heidegger's 1949 footnote specifies: “expressly before the being of beings, before the difference” (“Was ist Metaphysik?” 114).

29. Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 103.

30. *Ibid.*, 110.

31. Heidegger, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” in *Basic Writings*, 352.

32. See Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 56–59.

33. Ueda's translation of the German term *Gelassenheit* as *hōge shite byōjōshin* is noteworthy here. This Japanese phrase can be roughly retranslated in a literal fashion as "unmoved everyday heart-mind in letting-go." This "everyday heart-mind" signifies, in the Zen tradition, the state of utmost awakening (*kaku*), imperturbable by all dualities, that has grown in constant concentration beyond even enlightenment itself and into nothingness as such. Heidegger's releasement, for Ueda, serves to describe a detached self-awareness that can let itself go into being as well as into nothingness, that, having "no hold on things," tends neither toward the one nor the other.

34. Ueda, "'Nothingness' in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism," 160–61.