

Tetsugaku Companions to Japanese Philosophy 5

Ralf Müller

Raquel Bouso

Adam Loughnane *Editors*

---

# Tetsugaku Companion to Ueda Shizuteru

Language, Experience, and Zen



Springer

# **Tetsugaku Companions to Japanese Philosophy**

## **Volume 5**

### **Series Editors**

NEO Keiichi,  
Professor Emeritus, Tohoku University  
Aoba-ku, Sendai, Japan

CHEUNG Ching-yuen,  
Department of Japanese Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong  
Shatin, Hong Kong

LAM Wing Keung,  
Faculty of International Liberal Arts, Dokkyo University  
Soka-shi, Saitama, Japan

This new Springer series collects and presents studies on many facets of Japanese philosophy. Its aim is threefold: to demonstrate the unique philosophical potential of Japanese philosophy; to provide systematic and critical texts for research as well as for teaching on Japanese philosophy; and to reinforce the academic status of Japanese philosophy as an academic discipline. The series focuses on representative Japanese philosophers and on various themes in Japanese philosophy. It explores pre-modern as well as modern philosophers and themes, and provides a platform for comparisons with Western and non-Western philosophical traditions. The series reflects a growing interest in non-Western philosophical movements as well as the undeniable influence of Japanese philosophy in Asia. This new series:

- Demonstrates the rich potential of Japanese philosophy.
- Echoes recent developments in the field.
- Enhances the academic status of Japanese philosophy.

Ralf Müller • Raquel Bouso • Adam Loughnane  
Editors

# Tetsugaku Companion to Ueda Shizuteru

Language, Experience, and Zen

 Springer

*Editors*

Ralf Müller  
Department of Philosophy  
University College Cork  
Cork, Ireland

Raquel Bouso  
Department of Humanities  
Pompeu Fabra University  
Barcelona, Spain

Adam Loughnane  
Department of Philosophy  
University College Cork  
Cork, Ireland

ISSN 2662-2181

ISSN 2662-219X (electronic)

Tetsugaku Companions to Japanese Philosophy

ISBN 978-3-030-92320-4

ISBN 978-3-030-92321-1 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1>

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022, Corrected Publication 2023

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG  
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

# Prefatory Notes

Japanese words and names are transcribed according to the Hepburn system.

The ellipses in the quotations are indicated with brackets [...].

In all essays and notes, we use the following abbreviations:

C. Chinese

DZZ = *Dōgen zenji zenshū* 『道元禪師全集』 [Complete Works of Zen Master Dōgen]. 1969-1970. Ed. Dōshū Ōkubo. 2 volumes. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.

ff. And the Following Pages

G. German

Gk Greek

HWdPh = *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. 1971–2007. 13 volumes. Basel: Schwabe.

J. Japanese

K. Korean

M = *Manji shinsan dainihon zokuzōkyō* 『卍新纂大日本續藏經』 . 1975–1989. Ed. Kawamura Kōshō. 88 volumes. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai.

S. Sanskrit

T = *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 『大正新脩大藏經』 [The Taishō Edition of the Buddhist Canon]. 1961. Ed. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe. 85 volumes. Tokyo: Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō Kankōkai.

USS = Ueda, Shizuteru. 2001–2003. *Ueda Shizuteru shū* [Collected Works of Ueda Shizuteru], 11 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami.

The translations and original sources included in this volume are the following:

Chapter 3: James W. Heisig, “Approaching the Ueda Shizuteru Collection,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 37.1–2 (2005): 254–274. This review originally appeared as “Ueda shizuteru-shū ni sekkin shite” 「『上田閑照集』に接近して」 [Approaching the Ueda Shizuteru Collection], *Shūkyō kenkyū* 『宗教研究』 [Religious Studies] 79/345: 339–350.

- Chapter 4: Heinrich Dumoulin, translated from German into Japanese by Yoshihiko Wakabayashi, < Shohyō > Reikon ni okeru kami no tanjō to shinsei e no tsuranuki: Maisutā ekuharuto no shinpishugi-teki ningen-gaku to sono zen shinpishugi to no hikaku (ueda shizuteru-cho) <書評> 靈魂における神の誕生と神性へのつらぬき: マイスター・エクハルトの神秘主義的人間学とその禪神秘主義との比較(上田閑照 著), in ソフィア: 西洋文化ならびに東西文化交流の研究 [“(Book review) Shizuteru Ueda: The birth of God in the soul and the breakthrough to divinity. The mystical anthropology of Meister Eckhart and its confrontation with the mysticism of Zen Buddhism. (Departmental Bulletin Paper, Sophia University)], 16/1 (1967): 91-83, Retrieved from: <http://digital.archives.sophia.ac.jp/repository/view/repository/00000000771>.
- Chapter 5: Josef Sudbrack, “Review to Ueda, Shizuteru 1965. *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus*,” *Theologie Und Philosophie* 42 (1): 130 (1967).
- Chapter 7: Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照 and Kawai Hayao 河合隼雄, “Iyashi to shūkyō” 「癒しと宗教」 [“Healing and Religion,”] *Kikan bukkyō* 季刊仏教 [*Quarterly Buddhism*] 31.1 (1995): 2-37.
- Chapter 8: Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照, “Kokoro no fukasa” 「こころの深さ」 [“The Depth of the Heart,”] *Gakujutsu no dōkō* 学術の動向 [*Trends in the Sciences*], 5 (1996): 45-47.
- Chapter 9: Itō Masao 伊藤正男, “Nō to kokoro no himitsu. Ueda Shizuteru kaiin no ronsetsu ‘kokoro no fukasa’ ni kotaete” 『脳とこころの秘密. 上田閑照会員の論説「こころの深さ」に答えて』 [“The Secret of the Brain and the Mind. Responding to my colleague Ueda Shizuteru,”] *Gakujutsu no dōkō* 学術の動向 [*Trends in the Sciences*], 7 (1996): 47-48.
- Chapter 10: Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照 interviewed by Takahashi Yoshito 高橋義人, “Kyōto gakuha no dentō o seotte” 「京都学派の伝統を背負って」 [“To Shoulder the Tradition of the Kyoto School,”] *Jinkan fōramu* 人環フォーラム [*Human and Environmental Forum*], 19 (2006): 2-17.

# Introduction

Once asked by a journalist regarding the difference between Zen and philosophy, the Japanese philosopher Ueda Shizuteru (上田閑照, 1926–2019) responded that to understand and to live are distinct matters since understanding entails a certain detachment from life, yet in order to understand, he added, feeling is necessary: “If I understand and feel the world, if I understand and feel myself,” Ueda responded, “I will know how to live” (*La Vanguardia*, 11/1/2005). These two dimensions, reason and emotion, irreconcilable yet inconceivable without the other, are intertwined throughout Ueda’s philosophical, religious, and theoretical reflections. From the beginning to the end of the 11 volumes of his *Collected Works* (上田閑照集), and in every one of his numerous writings, Ueda is ever rooted in and equally concerned with spiritual and practical life.

As the most sustained continuation of the Kyoto School’s initiative to think beyond East and West, and between philosophy and religion, Ueda’s writings demand serious study, translation, and critical engagement within and well beyond Japan. In this volume—the first collection addressing Ueda’s thought in a Western language—we seek to provide an overview of his remarkable scholarly trajectory, while including critical materials to assist his growing readership with the project of defining his philosophical contribution, while extending and expanding the reception of his work. Thus, in addition to the scholarly articles by leading academics engaging various aspects of Ueda’s thought, the reader of this volume will also find commentary, interviews, personal reflections, as well as a bibliography of one of the twentieth century’s brightest minds, East or West.

Ueda served as Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Kyoto from 1946 until his retirement in 1989. He is well-known in Japan as the leading representative of the third-generation of the Kyoto School, as Nishitani Keiji’s foremost disciple (西谷啓治 1900–1990), and an authoritative interpreter of Nishida Kitarō (西田幾多郎 1870–1945). It is the liminal position he strives to hold between East and West, philosophy and religion that make his thought most challenging to circumscribe, yet it is precisely this liminality that renders his philosophy so important for readers outside of the Asian world who are just beginning to grapple with the critically limiting Eurocentric bias of the Western academy.



It is tempting to read Ueda's works as "philosophy of religion," and certainly there are provocations to count his writings within such disciplinary confines, yet there is a subtle incitement in his writings to a more fundamental concern, a challenge to secular philosophy as it has sought to define itself counter to religion and distinct from the Eastern tradition. As the son of a Shingon Buddhist priest and a lifelong Buddhist practitioner, the marks of his religious background and practice are discernible throughout his philosophic career. Outside of Japan, particularly in Europe, the publication of his dissertation on Meister Eckhart (1260–1328), written while at the University of Marburg, earned him the reputation of a scholar of medieval mysticism. His numerous lectures on Zen Buddhism have cast him as an insightful interpreter and renovator of that tradition, while his weekly teachings at the Shōkoku-ji Buddhist temple in Kyoto further reinforce the religious-philosophical complexity of his life and scholarship. Yet, we should not overlook that Ueda was trained in modern academic philosophy in Western universities, published and presented his work in German and had a sustained engagement with Western philosophy, with a keen interest in philosophy language, hermeneutics, and phenomenology all of which he engages alongside Asian principles, which problematize from within any pretension to a simple Western-secular status. Thus, our volume's subheading, "Language, Experience, and Zen" is meant to invoke three representative aspects of his complex philosophical project highlighted in this "Tetsugaku Companion to Ueda Shizuteru."

Ueda belongs to a generation of philosophers well aware of the unavoidable global context of his time. While accomplished in academic philosophy, which in Japan means mainly Western philosophy, Ueda proved to be a scholar profoundly sensitive to his Eastern heritage, in particular Buddhism, and its potential for establishing a global way of thinking. As part of the Kyoto School legacy, Ueda brought that Japanese Philosophy a significant way toward a rapprochement of diverse philosophical traditions. His painstaking readings of German medieval mystical literature and his ability to forge meaning between diverse languages and traditions constitute a philosophical practice that is deliberately and uniquely intercultural.

Zen Buddhism played a central role in Ueda's cross-cultural philosophical project. Zen is the lens through which Ueda confronts core Eckhartian doctrines, thus affording highly original interpretations from his profound mind, which complicates the philosophy-religion binary from within the Western tradition, a binary that tradition remains heavily invested in maintaining. From the encounter Ueda enacts between Zen and Eckhart, profound questions emerge regarding the relation between phenomena and language, and the limits constraining the human ability to articulate theories that describe reality. The core issues of his philosophy surrounding the nature of the self, the "I-Thou" relation, and what he calls the "twofold" structure of the world all develop as Ueda strives to carve out a way of speaking with the utmost care to respect the tension between what is full, present, and can be spoken of, and what is shrouded in darkness, negation, and emptiness, and thus lies beyond our horizon and demands a complex form of silence. Who am I? What is the place where human beings live, act, and die? What is the relation between language and existence? What does it mean to live? What is religion? All of these perennial

questions humans have struggled with since the beginning of the Western philosophical tradition; one by one Ueda complicates them all by exposing their problematics within a global context that any serious thinker of this age ignores at their own peril.

The 11 volumes of Ueda's *Collected Works* are organized thematically with three volumes devoted to his commentary on Nishida's philosophy, three to Zen Buddhism, one for his works on Eckhart, another comparing Eckhart and Zen, with the last three volumes focused on the dialectics of world and "empty expanse," the phenomenology of the self, and finally, religion. With the present volume, we seek to contribute to Ueda scholarship by creating a forum to critically appraise Ueda's ideas in dialogue with other thinkers who engage his philosophy at the deep level it demands.

The reader will find the present volume divided into two sections comprising 11 chapters. The first section, "Ueda Shizuteru's Philosophy" begins with three texts. Starting with his own introduction, we include Ueda's reflections on his career and those most crucial impacts and inspirations that determined the focus of his life's research. Next, Bret Davis—a foremost interpreter of Ueda and one of his closest students who attended his lectures in Kyoto—develops what he calls "Ueda Shizuteru's philosophy of Zen," placing this project within a lineage spanning Nishida's and Nishitani's endeavor to bring Zen thought and practice into dialogue with Western philosophy and religion. The last work in this section is by James W. Heisig, another of Ueda's closest philosophical interlocutors and perhaps the Western scholars in closest and most sustained dialogue with Ueda on many aspects of interreligious dialogue throughout his life. Heisig worked with Ueda to compile his *Collected Works* on the occasion of their publication, and in this piece he reflects on that process offering a rich and invaluable overview of the scholar's life and works.

As we aim in this initial section to review the reception of Ueda's philosophy in hopes of enabling new readings and continued critical reflection, we have included reviews of his doctoral dissertation by, among others, the well-known Jesuit and specialist of Zen Buddhism, Heinrich Dumoulin. Next, the reader finds an illuminative debate Ueda had with the Jungian psychologist Kawai Hayao and the neuroscientist Ito Masao (伊藤正男), illustrating the broad reach of Ueda's erudition. A final conversation with Takahashi Yoshio (高橋義人) further deepens our view of Ueda's engagement with his Asian tradition by elaborating the relationship with his predecessors, Suzuki Daisetsu, Nishida Kitarō, and Nishitani Keiji.

The second section of the volume consists of 13 chapters setting out to reflect in more focused detail on various aspects of Ueda's thought considered from the methodological, linguistic, and ethical points of view. Hence, this part offers a first attempt to not only elucidate his thought but to think further with the help of Ueda. The chapters of this section were purposefully written for this companion and thus represent cutting-edge research on the philosophy of Ueda. With the exception of the first chapter, those that follow are presented in pairs organized by common themes they illuminate.

Before the reader sets off to engage Ueda from the various angles presented in this volume, we feel that it is crucial to re-iterate that we seek to avoid a depiction of Ueda as a strictly Eastern philosopher who “reaches out” across a cultural divide to supplement the Oriental with the Occidental traditions (or, vice versa) or as a simple melding of cultural horizons. As the reception of his work illustrates, Ueda’s thought was first taken up outside of Japan with the publication of his doctoral thesis by, on the one hand, circles interested in medieval philosophy and mysticism, and on the other hand, by comparative religions and Zen Buddhism.

Throughout his career, Ueda maintained contact with Europe and delivered numerous lectures, especially in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Many of his publications in German or English come from these conferences as well as from his participation in the Eranos Circle. Yet, despite scholarly interest in his work in Europe, Ueda is a rare example of an Asian thinker whose success was not the result of the otherwise typical halo of exoticism and orientalism that propelled other early Asian thinkers to a type of attention or fetishism that undermined the intercultural aim of their work. Ueda’s contribution to Western academic discourse offers some of the first glimpses of an intercultural project that, at once, avoids the perils of Eurocentrism and orientalism.

This crucial liminality we seek to highlight in this volume is further reinforced particularly by the reception of his work in Spain and Italy, where he visited several times in the early new millennium. The first volume of his writings published outside of Japan appeared in 2004 in Spanish (Herder, Barcelona) and later, in 2006, the same expanded edition with four more writings appeared in Italian (Epos, Palermo; reed. Chisokudō, 2017). Later, his influence becomes discernible in Germany partly through the influence of Ryōsuke Ōhashi by way of his anthology, *Die Philosophie der Kyoto Schule*, and further with an edition of ten of Ueda’s writings published under the title *Wer und was bin ich?* (Karl Alber, Freiburg im Breisgau, 2011). We expect that the reception of this Kyoto School philosopher’s work will further extend throughout Europe and also in North America with a soon to be published anthology of Ueda’s texts compiled and translated by Bret Davis.

Still in the early moments of this century, and shortly after the tragic loss of one of this millennium’s most important thinkers, it is our hope that this volume can be received in the spirit of the project Ueda initiated. At a moment when cultural and religious tensions continue to augment to a devastating pitch, the intercultural and interreligious way of thinking made conceivable by Ueda has perhaps never been more crucial. It is our belief that continued and expanded engagement with Ueda’s thought, hopefully enabled to some small extent by this volume, can contribute to further broadening the reception of his project beyond the field of Christian-Buddhist or East-West dialogue, showing the way toward a truly viable global way of thinking for the twenty-first century and beyond.

# Contents

## Part I Ueda's Thoughts and Works

- 1 **My Philosophy** . . . . . 3  
Shizuteru Ueda
- 2 **The Contours of Ueda Shizuteru's Philosophy of Zen** . . . . . 9  
Bret W. Davis
- 3 **Introduction to Ueda's Works** . . . . . 27  
James W. Heisig

## Part II Marburg Dissertation

- 4 **Heinrich Dumoulin's Review** . . . . . 43  
Heinrich Dumoulin
- 5 **Josef Sudbrack's Review** . . . . . 47  
Josef Sudbrack
- 6 **Tsujimura Kōichi's Review** . . . . . 51  
Kōichi Tsujimura

## Part III Disputation

- 7 **Healing and Religion** . . . . . 61  
Shizuteru Ueda and Hayao Kawai
- 8 **The Depth of the Mind** . . . . . 91  
Shizuteru Ueda
- 9 **The Secret of the Brain and the Mind: Responding  
to My Colleague Ueda Shizuteru** . . . . . 95  
Masao Itō

**Part IV Interview**

- 10 Shouldering the Tradition of the Kyōto School** . . . . . 101  
Shizuteru Ueda and Yoshito Takahashi

**Part V The Methodological Approach – Radicalizing Transcendentalism**

- 11 Nishida and Ueda on Philosophical Reflection.** . . . . . 131  
Yuko Ishihara

**Part VI The Philosophical Position of the Twofold World**

- 12 Twofold Being-in-the-World in Ueda’s Philosophy:  
On His Interpretation of Heidegger and Nishida.** . . . . . 153  
Hironobu Ota
- 13 Ueda on Being-in-the-Twofold-World or World Amidst  
the Open Expanse: Reading Nishida Through Heidegger  
and Reading Heidegger Through Nishida** . . . . . 167  
John W. M. Krummel

**Part VII Questioning the Philosophical Medium – On Language**

- 14 Being With and In Language** . . . . . 189  
Yukiko Kuwayama
- 15 The Articulation of Silence in Language.** . . . . . 201  
Ralf Müller

**Part VIII Reflecting Philosophy: In Poetry**

- 16 Nothingness and Poetic Experience: Ueda and Valente.** . . . . . 227  
Pablo Acosta-García and Raquel Bouso
- 17 Ueda and Heidegger: Playing in Hollowness, Abiding  
in Actuality and the Risk of Poetic Language.** . . . . . 247  
Adam Loughnane

**Part IX Opening Up Philosophy: On Mysticism**

- 18 Ueda as Reader of Eckhart** . . . . . 265  
Bernard Stevens
- 19 On Mysticism and Non-mysticism, Religion and Non-religion** . . . . . 271  
Carlotta Moiso

**Part X The Space Between East and West: On Zen Buddhism**

**20 In-Between: Religious Quest and Philosophy of Life in Ueda and Buber** ..... 299  
 Raquel Bouso

**21 “The Self That Is Not a Self”: Ueda and Kuon’s *Ten Ox Pictures*** ..... 317  
 Gereon Kopf

**Part XI Existential Practice: Ethical Engagement**

**22 Ueda’s Metaethics** ..... 339  
 Jason Dockstader

**23 An Ontology of Non-Discriminatory Love: The Resurrection of the Triune Self in Ueda Shizuteru’s Appropriation and Critique of Meister Eckhart** ..... 353  
 Gregory Moss

**Correction to: Tetsugaku Companion to Ueda Shizuteru** ..... C1

**Appendix** ..... 385

**Biography** ..... 391

**Bibliography** ..... 393

---

The original version of this book was revised. A correction is available at [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1\\_24](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1_24)

## List of Contributors

**Pablo Acosta-García** is a Humanities doctorate from Pompeu Fabra University, where he presented a thesis with which he analyzed the value of the image in Marguerite Portete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. His publications have been centered on textual analysis, literary coding, and the relations between images and text. His latest book is the translation and editing in Spanish of "Memoriale," by the Umbrian mystic Angela da Foligno, Siruela, 2014. He has been an adjunct professor of Aesthetics and Literature at the UPF, lecturer of Journalism and Literature, and Narratology at the MeCoPH (Master of Communication, Journalism and Humanities, UAB), and also at the Col·legi de Doctors i Llicenciats de Catalunya. He is currently doing research at the Heinrich-Heine Universität Düsseldorf thanks to a Horizon 2020s Marie Skłodowska-Curie action.

**Raquel Bouso** is an associate professor at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona, where she received her PhD with a thesis on the notion of emptiness in the thought of Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990). She has translated into Spanish works by Nishitani Keiji and Toshihiko Izutsu, along with other works in Japanese philosophy. She edited the first book of collected essays by Ueda Shizuteru published outside Japan (Herder 2004, trans. it. L'Epos 2006). In addition to various articles, she has published *El zen* (Catalan, 2008; Spanish, 2012), coedited FJP vol. 6, *Cross-Currents and Confluences* (2009), and *La filosofía japonesa en sus textos*, with J. W. Heisig, T. P. Kasulis, and J. C. Maraldo (2016).

**Bret W. Davis** is Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University Maryland. He obtained a PhD in Philosophy from Vanderbilt University and has spent more than a dozen years in Japan, during which time he studied Buddhist thought at Otani University, completed the coursework for a second PhD in Japanese philosophy at Kyoto University, and trained as a lay practitioner at Shōkokuji, a Rinzai Zen monastery in Kyoto. In addition to publishing more than 60 articles in English and in Japanese on various topics in Japanese, continental, and cross-cultural philosophy, he is the author of *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (2007); editor of *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts* (2014); and coeditor of *Sekai no naka no*

*Nihon no tetsugaku* [Japanese philosophy in the world] (2005), *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School* (2011), and *Engaging Dogen's Zen: The Philosophy of Practice as Awakening* (2017). His translations from German and Japanese include *Martin Heidegger's Country Path Conversations* (2010), Dōgen's *Genjōkōan: The Presencing of Truth* (2009), and Ueda Shizuteru's *Language in a Twofold World* (2011). He serves on the editorial board of several journals and is coeditor of Indiana University Press's book series in World Philosophies.

**Heinrich Dumoulin** (1905–1995) was a Jesuit theologian and professor of philosophy and history at Sophia University in Tokyo, where he was professor emeritus. He wrote numerous works on interreligious dialogue, Japanese religions, and Buddhism, including a monumental history of Zen Buddhism in two volumes (*Geschichte des Zen-Buddhismus*, 1985). He was the founder of its Institute of Oriental Religions, as well as the first director of the Nanzan Institute of Religion and Culture.

**Jason Dockstader** is a lecturer in Philosophy at University College Cork, Ireland. His research interests are in comparative philosophy, the history of philosophy, metaethics, and moral psychology. His present research is focused on the history of moral anti-realism. He has published articles in the *Journal of Value Inquiry, Society and Politics, Metaphilosophy, Philosophia*, and the *European Journal of Political Theory*.

**James W. Heisig** is a permanent fellow at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture and professor of the Faculty of Arts and Letters, Nanzan University. After completing his studies in Europe (PhD Cantab.), Dr. Heisig taught philosophy and religion in the United States and Latin America for five years. He joined the staff of the Nanzan Institute in 1978 and served as Director from 1991 to 2001. His books, translations, and edited collections, which have appeared in 12 languages, currently number 80 volumes. They include *Nothingness and Desire: An East-West Philosophical Antiphony* (2013), *Jesus' Twin: A Dialogue with the Gospel of Thomas* (2015), *Much Ado About Nothingness: Essays on Nishida and Tanabe* (2015), and his Boston College Duffy Lectures published as *Of Gods and Minds* (2019). Dr. Heisig is also the general Editor of the 19-volume series *Nanzan Studies in Religion and Culture* and *Essays in Japanese Philosophy*, coeditor of *Nanzan Library of Asian Religion and Culture*, an Italian series on Japanese philosophy, *Tetsugaku*, a series of volumes on Korean Religions, and the author of a best-selling series of books on the Japanese writing system and a new series on the Chinese writing system. In 2015 he was awarded a doctorate honoris causa by Tallinn University, Estonia.

**Yuko Ishihara** is an assistant professor on Japanese Philosophy at the College of Global Liberal Arts in Ritsumeikan University in Osaka. She received her PhD at the University of Copenhagen in 2017 with a dissertation titled, "Transcendental



Philosophy and Its Transformations: Heidegger and Nishida's Critical Engagements with Transcendental Philosophy in the Late 1920s." Her main interests are in the Kyoto School tradition and phenomenology and specifically on the question of how far we can and should go in the phenomenological return "back to the things themselves." Recently she has been working on a project that attempts to widen the scope of the phenomenological *epoché* by taking it out of its limited context as it was introduced by Husserl and giving it a practical spin by presenting it as a way to cultivate one's well-being, and therefore as a useful tool not just for phenomenologists but for anyone who is willing to make use of it in their everyday lives.

**Masao Itō** (December 4, 1928–December 18, 2018) was a medical scientist (physiology and neuroscience) who was awarded the Japanese Order of Culture. His doctoral degree in medicine was awarded by the University of Tokyo in 1959, and he held a number of academic positions, including assistant professor at Kumamoto University School of Medicine, professor and later dean at the University of Tokyo School of Medicine, president of the Science Council of Japan, director of the RIKEN Brain Science Institute, and chairman of the International Science and Technology Foundation. After a long and distinguished career where Itō became a member of the Japan Academy and a Person of Cultural Merit, he returned to the University of Tokyo as professor emeritus.

**Hayao Kawai** (1928–2007) was a Japanese psychologist, Doctor of Education (Kyoto University), Professor Emeritus at Kyoto University and at the International Research Centre for Japanese Studies, a Person of Cultural Merit, Former Commissioner for Cultural Affairs, and a member of the National Council for Administrative Reform. Kawai specialized in clinical and analytical psychology (Jungian) as well as Japanese culture. He was the first Japanese psychologist to qualify as a Jungian analyst and contributed to the spread and practice of analytical psychology in Japan, being the first to introduce sand box play therapy to Japan.

**Gereon Kopf** received his PhD from Temple University (1996). He is affiliated with Luther College, the University of Iceland, and the International Institute for Philosophy at Tōyō University. Sponsored by the Japan Foundation and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, he visited Ōbirin University (1993–1994), Nanzan University (2002–2004), and Tōhoku University (Spring 2021). He taught at Hong Kong University (2008–2009) and at Saitama University (2013), authored *Beyond Personal Identity* (2001), coedited of *Merleau-Ponty and Buddhism* (2009), and edited the *Dao Companion to Japanese Buddhist Philosophy* (2019). He is the chief editor of the *Journal of Buddhist Philosophy*, contributes a series of essays on Japanese Buddhism to [buddhistdoor.net](http://buddhistdoor.net), and serves as the principal investigator of a grant from the Wabash Center to develop innovative strategies to teach "philosophy of religion inclusively to diverse students" in 2020–2021. He currently finishes a textbook on Zen Buddhism (Wiley-Blackwell, 2023) and develops a "multi-entry philosophy," a global-critical philosophy of mind, and a non-essentialist ethics.

**John W. M. Krummel** was born and raised in Tokyo, Japan, in a bilingual, bicultural family, to an American father and a Japanese mother. He received an MA in Philosophy from the New School for Social Research, Graduate Faculty, NYC, NY, in 1994 with a thesis on Heidegger and Foucault. Then he obtained a PhD in Philosophy from the New School for Social Research in 1999 with a dissertation on Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's notion of the imagination. In addition, he received a second PhD in Religion from Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, in 2008 with a dissertation on Nishida's dialectical philosophy in relation to Buddhism and Hegel. He is currently Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, NY; and Assistant Editor of the *Journal of Japanese Philosophy*, SUNY Press; and Editor of *Social Imaginaries*, Zeta Books.

**Yukiko Kuwayama** is a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Philosophy at Universität Hildesheim in Germany. She is researching bodily linguistic phenomenology of feelings and emotions in relation to the East Asian concept of *ki (qi)*, under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Rolf Elberfeld. During her previous studies at Sophia University Tokyo, Kuwayama worked on the border between theory and practice in Kantian epistemology and ethics and also studied translation (German and Japanese) while a master's student in Japanese Studies at Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, Bonn. Her current research focuses on Ueda's philosophy and the phenomenology of emotions and inter-affectivity.

**Adam Loughnane** is Lecturer in Philosophy at University College Cork and Co-Director of the Irish Institute of Japanese Studies. His research and teaching center on the phenomenological and aesthetic traditions of Europe and Asia. Focusing mostly on French and Japanese philosophies, Loughnane explores themes such as non-duality, non-theistic conceptions of faith, existentialism, phenomenological accounts of motion, perception, and expression, as well as intercultural philosophical methodology. He has recently completed a monograph entitled *Merleau-Ponty and Nishida: Artistic Expression as "Motor-Perceptual faith"* (SUNY 2019). His work in intercultural philosophy and aesthetics has been published in *Philosophy East and West*, *The European Journal of Japanese Philosophy*, *Performance Philosophy*, *Polylog*, and the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

**Carlotta Moiso** is "cultrice della materia" (teaching assistant) in "East Asian Religions and Philosophies" at the Department of Human Studies, Degree Course in African and East Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of Turin. She has studied Philosophy and Asian Languages at the Universities of Turin and Cologne. She has graduated in Philosophy under the guidance of Professor Gianluca Cuzzo and Professor Matteo Cestari with a Master's Thesis on "Nothingness and True Man. The Interpretation of Meister Eckhart in the Thought of Nishitani Keiji and Ueda Shizuteru" (2017).

**Gregory Moss** is currently an assistant professor of Philosophy at Chinese University of Hong Kong. He specializes in Post-Kantian German philosophy and has published in a variety of philosophical journals, such as *Idealistic Studies*, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, the *Journal for the British Society for Phenomenology*, *Social Imaginaries*, and the *Northern European Journal of Philosophy*. Before completing his PhD on Hegel's Logic of the Concept under Richard Winfield, he was a Fulbright Fellow with Markus Gabriel at the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität Bonn. He is author of *Ernst Cassirer and the Autonomy of Language* and translator for Markus Gabriel's *Why the World Does Not Exist*. With Robert Scott, he is the coeditor of *The Significance of Indeterminacy: Perspectives from Asian and Continental Philosophy* (Routledge 2018). His book *Hegel's Foundation Free Metaphysics: The Logic of Singularity* is forthcoming with Routledge (2019).

**Ralf Müller** is currently a research fellow at the Department of Philosophy, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. His research interests involve philosophy of language and culture, particularly the intercultural philosophy of Ernst Cassirer. His research also encompasses regional philosophies including pre-modern Buddhist and modern Japanese philosophy. After completing a doctoral dissertation, "Dōgen's Language Thinking: Systematic Perspectives from History and the Theory of Symbols" at Humboldt University (Berlin, Germany) and postdoctoral studies at Kyoto University (Japan), he has become the principal investigator for the research project "Translating Philosophy in/to Japan" ("Übersetzung von Philosophie nach Japan in kulturphilosophischer Perspektive"). Müller is also the founding member of the research network "Morphology as Scientific Paradigm" (both funded by the German Research Council, DFG). He has published widely in various languages with recent works such as "The Discovery of Language in Zen: Inoue Enryō's Prolegomena on the Philosophy of Zen School of 1893" and "The Becoming of Form and the Formlessness of Form: Contributions to the Philosophy of Life by Ernst Cassirer and Nishida Kitarō" (2018). For further details, see [www.ralfmueller.eu](http://www.ralfmueller.eu).

**Hironobu Ota** is currently Assistant Professor of History of Ethical Thought in Ehime University. He earned his PhD in the Department of Japanese Philosophy at Kyoto University with a dissertation on Nishida's philosophy of action. His major research interest is in the practical and political philosophy of the Kyoto School. His recent work includes "*Nishida Kitarō no poiēsis no tetsugaku: shizen, gijutsu, geijutsu, rinri*" ("Nishida Kitarō's Philosophy of Poiēsis: Nature, Technique, Art, Ethics") and "*Miki Kiyoshi no kouji no tetsugaku: Nishida Kitarō, Heidegger, Arendt*" ("Philosophy of Action in Miki Kiyoshi in Reference to Nishida Kitarō, Martin Heidegger, and Hannah Arendt") both in *The Bulletin of the Faculty of Law and Letters: Humanities in Ehime University*.

**Bernard Stevens** was born in Jakarta (Indonesia) under Belgian parents living there as diplomats. He is a philosopher, translator, and painter. He studied philosophy at the Freie Universität Berlin, Trinity College Dublin, and the Catholic University of Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium) where he has been FNRS researcher and professor. His teachers were Jacques Taminiaux, Jean Ladrière, Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricœur, and Shizuteru Ueda. Stevens was a program director at the International College of Philosophy (Paris) from 1993 to 1997 and visiting professor at various universities in Europe (Liege, Paris-Sorbonne and Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona), Africa (Kinshasa) and Asia including Fudan (Shanghai), Fujen (Taiwan), Kyoto, Tokyo, Nagoya, and Dokkyo (Japan). He is an honorary member of the Belgian Daseinsanalyse School, member of the Husserl Archive of Louvain, and member of the editorial board of *Phaenomenologica* and *European Journal of Japanese Philosophy*. He is an associate of “Proceedings of the East” in Brussels. As the specialist in phenomenology and continental European hermeneutics, he has dedicated himself to the study of contemporary Japanese philosophy since the early 1990s, and he was the first to be known in France through his works on Nishida, Watsuji, Maruyama, Kimura, and the other main representatives of the Kyoto School philosophers. He has contributed his articles to several journals including *Zen Buddhism Today*, *Heidegger Studies*, *Les Temps modernes*, *Esprit*, *Philosophie*, *Etudes phénoménologiques et la Revue Philosophique de Louvain*.

**Josef Sudbrack** (1925–2010) was a German Roman Catholic theologian, member of the Jesuit Order, and one of the most important scholars of mysticism of the twentieth century. One of Sudbrack’s central concerns was to bring Christian mysticism into dialogue with the pan-religious phenomenon of mysticism. After his religious studies (philosophy and theology in Pullach and Frankfurt am Main), he received his doctoral degree in Bonn (1963) with a thesis on Johannes von Kastl, followed by a habilitation in Innsbruck (1973), where he later became a lecturer in spiritual theology, followed by a visiting professorship at Harvard University. Between 1979 and 1986, he headed the editorship of *Geist und Leben*, a journal for theology and spirituality. Together with the Protestant mystic Wolfgang Böhme, Sudbrack founded the Society of Friends of Christian Mysticism in 1987, an association aiming to make the rich tradition of Christian mysticism known to a wider public. Sudbrack practiced zazen with Karlfried Graf Dürckheim, who promoted Zen meditation in the German-speaking world.

**Yoshito Takahashi** studied German and served as an assistant professor at Keio University in Tokyo, where he taught German literature from 1976 to 2009. As a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, he worked in Düsseldorf and Cologne from 1986 to 1988. He was the main editor of the *Neue Beiträge zur Germanistik (at iudicium)* journal, served on the board of the Goethe Society in Weimar, and the International Society for Intercultural German Studies (GiG). Since 2009, Takahashi has been professor emeritus at Kyoto University, visiting

professor at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, and professor at St. Agnes' University in Kyoto. His research focuses on Goethe's natural science, Grimm's fairy tales, and the Gnostic tradition in German idealism. To date, he has written or edited 38 books and published 110 essays.

**Shizuteru Ueda** (1926–2019) studied philosophy at Kyoto University and received his PhD from the University of Marburg (Germany) with a thesis on Meister Eckhart. Upon his return to Japan, he devoted himself to teaching at Kyoto University, where he held the chair of philosophy of religion from 1977 until his retirement in 1989. He then continued teaching at Kyoto University and Hanazono University and was a visiting professor and lecturer in various European cities such as Marburg, Basel, Bonn, Düsseldorf, Tübingen, Munich, Vienna, Zurich, Barcelona, and Bologna. He also participated in the annual meetings of the Eranos circle in Ascona (Switzerland). Most of his writings have been collected in 11 volumes by the publishing house Iwanami (2001).

# Part I

## Ueda's Thought and Works

### Introduction

It is important to note that philosophy was never a mere academic exercise for Ueda but was deeply rooted in all facets of his concrete, everyday life. Furthermore, he demanded that philosophy reflect upon the pressing global and ecological issues of our times. Ultimately, for Ueda, philosophy was a comprehensive enterprise spanning all realms of experience, selfhood, and reality.

Rather than proposing a one-sided solution that would favor philosophy over religion, Ueda sees what he calls a “two-fold” structure in the world, which calls for engagement beyond any simple binaries. Hence, his philosophy takes place in the two-fold opening between religion and philosophy, East and West. To gain a broad overview of his expansive project, this first four parts of this volume include not only concise introductions but also reviews of his dissertation, discussions with his colleagues in neighboring academic fields and an interview conducted by Professor Takahashi Yoshito, a colleague at Kyoto University.

The first three texts of Part I consist of a contribution by Ueda himself and by two scholars who have remained closest to his work and life, James Heisig and Bret Davis. These introductory texts provide the conceptual matrix for this volume and will aid the reader in navigating the more thematically focused and in-depth texts of the volume's second part. Readers of Japanese are encouraged to also consult Ueda's more comprehensive and detailed accounts, which accompany each volume of his collected works; a collection, which was—in contrast to Western conventions—prepared and published during the author's lifetime.

In the first text of this section, “My Philosophy” Ueda himself reflects on the evolution of his academic biography, beginning with his Eckhart studies, later focusing on his discovery of Zen, and finally considering his sustained study of Nishida philosophy. The following chapter, Bret Davis' “The Contours of Ueda Shizuteru's Philosophy of Zen” closely examines Ueda's thought on the conceptual level; namely, on his notion of the two-fold world, his understanding of language, “non-mysticism”, the question of the interpersonal self, and the self-negating

movement of that self as an empathetic openness to others. In the third and final text of this section, James Heisig's "Introduction to Ueda's Works" offers a systematic account of Ueda's entire body of writings. He places Ueda's reading of Zen and Nishida in a single framework based on the notion that the transition from one world to the other, while non-dual, involves a process of articulation from lived experience in silence to a fully elaborated form of linguistic articulation from within the subject-object predicament.

# Chapter 1

## My Philosophy



**Shizuteru Ueda**

As the author of volumes on Meister Eckhart, Zen Buddhism and Nishida's Philosophy, I am thankful and delighted that I will be reaching new readers. All three of these fields are at the core of my academic biography of more than fifty years, and together the three form the major axis of my life's research.

My philosophical studies began with Kant and Hegel. In my graduation thesis of 1949, I dealt with Kant and eventually my interests shifted to Heidegger and Jaspers. However, since I myself was inclined to walk the path of Zen, I was deeply attracted to Meister Eckhart. At this time, I received important guidance from Nishitani Keiji's Eckhart study *God and Absolute Nothingness* (1945). Nishitani had become widely known to the West particularly because of the English and German translations of his 1962 work *Shūkyō to ha nanika (Religion and Nothingness or Was ist Religion?* 1982).

In the fall of 1959, I had the opportunity to study abroad at the University of Marburg, Germany, following which I devoted myself to the study of Meister Eckhart for the next three years. In the fall of 1962, I submitted my (doctoral) Dissertation *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Zwei Hauptthemen der Mystik Meister Eckharts*, which was published in 1965 by Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn as a monograph and became my maiden work. I believe that these two facts – my first book being written in German and that Eckhart's mysticism was the main topic – have greatly determined the content of my research, my way of thinking, and the way in which my work has been manifesting since then to the present. My first work on the subject of Zen was published considerably late in 1973, and again many years later, in 1991 I began publishing books on

---

Translated by Ralf Müller and Adam Loughnane.

---

S. Ueda (✉)  
Philosophy and Religion, Kyōto University, Kyōto, Japan



Nishida's philosophy. In short, Eckhart, Zen, and Nishida's philosophy became subjects of my research in this temporal order, but in this case the temporal order established the way in which my research fields were interlinked at the time.

As the basic material [of my dissertation] during my first studies abroad in Marburg, I carefully read the collections of the German sermons and the German treatises in detail. At the time, J. Quint had edited the great works of Eckhart (the Latin works) of which many volumes had already appeared, which continued to be published by Kohlhammer. I was deeply amazed at the fact that Eckhart's texts were full of expressions that sounded like Zen language or literal translations [of Zen texts into Eckhart's]. However, as I was writing my dissertation, rather than entering into my own research interest regarding the proximity and distance between Eckhart and Zen, my task was to give an account of how Eckhart himself saw and explained the essence and the structure of his thinking in his German sermons and treatises, in particular his unique topic "Soul and God". Instead, I tried to refer to the Latin biblical commentaries as much as possible as they had also been published in several volumes. Of particular concern to me in my Eckhart interpretation is the following: In the texts of the German sermons, I have identified two doctrines, the doctrine based on the motif of "birth" where "God (the Father) gives birth to his single Son in the soul", and the doctrine based on the motif of "breakthrough" where "The soul breaks through (*durchbrechen*) God and penetrates into the nothingness of the Godhead". In the "birth" motif, there is an exhaustive passivity of the soul, while in the "breakthrough" motif, there is intense activity. To express the contrast, the "birth" motif is about "accepting God" and the "breakthrough" motif is about "abandoning God". While "the being one" of the soul and God is explained in the "birth" motif by the trinitarian language 「三一神論の言葉で」 as a divine life in which God the Father is in communion with God the Son, in the "breakthrough" motif, i.e., "neither Father nor Son", the "one" is explained by the formless condition of the one in its oneness. The doctrine associated with the "birth" motif is mostly in line with the tradition of Christian mysticism, but regarding the doctrine associated with the "breakthrough" motif, these have a distance from the self-understanding of Christianity as expressed in its doctrine and theological framework. Thus, it is clear that these two kinds of doctrines differ in nature. Given the fact that these two motifs appear repeatedly next to each other or conjoined in the sermon texts, while their relationship remains opaque, I thought that the study of the relationship of the two motifs forms a basis for interpreting Eckhart's fundamental thought. Now, in a great deal of scholarly literature on Eckhart that I could make use of at that time, these [two motifs] were hardly seen as two different doctrines, and furthermore, I was surprised that many Eckhart interpretations included almost no mention of the words where Eckhart invokes the realm I see as the "breakthrough" motif. In this regard, there were special circumstances around interpretations of Eckhart. One must say that during the 1960s the interpretations of Eckhart were oriented, explicitly or implicitly to the so-called problem of "heresy."

Thus, the basic purpose of my Eckhart studies was to confirm the two types of doctrines in his texts and to investigate their dynamic relationship within the overall structure of his thought. But when my Marburg dissertation was published as a

book, the situation changed anew. Professor E. Benz, an editor of the Latin Sermons in the *Complete Works of Eckhart* and one of my dissertation examiners at that time, suggested that I add an extra chapter on “Eckhart and Zen” as an appendix since it was a study written by a Japanese [scholar]. In response, I wrote that new chapter upon returning home and sent it to Germany where my book was published in 1965 including this appended chapter. This chapter became the base of what was later released in Japanese as “Zen and Mysticism” (now in USS, Volume 8, *Non-Mysticism – Eckhart and Zen*).

For quite some time since the publication of this book, many researchers in the German-speaking world interested in Eckhart from various fields such as theology, philosophy, religion, and medieval German literature have commented [on my research] in various forms. The focus of the issues [raised by the commentators] has been on the doctrine of the “breakthrough motif” that I had raised. And in many cases, the chapter “Eckhart and Zen” which was widely read prefigured the direction of those [critical] comments. My Eckhart research in this book was not originally intended to consider Zen, but “Eckhart and Zen”, was received by my readers as an indication of my position. And amongst the comments there was one that saw in the approach of highlighting the “breakthrough” motif a “zennish” interpretation of Eckhart. Presumably, the circumstance within which I had touched upon Zen prior to my Eckhart studies naturally affected the horizon of my Eckhart interpretation. Either way, in this development, “Eckhart and Zen” is not [merely] an appendix but gradually, as provoked by comments on my work from Eckhart researchers, it became one of my fundamental challenges. From then on, whenever I was given an opportunity, I have repeatedly presented and discussed the various aspects and dimensions of “Eckhart and Zen” based on the many issues [raised by the commentators]. Originally presented in the Fall of 1984 as the Joachim Wach lecture at the University of Marburg, this [lecture] has become the most detailed account regarding these issues from the point of view I have arrived at. The lecture confirms the correspondence of the features of existence as “empty and free” (*ledig und frei*), which stand out both in Eckhart and Zen while shedding light on the difference between both regarding the language concerning how to achieve self-awareness (e.g., in terms of the word “nothing” as the original concept that leads to Eckhart’s existential thought, contrary to Zen, which simply speaks of “nothingness”, “God is nothing”; or the place of self-awareness, “Nature” is often the place of self-awareness in Zen, whereas in Eckhart “Soul and God” is the place of self-awareness), and whether or not such a difference is meaningful.

Now, drawing a line to the Eckhart study in such a way, “Eckhart and Zen” has become the theme of my research and thereby “Zen” itself has become a new subject. In the meantime, in order to present the problematic relation of “Eckhart and Zen” and to be able to compare it with Eckhart in a meaningful way, the question has become how to re-interpret Zen. Prior to my study of Eckhart, I had touched Zen directly as a path of existence. Furthermore, from the self-awareness of “living in Zen” in a world where “Eckhart and Zen” becomes a problem in the first place, the investigation of the meaning of “Zen in the world” has largely become my own personal issue. In this case, “Zen in the world” does not mean that we consider Zen

objectively as one of the phenomena given in the world, but it asks whether the subject who lives according to Zen as an inner-worldly being is self-aware regarding what it means to live in Zen and of what kind of human existence Zen is. “Zen in the world/as a worldly engagement must go beyond traditional training and become a thinking,” – this is the “thought” that Suzuki Daisetsu expresses and as such Zen’s new mode of being has become my own problem. As a traditional “practice” in the sense of “Sit silently! (Do Zazen!)”, Zen is exhausted. However, as a self-awareness of Zen in the world, one must become self-aware in the effort to express in words how it is meaningful for human existence to “sit silently”. To give a great example, one can say that a similar problem arises when with Dōgen’s “just sitting” becomes the primal idea of the text called *Shōbōgenzō*. As described above, it is also a new situation that Eckhart—who until then had been familiar [to me] mainly from an academic interest—has become a great source of light from the Western world, which in the intellectual effort to grasp Zen can illuminate its significance in/for the world.

As already mentioned, I touched on and wrote about Zen for the first time, in “Eckhart and Zen,” the appendix to my Eckhart study (1965), but this was a writing on the subject of Zen. The first thing I wrote on the subject of Zen was “Der Zen-Buddhismus als Nicht-Mystik”, which I wrote in German during the same year. This is an attempt to define the basic character of Zen as “non-mysticism”, using Eckhart as a mirror. The term “non-mysticism” that arose on this occasion became for me over the course of more than thirty years a decisive term of utmost significance (cf. USS, Volume 8, *Non-Mysticism – Eckhart and Zen*).

In this way, although I began by writing on the subject of Zen little by little, I didn’t mean to describe and present Zen as given in the traditional manner on the path of existence because the aim was to amend the self-awareness of Zen in the world. Instead, I contributed to “Zen” discourse by the following effort: I thought deeply about and studied how Zen presents itself on the level of issues that are basic to human existence (for example [issues] such as “inner worldly being,” “experience,” “experience and words,” “body,” “I and thou (intersubjectivity)” and so on) and what meaning Zen classical texts could have for human existence that presented real examples and that I read through my own experience, and [I asked] what such a Zen could mean for human existence.

My “Zen” discourse is the fulfillment of Zen self-awareness in the world as described above, but regarding its fundamental methodological character one can call it an existential hermeneutics of Zen focusing on the ontology of man. That is, regarding my Zen discourse, it is naturally close to philosophy – that is to say, one can catch the difference in quality and status between Zen thinking and philosophy, but it is situated near philosophy. Eventually, from studying “Zen” regarding human ontology, the concept of philosophical human ontology, with Zen in mind, will be a thematic interest for me and the central subject of my research. At the same time, Nishida[’s] philosophy has become a guide to thinking and continues to guide me to this day.

If Suzuki Daisetsu was a Zen thinker concerned with the relation between Zen and the world, Nishida Kitarō was a philosopher from the start. During roughly ten years of preparing for the birth of his first book, *An Inquiry into the Good* (1911), he maintained a thorough practice in tandem with his intensive study of Western philosophy. Yet, from the beginning Nishida placed his own duty consciously on philosophy, on philosophy as investigation into understanding the world and self-understanding, as in the classics of philosophy as the “study of wholeness”, “study of the subject”, “study of self-awareness”. Nishida also addressed the problem of Zen as a ground for his philosophy with regard to developing a new understanding of the world and the self, by introducing human phenomena transmitted from the Eastern traditions, like Zen in particular, which until then did not show up in the horizon of traditional Western philosophy. To put it differently, there was a speculative effort to project a new world principle that sets apart the mutual differences by engaging “in between” the other tradition, which is thus capable of forming a unity of the world from this magnetic field of the “in between” (not in the sense of the domination of one over the other or an annexation, but with the differences becoming mutual wealth). Such [a principle], Nishida was not given by any established philosophical means. For Nishida, neither the traditional Eastern spiritual grammar, which expounds the roots [of founding principles] by tracing circles [around the subject matter in question], nor the Western philosophical grammar based on the organization of concepts by definition, could help. There was no [existing] principle, which one can form, which can lead to a self-awareness of existence in this world. Nishida tried to design a world that had not become reality yet, while using words without [an indigenous philosophical] grammar. The intricacy of Nishida’s philosophical dissertation can basically be said to be derived from such a level of thought.

Presently, the world is advancing rapidly towards uniformity and super-systematization in a way that is not similar to the world that Nishida tried to depict, and at the bottom of the world’s surface emptiness widens, and emptiness from which all kinds of frenzy occur (not only the struggle between human beings but also the change of ecosystems in the natural world). There is also a sense of premonition of ruin. Nishida’s philosophy can give an indication of whether this is going to stop, and what to do.

I have painted the patterns of my thought that have been opened by Eckhart, Zen, and Nishida’s philosophy. I hope it will be helpful for readers of this anthology. The speculative realm develops basically in between two different levels that overlap: the nature of religious existence and philosophical thought, likewise the tradition of Western Europe’s thought and the spiritual tradition of East Asia. Currently, I form my own philosophical human ontology in such a realm of thought, but speaking only of the core idea, regarding the self-awareness of the human subject, I conceive of it as the “I am I without being I” or as the “self-awareness of I and thou” (Nishida Kitarō) (see “Phenomenology of the Self”), regarding the world within which the subject is placed, I conceive of it as the world, which is overlapping in a way that cannot be seen (cf. “the overlapping of inner worldly existence”).

# Chapter 2

## The Contours of Ueda Shizuteru's Philosophy of Zen



Bret W. Davis

### Abbreviation

USS Ueda, Shizuteru. 2001–2003. *Ueda Shizuteru shū* 上田閑照集 [Collected Works of Ueda Shizuteru], 11 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami

### 1 Introduction

Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照 (1926–2019) was the central figure in the third generation of the Kyoto School of modern Japanese philosophy.<sup>1</sup> He not only followed in the

---

<sup>1</sup>On the Kyoto School and Ueda's place therein, see Ōhashi and Akitomi (2020) and Davis (2019a). While Abe Masao 阿部正雄 (1915–2006) is better known in the United States given his long residence there and his many publications in English (see Mitchell 1998), in Japan Ueda is unquestionably viewed as the central figure of the third generation of the Kyoto School. Having spent a number of years in Germany and published numerous articles in German, Ueda is better known in Europe than he is in the United States and other English speaking countries. For a list of Ueda's works in German, see Ueda (2007–2008, 5: 254–258). For a selection of these, see Ueda (2011a). For a review of Ueda (2011a), see Davis (2013). Earlier versions of chapters 1–4 of Ueda (2011a) are available in excellent English translations as Ueda (1982, 1983, 1989a, 1992). Ueda has approved my plan to edit an English anthology of his work that will include translations from both Japanese and from German texts of his. Scholarship on Ueda's work available in English includes Döll (2011, 2020), Davis (2008, 2013, 2014, 2019b), and Heisig (2005). The first monograph on Ueda's philosophy is in German: Döll (2005). In Japanese, some commentaries on Ueda's thought, along with responses and retrospective essays by Ueda himself, can be found in the 2005 issue of the journal *Tōzai shūkyō kenkyū* (Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies 2005). The first collection of essays in English on Ueda's thought recently appeared as a special issue of *Comparative and continental philosophy* (Davis 2022a). It contains a translation by Gregory Moss of Ueda's programmatic early essay "Meister Eckhart's mysticism in comparison with Zen Buddhism" as well as essays on key aspects of Ueda's thought by John Krummel, John Maraldo, and myself, and concludes with a review essay on Ueda (2011a) by Jason Wirth. The present volume is the first book-length collection of essays on Ueda's thought.

---

B. W. Davis (✉)  
Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, MD, USA  
e-mail: [bwdavis@loyola.edu](mailto:bwdavis@loyola.edu)

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022

R. Müller et al. (eds.), *Tetsugaku Companion to Ueda Shizuteru*, Tetsugaku Companions to Japanese Philosophy 5, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1_2)

footsteps but went several steps beyond his predecessors, Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945) and Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990), in the development of what can be called a “philosophy of Zen.” The italicized “of” in this phrase is meant to be understood as both an objective and a subjective genitive. In other words, Ueda not only philosophizes *about* Zen, he also philosophizes *from* Zen. Like Nishida and Nishitani before him, Ueda not only devoted himself to the study of Western philosophy and religion, he also intensively engaged in the practice and study of Zen Buddhism. Indeed, although Ueda discreetly refrained from presenting himself as a Zen master, he was in fact formally recognized as such by a former abbot of Shōkokuji monastery, Kajitani Sōnin 梶谷宗忍 (1914–1995).

With regard to their stances toward Zen, a development can be traced from Nishida, whose early years of intense Zen practice gave way to his attempt to formulate an original philosophy, implicitly on the basis of this experience as well as explicitly in dialogue and confrontation with the texts of Western philosophy (USS, 1: 109–144)<sup>2</sup>; then to Nishitani, who not only engaged in a lifelong practice of Zen but who also increasingly through the course of his career wrote both *from* and *about* what he called “the standpoint of Zen” (Nishitani 2009)<sup>3</sup>; and finally to Ueda, who began early on writing both *from* and *about* his engagement with the practice and study of Zen, initially by way of comparison and contrast with the radical mystical theology of Meister Eckhart (Ueda 1965: 145–169; USS, 8) and later often in the context of his interpretations of Nishida’s philosophy (USS, 5: 11–105; Ueda 1993). Whereas Nishida tended to stand facing Western philosophy with Zen experience as a decisive element of his background (in other words, he wrote *from* Zen more than he wrote *about* Zen), Nishitani turned around to face and explicitly reflect on the texts and practice of Zen, intentionally developing a bidirectional “philosophy of Zen.” Ueda took up Nishitani’s bidirectional path early on in his career, establishing himself not only as an expert scholar of Meister Eckhart and modern German philosophy, but also as an original philosophical interpreter of Zen. Although he maintained a deferential attitude toward Nishida and Nishitani, it is fair to say that in many respects Ueda matched and in some respects surpassed his predecessors in combining a rigorous and far-ranging inquiry into Western philosophy and religion with an intense and prolonged study and practice of Zen Buddhism, in a back-and-forth movement that enabled him to develop an original “philosophy of Zen” out of the encounter between these traditions.

To be sure, the encounter between philosophy and Zen is one of mutual confrontation as much as it is one of reciprocal augmentation. Bringing Zen practice and

---

<sup>2</sup>USS refers to Ueda’s *Collected Works*; see bibliographical information at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>3</sup>Nishitani and Ueda (1988), Ueda and Horio (1998), and Ueda et al. (2006) contain essays by Ueda and other leading contemporary Japanese scholars affiliated with the Kyoto School on the relation of the philosophies of Nishida, Nishitani, Hisamatsu Shin’ichi as well as the thought of Suzuki Daisetsu and others to Zen. See also the essays collected in USS, 5. On the relation between philosophy and the practice of Zen in Nishida’s, Nishitani’s, and Ueda’s thought, see Davis (2021) and Davis (2022b: 275–289).

philosophical intellection to bear on one another is not only a matter of mutual enrichment but also entails a great tension and a mutual calling into question. Even while it shares the aim of “self-awareness” (*jikaku* 自覚) with philosophy (Ueda 1993: 185), Zen’s suspicion of a merely intellectual pursuit of this aim is well-known. Ueda does not evade, but rather draws our attention to this disparity between Zen practice and philosophical intellection. He writes:

It must be said that there is a fundamental gap between Eastern practice (*gyō* 行), especially the Zen of non-thinking (*hishiryō* 非思量), and philosophy as an academic discipline of reflection (*hansei no gaku* 反省の学) that arose and developed in the West (USS, 5: 53).<sup>4</sup>

He goes on to say that “Nishida Kitarō cast himself into that gap” and inhabited the “magnetic field” of attraction and repulsion between these two disciplines. So did Nishitani, who once wrote that the “problem of Zen and philosophy [...] remains even now to be settled. It is, after all, the task remaining at the core of the spiritual and cultural encounter between East and West” (Nishitani 1986: 153). Nishida, Nishitani and Ueda see this great task also as a great opportunity to bring Zen and philosophy to bear on one another (see Davis 2021). Ueda compares the meeting of Zen and philosophy to the initial clashing encounter and eventual dialogical cooperation between the Greek reason and Judeo-Christian faith, the interweaving of which formed the backbone of the Western tradition (USS, 5: 3).

The intent of this chapter is to introduce the key themes and theses of Ueda’s philosophy—or existential phenomenology—of Zen. Having published his *Collected Works* between 2001 and 2003, in 2004 Ueda penned a retrospective sketch of the key themes and development of his thought for a conference devoted to his work, which was subsequently published in a special issue of the journal *Tōzai shūkyō kenkyū* [*Studies of Religion East and West*] (Ueda 2005; The Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies 2005).<sup>5</sup> He begins this sketch by stating that the three foci of his by then more than four decades of research have been Meister Eckhart, Zen Buddhism, and Nishida Kitarō. Thematically, he writes, his abiding concern has been with the question, “What is religion?”<sup>6</sup> More precisely, he later adds, his lifework has taken place in a space opened up by the overlapping of two kinds of “between”—between “religious existence” (*shūkyō-teki jitsuzon* 宗教的実

---

<sup>4</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this chapter are my own.

<sup>5</sup>Ueda also wrote retrospective epilogues to each of the eleven volumes of his *Collected Works* (USS). These epilogues were collectively published with some additional reflections in Ueda (2007–2008, 5: 2–258). See also the afterword to each of the five volumes of Ueda (2007–2008). These epilogues and afterwords illuminate the signposts of his thought-path and reveal how remarkably consistent that path has remained for more than half a century. This consistency is also attested to by the fact that Ueda paid little attention to chronological order in the arrangement of chapters and volumes of his *Collected Works*.

<sup>6</sup>“What is religion?” (*Shūkyō to wa nanika* 宗教とは何か) is both the title of Nishitani’s magnum opus, translated by Jan Van Bragt as *Religion and Nothingness* (Nishitani 1982), and also the title Ueda gave to the final volume of his *Collected Works* (USS, 11). On the difference it makes to rethink this question from the perspective of Japanese Buddhist traditions, see Davis (2004) and Davis (2020a).

存) and “philosophical thought” (*tetsugaku-teki shisaku* 哲学的思索) on the one hand, and between the intellectual tradition of the West and the spiritual tradition of East Asia on the other (Ueda 2005: 18).

## 2 Zen as a Path of Non-mysticism

Although Ueda had begun practicing Zen a few years prior to going to Germany to study in 1959, while at Marburg University he devoted himself to the study of Eckhart’s mystical thought on its own terms, submitting in 1962 a dissertation on what he perceived as the two central themes in Eckhart’s mysticism: “the birth of the Son in the soul” and “the breakthrough to the Godhead.” It was only with the publication of a revised and expanded version of this work as a book three years later, in 1965, that Ueda added a final section comparing and contrasting Eckhart and Zen (Ueda 1965: 145–169). Although this comparison and contrast appeared as more of an epilogue than a core chapter of his first book, it soon became a central focus of Ueda’s work over the ensuing decades (Ueda 2005: 8; *USS*, 8). By way of this comparison and contrast, Ueda developed an original interpretation Zen as a path of “non-mysticism” (*Nicht-Mystik* or *hi-shinpishugi* 非神秘主義).<sup>7</sup>

What Ueda means by non-mysticism is not a simple rejection of, but rather a *movement through and out of* mysticism. It is both a fulfillment of the genuine thrust of mysticism and a breakthrough beyond it. In a conversation at his home in 2006, Ueda expressed agreement with my suggestion that this dynamic movement through and out of mysticism might be more appropriately referred to as “*de-mysticism*” (*Ent-Mystik* or *datsu-shinpishugi* 脱神秘主義) or, even better, as “*trans-mysticism*” (*Trans-Mystik* or *tsūka-shinpishugi* 通過神秘主義). In any case, what he means by *non-* or *trans-*mysticism involves a double negation, a releasement from the ego and then from God. A releasement from the ego enables a union with God, the *unio mystica* that is the pinnacle of mysticism according to Ueda. Yet, pursuing the more radical path of non-mysticism, even this union is broken through and God is let go of for the sake of nothing, that is, for an experience of absolute nothingness which in turn returns us to a direct engagement in the here and now of everyday activity.

In the epilogue to volume 8 of his *Collected Works* Ueda tells us that, although he initially coined the German term “*Nicht-Mystik*” in order to distinguish Zen from Eckhart’s “*Mystik*,” he later came to apply the new term to the most radical element in Eckhart’s thought as well (*USS*, 8: 330). Nevertheless, Zen remains for him the paradigmatic path of non-mysticism. According to Ueda, Eckhart “comes to indicate *almost* the same world as Zen” when, beyond the “death/rebirth” found in dying to the self for the sake of being reborn in the life of God, he intimates a thoroughgoing “great death” and a rebirth from out of an absolute nothingness (*USS*,

---

<sup>7</sup>For an elaboration of the following account of Ueda’s comparison of Eckhart and Zen, see Davis (2008).



6: 303). Yet after exploring their profound resonances, Ueda goes on to mark a number of critical distinctions between Eckhart and Zen, distinctions which imply that the latter offers, in the end, a more thoroughgoing path of non-mysticism.

Whereas the “birth motif” in Eckhart remains in the realm of mysticism, the “breakthrough motif” leads him into the dimension of non-mysticism and thus into a profound proximity to Zen. However, differences remain, and, for Ueda, those differences indicate that the non-mysticism of Eckhart is not quite as radical or thoroughgoing as is that of Zen. Eckhart’s sole concern is said to be with the soul’s relation to God (USS, 8: 151), and he pays little attention to the world of nature; whereas, for Zen, natural phenomena express the very concrescence of the non-egoity of the true self (USS, 8: 77). To be sure, Eckhart does not only denigrate “creatures” as nothing (in the negative sense of a privation of being) on their own, but also talks of learning to see all things “in God” (Eckhart 1963: 89–90). But, unlike Zen, he does not let go of God so as to simply affirm the suchness of natural phenomena, that is, things such as they present themselves as they are within nothing but the empty expanse of absolute nothingness. Quoting Eckhart as saying: “To one who looks at a stick in the divine light, the stick looks like an angel,” Ueda writes: “Eckhart’s affirmation of the stick is not an affirmation of the stick as stick, but of the stick as an angel in divine light. Zen Buddhism speaks more straightforwardly: ‘Mountain as mountain, water as water’” (Ueda 2004: 160).

In the final analysis, Ueda concludes, Eckhart’s “nothingness” remains a negative theological sign pointing towards an inexpressibly higher Being. “In the case of Eckhart, because of the excellence of the supra-being (*Überwesen*) of God’s being, *it is called nothingness*” (USS, 6: 304–305). Eckhart’s nothingness of the absolute (*zettai no mu* 絶対の無) is an *adjective* modifying a substance. In contrast, Zen’s absolute nothingness (*zettai mu* 絶対無) is a *verb* referring to “the activity of emptying out” (*kūkai no hataraki* 空解の作き) (USS, 8: 147; cf. Ueda 1965: 165). In short, despite Eckhart’s most radical moments of breaking through the strictures of mysticism into the freedom of non-mysticism, Ueda finds metaphysical residues in his thought which impede the realization of the suchness of things in absolute nothingness and which inhibit the free and compassionate way of living without (the question) why.

### 3 Walking the Zen Path of the Oxherding Pictures

Ueda has a penchant and a gift for making the seemingly abstract philosophy of this dynamic non-mysticism concrete by way of commenting on the Zen classic, *The Ten Oxherding Pictures*.<sup>8</sup> In the first six pictures, a young man searches for an

---

<sup>8</sup>Yamada (2004). For Ueda’s commentaries, see Ueda and Yanagida (1992: 17–174), and Ueda (2002). Both of these are now included in USS, 6. In 2004 an interview with Ueda on his interpretation of the *Oxherding Pictures* was broadcast on the NHK television show, *Kokoro no jidai*; for a transcript see <http://h-kishi.sakura.ne.jp/kokoro-26.htm>. For an elucidation of the *Oxherding Pictures* that is much indebted to Ueda, see the concluding chapter of Davis (2022b).

Ox (his true self), finds its traces, sees it directly, catches and tames it, leads and then rides it home. The seventh picture can be understood as representing both the peaceful power and the potential danger of the mystical union. Here the man, having merged with and finally “forgotten” the Ox (i.e., having overcome the duality between the self that is seeking and the self that is sought), sits at peace with himself, or, as some versions have it, sings his praises to the moon (a traditional symbol of enlightenment). He has apparently realized his enlightened Buddha-Self. But the eighth picture, the empty circle, which Ueda understands dynamically as the radically emptying experience of the place of absolute nothingness, breaks through every possible dwelling in sanctimonious Self-satisfaction and through every possible attachment, even a subtle spiritual attachment to the most exalted experience of a *unio mystica* (USS, 6: 225–230).

Ueda reads the last three pictures as a circulating set (USS, 6: 208, 263): the empty circle of the eighth picture as the absolutely denuding experience of emptiness; the river and tree of the ninth picture as the egoless suchness of natural phenomena; and the sage returning to the marketplace and greeting a young man in the tenth picture as the compassionately engaged interpersonal encounter. While the first seven pictures recount the necessary path toward ecstatic mysticism or self-realization, it is the “forgetting the self” (Dōgen) in the leap into a circling between the last three pictures that, for Ueda, portrays the ultimate dynamic of Zen’s non-mysticism.

At a symposium on the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* that took place at Kyoto Sangyō University in November of 2011, I had the opportunity to ask Ueda to confirm and clarify my understanding of his interpretation of the tenth picture as depicting the “twofold” nature of the true self (Kyoto Sangyō University: 244–246). The tenth picture depicts an old man—often associated with Budai (J. *Hotei*), a tenth century Chan monk sometimes thought of as an incarnation of Maitreya, the future Buddha—entering the marketplace and greeting a young man. The twofold nature of the true self is depicted as (1) the finite form of the old man who encounters the young man and (2) the empty circle that encompasses that encounter. Ueda suggested that the empty circle of the tenth picture appears as a kind of illuminative background or halo of the old man. On the one hand, he affirms Nishida’s claim that the self is “a circle rather than a point, a *basho* [場所, place] rather than a thing” (Nishida 1987–1989, 1: 141; Nishida 2012: 95; cf. USS, 3: 92–101). And yet, at the same time, he recognizes that the self is also an embodied, finite, relative human being facing other human beings and things. The true self is thus irreducibly twofold, both an encompassing place and an emplaced person.

## 4 I, in Not Being I, Am I

Ueda's first book on the *Oxherding Pictures*, published in 1982 and coauthored with the eminent historian of Zen, Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山, is subtitled *A Phenomenology of the Self* (*Jiko no genshōgaku* 自己の現象学). Ueda's second book on the *Oxherding Pictures*, published in 2002, is entitled *Walking Through the Oxherding Pictures* (*Jūgyūzu o ayumu* 十牛図を歩む) and subtitled *The Path to the True Self* (*Shin no jiko e no michi* 真の自己への道). In 1973 Ueda published his first book in Japanese, entitled *Zen Buddhism: Radical Human Being* (*Zen Bukkyō: Kongen-teki ningen* 禅仏教—根源的人間).<sup>9</sup> In 2000 Ueda published a book entitled *What am I?* (*Watashi to wa nanika* 私とは何か),<sup>10</sup> and in 2011 he published a selection of his essays written in German over the years under the title *Wer und was bin ich? Zur Phänomenologie des Selbst im Zen-Buddhismus* (Ueda 2011a). Clearly, together with the question of the nature of religion, the basic question of philosophical anthropology has been a constant concern in Ueda's path of thought. This is not surprising given that, just as "know thyself" (*gnōthi seauton*) has been a motto of Western philosophy ever since Socrates endorsed this injunction from the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, the practice of Zen has been characterized by Daitō Kokushi and others as an "investigation into the matter of the self" (*koji kyūmei* 己事究明).

However, we must be careful not to misunderstand the self that we are searching for. Or, we might say, the search must proceed by way of clearing up various self-misunderstandings. Ueda sharply distinguishes a genuine search for the true self from a modern individualistic endeavor to "find myself" (*jibun sagashi* 自分探し). True "self-awareness" (*jikaku* 自覚), Ueda avers, is something very different from, indeed something precluded by, the kind of "self-consciousness" (*jiko-ishiki* 自己意識) that tends to lead in the opposite direction, namely, toward a narcissistic self-obsession (Ueda 2010: 24–25, 32, 53; *uss*, 10: 124–134). The "self" (*jiko* 自己) that Ueda and Zen seek to disclose is something other than a modern sense of an independent and self-assertive "ego" (*jiga* 自我) (*uss*, 10: 36–46). Even speaking of a search for the true self underlying one's individual ego can be deceiving, especially if we conceive of the self that we are trying to discover as some self-sufficient and permanent soul-substance. A genuine investigation into the self reveals that there is no such soul-substance to be found, and that, in fact, our craving to be such an immutable and independent entity not only lies at the root of our own suffering but also, insofar as this delusory craving alienates us from and sets us in opposition to others, it gives rise to the greed and hatred we habitually manifest. The Zen investigation into the self aims to dissolve the bundle of delusion, greed, and hatred (which

<sup>9</sup> Ueda (1973). A revised and expanded version of this book appeared under the same title in a paperback series published by Iwanami in 1993. In a rearranged order and collated with other related essays, most of the chapters of this book now appear in *uss*, 4, the volume title of which is *Zen: Kongen-teki ningen* (*Zen: Radical human being*).

<sup>10</sup> Ueda (2000); reprinted in *uss*, 10: 15–171. *uss*, 10 is entitled *Jiko no genshōgaku* (*Phenomenology of the Self*).

in Buddhism are called “the three poisons”) that generate and perpetuate the tumbleweed grasped as the ego.

Dōgen famously writes: “To study the Buddha Way is to study the self [*jiko o narau* 自己をならふ],” yet “to study the self is to forget the self [*jiko o wasururu* 自己をわするる]” and thus be “verified [i.e., enlightened] by the myriad things [of the world]” (Dōgen 2009: 256). To truly know oneself is to know that one is not a self-enclosed substance but rather a dynamic openness to one’s interrelatedness with others. To be sure, if mishandled, the instruction to “forget the self” can potentially be just as misleading as a self-obsessed endeavor to “find myself.” If one loses a sense of one’s situated agency and responsibility and merely passively follows the crowd or obeys the will of another, this loss of self is hardly a genuine solution to the converse problem of egoistic attachment and self-assertiveness. Ueda thus writes that genuine freedom is found by way of pursuing a middle way between “attachment to the self” (*jiko e no koshū* 自己への固執) and “oblivion of the self” (*jiko bōshitsu* 自己忘失) (USS, 10: 282).

One of Buddhism’s most important and most challenging teachings is that of *anātman* (*muga* 無我). The question is how to understand this core doctrine—and here, as elsewhere, interpretation begins with translation. Does *anātman* mean “no self” or “no ego” or “no soul”? That of course depends on what is meant by “self” and “ego” and “soul.” What is clear is that Buddhism rejects any ontology that posits an independent and substantial self, and that it calls for an ethical and religious abnegation of egoism. But precisely these negations of a false sense of ego can be understood to entail the affirmation of a true self that is awakened to, and compassionately participates in, its coexistence—or “interdependent origination” (*pratītyasamutpāda*)—with others. Indeed, Mahayana Buddhist traditions, and Zen in particular, have often affirmed such a conception of a true self (*shin no jiko* 真の自己) as the other side of the same coin of rejecting a deluded and pernicious sense of ego (*ga* 我) (Dumoulin 1994: 38–43).

Ueda understands the Buddhist teaching of *anātman* as a radical negation of egocentric manners of being a self as well as reifying interpretations of the being of the self. Yet, for Ueda, the teaching of *anātman* best serves as an antidote to our tendency toward egoistic self-assertion and self-reification, since, taken on its own, the doctrine can lead to the opposite problem of a mere absence or dissolution of our sense of self. The experience of *anātman* should be understood rather as the second moment in the dialectical movement of the true self, that is to say, of the self who affirms itself only by way of negating itself (USS, 10: 135–151). The self-identity of such a self can be expressed as “I, in not being I, am I” (*ware wa, ware narazu shite, ware nari* 我は、我ならずして、我なり).<sup>11</sup> In other words, the true self is neither a reified object nor a static subject; it is not a subjective or objective substance but rather a dialectically nondual process, a movement of “I, negating myself, am myself” (*ware wa, ware naku shite, ware nari* 我は、我無くして、我なり) (Ueda

<sup>11</sup> Ueda (2010): 34; USS, 10: 23–24. In German, Ueda writes: “Ich bin, indem ich nicht ich bin, ich” (Ueda 2011a: 199; see also Ueda 2011a: 14, 108, 214).

2010: 22). Ueda understands the Buddhist teaching of *anātman* to be calling attention to the crucial moment of “in not being I” or “negating myself,” a moment in the process of the true self that breaks open the karmically driven closed circuit of “I am I” and enables the self to be itself by way of not being itself. The true self, for Ueda, is realized as the dynamic entirety of this circling movement between self-negation and self-reaffirmation.

## 5 Between I and Thou, the Bow

The moment of self-negation in this movement of the true self is a matter of self-opening. The ego that merely asserts “I am I” does not include this moment of self-negation, and thus is not open to its coexistence with others. The modern *cogito* that presumes to be its own self-sufficient ground remains stuck in its self-enclosed self-consciousness and cuts itself off from an ecstatically empathetic relation with others. The moment of self-negation is thus the key to dialogue and a genuine I-thou relation.

Ueda uses the everyday Japanese greeting of the bow (*ojigi* おじぎ) as a concrete example to illustrate how mutual self-negation—the emptying of all ego-centered presumptions and agendas—returns us to a communal place wherein we, paradoxically, share “nothing” in common.

In the encounter with one another, rather than directly becoming “I and Thou” as in the case of a handshake, each person first lowers his or her head and bows. This does not stop at being a mere exchange of formalities. In the depths of “the between,” each person reduces himself or herself to nothing. Going from the bottom of “the between” into the bottomless depths that envelop self and other, each returns to a profound nothingness. Both persons, by means of bending their egos and lowering their heads [...], return for a moment to a place where there is neither self nor other, neither I nor Thou. Then, by raising themselves up, they once again face one another and for the first time become “I and Thou.” Having each cut off the root of unilateral egoism, they become an “I and Thou” in which each is opened to their mutuality. (USS, 10: 107–108).

Open to others, by way of being open to the empty-expanse in which together we dwell, I am I (USS, 10: 23–24). Ueda's philosophical anthropology, his “phenomenology of the self” rooted in Zen practice and everyday experience, has always been deeply concerned with issues of coexistence with others and interpersonal dialogue (USS, 4: 261–344; USS, 6: 188–203, 279–285; USS, 10: 101–123, 269–298; Davis 2014: 182–194; Davis 2017).

## 6 Exiting Language and Exiting Into Language

One of the hallmarks of Ueda's own life and thought has been his dialogue with the texts—and, through those texts, with the “person” (*nin* 人)—of his philosophical grandfather and progenitor of the Kyoto School, Nishida Kitarō. In 1991, Ueda published his first book on Nishida's philosophy (Ueda 1991),<sup>12</sup> which sparked a revival of Nishida studies in Japan. Ueda continued to publish influential interpretations of Nishida and otherwise did much to promote the study of Nishidian philosophy, for example by editing a still widely used three volume paperback collection of Nishida's key works (Nishida 1987–1989). It was no surprise to anyone when Ueda was appointed as the inaugural president of the Nishida Philosophy Association in 2003. Two major foci of Ueda's Nishida interpretation have been the notion of “place” (*basho* 場所) (uss, 3) and the relation of “pure experience” (*junsui keiken* 純粹經驗) to (religious, poetic, and philosophical) language (uss, 2).

The question of language was also a central issue in Ueda's interpretation of both Eckhart and Zen (uss, 8: 171–219; Ueda 1989b). The central chapters of Ueda's first book on Zen, published in 1973, were concerned with language and dialogue.<sup>13</sup> In 2009, when he was asked by the editors of *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook* to contribute a chapter that would represent his most important contribution to philosophy, Ueda compiled a text which I translated as “Language in a Twofold World” (Ueda 2011b).

The question of the relation between experience and language has not only been at the heart of Ueda's own philosophical path, he moreover shows how this question has always been at the heart of the Zen tradition itself. The Zen stance toward language seems paradoxically ambivalent. On the one hand, the fundamental practice of Zen is silent meditation, *zazen* (坐禪). On the other hand, the largely verbal “question and response” (*mondō* 問答) encounters revolving around a *kōan* (公案) are equally central to Zen practice, at least in the Rinzai tradition. On the one hand, Zen is said to be “not founded on words and letters” (*furyū-monji* 不立文字); words are said to be like a “finger pointing at the moon” or a “painting of a rice cake.” On the other hand, not only has the Zen tradition produced an abundance of recorded sayings, poetry, and other “words and letters,” explicit affirmations of the expressive power of language can be found in classical Zen texts, such as the following saying quoted by Ueda: “Zen is like spring and words are like the flowers. Spring abides in

<sup>12</sup> Even though Ueda did not publish his first monograph on Nishida until three decades into his literary career, when it came time to arrange his own *Collected Works*, he foregrounded his works on Nishida by gathering most of them in the first three volumes, the first of which is entitled simply *Nishida Kitarō* (uss, 1).

<sup>13</sup> Revised versions of these chapters appear as “Zen no kotoba” 禪の言葉 (The Language of Zen) and “Taiwa to Zen mondō” 対話と禪問答 (Dialogue and Zen Mondō) in uss, 4: 183–319. For an extensive treatment of the question of language in Ueda's philosophy of Zen, see Davis (2019b). For an introductory account of language and Zen that culminates with Ueda, see chapter 20 of Davis (2022b).

the flowers and all the flowers are spring. Flowers abide in spring and all of spring is the flowers" (USS, 4: 240).

Ueda shows how we can understand the paradoxical ambivalence between silent experience and linguistic expression, not as a problem that plagues Zen, but rather as a dynamic interplay essential to it. He quotes Bankei 盤珪 (1622–1693) as saying, in effect, that one must first “exit language” in order to attain the Dharma eye with which to “exit into language” in order to understand and express the Dharma in words (USS, 4: 240–241). Ueda finds this bidirectional movement away from and back into language epitomized in the twin practices of the Rinzai Zen tradition, namely *zazen* (坐禪) or silent seated meditation and *sanzen* (參禪) or verbal interviews with a Zen master. Ueda writes: “*Zazen* is a bottomless stillness and silence, whereas *sanzen* is a cutting edge of movement and speech” (USS, 4: 210). The bilateral movement between these two practices entails a double negation: “*Zazen* is a negation of language, and *sanzen* is a negation of silence” (USS, 4: 210).

Hence, the apparent contradictions in Zen between negating and affirming language, between prohibiting and demanding words, can thus be understood as exhortations to participate in the interplay of this twofold movement. One must go beyond language to experience things afresh; and one must bring this fresh experience of things into language. Ueda in fact sees this bilateral movement not just as essential to Zen practice, but as the essential relation of experience and language as such. He calls this double movement that of “exiting language and then exiting into language” (*kotoba kara dete, kotoba ni deru* 言葉から出て、言葉に出る) (USS, 4: 241; Ueda 2011b: 768–769).

Even though the moments of this movement may be provisionally isolated and thus intensified in the course of Zen practice, Ueda repeatedly stresses that experience and expression are ultimately not two separate occurrences, but rather two sides of the same primordial dynamic of “exiting language and then exiting into language.” Ueda’s understanding of the relation between language and experience is concisely summarized in the following passage:

What can be understood with, and expressed by language is not, in the end, language. [...] Any yet, it is not the case that there “is” something that cannot be expressed by language. Rather, at bottom lies what I have called the primordial movement of “exiting language and then exiting into language.” (USS, 2: 309)

## 7 Being-in-the-Twofold-World

Ueda develops his phenomenology of what he calls “being-in-the-twofold-world” or a “two-layered being-the-world” (*nijūsekainaisonzai* 二重世界内存在) in relation to the irreducibly twofold yet ultimately inseparable movement of “exiting language and then exiting into language.” In the following passage from his essay, “Language in a Twofold World,” Ueda clarifies the relation between these key components of this thought.

What I am calling “exiting language and then exiting into language” is not a smooth and automatic movement. It is rather a movement consisting of a twofold breaking through: language is torn through into silence and silence is torn through into language. It is precisely this movement that is primordial experience, which altogether I understand as a living wellspring of the death and resuscitation of experience. [...] In order to understand this movement, it is necessary to see that our being-in-the-world is in fact a two-layered being-in-the-world. In short, the world as a comprehensive space of meaning is in turn located within the world of a limitless openness, a hollow-space of no-meaning that is without limits. Insofar as we are in the world, we are located within this limitless openness. Yet, since the world of language is layered upon this world of limitless openness, often, indeed usually, we unwittingly remain bound by the delimiting power of language and the framework of relations of meaning. Hence, the world of language alone is taken to be the world of our being-in-the-world, and the limitless openness which transcends and envelops this world remains closed off to us. [...] [Where the] visible and linguistically defined world is taken to be the one and only world, the human subject that inhabits this world—either individually or collectively, and in various manners and levels—attempts to appropriate it as “my world”; and this is what gives rise to confrontations, conflicts, struggles, and distortions within this closed off world. This kind of being-in-the-world must be broken open by the true countenance of the world, so that the reality of human existence can be realized. [...] If we take the original and fundamental structure of human existence—which takes place in this dynamic of “exiting language and then exiting into language”—to be a twofold being-in-the-world, then the being of the human should be understood as the double movement of going from the world into the limitless openness and then once again into the world. (Ueda 2011b: 769).

This passage not only illustrates Ueda’s conception of the relation between language and experience, it also shows how his understanding of the true self as a movement of “I, in not being I, am I” correlates with his conception of how the world in which this self exists is in turn situated within an “empty expanse” (*kokū* 虚空).

With his notion of “being-in-the-twofold-world,” Ueda interpretively develops Heidegger’s conception of being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) as well as Nishida’s philosophy of enveloping “places” (*basho* 場所). Ueda draws on Heidegger’s phenomenological elucidation of how the meaningful world in which we dwell is structured as a totality of significations (*Bedeutungsganze*), which Ueda calls “an encompassing space of meaning” (*hōkatsu-teki na imi-kūkan* 包括的な意味空間). He also appreciates Heidegger’s indications of “the nothing of the world” (*das Nichts der Welt*) that is experienced in moments of anxiety when the meaningfulness of our world is fundamentally called into question, especially in the experience of being-towards-death (Heidegger 1993: 186–191, 265–266, 276; USS, 9: 30–31).

Ueda credits Nishida with developing a rigorously topological understanding of self and world, self-awareness and experience, self and other, and especially with marking the crucial distinction between determinate “places of being” (*u no basho* 有の場所) and the essentially indeterminate “place of absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu no basho* 絶対無の場所) (USS, 3: 74–75, 81–82; USS, 6: 256–262; USS, 11: 153–163). The place of absolute nothingness is not opposed to, but rather transcends and encompasses the determinate places of being. The latter include the “hierarchically ordered various worlds” (*kaidan-teki ni shuju no*



*sekai* 階段的に種々の世界) of physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and history (Nishida 1987–1989, 1: 14; *uss*, 3: 58–65), the last of these being the historically and culturally specific context in which each of the others are situated. In the end, Ueda always emphasizes that the meaningful worlds in which we dwell, the horizons of which are determined through the historical developments of our languages and customs, are always situated within a non- or trans-meaningful empty expanse. Our finite horizontal worlds are delimitations of an infinite openness (*uss*, 8: 294–295; *uss*, 9: 1–24 and *passim*; Ueda 2011a: 72–98, 190–191, 194–196, 201).

## 8 *Gelassenheit* in the Empty Expanse

Whereas Nishida spoke of “the place of absolute nothingness,” Nishitani spoke of “the field of emptiness” (*kū no ba* 空の場) (Nishitani 1982: 98–100, 110, 146–152, 159–165, 192; *uss*, 5: 140–165). Ueda’s own preferred expressions for this ultimate place or field or *Ungrund* of reality is “the empty expanse” (*kokū* 虚空), a traditional Buddhist term for the “empty space” through which beings thoroughly interrelate without obstructing one another. In his German writings, Ueda refers to this empty expanse as *die unendliche Offenheit* (the infinite openness), *die unendliche Weite* (the infinite expanse), and *die umfassende unbegrenzte Erschlossenheit* (the encompassing undelimited disclosedness) (Ueda 2011a: 72–79, 165–170, 190–191, 194–196, 201). The close connection between these ideas and what Nishida calls the “place of absolute nothingness” and Nishitani the “field of emptiness” is readily apparent and frequently made explicit by Ueda. The differences are more difficult to discern. Although Ueda commented on why Nishitani spoke of “emptiness” rather than simply adopting Nishida’s term “absolute nothingness,” he remained mostly reticent about the differences between these ideas and his own.

At a symposium in Kyoto in September of 2011, however, Ueda did offer a hint: He not only suggested, as he had in print earlier (Ueda 2011c: 22–29), that Nishida’s “absolute nothingness” remains to some extent still tethered to a metaphysical thinking of “the absolute” that rings hollow in the modern epoch of nihilism, he also suggested that Nishitani’s thought of “emptiness,” which was effectively developed by way of a “self-overcoming of nihilism,” remained itself nevertheless still somewhat too positive, too “bright” (*akarui* 明るい). For Ueda, there is a “dark” (*kurai* 暗い) as well as a luminous quality to emptiness that must be acknowledged. Based on his comments and my follow-up discussion with him at that time, I have the sense that, for Ueda, there is what might be called a sorrowful dimension to the empty space or “hollow expanse” which surrounds and pervades all existence, a dimension that is not only suppressed or evaded by metaphysical idealisms, theodicies, and otherworldly visions of paradise, but also not fully acknowledged even in Nishitani’s explications of the field of emptiness, despite all the attention Nishitani did give to the problems of nihilism and evil.

To be sure, borrowing a term from Eckhart that the later Heidegger also appropriated, Ueda contrasts the attunement of *Gelassenheit* (peaceful releasement) that corresponds to living from out of the experience of what Zen calls “the great death” with the attunement of *Angst* that belongs to what the early Heidegger speaks of as the experience of authentically being-toward-death (Ueda 2011a: 192; USS, 9: 40–45; Davis 2007: 57–58). Yet Ueda’s sense of *Gelassenheit* would seem to entail not only the profound peacefulness that accompanies liberation from the self-imposed strictures and attachments of the willful ego, and not only a creative playfulness of “living without why,” but also an acceptance that the impermanence and insubstantiality of all things remains tinged with profound sentiment of sorrow even—or, in a crucial sense, especially—after enlightenment. Ueda stresses in his accounts of being-with-others that the enlightened self is empathetically concerned with the concerns of others (USS, 6: 188–203; USS, 10: 101–123; Ueda 2011a: 18–20, 106–107, 115, 200, 211–213), and presumably especially with the concerns of those who are not yet enlightened and who thus suffer from an insatiable craving for an ultimately illusory permanence and substantiality. The Mahayana Bodhisattva is epitomized by figures such as Kannon 觀音 or Kanzeon 觀世音, the Bodhisattva of compassion whose name connotes “one who perceives the cries of the world,” and Vimalakirti, the enlightened layman who says: “This illness of mine is born of ignorance and feelings of attachment. Because all living beings are sick, therefore I am sick. If all living beings are relieved of sickness, then my sickness will be mended” (Watson 1997: 65). Enlightenment thus does not entail a mere escape from, and certainly not an abandonment of the world of suffering, but rather a liberated and liberating commitment to a compassionate engagement in it.

Upon visiting Ueda in his retirement home in August of 2018, less than a year before he passed away, I had the opportunity to question him further on his earlier comment that “emptiness” bears for him a “dark” quality. This time he stressed the *unknowability* of this ultimate nature and dimension of reality. This intimate conversation was all the more poignantly profound given that we were discussing both his experience of living alone at the age of 92, after the recent loss of his beloved wife and constant companion for many decades, and his comportment to his own undeniably approaching death. Strikingly, Ueda told us that he did not feel “lonely” per se and that his attitude toward death was one of acceptance of and *Gelassenheit* toward the unknown. Ueda embodied an indelible air of unassuming calm releasement throughout this unforgettable conversation.

Until the age of ninety, Ueda gave monthly talks at the monastery of Shōkokuji on the classics of the Zen tradition, for the last few years on the *Record of Linji*. Although his calm manner of “tranquil illumination” (the literal meaning of his given name, Shizuteru 閑照) is notably different from the shouts and blows that Linji is famous for, it would be difficult to find a more fitting contemporary model than Ueda for what Linji called “the true man of no rank” (C. *wuwei zhenren*; J. *mui shinnin* 無位真人) (Linji 2009: 129). Despite his world-historical significance as a

preeminent philosopher of Zen Buddhism who was deeply conversant with Western philosophy and religion, Ueda humbly walked the path he cleared for others.<sup>14</sup>

## Bibliography

- Davis, Bret W. 2004. Provocative ambivalences in Japanese philosophy of religion: With a focus on Nishida and Zen. In *Japanese philosophy abroad*, ed. J.W. Heisig, 246–274. Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture.
- . 2007. *Heidegger and the will: On the way to Gelassenheit*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- . 2008. Letting go of God for nothing: Ueda Shizuteru's non-mysticism and the question of ethics in Zen Buddhism. In *Frontiers of Japanese philosophy 2. Neglected themes and hidden variations*, ed. V.S. Horii and M.A. Curley, 226–255. Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture.
- . 2013. Review of Shizuteru Ueda, *Wer und was bin ich? Zur Phänomenologie des Selbst im Zen-Buddhismus*. *Monumenta Nipponica* 68 (2): 321–327.
- . 2014. Conversing in emptiness: Rethinking cross-cultural dialogue with the Kyoto School. In *Philosophical traditions (Royal Institute of Philosophy supplement 74)*, ed. A. O'Hear, 171–194. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2017. *Jiyū-na hinjugokan: Ueda Shizuteru no Zen-tetsugaku kara mita taiwa no kakushin* 自由な賓主互換—上田閑照の禅哲学からみた対話の核心 [The free exchange of host and guest: The core of dialogue according to the Zen philosophy of Ueda Shizuteru]. In 日本発の「世界」思想 *Nihon hatsu no "sekai" shisō* [Thoughts of the "world" issuing from Japan], ed. K. Tōgō, T. Mori, and M. Nakatani, 104–124. Tokyo: Fujiwara Shoten.
- . 2019a. The Kyoto School. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy*, ed. E.N. Zalta. (Summer 2019 Edition), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/ssum2019/entries/kyoto-school/>.
- . 2019b. Expressing experience: Language in Ueda Shizuteru's philosophy of Zen. In *Dao companion to Japanese Buddhist philosophy*, ed. G. Kopf, 713–738. New York: Springer Publishing.
- . 2020a. Faith and/or/as enlightenment: Rethinking religion from the perspective of Japanese Buddhism. In *Asian philosophies and the idea of religion: Paths beyond faith and reason*, ed. S. Sikka and A. Peetush, 36–64. New York: Routledge.
- . 2020b. Where did he go? Ueda Shizuteru Sensei's last lesson. *The Eastern Buddhist* 48 (2): 163–168.
- . 2021. Commuting between Zen and philosophy: In the footsteps of Kyoto School philosophers and psychosomatic practitioners. In *Transitions: Crossing boundaries in Japanese philosophy*, ed. F. Greco, L. Krings, and Y. Kuwayama, 71–111. Nagoya: Chisokudō Publications.
- . ed. 2022a. *The legacy of Ueda Shizuteru: A Zen life of dialogue in a twofold world*. A special issue of *Comparative and continental philosophy* 14 (2).
- . 2022b. *Zen pathways: An introduction to the philosophy and practice of Zen Buddhism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dōgen. 2009. The presencing of truth: Dōgen's *Genjōkōan*. Trans. B.W. Davis. In *Buddhist philosophy: Essential readings*, ed. J. Garfield and W. Edelglass, 251–259. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>14</sup>Ueda Sensei passed away on June 28, 2019, while this volume was in preparation. For some personal reflections on my last few meetings with him, see Davis (2020b).

- Döll, Steffen. 2005. *Wozu also suchen? Zur Einführung in das Denken von Ueda Shizuteru*. Munich: Iudicium.
- . 2011. Ueda Shizuteru's phenomenology of self and world: Critical dialogues with Descartes, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. In *Japanese and continental philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, ed. B.W. Davis, B. Schroeder, and J.M. Wirth, 120–137. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 2020. The self that is not a self in the world that is twofold: The thought of Ueda Shizuteru. In *The Oxford handbook of Japanese philosophy*, ed. B.W. Davis, 485–499. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dumoulin, Heinrich. 1994. *Understanding Buddhism*. Trans. J.S. O'Leary. New York: Weatherhill.
- Eckhart Meister. 1963. *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*. Edited with modern German translations by Quint J. Munich: Carl Hanser.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1993. *Sein und Zeit*. 17th ed. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Heisig, James W. 2005. Approaching the Ueda Shizuteru collection. *The Eastern Buddhist* 37 (1&2): 254–274.
- Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies. 2005. *Ueda Shizuteru-shi no shisō* 上田閑照氏の思想 [The thought of Ueda Shizuteru]. A special issue of *Tōzai shūkyō kenkyū* 東西宗教研究 [Studies of Religion East and West], no. 4.
- Kyoto Sangyō University. 2013. *The bulletin of the Institute of Japanese Culture* 18.
- Linji. 2009. *The record of Linji*, ed. T.Y. Kirchner. Trans. R.F. Sasaki. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Mitchell, Donald W. 1998. *Masao Abe: A Zen life of dialogue*. Boston: Tuttle.
- Nishida, Kitarō 西田幾多郎. 1987–1989. *Nishida Kitarō tetsugaku ronshū* 西田幾多郎哲学論集 [Collected philosophical essays of Nishida Kitarō], ed. S. Ueda, three volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- . 2012. Place and dialectic. Trans. J.W. Krummel and S. Nagatomo. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nishitani, Keiji 西谷啓治. 1982. Religion and nothingness. Trans. J. Van Bragt. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- . 1986. Remembering Daisetz Suzuki. In *A Zen life: D. T. Suzuki remembered*, ed. Masao Abe, 148–159. New York: Weatherhill.
- . 2009. The standpoint of Zen: Directly pointing to the mind. Trans. J.C. Maraldo. Intro. B.W. Davis. In *Buddhist philosophy: Essential readings*, ed. J. Garfield and W. Edelglass, 93–102. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nishitani, Keiji 西谷啓治 and Shizuteru Ueda 上田閑照, ed. 1988. *Zen to tetsugaku* 禅と哲学 [Zen and philosophy]. Kyoto: Zenbunka Kenkyūsho.
- Ōhashi, Ryōsuke 大橋良介 and Katsuya Akitomi 秋富克哉. 2020. The Kyoto School: Transformations over three generations. Trans. B.W. Davis. In *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese philosophy*, ed. B.W. Davis, 367–387. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1965. *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit: Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn. A new edition of this book was published in 2018 by Verlag Karl Alber, Freiburg and Munich.
- . 1973. *Zen Bukkyō: Kongen-teki ningen* 禅仏教—根源の人間 [Zen Buddhism: Radical human being]. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō. Revised and expanded edition published in 1993 by Iwanami, Tokyo.
- . 1982. Emptiness and fullness: Śūnyatā in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Trans. J.W. Heisig and F. Greiner. *The Eastern Buddhist* 15 (1): 9–37.
- . 1983. Ascent and descent: Zen in comparison with Meister Eckhart (I). Trans. J.W. Heisig. *The Eastern Buddhist* 16 (1): 52–73.
- . 1989a. The Zen Buddhist experience of the truly beautiful. Trans. J.C. Maraldo. *The Eastern Buddhist* 22 (1): 1–36.

- . 1989b. Eckhart und Zen am Problem 'Freiheit und Sprache.' *Beihefte der Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 31 (Köln: E. J. Brill): 21–92.
- . 1991. *Nishida Kitarō o yomu* 西田幾多郎を読む [*Reading Nishida Kitarō*]. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- . 1992. The place of man in the Noh play. Trans. P. Shepherd. *The Eastern Buddhist* 25 (2): 59–88.
- . 1993. Zen and philosophy in the thought of Nishida Kitarō. Trans. M. Unno. *Japanese religions* 18 (2): 162–193.
- . 2000. *Watashi to wa nanika* 私とは何か [*What am I?*]. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- . 2002. *Jūgyūzu o ayumu* 十牛図を歩む [*Walking through the Ten Oxherding Pictures*]. Tokyo: Daihōrinkaku.
- . 2004. 'Nothingness' in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism: With particular reference to the borderlands of philosophy and theology. Trans. J.W. Heisig. In *The Buddha eye: An anthology of the Kyoto School and its contemporaries*, ed. F. Franck, 157–169. Bloomington: World Wisdom.
- . 2005. *Watashi no shisaku: Kenkyū-reki ni sotte* 私の思索—研究歴に沿って [My thought: Retracing the history of my research]. *Tōzai shūkyō kenkyū* 東西宗教研究 4: 4–20.
- . 2007–2008. *Tetsugaku korekushon* 哲学コレクション [*Collected philosophical papers*], five volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- . 2010. *Ori-ori no shisō* 折々の思想 [*Occasional Thoughts*]. Kyoto: Tōeisha.
- . 2011a. *Wer und was bin ich? Zur Phänomenologie des Selbst im Zen-Buddhismus*. Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber.
- . 2011b. Language in a twofold world. Trans. B.W. Davis. In *Japanese philosophy: A sourcebook*, ed. J.W. Heisig, T.P. Kasulis, and J.C. Maraldo, 766–784. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- . 2011c. Contributions to dialogue with the Kyoto School. Trans. B.W. Davis. In *Japanese and continental philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, ed. B.W. Davis, B. Schroeder, and J.M. Wirth, 19–32. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照 and Tsutomu Horio, ed. 1998. *Zen to gendaiseikai* 禅と現代世界 [*Zen and the contemporary world*]. Kyoto: Zenbunka Kenkyūsho.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照, Hiroyuki Kitano, and Tetsurō Mori, eds. 2006. *Zen to Kyoto-tetsugaku* 禅と京都哲学 [*Zen and Kyoto philosophy*]. Kyoto: Tōeisha.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照 and Seizan Yanagida. 1992. *Jūgyūzu: Jiko no genshōgaku* 十牛図—自己の現代学 [*The ten oxherding pictures: A phenomenology of the self*]. Tokyo: Chikuma.
- Watson, Burton. trans. 1997. *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Yamada, Mumon Roshi 山田無文. 2004. *The ten oxherding pictures: Lectures by Yamada Mumon Roshi*. Trans. V.S. Hori. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

## Chapter 3

# Introduction to Ueda's Works



### Approaching the *Ueda Shizuteru Collection*

James W. Heisig

With the eleven volumes of the *Ueda Shizuteru Collection* (USC) lined up on my desktop, I am humbled by the thought of reviewing a lifetime of writing by a man considered to be one of Japan's foremost philosophers. I realize that there are others much better prepared for it than I, but two reasons lure me to the task.

First and most important, my personal affection for Prof. Ueda, whom I have known for over twenty years. My professional interest in his work goes back to 1982 when I translated the first of several of his German essays. Beginning in 1990, I was privileged to participate several times in the Kyoto Zen Symposia, where Prof. Ueda's contribution to this unique series of conferences was enormous. From 1992 on he joined us as a regular participant in the annual discussions of the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies and for several years served as its President. In 2001 I translated his public lectures at the Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona. I assumed the role again in 2004 at the same university and at an international congress on mysticism held in Ávila, and, earlier this year, at his closing lecture for the 19th congress of the International Association for the History of Religions in Tokyo. The impression he left on the uncommonly large audiences he drew in Spain was profound and, if it is not out of place for me to say so, reconfirmed his thinking on several points. In 2004 I collaborated in the publication of a collection of his essays into Spanish, which sold so well that the volume had to be reprinted within 3 months of issuance. As I came to know him better and, over the long hours of discussion associated with many of these projects, to wrestle with him over his ideas, I also come to realize how tightly his philosophy is woven into his life and personality. All of this lay in the background as I reread large portions of his writings over these last months. Or more accurately, I found these memories constantly surfacing from beneath the lines of the printed text.

---

J. W. Heisig (✉)

Faculty of Arts and Letters, Nanzan University, Nagoya, Japan

e-mail: [heisig@nanzan-u.ac.jp](mailto:heisig@nanzan-u.ac.jp)

My second reason for undertaking this review is a more practical one. At the 2004 annual gathering of the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Prof. Ueda presented a series of three lectures on his thought.<sup>1</sup> In them he offered an overview of his development and his key ideas, putting in my hands a kind of touchstone to mine his collected writings and organize a few general thoughts for the pages that follow.

## 1 The Organization of the Collection

To begin with the Iwanami publishing house is to be congratulated for producing a handsome and eminently readable series of volumes. The conditions under which the books were produced were demanding to say the least. During the 5 years or so that it took to complete the task, Prof. Ueda somehow managed—amidst an already grueling schedule, both at home and abroad, as author, teacher—to edit and gloss nearly 3800 pages of writings and to compose another 254 pages of “Afterwords” (often based on postscripts to other works). Publication of the *Collection* began in September 2001 with vol. 1 and came to a close with vol. 3 in December 2003. Even so, the results do not include the whole of his corpus. In addition to his Japanese writings, over 60 of his essays have appeared in German, English, Spanish, French, and Italian, 27 of which were originally composed in German. A list of these latter is included at the end of vol. 3. Eventually, one would suppose, a supplementary volume of later writings will have to be published and at that time one might also expect a comprehensive table of contents for the Collection as well as a cumulative index or, if the publishers can see their way to it, a digital version of the whole.

Since the first book-length treatment of Ueda’s thought has just appeared and draws freely on his German writings, a word about these is in order.

On closer inspection, the difference between Ueda’s Japanese and German writings is greater than I had anticipated. Time and again I went on a hunt through the *Collection* for a passage familiar to me from a German essay, only to find that it was not there, or at least not in the same form or line of argument. Not that Ueda deliberately “watered down” his essays for foreign consumption out of some misguided sense of loyalty to his mother tongue. On the contrary, as he himself reflects, writing in German and in Japanese cleared things up for him in different ways. “What became clear in German and what became clear in Japanese was not entirely the same. [...] Faint traces of the different contexts lingered in the gaps, echoing off one another and even changing places with one another” (USC, 4: 386–388). I can only imagine as I read these words how deep the suspicions he must harbor over the way I translated him extemporaneously and wonder if, along with his respect for the depth of the questions he received from his Spanish audiences, they were not also part of the reason he announced after returning from Ávila in 2004 that he has decided to study Spanish.

Ueda chose to organize his writings thematically rather than chronologically. In general the writings of the *Collection* fall into five main areas:

1. Nishida philosophy (1–3)
2. Zen (4–6)

3. The mysticism of Meister Eckhart (7–8)
4. A philosophy of the twofold world and a phenomenology of the self (9–10)
5. On religion (11)

These divisions are in part my own and, it will come as no surprise, begin to break down the closer one looks at the texts. Large sections of the volumes on Zen, for example, deal explicitly with Eckhart and Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎, and the final 3 volumes, which may be classified as Ueda's own philosophy, are so interwoven with the earlier volumes that it is often hard to isolate his own philosophical position from his presentation of the ideas of others. By the same token, the section on "Varieties of Locus" in vol. 3 includes essays written before Ueda had plunged himself into Nishida's thought (1959 and 1974), while a 1978 essay on "Experience and Language" (reworked in 1991), which only mentions Nishida's philosophy in passing, could just as well have been moved from its place in a volume on Nishida to one of the Zen volumes. In a word, the task of organizing must have been enormous and only makes the reader long for some indication of the principles on which it was done, but none are apparent. One cannot help but be struck by the large amount of overlap, the overflow of the categories, and the lack of a thread to trace the development of the author's thinking. The way one organizes one's own writings, of course, is bound to be very different from the way a successor might read and organize them. Never before has it been so clear to me how the questions the author brings to a corpus of writings diverges from those of the reader.

There is more. The transitions in the *Collection* from one theme to the other are often seamless and free of the controversy and criticism that went into their formation. While this confirms the unity of the whole, it makes tracing the "development" of Ueda's thought all the more difficult. In editing, combining and organizing essays written over a span of more than thirty years, Ueda seems to be working in the light of his latest thought and to be striving for consistency with it. The autobiographical information he provides in his Afterwords and his comments on the circumstances under which his essays were written only whets the reader's appetite for more information about the major shifts in his thinking. The best example of this appears in volume 7. In the Afterword he recalls how he came to the study of Eckhart, how he appended a section on Zen on the advice of his Marburg professor Ernst Benz, how his work was well received in some quarters and roundly criticized in others, how all of this gradually brought him to seek a position that overcame the obvious differences between Zen and the German sermons of Eckhart, and how he was led to reflect on the assumptions involved in the interpretation of texts. Only with great difficulty, and by reading the essays in an order different from their presentation in the *Collection*, can one see this story reflected in the texts themselves.

Ueda's thought is present in its entirety to him all at once and it seems more important to him that it be offered as an organic whole than that it signal the breakthroughs and turnabouts from one view to another. This is borne out in the organization of his own *Collection*, but his 1990s books on Nishida and his own way of



reading Nishida suggest that there is more going on here than simple editorial procedure. In laying out what he sees as three stages in Nishida's development—pure experience, self-awareness, locus (usc, 2: 283–288)—Ueda labors to show a single “dynamic” continuity unfolding (usc, 1: 286), such that the earliest works can be read with deeper understanding in the light of the later, and that all changes of view can be seen to mark a deepening or broadening of the question at hand. As he writes, “All the essays of his life need to be seen as literally a single, gigantic, extended essay he continued to write throughout his life” (usc, 1: 315). One has the impression that Ueda has taken the same approach in looking back over his own writing. In this sense, the organization of the *Collection* is itself a kind of statement about what a “philosophy” consists of.

In the same vein, one sees very little sustained, text-based critique of other philosophers in Ueda's writings. The clearest exception is a lengthy essay contrasting Nishida's “pure experience” with the Cartesian “cogito” as starting points of philosophy. In it Ueda confronts the writings of Michel Henry and Kimura Bin head-on (usc, 10: 175–233). Elsewhere we do see Ueda taking serious exception to the ideas of a range of thinkers, from Heidegger, James, and Jaspers to Eliade and Bollnow, but in each case it is one or the other general idea of these thinkers that he focuses on, not the actual writings or the wider theoretical context of the views being scrutinized. As disappointing as those familiar with the authors in question might find this, one has always to keep in mind Ueda's overarching concern: to deepen his understanding of the relation between self and world. It is the questions he brings to the writings of others that define him, not his disagreements with other philosophers. In this way, his philosophical style is close to Nishida's and closer still to that of his teacher, Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治.

For one writing in the second half of the twentieth century, Ueda's concern with historical paradigms or the deconstructing of assumptions is remarkably scant. The strength of his thought is that it invites us, again and again, to take a step back from the buzzing world of philosophical “opinion” to ask the kind of fundamental questions that seem immune to passing trends and the establishment of a professional stance in the academy. At its worst, this way of doing philosophy is oracular when it should be engrossed in exposing the collective biases of an age. At its best, it draws us out of those contemporary entanglements and reminds us of the commonness of questions that drive our humanity and enable us to be moved by texts that specialists have choked the life out of. On balance, Ueda is a good example of the best.

## 2 Major Influences in the Collection

The two thinkers who have influenced Ueda more than any other are Nishida Kitarō and Meister Eckhart. Though frequent references in the *Collection* leave no doubt on this matter, it is helpful to be reminded just how far their influence reaches—and how differently they reach there.

The ideas of Nishida are given more prominence in these volumes than those of any other author. There are several reasons for this. To begin with, it was only rather late in his career that Ueda began to wrestle with Nishida's thought in earnest. In the years after his retirement in 1989 it became a consuming passion. Nishida's memory and the shadow of his achievements were very much present at Kyoto University where Ueda spent his academic career, but it was only after his return from study in Germany that he began to read Nishida, and that principally in preparation for lectures delivered abroad. For nearly 30 years, beginning in 1970, he traveled frequently to German-speaking regions. "On those occasions, whatever the topic, I would read and reread Nishida as a basic and fundamental preparation" (USC, 1: 345). That said, the first essay he published on Nishida, to the best of my knowledge, appeared in 1981 under the title "The Understanding of Religion in Nishida's Philosophy." In it we see many of the motifs he would later take up. The piece was not included in the *Collection*.

The headlong plunge into Nishida's writings gave a focus to the first years of Ueda's retirement. Apart from his doctoral dissertation, published in German and not included in its original form in the *Collection*, the first book-length manuscript Ueda composed was a commentary on Nishida and dates from this period (*Reading Nishida Kitarō, Nishida Kitarō o yomu* 西田幾多郎を読む, 1991). His study of Nishida was hard-earned but this only increased his zeal to make Nishida better understood. As he himself puts it, "Never having met Nishida *in person*, before I could encounter him *as a person*, I had to overcome my near disgust at the difficulty his writings presented" (USC, 1: 349). More than a source of philosophical insights and suggestions, Nishida's thought shaped Ueda's understanding of the philosophical vocation and its defining questions. His writings on Nishida are no mere popularization or paraphrase. They are an attempt to stand where Nishida stood and to rethink his thoughts. It was this that enabled him to elaborate on Nishida's logic of locus in his own theory of the twofold world and to carry forward Nishida's notion of self-awareness to a full phenomenology of the self. The efforts of scholars who analyze written texts as historical documents or take up one or the other idea to apply it to a new situation are not enough to keep a philosopher's thought alive. It needs those who can fill their lungs with its spirit and breathe it out in new form. In Ueda's case, this *spiratio* is recorded in numerous essays on Nishida that inhale and exhale the same ideas again and again, each time sensing a nuance or connection that had escaped his notice before. I find this an interesting story all its own, but, to repeat what was said earlier, the *Collection* has to be dismantled and reassembled in order to tell it.

Eckhart's influence on Ueda has been of a different nature. Here was a thinker he deliberately set out to study, his interest piqued by the books of Aihara Shinsaku 相原信作 and Nishitani Keiji he read during his student years at Kyoto University. As is often the case for a young scholar, the years spent struggling with an author's work do not come to an end with the doctoral dissertation but become part of one's identity as an academic. Ueda was no exception. The initial struggle to defend the distinction between the "mysticism" of Eckhart and the "non-mysticism" of Zen ended with Ueda recognizing a "non-mysticism" that Eckhart himself achieved by

breaking through “mysticism.” (This transition is detailed in the Afterword to vol. 8.)

The study of Eckhart and his critics also seems to have defined Ueda’s exposure to Christian theology, which otherwise figures very little in his writings. Well aware of the suspicion surrounding Eckhart and mystical thought in Christian history, Ueda was also alerted to the importance of this tradition to “complete” traditional doctrinal theology, even though this is a debate he does not himself venture into. At most he gives a gentle nudge to theological reflection to appreciate the importance of negative theology by endorsing one or the other of Eckhart’s ideas from a Zen or philosophical standpoint. However, as we will see later, Eckhart provided an important confirmation of the fundamental philosophical model that Ueda came to develop.

To appreciate the crucial place of Eckhart in Ueda’s thinking it is important to remember that it was in commenting on the German sermons that he first introduced Zen into his philosophical perspective. Not only did Eckhart’s writings offer a rich source of comparison to Zen ideas, they also gave him an exegetical method for reading Zen texts. I am struck again and again how Eckhart’s way of reading scriptural texts and his play with imagery is mirrored in Ueda’s interpretation of Zen texts, notably in his attempts to decipher the enigmatic “Ten Ox Pictures” which began as early as 1976. Eckhart’s way of pulling out words and even grammatical usages from biblical texts in order to read in his own ideas are a constant headache for professional exegetes, but there is little chance anything even approaching the genius of his readings and the breadth of his vision would be able to survive the strict standards of contemporary scholarship. Ueda’s Zen interpretations, I believe, need to be measured by the same yardstick. It is the quality of the inspiration and the ability to move the reader that are decisive, not his fidelity to the norms of literary criticism. In no way belittling the role of historical and textual scholarship, the aim of his interpretations is different, and one should know that from the start when picking up Ueda’s essays on Zen. In my own case, after several years of reading Eckhart’s texts with my students, I was surprised in rereading Ueda’s essays to discover how profound his insights were and embarrassed at how shallow my appreciation of them had been, including those I myself had translated.

Ueda himself mentions Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙 alongside Nishida as a leading light in his intellectual life (USC, 1: 351). It was to Suzuki’s writings, apparently at first because of Rudolf Otto’s allusions in an appendix to *Mysticism East and West*, that Ueda turned in preparing a concluding section to his doctoral dissertation in which he undertook to contrast Zen and Meister Eckhart. Echoes of Suzuki’s research resound elsewhere in the volumes on Zen, as does his affection for Suzuki as a human being. Indeed, I have the impression from his reminiscences and reflections on Suzuki (the concluding essay to vol. 10, “Sleeping,” is a small gem of a testimony) that he admired him as no other person. That said, direct textual references to Suzuki’s ideas in reference to the development of his own are not nearly as evident as those to Nishida and Eckhart.

### 3 The Conceptual Matrix

Approaching the *Ueda Shizuteru Collection* it is helpful to have some idea of the fundamental structure of Ueda's philosophy, especially since he himself does not provide us with any specifically methodological essays. There are any number of core ideas that help define the contours of Ueda's philosophical position, but in the *Collection* these ideas lose their history and context in order to be woven into the whole. This is so much the case that if I were asked how best to get an overview of Ueda's thought, I could only recommend that one first read through all the Afterwords and then pick up any of the volumes and read it cover to cover. At the risk of reducing the richness of Ueda's writings to a few abstract concepts, I would like to try to organize his defining ideas into a single structural pattern and to indicate where they are treated in some detail in the *Collection*. I begin with a general comment on Ueda's notion of "religion."

Although Ueda allots an entire volume to "religion," its contents could serve as a key to the whole corpus, beginning with the opening essay "What is Religion?" where he scissors-and-pastes sections from other essays to lay out the groundwork of his mature philosophy. Not surprising, given his mentors, Ueda's understanding of religion revolved around the dialectic between experience and reflection. His primary data is not the actual phenomena of the way religions are organized, practiced, transmitted, or socially and politically justified. The blend of ritual, symbolism, superstition, and indoctrination that gives religious practice its distinct historical form is all but absent. Rather Ueda begins from the conviction that getting to the core of the human—in his own words, the heart of the philosophical quest lies in the question "What sort of thing is the existence of the self?" (usc, 1: 255)—entails getting a hold on what it is that drives people to express themselves in religious language. For this, mystics and Zen masters are a better guide for him than sociologists, literary critics, or historians, and texts are more help than fieldwork. The only sure measure of the authenticity of religious expression and the experience that grounds it is seen to lie in self-reflection. There is no external court of appeal or standard by which to describe what this self-reflection is like and how it can get derailed. One must be engaged in the question, "What is religion?" for the answer to have meaning.

Ueda's straddle of the frontier between philosophy and religion does not entail a metaphysics in the normal sense of the term. His philosophy is first and foremost a philosophy of self-awareness and as such is not concerned with objective ontological truth claims. This is not to say that it collapses into a kind of subjectivism. For one thing, the "self" that lies at the heart of the human is seen as a "no-self" that rests on a locus where the subject-object dichotomy has been overcome. For another, despite Ueda's insistence on "experience" and "self-awakening," he seems to agree with Eckhart and other mystics that self-awareness is itself an "interpretation" that brings together *theoria* (contemplating in thought) and *poesis* (expressing in action). Ueda's reflections on Eckhart's sermon on the New Testament story of Martha and Mary take this a step further by showing how interpretation is not a mental activity

but an actual “realization” (see, for example, USC, 4: 116–126). At the same time, he appreciates Eckhart’s hostility to the deliberate search for privileged, ecstatic experience. Despite the distance from the objective study of religion, Ueda’s is in no sense an esoteric understanding. On the contrary, his blend of philosophy and religion is an attempt to see through the most ordinary and everyday things of life to their “ground,” and to peer beneath that ground to the “infinite expanse” that opens up.

As best as I can figure, Ueda’s own philosophical position began to take distinctive shape with the application and then expansion of an interpretative model to Nishida’s thought, a model whose roots can be found in his studies on Eckhart and Zen. Without presuming to detail how this took shape developmentally, I will follow the same all-at-oneness principle that Ueda himself did in organizing the *Collection* and try to show how the model interlocks with any number of other conceptual patterns in his writings.

The model is first spelled out in his 1976 essay “Zen and Philosophy” and later expanded in a 1991 essay of the same name (in the *Collection*, moved to a third context in vol. 5). It begins as an analysis of Nishida’s idea of pure experience, or more precisely, as an analysis of a sentence from the Preface to *A Study of the Good* that Ueda reads as a recapitulation of Nishida’s starting point: “I would like to try to explain everything in terms of pure experience as the sole reality.” Ueda breaks this down into three distinct acts:

- (A) Pure experience itself, where there is no distinction between subject and object; this is called “awakening” (*kaku* 覺) and is the event recorded in Zen images of enlightenment.
- (B) Pure experience as the sole reality, in which the subject-object dichotomy returns, in the form of a primordial utterance (*Ur-Satz*), as the self-expression of A; this is called *jikaku* 自覺 and can be considered an expression of Zen thinking about the whole of reality being such as it is.
- (C) *Explaining everything in terms of pure experience as the sole reality*, which is no longer Zen but a philosophical structuring of the world (*Grund-Satz*); this is a self-awareness of the subject as being-in-the-world, or “the self understanding of the world.” Ueda sees these three as a dynamic that works in both directions:  $A > B > C$  moves away from experience and towards philosophy, while  $C > B > A$  moves towards experience and away from philosophical thinking. The transition  $A > B$  is common in Zen, but  $B > C$  and is not traditionally present in Zen, nor  $B > A$  in philosophy. For Ueda, Nishida’s genius lay in bridging those gaps “for the first time in the history of philosophy,” (USC, 5: 80), although he did not complete the movement from pure experience to awareness to self-awareness until he came to his logic of locus. It is interesting to note in this regard how Ueda sees Dōgen as having stopped at  $A > B$ , ignoring C, and agrees with Nishida that Tanabe Hajime had read Dōgen only from the standpoint of  $C > B$ , ignoring the further step back to A and so “completely missing the true spirit of Dōgen” (USC, 5: 73, 78).

As Ueda came to state this model in more general terms, widening it beyond what he had found in Nishida, his own philosophical position crystallized. This is particularly noticeable in German writings on the relationship between language and experience, such as the 1987 essay "'Glaube und Mystik' am Problem 'Erfahrung und Sprache'" (not included in the *Collection*). Among the many catalysts to this transition was his interpretation of Heidegger's idea of the "horizon" of "being-in-the-world" in the light of Nishida's logic of locus. Put in the crudest of terms, the self-consciousness "I" is constituted by a horizon of relationship and interconnect-edness. This is the totality of the world of meaning in which language is born, beginning with the word "I." But consciousness. In becoming aware of the nature of relationship to the world, a second horizon opens up, a nothingness beyond the limits of our world. This is what Ueda calls an "infinite expanse" or "empty void." This awareness does not stop at a gazing into the abyss but entails a return to the realization that one's very being-in-the-world is "located" in that larger expanse.

The transition from being in the world to being located in a world that is located in the infinite expanse is both a logical necessity and a foundation for religion. That is, it is an unfolding of the fullness of "self-awareness." It is not that some new object is discovered but that one's standpoint changes and, as a result, everything is seen in a fresh light, as "located in" two worlds, the one embracing the other. This perspective of all perspectives is Ueda's take on what Eckhart calls the *grunt ohne grunt* (*groundless ground*) and what Nishida calls the "locus of absolute nothingness."

Ueda sees the impulse for "noch eine Dimension mehr" (a phrase he was struck by in Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*; see USC, 11: 384–385) as a religious drive within the human, but at the same time he steers clear of any claims about what else might occupy that dimension. The idea stands or falls on how satisfying one finds this opening to infinity which relativizes all perspectives without making any new visible. One is reminded of the closing lecture of James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* which also refers to the urge for a "'more' with which in religious experience we feel ourselves connected." The difference is that for James the "more," whether ultimately fantasy or reality, points to something "literally and objectively true as far as it goes," whereas for Ueda the objectivity of transcendence stops at the subjective transcendence of the self.

There is one more crucial development in Ueda's conceptual model that cannot be passed over, an idea closely linked to his later commentaries on Nishida's thought but whose primary inspiration seems to have come from his study of the "Ten Ox Pictures" in the light of Eckhart's thought. Following Nishida's insistence that not only the place in which things are located but the things that are located there need to be recognized in their unique individuality which in turn is defined by their relationship with other individuals. Primary among the "individuals" is the self-aware person, which gives a special importance to the I-Thou relationship with other such individuals. Ueda contrasts this locus-oriented view of the I-Thou with Buber's position by suggesting that it disengages the *Zwischen* based on an "eternal Thou" from the individuals that are joined by it and locates it in absolute nothingness or "infinite openness" (e.g., USC, 10: 102–107). The full argument for this lies in his

several commentaries on the final three of the Ox pictures which Ueda reads as a phenomenology of the self coming to its own true nature in a movement from nothingness to suchness to the I-Thou relationship. The transition from one picture to the next is not a process with a definite end but a circular continuity, reiterating, in slightly different order, the same pattern we met earlier. First the self is emptied of itself entirely in the empty void. Then the self is reborn as a *selfless* self, a self whose being is the being of the human, whose simple existence is the locus of the freedom of the self. Finally, the selfless *self* emerges and selflessness is seen to be the arena, the “in between,” for a dialogical relationship of self and other.

The I-Thou relationship uncovered in the Ox pictures is also applied to the fullness of the Zen experience as it moves from *zazen* to *sanzen* to *samu/angya*. In this way Ueda nuances the relationship between levels A and B, not only in order to introduce a distinction between the relationship of self-awareness to the natural world and to other selves, but also to a place in the scheme for the relationship between contemplation and action. In this way, too, the problem with which he began his academic life, namely how to link Zen to the birth of God in the soul at the *grunt ohne grunt* where God and the soul are *unum et non unitum*, finds its proper interpretative framework.

Despite these developments, the basic pattern of the three levels remains basically intact. This is clear from the fact that Ueda continues to apply it in that form to other questions. One may mention, for example, the application to literature occasioned by his reading of Sōseki’s mysterious and much debated phrase 則天去私 “Follow heaven, forsake oneself” (usc, 11: 269). Allowing for a certain artificiality in proposing a scheme that is not present in the *Collection* itself but which, with some qualifications, may be of help for navigating one’s way through the volumes, I have tried to show the breadth of Ueda’s fundamental conceptual model schematically in Fig. 3.1.

In following the line of development as best I could, it struck me that while Ueda’s interpretation of Eckhart influenced his appropriation of Zen and in turn was solidified philosophically by ideas he found in Nishida, I see little evidence in his mature thought of Eckhart serving as a counterfoil to Nishida. There are several points at which this would seem a fruitful line to pursue. Principle among them is the need for a symbolic theory that Nishida’s thought cannot provide. Nishida’s efforts to crawl out from under the label of “psychologism” that was fixed to him after *A Study of the Good* may be partly responsible for his lack of attention to the psychological interpretation of symbolism that was very much in evidence throughout his academic career. It may even help to explain why his familiarity with the thought of Cassirer excluded the important element of symbolic theory. But there is so much in Eckhart’s sermons—and more so if one takes into account the Latin writings—that cannot simply be explained by tying it to the circularity of experience-language-world, and requires the kind of analysis that more attention to semantic theory could help provide.

To be sure, there is a place for images and symbols in Ueda’s thought, and an important place at that. Indeed, this is his reason for distinguishing between expressing individual events and things in the world in terms of signs and their

Self-awareness in the broad sense		Reading Nishida		Ueda's Philosophical Standpoint			
		Level A Pure experience	Awareness (the ground of self-awareness)	No bifurcation of subject and object	Ox Picture 8	Zazen	Existenz
Level B Pure experience as the only reality	Self-awareness (in the strict sense)	Ur-Satz	The self-awakening of the world	Subjectivity (as something objective)	Ox Picture 9	The "natural" world	<i>Zazen</i>
					Ox Picture 10	The "human" world	<i>Samu / angya</i>
Level C Explaining in terms of pure experience as the only reality	The unfolding of self-awareness (the self-understanding of the world)	Grund-Satz	The development of the bifurcation of subject and object	The primordial world	The world of being-in-the-world	Literature	<i>Sanzen</i>
				Being in a twofold world			
				Literary criticism			

Fig. 3.1 A Conceptual Model of Ueda's Thought



interrelationships, thus showing the world as a whole to be a system of signs, and expressing the encompassing infinite opening by way of symbolic representation (USC, 2: 359–367). Insofar as language is viewed merely as a positive expression of self-awareness, the ways in which language can impede and distort perception and consciousness, the ways in which it can be “over-determined”—both in the negative sense of being weighed down pathological meanings and in the positive sense of dragging in its wake archetypal meanings beyond the reach of the conscious mind—are leaped over. In other words, between the language expressing the everyday ego and the language expressing the selfless self, there lies a vast, rich world of metaphorical possibilities. Ueda’s schemes accent the precultural and transcultural, the prerational and the transrational, and to do so he leaves aside the way in which language actually works in the hubbub of time and history and culture. He is aware of the problem, but prefers to dig around in its roots rather than examine the branches and flowers. This is his prerogative, of course. My point is only that in order to understand Eckhart’s view of imagery, one has not only to try to “catch God in his dressing room” (Sermon 11), which draws it close to Zen, but also to understand the role that linguistic expression plays in his epistemological reflections. For this latter, Nishida is not much help.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4 The Wartime Question

In the midst of his retirement, deep into rereading Nishida, Ueda was invited to take part in an international Kyoto Zen Symposium that tried to consider, from a number of different angles, the question of the wartime complicity of the “Kyoto School.” (Ueda 1995a) An extended version of his presentation was subsequently published in Japanese (Ueda 1995b) and that in turn was abbreviated for a chapter in a book on Nishida’s life that ended up in vol. 1 of the *Collection*. Although there are numerous points at which Ueda’s reading of the relevant texts refute some of the more flamboyant claims made against Nishida’s “imperialist philosophy,” nowhere does Ueda lock horns with any of the critics, Japanese or foreign, not even when his own views are under fire. There are advantages and disadvantages to bracketing the debate and focusing on the texts. At least on this issue, I suspect the contemporary reader caught up in the political dimensions of philosophy will wish for more.

Ueda’s position is that Nishida was engaged in a “tug-of-war” over words (USC, 1: 217–222), using the vocabulary of the day to refute the distortions of meaning that had accrued to otherwise legitimate or at least plausible ideas. Ueda confines himself to the late writings of Nishida and makes no attempt to find anything like a “political philosophy” running through his earlier thought. Compared with Chris Jones’s recently published work on the subject (Goto-Jones 2005), Ueda sees the

---

<sup>1</sup>I am curious, for example, to know what Ueda would make of the hints about Eckhart dropped in Derrida’s “Comment ne pas parler: Dénégations” (Derrida 1987).

political dimension as incidental to both his own thought and to his reading of Nishida. What concern he shows is a result of his response to the question of Nishida's relationship to Japan's military regime. As Ueda would be the first to acknowledge, to look at Nishida's political thought under the shadow of these suspicions or in order to parry criticisms of his thought is to risk reading Nishida backwards. This is another reason for his apparent avoidance of the question.

Nearly everything I have written above needs to be qualified by reading the texts themselves. I have painted with bold strokes because of the limitations of space and because of my own insufficient grasp of the nuances of Ueda's thinking. As much as this made me dread the task of perusing the *Ueda Shizuteru Collection* and writing my reflections, in hindsight I find myself surprisingly refreshed and invigorated. I am reminded of the full hall of students, professors, and the general public to which Ueda delivered his first lecture in Barcelona. For over two and a half hours he held them spellbound with a philosophizing on Zen to which they were both unaccustomed and largely unprepared. Sitting on the podium at his side and looking out at the sea of faces alternatively smiling, frowning, confused, illumined, and questioning, I knew I was caught up in something extraordinary. My own experience with the *Collection* exactly.

## References

- Derrida, Jacques. 1987. *Psyché: Inventions de l'autre*. Paris: Galilée.
- Goto-Jones, Christopher S. 2005. *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School, and Co-Prosperity*. London: Routledge.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1995a. Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question. In *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, ed. James W. Heisig and John Maraldo, 77–106. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- . 1995b. Nishida Kitarō: *Ano sensō to Nihonbunka no mondai* 西田幾多郎: 《あの戦争》と《日本文化の問題》 [Nishida Kitarō: "That War" and "The Question of Japanese Culture"], *Shisō* 『思想』 [Thought], 857: 107–133.

# Part II

## Marburg Dissertation

### Introduction

Ueda's Ph.D. Dissertation, *The Birth of God in the Soul and the Breakthrough to Divinity: Meister Eckhart's Mystical Anthropology in Comparison with the Mysticism of Zen Buddhism* determined his entire existential and academic trajectory for years while simultaneously determining how his thinking was received in the West, primarily in Germany.

Ueda's doctoral work is most notable for having provoked debate within traditional Eckhart scholarship. His interpretation challenged the common reading of Eckhart in two ways: On the one hand, he discovered a neglect in Eckhart studies of a motive seemingly heretical to the Christian tradition, that being the orientation towards unity. On the other hand, his dialogue between Eckhart and Zen unearthed similarities between the two that could not be so easily dismissed. The contestation of his dissertation notwithstanding, over the years the importance of Ueda's contributions to inter-religious and East-West philosophical dialogue became more and more recognized by way of his participation at the Eranos colloquium and through his Joachim Wachs lectures (1984). Yet, it took almost forty years until the first work on Ueda's Eckhart interpretation appeared in a 2005 monograph by Steffen Döll.

To exhibit the impact Ueda's dissertation had on Eckhart scholarship and Christian thinkers in Germany at the time, we present three divergent appraisals of that work. The first comes to us from the well-known Zen historian and Jesuit, Heinrich Dumoulin. The second more critical treatment is from Jan Sudbrack, also a Jesuit but one more confined to Christian orthodoxy. The third review included in this volume was written by one of Ueda's Japanese colleagues, Tsujimura Kōichi. Of note is that most reviewers focus primarily on Ueda's thoughts regarding Zen Buddhism, despite the dissertation being primarily a study of Eckhart with a relatively shorter appendix ("Eckhart and Zen") added at a late stage on the advice of his Ph.D. supervisor. As Ueda himself explained in his Introduction (Chap. 1), Zen only truly became one of his main academic interests after the publication of his

dissertation. Throughout the years, attention has been increasingly drawn to this appendix rather than to his original and more substantial reading of Eckhart.

The reviews thus serve not only as an introduction to Eckhart studies but to Ueda's heterodox interpretation of Eckhart; and to an even greater extent, they introduce a challenge to the Western tradition provoked by the ambiguous position Zen occupies between philosophy and religion. It is also important to keep in mind that Ueda is not the first to compare Zen and Eckhart. He follows other great commentators including Suzuki Daisetsu (1870–1966), Nishida Kitarō (1870–1945), Rudolf Otto (1869–1937), and Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990).

# Chapter 4

## Heinrich Dumoulin's Review



Heinrich Dumoulin

*Shizuteru Ueda: Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus. Gütersloh. 1965\*.*

This work engages with two major schools of thought in contemporary philosophy of religion. On the one hand, we have the school which takes as its founder Rudolf Otto, the scholar who first undertook comparative research into the dialectical mysticism of Meister Eckhart and Eastern mysticism. On the other hand, we have the Kyōto School. Since its founding by Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎, the Kyoto School has paid particular attention to the religious metaphysics of Meister Eckhart from [the point of view of] the tradition of Zen Buddhism. The author of this book belongs to the Kyōto School. The research found within was born out of the thought of the Marburg School, and in continuing along the lines of this tradition it draws upon the ideas of two of its major figures, Friedrich Heiler and Ernst Benz.

A skilled linguist and accomplished philosopher, the author provides an abundance of middle-high German and Latin quotations of Eckhart's work, basing his findings upon comprehensive research into relevant literature. The single misprint which I did find was actually a quote drawn from Eastern thought: the Mahāyāna

---

Translated by Ralf Müller and Adam Loughnane.

\* (Source: <Shohyō> Reikon ni okeru kami no tanjō to shinsei e no tsuranuki: Maisutā ekuharuto no shinpishugi-teki ningen-gaku to sono zen shinpishugi to no hikaku (Ueda shizuteru-cho). <書評> 靈魂における神の誕生と神性へのつらぬき: マイスター・エクハルトの神秘主義的人間学とその禪神秘主義との比較 (上田閑照 著), in Sofia: Seiyō bunka narabini tōzai bunka kōryū no kenkyū ソフィア: 西洋文化ならびに東西文化交流の研究 (Book review) Shizuteru Ueda: The birth of God in the soul and the breakthrough to divinity. The mystical anthropology of Meister Eckhart and its confrontation with the mysticism of Zen Buddhism. (Departmental Bulletin Paper, Sophia University), 16/1 (1967): 91-83, Retrieved from: <http://digital-archives.sophia.ac.jp/repository/view/repository/00000000771>).

---

H. Dumoulin (✉)  
Sophia University, Tōkyō, Japan

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022

R. Müller et al. (eds.), *Tetsugaku Companion to Ueda Shizuteru*, Tetsugaku Companions to Japanese Philosophy 5, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1_4)

43

Buddhist terminology “*Die wahre Leere gleich dem wunderbaren Sein*” (“True emptiness is miraculous Being” – *shin kū myō u* 真空妙有), was translated as “*Die wahre Lehre sive das wunderbare Sein*” (“the true doctrine is the wonderful Being”) (Ueda 1965: 152). The author’s research is focused on two central themes in Eckhart’s thought: the birth of God in the soul, and the breakthrough to divinity. The birth of God is a central theme for Eckhart’s German language writings and sermons, and has once again become taken up in Eckhart research in Germany. Taking the original texts as his starting point, the author draws out the special characteristics of Eckhart’s twin conceptions of God and the soul, which are intertwined in a unique manner. He identifies within these concepts a tendency which does not accord with traditional Christian doctrine: a tendency towards a Neo-Platonist metaphysics. A correct understanding of the concept of “*Bild-Gottes-Sein der Seele*” (“the soul as the image of God”) is important for any interpretation of Eckhart. The author approaches this problem by way of a method which is both detailed as well as speculative. It is clear that Eckhart’s speculation concerning the “image” of God has a Platonic character. However, it is fully possible to provide an explanation of Eckhart’s texts without a Neoplatonic emanationism, by way of an interpretation of the kind we see with an Augustinian exemplarism as also expounded upon by Thomas Aquinas, or through the logo-centric speculation undertaken by the Church Fathers in following with the influence they received from Platonic thought. The author has an astute appreciation for the manner in which Eckhart’s concept of the soul is incorporated within negative theology (Ueda 1965: 80–82). However, this approach does mean interpreting Eckhart’s thought by way of the Christian tradition.

The second section of this work takes up the problem of the “breakthrough to divinity.” This section is extremely important for understanding the work as a whole, as well as the author’s own thesis. However, any investigation of this problem has to contend with the many difficulties which result from the limited number of original texts that can be referred to. This is especially the case when it comes to Eckhart’s work, where original texts were not adequately preserved. If an idea was transmitted to us only by way of a formula comprised of a single word, or only a very few words, then, whether we are looking from the perspective of the ambiguity of the original texts, or when looking from the perspective of how Eckhart himself drew attention to his rhetorical means of expression in his apologia at the Church inquiry, it is necessary to give careful consideration to the warning included in the words *prout sonant verba* (as the words sound). Eckhart’s thought itself was orthodox, even if his unique means of expression sometimes lent to them a dangerous (i.e. heretical) resonance.

In the first section of this book, the author remains faithful to Eckhart’s original work. However, by contrast, in the second section we see text which is not necessarily aimed at a faithful corroboration of the original material, but instead presents a thesis advanced by the author. According to the words of the author himself, this thesis is as follows: “By way of a reciprocal interpenetration of God and soul, the base of both God and soul are made manifest. However, as in this case the ground of God and of the soul are in fact one and the same thing, this manifestation means

nothing other than the realization of the self, returning to its own self.” (Ueda 1965: 120). Here, the soul returns to the divinity which accomplishes the birth of God, in other words, the origin of the self. “The soul, having returned to a singular state, is within that which has never departed.” (Ueda 1965: 128). Although the author uses Eckhart’s own words in order to justify his explanation, the actual foundation for his interpretation is what he himself takes as motivating Eckhart’s ideas. It is on this basis that he is able to claim that Eckhart’s thought is lacking a sufficiently thoroughgoing or “ultimate” consistency. As he writes: “Although it is clear that [...] the idea of a pure unity with a pure being [...] dominates the entirety of Eckhart’s thought... in the final analysis, it does not attain a sublimation of, for example, the various concepts of Christian theology, or of Christian devoutness.” (Ueda 1965: 140).

At the current time there is little prospect for Eckhart research to arrive at a broadly accepted means for resolving the various complicated, intricate problems surrounding Eckhart’s thought. Towards the end of the work, [Ueda] repeats his own position while referring to the opposing opinions of two or three well known scholars. According to his understanding, within Eckhart’s thought is a super-structure, which is inseparable from a theistic sub-structure. This is a structure which can be elucidated by way of the various concepts of Neo-Platonism, yet ultimately needs to be understood logically as a kind of monistic “mysticism of infinity” (*Unendlichkeitsmystik*), which destroys its own theistic base. However, in Eckhart’s case, the inseparability of this dual structure is maintained throughout (and the author clearly acknowledges this).

For the author, it is exactly in this respect that Meister Eckhart’s mysticism varies from Zen Buddhist mysticism. In Zen Buddhism we do not have a theistic sub-structure (such as we find completely sublimated in Eckhart’s thought). However, in its place, the super-structure is developed in such a manner that it reaches a radical conclusion. An all-embracing orientation towards unity (while not realized in Eckhart’s thought, it exists as an internal motivating force) is unconditionally realized through the Zen metaphysics of “non-dualism” (*funi* 不二, lit. not-two), and “immediacy” (*soku* 即). Here, nothing can be added to either the concept of “nothingness” (*mu* 無), or to that which exists within this world. At the end of the book, Ueda attempts to use his own insight in order to clarify the meaning of this Zen metaphysics by way of a *kōan* about a rose. Meister Eckhart’s negative theology broadly parallels the path of the Zen *kōan*. However, in Eckhart’s case the ultimate point of his thought is not ‘nothingness’ itself, but the nothingness of God, a form of *trans*-transcendental nothingness that cannot even be thought without God. As God occupies the center of Eckhart’s thought in this manner, his conception of the path according to which we reach “things” and the self itself is one which necessarily passes through God. What exists at the end is not a mere “rose without why” (as with a Zen *Kōan*), but a rose that comes from God.

At the end of the book, the perspective of Zen metaphysics is clearly articulated. Here, the author also raises an essential problem in need of research and confrontation. This is the problem of the relation between negative theology and revelation, or of the relation between the orientation towards the personal within mysticism, and the orientation towards unity. Perhaps this problem arises from contradictions

which are difficult to reconcile. If we think of personal existence and singular existence as capable of coming into unity within the absolute facticity of the highest Being, then that raises the question of how we are to understand the relationship between Christian mysticism, as personal mysticism, and the various forms of non-Christian mysticism. Let us conclude by simply noting that this is the kind of problem which, as of yet, remains unresolved.



## Chapter 5

# Josef Sudbrack's Review



Josef Sudbrack

*Ueda, Shizuteru 1965. Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus. 8 (174 S. und 2 Tafeln) Gütersloh, Mohn. 24 (Source: Theologie Und Philosophie 42 (1): 130 (1967)).*

One of the most difficult, but also most fruitful, tasks of modern theology is the study of phenomenology in the field of religion, which does not end with the superficial juxtaposition of forms of appearance, but attempts to penetrate into religious ways of life. The present study must be included [as part of] such investigations. It arose during a three year stay of Ueda's in Germany under the "personal support and encouragement" of professors Fr. Heiler and E. Benz. Its main section consists of the presentation of Meister Eckhart's teachings. In purely *philological terms*, the author meets with the opinion of modern Eckhart research. In the following, what we try to argue is [that there is] a misinterpretation belonging to a deeper level of Eckhart interpretation. The incorrect but rare use of writings where Eckhart's authorship is uncertain is to be forgiven by the fact that [Ueda's study] was about the "appearance" of his [thought] system, and less about the master himself. What is more difficult to forgive and more momentous is the almost total absence of engagement with modern Eckhart interpretations. The presentation of the master [in this volume] is organized according to two schemes of representation [*Vorstellungsschemata*] in which Eckhart expresses his "basic religious experience": the motif of the "birth of God in the soul" and "the breakthrough to the godhead," i.e. the two ancient interpretations of Christian Life, which Roussetot found on the one hand in the carnal and on the other hand in the ecstatic conceptions of love, which Reypens described as "mystique d'introversion" and "mystique

---

Translated by Ralf Müller and Adam Loughnane.

---

J. Sudbrack (✉)  
Innsbruck University, Innsbruck, Austria

d'extroversion." Each time Ueda guides the reader from the concept of God via his image of man (*Menschenbild*) to the encounter with God. The second part [of Ueda's study] regarding the "breakthrough" constitutes the climax, in which it seems to me that the ecstatic moment is somewhat over-exaggerated. Only the final part (Ueda 1965: 145–168) is about "Meister Eckhart in comparison with Zen Buddhism."

The objective representation [*das objektive Bild*] that this study seeks to skillfully elaborate appears to be severely distorted on the *level of interpretation*. For example, regarding the question as to whether Eckhart's doctrine comes primarily from experience or from theology—a difficult question that can only be tackled with the greatest care—there is a threefold argument in favour of experience (Ueda 1965: 22–25):

1. Regarding passages such as "Swere in diesen grunt ist geluoget einen ougenblick..." one must not overlook that these ideas, even in their literal formulation, are Neoplatonic, inherited from Augustine or Bernard (Quint and Steer 1936). The well-known phrase "compulsion to preach" (*Zwang zu predigen*) must also be seen against the background of a tradition beginning with Origen, whose exegesis [reveals] this compulsion from the encounter of God with Moses in Exodus 33.
2. "The relationship between God and the soul is the only theme of his sermons." But in the Middle Ages, there is an entire literary genre built on the "God-I" relation, which at first glance reveals the formulaic nature of the high frequency [of references to the relation], which Newman repeatedly invokes.
3. Ueda alludes to the inner certainty of Eckhart and sees proof therein that he "sometimes does not shy away from interpreting even a biblical text (...) violently and arbitrarily (...)" ["bisweilen nicht einmal davor (scheut), sogar einen biblischen Text... gewaltsam und willkürlich zu deuten..."] Here, however, Eckhart differs from his contemporaries mostly based on the *id quod*, not by the *modus quo* that is supposed to be conclusive.

Of course, it is the task of the researcher to seize on the pre-eminent character of the Thuringian's ideas and teachings. This character as a whole, however, must only be very carefully unpacked [to determine]; what can be attributed to the consciously received and lived Christian or non-Christian traditions; what belongs to the speculative reflection that is always being witnessed by the whole person; and what owes to [one's] command of language, which is also [considered] as an indispensable gift to experience, and where we find the actual starting point of the analysis.

Instead of discussing many similar individual references from Ueda's study, the focal point of the entire work [regarding] the confrontation with Zen Buddhism, must be addressed. This is where the strong language of the introduction, written by E. Benz ("Meister Eckhart in Japan," 11–20), states that Ueda is closer to the teachings of Meister Eckhart than one can say of many Eckhart scholars in Germany who treated him primarily as a scholastic and mystical theologian, to whom, however, the practice of *via mystica* was alien. Ueda describes Eckhart's doctrine as "mysticism of infinity with theistic underpinnings." Incarnation, Trinity etc., are

not discarded, but dynamically augmented into a speculation about unity (*Einheitsspekulation*), which—and this is undoubtedly the intention of the work—can only find its adequate articulation [*Aussage*] in speculative forms such as those of Zen Buddhism. Not only the “why” should be denied to God—as Eckhart does—but every statement must come to an end, the opposite of God and man must return “to the primordial one, i.e. via the nothingness as it occurs in the above 1. as the complete disappearance of God and 2. as the complete vanishing of man” [Ueda 1965: 163–164]). The difference from Meister Eckhart is evident, but the real question is: Was Eckhart a would-be mystic of nothingness, or was he fully a Christian who sought to express his lived Christianity through speculation in Neoplatonic language? The question of “the different form of the verbal event” must not be “reserved for a later investigation” but is the central point of the comparison with Zen. An observation of a painting prompted by E. Benz and [further] pursued by Ueda makes this clear. “Christ in the House of Martha and Mary” by Pieter Aertsen (1553) takes centre stage in the foreground in a rich, almost mannerist style, with abundant poultry, meat, fruit, etc., [all] the work of Martha; in the background we find Mary sitting at the feet of the Lord, small in scale, but the viewer’s eye is guided along the central perspective to this key locus within the painting. “This painting expresses that Jesus loses his pictorial greatness and is so small, that God is returning to the nothingness of the godhead...” (Ueda 1965: 147). But in the corresponding Zen picture, in which with a few black lines “a person can be seen in the process of cutting bamboo, God is completely absent ... there remains only a louder emptiness” (Ueda 1965: 148). Perhaps a quotation from the brother, “the excellent Andrea Pozzo S. J. (born 1642)” from his work *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum (...) Pars prima in qua docetur modus expeditissimus delineandi optice omnia, quae pertinent ad Architecturam*, [this being] the intention of the Flemish picture, to which he was closer than we are today, explains: “In the meantime, the reader is welcome to attack the work with pleasure and I take the guideline to always draw all lines of his actions according to the Augpunten [lit. true eye point], that is, according to the glory of God” (cf. H. Schade 1957: “Weltanschauliche Strukturen moderner Malerei.” *Religion, Wissenschaft, Kultur* 10, 360).

To place God and his incarnate Son in the “*Augpunten*”, i.e. to place them in the perspective of life—this is the point the Flemish master tries to make; and this is also the intention of Meister Eckhart. The fact that in his speculations he approached the mysticism of unity (*Einheitsmystik*) may be important and worth investigating, but should not become the central axis of the interpretation or the comparative approach, unless one [wishes to] eliminate Christianity from the statements of Eckhart.

## Bibliography

- Quint, J./Steer, G. (ed.), Meister Eckhart, Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke, hg. im Auftrag der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft, Abt. I: Die deutschen Werke, Stuttgart 1936ff., DW I, No. 5b, p. 90, line 6 - p. 93, line 4.

## Chapter 6

# Tsujimura Kōichi's Review



Kōichi Tsujimura

*Ueda Shizuteru. 1965. Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit [The Birth of God in the Soul and the Break-through to the Godhead]. Gerd Mohn: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.*

It is a delightful difficulty to discuss the work of a close friend. The *author* of the present treatise, Doctor Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照, Professor of Philosophy and Education at Kyoto University, studied religious philosophy under Professor Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治, practiced Zen under the guidance of Zen master Otsu Rekido 大津樞堂 and continued his research as a scholarship holder of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. He obtained his PhD with the work in discussion, which he submitted as his dissertation to Marburg University (Prof. Dr. Friedrich Heiler, Co-supervisors Prof. Dr. Ernst Benz and Prof. Dr. Werner Schroeder).

Already the title of the treatise: “The Birth of God in the Soul and the Breakthrough to the Godhead” clearly highlights its subject matter and its structure, and, in doing so, the author’s train of thought in interpreting Meister Eckhart. The subtitle of the treatise “Meister Eckhart’s Mystical Anthropology and Its Confrontation with Zen Buddhism,” which was apparently not chosen by the author himself, may help make the book accessible to the general public, however, in my eyes, [this subtitle] appears inappropriate, as it exposes the utterly serious matter of the *unum necessarium* to misunderstandings by associating with and rendering fashionable the terms “mysticism,” “anthropology” and “confrontation.” However, within an effort to critically explore the subject matter, it probably would be better to avoid such terms.

The monograph consists of a friendly introduction by Professor Ernst Benz, entitled “Meister Eckhart in Japan,” followed by an introduction by the author himself

---

Translated by Ralf Müller, Maria Römer, and Adam Loughnane.

---

K. Tsujimura (✉)  
Kyōto University, Kyōto, Japan

as well as the two main parts; I. “Meister Eckhart’s Sermons on the Birth of God in the Soul,” II. “Meister Eckhart’s Sermons on the Breakthrough”.

In his “Introduction,” Professor Benz describes the gradually increasing [amount of] scholarship on Eckhart in Japan, which contrasts with the “mystical barrenness” of today’s European Christianity. Since Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎, the founder of Japanese philosophy, Japanese scholarship on Eckhart has always had an essential connection with Zen Buddhism. On the other hand, Benz’ “Introduction” provides an historical overview of how Zen became known in Germany since Rudolf Otto’s [*West-östliche Mystik: Vergleich und Unterscheidung zur Wesensdeutung*, 1926].

After delivering this survey of both countries’ religious histories, Professor Benz distinguishes Ueda’s treatise with the following words: (1) “Thus, the present work, which is based on well-founded knowledge of the Latin and German originals, is the first historical and critical account of Meister Eckhart’s mystical anthropology to be penned by a Japanese Zen Buddhist. In that sense, it leaves all other previous Japanese efforts at understanding Eckhart far behind.” (2) “On the other hand, precisely the fact that Ueda approaches Meister Eckhart from a world of mysticism that is Non-Christian, this gives his explanations the air of novelty and freshness regarding the issues it raises, its questions and its answers. This distinguishes Ueda’s treatise favourably from many other presently available German inquiries.” (3) “As opposed to Suzuki’s treatise on Eckhart, however, Ueda refrains from quickly identifying Eckhart with Zen and instead highlights their differences.” We greatly welcome this benevolent and altogether adequate appraisal. However, I am personally of a different opinion regarding my appreciation of Suzuki’s work. For, in my eyes, Suzuki’s actual intention is not to claim the perfect identity of Meister Eckhart’s *Past Sermons* and Zen, but to foreground the *prospective potentiality* inherent in these sermons and, in doing so, to indicate a connecting factor between Zen and occidental thought.

In this review, in which I unfortunately cannot go into detail, I limit myself to highlighting the following four points (1) Ueda’s basic understanding of Meister Eckhart’s sermons, or, the fundamental problem of Ueda’s Eckhart interpretation; (2) Ueda’s unfolding of said problem; (3) the way in which Ueda tackles this problem; (4) a few questions and comments.

1. Ueda gained the *fundamental insight* of his Eckhart interpretation from the throng of Eckhart’s often times conflicting sermons and teachings. His insight consists of the idea that “*the relationship between God and the soul is the only topic of Eckhart’s sermons*” (Ueda 1965: 23). Such an insight certainly follows from Ueda’s own experience, as well as, as I may assume, from the influence of his teacher Nishitani, who once wrote a profound article about “The Relationship between God and the Human in Meister Eckhart’s Works” (1948 in Japanese). Ueda has clearly demonstrated that this relationship is rooted within the basic experience according to Eckhart (Ueda 1965: 23–25). Only the same recognizes the same.

The experienced, however, requires its appropriation through thinking. In such a way, the basic experience turns into the basic problem of Ueda’s treatise and Ueda’s fundamental insight into his fundamental thesis statement—on the one hand, in order to preach, and on the other hand, in order to interpret.

Accordingly, Ueda says: "Eckhart's powerful experience – 'God and I, we are one' (DW 113) – inevitably forces him to ask for the conditions for, the execution and consequences of unification with God: Eckhart has to ask: How does God need to be constituted in order to be one with the soul? How does the soul need to be constituted in order to be one with God?" (Ueda 1965: 25). Persistently considering these questions and their dynamic interpenetration, Ueda differentiates between two types of expressions, which Eckhart uses to articulate his experience, namely the "*birth motif*" and the "*breakthrough motif*". Ueda provides a succinct characterization of each. Accordingly, the first means: "God gives birth to his son in the soul and therewith gives birth to the soul as his son." The second means: "The soul penetrates to the ground of God and there comprehends how God is in himself and one with himself." Through the first motif, Eckhart speaks about the unification of the soul with God, while through the second, he speaks about the ground of the soul and the ground of God being one. The first motif addresses the father-son relationship between God and the soul, while the second addresses a relationship utterly stripped of any figurative quality. The first depends on the absolute passivity of the soul, while the second depends on its radical activity. With the first motif, Eckhart says: "I am the Son of God," with the second, he says: "I am neither God nor creature." (Ueda 1965: 25–26).

A man as knowledgeable in Zen as Ueda easily becomes aware of this sharp *differentiation*. And making use of this differentiation, it becomes possible to distinguish Meister Eckhart's conflicting sermons into two separate domains. This in itself would already constitute a merit of Ueda's research question.

2. Subsequent to the above-named differentiation, Ueda provides explanations for the first and second motif under the respective headings "Meister Eckhart's sermons on the Birth of God in the Soul" (I) and "Meister Eckhart's sermons on the Breakthrough" (II). In doing so, he *unfolds* the *problem*, which he had previously structured and formulated, first by separating the traditional Christian concepts at the ground of each motif. Secondly, he clearly shows how Eckhart, driven by his own experience, moves beyond the theological boundary drawn between these traditional concepts. Finally, he explores the nature of unification with God, according to how Eckhart internally experienced and conceptually developed [that nature].

In this way, Ueda wants to safeguard the historical ground, which lead to Eckhart's sermons, from arbitrary interpretation. At the same time, it becomes clear that in interpreting both sermons in such a manner, he discusses Meister Eckhart's basic concepts of "detachment," "letting go," "property," "God and Godhead," "the soul and the ground of the soul," "the 'spark' and the 'little castle'," "unbecoming" and "a true human," *etc.* by assigning them to their legitimate places [in Eckhart's writings and sermons]. Consequently, it appears to me, that the *unfolding of the problem* simultaneously is also an *explanation and discussion of Eckhart's basic concepts*. This certainly represents one advantage of his research question, an advantage which cannot be achieved at all through mere philological rigor. The subject matter itself is under a different, even stricter law.

Without going into the details of the problem's unfolding, of which I have provided a general characterization above, I would like to point out two aspects here: one concerns the *relationship of both motifs* with each other and the other the *essential character of unification with God*.

Very shortly put, the "birth motif" consists in "the unification of the soul with God" (Ueda 1965: 87) and the "breakthrough motif" within the soul's "taking leave of God" (Ueda 1965: 126) in the sense that the soul takes leave of itself once it is unified with God. Concerning their relationship or rather the leap from the former to the latter, Ueda writes: "If Eckhart thus speaks of the breakthrough motif, then his explanation of this motif is not only a paraphrase of 'the birth of God in the soul', but more. (1) The motif essentially depends on the activity of the soul ('I break through God'). (2) It is the achievement of perfect purity and transparency of God and the soul. This aspect, as well as that of the transparent oneness of God and the soul, are still thinly veiled in 'the birth of God in the soul' based on the figurative quality inherent in the relationship between father and son." Eckhart's sermons on the breakthrough address the explicit continuation of what, according to Eckhart, has happened after 'the birth of God in the soul.'" In other words, the "*breakthrough*" is the *explicit continuation of "the birth of God in the soul"*. The former is a coming-into-expression of the latter, whose coming-into-expression the continuation consists in. Speaking with Eckhart, it means a continuation of said unification towards being-one in a transparent manner, which precisely represents the ground and essence of that unification. Perhaps you could also say: it means that this unification (*unio*) is broken by the transparent presence of its own essence (*unum*), which is hidden from itself.

In this regard, I have to refer to the relevant passages of the Zen "Ox-Herding" picture book (translated into German by myself and Hartmut Buchner, 1958) despite Benz' warning against a "one-sided and swift identification"—a warning that is indeed worthy of being taken to heart. Except for a few differences, which Ueda very pertinently addresses at the end of his treatise, I must say, that in this picture book, "*the birth of God in the soul*" and "*the breakthrough*" approximately correspond to the third stage: "*Perceiving the Bull*" and the eight stage: "*Double Forgetting of the Herder and the Bull*" (regarding "double forgetting", see Ueda 1965: 164) respectively. Roughly put, the former is similar to passing a school entry exam, while the latter equates to passing a graduation exam. With the exception that the graduation exam exactly represents the essential beginning of a true human's life.

Such a "*true human*" holds within himself the ultimately essential character of Godly unification. By consequence, Ueda's reading of Eckhart reaches its destination within the "true human" as well. Ueda provides a very nice account of this "true human" through his excellent interpretation of Meister Eckhart's famous sermon on "Maria and Martha" (Ueda 1965: 137–139). This interpretation takes *one step further in "taking leave of God"*, meaning [proceeding] one step further beyond a transparent state of being-one, without losing either transparency or the state itself. Ueda writes: "Taking leave of God thus extends in two directions, while simultaneously being *one single* act of taking leave of God. The

first direction signifies the return of the soul to its primordial ground, where it has always been and always is; the second signifies the return of the human to the reality of the world, where it has always been and always is. Both happen in *one single* return. (Ueda 1965: 136, see also the eighth, ninth and tenth stage of the "Ox-Herding" picture book). "On the one hand, the soul resides somewhere beyond the after world, above God in the Godhead; on the other hand, it resides on this side of this life, as it appears within the human at the stove or in the barn (Ueda 1965: 136). Such a human is "a common human among humans and simultaneously not human anymore." Such a human is "a true human," whose amorphous appearance Ueda perceives in the afore-mentioned sermon "Martha."

Christ says: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things." Like Eckhart, Ueda says: the fact that Jesus called Martha by her name twice, is an indication of her double perfection, namely her perfection through her temporal work and her perfection in eternal bliss. In other words, it is an indication of her having completed that *one single* return in the *two* above-mentioned directions. This is why Christ says to Martha: "You are troubled about many things." Only after such completion, true *care* [*Sorge*] and *multiplicity* [*Vielheit*] emerge. This is because Martha already possesses the "*unum necessarium*," meaning the capacity of being-one with God.

"Martha is not anxious anymore about the One as such," because she is one with God himself under any circumstances. Only now is she capable of calmly tending to many things in the reality of the world without being prevented from being One with God by doing so. From such a capability wells an infinite and endless "*working without why*," meaning the "*vita activa*." In this regard, Ueda writes: "Thus, with Eckhart, the '*vita activa*' signifies the '*vita*' away from God towards the reality of the world, which is one and the same as 'towards the Godhead by passing through God'" (Ueda 1965: 139). (Let me add as a side note, that the terms "dynamic" (as a noun), "dynamic" (as an adjective) as well as "activity" and "active," which Ueda frequently uses in this treatise, and which initially may sound a bit problematic to some scholars nowadays, have to be understood from the context mentioned above.) As such, *life and work*, ultimately, the "*in-between*" exposes itself to "the relationship between God and the soul" in the research question, which Ueda has chosen and aims for in his Eckhart interpretation. That is no longer merely "mysticism."

3. We previously spoke about the *manner in which Ueda confronts his research question*. Professor Benz has already mentioned Ueda's *solid, philological competence*. As Benz says, one could also characterize Ueda's work as the "liberal depiction of a phenomenology of mystical experience in Eckhart's works" (Ueda 1965: 19). It is important for Ueda's treatise, that it has been acknowledged by occidental scholars, who are distinguished by their philological rigor and historical precision. However, how do we have to understand the freedom in Ueda's depiction, as Benz characterizes it? What kind of depiction does Ueda give? Answer: *A depiction out of the thing itself, as the thing explaining-itself*, through manifold and confusing disguises.



This results in Ueda's depiction of the matter being at the same time very *true to its nature*. I would like to dwell here on just this specific point. Ueda's premises in treating the problem were the concepts of God and the soul as determined by medieval theology—his premises were, for example, the doctrines of trinity and incarnation as "*imago et similitudo dei*". Based on that, Ueda clearly shows how Meister Eckhart, driven by his own experience, changed the interpretation of relevant scholastic doctrines to a considerable extent and, by doing so, created his own mystical doctrine. This depiction, which covers the first half of Ueda's treatise or, put differently, his treatment of the problem, will be characterized shortly [below]. The depiction constitutes, as it were, the fundamental preparation for Ueda's interpretation of Eckhart's actual teachings: *An explanation of Eckhart's mysticism's origination out of scholasticism*.

It appears to me that Ueda's explanation not only applies for the *historical origin* of said mysticism, but simultaneously also for the *essential origin of mysticism out of scholasticism in general*. Unmistakenly, the same relationship also applies to the *development of Zen Buddhism from Buddhist scholasticism* both in essence and in a historical sense. Most of the great Zen masters in China and Japan were originally Buddhist intellectuals. However, driven by a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the doctrines they had learned and were capable of teaching, they threw themselves into Zen. In that sense, I would like to remark regarding the *essential problem* of Ueda's treatise, that it is not a mere depiction in the sense of paraphrasing. Rather, it *foregrounds a self-creation of Eckhart's mysticism itself or its self-constitution from [out of] itself*. In such a way, it is *pure depiction* (see the meaning of "depiction" [German *Darstellung*] in Hegel's "Phenomenology of the Spirit"). The other half of Ueda's treatise, which deals with the specific teachings of Eckhart, constitutes the discussion in the above-mentioned sense.

4. Finally, I must point out a few obscurities of the present treatise and comment on them. The obscurities [include the following] three points:
  - (a) Ueda based his argument on the premise of Meister Eckhart's fundamental experience, which he had made evident in an indisputable fashion. I have nothing to object to this. However, before this grand experience happened, Eckhart must have experienced a deep "unrest," which at the same time meant a search for "rest," as well as an especially profound dissatisfaction with mere theological doctrine. His sermons "*In omnibus requiem quaesivi*" and "*In hoc apparuit caritas dei in nobis*" are an account of this. In the latter, for example, Eckhart says: "Now a Master says: God has become human. This elevates and ennobles the whole of humanity. We may be pleased with Christ, our brother, having ascended to heaven by his own efforts and with him now sitting above all the angels' choirs and to the Father's right. These Master's words are true. However, truly, they do not mean much to me. What would it help me to have a brother, who is a rich man, while I am poor? What would it help me to have a brother who is a wise man, while I am a fool?" (Quint, modern translation, p.187). This "*What would it help me?*" in which

a profound dissatisfaction with common theological doctrine, meaning here the doctrine of God becoming human, is palpable, and appears to me as the *one fundamental driving force*, which has led Eckhart to his grand experience, and even to the afore-mentioned freedom. This driving force is that, which says: "She (meaning: the soul) cannot bear that something should be above her. I believe she cannot even bear that God should be above her; if he is not in her and she does not enjoy the same level of well-being as him, she can never find peace." (Quint, work cited, p. 297).

- (b) My second question to Ueda's overall excellent treatise concerns the meanings of "being" and "nothingness" in Meister Eckhart's works. Despite Ueda's excellent explanations of various senses of "being" and "nothingness," to me, *the question about meaning of being and nothingness [die Frage nach dem Sinn von Sein und Nichts]* remains open; especially so, as Eckhart fundamentally destabilized the traditional notion of *creatio*, which led to (this notion's) loss of authority. It is possible that a new notion of being will sprout from the ground about which is said: "Here God's ground is my ground and my ground is God's." (DW 90) Thereupon, Eckhart gives a hint: "So noble is the being. We praise the dying in God, that he may put us into a mode of being that is better than life: a mode of being in which our life lives and in which our life becomes being" (Quint, work cited, p. 193). Here *the notion of being is no longer in an essential relationship with the creatio Dei, but with the dying in God*. However, what does being signify in such an understanding, in which being does not mean the traditional, empty eternal-being (ἀεί ὄν)? Wherefrom and whereupon has Eckhart understood his notion of being? Ueda writes that "Eckhart understands the notion of the Absolute through the category of '*substantia*', whereas Buddhism understands it through the category of '*relatio*'" (Ueda 1965: 166). I can second this opinion as a preliminary characterization. *However, I am highly doubtful about whether Eckhart's conception of the absolute ultimately does not remain within the limits of the traditional exegesis of being as "substantia."* Supposing that this is the case, then *is the "substantialitas" of said "substantia" still "substantia" itself?* It seems to me that, regarding this aspect of the problem, we have to undertake an in-depth reflection on Käte Oltmann's bold hypothesis: "God is the being of the world" (K. Oltmanns. 1935. *Meister Eckhart*, Frankfurt a. M., 187–201) once more.
- (c) I have nothing to add to Ueda's brief but crucial section "Meister Eckhart in comparison with Zen Buddhism," with which his treatise closes. It certainly is so far without precedent. His attempt at mounting an opposition by following the guiding principles of Eckhart's "without why" and Angelus Silesius' poem "The Rose is Without Why" on the one hand, and the word of Meister Dschau-dschou (jpn. Jōshu 趙州) "Oaktree in Front of the Garden" on the other, points towards the place of Zen by deepening (the comparison) step-by-step on various levels. To me, this appears as the best introduction for approaching Zen.

Still, here remains *one difficult question relating to, or facing, the essence of language*, as Ueda himself also clearly recognizes. More precisely, what remains, is the question relating to the unfathomably deep gulf between occidental metaphysical thought and East Asian Buddhist non-thought in relation to the word as the place where truth occurs. Ueda exemplifies this division through the “sermons” of Meister Eckhart and jpn. *mondō* 問答, that is, the question and response (practice in) Zen Buddhism. That is thoroughly correct. However, I believe that for both sides, the advantages are at the same time faults. The problem of language leads to the question of the essence of truth. Hence, I would like to conclude this review with the following words: “The truth will liberate you.”

# Part III

## Disputation

### Introduction

While Ueda is mainly known for his interpretations of Eckhart, Zen, and Nishida he was also deeply interested in contemporary scientific debates and a range of social issues, which he commented on from a philosophical as well as from a religious point of view. The essays in this section substantiate his broad intellectual engagement in and beyond the academic sphere. The key here, as it is throughout his works, is his concept of a two-fold world.

Through discussion with the Jungian psychologist Kawai Hayao 河合 隼雄 (1928–2007) and the neuroscientist Masao Itō 伊藤 正男 (1928–2018), the texts in this section thematize the notions of mind and brain: The first of three works, “Healing and Religion” presents a discussion between Kawai and Ueda. Next, in “The Depth of the Heart”, (delivered in 1995 at a public, academic-cultural forum in Kyoto held by the Science Council of Japan) Ueda invokes the traditional Japanese notion of *kokoro* (“mind” or, more literally, “heart”) exploring the possibilities it holds for rethinking ethics and brain-related issues such as cognition. The last text of the section, “The Brain and the Secret of the Heart” (1996) is a challenge to Ueda’s view by neuroscientist Itō. (Ueda responded the same year in the May edition of *Gakujutsu no dōkō*.) Both of these last two texts of the section discuss the relation of mind to brain from opposing perspectives.

# Chapter 7

## Healing and Religion



Shizuteru Ueda and Hayao Kawai

### 1 Disaster and the Ritual of Healing

**Editors:** Recently we have witnessed some terrible scenes with the major earthquake that struck the Hanshin and Awaji Island regions. Yet, amongst those scenes we have also witnessed the selfless work of those helping with medical care and disaster aid. Their commitment has been of great consolation to those affected by the earthquake, who have also, in turn, encouraged [those helping] in their efforts. It has been truly moving to see. Witnessing this, I realized that while they have helped attend to the physical bodies of the victims, the solace that they gave to their hearts and minds is also important.

**Kawai:** There might even be an understanding of healing that cannot be addressed by the labels such as body or mind. Amongst these categories my work relates to the mental aspect. Indeed, this recent earthquake has had a damaging effect on the mental health of many people. This is why I decided to offer phone counselling. Some told me that, unlike Westerners, the Japanese are not in the habit of seeking such counselling. But I replied to them that that was not a problem for me. The good thing about phone counselling is that you do not have to call in should you not want to. It is only an offer for those who want to call. If I went out to provide counselling in person it could come across as extremely pushy, if things went wrong. So, I thought, let's do it over the phone first. If no one calls, then that is no problem either.

---

Translated by Maria Römer.

---

S. Ueda (✉)  
Department of Philosophy, Kyōto University, Kyōto, Japan

H. Kawai  
Faculty of Education, Kyōto University, Kyōto, Japan

However, I ended up being inundated with calls. I thought that maybe encountering a disaster of that scope changed people's thinking a little bit.

**Ueda:** It is as if there is suddenly a giant shock, where everything is lost all at once. But then something new wells up. It's like that, isn't it? I think I can understand.

**Kawai:** People call me because they urgently wish to express that feeling. Listening to their calls I came to understand. In the beginning, people tell me that even though their house is not destroyed they are afraid to go inside because of aftershocks. Then they express how helpless they feel about not being able to do anything. I just listen to them quietly over the phone. When they ask me about the probability of aftershocks, I tell them that while aftershocks will occur, they are unlikely to be worse than the actual earthquake. Of course, no one is able to predict that there will be no aftershocks at all. But then, no one is able to predict that you will never be a victim of a traffic accident either, right? When they then reply: "Ah, I see... so really it's a matter of probability..." Then they are able to get to the point of thinking "OK, maybe I'll try going inside." There is a sequence of steps you need to take for them to reach that point. It's no good simply telling people from the outset that aftershocks aren't scary.

**Ueda:** So the first thing is that they need to express their fear.

**Kawai:** Yes, I listen to that first, and then I slowly, slowly ask them more about their feelings. It takes around 20 minutes, but that is the process of providing healing. What is important is that they are able to sufficiently express their own fears during that time.

**Ueda:** And so what is important here is whether we are able to quietly listen to them. With a phone conversation as well, there is that feeling of security they gain through being connected to somebody for that length of time.

**Kawai:** That's right. Although, I must note that the people who call me are those who have the emotional capacity to do so. Of course, there are also those who are suffering quite deeply, and don't have the mental energy needed to even call in.

**Ueda:** People like that have been left reeling from the shock, and end up stuck in that state, don't they? It takes them time to even recover to the point where they are able to make a phone call. So, in any case, these things take an awful lot of time. Just how long it takes to recover is going to vary depending on the person and the situation. It must be really difficult dealing with all these different kinds of cases.

**Kawai:** There is another thing I found interesting. This is something I heard from a clinical psychologist, who went into the disaster area to provide mental health care. Parents in the region had to leave their children by themselves in order to provide support to others or help clear up debris. This colleague helped out by gather-

ing them together and playing with them. The colleague told me that when the children came out to play they collected some empty boxes that had been used to hold aid material. After they turned them into houses they then smashed them up. It's a way of expressing their feelings, isn't it?

**Ueda:** Ah, I see. I can definitely understand that.

**Kawai:** And then after destroying the house, they would rebuild it. What is more, they would rebuild it more carefully than before. They would do so, and then they would smash it once again. Now, after repeating this several times, they would get to the point where the house could stay up even if they smashed it. I was deeply moved by that story. It seems that people who witnessed the scene were moved as well. When my colleague and I were discussing this episode, our conversation turned to the following topic. After the massive tsunami caused by the Hokkaidō earthquake (1993) there were children playing tsunami games. Apparently, their parents had become very angry with them, scolding them for playing "such sinister games." But in reality, these games were a way of helping the children to heal.

**Ueda:** In other words, they repeat their experience, doing so again and again until they have overcome it.

**Kawai:** Exactly. Actually, there is a clinical psychologist Fujimori Kazumi 藤森和美, who researched this topic in Okushiri. Directly after this recent earthquake she immediately caught a plane to deliver pamphlets to the local board of education. Apparently, these pamphlets describe these tsunami games, instructing people not to stop them. Instead, [the pamphlets] asked people to give children space to play freely. I am thinking of proposing this method to the board of education here as well.

**Ueda:** That really is amazing. And what is more, it is something that emerged spontaneously, right? For a game about starting all over again from scratch to emerge in such circumstances, like a natural occurrence, makes me think it is like an expression of a primordial capacity for healing.

**Kawai:** Yes, it is definitely a kind of self-healing capacity.

**Ueda:** A naturally appearing capacity, yes. What is amazing about it is also that it is not simply something the children thought up in their heads. Instead, they developed it through repetition based on their respective individual experiences. And then through that repetition they reached a point where their houses remained standing.

**Kawai:** Moreover, they apparently build the houses they will smash with extreme care, so that they are of excellent quality. And then just when you are thinking about how splendid these houses have turned out, they will smash them. And after repeating this several times, they will stop.

**Ueda:** Listening to this anecdote, I even have the feeling that it says all that needs to be said about the nature of healing.

**Kawai:** I was also deeply moved by this story.

**Ueda:** When I hear it, I feel like I understand. But it's also not something you can simply arrive at in a rational manner, is it?

**Kawai:** That's right. And such rituals and methods of healing must be different depending on the person too. You might think it's a good method, and that you can just instruct other children to "go and build a house," but that won't get you anywhere.

**Ueda:** This is because these things emerge naturally. So, each particular child has its own way of expressing this capacity for healing.

**Editors:** Is it not that such a naturally appearing capacity for healing is stronger in children? What about in the case of elderly people?

**Kawai:** I have not heard much about that. But I do think this kind of self-healing capacity appears with elderly people as well. However, if I may be so frank, elderly people have something tragic about them which makes it difficult for me to even approach them. It is so powerful that it makes me incapable of even going over and talking to them. Those who are more approachable will come up and have a chat if you ask them if they would like to speak with a clinical psychologist. Among some of the elderly there are those who tell me that they weren't able to ask for help themselves. In such cases, you need to listen to them carefully, giving them plenty of time.

**Ueda:** What about this? What you speak about may certainly be true for elderly people taken by themselves. But wouldn't it be different if the elderly were in the same place as the children you mentioned earlier? Then, rather than having the elderly or the children try to recover on their own, perhaps they could heal together at a better pace? Of course we could assume that there would be differences in the speed of recovery and so on, but can't we imagine something like this?

**Kawai:** You know that actually makes a lot of sense to me. Such cases do exist. Our colleagues don't need to force the children to do anything in order to get them to recover. Just by being with them they are able to gradually return to health and start playing outside again. Now, everyone is living together in the shelters. But even if the children run around, no one gets angry at them. Apparently, they just watch and smile.

**Ueda:** They are enjoying watching the energy that the children have in running around. I had a similar thought when watching some children on TV. You know



when a school re-opens and the children come out? Everyone gathers at the school gates and greets the teachers. When I was watching that, I felt like I was seeing something entirely new appearing from out of nothing.

This made me think of the “three metamorphoses” in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. First comes the camel, then the camel turns into a lion, and the lion finally turns into a child. At that point, the child represents the new beginning (*ein Neubeginnen*). This is considered the “first movement,” the “sacred affirmation.” I was reminded of these words. I don’t think the world could go on without children. If there were only adults then they would simply get more and more stuck in their ways, in accordance with their experiences. By contrast, I feel that children are always willing to start over once more, regardless of what happens. And so when I saw the children’s faces on TV I really felt saved.

**Kawai:** Yes, I really understand. Watching TV, you could see children smiling and making peace signs even in the middle of a serious disaster. That was a great comfort to see.

**Ueda:** Of course, the situation of the children within the context of their families may be different. But when they appeared as children on TV, it felt like a new beginning. Bit by bit, I could feel that I was coming to understand something.

## 2 How Japanese People Bond Together

**Kawai:** There is one thing I have been thinking about regarding the disaster. And that is something I have personally really been racking my brains over. Actually, I will give a lecture in the US soon and so I have been doing some preparation. I have been writing on the topic of suicide. While providing psychotherapy I am sometimes told by patients that they want to die. And I have noted that the percentage of people planning to commit suicide in Japan is far higher than in the US. To put it extremely simply, and using Western style terminology, the Japanese people have weak egos. Because their egos are weak, it is easy for them to think of simply erasing themselves and committing suicide. Well, that is the easiest explanation. It was while I was preoccupied with considering such things that the earthquake occurred.

Then an American friend sent me a fax. In it he said something like this: I was impressed by the strength of the Japanese people. There is no looting at all. Even if there is only one rice ball or only one half of a rice ball for the evening, the people staying in shelters will all wait in line in perfect order. They will receive their one rice ball or their half rice ball acceptingly and without complaints. Moreover, they might say that they have nothing to wear, but because the department stores are shattered, they would easily be able to take food supplies and clothing from there. Yet despite knowing this nobody loots the stores. My friend said that he was deeply

impressed by this sign of enormous self-control. In the newspapers there have also been articles where people from other countries have expressed the same sentiment. And so, I felt that I needed to explain both this phenomenon and the way that Japanese people can decide to die for insignificant reasons. This gave me a lot to think about.

**Ueda:** I wonder if thinking about that phenomenon in terms of control might miss the point. Isn't something already happening here prior to any questions of "control"?

**Kawai:** Yes, speaking of "controlling oneself" is a Western expression. In the case of this recent earthquake, everyone has been impacted in some way. There is a certain sense of security that people have knowing that everybody is in the same boat together.

**Ueda:** This is the recognition that they are starting out with, right?

**Kawai:** Exactly. It is in times such as this that Japanese people are extremely strong. So, if that is the case, then why might we decide to commit suicide over something rather simple? It happens when we suddenly lose this very sense of "connectedness." When we sense that this has gone, then even some small thing might cause us to feel like we might as well die. Because we are all by ourselves. But with this calamity everyone has been impacted by the crisis. And because we are all firmly supporting each other it's not a matter of self-control. Rather, it's that everybody is carefully looking out for each other. However, if you are suddenly disconnected from that "connectedness," then you might consider suicide even from a relatively minor setback.

**Ueda:** So that means that you need to develop a manner of coping when you find yourself alone.

**Kawai:** I have a hypothesis regarding this which I would like to ask your opinion on. This sense of "connectedness" that we share is not something verbal, but rather a kind of feeling. Now, people who need to change themselves in some way, or people who need to make some self-improvements, are necessarily going to separate themselves as a bit different from everyone else. If they don't then they can't really make any changes. But then once this happens, I think they can end up feeling an overwhelming sense of loneliness.

Now, when Western people go their own way, thinking "I'll take care of it myself," they already have a history since childhood of being trained in this "doing it yourself" attitude, right? But in the case of Japanese people, as soon as we have the thought of "I will," then we immediately feel like we are breaking off that connection we have with others. Of course, the weakness of our egos plays into this as well. And then after detaching oneself from everyone else you sink down, alone, into a different world. On the one hand it is a world of being, of form, but it is also

what we refer to as the world of nothingness. It has both aspects. Perhaps people tend towards simply seeing the negative side. Then they think, well, it's all empty anyway, and so they abruptly turn in that direction towards death.

So from a Western person's perspective we might say that Japanese people commit suicide for insignificant reasons. However, what the individual in question is experiencing is different from the world that Western people see.

**Ueda:** That's probably right. That moment where you slightly detach yourself from everyone else... It is difficult to express in words, but this is when a serious desolation occurs.

**Kawai:** Exactly. And afterwards comes that world of nothingness.

**Ueda:** And that world of nothingness is not a place you reach through some clear rejection of the self. Rather it is like a state you just glide into.

**Kawai:** A person who failed to commit suicide and received help once told me that when they were healthy, they thought only brave people committed suicide. This was because they had believed that the act of suicide required extreme determination. They told me that they now realized that this is not true. You open the door of the room you are in, and you go into the adjacent room. You do this, because the room you are in does not have enough air. If you go into the next room, then perhaps there is some air. This is the example they gave me. They suggested that if I was in a stuffy room then I would also think it quite normal to open the door and change rooms. I think this is a really good metaphor. You gently push open the door and you simply go into the other room.

**Ueda:** That feeling of just "gently opening" the way to the other side is not entirely alien to me either.

**Kawai:** I definitely would like to hear your thoughts on this.

**Ueda:** When it comes to how we must live as human beings, I do have one firm belief. But let me set that aside for a moment, and just focus on this feeling of "gentle" movement. My understanding follows from a certain extremely vivid experience that I have had. This experience dates back to the time when I had to give a lecture at Marburg University. I was quite worried about it because preparations weren't going very well. So, I was under a lot of pressure, but at the same time I felt like I couldn't find a solution. At the time, I was staying in Marburg University's guest house. As the guesthouse was located on a slope, there was a spot where it was quite high up from the ground. My room had a balcony looking at a cliff. Marburg has a lot of fog. At one point, the fog had built up so much that you could not see the ground. So there I was, standing on the balcony lost in thoughts, when I suddenly came to my senses. I realized that I could have very well gone beyond the veranda so easily, just like going into an adjacent room. It is not that I had actually consid-

ered it. Rather, I suddenly realized, you know, one instant later, that I had thought about it. To which I thought in turn: Oh, this is serious! How intriguing! That was quite an experience.

Although I am Japanese, I don't think of myself as having a weak ego. If anything, I am quite self-assertive. That is why I was all the more surprised at myself, and about how easily it would be to simply push open the door, or to not even have to push it, to simply just... go. I was also surprised about how this was not something altogether discontinuous from normal life.

**Kawai:** Exactly. It is continuous.

**Ueda:** And this is also why, if you look at it from the other side, it is linked to this sense that life itself is like a dream.

**Kawai:** I am delighted because I feel like you have helped to express what I have felt. In any case, I have been thinking a great deal about the ego of Japanese people.

### 3 What Is the Self?

**Ueda:** I believe that, rather than Japanese people having weak egos, it is a matter of how Western people and Japanese people fundamentally conceive of themselves. I think there is a difference here.

**Kawai:** Right, that is where the difference lies. That is why my upcoming lecture in the US carries the title "What *is* 'I'?" The Americans always ask: "Who am I?" To which they answer: "I am this or that." However, no one can provide an answer to the question "What is 'I'?" In other words, even in just saying "I," the way we think about it is different.

**Ueda:** For instance, in Japanese the question would be "What is the self?" It is not about asking "who".

**Kawai:** Right, it is not about "who," but "what."

**Ueda:** What is the self? This way of phrasing might seem objective or detached. In fact, however, it is an inquiry after your own self. It may appear objective, because from the outset there is something which is outside of the self. It is through incorporating this that we then arrive at the form which is the self. Once one becomes clearly aware of this, then one can arrive at a somewhat different expression other than simply saying that "I am I."

If someone were to ask me “what” the self is, then I would have a clear answer; “I am not I, therefore I am I.” Actually, I first formulated that sentence in German on the occasion of giving a talk for a philosophical group in Germany a few years ago. In German the sentence would be: “Ich bin, indem ich nicht ich bin, ich.” Based on that experience, if you put it in this form then I think westerners can actually get some understanding on a philosophical level. The formulation of “I am I” is also included within it. It is like the foundation upon which the “I am I” is based. It falls within it. And moreover, this foundation originates with that which is “not I.” It is not “I am I, therefore I am.” Grasping this specificity might sound like rhetorical quibbling, but it comes down to the German “Ich bin, indem ich nicht ich bin, ich.”

It is not necessary to always say the whole sentence. “I am I” is fine as it is. However, if you say “I am,” then next you end up going in the direction of “I am I.” I have an idea about how to deal with that. When you say “I am,” you insert a comma, a pause, afterwards. If the comma is well placed, then it is possible to forget the “I.” You insert a comma after “I am,” cutting yourself out of the picture, take a deep breath, opening a passage through the self, and say “I” once more: “I am,... I.” Here you are still saying “I am I,” but the nature of the “I” is altered. “I” opens up the possibility of healing the kind of egotism that occurs when you firmly assert that “I am I.” The space where this passage opens up is where the self and the other can really intermingle, where they can naturally come into true contact with each other. And then, after we have opened this passage, when the “I” emerges anew from somewhere vast and wide, it is now a steadfast, unwavering “I.” This is not about turning the individual into a philosophical position. Rather, in the sense of “I will walk the path that is mine” (Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎), I believe, the self establishes itself through its actual modes of being. The awareness of the “I” in “I am not” is the basis for the establishment of the “I.” Of course, that depends on whether your placement of the comma is good. This version includes a clear denial, so it is not simply something spontaneous. Rather there is an aspect to it where we are dealing with the problem of religious asceticism, of *gyō* 行 to put it in traditional language.

People often speak of a general Japanese mentality. Westerners might see the Japanese as having weak egos or being collectivist. Here though I think what we have is the distorted form of the denial of the self. In other words, here the “I am not I, therefore I am” does not lead to a clear self-awareness. Instead, it lingers on at the point of “I am not...”, with the self simply fading away. By contrast, if the part “I am not” is removed from “I am not I, therefore I am,” then we end up with “I am.” Here we have a strong ego in distorted form. In the case of Western distortions of the self, I think this variant is probably more frequent.

However, either way, if such a perspective is possible, then I think we are able to see a point of connection here between the Western interpretation of the self and the general understanding of the term in Japan and the East. The “I am not I, therefore I am” is something like an archetype of both approaches, the human original self that is easily distorted. This is the view that I have reached on this topic.

## 4 From “Middle Void” to “Emptiness”

**Kawai:** That sounds right to me. When I am abroad, I am really aware of how I am different from the people around me due to having been born Japanese. But, what I want to say is that if we think about it a bit more, then we can see that this is actually a topic that relates to all of humanity.

**Ueda:** Yes, so if we make a comparison with the fundamental formula of the original self, then we might have the self of “I am” being strongly asserted, taking on a distorted form as self-attachment. Or, on the other hand, we might have the distorted form of a loss of self, where the individual self simply disappears. Both are possible, and each is a distortion going in the opposite direction. People who have a similar distorted sense of the self can still reach some degree of social accommodation with each other through customs and systems. However, it is another thing altogether if two people distorted in opposing ways come into conflict. I’m sure you have experienced more than enough of such cases yourself. However, we cannot simply think we can avoid becoming distorted. That is very difficult for human beings. Ultimately, I think that being human is really just this whole process of becoming distorted, and then correcting it. Human beings easily distort, while correcting that distortion requires quite a lot of effort. It also requires time. Still, I have the feeling that the secret in healing such distortions lies in the “I am not I” (or to put it more simply, “forgetting the I”).

Actually, there is something that I would like to discuss with you today, Mr. Kawai. It relates to something you say in your commentary on [David Leroy] Miller’s *The New Polytheism*. I found it very interesting. And not only that, I think it expresses the current topic very clearly.

In that book, Miller takes the stance of advocating for polytheism. In your commentary you attribute great significance to how he can make a case for polytheism from his standpoint within a monotheistic world. I fully agree with you on that. The ensuing question obviously would be, what about us Japanese? I found it extremely interesting how you explain the “middle-void structure,” how it relates to the “middle-void balance,” “central integrity” and “central unity.” According to this conception, there is not a single, central, strong God integrating all things. Instead, the basic structure is that of the three [elements] together having a center, a so-called “middle-void” where the balance of the whole naturally takes shape. Another thing that I thought was extremely interesting was how the opening of the central “middle-void” has its own kind of enigmatic power. It is not moving as though it is in outright possession of its own active power, but passively there is this kind of unbounded power that gathers, forming a kind of symbolic patriarch. It also cannot be opposed. Your commentary really helps to clearly lay out this kind of hidden context. I found it really convincing.

When living in Europe, I often feel that things are different from Japan. In such moments, I seem to compare the bad things about Europe with the good things about Japan. However, once I return to Japan, I realize that there actually isn’t

anything good about Japan. Or rather, I would have to say, our potential strengths have had unintended negative results. If we look squarely at the reality of Japan, I think it is as though we have combined Japanese and European things together in a harmful way. The “middle-void” that you speak of is also actually negatively realized here. This is all extremely intriguing, or, should I say, thought-provoking.

I am jumping from topic to topic a bit, but energy gathers in this “middle-void,” doesn’t it? And as it is a structural body made from three elements, when power increases in the middle of it, the whole of it becomes distorted. In this case, because it is a “middle void,” the power really ought to dissolve into emptiness. Yet, it does not dissolve, but accumulates in the middle. This is where we have the emergence of a Japanese-style “patriarch.” And so I think we have to look for a way to deconstruct this structure, to dissolve it. I have been thinking about monotheism. Not in the immediate sense of a religious practice but, and I believe that this is an extremely adequate way of putting it, as an abstract concept. In particular, I have been considering the connection between monotheistic logic and the “middle-void.” To deepen this thought, we again need to break down the whole into somewhat of an original sketch. One model for such an original sketch would be the famous *Ten Ox Herding Pictures*.

In the *Ten Ox Herding Pictures*, we find the idea of the “void” as well, don’t we? However, in the *Ten Ox Herding Pictures* [this void] is not located in the center of three elements. Within the sequential order of the *Ten Ox Herding Pictures*, it appears at number eight. Yet, it simply appears and that is it, it has no further implications. And so, it doesn’t really have a fixed position. From the first to the sixth stage, the herder chases after the escaped bull, a metaphor for searching after the self. Then we have the completion of the true self in the seventh picture of “The Bull Transcended.” However, the completion of the true self turns out to be a serious pitfall. In the eighth stage, the whole path taken from the first to the seventh stage is erased and the self and the bull suddenly become nothingness. After suddenly disappearing, nothing remains. I consider that aspect to be extremely important. What is more, the story does not end with nothing remaining. From nothing remaining, we then have the subsequent ninth and tenth stages of “Reaching the Source” and “In the World.” From absolute self-denial in stage eight, the self is resurrected as a “self that is not a self.” [The self] then becomes truly natural (stage nine), before taking yet another turn and transforming into the intermingling of “I and Thou.”

And so the self emerges anew from nothing, just like the children from the disaster area that we discussed earlier. However, at the same time, the self can always potentially be reabsorbed by the nothingness depicted in the eighth picture. This whole context of relationships, perpetually turning in circles, is taken as reality. Its foundation lies in the premise that the void is not a “middle-void,” but something clearly bigger... How should I phrase it? In any case, this kind of structure can be seen here I think.

**Kawai:** To respond to your thinking just now, may I propose the following? As the “middle-void” is a surrounded void, the void that you are thinking of is that which surrounds it.

**Ueda:** That's it. It surrounds it. In surrounding the "middle-void," the void itself takes no shape. With a "middle-void" by contrast it seems inevitable...

**Kawai:** ... that it takes on a form. And then that form will transform into something again.

**Ueda:** If it takes on a form, then even if the middle is a void, then this inner part will gradually be filled with all sorts of things and grow heavy; immoderately heavy indeed, even if that cannot be seen. I find your expression of a Japanese-style "patriarch" extremely precise and accurate here. In order to prevent things from becoming like that, it is necessary to avoid simply being passive, and instead release the received power once more. But we need to do so by developing a clear awareness of [this power] and consciously put ourselves into a place where that is possible. I believe this becomes part of our training as human beings. Therefore, while it is certainly not a simple task, if we truly accept that it is necessary, then I think we can come to see that it is not something which cannot be done. That is, it means nothing other than starting over from scratch, like the children did. If you refuse to believe you are capable of doing that then there is no way forward. The *Ten Ox Herding Pictures* might appear simple, but the deeper you look into them, the more intriguing they become.

**Kawai:** They are incredible indeed. Whenever I look at them, I find my thoughts are led in new directions.

## 5 The Soul Resides Within the Gap Between Existence and Existence

**Ueda:** Yes, that is really true, isn't it? There was another thing that I found interesting in your commentary on Miller's book. Things start, after all, from the establishment of the self; from the necessity for the self to be established. We cannot overlook that.

**Kawai:** I agree.

**Ueda:** However, when we use the notion of the "self," I believe we end up with an unstable meaning, a double meaning one may say. For example, if we say in Japanese: "That person does not have a self," we mean that they are kind of wishy-washy in a bad way, right? By comparison, if we say: "That person shows its self too much," then we mean that having a self is something bad. Because this concept of self has both of these sides to it, we can level it out and express it formally as: "The self is at once the self and not the self." However, if we say it like that then we obviously have a kind of contradiction on our hands, out of which a kind of move-



ment will take shape. So, when we speak of the establishment of the self, at the same time there is a movement where the established self is in some way dissolved or softened. Through this movement the self returns once more in a new form. In that sense, this image of the connection between the “ego” versus the “self” is extremely useful. In addition to that, you and Miller agree on another point; if we are pairing the ego with the self, then in the end the establishment of the self becomes an “ego-self.”

**Kawai:** “Becoming.” That is the weakness in all of this.

**Ueda:** That seems to be an extremely important thing to point out. That is why [James] Hillman proposes the notion of the spirit, of the soul, rather than the self. Of course, the soul is also ambiguous when considered from the history of concepts. But that is exactly what is good about it, right?

**Kawai:** Indeed. I read something interesting recently in a book about clandestine Christians [in Tokugawa Japan]. The soul is *anima* [in Latin], isn't it? It seems the Japanese Christians misheard the word as “*arima*” and used the two consecutive logograms “to exist” for *aru* 在 and “space” for *aida* 間 to provide a phonetic transcription of *arima* in the Japanese script. That *arima* must be the soul. There is no “space” between “existence” and “existence”, but if we were to assume that there was, then this would be the “soul”, wouldn't it? They expressed this thinking as *arima* 在間.

**Ueda:** So *anima* becomes rendered as *arima* (“to be” and “space”).... I see. It is a mishearing, yet it is actually entirely correct. To say *arima* is actually a good choice. What I mean by that is, if you conceptualize spirit (*tamashii* 魂) simply as “soul,” then you will end up with some kind of substance.

**Kawai:** Right, exactly. I believe that the soul, in order to exist, needs some other form of existence, something that the soul itself is incapable of producing.

**Ueda:** There is existence and then there are souls, which seem to circulate within it.

**Kawai:** And then we are saying that *arima* does not exist (*arimase[n]*) (Laughs).

**Ueda:** Very nice. It certainly was a mishearing initially. But at the point where they rendered it in script they probably did not consider it a mistake anymore. Because it is exactly this “space between being” (*arima*). This is very interesting.

**Kawai:** Sawamura Sadako's husband has said the soul is the gap in everyday life. That is a similar idea, isn't it? It is in the gap. That is, it is *arima* (在間) – it is within (在) the space (間).

**Ueda:** Within the gap. I fully agree. However, because of my tendency to think about everything in abstract terms I would like to put it in the following way: if we think simply in terms of a gap, then it becomes something limited. Therefore, those things which are a gap can be thought of in a manner similar to the “middle-void” that we spoke of. That is, as not a gap per se, but an open place (*basho* 場所) within which the whole is located. The way I think of it, this kind of gap is akin to the space between the lines of a page, if the page were existence itself.

**Kawai:** Yes, so if we say that [souls] do not exist, then in a sense this is correct.

**Ueda:** Exactly. Strictly speaking, they do not exist. Rather, there is a place within which what exists is located. The place where things are becomes the space in the gap between existence and existence. To use Nishida Kitarō’s terminology, that is the meaning of “place” (*basho*), yes? Here the individual self becomes a kind of “place-like self.” This is an interesting way of putting it, isn’t it?

The idea of the self requires some form of integrity. If the self were dispersed this would undoubtedly be bad. In the end, we still need to be able to say, “I am.” However, the moment we utter “I am” we need to be careful to avoid simply becoming “I am I.” Once we have uttered “I am,” we allow this “I am” to quietly dissolve, opening up to the place which we share with others. From there the “I” is formed through its interactions and relations that occur within that place. The centrifugal and centripetal movements that occur within this space you are located in is referred to [by Nishida Kitarō] as the “place-like self” (the topological self). The self is this kind of hidden movement. If we cast a light on this movement don’t we arrive at something like the soul? In Europe, too, from long ago the soul has been understood as something contained within each individual, yet also that which connects individuals with each other.

Thus, the soul manifests as the “in-between,” but what is decisive is less the “being between” this and that, but the open place (*basho*) where all these things are “placed” [Nishida Kitarō]. This is why the self has to initially open up. Then what has been opened up can reintegrate once more. When the self thus reintegrates, this time all of the other elements that are together with it in the open place (*basho*) can join together with it and be integrated into a whole. And so we have the expression of “the self and the other are one,” or “all of existence is united.” However, if the self then persists in this clustered, cut off state, it runs the risk of subsequently inclining towards collectivism or unity in a negative sense.

**Kawai:** And so movement really is important, isn’t it? The very fact that there is movement to begin with. Because movement is a core part of the soul it cannot really be pinned down. Incidentally, I think that the act of making something conscious, if you like, is akin to projecting something onto a two-dimensional world. Unfortunately. So this means that we are only ever taking up one aspect of the soul’s movement and describing it. This is quite inescapable.

**Ueda:** In some cases doing this implies a certain active engagement. If we render things in two dimensions then they appear to us in a clearer form. However, it does indeed necessitate keeping in mind the fact that we are only looking at one part of the whole. For instance, when we look at the surface of a table, there is a huge difference between understanding that there is a reverse side, or not.

## 6 An Image of Death Acceptance

**Kawai:** If you are not careful, you might begin to take what is expressed in two-dimensions as the actual thing itself. If you do that then it's hopeless.

This might seem to be a tangent, but looking at the soul by way of such an image, the question of death strikes me as important. We meet many different people through psychotherapy. But at the end of the day, for most people, it is the fear of death which looms in the back of their minds. Even if people don't mention it explicitly, there is still this fear of death in the background. I think this is because the enormous progress that has taken place in the natural sciences has made it increasingly difficult for people to simply accept the various things that religions have to say about death. While it would be good if we could simply believe in heaven or hell, it is now simply too hard to do so. At the same time, there was a temporary mistaken belief that the natural sciences were capable of explaining everything to us. Yet, when it comes to confronting our own deaths we realize that we simply cannot find any understanding in natural science. This is one of the great problems of contemporary society. Finding a way that responds to [this problem] will also only become increasingly urgent.

**Ueda:** The images that the various religions have presented on this issue will be incapable of maintaining their iconographic power.

**Kawai:** They are rapidly losing it as we speak.

**Ueda:** Nevertheless, I think there is a clear reason why religions have produced such images so far. For example, in Buddhism, there is the image of Yamagoshi Amidasu emerging from behind the mountains to meet us when we die. I find this to be an extremely fitting image. Through death, we leave this world that we are living in. Then, we see that the world of ours has from the beginning been comprised of more than just this one world. How should I put it? What I mean is, this world has a "beyond," where there is this other world. In contemporary philosophy, the world is referred to as the "world horizon," the inclusive horizon of human meaning. And in the same way that that notion of a horizon implies the idea of something existing beyond that horizon, so too does this world have its "beyond." Now, the world in general is not infinite, but the largest possible meaningful space. Even if it is of maximum size, insofar as it is a meaningful space it will have a certain sense of closure. This sense of closure is not something we can immediately

perceive, yet without such a frame the world cannot exist. The world is the total meaningful frame, the ultimate frame. As long as the world itself is a finite world in this way, then it is in turn located within the infinite openness that exceeds and envelops it. I will call that “infinite openness” simply emptiness for now. If we simply say “infinite openness” then it sounds too blunt, so I would like to picture it by using the expression of emptiness that often appears in the *Daijō Kyōten* (Mahāyāna Sutras). So, the world is located in emptiness. As a result, when we say that we are within this world as *being-in-the-world*, this means that from the beginning we are placed in a world that is in turn placed in emptiness. This means that our existence is not only that of a self that is in the world, but transcends through [that world] into emptiness. This is why we can say, as before, that “I, am not I (transcending into emptiness), therefore I am (in the world).”

Returning to the problem of the meaning of death—death means that you disappear from this world. In my opinion, it simultaneously means that you pass beyond, into the empty space (the limitless opening) where the world is already originally located. That infinite openness I have preliminarily called emptiness is that place where our world is located. However, if we focus on just this aspect, we can simply refer to it as the place we can only reach through dying. Dying means going (passing over) to the place our world is located in. It is impossible to actually say where that place is, or to say what it is like. Truthfully, we cannot say. If we assume that the earlier image of being met from “beyond” is losing its reality, then instead perhaps the way forward is to consciously move towards the kind of philosophical understanding just mentioned. Of course, in the end we do not know what exactly happens after death. That is fine. By “fine,” I do not mean that it is fine to “not know whether there exists a world after death.” Rather, by “fine” I mean that this lack of understanding itself actually becomes a real sense for something infinite. One of my favorite poems is by Yosano Akiko. It reads: “Although my destination is unclear, it seems to me the moment I will return home and welcome ‘death’ has come near. Thinking of that, everything I have done so far in this world appears nostalgic to me.” The poem’s use of “where” (*doko* 何処) precisely captures how I understand the word in the context of our conversation. This is more than just a simple “where.”

**Kawai:** At that time, does this emptiness have any relationship with this world?

**Ueda:** This world is located within the emptiness. It is not located anywhere separate. In other words, to say that it is in this world is to say that the world itself has two layers. Although we simply perceive it as one world.

**Kawai:** Figuratively speaking, when I die, this means that I disappear from this world. However, I have a relationship with some other world. As a result, even though I am no longer around, for example, my friend will still have some relationship with me. So then, figuratively speaking, my friend is free to think: “Ah, Kawai is working as a psychotherapist in that other world as well.” There are times where we hold thoughts such as this with firm conviction. This is, of course, fully accept-

able. If you don't want to, then you also don't have to. So, putting it this way, it is OK for people to think that there is a world after death.

**Ueda:** Yes, that is entirely fine to think.

**Kawai:** Each person has their own way of expressing these things.

**Ueda:** Right. To the extent that it is a way of expressing this feeling, then if someone says that they can truly feel that the world is infinite then it is fine if they want to say that.

**Kawai:** The problem is that because this image is just so vivid it is problematic if the claim then becomes that the "other side" is actually in this world, as such.

**Ueda:** That is problematic indeed. It is even dangerous when people start talking about the other world in the same manner as they talk about this world. That, in turn, will then detract from its infiniteness.

**Kawai:** I thought the same. I tell this story often, but my acquaintance's child, who is an elementary school fifth grader, once asked me to tell him about the universe. He had me tell him all sorts of things about the galaxy. And then after all this he asked me where his mother was. The child's mother had passed away just a while prior. Everyone had been consoling him by saying "Your mother is in heaven," or, "You will see her again soon." Now, because that child was smart, he did not object to that, but listened to all of it, nodding quietly. However, he seemed to have judged that I was somebody who would tell him the truth. Now, in order to prevent me from just coming up with some convenient reply, the child had first made me talk about the galaxy and the universe. That is quite remarkable, isn't it? Then after he had made me tell him about the galaxy, he then followed up with the question: "Where is my mother?" I was deeply moved. This is a fifth grade elementary student that we are talking about! But being put on the spot like this it is very hard to give a suitable answer. Normally, people just say something perfunctory. However, children know when adults are doing that. Putting in the terms we have been using, this is where we speak of people being in the emptiness outside of the world. The religious saints have expressed this idea in ways that would be intelligible to their followers, using words that people could intuitively understand. If we say such things from within the context of this world, then everyone will reject it as nonsense. Nevertheless, if we try to get back to their original point, then we can start to gain an appreciation for the foundational insight behind the images they presented.

**Ueda:** That's right. Take your example just now. By pursuing these kinds of questions, the elementary school student was trying to explore the meaning of his own limited existence in this world. To me it seems, even if the child is presented with an answer by others, he will not be satisfied until he has found his own answer.

**Kawai:** We inevitably have to find our own answer.

**Ueda:** This is why Shinran 親鸞 visited Hōnen 法然 about one hundred times to consult him about the law. As far as the actual answer I give, I think I use the same words. But it is important that people continue to question until it becomes their own answer. Probably that elementary school student has found his mother through repeatedly asking himself the question “Where is she?”

**Kawai:** It is amazing that the child was capable of articulating such a question. They knew that if they only asked in a normal way they would only receive superficial answers. But even then, they would still nod and carefully listen. That is quite impressive.

## 7 The Child within the Adult

**Ueda:** You mention somewhere that there is an adult within every child. And furthermore, this is not just a simple adult, but an adult that is superior to normal adults.

**Kawai:** Some children are really uncanny. They can shock you.

**Ueda:** I really do think children are interesting. Thinking of my own experiences with children, I not only have intensely enjoyable memories, but also... How should I put it? One particular event comes to mind. It was nothing special in particular. I had gotten off a bus from Heidaira. When the bus stopped by Ginkakuji Temple there was another bus that was stopping at the stand across the road. I had been sitting by the window facing this bus, looking vacantly in that direction. Then I realized that there were three children looking at me from the window of the other bus. One of the children held up two fingers to make a peace sign. I thought I'd respond by doing a peace sign too. But I suddenly decided to be a little playful and held up three fingers instead.

**Kawai:** Because there were three children as well.

**Ueda:** I just did it spontaneously to be silly. The children hesitated for a moment. This was interesting. Then they looked at each other. And then one of them only held up one finger. This made me so happy. Then my bus set off and that was it. Still, it left me in a happy mood all day. While that is all that has happened, do you not find it extremely creative? I especially am fascinated by the momentary hesitation of the children. That one moment of hesitation gave birth to their clever response. Remarkable for their young age, I thought and admired back then.

**Kawai:** A true Zen dialogue.

**Ueda:** Exactly. That is what a Zen dialogue ultimately is about I believe. And then the bus sets off right afterwards. That was also really delightful.

**Kawai:** The movement.

**Ueda:** Right. This is what eternalizes the whole interaction. We say that there is an adult in every child, and it is also often said that there is a child in every adult.

**Kawai:** So when you held up three fingers that was an expression of the child in yourself.

**Ueda:** Exactly. This conversation is probably getting more and more off-topic, but I went to Yokohama for both elementary school and junior high school, while my high school was in Tokyo. From university onward, I have always been in Kyoto. So, I have never gone to any alumni reunions from my elementary school. Now, 5 years ago there happened to be a reunion just when I was in Tokyo, so I participated for the first time. I graduated from elementary school when I was twelve years old, so that was fifty years ago at that time. Seeing my former colleagues again after half a century, one of my first impressions was that they had all grown incredibly old. However, immediately afterwards, just two or three seconds later, it felt as though nothing had changed at all—from their facial expressions to the way that they spoke. I found that to be so intriguing at the time that I thought up a theory about it. In the beginning, there are two children within each of us. One of them remains a child. The other gradually, bit by bit grows into an adult. The one that grows into an adult conceals the other one that remains a child. However, the child possesses an infinite vitality and thus perpetually lives as a child. At a certain chance occasion, the adult can suddenly collapse, allowing the form of the child to appear. What do you think about such a theory of there being two children in each of us?

**Kawai:** I have some thinking on this which is quite similar. From when we are born we contain everything inside of us. Adults and children, all are in there. However, how we appear differs according to which part of us comes to the fore at any given time. Even 1-year old infants, if precocious, can contain an old person. Because the dominant side is in the foreground playing an active role we might not notice, but behind it are so many other differences. And so, in a sense, we do not change.

**Ueda:** However, there is also the process of growth. Meaning that while there are indeed many other, differently aged parts of us, still, at least one of them is growing up.

**Kawai:** That then would be the leader.

**Ueda:** The leader will then gradually grow up, become more and more intelligent and at the same time more and more spoiled.

**Kawai:** Right, right indeed.

**Ueda:** On the one hand, growth will create the potential for action. On the other hand, I believe we are capable of saying that a person is only able to live because he or she has a child inside them as well. Should that child disappear, then the person will disappear with it.

Returning to my earlier story, following that event, I had another strange experience. Some of the friends who I met at the elementary school class reunion used to come to my house often. They asked me if my mother was doing well and told me they would like to visit again one day. So, on one occasion, I took them to my mother's place in Kōyasan. It was winter, so we all sat around the electrically heated *kotatsu* table to have a chat. While we were engaged in discussion, I increasingly had this strange feeling. Like I couldn't tell if now was just like when we were children, or if when we were children was just like now. I felt like I was unable to tell the difference. It was an extremely odd feeling.

After my friends had gone home, well, at the end of the day fifty years had passed since we were children. So, this question of what those fifty years meant became very pressing in my mind. Initially, it seemed to me that the time of my childhood was like a previous life. I felt that things became quite clear when I used this label of a "previous life." I was able to make sense of things somehow. During the fifty years since my childhood I had all kinds of different experiences and, what is more, had moved to an entirely different region than my colleagues, where I had lived an entirely different life. As a result, speaking of "back then" felt like speaking of my own previous life prior to my current life. That sounded right to me overall.

Now, a while after this, a strange phenomenon occurred. I was surprised about it myself. This time, the fifty years I had lived started seeming to me as though it were actually the next life. That perception first emerged as a "feeling." I was able to reason out why this kind of "feeling" emerged. Because "back then" and "now" had become unified in my mind, my perspective on the past fifty years shifted over to "back then," which became now. So it felt as though the fifty years that have passed since then were actually the future life to come. It might sound a bit strange. It was now the opposite direction compared to when I felt that these fifty years were a prior life, with everything now still to come. As a result of that reflection, time as such began to appear like an entirely strange thing to me. You yourself mentioned somewhere that the perception of time changes according to how you look at it. The same goes for its speed. This is certainly the case.

## 8 The Healing Effects of a "Previous Life"

**Kawai:** People in the past used to explain the experiences you just mentioned through terms such as one's "previous life" or "next life." But fundamentally they were actually speaking of the same thing.



**Ueda:** I believe they were, yes. At the time, that was how one could describe what they experienced.

**Kawai:** That was the commonly accepted style.

**Ueda:** However, if we can no longer believe in ideas like a “previous life” or a “next life,” does this mean that our only option would be to instead think in the form you just outlined? I would say no.

**Kawai:** Today our vocabulary has become exceedingly poor. This means that our thought patterns are being pushed into poverty as well. In this respect, I quite like to bring up the thinking of the Middle Ages. When viewed from contemporary standards of thought their ideas seem ridiculous, however, they are actually rich with truth.

**Ueda:** I myself have never thought of using terms like “previous life” or “next life” to express my own experiences. Of course, I am very familiar with both, and in my own manner I understand well what is expressed through them. However, that was the first time I had ever used “previous life” or “next life” in a natural way to speak about my personal experience. What came first, of course, was the experience which necessitates the use of these terms. Meaning, the question of how I experience, now, the fifty years that have passed since my childhood. On the one hand, it is possible to experience these years as stretching out far into the past. On the other, it is possible to experience them as all being in the present. There are many ways of experiencing such years, and so I think it is with the language of a “previous life” or a “next life” that we can really be helpful addressing such experiences. If you cannot use this language, then it becomes necessary to narrate your experiences in a different manner. We cannot, however, simply dismiss these ideas as mere myth or nonsense.

**Kawai:** It is extremely unfortunate that our present age does not have much in terms of vocabulary that is suitable for capturing what these older ideas express. This is really a source of awkwardness.

**Ueda:** From my experience, it is not absolutely necessary to come up with new words. Rather, if you are able to understand your own experiences with them, then you may just use the old terms. Then, you are able to express the iconographic power of the terms in a way that also adequately captures your own experience.

**Kawai:** Exactly. I often jokingly say things like: “This is the worst person imaginable,” or: “Why did it have to come to that?” Then if someone were to tell me “Well, you probably had a fight with that person in your previous life so it can’t be helped,” then that would probably make me feel better about it. You can avoid having to ruminate over whether the fault lies with that person, or what it is that you might have done wrong. Telling myself “we have had a fight in our former lives” takes off

that burden and opens up space for further manners of coping. I believe that because we cope with such issues in an extremely limited scope we torment ourselves with unnecessary worrying or aggressively accusing the other person of being guilty. Instead, if we agree that there is nothing wrong with either the other person or you, this then gives you peace of mind.

**Ueda:** If we force ourselves to try and find ways of explaining, we eventually will either go overboard in our pushing back against the other person, or overly blame ourselves.

**Kawai:** Exactly. Everyone believes too strongly in there being a reason for everything. Within the extremely limited scope of the world we experience, we are convinced we are capable of understanding everything based on cause and effect relationships, aren't we? This leads us to doing really stupid things. Instead, we tend to widely open up our world to alternative modes of thinking.

**Ueda:** On top of this, in such moments we have to make the effort, just a little, of making concrete changes.

**Kawai:** The problem is that we cannot.

**Ueda:** If it is just a little, then I believe it is possible.

**Kawai:** You may be right. In fact, in the US there is a kind of therapy known as past life regression therapy.

**Ueda:** I was not aware of that. "Past life" in the sense of "previous life" and "next life"?

**Kawai:** Exactly. To give an explanation, imagine that someone extremely anxious comes in to receive counselling. The therapist then hypnotizes that person and makes him or her recall things from the past. The person then remembers things he or she had entirely forgotten about. For example, they may have fallen down a staircase when they were five years old and hurt themselves really badly. The memory of the anxiety caused by the incident had remained with the person all that time. Then, the patient can repeat the experience once more, including having a good cry, for example. Once the experience is repeated, the anxiety is gone. This method is called past life regression therapy, because you return to your past. This seems similar to what you have told me about your own experience earlier.

Undergoing such past life regression therapy, some people have gone beyond their childhood, and recalled past lives. Now, they recount, for example, how once they were knights in the Middle Ages, where they had killed someone for some casual reason. Their stories are extremely vivid. Then, if they are subsequently told that they experienced their past life the patient is quite understanding. This is a bit

different to your story, but past life regression potentially heals neurosis that had so far been incurable. This method has become fashionable and is now practiced a lot in the US.

**Ueda:** And then you are reborn in this world as such a splendid knight.

**Kawai:** I am in full agreement with you in that this method is based in the world the patient actually lives in, and that it functions by widely opening up that world to another world of an entirely different scale. But, in looking for the most adequate word to describe such a larger world, I think speaking of a “previous life” fits the best. You know, I am doing dream therapy. Sometimes patients tell me of dreams involving such past lives. When I then say “if this was past life regression therapy, they would tell you that your past life is responsible for that,” some patients answer “I can understand that...” Even though, of course, I do not claim that myself. Rather, patients might tell me, for example, that they had vivid dreams about being a barber in the Edo period. Then I tell them they were a barber in the Edo period in their previous life, to which they reply they understand what I mean to say.

**Ueda:** And then they might say that they “shaved your beard back then” or something like that.

**Kawai:** Right, exactly. However, that then turns into a problem. And so my approach to the conversation depends on the patient. You have to be careful, because if you give the wrong impression then you are going to give the impression that these two worlds are actually the same.

Thinking a bit further here, these are the kind of things which come out when you are treating patients who are suffering from an inability to distinguish dreams from reality. And so, although it does function as a method of healing, if you conflate these different worlds then this is what we refer to as a delusion, a fantasy. Or, conversely, what we think of as a fantasy can actually have the function of healing. This is the kind of understanding that you can reach. So in this regard everybody actually has this in common.

**Ueda:** If we are using a past life as a way of expanding our perspective on our present life, then that is very meaningful. If, on the other hand, we take a past life as literally the same as the present life, then this is a huge problem. There is a danger here in the form that such thinking can take. In the case of religion, for example, I believe there are cases where this thinking has been used intentionally. The point is not to establish a connection between the previous world and the current world and try to literally work within that framework. Rather, it is a meaningful way of helping us to expand our own world horizon, according to which we understand ourselves.

## 9 The Image as Waypoint

**Kawai:** This is also different from just rationally thinking about your previous life. It brings with it extremely vivid images. This is an important point. The power of healing is different. This is why I am amused when I hear about “past life regression.” Although I absolutely do not believe in a literal previous life, I understand well why such a psychotherapeutic approach is successful.

**Ueda:** We run into trouble if we believe that a previous life has existed in the same way as this present life.

**Kawai:** That is the crucial point.

**Ueda:** Nevertheless, on the positive side, we develop a sense that the world we live in is more than just this one world, that there is a place beyond it. This kind of sense is opened up for us, which is really significant.

**Kawai:** That is, if this sense opens in a healthy manner.

**Ueda:** Referring back to the example of the *Ten Ox Herding Pictures* from earlier, when this sense is opening it does so alongside these kinds of images. However, once it has fully opened up, then the images disappear, replaced by a state resembling emptiness. Such images appearing indicate a... how should I put it? They may indicate a transitional zone between this world and the infinite opening surrounding it. Still, the elements for the images are things relating to this world after all.

**Kawai:** Exactly. The images emerge based on their connection to this world.

**Ueda:** Through this connection, though. Yet, they appear as we pass through this world [to the beyond]. Yet, if we were then bound to these images even after reaching the other side, that would actually be very strange. That is why it has been necessary to develop a method whereby the images disappear after they have fulfilled their purpose. It is important to not forget the importance of method. That is difficult indeed. Seated meditation (*zazen*) and such approaches are precisely about that.

**Kawai:** Right, in seated meditation, you are free of images.

**Ueda:** Exactly. Images will inevitably emerge, but they are like beautiful clouds. Amongst them will also be some dark ones, but either way you may say that they will float and fade away eventually.

**Kawai:** This is where it gets interesting, no? This often comes up as a problem for us psychotherapists. If you do not control the relationship between those images and this world, life in this world will become impossible. That is why we place quite a

lot of value on images. By contrast, Zen does not stop at that point, because it strives to burst through with a single effort.

**Ueda:** Images attend Zen as well, of course. However, the images are not the problem. Rather, the fact that images emerge in the first place is taken as an indication of something. Their emergence is a sign of our limited consciousness breaking through to the other side, rather than the images themselves being significant. Images are fine being “empty.”

**Kawai:** I agree, that is where the difference lies.

**Ueda:** I have a strong interest in sandbox therapy, I have attempted to write a little on that. With this method we can see this perspective very strongly. Although, I am slightly concerned about what patients actually undergoing such therapy would say about it. I argue that we are placed in this world, and that this world is located within emptiness. Sandbox therapy reflects this two-layered nature of the world. Because the original word of sandbox therapy is the German *Sandspiel*, I tried using the term “sandbox play.” A sandbox is placed within a room and you recreate your own world in this box using sand.

However, when you are making this world, there is the space of the room which surrounds the sandbox. You move through that space, and bring various things into your created world. The fact that this space is already double-layered is quite significant in my opinion. This double layered nature becomes a model representing the dimensionality of “world/emptiness” that characterizes the world we actually live in. Perhaps a manifestation, rather than a model.

Another thing I found really intriguing, relates to my visit with Dora M. Kalff, who you kindly introduced to me and who let me stay at her place in Zurich. I did not actually set up a sandbox in my room. However, when I grabbed some of the sand available it felt really good. The reality of holding some kind of mass. In my view, that is extremely meaningful. I mean the fact that you hold it in your own hands. At Ms. Kalff’s place I then learned that you put the world into the sandbox and subsequently smash it. I think that is really important.

Even if what is created is the expression of a person’s psyche, it is this creating and destroying which actually constitutes the therapeutic work. Certainly, it is necessary to treat what is created as a clue for gaining insight into the mind of the creator. However, the therapeutic effect for the patient in question results from the process of creating and destroying in such a two-dimensional space.

## 10 The Other World Peeks Out from the Sandbox

**Kawai:** Putting this in terms of our earlier conversation, when sandbox therapy goes well, what is created is actually something from the other world. If it goes poorly, then people just create representations of this world. In good cases, however, a person's creation turns out to represent the other world. That is why I often say, the sandbox creations are not an expression of your inner life. Such things are altogether too insignificant. Instead, good therapeutic work brings out a world that goes beyond such expression. It brings them out right there, in the sand box. In these cases what is produced cannot be simply captured in words.

I have had the following experience: When I went to the US to make various comments on sandbox therapy, one American asked to have a look at something, telling me it was really amazing. He then said that a person's entire life was contained in a sandbox. He pointed at a slide on one side, and said one person stands on top of that slide, at the highest point. That person is the therapist. And then he pointed out an order that he saw, indicating the point that this person was born, what happened after that, and so on. Here was where the person's father had died, here was where he had to struggle, this is how far he had come, and that is the direction he was going to take in the future—he even indicated where his goal was. So, this person's entire life was included within this sandbox. Amazing. Then he asked whether I wanted to comment, to which I replied: No comments (laughs). And added: Because you have already said everything. That means the patient knows everything, and you also are aware of all that. What else should I have commented? There is nothing interesting about this. That is how I answered.

**Ueda:** The only thing left to do is to “Destroy it!”

**Kawai:** I added the following: The thing I most dislike is that the therapist is located at the top of this whole setting. I asked him to descend. He then told me that he cannot see very well from down there. He tells me he can see the trees, but he cannot say at all what is there. This image of the sandbox with the therapist descending may be quite intriguing actually. Because, I told him, nothing comes out of you being able to give a linguistic explanation for everything.

On the contrary, a successful session consists in making such explanations impossible. Such cases are extremely impressive. They take place on a different level. However, that is difficult for Americans to understand. They all want to find some sort of explanation. If you put something on a presentation slide, Americans like to make various comments about it. “That is his father; as he says, he has some father issues,” and so on. There is no need to get so excited about the father appearing in the sandbox. You only see it in the sand, because he already said it. When I make my own comment in the end, I inevitably will say something entirely different, because I am coming from an entirely different perspective, aren't I? Then everybody realizes, “oh” this is what you mean.

**Ueda:** All their attempts at explanation take the perspective of this world.

**Kawai:** Right, and certainly things in the sandbox look like they are from this world, too, but there is also something more there.

**Ueda:** In other words, they are trying to find a way to express things from beyond. This is where the therapeutic effect results from.

**Kawai:** Looking at the other side is what leads to the therapeutic effect. However, that is what Americans have problems with. Especially when it goes poorly. Sometimes I really am at a loss for words.

**Ueda:** Explaining means stuffing all things from the other world into this world, doesn't it?

**Kawai:** Exactly. I do not see any therapeutic function in fundamentally staying within this world and trying to explain it as it is. The point is in looking for how the connection with the other world is manifested. That is also where the therapist becomes important. Depending on who is standing there, the work itself changes.

**Ueda:** The therapist does not even have to say anything. It is enough for them to simply stand there.

**Kawai:** Americans have difficulty understanding this. Still, fortunately, they understand if I explain my approach by showing some really outstanding creations. When they see such impressive examples they in turn feel motivated to give it a try. In the beginning, I use rather easily comprehensible examples because they are better for the sake of explanation. But as we proceed deeper there are some really amazing things to show.

**Ueda:** By "deeper" here you mean, with respect to how the creations express the other world through this world.

**Kawai:** Generally, the frame of the sandbox keeps things contained. Otherwise, things potentially get incredibly dangerous. Patients may go to the other side and stay there.

## 11 Restoring our Cycle with this World

**Ueda:** There is a frame, but also, the place this frame is located in must in turn be situated in a place with no frame. It is within this duality of "world/emptiness." After witnessing sandbox therapy at Ms. Kalf's place, I have come to think that everything is similar to sandbox play. In other words, even such activities of putting

a pencil stand here on the table and a framed photograph over there. The further you extend that, the more and more our living in this world will appear as a gigantic sandbox. If you think about it in this way it is really interesting.

In the explanation you have just given, a single example is an indication of everything else. Explaining things means creating the world as we envision it, doesn't it? I have another example of a recent experience. I took the limited express of the Chūō Line to Shiojiri, which has a new carriage. Now, to my surprise, one of the toilets was very strange. Even in a *Shinkansen*, you normally open the toilet door manually. However, that was not the case in that carriage. Instead, you had to push a button. It took me quite a while to figure out that unless I pushed that button the door would not open. Once inside you also couldn't shut the door manually. Another sign indicated that I had to push a second button. I got quite exasperated.

What is the meaning in taking things that far? You can easily open the door with your hands. But also it is by using your hands to open it that your body physically connects with the world. Just because things are technically possible, or have become technically possible, does not mean that they should be done. The tap is a similar example. There is no compelling reason for having water coming out of the tap by us just extending our hands under it. There may be situations where this is a necessary feature, but such cases are rather rare. It is because we keep introducing such technology in this way that our very manner of being in the world is impacted. If we go on building everything this way we will end up having real problems when something like an earthquake were to occur. If something breaks somewhere, you could end up trapped inside the toilet.

**Kawai:** This kind of problem actually occurred with this recent earthquake. When I thought I would take the car out after the first shaking had stopped, the door of the garage where the car was parked did not open due to the power outage. The power outage of the whole house made it impossible to take the car out of the garage. That would not have happened with manual operation.

**Ueda:** I believe there is a need to critically think about such issues on a large scale. Everything is moving in that direction these days.

**Kawai:** Especially so in Japan. Japan developed later than the other industrialized countries, so it quickly goes mad for new scientific technologies.

**Ueda:** That use of technology again connects to a certain kind of aesthetic sense beyond the mere advantage of convenience. Design plays an important role. On the one hand, both Japan's and Europe's positive qualities relate to each other here. On the other hand, this is where their synergy turns rather negative. Moreover, this is now spreading in an unrestrained fashion. Thinking about this in respect to psychotherapy, this is a horrible situation. Also concerning the tap—I do not expect people to fetch water by themselves with a bucket. But at least by turning the faucet we have the experience of an actual connection with water while using it, don't we?



**Kawai:** If I were to put it unkindly, these days, everyone goes for more and more convenience and then comes to see us therapists to touch sand and heal. (Laughs) In that case, they should just touch sand in the first place.

**Ueda:** I fully agree. People should properly use their own bodies to interact with the world in the first place. Nature is already there, working, before we become ill. Of course, human beings are not simply something natural. In a sense, everything about us is artificial. Yet, we are capable of living because everything then becomes natural once more within this larger cycle. Through this large cycle the unnatural returns to nature. In the area of culture understood in a broad sense, the cycle through which the unnatural returns to nature has become deranged, like the proliferation and hypertrophy of some kind of cancer cell. Instead, the cycle now piles up unnatural things. This is an issue we have to tackle more seriously. However, even if there are people who might voice such concerns, they aren't going to find a warm reception within society at large.

**Kawai:** Indeed. Another problem is the economy. The production of ever new items brings in money, doesn't it?

**Ueda:** We all have had various experiences with this earthquake. As I recall, I read in the *Asahi Shimbun* that many victims reported a "loss of desire for material things." That really makes sense to me. Isn't there this phenomenon of losing desire for material things after we have undergone certain adversities? Moreover, the "materialistic desires" we are speaking of here is are not simply just a desire for things, but a manufactured, socialized desire, right? Even though such things may appear as if they truly have some power, when the truth of being human appears to us, then it is rendered insignificant in an instant. It would be fantastic if this recent occasion could spark such a change in society at large. If you will allow me to digress a bit here, ... Japan is often called a "Lifestyle Great Power," or an "Economic Great Power." I find this notion of a "great power" really strange though. I don't like the sound of it. Any country that tries to turn itself into a "great country" can quite quickly break down depending on the situation. It seems preferable to me that we become a small nation. To have a good life you only need so much.

**Kawai:** Living in itself is enough.

**Ueda:** Exactly, what counts is to live. And then there is a *plus alpha* nuance. However, not in the Buddhist sense of the "one path" (*Ekayāna*), like the fifth power. For instance, if you have a cup for drinking tea, it is more than enough if it is simply of good quality as a tool. However, lately, in cafés, we have fancy cups and spoons decorated with gold in this strange way. Such things appear odd to me. But, as we say, one instance tells us a lot about the overall situation. Such things work to entirely block up the gap between things that we spoke of before. There's no way this can lead to a good outcome.

**Kawai:** When put in that way, you could say that everywhere we are creating mechanisms for increasing the number of people suffering from neurosis.

**Ueda:** The problem lies in this blocking up of space. You trap yourself entirely in a fabricated world, and then you continue to build upon it internally.

**Kawai:** The whole of Japan somehow fundamentally needs to change.

**Ueda:** With this earthquake, recovery is important, of course. Moreover, people will need to properly get back on track with their lives. However, I believe on an emotional level, it also has instilled in people the feeling of a need for deeper change.

**Kawai:** It would be really amazing if it could help lead to greater awareness.

# Chapter 8

## The Depth of the Mind



Shizuteru Ueda

### 1 The Depth of the Mind

Last year [1995] on the 1st of July, the Science Council of Japan held a public academic culture forum in Kyōto, on the problem of “The Brain and the Mind.” Following the lecture “From Neuroscience to the Mind,” given by the director of the Science Council, Itō Masao 伊藤正男, I gave a lecture entitled “The Depth of the Mind.” One may say that the manner in which these two disharmonious terms, “neuroscience” and “depth of mind,” stood alongside each other at such an event, is itself testimony of the problematic situation that arises from the uncertainty of contemporary human existence. When they are brought together into cooperation, these terms present the possibility of fulfilling human existence. When they are separated, they have the potential to fracture human existence, and expose human beings to the nihilism that lurks within these gaps. We vacillate with uncertainty at the entanglement of these two possibilities. What is more, one must admit that in actuality, the latter is our actual situation, while the former has become simply an ideal.

Concerning “the Actuality and Future of neuroscience,” director Itō’s lecture pointed out in concrete detail the astonishing construction of the brain’s physiology, which is becoming ever more increasingly understood. One could hardly help but be overwhelmed by the power of this science of the brain, which has progressed to such an amazing degree. At the same time, if we were to listen to the same talk from the perspective of what we usually associate with the word “mind,” then there was something here which could not help but make us feel uneasy. While the title of the lecture was “From Neuroscience to the Mind,” the foundational problem of what we

---

Translated by Maria Römer, Ralf Müller, and Adam Loughnane.

---

S. Ueda (✉)  
Kyōto University, Kyōto, Japan

even understand by the word “mind” remained hidden as a presupposition. Judging from the contents of the lecture, the title does not actually indicate, as one might assume, an intention to question whether or not it is even possible to take up the problem of “the mind” by beginning with the standpoint of scientifically explaining the brain. Nor does it actually propose to ask after just how we can reach a suitable position with respect to the phenomena of “the mind” from the perspective of science, or to furthermore ask what significance such a scientific exploration of the brain would hold. Rather, its concerns were quite clearly to express an approach towards “the mind” from the perspective of neuroscience, which would make “the mind” an object of neuroscientific clarification. “Surely no one can doubt that our minds are the product of the operations of the brains in our heads.” (From the summary of Itō’s lecture; the following quotes are also taken from this summary.) As a result, for the science of the brain, the clarification of the question of “how the mind really evolves from the brain” is the task at hand. Therefore, the problem for neuroscience is that of (Itō). As a consequence, it seeks to “explore in microscopic detail how the functions in the respective parts of the brain are distributed.” Moreover, it tries to find out in which of these brain areas “the mind” is located (probably in “the especially developed area, after the human species emerged at the end of evolution”). Therefore, because “the inside of the brain contains numerous networks of interconnected nerve cells,” the clarification of its construction (which would be a major scientific undertaking) is a major research concern of neuroscience.

Itō’s lecture states that neuroscience is currently running up against a significant “secret.” However, if it “gives up” here, “it will end up returning to the dualism adopted since Descartes, namely that the brain and the mind are separate entities.” This is supposedly why neuroscience has to advance its research with utmost persistence. He further said: “Due to the recent progress of neuroscientific research, many activities of the mind, which at first glance had been considered mysteries so far, have come to be explained as activities of the brain. With the next century right before us, finally the opportunity has ripened to challenge head-on the difficult problem of in what way the subjective will and self-consciousness of the human being arises from the brain.” Itō also expressed the prospect that based on the progress of this research, it will be possible to answer questions such as: “Can one possibly reproduce the mind’s activities from the brain’s hyper integrated circuit? Will it be possible to copy this artificially such that robots we construct with this knowledge may come to really possess minds?”

Itō’s lecture clearly and convincingly expresses the standpoint of neuroscience, its results up until now and its future plans. As such, his lecture was an impressive demonstration of the significance and power of science. Still, the fundamental problem is “the brain and the mind.” From the outset, Itō’s lecture problematized “the mind” only within the horizon of neuroscience. Furthermore, this was not a kind of methodological restriction based upon an awareness of the limitations of scientific understanding. Rather, this was a restriction based upon the assumption that considers the “mind” as neuroscientific to begin with. The first line of the lecture’s summary expresses this almost unequivocally with the words: “Surely no one can doubt that our minds are the product of the operations of the brains inside our heads.”

However, when the “brain and mind” become a problem in the first place, this is by no means a result of the fact that neuroscience has still not sufficiently clarified its research object of “the mind” (a problem for science). Rather, the basic problem of “the brain” and “the mind” is that there is a qualitative gap between both (and it is important, more than anything, to first become aware of the existence of this gap, and that this can only be understood from the side of the “mind”). The problem then consists in how this qualitative gap can be bridged, how can there be, an integration of both “the brain and the mind.” For the human being can only become human based on this integration. The more neuroscientific research will progress, the bigger the problem of how to integrate “the brain” and “the mind” will become, as both are separated by the heterogeneity held between each other. At present, where neuroscience itself has arrived at the insight that it is possible to ask the question of how the will and self-consciousness “emerge from the brain,” one must say that this problem of integration has turned into a critical problem for human existence.

I do not mean to say that “the mind” cannot be an object of neuroscientific research in various ways. I mean that this “mind,” while it can indeed be an object of scientific research within certain methodologically limited domains, it is called the “mind” for a reason. It exists in a different way to the manner in which the brain exists. We can get some idea of the extent of the difference between the brain as an object of scientific research, and what we feel and understand by the word “mind,” by considering how Itō uses the word “secret” in his own lecture to describe this gap. Neuroscience aims to locate “the mind” in a specific area of the brain, or restrict it to specific functions. However, it does not think to halt before the “secret” of the gap between the mind and the brain, but rather wishes to uncover it. This is the urgent task of neuroscience, one which it believes to be possible to achieve. The understanding here is that if we were to halt before this “secret,” then, as Itō puts it, the result would be to “return to Cartesian dualism.” If this is correct, then we may say that Itō’s position as presented in this lecture was not only that of neuroscience, but also that of scientific monism. But what if, by contrast, we took as our starting point that which we feel and understand by way of the word “mind,” in order to think about its relation to its “secretive” nature? One may be able to say the following. It is not about solving “the secret,” but on the contrary, about cherishing and preserving “the secret” as a “secret.” In other words, one rather may say that “the mind” is to be found exactly in the knowledge of such a secret existing. What humans have become aware of with the word “mind” has deeply determined and shaped the humanity of human beings, without this awareness being the least bit dependent upon knowledge of the brain, let alone on neuroscience. Considered from this perspective, we must say that scientific monism conversely engenders the risk of rendering the human being nihilistic.

The term “mind” is one of the most important words through which the human being speaks of itself and, by speaking of itself, develops an awareness of itself. “The mind” is not a “part” of the human being, but a quality of human existence as such, of the whole of human existence as such. Therefore, it is all the more impossible to define it or consider it an object of research. “The mind” itself narrates “the mind.” And by listening to the words of “the mind,” we are awakened and respond

as “minds.” This is how we truly become human. I would like to reference two poems as examples of such words of “the mind.” “If the mind lives quietly as is natural for it, then the ill body will live comfortably, too.” (Yasuda Ayao 安田章生) “The bottom of my mind is deep and I believe that even waves of bliss and pain cannot reach it.” (Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎).

# Chapter 9

## The Secret of the Brain and the Mind: Responding to My Colleague Ueda Shizuteru



Masao Itō

### 1 The Secret of the Brain and the Mind

With great interest, I have had the honor to read what my fellow member Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照 discusses under the title “The Depth of the Heart” in *Trends in the Sciences* (Vol. 1 No. 2 May 1996). The article is a summary and response to Professor Ueda’s and my own lectures, presented at the public symposium of the Science Council of Japan, which convened last year on July 1st in Kyōto, as well as a dialogue which we had with Kawai Hayao 河合隼雄. It is difficult to advance such profound discussions on a podium of a symposium, in front of an audience of more than 1000 people in a form intelligible to these listeners. When I claimed, for example, that “the mind is located in the brain, and that it is possible to approach it through neuroscience,” Professor Ueda responded that “quite the opposite, the brain is located in the mind.” However, it was difficult to have a detailed discussion about it on the spot and the exchange ended without any further chance to pursue the argument further. This is why I was truly delighted about having obtained the opportunity to hear the sequel of that debate in this opinion section. Just how profound this problem is was brought to the fore in the debate that occurred last year between the humanities and social sciences on the one hand, and the natural sciences on the other, when the “Special Committee on the Brain and the Mind” finalized its report (printed in *Trends in the Sciences*, Vol. 1 No. 2). Professor Ueda’s editorial points out very well the essential point of difference between the reasoning of both parties, and I would like to take this opportunity to express my thoughts in reply.

---

Translated by Maria Römer, Ralf Müller, and Adam Loughnane.

---

M. Itō (✉)  
Tōkyō University, Tōkyō, Japan

Neuroscience by no means imagines that the mind is a part of the brain, like some kind of ping pong ball shaped thing. Rather, neuroscience conceives of the mind as an activity of a part of the brain. In other words, it does not consider it an object, but an activity. We may say that this understanding is a kind of functionalism. Currently, knowledge on the molecular matter and cells of the brain is increasing explosively. However, neuroscience does not consider all of these materials as of the same rank. Rather, it imagines a collection of neural networks created from the clustering of numerous cells, which are again interconnected among each other to form a larger system. Due to the incredibly large number of cells, and because they form a complex system that is still insufficiently understood by natural sciences, we as of yet do not have a concrete image of how they work. Nevertheless, what I argued in the above-named symposium was that we may anticipate that future research will solve the mystery that is the brain. Although we do not as yet know the way of approach, and this is why in a sense the brain remains a kind of “secret,” I do not think this is a permanent state of affairs.

One area of research that neuroscience has pursued so far, has been to determine which parts of the brain deal with the components of “the mind” as classified by psychology. Neuroscientists have sought to uncover which parts of the brain are responsible for the respective operations of the mind, as divided up into the five elements of cognition, movement, emotion, memory, and consciousness. As a result, neuroscience has determined that cognition is carried out by the back of the cerebral hemispheres, movement by the front, emotion by the limbic system, and memory training by one part of the cerebral cortex as well as in the cerebellum and basal ganglia. What remains obscure, however, is consciousness. As of yet, we have been unsuccessful in determining consciousness as resulting from the functioning of some specific part of the brain. Reasons for this could be deficient technology and insufficient research. It is possible that in the future we may discover that part of the brain which is responsible for consciousness. That we cannot resolve this issue with current technology and methods is not proof that the issue itself is unresolvable. Nevertheless, it is strange that consciousness is the only element to remain unclear, while the other four elements have been clearly determined. This is another reason why I have spoken of the “secret” that is consciousness. However, rather than concluding from this that consciousness has no relationship with the brain, my point is only that their relationship remains unclear, because there is as of yet no appropriate technology or method. If we do manage to uncover the nature of their relationship in the future, then this would constitute a major discovery in my opinion.

It seems that the difficulty of discovering which part of the brain is responsible for consciousness is not at all unconnected to the importance of consciousness for the mind. In Japanese, “mind” [translator’s note: *kokoro* 心, sometimes translated as “spirit” or “heart”] is understood as being deeply connected with the emotions, such as happiness or sadness. However, it seems that in English “mind” is taken as something colder and more rational. If one thoroughly investigates the mind’s elements, one will finally arrive at consciousness. Nishida Kitarō’s 西田幾多郎 poem, which Ueda quoted, can be understood as a piece which describes how consciousness, at its deepest level, quietly observes the activities of cognition and emotion. While



neuroscience has managed to associate the individual elements of the mind to the brain, it has yet to achieve this with respect to consciousness. Moreover, if we take it to be the case that it is just this element of consciousness that is the most important for the mind, then we have to conclude that a closure of the gap between brain and mind remains essentially unachieved thus far. The difficulty of research on consciousness also depends upon the fact that it is impossible to assess it objectively. Whether consciousness exists or not, we are only able to know via communication. We cannot measure it like temperature. This is why the most essential question of natural science arises here, namely, why inquire into something that we can neither locate nor measure? Therefore, it is not that neuroscience seeks to close the gap between the brain and the mind by way of force. Rather, it is putting its utmost effort into conceiving of methods of closing the gap, while presenting one initiative after another.

One approach towards closing this gap which resembles methods used in biology is to pursue the development and evolution of specific individuals. Normally, consciousness is thought to have three levels. Its lowest level is the state of being awake and not sleeping. Even fish should have consciousness on this level. On the next level, one is “conscious” of what is going on in the outside world after having received sensory signals. We can assume that this level exists for cats and dogs as well. The last level is that of “self-consciousness,” where one is constantly aware of what one is doing and actively has an effect on the outside world. This level is especially developed in humans, but is also recognized to be found in other primates to a certain degree. Chimpanzees possess the intelligence of a human of 3 to 4 years old, and can be assumed to have a similar degree of self-consciousness. One means of finding out about the relationship between the brain and the mind will probably be to follow the process through which self-consciousness develops parallel to the evolution of the brain. Alternatively, one could also pursue the process through which the infant develops its mental functions.

And so, the gap between the mind and the brain still remains large. There are two kinds of thinking about this problem: either that it will be forever impossible to close this gap, or that it will eventually be possible. At the present moment, with neuroscience having roughly figured out the mechanisms of the four elements of the mind, there is a vigorous interest in the problem of consciousness, which could be called the last sanctuary. Scientists are attracted to the unknown and drawn to mysteries. No one thinks that they can easily close the gap between the brain and the mind. However, if someone should possibly do so, then I cannot help but expecting that this would probably be the greatest discovery in the history of science.

It seems that the growing expectations held for the natural sciences are received rather as a shock by the humanities and social sciences. In Ueda’s editorial, he appears to express the sentiment that, given humans can live splendidly even without knowing anything about the brain, you scientists should stop sticking your nose where it doesn’t belong. He even expresses the apprehension that, by exposing this most important of secrets, humanity will collapse into anxiety and disorder or will turn nihilistic. As the “Special Committee on the Brain and the Mind” has explained exhaustively, it is hoped that neuroscience will be able to positively contribute

towards society by eradicating illnesses of the brain's nervous system, and by creating computers modelled on the human brain. Furthermore, it is hoped that neuroscience will shed more light on just what it is that makes humans human. How could this insight actually turn into something which drives humanity into anxiety, disorder and nihilism? Rather, is it too optimistic to think that it will be possible to create an even better society on the basis of this understanding? Speaking as a representative of neuroscience, I cannot see any benefit to be had in putting the brakes on our discipline. Rather, I look forward to the humanities and social sciences providing us with deep thinking on how the new knowledge produced by neuroscience can be made useful for human society.

# Part IV

## Interview

### Introduction

“To Shoulder the Tradition of the Kyoto School” is a look back over Ueda’s thought after the publication of his edited works. This part of the volume centers on the biographical framework within which he deploys his thought. Ueda is interviewed by the professor of German studies and translator, Takahashi Yoshito 高橋 義人 (1945–) who invites the reader to explore alongside Ueda the Kyoto School thinker’s own placement within the history of that movement. Additionally, one finds reflections on the importance of education, and further elaboration of Ueda’s views regarding the relation of religion, philosophy, and society.

# Chapter 10

## Shouldering the Tradition of the Kyōto School



Shizuteru Ueda and Yoshito Takahashi

Editors: Regarding Kyoto University, it is known for two Kyoto Schools; one being the Kyoto School of Physics founded by Yukawa Hideki 湯川秀樹 (1907–1981) and Tomonaga Shinchirō 朝永振一郎 (1906–1979), and the other being the Kyoto School of Philosophy formed by Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945), Tanabe Hajime 田辺元 (1885–1962) and Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990). Today we listen to Professor Ueda Shizuteru 上田 閑照 who is himself a representative and successor of the latter who will speak about the School of Philosophy.

Takahashi Yoshito 高橋 義人, born in Tochigi Prefecture in 1945. PhD in Literary Studies (Faculty of letters), Prof. at Kyoto University, Graduate School for Human and Environmental Studies, Specialist of Goethe.

### 1 Nishitani Keiji and Nishida Kitarō

**Takahashi:** Even after reaching a mature age you are as busy as always. And you have also completed a collection of your works (USS).<sup>1</sup> Congratulations!

**Ueda:** Thank you very much.

---

Ueda Shizuteru interviewed by Takahashi Yoshito.  
Translated by Maria Römer, Ralf Müller and Adam Loughnane.

---

<sup>1</sup>1 USS = *Collected Works of Ueda Shizuteru*. 11 Volumes. Published by Iwanami Shoten. 2001–2003.

---

S. Ueda (✉) · Y. Takahashi  
Kyōto University, Kyōto, Japan

**Takahashi:** Today I would like to speak with you a little about Religious Studies, which is your speciality. Before that, though, as you are one of only a small number of people who remember what Kyōto University was like back in the good old days, I would like to start our discussion by asking you about that time. You're a graduate of the First High School. Why did you decide to attend Kyōto University after that?

**Ueda:** That reason is extremely clear. I entered the First High School in 1933. In the autumn of that year there was a symposium where I was able to attend a lecture by Nishitani Keiji. Well, at the time there was a sign telling us who it was, but actually I'd never even heard Nishitani Keiji's name before, and of course I had no idea who he was. But I was somehow enticed to go there, and I ended up waiting at the venue for a little while. So there I was, when suddenly in came Professor Nishitani. He was wearing a kimono and *hakama* [traditional trousers] too. You see, that was something unthinkable at the time, something impossible. It was during the war and times were extremely strict. People were wearing clothing like *monpe* [work pants gathered at the ankle] and air-raid hoods. You almost never saw anyone walking around town in a kimono. And yet there was Professor Nishitani, striding into the hall in a kimono. There was a certain elegance or something about him that was indescribable. On the one hand, it was as though he entirely transcended the general atmosphere of the time. On the other hand, it was not as though he appeared particularly strange. Rather, he seemed extremely natural. Actually, as I found out later, Professor Nishitani usually wore a kimono at the time. So, just like that, he entered, like a visitor from a wholly different time or place. When I saw him, a certain feeling arose in me. I've completely forgotten what kind of lecture Professor Nishitani gave that day, but my impression of him from that time has remained extremely strong. When I finally decided to go to university, I had no hesitation at all about what to do. I would go to Kyōto University in order to study philosophy under Professor Nishitani. That was my motivation for going to Kyōto University. As it happens, while I was under the belief that Professor Nishitani was a philosophy professor, when I came to Kyōto University I found out that he was actually a Religious Studies professor. So, I decided on the spot to do Religious Studies instead. So, in the end what enticed me into attending Kyōto University was the sight of Professor Nishitani walking into that classroom wearing a kimono. In retrospect, I consider it a strange turn of fate. It was only afterwards that I also found out what a wonderful teacher he was. And as my own way of thinking gradually took shape, I was often occasioned to think about just what a good decision I'd made. The starting point of your studies is not something you can decide to plan out yourself. It's not as though you are in the position where you are able to say: "I want to do this," or "I want to do that." So, I think that I'm extremely fortunate that things worked out in the way that they did.

**Takahashi:** I have also visited Professor Nishitani at his home on one occasion. His house was right across from the university, so he could often be found walking around the College of Liberal Arts. When I went to visit him, he was also wearing a

kimono. When he walked around the college in his kimono he used to look about in a very nostalgic manner.

**Ueda:** I believe he did. Professor Nishitani started teaching at Morioka Third High School shortly after his graduation. I think he taught German and something else. Even though things have completely changed by now, the old buildings of Morioka Third High School remained there for quite a long time.

**Takahashi:** That's right, they remained there for a long time. It is exactly thirty years since I came to Kyōto University myself, but in the early days after arriving a lot of the really old buildings were still intact. Because my impression from that time is strong, if I look at the campus for the Faculty of Integrated Human Studies now, it somehow feels out of place. Listening to your account now, I get the impression that Professor Nishitani was someone who, up until [the day] he passed away, seemed as though he transcended worldly affairs.

**Ueda:** Yes, that's exactly right. But at the same time, he also had a profound interest in problems of history, in understanding just what kind of epoch that the world at that time was in. He also wrote numerous articles and essays on this topic. He had a strong interest in how the world was changing at that time. Professor Nishida Kitarō was like that as well — on the one hand he appeared to transcend the everyday world, but on the other hand he actually had a very strong interest in its workings. Among the events [relating to Nishida] that immensely impressed me was an episode from the time of the Russo-Japanese War. I believe it was on January 5th, 1875 when Lushun fell and the whole of Japan was in an uproar. Even in Kanazawa you had lantern processions taking place. At the time, Professor Nishida was a lecturer there at the Fourth High School.<sup>2</sup> His diary entry of that very day is quite impressive. Those days he was often doing Zazen,<sup>3</sup> including morning, afternoon and evening meditations. I'm not able to perfectly reproduce on the spot what he said word for word, but basically he wrote something like: "Today's lantern procession to celebrate the fall of Lushun is truly frivolous." By that he means "thoughtless." He clearly writes: "How shameful to be so ecstatic without thinking about the numerous sacrifices and the long journey still ahead." The following entry from the next day states there was a procession at the Fourth High School as well and he wrote that he would not participate in that. And in fact, because he was doing Zazen all day, it really might seem as though he was quite disconnected from what was going on. But in fact, his perspective on the course of history, on its process, was actually all the more profound. When he says that there is "a long journey still ahead," what he means is that it is not as though history has come to an end just

---

<sup>2</sup> Commonly referred to as the "Fourth Higher." Incidentally, "First Higher" would later become the Tokyo University Liberal Arts School, "and Second higher" became Tōhoku University Faculty of Liberal Arts. While "Third Higher" was initially located in Osaka, it was later moved to Kyōto, becoming Kyoto University's Faculty of Liberal Arts after the war.

<sup>3</sup> To "sit" (打座) means to practice zazen (seated Zen meditation).

because Japan won the Russo-Japanese War. And indeed, various incidents happened one after another for a long time after [the war], which ultimately led to Japan's defeat in the beginning of the Shōwa era. Of course, history did not end with the defeat either. The scale of historical change is so large. And so, to be so ecstatic about temporarily having occupied Lushun...

**Takahashi:** Do you think Professor Nishida took this attitude because of his engagement in Religious Studies, because he was doing Zazen, or because he was knowledgeable about Germany?

**Ueda:** Professor Nishida never travelled to any foreign countries at all. Which makes him all the more impressive. To an extent that was unusual for Japanese people at the time, he was very well read. From Greek to Medieval and contemporary philosophy —contemporary at the time was Bergson and Husserl— he studied all the foundational texts while he was at Fourth High School. This is why he had such a firm grasp of the foundation of European intellectual history. On top of that, Professor Nishida was born in 1870, so he had actually directly experienced that period towards the end of the century where Japan was coming into sustained contact with Europe, and there was an influx of all kinds of new things from that continent. He witnessed the establishment of a new Japan. This is why he had this extremely strong interest in, or appreciation for, understanding the world that we live in. So, while on the one hand he practiced Zazen, which is seemingly about cutting yourself off from the world entirely, and on the other hand he had this deep curiosity for history, those were actually not separate things. There is something here which I think is fundamental, or should I say, the most important thing, for human existence. If you think about it, doing Zazen is supposedly about detaching yourself from the world. Meanwhile, people who study history are prone towards not thinking much about that greater meaning to history which only comes into view when a longer time scale or broader perspective is adopted. Either they make a mountain of inconsequential local events, or in many cases they make judgements based on the ideologies that they use to frame these events within. As for Professor Nishitani, he had experienced Europe first hand, by way of studying philosophy in Germany. Moreover, a book he published in the early stage of his career is an exploration of Aristotle. Thus, he had studied Aristotle and Plotinus<sup>4</sup> from early on. Moreover, from the medieval period, he studied Eckhart<sup>5</sup> and from modern times,

---

<sup>4</sup>Responsible for establishing a philosophical tradition in the Roman Empire of the third century, which would later become referred to as Neo-Platonism. This tradition would have a profound effect upon the spiritual history of Europe. His chief work, *The Enneads*, was compiled after his death by his student.

<sup>5</sup>1260–1328. Representative thinker of German Mysticism. Eckhart was a member of the Dominican Order of Preachers. He lived in a number of European cities, including Paris, Strasbourg, and Cologne. While taking Thomistic scholasticism as its foundation, Eckhart's thought was strongly colored by Neo-Platonic ideas. After his death he was condemned for heresy by ecclesiastical authorities.

Schelling. Professor Nishitani was twenty seven years old, when he published his translation of Schelling's *Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom* with Iwanami's paperback series.

**Takahashi:** Was he that young? That is still a great book.

**Ueda:** Yes, he was. Thus, he clearly looked into things such as the cornerstones of European thought through texts and actually experienced Europe at the same time.

**Takahashi:** Schelling's German is pretty difficult.

**Ueda:** Indeed. It is difficult, but I think that the scholarly capabilities of high schools at the time are unimaginable from present times. When I went to high school during the war, the school hours were reduced. But for those up to one year above me, for example, well, you have your first and second foreign language, right? They spent thirteen hours per week on the first foreign language. Then they even spent eight hours on the second language. Three years of high school study would put your language skills in excellent shape. And we should keep in mind that we aren't just talking about a mere abstract "language skill." Professor Nishitani, for example, was reading *Zarathustra* in German at the time he was in High School. He had already reached that point in High School at which he was able to read intellectual texts.

## 2 Reflections on Post-war Japan

**Ueda:** After the war, Japanese people were said to be incapable of speaking foreign languages, or [it was said] that what is really important is that capacity to speak in a foreign language. This emphasis on speaking is really strange in my opinion. What I mean is that just because Japanese people can speak freely in their native tongue does not automatically imply that they can think. By contrast, if reading a text, particularly in a foreign language—for example, reading Aristotle or Plato or Thomas Mann, and thereby coming in contact with European thought—fosters an unthinkably deep understanding. Additionally, in European thought there is logic that dictates how you must think. I believe that it is very important to properly know the basis of European thought in order to understand Europe. Simply eating foreign foods or wearing expensive foreign clothes won't help you to understand what you ought to do when the need arises. We can see this kind of thing in the background of current international political issues. As I gradually get older, I've come to think that even if you cannot speak a foreign language, it is actually possible to understand the culture of that language to a deep degree through textual study alone. People often say that it is important to understand foreign cultures, but you don't really come to understand them by just talking a little to foreigners, or by travelling abroad a little bit, sightseeing, and buying some souvenirs, right? I feel that Japanese



culture today has got this terribly back to front, making the entire structure just unbearably mediocre to a distressing degree.

**Takahashi:** There certainly do seem to be many people who consider themselves foreign experts just by virtue of speaking a foreign language fluently, or by having listened to many foreign concerts, or by knowing a lot about foreign cuisine. I imagine that there will be quite a few individuals who would find themselves feeling embarrassed when someone as skilled in foreign languages as yourself points out how this is problematic.

It is certainly better to be able to speak foreign languages. However, what is important is whether there is content to that speech, isn't it? On this point, if you read the works of Professor Nishida Kitarō you are reminded that this was a man who engaged with the latest in contemporary German philosophy, while expounding his own thinking in a dialogue with Europe. By contrast, in present-day Japan, many works of philosophy or literary research do not go beyond the level of introducing foreign theories. There are few people who seriously attempt to challenge Western theories.

**Ueda:** I entirely agree.

**Takahashi:** Scholars today write primarily for a domestic Japanese audience, rather than seeking to make themselves understood internationally.

**Ueda:** Unlike in the Meiji era, many new universities have been built in Japan and those universities all have philosophy professors. This has led to the establishment of a philosophical world made up exclusively of Japanese people, who in turn only write articles in Japanese. But at the same time, there is a neglect of Japanese and Eastern spiritual traditions. The result is that it has become most unusual to question the actual meaning of philosophical thought. It's now possible to write papers for a Japanese audience only, to find employment in Japan only, and to get by in that way. Real scholarship requires perseverance. However, as it's quite challenging to keep on studying your whole life, many scholars abandon their scholarly studies mid way. Nevertheless, even if they do not keep on with their research their livelihood is secure.

**Takahashi:** At the moment, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology says that it wants to promote the internationalization of scholarship in Japan. However, in my view university scholars of the Meiji era were actually far more internationalized. There were quite a few individuals who were capable of holding their own even when travelling abroad. Nowadays, many scholars experience difficulties because they struggle with language learning, but in the past foreign language proficiency was simply taken for granted as a basis of your studies.

**Ueda:** You are so right. It feels as though the foundation is lacking somewhere.

**Takahashi:** Honestly, the fundamental attitude that sustains scholarship has become entirely too shallow.

**Ueda:** I agree. And what is more, this begins with elementary school education. There is, of course, something such as a reaction against the way things were done in the pre-war period. However, the fact that Japan started the war and [the question of] its wartime responsibilities are issues that were never actually dealt with in Japan. In the pre-war period people said things such as “One Hundred Million, Dying Honorably in Battle,” and in the post-war period it was tidied away by simply saying that militarism and the army were bad. However, in reality there were particular individuals who were responsible for making decisions at each stage, whose thinking actually led to how things unfolded. Nevertheless, there has been no attempt to pursue the matter properly. By contrast, I think countries such as Germany have been much more decisive on this front. This irresponsibility continues into the post-war period. When the war ended, something like an optimism took over that things would improve from now on. There was this way of thinking that it was good enough to simply be human, that you ought not to excessively train, educate, coerce, or give orders, that if you leave people be, they would eventually turn out well. This way of thinking dominated the post-war atmosphere. It was just as strange as the way of thinking that dominated the pre-war period. Naturally, this thinking manifested various negative effects on individuals. Human beings are the kind of thing where you really have no idea how they will turn out if you just leave them alone. From the beginning, no one gave that any consideration. This is why things have gradually turned out in the way that they have, and now we are really in a mess. There is no easy way of fixing this situation.

**Takahashi:** I am younger than you, nevertheless, since Japanese people have turned into such shallow human beings, I cannot help worrying about what is going to happen in the future.

**Ueda:** It wasn't like this in the past, though. In the post-war era, up until the period of great economic growth, everyone worked under the belief that they had to contribute to Japan's revival somehow or other. But these people were all educated before the war. They grew up and received a solid education in the pre-war period. However, after the war was over, you have people growing up who were educated according to the belief that humans can develop into amazing beings if you simply leave them alone. Once you have a generation of such people, two generations... Well...

**Takahashi:** People simply become worse and worse.

**Ueda:** I mean, something happens every day, right? Just yesterday there was that incident where children set fire to [their house] because they got angry after their parents told them to go to school. Incidents like this happen so often now it's simply accepted. But it is the parents telling their children to go to school who are in the

right. Incidents like this are representative of how simplistic some people are now in their thinking.

**Takahashi:** And so called “pressure-free” education or integrated study that people speak of these days is an example of this attitude of this “leaving people alone” approach to education?

**Ueda:** It really is very strange. If you were to leave the students alone but give them something to do by themselves then that at least would have some meaning. What makes them go strange is that they have nothing to do at all. The root of education after all is that humanity is what it is now by having experienced and learned all sorts of things over the course of thousands of years, and having accrued all sorts of achievements. Now, if humanity does not “study” what it has acquired throughout that history then it is impossible to take another step forward, isn’t it? This point has not been sufficiently understood. And it is not only MEXT [the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science and Culture] itself that does not understand this. What MEXT does, is that it creates what is called a council, and then relies on the results that these councils produce through their internal discussions. While these councils include experts such as university professors, even these individuals do not really have a clear perception of the issue.

**Takahashi:** You mentioned earlier how Professor Nishida thought that everyone celebrating after Japan won in Lushun was a serious problem. At the time, the government actually put the brakes on, while the mass media and journalists were the ones who celebrated. Isn’t this why the responsibility for the war not only pertains to the government, but also in very large measure to the media at the time who fostered this discourse about a “Fiendish America and Britain”?

**Ueda:** And this is still the case today. The Livedoor story is just another example of how today the mass media have become so influential that it is hard to take a stand against them. More and more, journals and weekly publications have started to overflow with provocative articles. Moreover, I find that there is something irresistible about the influence of television. Certainly, even today you can still find newspapers containing ideas presented in a rigorous manner, in the form of editorials. However, as you know, in Japan, people who find newspaper discussions stimulating are not in a position to have any real impact on the country. Such editorials have no impact whatsoever on politics or the economy for that matter. People will say, “oh that was a good opinion piece in the paper,” but it stops there. The ideas themselves have no significance with respect to social reality.

**Takahashi:** In the case of newspapers, for example, in the editorial column or an opinion column [journalists] might state things such as that we have to bring in a consumption tax, or that we have to be careful about such things as Livedoor. But, what actually makes the first page of the paper, or the social page, is that raising the consumption tax is outrageous, and that Livedoor is really quite interesting.

**Ueda:** And it is not getting any better.

**Takahashi:** Right, because the general readership will read the latter.

### 3 What Does It Mean to Engage in Scholarship?

**Ueda:** So, as I was saying, I ended up coming to Kyōto to study under Professor Nishitani after having been enticed by the manner in which he appeared for his talk dressed in a kimono. As for what I subsequently experienced, well, for the first time I truly learned the meaning of reading a book. Because it was shortly after the war, the university was in quite a state and classes weren't being held regularly, but about ten of us asked the professor to lead a seminar where we could read texts with him. This text was "Logik" (The Small Logic), which comes right in the beginning of Hegel's *Enzyklopädie*. At the time, only the *Logik* part had come out as a reprint.

**Takahashi:** This was independent of regular classes?

**Ueda:** Yes, separate from our regular classes with him. We were moving places all the time, sometimes also to Professor Nishitani's own home. We met once a week and usually each session would last 6 to 8 hours. And sometimes, despite taking so long, we did not even progress a single page. For Professor Nishitani it was not sufficient to simply render the German into Japanese, but to examine in what relation the respective parts stood to each other, and ask after what kinds of words were being used at each individual point. What astonished me was the German word "und" which corresponds to the English "and." To me, this kind of word didn't hold any particular significance at all. Yet I was asked why a particular "und" was "und." In this manner, we really did not neglect even one single word. What is more, rather than focusing simply on the meaning of each word, the emphasis was on how to read them within the broader context of the author's own thought. Through this method the context as a whole became clear to us. For me, this was the time that I first learned the proper way of reading a book. I believe that this became an important foundation for my subsequent studies.

**Takahashi:** Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* and the *Enzyklopädie* are both very dense works, and they are scattered throughout with implicit criticisms of his predecessors. Where would you even be able to take a class these days that would properly teach you how to read such texts.

**Ueda:** Yes, rigorous teaching that is based on foundational texts of this sort is only becoming increasingly rare, I think. This seems like an inevitable result of how universities themselves are changing in character. Nevertheless, if undertaking scholarship has any real meaning at all, then in my view it is essential that people undergo the necessary training. That said, making this point out loud with the hope

of calling people to act is becoming difficult even within the universities. Which is why it may be necessary, at the very least, for like-minded people to gather together and work as a kind of invisible collective. That's not to say that something like this would have an immediate impact on present society. However, we cannot go on with the way things stand now. I believe that somewhere a huge breakdown will occur. And when it does, for the very first time, society as a whole will realize: "Ah, that was not the right way of doing things." Only once this happens will we see a return to the understanding that scholarship requires steady effort.

**Takahashi:** Certainly, as you say, you no longer find at the universities the kind of patient, steady education of the old style. Meanwhile academic societies have increased in size, leading to a decline in opportunities for the kind of sustained discussion that you get from more closely-knit groups. So long as nobody convenes study groups of a suitably modest scale then people simply will not have the opportunity to really learn how to study.

**Ueda:** Exactly. This is why I believe it is important that those who share a common research sympathy, as it were, regardless of whether it is five people or ten, continue gathering together so that they can undertake this kind of serious and careful research. If you do that, then it will probably lead to other people heading to these gatherings, and wanting to participate. Putting aside the situation at the university level, there must actually be quite a few individuals out there who feel that the current situation is no good. This is why I think it is necessary that there is a place where such people can gather together and study. I think that it is totally fine for such study groups to start from one person's initiative and to then meet with a few people for intense reading sessions.

**Takahashi:** I have been convening such study groups myself. I have continued to hold monthly gatherings in Tōkyō for the last thirty five years, and Kyōto for the last thirty years. We even have an eighty year old professor participating. Let's say, there are some passages [in the study group's text] using prepositions in the dative when it should have been in the genitive. And when I say: "That is strange, isn't it?", then I am scolded: "Professor Takahashi, are you serious? Doesn't Adelung's dictionary<sup>6</sup> say that this has been used with the dative for seven years since 1783? If you aren't prepared to check Adelung's dictionary before coming then what's the point of even participating?" ([Takahashi] laughs). This kind of strict training is very educational, even at my age.

**Ueda:** This is the kind of training that is possible with individual study groups. It is impossible to do it within the current system. This is all the more reason why it has become so important that we actively create such study groups and use them for learning. The fact that such groups actually exist, frankly, is a real support for society.

---

<sup>6</sup>Grammatisch-Kritisches Wörterbuch der hochdeutschen Mundart, 4 volumes. Leipzig 1793.

**Takahashi:** When it comes to events such as academic symposia you do not really know to what extent you can say “Your paper is mistaken!” The person you say it to might take it the wrong way, and it is even possible that you could earn the ire of that person’s professor.

**Ueda:** I agree. By contrast, in small familiar groups you can have proper discussions. Everyone who participated in Professor Nishitani’s reading circle did so even while being intimidated by him. Whenever somebody was embarrassed by Professor Nishitani everybody would break out in a cold sweat. You just didn’t know who would be next. However, apart from these kinds of circles, the study groups I held with my friends were also quite significant because we were really able to freely say what we wanted in those discussions.

**Takahashi:** Professor Nishitani was able to conduct profoundly thorough readings of German, following each and every single word. Did he acquire this capability during his studies in Germany?

**Ueda:** I believe that it was an original capacity of his to begin with. While it is certainly the case that the university system was more thoroughly organized at that time, studying is after all something which you do on your own. So, everyone there was really studying hard. Not only Professor Nishitani. Professor Shimomura Toratarō 下村寅太郎<sup>7</sup> and Professor Kōsaka<sup>8</sup> were the same. I think they all studied unbelievably hard.

**Takahashi:** I had the honour to have met Professor Shimomura once. He had such a wide-ranging understanding of everything that you wondered how he had managed to absorb it all. When I met him, he was already in his final years, but his memory was very strong.

**Ueda:** I believe that what enters your mind while you are young lasts forever. And, you know, even with such small reading circles, even though the *Shorter Logic* is a smaller text, Professor Nishitani was always seen carrying the *Greater Logic* in order to quote necessary passages. He was always reading so much like that, to the extent that I sometimes wondered how he managed to study to that degree. I don’t

---

<sup>7</sup> 1902–1995. Philosopher, historian of science, Renaissance researcher. Studied under Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime. While taking up Nishida Philosophy as his basic starting point, Shimomura incorporated the perspective of intellectual history, pioneering new pathways into considering western philosophy, aesthetics, and the philosophy of science. Famed for his research into figures such as Leibniz, Leonardo da Vinci, and Burkhardt.

<sup>8</sup> Kōsaka Masaaki 高坂正顕, 1900–1969. Philosopher, accused of promoting a philosophy that was cooperative with the wartime regime, Kōsaka was purged from office for a period after the war. Once permitted to return to teaching he took on positions that included a professorship at Kyōto University, before being appointed the Dean of Tokyo Gakugei University. Strongly influenced by the philosophies of Kant and Nishida, he is recognized as belonging to the ‘Kyōto School’. His works include such texts as *The Philosophy of Race* and *The Historical World*.

believe it was only a matter of time. Professor Nishitani's family and his children were all living according to the same schedule as everyone else. They got up in the morning and went to school. As it happens, Professor Nishitani was up all through the night, and would only finally go to sleep in the morning hours. Then he would slowly wake up after noon. So, his wife had to prepare three meals for the children and three separate meals for her husband (laughs). However, I imagine that witnessing her husband's hard work and his general lifestyle she would have naturally wanted to support him.

#### **4 The Nishida – Tanabe Memorial Symposium and Suzuki Daisetsu**

**Takahashi:** How many students were in Religious Studies when you entered Kyōto University?

**Ueda:** Because everyone was returning from service in the army you had a mixture of ages all coming in at once, which made the total number of students at that time relatively large. There were quite a few really.

**Takahashi:** And, of all these students only one group was participating in study groups at Professor Nishitani's home?

**Ueda:** That's right. Not all students in Religious Studies studied in the same manner. Those who would visit Professor Nishitani's home were only a very small group. At the time, the students were entirely uncoordinated. That in itself was also quite interesting.

**Takahashi:** I believe that at Kyōto University, the custom has been to operate in a hands-off manner. So, Professor Nishitani only closely trained those students who he personally took a shining to. Is that right?

**Ueda:** Yes, but Professor Nishitani did not personally gather together the students that he liked. Rather the students would simply gather at his place on their own initiative.

**Takahashi:** As if they wanted to say: "Professor, please help us."

**Ueda:** That's right. In the beginning, a few of us asked him. And then other students who had heard about that gradually came to join us. The initiative was not at all Professor Nishitani's.

**Takahashi:** Did these gatherings continue after Professor Nishitani retired?

**Ueda:** They did. They continued especially after he retired. There was a study group on Nishida's philosophy, for example, which first started gathering after Professor Nishitani retired, and continued until he passed away. It was initiated by three or four students who were studying at Ōtani University, where Professor Nishitani went after retirement. They had asked Professor Nishitani if he would read texts from Nishida's philosophy with them. Then, more and more people joined after learning about it by hearsay. I also started participating midway after hearing about it. The [study group] then continued for twenty years and even up until the present, after Professor Nishitani had passed away. This is why participants need a certain degree of self-motivation. Without that, they will not last.

**Takahashi:** Is that study group on Nishida's philosophy different from the present Nishida-Tanabe Memorial Lecture?

**Ueda:** That's right, the Nishida-Tanabe Memorial Lecture is different from the study group. Reiu'in temple, which is located within Kyōto's Myōshin-ji temple, contains Professor Nishida's grave. Every year his former pupils conduct a memorial service there for the first anniversary of their teacher's death. Professor Nishida's remains have been interred in shrines in three places: Kamakura's Tōkei-ji Temple, in his hometown Unoke, and at Reiu'in temple. After Professor Nishida passed away, his former pupils erected these shrines and conducted annual memorial services there. They also decided to hold an annual symposium in honour of his memory. This is how the Memorial Lecture came into being. Once a year, as you know. The first lecturer was Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙. Professor Suzuki was born in the same year as Professor Nishida, and in the same city of Kanazawa as well. They were good friends when students at the Fourth High Middle School. As it happened, back then Professor Suzuki's father passed away, and he became entirely unable to pay his school fees and stopped going to the Fourth High Middle School. Around that time Professor Nishida caused some trouble with the Fourth High School and was expelled. It was a pretty strange case. The initial Fourth High School was based in Kaga. So, the students all shared this close knit familiarity with each other. The fiefdom of Kaga had been a particularly large domain even in the times of the Edo period. After the establishment of the Meiji government, which was basically run by the old Satsuma and Chōshū domains, Kaga turned into a thorn in their side. They weren't very keen on following the government's orders and what not. In the end the Meiji administration ended up putting its foot down and, starting with the school headmaster, replacing teachers for the Fourth High School with people from Satsuma, including some who were previously police officers. So the teachers at the Fourth High School quite suddenly formed a Satsuma clique. This resulted in a conflict between the school on the one hand, and its students on the other who had from the beginning celebrated the unique atmosphere of Kaga. Nishida had also contracted an eye disease at the time, but ultimately the reason he left the school was because he knew he could manage just as well studying on his own. All this going on was the background to Nishida and Suzuki leaving the school. As it happens both ended up in Tokyo. So you can understand how these two have been quite close the



whole way through their lives. This is why Professor Suzuki gave the first lecture after Professor Nishida passed away. At that time we took Nishida's Zen Buddhist title "Sun-shin" 寸心 [lit. meaning, an inch of mind] and named the event the Sun-shin society lecture. All the subsequent speakers of the Sun-shin society lecture were previous pupils of Professor Nishida's. However, when Professor Tanabe Hajime eventually passed away, Professor Tanabe's own pupils decided to do a Tanabe Memorial Lecture as well, which they convened once a year. Accordingly, after a while, you had a situation where every year there was both the Sun-shin society's Memorial Lecture and Professor Tanabe's memorial lecture. This actually continued for quite a long time. At some point someone suggested we should merge both efforts, which led to its present form of the Nishida–Tanabe Lecture. That's why now once a year we have those responsible who organize the memorial lectures (at Kyōto University's Faculty of Letters) on the history of Japanese philosophy.

**Takahashi:** Professor Suzuki's grave is in Tōkei-ji temple as well, isn't it. Even though Professor Nishida was the first to pass away, we might say that they have remained friends even after their deaths.

**Ueda:** That really is true. Professor Nishida and Professor Suzuki were not only close on a personal level, but they had various points of intellectual confluence as well. Professor Nishida was not only a philosopher, but also practiced Zen from a young age. He gradually brought this experience into a dialogue with European thinking within his own philosophical ideas. Professor Suzuki started from Zen, of course. However, he went to the US when he was young, where he worked both as an editor and a proofreader for a magazine company named Open Court Publishing House. Open Court was a publishing house, which published certain kinds of intellectual journals. In addition, its manager had an enthusiasm for Eastern thought, such as the philosophy of Laozi, and had published Chinese philosophical texts and what not in translation. Professor Suzuki was over there for ten years. During this time he was able to gain first-hand experience of how Western societies were structured, particularly with respect to Christianity. After all, because his own background was Zen, he felt that there was a certain gap between Christianity and himself. If this was just left as it were, however, then this would rule out mutual understanding. So, Professor Suzuki took up the task of finding a way of bridging this gap. He calls this "Zen Thought." "Zen Thought" might sound quite general, but actually it is not. Professor Suzuki attempted to develop his own particular form of thought which went by this name. This "Zen Thought" and Professor Nishida's philosophy do have different standpoints, but they resonate with each other. This is why Professor Nishida would always listen to Professor Suzuki and Professor Suzuki would always listen to Professor Nishida. At a deeper level they were connected. From the perspective of intellectual history as well, their intellectual cooperation was a significant development.

**Takahashi:** Professor Suzuki reached quite a mature age and was still living when I was a student. He would take kindly to my friends, who would sometimes go and pay him a visit at his house.

**Ueda:** That's right, he lived until he was ninety six didn't he? When I met him, he was ninety five. It was the memorial year of Rinzai, from the *Rinzai Roku* [the Record of Rinzai's Teachings<sup>9</sup>]. It was either twelve hundred years after his birth or twelve hundred years after his death—one of those two. Kyōto's Institute for Zen Studies<sup>10</sup> wanted to ask Professor Suzuki to speak about Rinzai and the *Rinzai Roku*, so they had me go and visit him. Throughout the whole morning and afternoon of one day, I asked him a lot of questions. I was still young at that time, but I remember feeling that it was as if Professor Suzuki was clearly more alert and together than I was. The following year he passed away quite suddenly. He died due to a twisting of the bowels, and it seemed as though he was lost in a sudden accident.

## 5 Learning at Kyoto University

**Takahashi:** When speaking of Kyōto University, people often mention its tradition of having a liberal approach towards education. But based on what you said earlier, it seems that the training was actually quite strict.

**Ueda:** Well, the training was systematically strict by design. Really, you could even say that its system was far too lax. That said, in those cases where it was not the professor teaching the students, but the students themselves taking the initiative to gather at their Professor's house to study, then yes, I believe it turned into a form of quite intense training. It was not only Professor Nishitani who was like this. It was the same for Professor Tanaka Michitarō 田中美知太郎,<sup>11</sup> and for professors specializing in Ancient Greek.

**Takahashi:** For Professor Yoshikawa Kōjirō 古川幸次郎<sup>12</sup> as well?

**Ueda:** Exactly. Of course, universities are supposed to be a place where you have lectures and seminars, which imply a certain degree of training that is strict enough in its own way. But nobody was taking notes on the students' attendance, and people who didn't attend could simply stay away as long as they pleased. I have a funny experience with that. For some reason, I wanted to attend Professor Ōyama's class.

---

<sup>9</sup> Analects of Linji Yixuan, the ninth century founder of the Chinese Rinzai Sect of Zen. The text that exists today is a recompilation of the Song period, and a founding text of Rinzai Zen.

<sup>10</sup> Principally focused on research into the Zen culture of the Rinzai sect. Located within Kyōto's Hanazono University.

<sup>11</sup> 1902–1991. Philosopher, specialist in Greek philosophy and philology of classical Western texts. Also a writer of critiques on the topic of civilization. His works include books such as *Logos and Ideas, Between the Good and the Necessary*, and *Plato*.

<sup>12</sup> 1904–1980. Chinese scholar, utilized a deep knowledge of the Chinese classics, alongside an empirical approach in order to compile "Kyoto University Sinology." Also well known for his translation of *The Analects*, and the poetry of Tang period China, such as *To Ho*.

Somehow, professor Ōyama Teiichi 大山定一<sup>13</sup> seemed interesting to me and I thought it might be a good idea. The thing is, nobody knew when his classes would take place.

**Takahashi:** It is said that they took place two to three times a year.

**Ueda:** This is funny as well. But nobody seemed to mind in the least. ... Or rather, they just took it in their stride as permissible at a university. The students would proceed assuming that a class was taking place that day. And after they waited for quite a while, someone from the office would show up to let them know that the day's class was cancelled, to which they would react with disappointment and relief at the same time. They were disappointed, but at the same time they were also glad. The following week, they would show up again hoping to listen to his lectures. And, again, they would receive the message that today's class was cancelled. And again, they were both disappointed and happy. If you read Professor Ōyama's work you could see that his writings were extremely good. The point is that the university was not simply about the classroom relationship between teachers and students, but also about the encounter between thinkers, and future thinkers. The relationship extended beyond the narrow frame of education.

**Takahashi:** That is indeed interesting, isn't it? In general, universities are supposed to be places where teachers teach students as part of an overall system or organization. Yet, in this case the reality is that it is the students who seek out the teachers, with the ones who are serious enough attempting to receive extra instruction from them. And if a student is willing to go so far as to visit the teacher to receive their instruction, then they have to be pretty dedicated to begin with. That means that the teacher is going to welcome them as somebody who has potential, and treat them as full-fledged adults despite their significant age gap.

**Ueda:** Yes, and what follows from this is that the professors become more serious as well. Otherwise, they would end up becoming lazy. Of course, because it is a system, it goes without saying that there are teachers and students and classes. But a university is not only this. Rather, its essence lies in it being an opportunity to meet professors. If, after taking a number of different classes, you find a professor who you would like to study under, then you would approach this professor and let him or her take you under their wing, as people used to say. The existence of such students in turn motivates the professors to actively engage in research themselves. This kind of association outside of the formal university system is really very important.

---

<sup>13</sup> 1904–1974. Scholar of German literature, critic. Known as a leading researcher of Goethe within Japan. Was also deeply familiar with writers such as Rilke, Mann, and Carossa. Also known for his translations of *Faust* and *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*.

**Takahashi:** I heard from a former student of Professor Ōyama that he would take some of his favoured students with him to Gion, where he would lecture them about life. As a result, some of Professor Ōyama's students would say, "When I was at Kyōto University I wasn't actually educated on campus. I received all my instruction in Gion." With any other university something like this would just be unthinkable wouldn't it?

**Ueda:** In that sense I think Kyōto University was liberal in a good way.

**Takahashi:** Meanwhile, today this way of doing things has really disappeared.

**Ueda:** I'm a bit out of the loop with how things are nowadays, but yes it seems that things have changed. For our reading circle with Professor Nishitani, where we read Hegel's *Small Logic*, we were moving all over the place here and there. Professor Mutō Kazuo 武藤一雄 lived in the neighbourhood of Ōtani University and sometimes we met there. Those meetings were greatly delightful. Studying in this place and in that place also helped to make things more engaging.

## 6 Kyōto University Directly After the Defeat

**Takahashi:** You have spoken of this special age in the history of Kyōto University, this period from when Professor Nishida was teaching, up until when Professor Nishitani was still active. We have these different thinkers formulating their own unique philosophies, and who knew what the essence of scholarship was, and who wanted to pass this knowledge on to those students who were capable of putting in the work. Was all of this lost with the war?

**Ueda:** I don't think we can straightforwardly say that it was all lost due to the war. Actually, in my view individuals were actually more free during the wartime period than might be expected. By looking at the matter on the basis of individual cases we can certainly make this claim. For example, if you draw your understanding of the period from the newspapers of the time, well yes what you get is just this appearance of an entire period coloured by war. However, if we look at people's individual lives, I think we can say that there were actually quite a few people who lived freely without having much to do with the war effort. It is quite interesting. For instance, an example that does come up often is how Nagai Kafū 永井荷風 was able to buy records as per usual despite the war. That is to say, this was a possibility. Well, Nagai Kafū is a famous example, but for many people this was how they lived. It was also that they simply couldn't live any other way. You simply cannot live by only following the orders of others. In that sense, I think that when it comes to this conception of professor Nishida's students as being restricted in their thinking because of the war, well to a surprising degree this was actually not the case. Everyone was able to pursue their own thinking in a significantly free manner.

**Takahashi:** Was there a time at which the atmosphere changed suddenly?

**Ueda:** Not with respect to Professor Nishida's students. But if we are speaking of society or the university, after the war things did change completely. Immediately after the war ended was when I officially entered the university, on the 1st of April 1945. I attended class for about two weeks. Classes had been running still even in the final year of the war. I went to Professor Shirai Jishō's 白井二尚<sup>14</sup> lectures on sociology and Professor Yamauchi Tokuryō's 山内侍立<sup>15</sup> lectures on Greek philosophy. Those were the two. Then I received a conscription order and I joined the army. I was the last generation to join.

**Takahashi:** Where did you go?

**Ueda:** To Wakayama. My registered home at the time was in Kōyasan. As it happened, there were only two university students in a battery of two hundred people, including myself. We were both eyed disdainfully. What I mean is that students of the old senior high schools and universities had a direct path to becoming a commissioned officer. And most people would take that path. Almost nobody would first be conscripted and then enter the army as a run-of-the-mill soldier. It's not as though I had any particular anti-militarist convictions. And then, of course, the defeat came in August. I returned from the army at the end of October, but I could not go to university anymore that year. This is why I re-entered the university officially in the year after 1946. At that time, that is to say, directly after the defeat, we see a clear division between people devoted to socialist ideals on the one hand, and well, what we can call pro-Americanism on the other. Of course, you could see this division among the university students, but also in various facets of society. But outside of this confrontation neither really amounted to anything at all. This was especially the case with respect to the educational system. At the time, you could see this with how the Japanese Teachers Union faced off against the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. No matter what kind of system you may have wanted to go about making, you really couldn't do it properly. This is because each side would raise their own opposing views on it. This led to an enormous vacuum in post-war Japan, a tangible vacuum. And no one takes responsibility for that even to this day. I remember it myself, but do remember that old large wooden lecture room. At the time, the socialist students were delivering endlessly long speeches there.

---

<sup>14</sup> 1900–1990. Sociologist. Works include *A Collection of Treatises in Sociology*.

<sup>15</sup> 1890–1982. Philosopher, a central figure of the Kyōto University philosophy department in the post-war period, following the passing of Nishida Kitarō. After retirement from Kyōto University, became dean of Kyōto Gakugei University (now, Kyōto University of Education). Works include *Greek Philosophy. Logos and Cultivation*.

**Takahashi:** And they went quite far in denouncing Professor Nishida and Professor Kōyama Iwao 高山岩男.<sup>16</sup>

**Ueda:** Indeed. Somehow or other, they were all lumped together as the “Kyōto School” and labelled pro-war. The funny thing is, during wartime Professor Nishida had actually been criticized for not properly supporting the war effort. So we have this kind of social, superficial judgement on Nishida, that does not go beyond the historical perspective of that moment.

**Takahashi:** In other words, it was not his beliefs that were a problem, but that he was used for political ends?

**Ueda:** That’s entirely right. Well, on the one hand you had this kind of situation. But then at the same time every individual student was different. There were those who were entirely committed to their cause and those who were not. For example, Professor Kōsaka Masaaki was purged immediately following the war. His home was located in the vicinity of Kamo river, [near Kyōto University], and we used to visit to do readings of Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit*. In the beginning there were three to five people. In that sense, we were going ahead with our learning entirely independently of the larger goings on in society. This kind of thing was going on here and there.

## 7 Progress in Religious Studies

**Ueda:** Professor Nishitani had ended up being purged as well, so after I was discharged I asked him if he would do a reading group with us. This continued even after Professor Nishitani was reinstated. At that time I often attended a class on reading Tibetan by Professor Yamaguchi Susumu.<sup>17</sup> He was from Ōtani University but lectured at Kyōto University part time. In retrospect, I don’t think this class was really suitable for my own course of study, but I had decided to attend given that I was interested in Buddhism. Once I had started participating, the classes got more and more interesting. So, I ended up also attending Professor Yamaguchi’s seminar at Ōtani University on the representative annotation of *The Fundamental Verses of*

---

<sup>16</sup> 1905–1993. Philosopher; alongside Nishitani and Kōsaka, was purged from university after the war, for having supposedly promoted a philosophy of collaboration with the wartime regime. After his ban was absolved, he took on professorships including at Kanagawa University, before becoming dean of Akita University of Economics and Law. His works include *Philosophy of World History*, and *The Heart of the Japanese Race*.

<sup>17</sup> 1895–1976. Buddhist scholar, priest of the Ōtani sect of Shinshu Buddhism. After studying Sanskrit and Tibetan in France, he proceeded to teach at Ōtani University and Kyōto Sangyo University. Later, he was appointed dean of Ōtani University.

*the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)*,<sup>18</sup> which was written in India. I ended up doing these classes for four years with burning enthusiasm. However, mastering languages —especially the classical ones— takes incredibly long, doesn't it? Especially Tibetan. Nowadays it's normal to romanize it, but at the time it was still presented in Tibetan characters. Tibetan characters are pictorial, intriguing letters and I loved that. So, I used to constantly copy texts of these Tibetan characters. This is why I spent such an incredible amount of time labouring on this. I used to attend Professor Nishitani's and Professor Kōsaka's reading circles for four to five years without interruption. But I would skip all my other classes so that I could devote my time to studying Tibetan and Sanskrit. However, at some point I was overcome by an extreme anxiety. The question of what exactly I intended to do with all this study became a serious issue for me. What plagued me was the uncertainty of whether it made sense to invest all this time into this kind of work if I wanted to turn Buddhist Studies into my lifelong profession then that was all well and good, but if not then how could I be justified in using my time in this manner? Then, one day, I made the firm decision to quit studying Sanskrit and Tibetan altogether. At the time, I was reading Heidegger with Professor Kōsaka as well. On top of that, after he had returned to his position at Kyōto University, Professor Nishitani had taken to reading short texts of Heidegger's later period every year. I consistently attended these seminars, and it helped lead me to the decision that I needed to focus my attention on studying Heidegger properly. During that time, I developed an interest in Eckhart. Professor Nishitani had published a book titled *God and Absolute Nothingness* after the war (which was the first proper scholarly monograph on Eckhart and, in my opinion, the quality of its argument has been unsurpassed to this day). Reading this book was a big stimulus for me, I think. Although, thinking about it now, proceeding from Heidegger to Eckhart was like tracing a kind of path back through the history of thought. At the same time, I joined the lay circle of Shōkoku-ji Temple's professional *dōjo* and started practicing Zen. It was the same lay circle that Professor Nishitani had formerly frequented, and I had this feeling of wanting to do the same thing. On the other hand, I kept on pursuing my studies of Heidegger and Eckhart, and little by little I started to walk that path which leads up to where I am today. And then, before long, I had the desire to go to Germany and specialize in Eckhart.

## 8 The Connection of Ideas Across all Times and Places

**Takahashi:** There is something which I have always wanted to ask you. Heidegger and Eckhart are quite different from each other, as are Nishida's philosophy and Zen. How do they all come together for you?

---

<sup>18</sup>A representative textbook of treatises for India's Mahāyāna Buddhism. Includes the 450 poetic verses of Nāgārjuna, as well as the attached annotations. Central text for the Mādhyamaka sect of Indian Buddhism, and the Sānlūn (J. Sanron 三論) sect of Chinese Buddhism. Translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva.

**Ueda:** Yes, they do come together for me. But they don't connect directly. Rather, they form a kind of three-dimensional structure. *An Inquiry Into the Good*, which is the point of departure for Nishida philosophy (shortly afterwards his article “Basho” 場所 [lit. meaning “place”] came out and people would speak of “Nishida philosophy” for the first time), begins with so-called “pure experience.” Pure experience, according to Nishida's text, means “that moment of seeing colors and hearing sounds, where there is neither subject nor object.” Normally, seeing flowers or hearing sounds is considered the material of sensual experience. Kant says as much. However, for Nishida, that “moment of seeing colors and hearing sounds,” contains everything within it in some fundamental manner. He took this conception as the foundation from which to try to explain everything. That is what *An Inquiry into the Good* is about. However, this “moment of seeing colors, hearing sound” is lacking any distinctions, to say nothing of explanatory methods. In other words, you have this gaping abyss between any attempt at explaining the structure of reality on the one hand, and this “moment of seeing colors and hearing sounds” on the other. At the same time, these two extremes are very important. To explain everything is the most basic interest of European philosophy. Furthermore, the “moment of seeing colors and hearing sounds” is the most primordial and foundational experience to be had in Zen. For Nishida, both were indispensable for human beings, which is why he tried to bring them together. However, this task was not an easy one. So, I thought I would like to explore by myself how they can be connected. “I would like to explain everything by taking pure experience as the sole reality.” This is a sentence from the preface to *An Inquiry into the Good*. If we were to interpret Nishida's goal of taking “pure experience as the sole reality” according to the standards of European philosophy, then we may say that he is looking for a philosophical “principle.” For Descartes, it would be *Cogito ergo sum*. For the Middle Ages it would be *Esse est deus*. For Nishida, “pure experience as the sole reality” was the philosophical principle from whence he tried to explain everything. Until this point it is the same style as European philosophy. However, the basic proposition of Nishida's that “pure experience is the sole reality”, is that the principle of philosophy, as long as it is a principle, is brought forward in the form of a thesis. However, as pure experience is expressed within “the moment of seeing colors and hearing sounds”, this moment is the moment where words still do not exist or where language is defeated. This means that there is something contained here which breaks the principle of philosophy as such. Arguing in this manner, Nishida hypothesizes three levels, developing each individually, as well as the space between them. This has parallels to the development of philosophy in Europe. However in this case it unfolds in a manner that accords with the tradition of Zen. There are various expressions that have emerged from Zen, aren't there? For example, “the flower is crimson”, or “water runs”. However, although one might say that “water runs”, in Zen, this speaks not only to water. Rather, at the same time, here something about the entirety of existence is expressed at once. Within Zen, this has been realized at the highest of its levels of realization, as well as at the level which is below that. But Nishida was the first person to attempt to connect this to philosophy. I believe that he was capable of making this attempt because he practiced Zen while studying philosophy, and study-



ing philosophy while practicing Zen. Of course, it was not that Nishida had attempted to make this connection from the beginning. During the ten years that Nishida spent in Kanazawa, he was continually confronted by this split. It was so deep that it felt like he himself was being pulled apart. Yet, despite this tearing apart, so to speak, the two separate extremes would eventually be joined together within the self that was Nishida. To put it in my own words, it was as though a magnetic field was established, and it was from there that his own original philosophical perspective emerged. These circumstances are basically similar to Heidegger's. The connection between the form of traditional European philosophy and the point in which it would exceed itself and turn into a problem, was the scene of Heidegger's contemplative suffering. His life-long problem consisted in how to be able to theorize *Das Sein* (Being), while not turning it into *das Seiende* (beings, e.g. the highest being or the most fundamental being) as with traditional metaphysics.

**Takahashi:** And trying to put into words that which goes beyond normal language, leads to, in Heidegger's case, the emergence of extremely difficult language.

**Ueda:** Exactly. The same applies for Eckhart.

**Takahashi:** However, you point out that there is another, higher level to Eckhart.

**Ueda:** Yes, exactly. This is very clear. In "Breakthrough" (*Durchbruch*) he speaks, with respect to God, of the "Nothingness of the Godhead" [*Nichtgott*], and with respect to the soul, of the "the ground of the soul" [*Seelengrund*]. In that sense, if we understand Nishida's philosophy as similarly attempting to capture the dynamic interplay of these three levels, then we can see the manner in which he is connected to both Heidegger and Eckhart. If we think this point through thoroughly, then I believe we may locate a vantage point whereby not only "Eckhart and Heidegger," but Nishida and Heidegger, Eckhart, and Zen, in other words, the bearers of both Eastern and Western traditions, are brought into a position where they illuminate each other reciprocally.

## 9 What Cannot Be Put into Words

**Takahashi:** The Goethe I am familiar with is similar on this count, but it seems that whether we are speaking of Eckhart, or Heidegger, or Zen, in each case the final destination cannot be put into words; it is where words fail us that what is most important is to be found. Of course, the trouble with scholarship is that it cannot work with things that are left unsaid.

**Ueda:** It is exactly as you say. This is why, even prior to scholarship, I believe the real challenge is to come into contact with what transcends language, and attempt to nevertheless render it into words. As you know, there are many ways of verbalizing

things. Through poetry. Through scholarship. Poetry is closer to the foundation of things in my opinion. Yet, nevertheless, scholarship has its own significance as well. What is most significant lies in how it attempts to relate numerous entirely different ways of thinking. Scholarship is not only about my thinking in a particular way. Rather, it is about acknowledging that “I think in this manner, yet, he or she thinks differently.” Now, why does the other person think differently? It is when we ask this question that we arrive at scholarship. With poetry it is different. What suddenly comes to mind is verbalized as it is.

**Takahashi:** I see. For example, for Goethe there was something about the natural world and about the world of our living that evades our comprehension. However, he was content for that which was mysterious to be left as it was, to be respected in its mystery. Similarly, Zeami’s *The Flowering Spirit* discusses the beauty of flowers. It says that one cannot express the beauty of flowers through words. Instead, it asks us to grasp them with our hearts as best as we can. I believe that [traditional Japanese arts such as] Sadō 茶道 [the Way of Tea] and Kendō 剣道 [the Way of the Sword] are the same—in the end, there are many things you cannot verbalize. Japanese Sadō and Kendō are based on this recognition that their art cannot be adequately transmitted through words, but must be acquired physically. Scholarship, however, attempts to do just this, to verbalize, to articulate in words.

**Ueda:** I believe that scholarship requires both words and also those things which cannot be put into words. What I mean is that, as human beings, we need both. While that which cannot be verbalized or conceptualized is important to us, there is a danger that we may forget this as we attempt to put everything into words. On the other hand, while we may speak of comprehending things that cannot be expressed, those who achieve this will become capable of saying something about them. Which is why I think it good if we seek to come into true contact with that which is wordless, while at the same time having that experience manifest itself in words.

**Takahashi:** Of course, that would be excellent. Nevertheless, it seems that there is a serious difference between those individuals who practice scholarship while being aware of the fact that some things cannot be said, and others who are not aware of this.

**Ueda:** Yes, they really do differ. I see this difference even between scholars of the same discipline, and it is often the reason why misunderstandings can occur.

**Takahashi:** Even with German scholars, I assume that the older generations had a greater appreciation for that which cannot be verbalized. Young people nowadays try to spell everything out, don’t they?

**Ueda:** As a sort of sign, the word does have the functions and meanings of a sign. Yet, I believe that this is not all there is to it. At the same time that each word has its function as a sign, it also has a kind of resonance, or tone. It is the inclusion of this

kind of resonance which makes words actually words. There is something very strange about only seeing within words that which can be taken as a sign, or can be rendered consistent.

## 10 Buddhist Teaching and Contemporary Japan

**Takahashi:** In Buddhist teachings, we find the understanding that suffering is at the root of existence. Without this understanding, it is impossible to do religious studies. What is your opinion on this?

**Ueda:** This is also a problem of how you perceive religious studies and scholarship. Religion as such cannot come into being if one has never encountered that which cannot be seen. However, once the unseen has been experienced, then that experience can be expressed, either by way of words, or by way of deeds. What is expressed can then be objectivized, and we therefore have the possibility of taking that objectivized phenomena of religion as a subject of scholarship within religious studies, which is all well and good as far as we are seeking formal knowledge. However, when it comes to religious philosophy, then things are a bit different.

**Takahashi:** Professor Nishida and you were able to deepen your understanding of religion through practicing Zazen. However, these are personal undertakings. Apart from this, religious studies also has an aspect which problematizes the role religion plays in society.

**Ueda:** I agree. It seems that at present not only so-called religious sociology, but religious studies in general is considerably motivated by a concern for the social.

**Takahashi:** With countries with a very strong ideological fundamentalism —such as Christianity in the case of the US— religion motivates their politics and even influences the politics of the world. At the same time, while Yoshida Shintō 吉田神道<sup>19</sup> enjoyed great political power in the Edo period, nowadays, Buddhism has almost no social impact at all.

**Ueda:** That's right. Especially when it comes to Buddhist groups. Or rather, I believe that they are committed to political power in an entirely different form. Currently, in Japan, Buddhism is organized into religious denominations, and these

---

<sup>19</sup>Yoshida Shinto. A school of Shinto created by Yoshida Kanetomo in the Muromachi era. [Also referred to as] Urabe Shinto. The Urabe clan, who were ancient shrine priests, became the priests of the Yoshida and Heiya shrines in the Heian period. However, Kanetomo asserted the correctness of the form of Shinto practiced by the Urabe clan over and against traditional Shinto. By devising numerous strategies, Kanetomo was able to expand the influence of the Yoshida family. By the modern period practically all Shinto priests were affiliated with this form of Shinto.

so-called denominations date back to the religious sect system established in the Edo period. In other words, they are based on a system where everyone must belong to a temple. This is why temples had a parallel significance as a kind of town hall. Originally, the connection between temples and the faithful, between temples and parishioners, was necessarily religious. However, because this connection was guaranteed by law, the temples began to take it for granted. The fact that temples used to function as town halls has meant that they have been positioned within a broader political context. I believe that this context remains even to this day. This is why certain Buddhist groups support candidates from specific sects at elections for the national Diet.

**Takahashi:** This is especially common for new religions.

**Ueda:** Very much so with new religions. The new religions are a representation of a renewed religious vitality arising at the time they emerged. They are groups that build relationships between people and, moreover, engage in politics with the clear aim of taking a social stance. The new religions are not that much different from European religions, I believe. However, even though the old denominational system of Buddhism that began in the Edo period no longer exists, its characteristics linger on quite persistently.

## 11 Evil, Emptiness and Nihilism

**Takahashi:** This is something that came up earlier in our discussion, but Nishida Kitarō's point of departure was *An Inquiry into Good*. On the other hand, Professor Nishitani Keiji was wrestling with Schelling's *Philosophical Inquiries into the Essence of Human Freedom*, which is a book about evil, isn't it? Did Professor Nishitani go into any detail on how he understood evil? I believe that in European religions, evil is a central topic, beginning with the problem of original sin. Is there such a tradition in Japan?

**Ueda:** That's a good question. When I was young there were a few papers written on the topic of evil. But since then, I believe there have not been very many. What in Europe becomes problematized as evil, probably refers back to what is called the question of worldly passions in Buddhism. Evil comes from the passions. The first and foremost root of these desires is what Buddhism refers to as the "self." And you see this with Professor Nishitani's approach. He digs down into the problem until he reaches its basis in the "self," and then from this point attempts to convert this standpoint into his own "philosophy of emptiness." However, he did not simply launch a "philosophy of emptiness." For Professor Nishitani, the question of nihilism is extremely significant in the history of thought, as a kind of "negative" or "antithesis." His "The Philosophy of Emptiness" is developed out of this "negative" in a

sense. His thinking did not end with “emptiness” alone, however. We see some new developments in his later writing. Recall that in Buddhism, “emptiness” is “emptiness that becomes empty.” Reality is re-interpreted as the “mysterious workings of being.” At the very end of his career, Professor Nishitani’s emphasis also shifted in this direction. So, beginning with the question of evil, he strongly identified with Nietzsche’s nihilism. As a result of investigating the Buddhist notion of the worldly passions of the self, he is able to relate the emptiness of this “self” to nihilism. Finally, he arrives at a path for the overcoming of nihilism in “emptiness,” as understood in the Buddhist expression: “form is emptiness, emptiness is form.” Nishitani was the first philosopher to turn fundamental Buddhist terms into primary philosophical categories. Nishida did, of course, use the term “emptiness” in his writings. But, from the beginning, he cleverly uses the term “absolute nothingness” as a basic philosophical concept. Nevertheless, at the time he intends it in such a way that it also implies the same Buddhist idea of “emptiness.” As Professor Nishida had his sights clearly set on engaging with “philosophy,” he never simply used Buddhist terms as such. Whenever Professor Nishitani mentioned nihilism, however, he not only meant Nietzsche’s nihilism, that is, not only nihilism in relation to Christianity, but also with respect to philosophy. That is to say, he went as far as the point out where the philosophical concept loses meaning. As it happens, Professor Nishitani sometimes uses the term “absolute nothingness” in his writing. Yet he never uses it when he wants to clarify his own position. “Absolute nothingness” is a term created by Professor Nishida in order to establish his own philosophical position. However, once such a concept is created, later scholars will refer to it and use it. The term “absolute nothingness” itself will become a sort of jargon. This is why I believe that the great difference between Professor Nishida’s and Professor Nishitani’s positions lies in their use of [the idea of] nihilism. In Professor Nishida’s case, nihilism is not yet turned into a problem. Professor Nishida’s age was the age of Neo-Kantianism in Europe, where the establishment of a philosophical foundation for science was the main problem. Yet, Professor Nishida did not seek to take up this problem of the foundation of science from within a European context. Instead, he began from an entirely different starting point, in order to explore the question of the form in which science is meaningful in general. At the root of Professor Nishida’s interest was the problem of how to integrate modern science and Mahāyāna Buddhism. For Professor Nishitani, however, science as scholarship is itself already grasped as something which stands within the shadow of nihilism. Put simply, to see things scientifically means to do so by killing them. This is where Professor Nishida’s and Professor Nishitani’s positions begin to diverge considerably. Nevertheless, one can say that in formulating his own philosophical stance by way of the concept of “emptiness,” Professor Nishitani was drawing on Professor Nishida’s own concept of “absolute nothingness.”

## 12 Meeting One's Mentor in Scholarship

**Takahashi:** Listening to you today, I was able to appreciate how your own scholarship was made possible by virtue of there first being such an extraordinarily distinguished teacher as Professor Nishitani.

**Ueda:** You know, I feel as if I have only recently been able to appreciate just how special Professor Nishitani was. There is still so much work which I need to sort out, but one thing I would really like to do before I retire is to help clarify Professor Nishitani's ideas.

**Takahashi:** So it is correct to say that Professor Nishitani is the teacher to whom you owe the most.

**Ueda:** Indeed. It is directly Professor Nishitani to whom I owe the most. However, if I were to trace the genealogy of my own thought, then the order would probably be Nishida, Suzuki, [and then] Nishitani. This is really quite clear. From my own interests, Professor Nishitani is my direct teacher. But Nishida's interest during his own time, Suzuki's interest within the world, and Nishitani's interest during his own time—I feel that these three are connected and work within my own thinking. Recently, I feel more and more strongly that I would like to rethink for myself one more time this chain of “Nishida, Suzuki, Nishitani.”

**Takahashi:** It would be good if there were many students who would pursue scholarship by engaging with the heritage which these great teachers of the past have left us, deepening it and developing it in their own unique way. Unfortunately, it seems that the number of such students has decreased considerably.

**Ueda:** I believe that without that act of searching, then there can be no encounters [with something new]. Both students and teachers have to seek each other out. For instance, it is common that out of ten students who study with the same teacher, only one student will really stick with them closely. For the other students the teacher is going to be reduced to some professor they have studied with during their university days. Encounters are peculiar things, which need to be initiated by both students and teachers alike.

**Takahashi:** Thank you very much for sharing your valuable stories with me today.

**Ueda:** Likewise. Thank you very much.

# Part V

## The Methodological Approach – Radicalizing Transcendentalism

### Introduction

The essays in this Part discuss various facets of Ueda's philosophical thinking. This fifth work thematizes the framework within which Ueda deploys his thinking within the transcendental tradition. Whereas Ueda's approach to Zen or his account of (Non-)Mysticism is in many respects well-received, a definitive philosophical standpoint remains elusive but potentially discernible in his writings on and deployment of Nishida's philosophy.

In her essay, "Nishida and Ueda on Philosophical Reflection" Ishihara Yuko takes advantage of Ueda's interpretations of Nishida not only to provide a clear account of where to place Nishida in the history of Western thought but to outline Ueda's own philosophic standpoint. She builds on Ueda's threefold schema Heisig discussed in some details in the introduction. From here the foundation is laid out for a new interpretation of Ueda's conception of a two-fold world. Ishihara underscores the role played by reflection in Nishida's discourse through a reading of Ueda's account of philosophical reflection as *j. jikaku* (自覚), a central concept of Nishida's most often rendered in English as "self-awareness" but with further nuances invoking the senses of self-reflection and self-awakening. She carefully analyzes Ueda's interpretation, shedding light on misunderstandings regarding the status of reflection in Nishida's philosophy, attempting to resituate his and, thereby, Ueda's thought within the Western transcendental tradition.

# Chapter 11

## Nishida and Ueda on Philosophical Reflection



Yuko Ishihara

### Abbreviation

USS Ueda, Shizuteru. 2001–2003. *Ueda Shizuteru shū* 上田閑照集 [Collected Works of Ueda Shizuteru], 11 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami.

### 1 Introduction

So long as philosophy is a reflective endeavor, articulating the nature of philosophical reflection is crucial for understanding any philosophical position. Such a task is all the more important for Nishida since his philosophy is too often neglected or dismissed on the grounds that it is “too religious” or “too speculative,” not just by western critics, but also by fellow Japanese scholars. In their remarks, they often imply that Nishida downplays the role of reflection in philosophical discourse and appeals to non-reflective religious experience instead. While such dismissal is ultimately based on a misunderstanding, it is also not completely unfounded. The basic idea underlying the entirety of Nishida’s philosophy is that the ground of reality, whether “pure experience” or “absolute nothingness,” is the selfless experience revealed not by any kind of reflection, but through the “rupture of reflection” (*han-sei no yabure* 反省の破れ), as Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照 puts it. Accordingly, the question naturally arises as to how one can articulate such a ground *through* reflection. If Nishida is committed to the task of philosophically articulating his position, which he evidently was, then it is worth pursuing an answer to this crucial question.

---

Y. Ishihara (✉)

College of Global Liberal Arts, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan



Unfortunately, Nishida was not so forthcoming when it came to explaining the nature of philosophical reflection in his thinking. In fact, the problem of reflection, and specifically philosophical reflection, has a peculiar place in Nishida's philosophy. On the one hand, to the extent that he hardly thematizes philosophical reflection (*tetsugakuteki hansei* 哲学的反省) as such in his writings, it seems that it was not so much of a problem. On the other hand, on many occasions, he speaks of the "standpoint of philosophy" (*tetsugaku no tachiba* 哲学の立場) in contradistinction to other standpoints such as the "standpoint of religion" (*shūkyō no tachiba* 宗教の立場). In so doing, he was calling attention to the question of how the reflective method in philosophy differs from various religious and other methods. Additionally, although philosophical reflection in the sense of *tetsugakuteki hansei* is not highlighted in his writings, *jikaku* (自覚) is a central concept and topic for Nishida. While *jikaku* is often translated as "self-awareness", for Nishida it refers to the specific way in which one becomes aware of oneself reflectively in the place one finds oneself. The meaning of *jikaku* in ordinary usage already has such connotations, as for example when one says "*hahaoya toshiteno jikaku o motsu* (母親としての自覚を持つ)" meaning, "I become aware of myself as a mother." Here "*jikaku* as a mother" connotes a self-understanding of oneself as a mother gained through one's engagement with the social and cultural context to which one belongs. Such self-understanding is not purely theoretical but involves the way one comports oneself in the world. Curiously, Nishida does not elaborate on a philosophical kind of *jikaku* or "*tetsugakusha toshiteno jikaku* (哲学者としての自覚)" (*jikaku* as a philosopher). But, judging from how central this concept was for him, it is natural to assume that a philosophical *jikaku* is operative throughout his writings.

Picking up on this last point, Ueda Shizuteru has provided an account of philosophical reflection *vis-à-vis jikaku* in the context of articulating how it figures in Nishida's philosophy. His account is extremely insightful in that it clarifies how Nishida's conception of philosophical reflection differs from the more traditional sort found in the history of western philosophy. As a matter of fact, I believe that Ueda offers an account of philosophical reflection that could be understood as a radicalized form of *transcendental reflection*. While Ueda himself does not express his idea in this way, such an interpretation will allow us to resituate Nishida's thought within the history of western philosophy, specifically in relation to the transcendental tradition. Upon doing so, we will be able to clear up some of the misunderstandings regarding the status of reflection in Nishida's philosophy.

In the following, I first present Ueda's account of philosophical reflection as it figures in Nishida's philosophy. While Ueda articulates this as an interpretation of Nishida, I present it as characteristic of Ueda's own positive account of philosophical reflection. I then proceed to argue that their mutual account of philosophical reflection is a radicalized form of transcendental reflection. In doing so, I also clarify what is truly unique about Nishida's and Ueda's conceptions of philosophical reflection. In Conclusion, I return to the ordinary Japanese usage of *jikaku* and ask what the nature of *jikaku* for the philosopher is.

## 2 Two Models of Reflection

Let us begin with the two models of reflection that Ueda offers, which he calls “small turn reflection” (*komawari no tanhansei* 小廻りの短反省) and “big turn reflection” (*ōmawari no hansei* 大廻りの反省) (1994: 103–104; 108–113). According to Ueda, while the former kind of reflection is prevalent in the western philosophical tradition, Nishida’s idea of *jikaku*, usually translated as “self-awareness” or “self-consciousness,” is exemplary of the latter.<sup>1</sup> Although Nishida himself does not make this distinction, it nicely highlights the uniqueness of his idea of *jikaku*.

As a starting point, Ueda takes a very simple example that Nishida himself had originally invoked in his earlier writings: the experience of seeing a flower.<sup>2</sup> What is the nature of this experience before we reflect and take a stance on it? Can we identify some sort of “I” or “self” at the heart of the experience? According to Ueda, the Buddhist tradition denies that there is such a self while the western philosophical tradition argues otherwise. Modern western common sense sides with the latter. We usually think that in our own experience of looking at a flower, there is an “I”, however implicit it may be, which is looking at the flower. Indeed, such a subject-object scheme is prevalent in one’s experience. Whether it is the experience of brushing our teeth in the morning or thinking about complex mathematical equations, we tend to believe that there is an “I” that is doing the brushing or the thinking. Yet, Ueda questions this common belief:

But is it really the case that from the very start, the subject “I” is seeing an object? [...] Is there really an “I” in the beginning? Is it not the case that there is the pure state of affairs or the presence [*genzen*, 現前] of the appearing of the flower (the pure presence prior to the determination of it as ‘flower’)? (Ueda 1994: 100)<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting that after posing this question, Ueda does not proceed to argue, as one may expect, that there is no self in such experience. Rather, he brackets this very question. He begins his analysis instead with the relatively uncontroversial point: *when I reflect on the experience, I become aware of the “I” that is reflecting on the experience*. Although it is difficult if not impossible to “verify” (*tashikameru* 確かめる) which view is correct, as Ueda says, “[w]hat is certain (*tashikanakoto* 確かなこと) is that when I say that ‘I am looking at the mountain,’ there is an ‘I’ that is saying that ‘I am looking at the mountain’” (Ueda 2000: 166). Rather than

<sup>1</sup>I am presenting the general outline of Ueda’s discussion in two of his works from 1994 (Ueda 1994: 98–119) and 2000 (Ueda 2000: 165–170).

<sup>2</sup>Nishida raises this example in his early, posthumously published writing, “Fragmentary Notes on Pure Experience” (*junsuikēiken ni kansurudanshō* 純粹経験に関する断章). Though the exact years in which these notes were written are unknown, they were supposedly composed around the time *An Inquiry into the Good* was originally published in 1911. Cf. Nishida (1980: 267–572). See also the afterword written by Tokuryū Yamauchi (*Nishida Kitarō Zenshū*, Vol. 16, 673–674). In Ueda’s work from 2000, he employs a different example of the experience of looking at a mountain but the idea remains the same.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Ueda (2000: 165–166). All Ueda citations are my translations.

speculating about the nature of our pre-reflective experience, he begins with our experience as it has already entered the arena of reflection. What happens upon reflection is that the reflective “I” goes back to the initial, pre-reflective experience and interprets it as *my* experience, namely that “I am looking at *the mountain*.”

At this point, Ueda describes two directions our thinking can take. On the one hand, one can think of this whole experience from the perspective of the reflecting “I” and interpret pre-reflective experience of seeing the flower as constituted by the higher-order “I,” *without which there would be no experience to begin with*. According to this view, the “I” is the condition of possibility of experience. Through reflection, we come to see that our initial experience of seeing the flower is *only* possible on the basis of its constitution by the “I.” Ueda sees the culmination of this way of thinking in the idea of transcendental subjectivity (Ueda 2000: 167). According to this view, reflection *articulates* the “I” that is allegedly only implicit in pre-reflective experience. Put differently, reflection is a way of *bringing out* the pre-reflective self.

On the other hand, the other direction seeks to *eliminate* the pre-reflective self. This view also acknowledges that, when we reflect on our initial experience, we come to see that the reflective ‘I’ constitutes the experience. But instead of then interpreting the initial experience as that which is only possible on the basis of the “I,” the initial experience is understood as the “original experience” (*genkeiken* 原経験) from which the “I” arises in the first place (together with the constituted experience). Here, Ueda emphasizes that it is *not* the case that we come to interpret the initial experience in this way upon reflection. One cannot reflectively come to see the initial experience as the original experience whereby the “I” is totally absent. Such theoretical thinking is alien to the matter at hand. Rather, it is something that can only be directly revealed through one’s experience. In the original experience, one simply apprehends oneself as completely nullified and selfless. As Ueda says: “[s]uch original experience is given in a ‘selfless’ manner [...] through the breaking down of the subject (‘I’) into nothingness” (Ueda 2000: 167). He also calls such experience *kaku* (覚) meaning “awakening” or “realization” (Ueda 2000: 146; see also 1991: 250).<sup>4</sup> As this word suggests, this is a kind of religious experience. But it is not something so inaccessible or extraordinary either. As a typical case of such awakened experience, Ueda refers to Nishida’s description of “pure experience” from the opening to *An Inquiry into the Good* (hereafter, *Inquiry*): “[i]n ‘the moment of seeing a color, hearing a sound,’ the subject-object frame that was closing off consciousness breaks opens into the clearing. This is “awakening” [覚]” (Ueda 1991: 250).<sup>5</sup>

We all have experience of losing the self when completely absorbed in a beautiful piece of music, for example. While this is a beautiful experience, there is nothing specifically religious about it. To be sure, most of the time, these are simply

<sup>4</sup> Ueda specifically describes such *kaku* as the awakening to one’s true mode of being in the clearing (Ueda 1991: 372).

<sup>5</sup> The original reads: 「『色を見、音を聞く刹那』、意識を閉ざしていた主客の枠が破れ、開けに開かれます。これが『覚』です。」

momentary experiences. But they can also have lasting transformative effects. When they are powerful enough to pull us out of our usual way of understanding ourselves as mostly self-enclosed and self-sustaining, then such events become awakened experiences. Importantly, it is *not* that we bring about those awakened experiences by giving them more reflective thought. In fact, no effort on our part can really bring about such experiences. Rather, it is the experience itself that pulls us out of our ordinary views of ourselves and reveals that we are nothing but reality actualizing itself, i.e., that we are selfless. I did not awaken myself but the experience awoke me. It is literally an awakened experience since it radically challenges and overturns our ordinary understanding of ourselves, i.e., it awakens us from our dogma. In such experience, we are sometimes led to say, “I am the music, and the music is me.” This is the way Nishida speaks in his “Fragmentary Notes on Pure Experience,” where he provides the following simple yet powerful description of pure experience: “I am looking at the flower At this moment, the flower is me and I am the flower” (Nishida 1980: 430). Of course, such remarks make little or only metaphorical sense when we take ourselves to be self-enclosed and self-sufficient. Usually, I have the firm belief that “I am I”, which in turn implies that I am *not* the flower and that the flower is *not* myself. Yet, when the selfless experience pulls us out of our ordinary ways of thinking and we are part of reality realizing itself, one naturally resorts to such ways of speaking. This allows us to see that the way we usually think of ourselves and reality is in fact a tainted view.

It cannot be overemphasized that selfless experience cannot be brought about through reflection. This is simply because reflection is necessarily bifurcating, i.e., it gives rise to the division between the reflecting I and reflected experience, however subtle the division may be. Yet, since selfless experience sees no such division at all, by its very nature, reflection cannot reveal it. Put differently, no reflection, however high-order it may be, can do the job of eliminating the “I”. As Ueda writes, “[t]he pre-reflective becomes the original givenness, *not through reflection*, but by way of the rupture of reflection [*hansei no yabure*, 反省の破れ]” (Ueda 1994: 178 [emphasis added]).

According to Ueda’s view, reflection takes the following form: At first, there is the selfless presence of “the flower.” This is the experience of *kaku* or awakening. Ueda describes this as “presencing to the presence” (*genzen e no genzai* 現前への現在) (Ueda 1994: 102). If someone were to ask *what* is being presented here, one cannot fully characterize the event since there is nothing that is determined. There is neither a determining subject nor a determined object. Only upon “coming back” to oneself in reflection, can one say “I am seeing the flower.” We must, of course, be careful with such a way of speaking since we do not want to suggest that there was originally a self that we only later came back to in reflection. It is only upon reflection that the subject-object dichotomy, and accordingly the “I”, arises for the first time. Ueda says that it is here that *ji-kaku* (note that *ji* means “self”, thus, *jikaku* means “self-awakening”) arises. This kind of reflection (namely, reflection *qua jikaku*) is quite different from the first view since *jikaku* arises with the awareness of its non-reflective origin in awakened experience. In such experience, the self is not there. And only in “coming back” to oneself in reflection, the self identifies with

itself. Yet, in doing so, it understands that the self is also selfless. Therefore, when the reflective I arises from the initial experience, it says: “the self is —*selflessly*— the self.” Ueda calls this kind of reflection “big turn reflection” because the self turns back on itself through a moment of self-negation or selflessness. This is to be distinguished from the “small turn reflection” whereby the self comes back to itself without realizing this selfless moment.<sup>6</sup> This refers to the first kind of reflection mentioned above. According to Ueda, contrary to the latter version, this reflection says, “the self is the self” or “I am I.”

At this point, let us take a moment to contemplate the idea of self-negation. What does it mean to say that the self is *selflessly* the self? How does it differ from the simple identification of the self with itself? Ueda tells us that this self-negation is “not merely formal.” By this, he means that the role of negation makes a significant, qualitative difference in what is at stake. As Ueda says, it is “the expression of the fulfillment itself in the presencing to the presence” (Ueda 1994: 102). This idea of “fulfillment” (*jūjitsu* 充実) recurs in passages where Ueda describes selfless experience. Referring to Nishida’s idea of pure experience, he says: “[i]n the very moment of seeing a color, hearing a sound, there is not yet subject nor object.’ In such experience, ‘I’ am infinitely open as the ‘selfless’ and fulfilled.” And shortly after, he also says that it is “the direct fulfillment (*chokusetsuteki jūjitsu* 直接的充実) of experience” (Ueda 2000: 168). Such a description nicely captures the fullness and richness of selfless experience as well as the radical openness or emptiness of the self. Whereas the usual conception takes the self to be closed off upon itself, thereby implying self-sufficiency, this view takes the self as being essentially and radically disclosed to reality. Here, “reality” should not be taken to be something that is objectified or necessarily implying that it is grasped by a self. Such experience of reality would not be fulfilling in Ueda’s sense of fulfillment. Rather, fulfillment occurs when the self is emptied of its various beliefs and desires that normally taint the perception of reality. In this way, selflessness or the emptiness of the self and the fullness and richness of the experience are two sides of the same coin: to be selfless *is* to be fulfilled by the fullness and richness of experience. Going back to my earlier example of being lost in the flow of music, the selfless encounter with the reality of the music certainly does not mean that I experience nothing. On the contrary, “I” experience “music” realizing itself fully.<sup>7</sup> Put differently, I am the very openness that allows the music to realize itself in its fullness without it being objectified as

---

<sup>6</sup>The expressions “short turn” and “long turn” are literal translations and intend to evoke the imagery of one’s reflection making a shorter, smaller turn or a longer, wider turn back onto oneself. Ueda’s idea is to distinguish between the direct way in which the self turns back onto itself (“short turn”) and the indirect and roundabout way that the self turns back onto itself through a moment of self-negation (“long turn”). While it is not conventional to speak in English of a turn in reflection being “short” or “long”, it should be noted that it is not natural to speak of reflection in these terms in Japanese either. I have kept the literal translations to alert the reader to the uniqueness of the imagery Ueda intends to evoke.

<sup>7</sup>Since it is somewhat inevitable to employ subject-object language in describing experience that is beyond it, I am here putting single quotation marks around the subject (I) and object (music) in the descriptions at the level of selfless experience.

something that is separate from me. In such experience, there is simply the “self-realization of reality itself,” as Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治, a student of Nishida’s, would put it (Nishitani 1982: 5). It is worth noting that Nishitani is employing the twofold meaning of the English word “realize,” namely “to actualize” and “to understand.” When we say that “music realizes itself in us,” on the one hand, it signifies the *actualization* of reality in us. On the other hand, it entails *our coming to an understanding*, or what Nishitani calls “appropriating through understanding,” that the music is indeed actualizing itself in us. Accordingly, we can observe that the moment of self-negation in the formulation “the self is selflessly the self” entails a self-understanding through the actualization of reality. In other words, self-understanding is mediated by the disclosure of reality. This is contrary to the kind of self-understanding of the self that immediately comes back to itself. Thus, small turn reflection involves immediate self-understanding, while big turn reflection involves self-understanding mediated by the actualization of reality.

### 3 Philosophical *jikaku*

In the above section, we discussed two models of reflection, namely one that immediately returns to itself and another that returns to itself through the mediation of self-negation. Put differently, one model articulates the pre-reflective self and one eliminates it. Let us now focus on Ueda’s description of *philosophical reflection*. Philosophical reflection is a specific kind of reflection insofar as it is a method employed in philosophical thinking. Broadly speaking—and putting aside all differences between the various philosophical tendencies—it is a higher-order reflection that attempts to reveal the underlying basis of knowledge or of reality itself. Ueda properly distinguishes the kind of reflection employed in our everyday lives from the higher-order *jikaku* employed in philosophy. For our purposes, let us call the latter, philosophical *jikaku*.

Ueda develops his view of philosophical reflection within the context of explicating Nishida’s philosophical position in the *Inquiry*, namely the “standpoint of pure experience” (*junsuikēiken no tachiba* 純粹経験の立場). Nishida describes pure experience as our direct, undifferentiated experience of reality prior to the subject-object distinction. The aim of the *Inquiry* was to show that pure experience is the “sole reality” from which the rest of reality and experience is derived. As Nishida says in the Preface: “I would like to explain everything on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality” (Nishida 1978: 4; 1990: xxx).<sup>8</sup> But, if pure experience precedes conceptualization and reflection, how can one attempt to develop a philosophical position out of it? In fact, as soon as we start reflecting on and talking about pure experience, is that not already a deviation from pure experience? It appears that

---

<sup>8</sup> Whenever the English translation is available, I have given the pagination from the Japanese original first, followed by the English translation pagination.

there is a chasm between pure experience and experience as it is reflectively understood. Moreover, there seems to be a further chasm between the above two and the philosophical position that is based on pure experience.

Ueda accordingly parses Nishida's attempt to explain everything on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality, into three distinct levels: (A) Pure experience, (B) Pure experience is the sole reality, and (C) I would like to explain everything on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality. Ueda takes A as an event that is often observed in the Zen Buddhist tradition (Ueda 1991: 235–236). For example, a Zen monk called Reiun who was distressed with his practice is said to have reached enlightenment upon seeing peach blossoms in full bloom, namely in “the moment of seeing the color” (*reiuntōka* 霊雲桃花). Or another monk, Kyōgen, was sweeping the garden when a small stone hit one of the bamboo trees. With this sound (i.e. in “the moment of hearing the sound”), he is said to have grasped the way (*kyōgengekichiku* 香巖擊竹).

However, as Ueda rightly adds, while these experiences are prevalent in the Zen Buddhist tradition, when Nishida introduced the idea of pure experience, he was not specifically referring to these Zen experiences nor was it his intention to explain Zen Buddhism based thereupon. Rather, “pure experience” was introduced within the context of *claiming* that it is the “sole reality.” As Ueda says: “[I]n the context of Nishida's thought, [pure experience] develops into “pure experience is the sole reality” (Ueda 1994: 182). This is the result of the level A pure experience becoming aware of itself [*jikaku*] as the sole reality.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, for Nishida, level A is coupled with the reflective level B insofar as the latter is the *jikaku* of the former. At this point, Ueda emphasizes that one should not think that what is expressed in B is a judgment *about* pure experience: “Since pure experience cannot be any object to begin with, this is not established as an object-judgment” (Ueda 1994: 182). Rather, the statement “pure experience is the sole reality” should be understood as describing pure experience as articulating itself. To employ Nishida's expression from the *Inquiry*, it describes the “self-development of pure experience” (*junsuikeiken no jihatsujiten* 純粹経験の自発自展). Perhaps, one way of understanding the difference is by asking what is the ground of the claim that “pure experience is the sole reality”. According to one possible reading, the ground lies in the judging self who unifies the subject and the predicate terms. However, this would involve making pure experience into a kind of object that can be variously predicated. Furthermore, the subject and predicate terms would rely on the judging self for its unification. An alternative reading suggests that the ground of the judgment lies in the very experience of pure experience, which affords the possibility of being articulated into various judgments. It is this reading that allows us to understand the reflective level B as an internal development, rather than an external imposition of the experiential level A.

<sup>9</sup>The original reads: 「しかし西田のコンテクストのうちでは『純粹経験が唯一の実在である』に展開している。これは(a)の純粹経験そのものが唯一の実在として自ら自覚したものである。」

Ueda calls the expression at level B the “original phrase” (*konponku*, 根本句, *Ur-satz*) and finds the equivalent in the Zen Buddhist tradition (Ueda 1994: 183. See also Ueda 1991: 237). For example, when it is said that the “flower is red in itself, water flows tranquilly in itself” (*hanawa onozukara kurenai mizuwa onozukara bōbō* 花自紅水自茫茫), Ueda asserts that such phrases in Zen Buddhism are not merely descriptive of flowers and water. Rather, they express the true nature of reality in general. “Original phrases”, according to Ueda, are self-sufficient and have the character of expressing and encompassing the whole of reality in a single, often simple phrase.

However, B is not yet the level of philosophical discourse. The aim of philosophy is not to provide a simple phrase that expresses everything in one go. Although it often does seek something like an original phrase, philosophy seeks this *as the basic principle* (*daiichi genri* 第一原理, *Grundsatz*) from which the rest of reality is derived, explained, or contextualized. When Nishida states that “I would like to explain everything on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality,” this is where we find him articulating his aspiration for the C level. In fact, on Ueda’s account this is the level unique to philosophical thinking. Furthermore, such statements suggest that Nishida understood philosophy as the all-encompassing science that seeks the fundamental principle(s) from which the interrelations between various positions are worked out.

Together, Ueda calls these three levels the “A-B-C interrelation” (A-B-C *renkan* 連関). He notes that the direction from A to B has been taken up by Zen practitioners and, accordingly, is prevalent in the Zen Buddhist tradition. Non-dual experience has given rise to various expressions whereby the experience is articulated and further reflected upon. However, according to Ueda, the step from B to C has not been taken up in the tradition. To begin with, Zen has always despised providing explanations. More specifically, it has not been interested in giving explanations of everything in the specific sense that Nishida has in mind here. Namely, the task in question is not so much to grasp the entirety of reality in one saying as Zen would have it, but to provide the framework from which everything is given its particular place and meaning. This task has not been seen in the province of Zen Buddhism. Indeed, there is an insurmountable chasm between B and C from the perspective of A. Ueda conjectures that Nishida was able to take this step from B to C because of his unique position as both a philosopher and a Zen practitioner.

The other direction from C to B is a way of taking the basic principle back to its origin. According to Ueda, this step is observable in the history of western philosophy as, for example, when the concept of being was interpreted *vis-à-vis* God as *causa sui*. It is interesting that he further notes that we can also see this in the history of modern Japanese philosophy and refers to Tanabe Hajime, a colleague and critic of Nishida, as an example. In his essay, “A Personal Philosophical Reflection on *Shōbōgenzō*,” Tanabe sets himself the task of extracting what is significant for contemporary philosophy from Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō*. Ueda observes that such an undertaking is a way of articulating what is given at the level of B and bringing it out to the level of C. However, according to Ueda, Tanabe did not further his step towards the level of A. Accordingly it remains an interpretation of the *Shōbōgenzō*



from the philosophical standpoint *without the accompanying experience regarding the content of the religious text*. We may say that it is a rationalization of experience from without rather than an articulation of experience from within.

Just as there was a huge chasm between C and B from the perspective of A, Ueda argues that there is also a huge chasm between B and A. From the perspective of C, even the idea that there is something beyond B, namely that which is beyond words, is simply unimaginable. Tanabe could not deepen his analysis to the level of A because in his eyes there simply is no extra step after B. Ueda goes as far as to claim that it may not be an exaggeration to say that this step from B to A was initiated for the first time in the history of philosophy by Nishida, again due to his unique position as a philosopher and Zen practitioner.

What is distinctive about Nishida's philosophical position, then, is that it is a dynamic interplay of the three levels. On the one hand, we find Nishida attempting to articulate "pure experience" in a philosophical way. This is the direction from the non-reflective to the reflective. And this is Nishida philosophizing as a Zen practitioner, as Ueda would put it. On the other hand, he proceeds from the level of the higher-order reflection back to experience in order to ground philosophical knowledge in non-reflective experience. This is Nishida the philosopher practicing Zen. Nishida's "philosophy of pure experience" is therefore an attempt to dynamically bring together the three qualitatively distinct levels.

Ueda's characterization of Nishida as "a Zen practitioner philosophizing and a philosopher practicing Zen" encapsulates what he took to be truly unique about Nishida. In a letter to Nishitani Keiji later in his life, Nishida replies affirmatively to Nishitani's comment that "there is something Zen-like behind Prof. Nishida's thought." After describing the core of Zen as grasping reality in truth (*shin no genjitsu haaku* 真の現実把握), Nishida proclaims that it has been his aspiration since his thirties to combine Zen and philosophy (as practiced in the West). Interestingly, he qualifies this as an "impossible" task.<sup>10</sup> According to Ueda, such a remark is not exaggerated. In his eyes, Zen's encounter with western philosophy is comparable to Christianity's encounter with Greek philosophy. Just as the latter event was not merely a historical event that occurred at a particular time in the past but has had a long-lasting influence on western culture until today, Ueda sees Zen's encounter with western philosophy as having an equally influential impact. Seen in this light, Nishida's philosophy as a whole (insofar as his struggle to bring together Zen and philosophy was lifelong) has a great deal to offer the world we live in today insofar as we are still struggling to bring the East and West into dialogue.

In the above, we considered Ueda's analyses of Nishida's position in the *Inquiry* in terms of the A-B-C interrelation. After basing his analysis on the *Inquiry*, Ueda goes on to further generalize the A-B-C interrelation. As we have seen, the statement "pure experience is the sole reality" (level B) was the articulation of the very experience of "pure experience" (level A). As such, it expresses the *jikaku* of "pure

---

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Ueda (1991: 223). The original letter is dated February 1943, 2 years before Nishida passed away.

experience” in the sense that the meaning expressed in those words are the *self-realization* (another meaning of *jikaku*) of “pure experience.” Accordingly, Ueda generalizes level B as the level of *jikaku*. Based on this reasoning, he reformulates levels A and C. Namely, since level A is the original experience from which *jikaku* arises, it is called *kaku* or realization (not yet *self-realization* but the simple experience of realization) as the origin of *jikaku*. Thus, level C, Nishida’s proclamation that he wants to “explain everything on the basis of pure experience as the sole reality,” is reformulated as the level where one attempts to understand the world (namely, “everything”) and the self insofar as world-understanding is simultaneously the understanding of the self *qua* being-in-the-world. Accordingly, the A-B-C interrelation is reformulated into the following tripartite structure: *Kaku* – *jikaku* – self-world understanding.

In light of this distinction, Ueda restates that in the *Inquiry*, Nishida had attempted a self-world understanding by way of “explanation” (“I would like to explain....”) (Ueda 1991: 251). And the principle driving the explanation came from the *jikaku* (i.e., the self-realization) of *kaku* (i.e., the experience of realization).

On this issue there are two points that Ueda mentions that are especially worth highlighting. Firstly, while *jikaku* is said to be the middle point between the experience prior to the subject-object split and the higher-order level of understanding, Ueda also calls the whole dynamic tripartite structure itself “*jikaku*.” The former is referred to as the narrow sense of *jikaku*. This is an interesting interpretation insofar as it gives *jikaku*, namely self-awareness and self-realization, the most pivotal role in Nishida’s philosophy. Put differently, by calling the whole dynamic structure *jikaku*, Ueda is interpreting Nishida’s entire philosophy on the basis of *jikaku*. It should be noted that I am not suggesting that Ueda takes Nishida’s philosophical position of *jikaku*, extensively articulated in *Intuition and Reflection in Self-awareness* (1917), as the pinnacle of Nishida’s philosophy. There is an important distinction to be made between Nishida’s philosophical position of *jikaku*, which was akin to Fichte’s transcendental position, and the notion of *jikaku* that came to express the dynamic structure of reflection, which was later succinctly formulated as “the self mirroring itself within itself” (*jiko ga jiko ni oite jiko o utsusu* 自己自身が自己に於て自己を写す). While Nishida gives up his philosophical position of *jikaku* by the 1920s, the idea of a dynamic structure of reflection *qua jikaku* remains central even in the 1930s and 40s. When Ueda interprets Nishida’s philosophy based on *jikaku*, he is referring to *jikaku* in the sense of the dynamic structure of reflection. Nevertheless, while Nishida emphasized the “place” of *jikaku* that is implied in the above formulation of *jikaku*, namely the *within* (*ni oite* に於て) of “the self mirrors itself within itself”, Ueda wanted to emphasize the dynamism implied in (the place of) *jikaku*. While subtle, Ueda’s preference is clear from his choice of calling the whole dynamic structure “*jikaku*” rather than “place.” For Ueda, the deepening and expansion of self-awareness are the two moments of *jikaku*, which allow different places to open up for us. Although *jikaku* and place are co-dependent concepts in Nishida’s philosophy, and while Ueda also sees the importance of the notion of place, Ueda underscores the dynamism that is implied in the notion of *jikaku*.

The second important point that Ueda mentions in this context is his unique understanding of philosophical reflection as it figures in Nishida's philosophy. As we have seen, level C, or the level of self-world understanding, was the level unique to philosophical thinking. According to Ueda, if we understand *jikaku* as the middle point of *kaku* and self-world understanding, then *jikaku* is the dynamic movement that, on the one hand, *deepens* itself through the experience of *kaku* while, on the other hand, *expands* itself through developing the understanding of the self and the world. As such, philosophical reflection is the development and expansion of *jikaku* in the narrow sense.

Returning to our discussion in the previous section where we examined the two models of reflection, we can now clearly state what is distinct about Nishida's conception of philosophical reflection. If we understand reflection under the first model whereby the self returns to itself in a self-sufficient manner, then philosophical reflection, which is a higher-level form of reflection, essentially becomes a matter of articulating the nature of the self that is firmly settled at the center of all understanding. As we see in Descartes' case, the existence of the world comes only after the self is secured regarding its central place in philosophical reflection.

However, if we understand reflection under the second model, which essentially includes the moment of self-negation (i.e., that knows its origin in selfless experience), then the nature of philosophical reflection starts looking very different. Since reflection *qua jikaku* involves reality or the world in the sense that being self-aware in the sense of *jikaku* means that the self is aware of itself by selflessly being disclosed to reality, what we called philosophical *jikaku* (or higher-order *jikaku*) is essentially a matter of understanding the interconnectedness of self and world. This is why Ueda could claim that level C or self-world understanding is nothing but the development and expansion of *jikaku*. Therefore, it is only natural that Nishida's philosophical understanding of the self and the world has significant differences from most western philosophy, which practices the first model of reflection. Furthermore, since there is no way that one can somehow *prove* that one model of reflection is superior to the other (after all they are just two directions our thought can take, as Ueda rightly notes), any attempt to dismiss Nishida's philosophy on methodological grounds must at the very least appreciate the difference between his model of reflection and the traditional model. Only then can we start critically assessing Nishida's philosophy.

#### **4 Philosophical *jikaku* as a Radicalized Form of Transcendental Reflection**

In the above, we considered Ueda's analysis of reflection and philosophical reflection as they figure in Nishida's philosophy. And in doing so, we saw how Ueda underlines the uniqueness of Nishida's position *vis-à-vis* more traditional positions of western philosophy. At this point, one may be left with the impression that

Nishida's view on philosophical reflection has very little in common with the more traditional kind. After all, Ueda's main point was that Nishida operates with a different model of reflection altogether. However, despite Ueda's emphasis on the discontinuity between Nishida's philosophy and western philosophy, there is an important *continuity* worth highlighting that I believe would allow us to better appreciate the significance of Nishida's philosophy in the context of world philosophy.

The continuity I have in mind here is that between Nishida's philosophy and the transcendental tradition since Kant. It is relatively well-known that immediately following the *Inquiry*, Nishida spent much time revising his position by critically engaging with neo-Kantianism as well as Fichte's philosophy. What is less known is that an important part of that engagement involved Nishida critically appropriating the transcendental method (Ishihara 2016). Rather than entering into the details of this engagement, what I wish to do in the following is to argue that Ueda in fact provides us with a case that speaks in favor of this appropriation. More specifically, I show how Ueda's analysis suggests that Nishida's view of philosophical reflection is not merely an alternative to western conceptions of philosophical reflection, but is a radicalized form of transcendental reflection. Such a reading not only allows us to better appreciate the significance of Nishida's philosophy, but also, sheds light on the nature of transcendental reflection, and more generally, the nature of transcendental ways of thinking.

In the context of explaining the two models of reflection, Ueda (2000: 167) explicitly refers to transcendental philosophy as an exemplar of the first model of reflection. In the first model, the reflective "I" goes back to the initial experience and interprets it as that which is only possible on the basis of this I. In other words, experience—including pre-reflective experience—is said to be constituted by the reflecting "I." According to this understanding of reflection, there is no experience without the self. We can certainly say that Kant's transcendental ego serves the role of this higher-order self insofar as it is the condition of possibility for synthetic a priori knowledge. Indeed, Kant's Copernican revolution showed that knowledge of objects is possible because transcendental subjectivity plays the central role in cognition, not the existence of objects, as was traditionally thought.

Since Ueda identifies traditional forms of transcendental philosophy as working with the first model of reflection and contrasts this to the second model exemplified in Nishida's philosophy, it may seem that Ueda is suggesting that Nishida's conception of philosophical *jikaku* is in essence a *non-transcendental* kind of reflection. But the following passage seems to suggest the contrary:

Instead of beginning with reflection and proceeding transcendently to a higher-order reflection ("reflection of reflection"), Nishida goes the other way around in "taking a step back by turning the light in upon oneself" [*ekōhenshō no taiho*, 回光返照の退歩]. First, the rupture of reflection [*hansei no yabure*] is experienced which then gives rise to the awareness of the limits of reflection. Then, through such awareness [*jikaku*] of its limits, the limits are permeated and the space of reflection expands to the pre-reflective by way of returning

to its origin. From there it proceeds to reflection and then on to reflection of reflection (now having the function of transcendental reflection). (Ueda 1991: 368 [emphasis added])<sup>11</sup>

Let us try to untangle this dense passage in light of our earlier discussion. Unlike more traditional forms of philosophical reflection in the West, Nishida's philosophical *jikaku* begins with the "rupture of reflection" (that is, the experience of "*kaku*"). Reflection that arises from such experience is qualitatively different from the kind that is oblivious to this origin since in the latter case, the reflective "I" immediately takes center stage and interprets itself to be the origin of itself. Rather than simply starting with the reflective "I," Nishida begins with the experience of *kaku*. And when reflection arises from such *kaku*, namely when *jikaku* occurs, such reflection expands its "space of reflection" to encompass the pre-reflective realm as both its limits and origin. Philosophical *jikaku*, then, is the higher-order reflection that further expands this space of reflection toward the understanding of the self and the world with the understanding of its limits and origin.

But what does Ueda mean when he says that this higher-order reflection has the function of transcendental reflection? How could this be when Ueda identifies transcendental philosophy as an exemplar of the kind of philosophy that is based on the first model of reflection? I believe we can make sense of this if we understand what Ueda calls transcendental reflection in the following way. Namely, as *a higher-order reflection that seeks the conditions of possibility for our knowledge and, more generally, our experience*. Note that this way of formulating the nature of transcendental reflection makes no immediate reference to "the self" or "subjectivity." Historically, as we see in Kant and the German idealist tradition, transcendental reflection was a way of articulating the structures of transcendental subjectivity. However, we can question whether this is a necessary consequence of transcendental reflection. Ueda's distinction between the two models of reflection allows us to see that it was merely a consequence of the model of reflection they were working with. Put differently, our understanding of the nature of transcendental reflection is contingent on how one understands the nature of reflection.

Under the first model, transcendental reflection seeks the conditions of possibility for our knowledge and experience in the structures of transcendental subjectivity because, according to this model, higher-order reflection is the heightened form of reflection centered around the reflective "I." This is what we find in Kant and the western transcendental tradition. But, under the second model, higher-order reflection seeks the conditions of possibility for our knowledge and experience *not* in any transcendental subjectivity, because that would already be at the level of reflection and would fall short of articulating the origin of reflection. Rather, transcendental reflection, in this picture, must go further and seek the conditions of possibility for our knowledge and experience in the non-reflective, selfless experience from which

---

<sup>11</sup>"*Ekōhenshō*" (回光返照) is a phrase that appears in the Zen Buddhist text, *The Record of Linji (Rinzairoku)*. The meaning of the phrase is: "turning the light in upon myself." Sasaki explains that "[t]he phrase may be said to describe the essence of Buddhist meditation – to take the mind, ordinarily occupied entirely with discursive thought and external phenomena, and direct it inward toward the source of the mind's activities" (Sasaki 2009: 266).

the reflective “I” arises in the first place. Accordingly, in the above quote, Ueda seems to be suggesting that Nishida is working with this latter kind of transcendental reflection insofar as Nishida’s philosophical *jikaku* finds the ground of our knowledge and experience in the experience of *kaku*.

Understood in this way, we can see how Nishida could be said to be operating with a kind of transcendental reflection. But the question remains: how could we say that Nishida’s philosophical *jikaku* is a *radicalized* form of traditional transcendental reflection? Since the two models of reflection are two alternative models that cannot be proven wrong from either perspective, how can we say that a higher-order form of reflection is a radicalization of the higher-order form of the other?

While it is true that the two models are equally valid ways of understanding the nature of reflection, Ueda clearly shows his preference when it comes to the discussion on the nature of philosophical reflection. Returning to the *Inquiry*, which Ueda takes to be the quintessence of Nishida’s philosophy (not in the sense that he thinks that it is the most clearly articulated work, but in the sense that it contains the core of Nishida’s whole philosophy), he notes that there are two “beginnings” in the work. Or put differently, he says that “‘the philosophy of pure experience’ *begins twice*” (Ueda 1991: 367). One of the beginnings is found in Part 2: Reality where Nishida identifies, through a kind of Cartesian doubt, “the starting point of his inquiry” (which is the title of Chapter 1) in the indubitable fact of direct experience. Subsequently, he says that conscious phenomena, which in this context refers to nothing other than direct or pure experience, is the sole reality. This is the *philosophical beginning* that is articulated as a result of reflecting on the starting point of philosophical inquiry. But there is also another starting point that is announced at the very beginning of the book, Part 1: Pure Experience (Chapter 1: Pure Experience), in the description of pure experience or what Ueda calls “*kaku*.” This is the *non-reflective beginning* that comes *before* reflection. It is the “beginning of the beginning” (Ueda 1991: 368). And, compared to the other beginning, which is presented by way of reflection, this beginning is announced abruptly and inevitably so because of its non-reflective nature. For the very event of pure experience, as we have stressed earlier in this paper, does not and cannot present itself through reflection but can only be presented in direct encounter with such experience. Many readers of the *Inquiry* stumble at the outset because *this* beginning is presented on the first page prior to any introduction of the context. What is interesting is that in the Preface, Nishida suggests to anyone reading the book for the first time to skip Part 1. Ueda notes that this was probably because Nishida anticipated the difficulty of understanding and appreciating what was being presented there.

As we have already seen in Ueda’s tripartite analysis of the *Inquiry*, the philosophical beginning in Nishida’s philosophy is ultimately made possible by its non-reflective starting point. Although such a philosophical beginning is certainly not necessary, Ueda claims that, “[s]o long as philosophy is a reflective discipline, taking reflection back to the pre-reflective is a form of radical reflection” (Ueda 1991: 368 [emphasis added]). And he continues: “Furthermore, the pre-reflective is originally the most direct. Thus taking reflection back to the pre-reflective is radicalizing reflection, but also, it is the recovery of the most direct.” The radicality of such

reflection is further underlined when Ueda otherwise speaks of “the suspension of reflection” (*hanseiteishi* 反省停止). Comparing this to the phenomenological *epoché*, he says that the suspension of reflection is much more far-reaching: “While the suspension of judgment is a specific method of philosophical reflection, the suspension of reflection is a way of reflecting on the practice of philosophy itself” (USS, 2: 210–211). For Husserl, the phenomenological *epoché* was a procedure of “bracketing,” or putting our general belief in the existence of the external world out of play in order to secure the field proper to phenomenology, i.e., phenomena as they present themselves to us. It is a radical method insofar as such bracketing brings out our unquestioned belief in the acceptance of the world, which is otherwise covered up in our natural ways of relating to the world. But however radical this may be, it still remains within the province of reflection since the phenomenological *epoché* is, as Ueda says, a specific method of phenomenological reflection.

The suspension of reflection, in contrast, radically questions the belief in reflection. It questions whether beginning with the reflective “I” is the only possible beginning for philosophical inquiry into reality. Of course, to the extent that philosophy is a reflective endeavor, it must begin with reflection. However, as we saw, reflection can take two directions. One direction interprets pre-reflective experience from the perspective of the reflective “I” and claims that reflection is a way of articulating the implicit “I” in experience prior to reflection. The other direction comes out of an acknowledgement that pre-reflective experience is the selfless origin from which reflection arises together with the subject-object dichotomy. In the latter case, the higher-order “I” does not heighten the reflective “I,” but rather, it proceeds to “cancel” (*kesu* 消す) the “I” that seems to be there in the initial experience. As Ueda says: “It is not that ‘I see’ the ‘seeing I’ [in a linear higher-order way], but rather, it is an effort of canceling the ‘I’ of the ‘seeing I’ into the thing that is being seen” (USS, 2: 211).

Let us dwell for a moment on this idea of “cancelling the ‘I’ into (or towards) the thing” or making the “I” disappear into the thing. In our experience of, say, seeing a flower, one can take the flower as an object standing opposed to oneself. In doing so, we tend to forget that this was due to an act of making the flower into an object, i.e. that it was a result of a positing act that grasped the flower as an object. If our experience of the flower as object was an effect of our performance, then what would happen if we could refrain from such action and instead let the thing simply reveal itself to us? This is what Ueda is suggesting when he says, “go into the thing” (*mono ni hairu* 物に入る). Here, “thing”, or *mono* (物, もの), does not denote the thing that has become the object (*kyakutai* 客体; *taishō* 対象) of our awareness. Rather, Ueda has in mind what the poet Matsuo Bashō says in the context of explicating what he takes to be the essence of good haiku: “Go into the thing and its minuteness manifests.”<sup>12</sup> For Bashō, good haiku is born from an elimination of one’s subjective coloring of experience. When haiku is composed from the subject’s perspective of seeing the “thing” as an object, namely when “the self and thing are

<sup>12</sup>The reference is from *Sanzōshi* (Three Color Notebooks). Quoted in (USS, 2: 217).

two [and not one],” such composition remains far from “good haiku” that arises from one’s complete absorption into the thing. Nishitani Keiji, in an essay titled “The Standpoint of Śūnyatā,” also refers to Bashō’s famous line, “From the pine tree learn of the pine tree; and from the bamboo of the bamboo” (Nishitani 1982: 128). Nishitani explains that Bashō is not suggesting that we observe the pine tree more carefully or much less to analyze it scientifically. Rather, “[h]e means for us to enter into the mode of being where the pine tree is the pine tree itself, and the bamboo is the bamboo itself, and from there to look at the pine tree and the bamboo” (Nishitani 1982: 128). Taking a hint from the Buddhist notion of *samādhi* (or “settling”; 定) as the state of mind of pure, selfless concentration on a thing, Nishitani characterizes the mode of being of things in their “selfness” (i.e. as they are in themselves, *jītai-sei* 自体性), as *jyōzai* (定在) or “samadhi-being.” It is the mode of being of things as they are “settled into their own positions.” According to Nishitani, the samadhi-being of things only manifests in the standpoint of Śūnyatā (or emptiness), namely the standpoint whereby the ego has given way its central position to the things themselves. Not surprisingly, we also find a similar characterization of the “thing” in Nishida’s thought. In his later period, he often spoke of “seeing as the thing [*mono*], acting as the thing [*mono*]” or “seeing by becoming the thing, acting by becoming the thing” (*monotonatte mi, monotonatte okonau* 物となって見、物となって行う). This is the kind of seeing and acting that is actualized when the subject loses itself into the thing and the subject-object split is no longer there, as in the case of learning from the pine tree. And in the *Inquiry*, he says: “To say that we know a thing simply means that the self unites with it. When one sees a flower, the self has become the flower” (Nishida 1978, 1990: 77).

Now, returning to our earlier discussion, according to Ueda, suspension of reflection prepares one to encounter experience in this selfless manner where we are at once disclosed to “the realization of reality,” to use Nishitani Keiji’s phrase once again. But what must be emphasized, he continues, is that such suspension of reflection is not equivalent to the actual experience of “going into the thing”, or what he also calls “presencing to the presence.” The suspension of reflection merely *prepares* one to encounter such reality. Perhaps, we could compare the distance between the two with the distance between the phenomenological *epoché* and the phenomenological reduction. The *epoché* is a negative procedure of suspending judgment, which must be subsequently complemented by the reduction, which, by contrast, is positive insofar as it is the procedure of “going back” to the field that has opened by the *epoché*. Similarly, we can say that the suspension of reflection is a negative procedure of putting the action of reflection out of play. Such negation, however, must be accompanied by the positive practice of actually letting oneself be disclosed to the selfless presence of the things themselves. Yet, the analogy stops there because the phenomenological *epoché* and reduction are both methods of phenomenological reflection. By contrast, while the suspension of reflection remains a method of philosophical reflection, the presencing to the presence is that which is by its nature non-reflective and hence is prior to or beyond reflection. In this sense, the distance between the suspension of reflection and the actual presencing to the presence is much greater than that between the phenomenological *epoché* and the reduction.



Let us now return to our question: In what sense is Nishida's, and effectively Ueda's, philosophical *jikaku* a *radicalized* form of traditional transcendental reflection? Put differently, why is seeking the conditions of possibility for our knowledge and experience in the non-reflective, selfless experience *more radical* than seeking them in the structures of transcendental subjectivity? From the above, we can say that the answer to this question lies in Nishida's and Ueda's resolute determination to take philosophical reflection back to its origin, i.e. to return to the very beginning of philosophical inquiry. As we saw in Ueda's analysis of Nishida's *Inquiry*, philosophy begins twice for Nishida. It was the beginning with non-reflective, awakened experience, that allowed him to ultimately identify the conditions of possibility for knowledge and experience with the selfless encounter with reality. Such reflection, namely reflection on the non-reflective, is radical insofar as reflection cannot reach the non-reflective without breaking from itself. And yet, once non-reflective experience is disclosed through the "rupture of reflection" as the ground of reality, then the space of reflection expands to the non-reflective and philosophical reflection takes this as the "beginning of the beginning."

The radicality of such reflection was also underlined by the somewhat paradoxical idea of the suspension of reflection that Ueda introduced. It is paradoxical as a philosophical method since it demands that one radically questions the very philosophical tool at one's disposal. And yet, it is this paradoxical nature of the method that puts us in a position to better appreciate the origin of reflection. Carrying out such a method, although not the same as actually having the selfless experience, nonetheless prepares one for such an encounter. In this sense, it may be the most one could expect from a philosophical method that inquires into the origin of itself.

## 5 Conclusion

In the Introduction, we briefly touched on the ordinary Japanese meaning of *jikaku* as connoting a kind of self-understanding gained through a disclosure of one's place. In Japanese it is also common to speak of "the deepening of one's *jikaku*" (*jikaku ga fukamaru* 自覚が深まる). According to Ueda, such language reflects the fact that one's *jikaku* is related to the deepening of the world one finds oneself in (Ueda 1991: 315). As an illustration, Ueda mentions how the very same act can have different meanings depending on what kind of place or world one finds oneself in. For example, if a person who has committed a robbery finds himself in the "world of law", he can atone for his crime by way of a legal penalty. But if his *jikaku* deepens to the "world of morality," the subject must transform himself internally, rather than through external compensation, to face what he has done. And furthermore, if the person's *jikaku* has deepened to the "world of religion," then even the idea of owning something for one's own sake is already sinful. Nishida's basic insight, which Ueda further develops, is this idea that we can have various kinds as well as various levels of *jikaku*

depending on what kind of place one finds oneself in and how one relates to this place. As human beings, we dwell in a plurality of places, each place providing one with a sense of identity and belongingness. And sometimes we may find ourselves more open to a place and more closed to another. In this way, our way of being is defined by our relatedness to our places. But what marks Nishida's and Ueda's true insight is the idea that ultimately, our *jikaku* is twofold.<sup>13</sup> Underlying all of our finite *jikaku* as, say, a parent, a scholar, a Japanese person, etc. is the *jikaku* of oneself as selfless and no-thing, or what Nishida calls "*jikaku* as absolute nothingness" (*zettaimu no jikaku* 絶対無の自覚). In Ueda's words: "[T]he self, by being in a place, is also, simultaneously, within the infinite openness (*mugen no hirake* 無限の開け). And I am open to 'the infinite openness' as 'selfless'" (Ueda 1991: 322).

For both Nishida and Ueda, then, one's *jikaku* must ultimately deepen to the understanding of oneself as selfless and infinitely open to one's place if we are to follow through with the deepening of *jikaku*. As philosophers, however, what is essential is not to simply have such *jikaku* but to grasp and articulate the nature of *jikaku* and, accordingly, of the world (since *jikaku* is correlated to world-understanding) in its twofold structure. So if we were to ask, "what is the nature of Nishida and Ueda's *jikaku* as a philosopher?" we could answer by saying that the nature of their philosophical *jikaku* is to grasp and conceptually articulate the twofold structure of our *jikaku* and our world *internally*, that is, by awakening to such twofold nature ourselves. As Ueda says, to philosophize is "to execute *jikaku* in a self-aware [*jikaku-teki*] manner" (*jikaku no jikakuteki suikō* 自覚の自覚的遂行) (Ueda 1991: 364). As Ueda emphasizes, such a task is not at all easy and this is what makes Nishida's philosophy so difficult to understand. It is not that Nishida spuriously tried to blur the boundary between philosophy and religion. Rather, the difficulty is a result of the sincere attitude of a rigorous philosopher wanting to provide a comprehensive explanation of the entirety of reality from the most direct, fundamental standpoint. As Nishida says in one of his later writings: "Since *An Inquiry into the Good*, it has been my aim to see things and to think things from the most direct and most fundamental standpoint. It has been to grasp the standpoint wherefrom everything arises and whereto everything returns" (Nishida 1979: 3).

---

<sup>13</sup>Nishida presents *basho* with a three-fold structure, which corresponds to the structure of *jikaku*: *basho* of being (*u no basho* 有の場所), *basho* of relative nothingness (*sōtaimu no basho* 相対無の場所), and *basho* of absolute nothingness (*zettaimu no basho* 絶対無の場所). This tripartite division provides a slightly more nuanced version than Ueda's idea of the "twofoldbeing-in-the-world" (*nijūsekainaisonzai* 二重世界内存在), which states that as being-in-the-world ("world" here means the comprehensive space of meaning), we are simultaneously within the hollow expanse (*kokū* 虚空). I am here following Ueda's concise version of the twofold structure of *jikaku*, which I believe is a condensed version of Nishida's tripartite structure of *basho* and *jikaku*.

## Bibliography

- Ishihara, Yuko 石原悠子. 2016. *Transcendental Philosophy and its Transformations: Heidegger and Nishida's Critical Engagements with Transcendental Philosophy in the Late 1920s*. PhD Dissertation. University of Copenhagen.
- Nishida, Kitarō 西田幾多郎. 1978. *Zen no kenkyū 善の研究 [An Inquiry into the Good]*. In Yoshishige Abe et al., ed. *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū 西田幾多郎全集*, Vol. 1, 3–196. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten (originally published in 1911).
- . 1979. *Tetsugakuronbunshū Daisan 哲学論文集 [Philosophical Essays, No. 3]*. In Yoshishige Abe et al., ed. *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū 西田幾多郎全集*, Vol. 9. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- . 1980. *Junsuikēiken ni kansuru danshō 純粹経験に関する断章 [Fragmentary Notes on Pure Experience]*. In Yoshishige Abe et al., ed. *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū 西田幾多郎全集*, Vol. 16 (*Shoki sōkō [Early Writings]*), 267–572. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- . 1990. *An Inquiry into the Good*. English translation by Masao Abe & Christopher Ives. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.
- Nishitani, Keiji 西谷啓治. 1982. *Religion and Nothingness*. Trans. Jan van Bragt. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sasaki, Ruth F., trans. 2009. *The Record of Linji*, ed. Thomas Y. Kirchner. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1991. *Nishida Kitarō o yomu 西田幾多郎を読む [Reading Nishida Kitarō]*. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- . 1994. *Keiken to jikaku: Nishida tetsugaku no “basho” o motomete 経験と自覚:西田哲学の「場所」を求めて [Experience and jikaku: In a search for “basho” in Nishida's philosophy]*. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- . 2000. *Watashi to wa nanika 私とは何か [What is the I?]*. Tokyo: Iwanami.

# Part VI

## The Philosophical Position of the Twofold World

### Introduction

In his self-introduction, Ueda indicates a crucial feature of his philosophy when he writes: “Regarding the world within which the subject is placed, it is overlapping in such a way that cannot be seen.” This is where the conception of “a two-fold being-in-the-world” comes into play. While one mode of viewing the world finds objects, presence and visibility, there is always another side, the side of the non-object, of negativity, and invisibility. Only from within this two-fold conceptual framework is it possible to grasp other central concepts of Ueda’s such as “I, am not I, [therefore] I am I”, and the “self-awareness of I and Thou”: Digging deeper into this concept we also find further evidence of the profound influence Heidegger and Nishida had on Ueda’s philosophy.

The two essays in this section depart exactly from this point. In his “Twofold Being-in-the-World in Ueda’s Philosophy: On His Interpretation of Heidegger and Nishida” Ōta Hironobu interrogates the concept of life (j. *inochi* 命), understood as the coexistence among all creatures through forsaking egoism and knowing the true content of one’s being. Ōta’s study centers on Ueda’s construal of ideal human experience and existence. He explains how the “two-fold” concept draws heavily from the philosophies of Heidegger and Nishida, arguing that while Ueda follows the former in defining human beings as “being-in-the-world”, it is the latter’s idea of “pure experience” that is the foundation of what Ueda calls “primordial experience”. Ōta contends that from within the totality of meaning where we live in the world, we see things pragmatically and see ourselves from the horizon of social relationships. Yet, according to Ueda, primordial experience obtains when we can affirm our life and love things just as they are, as exemplified by the poetry of Rilke and Bashō.

In his “Ueda on Being-in-the-Twofold-World or World amidst the Open Expanse: Reading Nishida through Heidegger and Reading Heidegger through Nishida” John Krummel examines Ueda’s interpretation of crucial phenomenological concepts of place, world, horizon, and his notion of the “open expanse”, disclosing the

importance of Nishida and Heidegger to Ueda, while also illuminating the productive way in which Ueda appropriates both sides of the encounters he undertakes. Krummel explains how Heidegger and Nishida have inspired a creative unfolding of their thematics in the philosophy of Ueda and demonstrates how Ueda reads each thinker in light of the other, making use of Heideggerian concepts in reading Nishida and vice versa.

# Chapter 12

## Twofold Being-in-the-World in Ueda's Philosophy: On His Interpretation of Heidegger and Nishida



Hironobu Ota

### Abbreviation

USS Ueda, Shizuteru. 2001–2003. *Ueda Shizuteru shū* 上田閑照集 [Collected Works of Ueda Shizuteru], eleven volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami.

### 1 Introduction

“Twofold being-in-the-world” (*nijū-sekai-nai-sonzai* 二重世界内存在) is no doubt the most important concept in Ueda's philosophy. By the concept, Ueda tries to show us his thought about the ideal experience and existence of human being. In *Existence and Hollow Existence: Twofold Being-in-the-World* (1992, revised in 1999),<sup>1</sup> Ueda writes as follows:

In short, the world itself where we live as being-in-the-world is inherently twofold and essentially twofold in the invisible way. We “are located within” [*oite aru* 於てある] the world and because of that, at the same time, we “are located within” the unlimited openness or the invisible hollow expanse [*kokū* 虚空] where the world is. (USS, 9: 22)

Ueda follows Heidegger's claim that human being as an individual is not an encapsulated ego but “being-in-the-world” (*In-der-Welt-sein*). However, in addition to

---

<sup>1</sup>This book was originally published under the title *Place: Twofold Being-in-the-World* (*Basho: nijūsekainaisonzai* 『場所——二重世界内存在』) in 1992 by Kōbundō in Kyoto. The revised version was published under the title: *Existence and Hollow Existence: Twofold Being-in-the-World* (*Jitsuzon to kyozon: nijūsekainaisonzai* 『実存と虚存——二重世界内存在』) by Chikuma shobō in Tokyo (1999).

---

H. Ota (✉)  
Ehime University, Ehime, Japan  
e-mail: [ota.hironobu.vf@ehime-u.ac.jp](mailto:ota.hironobu.vf@ehime-u.ac.jp)

this, he insists that this world is, in turn, “located within” a “hollow expanse” (*kokū*, a traditional Buddhist term for the “empty space” of non-obstruction) which transcends and envelops this world. The idea of “twofold being-in-the-world” can be divided into two notions: the twofold world and the twofold self within it. The concept draws heavily from the philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎. Ueda treats the concept of world through an interpretation of Heidegger and the concept of self through the philosophy of Nishida. In fact, much of Ueda’s terminology is derived from these two philosophers. For example, the idea of being “located within” comes from Nishida’s philosophy of “place of absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu no basho* 絶対無の場所). Furthermore, the idea of “hollow expanse” is a synthesis of Nishida’s “place” and Heidegger’s “openness” (*Offenheit*). The purpose of my article is to clarify the essence of “twofold being-in-the-world” by focusing on Ueda’s interpretation of Heidegger and Nishida.

## 2 Invisible Twofoldness of World: World and Nothingness in Heidegger

Heidegger’s central notion is “the ontological difference” (*ontologische Differenz*), that is, the crucial distinction between Being (*das Sein*) and beings (*das Seiende*). Human beings always “disclose” (*erschließen*) or “open” (*offen*) the Being of beings (e.g. when we say “the sky is blue” or “I am happy,” “is” and “am” correspond to Being whereas “the sky” and “I” correspond to beings). In Heidegger’s terminology, we as beings are defined by our “being-there” (*Dasein*), whose fundamental structure is called “being-in-the-world.” The self cognizes the Being of itself by relating to the Being of things and other beings. The world is exactly where the dynamism of the self is displayed as a movement towards the other and back towards itself. Heidegger calls such dynamic Being of *Dasein* “existence” (*Existenz*). However, it is misleading to think of *Dasein* as something that connects with the world by going outside of itself, for it is already “outside” together with other beings on the “horizon of the world.” Thus, the traditional categories of subject and object fail to characterize our most basic way of encountering beings. Ueda’s concepts of “twofold being-in-the-world” and “hollow existence” (*kyozon* 虚存) are developed from these two senses of “being-in-the-world” and “existence.” Ueda explicates the former concept in the first two chapters of *Existence and Hollow Existence* (“Meaningfulness and Nothingness of World, a Fourfold” and “Horizon and Beyond”) through an interpretation of Heidegger.

Let us first look into the meaning of Heidegger’s notion of “world.” *Dasein* encounters various beings in the world, namely “innerworldly beings” (*innerweltliches Seiende*). In daily life, these beings are understood as useful things, that is “things at hand” (*Zuhandenes*). For example, a hammer is usually understood as a tool to be used “in order to” (*um-zu*) strike nails “in order to” build a house. However, there is no such thing as a uniquely useful thing, since the usefulness of a thing belongs to a “referential totality” (*Verweisungsganzheit*). For example, a pen belongs to the totality of other useful things, such as ink, paper, table and so on. The “significance” (*Bedeutsamkeit*) of this referential totality is anchored in the Being of

Dasein, which cannot serve a further purpose, since it is the Being “for the sake of which” (*Worumwillen*) things are useful. When we understand beings, we always “disclose” or “open” the world as a “referential totality.”

Heidegger calls the kind of Being of innerworldly beings as things at hand “handiness” (*Zuhandenheit*). In contrast, he calls the innerworldly beings as mere substances that have various attributes “things objectively present” (*Vorhandenes*). The latter is preeminent in the natural sciences, which views beings through the process of “de-worlding.” The Being of beings as things objectively present is mere “objective presence” (*Vorhandenheit*), which is first discovered by neglecting the world. Although the fundamental Being of human beings is “existence,” human beings as innerworldly beings can also be understood in terms of “handiness” or “objective presence” from the pragmatic or scientific perspective.

Moreover, the world of Dasein is a “with-world” (*Mitwelt*). This is to say that we understand others in our daily lives as beings that bear a specific role. Even Dasein understands itself in terms of its world. For example, one might play the role of a father, a businessman, a mail clerk or a teacher while belonging to the network of human beings. The “with-world” is bound by the delimiting power of “language” and the framework of semantic relations. Heidegger regards the existential-ontological foundation of language as a “discourse” (*Rede*). Since the appearance of beings passes through a pattern of articulation, the world is imbued with a structure of significance from the start and is always characteristically linguistic. This is why language is referred to as a way of seeing the world, or as the a priori framework that constitutes a world.

The world is neither the totality of beings which can be objectively present within the world nor the so-called public world where we live, for it designates exactly the ontological and existential concept of “worldliness” (*Weltlichkeit*). If the world is not opened or disclosed, nothing could be understood. The world is the enabling possibility of our experience. Ueda defines the world as the “comprehensive and ultimate meaning space that covers a wide range and various levels of meaning spaces” (USS, 9: 19). In terms of language, Ueda treats the world as the “horizon” of understanding, or in Gadamer’s words, something that signifies “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (Gadamer 1975: 269). It is important for Ueda to emphasize that this horizon is essentially related to subjectivity.

After Heidegger analyzes the world, he goes on to discuss the phenomenon of “anxiety.” Anxiety should be distinguished from the similar phenomenon of “fear,” since we fear things that are always detrimental to innerworldly beings, whereas we become anxious about “*being-in-the-world itself*.” Heidegger continues to write as follows:

The totality of relevance discovered within the world of things at hand and objectively present is completely without importance (*ohne Belang*). It collapses into itself. The world has the character of complete insignificance (*Unbedeutsamkeit*). In anxiety we do not encounter this or that thing which, as threatening, could be relevant. [...] Being anxious discloses, primordial and directly, the world as world. (Heidegger 2010: 180–181)<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>The translation is slightly modified.



Anxiety has two characteristics. On the one hand, in anxiety the world's significance approaches "nothingness." But more importantly, on the other hand the world itself appears in anxiety. Dasein discovers the world itself, only after its significance collapses.

In *What is Metaphysics?* (1929), Heidegger explains "nothingness" in more detail. He insists "anxiety reveals nothingness" and at the same time "nothingness as the other to beings is the veil of Being" (Heidegger 1976: 312). Nothingness is neither an object nor a being at all, but the unlimited openness of Being where in the nothingness of anxiety reveals. In this sense, "Da-sein means: Holding itself out into nothingness [*Hineingehaltenheit in das Nichts*]. Dasein is in each case already beyond beings as a whole. This Being beyond beings we call 'transcendence'" (Heidegger 2011a: 115)<sup>3</sup>. Since Dasein transcends all beings and opens the world, it can understand all beings. We are located in the world and transcend this world. In other words, we are not mere animals that are conditioned by our surroundings; we have freedom because we are beyond the horizon. Without this notion of "being beyond the horizon" there can be no "melting of the horizon" (*Horizontverschmelzung*) between different people and cultures, in Gadamer's sense. That we are located in nothingness means that we are beyond the horizon.

Here Ueda notices the twofold nature of the world in Heidegger's philosophy. It signifies the world and nothingness, or to be more precise, the unlimited openness that the nothingness of anxiety reveals. Ueda describes this relationship between world and nothingness with the following: "Dasein is located within the world that is, in turn, located within nothingness" (USS, 9: 36). Nothingness in Heidegger corresponds to "hollow expanse," which is one of the most significant concepts in Ueda's thought. However, as I will discuss later, this concept has been affected more by Nishida's "place of absolute nothingness."

### 3 Visible Twofoldness of World: "A World" and "B World"

Nothingness as "hollow expanse" is always "invisible," and thus, it remains unconscious and almost neglected. Ueda named the world where everyday life and science take place *without any awareness* of the "hollow expanse," "the A world." In contrast, the world that is "*permeated*" (*shintou sareteiru* 浸透されている) by "hollow expanse" is called "the B world" (USS, 2: 343). The "A world" and "B world" are not spatially separated worlds that exist in different planes but appear to us as heterogeneous phenomena. In "B world", Dasein understands the innerworldly beings as "things at hand" for practical use and, at the same time, is confronted with the same entity in a poetic sense. The "A world" corresponds to the world in *Being and Time*, while the "B world" corresponds to the concept of "fourfold" (*das*

---

<sup>3</sup>The translation is slightly modified.

*Geviert*) in Heidegger's later period.<sup>4</sup> Ueda admits that if we inquire into the diachronic process of Heidegger's thinking, then strictly speaking, we must be careful in juxtaposing these divergent thoughts. However, regarding the matter itself, Ueda insists that this synchronic juxtaposition is in fact possible. He writes:

We can and should understand the world in *Being and Time* as referring to the twofold world. And should we present the gist of my thesis as purporting to the twofold world in reference to Heidegger, [...] then we can say that the twofold world corresponds with the world in *Being and Time* and the world as "fourfold." My thesis demonstrates that we can understand the true disclosure of the world only after we juxtapose these two worlds. (USS, 9: 27–28)

Although the twofoldness between the world and hollow expanse is invisible in itself, "the visible twofoldness where the invisible twofoldness becomes manifest" can be represented in religion through dichotomous relations between "this world and nirvana," "the worldly kingdom and the kingdom of God," "world and cosmos" etc. (USS, 9: 8). It is a mistake to understand these dichotomies objectively. In contrast to this, it is also a mistake to ignore such twofoldness. The former is "the distortion which is caused from the pretension of seeing the invisible" as is often seen in the history of religious representations of the divine (USS, 9: 23). The latter is "the distortion which is caused from the pretension that the invisible is nothing and the visible is the only reality." Our daily lives are pervaded by a distortion of the latter kind.

Ueda describes the latter distortion as corresponding to *the self-enclosed A World*, by referring to Heidegger's idea of "enframing" (*das Gestell*). In "The Question Concerning Technology" (1953), Heidegger writes: "Enframing means the gathering together of the setting-upon that sets upon man, i.e., challenges (*herausfordern*) him forth, to reveal the actual, in the mode of ordering (*bestellen*), as standing-reserve (*Bestand*)" (Heidegger 2011b: 227). Heidegger believes that the essence of modern technology does not consist in its usefulness for human beings as a means of realizing our intentions, but in the organization of everything into mere resource material. Even people have been turned into mere human resources in this sense. For Heidegger, the essence of pre-modern technology is best captured by the Greek word *poiesis*, which he interprets as a "bringing forth" (*Her-vor-bringen*) that encompasses both nature (*physis*) and handicraft. In contrast to the notion of "bringing forth," the truth of modern technology can be expressed in terms of "challenging" (*Herausfordern*). For example, agriculture in pre-modern times did not challenge the natural limits of soil but rather looked after it. However, in our modern technological world, usefulness has become the first principle of action. For Ueda, "enframing" is nothing other than a world that forgets about the hollow expanse.

---

<sup>4</sup>The "later period" in Heidegger's philosophy is the standpoint of the "history of Being" (*Seinsgeschichte*) to which Heidegger arrived after his the so-called "turning" (*Kehre*) from transcendental phenomenology to the diachronic understanding of Being.

When the B world becomes enclosed (or more radically speaking, when mankind forgets that it is located simultaneously in the world and in the hollow expanse), the world as mere A world becomes enclosed in itself in an increasing speed. Furthermore, because the B world is closed, mankind remains unaware of this closed-ness and circulates within this pseudo-openness of a world in an ever increasing pace. This world as mere A world will thus transform into “enframing” in Heidegger’s words. It is a comprehensive relation that incorporates everything—not only nature and things but also human beings—into a chain movement from the perspective of “ordering,” thereby growing more and more intense. This almost automatized chain movement reinforces its chaining nature, challenging all being and rendering everything vacuous. (uss, 9: 11–12)

The opposite of “enframing” for Ueda is Heidegger’s “fourfold” as the “B world,” where we become aware of the “hollow expanse.” “Fourfold” consists in the mutual reflection that takes place in the cross-section between the axes of sky-earth and divinities-mortals. In “Things” (1950), Heidegger writes: “Earth and sky, divinities and mortals—being at one with one another of their own accord—belong together by way of the simpleness of the united fourfold” (Heidegger 1971: 179). In fourfold, things such as a jugs and bridges are useful but at the same time, present themselves as “gatherings” of these four elements. According to Heidegger, the Old High German word for *thing* is etymologically derived from the notion of “gathering.” For example, wine as a product of grapes signifies the marriage or “gathering” of sky and earth. Wine as a libation, on the other hand, should be devoted to divinities while it is drunk by mortals. “This mirror-play of the real presence of the basic ones of earth and heaven, divinities and mortals, we call the world” (Heidegger 1971: 178–179). Fourfold is therefore the harmonious world between mankind (mortals) and nature (sky and earth) and it is here that we can glance at the divinities.

However, why does Heidegger refer to human beings as “mortals”? Heidegger responds as follows: “The mortals are human beings. They are called mortals because they can die. To die means to be capable of death as death [*den Tod als Tod vermögen*]. Only man dies. The animal perishes” (Heidegger 1971: 178–179). Only the human is one who is “capable of death as death.” This must mean that only human beings are aware of death as such, and can deepen their lives through this awareness. By becoming aware of death, human beings can take care of their own lives as well as those of other creatures’. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger discussed Dasein as “Being-toward death” (*Sein zum Tode*) in a rather individualistic manner. In the context of the fourfold, however, “mortals” signify mankind as beings that are considerate of the fourfold nature of the world.

In his “Memorial Address” (*Gelassenheit*) (1955), Heidegger refers to the “comportment toward technology, which expresses ‘yes’ and at the same time ‘no’,” with the phrase “releasement toward things” (*Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*) (Heidegger 1966: 54). *Gelassenheit* in today’s German is used in the sense of “calmness” and “composure.” However, it has older connotations, for example, Meister Eckhart used the word in the sense of letting the world go and giving oneself to God. In Japanese, Tsujimura Kōichi 辻村公一, a famous interpreter of Heidegger’s philosophy who studied under Heidegger in Freiburg, translated *Gelassenheit* with the Buddhist concept “hōge” (放下), which in turn refers to the peaceful state that

follows from the “releasement” from egotistic cravings and attachments. Ueda uses Tsujimura’s translation in his interpretation.

Ueda asks where the world as fourfold and the attitude as releasement are located. The answer is: “within nothingness.” Ueda contrasts the concept of “releasement” with “anxiety” in terms of nothingness. In *Being and Time*, nothingness was also related to death as the end of Dasein. Dasein is “Being- toward-death” and its authentic mode is the “anticipation” (*Vorlaufen*) of this possibility. So Heidegger claims “Being-toward death is inherently the anxiety” (Heidegger 2010: 266). However, for Ueda, it must be referred to as being “on the way” to “the primordial disclosure of nothingness” (USS, 9: 41), an idea that corresponds to Heidegger’s “releasement.” That is, in Ueda’s words, there must be a “deepening turn from the nothingness of anxiety to the nothingness of releasement” (USS, 9: 45).

#### 4 Primordial Experience and the Selfless Self: The Interpretation of Nishida

In “Contributions to Dialogue with the Kyoto School” (2011), Ueda writes about Heidegger’s nothingness as follows:

Yet it remains the case that Heidegger’s ultimate concern is still with Being. Being (*das Sein*) is spoken of in terms of nothingness to clearly distinguish it from beings (*das Seiende*), but nothingness is not the origin. (Ueda 2011: 23)

Ueda finds a more fundamental understanding of nothingness in Nishida’s concept of “the place of absolute nothingness.”<sup>5</sup> Nothingness, in Nishida’s philosophy, can be deemed more fundamental when compared to Heidegger’s concept thereof, because it is not disclosed through anxiety, but establishes the basis of “primordial experience,” as we shall see later on. The world as a horizon of experience is the totality of meaning that corresponds to “the place of being” (*u no basho* 有の場所) in Nishida’s terminology. As we have already discussed in the beginning, “hollow expanse” as the unlimited openness that envelops this world corresponds to “the place of absolute nothingness” in Nishida as well as to the “openness” of Being in Heidegger. In his essay “Place” (1926), which was later compiled into *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees* (1927), Nishida explicated the concept of “the place of absolute nothingness” as “the field of consciousness” that reaches beyond the subject-object dichotomy.

As we have already seen, Ueda discusses the self and the world in reference to Nishida and Heidegger respectively. In chapter five of *Existence and Hollow*

---

<sup>5</sup> However, Ueda does not use metaphysical concepts such as “the absolute.” In this respect, “hollow expanse” is affected by Nishitani Keiji’s concept “emptiness” (*kū* 空). Nishitani transformed Nishida’s absolute nothingness into “emptiness” in order to discuss the problem of “nihilism.” Ueda says “In a thoroughgoing nihilism, the very notion of the “absolute nothingness” rings hollow” (Ueda 2011: 26).

*Existence* entitled “Playfulness in the world and twofold being-in-the-world” he writes:

Should we refer to the subject as the self exclusively in terms of being-in-the-world, along the lines of Heidegger, then we must refer to the subject that is originally “located” within the world/hollow expanse as the self/non-self or the “selfless self.” Within the unlimited openness, i.e. the hollow expanse, [...] “there is no-I.” This subject “located within” the world (world/hollow expanse), which in turn is ultimately “located within” hollow expanse, is the “selfless self”; that is, the true self whose self-awareness can be formalized with the phrase “I am I, insofar as I am not.” Here, self-awareness does not refer to mere fact that I am myself, but means being opened to the place where I am “located within,” i.e. the “non-I,” and becoming aware of the self within this place. The openness of the place shines a light on the self.” (USS, 9: 150–151)

The self as being-in-the-world reflects itself by relating to the others in the world. However, because we “are located within” the “hollow expanse” that lies beyond the world, I am I insofar as the “non-I” (i.e. hollow expanse) forms the basis of the self. Ueda formalizes this dynamic structure of the self as “I am I, insofar as I am not.” The self is a total movement of this “self-awareness” (*jikaku* 自覚), which is one of the most important terms in Nishida’s terminology.

The problem of the self has been treated mainly in *What is I* (2000), a “complementary” work to *Existence and Hollow Existence* (USS, 10: 387). Since the self is not merely one but the one mediated by the many in the world, it exists in “the principal instability” that can be divided into two kinds (USS, 10: 16). The first is “the existential sickness of self-loss that [occurs when] the self cannot return to itself” and the second is “the existential sickness of self-enclosed attachment that [occurs when] the self cannot exit from the self” (USS, 10: 24). The former instability can also be regarded as the latter in an implicit way. Or in other words, both sicknesses can be derived from the formula “I am I,” since it neglects the non-I. In Buddhism, these instabilities are called *kleshas* (*bon’nou* 煩惱), which comprise greed, hatred, and blindness, that is, the “three poisons” (*sandoku* 三毒) of the ego. These instabilities cause the self to be evermore enclosed in itself. For our enclosed selves, it is difficult to become aware of these *kleshas* since arrogance is hidden within the fabric of our awareness. In order to awaken from our arrogance we would need Jaspersian “limit situations,” e.g. profound sorrow or remorse (USS, 9: 13). The closed self is disintegrated and revived as the selfless self, which is aware of its “hollow existence” (USS, 9: 331).

For Ueda, “primordial experience” (*konpon-keiken* 根本經驗) plays the role of converting the closed self into the selfless self. In “On experience” (1978/1997), he describes it in reference to “pure experience” (*junsui-keiken* 純粹經驗) as it is formulated in Nishida’s maiden work *An Inquiry into the Good* (1911).

For our being-in-the-world, the “unlimited openness” is often closed by the world as the framework of meaning due to our way of being and thus we become enclosed. [...] However, Nishida’s “pure experience” is one concrete example of the kind of primordial experience or a radical turn that tears through this closedness and discloses it to unlimited expanse and depth. To summarize the first paragraph of *An Inquiry into the Good* “pure experience” is revealed in the presence of “the moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound

that is prior to any deliberate discriminations” (and is therefore “pure” as a state prior to subjects and objects). (USS, 2: 11–12)

Nishida's original passage reads as follows:

To experience means to know facts [*jijitsu* 事実] just as they are [*sonomamani* 其儘に], to know in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one's own fabrications. What we usually refer to as experience is adulterated with some sort of thought, so by pure I am referring to the state of experience just as it is [*sonomama* 其儘] without the least addition of deliberative discrimination. 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. [...] This is the most refined type of experience. [...] A truly pure experience has no meaning whatsoever; it is simply a present consciousness of facts just as they are. (Nishida 1990: 3–4)<sup>6</sup>

In “Experience and Self-Awareness” (1985–1886), Ueda divides “pure experience” into three types (USS, 2: 203). Firstly, it is the direct experience that lies in “the moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound,” which is “prior to subject-object bifurcation.” For example, “when I look at a flower, the flower is I, and I am the flower” (Nishida 1966: 430). Secondly, it refers to the experience as a *continuous* flow of conscious concentration that can be illustrated by “[a] musician's performance of a piece that has been mastered through practice.” It is akin to the “pure duration” (*durée pure*) of Bergson and the “pure experience” of James. Thirdly, it signifies the structure of experience in general. According to Ueda, the first meaning is the most important characteristic of Nishida's “pure experience.”

The world is the linguistically mediated and articulated totality of meanings in which our daily lives are located. Language is referred to as a way of seeing the world or as the a priori framework that constitutes the world. After the so-called “linguistic turn” it has become commonplace to insist that since everything is expressed through language, it is impossible and even nonsensical to revert back to a prior state where there is no language. Thus we should fail in any attempt at seeking an experience of life in direct contact with “naked reality” (which is nothing but a fictional delusion). However, a kind of “naked reality” that tears through the framework of our linguistic world can indeed be *experienced*. Pure experience robs us of speech. Here we can see the world and the self in a new way. Ueda's “primordial experience” corresponds to his interpretation of the first type of pure experience. The “fact” of pure experience is neither a merely objective nor merely subjective experience, but the experience prior to the very distinction between the subject and the object, where we can see the world anew. This does not mean that there exists an ineffable reality that the intellect intuits retroactively. However, we can experience moments when language is penetrated in the present.

This “pure experience” is arrived at when the self goes beyond any horizon and becomes aware of itself within “the place of absolute nothingness.” In “Place” (1926), Nishida reiterates the idea of pure experience in terms of “the intuition of subject-object union” or “pure qualities” (Nishida 2012: 93). He stated that “in the

---

<sup>6</sup>Translation slightly modified.

standpoint of true nothing, beings must *be* just as they are [*arumono wa sonomani aru* 有るものはそのまゝに有る]<sup>7</sup> (Nishida 2012: 74–75). And in “Intelligible World” (1930), Nishida writes as follows in reference to Zen Master Qingyuan Weixin.

When we arrive at a lucid consciousness of absolute nothingness, there is neither I nor God. Moreover, since it is absolute nothingness, mountains are mountains and waters are waters; beings are just the way they are [*arumono wa aru ga mamaniaru* 有るものは有るが儘に有る]. (Nishida 1965a: 182)

In addition to this, in an essay entitled “Regarding my Notion of the Self-Aware Determination of Absolute Nothingness” (1931), Nishida explains this experience of “facts just as they are” from the perspective of temporality by calling it a “moment” (*shunkan* 瞬間). In Nishida “moment” does not signify a momentary point in time but an “overflowing with being,” in Ueda’s words (Ueda 1989: 3). Nishida illustrates this idea by claiming that the phrase “the bird flies” does not mean that “the bird” is the agent that flies, but rather that there is a totality of facts prior to the subject-object bifurcation (Nishida 1965b: 168). This is highly reminiscent of Dōgen’s phrase “birds fly as birds” (*tori tonde torino gotoshi* 鳥飛んで鳥の如し) in his *Shōbōgenzō*. Nishida criticizes Heidegger for not accounting for such “facts” (Nishida 1965b: 170).

In order to illustrate this interpretation of pure experience, Ueda gives many examples from poems and haikus:

Why just this autumn  
have I grown suddenly old —  
a bird in the clouds  
(*Kono aki wa/nande toshiyorulkumo ni tori* この秋は何で年よる雲に鳥)  
(Bashō 芭蕉) (Bashō 2000: 157)

Through all beings expands one space;  
The world’s inner space. Birds fly in stillness  
through us. Oh, I who would grow,  
I look out ward, and in me grows a tree.  
(Rilke) (Ueda 1989: 3–4)

The rose without why it blossoms because it blossoms  
To itself it pays no heed  
ask not if it is seen  
(Angelus Silesius) (Ueda 1989: 4)<sup>8</sup>

Boundlessly flows the river, just as it flows. Red blooms the flower, just as it blooms.

(The ninth poem of The Oxherding Pictures, *Jūgyūzu daikyūzu ge* 『十牛図』第九図・偈 (Ueda 1983: 3–4)

<sup>7</sup> Translation slightly modified.

<sup>8</sup> According to Ueda, “Once Tsujimura Kōichi was studying under Martin Heidegger in Freiburg, he showed Heidegger the Oxherding Pictures. Heidegger was impressed with the poem and picture of the tree in bloom alongside a river, and brought to Tsujimura’s attention a closely related verse of the poet Johannes Scheffler (1624–1677), better known as Angelus Silesius” (Ueda 1989: 3–4). Heidegger refers to Silesius’s poem in *The Principle of Reason* (Heidegger 1997: 54).

All these poems depict a concrete embodiment of the “selflessness” of the true self in all its immediacy. Pure experience that is permeated by “absolute nothingness” or “hollow expanse” is not an experience of nothingness as beings but rather the “overflowing with beings” as illustrated by Rilke’s phrase “Birds fly in stillness through us” or Bashō’s haikus on “a bird in the clouds” or “boundlessly the flower blooms.” Or in reference to Silesius, it expresses a certain immediacy of blooming (“the rose without why it blossoms”), since—in Nishida’s words—the fact lies “prior to subject-object bifurcation” or “deliberative discrimination.” Here we can develop a new appreciation of reality that transforms objective facts into facts of self-awareness (“in me grows a tree”, Rilke). In “The Death of Nature and Naturalness” (2002), Ueda further expounds the concept of primordial experience in terms of “nature”:

The original meaning of the word “nature” [in Japanese] (*shizen* 自然) has an etymological sense of “being thus, as it is of itself.” (*onozukara shikari* おの[自]ずから然り) The word does not refer to beings or to their fixed domain but to the “way of Being” in terms of “being thus, as it is of itself.” Moreover, it captures the true meaning of “Being.” In this sense, it has the same meaning as the Buddhist term for “truth,” that is, “thusness” (*nyoze* or *kakunogotoshi* 如是 in Japanese or *tathatā* in Sanskrit). [...] That the world is open and given “thusly” within “the unlimited openness” is, for us, the primordial fact and the original meaning of “being thus, as it is of itself.” [...] Since in today’s usage “nature” tends to signify nature within the world (e.g. in the sense of “natural environment”), I would like to express it with the stronger notion of “primordial nature” (*gen-shizen* 原自然). (USS, 9: 222–224)

## 5 Twofold Being-in-the-World and Philosophy of Life as *Inochi*

To summarize the above, according to the theory of “twofold-being-in-the world,” we exist within the world and, at the same time, are located within the “hollow expanse.” The “world” is defined as the horizon of our experience that constitutes the totality of meaning whereas “hollow expanse” is defined by its lying beyond the horizons. The twofold structure of being-in-the-world that consists of the world (horizon) and hollow expanse (beyond horizon) is called “invisible twofoldness.” When we remain unconscious and neglectful of the “invisible” hollow expanse, the world becomes the self-enclosed “A World,” which Ueda explains by interpreting the concept of “enframing” in Heidegger’s philosophy. In contrast, when we are “permeated” by the hollow expanse, the world begins to appear to us as the “B world”; that is, the harmonious world between human beings and nature, which Ueda explains by using Heidegger’s concept of “fourfold.” The twofoldness between the “A world” and “B world” is called “visible twofoldness.” The self that is permeated by “hollow expanse” is brought about by the self-awareness of *kleshas* through “limit situations,” especially in case of the awareness of our mortality. It is in such awareness that the self can experience “facts just as they are,” which tear through our *kleshas* and the framework of language. Ueda refers to this state of being with the concept of “primordial experience” or “primordial nature” which is an



interpretation of Nishida's "pure experience." In terms of existence, the self becomes "hollow existence" in the awareness of "primordial experience." Here we can encounter things in a poetic dimension and take a calm attitude toward the technological world.

Ueda's theory of "twofold-being-in-the-world" can be described as a kind of philosophy of life. However, while the translational equivalent to "philosophy of life" in Japanese is *sei-no-tetsugaku* (生の哲学), Ueda used the concept of *inochi* (いのち) in reference to life. How can we understand this concept? In "What is Religion?" (1992), Ueda inquires into what it means "to live as a human" in contrast to what it is "to truly live as human." Before answering these questions, he distinguishes between three layers of human life. The first layer is "biological life" (*seimei* 生命), which is shared by all creatures. Biological life can be analyzed by natural sciences, such as biology or physiology. The second layer is "cultural life" (*sei* 生), which is exclusive to human beings. This cultural layer, in turn, consists in two aspects: "livelihood" (*seikatsu* 生活) and "life cycle" (*jinsi* 人生). Since human beings are a kind of animal, our "livelihoods" that consist in providing for the necessities of life (e.g. food, clothing, and shelter) account for a "quantitative expansion" of the "biological life." That is, human progress is deeply rooted in the biological instincts that manifest in the cultural sphere as the desire for self-fulfillment. However, self-fulfillment in our "life cycles" cannot be achieved in any meaningful sense by mere material pursuits alone. Furthermore, since it is possible to imagine self-fulfillment without the incentive for material benefits, we can talk of the loftiness of "poverty." Finally, the third layer of life as *inochi*, which goes beyond both the biological and the cultural, is mediated through this awareness of "death" and "poverty", which entails giving up one's egoism and being satisfied with one's lot in life. Ueda explains this concept of life in the following passage:

It is through [the awareness of] "death" as the negation of biological life and through [the awareness of] "poverty" as the negation of material wealth (as a cultural aspect of life) that life as "inochi" can be lived in the fundamental sense. "Poverty", in this sense, does not refer to something that is socially conditioned and must therefore be overcome, but rather to the internally spontaneous poverty or "releasement toward the things" [in Heidegger's philosophy]. (USS, 11: 10–11)

Furthermore, in "On a clump of trees" (1957, revised in 2003), Ueda describes *inochi* as the form of primordial life that penetrates all creatures and human beings. He illustrates the awareness of *inochi* as "the attitude that finds the truth of life in the coexistence and sympathy with trees, birds, clouds and waters" (USS, 3: 237). This attitude is brought about only through becoming aware of "death" and "poverty" as experienced by human beings within the awareness of *inochi*. This awareness is the necessary condition for conceiving nature as a primordial experience. Ueda insists that since nowadays consumerist societies tend to damage the natural environment, we ought to overcome such natural self-destructive propensities by becoming aware of "primordial nature."

*Inochi* as a concept of life in the above sense is structured after the "twofold-being-in-the-world." This is to say, biological and cultural life are accessible to us

in the horizons that constitute the world. In contrast, *inochi* can be accessed through the awareness of that which goes beyond the horizons, i.e. “hollow expanse.” Thus, it could be argued that Ueda's brand of “philosophy of life” as the awareness of *inochi* provides the concrete contents to the otherwise formal theory of experience. And further, that the answer to Ueda's question regarding the true meaning of “living” lies in the awareness of “hollow expanse” that permeates our life cycles and livelihoods in the form of *inochi*. Ueda's philosophy of “two-fold-being-in-the-world” must be described as the philosophy of *inochi*.

## Bibliography

- Bashō, Matsuo 松尾芭蕉. 2000. *Narrow Road to the Interior and Other Writings*. Trans. Sam Hamill. Colorado: Shambhala.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1975. *Truth and Method*. Trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1966. Memorial Address. In *Discourse on Thinking: A Translation of Gelassenheit*. Trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund, 43–57. New York: Harper & Row.
- . 1971. Things. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter, 165–182. New York: Harper & Row.
- . 1976. Afterwords to ‘What is Metaphysik?’ (Nachwort ‘Was ist Metaphysik?’). In *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 9, 303–312. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.
- . 1997. The Principle of Reason. (Der Satz vom Grund.) In *Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 10. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.
- . 2010. *Being and Time*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. New York: State University of New York Press.
- . 2011a. What Is Metaphysic? In *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, 41–58. London: Routledge.
- . 2011b. The Question Concerning Technology. In *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, 213–238. London: Routledge.
- Nishida, Kitarō 西田幾多郎. 1965a. Eichiteki sekai 「叡知的世界」 [Intelligible World.] In 西田幾多郎全集 [Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō], Vol. 5. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- . 西田幾多郎. 1965b. Watashi no zettaimu no jikakuteki gentei to iu mono 「私の絶対無の自覚的限定といふもの」 [Regarding my Notion of the Self-Aware Determination of Absolute Nothingness.] In 西田幾多郎全集 [Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō], Vol. 6. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- . 西田幾多郎. 1966. Junsui keiken ni kansuru danyou 「純粹經驗に関する断章」 [Fragmentary Passages on Pure Experience.] In 西田幾多郎全集, [Complete Works of Nishida Kitarō], Vol. 16. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- . 西田幾多郎. 1990. *An Inquiry into the Good*. Trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives; Introduction by Masao Abe. Yale: Yale University Press.
- . 西田幾多郎. 2012. Basho. Trans. John W.M. Krummel and Shigenori Nagatomo. In *Place and Dialectic: Two Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1983. Ascent and Descent: Zen Buddhism in Comparison with Meister Eckhart Part One. Trans. James W. Heisig. *The Eastern Buddhist* XVI.1: 52–73.
- . 上田閑照. 1989. The Zen Buddhist Experience of the Truly Beautiful. Trans. John C. Maraldo. *The Eastern Buddhist* XXII.1: 1–36.
- . 上田閑照. 2011. Contributions to Dialogue with the Kyoto School. In *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, ed. Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder and Jason M. Wirth, 19–42. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

# Chapter 13

## Ueda on Being-in-the-Twofold-World or World Amidst the Open Expanse: Reading Nishida Through Heidegger and Reading Heidegger Through Nishida



John W. M. Krummel

### Abbreviation

USS Ueda, Shizuteru. 2001–2003. *Ueda Shizuteru shū* 上田閑照集 [Collected Works of Ueda Shizuteru], 11 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami.

### 1 Introduction

Two major philosophers from the first half of the twentieth century, coming from distinct cultural regions and equally recognized for their significance in the development of contemporary philosophy in their respective locales of Japan and Western Europe, are Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945) of Japan and Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) of Germany. One can find any number of reasons for bringing Heidegger and Nishida together for a comparative analysis, but one I find particularly compelling is the attempt each thinker makes, independently of each other, to *re-turn* back to the pre-philosophical source of philosophy —via an initial *step-back* from philosophy as traditionally construed— that in each thinker then compels a further turn to the “spatial” motif in terms of a *place* or *the open* that refuses confinement to the modern metaphysical discourse centered around the transcendental subject *vis-à-vis* its object. That *in itself* is not, however, the topic of this paper. Heidegger on the one hand has inspired much of phenomenology since Husserl and of Continental philosophy in general, and Nishida on the other hand has inspired the development of the Kyoto School of philosophy and much of contemporary Japanese philosophy beyond the confines of the Kyoto School. This paper is thus

---

J. W. M. Krummel (✉)  
Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Geneva, NY, USA  
e-mail: [krummel@hws.edu](mailto:krummel@hws.edu)

about how these two Western and Eastern thinkers, in each of their multiple *turns*, have in turn sparked a creative blending and unfolding of their thematics in the philosophy of Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照 (1926–2019). Ueda reads each thinker in light of the other, making use of Heideggerian terms and concepts in reading Nishida and in turn making use of Nishidian themes and concepts in reading Heidegger. His reading of each vis-à-vis the other sheds some interesting light on the thinker being read. Furthermore, his readings, underscoring some common motifs in the thinkers while also pointing to their differences, inspires the development of his own philosophical understanding of place, world, horizon, and the open expanse, that is quite compelling as an intercultural fusing of insights obtained from these two major philosophers coming from distinct cultural areas.

Nishida's work that is said to have initiated his so-called "Nishidian philosophy" (*Nishida tetsugaku* 西田哲学) of his middle and later years was his essay, "Place" (*Basho* 「場所」), published in 1926. Heidegger's momentous work, *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*), was published the following year in 1927. But a thorough comparison of their works needs to take into consideration both of their later works that grow out of these initial endeavors. It would also certainly help to pay close attention to that significant initial stage in Nishida's philosophy that led to his "Nishidian philosophy," namely his *Inquiry into the Good* (*Zen no kenkyū* 『善の研究』) of 1911. Not many comparativists have been capable of bringing Nishida's philosophy as a whole and Heidegger's philosophy as a whole into juxtaposition as most are only familiar with one or two of their works, but not their entire oeuvres. Ueda Shizuteru on the other hand studied at Kyoto University under Nishida's student Nishitani Keiji 西谷 啓治 (1900–1990), who had in turn studied with both Nishida and Heidegger. Furthermore, Ueda wrote his thesis on the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart at the University of Marburg, the Christian mystic who was most dear to Heidegger. Ueda is one current representative of Kyoto School philosophy who is well-acquainted not only with Nishida's oeuvre but also with Heidegger's. Ueda states in his *Reading Nishida Kitarō* (*Nishida Kitarō o yomu* 『西田幾多郎を読む』) that to compare Heidegger's entire thinking up to his last period and Nishida's thought also up to his last period, including their alterations and turns, would be "one of the most valuable paths to investigating the significance, potential, and problematic of Nishidian philosophy" (Ueda 1991: 350). And he continues that,

"Heidegger and Nishida" is one large intersection that can illuminate what Nishidian philosophy signifies in terms of the history of world philosophy, or for us today, when Nishidian philosophy mingles (crosses) with and meets the stream of European philosophy. (Ueda 1991: 350)

Ueda believes the encounter of Western philosophy and Zen in Nishida to be an epochal event that matches in significance the meeting of Christianity and Greek philosophy that spurred the unfolding of the European spirit for many centuries (Ueda 1991: 17–18). But if the intersection of Nishida and Heidegger illuminates that epochal "significance, potential, and problematic" of Nishida's thought, one might in turn say the same for Heidegger that he sheds light on the history of the tradition of Western philosophy and opens the potential for cross-cultural dialogue

with traditions of the East.<sup>1</sup> Ueda has written several book-length studies on Nishida, and his work on Heidegger at first may not be so evident. Yet within his various works, including those on Nishida, one finds many references to, and discussions of, Heidegger. The juxtaposition of these two thinkers within the thought of Ueda appears to be mutual in that the way Ueda reads Nishida by way of Heideggerian motifs and themes sheds light on Nishida's thought and in turn the way he reads Heidegger using Nishidian concepts illuminates Heidegger from a new angle. And the two streams of Heideggerian and Nishidian thought, in each of their "placial turns" —Nishida's "logic of place" (*basho no ronri* 場所の論理) and Heidegger's "topology of being" (*Topologie des Seyns*)— that meet in Ueda's thinking unfold and come to fruition in Ueda's own philosophy of place, that is, of being-in-the-twofold-world (*nijū sekai naisonzai* 二重世界内存在) which he also explicates in terms of his notion of the "open expanse" (*kokū* 虚空). In the following I will first discuss how Ueda reads Nishida in light of Heidegger, then how he reads Heidegger in light of Nishida, and end with a discussion of his own placial thought that brings the two together.

## 2 Reading Nishida Through Heidegger

Ueda provides a thorough and deep analysis of Nishida's work primarily through two book length works, *Reading Nishida Kitarō* (*Nishida Kitarō o yomu* 『西田幾多郎を読む』) of 1991 and *Experience and Self-Awareness* (*Keiken to jikaku* 『経験と自覚』) of 1994. In reading Nishida, Ueda makes use of Heideggerian concepts and terms that cast Nishida's thought under a different light. Ueda begins his analysis of Nishida's thought chronologically with Nishida's initial philosophy of "pure experience" (*junsui keiken* 純粹経験). This is not simply for the sake of biographical chronology but has a philosophical significance in that "pure experience" is fundamental for Nishida's entire philosophical work, taking his oeuvre as a whole. Ueda spends large portions of his two books on Nishida —*Reading Nishida Kitarō* and *Experience and Self-Awareness*— on pure experience as set out in Nishida's *Inquiry into the Good*. He takes the meaning of "pure experience" in Nishida to be the very moment (*setsuna* 刹那), e.g., of seeing colors and hearing sounds, an undifferentiated immediate presencing (*chokusetsu genzen* 直接現前) without subject or object (Ueda 1994: 181). We will begin our discussion of how Ueda reads Nishida by looking at his analysis of this Nishidian concept.

Ueda understands "pure experience" in Nishida to refer to a fundamental *event* that is pre-intellectual, pre-philosophical, and pre-linguistic. As *experience* it is concrete and immediate, preceding the process of thought that would dichotomize the experience in terms of subject and reality. But it is also a concrete and immediate

---

<sup>1</sup> This is another issue that needs to be argued for, but which I will not pursue here since it is not the topic of this essay.

event or fact (*jijitsu* 事実) preceding the subject-object opposition (Ueda 1994: 10). And at the same time it is an “activity in itself” (*katsudō sonomono* 活動其者) that is the source of language, thought, and reality “dividing and developing from pre-thought to thought” (Ueda 1994: 129; also see Ueda 1991: 107–108). He borrows Heidegger’s words to characterize this as “prior to thought” (*vor das Denken gehören*) (Ueda 1994: 191–192). And he claims that the basic positions of Nishida and Heidegger here are very close even if Nishida comes to speak in reference to the nothing (*mu* 無) and Heidegger spoke in terms of *das Sein selbst* (Ueda 1994: 145). From this initial stage, the process of thought unfolds through various stages to articulate reality. For example, the initial event can evoke a pre-intellectual exclamation, “this what!” (*kore nanzo!* 是れ何ぞ!) that sounds the tremor of the opening (*hirake* 開け) of the event that in later Nishida’s terms is the place of implacement (*oitearu basho* 於いてある場所) of things (Ueda 1994: 143). Elsewhere Ueda mentions the exclamation, “Oh!” in Rilke’s epitaph, “Rose, Oh perfect contradiction...” or in Japanese, “Ō!” (おお!), as a primal emotive enunciation that breaks through language, snatching words away, to speak without articulation as the sound of the very event that is pure experience and, in the process, to engender words anew (see Ueda 1991: 104–105).<sup>2</sup> Only after that initial astonishment—what the Greeks called *thaumazein*, the beginning of philosophy—can one utter the question, “What is this?” This question however does not yet concern entities, existing things, and instead Ueda likens it to what Heidegger called the “fundamental question of metaphysics” (*Grundfrage der Metaphysik*), “Why are there entities and rather not nothing?” It is the question of being that expresses that wonder (*gyōtan* 驚歎)—again *thaumazein*—that indeed there are beings, an amazement of “this what!” (*kore nanzo!* 是れ何ぞ!) (Ueda 1994: 144).<sup>3</sup>

After the initial astonishment in pure experience that led to the fundamental question, one may attempt to answer with the statement, “This is X.” Ueda identifies the corresponding statement in *Inquiry into the Good* as: “Pure experience is the sole reality” (Ueda 1994: 182). As responsive to the fundamental question, Ueda characterizes this as a “fundamental expression” (*konpon ku* 根本句), or in German, *Ur-satz*. It is the initial articulation of the pre-linguistic event that is pure experience (Ueda 1994: 183). Only then at the third stage does this unfold in the articulation of a philosophy, as a reflection upon the initial pre-reflective beginning, which Nishida expresses when he says, “I want to explain everything by taking pure experience as the sole reality”<sup>4</sup> (Ueda 1994: 184), and which becomes the main theme of Part Two of *Inquiry into the Good*, titled, “Reality” (Ueda 1991: 138–139, 1994: 176). In Ueda’s reading, this is the starting point of the investigation, the beginning of philosophy proper for Nishida (Ueda 1991: 139, 1994: 176–178). But with the

<sup>2</sup>On Ueda’s discussion of this primal word in Rilke, see Fritz Buri’s discussion of Ueda’s at-the-time yet unpublished essay, “Erfahrung und Sprache,” in Buri (1997: 275–276).

<sup>3</sup>Also see Heidegger (2004: 121): “Only on the ground of wonder—that is, the openness [manifestness] of the nothing [*Offenbarkeit des Nichts*—does the “Why?” arise.”

<sup>4</sup>This statement can be found in Nishida’s preface to the first edition of *Inquiry into the Good*. In the English translation, it appears in Nishida (1990: xxx).

fading of the initial fundamental wonder, the question of “why...” can degenerate into the search for, and postulation of, the “highest being” grounding everything else, whether conceived in terms of God or mind or matter, etc., or in other words, metaphysics. Nishida however is aware that reality itself as the source of thought cannot be the consequence of reflective thought; it is the primal given that breaks through reflection. Ueda reminds us that it is in fact this Part Two of *Inquiry into the Good*, the narrative development of pure experience, that Nishida wrote first. Only then did he reflectively return to what precedes philosophical thought to found it at its root. The aim of Part One was thus to re-present that pre-reflective source. According to Ueda, Nishida thus returned to this root *after the fact* as the *beginning* of “philosophical thought.” And to characterize this *re-turn*, Ueda appropriates Heidegger’s term “repetition” or “retrieval” (*Wiederholung*) (*hanpuku* 反復, *uketorinaoshi* 受取り直し) (Ueda 1991: 230–231). The implicit suggestion is that Nishida thus managed to avoid the fall into metaphysics. For the retrieval of the pre-philosophical source of philosophy as the pre-metaphysical source of metaphysics suggests an “overcoming of metaphysics”.<sup>5</sup> Ueda reminds us here that it was Heidegger who spoke of an “overcoming of metaphysics” to ask anew the “fundamental question” of being in turning back to “the assault of being” (*Das Sein angehen*) (Ueda 1994: 145). And he points out that just as for Heidegger the root of metaphysics is no longer metaphysical, the root of philosophy for Nishida is a non-philosophical root (Ueda 1991: 139–140). And yet we cannot simply begin anew from that pre-thought pre-linguistic source to found the absolute inception when everything has *already* begun and we are *always already* caught up in language and thought. It was Heidegger’s recognition of this fact that made him speculate on an “*other beginning*” (*andere Anfang*) (*betsu no shigen* 別の始元) (Ueda 1991: 369–370). Ueda thus describes Nishida’s pre-reflective “beginning of the beginning” pointed to in Part One as such an *andere Anfang* (*besshigen* 別始原) (Ueda 1994: 178). And he uses several other Heideggerian phrases in depicting what Nishida is doing here. For example, he characterizes Nishida’s attempt to think that pre-thought beginning, as a thinking “out of the experience of thinking” (*aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*) (Ueda 1994: 129). He also uses another Heideggerian phrase when he states that Nishida, who was a philosopher and at the same time a Zennist, was able to take for the first time in the history of philosophy a leaping “step back” (*Schritt zurück*) (*taiho* 退歩) from thought to that pre-thought source of thought. And when he does so he names Heidegger as *also* an unprecedented case in the history of philosophy in the West, wherein a parallel course from thought to pre-thought event

---

<sup>5</sup>Nevertheless one might notice that in his very desire to “explain everything by means of pure experience as the sole reality,” Nishida uses a language that is manifestly metaphysical—inspired by German Idealism and Neo-Kantianism—in comparison to Heidegger’s sustained effort to look for a non-metaphysical language, which is in fact what led him in his later works to poetry. Although Ueda mentions Heidegger’s turn to poetry while mentioning the increasing complexity in Nishida’s thinking and his writing style (Ueda 1994: 235), he does not delve into this contrast in their writing styles and the metaphysical aspect of Nishida’s language. In this respect Nishida’s Kyoto School descendants, influenced by Heidegger and post-Heideggerian phenomenology in their language, including Ueda’s mentor Nishitani Keiji and Ueda himself, may have fared better.

was problematized and made an issue for philosophy (Ueda 1991: 84, 1994: 193–194).<sup>6</sup> In Heidegger’s case, that step back to the root of metaphysics involved a “remembrance” (*Andenken*) (*kaishi* 回思) that led him to poetry and the issue of the interrelationship between thinking and poetizing (*Denken und Dichten*) (Ueda 1991: 84, 1994: 235). Ueda states however that Nishida was also attempting to “remember” (*andenken*) that non-metaphysical root, from which one’s unfolding thought remains inseparable (Ueda 1991: 151). In other words, in Ueda’s characterizations, Nishida’s turn to pure experience involves a number of Heideggerian motifs —retrieval, other beginning, step-back, remembrance, and so on.

As anyone familiar with Nishida’s oeuvre knows, the notion of a primal fact preceding the subject-object split eventually leads Nishida to conceive the I not in terms of a grammatical subject, objectified as some thing, but rather as a predicating unity that envelops what becomes the grammatical subject, including the epistemological subject and object. Ueda explains that uttering “I” (*watashi* 私) is possible only on the basis of the primeval situation preceding that utterance of “I,” that is, pure experience (Ueda 1994: 6–7). This leads to a sense of the I that is twofold: the I that opposes the object as subject and the I that is opened up by exiting the I into the disclosure or openness of the place that is not-I and envelops subject and object (Ueda 1994: 114–116). Nishida, according to Ueda, is thus led in his later works to reconceive the I as a place (*basho* 場所), a placial self (*bashoteki jiko* 場所的自己). Ueda views this move to be the beginning of Nishida’s “placial turn” (*bashoteki tenkai* 場所的展開) that unfolds through the late 1920s to the 1930s, whereby Nishida having first reconceived the self as a place, then comes to focus his attention on the self’s own implacement qua place within the broader place that is the world (*sekai* 世界). The further turn is thus from self as place to the place wherein the self is implaced (Ueda 1994: 28). Ueda explains this in terms of the twofoldness of place. The self that, in Nishida’s terms, “sees itself within the self” is this placial self that is hence not-self (*ware narazaru* われならざる, *jiko narazaru* 自己ならざる) in the sense of a grammatical subject or objectified self (Ueda 1994: 114–116). This in turn implies for Ueda that the self that is placial is at the same time itself opened to the place wherein it is implaced (Ueda 1991: 319). For example, one’s self-awareness that “I am a teacher” is opened to the place —the context— wherein teacher and students are co-implaced and co-exist (see Ueda 1991: 319). Ueda thus finds Nishida’s mode of being of self-awareness fundamentally tied to place in its twofoldness.

In explicating these turns in Nishida Ueda makes use of Heidegger’s language of the “open” (*Offen*) (*hirake* 開け) (also “disclosedness,” *Erschlossenheit*), explaining that Nishida’s sense of self-awareness ultimately means to be opened to (and by) (*hirakereteiru* 開かれている) the openness that is the place wherein one is and to see oneself within the opening of that place (Ueda 1991: 322–323). Ueda believes Nishida’s understanding of consciousness approaches the early Heidegger who,

<sup>6</sup>Interestingly Ueda borrows the term *taiho* from a phrase in Dōgen in order to translate the Heideggerian term *Schritt zurück*. See Ueda (1991: 84).



reducing consciousness (*Bewußtsein*) to a mode of being (as *bewußt-sein*), grasps this mode of being as the fundamental structure of human existence that ex-sists in its openness, being-opened by and to the open, as “being-(t)here” (*Da-sein*) (*gen-sonzai* 現存在), being-opened in the (t)here. Ueda claims that how Nishida grasps consciousness qua place indeed is akin to what Heidegger means by “the (t)here” (*das Da*) (*gen* 現) (Ueda 1994: 125–126) and that we can explain Nishida’s notion of “place” with Heidegger’s notion of “(t)here” (*Da*). Ueda suggests that the two nuances of the German “*da*” — “being present here” (*gen ni koko ni* 現にここに) and “being opened” (*hirakarete* 開かれて) — are recognizable in the twofoldness of place found in Nishida (Ueda 1991: 347). In this respect Nishida’s twofoldness of place as self and world, for Ueda, approaches Heidegger’s founding of the intentionality of consciousness upon the dis-closedness (*die Erschlossenheit*) (*kaijisei* 開示性, *kaisei* 開性) of being-(t)here as being-in-the-world (Ueda 1991: 347, 1994: 125). On this basis Ueda finds Nishida’s position that the self is opened to the place wherein it is implaced as a placial self (*bashoteki jiko*), the place that is the “world,” approaches Heidegger’s recognition in *Being and Time* that being-(t)here (*Dasein*) is related to its “world” as being-in-the-world (Ueda 1991: 346). And as the later Heidegger, looking back, comprehends being-(t)here anew as *not* confined to the mode of being of man but rather more primordially as the “(t)here” (*Da*) of being itself (*das Sein selbst*), Ueda notices an analogous *further* turn in Nishida whereby the field of consciousness (*ishiki no ba* 意識の場) is ultimately opened in the direction of that which *exceeds* it as the scene transcending the subject-object relation (Ueda 1994: 125–126), which becomes reconceived and broadened in terms of the place enveloping *I and thou* and eventually the place enveloping the individual vis-à-vis other individuals, that is the world *as it mirrors or determines itself* in these co-relating individuals. This completes Nishida’s 180 degree turn from thinking of the self qua place to thinking of the world as the place wherein the self is implaced and as expressing itself in that self. For Heidegger, the “open” in which being-(t)here is opened is the world so that being-(t)here is being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*), but Ueda suggests that the “being-in” (*In-sein*) here in Heidegger is equivalent to what in Nishida’s terms would be “being implaced” (*oitearu* 於いてある) (Ueda 1991: 347). Ueda thus finds equivalence in both Heideggerian being-in and Nishidian implacement as ontological structures (*sonzai seikaku* 存在性格) essential to being human (see Ueda 1991: 312) while also finding correspondence in their notions of “world” as that wherein the human being exists. Ueda, however, does point to a difference between them in that while the self for both is an opening into and by the open — the world — Nishida makes it more explicit that this implies its being self-less or *without* self (*jiko-nashi* 自己なし) rather than merely the self’s ecstatic ex-sistence (*Existenz, Ek-sistenz*) (Ueda 1991: 347).<sup>7</sup> And while Heidegger did not develop the aspect of being-(t)here-with (*Mitdasein*) in relation to the world, Nishida looked into the I-thou relation and then the mutual relations between

<sup>7</sup> However this in itself could be another topic of inquiry for a distinct paper: the extent to which no-self or selflessness in Zen Buddhism and Kyoto School thought are the same as, similar to, or different from, ex-sistence in existential phenomenology.

individuals within the world as sustained upon the broader place of absolute nothing (see Ueda 1991: 358).

Place as such in Ueda's reading of Nishida is multi-layered. It is a multi-layered horizontal structuring of semantic and ontic place/s: it is the predicate-pole encompassing and determining the grammatical subject, it is the self enveloping the objects it thinks and knows, it is the context enveloping the self in its interaction with other selves, and it is the world encompassing the multiplicity of such contexts providing a comprehensive semantic space. Ueda however makes the important observation that no matter how multi-layered it may be, place by definition is de-limited (Ueda 1991: 322). If we are to think of place in the phenomenological terms of horizon, we see that each horizon is itself limited and always implies a "beyond" on its *other* side, constituting the very condition for its possibility (Ueda 1993: 80). Place is place through its further implacement. Ueda finds that endlessness of implacement, its infinity or indeterminateness, signified in Nishida's notion of the place of absolute nothing (*zettai mu no basho* 絶対無の場所), wherein the place of all places, the place of all beings is ultimately implaced. Appropriating the Heideggerian notion of the open, Ueda describes this in terms of an unlimited, undetermined or infinite open (*mugen no hirake* 無限の開け, *kagirinai hirake* 限りない開け) (Ueda 1991: 322, 1994: 28). And he ties this understanding of place back to Nishida's initial theory of pure experience by explaining that the horizon of self-understanding (self-awareness) unfolding from pure experience ultimately takes place in a marginless and bottomless space (*yohaku oyobi sokonaki gyōkan* 余白および底なき行間) (Ueda 1991: 29–30) that he also characterizes as an "open expanse" (*kokū* 虚空). This notion in its content certainly reminds us of the later Heidegger's notion of an "open or free expanse" (*freie Weite*) although Ueda makes no direct reference to that Heideggerian term. In any case, according to Ueda, the world's openness as a comprehensive semantic space is made possible through its "implacement" in the limitless open (*kagirinai hirake*) (see Ueda 1994: 210–211) that Nishida calls the place of absolute nothing, whereby the absolute nothing simultaneously permeates the very character of the world. And as alluded to above this is where Ueda notices a distinction in Nishida from Heidegger's characterization of the world, whereby the world qua comprehensive semantic space is seen on the basis of its single coherence through the relationality of semantic connections.<sup>8</sup> So Heidegger does not directly problematize the world's "place of implacement" in the way Nishida does (Ueda 1991: 348). And yet Ueda does add here that in Heidegger as well, the "nothing" (*Nichts*) becomes a decisive issue in a certain way. In connection to our thrownness of being-in-the-world, the fundamental mood of anxiety (*Angst*) discloses this "nothing" as that into which the meaningful world slips away, nakedly manifesting the world as suspended upon the nothing as its background. The human being-(t)here who is accustomed to and intimate with the world as the comprehensive space of relations of significance, in anxiety faces the world as disclosed by the

---

<sup>8</sup>And we might add here that during the period of *Being and Time* this coherence is ultimately guided by one's relationship to death.

nothing (Ueda 1991: 349). We will discuss what Ueda makes of this relationship of world and nothing in Heidegger in the following section.

What we thus notice in Ueda's reading of Nishida is the prevalence of Heideggerian themes and motifs. In his attempt to understand and explicate Nishida, Ueda makes much use of Heidegger's terminology and conceptions, while also providing useful contrasts to draw out Nishida's distinctness. Ueda characterizes the early Nishida's attempt to paradoxically re-start his philosophical quest by returning to its pre-philosophical pre-thought source, in Heideggerian terms, as a "step back" (*Schritt zurück*) from the usual metaphysical starting point of philosophy and a "retrieval" (*Wiederholung*) and "remembrance" (*Andenken*) of that source that calls for the "fundamental question of metaphysics" (*Grundfrage der Metaphysik*) so as to initiate an "other beginning" (*andere Anfang*) of philosophy. And he also finds parallels between on the one hand the more mature Nishida's philosophy of self and world qua place and on the other hand Heidegger's understanding of self in terms of a being-(t)here (*Dasein*) and the world (*Welt*) as a comprehensive semantic space in and to which being-(t)here is opened up. And just as Heidegger characterized being-(t)here and world and their relation of being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-Sein*) in terms of "openness" (*Offenheit*) and "the open" (*das Offen*), Ueda does the same in characterizing Nishida's understanding of self qua place and world qua place. Throughout his explications of Nishida's concept of place, Ueda makes continuous use of this Heideggerian motif of the open (*Offen*) and opening or dis-closure (*hirake*). To my knowledge, there are no precedents within the Kyoto School of this use of the term *hirake* or "open," and certainly not to this extent. Although Ueda does not always present it as such, the Heideggerian inspiration, I think, is apparent. And he makes use of Heideggerian concepts besides the "open," both in his in-depth analysis of the position of pure experience vis-à-vis philosophical thinking in the early Nishida and in his exposition of the relationship between self as place and world as place in Nishida's more mature phases. Our next question is then: Does Ueda's understanding of Nishida affect how he reads Heidegger?

### 3 Reading Heidegger Through Nishida

An important way in which Ueda's appropriation of Nishida affects his reading of Heidegger, illuminating Heidegger under a new light, is through that prime motif of the nothing (*mu* 無) in Nishida. But even more generally, what leads to this illumination of Heidegger, especially Heidegger's understanding of both world and human existence, under the abyssal light of the nothing is how Ueda reads the Heideggerian concepts of world and being-in-the-world in Nishida's terms of place (*basho* 場所) and implacement. If Ueda reads Nishida's notion of place in terms of the Heideggerian open (*Offen*), he also reads Heidegger's notions of the (t)here (*Da*) and the world (*Welt*) in terms of Nishidian place, whereby being-(t)here's "being-in" (*In-sein*) as being-in-the-world is in Nishidian terms "to be implaced" (*oitearu*

於いてある) (Ueda 1991: 347). Ueda understands what Heidegger means by “world” as the hermeneutically disclosed space, a semantic space (*imi kūkan* 意味空間) constituting the horizon of experience (Ueda 1991: 374–375, 347), wherein we discover ourselves in association with others (Ueda 1992: 41) within a situation, a place (*basho* 場所) or field (*ba* 場).<sup>9</sup> This world for Heidegger, according to Ueda, is one fundamental moment ontologically constitutive of our being-(t)here as being-in-the-world. But Ueda adds that from Nishida’s perspective this retains the subjective character of “seeing the world from the self” (Ueda 1991: 347–348). However unlike Kyoto School critics of Heidegger of previous generations who reduced Heidegger to the Heidegger of *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*), thereby limiting their analyses, Ueda is also familiar with Heidegger’s later works. So he adds here that even from the later Heidegger’s perspective of the “thinking of being,” how Heidegger understands “world” in *Being and Time* retains the character of transcendental philosophy (Ueda 1991: 347–348). In other words, Ueda acknowledges here Heidegger’s own maturation and development in his later works beyond vestiges of transcendentalism. The point, in any case, is that the world cannot be simply reduced to an ontological constituent of being-(t)here’s mode of being. There must instead be a disclosure of the world and an opening of being-(t)here that occurs from the side of the world itself —or in Heideggerian terms, being itself. Nishida in this respect, in Ueda’s assessment, had already and explicitly included the viewpoint of seeing the self from the side of the place wherein it is implaced in his idea of “place mirroring itself within itself” (*basho ga bashojishin no uchi ni mizukara o utsusu* 「場所が場所自身のうちに自らを映す」) whereby the self is thus ultimately self-less (*jiko nakushite* 自己なくして) (Ueda 1991: 348). And this is also the direction towards which Heidegger begins to move in his later works after 1929.

Reading (t)here and world in terms of place also leads to an understanding of the nothing in Heidegger in related terms. There are times when the meaningfulness of the world breaks or slips away and we are confronted with what escapes its semantic framework. Ueda suggests that in Nishida’s case the event that breaks through this pre-comprehended world to snatch away our language for comprehension, thus initiating a new inquiry into meaning and being —indeed philosophy— in a kind of “death and resurrection” on our side and destruction and reconstitution on the side of the world, was pure experience (Ueda 1991: 1031–04). For Heidegger in *Being and Time* it is anxiety (*Angst*) (*fuan* 不安). When exposed to anxiety, “everything inner-worldly” loses its meaning, the “totality of relations” within the world and as a whole loses its significance so that the world becomes meaningless (Heidegger 1993: 186, 343). In this “nothing of the world” (*das Nichts der Welt*) (*sekai no mu* 世界の無), being-(t)here is exposed to an uncanny and empty senselessness. But as the world thus sinks, submerges, into the nothing and everything within the world loses significance, the world’s character as whole becomes manifest and the world as world presences (Ueda 1992: 44; Heidegger 1993: 187). Anxiety in this respect

<sup>9</sup>In the original version of *Place: Being-in-the-Twofold-World*, Ueda uses the expression “field” or “site” (*ba* 場) to describe this (Ueda 1992: 41), but in a later edition that appears in USS, 9: 28, he uses the term “place” (*basho*).

is also the phenomenological ground that manifests the originary ontological whole of being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1993: 180–183); it primordially and directly opens the world as world (*die Welt als Welt*) (Heidegger 1993: 187). Ueda explains that there is thus a hidden thread that constitutes the world's twofoldness connecting the world as a totality of interrelated significances stretching over semantic space and the world as world manifest in its nothingness or meaninglessness as “nothing” (Ueda 1992: 45). That thread ultimately is understood in terms of implacement. The world of meaning is grounded—but *also* ungrounded—upon the world of the nothing in that the horizontal network of meanings is delimited by the nothing (Ueda 1992: 50); nothingness is what permits the world to be meaningful.

In his inaugural lecture, “What is Metaphysics?” (*Was ist Metaphysik?*), published 2 years after *Being and Time*, Heidegger takes as his theme, what he calls “the nothing” (*das Nichts*) in association with the “the whole of beings.” Heidegger here speaks of the mode of being of being-(t)here to be “being- held-out-into-the-nothing” (*Hineingehaltenheit in das Nichts*) (Heidegger 2004: 115). Here as well, Ueda emphasizes, it is the fundamental attunement or mood of anxiety (*Angst*) that discloses the nothing (“Die Angst offenbart das Nichts”). Anxiety is what “makes the whole of beings slip away” (Heidegger 2004: 112), but it is also the case that “only on the basis of the originary opening [*Offenbarkeit*; manifestness] of the nothing can the being-(t)here of man approach beings and be concerned with them” (Heidegger 2004: 115). By being held-out-into-the nothing, we transcend beings as a whole. But on the basis of the “whole,” that is the comprehensive space of semantic relations—the contextual whole that comprises the world—we can in turn be concerned and deal with those beings (Ueda 1992: 47; Heidegger 2004: 118, 121). Ueda thus understands the “world” here as the horizon of experience sustained by the a-meaning of the nothing lying beyond on the other side of the horizon (Ueda 1992: 100–101). As in *Being and Time*, the nothing here on the one hand makes beings as a whole slip away, giving them no support, whereby being-(t)here finds itself drifting upon nothing. But on the other hand the nothing, in reverse, sustains the contextual whole through delimitation, making it possible for being-(t)here to exist through involvement with beings on the basis of that whole (Ueda 1992: 47). Ueda explains, however, that while in *Being and Time*, the sudden manifestation of the nothing through anxiety makes the meaningfulness slip away, in *What is Metaphysics?*, it is more clear that the (t)here of being-(t)here is from the start directly “held out into the nothing” (Ueda 1992: 47–48). The world ungrounded in the nothing is here at the same time *also grounded* from the very start in the nothing. For only by being delimited by the nothing can the whole of beings appear (Ueda 1992: 49). So what makes world as world (*Welt als Welt*) is its wholeness as delimited by, or back-to-back with, the nothing. Only thus do beings come to possess coherence (Ueda 1992: 50). But “fallen,” into our dealings with things within the world, facing “beings themselves and nothing else” (*das Seiende selbst— und sonst nichts*), we forget that nothing upon which our world is sustained. But because the nothing is what makes beings manifest for our being-(t)here in the first place, Heidegger is compelled to nominalize that inconspicuous “nothing” (*nichts*) as “the nothing” (*das Nichts*). The disclosure of this state of the world as delimited by the

nothing and manifest to being-in-the-world is none other than anxiety. In Ueda's reading, understanding alone, directed within the world, articulating beings within it, cannot grasp that whole, but the attunement of anxiety discloses that wholeness for what it is without articulation, by facing the nothing delimiting it (Ueda 1992: 55–56). Attunement is our thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) into the world, and “to be thrown into the world” is itself to be thrown into “the nothing of the world” (Ueda 1992: 56). Anxiety thus manifests this fact of one's thrown *implacement* in the world along with the world's *implacement* in the nothing. In being “in the world” (*in der Welt*), being-(t)here is thus also “in the nothing” (*in dem Nichts*) (Ueda 1992: 57). As we saw earlier Ueda understands this Heideggerian “being-in” in the Nishidian terms of “being implaced” (*oitearu* 於いてある) (Ueda 1991: 347).

It is at this point that Ueda gives us an interesting reading of Heideggerian *Angst* vis-à-vis the nothing in light of what initially appears to be the more positive understanding of the nothing in Nishida. And he ties this into the later Heidegger. Ueda points out that the only reason why the disclosure of the world's implacement in the nothing occurs together with anxiety is fundamentally because we had *forgotten* the nothing that founds our being-(t)here. Anxiety as such presents the nothing negatively (*hiteiteki* 否定的) (Ueda 1992: 57). Ueda states that anxiety's disclosure of the nothing demands a further fundamental turn or conversion (*konpon tenkan* 根本転換) on our part towards the nothing itself, whereby a more originary disclosure of the nothing occurs as our very “(t)here” (Ueda 1992: 54). We recall that Nishida conceives place (*basho* 場所) as dynamically multi-layered and ultimately implaced within the place of absolute nothing. In Ueda's reading, the openness of the world as comprehensive semantic space is made possible for Nishida through its “implacement” in the limitless open that is the place of absolute nothing, which in turn permeates the character of the world. But in Heidegger's case, the world as that comprehensive semantic space is seen only on the basis of its single coherence of semantic interconnections, in other words from its interior coherence but not on the basis of what sustains it from without. The nothing is thus problematized only as the negation of the world's coherence as a network of meanings. In Ueda's view, Heidegger thus does not directly problematize the world's “place of implacement” (*oitearu basho* 於いてある場所) (Ueda 1991: 348). Yet it is through the fundamental mood of anxiety that the nothing is disclosed as that *into* which the world slips away and as the *background* upon which the world is suspended. It entails a vision of the world's backside as constitutive of its semantic connections for our being-(t)here *within* the world, whereby we are anxious (Ueda 1991: 349). The nothing however is still seen here in its *contrast to* the world, as *negative vis-à-vis* the world, viewed from the stance of an “inauthentic” being-(t)here absorbed in its everyday interactions and forgetfulness of being/nothing as something “alien” that irrupts into and breaks the world of familiar meanings. It is our forgetting of the nothing of being that grounds its manifestation in anxiety (Ueda 1991: 53). By contrast in Nishida's case, the nothing is problematized on the basis of a certain positivity in terms of the absolute nothing as a creative potentiality. And yet Ueda, on the other hand, does acknowledge Heidegger's recognition to

a certain extent of the positive role of the nothing in that through “being-held-out-into-the-nothing,” being-(t)here’s involvement with beings become possible in the first place. The suggestion however is that this recognition is muted at this point in Heidegger and only anticipates a later move. He sees in it a presentiment in Heidegger that if our *originary* mode of being is “in the nothing,” the relationship between the disclosedness of the “(t)here” (*Da*) and the nothing cannot be exhausted by the mere experience of anxiety (Ueda 1991: 349). Instead we ought to view anxiety’s disclosure of the nothing as an *initial and negative* disclosure of the world vis-à-vis our being-(t)here as immersed in the world. Ueda points out that in the later Heidegger’s “thinking of being,” the mutual belonging of being and nothing increasingly becomes an issue, and that with this the world and its features *also* undergo deep alterations, e.g. as in Heidegger’s later notion of the fourfold (*Geviert*) (*shihōkai* 四方界) (Ueda 1991: 349–350). The nothing as disclosed through anxiety is thus not the originary form of the nothing, but is only how it manifests initially when one has forgotten the nothingness of the world. It is not yet the nothing in its originary presencing as the “(t)here” of being-(t)here “holding itself out into the nothing” (*Sichhineinhalten in das Nichts*) (Ueda 1992: 53). Ueda finds the fundamental turn still required in our relationship to the nothing (Ueda 1992: 54) in Heidegger’s later thought of “releasement” (*Gelassenheit*) (*hōka shite byōjōshin* 放下して平常心; *hōka e no ochitsuki* 放下への落ち着き) (Ueda 1992: 59, 64). The earlier and later stances of Heidegger, in Ueda’s view, thus conceal a connection, underlying their differences, through this relationship to the nothing (Ueda 1992: 66–67).

But even prior to Heidegger’s later (post-1930) works, already towards the end of “What is Metaphysics?” we find a more radical formulation of “being held out into the nothing” when Heidegger speaks of “releasing oneself into the nothing” (*das Sichloslassen in das Nichts*) (Heidegger 2004: 122). Ueda interprets this to mean entering without reserve into the nothing disclosed by anxiety, and thereby breaking through anxiety, whereby the originary disclosure and opening of the nothing becomes the “(t)here” of one’s being-(t)here (Ueda 1992: 58). In “What is Metaphysics?,” on the basis of the “(t)here” as “being held out into the nothing,” Heidegger speaks of the mutual belonging of being and nothing<sup>10</sup> even if this mutuality is not yet completely manifest in the “(t)here.” Ueda thinks Heidegger here is still confining his inquiry into the nothing from the standpoint of “beings as a whole.” But when thought comes to respond to that very circumstance of the mutual penetration of world and nothing, or being and nothing, thought will have to proceed —according to Ueda— not through the language of a fundamental ontology nor of a thought engaging in grounding metaphysics, but by listening to the words of poetry or myth (Ueda 1992: 62–63). Hence the later Heidegger, as acknowledged by Ueda, speaks of “thinking and poetizing” (*Denken und Dichten*) (Ueda 1992: 63). One might ask here, though, how Nishida fares with the

<sup>10</sup>“Sein und Nichts gehören zusammen...” (Heidegger 2004: 120).

heavily Germanic metaphysical language he employs in his attempt to construct a system—from out of the desire to “explain everything by taking pure experience as the sole reality”—in response to the extra-systemic event of pure experience. Ueda does not ask that question of Nishida, but in Heidegger’s case, he notices a leap or turn in his thinking that is a deepening from anxiety as exposed to the nothing to the “releasement” (*Gelassenheit*) that sets one free into the nothing—a move “from the nothing of anxiety to the nothing of releasement” (Ueda 1992: 64). This shift from the nothing of *Angst* to the nothing of *Gelassenheit* allows Heidegger to leap beyond the confines set by *Being and Time* of the “potentiality for being” or “ability to be” (*das Seinkönnen*) based on the “understanding” (*Verstehen*) of the semantic network that make possible comportment to beings within the world (Ueda 1992: 64). The idea of a voluntary acceptance or self-releasement of one’s being vis-a-vis the nothing (*Sichloslassen in das Nichts*) anticipates, in Ueda’s eyes, releasement (*Gelassenheit*) as it appears in Heidegger’s later works. So with the move from anxiety to releasement, the anthropocentric stance that views the world as the “totality of our involvements” eventually gives way to the “fourfold” world of earth and sky, divinities and mortals, wherein as mortals we partake in the “mirror play” of this fourfold and *let go* of our presumed position as “subjects” of the world or of being (see Döll 2011: 132). On this basis we can genuinely *be* instead of simply “being able to die” as in Heidegger’s earlier notion of “being-towards-death” (Ueda 1992: 64–65).<sup>11</sup> Ueda therefore thinks that the world as explicated in *Being and Time* needs to be layered with how the later Heidegger understands the world in terms of the “fourfold,” in order to disclose the true form of the world (Ueda 1992: 40), that is, as contingent, implaced in and penetrated by the nothing.

In summary, as we have seen, Ueda’s reading of Heidegger makes use of Nishidian concepts: The (t)here of being-(t)here is understood in a way reminiscent of Nishida’s placial self, but more explicitly the “being-in” (*In-sein*) of being-in-the-world and being-(t)here are understood in terms of “implacement” (*oitearu koto*) and the world is understood as that place of implacement (*oitearu basho*). Moreover, Heidegger’s stance in regard to the world and also of the nothing during the late 1920s in *Being and Time* and “What is Metaphysics?” are evaluated in light of how Nishida understands the world and the place of absolute nothing, especially in their relationship of implacement. This critique however permits Ueda to view the later (post-1930) Heidegger, in regard to his understanding of world and nothing—having moved his stance from anxiety to releasement—thus in a more sympathetic light.

---

<sup>11</sup>And Ueda points out an additional parallel transmutation in Heidegger occurring along with that of the world and ourselves: A tool that in *Being and Time* is something “for-the-sake-of...” becomes what the later Heidegger calls a “thing” (Ueda 1992: 102).



#### 4 Being-in-the-Twofold-World or World/Open Expanse

On the basis of his readings of Nishida and Heidegger, but also of other thinkers—including, but not limited to, Franz Bollnow, Karl Jaspers, Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, Mircea Eliade, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and others—Ueda constructs his own creative standpoint in regard to place, the open, world, and our existence in terms of implacement and being-in-the-world. This standpoint is expressed, for example, in his book, *Place: Being-in-the-Twofold-World (Basho: Nijū sekainaisonzai 『場所—二重世界内存在』)* of 1992. One common thread in his readings of both Nishida and Heidegger is his recognition of a certain duplicity or twofoldness (*nijūsei* 二重性) in the *wherein* that we *are*, constitutive of our world and of our being. The world on the one hand is a relational totality or whole of meaningful connections stretched out over semantic space, and on the other hand the world is manifest or disclosed in its nothingness. The world on the one hand is the comprehensive space of meanings or significances, but on the other hand is exposed to a meaningless excess beyond the bounds of significance, and in that respect is a “nothing” (see Ueda 1992: 45–47). The whole of beings for Heidegger is the world wherein being-(t)here can be meaningfully concerned with and directed to beings. But that wholeness is de-limited, determined, defined, by the nothing exceeding it (Ueda 1992: 50). And the place of beings as well as the socio-historical world, for Nishida, is ultimately implaced in the place of absolute nothing, thus constituting a similar sort of twofoldness (Ueda 1991: 374, 1994: 29–30). The world (*sekai* 世界) for both Nishida and Heidegger is the final place as the space of meanings that includes all the places—as concrete delimited spaces—juxtaposed to one another and multi-layered upon one another. But even this world as a comprehensive place is limited and finite. That wherein it is implaced would be the unlimited or boundless open (*hirake*), transcending and enveloping the world (Ueda 1991: 374). The world as a comprehensive space of meaning—a relational whole of significances—is implaced within an unlimited openness, a hollow space beyond meaning, that both Heidegger and Nishida call the nothing (*Nichts, mu* 無). In that sense as Heidegger states being-(t)here is “held out into the nothing,” and in Nishidian terms we are “implaced in the nothing.” The whole that makes beings meaningful, or place that by definition is de-limited, is shaped, suspended, supported, upon or by—implaced in—the nothing. Whether we speak of whole or place, there is assumed an exterior, an excess, an outside that cannot be comprehended or delimited by it. That excess would have to be something like an unbounded or unlimited openness (*die unendliche Offenheit*) (*mugen no hirake* 無限の開け) that transcends and envelops that place (Ueda 1991: 313–314). Ueda takes this insight from both Heidegger’s exposition of the world’s relation to the nothing as well as from Nishida’s exposition of place as ultimately implaced in the place of absolute nothing, and on this basis develops his own philosophical understanding of the world and our implacement within it as being twofold (*nijū* 二重).

To illustrate this Ueda makes use of the notion of the structure of the horizon of experience (*die Horizont-Struktur der Erfahrung, keiken no chihei kōzō* 経験の地平

構造) thematized in phenomenology as a guide (Ueda 1991: 374). When we take the world in the phenomenological terms of the horizon of experience —which Ueda says is what he has been calling semantic space (*imi kūkan* 意味空間)— we take as metaphor the image of the line of the horizon and the space of its hither side that is the field of vision. Ueda notes that implied in this metaphor is that the *other* side *beyond* that line necessarily belongs to the world, constituting the limit of its possibility. There is thus an *other* side of the horizon that overlaps with the world horizon, and Ueda names this fundamental state of affairs, the twofold horizon (*nijū chihei* 二重地平) (Ueda 1992: 98). This precisely signifies the twofoldness of the world itself. In terms of *something* or *what is*, this “other side of the horizon” is a *nothing*. But just as Heidegger spoke of the forgetfulness of being and nothing in our absorption with intra-worldly beings, Ueda here speaks of our forgetting of this nothing on the other side of the horizon as our gaze is turned toward what emerges within the horizon of the world. And yet every horizon emerges from its “other side” and disappears into its “other side” (Ueda 1992: 101). It is sustained by that nothing. Ueda also uses the metaphor of the text and its margins to describe this. The other side of the horizon is the blank space on the margins of a page on the basis of which the text is sustained. Thus the various meanings of being “as... (X)” emerges not only out of the semantic network of issues, but from a certain sympathy with that empty space on the margins. The silence of that empty space reverberates back from the margins into the very intra-worldly significances, filling up their meanings with a certain inexhaustible depth (Ueda 1992: 101–102).

The two-fold horizontal structure of the world thus determines the quality of our experience as implaced within that horizoned space. Negatively the other side of the horizon is the limit of experience, the non-knowledge that is the limit to knowledge. We can never know the whole that would include what lies not only within but also beyond the horizon, for our knowledge, always horizoned, is limited by our position and stance. Our realization of this fundamentally relativizes our knowledge. But at the same time, by knowing the limits of knowledge through this realization, Ueda maintains that a certain unlimitedness of our knowledge is opened up. This is its positive aspect. In a certain sense our knowledge that we cannot know the whole becomes a knowledge *of* the whole. Not-knowing in the sense of knowing that we do not know —included in our self-awareness— constitutes a path to the unlimited (Ueda 1991: 375). It is a non-knowing that is a knowing of unlimitedness (Ueda 1992: 98–99) —and this may precisely mean the unlimited unfolding of the limits of knowledge for knowledge in its contingencies is ever unfolding.<sup>12</sup> What this non-knowing opens up to then for Ueda would be the place or opening that envelops, implaces, that overlapping twofoldness of the world, both this side and the other side of the horizon. A development of Nishida’s notion of the place of absolute nothing but also of Heidegger’s notion of the open that opens out from beyond the horizon —for example, the free expanse (*Weite*) or “open that surrounds us” (*das*

---

<sup>12</sup>Using Karl Jaspers’ words, Ueda states that while there can never be total knowledge (*Totalwissen*) (*zentai chi* 全体知), this very non-knowing that is a knowing of this fact is “fundamental knowledge” (*Grundwissen*) (*konpon chi* 根本知) (Ueda 1992: 98–99).

*uns umgebende Offene*) (Heidegger 1983: 47, 1966: 66)— Ueda speaks of this in terms of a “non-place” (*hibasho* 非場所), a limitless or endless open (*kagirinai hirake* 限りない開け) that is a void, an empty or open expanse (*kokū* 虚空, literally meaning “hollow void” or “vacant sky”) (Ueda 1992: 106, 139).<sup>13</sup> That openness of the expanse in implacing or enveloping both sides of the horizon thus permeates the world, whereby that which is at one’s feet is filled with bottomless depth. To illustrate this, Ueda refers to Jakob Böhme’s statement that “heaven is at one’s feet” (Ueda 1992: 107).

The twofoldness of the world in turn also means for Ueda the twofoldness of human existence as being implaced, which in turn has ethical implications. As we have already noted, our being-(t)here that is a “being-in-the-world” for Heidegger is at the same time, in its “(t)here,” being “held out *into* the nothing” (Ueda 1992: 50–51). And to be implaced in what Nishida called place is at the same time ultimately to be implaced in an indeterminate open implacing that very place —what Nishida called the place of absolute nothing (Ueda 1991: 313–314). The self always finds itself within a specific “world” —the contextual whole of meanings— and the world in turn is located within the limitless open. For this reason both self and world are enveloped by, implaced within, but also permeated with the nothing. Although Heidegger himself did not formulate his thoughts in such terms, Ueda creatively reformulates them as follows: “Being-(t)here is implaced (*oitearu*) in the world implaced (*oitearu*) in the nothing” (“*gensonzai wa mu ni oitearu sekai ni oitearu*” 「現存在は無に於いてある世界に於いてある」) and “Being-(t)here that is implaced in the world, by being implaced in the world, is at the same time implaced in the nothing in which the world is implaced” (“*sekai ni oitearu gensonzai wa, sekai ni oitearukoto ni yotte, dōji ni, sekai ga oitearu mu ni oitearu*” 「世界に於いてある現存在は、世界に於いてあることによって、同時に、世界が於いてある無に於いてある」) (Ueda 1992: 51). Combining Heideggerian and Nishidian terminology along with his own insights, Ueda thus expresses the fundamental structure of human existence in the following formula: As being-in-the-world, man is implaced in the world that is in turn implaced in the boundless open (*kagirinai hirake* 限りない開け; *mugen no hirake* 無限の開け) or open expanse (*kokū* 虚空) (Ueda 1991: 374). Our being is thus a being-in-the-twofold- world (*nijū sekai naisonzai* 二重世界内存在) —both being-in a “two-fold world” and a “two-fold being” in the world (Ueda 1992: 283). Human existence is two-layered or twofold because it stands simultaneously upon the horizon of the world resting upon that empty expanse of the nothing. In realizing this we abandon our self-enclosed ego —the self dies to its ego in self-negation— to ex-sist (*datsuji* 脱自) as a “non- self,” standing “self-lessly” (*jiko nakushite* 自己なくして), in the open expanse (Ueda 1991: 194). On this basis, Ueda can unpack the implications of Nishida’s sense of self-awareness, that the essence of self-awareness as multi-layered place is that *wherein* the ego is implaced, to which the self is opened as no-self

<sup>13</sup>Bret Davis explains this term to be Ueda’s appropriation of a term from Zen Buddhism and describes its meaning as a “topological expression for *sūnyatā*” and as a metaphorical reference to the “empty space” that envelops all things without getting in their way. See Davis (2017); and translator’s note by Bret Davis in Ueda (2011: 32.n.7).

(*jiko-nashi* 自己なし) (Ueda 1991: 321). He takes this to also be the true meaning of Nishida's phrase "seeing without a seer" (*mirumono nakushite miru* 「見るものなくして見る」) or "seeing by becoming nothing" (*mu ni shite miru* 「無にして見る」) as constituting the original structure of self-awareness (Ueda 1991: 321). The true self undergoing and realizing this process is thus twofold, "being-in-the-world, opened to-and-by the boundless open."

The open expanse is then also where there can be a genuine encounter among mutual *others*, having escaped *out* of —*ex-sisting*— their egos (see Ueda 1991: 194). And on a more global scale this also becomes Ueda's suggested solution to the issue of what might allow for genuine dialogue to take place between distinct cultural-linguistic worlds that Heidegger had called "houses of being".<sup>14</sup> For it implies the space beyond, but implacing, all horizons, holding the promise of a "world of worlds" or "multi-world" (*sekaiteki sekai* 世界的世界) that Nishida had hoped for.<sup>15</sup> This space was also implicit in Heidegger's notion of the region and the open.

This emphasis upon the alterity beyond and exceeding the horizon and freed within the horizonless space of the open expanse may perhaps serve as a response to the issue Ōhashi Ryōsuke raises that the notion of a "horizon" is tied to transcendental subjectivity, and that in speaking of a "twofold horizon," Ueda may be drawing in remnants of subjectivity (Ōhashi 1995: 213). Ueda, for example, speaks of how the horizon moves in accordance with our position and that from this reciprocity between subject and horizon, various sites of meaning are opened up (Ueda 1991: 374–375). Ōhashi asks whether the subjectivity tied to the horizon would obstruct the execution of a genuine placial turn in Nishida's sense of "seeing from the world." (Ōhashi 1995: 213). Yet no matter how far we go, the horizon necessarily points to an excess on its other side, despite the fact that we ordinarily forget this and are preoccupied with what is within the horizon (Ueda 1991: 375). However even though Ueda speaks of the "other side of the horizon" (*chihei no kanata* 地平の彼方), Ōhashi wonders whether there is still implicit a reference to subjectivity (Ōhashi 1995: 213). Heidegger himself, recognizing this problem abandons in his later works this concept of horizon that he had initially borrowed from Husserl. In the 1940s Heidegger explicitly replaces the horizon with the notion of that which regions (*Gegnet*) and its regioning act or process (*Gegnen*) that lies on the *other side* of the horizon and on the basis of which the *topoi* of human dwelling are constructed.<sup>16</sup> In fact this notion of the region is what Heidegger in the 1950s develops into "the four cardinal regions (*Gegende*)" gathered to constitute a space of dwelling in terms of the fourfold of the world that Ueda refers to.<sup>17</sup> The idea there is still very

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, "Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache" in Heidegger (1959, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Here I am developing what had been suggested by Bret Davis in Davis (2014: 186–187).

<sup>16</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Logik. Heraklits Lehre vom Logos* ("Logic: Heraclitus Doctrine of Logos") in Heidegger (1979), and *Zur Erörterung der Gelassenheit* ("Toward a Discussion of Releasement") in Heidegger (1983). Also see Krummel (2016).

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, *Das Ding* ("The Thing") and *Bauen Wohnen Denken* ("Building Dwelling Thinking"), both in Heidegger (1954).

much in accord with Ueda's insights concerning the relationship between world and open expanse, a relationship for which Ueda came to use the formula with the fraction sign, "world/open expanse" (*sekai/kokū* 世界/虚空) (which one might translate as "world amidst the open expanse"). The formula conveys the sense that the open expanse exceeds but encompasses and penetrates both sides of the horizon, this side and the other side, which as Ōtsuka acknowledges approaches *both* what Nishida calls "the world's self-determination" and what Heidegger speaks of as the "worlding of the world" (Ōhashi 1995: 213). And I would add here that it approaches Heidegger's notion from the 1940s and 50s of the "regioning of that which regions." We may conclude at this point that Ueda took insights from both Nishida and Heidegger in each of their respective attempts to overcome the subject-object dualism and transcendentalism of traditional modern Western philosophy and *re-turn* in a *step-back* from philosophical thought to the very open that refuses confinement to, or is in excess to, that metaphysical discourse of the transcendental subject vis-à-vis its object. That open field that exceeds, yet embraces, the subject-object encounter and the world of significances, is expressed in Heidegger's topology and Nishida's logic of place. And Ueda developed those insights in his own notion of being-in-the-twofold-world and world amidst the open expanse. Even if his focus upon the horizon structure of the world initially appears to retain a remnant of transcendentalism with its reference to the subject, his recognition and underscoring of an *other* side that is in *excess to*, and escapes assimilation by, the world of meanings, deconstructs such transcendentalist residues. And the formula "world/open expanse" expresses that dynamic of the world's (de)construction.

## Bibliography

- Buri, Fritz. 1997. *The Buddha-Christ as the Lord of the True Self: The Religious Philosophy of the Kyoto School and Christianity*. Trans. Harold H. Oliver. Macon: Mercer University Press.
- Davis, Bret W. 2014. Conversing in Emptiness: Rethinking Cross-Cultural Dialogue with the Kyoto School. In *Philosophical Traditions*, ed. Anthony O'Hear, 171–194. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2017. The Kyoto School, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/kyoto-school/>
- Döll, Steffen. 2011. Ueda Shizuteru's Phenomenology of Self and World: Critical Dialogues with Descartes, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. In *Japanese and Continental Philosophy*, ed. Bret Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason Wirth, 120–137. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1954. *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Pfullingen: Günther Neske.
- . 1959. *Unterwegs zur Sprache*. Tübingen: Günther Neske.
- . 1966. Conversation on a Country Path About Thinking. In *Discourse on Thinking*, 58–90. New York: Harper & Row.
- . 1979. *Gesamtausgabe Bd. 55*. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann.
- . 1982. Dialogue on Language. In *On the Way to Language*, 1–56. New York: Harper & Row.
- . 1983. *Gesamtausgabe Bd. 13*. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann.
- . 1993. *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- . 2004. Was ist Metaphysik? In *Wegmarken (Gesamtausgabe Bd. 9)*, 2013–2122. Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann.

- Krummel, John W.M. 2016. *Chōra* in Heidegger and Nishida. *Studia Phaenomenologica* 16: 489–518.
- Nishida, Kitarō 西田幾多郎. 1990. *Inquiry into the Good*. Trans. Masao Abe and Christopher Ives. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ōhashi, Ryōsuke 大橋良介. 1995. *Nishida tetsugaku no sekai—aruiwa tetsugaku no tenkai* 西田哲学の世界—あるいは哲学の転回 [*The World of Nishidian Philosophy—Or the Philosophical Turn*]. Tokyo: Chikuma shobō.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1991. *Nishida Kitarō o yomu* 西田幾多郎を読む [*Reading Nishida Kitarō*]. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- 上田閑照. 1992. *Basho: nijū sekainaisonzai* 場所:二重世界内存在 [*Place: Being-in-Two-fold-the-World*]. Tokyo: Kōbunsha.
- 上田閑照. 1993. Pure Experience, Self-Awareness, Basho. *Etudes phénoménologiques* 18: 63–86.
- 上田閑照. 1994. *Keiken to jikaku: Nishida tetsugaku no ‘basho’ o motomete* 経験と自覚: 西田哲学の「場所」を求めて [*Experience and Self-Awareness: In Search of the “Place” of Nishidian Philosophy*]. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- 上田閑照. 2011. Contributions to Dialogue with the Kyoto School. In Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, Jason M. Wirth, ed. *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, 19–32. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

# Part VII

## Questioning the Philosophical Medium – On Language

### Introduction

Ueda's study of Zen lies in between philosophy and religion, but is still closer to philosophy, as he himself points out in his self-introduction. While he uses various "idioms" (poems, koan literature, sermons, etc.) he also reflects on the workings of language and questions common understandings, thereby challenging the very basis of doing philosophy. Furthermore, language is the most important locus from which the conception of a twofold world was born and to which it applies.

In her "Being with and in Language: Ueda's Phenomenological Approach to Language through *Urwort*" Kuwayama Yukiko offers an astute depiction of the two-sidedness of language as that which opens up and at the same time, discloses reality. She uncovers two approaches to language operative in Ueda's philosophy: one takes language as the transcendental condition of all experience, and the other assumes no words touch the contour of one's experience. Further developing Ueda's "two-fold" theory, Kuwayama argues that his understanding of language synthesizes aspects of both positions. By proposing what she refers to as a "dynamic understanding of language", Kuwayama offers a new interpretation of Ueda's concept "*Urwort*" ("primordial word" or "originary word," j. *kongengo*) where experience and language can be seen as complementary. This work thus examines Ueda's view of language as a transformative movement between speech and speechlessness, based on a "limitless openness" (*kagirinai hirake*) whose contours can appear in the emergence of linguistic experience as *Urwort*.

Further developing a similar theme, in his "The Articulation of Silence in Language: On Ueda Shizuteru's Language Thinking" Ralf Müller critically interrogates whether it is possible to consistently reconstruct that to which silence refers. Considering the importance Ueda gives to language, that he develops his thought based on authors such as Humboldt, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty remains an enigma demanding clarification if we are to fully understand his conception of silence. Müller addresses the importance of silence as a mode of expression, inquiring into the possibility of a form of silence in Ueda's philosophy that might

challenge his underlying assumption that human beings are primarily linguistic. Müller contends that Humboldt's and Cassirer's notions of "articulation" can help clarify Ueda's use of the term and how his application expands the concept to encompass "voicing" (*Verlautlichung*) and "vocalizing" (*Verlautbarung*), thus affording a new interpretation of the relation between language and silence. The paper aims to interpret Ueda's analysis of how the silence of sitting meditation draws one towards articulating the very idea of silence in words.



# Chapter 14

## Being With and In Language



### Ueda's Phenomenological Approach to Language Through *Urwort*

Yukiko Kuwayama

#### 1 Introduction

Ueda's approach to language brings together two views according to the structure of a grammatical chiasma: Experience determines one's linguistic way of being, and language determines one's way of experiencing. As such, the question arises whether it is possible to experience beyond the linguistic, since language appears to be an *energeia* or a web always already present in experience. To begin approaching this question, we will have to consider Ueda's understanding of the spontaneous emergence of language as *Urwort*, (*kongengo* 根源語), in expressions such as "oh" or "ah," which discloses mental and corporeal movement directly expressed in a word and voice. Ueda understands the experience of *Urwort* as a breakthrough which allows one to notice how completely one is given to linguistic experience beyond our ability to express in that very language.

Through an illustration of Ueda's discourse on language, this paper considers the phenomenon of a verbal and corporeal expression as *Urwort*. To begin, I focus on Ueda's notion of the interrelatedness of language and experience, to focus on both corporeal and verbal expression, which occur unexpectedly and spontaneously. To introduce the concept of *Urwort*, I discuss two differentiated modes of verbalization, the "hollow" (虚) and the "actual" (実), which illuminate Ueda's pivotal notion of "openness". I thus aim to highlight the inevitable connection between language and the self, as well as self-consciousness and selflessness in the practical dimension of everyday-life. Before commenting on the connection between *Urwort* and the "limitless openness," I first summarize Ueda's approach to Language, experience, and the relation between the two.

---

Y. Kuwayama (✉)

Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris, France

## 2 Experience in the Presence (*Anwesenheit*) of Language

To understand Ueda's *Urwort*, we must first grasp how he construes the relation between experience and language. Experience here is neither strictly mystical union nor mundane happenstance, but any event that unfolds between one and another (Ueda 2011b: 135). In his book *Wer und was bin ich?* Ueda writes: "Erfahrung besagt, etwas erfahren (A) und erfahrend zugleich wissen (B) was und wie erfahren wird" (Ueda 2011b: 135).<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Ueda's notion of experience has both the "how" and the "what"<sup>2</sup>: His definition embraces both the form and the content of experience simultaneously. Put differently, the subject is at once aware of both the object of their experience and the fact of their experiencing. As Ueda explains: "The knowing (*das Wissen*) of what is experienced and how it is experienced, belongs to the experience. This knowing is not possible without a certain condition (*Verfassung*) of itself. The basis of the condition (*Verfassung*) is prepared through language" (Ueda 2011b: 136).<sup>3</sup>

In *Wer und was bin ich?* Ueda invokes the chiasmatic relation of language and experience:

I see a mountain. At this point it is supposed that this sentence addresses on an immediate experience. In this way, the self- understanding that belongs to the experience itself, is fulfilled with the help of language. Here, we note a specific inner connection and entanglement of the experience and the language (Ueda 2011a: 136).<sup>4</sup>

In the experience (verbalization) of "I see a mountain," one knows that the context is now built for an immediate experience of seeing the mountain, consciously or unconsciously. So, the language here should also be understood as verbalization. The understanding of the experience which opens itself from itself (*von alleine*) is formed and opened through the process of the verbalization of "I see a mountain." I interpret this interrelatedness between language and experience as experience *in the*

---

<sup>1</sup>In English translation: "Experience means (A) to experience something and (B) to know in experiencing what and how one experiences." Cf. Nishida Kitaro's concept of "acting intuition" (行為の直観). All translations are mine except where noted.

<sup>2</sup>Strictly seen, Ueda distinguishes between two different types of experiences: (1) Experiences by which one knows what is experienced and how it is experienced. (2) Experiences by which one does not understand or know the "what" or "how" or what one should do in the experiencing itself (Cf. Ueda 2011b: 135).

<sup>3</sup>The original reads: "Zur Erfahrung gehört das Wissen, was und wie erfahren wird. Das Wissen ist nicht möglich ohne irgendeine Verfassung des Wissens. Die Grundlage der Verfassung ist dabei von der Sprache bereitet." (Ueda 2011b: 136)

<sup>4</sup>The original reads: "Ich sehe einen Berg. Man denkt sich dabei, dass es sich um eine unmittelbare Erfahrung handelt. Auf diese Weise wird das Selbstverständnis, das zu der Erfahrung selbst gehört, mit Hilfe der Sprache vollzogen. Hier konstatieren wir eine besondere innere Verbindung und Verflechtung der Erfahrung mit der Sprache."

*dynamic presence*<sup>5</sup> of language. Ueda is clear that we must avoid the mistaken standpoint that supposes verbal expression can never contribute or possibly even obscures comprehension of one's experiences, a mistaken standpoint that denies verbalization in order to protect the sanctity of direct experience. Furthermore, Ueda warns us of the danger of the opposite but equally extreme standpoint, which supposes that language *is always present* as a condition of all experience. This latter view can lead to the assumption that language is the transcendental condition of possibility of experience. Ueda emphasizes the difference between his proposition and what he takes as the mistaken view that sees no room for experience where there is no language and thus posits the primacy of verbalization over the content of experience.<sup>6</sup> To the contrary, Ueda believes that language is indeed indispensable, but the most crucial feature of experience always lies in the experience itself. This means that language cannot ever fully capture experience or the appearance of phenomenon in general.<sup>7</sup> For Ueda, because "self-understanding" (*Selbstverständnis*) is realised in "language", that language always has an identifying or determining (*bestimmend*) character, and thus self-understanding can never comprehend the entirety of an experience.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, a clear differentiation between experience and language is seen in Ueda's thought, but at the same time it must be noted that experience is a phenomenon that always appears *with* or *in dynamic presence* of language.

Even though experience can be distinguished from language Ueda sees them as interconnected. This however, prompts us to ask: What lets us distinguish the two as two? How can we speak of something that makes experience distinguishable from language itself?

Ueda refers to the element of experience as "A" to contrast with the act of verbalization, "B". And he refers to "Ax" ("A" plus "x") as something that feels as if an experience ("A") must be something much more or much richer than the verbalization ("B"). This "Ax", which is something<sup>9</sup> felt as much richer than the verbalization ("B") itself is a surplus or an excess (x) that Ueda refers to as *das Unbestimmbare* (the indefinable) indicating experience as such, and is seen as essentially distinct

---

<sup>5</sup>With this expression "dynamic presence of language" I imply a part of (self-)consciousness, yet I keep the formulation "dynamic presence of language" for the following reason: The concept of self-consciousness is unsatisfying or covers a larger field than Ueda intends. This is the case when the contrasting concept "unconsciousness" for instance is set up counter to the notion of consciousness. Language in Ueda's thought, which I articulate as "dynamic presence of language," is more fundamental than consciousness as a phenomenon of "being conscious about something", and opposed to "unconsciousness". The presence of language could condition the subject even if she is unconscious of her act or behavior (Cf. Tani 2016: 152).

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Ueda 2011b: 136–137.

<sup>7</sup>ibid.

<sup>8</sup>ibid.

<sup>9</sup>This can be understood according to the late-Wittgenstein's notion of the "something (*etwas*)", which evades specification or any linguistic structure or system. (PU 304.)

from language itself (Ueda 2011a: 137).<sup>10</sup> The question about a distinction between language itself and experience *per se* originates already with the term itself: we use “experience” to refer to the act of experiencing (as a verb) and also when referring to *the thing experienced* (as a noun, “experience”). This reminds us of Saussure’s distinction between *signifié* and *signifiant*. A verbalized sentence can be considered in connection with the *signifiant* and the thing experienced with the *signifié*. Because of the possibility of taking a dualistic perspective that distinguishes “the active” and “the passive,” the stream of consciousness which is running during the experience in which the present dynamic of language is included, is split in two: language and experience. However, when the focus is put on the way the phenomenon occurs, in which the verbalization based on a spontaneous experience is born, the interrelatedness of both becomes clear once more. At the same time, once we look for verbal expressions for an actual experience, it can happen, that every attempt of verbalization feels slightly different to the experience itself. This difference can be understood as the surplus (“x”). And since this surplus “x” which specifies experience as experience, distinguished from language *per se*, firstly appears to be present through the presence of the sentence verbalized (“A”), language here cannot be assumed to be an independent instance that covers or destroys the undefinable (*das Unbestimmbare*) of the experience. “Language” (or, more precisely, the *dynamic of language*) is always present and relevant to the experience itself. In the following chapter, I focus on a representative example as this unintended experience.

### 3 *Urwort* (kongengo 根源語)

Ueda’s concept *Urwort* refers to the beginning of the entire process through which experience emerges. *Urwort* such as “oh,” “ah” or “wow” (categorized grammatically as interjections) are normally uttered entirely spontaneously and without any intention to pronounce them.

There are three important steps in Ueda’s thoughts on the relation between language and experience: First, the concept *Urwort* (根源語) as the starting point of an unintended experience of verbal expression, followed by a speechlessness that prompts one to understand and thus verbalize that experience beyond a simple

---

<sup>10</sup>“Im Unterschied oder im Gegensatz zu dieser ersten Ansicht gilt auch eine andere. Für diese ist das Moment B zwar unentbehrlich, aber das Entscheidende der Erfahrung als solcher liegt in A, das durch die sprachliche Auslegung und Bestimmung nicht erschöpft werden kann. Da das Selbstverständnis der Erfahrung in der Sprache vollzogen wird, und da sprachliches Bestimmen eine Art Begrenzung ist, zumal in Wirklichkeit jeweils in einer bestimmten Muttersprache mit einem bestimmten Wortschatz und in einer bestimmten Artikulationsart, so kann das Sprachlich auslegende Bestimmen die zu bestimmende Erfahrung A nicht vollständig absorbieren. Es bleibt immer und irgendwie etwas übrig in der Erfahrung A. Die auszulegende Erfahrung A ist immer irgendwie mehr als die sprachlich ausgelegte Erfahrung. Dank dieses Mehr in A, danke des Unbestimmbaren, im Grunde unbegrenzten Überschuss in A, das in Wirklichkeit als ein AX ist, wird Erfahrung nach der zweiten Ansicht erst eigentlich Erfahrung.”

exclamation such as “oh” or “ah”. Secondly, one comprehends two types of verbalizations within the language of actuality (実の言葉 “*Sprache des Realen*”) and of hollowness (虚のことは “*Sprache des A-realen*”). These represent two ways of being: The former defines, seeks to analyse, or control experience, phenomena or even ourselves, whereas the latter has a more open, playful attitude. Third, is the connecting of the “limitless openness” and the emergence of the *Urwort*. When considering the emergence of the *Urwort*, it should not be understood as separate from the limitless openness, since the *Urwort* represents a medial<sup>11</sup> (spontaneous) emergence of experience occurring simultaneously with the expression of the experience in language. This final step is needed to grasp how the dynamic presence of language, which cannot be denied in the moment experience emerges, goes beyond one’s intention and language itself.

Ueda refers to a poem of Rainer Maria Rilke’s: *Rose, oh reiner Widerspruch, Lust, Niemandes Schlaf zu sein unter soviel Lidern*, where he reads the “oh” as representative of the *Urwort*. He explains that it is not merely a grammatical interjection but also “an origin or the original fountain from which the whole of the poem springs” (Ueda 2008: 64). He further explains that it is “a kind of sound that signals that something more than just language breaches the verbal world” (Ueda 1993: 81).<sup>12</sup> For Ueda, this “oh” produces a moment in which one cannot yet segment what happened at all through verbalization.<sup>13</sup> He adds, in the “oh!”, “the pre-understood world gets broken.” He explains that the speaker becomes “speechless and the speaker himself becomes the sound ‘oh,’” which he claims means that “This ‘unsayable presence (*die unsagbare Präsenz*)’ leads us to verbalize itself.”<sup>14</sup> Here we find a clue for the above question: This *Urwort*, as a trace of this unsayable presence (“Ax”) is part of what allows us to distinguish language from experience.

At this point, to make the peculiarity of the *Urwort* more distinct, let us consider in more detail Ueda’s terms *actual* (“*das Reale*”) and *hollowness* (“*das A-Reale*”) in language (実の言葉, 虚のことは),<sup>15</sup> which he uses to refer to two modes of verbalization in correspondence with two different ways of appearing of the world. The actual (実) refers to a descriptive mode of verbalization. By way of example, Ueda writes that this kind of language “expresses the state of affairs but this language (verbal use for the *actuality*) disappears with the appearing of the affairs (when it’s

<sup>11</sup> “Medial” in the sense that, seen from the perspective of the subject, the emergence of the *Urwort* occurs neither purely actively nor purely passively.

<sup>12</sup> The original reads: “言葉を超えたものが直接に突入してきて言葉の世界を引き裂くその音響” (Ueda 1993: 81).

<sup>13</sup> In the breaking of the sound or word, “ist die sprachlich vorverstandene Welt durchbrochen und zerissen. Sprachlos ist der Mensch selber zum »Oh!« geworden. Zugleich ist eben dieses »Oh!« der allererste Urlaut des Unsagbaren. Die sprachberaubende, unsagbare Präsenz, in der der Mensch sprachlos ent-wurde, ist in diesem und als dieses »Oh!« zum Ur-Wort geworden (Ueda 2011a: 147).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ueda expresses these two terms as “*das Reale*” and “*das A-reale*” in his own German publication: “Wer und Was bin ich?” (Ueda 2011a: 165).

verbalized), and hides right behind the (appearance of the) affairs.”<sup>16</sup> This is Ueda’s attempt to describe what happens to one’s consciousness, when something is described verbally as *actual*. In such a case, we can imagine the situation as akin to a descriptive picture, and since this makes images so precisely in terms of what is “actual”, we do not need words or expressions in addition to the image.

The other means of verbalization introduced by Ueda, the language of hollowness (ger. das *A-Reale*) is associated with poetic or metaphorical verbalization. He explains, that in this case, “something hollow” (*A-Real*, 虚のこと) or something impossible is expressed (Ueda 2008: 20), and that “This something unreal [or hollow] expressed through language always stays in language (the expression itself) and (yet), this (something expressed through this expression) distinguishes itself even more from the verbalization itself” (Ueda 2008: 24).<sup>17</sup> A further passage of Ueda’s is helpful: “Something *hollow* can be expressed only through language, and can be (or stay) only in the language, too” (Ueda 2008: 24).<sup>18</sup> In a metaphor, the things expressed can appear to invoke unrealistic or illogical expressions. However, exactly because of this dissonance, something otherwise un-expressible can be present in one’s consciousness, something that can hardly be expressed without this exact combination of words.

To clarify the distinction between these two dimensions of verbalization, Ueda invokes a poem written by a Japanese child:

The sun sets between Mt. Kurohime and Mt. Myōkō;  
Just then an orange cloud Smoothly passes before my eyes.  
Carrying the day’s events, the cloud drifts along, I was studying at school -  
Is it watching that, I wonder? (Davis 2011: 775)<sup>19</sup>

It is in the fourth line (“Carrying the day’s events, the cloud drifts along”, *Ichinichi no dekgoto o nosete kumo wa ugoku* 「一日の出来事をのせて雲は動く」) that we find the language, which according to Ueda represents the verbalization of hollowness. Of course, it is physically impossible for clouds to carry everything that happened in a day, so, this sentence has a metaphorical sense that calls on one’s imagination in that it implies more than what is written. This “more” further demonstrates the trace, which can be distinguished from the words themselves, which cannot be reached through analysis or by way of the verbalization of actuality.

<sup>16</sup>The original reads: “言葉は事をあらわす(表す)が、その際、事のあらわれ(現われ)とともに言葉は事の背後にかくれて言葉としては見えなくなる。” (Ueda 2008: 23)

<sup>17</sup>The original reads: “却って言葉の表す「こと」は言葉のうちにのみあって(言葉においてのみ保たれていて)、「こと」の現れがむしろ言葉を言葉として際立てる。” (Ueda 2008: 24)

<sup>18</sup>The original reads: “「虚のこと」は、言葉でしか表現できないし、言葉のうちにしかない。” (Ueda 2008: 24)

<sup>19</sup>The original reads: “姫山と妙高山の間に日はしずむ

その時みかん色の雲が  
すうっとわたしの目の前を通る  
一日の出来事をのせて雲は動く  
わたしが学校で勉強していたのは  
見ているだろうか” (Ueda 2008: 20).

#### 4 Language as Verbal Act: *Urwort* as Spontaneous Emergence of Expression

Ueda's approach to language centers on the act of verbalization. Even when using the term *kotoba* which means "language," he refers to all verbalization as either "actual words" (*jitsu no kotoba* 実の言葉) or "hollow words" (*kyo no kotoba* 虚のことば). Even the word *Urwort* (*kongengo*) which ends with the character *go* (語) in Japanese and *Wort* in German, both of which mean "word," is used to refer to a spontaneous act of verbalization, such as when we can say nothing other than "oh". When we do so unintentionally, this "oh" is a spontaneous emergence of expression of language itself.

The act of verbalization in the case of *Urwort* is an event in which both the passive receptivity of the speaking subject and the active work of their expression work together simultaneously. This emergence of an expression as *Urwort* is, Ueda believes, not just a human speech act, but a spontaneous 'act' of language itself. In this dimension, there is a subject who expresses something verbally, and in a sense actively, but in the exact moment the expression emerges the subject is not consciously willing this emergence: Rather, 'passively' the subject is *involved in* but not the sole origin of the expression. The realization of our act of language as a self-language dynamic that shows itself spontaneously (denoted as the grammatical middle voice) leads us to reflect on how verbalization is an event between a linguistic self and a linguistic world, between speech and silence. As Ueda mentions, the struggle to give expression to the unspeakable begins with the speechlessness brought out through the *Urwort*.<sup>20</sup>

Returning to consider the two modes of verbalization, it is important to keep in mind that both modes can be productive, yet problems emerge if language or experience are understood according to just "hollowness" to the exclusion of "actuality" or vice versa. As Ueda writes: "There is a danger, that the experience can become too solid and fixed through the verbal use for actuality, while the verbal use for hollowness can lead us to dilute the experience as well".<sup>21</sup>

In the language of "actuality" one attempts to describe things as an image, trying to remain loyal to sensual perceptions or intuitions from a perspective that seems to be at a distance from the object referred to in linguistic expression. On the contrary, the poetic or metaphorical way of language, the language of "hollowness", tries to speak from one's individual or personal experience. When we think of how the

<sup>20</sup>This perspective on verbalization can contribute to the phenomenological project of describing language and experience from the first person perspective. The importance of reflection on verbalization within a phenomenological framework is referred to in Elberfeld's *Transformative Phänomenologie* (Cf. Chapter 3, Elberfeld 2017: 391).

<sup>21</sup>The original reads: "経験が「実」を言う言葉によって固まる危険性の反面、経験が「虚」を言う言葉によって希薄になる危険性がある。"(Ueda 2008: 43). A summary of this is also introduced in the following way: "it can also happen, as the hollowness and hollowing out operation of language rarely the actuality of human existence, that the hollowness of language gets used arbitrarily" (Davis 2011: 783).

*Urwort* is born, that is, by way of spontaneous verbal emergence, it is undeniable that there is something else which enables one to explain the “oh” expression, one could name it affectivity, emotionality or a dynamic movement from a non-saying state to the utterance.<sup>22</sup> In the case of a metaphorical language, every poet is challenged to find the *exactly fitting* expression for this undefinable (*das Unbestimmbare*, Ueda 2011a: 137) impulse to expressions. In her attempts to find the right words, the expression itself can only be born in the co-incident (*Zusammentreffen*) of what is undefinable and the words themselves. Or more precisely, the undefinable brought through the expression itself can be felt precisely during the very process of discovering the fitting expression. But how can the undefinable (*das Unbestimmbare*) be understood?

Poetic language, the language of “hollow words” describes the world in “the limitless openness” (*kagirinai ake* 限りない開け, Ueda 2008: 25). Ueda explains that this activity (the hollowing-out operation of language, *kyo no kotoba* 虚のことは, Ueda 2008: 26) “means that the limitless openness is described, even though this as such cannot be described” (Ueda 2008: 26). The dimension of limitless openness made open through the metaphoric sentence is called the “hollow world” (*‘kyo’ no sekai* 「虚」の世界). While the hollow world cannot be fully described as the language of actuality desires, Ueda writes that it “still lets us speak of it, in fact, this means, something impossible or unreal can still be described in this hollow world (「虚」の世界), i.e. the limitless openness”.<sup>23</sup>

## 5 The Undefinable (*das Unbestimmbare*)

Let us look deeper into Ueda’s concept of “openness” (*hirake* 開け). To understand this concept only as passivity or receptivity on the part of the person using language, as opposed to active speaking does not capture the nuance of the Japanese word

<sup>22</sup>Without any ontological premise of affectivity or emotionality, the dynamic and transitive dimension between the experience and language can be found here. This something could also be compared with the surplus “Ax” that Ueda refers to, which he later also calls “religiosity,” yet I interpret this as a kind of affectivity and emotionality.

<sup>23</sup>The original reads: “限りない開けのなかで世界を描きなおし、そのことがまた、そういう仕方でも限りない開けを描くことなのである。限りない開けそのものは描くことはできない。描かれるかぎりは「世界」であるが、「実」世界ではありえない「こと」が自然に描かれるというその描き方において「虚」の世界であり、この「虚」の世界のなかで同時に「実」の世界も描かれているのである。”(Ueda 2008: 25, 26). This passage suggests a surfaceless spatiality in which we experience our thoughts, sentiments and ideas. Seen physically, there is no canvas (spatiality) in front of us, but we cannot help describing and drawing things into this invisible canvas (invisible spatiality). The Japanese term *kokoro* (心) can be assumed to refer to this invisible spatiality, as well. (In English, it could be “mind”. In German some translations can be *Gemüt* (temper, mind) or *Zentrum* (center)). The expression “surface-less spatiality” derives from my translation of Hermann Schmitz’s concept of *flächenloser Gefühlsraum* in his *leib-phänomenologisch* theory of feelings and emotions (Schmitz 2014: 22). See also: Hisayama (2014: 89).



*hirake*.<sup>24</sup> Yet, before attempting to define the concept, we must acknowledge another of Ueda's formulations, that is, the notion of "the undefinable" (*das Unbestimmbare*, Ueda 2011b: 137). This undetermined something – something that we can hardly focus on, that can at most be felt or guessed at, nevertheless motivates the spontaneous emergence of linguistic expression.

The spontaneous character of the emergence of the *Urwort* (根源語) is a trace that can be followed to partially grasp the ungraspable dimension of limitless openness. No matter how much one tries to reflect on the present moment in which the *Urwort* is expressed, one loses the present moment as soon as one consciously reflects upon it. Thus, the limitless openness, as a pre-reflective trace, is simultaneously a limit of our self-reflexivity. As is the case in Nishida's concept of "pure experience," when the subject consciously reflects on her own experience, the original unity of subject and object is lost and a boundary between the two appears in consciousness. This boundary is a new stream of consciousness. Here, the bounded and unbounded/limitless come together as two dimensions seen from two different perspectives but as though they constituted a single phenomenon. It is exactly this point, where the boundariless and limitless open, that consciousness is at its limit or horizon. That is to say, it is when consciousness touches the contour of its boundaries (horizon) that the limitless openness (outside of the horizon) presents itself. However, since becoming conscious of the limitless undetermined openness (outside-space of the horizon) means gaining a *new* horizon (to be in a new stream of consciousness, to grasp the undetermined), so the already seen openness should not be assumed as limitless, but rather, it should be understood as a prior limit sedimented within the space of the *newly* established horizon. This means, as soon as the limitless openness becomes consciously graspable, it is no longer limitless, it becomes a newly limited openness. And this game of evasion does not seem to end, since experiences as the spontaneous occurrence of *Urwort* are principally possible everywhere and any time.

To be precise, we must emphasize the difference between "openness" (開け) and "limitless openness" (限りない開け). When Ueda speaks of the self (*ware* 我) who defines himself as a subject, at the same time, he delineates his concept of "openness" (or *limited* openness). This limited openness could also be called "the other" (or *der Andere*).<sup>25</sup> In this context, Ueda refers to Heidegger's concept of "world" (*die Welt*) related to his conceptualization of *In-der-Welt-Sein*. It is important to note that Ueda assumes Heidegger's concept of "world" as something open but only to the self (subject), which means something open but limited and always remaining as the centre of one field (world) (Waldenfels 1997: 20–21). At this point, alterity becomes open to the subject and the subject must also be understood within this alterity. So far, alterity remains as something open to the subject, but at the same

<sup>24</sup>*Hirake* has a particular, unusual ending. The verb *hiraku* (to open) is normally nominalized as *hiraki* or *aki* (開き). In the form of *hirake*, I understand a certain movement which stays in the process where something is opening and remains in its opening status.

<sup>25</sup>The other (*der Andere*) which is set up through a distinction of something from oneself. See also: Waldenfels (1997: 20, 21).

time is already defined (as an alterity), in so far as it can be called “something open (to us).” On the other hand, the *limitless* openness needs no grounds of any subjectivity or centre which cognizes the alterity. *Hirake*, which should be distinguished from an ordinary nominalizing form *hiraki* or *aki* (of the verb *hiraku*), rather means an appearance or phenomenon that has no centre, no causal order; making no impression of a substantialization or a hypostatization of the movement of opening (開け).

It is worth mentioning that Ueda further invokes this undefinability when he asks—in the same section where he writes about hollow language—“When will we be able to listen?” (*Watashitachi ha itsu kikiurumono ni naru ka* わたしたちはいつ聞きうるものになるか。) (Ueda 2008: 43). Here, he invites us to pay attention to the dimension of experience beyond the grasp of conscious reflection (Ueda 2008: 43). Likewise, it may be read as Ueda’s modest criticism of the ordinary tendency of the language of “actuality” to determine and define things and experience.

## 6 Conclusion

Ueda’s approach to language emphasizes the interrelatedness between experience and language, despite the fact that the two never coalesce into a single phenomenon. For Ueda, language is always dynamically present, as a dynamic web within which we experience the world.<sup>26</sup> A danger arises if we understand this web as an unchanging structure, or conversely, a danger that attends ignorance of the boundaries of linguistic experience, which cannot be fully described in the language of “actuality” but nevertheless awaits expression in poetic language and through the spontaneous emergence of language as *Urwort* (Ueda 2008: 253).

Through Ueda’s view of the dynamic act of language, it becomes clear that even the so called “content” of verbalization itself can be born in the very moment of speaking. Here we can consider language to be an activity (*energeia*) rather than a faculty that one could control or possess (Ueda 2008: 254). Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that *Urwort* is an example of the spontaneous manifestation of this dynamic activity and as a phenomenon that discloses a trace of something undefined in our experience. Through experiencing the emergence of the *Urwort*, we realize that in experience we are open to completely unexpected events that cannot be defined in the language of actuality. This experience continuously reminds us how unpredictable life can be, since we are moved to react to this undefinable expression only after *passively* and unexpectedly experiencing the emergence of the *Urwort*.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup>The original reads: “言葉の体系はいわば世界の見取図であって、世界との出会いは通常、言葉の枠組の内で行なわれ、言葉によってすでに整理されつつ経験される。その意味で通常われわれの世界は同時に言葉世界である。” (Ueda 1993: 80).

<sup>27</sup>My use of the term “to react,” follows Waldenfels’ approach to the “alien” (*das Fremde*), which I read in parallel with Ueda’s “limitless openness” (Cf. Waldenfels 1997: 50–53).

In this sense, the act of speaking, as well as the presence of language as the web enabling one's experience, can give us a sense of our own undefinability. With this, Ueda helps us realize the possibility of shaping our language in creative and rejuvenative ways rather than just staying solely in the web in which one already speaks (Ueda 2008: 255). Ueda calls this “ex-sistence”<sup>28</sup> the state of being trapped in the circle of language to the free movement, as if we were drawing a picture” (Ueda 2008: 254).<sup>29</sup> At this point, Ueda cites Merleau-Ponty's sentence on the transformation of language which means the “transformation of my being (*transformation de mon être*)” (Ueda 2008: 256)<sup>30</sup> and illustrates this movement of “ex-sistence” as follows:

Although all these movements of exiting language and then exiting into language are indeed taking place within the horizon of language, it is the movement at the extreme limits of these movements that I am looking for. Insofar as this movement is at the extreme limits, it rarely arises; and, in fact, for the most part, it does not occur at all. But even this non-occurrence gives rise to certain problems, and in this way determines our manner of being (Ueda 2011c: 769).<sup>31</sup>

This transformation of language, i.e. “transformation of my being” takes place through “exiting” and coming back into language. Seen retrospectively, the endless attempt to reach the undefinable between speechlessness and speech is only possible within the horizon of language. This alternation lets us notice the transformable contour of the horizon of language and how this process effects a transformation of one's being. In this way, language shows itself as an important factor that transforms itself and transforms us in the process, in the sense that language changes our mode of perception and sensation, and thus also our way of being.

## Bibliography

- Davis, Bret W. 2011. Schroeder, Brian & Wirth, Jason M. (eds.). Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School. Indiana University Press.
- Elberfeld, Rolf. 2017. *Philosophieren in einer globalisierten Welt – Wege zu einer transformativen Phänomenologie*. Freiburg/München: Karl Alber.

<sup>28</sup>This is also described as “stepping outside of oneself” (Ueda 1982: 37)

<sup>29</sup>*Kotoba no wa ni tojikome rareta arikata kara, e wo kaku jiyūna undō e no datsu ten* 言葉の輪に閉じ込められたあり方から、絵を描く自由な運動への脱転。Translation mine, with a reference to Ueda (2011c: 768). Also: Ueda (1982: 22).

<sup>30</sup>See also, Merleau-Ponty (2012: 189).

<sup>31</sup>Cf.: “What I call exiting language and then exiting into language is not a smooth and automatic movement. It is rather a movement consisting of a twofold breaking through: language is torn through into silence and silence is torn through into language. It is precisely this movement that is primordial experience, which altogether I understand as a living wellspring of the death and resuscitation of experience. The primordial sentiment of ‘Oh!’ could be taken as one archetype for this event of fundamental experience” (Ueda 2011c: 768).

- Hisayama, Yuho 久山 雄甫. 2014. *Erfahrung des ki – Leibspähre, Atmosphähre, Pansphähre*. Freiburg/München: Karl Alber.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1998. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Kokubun, Kōichiro 國分 功一郎. 2017. *Chūdōtai no sekai* 中動態の世界. Tokyo: Igakushoin.
- Maraldo, John. 2011. Alterity and Non-duality in the Oxherding Pictures of Chan/Zen. In *American Academy of Religion, Buddhism Section*.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2012. *Phenomenology of perception*. New York: Routledge.
- Müller, Ralf. 2015. Die Artikulation des Schweigens in der Sprache – Zum Sprachdenken des Philosophen Ueda Shizuteru. *Asiatische Studien* 69 (2): 391–417.
- Morita, Aki 森田 亜紀. 2013. *Geijutsu no chūdōtai* 芸術の中動態. Nara: Moe-Shobō.
- Schmitz, Hermann: *Atmosphären*. Karl Alber. Freiburg/München. 2014.
- Tani, Tōru 谷 徹. 2016. Aida de au – seimei no jitsuzei? *Gendaishisō* [*Revue de la pensée d'aujourd'hui*] 44–20. Seidosha.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1982. *Emptiness and Fullness in Śūnyatā in Mahāyāna Buddhism*. Trans. James W. Heisig and Frederick Greiner. The Eastern Buddhist New Series, 15.1: 9–37.
- 上田閑照. 1993. *Zenbukkūō – kongenteki ningen* 禪仏教—根源的人間. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
- 上田閑照. 2008. *Kotoba* 言葉. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
- 上田閑照. 2011a. *Wer und was bin ich? – Zur Phänomenologie des Selbst im Zen-Buddhismus*. Freiburg i. B: Karl Alber.
- 上田閑照. 2011b. *Watashi towa nanika* 私とは何か. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
- 上田閑照. 2011c. Language in a Two-Fold World. In *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, eds. J.W. Heisig, T.P. Kasulis and J.C. Maraldo, 766–784. Trans. Bret Davis. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Waldenfels, Bernhard. 1997. *Topographie des Fremden*. Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2015. *Philosophische Untersuchungen*. Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main.

# Chapter 15

## The Articulation of Silence in Language



### Ueda Shizuteru's Language Thinking

Ralf Müller

#### Abbreviations

- HWdPh 1971–2007. *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. 13 volumes. Basel: Schwabe.
- USS Ueda, Shizuteru. 2001–2003. *Ueda Shizuteru shū* 上田閑照集 [Collected Works of Ueda Shizuteru], 11 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami.

#### 1 Introduction

In modern philosophy of language silence has rarely been discussed; partly because it was trivialized as the suspension of speech or interpreted as the manifestation of a lack where the human faces the ineffable. It is surprising that authors of the first great blossoming of European philosophy of language such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, Johann Georg Hamann, and Johann Gottfried Herder kept silent about silence. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the Modern Age the theme of silence has receded into the background whereas earlier, especially for thinkers of philosophical mysticism, silence had long been an indispensable topic. Does philosophy's turn to the human finitude and linguistic capacity (*Sprachlichkeit*) necessarily result in abandoning the concept of silence as a worthwhile topic? Steeped in

---

R. Müller (✉)

Department of Philosophy, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022

R. Müller et al. (eds.), *Tetsugaku Companion to Ueda Shizuteru*, Tetsugaku

Companions to Japanese Philosophy 5, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1_15)

201

philosophical writings both “East” and “West,” Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照 demonstrates that this need not be the case.<sup>1</sup>

In what follows, I begin by delineating in what sense silence is a relevant philosophical topic, and do so within the horizon of philosophical anthropology. Secondly, I differentiate two concepts of silence: speaking silence or “discursive silence,” which partakes in discourse such as the teaching of the Buddha, and non-speaking or “non-discursive” silence, which opens up a space for language, speech and discourse. Because both are usually conflated, silence either becomes trivialized or mystified. Thirdly, I examine how silence relates to language. My claim is that silence can become an object of philosophical research, however, not considered on its own but rather in relation to the human capacity for expression (*Ausdrucksvermögen*) in both its linguistic and non-linguistic forms. A critical appraisal of Ueda’s ideas undertaken here in the fourth section can pave the way to analysing this relation by considering the approaches of Ernst Cassirer and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I conclude in the fifth and final section with an interpretation of silence in Zen following Ueda’s treatment of the Zen Buddhist Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253).

The grounding argument of this analysis follows Humboldt, who writes that language is “the means by which man forms himself and, at the same, the world, or, rather, he becomes aware of himself by separating a world from himself.”<sup>2</sup> A mediation is constitutive for the human self-world relation (*Selbst- und Weltverhältnis*) and it is language that is this mediating relation. How then can silence be integrated into this relation?

## 2 How Does Silence Relate to Language?

For an anthropological-philosophical approach, the phenomenon of silence remains of only limited importance so long as it is treated strictly within the tradition of European philosophy beginning with Socrates where it is considered mostly as a

---

<sup>1</sup>Cf. J. Kreuzer’s remark: “[M]it dem Beginn der Neuzeit [ist] das Ineffable als bloßes Negat oder bloße Absenz von Sprache nur noch von peripherem Interesse” (HWdPh, 11: 259, Lemma “das Unsagbare”). For a historical account of the notion of silence in East and West cf. the account by Kreuzer and Wohlfahrt (HWdPh, 8, Lemma “Schweigen und Stille”). On the one hand: “Bei den großen neuzeitlichen Sprachdenkern G. Vico, J. G. Hamann, J. G. Herder und W. von Humboldt finden sich keine philosophisch relevanten Ausführungen zum Thema. – Das gleiche gilt für I. Kant und J. G. Fichte. – Auch G. W. F. Hegel ist kein Denker des Schweigens” (HWdPh, 8: 1488). They represent “the” East in a way that needs —at least— a supplemental account as suggested in the present article: “Die Kultur des Zen ist eine Kultur des Schweigens, die ihre Wurzeln im Daoismus wie im Buddhismus hat. Das Schweigen des Buddha ist eine der bekanntesten Stellen in den Sutren, die vom Ursprung des Buddhismus erzählen” (HWdPh, 8: 1494).

<sup>2</sup>Sprache ist “das Mittel, durch welches der Mensch zugleich sich selbst und die Welt bildet oder vielmehr seiner dadurch bewusst wird, dass er eine Welt von sich abscheidet.” (von Humboldt 1960–1981, 2: 207)

practice for preparing for death. The same holds for its treatment in theology where silence is often related to the ascetic exercises of monks. Although it is reasonable to consider silence in a particular cultural or life-worldly space, the question of the meaning of “silence” persists if it remains abstracted from any intellectual or religious background, in particular for a linguistic being that is finite.

Since the word silence in its literal, conceptual or metaphorical usages has myriad meanings, it is almost impossible to start with a comprehensive definition. However, we can outline a range of forms in which it appears and thereby single out what is most central for the present analysis.<sup>3</sup> Starting with verbal speech, the most elemental designation for silence can be found in the literal suspension of speech, i.e. not saying any words. In this case, one refrains from verbalization not because one is incapable or disallowed from speaking, nor because exhaustion has overwhelmed one’s ability to articulate. Rather, I would like to consider when one willingly keeps silent.

We must keep in mind what experience teaches us regarding language and its suspension, that is, we are not entirely in control of silence. Silence as I take it in this second sense, is different from the voluntary interruption of speech. There are moments in which words fail us. We *are* silenced. Nevertheless, we suddenly break through silence because a succinct expression flares up and finds its path giving voice to what we wish to express, which can then be interpreted as the vocalization of an idea.<sup>4</sup> In cases such as these, silence is a temporary loss because, in the end, one is capable of resuming discourse.<sup>5</sup>

A third framework to consider is when one is “at the mercy” of silence as it is conceived in psychoanalysis. From the standpoint of the therapist, silence is a therapeutic means to make/let the patient speak. Yet, from the side of the patient silence obtains on more levels: in one sense it might be that words simply slip away but on

---

<sup>3</sup>The present article seeks to gain the unique sense of Ueda’s language thinking. In the process of writing the article the project grew into an attempt to critically receive his thinking and to theorize about silence as it has been invoked by Ueda. Thereby it became evident that his thinking is suggestive but lacks the theoretical framework, which is tentatively supplemented on the pages that follow. The existing secondary literature has, however, been neglected even on occasions where its usage would have been desirable. Mayer (2007) offers some orientation. Mensching (1926) deserves special mention for an account of the multiple dimensions of the transcendent relation of silence; cf. Mühlhäuser (2014) for a comprehensive revision in literary studies. The first German-speaking philosophical dissertation on silence is Plitz (1987). The last recent anthology including a consideration of Wittgenstein is Markewitz (2013).

<sup>4</sup>Cf. e.g. von Kleist (2011). He does not treat the phenomenon of silence as such, but the process that he describes genuinely can be understood as a movement of speaking in relation to silence, namely from the unspoken to what is to be spoken. In every instance of speech, the spoken crosses/intersects with the unsaid.

<sup>5</sup>Only rare pathological cases of aphasia as described in medical psychiatry show proof of a loss of language in which in the most extreme form of a global aphasia the relation of language and silence is ultimately torn and man is—in his essence—deprived of his primal linguistic being. Cf. e.g. the different forms of lesions that are named after particular brain regions which step up/escalate from the amnesic or anomic aphasia via the Broca, Wernicke and eventually global aphasia. In regard to Freudian psychoanalysis, cf. Ferenczi (1919) or Páramo-Ortega (1967).

another level, silence is more than the drying up of verbalization but rather an unconscious strategy for concealing something by resisting verbalization. In this case, silence is a way of being out of control.

Before moving to the next section, allow me to summarize some of the underlying suppositions as derived from the above analysis. First, to fall silent and not speak presupposes that there is something to say and someone capable of articulating it linguistically. Moreover, while silence can be associated with secrecy or discretion this remains correlated to speech and thus sets silence in opposition to language. The critical point in this first tentative approach to the phenomenon is that silence can be determined as willfully or involuntarily refraining from verbalization, but on both levels, silence remains tethered to language, to speaking, and to linguistic capacity. In short, on this level, only a being in control of language has the power to keep silent. In particular, the notion of silence as a simple suspension of speech precedes the question whether language *itself* speaks or remains silent and whether in and through silence something is said.

Moving to the next section, considering religious practices, the question we must face is whether these confirm the relation of silence to language as indicated above. The litmus test is Buddhism because it seems to represent a more radical sense of silence. This is the case, at least, if we look at the most prominent topos in Buddhist literature, according to which its founder becomes famed for overcoming speaking and having opened up the horizon of a “primordial” silence that undermines language. Contrary to this assumption, the paper demonstrates that in Buddhism silence also remains bound to language.

### 3 The “Primordial Silence” Beneath Speech

My next claim is that in Buddhism, silence is also on one level nothing other than the suspension of speech and thus remains bound to language. More particularly, this is also true in those cases that border on the loss of language such as when a student of Zen Buddhism struggles to find an answer to a *koan*. In order to demonstrate this claim, I start from an example from the Buddhist texts that allows us, as a first step, to determine more precisely this somewhat trivial —since only formal— concept of silence and from there, in a second step, to discern silence in a non-trivial sense. Maurice Merleau-Ponty will provide the analytic means for identifying this non-trivial concept of silence.

#### 3.1 *Silence as a Way of Speaking*

In the Buddhist canon, the various legends disclose subtle distinctions between stances towards language. Furthermore, Buddhist practices of silence are only seemingly opposed to language. In the earliest Buddhist canon, i.e. in the so-called



teachings of the Buddha, there is only a single known instance (in the *Samyutta Nikāya*) that explicitly considers the silence of the Buddha. While this has given rise to many speculations as to why the Buddha kept silent,<sup>6</sup> it is possible to interpret the event as a simple suspension of language without assuming that there was a hostile attitude undermining the importance of language or pointing beyond speech and discourse in a speculative manner.

The passage recounts the reaction of the Buddha upon the questions of a pilgrim: “‘How is it, Gotama Buddha, is there a self?’ Upon this question, the Buddha kept silent. ‘How is it then, Gotama Buddha, is there no self?’ Upon this second question, the Buddha, also, kept silent. The pilgrim Vacchagotto got up and left.”<sup>7</sup>

In response, the Buddha suspends the teaching he had initiated regarding the question of the self to avoid taking a position on the side of the “eternalists” or on the side of the “nihilists.” Furthermore, the Buddha explicitly refers to his silent “response” as pedagogical and explains to Anando, one of his disciples: “Had I, however, responded to the question of the pilgrim Vacchagotto, whether there is no self, by maintaining: ‘There is no self,’ then Vacchagotto already bewildered would have become even more confused: ‘Before I had a self, but now not anymore.’” (“Hätte ich aber, Anando, auf die Frage des Pilgers Vacchagotto, ob es kein Selbst gibt, geantwortet: ‘Es gibt kein Selbst’, so würde der verwirrte Vacchagotto noch mehr in Verwirrung geraten sein: ‘Früher hatte ich ein Selbst, jetzt nicht mehr’”) (Frauwallner 1956: 19).

Here, the silence of the Buddha is not directed against language, but —primarily for pedagogical reasons— against arguing for either of the two broad possible positions linguistic expression would entail. In principle, according to the transmission, the Buddha is ready and willing to respond to questions regarding his teachings. In the quoted passage, rather than choosing one of the two positions, he creates a third possibility beyond the yes-no constraints of the question, that is, he abstains from giving a verbal response. Therefore, the silence as such has no specific meaning, but can be explained from the context in which it occurs. There is no other passage that would question such an interpretation or would give reason to attribute —particularly here— a higher importance to silence than to language. Therefore, the lack of words and the suspension of speech remains bound to language. To put it differently, since this silence of the Buddha does not radically undermine the linguistic transmission but instead upholds it in a specific way, it can be considered what I call “discursive silence”. It is a discursive silence since it partakes in the teaching of the Buddha as a primarily linguistic discourse.

However, this is not all that has been transmitted about the silence of the Buddha. A prominent type of Buddha-statue depicts the founder in seated meditation and thus demonstrates —without words— a practice of silent exercise, which is

<sup>6</sup>Cf. the summary account in Schlieter (2000: 176–180).

<sup>7</sup>“‘Wie ist es, Herr Gotamo, gibt es ein Selbst?’ – Auf diese Worte schwieg der Erhabene. – ‘Wie ist es denn, Herr Gotamo, gibt es kein Selbst?’ – Ein zweites Mal nun schwieg der Erhabene. Da erhob sich der Pilger Vacchagotto und ging fort” (Frauwallner 1956: 18).

mentioned in Buddhist teachings only randomly when speaking of the Buddha leaving the community. To put it differently, there are not many words in the early canon about the Buddha expressing his original teaching as silent meditation even though these canonical texts mention his retreat in solitude for meditation, as well as his having abandoned giving linguistic advice to his students in his verbal teachings altogether.

In contrast, sculptural depictions of this theme are many and represent the Buddha “teaching” silence – without the use of words. As such, the depiction manifests what the Buddha expresses without partaking in the written teaching discourse. Then the question is whether it indicates a more profound kind of silence; a more original way of teaching silence. If this kind of silence is not invoked in the teaching discourse, is it then bound to language in a different way as in the case of silence that partakes in the discourse? The question is then whether this other kind of silence still has a relation to language, and if so, to what kind of speech. Is it possible to interpret the bodily manifestation of the enlightened silence as a form of expression?

### 3.2 *The Determination of Non-speaking Silence*

Recourse to Western philosophy helps us define non-speaking, i.e. non-discursive silence more precisely. I focus on two aspects: First, I clarify in which respect language in the case of silence that is not a non-speaking silence also provides the framework for my conceptualization. Secondly, I develop the figurative and gestural character of the kind of silence that is different from the speaking kind.

Ueda himself suggests building a bridge to the West since he treats Merleau-Ponty as a source to develop a concept of silence that cannot be reduced to the mere lack of language or suspension of speech. The core determination from which he begins is a phrase from *Phenomenologie de la perception* where Merleau-Ponty refers to primordial silence (*le silence primordial*), below the noise of speech (*sous le bruit des paroles*) (Merleau-Ponty 2001: 214). This silence that is different from simply refraining from teaching discourse by not speaking lies beneath (*sous*) language. The question this analysis must face is whether it can thus be specified—in opposition to discursive silence—by the fact that language is entirely absent?

Some points indicate a more radical cut from language in the case of the primordial silence (“le silence primordial”). In the German translation of *Phenomenologie de la perception* the “sous” from the text quoted is translated in German as “dies-seits” and in English as “beyond”. However, can the primordial silence in relation to language be carried away that far? Ueda’s interpretation follows the Japanese translation of the relevant passage in which the meaning of “sous” is interpreted as “under” or “beneath,” in Japanese 「下」 (jpn. reading *shita*).<sup>8</sup> According to this

---

<sup>8</sup> In Japanese *kotoba no zawameki no shita ni mō ichido shigen no chinmoku* 言葉のざわめきの下にもう一ど始原の沈黙 (uss, 4: 201).

change of perspective from “beyond” to “under” in the Japanese translation, primordial silence cannot be found in the suspension of speech, but rather in the interstices of language, i.e. silence lies at the foundation of language and is at the same time concealed by language. Silence is concealed by the abundance of words and the business of speech.

Yet, if in comparison to language silence is primordial, then it seems as if the unspoken must carry words. How can this be intelligible? In opposition to the temporal phenomenon of speaking, Merleau-Ponty chooses a spatial metaphor when he defines “primordial silence”. He does so because silence opens a space or gives room to language in which the latter can evolve. The silence is the expanse in which speech occurs. Nevertheless, the metaphor should not be interpreted as if silence exists independent from language. Instead, silence withdraws as emptiness insofar as it gives the space which speech demands. In other words, silence remains mediated by language.

The belonging together of language and silence can be elucidated further by interpreting the short quote from Merleau-Ponty with the help of the correlative terms “stillness,” “noise,” and “sound.” “Primordial silence” does not lie beneath language but is concealed beneath “the noise of speech” (*le bruit des paroles*). The noise is not merely an annoying sound, because in the noise the character of language is still audible even if the linguistic units have lost their meaning. The noise still echoes the sound of words or phrases from far away. What is decisive is not the noise per se, but how the noise of speech grounds silence. A noise has lost every valence of linguistic meaning. By contrast, a meaningful sound as a structured acoustic event includes at minimum the structure of language as it is thematized in phonetics.

Phonetics examines only the “material exteriority” of language whereas language as a semantic system is based on a system of internally structured sounds, i.e. it is constituted by phonetic sound. The sounds of language cannot be reduced to sound in general or to noise because of their systematicity. In other words, primordial silence remains bound to language because it also partakes in the world of meaning in the same way as a language even if its structure is not linguistically or discursively organized.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, Merleau-Ponty defines this kind of primordial silence in relation to language. With this, it becomes intelligible why he takes the question of silence as central for an understanding of the human being without undermining the determination of the human being as a linguistic being (cf. Merleau-Ponty 2001: 214). This figure of argumentation remains authoritative, yet as we turn to Ueda we see that the relation of language to silence appears in a positive way as complementary, and sometimes in a hostile way, as antagonistic.

---

<sup>9</sup>Through this partaking language and primordial silence are radically cut off from the natural world as the entirety of purely acoustic events. Even though the semantic net of language can open up, in a secondary sense, in the rest of the world, one can locate language only in relation to stillness as the absence of acoustic events if one reduces language to pure noise.

### 3.3 *The Silence in Relation to Gesture*

What I am referring to as “non-discursive silence” can be understood based on the figurative depiction of the Buddha’s silence. The questions this analysis must face are, how can the figurative and gestural character of non-discursive silence be established, and relatedly, how can the relative autonomy of this primordial silence in the depiction of the Buddha in comparison to discourse be made intelligible?

Primordial and non-discursive silence has, on the one hand, an intrinsic relation to language, but, on the other hand, it cannot be reduced to language. As Merleau-Ponty rightly shows, silence can in itself be pregnant with meaning in the same way as it is irreducible to the lack or suspension of speech. Such silence can be broken through not only by words. Merleau-Ponty refers somewhat in passing to a “gesture that breaks the (primordial) silence” (*le geste qui rompt ce silence*) (Merleau-Ponty 2001: 214). Accordingly, the non-discursive, primordial silence correlates not only to language but also to other non-discursive forms of human expression.

An important next step is to bring the understanding of gesture closer to that of language. Merleau-Ponty achieves this by focusing not on the non-linguistic from the perspective of the linguistic but in the opposite direction. Thus he writes: “speech is a gesture and its signification a world” (*La parole est un geste et sa signification un monde*) (Merleau-Ponty 2001: 214). Shifting perspectives does not simply annihilate the basic difference between gesture and spoken words as linguistic expressions with the latter depending only little on context in comparison to gesture. However, in this quote, Merleau-Ponty gives more than an analogy. Speech must be conceptualized as a gesture because every act of speaking brings into motion much more deep strata of expression while the phonetic verbalization is a phenomenon that appears on the surface of human expression.

Let us further detail the relation between speech and gesture. Humans live in a meaningful world in which relations of action constitute the life-worldly context that gives meaning to enunciation. Gestures can then be interpreted as actions that are condensed as a short form, which gain their meaning from the context and the situation. Linguistic enunciations are based on these gestures or are accompanied by them. However, the proximity between language and gesture does not result only from the dependency of the discursive form of expression on the context one is embedded within. Both the gesture (as figurative yet soundless appearance) as well as words (as phonetic, essentially vocal appearances) both emanate from the human body, which comprises all relations of actions and bestows them with meaning. Merleau-Ponty’s notion of expression can, therefore, be interpreted in such a way that the holistic structure of meaning embeds and grounds verbal language as a system of semantically rich units.

The question we must now address is, what is the significance of Merleau-Ponty bringing gesture so close to language for our understanding non-discursive silence? As laid out above, silence is mediated by speech. However, a lack of words results in the lack of phonetic substance for attaining/making sense. What then remains of silence? It can also be mediated by gesture. Thus, it is a practical matter which of the two forms of silence is effective (the speaking/discursive or the non-speaking/

non-discursive) and whether both forms are superimposed on each other. In other words, the question is whether silence can be interpreted as a simple suspension of speech or as the more complex case of non-discursive silence in relation to linguistic and/or non-linguistic expression. While discursive silence is filled with words, non-discursive silence as gesture has the character of a reference to the contextually un-spoken or to the yet-to-be spoken; it is pregnant with it but remains silent in its indeterminacy.

Does this mean that every kind of meaning making fails? Not necessarily: While the meaning of the gesture is more than speech in that it depends on context, in the case of silence there is *nothing but* context since silence in itself does not express anything positively. Even the reference to context and situation as the ultimate momentum of meaning can be achieved only indirectly. The retreat of the sensible side deprives every specific sense in order to be ultimately related to the function of meaning-giving in general.

Just as language is marked by the double structure of sound and meaning, so the gesture has a meaningful and a sensible side. Gesture is only —and more so than verbal language— strictly bound to its context. In so far as silence can be treated as gesture, due to the suspension of every positive or active meaning bestowing, it reaches the maximum of boundedness to context and represents nothing over and above context. In other words, no sensible momentum that is particular to silence remains. Each instance of silence is nothing but a kind of “passive presence” of its embeddedness.

If we want to understand how this silence as a meaningful phenomenon is realized, we must examine not only the external relation of language and gesture but also the internal structure of sense and sensibility that is particular to that relation. The question is how the meaningful content of silence can be realized at least indirectly on the level of the sensible.

## 4 Voicing as the Origin of Articulation

As discussed in the previous section, it is impossible to have immediate access to either discursive or non-discursive silence. Discursive silence remains bound to language, and non-discursive to both linguistic and non-linguistic expression. To come to an understanding as to how non-discursive silence appears, we must examine in detail how the relation of sense and sensibility manifests itself.

### 4.1 *The Double Structure of the Concept of Articulation*

Whether speaking of the linguistic or the non-linguistic, the “phenomenon” of sense is constituted only in relation to the sensible; in fact, the relationship is prior to either end of the relation. This double structure of sense and sensibility is derived

from Humboldt's linguistics. He calls this double structure "articulation" where the word is segmented on two correlating levels of sound and meaning. In abstracting from the phonetic material, the concept can also be applied to non-linguistic forms of expression. Ernst Cassirer transforms this aspect of Humboldt's theory of language into a fruitful foundation for his philosophy of culture.

The crucial step that Cassirer takes is to interpret the form of creation not as a process of the external world but as a process interior to perception. Departing from Gestalt psychology, he develops the most central concept of his philosophy of culture, i.e. the idea of symbolic pregnancy. Cassirer writes:

It is the perception [that], by virtue of its own immanent organization, acquires a kind of spiritual "articulation" [*Artikulation*] – which, as structured in itself, also belongs to a determinate construction of sense [*Sinnfügung*]. In its full actuality, in its totality and vividness [*Lebendigkeit*], it is at the same time a life "in" sense [*Sinn*] (Cassirer 2021: 239).<sup>10</sup>

In Cassirer's text, "articulation" appears in scare quotes because he applies a typically linguistic concept to non-linguistic manifestations. However, articulation still comprises the kernel of the Humboldtian concept, i.e. the power to mediate self and world in the formation of linguistic and non-linguistic syntheses in the objectification of sense in the sensible: the kind "in which a perceptual experience as a 'sensible' experience comprises, at the same time, an unmediated non-sensible 'sense' and represents it in an immediate and concrete fashion" (Cassirer 2021: 239).<sup>11</sup> Through this abstraction and expansion, Cassirer is able to give the necessary breadth to his philosophy of culture.

Absolved from any programmatic requirements, Ueda makes use of Cassirer's all-encompassing concept of articulation for his examination of language and silence in Zen Buddhism.<sup>12</sup> Apart from the issue of whether there is reception between Cassirer and Ueda or between Merleau-Ponty and Ueda, the analogy to Cassirer is readily visible. Without clearly delineating his own conception, Ueda takes the kernel of the notion of articulation, which becomes an analytic feature of

---

<sup>10</sup> Cassirer (2021: 239); the German text reads as follows: Es ist "die Wahrnehmung selbst, die kraft ihrer eigenen immanenten Gliederung eine Art von geistiger 'Artikulation' gewinnt – die, als in sich gefügte, auch einer bestimmten Sinnfügung angehört. In ihrer vollen Aktualität, in ihrer Ganzheit und Lebendigkeit, ist sie zugleich ein Leben 'im' Sinn" (Cassirer 1994: 234–235).

<sup>11</sup> The German text reads as follows: "die Art", "in der ein Wahrnehmungserlebnis, als 'sinnliches' Erlebnis, zugleich einen unmittelbaren nicht-anschaulichen 'Sinn' in sich faßt und ihn zur unmittelbaren konkreten Darstellung bringt" (Cassirer 1994: 234–235).

<sup>12</sup> In his texts Ueda reconsiders Humboldt and Cassirer time and again (cf. *uss*, 2: 295, 301, 383) questioning whether language or symbols are really the proper means in order to think through the unity of self and world vis-a-vis Nishida's concept of pure experience. It is the idea of non-linguistic reality independent from human agency which is the point of reference of movement out of and back into language (cf. *uss*, 2: 300). The most important source of inspiration here is, as indicated before, Merleau-Ponty (cf. *uss*, 2: 302).

a number of his analyses. He uses the term in the sense in which “the primordial concentrated totality is expressed in the respective unity under tension” (Ueda 1982: 225).<sup>13</sup> This quasi-definition can be interpreted as in accord with Cassirer because in both cases there is a threefold structure: (a) a holistic phenomenon, what Cassirer calls “perceptual experience” and Ueda calls “totality”; (b) a dichotomous structure, “sensible experience” in Cassirer and in Ueda a unity under tension between two poles and; (c) a dynamic synthesis formed through symbolic objectification: the objectification is the concrete representation in Cassirer and, the “expressing” in Ueda.

Although “articulation” appears in the works of both philosophers, it is essential to notice two features of the relation of linguistic and non-linguistic forms of expression that differ between them. Cassirer has made it clear that other forms of sense objectification exist next to and equal to that which obtains through language. This is an important idea which ensures that gesture —and by the same token silence— is not merely devalued in comparison to language as a deficient form of articulation. On the other hand, non-linguistic forms of articulation become more subtly differentiated relative to language and they remain structurally dependent upon language as the only fully developed system of sense bestowal.

The concept of articulation is thus a means for elucidating the complementarity of language and silence. However, in the case of silence, it must be specified as a particular kind of gestural structure. Such a specification is needed to give a more precise concept of articulation and in particular regarding the dynamism and concreteness of linguistic expression. The concept of articulation also helps us grasp how Ueda understands the phenomenon of silence.

## 4.2 From Language to Speaking

How Ueda’s thought encompasses silence from the side of language is motivated primarily by his favour for Humboldt’s language thesis. However, at the same time, he treats silence as a phenomenon that, in his account, undermines that language thesis.

Human beings are fundamentally entrenched in language since, according to Humboldt, language is, contrary to a conventionalist’s approach, not only an instrument or tool but a formative organ (*bildendes Organ*) of existence. Language is, as quoted above, “the means by which man forms himself and, at the same, the world,

---

<sup>13</sup>“Die ursprüngliche konzentrierte Ganzheit jeweils in der gespannten Einheit zum Ausdruck gebracht wird.” Ueda treats the notion of articulation (j. *setsubun* 節分) more extensively in the context of the *Urwort* as in the Japanese texts such as USS, 2: 304–307. Nevertheless, there is no more succinct conceptualization or more detailed argument than in the German text.

or, rather, he becomes aware of himself by separating a world from himself.”<sup>14</sup> Language is therefore the condition and at the same time the possibility of human self-relation and relation to the world. Furthermore “all of our finitude leads to us being unable to discern us immediately and by ourselves, unless through the other opposed to us.”<sup>15</sup>

The principle of differentiation (*Abscheidung*) is based on the fact that language is inherently dynamic. Humboldt writes: “Language, understood in its real essence, is something permanently and in every instant transient. As such, it isn’t a creation (*ergon*), but something creating (*energeia*).”<sup>16</sup> In this definition of language a radical shift occurs from language to speech whereby language as the “system of speech” (*System der Rede*) is no longer defined as a “dead shell” (*totes Gerippe*) of linguistic rules and expressions. Humboldt therefore brings the individual act of speech into the focus of linguistic research whereby he also brings attention to those moments in which the normal flow of speech ends and faltering occurs, i.e. moments in which one searches for the relevant expression, the correct formula, or the proper style. Put differently, Humboldt focuses on the act of articulation, the activity of forming synthesis in speaking, the joining of sense and the sensible in linguistic sound.

It is crucial to be more precise about the analytic means necessary for analysing Ueda’s poem I discuss below. First, one grasps the dynamism of language only if one thinks of it in terms of its unfulfilled performance and its openness. Language as *energeia* in the Aristotelian sense does not primarily refer to process but rather its performance, i.e. a particular stage and thereby the process as it is being realized. Language is, therefore, the carrying out of a possibility of an evolving being (cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysik* 1048, b34–35). Moreover, language has its *telos* in itself and not in something external to itself. In this regard, its being directed towards a *telos* in its un-fulfilled nature is at the same time a source of a never-ending power of creation.

Ueda takes up this dynamism in his usage of the term articulation. However, what is missing almost entirely in Humboldt but contributed by Ueda is the examination of the origin of this dynamism, where the individual speech act is (1) located in a lived body, (2) has a phonetic materiality and (3) is thus established as the reality of vocalization. In other words, the articulation of language has its material

---

<sup>14</sup> Sprache ist “das Mittel, durch welches der Mensch zugleich sich selbst und die Welt bildet oder vielmehr seiner dadurch bewusst wird, dass er eine Welt von sich abscheidet.” (von Humboldt 1960–1981, 2: 207)

<sup>15</sup> “[A]lle unsre Endlichkeit führt daher, daß wir uns nicht unmittelbar durch und an uns selbst, sondern nur in einem Entgegengesetzten eines anderen erkennen können.” (von Humboldt 1960–1981, 2: 208)

<sup>16</sup> “Die Sprache, in ihrem wirklichen Wesen aufgefasst, ist etwas beständig und in jedem Augenblick Vorübergehendes. [...] Sie selbst ist kein Werk (*Ergon*), sondern eine Tätigkeit (*Energeia*).” (von Humboldt 1998: 174)



origin in the pitch of vocalization referring not only to the beginning of the individual empirical speech act, but rather to the human capacity for language and speech.<sup>17</sup>

Humboldt approaches the idea of vocalization indirectly. Although he describes the different phonetic systems in their concrete form, this description remains unmediated by individual speech acts. However, his considerations relate to vocalization in regard to two aspects: in the analysis of the accent stress in a word and of the pause between words. Despite what might be shortcomings, Humboldt does highlight the crucial term that allows him to define language counter to a static definition by focusing on the idea of vocalization, that is, turning ideas into sound. Thus, Humboldt stresses that “the physical, actually shaped sound alone truly constitutes language.”<sup>18</sup> However, he is not interested in the sensible side of sound as such, but only its capacity to transmit sense and make something intelligible. This is his focus because for Humboldt what is most important is the union of features realized in sound that are distinct from the representation of what is articulated.

### 4.3 *From the Sound to Vocalization*

Even though Ueda also maintains non-linguistic forms of articulation in conjunction with language, it is noteworthy that he argues from the standpoint of linguistic expression in favour of the importance of silence.

Ueda examines a verse from a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke to deepen Humboldt’s concept of articulation regarding its performativity. To be more precise, he reflects on a single sound, the “oh” in the verse “Rose, oh reiner Widerspruch, Lust, | Niemandes Schlaf zu sein unter soviell Lidern”. Ueda transcending Humboldt results precisely from the vocal feature of “this ‘oh!’ [which] is at the same time

---

<sup>17</sup>The concept of vocalization in the present context does not stem from Ueda. It will be used in the following to interpret what Ueda discusses as the interjection “oh”. Besides Humboldt, Ueda’s language thinking is influenced primarily by Heidegger. Heidegger would dismiss the level of analysis as suggested in this paper. To Heidegger, it is beside the matter of language since vocalization may be a topic of phonetics, but appears as an empirical object derivative of philosophical reflection. Already in *Being and Time* Heidegger writes: “Das Hören ist für das Reden konstitutiv. Und wie die sprachliche Verlautbarung in der Rede gründet, so das akustische Vernehmen im Hören” (Heidegger 1995: 163). In another instance he identifies the difference between man and animal in relation to the human voice and translates a well-known passage from Aristotelian *Politics* using the term vocalization (“Verlautbarung”) in the following way: “Nun ist die stimmliche Verlautbarung [...] eine Anzeige [...] des Angenehmen und Betrübliehen, [...] weshalb sie als Weise des Lebens auch bei den anderen Lebewesen vorhanden ist” (Heidegger 2002: 46). Contrary to Heidegger, Cassirer also always rethinks the “deeper” levels of life as the chapter on pathology in the 3rd volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* testifies. The only consideration missing is that he did not draw consequences regarding the linguistic and non-linguistic (symbolic) articulation of the human; as Cassirer research is currently occupied.

<sup>18</sup>“[D]er körperliche, wirklich gestaltete Laut allein [macht] in Wahrheit die Sprache aus” (von Humboldt 1998: 206).

also the lifting, the first beginning of the next verse and word [...] It is the very first 'Urlaut'... the very first word."<sup>19</sup>

The "oh" as the "very first 'Urlaut'" does not refer to an element that explains the human capacity to articulate in an empirical sense. Rather it represents that which makes the human; that is, the capacity to form linguistic sounds, which always already constitutes a part of a holistic and fully developed system of speech.

Ueda stresses the "oh," which is not significant because of its abstract capacity to signify but rather because of its performance of language formation: from its origin in the voice via consonants, vowels, and syllables that are voiced to the enunciation of entire words and phrases in vocalization. The "oh" lies at the origin of vocalization of the spoken, and, as Ueda points out the poem commences and is lifted/lifts itself with the "oh." The return to the phonetic "origin" of and through the "oh" is not a fall back into a "natural primordial state" of meaningless babble. Every sound, even the simplest vocalization is in continuity with a fully developed articulation; in the case of Ueda's example, in continuity with poetic articulation.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the "oh" raises questions: If it is equally part of language, how can it be translated into another language? Does it have a semantic value? Is the semantic value possibly identical to the phonetic value? Evidently, the "oh" refers to a level of natural language which cannot be determined by its denotative function alone. The "oh" is not yet a word in the sense that its meaning is not context invariant. At the same time, it is not a meaningless noise. This becomes plausible so long as one avoids construing language as a "hard shell" (*starres Skelett*), and rather as a dynamic fabric or even as a "living organism" (*lebendiger Organismus*): The "oh" as *Urlaut* has in this regard a more sensible dimension than a more differentiated form of articulation since its origin is audible in and by way of the lived body. This can also be interpreted as the reason Ueda takes the "oh" as the *Atemlaut* (sound of breath). It works as an onomatopoeic and thereby already conventionalized expression no a faraway noise but a vital expression.

Moreover, if one takes into account that the breath is the basis of the voice, of vocalization, and thus the foundation of sense formation, then the sound of the breath (*Atemlaut*) carries the "*Urfunktion*" of sense formation. After a short pause, the breath resumes and with every vocalization new sense emerges. In an instant, the "oh" breaks through preconceived enframings of the world as constituted by prevailing discourse while opening new horizons of meaning. In this way, the emergence of a vowel (contrary to soundless consonants) reflects the coming into being of a new word and thereby the birthing of a new world. Ueda interprets the poem in this way: the "oh" is proof of a moment of astonishment and surprise. As Ueda writes: "The rose lightens up, no, not the rose, but SOMETHING unspeakable."<sup>20</sup>

The smell and the redness of a flower are possibly so impressive that the overwhelming experience supersedes any conceptualization within a botanical or any

<sup>19</sup>"[D]ieses ,Oh!'ist zugleich auch der anhebende, der erste Beginn der folgenden Versworte [...] Es ist der allererste Urlaut [...] das allererste Wort" (Ueda 1982: 219).

<sup>20</sup>"Es blitzt die Rose, nein, nicht die Rose, sondern ETWAS Unsagbares" (Ueda 1982: 219).

other order. In this case, this individual rose does not appear as a rose. Within this astonishment the rest of the world is likewise slightly shaken within its own categorical constellations. Once the individual thing ceases to fit into the general world view, the world as a whole seems to be derailed and to lose its ordinariness: the extraordinary thus becomes perceptible. Thus Ueda points out that “the ‘oh!’ is, so to say, an *Ur-laut* of presence, that breaks through the world of language.”<sup>21</sup> The “oh” breaks through language, insofar as the voicing resumes, yet it remains momentarily unclear which sound and which word the voice will form. In the indeterminacy of the sound lies the openness and the mutability of the yet-to-be spoken.

#### 4.4 From the “oh” to Silence and Back

Linguistic articulation is a constant movement that resumes time and again, it is similar to the coming and going of the breath’s sounding. It encloses, however, a moment of pausing, and that is why Ueda writes not only about the breakthrough into the linguistic world in the emergence of sound from the breath, but also of the breaking through and out of language back to silence, i.e. going beyond the linguistic world which suggests the complete suspension of the workings of language. The sound of the breath is close to silence. The reason is that the “oh” “does not, yet, belong to language, but is a non-word-like foreword to language that, first of all, discloses the path to language, again.”<sup>22</sup> The “oh” is a word *in statu nascendi*: it is not yet part of language, but it is not merely a noise, either.

The “oh” is more than a wordless silence since as a singular sound it unites two movements: the departure from language and the return to it. Ueda expresses how fundamental the first movement of leaving language really is: “‘Oh!’ is the ultimate breath vowel by which man dies his linguisticity.”<sup>23</sup> Whereas the sound of breath reaches back into the vital functions of life up to the heart’s rhythm, with every suspension of articulation the end of life is present. However, Ueda conceives of the articulation as an open process whose direction of movement carries an ambivalence. He maintains that what happens is an “extreme movement out of language into absolute silence and from out of silence back into language.”<sup>24</sup> The adjectives “extreme” and “absolute” as well as the metaphor of a movement “out of” language insinuate a fundamental difference between language, silence, and the finality of the movement towards death. The radicality of the movement is undergirded by the fact

<sup>21</sup> “Das ‚Oh!‘ ist sozusagen ein *Ur-laut* der Präsenz, der die Sprachwelt durchbricht” (Ueda 1982: 219).

<sup>22</sup> Das Oh “gehört zwar noch nicht zur Sprache, es ist aber ein un-wortliches Vorwort zur Sprache, durch das überhaupt der Weg zur Sprache wieder erschlossen wird” (Ueda 1982: 219).

<sup>23</sup> “‘Oh!’ ist der letzte Atemlaut, mit dem der Mensch in seiner Sprachlichkeit stirbt” (Ueda 1982: 219).

<sup>24</sup> In German it reads as “extreme Bewegung aus der Sprache heraus in das absolute Schweigen und aus dem Schweigen heraus wieder in die Sprache hinein” (Ueda 1982: 219).

that Ueda writes of a “breakthrough”: “One has to breakthrough language towards silence and this silence has to be broken through towards language.”<sup>25</sup> Does the conjoining of language and silence thus become doubtful? The following section demonstrates the opposite: While Ueda’s own wording and discussion is ambiguous and seems undecided, he must conceive of the relationship as a matter of complementarity because the dynamics of a breakthrough out of and back into language constitute itself not externally but can emerge only from an internal relationality.

#### 4.5 *From the Urwort to the Philosophical System*

Ueda’s argument points out that silence and language need to be conceived of as entirely complimentary even though some of his formulations suggest it to be otherwise. His use of the concept “articulation” as designating something beyond the limited scope of language belongs here, where one sees to what extent silence remains bound to language and other forms of non-linguistic articulation.

As referred to above, according to Ueda articulating oneself means that “the primordial concentrated totality is expressed in the respective unity under tension” (Ueda 1982: 225). Coming from this determination, Ueda intensifies the articulation of sound and vocalization in the direction of the voicing. He, therefore, points the way from articulated discourse back to the point at which vocalization originates, just where phonetic sound emerges from and remains minimally contrasted from silence. However, Ueda also shows how the articulation evolves, expands, and rises beyond the simple phoneme. And thus, Ueda delineates a bi-directional movement out of language via the “oh” and into language leading to the most complex articulation possible.

The primordial form of articulation still has a pre-propositional character. Coming out of silence, the “oh” as the *Urwort* manifests a totality under tension, which transcends itself towards differentiation. It leads into the full form of a sentence and thus attains propositional form: The *Urwort* splits into the polar structure of subject and predicate. Ueda illustrates this by the example of Nishida philosophy. In Ueda’s understanding, “pure experience” is Nishida’s *Urwort* under tension, which emanates a polar structure and evolves into the foundational principle of his philosophical system: “Pure experience is the sole reality.” From the first level of the *Urwort* to the second level of the foundational principle, the evolution finally reaches the third level on which that principle has turned into a philosophical system.

In the case of Rilke, it is the *Urwort* “oh” that evolves into a poetic verse on the second level and finally turns into his entire poetic work on the third level.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ueda (1982: 219): “Die Sprache muß zum Schweigen durchbrochen und dieses Schweigen muß wiederum zum Sprechen hin durchbrochen werden.”

## 5 Silence as the Negation of Language?

We must now ask regarding the non-linguistic dimension of articulation. As previously outlined, linguistic articulation always provides the horizon of speaking or discursive silence. In this regard, all talk of an antagonism or undermining of language through silence is unfounded; rather the relation must be conceived of as complementary. Is the same true for non-speaking or non-discursive silence? Does it undermine or correlate to the linguistic, and even more so the non-linguistic dimension of articulation? Is it possible that a complementarity is also characteristic of the relation of silence to non-linguistic articulation?

In these final pages, I consider two points: not only how Ueda expands the notion of articulation but how he modifies it. According to this line of reasoning, it is important to note how the core of Zen Buddhism, i.e. the silence in sitting meditation may be a particular form of expression of its own. Yet, considered in relation to the notion of “articulation” it can also be seen as integrated within a network of different forms of articulation, which remain bound to language by a particular form of praxis.

### 5.1 *Forms and Modes of Articulation*

Ueda’s stance towards language is ambivalent not merely because of his own thoughts on silence but, also in relation to other forms of articulation with which his stance seems to oscillate. Thereby language does not appear to have a privileged position, although he discusses the movement in the direction of and away from silence not only based on a linguistic example, the “oh”-event, but also conceives of “this oh-event terminologically as the ‘Urwort.’”<sup>26</sup> He writes that the possibilities of articulation go far beyond language: “This event is not bound to any specific word, not even to the ‘oh’ as an interjection. The relevant event realizes itself in pre-linguistic forms such as laughter or weeping, breathing, also, in a single breath taking, just as well as in bodily movement which we can call language of the lived body.”<sup>27</sup>

The following should give us pause: On the one hand Ueda talks of “prelinguistic forms” which should be called non-linguistic, since they are not linguistic and do not become linguistic, but are correlative to language and probably only conceivable within a network of forms of articulation which encompass a fully evolved system of language. On the other hand, Ueda rightly notices that one can speak of a

<sup>26</sup> “Dieses Oh-Ereignis [...] terminologisch als ‘Urwort’” (Ueda 1982: 220).

<sup>27</sup> “[D]ieses Ereignis [ist] an kein bestimmtes Wort gebunden, auch nicht an das ‘oh’ als eine Interjektion. Das betreffende Ereignis kann sich auch in vorsprachlichen Formen wie Lachen oder Weinen, ebenso in einem Atemzug, einem einzigen Atemzug, genauso gut auch in einer Körperbewegung vollziehen, die wir Leib-Sprache nennen könnten” (Ueda 1982: 220).

“language of the lived body” insofar as the differentiation of human forms of expression can be cultivated as an encompassing system that comes close to human language. Thus, it becomes clear that the dissolving of silence from language is problematic also in other cases of articulation.

Starting from the question of whether the concept of “articulation” remains bound to the most complete system of articulation (i.e. language) because of the momentum of semantics it is natural to argue in favour of a continuity between the linguistic and the non-linguistic. Evidently, Ueda supports in one regard the continuity since he also talks of three fundamental momenta of the (1) poetic, (2) logos-like, (3) and action articulation (cf. Ueda 1982: 220) —and thereby the elemental character of the concept of articulation becomes clear. Even though they are different, there is unity between them: “These articulations lie —despite their modal variation— on the same level that should be named the first level of articulation since the articulation can go beyond that level.”<sup>28</sup>

## 5.2 *The Location of Silence in the Space of Articulation*

In the pre-modern period Zen evolved primarily as a kind of poetic or practical articulation, and later through the encounter with Western academic philosophy evolved towards a logos-based articulation in the “Zen philosophy” of Nishida, Nishitani, and Ueda. Given that Ueda concedes these three kinds of articulation as the basic forms of the way Zen manifests, the specificity of Zen cannot primarily be determined by silence. This is so because silence cannot be determined on its own, but only by the way in which silence manifests in various linguistic and non-linguistic forms of ritualised expression.

In his Zen, Ueda attributes a particular structure to the linguistic side of practice even though the encompassing relations of action could also be described regarding practical articulation. However, he expresses, again, that in the Zen Buddhist practice there was also a primacy of language. The threefold order can be summarized as follows:

On the practical path, *za-zen* is the place of learning to keep silent, *samu* (work) and *angya* (pilgrimage) is place of learning to listen, *san-zen* [the dialogue with one’s master] is the place of learning to speak. On the one hand, ‘Keep silent!’, and on the other hand, ‘speak up!’ – this is the master’s double-edged sword.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup>“Diese Artikulationen liegen bei ihrer modalen Verschiedenheit doch auf derselben Ebene, die als die erste Artikulationsebene bezeichnet werden sollte, da die Artikulation über diese Ebene hinaus weitergehen kann” (Ueda 1982: 220).

<sup>29</sup>“Auf dem Weg der Übung bedeutet das *Za-zen* den Ort des Schweigenlernens, das *Samu* und *Angya* den Ort des Hörenlernens, das *San-zen* den Ort des Sprechenlernens. Einerseits ‘Schweig!’, andererseits ‘Sag ein Wort dazu!’, das ist des Meisters zweischneidiges Schwert” (Ueda 1982: 214).

In other words, the third momentum manifests the dialogue, the critical exchange.<sup>30</sup> All of this aims at awakening “*als Wortereignis*” (Ueda 1982: 214), whereby Ueda suggests a unique understanding in comparison to how Zen is commonly depicted. To be more precise, he demonstrates not only that silence as practice—and on a theoretical level, as an expression of this praxis—is embedded in specific forms of linguistic and non-linguistic articulations. Instead, his account is radical in that the momentum of awakening itself is not anymore purely thought of as a matter of interiority, which could be examined in silence alone, but on the contrary, is rather closely linked to language as “*Wortereignis*” (Ueda 1982: 214) and thereby to a form of externalisation or objectification of a momentum that seems unspeakable as lived experience. Alternatively, to put this into less psychologistic words, in Ueda’s interpretation, awakening takes on the form of a vocalization in which the “inner” sense and the “outer” sensibility form a unity.

What then remains regarding non-discursive silence? Does it dissolve entirely into the various relations of linguistic and non-linguistic forms of articulation? Does it lack every originality of meaning bestowal even though in seated zazen meditation one can and is supposed the practice silence?

### 5.3 *The Negation of Language in Silence?*

There is a passage in Ueda’s commentary on the Zen-Buddhist Dōgen, which directly addresses these questions and appears to offer a radical solution regarding the relation of silence to language. In this passage, Ueda asks, “why did Dōgen write the *Shōbōgenzō*?” (Ueda 1995: 221). This partly theoretical and speculative work of Dōgen’s expresses tension regarding the typical image of Zen as identical with purely non-linguistic praxis.

The beginning of the passage that is translated in its entirety and appended at the end of this essay, suggests that the silence of seated meditation is the radical negation which embraces the negation of language. Ueda writes: The “only” in

Dōgen’s [conception of meditation as] “only sitting” [*shikan taza* 只管打坐] is not an airy “only,” as one says, “it is enough, to only sit in meditation.” It is the carrying out of a thorough and penetrating negativity and it is infused with negativity. [...] Seated meditation is the dropping off of body and mind [*shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落], this is only-sitting.<sup>31</sup>

In other words, the linguistic formulation of “only-sitting,” according to Ueda’s interpretation, maintains a complete negation of all other forms of linguistic and non-linguistic articulation. What remains is the radical withdrawal of all forms of expression. However, Ueda’s elucidation does not end with the statement

<sup>30</sup>In German it reads as “zeigt den Dialog, die Zwiesprache” (Ueda 1982: 214).

<sup>31</sup>Cf. here and in the following the translated text in the appendix.

about the complete negation just as Dōgen does not content himself with only sitting and keeping quiet. Rather, at this point the question arises, why and how do theory and practice, language and exercise conjoin without giving up the radical stance as initially proposed by Dōgen and Ueda in the practice of silent meditation.

What is radicalized by Ueda is the relationship of language and silence, but still as a matter of complementarity since he drives it to the point where they meet. However, it is important to keep in mind that this does not ultimately negate the founding structure of meaning, i.e. the continuous forming of syntheses by externalizing sense into sensibility. Ueda thus interprets the relation of silence and seated meditation, its theoretical reflection (in thought), and the articulation of this reflection (in written form) as follows:

The matter of the thorough penetrating negativity “only sitting” is at the same instant the primordial idea “only sitting”; for that reason it is possible to express [*hyōmei suru* 表明する] this very point of view (e.g. the point of view that is call Dōgen-Zen) by this word “only sitting.”

The movement of thinking as described by Ueda and the momentum of objectification result from negating the idea of an all-negating praxis, which would result in an externalisation of this thought in expression and so to a kind of mediation between praxis and expression. The movement and the performative character of thought transcend its seemingly inherent contradictory character, such as when Ueda writes: “However, the idea ‘only sitting’ is an idea that comprises the negation of the idea; it is such a primordial idea [*genshisō* 原思想] because it is the idea of the matter ‘only sitting,’ that is the thoroughgoing negation, in other words, it is also a thoroughgoing negation of the idea.”

Finally, Ueda seeks to expand the movement of thought in the direction of its phonetic articulation:

The matter “only sitting” is the word “only sitting,” but between matter and word there is a thoroughgoing negation [*tettei teki hiteisei* 徹底的否定性]; thereby that this is reflected in words, the dynamism itself is penetrated on the level of the primordial idea which in principle arises in self-awareness, i.e. there where [the matter] only sitting is the so called word.

For Ueda the linguistic articulation is intrinsic to seated meditation precisely because silence negates language: Silence is meant here as the performance of negativity, i.e. the negation between language and world. The negativity lies therein and the word works only insofar as it negates the thing addressed as independent from language. The locus of the mediation of language and world lies, according to Ueda, in self-awareness.

This kind of *bewusstseinsphilosophische* speculation and all its consequences may be debatable. The crucial contribution by Ueda for the present account is the analysis of the relation of silence in seated meditation to the linguistic articulation of this silence. He points to where Zen Buddhist practice touches theoretical reflection and questions to what extent language mediates silence in Buddhism.



## 6 The Mediation of Silence Through Language

The decisive theme of the present study is the concept of mediation and the question, “is it possible to linguistically articulate something non-linguistic?”. How is it possible to give voice to the voiceless? How does a verbalization of silence occur in and through language? In what sense does silence speak in language?

The starting point for these questions is the determination of the human as a linguistic being. Thereby priority is given to the linguistic over other non-linguistic forms of articulation. This priority consists in the perfection of the denotative function and the development of an encompassing and differentiated sign system. Only from here do the non-linguistic forms of articulation gain their denotative potential. Therefore, independent of whether or not silence can be conceived of as a form of articulation it can only be grasped insofar as it remains mediated by language.

Contrarily, I initially argued that language is grounded in non-linguistic forms of articulation, which are more basic because of being founded in concrete relations of action and bodily *Lebensvollzüge*. Thereby, a high semantic density is inherent to non-linguistic forms of articulation. Thus, if silence —analogous to language— represents a proper expression, then it is due to its situatedness and context, which can also be given in a contrastive way.

However, if silence itself must be conceived of as a form of articulation, there is thereby a double indirectness in relation to language, which can help explain why silence is thought of as the radical other of language. The indirectness persists in two respects: First of all, seen from the side of the body, silence is different from other forms of non-linguistic articulation, different from gesture, and thus remains passive insofar as in silence an active or definite form of expression is lacking. In itself, silence is nothing other than a pause or a suspension or a lack. Thereby, the comparison with gesture also helps clarify that silence is not merely a suspension or interruption of linguistic discourse. A gesture breaks through discourse not in a linear fashion but rather through the superimposition with a plurality of connotative relations.

The denotative function of language cannot be explained based on the system of language alone but demands more comprehensive pragmatics. The dependency and embeddedness do not, however, change anything about the idealised function of language as a means of context-free, purely conventional meaning-making and gestural framework: gesture is inherently contextual and specific, not general. Only out of this relation does gesture attain the potential of “pure” meaning, and in particular out of a contrastive relation to each other. What then happens when the gesture is even more closely related to language, but at the same time more passive than every positive gesture, or radically passive, because it “appears” at first sight as suspension? Then one keeps silent. And in this silence as the negation of language in the gesture of silent sitting we find nothing more than an indirect but radical affirmation of the linguistic being of man.

However, there is more to silence as gesture. Given the present context and its being embedded in Zen Buddhist practice, silence is superimposed by historical and

existential layers of meaning condensing into an iconic character that is thus inherent to the posture of seated meditation. Silence inherits a particular iconic character because it consists of a ritualized and codified practice. As Steineck rightly remarks, silence as

the [kind] meditation [which is practiced by] “facing the wall” also implies its imitation and play, so to say, *imitatio Bodhidharmae*, but, going along with the interpretation [of silent meditation] by Dōgen, it is not only the play, but also the performance of the religious ideal and, thus, not only a copy or effigy but also the repetition of the *Urbild* as such.<sup>32</sup>

To return to the *Shōbōgenzō* and the question raised by Ueda, it is clear that Dōgen presents his own interpretation of sitting. Thus silence-as-articulation is related not only to language but also includes a reflexive level by the very fact that it is a re-interpretation of tradition. Dōgen’s own and many other texts are proof. Nevertheless, Dōgen still takes it a step further since he does not hesitate to maintain that “all the Buddhas and Patriarchs have the capacity to perfectly express [the truth], (*dōtoku* 道得)” (Dōgen 1989–1993, 1: 374).<sup>33</sup> Dōgen is referring to something more broad than merely verbal language, but verbal language as such is entirely affirmed.<sup>34</sup> This reflexive affirmation of language out of Buddhist praxis is very much plausible if one realizes, as Dōgen did, that silence is mediated by language also in speaking: “Upon voicing the perfect expression, the non-expressed remains, nevertheless, unsaid” 1: 375).<sup>35</sup>

## Annex: Translation

Excerpt from Ueda’s commentary on Dōgen (Ueda 1995: 222).

[The “only”] in Dōgen’s [conception of meditation as] “only sitting” [*shikan taza* 只管 打坐] is not an airy “only,” as one says, “it is enough, to only sit in meditation.” It is the performance of a thorough and penetrating negativity and it is infused with negativity. “Put an end to discretions of memory, imagination or analysis,” “stop looking for explanations and chasing after words,” and “[learn] to let the light turn back and shine on your own true nature,” this is seated meditation [*zazen* 座禪]. To sit in meditation is the dropping off of body and mind [*shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落], this is only-sitting. Then the matter [*koto* 事] “only sitting,” i.e. the carrying out of a thorough going negativity, becomes at the same time the word [*kotoba* 言葉] “only-sitting,” [...] it is the very idea, the primordial idea “only sitting.” The matter

<sup>32</sup> Schweigen hat als “die Meditation ‘mit dem Gesicht zur Wand’ [...] zwar auch Darstellungs- und Aufführungscharakter, sozusagen als *imitatio Bodhidharmae*, aber sie ist, zumindest in Dōgens Deutung, nicht nur Auf-, sondern auch Durchführung des religiösen Ideals und somit nicht nur ein Nach- oder Abbild, sondern Wiederholung des Urbilds selbst” (Steineck 2008: 293).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. German translation of the fascicle “Dōtoku” in Müller (2013: 274–279).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. the comprehensive account of “Dōgen’s language thinking” in the sense of an introduction to the present discussion of silence in Müller (2013: 249–321).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. the “Unausgedrückten” in Müller (2013: 285–287).

of the thorough penetrating negativity “only sitting” is at the same instant the primordial idea “only sitting;” for that reason it is possible to express this very point of view (e.g. the point of view that is call Dōgen-Zen) by this word “only sitting.” However, the idea “only sitting” is an idea that comprises the negation of the idea; it is such a primordial idea [*genshisō* 原思想] because it is the idea of the matter “only sitting;” that is the thoroughgoing negation, in other words, it is also a thoroughgoing negation of the idea. This is the reason [*yuen* 所以] why “only sitting” in itself is an elemental dynamism [*kongenteki dainamismu* 根源的ダイナミズム]. The matter “only sitting” is the word “only sitting;” but between matter and word there is a thoroughgoing negation [*tettei teki hiteisei* 徹底的否定性]; thereby that this is reflected in words, the dynamism itself is penetrated on the level of the primordial idea which in principle arises in self-awareness, i.e. there where [the matter] only sitting is the so-called word. And this is the elemental ground upon which the Shōbōgenzō was written.

## Bibliography

- Aristoteles. 1994. *Politik*. Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- (1995): *Metaphysik*. Studienausgabe, Vol. 5. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Cassirer, Ernst (1994): *Phänomenologie der Erkenntnis*. (Philosophie der symbolischen Formen, Vol. 3). Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- (2021): *Phenomenology of Cognition*. (The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 3). Transl. by Steve G. Lofts. London: Routledge.
- Dōgen. 1989–1993. *Dōgen Zenji zenshū* 道元禪師全集 [*Complete Works of Zen Master Dōgen*]. Vol. 7. Tokyo: Shunjusha.
- Ferenczi, Sándor. 1919. Zur psychoanalytischen Technik. *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* V: 181–192.
- Frauwallner, Erich. 1956. *Die Philosophie des Buddhismus*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1995. *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- . 2002. *Grundbegriffe der aristotelischen Philosophie*. (Gesamtausgabe 18). Frankfurt: Klostermann.
- Markewitz, Sandra, ed. 2013. *Jenseits des beredten Schweigens. Neue Perspektiven auf den sprachlosen Augenblick*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag.
- Mayer, Heike. 2007. Schweigen. In *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol. 8, 686–706. Tübingen: De Gruyter.
- Mensching, Gustav. 1926. *Das heilige Schweigen. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung*. Gießen: Töpelmann.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 2001. *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Mühlhäuser, Matthias. 2014. *Schweigen und Schweigeformen in der Literatur: Zur Hermetik des beredten Schweigens in Gottfried von Straßburgs “Tristan”*. Hamburg: Diplomica Verlag.
- Müller, Ralf. 2013. *Dōgens Sprachdenken. Historische und systemtheoretische Annäherungen*. Freiburg: Karl Alber-Verlag.
- Páramo-Ortega, Raúl. 1967. Einige Bemerkungen über das Schweigen des Analytikers. *Jahrbuch für Psychologie, Psychotherapie und medizinische Anthropologie* 15.3 (4): 247–252.
- Plitz, Wolfgang. 1987. *Die Philosophie des Schweigens – das Schweigen in der Philosophie*. Dissertation an der Universität Würzburg.

- Schlieter, Jens-Uwe. 2000. *Versprachlichung–Entsprachlichung: Untersuchungen zum philosophischen Stellenwert der Sprache im europäischen und buddhistischen Denken*. Köln: edition chōra.
- Steineck, Raji C. 2008. Rituale in der Bildung der Sōtō-Schule. *Hōrin: Vergleichende Studien zur japanischen Kultur* 15: 277–293.
- Ueda, Shizuteru. 1982. Das Erwachen im Zen-Buddhismus als Wort-Ereignis. In *Offenbarung als Heilserfahrung im Christentum, Hinduismus und Buddhismus*, ed. Walter Strolz, 209–234. Freiburg: Herder.
- . 1995. Kaisetsu 解説. In *Daijō butten* 大乘伝典 23: *Dōgen* 道元, eds. Ueda Shizuteru and Yanagida Seizan, 93–255. Tōkyō: Chūō kōron sha.
- von Humboldt, Wilhelm. 1960–1981. *Wilhelm von Humboldt. Werke*. Vol. 5. Stuttgart: Cotta.
- von Humboldt, Wilhelm. 1998. In *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluß auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts*, ed. Donatella Di Cesare. Paderborn: Schöningh.
- von Kleist, Heinrich. 2011. *Sämtliche Erzählungen; Über die allmähliche Verfertigung der Gedanken beim Reden; Über das Marionettentheater*. Köln: Anaconda.

# Part VIII

## Reflecting Philosophy: In Poetry

### Introduction

Ueda spent his entire life navigating different language worlds, East and West, including: classical Chinese and Japanese, Latin, Middle High German, and later in life, Spanish. Translation was, thus, a crucial aspect of his philosophical endeavor. Yet, even more critical was his navigation between seemingly heterogenous textual genres. A significant period of his later years was devoted to translating pre-modern Zen texts into modern Japanese, including several fascicles of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*.

In their “Nothingness and the Poetic Experience: Ueda and Valente,” Pablo Acosta and Raquel Bouso demonstrate how philosophical reflection can be enriched by and mediated through poetry, in particular from within the experience of nothingness, which they consider from the point of view of Ueda and the Spanish poet and essayist José Ángel Valente. The grounds for the comparison issue from theoretical reflections on language and creativity put forth by both thinkers based on their reading of mystical literature. Going beyond describing a mere analogical comparison, the authors suggest a “rhizomatic” connection obtaining between the philosopher and the poet, which captures the proximity both discerned amid European mysticism and Eastern spiritual traditions, especially the understanding of language derived from various forms of apophaticism.

The themes of poetry and negation are echoed in “Ueda and Heidegger: Playing in Hollowness, Abiding in Actuality and the Risk of Poetic Language”, where Adam Loughnane measures the proximity and distance between Heidegger and Ueda and their poetic exemplars in hopes of pointing the way to a more authentic approach to language, one which sustains fidelity to the philosophic theory it inspires. Loughnane builds a dialogue between Ueda and Heidegger based on their mutual attempts to avoid the perils of representational language. Considered in tandem, these thinkers’ theories of language raise important questions regarding philosophy’s relation to poetry. Invoking Ueda’s notion of a two-fold world, Loughnane suggests both

philosophers construe the poet as speaking of things in the world as neither fully posited nor negated. Yet, he highlights a crucial discrepancy arising from their choice of poet-exemplars, which complicates the comparison regarding the type of poetic enactment that best overcomes the dangers of representation.

# Chapter 16

## Nothingness and Poetic Experience: Ueda and Valente



Pablo Acosta-García and Raquel Bouso

### Abbreviations

USS Ueda, Shizuteru. 2001–2003. *Ueda Shizuteru shū* 上田閑照集 [Collected Works of Ueda Shizuteru], 11 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami.

### 1 Introduction. Ueda and Valente: A Rizomatic Connection

In their well-known work *A Thousand Plateaus* (*Mille plateaux*, 1980), Deleuze and Guattari wrote, “A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicles” (Deleuze-Guattari 1987: 6). They use this image as a corrective to centered systems as well as hierarchical structures, proposing a rhizomatic philosophical model in their place:

In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states (Deleuze-Guattari 1987: 21).

In this essay, we adopt the metaphor of the rhizome as a starting point from which to examine the insights offered by the Japanese philosopher Ueda Shizuteru (1926) and the Spanish poet and essayist José Ángel Valente (1929–2000) on the issue of poetic creativity. Despite their different backgrounds, both thinkers share a concern

---

P. Acosta-García (✉)  
Autonomous University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

R. Bouso  
Department of Humanities, Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona, Spain

for the mystical tradition and the question of language, and they developed ideas independently that appear strikingly similar. As far as we know, Valente was acquainted with the philosophy of the Kyoto School (Valente 2000: 47) but there is no evidence that Ueda and Valente ever read each other's works. As Deleuze and Guattari remark, the "tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance" (Deleuze-Guattari 1987: 25), and it is under this assumption that we suggest a connection between two thinkers whose views can shed light on the role of nothingness in poetic experience.

To begin, we consider José Ángel Valente's poetics and his conception of nothingness, looking into his earliest poems and his interest in mysticism and later turning to his essays, focusing on his view of the East, the hermeneutic schools of thought developed in the twentieth century, and his search for syncretism. Secondly, we will deal with Ueda's hermeneutics of experience and his analysis of Zen language and *renku* poetry. To conclude, we discuss how the roles of the primal word and of silence were crucial for both thinkers in their understanding of mystical experience and the process of artistic creation.

## 2 José Ángel Valente: Poetics and Evolution Into Nothingness<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 *From His First Books of Poetry to His Encounter with Mysticism*

The figure of José Ángel Valente (Orense, 1929 – Geneva, 2000) is well known in the field of Hispanic Studies not only as a recognized philologist, but also for being one of the most idiosyncratic Spanish poets of the twentieth century. As we explain in detail in the following pages, he began his poetic production early in his life, at the age of 15, following the realistic, socially-oriented tendencies of the period (Sánchez Robayna 2014: 11–12). Later, with the discovery and gradual internalization of the mystical writings of the Castilian "Siglo de Oro," his production took a turn and became itself a completely different way of understanding (and explaining) poetic language, both as a process of self-knowledge and as a recreation of the "primal word".<sup>2</sup> This theoretical aspect of his work helps us to better understand the radical change in his vision of writing and creation, and it is surely related to his humanistic background. As Andrés Sánchez Robayna suggests, his first readings of the great Castilian mystic Juan de la Cruz (1542–1591) were during the Madrid

<sup>1</sup>For a more in-depth discussion on Valente and mysticism following the line of inquiry presented in this section, see Acosta-García 2019.

<sup>2</sup>Following Blecua 2006: 31–88, the literary production of the "Siglo de Oro" can be roughly located between the poetry of Garcilaso de la Vega and the dramatic works of Calderón de la Barca, that is to say, from the publication of the *Las obras de Boscán y algunas de Garcilaso de la Vega: repartidas en quatro libros* in 1543 until the last quarter of the seventeenth century.



years, at the beginning of his university studies (Sánchez Robayna 2014: 19). One early fruit of these readings is the following passage from a poem that Valente dedicated to Juan de la Cruz:

O wounded heart,  
empty of color, shape and touch,  
which into the secret ladder ventures,  
who is it who walks into the night  
from one edge to another, from one river to another,  
from one border to another, enraptured?<sup>3</sup>

As this passage suggests, the poetic references of Juan de la Cruz betray a strong influence, not only on the narrative of the escape of the lover using a “secret ladder” (line 3) in the night time landscape of the three last lines, but also in the very specific theological image of the wound of love (line 1) related to the deprivation of perception (line 2).<sup>4</sup> Here we find a first approach to mystical poetry understood not only in its lyrical sense, namely as a spiritual song of love, but also as a dynamic process of intimate inquiry. Nevertheless, in our view, this piece expresses the admiration for a figure, whose language Valente discovered and used for the first time, rather than his later identification with and attachment to the Spanish mystical tradition. As the subtitle of the poem intimates, we should understand this as a homage to an author not as devotion to a master. Our interpretation of the lines quoted accords with the traditional periodization of Valente’s poetry into two periods, the first being marked by a ‘realistic’ or ‘critical’ phase coinciding with the expressive tendencies of the time, and a second later period characterized by a ‘metaphysic turn’ especially evident in the publication of his book *Material memoria* [Memory Material] (1977–78).

These ostensible two periods should always be carefully invoked. As Sánchez Robayna asserts: “Although Valente emphasized the metaphysical enquiry from a certain moment around 1980 onwards and the publishing of the book *Material memoria*, he never left behind the *critical poetry* that defined his work from the beginning of his activity” (Sánchez Robayna 2014: 47). Robayna’s views of Valente’s work as an organic whole in which certain tendencies coexist and develop

---

<sup>3</sup> *Oh corazón herido, / vacío de color, de forma o tacto, / que en la secreta escala se aventura, / ¿quién es el que camina hacia la noche / de confín a confín, de río a río, / de frontera a frontera arrebatado?* We quote J. Á. Valente’s poems following the Spanish edition of his complete lyric works (Valente 2014), but making reference both to the title of the poem and to the original collection of poems in which it was included. In this case: “Homenaje a san Juan de la Cruz en Segovia”, in *El desvelado* [1952], 784, vv. 26–31. This poem was commented on in T. Aguilar-Álvarez Bay, “La nada como ejercicio creador. La *Guía espiritual* de Molinos en Zambrano y Valente”, in *Acta Poetica* 35/2, 2014, 26–27. The remainder of Valente’s translated texts that will appear in this chapter have been translated by Bouso, Acosta. For an English collection of his poetry, see Valente 2013.

<sup>4</sup> This process of purification is one of the main topics which Juan de la Cruz explains in his *Subida al monte Carmelo*, an unfinished spiritual commentary of one of his most famous songs (“En una noche oscura...”). He deals especially with the concept in *Subida al Monte Carmelo*, books I and II, in Juan de la Cruz 2000: 152–403.

is, of course, richer than a neat separation between two antithetical poetics. However, after the publication of *Material memoria*, the use of words as a way to search and create a different reality was a constant not only in Valente's poetry, but also in his literary essays and academic research. It is undeniable that in 1974 the intellectual activity of Valente showed a deep interest in mystical experience, especially in relation to the concept of 'nothingness'. This preference was exemplified in the remarkable introduction to *Guía Espiritual* [Spiritual Guide] and *Defensa de la contemplación* [In defense of Contemplation] by the convicted heretic Miguel de Molinos (1628–1697) that accompanied Valente's edition of these works.<sup>5</sup> His encounter with this text, which inherited and revived the school of European apophatic theology focused on meditation, was met with continuity with his own poetry, strengthening the hermetic and 'negative' qualities of his writing. This new attitude developed following *Material memoria* both in collections of poems such as *Mandorla* (1982), *El fulgor* [The Brightness] (1984), and *Al dios del lugar* [To the God of the Place] (1989), and in books of essays containing his new poetics and explanations of the poetics of the Castilian mystics, such as *La piedra y el centro* [The Rock and the Center] (1983) and *Variaciones sobre el pájaro y la red* [On the Bird and the Net] (1991).<sup>6</sup> As an international conference devoted to Juan de la Cruz has attested, Valente's intellectual interest in Spanish apophatic mysticism lasted into his final years. The contributions, which he later edited together with José Lara Garrido are in *Hermenéutica y mística: San Juan de la Cruz* [Hermeneutics and Mysticism: Saint John of the Cross] (Valente 1995).

## 2.2 *The Essays: The Vision of the East, Hermeneutic Schools of Thought, and the Search for Syncretism*

As noted above, Valente began reading Spanish baroque mysticism first as a student and later as an academic. He was not only a poet, but also a great reader of primary and secondary sources, and a theorist who applied his knowledge to elucidate his own poetry. Reading his essays we find a variety of prominent scholars cited, especially in fields related to the history of religions. In the following passage, for instance, he refers to the works of Rudolf Otto:

In autumn 1924, in the US, Rudolf Otto gave a series of lectures that he later used to write an essential book, *Eastern Mysticism, Western Mysticism*, in which he established a surpris-

---

<sup>5</sup>Valentes' first edition was published as *Ensayo sobre Miguel de Molinos. Guía espiritual. Defensa de la contemplación* (1974), and it was later reprinted, without the initial *Ensayo* but with a new prologue as Miguel de Molinos, *Guía espiritual. Defensa de la contemplación (fragmentos)*, 1989. On the discovery of Molinos by Valente, see Aguilar-Álvarez Bay 2014. On the concept of "nothingness," see Valente 2000: 44–48.

<sup>6</sup>These collections of essays can be found in the second volume of Valente's *Obras completas* (2008). However, in the following pages we quote the earlier editions as separate books.

ing system of similarities between Śaṅkara (800 A.D.), the Hindu master of non-duality, and Eckhart, the Rhenish master of simple unity. In this case, for obvious reasons, the examination of a possible transmission process was completely excluded. Therefore, Otto's fascinating work demonstrates by itself the existence of homogeneous structures in mystical phenomena, regardless when or where they took place. Some extreme experiences tend to be expressed with an analogous language (or with the same suspension of language) and with analogous forms of symbolization. This homogeneity does not exclude possible differences. On the contrary, as Otto asserts: "the essence of mysticism can only be captured through the totality of its possible differences" (Valente 1991: 166-167).

Thus, Valente extracted from a lecture of Otto's a comparison between some of the ideas of Adi Śaṅkara and of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Rhenish Dominican Meister Eckhart, highlighting (and championing) the notion of the universality of mystical language. In other words, Valente used an academic text to support his interpretation of what mystical phenomena were and regarding their relation to language. His own position in the debate around the transmission of religious ideas and practices was clear: it is not possible to find a direct link of transmission (either oral or textual) between religious experiences that were expressed in a very similar way but in different periods or geographies ("regardless when and where they took place"), but the striking coincidences in the theology of the two aforementioned authors seem to suggest that there is a common human basis in mystical expression (this is what he calls in the quote "homogeneous structures in mystical phenomena"). Additionally, it is interesting to note that Valente specifically traces a continuity in which he connects "some extreme experiences" with parallel forms of mystical language. This connection, supported by the theses of Otto and others, allowed him to clarify the poetics implicit in the works that he published from *Material memoria* on. On the one hand, the theory of the emergence of a natural language that was used to express certain "abyssal experiences" placed his writings within a sort of poetic mysticism that had no explicit link to a deity. On the other hand, it let him comprehend his own position against the background of the Castilian tradition of apophatic expression. As he continues in the same essay,

The differential manifestations of mystical phenomena are determined by the different religious or cultural contexts, but they also exceed them. Therefore, despite the restrictions of his own tradition, a German Dominican from the thirteenth century can be closer to Vedānta or Mahāyāna mysticism than to Plotinus's mysticism regarding certain points. Likewise, Hans Liebeschütz notes typical elements of Iranian cosmologies in the work of the "Germanic prophetess" Hildegard of Bingen, written over a century before Eckhart's. This is also the reason behind Swami Siddheswarananda's words: "When the numerous visitors interested in Hinduism lament, with a sense of inferiority, the lack of an equivalent to Raja yoga in the Christian tradition, we advise them to read the complete works of Saint John of the Cross repeatedly, as we ourselves have done, and we can certainly say that we consider Saint John of the Cross as the Western Patanjali" (Valente 1991: 166-167).

In this passage, the scholar-poet sets out the idea of mystical experience understood through a universal basis by building bridges between Western theologians and visionaries (Plotinus, Hildegard of Bingen, Eckhart, Juan de la Cruz) and Eastern religious traditions (Vedānta, Mahāyāna). In the final lines, he refers to the Hindu monk Swami Siddheswarananda to support his view. On the one side, this provides

him with a ‘modern’ religious authority who perceives the same sort of continuity between the practices of Eastern and Western religions that Valente does; on the other, it allows him to add Juan de la Cruz and his negative theology to the equation.<sup>7</sup> As the previous excerpts attest, Valente supported a kind of syncretism that connects different religious traditions, including doctrine and imagery, in order to create a wider theoretical space to understand his own poetry. This is a tendency that we can place specifically in his later thought and especially in his writings of the 1990’s, for instance, in the essay quoted above and in the following transcript of a conversation he had in the studio of the Catalan artist Antoni Tàpies in 1995:

José Ángel Valente: Modernity started with the stake in which Giordano Bruno’s body was burned, exactly in 1600 [...]. Bruno said that real philosophy is both poetry and painting, that real painting is not only music, but also poetry, and that real poetry and music are both painting and a certain divine wisdom. I think this radically suggests the principle that every creation comes from the same matter.

Antoni Tàpies: This fourth element, divine wisdom, is very important. Sometimes it is wrongly interpreted, because in such a materialistic time as ours it can seem a return to old institutional religious beliefs. However, depending on how we interpret it, it can be very modern (Valente 2002: 90-91).

Concerning the words of Tàpies, we should not forget that both interlocutors were raised and spent their youths in the repressive context of Spanish National-Catholicism. In our opinion, we should understand his allusion to the fear of a “return to the old institutional religious beliefs” within the framework of a society that had still not gotten over the trauma of the Civil War and the later empowerment of Catholicism as a state religion. The entire conversation reflects the creative visions of the artist and the poet who used religion as a framework to understand their creation from an inclusive point of view. As Tàpies later expresses in the same text, “the sacred” is the only way to get to “non-rational, ineffable worlds”. Of course, in this case ‘sacred’ is in scare quotes because both authors are consciously applying religious concepts to a secular context.

For instance, a similar sacred-secular ambiguity is found in Valente’s reference to “materia” (matter) and Tàpies’ “divina sabiduría” (divine wisdom). Here, they are referring to an anthropological characteristic of human nature linked to spirituality. During their conversation, they deliberately oppose this “structural component” (borrowing Lluís Duch’s words) of the human being to historical religions as strongly hierarchized social organizations that formalize revelations in different contexts (Duch 2012: 66). Thus, the focus of this conversation is the first concept, the sacred as a human capacity: Valente later adds that the artist needs a “sacred attitude” to create, that is to say, that she or he has to activate this potentiality to search for a primal, original knowledge in the individual creative process. As we will see, Valente’s perception of such a process is a non-rational impulse that enables the poet to explore himself in the search for a language that is free of conventional

---

<sup>7</sup>About the continuities of Juan de la Cruz’s negative theology from the perspective of European medieval mysticism, see Acosta-García and Serra-Zamora 2017: 253–274.

norms: he pictures this process as a sort of dive into a “*materia oscura*” (“dark matter”) that lies within the inner self.

### 2.3 *The Primal Word: Artistic Creation, Formless Matter, and Nothingness*

In his posthumous collection of essays *Elogio del calígrafo* [In Praise of the Calligrapher] (2002) there is a text focused on the image of the garden. There, concerning the poetic word, Valente invokes the Golden Age, a pre-historical moment in which humans spoke a sort of divine language, “the language of birds” (Valente 1991: 62). Of course, the poet uses this image consciously: he knows that he is referring to a myth present in different Indo-European religious traditions, such as Sufism, where it represents the language of angels, and Greek mythology, in which it appears as a gift given by the gods. The language of birds seems to be charged with the general meaning of a spiritualized, pure, and original language. In Valente’s words:

Total word and initial word: matrix word. Every poetic word takes us to the origin, to the *arkhé*, to the original slime or matter, to the shapeless, where shapes are perpetually incorporated. Absolute word which, as Scholem writes following the Hebrew tradition, “is still without meaning in itself, but it is pregnant with meaning.”

Initial word or pre-word, which has no meaning yet because its nature is not to mean but to express. This is the place of the poetic, for the poetic word neutralizes the functionality of language to make it the place of expression. [...] This is the intelligible word, which demands intelligence to abandon, in the words of Nicholas of Cusa, “the nature of the words we use”. Therefore, this is a word that rejects utilitarian functions, denying language as mere functionality, and essentially pointing to the knowledge of the unknowing, to an understanding of the non-understandable and whose only way of understanding is [...] *intelligere incomprehensibiliter*: incomprehensible understanding. This is the place that San Juan de la Cruz grants the word in his *Coplas hechas sobre un éxtasis de alta contemplación* [Nine verses made upon an ecstasy of high contemplation]: ‘I entered, not knowing where, / And there I remained uncomprehending, / [...] And so my spirit was blessed / With understanding without understanding, / Transcending all knowledge.’ (Valente 1991: 62).

Perhaps this is one of the passages in which the Galician writer explains his conception of the poetic word more elaborately. Essentially, he opposes two kinds of language: on the one hand, the conventional word, that is to say the language we use in our everyday life, which, therefore, has a common meaning; on the other hand, the word-full-of-meaning which he calls *palabra total*, *palabra matriz*, *palabra absoluta*, *palabra inicial*, and *antepalabra* (total word, matrix word, absolute word, original word, and pre-word, literally and respectively) in the previous quote. According to Valente, this original word is the objective of the poet’s search. The poet looks for it in the “dark matter”, that is to say, in the shapeless original language inside the author which is absolutely free of any conventional, shared meaning. This is his conception of the language of birds.

Moreover, Valente's allusions to the Christian *via negativa* are explicit in the passage. He speaks of "an understanding of the non-understandable and whose only way of understanding is [...] *intelligere incomprehensibiliter*: incomprehensible understanding". In the below text, he discusses this topic in greater detail:

That initial word that tells of the beginning or the origins is, for that same reason, the only word that makes every procreation possible. As María Zambrano notes, "that word is not a concept, rather it prompts conception". It is only because of this word that the concluded or occluded opens and the form perpetually returns to formation. The Stoics called it seminal logos: spermatic logos, semen-word. It is, strictly, the breath of the Ghost, the Pnuma, which, according to Yves Congar, the Greek Fathers called the Sperm of God. Thus, this word, which predates meaning, is gravid or pregnant or impregnated with every possible meaning (Valente 1991: 66).

Therefore, the "shapeless word" does not contain a concept, but it is the place where all the potential of language dwells. Here, Valente links this language with the divine and develops this idea by shaping it in a sort of theological allegory related to the Incarnation of Christ. The original word does not have a meaning but *conceives* all meanings in the Marian sense of the *conceptio Verbi*: the word is pregnant with a pure, spiritual significance. Nevertheless, this Christian expression is far from dogmatic. In all these passages the allusions to different traditions (the ancient Greek philosophical tradition, the Stoics, the Kabbalah) are combined with references to Christian theologians (Nicholas of Cusa, Juan de la Cruz, the Greek Fathers, Yves Congar), scholars (Gershom Scholem) and Valente's friend, the poet-philosopher María Zambrano. Valente is using the all-inclusive methodology that we explained above to construct his conception of poetry. Inside every human being, independent of creed, there is the possibility of looking for the primal word: this is what real poetry is, as has been expressed by a variety of religious and intellectual traditions throughout history. As he articulates in a note in this same essay:

This is not postulating a new kind of knowledge, but very old and substantiated forms of knowledge. The old thinkers distinguished with absolute precision the *logos endiathetos*, or inner word, from the *logos prophoricos* or external word. Word always accompanies us, even if we keep quiet or, especially, when we keep quiet. And this is because the word that is not designed for functional purposes is the one that is part of us; the word we do not utter, the one that speaks within us and that we sometimes translate into speech (Valente 1991: 62, n.3).

Here Valente maintains and develops the distinction between everyday language (*logos prophoricos*) and the poetic word (*logos endiathetos*). It is interesting to note that this opposition is based on the 'passive' position of the word full of meaning. Against the instrumentality of external language, which we are obliged to use in society, the inner word plays a constitutive role in human beings and it can be either uttered (searched for and written) or just left in silence. This link between the poetic word and silence reinforces the conception of 'the sacred' as a structural and intrinsic element of human beings while also relating poetic experience to apophatism. As Valente expressed in a poem collected in *Al dios del lugar* (1989):

TO DELETE ONESELF.

Only in the absence of signs  
Does the god settle.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.4 *Poetic Experience as Wisdom*

It would be impossible to complete our discussion of Valente's poetic thought without discussing his conception of the poetic process as a form of knowledge. Early on in his career, in a collection of essays published in 1971, he wrote the following:

At the moment of poetic creation, the only experience you have is that of its particular unicity (the specific object of the poet). The poet does not work with previous knowledge of the material of the experience, but that knowledge is generated as part of the creative process and this is, in my view, the essential element of poetic creation. The tool through which the knowledge of a specific experience material is generated during the process of creation is the poem itself. I mean that the poet knows the domain of reality on which the poem is built when the poet gives it a poetic form: expressing it is acting on this knowledge. It is only in this sense that I believe that Goethe's statement takes on its true dimension: "The supreme and only operation of art is to give shape" (Valente 1994: 21-22).

We can extract three definitions from this passage of Valente's intricate prose. First, experience ("experiencia") is identified in the text as the specific object of the poet ("objeto específico del poeta"), that is to say, something that exists within an ineffable inner world, but which has no form and is therefore non-cognizable by means of usual human approaches. Secondly, poetic creation ("creación poética") is seen as a dynamic search for the original word, which we have already discussed above, and which is identifiable with the aforementioned experience of the ineffable. Thirdly, 'poem' ("poema") is understood as a dialogic term: in one sense, it is an authentic process of knowledge, because it enables the poetic search; in another sense, it is a tangible, result of this literary process. Thus, acquiring experience of the word full of meaning requires a process of knowledge that is, precisely, the process of poetic creation. The final product is the poem itself, which is the driving force behind the whole dynamic. This idea is developed in the following paragraph, where he even puts forward what he calls "the law of necessity of poetry":

Hence the feasibility of formulating what we could call the law of poetic necessity: there is an aspect of experience, as a given element, that can only be known poetically. This knowledge is generated through the poem (or through equivalent structures in different aspects of the artistic creation) and dwells in it. Therefore, critics miss the mark when instead of addressing the poem, they address the alleged experience that motivated it, looking into it in order to explain the poem, because such an experience, which is susceptible to being known, exists only within the poem and not outside of it (Valente 1994: 24).

Therefore, Valente's experience does not exist before artistic creation, but is found *through* creation. The experience-knowledge of this un-created word is inseparable from the language of creation. In the following lines, the Galician poet links this

---

<sup>8</sup>BORRARSE. / Sólo en la ausencia de todo signo / Se posa el dios (Valente 2014: 464).

theoretical comment with mystical experience and mystical language using Juan de la Cruz's songs and commentaries as examples:

About the material provided by his mystical experience (lived, but essentially unknown and obscure), Saint John of the Cross, for instance, constructs the marvelous building of his Song and his Dark Night, through which (only through which) his own knowledge of that experience is generated in its unchangeable individuality. Therefore, when he writes his commentaries, the Carmelite saint was not trying to first explain his experiences so that we can better understand his poems, but he comments on what the latter say about the former. It could not have been otherwise, because that experience, as something that can be known in its particular unicity, only exists in his poems (Valente 1994: 24).

This is an absolutely Valentean interpretation of the diptych formed by Juan de la Cruz's lyric compositions and his own commentaries on them. Following the line of thought expressed in the last passages, Valente defines Juan's mystical experience not as obtaining prior to the poem, but as arising simultaneously with its writing. In fact, he repeats, it is the process of writing that leads to the experience. As is well known, the biographical records of the Carmelite friar do not recount any explicit mystical experience defined as direct knowledge of the divine. As Alois Maria Haas wrote, in Christian contexts there is a large group of mystics who write not about their contact with God (and, consequently, do not describe their own "experience"), but whose works belong to the literary genre of mystagogy, that is, they author texts that focus on theoretical and doctrinal discourse (Haas 2002: 67–68).

This idea of Haas's is helpful for understanding not only the poetic writings of Juan de la Cruz, but also the commentaries to which Valente refers in the last quotation. From its contents we can deduce a personal mystical experience, although their core is theoretical, doctrinal, and didactic. In fact, when reading Juan de la Cruz, we should not forget that a great part of his intended recipients were nuns, for whom he played the role of spiritual advisor. From this point of view, Valente includes his notion of poetic experience in his explanation: the commentaries of Juan de la Cruz on his own poetry are an explanation of the knowledge apprehended during the process of writing that is also meant for himself. In this sense, the parallel traced by Valente between the Carmelite's work and his own writing (poetry and essays) seems clear. Moreover, Valente later notes that, as perfect readers, we can only *know* poetic experience through the poems:

Hence the possibility to go a step further and assert that on the basis of the poems of Saint John of the Cross, a hypothetical perfect reader of his work could achieve the knowledge of the experience that originated them, in the same way in which the poet knew it. I say knowing it, neither experimenting with it nor living it, which are very different things, as different as poetry and life are from each other (Valente 1991: 25).

Consequently, Valente is opposing two kinds of knowledge: the lived experience and the knowledge of it or, in other words, the human language used in the poem (a codified experience) and the living experience itself. Thus, in Valente's view, poetic knowledge is not a rational process, but the construction of the text bridges the gap between the poet's experience and the reader's knowledge:

Thus, from this point of view, poetry is, primarily, the revelation of a facet of reality to which there is no other possible access than poetic knowledge. This knowledge is generated



through poetic language and it is realized in the poem. For this is indeed the only possible unity of poetic knowledge; not any given single line, however excellent or beautiful it may seem, nor an expressive procedure generated from it, but only the poem as a structure where these elements coexist in a fluid dependency, correcting and adjusting each other to form a superior type of unity (Valente 1991: 25).

### 3 Nothingness and Poetic Experience in Ueda's Thought

#### 3.1 Ueda's Philosophy of Religion

Since the volume in which this chapter is included is devoted to Ueda Shizuteru, a few remarks on his trajectory will suffice to introduce him and his relevance for the rhizomatic connection suggested here. Ueda graduated from the University of Kyoto with a degree in philosophy. Following the advice of his former professor Nishitani Keiji, he went to Marburg University in Germany to pursue his doctoral studies. Under the guidance of Ernst Benz, he completed a dissertation on Meister Eckhart, later published with the title *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik der Zen-Buddhismus* (Ueda 1965). Rather than focus on Eckhart's Latin writings, Ueda conducted his research on his German works, whose new edition was being published at the time. It is well known that Eckhart was a great innovator with respect to the terminology he used to preach and address spiritual issues and, indeed, his German works have significantly contributed to the development of German philosophical language. For Ueda, the peculiar and at times iconoclastic Zen forms of expression echoed the fresh and free use of language of the medieval thinker and spiritual guide.

Hence, it is not surprising that after obtaining his doctorate, Ueda turned his efforts to explore the similarities between certain Eckhartian expressions and those of Zen masters. He studied the diversity of contexts and worldviews that lied behind similar words with a careful study of the language. The comparison between Zen and mysticism was in part motivated by the interest in Zen Buddhism that arose in German academic philosophy circles. This task, as well as his own experience in writing philosophy in two languages, German and Japanese (Kasulis 2011: 1017–1018), led Ueda to deepen his understanding of the nature of language. Thus, together with Nishida's philosophy, mysticism and Zen are the core of Ueda's philosophical thought.

While he follows the philosophical style of the Kyoto School, the influence of German philosophy on his writings is remarkable, as is the influence of Martin Heidegger in particular, along with Wilhelm von Humboldt, Ernst Cassirer, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and French philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Derrida who motivated a great deal of Ueda's reflection on language. As Ueda himself explained in his Preface to the Spanish edition of his collection of essays entitled *Zen and Philosophy* (Ueda 2004: 8), Zen Buddhism, mysticism, and philosophy,

especially Nishida Kitarō's philosophy, constituted the three key focuses of his intellectual career. Religion is perhaps the only concern common to all three. This concern pervades Ueda's work not only in questioning what religion is from a philosophical perspective or in a primal existential sense, he also explores the question regarding what it means to be religious in a so-called secular age.

### 3.2 *Experience and Expression*

It is by interpreting three key notions in the development of Nishida's philosophy, namely, "pure experience" (*junsui keiken* 純粹経意), "self-awareness" (*jikaku* 自覚), and "place" (*basho* 場所) that Ueda devises a hermeneutic framework based on the relation between "experience", "understanding", and "the horizon of understanding" (USS 1). Within this framework, Ueda deals with the problem of the articulation that arises from non-articulation, or in other words, language that comes from silence. This can be read in parallel to Nishida's attempt to elaborate an "oriental logic" (東洋の論理) capable of giving "form to that which is formless, voice to that which is voiceless" (Nishida 1987), which, according to him, lies at the basis of Eastern culture. As Ueda notes, that which is beyond form and speech has been a central interest in spiritual writings both in the East and the West. In the European mystical tradition, mystics have often struggled with words to give an account of their spiritual experience, the *unio mystica*; in turn, the Zen tradition is well known for its suspicion towards words and scriptures and for its vindication of a silent transmission of its teachings. However, in both cases, a rich literary tradition has come down to us. When tackling the relationship with language that lies behind Zen literature, Nishida's philosophy, together with his studies of Western phenomenology and hermeneutics, provided Ueda with the conceptual tools that helped him to develop his own philosophy of language.

Let us first examine Ueda's way of thinking of language in relation to experience. Taking Nishida's notion of "pure experience" as a starting point, one might wonder whether or not such an experience is possible from a linguistic perspective. That is to say, for Nishida, the moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound is a pure experience, it precedes the differentiation between the experiencing subject and the experienced object, and the individual is formed through their development. Judgement of what the color or the sound might be only comes afterwards, when one has lost the primal unity and becomes detached from that experience. For Ueda, even in such a case, one cannot avoid language because being in the world implies inhabiting the world of language: "any reality that we perceive is already a reality that is interpreted through language. [...] our experience of the world is a priori linguistically constituted" (Ueda 1995: 1). Therefore, he interprets pure experience as:

the fundamental experience that we are deprived of our words and the fundamental experience that our words are born anew. As such fundamental experience, it enables experience to retrieve its radicality. In this sense, pure experience is a “word-event” (*Wort-ereignis*). Accordingly, I would like to regard pure experience itself as the proto-word (Ueda 1991: 141).

For Ueda, the immediate presence of something unspeakable and incomprehensible, the experience itself, does not allow for an interpretation, moreover, it deprives the person who usually moves within the world of language, of language itself, and thus he or she cannot help but remain in silence. However, we are immersed in language from the very beginning, to us language is a given, our world is a world of language. Therefore, even pure experience is expressed through language, albeit in the form of a simple phonetic body without any grammatical role, like the interjection “Oh!”.<sup>9</sup> Actually, for Ueda, such a spontaneous interjection before the presence that leaves us speechless does not belong to language, rather it is a “proto-word”, an “‘non-word word’ prior to language” (*un-wortliches Vorwort zur Sprache*, Ueda 1995: 5). This movement “out of language and into language” (Ueda 1991: 143),<sup>10</sup> namely, the “word-event” (*Wort Ereignis*), takes shape as an original language insofar as it somehow reveals its deep original source. According to Ueda, the word-event expresses experience in one of two ways: either in a poetic articulation or in a logos articulation.<sup>11</sup>

It is in the poetic articulation where, despite their obvious cultural and historical differences, Ueda finds a commonality between Meister Eckhart—as representative of medieval European mystical tradition—and Zen Buddhism. In both cases, Ueda identifies a basic common experience relative to a change in the way of being that determines their ways of understanding. Specifically, the realization of the true self implies a breakthrough in the linguistic network that envelops the world, and transforms it into an openness, a sort of freedom that becomes the source of a new word. Thus, silence can become a “primal word” through which silence expresses itself. For Ueda, this word predates language and reopens a new path towards language for those who were deprived of it. This is a distinctive kind of word, for it expresses the movement out of language and back into it. Silence and speech are not two opposing concepts here but part of a single event. In this way, silence resonates with the words of the person who has undergone such an experience and serves as guidance to others, inviting them to awaken to the truth.

---

<sup>9</sup>Ueda comments on this interjection as it appears in Rilke’s epitaph (Rose, oh pure contradiction, delight/ to be the sleep of no one under so many/ lids). (Ueda 1991: 143). This “Oh!” is also called *Urwort*, an original, primordial word.

<sup>10</sup>Here, Ueda observes that this “proto-movement”, which is pure experience is linked with the movement of going “out of the self and into the self” and going “out of the world and into the world”.

<sup>11</sup>As examples of this logos-like articulation, Ueda mentions the philosophies of Nishida and Nishitani (Ueda 1991: 149).

### 3.3 *Understanding and the Horizon of Meaning*

In Ueda's view, the linguistic process described above challenges what contemporary philosophy calls the "horizon structure of experience" (*die Horizont-Struktur der Erfahrung*; Jap. *keiken no chiheikōzō* 地平構造), according to which the world of the being-in-the-world is the final horizon of experience, that is, there is no "horizon of meaning" beyond the world. Accordingly, Ueda distances himself from the position of philosophical hermeneutics. Whereas he considers that the fundamental principle of philosophical hermeneutics lies in the understanding of what is understood verbally, for him, what lies at the basis of understanding in terms of language is not language, hence the aforementioned movement "out of language and into language". That is to say, it is not only that there is something that we cannot express through language, an ineffable experience, but there is also a fundamental experience through which the ineffable becomes language (Ueda 1991: 118).

Thus, language certainly opens up a cognitive horizon. However, adding to Wittgenstein's famous sentence "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" in the *Tractatus* 5.6 (Wittgenstein 1961: 68),<sup>12</sup> for Ueda, since language determines and delimits our world, there must be something beyond this horizon. Clearly, he does not think of this "beyond the horizon" as a thing but rather as nothingness or as an infinite openness in which the world is located. According to him, we exist in a double world—the world where we are located and the openness where our world itself is located. Yet, this does not mean that there are two worlds, rather it points to the open structure of this world with regard to infinite meanings. As Ueda explains, we cannot talk about what is "beyond the horizon" inasmuch as the horizon is by essence finite, but we know that it exists, and we can point it out symbolically: language, by virtue of its symbolic nature, allows us to refer to this invisible openness.

In order to reach this openness, the self must negate itself, that is, it needs to go through an ecstatic experience of selflessness. This process can be regarded as the core of mystical experience and Zen awakening to the truth of self, usually conceived as a personal experience, which is unspeakable and non-transferable. Ueda argues that the words that refer to this invisible openness where our world is located come from the self-understanding of one's own openness, even if they no longer refer to the self. Thus, experience does not yet belong to us, rather it becomes expression without attachment to words. To attain the true self, it is necessary to dissolve the self-centered ego, and analogously, at the linguistic level, it is necessary to exit language for language to be possible. Consequently, the attainment of the truth of the self is the above-mentioned "word-event". Since this openness becomes a new horizon, the resulting understanding grants reality a deeper dimension. In this

---

<sup>12</sup>Notice that, later in this work, Wittgenstein specifies that "The world is my world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of language (of that language which alone I understand) mean the limits of my world" (5.62), which leads to the claim "I am my world". It might be said that Ueda's theory of language attempts to escape this kind of solipsism.

manner, that which cannot be expressed through language comes into being as a kind of language that has true meaning. The usual limited framework where our existence takes place opens up to a more complex dimension of meanings. The usual calculating way of thinking then gives way to a richer and evocative poetic use of language. Nevertheless, for Ueda, this language is not only the prerogative of mystics and poets. This may happen in the midst of our everyday existence, as a continuous back and forth dynamic between silence and language, to the extent that one delves into one's own spiritual experience and its understanding.

Ueda privileges the notion of openness<sup>13</sup> to that of nothingness or emptiness, which were often used by Nishida and Nishitani respectively. With this choice, he is perhaps following Heidegger's discussion of *freiheit* (freedom) in terms of *offenheit* (opening). However, the characteristic lack of restrictions inherent to openness retains the idea that singles out the so-called "oriental nothingness", the boundlessness that allows novelty and creativity. The words coming from this depth constitute an event of self-expression, like something that occurs freely and spontaneously. This kind of language is always creative because it can be spoken using an infinite variety of combinations without exhausting the open source whence it arises.

### 3.4 *Aesthetic Experience and Religious Experience*

As we have seen, Ueda speaks of a movement of liberation from language toward language. This suggests a way of avoiding the danger inherent to language of becoming enslaved to words, trapped in fixed meanings, confounding occurrences with words. Speaking can become a creative activity if language is used creatively, so that a new quality of language emerges where one forges the world. What makes this possible is our living both within and outside of language. Mystics and Zen masters have always been well aware of the dangers of language, particularly when referring to ultimate reality, be that God or Nothingness. It is from here that the so-called apophatic way (*via negativa*) derives as a corrective.<sup>14</sup> In fact, Ueda refers to

---

<sup>13</sup>One Japanese term that Ueda uses to describe this limitless openness, *kyokū* 虚空, can be translated as "hollow expanse". In the same way, Ueda speaks of "hollow words", "hollow" meaning here "fictional" in contrast with "full" or "actual", a terminology that the philosopher borrows freely from traditional Japanese literary theory to develop his theory of language. The meaning of "hollow words" in his theory can be summarized as follows: "Language reveals things. When this happens, (1) words are signs, and language is a system of signs that reveal beings (the various beings and their specific relations). (2) Insofar as these beings are located within a totality of beings, words, while revealing beings, are symbols that reflect being as a whole or the whole of being. (3) While revealing beings and while reflecting being as a whole, words are "hollow words" that reflectively expose the hollow-expanse or [absolute nothingness] in which being as a whole is located." (Ueda 2011: 778).

<sup>14</sup>On the *via negativa* and the *via eminentiae* as other mystical ways of using language to point to the infiniteness of God, see: Ueda 1997: 86.

two pairs of religious images to illustrate this event of exiting language and exiting into language in Christianity and Buddhism: the movement between the God of revelation (*deus revelatus*) and the hidden God (*deus absconditus*); and the movement between “the provisional body of the Buddha” (*upāya dharma-kāya*, the [dharma-body] of [expedient means], a provisional form assumed out of compassion for suffering beings) and “the absolute body of the Buddha” (*dharmatā dharma-kāya*, the dharma-body of essential truth, ultimate reality empty of form) (Ueda 2011: 771). However, for Ueda, these are representatives of the standpoint of faith which takes the depth of God as an esoteric sacrament while mystical terms entail a more radical negation:

Mysticism, on the contrary, takes up even this depth of God between the revealed God and the hidden God as an elevated place of the human subject’s movement of exiting language and then exiting into language. Hence, as we see in the case of Meister Eckhart, for mysticism the “language” at issue in exiting language includes even the word of God and the word that is God (Ueda 2011: 771).

Thus, although Ueda recognizes that somewhere and somehow there is an unspeakable reality, he believes that the event that incites one to move into language and out of language is what is truly real. Ueda’s interest lies in the moment in the midst of collapse when the proper words occur, and the “word event” comes about. That is, the dynamic whereby we free ourselves from language and are able to use it creatively, negatively or otherwise.

Let us consider an example taken from the Japanese form of poetry called *renku* 連句, which Ueda comments on to illustrate how close religious (or perhaps better mystical) experience and aesthetic experience are in this regard:

This stone basin, covered with moss, beside flowers. This morning’s irritation evaporated of itself.

Eating a meal for two whole days.

Cold north wind on the island, it’s almost snowing.

In the evenings the climb to the mountain temple, to light the lanterns (Ueda 1989: 34).

As Ueda explains, the word *renku* consists of two characters, the first means “linking or being connected to one another” and the second denotes a brief but significant utterance, a concise or aphoristic poetic form similar to the famous *haiku*. In this form of linked verse, a poet composes a line of five, seven, and five syllables, and a second poet then composes a short line of twice seven syllables; a third poet adds five, seven, and five syllable lines, and this continues until reaching a composition of 36 lines. In Ueda’s interpretation, the most interesting aspect of this form of poetry is how a poet projects his own world into a given situation: the successful poet is the one who is able to interpret the preceding line in a new way, and whose interpretation will be visible within the horizon opened by their line, and so on. Therefore, the subsequent poet has to understand, interpret, and reinterpret the previous lines in his own creation of a new meaning:

The poet actually dwells in a double world not merely horizontally, but also vertically, not only in that double world just described [i.e. the world of the previous line and the world of

the following line], but also in the all-embracing world of the infinite openness based on nothingness" (Ueda 1989: 31).

Not only does this nothingness lie between lines but it can also be seen in the relatedness of every created world, a world disclosed "self-sufficiently" by a line but which "self-lessly" belongs to a relational world. We may also apply this to the self of the poet, which reveals itself and at the same time negates itself to give way to the self of the next poet. Here we can see how close aesthetic experience is to religious experience.

Let us now ponder how Ueda reads the *renku* poem quoted above. He imagines a small and peaceful garden suggested in the first line. In the second line, he detects a change of mood; someone has forgotten his irritation perhaps while working in the garden. This person's behavior becomes comical in the third line for he or she has been eating for two days. The fourth line depicts a different atmosphere, a cold remote island, maybe an allusion to the tragic life in exile of a figure of Japanese history. Perhaps the person is the ex-emperor who has been eating abundantly preparing himself for a hard task amidst the mounting snow. It is possible to see here a sort of fusion of horizons, in Gadamer's terms, the horizons of meaning of the past and the present fused together. In fact, this poetic form is paradigmatic of the process of understanding cultivated while engaging in a conversation. Yet, in interpreting this instance of poetic articulation of experience, Ueda does not place the emphasis on history or on tradition but in the unsaid, in the space "between" the lines, "on the one hand this empty 'between' counts as the infinitely open space of nothingness, and on the other it is the very event of the shifting worlds" (Ueda 1989: 31). Deprived of subjectivism by virtue of the self-negation and relatedness that this linguistic event entails both for language and for the self, Ueda seems to find it important to underline that the experience of understanding and the process of creation always take place in an interpersonal domain where all positions are changeable and interdependent.

#### 4 Conclusions: Encounters in the Nothingness

As we have seen, Valente and Ueda share a common interest in poetic experience that becomes fundamental in the development of their theory of language and hermeneutics. Regarding their views on language, it is extremely remarkable that both authors speak of a "primal word", whether in terms of the "palabra total", "palabra matriz", "palabra absoluta", "palabra inicial", or "antepalabra" in Valente's poetics, or the "proto-word", a "'non-word word' prior to language" (*un-wortliches Vorwort zur Sprache*, in Ueda's philosophy). For both thinkers, alongside the conventional uses of language, where it is seen as a mere tool for communication and calculation, there is the possibility of a more authentic and creative, closer to an absolutely essential source. This primordial center can be referred to as nothingness but, in fact, it is nameless, formless, and unspeakable. More than a mere linguistic

resource along the same lines of the *via negativa*, for both authors this nothingness means the experience of self-negation, in Ueda's terms, or the "abyssal experience" in Valente's words, which lies behind the utterance of true and open words (Ueda) and words of a kind of divine wisdom (Valente).

While both thinkers draw on Christian mystical literature, there are also differences between them, especially in connection with their different approaches to linguistic experience. In the case of Valente, for example, it is clear that he uses the language of religion to speak about his own inner quests, in order to later develop his hermeneutics of poetry using this system of expression. Ueda, in turn, conducts his research on mysticism and poetry as a philosopher of religion but does not lack an existential quality. Moreover, whereas Valente searches for a common ground in all forms of mystical expression, a sort of syncretic universalism, Ueda is more cautious and seems to content himself with indicating the commonalities in the use of language between the two contexts that are most familiar to him, namely the Christian and Zen Buddhist traditions.

In Valente, his discussion is based on whether or not he is just using a meta-language, a sort of construct that transfers the technical terminology of religion to the world of art. Likewise, it is also relevant to determine whether or not he betrays a paradoxical desire for a "non-transcendent transcendence" or an "immanent transcendence" in a world where absolute schemas and concepts are not valid, and where the idea of God is outdated or felt as void. In Ueda, the absence of God experienced in Western modernity charges the radical language of negativity in mysticism with new meaning where, as we have seen, the experience of the hidden God or the divine nothing comes into language. However, despite Ueda's emphasis on the everydayness of poetic experience, the views on poetry and creativity of these two authors seem to somehow linger on the romantic conception of the artist-seer who is inspired by something external and from another mysterious and ineffable place. Thus, the conception appears of the artist-seeker who explores an other-worldly realm (in their own words, dark matter, the ineffable, what is beyond the horizon, nothingness, and silence), which in turn brings knowledge to this world in the form of art.

## References

- Acosta-García, Pablo. 2019. "Palabra matriz y escritura poética: José Ángel Valente y la *fable mística*", *Revista chilena de literatura*, 99.
- Acosta-García, Pablo, and A. Serra Zamora. 2017. Apophatic Mountains: Poetics of Image in Marguerite Porete and John of the Cross. *Viator* 48 (1): 253–274.
- Aguilar-Álvarez Bay, T. 2014. La nada como ejercicio creador. La Guía espiritual de Molinos en Zambrano y Valente. *Acta Poetica* 35 (2): 26–27.
- Blecua, Alberto. 2006. El concepto de 'Siglo de oro'. In *Signos viejos y nuevos*, ed. X. Tubau, 31–88. Madrid: Crítica.
- De la Cruz, Juan. 2000. *Obras completas*, Eulogio Pacho, ed. Burgos: Monte Carmelo.



- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (*Mille plateaux*, 1980), translation and foreword by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Duch, Lluís. 2012. *La religión del siglo XXI*. Madrid: Siruela.
- Haas, Alois M. 2009. *Viento de lo absoluto*, trans. Jorge Seca. Madrid: Siruela.
- Haas, Alois M. 2002. *Maestro Eckhart. Figura normativa para la vida espiritual*, trans. Roberto H. Bernet. Barcelona: Herder.
- Kasulis, Thomas P. 2011. Culture and Identity. Overview. In *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. James W. Heisig, Thomas P. Kasulis, and John C. Maraldo, 1005–1037. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎. 1987. *Hataraku mono kara miru mono e* [From That Which Acts to That Which Sees.] In *Nishida Kitarō Zenshū* 西田幾多郎全集 [Collected works of Nishida Kitarō] 4, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Sánchez Robayna, Andrés. 2014. Introducción. In *Poesía completa*, ed. José Ángel Valente and Andrés Sánchez Robayna, 9–61. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1965. *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik der Zen-Buddhismus*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn.
- . 上田閑照. 1989. “The Zen Buddhist Experience of the Truly Beautiful”, trans. John C. Maraldo. *The Eastern Buddhist* 22 (1): 1–35.
- . 上田閑照. 1991. “Experience and Language in the Thinking of Kitarō Nishida”, trans. by T. Nobuhara. In *Zen Bunka Kenkyūjo kiyō* 禅文化研究所紀要, 17, 91–154.
- . 上田閑照. 1995. Silence and Words in Zen Buddhism. *Diogenes* 170 (43/2): 1–21.
- . 上田閑照. 1997. *Kotoba to jitsuzon. Zen to bungaku* 言葉と実存. 禅の文学 [The existence of Language: Zen and Literature.] Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- . 上田閑照. 2004. Prólogo. In *Zen y filosofía*, ed. Raquel Bouso. Barcelona: Herder.
- . 上田閑照. 2011. “Language in a Twofold World,” trans. by Bret Davis. In *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. James W. Heisig, Thomas P. Kasulis, and John C. Maraldo, 766–784. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Valente, José Ángel. 1974. “Ensayo sobre Miguel de Molinos.” In Miguel de Molinos, *Guía espiritual. Defensa de la contemplación*, 9–51. Barcelona: Barral Editores [second edition with a different prologue: Miguel de Molinos, *Guía espiritual. Defensa de la contemplación (fragmentos)*, José Ángel Valente, ed. Madrid: Alianza, 1989].
- . 1991. *Variaciones sobre el pájaro y la red; precedido de La piedra y el centro*. Madrid: Tusquets.
- Valente, José Ángel. 1994. *Las palabras de la tribu*. Barcelona: Tusquets.
- Valente, José Ángel, and J.L. Garrido, eds. 1995. *Hermenéutica y mística: San Juan de la Cruz*. Madrid: Tecnos.
- Valente, José Ángel. 2000. “Mandorla: la experiencia abisal,” *Letras libres*, 21: 44–48. [Previously published with the title “La experiencia abisal” in Nada, mística y poesía. *Er, revista de filosofía*, 24/25, 1999: 223–236].
- Valente, José Ángel, and Antoni Tàpies. 2002. Conversación entre Antoni Tàpies y José Ángel Valente. In *Elogio del calígrafo: ensayos sobre arte*, ed. J.Á. Valente, 90–91. Barcelona: Círculo de lectores.
- Valente, José Ángel. 2013. *Landscape with Yellow Birds*. trans. Tom Christensen, New York: Archipelago Books.
- . 2014. *Poesía completa*. Andrés Sánchez Robayna, ed. Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1961. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1921)*, trans. D.F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness. Introduction by Bertrand Russell. London and New York: Routledge.

# Chapter 17

## Ueda and Heidegger: Playing in Hollowness, Abiding in Actuality and the Risk of Poetic Language



Adam Loughnane

### 1 The Danger of Representation: “Open” and “Abyss”

Following Hölderlin, Heidegger characterizes his time as “destitute” (*dürftiger Zeit*) as the world’s “midnight” (*Mitternacht*) where the “united three” (*einigen drei*) classical gods, Heraklitus, Dionysus, and Christ have all retreated in an age defined by their absence. While the context Heidegger sets up in “What are Poets for?” (*Wozu Dichter?*) is obscure, for the purposes of this study, we can read this work according to Heidegger’s broader critique of Western metaphysics. As Heidegger explains in *The Principle of Reason (Der Satz vom Grund)*, metaphysics asks the question of Being, but only focuses on Being as “ground” (*Grund*) and ignores its second valence, its negative “Abyssal” (*Abgrund*) dimension (Heidegger 1996). The world’s “midnight” is “destitute” not because a metaphysical theory has misrepresented the world and thus demands a new, better representation, but because representation itself is taken as deeply problematic, even dangerous. Metaphysics attempts to represent the world but is blind to the Abyssal valence of Being, it can only see its positive features, and thus, in need of certainty, sets these up as ontological grounds. If Heidegger is right, forcing the world to conform to representational expectations evolves into the technological disclosure of Being (Heidegger 1982a) and a calculative way of thinking (Heidegger 1966) that endangers us, puts us outside a safety that is otherwise available, but which metaphysics cannot access. Through a poetic dwelling in the world, the poet risks speaking beyond representation. While this is a linguistic and existential risk, nevertheless the poet finds a safety in “unshieldedness” (*Schutzlossein*) by establishing a relation through language to Being’s abyssal valence.

---

A. Loughnane (✉)

Department of Philosophy, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland

e-mail: [adam.loughnane@ucc.ie](mailto:adam.loughnane@ucc.ie)

In this paper, I consider metaphysics as a project that seeks to reduce the risks intrinsic to language, but in failing endangers humanity in a more precarious way. The poet, in working out a non-representational stance within language, accepts the inherent risk of being-in-the-world, does not seek to dissimulate that risk, and thus finds a safety otherwise unavailable.

How, though, does representation endanger us? Because representational thinking only sees the positive disclosure of Being, not its negative quality, the prevailing assumption is that philosophy can, in principle, fully disclose that positivity and thereupon gain the certainty it needs to establish metaphysical foundations or “grounds”. Western metaphysics has been a history of such attempts. From the undemonstrable certainty of Aristotle’s first principles, to the law of non-contradiction, the indubitability of Descartes’ *cogito*, and the Leibnizian principle of sufficient reason. Among all of these attempts to establish positive grounds Heidegger and Ueda focus on the last, appealing to poets to challenge the Leibnizian principle that “nothing is without why” (*nihil is sine ratione*). They both turn to Angelus Silesius to show how philosophy, if it risks being oriented to the two-fold nature of Being as “ground” and “abyss”, can speak of the world, and dwell within it less destructively beyond the “why” of sufficient reason.

I would like to consider how metaphysics is inherently oriented towards eliminating an existential risk, which we are better to embrace. We attempt to reduce this risk because the abyssal features of Being appear threatening. A persistent aversion to nothingness, negativity, *nihilum*, a *horror vacui* characterizes the Western intellectual tradition. Yet, if Heidegger and Ueda are right, it is only in orienting oneself to the two-fold aspect of Being, its positive and negative valences, that we find the safety we desire. If Being were univalent, only constituted by its positive grounds, then it is conceivable that philosophical metaphysics could establish the type of certainty and safety it wants. If any such foundations had been established, the certainty generated would reduce the risk of one’s actions and speech. For example, when attempting to find answers to our most demanding human questions regarding the self, freedom, morality, moral dilemmas, existential issues, etc., if we could be certain about any single stable metaphysical principle, this surely would not answer all of our questions, but in providing a foundation of certainty from which to begin, this hypothetical ground would at least reduce a type of uncertainty that appears unproductive for Western philosophy, that is, foundationlessness, or what Heidegger considers groundless grounds.<sup>1</sup> Negativism and nihilism have haunted this possibility, and in attempting to evade this feature of Being because of its ostensible dangers we have built positive metaphysical systems that have led to a far greater endangerment of humans and of the world.

---

<sup>1</sup> Heidegger writes, “Being ‘is’ in essence: ground/reason [*Grund*]. Therefore being can never first have a ground/reason which could supposedly ground it. Being ‘is’ the abyss [*Abgrunde*] in the sense of such a remaining-apart of reason from being. To the extent that being as such grounds, it remains groundless. ‘Being’ does not fall into the orbit of the principle of reason, rather only beings do.” (Heidegger 1996: 51).

Rather than attempting to put forth yet another philosophy seeking to re-institute a new and better foundational theory to represent the world, Heidegger questions that attempt altogether and turns to the poet as one who has found a different way with language, one which embraces the risk of relating to the Abyssal in language. In so doing, the poet risks groundlessness but turns it into a safety metaphysics cannot access. The poets have the “saving power” (*das Rettende*, Heidegger 1982a: 28) in the “destitute time” because they can suffer the absence of philosophical grounds without abdicating the word. Poets find a way to “sing” within groundlessness. That is, their language does not rely on or wait for the assurance given by a foundational metaphysical theory that would reduce the risk of their articulations. Instead of formulating a new theory that would represent the world in a new, better, or more accurate way, the poet abandons representation itself. For Heidegger this is decisive since, as he writes,

It is by the positioning that belongs to representation that Nature is brought before man. Man places before himself the world as the whole of everything objective, and he places himself before the world. Man sets up the world toward himself, and delivers Nature over to himself. ... Where Nature is not satisfactory to man’s representation, he reframes or redistributes it. (Heidegger 2001a: 107).

To demand that existence conform to the expectations of a representational model is to treat the world and things in it as constituted only by Being as “ground” not as “abyss”. Thus, both Being and beings are disclosed as “objects”. Yet, as Heidegger warns us, “we must never represent this sphere of Being and its sphericity as an object” (Heidegger 2001a: 121). This is where the greatest danger lies. Metaphysics aims at the safety of “shielding” (*geschützt*) at minimizing existential risk but because the representational framework reduces things to their objectivity, it has the opposite effect, it “places man outside all care or protection; the imposition of the objectifying of the world destroys ever more resolutely the very possibility of protection.” To regain true protection—a protection given by Being in both of its valences—demands that one abandon the false shielding that would come by accurately representing the world, things in it, and ultimately, Being itself. Paradoxically, the protection of Being does not come from the safety metaphysics gropes for—which aims to reduce risk by establishing foundational theories—but by sustaining a form of risk as “unshieldedness” (Heidegger 2001a: 113). Following Rilke, Heidegger writes that it is “unshieldedness itself [that] grants a safety” (Heidegger 2001a: 119). For Heidegger, the poet’s “song turns our unprotected being into the Open” (Heidegger 2001a: 137), where the “open” is the abyssal realm immune to representation and objectification: A realm where subject-object language does not describe entities and thus, the various modes of comportment towards the world sanctioned by subject-object metaphysics are inappropriate guides for speech. The poet is left without a metaphysical ground that would guide her articulations; nevertheless she sings unprotected, and in doing so converts her unshielded exposure into safety by embracing the absence of grounds without attempting to re-instate new foundational theories.

When faced with the most vexing questions of human existence, to speak about these without recourse to foundational theories, at a time when gods are absent, in the face of an ontological abyss, appears inherently risky, possibly foolish. Nevertheless, Heidegger describes the poet as “venturesome” (*Wagenderen*) because he risks language when the “Open” has not yet been positively disclosed, when language cannot exhaustively represent Being, and when exactly what things are or how they should be defined remains undetermined, possibly undeterminable. Poetic language is a type of enunciation that sings in the absence of foundations without trying to reinstate representable metaphysical grounds, or metaphysics grounded on representation. Heidegger calls the poet’s orientation “silence”, but is emphatic that the poet “does not abdicate the word” (Heidegger 1982b: 88). The poet’s silence is only an abdication (*Absagen*) of words that aim at the false safety of metaphysics and representation. Poets are exemplars for Heidegger because the silence they enact in the face of great uncertainty discloses a different orientation towards Being through language. The poet “sings” without the usual metaphysical assurances that would reduce the risk of utterance. And, in so venturing themselves and their world they find an appropriate orientation to Being’s two valences that brings a protection only possible when one risks language beyond representation, beyond positivity, and beyond foundationalism.

## 2 Ueda: “Hollowness” Between Visibility and Invisibility

While there are important differences between their philosophies we will consider, as in Heidegger’s ontology, Ueda’s is likewise two-fold. While Heidegger refers to the Ground/Abyss bivalence, Ueda speaks of the “two-fold” as “hollowness” (*kyo no koto* 虚のこと) and “actuality” (*Jitsu no koto* 実の事). The “hollow” is the non-objective feature of existence, which is immune to representation. As in Heidegger’s philosophy, so with Ueda, our time is one of near unrestrained objectification, which threatens humanity at the most fundamental level. Like Heidegger, Ueda looks to poets for their way of being oriented to the negative through language. For Ueda, the principal danger is not necessarily that one realm dominates, it is the imbalance between the two that is most threatening: “When a balance of actuality and hollowness has not been established as the rule,” he writes “dangers arise for human existence” (Ueda 2011: 784). Ueda’s poet averts the hazards of representational language by striking the proper balance between “hollowness” and “actuality” through a poetic use of language, a disposition to what is that does not reduce the world to its objective positivity, or to “actuality”.

In striving to articulate a non-representational orientation to the world that achieves the proper balance between actuality and hollowness, Ueda’s theory of poetic language calls on us to re-think the distinction between the visible and invisible. “Actuality” according to Ueda is readily visible whereas “hollowness” is invisible and demands an alternate linguistic posture for one to dwell appropriately in this realm. Let us consider the poem Ueda analyzes to see how the young, un-named poet he invokes strikes the proper balance

between actuality and hollowness. The sun sets between Mt Kurohime and Mt Myoko;  
 Just then an orange cloud  
 Smoothly passes before my eyes.  
 Carrying the day's events, the cloud drifts along.

I was studying at school-  
 Is it watching that, I wonder?

Ueda focuses mostly on the fourth line. That a cloud could “carry the day’s events,” might be taken as merely metaphorical, not descriptive of the actual world. The cloud is not something that can literally (or visibly) carry anything, nor is a day something that we see being carried. It might be thought that we construe experience as such simply to embellish the effect of an event that is otherwise more literally and straightforwardly described with language evaluated based on its ability to represent the visible world. If one merely referred to the cloud as big or white, or the day as sunny or rainy, these would seem to be more “accurate” representations. Such descriptions can be appraised regarding whether or not they correspond to features in the world that are easily visible. Favoring the visible, representable world as such is a feature of philosophies that make little or no room for absence, invisibility, or the non-representable, that is, no constitutive role for the ontologically negative. As such, “positivist” philosophies, or what has been called the “metaphysics of presence,” only consider what is visible and representable as real. Ueda’s “Hollowness” as well as Heidegger’s “Open”, and their mutual appeal to the poet are meant to correct the reduction of Being to positivity by showing how one can be productively and soteriologically oriented to the negative in language. Ueda is clear however, that in bringing “hollowness” into the picture we should not exclude actuality: Negativity must be included but it should not overwhelm positivity. There is a truth to the visible, objective world, albeit not the truth the metaphysics of presence believes. Because the world is “two-fold”, in addition to what is visible and representable, there is a constitutive dimension of invisibility, of absence and negativity. To dwell appropriately within this realm requires a language attuned to this two-fold character, to positivity and negativity. In referring to the day-carrying quality of the cloud, the poet does just that.

If the world were fully constituted by its objective features, by what is positively visible, if it were not inflected by the negative, part of the safety and comfort representation offers would be the ability to verify language through correspondence based logic. But, because speaking of the negative cannot be evaluated based on such logic, poetic language appears to be an indulgence. Thus, poetic formulations *add* something that is not truly there the way what is visible is there. Poetic or metaphorical language is, thus, an addition. Subjective additions onto an objective world. Yet, in the context of a two-fold world, it is actually the other way around: Poetic language is not an addition—*representational language is a subtraction*. Limiting one’s articulations to representing the positively visible is to choose a reduced context for describing an object or the world. Representation can only capture one valence of the real because its justificatory power lies in the ability of language to correspond to what is visible. Yet, in Ueda’s bivalent ontology, things are

constituted by their representable *and* non-representable aspects, by their visible features as well as their invisible relations. To follow Ueda on this point requires a shift away from the positivist ontologies and the metaphysics of presence to an ontology that embraces the invisible. In a more basic sense, it is a shift to a relational ontology that sees a constitutive role for the negative. This is the character of the ontology Ueda inherits from his Mahāyāna-inspired Zen Buddhist tradition. While the terms “relational ontology” and “substance ontology” are precariously general, the first steps towards understanding the shift away from Western metaphysics both Ueda and Heidegger attempt is well represented by this basic distinction.

Relational ontologies do not negate the existence of entities or the world entirely, but simply treat the relations between them as ontologically primary. As opposed to the isolated and circumscribed (Gk. *perigraptos*) object with its internal unchanging essence, objects in a relational ontology are empty of internal essence, “negated” we say, and constituted by their external relations, which are in constant flux. Thus, the Zen tradition speaks of negated selves and objects, or “non-selves” and “non-objects”. Ueda’s “hollow object” is relational in this sense. And, because the relations that sustain any object are infinite, they are never fully visible and thus not circumscribable. Thus, the invisible has a constitutive ontological role in the Buddhist “thing concept”. Things are “empty” (S. *śūnyatā*) and “co-dependently arise” (S. *pratītyasamutpāda*) within an invisible network of causal relations. We can see the Mahāyāna idea of this relational “co-dependent arising”, in how Ueda characterizes language.

Even as a system of signs, the nature of this system is to be a kind of whole that can never be completely surveyed; and, at the same time, this whole is reflected in the mutual referentiality of its signs. Thus, language reveals phenomena within the world as reflecting the whole of the world... Moreover, language reveals this totality as something that cannot be completely surveyed and yet carries the sense of transcending the world (Ueda 2011: 777).

Whereas the positive object is fully visible and circumscribable insofar as it is subtracted from the relationality that sustains its existence, the negated-object, the “hollow thing” is never fully visible because its relations proliferate infinitely, because the visible is inflected by the invisible. With the implications of this notion of relationality for language and thinghood in mind, we can return to the young poet’s line. It is certainly not *positively* visible how a cloud carries a day. If we ask for something that corresponds to the poet’s language, we find nothing. This aspect of its relationality, how it “carries,” cannot be made visible and thus cannot be represented. Limited to actuality, and to the positive, the fourth line reads as an indulgence, an addition. Yet, because “hollow objects” are constituted by their external relations, the poets “hollow words” are not limited to the positively visible, nor are they appropriately evaluated based on how they correspond to what can be visibly present.

While there are potentially infinite relations constituting any particular “hollow thing”, one of those relations, indeed, one of the most decisive is the relation between the non-self and non-object; that is, the self and object defined in terms of their relationality, their negativity. As Ueda writes, “the cloud that drifts along *is also within my world*... I am among those events of the day... I, too, am inside the

cloud and am included in its movement.” (Ueda 2011: 772). Representation is a reduced mode of description, it is an inherent linguistic subtraction because it assumes that there is an object at an ontological divide from the subject that speaks of it and the relations that sustain its existence. It would certainly be easier to speak of things or the self if they were not co-constituted by way of invisible relationality. Our pressing human questions would be much easier to approach. Yet, to speak of a self and a world in their full ontological breadth demands an idiom that embraces negativity as invisible relationality. Because the world the hollow object brings forth overlaps and intertwines with the poet’s world, their relation to an object, to a cloud or a day, is one aspect of that invisible referentiality: An aspect excluded by language that ignores the negative, or logic that favors correspondence. There is no enunciatory position external to the cloud that can be referred to outside of relational intertwining with the day or she who invokes it. To speak poetically is a risk because this kind of language straddles the visible and the invisible junction of the hollow object and hollow self, an intersection that cannot provide the type of assurance representational correspondence demands. The poet speaks from the position of subject-object ambiguity that constitutes their mutual co-existence and this is inherently risky since this is the aspect that hides in non-representational invisibility.

To speak only in/of actuality—in Heidegger’s terms, as if Being were only “ground”—is to strip away an object’s worldliness. It is to parse subject and object and treat them independently and to forgo the rich ambiguity that is their co-existence in favor of the fantasy of foundational certainty provided by correspondence. It is precisely this reduction that both Ueda and Heidegger see as endangering our existence. The stripping away of relationality, the un-worlding of the subject and object, the reduction of the invisible to the visible, are not merely less accurate, they are existentially dangerous. Insofar as language follows this reduced ontology, we are given to think of ourselves without any ontological relation to the world. Because that relationality is an infinite invisible network, it constitutes the existence of the self as a relational being, but cannot be represented. As Ueda writes, “the invisible aspect of it is not sensed,” and thus

only what is visible and determined by language is taken to be the world. Then, where this visible and linguistically defined world is taken to be the one and only world, the human subject... attempts to appropriate it as “my world”; and this is what gives rise to confrontations, conflicts, struggles, and distortions within this closed-off world (Ueda 2011: 769).

While the poet can avert the dangers of representational objectivity by speech that recognizes a two-fold ontology, including the hollow *and* actual, ground *and* abyss, there is a further danger and abuse that persists. That is, while the poet’s language brings the negative into their utterance, there is a danger that one goes too far and abuses the freedom from correspondence-based evaluation. Thus, Ueda warns us that while we must “play in hollowness while abiding in actuality” we must not “play in actuality while abiding in emptiness”. The latter is an abuse the poet is always endangered by and a concern we find in Ueda and Heidegger alike. Let us return to Heidegger and come back to this particular danger in the concluding section.



### 3 Heidegger: Invisibility of the “Heart’s Inner Space”

Deciphering Heidegger’s understanding of the poet’s relation to the invisible demands close reading of sections of “What are Poets for?”. If not read carefully, some passages could seem to suggest that he goes against Ueda’s notion of the invisible because he associates it with the destructive features of representation and positivism.

Such representation knows nothing immediately perceptual. What can be immediately seen when we look at things, the image they offer to immediate sensible intuition, falls away. The calculating production of technology is an “act without an image”. Purposeful self-assertion, with its designs, interposes before the intuitive image the project of the merely calculated product. When the world enters into the objectness of the thought-devised product, it is placed within the nonsensible, the invisible. What stands thus owes its presence to a placing whose activity belongs to the *res cogitans*, that is, to consciousness (Heidegger 2001a: 124).

Heidegger does associate the invisible with the dangerous tendencies of self-assertion, yet the crucial distinction is that he speaks of two kinds of invisibility. Between the two, their distinct spatiality is decisive. In the above quote, he refers to the invisibility of the space of “consciousness,” whereas the invisibility the poet speaks of is distinct, that is the spatiality of the “heart’s inner space” (*Innenraum des Herzens*, Heidegger 2001a: 125).

The invisibility of “consciousness” invokes a distinction between the internal and external worlds. It is the invisibility of the subject. To the extent that the object is treated according to the desires of that subject, the object’s own invisibility is ignored and the subject’s internal invisibility dominates. In this case, the invisible realm external to the subject that constitutes the bonds between self and world has no ontological status. This invisibility of “consciousness” is the one the poet turns from. Heidegger’s poet strives for the invisibility of the “true interior of the heart’s space” (*das eigentliche Innere des Herzraumes*, Heidegger 2001a: 127) where the internal-external binaries do not hold. “The inner and invisible domain of the heart is not only more inward than the interior that belongs to calculating representation, and therefore more invisible; it also extends further than does the realm of merely producible objects” (Heidegger 2001a: 127).

“Producible objects,” (*herstellbaren Gegenstände*) things defined within the spatiality of consciousness according to their visibly representable features, extend no further than their circumscribable limits. The spatiality of the heart is a more expansive realm because it is an interior whose depths are greater because they include the depths of the world. To use poetic language is thus to “turn the transient and therefore preliminary character of object things away from the inner and invisible region of the merely producing *consciousness*” (Heidegger 2001a: 127).<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the poet speaks from the “true interior of the *heart’s* space, and there allows [the thing]

---

<sup>2</sup>(emphasis added).

to rise invisibly.” (Heidegger 2001a: 127).<sup>3</sup> Thus, like the un-named child, the poet speaks of the world as it overlaps with the self from within a space where something like a cloud can carry his/her day.

There are two stances towards the invisible in language: One overwhelms the object with the *subject's* interior invisibility and demands that the world conform to its positivist desires. The other invisibility, the invisibility of the heart, like Ueda's hollowness, abides within the invisible as a realm beyond subject and object, internal- external opposition. This world is inherently more difficult to speak of. One cannot accurately represent it, partly because the language that attempts to describe the world changes the world, expands it and modifies it because all utterance, all “hollow words” are part of the world's very definition.

Poetic language does not seek to reduce the risk of representing the un-representable, but speaks from the ambiguity that binds subject and object within the invisible bivalence of the two-fold world. The poet uses language that believes in the invisible without amputating objects from their worldly relations, or from their relations with the self. The poet brings the world and self along in their invisible relationality through her enunciation. What Heidegger calls the “the innermost and most invisible region” (Heidegger 2001a: 127) is not a smaller realm restricted to the inside of a subject as opposed to a more expansive external world. Going into the self is a move into the world, thus that interior is the “widest inner space of the world” (Heidegger 2001a: 127). The poet enacts a “conversion [that] points to the innermost region of the interior” (Heidegger 2001a: 127). The conversion away from the spatiality of “consciousness”, Heidegger writes, “is an inner recalling of the immanence of the objects of representation into presence within the heart's space” (Heidegger 2001a: 128). It is here, in this space where the poet risks language that safety is possible. Otherwise, language is merely self-assertive, merely seeking the safety of representation, but, as Heidegger claims, “as long as man is wholly absorbed in nothing but purposeful self-assertion, not only is he himself unshielded, but so are things, because they have become objects” (Heidegger 2001a: 128). Thus, there is a false safety in the positivist attempt to grasp self and world, and its metaphysics endangers both. Poetic language, on the other hand, by incorporating the negative, by speaking from the heart's inner space, accrues more risk, but paradoxically gains protection in so doing:

The interiority of the world's inner space unbars the Open for us... Within this interior we are free, outside of the relation to the objects set around us that only seem to give protection. In the interiority of the world's inner space there is a safety outside all shielding (Heidegger 2001a: 128).

By treating the world beyond objectivity as “hollow things”, protection (*Schutz*) is gained for both self and world by virtue of a linguistic orientation that does not subtract one away from the world but speaks from within the ambiguous spatiality where they are not-two. If the poet risks speaking from this foundationless non-position and thus respects the invisibility of the realm where one's depths and the

---

<sup>3</sup>(emphasis added).

depths of the world are the same spatial realm, one gains the “open”. To allow things—and ultimately the self as constituted by them—to abide in the invisibility of the heart, is to speak from within the “open” where the space of one’s heart and the heart of the world coincide. Poetic language is then not a tool to assert the self or to represent things in the world, but a way of being-with them in the most fundamental ontological sense. Heidegger and Ueda ponder the poetry of Angelus Silesius as a model for poetic language, in particular, the below lines from his “Cherubinischer Wandersmann”.

The rose is without why / it blossoms / because it blossoms To itself it pays no heed / asks  
not if it is seen (Angelus Silesius 1923: 61).

Both philosophers invoke Silesius’ “without why”, to challenge Western philosophy insofar as it is grounded on the principle of sufficient reason and its demand that all beings and events answer the “why”. To assume that such an answer can always be disclosed—and thus to believe objects can always be positively disclosed according the demands of representation—is to assert that subject-object binaries and their attendant spatiality define the only framework within which we can hope to respond to our most pressing human questions.

Although Ueda follows this thinking regarding the above lines, he further considers the poet’s writings and will eventually seek to challenge and go beyond Silesius. In the below, we can see Ueda further appealing to his poetry in an attempt to go beyond the spatiality of consciousness and the simple internal-external, visible- invisible binaries.

The rose here  
that with your outer eye you see  
has blossomed in God since eternity (Angelus Silesius 1923: 36)

The rose seen with the “outer eye”—which we assume sees blossoming in the external world—is a blossoming internal to God himself. Further, if the self is also a creation of God’s, as the rose is, then the blossoming of the self is also part of God’s internal spatiality. Ueda remarks on Silesius’ relation to Eckhart, who writes; “Whatever is in God, is God” (Eckhart 1978: 167). We must speak of that blossoming “without why” because only as such is it possible to speak beyond the oppositions that posit the self as subject and god, the world, or things in it as objects. The rose’s blossoming is not a phenomena external to the self, or to God. Silesius suggests the ambiguous spatiality of the heart’s inner space when he writes that “If you be born of God / God blossoms in you” (Angelus Silesius 1923: 32). Reason giving is as inappropriate to the blossoming of the rose as it is to God. This blossoming in the heart undoes the distinction between internal and external spatiality. The engagement to the world, to the rose, or to God through language at the level of “without why” proves to be a decisive point for evaluating the poet exemplars.

Ueda further invokes this spatiality in his appeal to Rilke who writes that “Birds fly in stillness / through us. Oh, I who would grow, / I look outward, and *in* me

grows a tree.”<sup>4</sup> Just as the day-carrying clouds read as an indulgence, our positivist and representational language governed by the principle of sufficient reason construes Rilke’s lines similarly. Yet, the position from which we judge poets as such is a highly abstracted ontological position that ignores our constituting relationality with the world and the complicated spatiality of our belonging therein. Ueda appeals to Rilke on this precise issue:

The crucial point here is the reality of communication of inner and outer: “I look outward, and in me grows a tree.” How did this become possible? By breaking through the wall between inner and outer. And what is this wall of inner and outer? Nothing other than the I, the ego that separates the inside and outside of me... This open union of inner and outer can be realized only when the wall of the closed I is broken through (Ueda 1989: 20).

Bringing the negative into language so as to speak from within the ambiguous spatiality where we belong in the world we speak of is the poetic language Heidegger and Ueda desire. If we can get there, they believe, we will have established a different, less destructive relation in/as the world. Nevertheless, a danger remains. The poet must go beyond objectivity and the binary spatiality that parses the interior invisibility against exterior visibility, nevertheless it is possible that the poet goes too far in this direction and loses the self or the object altogether. We must bring negation into the picture, but not to annihilate all positivity. A balance is needed where the self, world, or God are invoked beyond exclusive positivity or negativity, between actuality and hollowness. While overcoming western metaphysics is mostly a project of bringing the negative into view, one can go too far and lose all actuality to hollowness. In this case, we do find a threat of poetic indulgence. To retain the proper balance between the positive and negative, Ueda urges us to “play in hollowness while abiding in actuality,” but the opposite, “toying in actuality while abiding in hollowness” (Ueda 2011: 783) goes too far in the direction of negation and is a danger the poet must avert.

#### 4 Negation and the Threat of “Toying with Actuality”

Both Ueda and Heidegger are clear that there is a danger with the kind of representational language that abides in objectivity, but while they want to bring language of the non-objective to the fore; to speak from within the invisible spatiality that binds us to the world, neither endorse a complete denial of objectivity, or the existence of a fully negated object without any positive or “actual” existence. Heidegger makes it clear that while “we must never represent this sphere of Being and its sphericity as an object,” in the same breath he asks “must we then present it as a nonobject?” (Heidegger 2001a: 121) and his answer is an emphatic “no”: “That would be a mere flight to a manner of speaking,” he asserts. Likewise, Ueda

---

<sup>4</sup>“Es winkt zu Fühlung fast aus alien Dingen,” (Rilke 1963: 93). English translation by John Maraldo in Ueda 1989: 20.

urges us not to move too far in the direction of negation and thus lose all manner of actuality: “When language speaks only in terms of hollowness” he writes, “there is a danger of rarefying experience. In the one, reality gets overly determined by how it is spoken of; in the other, reality evaporates through language” (Ueda 2011: 784). Reality would evaporate if the world or objects in it were merely empty without any positivity. If this were the case, we would have the opposite problem of the one that arises from representation and positivist metaphysics: Instead of being constrained by the visible features of the object, if it were fully lost to negativity the object would make no demands on language or constrain what we say about the world. While Heidegger and Ueda want to bring the negative into view and urge a type of language that issues from the ambiguous spatiality of self and world, neither endorses an outright negation of self or world. To go to that extent, all constraints would evaporate giving license not only to the worst poetic indulgences, but potentially nefarious twisting of language in all realms of existence.

Ueda is looking for a middle ground between hollowness and actuality, which is similar to Heidegger’s desire to go beyond objectivity without losing the object altogether. Ueda endorses “playing in hollowness while abiding in actuality” as a linguistic orientation that capitalizes on the latitude given by the invisible relationality that brings objects to presence, where clouds can in a literal sense carry the day and birds fly through us in stillness. He cautions, however, of “toying with actuality while abiding in hollowness” (Ueda 2011: 783), which would be to speak from the complete loss of objectivity and actuality, where no common ground could be appealed to for verifying or refuting claims anyone might put forth. It is this type of linguistic abuse that Ueda sees growing in the media.

While Ueda wants to re-institute the hollow realm, reality is, in the end, twofold. Hollowness has in general been increasingly forgotten in western metaphysics, but bringing it back should not completely overwhelm actuality. Although objects are empty or hollow, they nevertheless have one valence of existence that is visible and actual. If the poet disregards this reality they evade the dangers of representational language but go too far to the other extreme to speak purely from a subjective point of view, and it is precisely here that we can now speak of the danger of poetic indulgence. To speak from the fully non-objective, to “toy with actuality” is to speak as though the world places no constraints on one’s language and it is from this position that the worst abuses of language are made possible. Ueda says that

Words can then be used arbitrarily to say just about anything. Particularly in our day and age, the danger of language being taken in this direction seems to be growing, due to the central role the media has come to play in contemporary society. The dismantling of reality and its glitzy reconstruction (in the sense of hollow embellishment) in and through the media is progressing at an accelerated rate. How rampant in the so-called real world of actual society are hollow words spoken as lies... when a balance of actuality and hollow-ness has not been established as the rule, distinctive difficulties and dangers arise for human existence (Ueda 2011: 783).

To “toy with actuality” is to assume that there is no world brought along by objects, no relational totality that comes to presence with every word. To speak as such is *not*

to affirm the world but is to affirm the self, the subject, or “consciousness”. It is a type of freedom tied to the myth of “originality” and the root of naïve ideas of creative freedom and individual creative genius. This is the mistake common today that associates post-modernity with an un-restrained relativism that has spurred the “post-truth” era. In warning about “toying with actuality,” or the “invisible of consciousness” both Ueda and Heidegger are explicit regarding the dangers of this form of relativism un-hinged from actuality.

## 5 Conclusion: Poetic Language “Without Why”

To conclude, I would like to return to the point I alluded to at the beginning of this study regarding the disparity between the exemplars the two philosophers choose to illustrate their theories of poetic language. Both want a type of poetic language that lets something appear without demanding as a precondition of its appearing that its reasons can be articulated. Ueda, however, is not sure whether Heidegger’s appeal to Silesius brings us to that point. In attempting to go beyond Silesius, particularly in his appeal to the un-named poet and to Zen Buddhism, Ueda raises issues regarding the relation between philosophy and poetry and the possible obstructions that impede the philosopher’s abilities to employ poetic language.

While many of Heidegger’s poets, including Rilke, Hölderlin, Stefan George and others are beyond reproach as literary figures, features of their common idiom open them to a challenge regarding their status as exemplars for the philosophy of poetic language being put forth. Many of the phrases Heidegger refers to involve the poets making quasi- or even fully-philosophical claims, where they formulate existential or even metaphysical assertions that describe the nature of language, of thinking, of the Open, or human nature itself. For example, Heidegger quotes Hölderlin who writes “Full of merit, yet poetically, man Dwells on this earth” (Heidegger 2001b: 214). Stefan George is invoked in “The Nature of Language,” (“*Das Wesen der Sprache*”) writing that “so I renounce and sadly see, where words break off no thing may be” (Heidegger 1982b: 60). When speaking of the “Open,” Rilke writes, “our unshieldedness (*Schutzlossein*) [...] and that, when we saw it threatening, we turned it so into the Open” (Heidegger 2001a: 119). And in the same poem, “so into the Open that, in widest orbit somewhere, where the Law touches us, we may affirm it” (Heidegger 2001a: 120).

The poetic value of these lines and the poems they are part of are beyond question. And, it would seem difficult to include the young Japanese poet among their ranks. Yet, as exemplars for the theories of poetic language being put forth, we should notice that, grammatically speaking, the passages Heidegger chooses from the famed poets are often close to or explicitly in the indicative or even imperative moods, whereas the un-named poet makes a more straightforward declarative statement. Heidegger’s poets might not be precisely in the grammatical mood of reason giving, yet their idiom is closer to this type of articulation. As some have pointed out, Hölderlin and Rilke might verge on “didacticism” insofar as they expound

philosophical theories of German idealism and early German Romanticism in verse. They might even go so far as to give a directive to those who seek the orientation they invoke, whereas Ueda's poet is saying something "of deep existential import for the person, *not by giving a directive*, but by something more immediate" (Ueda 1989: 16).<sup>5</sup>

But, what of Silesius formulation? It does not appear to give any directive and is cut down to the bare minimum, where it might not be possible to refer to the rose and say anything less about it. Yet, according to Ueda, even the "without why" remains caught in the idiom of reason giving, by virtue of the "because".

the formulation "[it] blossoms because it blossoms" remains caught up in thought, that is, in an answer indicating sought-for reasons. The latter formulation treats of something that is already an object of thought... Between the world of the saying, "it blossoms because it blossoms" and the "simple emergence out of itself" there is a subtle but decisive shift brought on by the "because" of thought (Ueda 1989: 12).

To avoid the reason-giving demand of Silesius' formulation, Ueda proposes the Zen orientation to the rose, where "flowers blossom just as they blossom" or even more terse, "Flowers bloom". The "just as", Ueda believes, is able to evoke the flower without forcing it to conform to reason-giving expectations and the associated positivist metaphysics. While Ueda's critique might misconstrue the bivalence Heidegger reads in Silesius' formulation,<sup>6</sup> and might find corresponding language in Heidegger's use of the "middle voice" and the "double genitive," let us return to consider their respective appeals to the poets they invoke.

Heidegger's poets, in their often didactic idiom *illustrate* a theory of language, whereas with Ueda, his prototype is quite different. His poet does not seek to describe the nature of the world or the relation between language and objects, but we might say, he/she makes a simple enunciation from within the inner space of his/her own linguistic relation to the world. Whereas the lines of the famous poets speak *about* a fascinating notion of language, the un-named poet makes a fascinating utterance *according to* that notion. No doubt, the young poet's line reads as far more mundane in comparison to the lofty enunciations of Hölderlin, Rilke and others. Yet, it is worth considering that these poets would have been working, at least partly, according to the romantic ideal of individual creative genius and self-expression.

---

<sup>5</sup>(emphasis added).

<sup>6</sup>Heidegger would agree that "why" is caught up in reason giving: "'Why' is the word that inquires after reasons, and 'because' is the word that indicates reasons in answer. 'Why' seeks reasons; 'because' gives them." [...] "The rose is without why, yet-with respect to 'because'-is not without a reason!'" Heidegger also treats the "without why... because" line in a two-fold way. One asserts the groundlessness of reason, the other, the ground. One is reason-demanding, the other not. Ueda does not seem to acknowledge the two-fold nature of Being Heidegger is putting forth as "ground" and "abyss". The "because" is certainly in the realm of reason-giving, and thus refers to the positive valence of Being as "ground". Yet, "without why" invokes the groundless valence, the abyssal dimension of Being. If Ueda fails to recognize this two-fold bivalence, he might miss how the "without why" and "because" are interpreted very close to his own "just as". Together, the two invoke the two-fold nature Ueda also strives for. If this is an oversight of Ueda's it might allow us to push back slightly on his critique of Heidegger's appeal to Silesius.

They did not seek to negate themselves in poetic enunciation, quite the opposite. For a writer conforming to the notion of poetic language in both Heidegger's and Ueda's philosophies, their language should not reinforce the self and create the identity or a name for themselves as someone who has mastered language and has such a command of writing that they are able to make sophisticated poetic utterance: Rather, according to their theories of poetic language, we should expect a self that is diminished in its use of language, a negated self, a non-self, one who speaks in the most ordinary way, with utterance that does not make a name for oneself as a poet, an utterance of an ordinary, anonymous speaker.

Speaking of the day-carrying clouds, the young poet does not attempt to make a philosophical point to illustrate a theory of language, nor does he/she attempt to illustrate what hollowness or actuality are, or to reinforce their identity as a poet. The line "Just then an orange cloud smoothly passes before my eyes. Carrying the day's events, the cloud drifts along", makes no philosophical claims, yet has deep philosophical significance. While the German poets might accurately describe the nature of the linguistic world and our relation to it, the Japanese poet foregoes describing language and speaks from out of the ambiguous relationality where both his day and himself can be carried by the clouds he sees. To bring the mundane world of language to the fore, we use language in this way when we refer to the world in our most mundane articulations. Many of our sayings, metaphorical or otherwise, invoke "hollow things." Perhaps, we get by better in the world when our language is poetic, and it is only when something obstructs the self that we revert to the language of actuality and self-assertion. Given Heidegger's own insistence on the significance of the "everyday," it is perhaps questionable whether one needs recourse to poetry whose idiom might be at odds with the theory of language being put forth. We can ask then, are Heidegger's poets not veering, with their indicative and descriptive idiom, in the direction of attempting to represent the world, to have language correspond with the open rather than a spontaneous saying and singing from within the open. If so, it could be that Ueda's young and humble un-named poet, even more so because of his/her anonymity is the one to follow, not simply for understanding a theory of poetic language, but in speaking in a non-representational mode from out of a proper balance between actuality and hollowness.

## Bibliography

- Angelus, Silesius. 1923. *Sämtliche poetische Werke und eine Auswahl aus seinen Streitschriften*, vol. I, ed. Georg Ellinger. Berlin: Propyläen Verlag.
- Eckhart, Meister. 1978. *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*, ed. and Trans. Josef Quint. Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1966. *Discourse on Thinking*. Trans. John M. Anderson, E. Hans Freund. New York: Harper & Row.
- . 1982a. *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*. Trans. William Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row.
- . 1982b. The Nature of Language. In *On the Way to Language*. Trans. Peter D. Hertz. San Francisco: Harper & Row.



- . 1996. *The Principle of Reason*. Trans. Reginald Lilly. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- . 2001a. “What Are Poets For?”. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Perennial Classics.
- . 2001b. “...Poetically Man Dwells...”. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Perennial Classics.
- Rilke, Rainer Maria. 1963. Es winkt zu Fühlung fast aus alien Dingen. In *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. II. Frankfurt: Insel Verlag.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1989. The Zen Buddhist Experience of the Truly Beautiful. Trans. John Maraldo. *The Eastern Buddhist* 22.1: 1–36.
- . 上田閑照. 2011. Language in a Two-Fold World. In *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, eds. J.W. Heisig, T.P. Kasulis and J.C. Maraldo, 766–784. Trans. Bret Davis. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press.

# Part IX

## Opening Up Philosophy: On Mysticism

### Introduction

In both Eastern and Western worlds, poetry grows out of an intimate and elusive relation to language. Great poets know this, so too do mystical philosophers and theologians. While a simple juxtaposition between Eastern religiosity and un-mediated linguistic expression against a Western tradition whose language is overly intellectual and conceptual, Ueda's Eckhart-Zen dialogue prohibits any such simple construal. As linguistic beings, we dwell neither in the fully expressible nor the purely un-expressible. Within a two-fold world, we are caught between "exiting language" and "exiting back into language". Thus, we have Ueda's notion of a Zen form of mysticism subjected to the same reciprocal dynamic where one sustains a perpetual exit and re-entry in what Ueda calls non-mysticism.

In "Ueda as Reader of Eckhart", Bernard Stevens explores Ueda's reading of Eckhart in light of his other major interpreters. Stevens was invited by Ueda to take part in a seminar in Japan to discuss his criticism of the Kyoto School. The encounter with Ueda played a decisive role in his subsequent philosophic path. In his contribution, Stevens describes Ueda's reading of Eckhart as a culmination of a gradual process of interpretation initiated by Nishida and continued by Nishitani and Abe Masao (阿部 正雄, 1915–2006). Among the various attempts to express the School's fundamental and shared concern, Stevens detects an increasingly marked reconciliation of Christianity with the experience of self-awakening in Zen Buddhism.

In her "On Mysticism and Non-Mysticism" Carlotta Moiso challenges the very term mysticism as it applies to Ueda's Zen and Eckhart readings. Moiso analyzes the movement in Ueda's reflections on "religion" and "non-religion" proposing that these concerns of Ueda's can be understood in light of his existential search to answer the question "what it means to live as human beings?", which she construes as a problem bound to the specificity of contemporary times. Moiso understands Ueda's dialogue between Eckhart and Zen as an opening for religion to discover

new possibilities in the contemporary global world and in the field of inter-religious dialogue. She thus calls into question the appeal to mysticism, understood as something universal pertaining to all religions beyond historical contingency, and asks whether the project of “non-mysticism” can counter the risk of inclusivism.

# Chapter 18

## Ueda as Reader of Eckhart



**Bernard Stevens**

The attention given to the works of Eckhart by the philosophers of the Kyōto School is remarkable: One by one, he is consecrated by Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎, Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治, Abe Masao 阿部正雄 and Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. Just as the Oriental artist who, under master after master, repeats the same motif gradually bringing it to perfection, the philosophers of Kyoto search for the most appropriate formulations to state the fundamental and common intuition around which the thought of their school is articulated. It is the search for truth which animates them, not the originality of the one who would build a singular body of work. Yet, in their thought we do not find a repetition of the same, but a gradual deepening of a common inspiration and a progressive disengagement from Christian theological thematics, at the same time as an increasingly marked reconciliation with the experience of “awakening to oneself” (自覚 *jikaku*) in the Zen Buddhist view of satori (悟り). I would like to say a word here regarding this approach according to Ueda Shizuteru.

Professor Ueda is undeniably the most significant figure of the third generation of the Kyoto School, of which he was the indefatigable apostle before becoming the Dean of the Department of Philosophy Kyoto University in the 1990s. A student of Nishitani’s, whom he decided to follow after attending a conference that had disparaged him, Ueda became his most faithful disciple and interpreter—much like Nishitani himself had been, three decades earlier, the closest disciple of Nishida, the founder of the Kyoto School. Ueda, therefore, continued the dialogue begun by his master between Western philosophy and Eastern thought, Christianity, and

---

Translated by Adam Loughnane.

---

B. Stevens (✉)  
UCLouvain Faculty of Philosophy, Arts and Letters, Collège Erasme,  
Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium  
e-mail: [bernard.stevens@uclouvain.be](mailto:bernard.stevens@uclouvain.be)

Buddhism (especially Mahāyāna). And his study did not proceed without Zen meditative practice, carried out occasionally with a group of lay practitioners at Shōkoku-ji Monastery. His teachings were spread as generously in the Orient as they were in the Occident, from Arashiyama in Kyoto to the sumptuously decorated Ascona, on the edge of Lake Maggiore, during the Eranos Tagungen gatherings.

While the dominant trajectory of his Oriental inspiration extends from Indian Mahāyāna to Sōtō Zen, the line running through his Western inspiration is marked by German idealism with extensions into Heidegger's thought, as well as the more veiled idealist roots that go back to Rhenish mysticism, especially the works of Meister Eckhart, to whom Ueda devoted his doctoral thesis, which he composed in 1962 in Germany at the University of Marburg, *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zu Gott. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik der Zen-Buddismus* (1965). The subject included two of the Rhenish master's most important themes: the "birth of God in the soul" and the "breakthrough to the divine". This work, by his own admission, remained the most decisive of his writings.

Ueda's overall philosophical effort is to put rational words to the unspeakable event of "pure experience", of which Zen meditation is the quintessence—the quintessence, which Eckhart had the intuition of when speaking of detachment, the birth of God in the soul, and the breakthrough to the divine. His deep knowledge of Eckhart's thought would thus be a means for Ueda to approach spiritual experience that seemed to him comparable to the notion of "awakening to the self": Employing Eckhart to introduce Zen to the Occident (as a light to illuminate Zen for Western eyes) is undoubtedly the great originality of Ueda's reading of the Rhenish mystic. The unspeakable aspect of spiritual experience can be pointed to by means of the plurivocal or metaphorical words of Zen poetry and koans, which act as an extension of the more literal use of ordinary language and aim at the limitless opening extending beyond the everyday world. The words of language can therefore manifest states of things in the world (they disappear behind what they designate); but they also express certain things (thus highlighting those things all the more, opening a virtual or "hollow" world, which goes beyond the factual and envelopes (things in the world). In short, language is a system of signs that can become the expression of the world's dual nature of: factual and virtual, actual and hollow, or even ontological and meontological.<sup>1</sup>

It is in this spirit that Ueda grapples with Eckhart's thought.

What then is Ueda's own contribution to this question at the heart of the Kyoto School? Nishida had already indicated the site of a convergence between Eastern religious thought and German mysticism,<sup>2</sup> yet it is Nishitani who put forth the first significant explanation. Let us briefly consider this topic.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Ueda 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. The chapter on « God » (神) in Nishida's *Zen no kenkyū* (1911), specifically Nishida 1997: 230.

<sup>3</sup> In his complete works he devoted to Meister Eckhart, whose content is summarized in Keiji Nishitani, *Shukyo to wa nani ka* 宗教とは何か, 1961 [What is religion?]. In particular, the second chapter on to the theme "The personal and the impersonal in Religion". For a French translation, see Nishitani 2014, "Personnalité et impersonnalité dans la religion": 197–219.

Regarding the thinker of negative theology, Nishitani emphasizes not that there are two gods but that there is a distinction between God and divinity, understood as the “essence” (本質 *honshitsu*) of God. Divinity or deity (*Gotttheit*) refers to the realm where God is found in himself, and it is this place that is referred to as absolute nothingness. This is the site that is beyond any form of existence and especially where one has gone beyond the mode of being of the Creator God. The latter is the aspect of God that has been revealed to creatures. As the appearance of God as seen by creatures, it is therefore not “the essence” of God.

Moreover, the image of God which has been attributed to man, while including such a nothingness, makes man, through the action of the Holy Spirit, “the child of God”: This is what is referred to as “the birth of God” in the spirit (Nishitani uses the word “spirit”, 霊, rather than “soul”, 魂). The “incarnation” of God in Christ was the birth of God in the human world as a historical event, but Eckhart has transferred this event to the interior of the human spirit as a spiritual experience available to everyone. Yet, when man wants to reach the essence of God, this means that the spirit, from within the spirit itself will, little by little, overcome its ego-centric nature. This is to hold oneself in detachment, separation (*Abgeschiedenheit*) and in “vacancy” (*ledig stehen*). The spirit continues to pierce to the interior of God. In proceeding in this direction all the way to its end, the spirit reaches absolute nothingness which is the essence of God. One reaches the place where there is no longer anything, which is called the “desert” of the divinity. It is the groundless ground common to man and God (the uncreated “I am”). And it is what forms their unity: it is not a question of uniting with God (*Deo unitum esse*) but of being one with God (*unum esse cum Deo*). This site, which is the death of the human ego, is one’s new birth towards life within God. It is only here that man can truly be himself, by discovering the radicalization of his freedom and autonomy (to know his subjectivity). However, even if nothingness is taken to be absolute, it must be lived at the very heart of everyday life, as something open directly underlying this life. It is not a question of a contemplation of God: we could rather call it the *realization* in everyday life of the nothingness of the “divinity” that transcends all knowledge. This realization makes it possible to “escape God for the sake of God”, to escape from the image of God of Biblical Revelation to reach the essential reality of God’s divinity. Man and God are truly themselves in the union of their nothingness.

Nishitani also attaches the theme of “vacant” being to that of kenosis, which is later extensively developed by Abe Masao eliciting commentary from theologians across the Atlantic.<sup>4</sup> The in-difference of divine love encompasses all things just as they are in their differences and in their most concrete aspects, such as, for example, a righteous man or a bad man. Therefore, this undifferentiated love that even loves its enemies (what we call *agap e*) is the “emptying of oneself” (己を空しくすること *onore wo munashiku suru koto*). In the case of Christ, this was his becoming man, taking the form of a servant, according to the divine will. The source of such “emptying of oneself” (*ekken osis*), present in Christ, is found in God. And to express this

---

<sup>4</sup> See in particular Abe 1990.

in Eastern terms, one could speak of the non-ego (無我 *muga*), that which God shares with the divine aspect of man. This is precisely what Buddhahood aims at.

Thus, we have a summary of the Nishitanian reading of Eckhart, insofar as his thought approaches Buddhism.

With this, in a certain sense, everything is already said. Yet, Ueda will become more precise in his reading of Eckhart's thought, which he had access to in the J. Quint edition, which united the German sermons and his Latin works. It is in reading these works in particular that he discovers expressions that seem to him to be literal translations of Zen sentences.

To summarize Ueda's approach to Eckhart, we can say that he sees two dominant themes in the early German sermons: The motif of "birth" (the birth of God in the soul, in the manner of the incarnation of the Son) and the motif of the "breakthrough" (the breakthrough of the soul to the essence of God, all the way to the nothingness of divinity).<sup>5</sup> While the motif of birth is characterized by the complete passivity of the soul in its receptivity to God, the motif of breakthrough (*Durchbrechen*) is characterized by its intense activity in its "rejection of God" in favor of divinity. In the motif of birth, according to the Christian mystical tradition, the soul and God are united as the Son and the Father are united in the Trinity. In the more "heretical" motif of breakthrough, this unity is marked by the absence of a personalized form of divinity. According to Ueda, the key to Eckhart's thought lies in the relation between these two distinct and irreducible thoughts. It is in the motif of breakthrough that the light of Zen is most enlightening, which is made more explicit in his studies following his thesis work.

What Eckhart and Zen have in common is, in particular, the "empty and free" character (*ledig und frei*) of existence, which is the fundamental category of religious existentialism: that is, the characterization of the absolute as "nothingness" (Eckhart does indeed qualify God as "nothingness" to express his radical otherness in relation to the mundane world). There are, however, differences in how he expresses the manner of reaching the site of "awakening" within existence (the spontaneous nature in Zen, the soul for Eckhart). What Ueda also seeks to highlight is the mundane character of Zen, its "non-mystical" character (rather than being "a mysticism of negation").<sup>6</sup>

It seems, in fact, that the essence of the convergence between Eckhart and Zen, according to Ueda, is the fundamental question of freedom. In the context of Eckhart, that is to say, the Western context, this term encompasses, of course, the freedom of thought and therefore the autonomous character of the philosophical quest. But it is freedom in detachment that preoccupies Ueda the most: Freedom in the eyes of God, detachment in the union with God. "To be totally detached and free as God in himself is detached and free." And for man, the most extreme detachment is to be detached even from God. This takes place when God reveals himself as nothing. The greatest detachment is to free oneself from God for the benefit of God.

---

<sup>5</sup>We find this summarized in Ueda 2004.

<sup>6</sup>See Ueda 1965b.

That is why we pray to God that He frees us from Himself. To free oneself from Him is above all to free oneself from oneself, to free oneself from the “I” in order to unite with the only “I am” who can really be: the divine. The event of the being One of I-and-God, this alone makes us “empty and free”. This event occurs primarily through the “birth of the son” (*Sohnesgeburt*) and the “breakthrough” (*Durchbruch*). Ueda emphasizes that for Eckhart the birth of the son in the soul occurs in a manner similar to the birth of the son in eternity. This event takes place by the productive activity of God, by his grace, and by the passive receptivity of the soul which, in complete detachment, is completely emptied of its ego, transformed into pure nothingness. What Ueda emphasizes is that this process of the birth of God in the soul becomes an event of the person himself and that salvation occurs in him and not through the intermediary of a Saviour. This autonomy, one might say, of soteriological/saving action is what brings Eckhartian religiosity closer to that of Zen and to the notion of awakening to oneself around which the latter gravitates. Everyone can reach enlightenment as the Buddha has himself, and attain the same truth. Thus, to die to oneself in nothingness becomes a condition of rebirth. And if this rebirth is coextensive with Buddhist self-awakening, we have here a point of “unanticipated convergence”.

To clarify all that has been said here, it may be helpful to better understand what Eckhart means by the term “God”. It is the soul that holds the secret. But the soul itself is beyond all images. It cannot be grasped in any of these cases, not when it is understood as the receptacle of the image of God. But when the soul itself seeks to penetrate the deity, what is it? Do these two models follow the same dynamics? The breakthrough is the return of the soul, which in going beyond the limited truth of the Trinitarian God reaches its fundamental essence, which is the divinity. It is the solitude of the desert, where silence reigns: we cannot talk about it. It is not truly a union of the soul with God, but an unspeakable unity, common to the soul and to God, beyond the Trinitarian definition of God (in which one inscribes the thematics of birth), beyond the unity of transcendentals, and to which nothing can be added. It is here, in this negation of any precise qualification, that Eckhart turns to negative theology. This breakthrough of the soul towards the non-being of God is a return to its own original essence, where it is free of God and all things. Where, in a sense, it is its own cause. This theme highlights the activity of the soul in its quest, in contrast with its receptivity according to the theme of birth. And this is the deep connection of the two motifs: activity and passivity turn into one another. Having become perfectly receptive to God, the soul has attained divinity and therefore participates in its own spirit.

## Bibliography

- Abe, Masao 阿部正雄. 1990. *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, ed. John B. Cobb, Jr., and Christopher Ives. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press. Reprint 2005 by Wipf and Stock, Eugene, Oregon.



- Nishida, Kitarō 西田幾多郎. 1997. *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 [An Inquiry into the Good] (1911). Tokyo: Iwanami.
- Nishitani, Keiji 西谷啓治. 2014. Personnalité et impersonnalité dans la religion. Trans. B. Stevens. *Philosophical Review of France and abroad* 2: 197–219.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1965a. *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zu Gott. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik der Zen-Buddhismus*. Gütersloh: Gütersloh Mohn.
- . 1965b. Der Zen-Buddhismus als ‘Nicht-Mystik’ unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Vergleich zur Mystik Meister Eckharts. In *Transparente Welt*, ed. G. Schulz, 291–313. Bern and Stuttgart.
- . 2004. “La libertad y el lenguaje en el Maestro Eckhart y en el zen.” Trans. Illana Giner. In *Zen y filosofía*, ed. Ueda Shizuteru and Raquel Bouso, 51–134. Barcelona: Herder.
- . 2011. “Language in a Twofold World.” Trans. B.W. Davis. In *Japanese Philosophy. A Sourcebook*, ed. James W. Heisig, Thomas P. Kasulis, and John C. Maraldo, 766–784. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

# Chapter 19

## On Mysticism and Non-mysticism, Religion and Non-religion



Carlotta Moiso

### Abbreviation

USS Ueda, Shizuteru. 2001–2003. *Ueda Shizuteru shū* 上田閑照集 [Collected Works of Ueda Shizuteru], 11 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami

*In memory of shared silence and words  
with Anna Berres and Henryk Dechnik*

### 1 “Mysticism”, “East” and “West”. Some Historical and Critical Perspectives

In this paper, I would like to focus on Ueda Shizuteru’s understanding of the movement from “mysticism” to “non-mysticism” in its connection with his reflections on “religion” and “non-religion”. As I will show in the following pages, the relationship between these central themes of Ueda’s thought is quite complex and not simply reducible to a linear scheme. Ueda treats them mostly in different works and does not develop their relation systematically. Through the analysis of Ueda’s texts, I would like to indicate, how an important common thread can be seen in the existential search for an answer to the question “what does it mean to live as human beings?”. At the same time, this individual inquiry cannot be separated from our questioning the world in which we are living and the complexity of its tasks. As I would like to point out, the reflection on “mysticism”, “non-mysticism”, “religion” and “non-religion” is deeply bound to the modern and contemporary situation. A detailed analysis of these aspects goes far beyond the possibilities and the purpose

---

C. Moiso (✉)

Department of Human Studies, University of Turin, Turin, Italy

e-mail: [carlotta.moiso@unito.it](mailto:carlotta.moiso@unito.it)

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022

R. Müller et al. (eds.), *Tetsugaku Companion to Ueda Shizuteru*, Tetsugaku

Companions to Japanese Philosophy 5, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1\\_19](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1_19)

of this contribution, but it is important to indicate at least some issues as they are implicated in Ueda's thought and in the broader context in which it takes place.

In considering the affinities between Meister Eckhart and Zen, Nishitani and Ueda have stressed the importance of a similarity beyond the historical differences for the opening of new possibilities for "religion" in a contemporary global world (Nishitani 1986–1995, 7: 3–8; Ueda 2011a: 172). At the same time, Ueda — whose precise studies on Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism have contributed to the inter-religious dialogue with Christian thought— highlights the difficulties of interreligious discourse and the problematic nature of an inclusivistic model, which asserts the superiority of one religion over others (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 42). But, we might ask, in the idea of mysticism as something universal pertaining to all religions beyond historical contingency is there not also the risk of falling into a kind of inclusivistic model? Does this problematic consideration not concern Ueda's idea of "non-mysticism" as well, because of its basis in mysticism? If not, why? This study examines Ueda's works for answers to these questions.

Before going into a detailed analysis of Ueda's reflections on "mysticism" and "non-mysticism" and their relation to his understanding of Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism, I would like to further develop two important questions, which Ueda suggests in his afterword to his volume *Mysticism and Non-mysticism* (USS, 8: 336–337; republished in Ueda 2007–2008, 5). Thinking about the "and" in the expression "Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism," he questions the "world" in which it becomes possible to problematize together the "Western Meister Eckhart" and "Eastern Zen," and what meaning this has for the world. Conversely, he also asks which world opens out from the standpoint of what is common to Meister Eckhart and Zen.<sup>1</sup> These questions also recall the famous introduction to *God and Absolute Nothingness* (*Kami to zettai mu* 神と絶対無) (Nishitani 1986–1995 7, published in 1948), quoted by Ueda at the beginning of his essay on Meister Eckhart and Zen (Ueda 2011a: 172). Here Nishitani, commenting on the title of his collection of essays, writes:

The title, which I gave my book on Meister Eckhart and German Mysticism in the Middle Ages might sound unexpected. Indeed, "absolute nothingness"<sup>2</sup> has its origin in the Buddhist tradition. Even if Eckhart himself also speaks about the "nothingness" of the Godhead, between "nothingness" in Eckhart and Buddhist "nothingness," there is a fundamental difference, as much difference as between the Western and the Eastern Spirit, as between Christianity and Buddhism. Both "nothingnesses" belong to a completely different world. Nevertheless, there is in Eckhart a contact point with Buddhism. Precisely because Meister Eckhart and Buddhism each belong to a different world, this contact point should lie on a deeper, more fundamental level. [...] The Title "God and Absolute Nothingness" shall also express that Eckhart's Christian experience contains in itself a correspondence to the Buddhist experience. This seems to me very important for the contemporary situation. [...] Where the historical contingency of these so different worlds is broken through, appear

<sup>1</sup> Pointing out these two questions I simplify Ueda's complex formulation in USS, 8: 336–337.

<sup>2</sup> On this key concept of the Kyōto School see p. 285

the traces of the original religious life, as it is grounded in the human essence as such. (Nishitani 1986–1995, 7: 3–6; Ueda 2011a: 172).<sup>3</sup>

I have quoted this long passage because it clearly shows what is at stake and some of the problematic issues implied. I return later to Ueda's and Nishitani's understanding of the significance of "mysticism" for the contemporary situation, in its connection with the question about religious life as grounded in the human essence. First, I would like to point out a few issues, which are implied in Nishitani's and Ueda's reflections and the horizon in which they take place. In order to understand the meaning for the world of the "and" between Meister Eckhart and Zen, we have to refer to the broad and complex historical context which contributed to the hegemonic discourse on "East" and "West" as separated and opposed reified entities, and question the role of the concepts of "mysticism" and "experience" in relation to this discourse. In this regard, I would like to underline a few interconnected elements.

As has been highlighted by several studies since Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), the self-definition of Europe and America as the "West" has been based on its creation of a dual juxtaposition with the "Orient/East", characterized respectively as "rational, scientific, technological" etc. and "mystic, spiritual" etc.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, we have to consider how in the nineteenth century the interest in the "Orient," in particular in India, was related to the Romantic critique of then present-day Europe and the search for alternatives to the dominating mechanized and rationalistic worldview. In this concern, the interest in the "Orient" and in "mysticism" in general were bound together in the attempt to deal with the perceived loss of faith and sense of unity and wholeness in society after the Enlightenment.<sup>5</sup> The endurance, through several transformations, of these ideas and aspirations about India and the "Orient" (Halbfass 2017: 82–83) has exercised a great influence on the models of self-representation in Asia as well, in particular due to the role of the Theosophic Society (Halbfass 2017: 82–83; Sharf 1995a: 142–144; Sharf 1995b: 253; Lo Turco 2006: 39–44; Sernesi 2006: 19).

The theme of "experience" has been made the focus of important works by Robert H. Sharf and Wilhelm Halbfass, who have shown the modern background of

---

<sup>3</sup> Here, I follow Ueda's German translation, adding the missing ellipses between the different parts of Nishitani's text. If not otherwise indicated, all translations in this essay, from German, Japanese and Italian are mine. I am thankful to Prof. M. Cestari, for much important advice, although the responsibility for mistakes or inaccuracies is my own.

<sup>4</sup> On the critique of "Orientalism", "Occidentalism" and "Reverse-Orientalism" see Said (1978), Coronil (1996), Miyake (2010), and Sernesi (2006). For further bibliographic references on post-colonial studies see Sernesi (2006): 17.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed description of the romantic interest in the Orient see the relevant chapter in Halbfass 2017. The book gives an accurate overview of the history of the relations between India and Europe from a philosophical and cross-cultural perspective. On the association between India, the "Orient", and "mysticism" see also Malinar (2016) and King (1999). It is important to note that the mentioned sense of loss of unity and wholeness in society, due to the rationalistic critique of its social and political ground of legitimization, does not only merge with the romantic interest for the "Orient" and "mysticism", but is also fundamental for the romantic program of a "New Mythology" and the centrality of the figure of Dionysus in the imaginary of the time. See Frank (1994).

its use in relation to Asian religious traditions. This usage is deeply connected with the huge impact of Westernized modernization in Asia and how the exponents of several modernist movements across Asia have sought ways to rethink their own traditions and strategies to legitimize them. The concept of “experience”, in its ambiguity, could provide a valid response to the missionary claims for the superiority of Christianity, showing that the criticism to which religion was subject in Europe after the Enlightenment was not effective against Hinduism, in particular Vedānta, as asserted by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), or Buddhism, as argued by exponents of the “*vipassanā* revival” in Southeast Asia regarding Theravāda Buddhism, and by Suzuki Daisetz T. (1870–1966) concerning Zen Buddhism (Halbfass 2017: 378–402; Sharf 1995a, 1995b, 2000; Lo Turco 2006). The great influence of the works and personalities of the above-mentioned authors and others in Asia, America, and Europe have contributed to spreading the association of the traditions concerned with the unquestioned centrality of “experience”. It is not possible here to deepen the complexity and breadth of this theme. Far from being a unanimous discourse on the subject, it involves authors belonging to historically opposed traditions. Still, it is relevant to hint at the importance of American and European sources in the cultural background of the authors mentioned, and the problems which emerge when we try to find the ideas relating to “experience” in pre-modern texts.<sup>6</sup>

In this regard, it must be underlined how the related models of self-representation are characterised by a “selective approach” (Sernesi 2006: 17–18) where specific aspects are isolated from the previous ritual and textual context and brought into a new constellation. I have tried to indicate some of the motivations of this approach. The problem emerges when the ideas concerned are presented in a logic of “authentic essence/degenerations,” as in the view of several modernist models of

---

<sup>6</sup>In particular, Sharf has shown that personal experiences “do not constitute the reference points for the elaborated discourse on meditative states found in Buddhist scholastic sources” (Sharf 1995b: 260, cf. 233). He also notes that the Japanese words used for the word “experience,” *keiken* 経験 and *taiken* 体験, “are rarely attested in premodern Japanese texts. Their contemporary currency dates to the early Meiji, when they were adopted to render Western philosophical terms for which there was no ready Japanese equivalent” (Sharf 1995b: 249; Sharf 2000: 275). See also Gyatso’s critical consideration of Sharf’s position from the standpoint of the studies on Tibetan Buddhism (Gyatso 1999). For an important reframing of the debate about “experience” see Greene’s history of Buddhist meditation in early medieval China (Greene 2021). It is not possible here to deepen the concept of experience in the thought of the Kyōto School. Nishida Kitarō’s idea of “pure experience” (*junsui keiken* 純粹経験) is fundamental for Ueda’s reading of Nishida’s thought as well as for Ueda’s own philosophical development (Ueda 1991, 2007–2008, 2; Ueda 2011a: 134–144). On Nishida’s notion of “pure experience” see Elberfeld 1999. For a discussion of Nishida’s concept in relation to William James’ and the broader context of 19th–20th century European and American philosophical debates see Feenberg and Arisaka (1990), and Feenberg (1999). On the relation between Nishida and Suzuki see Yusa (2002). On Suzuki’s thought see also Mori (2020). Ueda underlines the creative reinterpretation made by Suzuki, as we can see in his considerations on “Suzuki Daisetsu’s (Daisetz Suzuki) ‘Eastern Way of Seeing’ and Izutsu Toshihiko’s ‘Eastern Philosophy.’ [...] While both concerned themselves with ‘Eastern’ ideas, these ideas were reinterpreted within a world-horizon and were creatively transformed to address the world” (Ueda 2011b: 21).

representation of the “true essence” of Buddhism, reducing the historical complexity to a reified unity,<sup>7</sup> and when these ideas are uncritically repeated in common representations.

If we consider the history of “mysticism” in Europe, it is very interesting to invoke the reflections of Michel De Certeau and Emiliano Fiori<sup>8</sup> on the modern origin of the substantive term “mysticism” as a peculiar development of the adjective “μυστικός” (*mystikos*). In the Greek context the adjective meant “related to the mysteries”, as the *mystēs* (μύστης) was the initiated into the mysteries (τὰ μυστήρια *ta mystēria*) (Liddell and Scott 1996: 1156). This adjective found its diffusion in the Christian tradition through the work of the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (5th–early 6th CE).<sup>9</sup> Fiori underlines the development that came from Dionysius’ *Theologia Mystica*, where “mystic” is an adjective that cannot be separated from the organic “liturgic-philosophic-mystic” whole of his thought.<sup>10</sup> As has been analysed by De Certeau, the emergence of “mysticism” as a substantive in the 16th–17th centuries would be directly related with the separation of this aspect and the constitution of a specific field, following which the past texts were selected and reinterpreted introducing caesuras which were previously absent (De Certeau 2010: 52–54, 71 ff.; Fiori 2017: 185–186, 216).

I would like to conclude this overview with some considerations on “experience” and “mysticism”. The relevance of the thematization of “experience” in the Christian tradition can be traced back to the medieval idea of the “*cognitio Dei experimentalis*,”<sup>11</sup> but from about the 19th–20th centuries it assumes new meanings in the context of the rationalistic and scientific critique of religion, the tasks of interreligious dialogue, and the confrontation with atheism. In this regard, the idea of religious, mystical “experience” becomes the place of the possible encounter with the search for meaning of human life when other ways are considered to have lost their legitimation. As Sharf points out, the possibility of finding the centrality of the idea of transformative experience in the self-representation of their own traditions by exponents of Asian religions is mostly interpreted by European and American thinkers as a clear proof of the universality of this idea, without questioning its modern background (Cf. Sharf 2000: 276). Another aspect, which I would like to underline, is

<sup>7</sup>On the difficulty of reducing the Buddhist tradition to a single core see Williams (2009): 123–125. On the critique of this dual logic of authentic essence/contingent manifestations see Sharf (1995a): 110, 116, 122, 145, (1995b): 247–251, 259, and Sernesi (2006): 18–19.

<sup>8</sup>I am very thankful to Dr. Matteo Poiani for these two bibliographic references.

<sup>9</sup>On the usage by Dionysius of the “*Mysteriencharacter*” (the character of being related to the Mysteries) of the “unspeakable words” as a fundamental hermeneutic principle in the exegesis of the Bible, see Haas (2007): 72 ff.

<sup>10</sup>Fiori also highlights the liturgical character of the Mosaic experience in the *Theologia Mystica*. See Fiori (2017): 213–214 and his further bibliographical indications.

<sup>11</sup>For the interpretation of this expression and further references on the tradition of monastic “language of experience” (*Erfahrungssprache*), see Haas (2007): 43 ff. On the contemporary debate on “experience,” between “perennial” and “constructivist” positions, see Haas (2007): 38–48. On the history of the term see also the contributions to the international colloquium: “Experientia” (Veneziani 2002).

the risk that in the dialogues concerning “Mysticism, East and West,” the use of the problematic terms “East/Orient” and “West/Occident,” with their heavy colonial and ideological implications, continues to be legitimized through the very dialogue aiming to overcome them.

At the beginning of this section I referred to Ueda’s questions regarding the world in which it becomes possible to problematize the relation between Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism and which world opens out from the standpoint of the awareness of this encounter. In this regard, I have pointed out some problematic issues, which have to be considered in order to further develop what is at stake in Nishitani’s and Ueda’s reflections on “mysticism” and “non- mysticism.”<sup>12</sup>

In the previous quote of Nishitani’s, we saw the relevance of the correspondence of experience between Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism. In the same pages of his introduction, Nishitani recalls the philosophical attempts leading up to the beginning of the nineteenth Century to find a universal essence common to the various religions, which had been contrasted by the opposing tendency to concentrate more on the differences. Thus, he stresses the need in his contemporary context for a greater awareness of what is common among religions, even though this awareness does not have to be sought as an ideal or abstract universal essence. In this regard, the correspondence of religious experience beyond the historically determined differences opens new possibilities for religion, from the awareness of religious life as it is grounded in human essence (Nishitani 1986–1995, 7: 6). Nishitani also refers to the idea of mysticism as something universal pertaining to all religions, even though it appears in different forms, thus indicating that “there is a reason why many psychologists and philosophers of religion have sought in mysticism the essence of religion” (Nishitani 1986–1995, 7: 7–8).

In the first part of this paper I introduced the question regarding the possible risk of “inclusivism” (*hōkatsushugi* 包括主義) related to the idea of mysticism as the essence of religion.<sup>13</sup> This risk lies in its connection with an implicit dualistic model

---

<sup>12</sup>Another aspect of Ueda’s worldview that is important to indicate is his concern with the risk of contemporary homogenization, in its relation with the global diffusion of nihilism. The ideas of “East” and “West” remain part of his horizon, in the search of a “world that would include the rich content of the variety of different traditions, a world wherein each of these traditions could be revitalized” (Ueda 2011b: 30). At the same time, he sees this possibility contrasted by the risks connected with the contemporary tendency towards homogenization and the global reality of a nihilistic levelling. In this concern, Ueda points out that: “The issue at stake in the world today is not the reality of ‘East and West,’ as it was for Nishida, but rather what makes meaningless the distinction of East and West, namely, the ‘superficial one world and its nihility.’ This is the true problem of the ‘world’ today, a problem now shared by all those whose being is that of being-in-the-world. [...] Nishida spoke of ‘digging down in between East and West.’ Today it is necessary to dig down beneath the bottom of the homogenized world” (Ueda 2011b: 27, 31). It is not possible here to analyze in extension Ueda’s concern with the problem of nihilism as it is interwoven with his reading of Nishitani’s thought. These considerations are nevertheless of much importance for his understanding of “non-religion”. See *infra* n. 46.

<sup>13</sup>On the concept of “inclusivism” see Ueda (2007–2008), 1: 42. See also Halbfass’ comment to P. Hacker’s article on “Inclusivism” (Halbfass 2017: 403–418). See also Faure’s reading of Suzuki’s thought (Faure 1993: 60–67).

defining a true/authentic essence of religion counter to its contingent cultural determinations, which may become a means of self-affirmation. In the following pages, I would like to argue how Ueda develops Nishitani's search for a "greater awareness of what is in common," trying to avoid the affirmation of an "ideal and abstract universal essence." As I would like to show, Ueda's reflections on "mysticism" and "non-mysticism" are linked to his confrontation with the risk of self-appropriation and instrumentalization of "truth." From this analysis, I intend to show how Ueda develops Nishitani's idea of "the awareness of religious life as it is grounded in human essence".<sup>14</sup>

## 2 From Mysticism to Non-mysticism: Ueda's Sources and His Own Development

Even if the term "mysticism" remains fundamental for Ueda's reflections, he highlights the divergences in its interpretation and the contrasting evaluations by scholars. He also problematizes the possibility of saying that there is a fundamental experience common to Meister Eckhart and Zen, underlining the difficulty connected with individuating this similarity in "mysticism" (USS, 8: 321–322). Nevertheless, he tries to show in which sense he intended the terms "mysticism" and "non-mysticism" and how he found a fundamental suggestion for his own interpretation of this affinity through considerations of the work of the German theologian and historian of religion, Rudolf Otto (1869–1937).

Ueda refers on several occasions<sup>15</sup> to the considerations of Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism by Otto in his appendix to the third edition of his book *Mysticism East and West*.<sup>16</sup> Otto indicates a similarity between Zen, considered as the mysticism of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and the deepest moments of Meister Eckhart's thought. He sees this similarity in an infinite dynamic, which he characterizes as *Unendlichkeit nach Innen*, as an "infinity towards inside" (in Ueda's translation: *uchi ni mukatte mugensei* 内に向かつて無限性) in the case of Eckhart and, in the case of Zen Buddhism, as an endless openness, which, as far as one goes upwards, is never enclosed (Otto 1971: 271–272; USS, 8: 326). In Ueda's Japanese translation,

---

<sup>14</sup>As the focus of the essay will be Ueda's development, it will not be possible here to analyze extensively Nishitani's texts as well as the much-discussed relationship between his religious and political philosophy. On the controversy about the political thought of the Kyōto School see: Arisaka (1996, 1997, 2014, 2020), and Davis (2019), Elberfeld (1999), Faure (1995), Goto-Jones (2008), Heisig and Maraldo (1995), Heisig (2009), Isomae (2014): 224–226, Maraldo (2006), Ōhashi (2001), Ōhashi and Akitomi (2020), Parkes (1997, 2011). Sakai and Isomae (2013<sup>3</sup>). Ueda's own contribution to the discussion is important for understanding his position. See Ueda (1995).

<sup>15</sup>See for ex. Ueda (2011a): 171–172; USS, 8: 325–326. Otto's text is also quoted by Nishitani in his forward to *God and Absolute Nothingness* Nishitani (1986–1995), 7: 4–5.

<sup>16</sup>In his interpretation of Zen Buddhism, Otto refers to Suzuki Daisetsu's essay on the *Ten Ox Pictures* (Suzuki 1923).



regarding this second characterization we find his important key concept of “endless openness” (*kagirinai* ‘*hirake*’ 限りない「開け」), which is also very important for his idea of the “twofold being in the world” (Cf. Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 65–68).

For Otto the peculiarity of Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism toward other forms of mysticism such as Vedānta’s and Plotinus’ can be found in this dynamic that does not stop with the One.<sup>17</sup> This aspect is further developed by Ueda in his ideas on mysticism and non-mysticism. While he considers the ideas of the One and the union with it as fundamental for mysticism, non-mysticism has its beginning with the question “where does the One return to?” (Cf. USS, 8: 328).

Another very important factor for Ueda’s idea of non-mysticism was Suzuki’s retraction of his previous characterization of Zen Buddhism as a peculiar form of mysticism. Suzuki, as he writes in his review of Dumoulin’s *History of Zen Buddhism*, came to consider the term “mysticism” as “highly misleading in elucidating Zen thought.” Because in his view “Zen has nothing ‘mystical’ about it or in it. It is most plain, clear as daylight, all out in the open with nothing hidden [...]” (Suzuki 1965).<sup>18</sup> In Ueda’s use of the term “non-mysticism” there is a reference to the everyday mind (*heijōshin* 平常心) of “sleeping, waking up, eating and dying,” as well as the mode of being of Martha, working in the kitchen, but Ueda underlines that this kind of non-mysticism has its basis (*dodai* 土台) in mysticism.<sup>19</sup> Without mysticism as its base, or springboard, following Davis’ translation (Cf. Davis 2008: 225), non-mysticism would have a different meaning (USS, 8: 322–323, 329). As Davis writes, “what Ueda means by non-mysticism (*Nicht-Mystik* or *hi-shinpi-shugi* 非神秘主義) is not a simple rejection of, but rather a movement *through and out of* mysticism. It is both a fulfillment of the genuine thrust of mysticism and a breakthrough beyond mystical union” (Davis 2008: 222).<sup>20</sup>

A third important source for Ueda’s idea of “non-mysticism” is Nishitani’s consideration in the above-mentioned introduction to *God and Absolute Nothingness*. Commenting on Heiler’s idea of mysticism as something universal pertaining to all religions and his conception of Buddhism as mysticism, Nishitani indicates how Buddhism could be considered mysticism, introducing the expression “a form of

<sup>17</sup> Here, it is not possible to discuss Otto’s views on Śaṅkara, the founder of *kevalādvaita* (absolute non-dualism) or Plotinus. A hint of a criticism of Otto’s interpretation of Śaṅkara can be found in Davis (2008): 233, n. 19. It is important to add that as in the case of Eckhart, the interpretation of Śaṅkara’s view as “mysticism” is also a debated theme cf. *infra* n. 22. I am grateful to Prof. G. Pellegrini for important discussions on these topics.

<sup>18</sup> See also T. Merton’s statement about Suzuki (Merton 1968: 63). But it is notable that in his dialogue with Merton Suzuki continues to explain Zen’s emptiness by referring to the Godhead (Merton 1968: 133–134).

<sup>19</sup> In one note Ueda also writes of the possibility of a movement from non-mysticism to mysticism. In this case, mysticism is not to be intended as what stops at mysticism alone, but as what reflects the depth of reality. In the context of Buddhism, Ueda sees non-mysticism as represented by Zen and this kind of mysticism in esoteric Buddhism (*mikkyō* 密教) (USS, 8: 340–341).

<sup>20</sup> Davis also refers to this movement with the term “*de*-mysticism” (*Ent-Mystik* or *datsu-shinpi-shugi* 脱神秘主義). On Ueda’s understanding of “non-mysticism” cf. Davis’ presentation in Davis (2008) in particular 221–239.

body-mind-dropped-off mysticism”. This idea is developed by Ueda, who writes of non-mysticism as the “mode of body-mind-dropped-off mysticism” (*shinpishugi no shinjin datsuraku tai* 神秘主義の「身心脱落」態) (USS, 8: 323, 329; Davis 2008: 225, 230).<sup>21</sup>

Ueda originally introduced his key-concept of “non-mysticism” in order to distinguish what he considered characteristic of Zen Buddhism’s approach from the mysticism of Meister Eckhart<sup>22</sup> (Ueda 1965b). In his later works, he extended the use of the term to comprise the most radical motif of the “breakthrough” (*Durchbruch, toppa* 突破)<sup>23</sup> in the thought of Meister Eckhart. Ueda came to understand the dynamic movement “from mysticism to non-mysticism” as a radicalization of the detachment, as a negation not only of the egoistic self, but also of its clinging to the ultimate truth, in a twofold direction of “upwards” and “downwards.” In this concern, it is also interesting to consider Ueda’s contribution to the conference on “All-One” (*All-Einheit*), where he stresses the possible risk connected with the ideas of “One” and “oneness,” criticising a substantialised conception of oneness, which could rule out multiplicity and cause struggle and ideological opposition. Part of his argumentation recalls Hegel’s critique of “abstract unity,” but Ueda’s contribution has to be seen in the affirmation of the need to abandon even the attachment to the One, through a twofold dynamic of detachment which constitutes the central aspect of his idea of “non-mysticism”.

If all is “in reality” one, then the true being-one has to be relived from the substantial fixation through determined forms of the One. This is what is meant by the question: “Where does the One return to?” This question leads to the awareness that the One has to become nothingness, or that the man has to leave the One, in two reciprocally related (*zusammengehörig*) dynamic directions: towards nothingness and towards multiplicity (or back to multiplicity) (Ueda 1985: 137–138).

Ueda considers the “*unio mystica*” (*shinpiteki gōitsu* 神秘的合一) and the idea of the “One” as fundamental for mysticism. To these elements he adds “*ekstasis*” (USS, 8: 328). Though “*unio mystica*” and “*ekstasis*” are usually intended as the same, in Ueda’s reflections the possible distinction between these two moments is of great importance. This possibility is given by the Japanese term *datsuji* (脱自) which can

<sup>21</sup> I am following Davis’ translation of the expression. Davis also refers to Nishitani (1986–1995), 7: 7.

<sup>22</sup> Whether Meister Eckhart’s thought has to be considered “mysticism” or not is indeed a much-debated theme and also depends on the meaning attributed to the word “mysticism.” Every kind of irrationalism or mystical vision is very far from his thought. On this theme cf. Beierwaltes (2000): 120–122, Sturlese (2007): 47–60, Ruh (1989): 188–196, and Haas ().

<sup>23</sup> On Ueda’s interpretation of the two motifs of the “birth” and the “breakthrough” in Eckhart’s German Works, see Ueda (1965a, 1986, 1989, 1992<sup>3</sup>). For the English translation of the German and Japanese terminology concerning Eckhart and Ueda’s interpretation, I also refer to Davis (2008), Ueda (2004), and Walshe (2009). For a general introduction to Meister Eckhart, see Beccarisi (2012), Dall’Igna (2017), Sturlese (2007), and De Libera (1998).

be used to indicate “*ekstasis*” in mystical context,<sup>24</sup> but has literally the meaning of “dropping the self,” as it becomes clear from the two composing characters: *datsu* (脱) “to shed, to drop, to let go of” and *ji* (自) “self, oneself.” While the word “*ekstasis*” or “ecstasy” is strongly connoted in the sense of the “*unio*” with the “One” (cf. Langer 2004: 114–116)<sup>25</sup> or with God, Ueda’s use of the term *datsuji* is deeply connected with Dōgen’s “dropping off the body-mind” (*shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落)<sup>26</sup> and Eckhart’s *Gott lassen*, “letting go of God.”

Ueda regards the movement “from *unio* to *ekstasis*” as characteristic of mysticism, but because there is the possibility that this movement stops at the *unio* alone he distinguishes mysticism, which has its peculiar mode in the *unio*, from non-mysticism, which has its peculiarity in the *ekstasis* (uss, 8: 328–329). The sense of this distinction can be shown by Ueda’s attention to a passage of Meister Eckhart’s: “When I return to God, if I do not remain there...”<sup>27</sup> (Eckhart 1955: 273; Walshe 2009: 294). Ueda’s comment is very important for understanding his idea of *ekstasis*:

because it can happen that the soul “remains there” [stops there], “remains attached.”<sup>28</sup> If the soul stops, attached, the breaking-through appears as the further, the second moment, but in that case the soul does not have the strength to break through, because the soul that remains attached is not the only-begotten Son (Ueda 2006a: 154).

Thus, in Ueda’s distinction between *unio* and *ekstasis* we also find the result of his attempt to understand the relationship between the two motifs, of the “birth” and the “breakthrough”, which had guided his research on Meister Eckhart since his PhD thesis.

This is highlighted in Ueda’s afterword to his book *Non-Mysticism – Eckhart and Zen* (*hishinpushugi – Ekkuharuto to zen* 非神秘主義—エックハルトと禪), where he explains that his interest in non-mysticism, with its shift of focus from *unio* to *ekstasis/datsuji*, was also the expectation of a “(reverse) tangent point” with contemporary atheism,<sup>29</sup> but his primary interest was to overcome the problems concerning a mysticism that stops at the “*unio mystica*” (uss, 8: 321, 329). Ueda holds that in the union with God, with the Absolute, there is always the risk that this union

<sup>24</sup> In translating this term with *ekstasis* it is important to note that Ueda explicitly does not use other terms which are more common like 忘我 (*bōga*, trance) and エクスタシー (*ekusutashī*, ecstasy). With the term *datsuji* he indicates an event of human existence (uss 8: 328). At the same time, because he is referring to his idea of the movement “from *unio* to *datsuji*” as proper to every true mysticism, the translation of the term as *ekstasis* shows an important aspect of his analysis. Cf. Nishitani’s use of the term *datsujisei* 脱自性, which has been translated as *ekstasis* in Nishitani (1986–1995), 10: 78, and Nishitani (1982): 68. Nishitani refers to Eckhart and Heidegger.

<sup>25</sup> On the ambiguity of Plotinus’ use of the term “ekstasis” see Fiori (2017).

<sup>26</sup> See *supra* n. 21.

<sup>27</sup> The sentence continues with: “my breakthrough will be far nobler than my outflowing.”

<sup>28</sup> Ueda refers to Eckhart (1955): 412, corresponding to Sermon 72, Eckhart (1976): 245: “Dannoch, dâ der sun ûzvliezende ist von dem vater, dâ enbehanget diu sêle niht: si ist obe bilde” (“The soul draws from where the Son draws. But the soul is not suspended even there, where the Son issues forth from the Father: she is above all images,” Walshe 2009: 459).

<sup>29</sup> On this theme see also Ueda’s attention to the deep meaning of Eckhart’s “without why” in the context of contemporary nihilism. Ueda (2011a): 173–174.

between the I and God becomes just a way for expanding the I (USS, 8: 330).<sup>30</sup> Here we can note the relevance of the Japanese term *datsuji* (脱自), to drop off the self, also the self which is united with God. At the same time, if this dropping off does not occur there is no true event of *unio* or “mysticism”. In this sense, Ueda writes of the “*unio and yet ekstasis*” (*gōitsu soku datsuji* 合一即脱自) (USS, 8: 328). The notion that through a radicalization of detachment not only the egoistic self, but also its clinging to the ultimate truth must be dropped off, is central to Ueda’s thought, as can be seen in his analysis on the 7th to 10th images of the *Ten Ox-herding Pictures*,<sup>31</sup> as well as in his understanding of the movement of “upwards” and “downwards” in Meister Eckhart and Zen.

### 3 Meister Eckhart and Zen

In this section, I would like to concentrate on Ueda’s various analyses of the theme of “*Gott lassen*,” the letting go of God in accordance with Eckhart’s interpretation of the words of Saint Paul in Rom. 9,3, in Sermon 12, and of the pericope of Martha and Mary (Luc. 10,38–40), in Sermon 86.<sup>32</sup> These passages have been commented on repeatedly by Ueda, since his doctoral thesis, and constitute central aspects of his interpretation of Meister Eckhart as well as his comparison between the thought of the Dominican Meister and Zen Buddhism.

Focusing on Eckhart’s motif of the “breakthrough,” Ueda notes a twofold aspect of the “letting go of God,” as can be found in the words of Saint Paul: “I would be willing to be eternally separated from God for the sake of my friend<sup>33</sup> and for God’s sake” (Eckhart 1958: 195; Walshe 2009: 296). Eckhart comments on the passage with the well-known statement that “the highest and final letting go, of which humans are capable, is letting go of God for the sake of God” (Eckhart 1958: 196; Davis 2008: 221). Ueda points out how the “letting go of God” takes place in two directions, but as one action of “letting go.” “The first direction is the return from the soul to its ground [*Urgrund*], where it has always been and is, the second is the

<sup>30</sup>In Davis’ translation of the sentence: “[In such cases,] the ‘union between God and me’ gets dragged in the direction of the ‘me’, and the danger of God serving as a means to inflate the ‘me’ arises” (USS, 8: 330; Davis 2008: 246).

<sup>31</sup>On Ueda’s comment to *The Ten Ox-herding Pictures*, see Döll (2005): 26–58.

<sup>32</sup>Ueda underlines that Nishitani’s work *Kami to zettai mu* 神と絶対無 (*God and Absolute Nothingness* Nishitani 1986–1995, 7), published in 1948, was the first study of Eckhart’s to extensively discuss Sermon 86 by inserting it in a comprehensive interpretation of Meister Eckhart (Ueda 1981: 264). It is important that the title of Nishitani’s chapter in which he analyses the pericope of Martha and Mary is *The standpoint of practice (jissen no tachiba 実践の立場)* (Nishitani 1986–1995, 7). For a comprehensive study of the history of the interpretations of the pericope and its role in Eckhart’s works, see Mieth (1969). On the relationship of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* in medieval thought and Ueda’s interpretation of the pericope, see also Bouso (2012).

<sup>33</sup>The expression “my friend” is intended by Eckhart as referring to all human beings, without any kind of preference for closer people or for oneself (Cf. Eckhart 1958: 195).

return of the soul to the concrete everyday reality of the world as a human being” (Ueda 1965a: 136). “In unison with the movement ‘away from God to the nothingness of the godhead’ goes a movement ‘away from God to the reality of the world’” (Ueda 2004: 159). This twofold “letting go of God” is further analyzed by Ueda in his comment to Meister Eckhart’s peculiar interpretation of the pericope of Martha and Mary in Sermon 86 (Eckhart 1976: 481–492; Walshe 2009: 83–90).

Eckhart inverts the traditional reading of the pericope, which sees preeminence in the figure of Mary, who remains seated at Jesus’ feet, listening to his words, thus asserting the superiority of the *vita contemplativa* over the *vita activa*. Eckhart, also going against the literal meaning of the pericope, sees perfection in Martha, who is working in the kitchen for the guest Jesus.<sup>34</sup> In Eckhart’s comment, Martha’s words, “Lord, tell her to help me,” are motivated by the fear that her sister, dallying in the pleasure of her spiritual satisfaction, “might progress no further.” Moreover, Jesus’ answer would be intended not as a rebuke, but as a reassurance that Mary would become as Martha desires. Martha’s being busy about many things is interpreted as meaning, “You are among things, but they are not in you,” in the sense of an unhindered activity, which becomes possible only because, in Ueda’s words, “Martha is no longer preoccupied about the One [the only thing which is necessary], therefore she can be careful about many things – without being hindered in her being-One with God” (Ueda 1965a: 137). Ueda interprets Martha’s words “bid her arise that she may be perfect,” as an expression of the need to let go of the subtle form of attachment, which is still present in the *unio mystica*, the attachment to the “being united with God”, where the risk remains that God becomes a way to increase the I, which is united with Him.

Ueda also places great importance on Eckhart’s characterizations of Martha as having “lived long and well,” where in Eckhart’s words “life gives the finest understanding” (Eckhart 1976: 482; Walshe 2009: 84), and of her “mature age and fully trained ground of being” (Eckhart 1976: 481; Cf. Walshe 2009: 83).<sup>35</sup> As I will show in the next section, the connection with Ueda’s reflections on religion can be seen in the attention given to Eckhart’s description of the two sisters: Mary, who, sitting at the feet of Jesus was still “learning, for she had just gone to school to learn how to live” (Eckhart 1976: 492; Walshe 2009: 89; *uss*, 7: 329) and Martha, who, in her work for the other (*uss*, 7: 321), is understood by Ueda as the concretization of the twofold direction of the “letting go of God,” to the nothingness of the Godhead and, at the same time, to everyday reality. In this sense, Ueda refers to Martha as “a true

<sup>34</sup>As noted by Ueda, in other passages Eckhart follows the traditional interpretation of the pericope (Ueda 1981: 267–268).

<sup>35</sup> “[Daz eine was] ein hêrlich alter und ein wol geüebter grunt ûf daz allernaehste” Ueda’s Japanese translation is: “Enjukuseru nenrei to tetteiteki ni shûrensareta kontei” 円熟せる年齢と徹底的に修練された根底 (*uss*, 7: 334–335). See also Ueda (2007–2008), 4: 311–332. Ueda also refers to Eckhart’s “practice of true virtue” (Eckhart 1976: 492; Walshe 2009: 90; Ueda 1965a: 138) and underlines the theme of the *wohlgeübten Leib*, the “well-disciplined body” (Ueda 1981: 264, 266–267; Eckhart 1976: 491; Walshe 2009: 89). The entire Sermon is also of great relevance for Eckhart’s conception of the “*Imitatio Christi*.”

human” (*hitori no shin naru ningen, ichi shin nin* 一人の真なる人間, 一真人, *ein wâr mensche*), which Eckhart uses in S. 12 (Eckhart 1958: 197; uss, 7: 317, 339; cf. Ueda 1965a: 135-139). Ueda also underlines how the term “human” here means more than only “soul” or “soul’s ground,” because of this bi-directionality of detachment (Ueda 1981: 263). This also has an implication for the understanding of the actions, which are wrought “without why” from the inmost ground of the soul (Cf. Sermon 5b; Eckhart 1958: 90; Walshe 2009: 110) and, at the same time, in a specific way in everyday reality.<sup>36</sup>

Interpreting Eckhart from an existential perspective, Ueda sees in his thought a “structured dynamic” of negation and affirmation, through radical detachment to the pure and unspeakable ground and springing out from there a new return to the world’s and life’s reality (Ueda 2006a: 159). The same coincidence of negation and affirmation can be found for Ueda in Zen Buddhism, where it is indicated with the terms *kōjō* (向上, *upwards*) and *kōge* (向下, *downwards*),<sup>37</sup> but he considers Zen more radical in its way upwards, the negation, as well as in its way downwards, the affirmation.

Ueda sees a parallel between Eckhart’s “letting go of God” in expressions such as: “If you meet the Buddha, kill him,” “don’t dwell where the Buddha is, and run quickly past where the Buddha is not”.<sup>38</sup> As explained by Ueda, the way upwards in Zen regards the infinity of the negation, the infinite nothingness, “beyond the hundred negations,” without imagining any kind of transcendence. For Zen every conception of the Absolute means “clinging to the truth,” a subtler and more dangerous form of self-attachment (Ueda 1981: 259).

For Ueda, the negation in Zen Buddhism is more radical than in Meister Eckhart as can be seen in the different conception of “nothingness”: in the nothingness of the Godhead of Meister Eckhart and in nothingness as a de-substantializing dynamic in Zen Buddhism (Ueda 1981: 259–260). Ueda analyzes these differences also utilizing the expression “negation of negation,” which, through a formal correspondence, shows a very different meaning (Ueda 1965a: 150).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup>“In einer bestimmten, dem jeweiligen Ding entsprechenden Weise” (Ueda 1965a: 138). For a lecture on Eckhart’s “without why” in reference to the thought of Thomas Aquinas, see Matsuda (1995).

<sup>37</sup>For Ueda’s characterization of “upwards” and “downwards,” see Ueda (1981): 236–239. Ueda sees negation and affirmation in their connection with the free movement from itself to itself of the selfless-self, where what matters is not only the movement as such but the disclosure of the infinite openness as the place in which this movement occurs.

<sup>38</sup>The first quotation is from Linji, the second is attributed to Zhaozhou (Jōshū). This saying is also very similar to the first lines of Kuonan’s (Kakuan) comment on the eighth of *The Ten Ox-herding Pictures* (Davis 2008: 221).

<sup>39</sup>Meister Eckhart’s use of the expression “*negatio negationis*” or “*versagen des versagenes*” has been developed by Cusanus with his concept of “Non-Aliud”. The expression “negation of negation” becomes central in Hegel’s dialectic. Sometimes Ueda refers to it as a “philosophical term,” in other works he seems to use it as a term pertaining as such to the Zen tradition. It is important to note that the expression “negation of negation” referred to “nothingness” in the philosophical context of the Kyoto School does not have the processual meaning that it has in Hegel (Cf. Ōhashi 2011: 26). On Ueda’s use of the expression “negation of negation” see also Davis (2008): 236. I would like to thank Prof. G. Cuzzo for many suggestions for my studies on Meister Eckhart and Cusanus.

In the case of Eckhart, the expression “*negation of negation*” or “*versagen des versagennes*” denotes that God is the negation of the negation, which the creatures themselves are. For Beierwaltes, Eckhart’s expression “*negation of negation*” can be understood both in a relative and in an absolute way. In the relative way, referring to a theme that has its origin in Plato’s *Sophist*, it indicates that each entity, because of its own identity, is something other than every other entity. “In being itself it is not the other, it excludes the other from itself and making this movement it ‘negates’ the other” (Beierwaltes 2000: 133). This idea can be found in Eckhart’s Sermon 21 in the affirmation that “all creatures have a negation in themselves: one negates by not being the other” (Eckhart 1958: 363; Walshe 2009: 467). In an absolute sense, the expression “negation of negation,” as it refers to “the One,” denotes the exclusion from the One of “all multiplicity and of the negativity which is implicit in alterity, difference and in multiplicity.” This form of negation indicates the *distinctio* of God from everything (Beierwaltes 2000: 134), and that “He is one and negates all else, for outside of God nothing is” (Eckhart 1958: 363; Walshe 2009: 467).<sup>40</sup> In Ueda’s words: “God is the negation of the creature, which in itself is a negation” (Ueda 1965a: 150).

In Eckhart’s thought, the concepts of “being” and “substance” remain central. Besides, the radical expression “God is a nothingness” (*Got is ein niht*) does not mean a privation, as in the case of creatures, but that “He is above-being” (Sermon 71; Eckhart 1976: 223; Walshe 2009: 140), a “superessential nothingness” (Sermon 83; Eckhart 1976: 442; Walshe 2009: 463). The “nothingness” is a negation of all human categories which try to grasp his essence (Ueda 1965a: 116–117)<sup>41</sup> and, as emerges from the use of the expression “negation of negation,” another denotation for the “pure One.” Conversely, in the case of Zen Buddhism, “nothingness is an expression for the de-substantializing dynamic, corresponding to the Mahāyāna Buddhist conception of relationship” (Ueda 1981: 260; See also Ueda 1965a: 166; uss, 8: 146–147). In Ueda’s explanation:

for Buddhism, everything that is, is in relationship to others, indeed in a reciprocally conditioned relationship. For anything “to be related,” therefore means that in itself it is a nothingness, and that in this nothingness the totality of all relationships is concentrated in a once-and-for-all unique manner (Ueda 2004: 161; see also Ueda 2011a: 23–24).

The difference in the way of understanding “nothingness” also has important implications for the question of the relationship between the One and the many. As

---

<sup>40</sup>For the meaning of the expression “*negatio negationis*” in the Trinitarian context in Eckhart’s thought, see Beierwaltes (2000): 134–136. Other occurrences of the expression are found in Eckhart (1992): 556, 692.

<sup>41</sup>In his doctoral thesis Ueda distinguishes three kinds of nothingness in Eckhart’s thought, corresponding to three kinds of *Finsternis* (darkness). Other than the mentioned nothingness as *privatio*, in the case of creatures, and the *Übersein*, which negates all human categories, Ueda also mentions a third meaning, for which “God is not only unknowable by the human being, but also for himself, and in this sense a “nothing” which cannot be substituted by any positive denotation.” This third conception of nothing corresponds to the *Finsternis* beyond every opposition. “The nothingness as God is in himself lies beyond the opposition between God and creature, God and human being, it is neither being nor nothing” (Ueda 1965a: 116–118). In his comparison between Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism, Ueda seems to focus on the second meaning of nothingness as *Übersein*.

pointed out by Ueda, in Zen Buddhism “the truth of the ‘One’ is ‘None and yet Many’ [*mu ni shite ta 無にして多*]” (USS, 8: 5–7; Davis 2008: 231; See also Ueda 2011a: 23–26).<sup>42</sup>

As emphasized by Ueda, in Zen Buddhism, “nothingness” which he also indicates using Nishida’s philosophical terminology “absolute nothingness”,<sup>43</sup>

must not be clung to as nothingness. It must not be taken as a kind of substance, or even as the *nihilum* of a kind of “minus substance.” The important thing is the de-substantializing dynamic of nothingness, the nothingness of nothingness. Put in philosophical terms, it refers to the negation of negation, which entails 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 (Ueda 2004: 161–162).

While Eckhart’s own use of the expression “negation of negation” seems very far from this second formulation of Ueda’s, as it is deeply bound to the concepts of “substance” and the “One,” it is relevant that in Ueda’s description of the Zen Buddhist meaning of the “negation of negation” we find the same dynamic of negation and affirmation, which is also central for his reading of Meister Eckhart. Although for Ueda, Eckhart would be less radical in his negation and affirmation. This can be seen not only in the way upwards of negation, but also in the way every affirmation of creatures is always mediated by God (Ueda 1981: 260; Ueda 1965b).<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup>On Ueda’s understanding of the “One,” “None and yet Many” in Zen Buddhism, see Davis (2008): 230–231. Davis also refers briefly, but very precisely to Nishitani’s interpretation: “‘the None beyond the One’ (Nishitani 1986–1995, 11: 243) does not dissolve but rather enables the distinct presenting of the Many.” On Nishitani’s reading of the theme of the “All-One” through his “standpoint of *sūnyatā*,” see Nishitani (1982): 141–147.

<sup>43</sup>For a critical analysis of the difficulty of understanding this key term of Nishida’s philosophy as a strictly Buddhist concept, see Cestari (2010).

<sup>44</sup>An important aspect, which cannot be dealt with here of Ueda’s comparisons between Meister Eckhart’s and Zen Buddhist thought is his analysis through commentary on the images of *The Ten Ox-herding Pictures*, in particular from seven to ten. In this comparison he often refers to a Flemish painting of the sixteenth century representing the pericope of Martha and Mary. Ueda attributes the painting to Pieter Aertsen (Döll 2005: 123) has noted that the painting is not to be found in the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam as Ueda thought. Indeed, the painting, which is published in Ueda’s thesis is not by Aertsen but by his nephew Joachim Bueckelaer (or Beuckelaer), signed and dated 1566, and is at the Rijksmuseum of Amsterdam (inv. n. A 1451). Probably it has been confused with another painting of the pericope by P. Aertsen dated 1553. Following the suggestion of Prof. E. Benz, Ueda interprets the painting following Eckhart’s peculiar reading of the pericope. As I have written, “Several elements lead us to reject this hypothesis. In particular the great opulence of the representation in the foreground of the kitchen work and the presence of the iconographic motif of the ‘chicken roasted on a spit’ refer to the theme of the ‘*voluptas carnis*.’ The theme of ‘Jesus with Martha and Mary’ has been represented several times by Aertsen and Bueckelaer, but it seems that these depictions are to be intended in accordance with the usual interpretation of the pericope, bound to a moralistic disapproval of the ‘*voluptas carnis*.’” (Moiso 2010/2011: 54; see Emmens 1973: 93–101; Kavalier 1986: 18–26). I am thankful to my mother, Dr. C. Diekamp, specialist in Flemish paintings, for this information. Despite the different meaning of the painting in itself, Ueda’s comparative commentary pertaining to an ideal representation of the pericope in Eckhart’s sense and *The Ten Ox-herding Pictures* remain very useful for understanding the differences he sees between Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhist thought. On Ueda’s confrontation between Eckhart and Zen, see Döll (2005): 63–68.



## 4 Religion and Non-religion

Even if Ueda mainly discusses the themes of “religion,” “non-religion,” “mysticism” and “non-mysticism” in separate texts, and he does not refer directly to “mysticism” or “non-mysticism” in his essays on “religion,” there are nevertheless several common elements between these threads of his research. One of these is the attention given to the theme of the “true human” (*ichi shin nin* 一真人) in his works on Meister Eckhart (See Ueda 1965a: 135 ff.; Ueda 2011a: 175; Ueda 1992; *uss*, 7: 315–339; *uss*, 8: 97–169).<sup>45</sup> Moreover, in one of the concluding chapters of his Japanese volume on Meister Eckhart (*uss*, 7) we also find an important indication for understanding his use of the term “non-religion”, as we can see from the title: *Non-religious Religion - practical devotion in the no-God (hishūkyō no shūkyō – mushin ni okeru jissenteki keiken 非宗教の宗教—無神における実践的敬虔)*. This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of Eckhart’s passages on the words from Saint Paul and the pericope of Martha and Mary, which I have addressed in the last section. Ueda concludes the chapter highlighting how Eckhart’s conception of the “true human,” as it is represented in “Martha”, could indicate a way to overcome various dualisms, such as *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, interior and exterior human, theism and atheism as well as religion and secularism, etc. (*uss*, 7: 339 Cf. Ueda 2004: 159). Eckhart’s thought, in its depth and irreducibility to simple binary oppositions, has been seen by Nishitani and Ueda as an important model for rethinking several problems bound to our contemporary situation, in particular the questions of the overcoming of nihilism and the possibility of a non-egoistic subjectivity.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup>On the great relevance of Eckhart’s thought for the recognition of human dignity, see Ueda (1965a): 40–49, and Sturlese (2007): 35–45. The theme of the “true human” in Ueda is also deeply influenced by Linji’s “true human without rank” (*mui shinnin* 無位真人). See Döll (2005): 40–41. See also Ueda’s dialogue with Suzuki, in Ueda (1973).

<sup>46</sup>On the attempt to rethink the question of human subjectivity in a way that overcomes self-attached egoity, see Ueda and Nishitani’s analyses of the expressions of the “saying ‘I’” in the works of Meister Eckhart. See Nishitani (1982): 62–68, Ueda (1986, 1989); cf. Ueda (2004): 161. Concerning the reading of Meister Eckhart’s “life without why” in the context of the overcoming of the nihilistic lack of an answer to the question “why?” see Ueda (2011a): 173–174. I have treated these themes extensively in Moiso (2015/2016). See also Bouso (2012): 331–333. It is not possible in the context of this paper to analyze another important text for the understanding of Ueda’s use of the term “non-religion”: *Between Religion and Non-Religion (shūkyō to hishūkyō no aida 宗教と非宗教の間)*. In this text, written for an anthology of essays by Nishitani, Ueda indicates that this expression, “between religion and non-religion”, which is also the title of one of Nishitani’s essays, can be understood: “as comprehending Nishitani’s whole thought and way of living his whole life. In this sense ‘between religion and non-religion’ is the other back [of the problem] of ‘the overcoming of nihilism through nihilism’ which was Nishitani’s lifetime task. [...] Perhaps non-religion [*hishūkyō* 非宗教] is neither no-religion/without-religion [*mushūkyō* 無宗教] nor anti-religion [*hanshūkyō* 反宗教]. Rather conversely, it is even possibly a religion called non-religion [*hishūkyō to iu shūkyō* 非宗教という宗教]. But what is religion in the first place? Why is religion becoming a problem? Thus, why is the “between” with non-religion becoming the place of the problem? This is probably prominently a phenomenon of human beings in the contemporary age [*gendai* 現代]. ‘There is no religion in the contemporary age. In religion there is no contemporariness’ (Nishitani Keiji). The problem concerns how we live, how living we die, in this dilemma of the ‘nihility of the contemporary age’ [*gendai no kyōmu* 現代の虚無] [...] (Ueda 2001: 309–310). See also Nishitani’s speech on *Encountering No-religion*, held at the conclusion of the Third Kyoto Zen Symposium, on “The significance of *Samādhi* and Meditation in the Contemporary World” (Nishitani 1985a: 141–143).

In the following pages, I would like to indicate some features of Ueda's considerations on "what is religion" in their connection with the problem "what does it mean to live as a human being?" Underlying these reflections emerges the existential question of facing the abyss of death. "What does it mean to live and die as human beings?" This is the fundamental question to which each of us must give his/her own individual answer. In his lifelong confrontation with Meister Eckhart and Zen, Ueda developed his understanding of the root of religious reality as a movement to the unspeakable ground of life and from there, a return to the world and life's reality. This twofold movement also constitutes a central aspect of his comprehension of being human in the paradoxical relation with death and life (Cf. Ueda 1965a: 135–139; Ueda 1992<sup>3</sup>: 229–230; Ueda 2011a: 121–133. Cf. also Haas 2007: 149–171).

In his afterword to the collection of essays *Shūkyō 宗教 (Religion Ueda 2007–2008, 1)*,<sup>47</sup> Ueda explains that in the roughly 10 years preceding its publication, the questions concerning "what does it mean to live as a human being?," "what is a human being?" gradually became the main point of his interests, together with the problem "what is religion?" I would like now to concentrate on how these two questions, "what is a human being?" and "what is religion?" are considered by Ueda in these essays as a single problem (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 425), focusing in particular on his conception of "practice."

As Ueda writes in his essay *The Contemporary Age and Religion - Problems (gendai to shūkyō – mondai 現代と宗教—「問題」)*, "in the present, the fact of being a human, of living as a human being, is felt as something which is becoming uncertain. What is it to be human? This must become again a problem for us humans." Echoing Nishitani's reflections in Nishitani 1986–1995: 16,<sup>48</sup> he affirms that:

---

<sup>47</sup> It is important to note that the association of the Japanese term 宗教 (*shūkyō*) with the meaning of the English word "religion" was only introduced in the modern context, in the Meiji era, as a translation for the term present in Western languages, causing a shift in its cognitive paradigm (Isomae 2014: 27). As explained by Isomae, "*shūkyō* 宗教 as a term can be found since early times in Japan's Chinese-character Buddhist dictionaries. In the Edo period (1615–1868), it normally conveyed the meaning of 'the true teaching, which is Buddhism'" (Isomae 2014: XV). On the complex history of the Japanese word *shūkyō* and other related terms, see Isomae (2014: XV–XIX, 27 ff.). The component Chinese-Japanese characters 宗 ("lineage," "ancestor," "school," "sect," but it is also used in Buddhist logic) and 教 ("teaching," "doctrine") have multilayer meanings from the classical Chinese and Buddhist usage, in their connection with Sanskrit terminology. Cf. *Grand dictionnaire Ricci de la langue chinoise* (2001), VI: 192–193, Muller 2022, Soothill and Lewis (1970): 255, and Matsumura (1995): 1246. Nishitani and Ueda repeatedly question the meaning of the word "religion," but, as far as I know, they do not discuss the modern connotations of the term itself. They rather try to open the term from within to a broader horizon.

<sup>48</sup> The relationship with Nishitani's thought can also be seen from the title of Nishitani's essay: *The Problems of the Contemporary Age and Religion (Gendai no mondai to shūkyō 現代の問題と宗教)*. Ueda develops Nishitani's reflections on the meaning of the verb "to be" in relation to human beings. "To be a human being means that one must become human. In other words, 'being' for a human being means 'becoming'. The human existence (to be) is essentially not divided from 'to become'" (Nishitani 1986–1995, 16: 6). These ideas are also deeply related to Nishida's idea of *praxis*: "...it is possible to conceive of *praxis* as an action in which the human being aims at human being. It is possible to claim on that basis that *praxis* is an action in which the self becomes itself. It is here that our self is constituted and born. One might say that *praxis* is the *poiesis* in which we produce our self itself" (Nishitani 1986–1995, 10: 142; Cestari 2009: 286). On Nishida's practical philosophy, see Cestari (2009).

for human beings, it is not that if they are humans, they “are humans.” Humans are humans due to the fact of becoming humans again. Humans have to learn from other humans to be humans. This is the fundamental point of what is called practicing [*kunren* 訓練] as a human being (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 34).

For Ueda, “if this aspect is neglected, for example under the assumption that humans become good humans if they are left to themselves, humans probably become strange, perverse, egocentric and inhuman [*hiningeteki* 非人間的].”

These considerations are developed in the essay, *What is Religion?* (*shūkyō to hananika* 宗教とは何か), where Ueda focuses on the uncertain and unstable ambiguity of human existence (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 426). This ambiguity, consisting in the possibility of truly becoming human or also of losing oneself, of becoming nonhuman, or even diabolical, is from the beginning inherent in the fact “of being a human being.” This ambiguity is highlighted by the need to add the adjective “true” in order to indicate the authentic mode of being human and is shown by the series of positive and negative expressions such as “true human being” (*shin ningen*, 真人間) or “true man” (*shinjin* 真人) and “brute” (*ninpinin* 人非人) (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 51). “What is a human being?” For each human being, this is not something definite, it depends on what one becomes, on whom one takes as a model for each one’s life. To be human is something that has to be learned from other humans. These are not abstract considerations, as Ueda underlines the importance of the encounter with somebody’s way of living and ways of facing concrete situations, which generate in oneself the deep impression “this is a human being.” But this encounter is not something casual, it responds to each one’s existential inquiry: “is it really okay like this?” “How would it be good?” As for Nishitani, only when one becomes a dilemma to oneself, does the search become a reality (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 35, 52–53).

Ueda sees in this encounter the deep meaning of the term “education.” Here he underlines the fundamental aspect of “training” (*kunren* 訓練), which does not only regard the acquisition of determinate norms or etiquette, but is essentially intended as human formation, and “practice” (*gyō* 行)<sup>49</sup> (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 53). This practice is for Ueda primarily the negation of the self-attached “I” (*ware* 我) and also constitutes the key aspect of his view of religion. It is important to note that Ueda insists that this negation has to be made not only regarding the individual self-attached “I” (*kojinware* 個人我), but also in relation to the various collective egos (*shūgōware* 集合我). Likewise, in the case of religion, if this negation of the collective ego is not accomplished, religion, God, and various kinds of universalism risk

---

<sup>49</sup> In Buddhism “*gyō* 行” refers to ascetic practice, but the term also means “action,” or “deed.” It is one of the terms used by Nishida for “action.” (Cestari 2009: 279). On the importance of the term in the early thought of Nishitani see Mori (1997): 5-17.

becoming ways to expand the ego, in collision with other egos (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 36, 38, 56–57, 62).<sup>50</sup>

On one hand, the ambiguity of human existence is seen by Ueda as something rooted in human existence, while on the other hand, the contemporary age is seen as presenting an essential tendency towards dehumanization. Ueda identifies the fundamental structure of human being in the “saying ‘I’ standing in the erect position,” (*chokuritsushite “ware” to iu* 直立して「〈我〉と言う」) where the ambiguity of human existence lies in the fact that this “I” can be either the self-enclosed I, as in the sentence “I am I,” or the “I” which has been opened by the negation, as in “I am I, without being I.” Ueda analyses the original form of this negation expressed by the “without being I” in the relationship of the human being to the sky and the earth, in the respect for what is above and “transcends” the self and in the thankfulness for what sustains it (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 59–61).<sup>51</sup> The loss of the relationship with what negates the self and opens it from its self-closure, and furthermore, the fact that this self-negation is not felt any more as a need, is deeply connected with the contemporary situation and its risks of large scale destruction of nature and the diffused sentiment of hollowness concerning human life itself (Cf. Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 62–63, 107–109).

In the already-mentioned essay *Gendai to shūkyō – “mondai”* (現代と宗教 — 「問題」, *Contemporary Age and Religion- “Problems”*), Ueda analyses the problematic nature and possibilities of human existence in the contemporary age from the perspective of religion. In a complex picture, he describes the tendencies towards individualization and “invisible religion,” the role of new religions, “spirituality,” animism and the problem of fundamentalisms. He also points out the ambivalence entailed in “interreligious encounter” (*shūkyō aida* 宗教間), consisting in the possibility that the confrontation with other religions becomes an incentive for the self-will of one’s own religion and that the “revitalization” through interreligious encounter becomes distorted as a “clash of civilisations.” Conversely, in the confrontation and contact with other religions there is also the possibility of a deepening of the roots of one’s own religion and from there of a religious reformative revitalization in the togetherness with other religions (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 38–39).<sup>52</sup>

Considering the problem of how to deal with the claim of “non restricted absoluteness” of one’s own religion in interreligious relationship, he excludes an inclusivistic model, which asserts the superiority of one religion over others, and suggests

<sup>50</sup> See for ex. Ueda (2007–2008), 1: 56: 「我」として問題になるのは、個人の言う「我」(個人我)だけでなく、さまざまな性質と規模における社会的集合体(会社や組合などから始まって大きな例で言えば、民族や、制度化されて構成された国家やブロックなど)の集合我も問題になります。共にある「われわれ」が他の「われわれ」に対して大きく強く「我」となるのが集合我ですが、集合我が「自我」的になった場合には歴史的には大きな危険性を現してきます。特殊にして中途的ではあっても或る種の普遍的な性格をもつことによって、構成する個々人を強制し、他の集合我に対しては正義の観念と結びついて(しばしば「神」、しかも「我が神」をもち出して)「我」を絶対化しやすいからです。世界の歴史は現実に実にさまざまな戦争の歴史になっています。』

<sup>51</sup> I have briefly presented these themes of Ueda’s thought in Moiso (2015/2016): 82–85.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Nishitani (1985). On the discussion of Ueda’s understanding of “universality” and “pluralism” see also Kopf (2014) and Davis (2020): position 1385 ff.

two concrete ways of living interreligious togetherness. The first would be the possibility of sharing deep silence, so that each one would deepen their own religion and at the same time become closer to the others. Ueda himself describes the profound impression he had from this kind of encounter. He calls this way of transcending the world together “religious” (*shūkyōteki* 宗教的).<sup>53</sup> The second way consists in being together in the world in concrete engagement for others, as happens in the case of natural disasters or in helping victims of crime. Ueda characterizes this working together as “non-religious” (*hishūkyōteki* 非宗教的) (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 42–43).<sup>54</sup> In this twofold direction of religious silence and engaged non-religious work we can see the correspondence with the dynamic of “upwards” and “downwards” which is central to Ueda’s understanding of the affinity of experience between Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism.

## 5 Final Considerations

In conclusion, Ueda’s reflections on the movement from “mysticism” and “non-mysticism,” —as it is considered proper to every true mysticism, and the question about what it means to really live as human beings, in its connection with the theme of the true human being— seem at first to be related to a model centered on an authentic essence and the risks of violence towards what does not coincide with that idea. But if we look closer at Ueda’s analysis, we see that this aspect is exactly what Ueda criticizes and tries to avoid. As can be noted in his interpretation of the affinity of experience between Meister Eckhart and Zen, he shifts attention from a discourse on “essence,” with its risks of self-appropriation, to an infinite practice of detachment, in which not only the individual egoistic self, but also its clinging to the ultimate or absolute must be negated. It is important to note that Ueda underlines that this negation must also regard the several collective egos of society, the nation, religion, and how, if this negation does not occur, there is the risk that God, the idea of justice or some kind of universalism, become means of self-appropriation and self-absolutization.

The questions about “mysticism,” “non-mysticism,” “religion” and “non-religion,” have accompanied Ueda’s lifelong research. As I have tried to show in these pages, they are connected with many themes, ranging from Ueda’s own textual analysis to his questioning about the meaning of human life and the contemporary world. Considering the relationship between Ueda’s understanding of

---

<sup>53</sup>For Ueda, if such a basis of experience of “religiously” being together misses, there is the risk that the variously organized “interreligious dialogues” might finish with festival noise or stop at gestures of reciprocal understanding (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 43).

<sup>54</sup>Ueda underlines the significance of this common engaged activity against the increasing dehumanization in the contemporary world. At the same time he points out that it could bring about a real practical reciprocal understanding of one’s own religion and the other religions (Ueda 2007–2008, 1: 43).

“mysticism” and “non-mysticism,” and his reflections on “religion,” I have tried to reflect on the possibilities and risks of this relationship, asking if this relationship has to be intended as a sort of “inclusivism.” In this concern I have tried to show how in Ueda’s texts there is a deep attention to the risks of violence related to the self-appropriation of “truth” as a form of individual and collective self-absolutization.

Ueda does not treat the relationship between “mysticism,” “non-mysticism” and “religion” and “non religion” in a linear and systematic way, but leaves it, I would say, intentionally, open. To the question “what is religion?”, a question oriented towards the essence and the definition (Cf. Davis 2020: position 483), he answers with another question, “what does it mean to live and die as human beings?” Thus, opening the inquiry on religion to the dimension of practice. This existential and practical interest is also present in his exegetical works on Meister Eckhart’s thought, even if their style and purpose differ from his essays on religion. In the former, Ueda gives much attention to reconstruct the textual and historical context of the Dominican Meister, while in his essays on “religion,” his questioning of “religion” does not aim to describe the various existing religions.<sup>55</sup> It is rather his attempt to locate himself in the place of this existential question, in a dialogue that also involves also the reader’s own inquiry.<sup>56</sup>

## Bibliography

- Arisaka, Yoko 有坂阳子. 1996. The Nishida Enigma. The Principle of the New World Order. *Monumenta Nipponica* 51(1): 81–105.
- 有坂阳子. 1997. Beyond ‘East and West’: Nishida’s Universalism and Postcolonial Critique. *The Review of Politics* 59(3): 541–560.
- 有坂阳子. 2014. Action, History, and the Dialectical Universal in Nishida’s Philosophy. In *Kitarō Nishida in der Philosophie des 20. Jahrhunderts. Mit Texten Nishidas in deutscher Übersetzung*, eds. Rolf Elberfeld and Arisaka Yoko, 146–170. Freiburg/München: Karl Alber.
- 有坂阳子. 2020. The Controversial Cultural Identity of Japanese Philosophy. In *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy*, ed. Bret W. Davis, kindle ed., chapter 36, position 21262–21960. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Beccarisi, Alessandra. 2012. *Eckhart*. Roma: Carocci.

---

<sup>55</sup>It has to be noted that Ueda’s attention to Meister Eckhart’s own historical, theological and textual context is wider in some of his works, depending on the audience and readers addressed by Ueda. It is also relevant to note that Ueda generally does not give much space to the discussion of the “modalities of doing religion” which have been called “liturgical” and “immediate-practical” by A. Y. Chau. Instead, Ueda gives preference to the analysis of “personal-cultivational,” “discursive-scriptural” and “relational” modalities. On the meaning of these “modalities” and their importance for rethinking the task of “religious pluralism” see Chau (2019): 25–33. But see also Ueda’s considerations on “worship” as “one of the most important practices in Zen monastic life” (Ueda 2006b: 80–81).

<sup>56</sup>I agree with S. Döll’s accurate concluding considerations in his chapter on Ueda’s thought. See Döll (2020): position 14132–14159.

- Beierwaltes, Werner. 2000. *Platonismo nel Cristianesimo*. Trans. M. Falcioni. Milano: Vita e Pensiero.
- Bouso, Raquel. 2012. Action et contemplation: sur une lecture eckhartienne de Shizuteru Ueda. *Théologiques* 20(1–2): 313–339.
- Cestari, Matteo. 2009. From Seeing to Acting, Rethinking Nishida Kitarō's Practical Philosophy. In *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 6. Confluences and Cross-Currents*, ed. James W. Heisig and Raquel Bouso, 273–296. Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture.
- . 2010. Between Emptiness and Absolute Nothingness. Reflections on Negation in Nishida and Buddhism. In *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 7. Classical Japanese Philosophy*, ed. James W. Heisig and Rein Raud, 320–346. Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture.
- Chau, Adam Yuet. 2019. *Religion in China. Ties that Bind*. Cambridge, Polity press.
- Coronil, Fernando. 1996. Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Nonimperial Geohistorical Categories. *Cultural Anthropology* 11: 51–87.
- Dall'Igna, Antonio. 2017. *Homo ab humo dicitur. La radicalità del rapporto Dio-uomo nel "Commento al Vangelo di Giovanni" di Meister Eckhart*. Milano: Mimesis.
- Davis, Bret W. 2008. Letting Go of God for Nothing. Ueda Shizuteru's Non-Mysticism and the Question of Ethics in Zen Buddhism. In *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 2. Neglected Themes and Hidden Variations*, ed. Victor Sōgen Hori and Melissa Anne-Marie Curley, 221–250. Nagoya: Nanzan.
- . 2019. The Kyoto School. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/kyoto-school/>. Accessed 29 May 2020.
- . 2020. Introduction: What is Japanese Philosophy? In *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy*, ed. Bret W. Davis, kindle ed., position 476–3033. New York: Oxford University Press.
- De Certeau, Michel. 2010. *Sulla mistica*. Trans. D. Bosco. Brescia: Morcelliana.
- De Libera, Alain. 1998. *Introduzione alla mistica renana*. Trans. A. Granata. Milano: Jaca Book.
- Döll, Steffen. 2005. *Wozu also suchen? Zur Einführung in das Denken von Ueda Shizuteru*. München: Iudicium.
- . 2020. Ueda Shizuteru: The Self That Is Not a Self in a Twofold World. In *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy*, ed. Bret W. Davis, kindle ed., chapter 22, position 13877–14271. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Meister Eckhart. 1955. *Deutsche Predigten und Traktate*. Trans. J. Quint. München: C. Hanser Verlag.
- . 1958. *Die deutschen Werke. Predigten Erster Band*. Trans. J. Quint. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- . 1976. *Die deutschen Werke. Predigten Dritter Band*. Trans. J. Quint. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- . 1992. *Comento al Vangelo di Giovanni*. Trans. M. Vannini. Roma: Città Nuova.
- Elberfeld, Rolf. 1999. *Kitarō Nishida (1870–1945). Das Verstehen der Kulturen. Moderne Japanische Philosophie und die Frage nach der Interkulturalität*. Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi.
- Emmens, J.A. 1973. 'Eins aber ist nötig'. Zu Inhalt und Bedeutung von Markt- und Küchenstücken des 16. Jahrhunderts. In ed. J. Bruyn et al., *Album Amicorum J. G. van Gelder*, 93–101. Den Haag: Nijhoff.
- Faure, Bernard. 1993. *Chan Insights and Oversights. An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 1995. The Kyoto School and Reverse Orientalism. In *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*, eds. Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Steven Heine, 245–281. Albany: Suny Press.
- Feenberg, Andrew. 1999 (January). Experience and Culture: Nishida's 'Path to the Things Themselves'. *Philosophy East and West* 49(1): 28–44.
- Feenberg, Andrew and Arisaka Yoko. 1990 (June). Experiential Ontology: The Origins of The Nishida Philosophy in the Doctrine of Pure Experience. *Philosophical Quarterly* XXX.2(118): 173–205.
- Fiori, Emiliano. 2017. Il *nous* e l'altare: La teologia mistica di Dionigi Areopagita al di là di Evagrio. In *L'anti-Babele. Sulla mistica degli antichi e dei moderni*, ed. I. Adinolfi et al., 185–216. Genova: Il Melangolo.

- Frank, Manfred. 1994. *Il dio a venire. Lezioni sulla Nuova Mitologia*. Trans. F. Cuniberto. Torino: Einaudi.
- Goto-Jones, Christopher, ed. 2008. *Re-Politicising the Kyoto School as Philosophy*. London: Routledge.
- Greene, Eric M. 2021. *Chan Before Chan: Meditation, Repentance, and Visionary Experience in Chinese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Grand dictionnaire Ricci de la langue chinoise*. 2001. Paris: Institut Ricci de Paris et de Taipei; Desclée de Brouwer.
- Gyatso, Janet. 1999. Healing Burns with Fire: The Facilitation of Experience in Tibetan Buddhism. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67 (1): 113–147.
- Haas, Alois M. 2007. *Mystik als Aussage. Erfahrungs-, Denk- und Redeformen Christlicher Mystik*. Frankfurt am Main – Leipzig: Verlag der Weltreligionen.
- . 2016. *Grandi Mistici. Meister Eckhart*. Trans. E. Gatti. Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna.
- Halbfass, Wilhelm. 2017. *India and Europe: An Essay in Philosophical Understanding*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers PVT. LTD.
- . 2009. Nishitani Keiji and the Overcoming of Modernity (1940–1945). In *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 6: Confluences and Cross-Currents*, ed. Raquel Bouso and James W. Heisig, 297–329. Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture.
- Heisig, James W., and John C. Maraldo, eds. 1995. *Rude Awakenings. Zen, the Kyoto School, & the Question of Nationalism*. Heisig, Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai'i Press.
- Isomae, Jun'ichi 磯前順一. 2014. *Religious Discourse in Modern Japan. Religion, State, and Shintō*. Trans. G. Amstutz and L.E. Riggs. Leiden-Boston: Brill.
- Kavaler, E. Matt. 1986. Erotische elementen in de markttaferelen van Beuckelaer, Aertsen en hun tijdgenoten. In [Exhibition catalogue] *Joachim Beuckelaer. Het markt- en keukenstuk in de Nederlanden 1550–1650*. Gent: Museum voor Schone Kunsten.
- King, Richard. 1999. *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Kopf, Gereon. 2014. Philosophy as Expression: Towards a New Model of Global Philosophy. 西田哲学会年報 *Nishida Tetsugakkai Nenpō* 11: 181–155.
- Langer, Otto. 2004. *Christliche Mystik im Mittelalter. Mystik und Rationalisierung – Stationen eines Konflikts*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Lo Turco, Bruno. 2006. Salvare il buddhismo dalla scienza. Osservazioni su una confusione di giochi linguistici. In *Il buddhismo contemporaneo. Rappresentazioni, istituzioni, modernità*, eds. Marta Sernesi and Federico Squarcini, 37–59. Firenze: Società Editrice Fiorentina.
- Liddell, Henry G. and Scott Robert. 1996. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Malinar, Angelika. 2016. Konfigurationen von Mystik zwischen Indien und Europa. In *Meister-Eckhart-Jahrbuch*, ed. Regina D. Schiewer, vol. X, 103–120. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Maraldo, John. 2006. Review: The War Over the Kyoto School. *Monumenta Nipponica* 61 (3): 375–406.
- Matsuda, Mika 松田美佳. 1995. Eckharts 'ohne Warum' im Zusammenhang mit der thomanischen Teleologie. *shūkyōtetsugakukenkū 宗教哲学研究 [Society for Philosophy of Religion]* 12: 139–148.
- Matsumura, Akira 松村明, ed. 1995. *Daijisen 大辞泉 (Major Japanese Dictionary)*. Japan: Shōgakusan.
- Merton, Thomas. 1968. *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. New York: New Directions.
- Mieth, Dietmar. 1969. *Die Einheit von Vita activa und vita contemplativa in den deutschen Predigten und Traktaten Meister Eckharts und bei Johannes Tauler*. Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet.
- Miyake, Toshio 三宅俊夫. 2010. *Occidentalismi. La narrative storica giapponese*. Venezia: Cafoscarina.
- Moiso, Carlotta. 2010/2011. *Gottheit e vita activa. L'interpretazione di Meister Eckhart di Ueda Shizuteru*. Tesi di Laurea, Università degli Studi di Torino. Facoltà di lettere e Filosofia. Corso di Laurea triennale in Filosofia. Not published work.



- . 2015/2016. *Il nulla e l'uomo vero. L'interpretazione di Meister Eckhart nel pensiero di Nishitani Keiji e Ueda Shizuteru*. Tesi di Laurea Magistrale, Università degli Studi di Torino. Dipartimento di Filosofia e Scienze dell'Educazione. Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Filosofia. Not published work.
- Mori, Tetsurō 森 哲郎. 1997. Religion in the Early Thought of Nishitani Keiji: The Bottomlessness of Nature. *Zen Buddhism Today* 14: 1–18.
- . 森 哲郎. 2020. Modern Zen Thinkers: D.T. Suzuki, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi, and Masao Abe (Part one). In *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy*, ed. Bret W. Davis. kindle ed., chapter 11, position 7316–7566. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Muller, Charles, ed. 2022. Digital Dictionary of Buddhism URL <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb/>. Accessed 11/09/2022.
- Nishitani, Keiji 西谷啓治. 1982. *Religion and Nothingness*. Trans. J. Van Bragt. Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press.
- . 西谷啓治. 1985a. Encountering No-religion. *Zen Buddhism Today* 3: 141–144.
- . 西谷啓治. 1986–1995. *Nishitani Keiji chosakushū* 西谷啓治著作集 [The Collected Writings of Nishitani Keiji], 26 vols. Tōkyō: Sōbunsha.
- Ōhashi, Ryōsuke 大橋良介. 2001. *Kyōtōgakuha to Nihon-kaigun: Shinshiryō “Ōshima memo” wo megutte* 『「京都学派と日本海軍」新史料「大島メモ」をめぐって』 [The Kyoto School and the Japanese Navy: On the Newly Found Historical Document, The Ōshima Memoranda]. Kyōto: PHP Kenkyūsho.
- . 大橋良介. 2011. *Die Philosophie der Kyōto-Schule. Zweite, erweiterte und mit einer neuen Einführung versehen Auflage*. Freiburg-München: Karl Alber.
- Ōhashi, Ryōsuke 大橋良介 and Akitomi, Katsuya 秋富 克哉. 2020. The Kyoto School: Transformations Over Three Generations. Trans. B.W. Davis. In *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy*, ed. Bret W. Davis, kindle ed., Chapter 16, position 10504–11109. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Otto, Rudolf. 1971. *West-Östliche Mystik. Vergleich und Unterscheidung zur Wesensdeutung. Dritte Auflage, überarbeitet von Gustav Menching*. München: C.H. Beck.
- Parkes, Graham. 1997. The Putative Fascism of the Kyoto School and the Political Correctness of the Modern Academy. *Philosophy East and West* 47 (3): 305–336.
- . 2011. Heidegger and Japanese Fascism: An Unsubstantiated Connection. In *Japanese and Continental Philosophy. Conversations with the Kyoto School*, ed. Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth, 247–265. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Ruh, Kurt. 1989. *Meister Eckhart. Theologe-Prediger-Mystiker*. München: C.H. Beck.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- . 酒井 直樹, Isomae Jun'ichi 磯前順一. 2013. *Kindai no chōkoku to Kyōtōgakuha. Kindaisei, teikoku, fuhensei* 『「近代の超克」と京都学派. 近代性・帝国・普遍性』 [The “Overcoming of Modernity” and the Kyōto School. Modernity, Empire and Universalism]. Japan: Ibunsha.
- Sernesi, Marta. 2006. Alla ricerca del vero *dharma*: modelli descrittivi in competizione e la nascita del *Western Buddhism*. In *Il buddhismo contemporaneo. Rappresentazioni, istituzioni, modernità*, ed. Marta Sernesi and Federico Squarcini, 11–35. Firenze: Società Editrice Fiorentina.
- Sharf, Robert H. 1995a. The Zen of Japanese Nationalism. In *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr., 107–160. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1995b. Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience. *Numen* 42 (3): 228–283.
- . 2000. The Rhetoric of Experience and the Study of Religion. *Cognitive Models and Spiritual Maps (a special issue of the Journal of Consciousness Studies)* 7 (11/12): 267–287.
- Soothill, William E., and Hodous Lewis. 1970. *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents and a Sanskrit-Pali Index*. Taipei: Cheng-Wen Publishing Company.
- Sturlese, Loris. 2007. *Homo divinus. Philosophische Projekte in Deutschland zwischen Meister Eckhart und Heinrich Seuse*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

- Suzuki, Daisetz Teitarō 鈴木(貞太郎)大拙. 1923. The Ten Cow-herding Pictures. *The Eastern Buddhist* (Original Series): 176–195.
- 鈴木(貞太郎)大拙. 1965. A History of Zen Buddhism by Heinrich Dumoulin [Review]. *The Eastern Buddhist New Series* 1: 123–126.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1965a. *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit. Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus G. Mohn.
- 上田閑照. 1965b. Der Zen-Buddhismus als ‘Nicht-Mystik’ unter besonderen Berücksichtigung des Vergleichs zur Mystik Meister Eckharts. In *Intransparente Welt. Festschrift für J. Gebser*, ed. G. Schulz, 291–313. Bern-Stuttgart: Huber.
- 上田閑照. 1973. The Sayings of Rinzai: A Conversation Between Daisetz Suzuki and Ueda Shizuteru. *The Eastern Buddhist New Series* 6(1): 92–110.
- 上田閑照. 1981. Die Bewegung nach oben und die Bewegung nach unten: Zen-Buddhismus im Vergleich mit Meister Eckhart. *Erano* 50: 223–272.
- 上田閑照. 1985. Vorüberlegungen zum Problem der All-Einheit im Zen Buddhismus. In *All-Einheit. Wege eines Gedankens in Ost und West*, ed. Dieter Henrich, 136–150. Stuttgart: Klein-Cotta.
- 上田閑照. 1986. Meister Eckharts Predigten. Ihre “Wahrheit” und ihre geschichtliche Situation. In *Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter. Symposium Kloster Engelberg 1984, Germanistische Symposien 7, Jahrbuch*, ed. K. Ruh, 34–48. Stuttgart: Metzler.
- 上田閑照. 1989. Eckhart und Zen am Problem ‘Freiheit und Sprache’. In *Luther und Shinran – Eckhart und Zen. Joachim Wach – Vorlesungen der Philipps-Universität Marburg*, ed. M. Kraatz, III, E.J. Brill, 21–92. Köln.
- 上田閑照. 1991. *Nishida Kitarō wo yomu* 西田幾多郎を読む [Reading Nishida Kitarō]. Japan: Iwanami.
- 上田閑照. 1992<sup>3</sup>. “Kaminoko no tanjō” to “shinsei he no toppa” – doitsugo sekkyōshū ni okeru maisutā Ekkuharuto no konponshisō 「神の子の誕生」と「神性への突破」-ドイツ説教集におけるマイスター・エックハルトの根本思想-[“The Birth of God’s Son” and “The Breakthrough in the Godhead”. The fundamental thought in Meister Eckhart’s German Sermons]. In *Doitsu shinpishugi kenkyū* ドイツ神秘主義研究 [Research on German Mysticism], ed. Ueda Shizuteru, 107–232. Japan: Sōbunsha.
- 上田閑照. 1995. Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question. In *Rude Awakenings. Zen, the Kyoto School, & the Question of Nationalism*, eds. James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, 77–106. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawai’i Press.
- 上田閑照. 2001. “Nishitani Keiji – shūkyō to hishūkyō no aida” 西谷啓治—宗教と非宗教 [Nishitani Keiji – Between Religion and Non-Religion]. In *Shūkyō to hishūkyō no aida* 宗教と非宗教 [between religion and non-religion], ed. Ueda Shizuteru, 309–338. Tōkyō: Iwanami shoten.
- 上田閑照. 2004. ‘Nothingness’ in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism: With Particular Reference to the Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology. In *The Buddha Eye: An Anthology of the Kyoto School and Its Contemporaries*, ed. Frederick Franck, 157–169. Bloomington: World Wisdom.
- 上田閑照. 2006a. Libertà e linguaggio in Meister Eckhart e nel buddhismo zen. In C. Querci and C. Saviani, eds. and Trans. *Zen e filosofia*, 93–212. Palermo: L’Epos.
- 上田閑照. 2006b. La pratica dello zen. In C. Querci and C. Saviani, eds. and Trans. *Zen e filosofia*, eds. and Trans. C. Querci and C. Saviani, 55–89, Palermo: L’Epos.
- 上田閑照. 2007–2008. *Ueda Shizuteru tetsugaku collection* 上田閑照哲学コレクション [Ueda Shizuteru’s Philosophical Collection], 5 vols. Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten.
- 上田閑照. 2011a. *Wer und was bin ich? Zur Phänomenologie des Selbst im Zen-Buddhismus*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Karl Alber.
- 上田閑照. 2011b. Contributions to Dialogue with the Kyoto School. Trans: Davis, B.W. In *Japanese and Continental Philosophy. Conversations with the Kyoto School*, eds. Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder and Jason M. Wirth, 19–32, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Veneziani, Marco, ed. 2002. *Experientia. X Colloquio Internazionale. Roma, 4–6 gennaio 2001*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki editore.
- Walshe, Maurice O’C. 2009. *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*. Trans. and ed. Maurice O’C. Walshe, revised with a Foreword by B. McGinn.
- Williams, Paul. 2009. *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. 2nd ed., Kindle ed. New York: Routledge.
- Yusa, Michiko 遊佐道子. 2002. *Zen & Philosophy. An Intellectual Biography of Nishida Kitarō*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.

# Part X

## The Space Between East and West: On Zen Buddhism

### Introduction

This chapter is representative of what Ueda has become most widely acknowledged for, that is his engagement with Zen Buddhism. In the first article, “In-between: Religious Quest and Philosophy of Life in Ueda and Buber”, Raquel Bouso enlarges Ueda’s project of spanning diverse traditions, in this case between Zen and Hasidism. She takes up another vital theme of Ueda’s already pointed to by Ōta: that is, the philosophy of life borne out of the two-fold world. Bouso engages the question of Ueda’s relation to Zen Buddhism, designating its impact on the existential dimensions while problematizing the impact of cultural and religious traditions on his philosophy. By placing Buber’s revitalized Hasidism in dialogue with Ueda’s philosophy, this chapter sheds light on Ueda’s unique approach to Zen Buddhism and how it shaped his philosophical trajectory. Bouso suggests that through the hermeneutics of Zen texts and images Ueda developed an existential standpoint enabling him to rethink the role of religion in our secular, or possibly post-secular, modern society.

In his essay, “The Self that is not a Self”: Ueda and Guoan’s Ten Ox Pictures”, Gereon Kopf enacts a profound elucidation of the core of Ueda’s phenomenology of the non-self. Kopf analyzes philosophical commentary on Guoan’s version of the Zen Ox-Herding parable. This commentary highlights Ueda’s view of the self and his version of mysticism. Kopf claims that Ueda’s reading reflects the Tendai concept of “buddha-nature” and the “I-and-Thou” dialogical relationship as articulated by Buber, concluding that Ueda’s commentary on the parable discloses a central feature of his understanding of consciousness.

# Chapter 20

## In-Between: Religious Quest and Philosophy of Life in Ueda and Buber



Raquel Bouso

### Abbreviation

USS Ueda, Shizuteru. 2001–2003. *Ueda Shizuteru shū* 上田閑照集 [Collected Works of Ueda Shizuteru], 11 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami

*The way in this world is like the edge of a blade.  
On this side is the underworld, and on that side is the  
underworld, and the way of life lies between.*

Martin Buber

## 1 Introduction: Tradition and Renewal

The renowned scholar of the Kabbalah Gershom Scholem once heard the following story, which is part of a collection of Hasidic tales retold by the Hebrew novelist and storyteller, S. J. Agnon:

When the Baal Shem had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer—and what he had set out to perform was done. When a generation later the “Maggid” of Meseritz was faced with the same task he would go to the same place in the woods and say: We can no longer light the fire, but we can still speak the prayers—and what he wanted done became reality. Again a generation later Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had to perform this task. And he too went into the woods and said: We can no longer light a fire, nor do we know the secret meditations belonging to the prayer, but we do know the place in the woods to which it all belongs—and that must be sufficient; and sufficient it was. But when another generation had passed and Rabbi Israel

---

R. Bouso (✉)

Department of Humanities, Pompeu Fabra University, Barcelona, Spain  
e-mail: [raquel.bouso@upf.edu](mailto:raquel.bouso@upf.edu)

© Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022

R. Müller et al. (eds.), *Tetsugaku Companion to Ueda Shizuteru*, Tetsugaku Companions to Japanese Philosophy 5, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1\\_20](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1_20)

299

of Rishin was called upon to perform the task, he sat down on his golden chair in his castle and said: We cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of how it was done. And, the story-teller adds, the story which he told had the same effect as the actions of the other three. (Scholem 1995: 355)

As Scholem remarks, this anecdote can symbolize either the decay of a great movement—namely, Jewish pietism that developed in Eastern Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century—or a mere transformation of its values.

Scholem admits that “the secret life” conveyed by the above story “can break out tomorrow in you or in me,” (Scholem 1995: 355) but professors can only recount history once the story ends, and to speak about the future is the task of prophets. Significantly, the historian of Christian mysticism Bernard McGinn, who has greatly contributed to interreligious dialogue, also refers to this anecdote to describe his own scholarly task. McGinn claims that, as we learn from a number of Christian mystics, studying and writing can also be considered spiritual practices (McGinn 2007: 141–146). In all likelihood, Martin Buber (1878–1965) and Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照 (1926–2019) could also use this story to illustrate their respective scholarly approaches to the religious traditions of Hasidism and Zen Buddhism, which they both study in a secular and religiously changing contemporary world. However, they do not merely pass on stories but rather recreate and interpret them in their own way to infuse spiritual life into their own philosophical inquiries and time. At least, this is the working assumption from which this paper sets out to consider the philosophical and religious significance of Ueda’s work in light of Buber’s writings.

It is well known that Ueda mentions Buber alongside Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Jaspers, and Bollnow, as part of his background in the areas of ontology and the philosophy of religion (Ueda 1994: 10). Nevertheless, the aim of this paper is not to discuss Buber’s influence on Ueda or the dialogue that Ueda maintains with Buber’s thought in his own work, which centers especially on the interpersonal relations between the I and Thou. The focus here is a common concern that, in my view, both philosophers share, that is, that the highest truth can be revealed in everyday life, and that it is possible to realize this in our modern world. I also suggest that this insight of Buber’s might be inspired from his reading of Hasidic tales and with Ueda by way of his reading of Zen *mondō* 問答 (lit. questions and answers), showing the commitment of both philosophers to rediscovering their historical spiritual traditions and to turn them into the living present.

## 2 Buber’s Hasidism

*Between the teaching and religion, leading from the one to the other, stand parable and myth. [...] the parable as the word of this man himself, the myth as the impact of this life on the consciousness of the age.*

Martin Buber

Hasidism is the common name of a Jewish mystical revival movement that developed in Eastern Europe in the latter half of the eighteenth century and became a

major force within modern Judaism before the end of that century. It should be noted that Hasidism did not emerge from the schools of the higher social strata or leading intellectuals; on the contrary, its first teachers belonged to a social group of popular preachers who wandered usually between small and poor Jewish communities (Dan 1987: 3785). It is also worth mentioning that the spiritual side of religious life holds a central place in Hasidic teachings: “The *fons et origo* of Hasidism lies in the overwhelming experience of the all-pervasive presence of God” (Green 2009: 317–318). Great emphasis is placed on right intentions in prayer, spiritual repentance, love and fear of God, social justice, and love for fellow people. The movement would represent a revival of such values within the framework of everyday religious life.

However, critical scholarship has remarked that in some respects Hasidism appears as a kind of “ethical Judaism” based on an enthusiastic celebration of festivals and social ethics and thus often lacking strict adherence to the commandments of Judaism. This was precisely the case of some Jewish writers in Hebrew and Yiddish who in the early twentieth century presented Hasidism in nostalgic terms after having abandoned traditional Judaism and embraced Western ways of life. Thus, scholars such as Martin Buber have been regarded as perpetuators of this romantic image of Hasidism as pure, spiritual Judaism that conveys love of Israel, love of God, and love toward every human being (Bertman 2000: 80; Dan 1987: 3791). In fact, as Martina Urban warns, any discussion of Buber’s work on Hasidism must take into consideration the debate that arose in the wake of Gershom Scholem’s critical reexamination of the premises underlying Buber’s interpretation of Hasidism, a controversy both on scholarly method and on Jewish identity (Urban 2008: 1).

## 2.1 *An Image of Man, a Way of Life*

Examining this question in depth is not the aim of this paper, nor is this the place to delve into the trajectory of Buber’s thought; however, some details may be relevant in order to highlight the aspects of his thought that better suit comparison with Ueda.

As a child in Lemberg (now Lvov, Poland), Buber came into contact with the Hasidim surrounding his grandfather, who was a distinguished Midrashic scholar (Rudavsky 1967: 236). In 1906, Buber published his first literary compilation of Hasidic stories, *Tales of Rabbi Nachman (Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman)* and 2 years later *Legend of the Baal Shem (Die Legende des Baalschem)*, which were followed by essays on the meaning of Hasidism for modern men. As a philosopher, Buber is particularly well known for his dialogical philosophy, and therefore it is worth questioning the impact of Hasidism on his thought.<sup>1</sup> Scholem, for

---

<sup>1</sup>In the collection of autobiographical fragments entitled *Meetings*, Buber explains how before writing *I and Thou* and as a sort of “spiritual askesis,” he did not read about Hasidism nor philosophy, except Descartes (Buber 2002: 66).

instance, accused him of freely selecting or using things according to his own existential philosophy, and pointed out his preference for Hasidic legend over discursive writings,<sup>2</sup> and his emphasis on mysticism or existential aspects detrimental to the real meaning of the text and the centrality of tradition. In response to Scholem's criticism, Maurice Friedman maintains that Buber was in dialogue with Hasidism many years before his philosophy developed (Friedman 1981: 149), and Samuel Dresner claims that Buber's understanding of Hasidism moved—much as his general thought—from mysticism to existentialism, i.e., from his concern with the ecstatic quality of Hasidism to its “hallowing the everyday” and the “concrete here and now” (Dresner 1983: 166). Buber himself acknowledged that his presentation of Hasidism was not historical as it did not discuss Hasidic teachings in their entirety nor took into consideration the opposing views that prevailed between different schools within the movement. When he started studying the sources, his aim was not to present Hasidism in a comprehensive way, neither historically nor hermeneutically. His task had instead essentially the same nature as his work on Judaism: “I have dealt with that in the life and teaching of Judaism which, according to my insight, is its proper truth and is decisive for its function in the previous and future history of the human spirit” (Buber 1991: 731).

Indeed, the concern with a true way of life seems a constant in Buber's intellectual journey, which is described by Mendes-Flohr (1989) as an initial search for community, first in the domain of subjective-cosmic *Erlebnis* (lived experience) and later in the sphere of interpersonal relations. His interest would have begun with Nietzsche and his Dionysian celebration of ecstatic oneness, which led him to participate in the *Neue Gemeinschaft* community as an attempt to overcome the spirit of disunity, to devote his doctoral dissertation to the problem of individuation in Cusanus and Boehme, to regard the movement of Zionism as a renewal of the primal energies of Jews, and to proclaim an affinity with Daoism. This new turn culminated in his most celebrated work *I and Thou* (*Ich und Du*) in 1923, although according to Mendes-Flohr his dialogical philosophy was somehow already present in his first writings, for instance, in the concept *das Zwischenmenschliche* (the inter-human) (Mendes-Flohr 1989: 31). A relevant detail for the purpose of this paper is that for years he was Professor of Comparative History of Religions at the University of Frankfurt, and furthermore, he actively engaged in comparative mysticism and the study of Eastern thought.<sup>3</sup> During these years, and together with Franz Rosenzweig, he started the translation of the Hebrew Bible into German, which was published in 1937 in 15 volumes. In 1938 he moved to Israel, where he taught at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and worked for peace between Jews and Arabs until he died in 1965.

---

<sup>2</sup>Buber's chief sources of knowledge of Hasidism were its legends, but Martina Urban argues that he also draws upon Hasidic theoretical literature, even if only a few scholarly monographs on the movement were available when he embarked on his study at the beginning of the twentieth century (Urban 2008: 2).

<sup>3</sup>On Buber's interest in East Asian religions, see: Herman (1996), Moran (1972), Werblowsky (2002), Friedman (1976) and Nelson (2017a, b).



## 2.2 *The Redemption of the Everyday (Die Erlösung des Alltags)*

Buber devoted an important part of his life, 55 years, to reword the tales and teachings of Hasidism. As noted above, this work was less concerned with historiography or with defining theoretical concepts than with portraying an image of man, a way of life. Mainly, Buber learned from Hasidic tales that redemption, like creation, takes place at every moment. Unlike in mainstream Judaism, so to speak, in Hasidism, redemption is not dependent upon Messianic calculations or any apocalyptic event, but on the unpremeditated turning of our whole world-life to God. According to Buber, this turn is available to the entirety of mankind throughout the ages.

Based on the Kabbalistic tradition—in particular on the Lurianic school—and incorporating many elements of Neo-Platonism, Hasidism regards all things as “shells” within which the divine spark is contained, which is to be released by the wholehearted joy of human action. In the words of the Hasid master Baal-Shem Tov:

a man is benefited by the life that is in everything that he wears and eats and even in the tools that he uses; in them are the holy “sparks” that belong to the “root” of his soul; when he uses this tool or when he eats food even for the needs of his body, he brings salvation to these “sparks” (Buber 1988: 207).

In this manner, everything can become material for sanctification, for the profane is for Hasidism only a designation for “the not yet hallowed.” It is only necessary for one’s relation to any given object to be consecrated in his life through nature, work, friendship, marriage, and solidarity with one’s community. Thus, the basic distinction between the sacred and the profane<sup>4</sup> is overcome in Hasidism:

Hasidism is not pantheism. It teaches the absolute transcendence of God, but as combined with his conditioned immanence. The world is an irradiation of God, but as it is endowed with an Independence of existence and striving, it is apt, always and everywhere, to form a crust around itself. Thus, a divine spark lives in every thing and being, but each such spark is enclosed by an isolating Shell. Only man can liberate it and re-join it with the Origin: by holding holy converse with the thing and using it in a holy manner, that is, so that his intention in doing so remains directed towards God’s transcendence. Thus the divine immanence emerges from the exile of the “shells.” (Buber 1958: 126–127)

The Hasidim live in and with the world. Hence, man is responsible for the world, and as Buber remarks, modern men may learn from this attitude, not by imitating but by recreating it:

---

<sup>4</sup>Cf. On the Hasidic “sacramental existence,” Buber says that “That double growth [of the image of God and the will to realization] is no longer satisfied by the boundary drawn in life between God and the world and the boundary drawn between the holy and the profane. Both boundaries are static, fixed, timeless. Both allow the currently real happening no influence. The image of God that has become greater demands a more dynamic, labile boundary between God and the world, for it means a knowledge of a strength willing to flow forth and yet self-limiting, of a resisting and yet also yielding substance” (Buber 1988: 172). Yet, for Buber, the separation (between God and the world, sacred and profane, nature and spirit) is necessary, see Bertman 2000: 82–84.

Every person born into this world represents something new, something that never existed before, something original and unique. “[...] Every single man is a new thing in the world, and is called upon to fulfill his particularity in this world”. [...] Every man’s foremost task is the actualization of his unique, unprecedented and never-recurring potentialities, and not the repetition of something that another, and be it even the greatest, has already achieved. (Buber 1958: 139–140)

### 2.3 *Hasidism as a Kulturkritik*

According to Buber’s critics, his attempt to render Hasidism meaningful to modern man determined his reading, and his focus on the “meeting” between man and God led him to emphasize the relationship of the Hasidim to the concrete world at the expense of the Gnostic —dualistic and world-rejecting— elements that Hasidism adopted from Kabbalistic theosophy. As we have seen, Buber’s interest in Hasidism was not primarily scholarly and his recovery of the past was not mainly based on historical-philological method. In fact, Buber contributed to the reawakening of interest in Hasidism in opposition to the emphasis of *Jüdische Wissenschaft* on rationalism, philology, and positivism, as well as “its pursuit of a historiography ‘which sees the past as a meaningless ‘promiscuous agglomeration of happenings,’ thus fragmenting ‘Jewish history into many tiny problems’” (Dresner 1983: 165). Instead, Urban describes Buber’s earliest anthologies as a poetically and imagistically delineated phenomenology of Hasidic ecstatic mysticism (Urban 2008: 2), and by means of a very exacting analysis, proposes regarding him as a critic of modern culture and an advocate of Jewish modernism. From this standpoint, his ahistorical representation of the movement could be understood as part of his hermeneutic programme. Looking at Hasidism as a lived experience, he could reevaluate Jewish spiritual sensibilities and intellectual orientations, and represent the renewal of the individual and the community, between continuity and innovation.

By so doing, it has been said that Buber enriched religious and philosophic literature with a lasting contribution, and was influential far beyond modern Jewish thought, both religious and secular.<sup>5</sup> As for the Jewish theology of the earlier twentieth century, according to Green, the personalistic language of Hasidism was attractive to figures like Buber due to the influence of existentialism. By contrast, the interest in the nontheistic and more abstract religious language that also lies at the heart of this movement awoke later when more Hasidic materials were accessible as a result of the influence of mysticism, especially that of contemplative Buddhist and Hindu origin, and when “the ‘death-of-God’ movement served to underscore the fact that God as ‘Father’ or ‘King’ —the essential personal metaphors preserved in later Jewish theology— describes a religious reality no longer known by many contemporary seekers” (Green 2009: 320–321). Not only did Hasidism find a more visible place in the history of religions, but its revival also paved the way for

---

<sup>5</sup>For a more detailed account of the reception of Buber’s Hasidism, see Friedman (1985): 425–428.

cross-cultural and interdisciplinary comparisons. In an epoch marked by the “eclipse of God,”<sup>6</sup> Buber enhanced the inclusion of experience in the “magic of existence,” the “myth-forming power,” to use his own words in his “The Teaching of the Tao” (Buber 1992: 170). In this work, Buber distinguishes science, law, religion, and teachings, the latter being the basic spiritual force in the East that cannot be restored nor renewed: “eternally the same, still it must eternally begin anew” (Buber 1992: 171). In this new beginning, parable and myth play a vital role. Thus, when a person who has verified and clearly understood the teachings seeks those in need and speaks to them in a language they can comprehend, using parables, the memory of his life then becomes a parable in itself, a sort of myth that drives towards the future, towards a yearning for religious freedom, for teachings come to life again.

### 3 Ueda’s Zen

*The world in which we truly live is not directly upon the ground,  
nor one inch above the ground, but in the space  
between the two between the two, yet somehow encompassing  
the two.*

Ueda Shizuteru

Chan (later known as Zen in Japan) is a school of Buddhism that first developed in China in the sixth century CE. From there it spread to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam in the ninth century, and moved to other parts of the world in modern times. Zen is different from other Buddhist schools mainly because it focuses on practice, prioritizing sitting meditation (*zazen* 座禪) usually under the personal guidance of a master (*sanzen* 參禪). The Japanese philosopher Ueda Shizuteru, recognized as the last exponent of the Kyoto School of Philosophy, has referred to Zen as the focus of his existential path (Ueda 1994: 10). He was a lay practitioner of the Rinzai school of Zen for a number of years and has devoted several writings to that tradition.<sup>7</sup>

When talking and writing about Zen, Ueda often started by clarifying that he was never trained as a Zen monk and that his only way of approaching Zen is to recount

<sup>6</sup>In the *Eclipse of God* (Buber 1957a), Buber interprets the “death” of God as the incapacity of modern man to apprehend and relate to an absolute reality independent of himself, to imaginatively perceive this reality (which eludes direct contemplation), and to represent it through images (for him, the true images of God do not come from the imagination but from true encounters). With the metaphor of the eclipse (of the light) of God, instead, he suggests that there is no such extinction since that which has stepped in between may give way.

<sup>7</sup>Besides the various edited books, contributions to collected works, and numerous lectures that Ueda has devoted to Zen (mostly in German), the *Ueda Shizuteru shu* 上田閑照集 [*Ueda Shizuteru Collection*] (uss) includes four volumes that deal with Zen: *Zen bukkyō: kongenteki ningen* 禪仏教: 根源的人間 [Zen Buddhism: The Fundamental Human Being], Volume 4; *Zen no fūkei* 禪の風景 [A view of Zen], Vol. 5, and *Michinori “jūgyūzu” o ayumu* 道のり十牛図を歩む [*The Ten Ox-herding pictures*], Vol. 6, and *Hishinpushugi. Ekuharuto to Zen* 非神秘主義: エクハルトと禪 [*Non-mysticism: Eckhart and Zen*], Vol. 8.

how he first came into contact with it, his impression of it at the time, and his understanding based on instruction and his own practice. His family practiced Shingon Buddhism and his first contact with Zen was in his late twenties through books (Ueda 1993: 153), specifically *Zen hyakudai* 禪百題 by Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙,<sup>8</sup> a work which reproduces the classical Zen dialogues (*mondō* 問答) as living events. Later, he met Suzuki in person, and this encounter convinced him that when following a spiritual path it is crucial to learn from other's experiences and particularly to see its truth embodied in a living person.

After graduating in philosophy from Kyoto University, being interested in mysticism, he spent 6 years in Germany and Switzerland studying the medieval thinker Meister Eckhart. When he completed his dissertation at Marburg University and was preparing his manuscript for publication, his advisor, Ernst Benz, encouraged him to include an appendix with a comparison between Eckhart and Zen. Ueda followed Benz's advice and the appendix attracted the interest of European scholars in general, not only medievalists and theologians. He then furthered his studies of Zen with a view to clarifying his insights and exposing them to the analysis of a Western audience. Such insights had their roots in his background in Western philosophy, Japanese modern philosophy —basically Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 and Ueda's professor Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治— and Ueda's own research on mysticism. All of this helped him to articulate his philosophical hermeneutics. Thus, practical experience, scholarly study, and personal encounters combine in Ueda's approach to Zen.<sup>9</sup>

In his descriptions of Zen, Ueda often quotes sayings, poems, and *kōan* (dialogues usually maintained between master and disciple, gathered in collections, and used in Zen training), but more frequently he calls on the ancient Chinese parable of the ox-herding pictures, which was originally employed to initiate new practitioners into Zen discipline. Similarly, through images, Ueda seeks to make Zen comprehensible to a modern audience and to capture the parable's inner meaning, which from a philosophical point of view results in a sort of phenomenology of the self. His hermeneutics also integrates aesthetic experience and a new practical knowledge of reading that turns into a self-reflective activity.<sup>10</sup> Just as the herdsman in the Zen parable searches for his ox, the reader/listener may inquire about his/her own self and the nature of his/her existence, thus the story becomes a sort of metaphor of the human search for self-knowledge. In Ueda's words,

---

<sup>8</sup>Suzuki's recovery and translation into English of Zen sayings was a groundbreaking task whose impact could be considered analogous to the compilation of Hasidic proverbs and parables by Buber. Indeed, with his anthology, Buber "wanted to showcase the artistic cultural achievements of the Hasidic masters and make available their transtemporal, universal meaning, and in so doing to accord Hasidism a status akin to that enjoyed by Buddhism in the Western world today" (Urban 2008: 7). Incidentally, Buber relied on Suzuki for his understanding of Zen (Friedman 1981: 163) and they met at Columbia University (Abe 1995: 159).

<sup>9</sup>On the dialectics of experience and understanding in Ueda's philosophy, see Bouso (2004).

<sup>10</sup>On Ueda's hermeneutics of images, see Bouso (2016).

My ideas are also, I must admit, quite distinct from the traditional, experientially-based Zen explanations offered by Zen masters. My intention, in short, is to try to interpret Zen from a human standpoint (or perhaps it would be better to say, to understand the human condition from the standpoint of Zen) (Ueda 1994: 11).

According to Ueda's reasoning, Zen is concerned with the realization and illumination of the self. To grasp something means to put it in words, since only that which can be captured in words is seen as having existence. Furthermore, the self who does the grasping is also involved in the process, and therefore the grasping 'I' is captured in words in order to confirm its own existence. We are then faced with the phenomenon of language.

### 3.1 *Re-creating the Text*

For Ueda, reading a text in Zen implies a physical process in which the problem addressed by the text is recognized as one's own personal existential predicament:

merely reading a text in a philologically correct way does not guarantee that one understands the text's message. The reading of any work invariably involves interpretation, and that, in turn, inevitably brings up questions of the depth and horizon of that interpretation. This is particularly true in the case of Zen texts, where the surface meaning of the words does not always directly convey the intention of the author or speaker. The paradoxical result is that readings which are correct from a linguistic point of view can suggest interpretations that are misleading, and vice versa. This is one of the most intriguing aspects of Zen literature. (Ueda 2013: 12)

In Zen training monasteries, these texts are typically put to use during the one-on-one encounters between master and disciple known as *sanzen*, during which *kōans* are given to the monk in the form of questions or problems that the monk must solve. In the Zen tradition, this kind of dialogue consists in an immediate exchange between master and disciple with no time for rational analysis, in which the answer the disciple gives reveals his stage of progress to the master. For Ueda, these questions are presented in the form of language, and the responses are expressed in the same form (including body language and silence). Yet, the trajectory that connects these two linguistic endpoints is not a step-by-step progression of words in themselves. During the *samādhi* (deep concentration) of *zazen* there is a gap that simultaneously separates and connects the language of the question and the language of the answer. Ueda characterizes this process with the expression "from language, into language" (Ueda 2013: 13) that is, with the inquiry emerging *from* words and the response emerging *into* words.

According to Ueda, it is in this "from language, into language" dynamic, that the true significance of a "text" in Zen practice can be found. At the same time, the text represents a form of invitation to—and guidance in—experiencing this movement "from language, into language." This dynamic goes yet another step further in the case of translations, where another leap out of language and back into language is required. Referring to a new translation of Japanese *kōan* into English, for example,

Ueda makes the claim that the synergistic action of this double leap has given birth to a new text, one that emerges into the world of English less influenced by the outlook of Japanese culture than the original text (Ueda 2013: 13). While there is the risk of a loss of meaning, Ueda highlights the fact that translations can be a valuable approach to the re-creation of a new, more direct expression of Zen.

### 3.2 *Everydayness in Zen*

If Zen consists fundamentally in sitting, looking at nothing, thinking of nothing and, apparently, doing nothing, how can it be significant for our lives? Ueda claims that as we explore this stillness of body and mind we undergo a process of opening that encompasses and yet transcends the entire world, and this means clarifying the true place and true nature of our being (Ueda 2007: 13). During a conversation with Suzuki Daisetsu, Ueda asked Suzuki about the meaning of Zen expressions that puzzled him, such as “no matter” (*buji* 無事), in the ninth-century *Sayings of Rinzai*. Suzuki linked the word *buji* to the Zen expression “no-mind” (*mushin* 無心), which refers to life the way Master Rinzai teaches, that is, without worries or concerns, without purpose, just taking things as they are.<sup>11</sup> Ueda acknowledges that to understand in a vital sense that this creative mode of existence consists in “merely wearing our clothes and eating food” is extremely difficult:

How is it that what comes out naturally and without reflection is connected with eating food and wearing clothes? [...] Zen is unique among world religions in that its highest truth is wholly revealed in wearing clothes, eating food, sleeping when tired (Ueda and Suzuki 1973: 95).

Suzuki explains that “Everydayness” was first used by the Zen master Baso (707–786), who said “everyday mind is the Way (Tao)” and assumes that the everyday mind lies at the very base of the Chinese way of thinking (Ueda and Suzuki 1973: 95). Everydayness is to come directly forward, without deliberation or reflection. What must be grasped without deliberation is the root from which everydayness stems. Thus, according to Suzuki, when Zen uses the word “Way” (*Tao*, in Chinese) in expressions such as “everyday mind is the *Tao*,” this attests to Zen having become truly Chinese in the sense of the concrete, despite Buddhism’s Indian origins being more abstract and speculative.

Ueda has developed some of the views expressed in that dialogue on several occasions (in detail in Ueda 2001). According to him, the Zen path consists in the static and silent *zazen* as the place of true emptiness without self or others. But it also includes a second and indispensable aspect, the dynamic and verbal *sanzen* as the place of the wondrous “person to person” encounter; and here, the Zen *kōan* plays an important role. Ueda also adds that training in *zazen*, practicing the

---

<sup>11</sup>The conversation took place in Karuizawa on 21 July 1965, commemorating the 1100th anniversary of Chinese Zen Master Rinzai’s death.

everyday with *zazen*, without aim or merit, is the model for cultivating the everyday itself (Ueda 1990a: 42).<sup>12</sup>

Thus, in his description of Zen, he focuses on the practice connected to the task at hand, the way in which a person exercises what he calls “the *samādhi* of things” and non-attachment, and the way whereby a person practices formal sitting or free-form breath-counting in the intervals between tasks. In this twofold way, a day during which a person does all kinds of things and adapts to various circumstances is made into a day of Zen.

Still, for Ueda, there is a risk in the Zen orientation to the everyday. He states that to avoid pure formalism and mere repetition, Zen must leave behind and once again learn and keep on learning the concrete reality of everyday life in and from everyday life. Thus, according to Ueda, Zen is not Zen unless it is bringing reality to new life in all its concreteness. Here again lies the idea of learning from tradition while giving a new life to it.

### 3.3 *Zen in the Contemporary World*

For Ueda, the contemporary world has reached a state where living in a truly human way has become nearly impossible. He locates the origin of this crisis in the ever-increasing growth of culture (which includes various aspects of civilization such as technology, industry, and so on) and in humanity’s present way of living, which destroys the natural life that supports us and blocks off the path to the “higher life,” the true goal of our existence (Ueda 1993: 168).<sup>13</sup>

Distorted by this cultural growth, our society undervalues the significance of the self-aware individual, hinders human cooperation, and has suppressed our ability to live in a truly human way. It is not enough to change society, it is the self-awareness of individuals that must be changed, and not on an individual basis either, but through the transmission of awareness from individual to individual, through a renewal of communal human life. Thus, in Ueda’s view, Zen can aid this individual self-awareness and the recovery of the cooperative human community. The higher life that lives via death, and allows us to live a truly human life, can only be realized through “poverty” (i.e. the denial of the desire for abundance that forms the basis of

<sup>12</sup>On Ueda’s treatment of the Zen notion of “living without a reason why and returning to the world” in comparison to Eckhart’s *vita activa*, see Bouso (2012).

<sup>13</sup>“Seimei to sei to inochi” 「生命と生と命」 (Ueda 1991: 28–56). Humans, as animated creatures, possess life (*seimei* 生命) which all creatures share and which is lived within the boundaries of the environment. At the same time, human beings have a distinctive human “life” (*sei* 生 or *jinsei* 人生 life-as-a-human-being) that can be characterized as “cultural,” and involves aspects of livelihood or life-style (*seikatsu* 生活) as food, clothing, and shelter. Human life subsists on the basis of the two conflicting aspects of *seikatsu* and *jinsei*. The solution could be to live a truly human way and attain the higher life (*inochi* 命).

our livelihood) or in Zen words “there is inexhaustible treasure in the possession of nothing”, a way of living in freedom.

Ueda follows the idea held by his teacher Nishitani that modern phenomena such as secularization, scientism, and nihilism force us to rethink the meaning of religion. Therefore, Ueda reflected broadly on the implications of religion for our everyday lives.<sup>14</sup> For him, religion represents an internalization of ethical principles. However, in the problems we face nowadays, the internalization of the values of religion alone is no longer sufficient to result in ethical conduct. It is necessary to acknowledge and accept the interrelation of religion, ethics, and law. Religion is a primal part of the human condition: “religion is best characterized, not as something extraordinary or special in life, but as a basic force bringing human existence to fulfillment” (Ueda 1990c: 167). Nevertheless, the very fact of human-ness encompasses religion: “It is not that one acts for the sake of Buddhism, or that one acts especially as a Buddhist, but that in acting as a human being the religious element naturally comes into play” (Ueda 1990c: 168).

Instead of religion as such, Ueda prefers to speak of religion as the concrete expression of spirituality, a vital, living force. He thinks of laypeople as those who, while living ordinary lives in the world, engage in Buddhist practices with the goal of attaining the truth. Their lifestyle can be imperfect from a traditional standpoint, ponders Ueda, but in the contemporary world, he trusts that this approach may prove to be the most appropriate.

## 4 Conclusions

As noted above, with their respective understandings of Hasidism and Zen, Buber and Ueda sought to comprehend the place of these movements among world religious traditions and to make explicit their significance for the modern world. They recount the stories —albeit not the history in the aforementioned sense intended by Scholem— to preserve the existential meaning of those teachings and to make it available to a new audience beyond its original context. Modern individuals no longer share the same cultural and symbolic landscape inhabited by their predecessors, but furthermore, especially in Ueda’s case, crosscultural transmission requires a mode of transmission that is not based on common cultural assumptions. Moreover, as philosophers, Buber and Ueda offered a creative interpretation of Hasidism and Zen that was very influential in their intellectual milieu, in which *Lebensphilosophie* and the existential stance were crucial. Therefore, mystical literature plays a significant role in their philosophies, and so, Hasidic tales and Zen sayings can be regarded as sources for a new development of philosophical thought rather than merely folk

---

<sup>14</sup> Specifically concerning the connection of “religion and everyday life” (“Shūkyō to nichijōsei” 宗教と日常性) see Ueda (1991): 133–158, where he refers to Eckhart and the parable of the ox-herding pictures.



expressions of a tangential heterodoxy belonging to the past.<sup>15</sup> Their appreciation and cultivation of cultural creativity fostered by inner spiritual life place them in the middle ground between religion and philosophy where it is precisely this openness that allows the encounter to happen.

In this vein, the intellectual journey of Buber has been characterized as embodying the speculative dimension of “betweenness” (*zwischen*): his being *between* Jewish-German philosophy, halfway *between* two wars and the attempts at a new school of thought after the Shoah; *between* the need of a systematic unification capable of granting coherence and truth to his numerous philosophical interests and the tragic acknowledgement of the fragmentation and failure of all systems; *between* the utopic tension of the cultural Zionism and Realpolitik of the State of Israel (Ricci 1993: 163). In turn, Ueda spent his philosophical career *between* two languages, German and Japanese. Thus, the experience of learning to write philosophically in German instead of using his native tongue, eventually became part of his way of doing philosophy (Kasulis 2017: 568). His philosophical path moves *between* East and West, religion and philosophy, praxis and study, and he accordingly described his attempt to explain Zen as “neither a traditional nor a strictly academic approach; I will probably stay somewhere between the two, in line with my own interests and experience” (Ueda 1994: 10).

To conclude, in addition to their interest in the spiritual tradition and their “in-between” trajectory, let us summarize some of the other common features just discussed. First, for Buber and Ueda, language and conversation are of great importance. The mode of discourse they favored in their philosophical reflection was religious-poetic expression through the myths, legends, dialogues, and sayings that best captured the lived experiences shared in the encounters between two people. Both authors would agree on the value of words when these express life, not when they supersede it. Secondly, for both thinkers, daily life is central since redemption/awakening and liberation come from sanctifying/paying attention to everydayness.<sup>16</sup> This is perhaps the core message that they learned from the traditions they studied and then conveyed to their contemporaries. Lastly, their openness to other cultural traditions enriched their philosophical insights and, to a certain extent, helped to

---

<sup>15</sup>Indeed, due to his modern elaboration, some interpreters speak of “Buber’s Neo-Hasidism” (for instance, Rudavsky (1967): 235–244). In the case of the Kyoto School, some scholars describe its authors as belonging to Buddhist philosophy, while traditional Buddhist and sectarian scholars in Japan and the West do not widely read Kyoto School philosophers, and for some others they are not even considered Buddhists.

<sup>16</sup>As Harold Coward argues: “Buber sees redemption as the eradication of human-caused evil in history by sanctifying daily life – through seeing it as an encounter with God [...] Buber’s understanding of redemption is strongly influenced by the Hasidic teaching” (Coward 2003: 21–22). As he explains, this is not the result of our own seeking but is due to the grace of God. The theistic terminology differs from Ueda’s who refers to the ultimate as an openness, or in Eckhartian terms as God as empty and free, a Nothingness. The role of grace, however, can be considered as an equivalent of the Zen idea of letting go or Dōgen’s “sitting only” without purpose.

develop their hermeneutics.<sup>17</sup> Consistent with their focus on dialogue and intersubjectivity, the term “intercultural” also seems adequate to describe part of their practice of philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

An essay written by Buber entitled “The Place of Hasidism in the History of Religion” (Buber 1988) is particularly interesting in this regard, for there he offered a comparison between Hasidism and Zen. Common to both Hasidism and Zen is what Buber describes as the positive relation to the concrete, a relation that is both expressed by attaching the highest importance to the content of the given moment, and by insisting that one must act simply as the situation requires. These two traditions embody a common principle in the same pattern of personal relationship between master and disciple, that is, through a living encounter. Regardless of the differences between them,<sup>19</sup> Buber seems to find in Zen the same thing that attracts him to Hasidism, the capacity of proposing a way of life able to overcome the dualism between matter and spirit, sacred and profane, the Absolute and the worldly.

As noted above, Ueda also undertakes intercultural dialogue, and in his understanding of Zen underscores the aspect of the “every day Zen life” in which practice is everything. In this regard, he mentions the teachings of the Christian mystic Meister Eckhart as very similar to that of the Zen Master Rinzai.<sup>20</sup> Ueda was concerned that westerners would understand Zen as justifying daily rituals of eating food and wearing clothes as sufficient on their own without a need of spiritual discipline. To avoid this misunderstanding, Ueda suggests employing Eckhart’s philosophy as a stepping stone for westerners to properly grasp Zen.

Ueda’s interpretation of Zen *mondō* 問答, where he clearly links a kind of I-Thou encounter to language, is also fundamental for our comparative perspective, and incidentally brings us back to the opening words of this paper. According to Ueda,

---

<sup>17</sup>In his remarkable essay on this topic, Friedman concludes that “while largely overlooked except by Zen scholars such as Nishitani and Hisamatsu, Buber’s dialogue with Oriental religions, and with Taoism and Zen in particular, is of great importance, second only to his dialogue with Christianity” (Friedman 1981: 167).

<sup>18</sup>In this case, whereas Ueda is very cautious when making comparisons across cultures, Buber’s claims about the unity of the Eastern spirit or Oriental thought may sound as though it is too severely lacking in nuance, especially from the perspective of orientalist critical theories; see, for instance, the above-mentioned “The Teaching of the Tao” (Buber 1911; see in 1992: 167–189), “China and us” (1928, included in 1957b: 121–125), and “The Spirit of the Orient and Judaism” (written in 1916, in 1967: 56–78).

<sup>19</sup>Buber in 1988 argues that Hasidism is “messianic” rather than “dialectic, like Zen;” it aims at fulfillment rather than at annulment. On this view of Zen, Masao Abe says that Buber understands that Zen is concerned not with things themselves, but with their non-conceptual nature as symbols of the Absolute, while in the Zen experience of *satori* things manifest themselves as realizations of true Emptiness. Moreover, he questions the possibility that Buber and Hasidism can overcome the dualistic subject-object structure in the manner Zen does (Abe 1995: 164).

<sup>20</sup>Ueda notes that there are many phrases in Eckhart that almost seem to be translations of Zen terms. But when it comes to giving and taking, the staff and *kwatz* of the Rinzai *mondō* 問答 sayings, which are concerned with Zen practice itself, cannot be found in Eckhart. Finally, he concludes that in the world of *logos* (theoretical reason, *ri* 理) they are almost identical, but in the world of *pragma* (*ji* 事, practical matters) they differ considerably (Ueda and Suzuki 1973).

this sort of dialogue can only succeed between men who have awakened to the selfless self. Ueda's line of thought shows, as Hans Waldenfels states, that his "consideration of conversation encounters man right in his overt realm of experience even as it seeks to initiate him into the realm of transrational communication that Western man only understand with difficulty and has little access to" (Waldenfels 1980: 131–132). In Buddhism, linguistic communication runs parallel to the *bodhisattva* ideal, "continuously take[ing] place between the enlightened and unenlightened, between the enlightened and those seeking enlightenment" (Waldenfels 1980: 132) and thus, language can be perceived as a way of expressing the need for healing and offering consolation.

Seen from a Christian perspective, in interpreting Eckhart Ueda sees in his preaching a correspondent word-event and a phenomenon of religious existence. Indeed, as Alois M. Haas points out, in Christianity there is the teaching of *contemplata aliis tradere*, that is, to pass on to others what one has seen in contemplation.<sup>21</sup> In Eckhart, as in Zen dialogues, language works in a mystagogic way: it does not merely tell us about one's experience but it lends others guidance to experience their own self. In this sense, mystical language is the servant of praxis (Waldenfels 1980: 133). That is why, for Haas, the crisis of religious language in the West is due to the fact that it has lost its mystagogic character in favor of the ontological-dogmatic assertion as a form of expression. This seems quite close to the role of parable and myth, between teachings and religion, mentioned by Buber.

Zen has evolved precisely surrounding this linguistic tension and that is why Ueda values its unusual capacity for overflowing the common-sense realm, "there is an undeniable quality of transcendental separation about it," while at the same time it "is also in the closest of contacts with everyday reality, with the drinking of water and the washing of bowls as the ultimate expressions of truth" (Ueda 1990c: 170). The strength of Zen, according to Ueda, lies in this dynamic of separation and adherence, "Zen has to learn somehow to abide between these two extremes, though of course this 'betweenness' is already encompassed within the original movement". This reminds Ueda of the wandering monk and nature poet Saigyō Hōshi 西行法師 (1118–1190) who is said to have lived his life "one inch off the ground," and he comments:

Thus it is fantasy in the realm of literature and mythology in the realm of religion which most truly depict the reality of our lives. The way of thinking that sees truth only in a 'both feet firmly upon the ground' approach is biased and one-sided. The space between the ground and one inch above –this is the true breadth of reality" (Ueda 1990c: 171).

---

<sup>21</sup> In "Die Problematik von Sprache und Erfahrung in der deutschen Mystik" in Beierwaltes et al. *Grundfragen der Mystik*, 73–104, quoted by Waldenfels (1980): 132.

## Bibliography

- Abe, Masao 阿部正雄. 1995. Zen Buddhism and Hasidism—Similarities and Contrasts. In *Buddhism in Interfaith Dialogue*, ed. Steven Heine, 159–165. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Bertman, Martin A. 2000. Jewish Mysticism Without Loss of Identity. *Judaism* 49 (1): 80–92.
- Bouso, Raquel. 2004. Lenguaje y silencio. Experiencia y comprensión en Ueda Shizuteru. In *Comparatisme e filosofia*, ed. Maria Donzelli, 239–261. Napoli: Liguori.
- . 2012. Action et contemplation. Sur une lecture eckhartienne de Shizuteru Ueda. *Théologiques* 20: 313–339.
- . 2016. Thinking Through Translation: Nishitani and Ueda on Words, Concepts, and Images. In *Philosopher la traduction*, ed. Uehara Mayuko, 88–118. *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy*, 9; Nagoya: Chisokudō.
- Buber, Martin. 1957a. *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy*. Trans. Maurice Friedman. New York: Harper and Row.
- . 1957b. *Pointing the Way: Collected Essays*, ed. and Trans. Maurice Friedman. New York: Harper and Brothers.
- . 1958. *Hasidism and Modern Man*, ed. and Trans. Maurice Friedman. New York: Horizon Press.
- . 1967. The Spirit of the Orient and Judaism. In *On Judaism*, ed. Nahum Glatzer, 56–78. New York: Schocken.
- . 1988. *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism* (1960), ed. and Trans. Maurice Friedman. Amherst/New York: Humanity Books.
- . 1991. Replies to my critics. In *The Philosophy of Martin Buber*, eds. Paul Arthur Schilpp and Maurice Friedman, 689–744. La Salle, Ill.: Open Court.
- . 1992. In *On Intersubjectivity and Cultural Creativity*, ed. S.N. Eisenstadt. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- . 2002. *Meetings. Autobiographical Fragments* (1963), ed. and intro. Maurice Friedman. New York: Routledge.
- Coward, Harold. 2003. *Sin and Salvation in the World Religions*. Oxford: Oneworld.
- Dan, Joseph. 1987. "Hasidism." In *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. Lindsay Jones, 3785–3792. Detroit et al. Thomson Gale.
- Dresner, Samuel H. 1983. Hasidism Through the Eyes of Three Masters. *Judaism* 32 (2): 160–169.
- Friedman, Maurice. 1976. Martin Buber and Asia. *Philosophy East and West* 26 (4): 411–426.
- . 1981. Martin Buber and Oriental Religions. In *Buddhist and the Western Philosophy*, ed. Nathan Katz, 149–171. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press.
- . 1985. Martin Buber's Influence on Twentieth Century Religious Thought. *Judaism* 34 (4): 417–432.
- Green, Arthur. 2009. Hasidism. In *20th Century Jewish Religious Thought*, ed. Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr, 317–323. New York: The Jewish Publication Society.
- Herman, Jonathan R. 1996. *I and Tao: Martin Buber's Encounter with Chuang Tzu*. Albany/New York: SUNY.
- Kasulis, Thomas P. 2017. *Engaging Japanese Philosophy*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- McGinn, Bernard. 2007. Trobar Déu en el no-res, parlar de Déu en silenci. In *Mística i diàleg inter-religiós*, ed. Francesc Torrades, 138–146. Barcelona: Fragmenta.
- Mendes-Flohr, Paul. 1989. *From Mysticism to Dialogue: Martin Buber's Transformation of German Social Thought*. Detroit: Way State University Press.
- Moran, James. 1972. Martin Buber and Taoism. *Judaism* 21 (1): 98–103.
- Nelson, Eric S. 2017a. Technology and the Way: Daoism in Buber and Heidegger. In *The Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early-Twentieth-Century German Thought*, 109–130. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- . 2017b. Encounter, Dialogue, and Learning: Martin Buber and Zen Buddhism. In *The Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early-Twentieth-Century German Thought*, 201–224. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

- Ricci Sindoni, Paola. 1993. Martin Buber (1878–1965). Il sogno di una esistenza unificata. In *Dio nella filosofia del Novecento*, ed. Giorgio Penzo and Rosino Gibellini, 165–174. Brescia: Queriniana.
- Rudavsky, David. 1967. The Neo-Hassidism of Martin Buber. *Religious Education* 63 (3): 235–244.
- Scholem, Gershom. 1995. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (1946)*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Ueda, Shizuteru. 2001. *Zen bukkyō: Kongenteki ningen*. 禅仏教: 根源の人間 [Zen Buddhism: The Fundamental Human Being], volume 4, *Ueda Shizuteru shu* 上田閑照集 [Ueda Shizuteru Collection] (uss) Tokyo: Iwanami.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1990a. Everyday Zen. Trans. Jan Van Bragt. *Chanoyu Quarterly* 62: 38–50.
- 上田閑照. 1990b. Everyday Zen. Trans. Jan Van Bragt. *Chanoyu Quarterly* 63: 34–47.
- 上田閑照. 1990c. The Existence of Man – Life ‘One Inch Off the Ground. *Zen Buddhism Today* 8: 165–171.
- 上田閑照. 1991. *Ikiru to iu koto. Keiken to jikaku* 生きるという。経験と自覚. Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin.
- 上田閑照. 1993. Thoughts on Zen. *Zen Buddhist Today* 10: 153–170.
- 上田閑照. 1994. The Practice of Zen. *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 27(1): 1029.
- 上田閑照. 2007. ‘Outwardly, Be Open; Inwardly, Be Deep’: D. T. Suzuki’s ‘Eastern Outlook’. Trans. Thomas Kirchner. *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s., 38(1/2): 8–40.
- 上田閑照. 2013. Introduction. In *Entangling vines: Zen koans of the Shūmon kattōshū*. Trans. and annotated Thomas Yūhō Kirchner, 7–13. Boston: Wisdom Books.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照 and Daisetz. Teitarō Suzuki 鈴木(貞太郎)大拙. 1973. The sayings of Rinzaï. *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 6(1): 92–110.
- Urban, Martina. 2008. *Aesthetics of Renewal. Martin Buber’s Early Representation of Hasidism as Kulturkritik*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Waldenfels, Hans. 1980. *Absolute Nothingness. Foundations for a Buddhist Christian Dialogue*. Trans. James W. Heisig. New York: Paulist Press.
- Werblowsky, R.J. Zwi. 2002. Buber and the East Asian (Chinese) Religions. In *Martin Buber: A Contemporary Perspective*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr, 166–173. Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

# Chapter 21

## “The Self That Is Not a Self”: Ueda and Kuon’s *Ten Ox Pictures*



Gereon Kopf

### Abbreviations

- DZZ *Dōgen zenji zenshū* 『道元禪師全集』 [*Complete Works of Zen Master Dōgen*]. 1969–1970. Ed. Dōshū Ōkubo. 2 volumes. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- M *Manji shinsan dainihon zokuzōkyō* 『卍新纂大日本續藏經』 . [*The New Compilation of the Great Japanese Supplement to the Buddhist Canon*] 1975–1989. Ed. Kawamura Kōshō. 88 volumes. Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai.
- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 『大正新脩大藏經』 [*The Taishō Edition of the Buddhist Canon*]. 1961. Ed. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaigyoku Watanabe. 85 volumes. Tokyo: Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō Kankōkai.
- USS Ueda, shizuteru. 2001–2003. *Ueda shizuteru shū* 上田閑照集 [*Collected Works of Ueda Shizuteru*]. 11 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami.

### 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Ueda Shizuteru 上田閑照 (1926–2019) famously credited sources from the Zen Buddhist tradition as the inspiration for much of his philosophy. As I discussed in an earlier article, he even developed formal criteria for “Zen Philosophy” (*zen tetsugaku* 禪哲学) in contrast to “Zen Thought” (*zen shisō* 禪思想) and the

---

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank the providers of the online resources *The SAT Daizōkyō Text Database* (<http://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/>) and the *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* (<http://www.acmuller.net>) for their invaluable service.

---

G. Kopf (✉)  
Luther College, Decorah, IA, USA  
e-mail: [kopf@luther.edu](mailto:kopf@luther.edu)

discourses of “Zen persons” (*zensha* 禪者) (Kopf 2015a). So it is not surprising that he collaborated with the renowned Buddhologist Yanagida Seizan 柳田聖山 (1922–2006) on a commentary on the so-called *Ten Ox Pictures* (*Jūgyūzu* 十牛圖). In this commentary, he roots his concept of the “self that is not a self” (*jiko narazaru jiko* 自己ならざる自己) (Ueda 1992: 60) in the Zen tradition and particularly in his reading of the *Ten Ox Pictures*. In this process he applies the language of the Kyoto School (*Kyōto gakuha* 京都学派) philosophers, modern academic philosophy, and Christian theology to this series of pictures and poems from the Song dynasty (960–1279). The result is a creative and innovative conception of self as the “spiritual self” that brings out its existential relationality. In this paper, I read his commentary against the poems Kuoan Shiyuan (*Kakuan Shien* 廓庵師遠) (twelfth century)<sup>2</sup> composed to go along with these pictures as well as alternative interpretations of Kuoan’s work. Concretely, I will introduce Kuoan’s version of the *Ten Ox Pictures*, discuss Ueda’s reading thereof, suggest an alternative reading, and discuss the uniqueness of Ueda’s approach and what he contributes to a contemporary understanding of the “self.” The goal is to arrive at an appreciation of the originality and depth of Ueda’s thought and to show how Ueda’s interpretation of the *Ten Ox Pictures* illuminates the way to a new conception of “self” and “consciousness.” The key to both is Ueda’s conception of the “self that is not a self” as relational insofar as it emerges from the I-and-Thou relationship on the basis of the “absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu* 絶対無) characteristic of the “eternal Thou” (*eien no nanji* 永遠の汝) (Ueda 1992: 107). The analysis of these concepts will be the focus of this paper.

## 2 Kuoan’s *Ten Ox Pictures*

As it is the case with any text, there exist multiple versions and manuscripts of the pictures commonly referred to as the “ox herding pictures” (*gyūbokuzu* 牛牧圖). These sets consist of four, five, six, eight, ten, and even twelve pictures, respectively. They also have inspired the twelfth century Daoist “horse herding pictures” (Komjathy 2017: ix) and the nineteenth century Tibetan “elephant herding pictures.” The two most famous versions of the Zen Buddhist “ox herding pictures” were introduced to the Anglophone audience by D. T. Suzuki 鈴木(貞太郎)大拙’s *Manual of Zen Buddhism* (Suzuki 1974). They are the *Ten Ox Pictures* of Dabai Puming 太白普明 (eleventh century) and Kuoan Shiyuan respectively. The former focuses on the transformation of the ox and the latter on the transformation of the ox-herder. Both sets seem to be designed to complete the shorter versions attributed to the Chan masters Huqiu Xueting 虎丘雪庭淨 (10th–11th centuries), Foguo Weibai 佛國惟白 (1027–1090), Zide Huihui 自得慧暉 (1090–1159), and Qingju Haosheng 清居皓昇 (eleventh century). Since Ueda interprets Kuoan’s set, I will focus on Kuoan’s pictures and poems here.

Kuoan’s *Ten Ox Pictures*, which consists of ten pictures and accompanying poems, tell a pastoral narrative of a young farmer who searches for, finds, and tames

<sup>2</sup>In contemporary Chinese, his name is sometimes written 郭庵, “Guoan.” In addition, either version can also be transliterated in pinyin with an apostrophe inserted after the “o” to mark the pronunciation of the individual characters as “kuo” and “an” or “guo” and “an” respectively.

an ox. The ten pictures, which can be found in the appendix, are titled (1) “seeking the ox” (*jingyū* 尋牛), (2) “seeing the traces” (*kenzeki* 見跡), (3) “seeing the ox” (*kengyū* 見牛), (4) “catching the ox” (*tokugyū* 得牛), (5) “domesticating the ox” (*bokugyū* 牧牛), (6) “riding the ox home” (*kigyū kika* 騎牛歸家), (7) “forgetting the ox while the person remains” (*bōgyū sonnin* 忘牛存人), (8) “forgetting the ox and the person” (*jingyū gubō* 人牛俱忘), (9) “return to the origin,” (*henkan hongen* 返還本源), and (10) “entering the marketplace with full hands” (*nyūten suishu* 入廓垂手). Picture one depicts a young cow-herder who is lost, looking for something. His head looks over his shoulder, his gaze is directed backwards as if he does not know where he is or even what he is looking for. The title explains: “looking for the ox”; the poem remarks “he is searching for what is lost [...] there is no place [left] to search.” Contrary to the title, neither picture nor poem gives us an idea of what the subject of his search is. In picture two, the herder recognizes the traces of the ox; his head and body are aligned, following the directions of the traces. His body is active, in motion. In picture three, the ox finally appears, however, herder and ox are still separated. In picture four, herder and ox are connected by a rope, but they look two opposite directions and seem almost standoffish. This situation changes in picture five, when herder and ox are looking and walking in the same direction. The obvious distance between ox and herder is overcome in picture six, when the herder is “riding the ox home.” In picture seven, the ox disappears or, as the title of the picture says, “is forgotten.” The poem explains, “the ox is vanquished, and the person is idle.” However, while English translations usually render the first half as “the ox is no more, the man alone sits serenely” (Suzuki 1974, 132) or “No more Ox! The man is serene” (App 1996: 7), the Chinese is quite ambiguous. First, the Chinese character rendered by Suzuki and App as “no more” “kong” (*kū* 空) is usually translated as “empty,” “sky,” “space,” “vacant,” or “leisure” and, second, the character “ye” 也 used after both “ox” and “person” indicates a parallel structure rather than a juxtaposition. In some sense, both English renditions reflect the title of the picture “forgetting the ox while the person remains.”

However, the verb “forgetting” seems to indicate that the topic of picture seven is epistemological rather than ontological: At stake is the person’s awareness of the ox, not the existence of the ox itself. Be that as it may, pictures one through seven depict an ever decreasing distance between person and ox starting with picture one where the ox is barely implied and picture two where the person is present only indirectly to the oneness of person and ox in picture seven and the disappearance of both in picture eight.

The first six pictures clearly tell the pastoral narrative. Its storyline breaks in picture seven. Picture seven shows the young farmer sitting peacefully and the ox is nowhere to be seen. What is interesting is that the picture is not termed “the ox is gone” but “the ox is forgotten” and the poem uses the Buddhist technical term “emptiness” (S. *śūnyā*, C. *kong* 空) to describe the state of the ox. Even more puzzling is that picture eight, “ox and person are forgotten,” depicts the “empty circle” (*kūensō* 空円相), the unofficial trademark of Zen teachers, evoking the Buddhist concept “emptiness” (S. *śūnyatā*, C. *kong* 空), the term the poem ironically uses in picture seven. Pictures seven and eight plus their respective poems clearly indicate that the ten pictures mirror Buddhist concepts and illustrates the process of



“forgetting the self” and “attaining no-self” during the practice of meditation. Interestingly enough, the same sentiment indicating “forgetting the self” is echoed by the Japanese Zen master Dōgen 道元 (1200–1253), who famously said

[t]o study the Buddha way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be actualized by the ten thousand dharmas; to be actualized by the ten thousand dharmas is to cast off body and mind of self and other; the traces of awakening and the awakening whose traces have disappeared go on forever” (DZZ 1: 7–8).

Furthermore, Dōgen’s observation also reverberates with the substitution of the person with the world, “ten thousand dharmas,” in picture nine and the intersubjectivity of “self and other” in picture ten. Picture nine shows nature, a tree with blossoms and water. Kuonan’s commentary reads “the water itself is expansive, the flower itself is red.” Interestingly enough this last line of poem nine picks up the first two characters of poem one, “expansive” (C. *mangmang* 茫茫). In picture ten, the now matured herder returns to town and meets a disciple. Neither the title nor the poem mentions this moment of relationality and intersubjectivity as depicted in picture ten. However, this theme is common to, as I will show later in this essay, quite a few Zen texts such as *The Comprehensive Chronicles of the Buddhas and the Patriarchs*, (C. *Fozu tongji* 『佛祖統紀』) (T 2035.49.129a-475c) and Dōgen’s “Mountain and Water Sūtra” (*Sansuikyō* 「山水經」) (DZZ 1: 258–267). Most of all, this theme of intersubjectivity is central to Ueda’s commentary on the *Ten Ox Pictures*.

It is thus possible to superimpose onto these pictures basic Buddhist terminology about the practice dating all the way back to Shakyamuni. Picture one depicts “ignorance” (S. *avidya*). It shows the young cow-herder in the woods lost and disoriented. The ox is nowhere to be seen. At this point the onlooker does not even know what the farmer is looking for. Perhaps, he does not know himself? Picture two, where we see the cow-herder noting and following the tracks of the ox, illustrates the moment a person hears of the Buddha-dharma not unlike the sixth patriarch of Chan (J. *Zen*) Buddhism, Caixi Huineng 曹溪慧能 (638–713), who joined the Buddhist sangha upon hearing the words of the *Diamond Sūtra* (C. *Jingangjing*, J. *Kongōkyō* 金剛經) (T 235.8) chanted by a Buddhist priest. Pictures three through six depict the struggle of the practitioner to tame one’s mind, according to Walpola Rahula (1978), to master the *hwadu* 話頭, the key phrase of a *kōan* 公案, according to Kusan Sunim (1985), or to control one’s innermost desires and “defilements” (S. *kleśas*), according to Gyeongheo (1849–1912). The latter even suggests, in reference to the *Lotus Sūtra* (C. *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經), that the ox symbolizes “evil spirits and demons” (C. *chimei wangliang*, K. *imae mangnyang* 魑魅魍魎) (T 262.9.14a03). Having reached the stage illustrated by pictures seven, “the ox is forgotten,” the mind is at peace, the evil spirits are tamed, and the *hwadu* is no longer necessary, the ox is gone. The practitioner attains “emptiness” in picture eight, “wisdom” (S. *prajñā*, J. *eichi* 叡智) in picture nine, and “compassion” (S. *karuna*, J. *jishi* 慈悲) in picture ten. Picture ten can also be understood as a depiction of the bodhisattva ideal in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

### 3 Ueda’s Interpretation of the *Ten Ox Pictures*

In his book *The Ten Ox Pictures* (*Jūgyūzu* 十牛図),<sup>3</sup> Ueda advances his unique interpretation of these pictures, for which he draws inspiration from Zen texts, Christian and Jewish mysticism, and the philosophy of the Kyoto school. He suggests that these pictures illustrate the process of “self-understanding”<sup>4</sup> (*jiko rikai* 自己理解) (Ueda 1992: 33) and “self-examination” (*koji kyūmei* 己事究明) (Ueda 1992: 34; Nishitani 1986–1995, 11: 5). This observation is in itself not especially unique or controversial, however, Ueda’s notion of self-understanding is. The first term, “*jiko rikai*”, is rather generic and the second, “*koji kyūmei*”, evokes sayings and ideas from the Zen tradition.<sup>5</sup> Ueda’s teacher Nishitani Keiji 西谷啓治 (1900–1990) uses the very same phrase, “*koji kyūmei*,” in his essay *The Standpoint of Zen* (*Zen no tachiba* 禪の立場) (Nishitani 1986–1995, 11: 5–31) to identify the quest for self-awareness as the most basic feature and purpose of philosophy in general and Zen Buddhist philosophy in particular. According to Nishitani, the notion of “self-examination” marks commonalities between Zen philosophy and post-Cartesian philosophy such as Husserl’s phenomenology. The method, according to Nishitani, used in both traditions is a systematic reduction of human experience to disclose the structures of consciousness and, ultimately, the self. In his commentary on the *Ten Ox Pictures*, Ueda picks up this line of thought in two ways: First, he uses the same term “self-examination” to identify the purpose of the *Ten Ox Pictures* as a “phenomenology of the self” (Ueda 1992: 29). Second, the pictures raise the questions as to “what is the true self” (Ueda 1992: 34). In this quest the “self encounters itself” and “the self itself becomes the problem” (Ueda 1992: 34). This is the framework Ueda uses to develop his conception of the “self that is not a self” in three steps: the examination of the self, the loss of the self, and the disclosure of the existential intersubjective structure of the self.

Ueda thus argues that the series of the *Ten Ox Pictures* constitutes a map for self-examination. He approaches this map of self-examination three times. First, he discusses the pictures in sequence. Second, he proposes, using the terminology of Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945), that pictures one through seven portrayals of the self in the “place of being” (*yu no basho* 有の場所) (Ueda 1992: 82) and pictures eight through ten, the self in the “place of absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu no basho* 絶対無の場所) (Ueda 1992: 84). Finally, Ueda reads all ten stages through

<sup>3</sup>The NHK broadcasted a conversation with Ueda on his interpretation of the *Ten Ox Pictures*. The transcript of this conversation is published as “Jūgyūzu o yomu” online (Ueda 2003).

<sup>4</sup>Yokoyama Kōitsu 横山紘 (2000, 2005) similarly identifies self-discovery as the main theme of the *Ten Ox Pictures*.

<sup>5</sup>Nishitani observes that “The phrase ‘*koji kyūmei*’ is often used in Zen” (Nishitani 1986–1995, 11: 5) and discusses this phrase in particular length in his essay on *The Poetry of Hanshan* (C. *Hanshanshi*, J. *Kanzanshi* 寒山詩) (Nishitani 1986–1995, 12: 3–235). Texts such as *The Sayings of Monk Tetsuō* (J. *Tetsuō oshō goroku* 徹翁和尚語録) employ the phrase “examining the self” (J. *kyūmeikoji* 究明己事) (T 2566.81.269b26s), Daitō Kokushi 大燈国師 (1282–1337) the Japanese phrase “to examine the self” (J. *koji o kyūmei suru*).

the lens of picture eight, the “empty circle” (*kūensō* 空円相) (Ueda 1992: 60). All three sections are driven by the central question “what is the true self?” While the very notion of the “true self” seems at odds with a philosophy that upholds the doctrine of “no-self” (S. *anātman*, J. *muga* 無我), the answer to this question is, of course, the “self that is not a self” (*jiko narazaru jiko* 自己ならざる自己) (Ueda 1992: 60). But what do these words mean? Do they signify, as D. T. Suzuki suggests, the “true self” that emerges after the disappearance of the “small ego”? Does this phrase emphasize selfhood or negate it? If Ueda, as it soon becomes clear, suggests a “third” possibility, how does he untangle the obvious and seemingly irreconcilable tension between affirmation and negation, essentialism and nihilism? What clues towards a theory of selfhood that answers these questions does Ueda find in these ten pictures and the concomitant poems that have guided Zen practitioners in their practice of meditation for almost 1000 years? Why does Ueda use the works of German mystics, medieval as well as modern, and the insights of Nishida, the founder of the Kyoto school, and Nishitani, Ueda’s own teacher, respectively, as hermeneutical lenses and what do these philosophies reveal about the process of self-discovery depicted in the *Ten Ox Pictures*?

Walking the reader through the ten pictures, Ueda portrays picture one as “the first step towards the ‘true self’” (Ueda 1992: 33). He adds, “the existential way of searching for the true self constitutes the beginning of the true self” (Ueda 1992: 33). Ueda, thus, sets up picture one as the beginning of the journey towards the “true self.” The way he describes picture one, however, is quite puzzling. It is worth reading the whole sentence: “Picture one is called ‘searching for the ox.’ It marks the first stage when we commence to seek the mind-ox that has been lost out of sight” (Ueda 1992: 33). Ueda identifies that which is “lost out of sight” as “mind-ox” (*shingyū* 心牛). The term “mind-ox” does not constitute a popular phrase and Ueda does not use it thereafter again either. This phrase can be translated as “mind and ox” or “mind-ox.” Either way, this phrase identifies what is lost and searched for in the *Ten Ox Pictures*. Interestingly enough, this phrase can be found in the Buddhist canon<sup>6</sup> and in Puming’s version of the *Ten Ox Pictures*. Both, the *Jingde Records of the Transmission of the Lamp* (C. *Jingde chuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄) (T 2076.51.196-467) and Puming use the phrase “mind-ox” (C. *xinniu* 心牛) to reflect on the significance of the “white ox” (C. *bainiu* 白牛) (T 2076.51.427c03, Puming 1978).<sup>7</sup> Puming uses this phrase in his verse interpreting picture eighth, which depicts the ox-herder and the ox, who has just completed a transformation from

<sup>6</sup>Some of the Buddhist scriptures that use this phrase are the *Arising World Sūtra* (J. *Kisekyō* 起世經), the *Yogacārabhūmi Śāstra* (J. *Yuga shijiron* 瑜伽師地論), and the *Jingde Records of the Transmission of the Lamp* (C. *Jingde zhuandeng lu* 景德傳燈錄) (T 2076.51.196-467)

<sup>7</sup>The *Jingde Records of the Transmission of the Lamp* clearly contrasts the “mind-ox” with the “intentionality-horse” (C. *yima* 意馬). Puming’s text, on the contrary, is somewhat ambiguous. The second line of the verse accompanying picture seven can be read as either “The person is devoid of intentions, the ox is the same” or as “The person is no more, the mind-ox is the same.”

black into white, surrounded by clouds.<sup>8</sup> The phrase “white ox” is a more common symbol in the Zen literature. To Puming, the “white ox” marks the transformation of the mind during meditation. On the contrary, Kuonan does not use the phrase “mind-ox.” While Ueda does not reflect on the phrase “mind-ox” any further, he clarifies that the ox symbolizes “an extremely important matter,” the “original mind” (*honshin* 本心) (Ueda 1992: 33), and the “original self” (*honrai no jiko* 本来の自己) (Ueda 1992: 41). It is important to note that, to Ueda, the ox does not signify the “true self” (Ueda 1992: 167) but rather that which is missing and without which we are lost in ignorance. The awareness of this loss, then, marks the beginning of our journey to self-discovery.

This brings us to one of the central questions with regard to the *Ten Ox Pictures*: What does the “ox” symbolize? As we have seen above, some interpreters suggest that the ox signifies meditation methods such as the *hwadu* or *klesas*, defilements. Some Buddhist texts compare the everyday mind to an ox who needs to be tamed.<sup>9</sup> To Ueda, however, the ox is not something to be tamed, but to be found and united with. He interprets the traces of the ox in picture two of Kuonan’s set as “footprints of the ‘true self’” (Ueda 1992: 37). To Ueda, picture three signifies the “insight into one’s nature” (*kenshō* 見性), pictures three, four, and five constitute the “three stages” (*sangyōi* 三境位) of the “path to study the body” (*shingakudō* 身学道) (Ueda 1992: 39). Ueda’s rather idiosyncratic interpretation of the ox as “original self” reverberates with the “thought of original enlightenment” (*hongaku shisō* 本覚思想) of Japanese Tendai Buddhism; his claim that the “insight into one’s nature” has to be cultivated through meditation echoes Jinul’s 知訥 (1158–1210)<sup>10</sup> reconciliation of the ideologies of sudden and gradual enlightenment that divided the Chan (*Zen* 禪) schools in China during the late Tang and early Song dynasties.<sup>11</sup> Be that as it may, Ueda does not advocate a return to this original nature, but rather envisions a “unity” (*ittai* 一体) of person, i.e. practitioner, and original nature in pictures six and seven (Ueda 1992: 155, 167). In contrast to picture five, which still depicts a duality, in picture six, “herder and ox are already one [...]. The oneness in the unity of the two, herder and ox, is completely natural” (Ueda 1992: 53) and, by implication, their separation is a problem. Ueda also describes this unity of herder and ox as “mystical unity” (*shinpitēki gōitsu* 神秘的合一) (Ueda 1992: 53) and “self-identity of being” (*yu no jikodōitsu* 有の自己同一) but also as “attachment to the self” (*jishū* 自執) (Ueda 1992: 54). In other words, the unity depicted in picture seven constitutes a transition to the “true self.” Before we discuss the “true self” as depicted in the pictures eight through ten, I would like to highlight one more of Ueda’s observations.

<sup>8</sup>This picture has no equivalent in Kuonan’s set but precedes Puming’s equivalent to Kuonan’s picture seven. Puming’s set ends with the “empty circle,” picture eight in Kuonan’s set.

<sup>9</sup>According to Rahula, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* compares the mind to a bull that has to be tamed during meditation (Rahula 1978: 15).

<sup>10</sup>Interestingly enough, Jinul referred to himself as the “ox-herder” (K. *moguja* 牧牛子).

<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of Jinul’s approach, see Park (2008: 195–197).

This unity of herder and ox constitutes a twofold shift in perspective. First, pictures one through five depict or, at least, imply a duality, pictures six and seven a oneness. Second, while the titles of pictures one through six focus on the ox, in picture seven “the ox is forgotten and, at the same time, the person appears for the first time in the title” (Ueda 1992: 45) and, one could add, the first time in the poems. Ueda’s observation is as astonishing as it is profound: While the person appears in every one of the first seven pictures, the character “person” (*hito* 人) is mentioned for the first time in the title and the poem accompanying picture seven. To Ueda, this is philosophically incredibly significant: In picture seven, “the ox becomes the person. While before in picture six, we could see the process by means of which the searching self and the true self that is searched become one, in picture seven, within this oneness, the true self appears as a real person.” And again, “the image of the ox [...] portrays the true self as it is expressed when the self is divided into two selves from each other” (Ueda 1992: 45–46). In other words, Ueda suggests that the image of the ox symbolizes our “original nature” as long as it is conceived as something different from and external to us. In the unity of practitioner and original nature portrayed in picture seven, the “true self” first appears even if only in reified form. This mistaken view or the “true self” as a reified object, our “self-deception” (*jiko gokai* 自己誤解) (Ueda 1992: 33), is caused by the standpoint of the “place of being” that causes us to reify and externalize what is real. The expression of the “true self,” to the contrary, requires a new standpoint, “the place of absolute nothingness.” This standpoint, Ueda argues, is introduced in picture eight.

Using Nishida’s neologisms that have become characteristic of what we call “Kyoto School Philosophy,” Ueda meticulously contrasts pictures seven and eight clearly announcing a paradigm shift in the transition from picture seven to picture eight. According to Ueda, picture seven symbolizes “the one” (*ichi* 一), also “oneness” (*ittaisei* 一体性), picture eight “nothingness” (*mu* 無) (Ueda 1992: 57) or “emptiness” (*kū* 空) (Ueda 1992: 55). Picture seven marks “absolute affirmation” (*zettai kōtei* 絶対肯定) (Ueda 1992: 56), picture eight the “dialectic of affirmation and negation” (*kōtei to hitei no benshōhō* 肯定と否定の弁証法), “affirmation-and-yet-negation” (*kōtei soku hitei* 肯定即否定) (Ueda 1992: 90, 93), and, using a key concept from Huayan (J. *Kegon*) 華嚴 Buddhism, the “mutual interpenetration of affirmation and negation” (*kōtei to hitei no sōsokunyū* 肯定と否定の相即入) (Ueda 1992: 150). Following Nishida, Ueda affirms that “absolute nothingness” is not the “nothingness that opposes being” (Ueda 1992: 60). In this sense, it transcends the dichotomy of “being-buddha” and “not-being-buddha” (Ueda 1992: 55).<sup>12</sup> “Absolute

<sup>12</sup>In this context, Ueda evokes the famous Zen saying that “mountains are not mountains” and “mountains are just mountains” (Ueda 1992: 64, 118, 135). The full text of this passage can be found in the *Addition to the Records of the Transmission of the Lamp* (C. *Xu zhuangdeng lu* 續傳燈錄): “Thirty years ago, when I had not yet started meditation, I saw that mountains were mountains, waters were waters. After I had begun meditating and gained some knowledge, I saw that mountains were not mountains, waters were not waters. But now as I achieved a place free of desire, I see that mountains are just mountains and waters are just waters” (T 2077.51.614; Kopf 2014: 163).

nothingness” (*zettai mu* 絶対無), so Ueda, “is neither one nor two” (Ueda 1992: 59) and marks the “nothingness of nothingness” (Ueda 1992: 66): “Even emptiness is empty” (Ueda 1992: 60). In short, picture eight constitutes the “opening of absolute nothingness” (*zettai mu no hirake* 絶対無の開) (Ueda 1992: 77). To distinguish pictures seven and eight Ueda uses the terminology and philosophy of Nishida rather heavy-handedly to “eschew all binaries (dualities) of person and ox, mind and dharma,<sup>13</sup> ordinary and holy, delusion and awakening, being-buddha and not-being-buddha” (Ueda 1992: 56) because he believes that the “self that is not a self” is indicative of a metaphysical framework that is non-dualistic. Picture eight expresses as non-dual paradigm the “continuity of discontinuity” (*hirenzoku no renzoku* 非連続の連続) of the “self that is not a self.” This “continuity of discontinuity” does not only refer to the personal development of the self, but also to its depiction in the *Ten Ox Pictures*. Therefore, Ueda identifies picture eight as the pivot of the *Ten Ox Pictures*: It is expressed in pictures nine and ten respectively (Ueda 1992: 96), it entails the whole personal development depicted in all ten pictures (Ueda 1992: 154–155, 170), and, as literal and proverbial “empty circle” (*kūensō* 空円相) (Ueda 1992: 60), it functions as the framework, both literally and figuratively, of the “whole development of the self” (*jiko no zenkeireki* 自己の全経歴) and provides each stage with meaning and purpose (Ueda 1992: 153). Ueda explains the function of the “empty circle” as follows: “The self seeks itself as the ‘true self’ in the middle of the ‘true self.’ This means that, from the beginning, the ‘true self’ is not represented by the figure of the ox but by the shape of the “circle” (*ensō* 円相) (Ueda 1992: 155–156).

Ueda suggests that pictures eight through ten depict “three stages” (*sangyōi* 三境界) — “nothingness” (*mu* 無), “nature” (*shizen* 自然), and “humans” (*ningen* 人間) (Ueda 1992: 74, 89, 104) — as well as the “three moments” (*mitsu no keiki* 三つの契機) — “world” (*sekai* 世界), “god” (*kami* 神), and “humans” (*ningen* 人間) (Ueda 1992: 165) — of the “self that is not a self.” Ueda even compares these “three stages” and “three moments” of the “self that is not a self” to the “trinity” (*san’i ittai* 三位一体) of Christian theology and the teachings of the “three bodies of Buddha” (S. *trikāya*, J. *sanshin* 三身) in Mahāyāna Buddhism (Ueda 1992: 72). He further suggests that these three pictures reveal the “nothingness, the oneness, and the twoness” of the self (Ueda 1992: 92). On first sight, the items on these two above-mentioned lists do not seem to correspond to each other. In some sense, the list of the “three stages” describes the content of the pictures and the list of the three moments, Ueda’s interpretation thereof. Nevertheless, the correlation of “nature” and “god” will need further elaboration below. For now, it suffices to note that, to Ueda, picture nine portrays the “totality” (*zettai* 全体) and “undifferentiated one” (*mibun no itsu* 未分の一) (Ueda 1992: 92) while picture ten illustrates the personal dimension of the “self that is not a self” (Ueda 1992: 111). In other words, picture eight identifies the “place” qua “place of absolute nothingness” from where the

<sup>13</sup> Here, Ueda uses the term “dharma” (J. *hō* 法) in the Yogācāra sense of “object of experience.”

“self that is not a self” emerges, picture nine portrays the vertical, and picture ten envisions the horizontal dimension of this “self that is not a self.”

Having clarified the literary and conceptual context of Ueda’s notion of self-discovery, I now would like to turn to the central question of this essay: What is Ueda’s understanding of the “true self” and the “self that is not a self”? In general, the quest for the “true self” seems to run counter to the Buddhist belief in “no-self-ness” (*mugasei* 無我性) (Ueda 1992: 62). However, since the beginning of the Buddhist tradition, its representatives refused to deny the notion of a self itself. Rather, the concept of “no-self” (S. *anātman*), for the most part, targeted the belief in an “ātman,” i.e. an uncaused, eternal, and unchanging self. E.g., in the *Samyukatāgama Sūtra* (J. *Zōagonkyō* 『雜阿含經』), the founder of Buddhism, Shakyamuni (J. Shakamuni 釈迦牟尼), explained his refusal to answer the questions as to whether we possess or do not possess a self with the comment “[i]f I had said that there is a self, he would have formed the view of the self. If I had said that there is no self, he would have fallen into ignorance and madness and would be even more confused” (T 99.2.34.245). The somewhat later *Mahāprajñāpāramita Śāstras* (J. *Daichidoron* 『大智度論』) provide a philosophical argument for this stance when they explain that “[i]f there is permanence, there is impermanence, self-existence, no self-existence, activity, no activity, form formlessness. These are many forms of non-attainment” (T 1509.25.12.148). In a similar manner, Ueda rejects essentialism as the “sickness of attachment to the self” as well as nihilism as the “sickness of losing the self” (Ueda 1992: 163) and, thus, evokes “the dialectic movement between no-self and self” (ibid., 92). In concrete terms, this means that “I, being not I, am I” (Ueda 1992: 78) and “because I am not I, I am I” (Ueda 1992: 159). Here, Ueda applies D. T. Suzuki’s (1870–1966) formulation of what he called the “logic of *sokuhi*” to the notion of the self. Suzuki explains the modality of this “logic” as follows: “when we say A is A we mean that A is not A, therefore it is A” (Suzuki 1968–1971, 5: 381). This formulation clearly expresses the dialectic of self and no-self and echoes the “dialectic of affirmation and negation” characteristic of “absolute nothingness.” This conception of self and no-self is expressed in the above-mentioned famous line from the *Addition to the Records of the Transmission of the Lamp*:

Thirty years ago, when I had not yet started meditation, I saw that mountains were mountains, waters were waters. After I had begun meditating and gained some knowledge, I saw that mountains were not mountains, waters were not waters. But now as I achieved a place free of desire, I see that mountains are just mountains and waters are just waters (T 2077.51.614; Kopf 2014:163).

These phrases sound mystifying and even mystical. But what does it mean to encounter one’s own negation? What does it mean, in the words of Nishida, that a self becomes itself in the act of “self-negation”?<sup>14</sup> The answer to these questions, Ueda finds in pictures nine and ten of the *Ten Ox Pictures*: the negation of the self

<sup>14</sup>Nishida proposes that “insofar as our self transcends itself inside of itself through self-negation, it possesses a self” (Nishida 1988, 11: 458).

manifests itself in the totality of existence expressed in nature and, to cite Emanuel Levinas (1906–1995), “face-to-face with the Other” (Levinas 1987: 79).

I have mentioned above that Ueda identifies picture nine, totality expressed as nature, as the vertical and picture ten, the encounter of the “old” and the “young” person (Ueda 1992: 65, 106), as the horizontal dimension of the “self that is not a self.” The standpoint of “absolute nothingness” has cured the illness of self-loss and self-attachment and has disclosed the existential structure of the no-self. Did Ueda look to Nishida’s philosophy to elucidate the philosophical significance of picture eight, he relies on sayings and concepts from the Zen tradition, in particular, from the *Shōbōgenzō* 『正法眼藏』 (DZZ 1) of the medieval Japanese Zen master Dōgen (1200–1253), to unravel the mysteries of the “self that is not a self.” Following Dōgen’s thought, Ueda suggests that “the self that is not a self” as it is depicted in the sequence of pictures eight, nine, and ten, can be said to portray the attainment of the manifestation of the dynamic totality” (Ueda 1992: 102) and that “this ‘self that is not a self’ as it is opened in that space of absolute nothingness manifests the dynamic totality” (Ueda 1992: 123). Unfortunately, Ueda does not explain what this apparently central concept of “manifesting the dynamic totality” (*zenkigen* 全機現) means. The term “*zenkigen*” combines the phrase “dynamic totality” (*zenki* 全機) and the verb “to manifest” (*arawareru* 現れる). The term “*zenki*” occurs in quite a few Buddhist texts, most prominently in the *Blue Cliff Record* (C. *Foguo yuanwu chanshi biyan lu* 佛果圓悟禪師碧巖錄) (T. 2003.48.139a-292b), whereas “*zenkigen*” can be found mostly in the *Sayings of Zen Master Foguo Yuanwu* (C. *Foguo yuanwu chanshi yulu* 佛果圓悟禪師語錄) (T 1997.47), the *Sayings of Monk Enzan Bassui* (J. *Enzan bassui oshō goroku* 鹽山拔隊和尚語錄) (T 2558.80), and the fascicle “Zenki” 「全機」 in Dōgen’s *Shōbōgenzō* (DZZ 1: 203–205). Dōgen’s “Zenki” is dedicated to his interpretation of Zen Master Foguo Yuanwu’s famous words “birth manifests the dynamic totality, death manifests the dynamic totality” (T 1997.47.793c06; DZZ 1: 204). Dōgen explains that

birth manifests the dynamic totality, death manifests the dynamic totality. Know that within the innumerable dharmas within ourselves, there is birth and there is death. Quietly reflect on the fact that birth now as well as the numerous dharmas that coincide with this birth become birth and, at the same time, do not become birth. As one dharma and one time, there is nothing that does not belong to birth. As one heart and one event, there is nothing that does not belong to birth” (DZZ 1: 203–204).

He then adds “Know that within the self, there is a multitude of dharmas, there is birth and there is death.” On the first sight, Dōgen seems to say that the totality is expressed fully but not completely in each of two opposite moments, birth and death, Ueda would say, affirmation and negation, perhaps even self and other. Two of Dōgen’s other fascicles support this hunch. As I have mentioned above, Dōgen famously states in his “Genjōkōan” 「現成公案」 that “to study the buddha-way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self; to forget the self is to be actualized by the ten thousand dharmas; to be actualized by the ten thousand dharmas is to cast off body and mind of self and other” (DZZ 1:7–8); in his fascicle “Dōtoku” 「道得」, Dōgen proposes that “inside of me there is the depth of expression and there is the depth of non-expression; inside of him there is the depth of expression



and there is the depth of non-expression; in the depth of the way, there is self and other, in the depth of the non-way, there is self and other” (DZZ 1: 302). If we use these two latter fascicles as hermeneutical lenses, it becomes clear that “*zenkigen*” indicates the moment when the totality of experience, the “ten thousand dharmas,” is fully but not completely expressed in two separate instances, self and other, that oppose each other as affirmation and negation.<sup>15</sup> Dōgen’s texts thus confirm Ueda’s contention that the “self that is not a self” reveals both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. Or, in Nishida’s words, “our self mediates the self-expression of the absolute one in the act of self-negation” (Nishida 1988, 10: 540). To paraphrase the above-cited observation of Ueda, “the absolute one negates itself in the self and thus expresses itself,” I propose that this is what Ueda means when he defines the “self that is not a self” as the “manifestation of the dynamic totality.”

Ueda is convinced that the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of the “self that is not a self” are intimately connected. He explains that “the totality wherein self and other encounter each other comprises the self, not the other. The same totality comprises the other, not the self” (Ueda 1992: 111). On the same page, Ueda provides a longer explanation as to why this is so:

Because the self stands on the undifferentiated oneness of the self and other, the totality wherein these two, self and other, encounter each other constitutes the self. However, because the no-self stands on the undifferentiated oneness of self and other from the beginning, in this state of being no-self, the self will place the focus on the other the next time around (Ueda 1992:111).

This passage brings together our previous considerations. The totality of existence and experience is expressed fully in the dialectic and in the relationship of birth and death, affirmation and negation, self and other. In so far as this totality is experienced by the self as transcendent, it can be conceived of as “god” and as “eternal Thou” (Ueda 1992: 108, 110). In his description of the totality as transcendent god, Ueda relies on the works of Meister Eckhart (1260–1328), Nishida Kitarō, and Martin Buber (1878–1965). Ueda borrows from Nishida and Buber the terminology of the “eternal Thou” (Ueda 1992: 108–110; Buber 1995: 89) and “absolute other” (*zettai no ta* 絶対の他) (Nishida 1988, 6: 389), respectively, and from Meister Eckhart and Nishida, the non-dual nature of god. However, Ueda observes, “god does not exist outside,” “the metaphysical claim ‘god exists’ is invalid; the claim ‘god is nothing,’ ‘god does not exist,’ is equally invalid” (Ueda 1992: 134).

Ueda does not reject the conception of a god but an essentialist understanding thereof. His discussion of “god” strangely reminds the reader of Shakyamuni’s response to the question whether we have a self and of early Buddhist debates on selfhood. These argumentative strategies are designed to destabilize our notions of self and god in the same way in which the standpoint of “absolute nothingness” subverts the categories of “inside” and “outside” (Ueda 1992: 122). Ueda maintains that “god” and “self” constitute “two aspects” of “the self that is not a self.” The former constitutes the religious dimension of the “true self” and the latter a

---

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly enough, Levinas describes death as absolute otherness (Levinas 1987: 71–79).

“non-religious” one (Ueda 1992: 102–103). Nature as represented in picture nine similarly displays the “non-religious” side of the totality of experience as well as the “depth of the everyday” (J. *byōjōtei* 平常低) (Ueda 1992: 103, 131) of god. To illustrate the “non-religious” character of totality, Ueda evokes the famous Zen saying “kill the buddhas and the ancestors” (*satsubutsu satsuso* 殺佛殺祖) (Ueda 1992: 128; T 1997.47.792a09), which is also known as “when you see a buddha, kill that buddha; when you see an ancestor, kill that ancestor” (J. *kenbutsu satsubutsu kenzo satsuso* 見佛殺佛 見祖殺祖) (T 1999.47.979b23; T 2000.47.1041b25–26). However, what is most important to Ueda is that “the foundation of god and the foundation of the self are identical” (Ueda 1992: 130). His words echo Buber’s observation that “[c]ertainly God is wholly other and yet the same. He is completely present” (Buber 1995: 75). The seeming distance between God and self is overcome in the religious practice of “prayer” (*inori* 祈り) and “Zen meditation” (*zenjō* 禪定) respectively (Ueda 1992: 110). To express this intimate relation between god and self, Ueda uses one of Nishida’s neologisms, “the inverse correlation” (*gyakutaiō* 逆対応) (Ueda 1992: 111, 112): “Our self faces absolute negation in the self-identity of contradictions. Therein, the self opposes the absolute one and touches god in the act of an inverse correlation” (Nishida 1988, 11: 427). It is in this act of self-negation that the self expresses the totality of experiences and affirms itself. This is the concrete meaning Ueda assigns to the dialectic of affirmation and negation. Up to now, Ueda’s reading of the *Ten Ox Pictures* followed the mainstream rhetoric of the Kyoto School philosophers. His interpretation of picture ten reveals his unique contribution to the philosophy of no-self.

Picture ten depicts the social, horizontal, dimension of the “self that is not a self.” The picture portrays an old person interacting with a younger one in a town. This interaction, often referred to as “encounter dialogue” (McRae 2004: 74), constitutes a common trope in the Zen Buddhist canon, its “question-and-answer” (*mondō* 問答) format a canonized literary genre in the Zen Buddhist tradition (Ishii 2010; Ueda 1992: 69, 106) on which Dōgen predicated his above-cited concept of “expression” (*dōtoku* 道得) (DZZ 1: 301). As mentioned above, *The Comprehensive Chronicles of the Buddhas and the Patriarchs* famously recalls the interactions between Bodhidharma and his four disciples that allegedly occurred at the time when he chose a successor (T 49.2035.291). Similarly, in Dōgen’s “Mountain and Water Sūtra,” Zen master Decheng (J. *Tokujiō* 德誠和尚) concludes his journey of self-discovery when he meets a disciple (DZZ 1: 266).

Ueda, however, reveals the exciting philosophical ramifications of this common trope. In his first discussion of picture ten, Ueda boldly states that “the true self does not reside in *nirvāṇa* but ventures into the street and meets others” (Ueda 1992: 60). Ueda adds to this comment that “the true self expresses the situation in which two people meet” (Ueda 1992: 67). In his second discussion of picture ten, Ueda adds “in picture ten, the true self constitutes the reason two people face each other (generally speaking, become people)” (Ueda 1992: 91). Here, Ueda evokes the observation made by Watsuji Tetsurō that the Japanese word “*ningen*” 人間 (person) is existentially spatial and relational (Watsuji 1961–1963, 9: 13–20). In picture ten, the face-to-face encounter of two people, young and old, constitutes the

reality of the true self as the “self that is not a self” (Ueda 1992: 69). “The ‘self that is not a self’ appears as self in the form of the real twofold self, that is, as self-and-other” (Ueda 1992: 68). “The ‘true self,’ that is, the “self that is not a self” ... constitutes the oneness of the self-and-other” (Ueda 1992: 112). Inheriting Watsuji’s insight, Ueda even writes the Japanese word for “person,” *nin*gen 人間, as “*nin*[gen]” “人「間」” literally “the space between’ people” (Ueda 1992: 113).

To illuminate what he considers the relational character of the “self that is not the self” and the embodiment of its “dialectic of affirmation and negation,” Ueda refers to Martin Buber’s “I- and-Thou” (G. *Ich-Du*) (Buber 1995: 3). Ueda’s account of the self’s existential relationality inherits from Buber’s inspirational writing the driving conviction that “in the beginning there was relationality” (Buber 1995: 18) as well as the belief that self discloses an existential “twofold-ness” (*nijūsei* 二重性, G. *Zwiefältigkeit*) (Ueda 1992: 77; Buber 1995: 3). Ueda translates Buber’s “*das Zwischen*” (“in between”) using Watsuji’s terminology of “*aida*” 間 (the space between) and “*aidagara*” 間柄 (betweenness, relationship) (Watsuji 1961–1963, 9: 13–20). This relationship between I and Thou possesses “infinite depth” and expresses “absolute nothingness” (Ueda 1992: 113). But how does this existential relational character of the “self that is not a self” have to be understood? If the self does not constitute an identifiable and causally independent essence, what is it that we call the “self”? To expound on “the self that is not a self” which is, simultaneously, affirmed and negated, Ueda refers to Nishitani’s observation that

first, as subjects both I and Thou constitute absolutes, respectively. Second, I and Thou oppose each other absolutely ... A is completely separate from B. It does not belong to it. Conversely, we must say that B is independent from A and does not belong to it. Therein, A and B stand in a relationship that fundamentally connects them, for the first time (Nishitani 1986–1995, 12: 277; Ueda 1992: 112).

Ueda inherits from Nishitani the notion that the self is existentially ambiguous and adds to it Buber’s conception of the “basic word” (G. *Grundwort*) (Buber 1995: 3) proposing that its relation to the other is constitutive of the self.

In the background of Ueda’s discussion of the I-and-Thou, which he ostensibly bases on Buber’s essay whose key terms he renders into Japanese using Watsuji’s terminology and which he interprets using Nishitani’s insight, one can recognize traces of Nishida’s discussion of the “I and Thou” (*watakushi to nanji* 私と汝) (Nishida 1988, 6: 341–427). The current essay, of course, does not provide the space for an in-depth examination of Nishida’s conception of “I and Thou,” how he distinguishes it from “self and other,” and why he chooses the term “absolute other” instead of, as Buber did, “eternal Thou.” Nevertheless, a short introduction to Nishida’s concept will illustrate why and how Ueda identifies relationality and intersubjectivity as the most fundamental characteristic of the “self that is not a self.” In his essay *I and Thou* (*Watakushi to nanji* 私と汝) (Nishida 1988, 6: 341–427), Nishida’s main argument is threefold. (1) I and Thou cannot exist without each other. Nishida uses the Hegelian terminology of “determination” (G. *Bestimmung*) to argue their interdependence, which he refers to, elsewhere, as “mutual determination” (*sōgo gentei* 相互限定) (Nishida 1988, 8: 23; Nishida 1988,

10: 143): “Insofar as the I and Thou together are determined by means of the dialectical determination, I and Thou are mediated by absolute negation” (Nishida 1988, 6: 372). The self does not comprise an independent reality but is existentially woven into a tapestry of interdependence. 2) Nishida argues that not only are self and other intertwined but also our sense of independence and dependence:

I and Thou are wholly other. There is no universal that contains both I and Thou. The I becomes an I by recognizing the Thou. The Thou become a Thou by recognizing the I. In the depth of the I is the Thou; in the depth of the Thou is the I. The I unites with the Thou in the depth of the I. The Thou unites with the I in the depth of the Thou. Because they become completely other, they unite internally (Nishida 1988, 6: 381).

Interestingly enough, this insight is echoed by Jessica Benjamin, a psychoanalyst with a solid background in Hegelian philosophy. She coined the term “mutual recognition” to articulate that individuals can become individuals only in relationships to an other. She explains:

The very need for recognition entails this fundamental paradox. At the very moment of realizing our own independence, we are dependent upon another to recognize it. At the very moment we come to understand the meaning of ‘I, myself’ we are forced to see the limitations of this self. At the moment when we understand that separate minds can share the same state, we also realize that these minds can disagree (Benjamin 1988: 33).

Here, Benjamin describes the existential paradox of human persons: we need relationships to become individuals. Ueda similarly ascertains that “individuals are individuals in relationship to [other] individuals” (Ueda 1992: 112). This paradox requires that we share an “internal unity” despite our external separation and isolation so much that “separate minds can share the same state.” To express this existential mutuality between the two seemingly autonomous entities of self and other, Ueda coins the term “self-awareness is awareness of the other” (*jikakukakuta* 自覚覚他) (Ueda 1992: 65). In a separate essay I have referred to this form of awareness as “knowing oneself—understanding the other; knowing the other—understanding oneself” (C. *zhijimingta zhitamingji* 知己明他 知他明己) (Kopf 2017: 262). It is this need for and paradox of mutual recognition that motivates Nishida and, by extension, Ueda to rethink the nature of the self as “self that is not a self” and to develop conceptual terminology that can articulate the inherent relationality of self and other. (3) Since we tend to reify concepts into essences, it is necessary to use language that subverts essentialism and dualism, two worldviews that seduce us into believing that self and other constitute individual and causally independent realities. In other words, Benjamin, Nishida, and Ueda do not critique and subvert a specific form of logic but the conception that individuals comprise isolated and closed systems in the sense of Leibnizian *monads*.

Ueda thus argues that the *Ten Ox Pictures* suggest a paradigm shift. He envisions this paradigm shift as a transition from the “place of being” to the “place of absolute nothingness.” This is why he identifies “in-betweenness” and “relationality” (*aidagara* 間柄) as a third term (Ueda 1992: 107); this is the reason he uses terms such as Kōyama Iwao’s 高山岩男 (1905–1993) “call-and-response” (*ko’ō* 呼応) (Kopf 2015b: 29) as well as Buddhist terms such as “mutual interpenetration” (*sōsokunyū*

相即入) and “death-and-yet-birth” (*shisokushō* 死即生) to describe the relationship between self and other. However, while these terms are rather subversive and, in some sense, deconstructive, Ueda offers, elsewhere, an indication of how the terminology of “I and Thou” differs from that of “self and other” and how the relationality of I-and-Thou has to be conceptualized so that we can conceive of the “self that is not a self.” In short, he suggests conceiving of I and Thou as two “subjects” (*shutai* 主体) (Ueda 1992: 112) interacting with each other and proposes to describe their relationship as “weaving vines” (*J. kattō* 葛藤) (Ueda 1992: 80). *Kattō* is an interesting word as it constitutes the compound of the characters for Japanese arrowroot and Japanese wisteria, respectively, but is mostly used to designate complex psychological relationships. In one of his many essays on Dōgen, Thomas P. Kasulis translates *kattō* as “(verbal) entanglements” (Kasulis 1985: 92). And this is where it gets interesting. The usage of this term has a rich history in the Buddhist tradition where it is used both literally and figuratively. Dōgen’s fascicle “Kattō” 「葛藤」 (DZZ 1: 331–337) is a commentary on the above-mentioned passage from the *The Comprehensive Chronicles of the Buddhas and the Patriarchs*, which recalls a conversation between Bodhidharma and his four most advanced disciples. According to this text, Bodhidharma evaluated the answers his disciples gave to the question “can you express your attainment” with “you attained my skin,” “you attained my flesh,” “you attained my bones,” and “you attained my marrow,” respectively (T 2035.49.291). For the most part, these four answers have been understood to be graded by the level of wisdom they express. However, Dōgen disagrees with this reading and suggests that the true meaning of what Bodhidharma really proclaimed to his students was “you attain me, I attain you.” This phrase destabilizes the duality of self and other insofar as it articulates the “oneness of inside and outside” (*naigai ichinyō* 内外一如) (DZZ 1: 333). In other words, Dōgen claims that the relationship between Bodhidharma and his disciples was existentially transformed and had become truly intersubjective. In his fascicle “Sansuikyō” (山水教), Dōgen similarly suggests that Zen Master Decheng attained the transformed state of awareness characteristic of what Zen thinkers refer to as the “no-mind” (*mushin* 無心) only when he met his disciple. Dōgen explains that “when the person saw Decheng, he became Decheng; when Decheng touched the person, he became that person” (DZZ 1: 266). Dōgen’s innovative interpretation of these popular texts and stories disclose the existential relationality of I-and-Thou Ueda evokes in his commentary of the *Ten Ox Pictures*. This non-dual conception of the “self that is not a self,” which rejects the notion of the “self” as an isolated and causally independent system in favor of a dynamic interaction between self and other, constitutes Ueda’s contribution to the understanding of this particular Zen text as well as to our understanding of what it means to be a self in general. In the last section of this paper, I will propose a new conception of selfhood based on Ueda’s reading of Kuon’s *Ten Ox Pictures*.

## 4 Towards a New Conception of the Self

In this paper I have shown that Ueda makes four fundamental claims about the nature of consciousness in his commentary on the *Ten Ox Pictures*. (1) Ueda postulates that there are two forms of consciousness: everyday consciousness, depicted in pictures one through six of the *Ten Ox Pictures*, which introduces an essential difference between subject and object, self and world (totality), as well as self and other, and the transformed consciousness depicted in pictures eight through ten. (2) The first six (or seven) pictures portray the self as constructed in the “place of being,” while the transformed awareness reflects the “self that is not a self” located in the “place of absolute nothingness” depicted as the “empty circle.” (3) “The self that is not self” expresses a dynamic relationship between self and totality, on the one side, and I and Thou, both of which constitute individual expressions of this totality, on the other. (4) Ueda employs language that intentionally subverts the notion that the self constitutes a closed system in order to articulate that the “self that is not a self” “manifests the dynamic totality” and to destabilize the kind of language that seduces us to become attached to either essentialism or nihilism. This is Ueda’s contribution to our understanding of selfhood and the conceptual frameworks that we apply to reflect on who we are. However, one question remains: What is the difference between the “self” located in the “place of being” and the “self that is not a self” located in the place of “absolute nothingness”? Ueda successfully clarified the difference in the metaphysical frameworks these conceptions imply. But what creates these different metaphysical frameworks? Why does the “self” depicted in pictures one through seven perceive the world differently than the “self that is not a self” depicted in pictures eight through ten? Why are some people attached to either the existence or the non-existence of a self whereas others are not? I believe the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (J. *Ryōgakyō* 楞伽經) (T 672.16; Suzuki 1994) can offer a key to this conundrum.

If one reads Kuonan’s *Ten Ox Pictures* on the background of the Buddhist scriptures such as the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* (J. *Ryōgakyō* 楞伽經) (T 672.16), the ten pictures seem to indicate the overcoming of everyday consciousness characterized by the dichotomy of the cognitive subject and object. The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* as well as Vasubandhu’s (J. *Seshin* 世親) (4th/5th century) *Thirty Verses* (S. *Trīṃśikā*, J. *Yuishiki sanjū ronju* 唯識三十論頌) offer two categories that help with the interpretation of these pictures, namely the distinction between “mind” (S. *citta*, J. *shin* 心) as well as the “mental object” (S. *caita*, J. *shinjo* 心所) (Suzuki 1994: 44) and the so-called doctrine of the “three natures” (S. *trisvabhāva*, J. *sanshō* 三性) (Suzuki 1994: 59–60). The conceptual pair *citta-caita*, which is central in the Yogācāra tradition and the forms of Buddhism influenced by it, postulates, not unlike Edmund Husserl’s (1859–1938) phenomenology, that consciousness reveals a subject-object structure and that the epistemic subject, *citta*, is always constituted *vis-à-vis* the object of cognition. Husserl called the epistemic subject “*noesis*” and its objective content “*noema*.” The so-called “three natures,” “imagined nature” (S. *parikalpita svabhāva*, J. *henge shoshūshō* 遍計所執性), “interdependent nature” (S. *paratantra svabhāva*,

J. *eta kishō* 依他起性), and “perfected nature” (S. *parinispanna svabhāva*, J. *enjō shishō* 圓成實性) outline a process by means of which everyday consciousness is transformed and overcome. “Imagined nature” indicates the insight that the world is mistakenly constructed as an independent object, while “interdependent nature” indicates that the seemingly independent object is constructed by and dependent on an epistemic subject. “Perfected nature,” however, signifies the transformation of everyday consciousness and a state where the epistemic subject no longer projects its own constructions onto the world as its own fabricated object.<sup>16</sup> Applying this Yogācāra terminology to the *Ten Ox Pictures*, one can interpret the young herder as *citta* and the ox as *caita*: Pictures one and two symbolize the “imagined nature” where the subject projects its own preconceptions on a constructed object, pictures three through six the “interdependent nature” in which *citta* and *caita* depend on each other, and pictures eight to ten the “perfected nature,” an awareness devoid of intentional projection, an awareness without an epistemic subject. Picture seven constitutes, as Ueda suggests, the threshold between intentional consciousness and transformed awareness,<sup>17</sup> In other words, picture one designates the subjective and egocentric consciousness in search for objectivity, pictures three to six the subject’s struggles with its own imagined objectivity and the insight that knowledge is constructed, and pictures eight to ten a transformed awareness devoid of a positing subject. Buddhist philosophers suggest that this dissolution of the subject-object structure of everyday consciousness constitutes the basis for “wisdom” and “compassion.”

I think if we combine the interpretation of pictures one through six from such a Yogācāra standpoint with Ueda’s understanding of pictures eight through ten, we can identify a significant difference between everyday consciousness that postulates the “self” as a being and a transformed awareness that gives rise to the “self that is not a self.” If the epistemological subject posits the world as an object, then, the self itself as well as the others will become objectified and self-awareness is not possible. Intersubjectivity in the sense of the I-and-Thou where self and other encounter each other as equals and recognize each other as subjects requires a different kind of consciousness, a consciousness that does not attempt to possess the world as its own intentional object. Rather, this transformed awareness engages the world as a Thou and expresses a dynamic interaction wherein neither objectifies the other but both recognize and thus determine each other as “manifestations of the dynamic totality.” In some sense, Ueda not only rejects both a first-person ontology, which conceives of consciousness as subjectivity, and a third-person ontology, which makes consciousness the object of knowledge and scholarly inquiry, but he also introduces a new understanding of self and consciousness as intersubjective. I call this conception of self and mind “second-person ontology.” The clarification of such

<sup>16</sup>In the Yogācāra tradition, there are multiple interpretations of these “three natures” especially with regard to the relationship between the “interdependent nature” and the “perfected nature.”

<sup>17</sup>In his *Zen Action – Zen Person*, Kasulis suggests that meditation engenders a transformation of “intentional” consciousness into a “non-intentional” one (Kasulis 1981: 72–75).

an understanding of consciousness as inherently intersubjective will not only enhance our understanding of the Zen experience but, more importantly, reveal the twofold self that constructs the world as its object and, at the same time, engages with the world and all the subjects that inhabit it in a dynamic and reciprocal interaction revealing an existentially open and interconnected self. I have started to sketch the outline of such an inherently intersubjective “no/self” in my essay “Self, Selflessness, and the Endless Search for Identity: A Meta-psychology of Human Folly” (Kopf 2017). The key to this conception lies in Ueda’s interpretation of the *Ten Ox Pictures*.

## Bibliography

- Abe, Masao 阿部正雄. 1992. *A Study of Dōgen: His Philosophy and Religion*, ed. Steven Heine. Albany: SUNY Press.
- App, Urs. 1996. *International Research Institute for Zen Buddhism*. Kyoto: Hanazono University. Last access on August 1, 2019. [http://iriz.hanazono.ac.jp/frame/data\\_f00c.en.html](http://iriz.hanazono.ac.jp/frame/data_f00c.en.html)
- Benjamin, Jessica. 1988. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Buber, Martin. 1995. *Ich und Du*. Stuttgart: Phillip Reclam Jr. GmbH & Co.
- Husserl, Edmund. 1960. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Trans. Dorion Cairns. The Hague: Springer Science and Business Media B.V.
- Ishii, Kiyozumi 石井 清純. 2010. *Zen mondō nyūmon* 『禅問答入門』 [*Introduction to Zen Encounter Dialogues*]. Tokyo: Kadogawa Sensho.
- Kasulis, Thomas P. 1981. *Zen Action – Zen Person*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.
- . 1985. The Incomparable Philosopher. In *Dōgen Studies*, ed. William LaFleur, 83–98. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Komjathy, Louis. 2017. *Taming the Wild Horse: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Daoist Wild Horse Taming Pictures*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kopf, Gereon. 2005. Critical Comments on Nishida’s Use of Chinese Buddhism. *Journal for Chinese Philosophy* 32 (2): 313–329.
- . 2014. ‘When all dharmas are the Buddha-dharma’: Dōgen as comparative philosopher. In *Dōgen and Sōtō Zen: New Perspectives*, ed. Steven Heine, 138–164. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2015a. Zen, Erfahrung und Philosophie: Ueda Shizuteru und die Schöpfung einer Zen-Philosophie. Trans. Ralf Müller. *Asiatische Studien – Études Asiatiques* 69 (2): 369–390.
- . 2015b. Antiphony: A Model of Dialogue. *The Bulletin of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture* 39: 26–35.
- . 2017. Self, Selflessness, and the Endless Search for Identity: A Meta-psychology of Human Folly. In *Self and No-Self: The Debate about Selflessness and the Sense of Self*, ed. Ingolf U. Dahlferth and Trevor W. Kimball, 239–262. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Kusan, Sunim. 1985. *The Korean Way of Zen*. Trans. Martin Fages, ed. Stephen Batchelor. New York: Weatherhill.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. 1987. *Time and the Other [and Additional Essays]*. Trans. by Richard Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- McRae, John. 2004. *Seeing through Zen*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Nishitani, Keiji 西谷啓治. 1986–1995. *Nishitani keiji chosakushū* 『西谷啓治著作集』 [*Collected Works of Keiji Nishitani*]. 26 volumes. Tokyo: Sōbunsha.
- Nishida, Kitarō 西田幾多郎. 1988. *Nishida kitarō zenshū* 『全集』 [*Complete works of Kitarō Nishida*]. 20 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.



- Park, Jin Y. 2008. *Buddhism and Postmodernity: Zen, Huayan, and the Possibility of Zen Buddhist Postmodern Ethics*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Puming. 1978. *Mu niu tu song* 『牧牛圖頌』 [*The Oxherding Pictures with Illustrations and Verses*]. Hong Kong: Bong Kong Buddhist Publication Printing Press.
- Rahula, Walpola. 1978. *Zen and the Taming of the Bull: Towards a Definition of Buddhist Thought*. London: Gordon Fraser.
- Sueki, Fumihiko. 2015. *Kusakijōbutsu no shisō* 『草木成仏の思想』 [*The Belief that Grass and Trees become Buddha*]. Tokyo: Kabushiki Kaisha Sanga.
- Suzuki, D.T. 鈴木大拙. 1968–1971. *Suzuki daisetsu zenshū* 『鈴木大拙全集』 [*Complete Works of Daisetsu Suzuki*]. 32 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- . 鈴木大拙. 1974. *Manual of Zen Buddhism*. London: Rider.
- . 鈴木大拙 (Transl.). 1994. *The Lankavatara Sutra – A Mahayana Text*. Taipei: SMC Publishing.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1991. *Nishida kitarō o yomu* 『西田幾多郎を読む』 [*Reading Nishida Kitarō*]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- . 上田閑照. 1992. Jiko no genshōgaku: Zen no jūgyūzu o tebiku toshite 「自己の現象学— 禅の十牛図を手引くとして」 [Phenomenology of the Self: An Interpretation of the *Ten Ox Pictures* in Zen]. In *Jūgyūzu* 『十牛図』 [*The Ten Ox Pictures*], eds. Shizuteru Ueda and Seizan Yanagida, 19–174. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō.
- . 上田閑照. 2002. *Nishida kitarō wa dare ka* 『西田幾多郎は誰か』 [*Who is Nishida Kitarō?*]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- . 上田閑照. 2003. *Jūgyūzu o yomu* 「十牛図を読む」 [Reading the Ten Ox Pictures]. *Kokoro no jidai (NHK kyōiku terebi)* 『NHK 教育テレビのこころの時代』 [*Times of the Heart (An educational program of the NHK)*]. Last accessed August 10, 2019. <http://h-kishi.sakura.ne.jp/kokoro-26.htm>
- Watsuji, Tetsurō 和辻哲郎. 1961–1963. *Watsuji tetsurō zenshū* 『和辻哲郎全集』 [*The Complete Works of Watsuji Tetsurō*]. 21 volumes. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Yokoyama, Kōitsu 横山紘一. 2000. *Jūgyūzu nyūmon: “atarashii jibun” no michi* 『十牛図入門: 「新しい自分」の道』 [*Introduction to the Ten Oxherding Pictures: The Way to a “New Self”*]. Tokyo: Gentōsha.
- . 横山紘一. 2005. *Jūgyūzu: jikohakken e no tabi* 『十牛図: 自己発見への旅』 [*The Ten Oxherding Pictures: The Journey to Self-Discovery*]. Tokyo: Shunjūsha.

# Part XI

## Existential Practice: Ethical Engagement

### Introduction

The final chapter takes up and makes explicit an underlying theme central to both Ueda's philosophical endeavor as such as well as of the resources he is drawn on, primarily Buddhism: engaging the no-self in this world. Jason Dockstader suggests an interpretation based on dialetheism – most reasonable to assume that this reading isn't impossible, but hardly endorsed by Ueda himself. He does so by reflecting upon and developing Bret W. Davis's commentary on Ueda. In his argumentation, Dockstader puts forth the claim that moral facts both exist and do not exist, and that moral judgments end up being both true and false, a true moral contradiction. He thereby contributes to a growing literature aiming to discover the implied metaethics of figures in the Mahāyāna and Madhyamaka Buddhist ethical tradition. According to Dockstader, Ueda's moral dialetheism, as developed through his Zen-inspired non-mysticism, is noteworthy for not only its theoretical novelty but for its therapeutic benefits.

The second article, by Gregory Moss, defends Ueda against critique both East and the West. In his essay, "An Ontology of Non-Discriminatory Love: The Resurrection of the Triune Self in Ueda Shizuteru's Appropriation and Critique of Meister Eckhart", Moss investigates the comparison between Zen and Eckhart's motif of the "birth of God in the soul" in Ueda's writings in order to tackle the controversial issue regarding responsibility and ethical action in the absence of a substantive self. Moss invokes the question of how the "selfless self" can be a viable alternative to normative ethical theory in order to counter theologian Fritz Buri's critique of Ueda's project. He argues that Ueda's account of ethics is grounded in the total ontological and epistemic reversion of the self to selflessness, which he exemplifies in the ontological groundwork of Ueda's ethics of compassion.

# Chapter 22

## Ueda's Metaethics



Jason Dockstader

### 1 Introduction

There has been a recent surge in papers addressing the metaethical foundations of Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics. In particular, scholars of the Madhyamaka tradition have sought to tease out the metaethical views implicit in figures like Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva (Cowherds 2011, 2015; Davis 2018; Tillemans 2011).

Bret W. Davis (2008) has similarly questioned the metaethical presuppositions of Kyoto School philosopher Ueda Shizuteru and his Zen-inspired non-mysticism. Davis's discussion of Ueda echoes a concern found throughout the attempts to address Mahāyāna Buddhist metaethics: how exactly is Buddhist ethics supposed to be grounded on anything metaphysically real if nothing at all enjoys a real or self-subsistent existence? In other words, what could ground ethics if there are no grounds? Davis puts the question this way: "When one breaks through the transcendent being of God to an absolute nothingness, to an open expanse wherein all things can manifest themselves in the immediacy of their suchness, what principle is left for distinguishing right from wrong or good from evil?" (Davis 2008: 222). Such questions are driven by the worry that the process of emptying things of their independent existence may go too far and leave Buddhist practitioners without a principled way to live ethically in the world. Gordon F. Davis (2018) has called it 'the *atipada* problem,' signifying the risk of overstepping the bounds of worthwhile reflection by pronouncing entities as ultimately empty. Davis worries there might be something self-defeating about too much *śūnyatā*. At the very least, there seems to be a tension, if not a dilemma, in Buddhist metaethics: how can a Buddhist hold both to a universal compassion or karmic law or the bodhisattva path *and* to a view

---

J. Dockstader (✉)  
University College Cork, Cork, Ireland  
e-mail: [j.dockstader@ucc.ie](mailto:j.dockstader@ucc.ie)

of the ultimate emptiness of all things? It seems in the end one or the other will have to give way.

I would like to do a couple things in this paper. I would like to show how the way Davis answers his question about Ueda tacitly yet ambiguously takes a position within the contemporary metaethical taxonomy of views, a taxonomy neither he nor any other scholar of Mahayana metaethics has yet to elucidate with a sufficient degree of precision. I argue that only with a proper understanding of the spectrum of metaethical views will attempting to pinpoint the latent metaethics of a figure like Ueda meet with any sort of success. This is merely to say that comparative philosophy needs contemporary metaethics. Comparative philosophy can improve with a greater understanding of the very concepts it is trying to use. Of course, there is the worry of overdoing it and mangling the insights of a figure like Ueda in order to get them to fit into the Western metaethical taxonomy, a move that might smack of philosophical imperialism or chauvinism. I think this worry is overwrought. If one thinks there is no *philosophical* benefit to understanding Ueda's latent metaethics in contemporary Western analytic terms, then they are welcome to make that argument. On the other hand, if one feels that putting the thoughts of Ueda through the wringer of Western metaethics can provide no *therapeutic* benefits, that is a consideration I think we should take more seriously. Ultimately, however, as I will argue, I think if philosophy, including something like the comparative metaethics attempted in this piece, is going to succeed depends ultimately on its therapeutic upshot.

Another thing I would like to do here is show how the actual metaethical view implied by Ueda's non-mysticism is in fact a position that contemporary metaethicists have not yet properly developed. I claim this is great news for metaethicists. Stuck as they are in the Western tradition and utterly over-professionalized, thus missing the therapeutic upshot of holding certain positions, metaethicists on their own would most likely have never stumbled upon this view. In general terms, what a latent Buddhist metaethical view can offer contemporary metaethics is a way of understanding moral facts without the traditional three laws of thought, the three principles of classical logic: the principle of identity, the principle of noncontradiction, and the principle of excluded middle. The principle of identity says a thing is identical to itself, and that whatever is, is. The principle of noncontradiction says that contradictory statements or states of affairs cannot both be true in the same way at the same time. And the principle of excluded middle says that for any statement or state of affairs, only it or its negation could be true.

In its most therapeutically rich forms, Mahāyāna Buddhist metaphysics rejects these three principles. It is not the case for many Mahāyāna Buddhists that things are identical to themselves, that things are what they are, that they cannot truthfully contradict themselves or each other, or that statements have to be either true or their negations true. As far as I know, no metaethical view has yet been offered that violates these three principles. And, as far as I know, no attempt to reconstruct a Buddhist metaethical view has noted its violation of these principles. Therefore, what I will do is show how Davis's reading of Ueda leads the way toward a metaethical position not yet made clear. This position will hopefully capture the full metaethical intent and import of Ueda's non-mysticism and provide a template for

Mahāyāna Buddhist metaethics more generally. I will call this view 'moral dialetheism.' I will thus proceed by first offering the main options in contemporary metaethics, then show how Davis gets one side of Ueda's metaethics right, and then conclude by providing the other side of Ueda's full metaethical position. Moral dialetheism will be offered as both Ueda's implicit metaethical view and a novel metaethical view.

## 2 Metaethics

Metaethics is the study of moral facts. Moral facts are intrinsically prescriptive, inescapably authoritative, irreducibly normative, mind-independent, and objective categorical reasons for action. They are not mere desires, preferences, pieces of prudence or advice, or Humean-style hypothetical reasons for action. Metaethics asks three questions about moral facts. First, it asks the psychological question of which mental state one is primarily in when expressing a moral judgment. When I say 'stealing is wrong,' am I primarily expressing a belief, an emotion, or a desire? Second, metaethics asks a semantic question concerning the meaningfulness or truth-aptness of moral discourse. When I say 'stealing is wrong,' am I saying something meaningful and in the business of aiming to report the facts about the world? And third, metaethics asks an ontological question about the existence of moral facts. Do moral facts exist? Do they exist out in the world, objectively, independent of my mind or mental states? When I say 'stealing is wrong,' am I actually referring to a property called 'wrongness' being instantiated in the world by some action or event or state of affairs? Metaethical positions are disambiguated by how they answer these three questions. If one answers the psychological question by claiming one is primarily expressing a belief when expressing a moral judgment, then one is a cognitivist. If not, then one is a noncognitivist. If one answers the semantic question with the claim that moral discourse is meaningful, truth-apt, and in the business of aiming to report the facts, then one is a factualist. If not, then one is a nonfactualist. If one answers the ontological question by claiming that moral facts do exist out in the world mind-independently, then one is a realist. If not, then one is an anti-realist.

Most metaethicists are moral cognitivists, factualists, and realists (Bourget and Chalmers 2014). They believe we are primarily expressing beliefs and aiming to say something true about really existing moral facts when we express moral judgments. Moral realists subdivide on the basis of where they place moral facts in the world. Some say moral facts, or moral normativity more generally, cannot be found anywhere in the natural world as science describes it. Thus, moral facts must exist non-naturally. These realists are moral non-naturalists. Other realists think moral facts do exist in the natural world, either as natural properties themselves or as reducible to natural properties. These folks are moral naturalists, Cornell realists or moral reductionists respectively. Moral non-naturalists and naturalists are robust moral

realists. They think moral facts are not reducible to any agent. There are other types of realists who are less robust. They are minimal moral realists. They think moral facts are mind-dependent to a certain extent. These metaethicists are moral voluntarists. Moral voluntarist views are distinguished based on which agent to which moral facts are reduced. Moral supernaturalists say moral facts depend on God's agency. Moral relativists say moral facts depend on a certain society or culture or group. Moral constructivists say moral facts depend on the decisions of rational minds. Moral subjectivists say moral facts are reducible to any subject's mental agency. Robust and minimal moral realists all agree as moral cognitivists, factualists, and realists, but differ in where they place moral facts in the world. Often Buddhists are thought to be either moral naturalists or constructivists, as both views are thought to be the metaethical conditions of virtue ethics and, at times, consequentialism, and many regard Buddhist ethics to be either virtue ethical or consequentialist (Keown 2001; Tillemans 2011).

Moral anti-realism is the view that moral facts do not exist. One can arrive at this view in two ways. One can deny both that we hold genuine moral beliefs and that morality is a truth-apt discourse. Since we are expressing other mental states and not using a discourse in the business of aiming to report the facts when uttering moral judgments, there can be no moral facts to which our moral judgments correspond. This combination of psychological noncognitivism, semantic nonfactualism, and ontological anti-realism is often called moral expressivism. The other way to arrive at moral anti-realism is by retaining a cognitivist view of moral psychology and factualist view of moral semantics while still concluding moral facts do not exist. This view is moral error theory. It says we have genuine moral beliefs and moral discourse is truth-apt, but that no moral judgment ever succeeds at corresponding to moral facts. This is because there are none. They are simply too weird to exist. Thus, morality is systematically in error. Since it is generally accepted that branches of Mahāyāna Buddhism like Madhyamaka and Zen are thought to be broadly skeptical or anti-realist about whatever is thought to exist mind-independently, including moral facts (reflections and koans from the *Platform Sutra* onward on the 'original face' prior to thinking about right and wrong, good and evil, attest to this), I will spend more time on moral error theory in order to see how precisely Ueda's latent metaethics might slot into the contemporary metaethical taxonomy.

As found in J.L. Mackie's presentation of moral error theory (1977: 48–49), there are roughly five ways error theorists try to show moral facts do not exist. First, talk of objective moral facts seems to be relative to local ways of life and so betray a dependence on certain subjective concerns. Second, moral facts appear metaphysically weird insofar as they are meant to be intrinsically motivating. Third, moral facts seem to not exist in the natural world in any obvious or empirical way. Fourth, humans would require an as-yet undetected and thus equally weird epistemic capacity to access these weird moral facts. And fifth, it does not seem beliefs about moral facts persist for epistemic reasons but because they offer other advantages. Together, these claims are often called the argument from relativity (first point), the argument from queerness (second through fourth points), and the evolutionary debunking

argument (fifth point). These arguments amount to a positive disbelief in the existence of moral facts.

At this point, the error theorist is faced with a problem: what to do with a false discourse like morality? Matt Lutz has called it the 'now what' problem (Lutz 2014). There are a number of solutions to this problem, but error theorists have not reached a consensus. The 'now what' problem might be a reflection of Mackie's own uncertainty about what to do with morality. Each of the main solutions claim to have their source in Mackie. The first solution is moral conservatism (MC) (Olson 2014). MC holds we should accept moral error theory and yet retain belief in the existence of moral facts and continue to assert moral propositions. The conservationist believes it would be prudent and natural to continue on believing in and asserting the existence of moral facts. It would be prudent because, it is claimed, a world without moral belief and discourse would be a diminished world, one losing out on the benefits for cooperation morality supplies. Genuine moral belief and assertion seems to grease the wheels of social coordination and really move us to cooperate, and so we should conserve both regardless of how convinced we are of the error theory. It would be natural to conserve morality as well because belief in moral facts might be so ingrained in us that we lack the cognitive resources to either really or consistently deny the existence of moral facts or cease genuinely asserting moral propositions. In this sense, MC is more a descriptive view of what we would be like even if we accepted the error theory. We will continue to believe in moral facts even if we also believe they do not exist in the same way we will continue to perceive one line being longer than the others in the Mueller-Lyer illusion even though we also know the lines are the same length.

The second solution is revolutionary moral expressivism (RME) (Svoboda 2015). RME agrees with MC that moral discourse is too useful in generating and sustaining cooperation to discard, but finds MC to border on being purposely deceptive and irrational. To assert a belief in something one does not really believe is to lie. To believe something one does not really believe is to be irrational. MC responds by claiming that there is no irrationality because we should conserve morality by only occurrently believing in moral facts while dispositionally believing the error theory and accessing that belief in our more reflective moments (Olson 2014: 192). Avoiding the backsliding and seemingly irrational and propagandistic tendencies of MC, RME allows us to use moral discourse without slipping into self-contradiction. Instead of conserving real belief in and assertion of moral facts, RME recommends we reform our moral practice and treat moral discourse the way moral expressivists say we already do. Such treatment involves accepting and expressing moral discourse with a mental state other than belief. Also, it involves treating moral discourse as a means of communicating not in the business of aiming to fully report the moral facts. There are a variety of expressivist views. At the moment, the RME that has received the most attention is revolutionary moral fictionalism (RevMF) (Joyce 2016).

RevMF is a nonassertive kind of fictionalism, differing from an assertive kind (Nolan et al. 2005) by being a force, instead of content, fictionalism. It says we should only make-believe in and quasi-assert the existence of moral facts. It

suggests giving up really believing in moral facts, either as out in the world, in agents, or as real fictions. We should make-believe in moral facts instead, which would be to occurrently accept or think about moral facts without fully believing them to be real in any way. The noncognitive state of make-belief replaces the cognitive state of real belief. Just as with MC, with RevMF we are still disposed to believing in the error theory in our more reflective moments. And rather than assert moral judgments with a tacit story operator as with an assertive fictionalism, RevMF suggests reducing the assertive force from moral utterances, thereby allowing for the use of moral discourse without having to really assert anything. Moral judgments are to be only quasi-asserted. Quasi-assertion is a way of uttering a sentence without the intention of fully referring to anything. Actors in plays do not really assert their lines, but quasi-assert them, because they are make-believing in what they say. RevMF recommends we treat moral discourse this way.

A third view is Lutz's moral substitutionism (MS). Stan Husi has also similarly recommended reforming (or revising) morality through substitution. He argues error theorists would be better off deflating the robustly realist truth conditions of moral discourse and substituting them with minimal truth conditions (Husi 2014). Lutz's MS recommends substituting full belief in and assertion of moral facts with full belief in and assertion of other normative facts that are reducible to strongly held desires, preferences, and other pro-attitudes. So, when we express moral judgments we should really be asserting our beliefs in hypothetical reasons we believe pertain to us. And again these hypothetical reasons are our strongly held pro-attitudes. The speaker-meaning of the substitutionist's moral utterances will differ from their surface grammar, but if one wants to know what the substitutionist really thinks about the existence of moral facts they will tell them about the error theory.

A final solution to the 'now what?' problem for error theorists is moral abolitionism. Unlike the other options, it recommends we simply abolish or eliminate moral belief and discourse altogether. Abolitionists qualify their view as being assertive. Assertive moral abolitionism (AMA) involves believing the error theory and abolishing morality and encouraging others to believe it and abolish morality as well. Richard Garner summarizes the view: "Assertive moral abolitionists construe moral judgments as false assertions, but they urge us to stop making them because they believe that any benefits that come from pretending that moral realism is true are outweighed by the harm that comes from having to promote and defend a series of easily questioned falsehoods." (Garner 2007: 506) A MA offers a number of reasons for abolishing morality and encouraging others to do the same. First, there is the general point that it would be beneficial for epistemic hygiene to abolish false ways of believing and speaking (Marks 2013: 24). Second, since moral discourse is permeated by deep, intractable disagreements, the only way to really avoid such intractability is to avoid moral discourse in the first place (Garner 2007: 502; Mackie 1980: 154). Third, there is a tendency for morality to be used as a means to justify unfair distributions of wealth and power (Garner 2007: 502; Mackie 1980: 154). Fourth, morality is often used as a means for motivating patriotism and international war (Garner 2007: 502; Mackie 1980: 154). Fifth, the expression of moral judgments is driven primarily by negative emotions like sadness, anxiety, anger,



contempt, disgust, resentment, and indignation (Marks 2013: 83). There is something pathological about much moralizing. And sixth, morality is often deployed with a heightened arrogance that leaves one open to the charge of hypocrisy (Marks 2013: 86). For these reasons, AMA recommends we abolish morality and urge others to do so as well if we are convinced of the error theory. It should be noted that the motivations for AMA sound remarkably Buddhist, and yet, as we will see, Ueda doesn't recommend abolition.

### 3 Davis on Ueda

Now that we have a rough sketch of the contemporary metaethical taxonomy, the particular metaethical view implied by Ueda and rendered partially explicit by Davis can be discussed with greater precision and thus further developed. Davis focuses his discussion of Ueda on his non-mysticism, which is his combination of Meister Eckhart's mysticism whereby one becomes the nothingness of all creation by unifying with the transcendent nothingness of the abyssal ground of God, the Godhead, with Zen Buddhism's de-mysticism whereby one retains creation's abyssal nothingness while simultaneously returning to and immersing oneself within the everyday world of conventional reality. Constantly cycling through the nondual identity yet real difference between the ecstatic ultimate truth of divine nothingness and the instatic conventional truth of everyday mundanity constitutes the essential experience of Ueda's non-mysticism. This constant cycling is captured in the ceaseless transition from the eighth to tenth stages, and back again, captured in the last three images of *The Ten Ox Pictures* (Ueda 1982). From an empty circle signifying the nothingness of all things to a tree spontaneously in bloom alongside a river signifying the autopoiesis of natural emergence and decay, to a final scene of the everyday banality of human exchange signifying the simultaneous spontaneous nothingness and fullness of all things—what we have is a presentation of truly self-contradicting reality that one experiences and becomes through a proper Zen practice Davis claims is Ueda's ultimate non-mystical vision.

What concerns us with respect to this vision is the metaethical view it presupposes. Davis correctly sees in Ueda an emphasis on the Mahāyāna championing of understanding and compassion as the motivation for repetitively cycling through the eighth through tenth stages represented in the last three ox pictures. Davis says that, for Ueda, it is the “compassionate openness” of the empty everyday mind that allows for the experience of non-mysticism (Davis 208: 229). Ueda himself, reflecting on the famous claim in the *Heart Sutra* that ‘form is emptiness, emptiness is form,’ speaks of the “Great Understanding” required to view form as emptiness and the “Great Compassion” required to view emptiness as form (Ueda 1982: 19). Ueda also speaks of a kind of selfish selflessness required to constantly return to the everydayness of human interaction. In completely understanding that everyone, including oneself, is ultimately empty while retaining a thorough compassion for the impermanence all sentient beings must suffer, one perfects and overcomes one's

ultimate desire to liberate oneself and all beings by divesting oneself of all desires and thus selfhood while still remaining an utterly average person with all the normal desires and concerns. Everyone can be saved only by realizing there is no one to save and so selfishly behaving contrary to the truth there is no one to save because there really is everyone to save. At least, Ueda seems to be getting at something like this in this passage:

To encounter others, the true self does not dwell off in 'nirvana,' but keeps to the well-travelled and frequented roads of the world, without forsaking absolute nothingness. Here again we come to the dynamic with a double perspective: on the roads of the world as in nothingness, in nothingness as on the roads of the world. Untiring and serious effort made on behalf of another is thus at the same time, in virtue of nothingness, play for oneself, though not in the sense of a play that entails the loss of effort and compassion. This is what Zen has in mind with those double statements that look contradictory if only viewed logically. On the one hand it is said, 'Living beings are countless, we vow to save them all.' And on the other, 'There is no living being that we should save or have saved, nor is there any salvation.' (Ueda 1982: 21)

Now, Great Understanding, Great Compassion, and selfish selflessness all sound like virtues. Virtues are global, robust dispositions to do the right thing in the right way toward the right people and in the right circumstances at the right time. Virtues entail a certain degree of objectivity in their existence and function: they are constituted as truthmakers for moral judgments. Virtues are thus moral facts, or at least go to constitute a correspondence to moral facts. They enjoy irreducibly categorical normativity. They *must* be embodied and instantiated. The key question then is this: does Ueda think such moral facts *really* exist? That is, is Ueda a moral realist? And, in particular, is Ueda a moral naturalist? It seems the answer to this question will ramify throughout and apply to all members of the Kyoto School, Zen Buddhism in general, and Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy *writ large*. Is this tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhism moral realist?

Davis seems to answer in the affirmative. In order not to fall into the apparently robustly moral anti-realist tendencies of Śāṅkara's mystical Advaita Vedānta, Davis claims Ueda's Zen non-mysticism must retain some sort of moral realism (Davis 2008: 237). On the other hand, Ueda's moral realism cannot be of the Eckhartian sort either. If Ueda cannot avail of an Advaitin total annihilation of moral facts and behavior, he also cannot fall back on an Eckhartian submergence into the transcendent substantiality of the divine will. Both approaches engage in too much one-sided reification of moral facticity: either an error-theoretic style assertive moral abolitionism (Śāṅkara) or a moral supernaturalism that drifts into impersonal moral non-naturalism (Eckhart). Davis thus concludes Ueda's metaethics must avoid both views and somehow thread the needle between an abolitionist anti-realism and a robust realism. Davis takes Masao Abe's metaethical version of Weixin's famous three stages of insight—where the mountain starts off as a mountain, gets annihilated as a mountain, and finally returns to being a mountain but only so as empty of all substantial mountainhood—and claims it represents a basic teaching of Zen Buddhism, thus implying it must also be Ueda's latent metaethical view. Abe's metaethical rendition reads as follows:

Before Buddhist practice, I thought 'good is good, evil is evil.' When I had an insight into Buddhist truth, I realized 'good is not good, evil is not evil.' But now, awakening to true Emptiness I say, 'good is really good, evil is really evil.' (Abe 1995: 199)

Abe's metaethical insight seems to track with Nāgārjuna's original point that ultimate truth is nothing but "the clear recognition of, and unattached compassionate engagement with, conventional truth understood as conventional truth" (Davis 2008: 238). Thus, even though moral facts are ultimately empty, and thus unreal, "they are nevertheless conventionally very real and very important" (Davis 2008: 238), and all there really *is*, is the conventional insofar as emptiness is ultimately empty.

This makes the metaethical view Davis imputes to Ueda sound like either moral conservatism or revolutionary moral fictionalism. Recall that both views first accept the error theory in believing that moral facts do not ultimately exist, but then offer arguments to the effect that either retaining genuine belief in and assertion of moral facts (conservatism) or reforming moral practice to entail make-believing in and quasi-asserting moral facts (fictionalism) is the prudent response to the systematic falsity of morality. Both conservatism and fictionalism sound quite like the third stage of Abe's insight: moral facts, while empty and unreal, are ultimately real in the sense of being required for a Mahāyāna ethical (that is, a greatly understanding and compassionate) approach to everyday life. These two error theoretical approaches appear to be saying that while morality is ultimately false, it is also conventionally true, or at least conventionally real *qua* useful for the sake of aiming to save humans from suffering, which is the bodhisattva path after all. This latter point might also track with a reading of Mahāyāna *upāya*, or 'skillful means,' as either an occurrent belief (conservation) in or make-belief in (fictionalism) and thus a use-of what ultimately doesn't exist for the sake of liberating fellow sentient beings. Morality is a useful falsehood either forgotten as false yet occurrently believed in or pretended to be true for the sake of being used as a tool, a mental shortcut or heuristic, in the attempted cessation of sentient suffering. This would make Mahāyāna, and in particular Zen, metaethics a moral error theory that either goes conservationist or fictionalist, but does not go abolitionist in order to avoid a one-sided reification of emptiness or go supernaturalist/non-naturalist in order to avoid an Eckhartian reversion to robust moral realism.

While there seems to be a fair degree of plausibility to either the conservationist or fictionalist reading of Ueda's Zen, and hence the full Mahāyāna Buddhist metaethical view, neither quite matches up. Davis makes this claim. I will make this claim as well, but for different reasons, dealing more with certain incompatibilities between conservatism and fictionalism, and Buddhism. I will claim conservatism gets closer to the latent metaethical view, but remains only partial. I will also claim that Davis gets things partially correct, but before that, let's see why Davis rejects a conservationist or fictionalist approach. He asks, "is an acceptance of the necessity of making ethical judgments as part and parcel of engaged living in a world of conventional truth all that Zen's non-mysticism has to offer ethics" (Davis 2008: 239)? Davis answers in the negative. He thinks there still must be

objective moral facts of the matter that are not merely occurrently believed in and genuinely asserted, or make-believed in and quasi-asserted, all the while still being believed to be ultimately non-existent. For Davis, implicit to Ueda is a genuine belief in really existing moral facts. Zen Buddhist metaethics must be realist in some sense. Zen ethics is indeed virtue ethical and thus must be metaethically realist so that Buddhist virtues constitute objective moral facts. Davis cites Christopher Ives approvingly when he claims “Zen promotes what might be called a ‘foundational’ ethic” (Ives 1992: 3), with such a foundation being the basic virtues of the bodhisattva path like understanding, compassion, selflessness, and the Four Great Vows that are essential to the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition. However, Davis further develops Ives’s point by arguing that the ultimate metaethical ground for Zen ethics is not merely the constellation of Buddhist virtues that composes its ‘foundational ethic,’ but *what* those virtues depend upon for their moral facticity, which is precisely the process itself of cycling through the stages of non-mysticism, the process itself by which one embodies and empties and non-attachedly embodies again the Buddhist virtues. Going from nothingness to everydayness and back again constantly, simultaneously—*that* is the ultimate ground of value. Indeed, it is the real source of goodness itself. The process itself is objectively good. Avoiding or denying or getting stuck at one stage of the process is objectively bad. Davis writes, “in saying that all specific evaluative distinctions need to be repeatedly deconstructed and critically reevaluated by way of both transcending and returning to the conventional world of good and evil, what is implied is that *maintaining this dynamic process itself is a root source of goodness, while inhibiting it is a root source of badness.*” In Ueda’s terms, Davis puts it thusly: “the *unhindered movement* of the process of non-mysticism is a wellspring of goodness” (Davis 2008: 245, italics in original).

#### 4 Moral Dialethism

Davis is half-right. On the one hand, it does seem that implicit to Ueda and the tradition of Mahāyāna Buddhist ethics is a robustly realist moral naturalist metaethical view whereby there is objective goodness in the therapeutic process of simultaneously annihilating and preserving the Buddhist virtues along with all other things and properties. On the other hand, however, Davis seems to settle here and proclaim a metaethical view that is completely or only realist. That seems incomplete. To say the process itself of emptying value of its reality and then returning to it and recognizing its reality through a spontaneous and detached performance of everydayness is the ultimate and foundational good is to miss that the process itself too must be ultimately empty and valueless. To miss *that* would be to do something objectively bad in Davis’s (and his Ueda’s) own book. To get stuck at the metaethical stage of proclaiming the truth of the objective reality of real goodness in the process of therapeutic emptying and reconstituting is to actually fail both at getting the right metaethical view implicit to Ueda and Zen metaethics more generally *and*

experiencing the proper therapeutic upshot of holding that view. But what are we to do if we've already noted that Ueda's metaethics can't be either an error-theoretic conservatism or fictionalism insofar as both are merely anti-realist and involve using morality with less than fully realist sincerity? If neither Davis's processual robustly realist moral naturalism nor either a conservationist or fictionalist error theory captures the full picture of Ueda's metaethical view, then what do we do? I say we combine these views and create a new metaethical position.

Ueda's metaethics actually has to be saying *both* that the process of emptying and returning is objectively good and that nothing is objectively good. As Ueda says above, if viewed logically, this is a contradiction and hence false. It seems it can't both be that there is objective goodness and nothing is objectively good. But that is exactly Ueda's view, and it is, I claim, the implicit metaethical view of the Zen tradition that follows from certain aspects the Madhyamaka and Mahāyāna traditions. It must be a true contradiction. The Zen tradition has been noted for its dialetheical tendencies (Deguchi et al. 2008). A dialetheia is a contradiction that is true. It violates the three principle of classical logic mentioned in the introduction. Applied to metaethics, a moral dialetheical view would say that moral facts both do and do not exist, there are both Buddhist virtues and the objectively good process of embodying them through emptying and re-embodiment through detached everydayness *and* there are no virtues whatsoever and no objective value instantiated by the process of non-mysticism itself. The ground of Buddhist ethics is the groundlessness of the nonexistence of value, which is precisely how value objectively exists. There both is and is not Buddhist virtue, Buddhist Great Understanding, Great Compassion, and selfish selflessness. There both is and is not an objectively good process of non-mystical therapy. There both is and is not a metaethical foundation to Ueda's ethics, which both is and is not an ethics considering it is entirely swallowed up by soteriological concerns. In other words, an ethics entirely subsumed by therapeutic intent is both the annihilation and perfection of ethics. There both are and are not moral facts. Realism and anti-realism are both true.

To develop moral dialetheism as a contemporary metaethical option we would actually have to push the moral conservationist back into the seemingly 'irrationalist' tendency it seems to fall into claiming the error theorist should continue to genuinely believe in and really assert moral facts. Other error theorists accuse the conservationist of being irrational by claiming we should both believe in and not believe in the existence of moral facts. Recall that to believe what one does not believe is to be irrational, to assert what one does not believe is to lie, or so the charge goes. The conservationist responds by using the distinction between dispositional and occurrent belief. A dispositional belief is a belief one is disposed to hold while an occurrent belief is a belief one actually holds now. The conservationist says the error theorist should be disposed to holding the error theory in more reflective and abstract settings like the classroom, but hold regular moral beliefs in everyday settings. This way the conservationist is never simultaneously occurrently holding the error theory and moral beliefs, thereby dissolving the apparent contradiction of holding both. The conservationist only occurrently believes the error theory in reflective settings, but since most settings aren't reflective the conservationist can

get away with holding a number of sincere moral beliefs while also asserting those beliefs without lying since he is not occurrently believing the error theory.

I want to claim a moral dialetheical view would actually not find occurrently holding the error theory and genuine beliefs about objective moral facts to be false or irrational. Rather, believing both in the objective goodness of the process of non-mysticism and the nonexistence of moral facts is precisely what Ueda is offering and is the position no metaethicist has yet to develop. Perhaps the Buddhist practitioner is only disposed to holding the emptying belief in the emptiness or absolute nothingness of all things, including moral facts, when at a particular stage, especially the eighth, in the process of non-mysticism. But Ueda's point is that one is never to stop at a stage, but to occurrently hold the realization of each stage while realizing any particular stage. The import of non-mysticism is to have the therapeutic experience of realizing everything both is and is not simultaneously, and to treat things accordingly. This way one can be virtuous while knowing and embodying the truth that virtue is impossible, that there is no moral, or any other, fact of the matter. The metaethical presupposition of such of view must be that there are no moral facts and realizing *that* involves accessing a moral fact, an objective good, which is obviously just another moral fact that doesn't exist. Therefore, by filling out the picture of Ueda presented by Davis we both get Ueda's, and perhaps the full Zen, implicit metaethical view and a novel position to slot into the contemporary metaethical taxonomy. Moral dialetheism says moral facts both do and do not exist. It seems Ueda says that too.

## Bibliography

- Abe, Masao 阿部正雄. 1995. *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Bourget, D., and D. Chalmers. 2014. What Do Philosophers Believe? *Philosophical Studies* 170 (3): 465–500.
- Cowherds, The. 2011. *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2015. *Moonpaths: Ethics and Emptiness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davis, Bret W. 2008. Letting Go of God for Nothing: Ueda Shizuteru's Non-Mysticism and the Question of Ethics in Zen Buddhism. In *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 2. Neglected Themes and Hidden Variations*, ed. Victor Sōgen, Hori Melissa, and Anne-Marie Curley, 226–255. Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture.
- Davis, Gordon F. 2018. The *Atipada* Problem in Buddhist Meta-Ethics. *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 25: 185–231.
- Deguchi, Yasuo, James Garfield, and Graham Priest. 2008. The Way of a Dialetheist. *Philosophy East and West* 58 (3): 395–402.
- Garner, Richard. 2007. Abolishing Morality. *Ethical Theory Moral Practice* 10 (5): 499–513.
- Husi, Stan. 2014. Against Moral Fictionalism. *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 11: 80–96.
- Ives, Christopher. 1992. *Zen Awakening and Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Joyce, Richard. 2016. *Essays in Moral Skepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Keown, Damien. 2001. *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lutz, Matthew. 2014. The 'Now What' Problem for Error Theory. *Philosophical Studies* 171: 351–371.

- Mackie, John L. 1977. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. London: Penguin.
- Mackie, John L. 1980. *Hume's Moral Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Marks, Joel. 2013. *Ethics Without Morals: In Defense of Amoralism*. New York: Routledge.
- Nolan, Daniel, Greg Restall, and Caroline West. 2005. Moral Fictionalism versus the rest. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83: 307–330.
- Olson, Jonas. 2014. *Moral Error Theory: History, Critique, Defence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Svoboda, Toby. 2015. Why Moral Error Theorists Should Become Revisionary Moral Expressivists. *Journal of Moral Philosophy*: 1–25.
- Tillemans, Tom J.F. 2011. Madhyamaka Buddhist Ethics. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*: 359–378.
- Ueda, Shizuteru 上田閑照. 1982. Emptiness and Fullness: Sunyata in Mahayana Buddhism. *The Eastern Buddhist* 15 (1): 9–37.

## Chapter 23

# An Ontology of Non-Discriminatory Love: The Resurrection of the Triune Self in Ueda Shizuteru's Appropriation and Critique of Meister Eckhart



Gregory Moss

## 1 Introduction: Towards an Ontology of Love

In *The Buddha-Christ as the Lord of the True Self: The Religious Philosophy of the Kyoto School and Christianity*, Fritz Buri critiques Ueda's account of ethics on multiple fronts. First, he argues that if the self were really selfless, then it would *not* be a self (Buri 1997: 282). Second, since he believes that one must have objective knowledge of the self and its situation in order to act ethically, if one ceases to take the self as an object of discursive knowledge, then one could not in principle act ethically (Buri 1997: 270). Finally, Buri argues that ethics is only possible if there is an autonomous self that has discursive knowledge of itself as a subject, as well as takes itself to be responsible for its conduct (Buri 1997: 270). In short, for Buri "Ueda cannot show us how from a selfless self in the theoretical sense there can appear a man who conducts himself self-lessly in the ethical sense." (Buri 1997: 270)<sup>1</sup> Indeed, although Buri's critique is quite terse, it is still powerful. Despite the fact that these objections are in many ways typical of Western readings of Buddhist philosophy, they are persistent and therefore deserve close attention.

Bret Davis tackles a very closely related set of questions in his *Letting Go of God for Nothing*. There he asks a question that Buri appears to be asking: "does Ethics require at least a background trace of substantial transcendence?" (Davis 2014:

---

Hong Kong General Research Council, University Grants Committee, Project Number 14621820.

---

<sup>1</sup>For a comparative account of compassion qua love, see Tanabe's conception of the Absolute Nothingness as Praxis, or Absolute Nothingness qua love. See Ueda 2011: 24.

---

G. Moss (✉)

Department of Philosophy, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hongkong SAR, China  
e-mail: [gsmoss@cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:gsmoss@cuhk.edu.hk)



237). Indeed, Buri appears to be working under the assumption that without an autonomous (and thereby *responsible*) self, who is distinct from its negation, namely selflessness, ethics would be impossible. In what follows, I offer a defense of Ueda against Buri's objections. One main problem with Buri's criticism, as I will argue, is that it supposes that the critique of the reflective relation to the I precludes any discursive or reflective activity in practical life. Although the immediate identity of self and other in the selfless self does entail a direct and unreflective compassionate response to the situation at hand, Christopher Ives agrees with Davis that this does not entail that it is impossible to deliberate about ethical matters without attachment or reifying the subject matter about which one deliberates (Davis 2014: 142; Ives 1992: 49–50). In order to fully respond to all of Buri's charges, however, a closer investigation of the relation between discursive reason and Ueda's conception of the selfless self is in order. Because Ueda presents his Zen ontology by means of an interpretation and appropriation of Meister Eckhart's philosophy, in order to reconstruct Ueda's ontology of the self, Meister Eckhart's mysticism cannot be ignored.

Because Ueda's account of the ethics of compassion is grounded in the total ontological and epistemic reversion of the self to selflessness, in order to respond to Buri's objection that Ueda cannot account for how the selfless self gives rise to ethical action, I must first work through the *ontological groundwork* of Ueda's ethics of compassion. In part III of his essay "Das Selbst im buddhistischen Denken-Zum West-östlichen Vergleich des Selbstverständnisses des Menschen" (The Self in Buddhist Thought. Towards a West-East Comparison of the Self-image of Man) Ueda develops an ethics of compassion grounded on an ontology of a self that is no longer distinguishable from what is without self, and no longer *discriminates* between self and its other (Ueda 1974: 153). Such a self both is and knows itself to be selfless. Here Ueda argues that the source of man's lack of redemption is the tendency of the human being to objectify the ego or what is the same, to conceive of himself as a thing (Ueda 1974: 158). Accordingly, for Ueda the root of the human being's perversion (as well as her redemption) is portrayed as *ontological* and *epistemological*. In enlightenment one *becomes* compassion, a "thinking-acting" which corresponds to the situation at hand (Buri 1997: 269). By overcoming the self which is reified in discursive thought, the self becomes directly responsive to the suffering of the other in great sympathy (Buri 1997: 270). Ueda draws these ethical conclusions on the basis of the last three pictures of the *Ten Oxherding Pictures* (Ueda 1974: 158).

Although Buri's objections can only be met by carefully working through Ueda's ontology of selflessness and ethics of compassion, nevertheless, in his *Mysticism: East and West*, Rudolf Otto rightly claims that the West can gain the best possible comprehension of Zen through the thought of Meister Eckhart (Otto 1971: 269–272). Following this approach, in his *Gottesgeburt* Ueda offers the West an instruction in the philosophy of Zen Buddhism through his adept comparative analysis of the

difference between Meister Eckhart's mysticism and Zen philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Beyond simply introducing Zen by means of Eckhart's speculative mysticism, Ueda's own philosophy is profoundly affected by his engagement with Eckhart. Indeed, as James Heisig points out, "I am struck again and again by how Eckhart's way of reading scriptural texts and his imagery are mirrored in Ueda's interpretation of Zen texts, notably in his attempts to decipher the enigmatic "Ten Ox pictures [...]" (Heisig 2005: 261). Accordingly, Ueda's critique and appropriation of Eckhart is a forerunner in its realization of the comparative potential of Eckhart's philosophy of indistinct union.<sup>3</sup>

Because Ueda integrates and critiques various aspects of Eckhart's philosophy in his account of Zen, reconstructing Ueda's position in view of meeting Buri's critique requires a detailed account of his reception of Eckhart. For Zen, the negation of the absolute difference between self and other does not reduce either self or other to one form, for each relata is absolutely nothing by itself: each is only in its inseparable relation to the other, according to the Buddhist notion of dependent co-origination. In order to show that the non-discriminatory love that constitutes Ueda's ethics of compassion is possible, one must show that a self that is inherently contradictory, namely a self that is relational in its very identity, is ontologically possible. By not differentiating form from emptiness, *samsāra* from *nirvāna*, Zen collapses the distinction between the "God" who is in *relation* to creatures and the Godhead (who is indistinct and in *no relation whatsoever*) of Eckhart's mysticism. Indeed, Buri's assumption that the self is inconceivable if it is identified with its negation appears quite reasonable, for otherwise the self would be a contradiction. This shows that one motivating source of the disagreement concerns *the logical structure of the real*. It is for this reason that the locus of the present critique of Buri must focus on the relation of Ueda's *fundamental ontology* to the status of discursive thinking in theoretical and *practical* reason.

## 2 Love in Meister Eckhart's Speculative Mysticism

In his *On the Incarnation*, St. Athanasius, one of the heroes of the council of Nicaea (AD 325), famously wrote that "For He was made man that we might be made God." (St. Athanasius 2007: 3). Considering Athanasius's provocative statement, it is clear that because God *is* perfection, in order to become perfect one must become God. Becoming perfect, moreover, means to become indistinguishable from being and to incarnate love. Eckhart endorses the possibility of becoming God in love: "it sounds wonderful that the human being is thus able to become God in love; however it is true in the eternal truth." (Radler 2010: 171, Sermon 5a). Because perfection is

<sup>2</sup>The full title is *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit: Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus*.

<sup>3</sup>This potential is also most recently commented upon by Christina Radler (Radler 2010: 171–198).

a command, the Christian life may be understood in a profoundly mystical way: in order to fulfill the command to “be perfect” one must achieve what is called the *unio mystica*. Athanasius’ deep insight on the incarnation pertains to the possibility of realizing union with God. Athanasius reasons that the fact that God became incarnate in the person of Jesus demonstrates the possibility of the union of God and the human being. God and the human being *can* become one because they *have become* one in the person of Christ. Accordingly, the incarnation not only shows what union with God looks like ethically, but it also demonstrates the possibility of what humans might otherwise deem impossible. Paul echoes this theology of incarnation when he calls on followers to “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom 13.14). The doctrine of Athanasius, arguably more central to the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church, goes by the name *theosis*. *Theosis* signifies the process of deification. Eckhart adopts this theology in *On Detachment*. (Eckhart 1981: 293). Eckhart offers a much more radical understanding of deification than is commonplace,<sup>4</sup> especially in the tendency of early Protestant thought, whose theology emphasized the human being’s total depravity and separation from God. Eckhart’s theology of *theosis* is not only influenced by the early church fathers, but also by the Neoplatonic philosophy of Pseudo-Dionysius, for whom *theosis* is indisputably central to Christian practice.<sup>5</sup> Eckhart contributes to the Neo-platonic theology of *theosis* by arguing that it is by way of detachment that the human being can become divine. Detachment is justified by the undifferentiated or indistinct nature of the Godhead.

According to Eckhart, Christian *agape* is a love that disallows duality (Eckhart 1981: 193, Sermon 71). *Agape* is a kind of love which does not discriminate amongst the objects of its love. In the same sermon where Jesus commands his followers to be perfect, Jesus calls on people to love their enemies (Matt. 5.43–48). Just as the sun does not distinguish between objects upon which it will shine and those upon which it will not, *agape* is indiscriminate insofar as it does not distinguish between friend and enemy. As objects of love, this duality is overcome. The *agape* of God is undifferentiated. For Eckhart, the undifferentiated and non-dual nature of God’s love is entailed by the equivalence between God and being. When one claims that “x is” or “y is,” one does not distinguish between x or y. To say of either that “it is” does not differentiate between subjects. God’s Being is indistinct from God’s love: Being and love are equally without difference in God.

---

<sup>4</sup>One common way of softening Athanasius’ saying is to claim that one becomes “like” God. Eckhart, rather,

claims that one in fact becomes God, not just like him.

<sup>5</sup>Pseudo-Dionysius speaks of “the union of divinized minds with the light,” and the “many who are raised, so far as they can be, to divinization.” Further he speaks of God as the “source of perfection for those being made perfect, source of divinity for those being deified.” See Pseudo-Dionysius 1987: 51 See also verse 108 of the Gospel of Thomas: Jesus said, “Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me; I myself shall become that person, and the hidden things will be revealed to him.” See Leloup and Rowe 2005: 55.

## 2.1 *The Ontological Ground of Agape: Nothingness of the Godhead*

Given that being does not differentiate, and *agape* is an undifferentiated love, in order to become God the human being must become indistinct. Here again, Eckhart draws upon Pseudo-Dionysius. In order to become divinized one must “transcend all things,” “deny all beings,” and cease from all intelligent activity (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987: 54). Eckhart states that “if you do not want to be brutish, do not understand God who is beyond words.” (Eckhart 1981: 207, Sermon 83). “Reason” is an “inferior power” because it is discretion (Eckhart 1981: 207, Sermon 83). In the soul that knows God there dwells a “simple silence.” (Eckhart 1981: 198, Sermon 48). What is meant by “reason is discretion”? All conceptual knowing differentiates its object. When one predicates a concept of a subject, one differentiates the subject according to the predicate, and distinguishes it from the negation of that predicate, e.g. “the human being is a mammal” entails that it is false that “the human being is a fish.” Such a discretionary knowing always invokes comparisons. In order to become indistinct, and to know the God that is indistinct, one must abandon reason and conceptualizing. As a result, one ought not attempt to understand God with words (which express concepts); rather, one should dwell in silence. The proper way to know God is immediately, in “intellectual” understanding (Eckhart 1981: 208, Sermon 83) which is a knowing without any medium (such as concepts), and knows directly without comparisons.

Since indistinct being cannot be known through a medium, except by making it distinct, the only way to know indistinct being is to know it immediately. In immediate knowing, the human being no longer relates to its object through something else, for this is the meaning of mediation. Accordingly, for Eckhart knowing being means that one must realize being existentially. “Realizing being existentially” means that one must become being. The immediate relation to being in “intellectual understanding” is nothing other than becoming identical to that with which one stands in relation. For Eckhart, detachment is that process of realizing God existentially. Regarding detachment, Eckhart writes that “All it wants is to be. But to wish to be this thing or that, this it does not want. Whoever wants to be this or that wants to be something, but detachment wants to be nothing at all.” (Eckhart 1981: 287). What is more, God *is* detachment: “God has it from his immovable detachment that he is God, and it is from his detachment that he has his purity his simplicity and his unchangeability” (Eckhart 1981: 288). Since God is detachment, the only way to become “equal with God” is through detachment (Eckhart 1981: 288). Since being is without distinction, being is detached from all distinct beings. Thus, in order to realize *theosis*, one must become detached from all distinct beings or “creatures.” Usually, I identify myself as “this” or “that” being, and I conceive of myself as a distinct being by means of various representations. Detachment requires the human being to let go of all representations of a self that are distinct from being, of all representations of an I that is a distinct thing, a “this” or “that.” Through this psychological death, or ego-suicide, the human being allows the separate I to die and

God to enter the soul.<sup>6</sup> In this way, Eckhart interprets Paul's mystical saying "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20) as claiming that he no longer exists as a being separate from God. Accordingly, detachment is the process of letting go of the conception of one's ego as a being that is separate from God. By ceasing to identify with any particular being, the human being becomes receptive to God.

Eckhart provocatively identifies detachment (and thereby God) with "nothing." In Sermon 83 Eckhart writes:

"Then how should I love him?" You should love him as he is a non-God, a nonspirit, a nonperson, a nonimage, but as he is a pure, unmixed, bright "One," separated from all duality; and in that One we should eternally sink down, out of "something" into "nothing." (Eckhart 1981: 208, Sermon 83).

Detachment does not just mean that the human being detaches from his own misguided self-conception. Rather, the human being also detaches from a conception of God as a distinct thing. Perfect detachment is nothingness: "Now detachment approaches so closely to nothingness that there can be nothing between perfect detachment and nothingness." (Eckhart 1981: 286). More directly, Eckhart claims that God is a *transcending nothingness*: "If I say, 'God is a being,' it is not true; he is a being transcending being and a transcending nothingness." (Eckhart 1981: 207, Sermon 83). Since perfect detachment results in transcending all distinct beings, detachment transcends all comparative determinations. Being is the absolute, for all things depend on being in order to be, and nothing exists beyond being (for only nothing is beyond being). Accordingly, there is nothing one could in principle oppose to being. Anything that could be oppositional must fall within being, and thereby would not stand external to being as its negation. Detachment leads one to the unconditioned universal, beyond all comparative determinations.

The existential realization of indistinct being further entails that God is nothing. Since God is indistinct being, and indistinct being is not a thing, God is no-thing. Because God is indistinct, God offers no principle in virtue of which he could be made distinguishable from *nothing at all*. Thus, the indivisible Oneness of God entails that God is nothing. Thus, God is a "transcending nothingness." Because God is the One who contains no plurality, becoming one with God means becoming the One itself. To become the One itself means that one must no longer relate to God as "something". At the outset of the quest for theosis, God or the absolute stands opposed to the human being as the divine other, the Lord and Creator of the world. Via detachment the human being breaks through "God" of the creatures, and becomes nothing. Detachment wants merely "to be" and this is no different from wanting nothing at all. In a profound turn of events, by becoming detached from all comparative beings, one not only becomes detached from oneself as a separate being, but one becomes detached from the Absolute as a separate being. As Eckhart writes: "So therefore let us pray to God that we may be free of 'God'". (Eckhart 1981: 200, Sermon 52). Accordingly, for Eckhart "God" is God understood as a

---

<sup>6</sup>"Therefore, God must of necessity give himself to a heart that has detachment. See Eckhart 1981: 286.

being that stands in relation to other beings. This “God” only exists for those who have not yet detached, and not yet seen the true essence of the Godhead, who is absolutely nothing. Insight into the absolute is achieved by breaking through “God” to the Godhead. If mysticism is constituted by the union of the separate human being with a separate God, and Eckhart’s breakthrough to the absolute entails the annihilation of all separate entities, including the human being and God, then as Ueda points out, Eckhart’s philosophy transcends mysticism. According to Ueda, Eckhart’s account of *theosis* might be construed as a non-mysticism (Ueda 1982: 159) or as Davis has called it, a “de-mysticism” (Davis 2014).<sup>7</sup> Becoming God means breaking through “God” to the Godhead, the essence of God as nothing. Following Ueda, the “breakthrough to the nothingness of the Godhead” entails breaking through to the essence of God, who is “modeless, formless, unthinkable, and unspeakable.” (Ueda 1982: 158). God is beyond representation and all objectification (Ueda 1982:158).<sup>8</sup> Rather than union with God, one might say, as Nishitani notes, that there is no multiplicity: God and the human being constitute a simple oneness (Nishitani 1983: 63). As Eckhart says, “If my life is God’s being, then God’s existence must be my existence and God’s isness is my is-ness, neither less nor more.” (Eckhart 1981: 187, Sermon 6). Thus, he asks, “Who are they who are thus equal? Those who are equal to nothing, they alone are equal to God.” (Eckhart 1981: 187, Sermon 6).

“God” (the relative Absolute, which exists in distinction from creatures) only exists as long as I exist. Once I detach from the ego and all distinctions, “God” ceases to be: “And if I did not exist, ‘God’ would not exist. That God is ‘God,’ of that I am a cause; if I did not exist, God too would not be ‘God.’” (Eckhart 1981: 203, Sermon 52). Eckhart tells us that it is exactly in virtue of God’s transcendence that God is immanent in all things. As indistinct, God cannot be compared with or separated from any beings: “Therefore, God is free of all things, and therefore he is all things.” (Eckhart 1981: 201, Sermon 52).

Accordingly, God is nothing different from the world of particular beings. Indistinct being is inseparable from, indeed identical to, the whole world. Or to put it the other way around, nothing can be held outside of God. If it were, then it would be separable and different from what is without difference. But in this case, what is held outside of God would bring about a differentiation in God: God would become “something” in contrast to an other, e.g. “nature” or the “creatures.” In good Neo-platonic form, the One overflows out of itself and emanates the world. But this world (including nature and the soul) is itself God, but God in the form of differentiation and otherness. This final insight indicates that the movement out of the One is also simultaneously a movement back to the One. The duality of the world itself does not stand in contrast to anything: if there were no undifferentiated

---

<sup>7</sup> If I think of mysticism more generally as the immediate non-conceptual intuition of the Absolute, then Eckhart’s account of *theosis* could still be considered a form of mysticism.

<sup>8</sup> While one could say of “God” that he is good, one cannot say of God that he is good, for God transcends all distinctions. See Eckhart 1981: 207, Sermon 83.

being, but only beings that stand in contrastive relations to each other, then contrastive being would not be contrastive, for it would not stand (as a whole) in contrast with anything. Thus, the world as a multiplicity would not itself be multiple. Thus, God is constituted by a threefold movement: God qua indistinct One, God qua differentiated or enformed being, and God as the unity of the indistinct and enformed being. Eckhart identifies each of these moments with one person of the holy trinity: God the Father (indistinct being), God the Son (the indistinct made distinct), and God the Holy Spirit (the unity of the distinct with the indistinct). God's creation of all things out of nothing is nothing less than God's creation of all things out of himself, since he is essentially nothing.<sup>9</sup> *Creation ex nihilo is creation ex deo.*

Because nothing lies outside of God, all things only exist insofar as they exist in God. This does not mean that God is simply the aggregate of all things. Rather, God is the whole process that differentiates itself and maintains itself (or never goes outside itself) in that differentiating process. Nothing is beyond God to determine God. Thus, God is self-determining. God stands alone and is uncaused. God is the cause of himself. Just as God is without cause, or what is the same: God is his own why, his own reason for being.

*Theosis* is the way human beings participate in this eternal cosmic process of self-alienation and self-return. Upon completely detaching from all creatures and descending into nothingness, one is reborn. Now, the distinction that originally separated the human being from God is no longer separable from him. Rather, the human being is reborn as the Son of God. This salvation, according to Ueda, is direct and without mediation: (Ueda 1982: 157)

Therefore the heavenly father is truly my Father, for I am his Son and have everything that I have from him, and I am the same Son and not a different one. Because the Father performs one work, therefore his work is me, his Only-Begotten Son *without any difference.* (Eckhart 1981: 188, Sermon 6, *emphasis added*).

God appears in the human form when he multiplies himself in my form. Through detachment, one participates in the eternal birth of the Son in the Father. Through this participation, the human being achieves eternal life by participating in the eternal life constitutive of God's eternal self-creation. Because the human soul becomes indistinct from God the Father, God gives birth to his Son as human being. For this reason, Ueda shows that Eckhart is clear that the ground of the soul is nothing different from the ground of God. On Ueda's reading, "the nothingness of the Godhead is the soul's very own ground in a non-objective manner." (Ueda 1982: 158). Eckhart confirms this: "'Truly you are the hidden God,' (Is. 45:15) in the ground of the soul, where God's ground and the soul's ground are one ground." (Eckhart 1981: 192, Sermon 15).

---

<sup>9</sup> Here one encounters the heterodox position that the son and the world are begotten by God.

Finally, the birth of Christ in the soul releases the Holy Spirit (the unity of God the Father and God the Son). For every human being who undergoes perfect detachment, the very same process is re-duplicated: God is re-duplicated in every detached soul. Through detachment, love is incarnated in the soul.<sup>10</sup> Through participating in the freedom of God, the human being becomes free. Human freedom is nothing more than participation in God's freedom. Indeed, Ueda is clear that only with the presence of the essence of God is true freedom achieved (Ueda 1982: 159; Radler 2010: 171, Sermon 5a). Just as God's freedom is without why, so the human being's freedom is. On one occasion when asked why God became man, Ueda refers to Eckhart's reply that "when we no longer recognize a why, then the son will be born in the soul." (Ueda 1965: 156).

As Nishitani astutely points out in his discussion of Eckhart, both the human being and God must undergo *ecstasy* (Nishitani 1983: 68). Ecstasy is the act of "going beyond oneself." In detachment, the human being negates his own distinct being, and goes beyond his separate self into God. Likewise, God goes beyond his own indistinct being in his emanation of the world and the birth of the Son. Nonetheless, ecstasy not only leads the self beyond itself, but also gives birth to the true self. The human being discovers his true self as a Son of God, and God is eternally becoming his true self by overstepping his limits and returning to the Father by means of his self-loss. Ecstasy is twofold in two senses: both God and the human being are constituted by ecstasy, and within that whole ecstatic process, each steps beyond itself twice: beyond both their in-distinction as well as their distinction. Ueda points out that the union of affirmation and negation is evident from the ecstatic quality of God: Being is nothing; the One is multiple.<sup>11</sup> As Ueda points out, the relationship of the divine and human ecstasy is further clarified in Eckhart's answer to the question "why did God become man?" Eckhart replies that "he became man so that he could give birth to you as his one and only son." (Ueda 1982: 154).

These reflections bring to bear one of Ueda's more profound insights regarding Meister Eckhart's mysticism. Things and persons are not divine by themselves. Rather, the human being is divine only in virtue of his participation in God. Or to put it the other way, the human being is divine through God's mediation. Eckhart writes that the stick is holy when it is "seen in the divine light." The stick is holy not merely *qua* stick, but in and through the divine light. Eckhart's affirmation is mediated (Ueda 1982: 152). Thus, the being of the distinct thing is not immediately or directly affirmed. It is not holy in virtue of itself, but in virtue of something else. Thus, the being (which is indistinguishable from its divine being) is affirmed in a mediated way. This world of distinction, originally negated in detachment is in fact affirmed, but it is not immediately affirmed. Rather, it is affirmed only indirectly,

---

<sup>10</sup>Eckhart is clear that the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ is not to be understood as a unique event in the irretrievable historical past. See Eckhart 1981: 183, Sermon 5b.

<sup>11</sup>As Ueda puts it, the union of affirmation and negation is "the coincidence of nothingness and here and now actuality." (Ueda 1982: 159).



namely in virtue of the mediation of God's indistinct being. Affirmation of the world is achieved through mediation: through the Godhead. The essence of God as the One is the mediating power by means of which the differentiated world (as well as the expression of that differentiation in speech) is affirmed. In this way, we find Eckhart's commitment to thinking God in terms of *substantio*. God is the one substance in which all things persist and have their being. It is also in light of this that both Nishitani and Ueda argue that Eckhart is neither an atheist nor a theist (Ueda 1982: 159; Nishitani 1983: 64).

That Eckhart's union of one and many is thoroughly mediated becomes evident from the absolute separation of "God" from the Godhead. Once one transcends "God" to the Godhead, one never returns to "God." "God" is an illusion of the true Godhead. Eckhart certainly does not identify the one with the other. "God" is an expression of the absolute when the absolute is grasped in a relative way. The all-encompassing Godhead is the absolute expression of the absolute. Although the Godhead encompasses all determinate distinctions, including whatever one might make of "God," Eckhart does not identify "God" with the Godhead. The emphasis is always on their difference. Although one affirms distinction upon returning from the indistinct Godhead, "God" cannot be Godhead: the relative absolute remains distinct from the absolute *qua* absolute. This dimension of absolute difference corresponds to Eckhart's identification of the human being as the vessel of God's being, knowing, and loving. "God" remains left behind. In enlightened detachment, I no longer look up to "God," speak about "God" or worship "God." Rather, in perfect detachment I am God's mind by which he knows, God's hands by which he loves, and God's body in which he is incarnate.

## 2.2 *Eckhart on Undifferentiated Love*

Because God is love, when God becomes incarnated in human form, love is incarnated in the human being. As Eckhart says, "in love I am more God than I am in myself." (Radler 2010: 171, Sermon 5a). Ueda helpfully illuminates Eckhart's understanding of the realization of the love-relation in human life through his analysis of Luke 10:38, a passage which Eckhart discusses in Sermon 2. Eckhart interprets this Biblical passage in the following way: "Our Lord Jesus Christ went up into a little town, and was received by a virgin who was a wife." (Eckhart 1981: 177, Sermon 2).

Although this is not a proper translation of the passage, Eckhart's free interpretation is instructive regarding his understanding of the way God is present in human life. In order to be "fruitful" as a wife ought to be, namely to give birth to Christ in the soul, one must first become a "virgin," that is purified and free of one's ego and

all plurality (Eckhart 1981: 177–179). As Ueda points out, it is only with the surrender of the ego that one can experience authentic life (Ueda 1982:157).<sup>12</sup>

Love might appear to be a paradox. For love is a relation, and relation requires plurality, but if God is *indistinct*, then there cannot be any plurality. If there is no plurality, then there cannot be any relation, and thereby no love. Eckhart answers this question by claiming that all love is self-love: “All the love of this world is founded on self-love. If you had forsaken that, you would have forsaken the whole world.” (Eckhart 1981: 187, Sermon 6).

God is the only being that is. Although God is indistinct, as indistinct, God is nonetheless inseparable from differentiation. Thus, there is plurality in God as the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Given that God is the only one that is, and God is three in one, the only one whom God could in principle love must be himself. God’s identity is constituted by the *love-relation* of the Holy Trinity. To *be* love, God must be relational in his very identity.

We will remember that one of Buri’s objection to Ueda makes the reasonable argument that if the self is selfless, then it *cannot* be a self. In Buri’s words: “‘Self-less self’ which, if were truly self-less, would no longer be a self, just as ‘nothingness’ is no real nothingness as long as we speak of it. No real problems can be solved with the paradoxes of his conceptuality.” (Buri 1997: 282).

However, this argument seems incongruent with the personhood of God, whose self consists in his selflessness. Indeed, God is that agent who gives away his very agency. Because Eckhart demonstrates how God’s very self consists in selfless love, Buri’s objection to Ueda ought to apply just as much to the Christian Deity as it applies to Ueda’s conception of Zen. If the self cannot be selfless, then God cannot be love, and *theosis* in the Christian sense would be impossible. Indeed, one of the greatest stumbling blocks to accepting the possibility of the selfless self is the insistence that there cannot be true contradictions. However, it would appear that without the possibility of the true contradiction, God could not be love. Thus, there is at least one real problem that can be solved with such a paradox of conceptuality, namely the possibility of *agape*. What is important is not so much that we reflect upon the contradiction, but that we live *into* it—in Christian terms this means nothing other than to be a fool for Christ (1Cor 4,10).

Although there is only God to love, in order for the human being to become a vessel of God’s self-love, the human being must renounce all of his own self-love. The process of detaching from one’s own ego is no different from ceasing to love

---

<sup>12</sup>The “wife” in the passage quoted is Martha. In the following verses, Martha is depicted as working in the kitchen preparing food for the guests, while Mary sits at Jesus’ feet listening to him preach. Ueda illuminates the meaning of Eckhart’s affirmation of Martha through a close analysis of Joachim Beuckelaer’s painting, “Kitchen Scene with Jesus in the House of Martha and Mary in the background,” which depicts the scene. On the one hand, Mary is looking up to Jesus. On Ueda’s reading, this signifies that Mary has not yet abandoned “God” (*Martha hat Gott gelassen*) (Ueda 1965: 147). Ueda points out that Martha has abandoned “God” and returned to reality. Ueda further shows that Eckhart links the turn away from “God” to the *vita activa* in the everyday reality of the world. On Ueda’s reading, the real achievement of the breakthrough to the Godhead is the return to everyday reality. See Ueda 1982: 159.

oneself. Indeed, to want nothing but “to be” is nothing less than wanting simply to love. True love cares nothing for oneself; it only cares for the beloved and is wholly absorbed in it —and thereby it paradoxically loves itself as the selfless self. In detachment, through ceasing to love the human ego and only loving God, the human being loves all things. Since God is inseparable from all things, by turning to love God alone, one cannot help but love all things. Thus, the human being can learn to love universally without differentiating amongst the objects of his love, as the sunlight falls on the good and the evil without difference (Eckhart 1981: 286).<sup>13</sup>

A purely detached love is without why as God is without why. Any kind of love that seeks a why hinders the ecstasy of God’s love (Radler 2010: 190, Sermon 7b/ Latin Sermon). Eckhart’s concept of nothingness exemplifies Ueda’s understanding of how the Western tradition cancels and preserves non-being by transforming it into eternal life. By becoming free of “God”, the human being participates in the eternal life of God: “Therefore I am the cause of myself in the order of my being, which is eternal [...]. And therefore I am unborn, and in that manner I can never die.” (Eckhart 1981: 202, Sermon 52).

### 3 The Critique of Subjectivity: Incarnation, Resurrection, and Trinity in Ueda’s Conception of Selfhood

In this section, I explicate Ueda’s appropriation of Eckhart’s concept of resurrection. Ueda follows Nishitani’s critique of subjectivity in *Gottesgeburt*, by demonstrating how the Zen approach to philosophical questions points us beyond the logical to the real. Finally, I show how Ueda’s ontological concept of the *triune* character of the selfless self is motivated by an engagement with Eckhart, and is illustrated by the pictures of the *Ox and his Oxherd*.

Nishitani posits three fundamental fields of negation on which things may appear: the field of consciousness, the field of nihility, and the field of *śūnyāta*, or Absolute Nothingness, where things exist and appear as they are in themselves (Parkes 2014: 2–3). The first stage, consciousness, is of an object. Whenever it attempts to know itself, it conceives itself conceptually. In order to conceive itself, it must objectify itself —for it cannot think itself conceptually and be both subject and object in the same respect. Because consciousness conceives of itself as an object, it fails to know itself as the subject of its knowing. Instead, what appears is another object in the field of consciousness. Accordingly, just as fire never burns itself, but only something else, so does consciousness only have awareness of

---

<sup>13</sup> Eckhart argues that Detachment is greater than love. This can be made consistent with his other claims about love in a number of ways. First, if one considers love here as “differentiated love”, then praising detachment over differentiated or preferential love would solve the problem. Or one could read the passage as indicating that it is only through detachment that one can learn to love absolutely.

another object, never itself. The first stage of negation, conceptual consciousness, fails to see itself.

What underlies the subjective and conceptual knowing of consciousness is the negation of consciousness—or what he calls “nihility.” This nihility constitutes the second stage of negation in which the negation of conscious subjectivity is the ground that makes subjectivity possible. Indeed, in the isolated being of Descartes’ cogito, Ueda uncovers the very same nihilism that is also lurking at the ground of Kant’s “I think,” wherein “hollowness spreads and before long even a reversal to nihilism occurs.” (Döll 2011: 90).

Finally, the negation of subjectivity is not distinct from subjectivity itself. Insofar as subjectivity considers its own negation, it transforms it into an object of its knowing. As an object of its knowing, the negation of consciousness that underlies consciousness is brought into the field of consciousness itself. Accordingly, even if subjectivity recognizes that nothing lies at the ground of its being, its recognition of that fact in conceptual cognition transforms that nothing into something. Thus, “nothing” is not yet truly nothing at the second stage of nihilism, for it is still treated as a kind of object. Nishitani draws the inference that consciousness can only be active in its conceptual objectification if it is not conscious of itself—if consciousness itself is not conscious. Simply put, on the third stage of *śūnyāta*, consciousness itself must not be conscious of itself. Because conceptual consciousness always separates the concept from its negation, in order to fully recognize the negation of consciousness that makes consciousness possible, subjectivity must abandon discursive and linguistic philosophical conception and adopt a religious practice of non-conceptual attentiveness to itself. Thus, in order for nothing to truly be nothing, in order for the absence of subjectivity to correspond to itself as it truly is, the nothingness of subjectivity cannot be opposed to subjectivity—it must be indistinguishable from it (See Moss 2019a, b).

In his critique of Descartes, Ueda argues that “under the feet” of the conscious I a wordlessness appears. Insofar as philosophical language requires us to conform to principles of logical discourse, the trans-logical space that undergirds logical space must transcend language (Döll 2011: 189). Ueda reports that a monk once asked Dschau-dschou: “what is the meaning [of the fact] that the Patriarch came from the West?” Dschau-dschou answered: “Oak tree in front of the garden.” (Ueda 1965: 153). Ueda’s questioning of the form of rational inquiry follows Nishitani’s critique of reason. Dschau-dschou’s answer undermines the very logic of questioning. The question “why” anticipates that there is a *reason* why the Patriarch travelled to China. Indeed, it anticipates an answer that begins with something like “because”. Instead, Dschau-dschou answers unintelligibly (Ueda 1965: 154). By answering in a way that breaks through the language of logic, Zen draws the practitioner into the unintelligible and out of the mode of the question altogether. Rather than answer the question, the Zen master immediately negates the question itself (Ueda 1965: 155). Ueda is clear that Dschau-dschou draws the student out of the logical mode of investigation and into the real absolute by questioning the very act of posing the question.

### *Ueda's Holy Trinity: Emptiness in the Ox-Herding Pictures*

As is well known, Ueda is fond of elucidating the concept of nothingness and its realization through an analysis of the ten images in the *Ox and his Oxherd*. The eighth image, (See Appendix, Fig. 8), represents Absolute Nothingness as radical negation (Ueda 1982: 161). According to Ueda, “[Absolute Nothingness] must not be taken as a kind of substance, or even as a nihilum of a kind of “minus substance.” (Ueda 1982: 161).

Following Nishitani, Ueda warns against clinging to nothingness. Once nothingness itself is seen as nothing at all, one arrives at Absolute Nothingness as “negation of negation” or the nothingness of nothingness (Ueda 1982: 161). For Ueda, this is a simultaneous and bi-directional movement that consists of ceaseless negation and straightforward or immediate affirmation (Ueda 1982: 160). On the one hand, because Absolute Nothingness is the negation of negation, and the negation of negation is itself a negation, it follows that the negation of negation itself must also be negated. Given that the negation of the negation of negation is also a negation, it must also be negated, *ad infinitum*. On the other hand, because negation is negated, there is nothing there except the absence of negation, which is nothing less than a direct affirmation. This return to affirmation leaves no trace of mediation: it is a simple and immediate affirmation (Ueda 1982: 161–162).

According to Ueda, the affirmation of affirmation and negation is exemplified in the typical Zen formula: “It is and like-wise it is not. It is not and likewise it is.” (Ueda 1982: 161). This typical formula, “A and not A” inhibits substantializing thought, insofar as it wards off one-sided thinking (Ueda 1982: 161). The double perspective “A and not A” expresses the truth of being and nothingness (Ueda 1982: 161) on the side of affirmation. But just insofar as Absolute Nothingness is *just* nothing, it is neither affirmation nor negation, neither being nor nothing (Ueda 1982: 160). Indeed, the inscription under the empty circle above indicates the neither-nor structure of Absolute Nothingness: “holy, worldly, both vanished without a trace.” (Ueda 1982: 161–162).

Ueda supports the conclusion that “this is not subjectivity, therefore it is subjectivity” by applying the formula “A and not A”: I am I and likewise I am not I (Ueda 1982: 161). As long as one still refuses to admit the contradiction and only says “I am I”, the human being remains “sealed up in itself” in mere ego-consciousness (Ueda 1982: 161). The human being becomes what he calls “the true man” through the death of the ego. In respect to the human being, the empty circle is the “nothingness-self” or “nothingness viewed as someone.” (Ueda 1982: 160). The *Ox and his Oxherd* graphically represents the way of self-becoming; it represents the perfection of Zen practice (Ueda 1982: 160).

It is here, on the field of *śūnyāta*, where things exist in themselves, on their home ground. On the field where emptiness itself is empty, emptiness corresponds with itself, and is what it is. This self-correspondence or self-identity is not the same as the self-identity of things insofar as they exist on the field of consciousness in which reason and sensation have their domain and application. The self-identity operative on the field of consciousness is one in which identity excludes its negation. The field of nihility, the in-between of consciousness and emptiness, mediates between them.

Ironically, on the field of *śūnyāta*, identity is indistinguishable from non-identity. This is the field where things correspond with themselves; the field where correspondence with self is also correspondence with other. In *śūnyāta*, subjectivity in itself is that which “in not being a self it is a self.” (Nishitani 1983: 157). By throwing off the hegemony of subjectivity, one is throwing off subjectivity as a one-sided phenomenon that stands apart from its negation: in *śūnyāta* subjectivity returns as it is in itself in union with its other (Nishitani 1983: 124).<sup>14</sup>

Since Nishitani and Ueda describe things on the field of Absolute Nothingness from the perspective of reason, their descriptions appear paradoxical. Since the conceptual determination of things always bars us from what they are in themselves, it is only meditation, non-conceptual attentiveness to the nothingness of subjectivity, that makes it possible to have knowledge of things in themselves.

As Ueda puts it, the *relationship* of one thing to another demands that *the totality* of relations be concentrated into one: “For anything “to be related”, therefore, means that in itself it is a nothingness, and that in this nothingness the totality of all relationships is concentrated in a once and for all, unique manner” (Ueda 1982: 161).

In Zen, the oneness of affirmation and negation (or Being and Nothing) is a radicalization of relatedness in a unique localization (Ueda 1982: 160). Each thing is immediately the all. “The existential dynamic” is concrete and individual at any given moment (Ueda 1982: 164). As Buri notes, for Ueda the movement toward nothingness is the same as the movement toward plurality. This is the “colorful symphony of Being in openness.” (Ueda 1974: 148) Ecstasy is the self-transcendence of the self (Ueda 1974: 68).<sup>15</sup> Nishitani and Ueda appropriate this term to express that the fundamental mode of ecstasy or self-transcendence is the enlightened self (Ueda 1982: 163).

Ueda argues that upon disappearing into Absolute Nothingness, the self does not remain invisible. In fact, it is in virtue of this disappearance that the self is resurrected. The resurrection of the self is depicted in the ninth and tenth pictures in the *Ox and his Oxherd* sequence (See Appendix, Fig. 9).

The accompanying text reads as follows: “boundlessly flows the river, just as it flows. Red blooms the flower, just as it blooms.” (Ueda 1982: 162). Ueda writes that “the tree blooming alongside the river is none other than the selfless self.” (Ueda 1982: 162). For Ueda the blooming tree incarnates the selfless self in a “nonobjective manner.” (Ueda 1982: 162). Why does this follow? Since the subject has become the non-subject, the self is selfless. If I conceive of nature as an other to the self (e.g. as a kind of *non*-subject), the self becomes nature insofar as it becomes self-less in enlightenment. In becoming nature, the self is no longer just nothing. Although the self experiences the Great Death in becoming absolutely nothing, it is re-born again as nature. For this reason, Ueda speaks of resurrection. This re-birth or resurrection

<sup>14</sup>This lesson is exemplified well in the well-known story, where the emperor of the Wu Liang Dynasty asked Bodhidharma: “What is the first principle of the holy teachings? Bodhidharma answered: “Emptiness, no holiness.” The Emperor asked a second question: Who is this standing before me? Bodhidharma answered: “No knowing.” (Nishitani 1983: 155).

<sup>15</sup>Of course, ecstasy is a central concept in Western existentialism. See Heidegger 2008: 377.

is the coming to be manifest of the self as it is, free from the false dualism of self and other. Or as *Questions and Answers in a Dream* puts it, “hills and rivers” (nature) become the “self’s own original part.” Thus, nature itself is the first resurrected body (Ueda 1982: 162). As is evident, Ueda appropriates the term “resurrection” to describe the awakening of all things that happens at the instance of the enlightenment of the self. Because the non-subject no longer stands opposed to the subject, subject and object have become indistinguishable (Ueda 1982: 162).<sup>16</sup>

Insofar as the process of the resurrection of the self into nature is just as much nature’s resurrection (or awakening) into selfhood, the “awakening of all things” is what Ueda calls the “naturing of nature” (Ueda 1982: 162).<sup>17</sup> The term “nature” for Ueda corresponds to the term “home ground” in Nishitani. For Ueda, “nature” signifies “being so from out of itself” and closely follows Heidegger’s concept of phenomena as that which makes itself manifest (Ueda 1982: 162). Given that in Absolute Nothingness emptiness is empty, emptiness applies emptiness to itself. Hence, it is on the field of Absolute Nothingness wherein the thing (as well as the self) corresponds with itself as it is or as Nishitani and Ueda put it, where it “appears in its suchness or thusness” (Ueda 1982: 163). These terms signify truth as the original disclosure of the subject before the division of knowing and being. In enlightenment, the self is by nature its immediate, non-conceptual knowing of nature. For Ueda, since the self has become indistinguishable from nature, “man experiences flowers just as they bloom “out of themselves” and “flowers bloom out of the nothingness of man as out of themselves.” (Ueda 1982: 162). For Ueda, nature is nothing less than the truth of the being of beings (Ueda 1982: 162).

Following the first resurrection of the selfless-self, the self is resurrected a second time, as is illustrated in the final picture of the *Ox and his Oxherd* (See Appendix, Fig. 10).

In speaking of the second resurrected body, Ueda draws upon the image of the master and the student. This image depicts a life shared in common in which an old man (presumably a master) meets a youth, and is presumably teaching him a *kōan* 公安. Insofar as the self is indistinguishable from what is other, so must the master see himself as indistinguishable from every other subject. Appealing to Buber’s “I am I and Thou” and “I and Thou are I” (Ueda 1982: 163), Ueda writes, “for the self in its selflessness, whatever happens to the other happens to itself.” (Ueda 1982: 163). If one sees oneself in the other as the other, one can in principle achieve the goal set out by the golden rule, namely to love one’s neighbor as oneself. In part III, I apply these insights into the first and second resurrected bodies in order to motivate Ueda’s account of the Great Compassion.

Together, the last three *Ox and his Oxherd* pictures represent the “threefold manifestation of self.” The whole threefold self is a “threefold process of transformation.” (Ueda 1982: 163). Absolute Nothingness is not the sum of all three pictures, or any one of them. The process can never be reified. Rather, the threefold self is the

<sup>16</sup>Here the subjective and existential factors are joined together.

<sup>17</sup>This is a creative appropriation of a Heideggerian formula of the “thinging of the thing.”

entire dynamic process. Following Nishitani, Ueda describes this dynamic process as *ecstasy* in the sense that the self transcends itself at each step: in Absolute Nothingness the self has passed beyond itself as a separate being. In nature, the self has passed beyond itself as nothingness. In community, the self has passed beyond itself as the flowering tree and the flowing river to become I and Thou.

If I consider Ueda's appropriation of the concepts of incarnation, resurrection, and the trinity, it would be problematic to deny the influence of Christianity on his thinking. The self undergoes the Great Death and becomes nothing. But this nothing does not remain nothing, for it acquires flesh; it acquires a body. As Buri has pointed out, Ueda re-thinks the Apostle Paul's conception of the resurrected body (Buri 1997: 271). The nothing is incarnated as nature and as the I and Thou. Rather than the incarnation of God, here Absolute Nothingness incarnates itself personally and impersonally in nature and the human person. Nature becomes *the incarnation of nothingness (Fleischwerdung des Nichts)*<sup>18</sup> (Ueda 1965: 167). The resurrection of the self in nature and the human person is just that incarnation of the Absolute Nothingness of the self. As Ueda puts it, "nothingness and the self interpenetrate each other." Nothingness comes to be perceived *as someone* (Ueda 1982: 160). Accordingly, for Ueda the incarnation of the nothing is not separable from the resurrection of the self. Finally, the whole ecstatic process of nothingness overcoming its negative form in nature and the human person is the holy trinity. Ueda's thinking is Trinitarian, though it is Absolute Nothingness which is three-in-one, rather than God. In each of the three one discovers the selfless-self, the Absolute Nothingness which is immanent in, yet transcends each stage.

Although Ueda offers an account of Absolute Nothingness as three-in-one, his account can be fruitfully understood as giving an account of the difference between authentic duality and inauthentic duality (Döll 2011). Insofar as each thing is an element in the world, it is relative, and not absolute. Insofar as each thing is the whole, it is the absolute. Accordingly, the world is both relative and absolute, and this twofold structure permeates everything. Usually, philosophers consider that the whole cannot be contained in its part, or that the part could be the whole. Given that the whole is the element, and the element the whole, this opposition of part to whole is indicative of a false duality. Rather, insofar as the element is the whole, the whole is fully contained in what is relative. Thus, the whole would be lesser and greater than itself. Insofar as the whole would be the element, the element would be contained within itself, *ad infinitum*. This is the dimension of ceaseless negation. In so far as every element of the whole is the whole, as a mere element it would also exclude every other element, it would exclude itself and be outside of itself. The status of the whole as outside itself is the dimension of *ecstasy*. Although it is ceaselessly negating itself, it is always negating itself. Insofar as it is always negating itself, it is never outside itself as that which is outside itself. Upon returning to

---

<sup>18</sup>This German phrase means "the incarnation of the Nothing", the act whereby the Nothing comes to be (*Werdung*) in the flesh (*Fleisch*).



Ueda's contrast between Eastern and Western conceptions of nothingness, it is clear that in the Zen conception, being and nothing constitute an inseparable duality.

Further, any vertical or horizontal ordering of things would entail some distinction between the things that are ordered. Yet, here in *śūnyāta*, each thing is indistinguishable from what is other to it. Given that all things are indistinguishable on the field of Absolute Nothingness, all things are in a state of radical and absolute equality (Döll 2011: 102). The subject itself is just as much that in which the non-subject has its identity as the non-subject is that in which the subject has its identity. That is, each thing is both the master and the servant of every other thing (Döll 2011: 148). The self, as the center, is the master of the non-self, and likewise, the non-self, as the center, is the master of the self. Ueda makes this point in his description of the final Ox picture. Because it has become nothing, it has become selfless, and serves the youth for its own sake. In this way, it is absolutely dependent on the youth, for the youth constitutes the very being of the master as one "without self." Yet, he is also self-sufficient, for the youth has his being in the master, who is the selfless center of the youth. In this way, the master is equally self-sufficient as he is dependent (Ueda 1982: 163).

#### 4 From *Agape* to the Great Compassion: Ueda's Critique of Meister Eckhart

Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木 大拙 famously identified Meister Eckhart with Zen. Likewise, Ueda is clear that there are many similarities between Zen and Meister Eckhart's philosophy that are worth noting. First, just as Eckhart emphasizes that the human being can become (not just like) Christ, so does Zen insist on the possibility that the human being can become (not just like) Buddha. Second, both recognize that salvation requires breaking through to Absolute Nothingness by means of detachment. Third, neither stops with mere nothingness. In fact, both recognize that realizing wisdom in detachment only becomes complete through an affirmation of the reality of the world in all its diversity (Ueda 1982: 158–189; Ueda 1965: 146). Finally, I would add an important practical correlate to Ueda's comparative analysis: both envision that the breakthrough to nothingness gives rise to a self whose character becomes constituted by an attitude of absolute non-differentiating love.

Despite these similarities, Buri agrees with Ueda that Suzuki's identification of Eckhart's Christianity with Zen is premature (Buri 1997: 253). Ueda's precise and convincing analysis of Zen and Eckhart shows that unlike Zen, Eckhart's philosophy affirms the world of differentiation in a mediated way through the affirmation of God as a unitary substance. Unlike in Zen, this mediated relation to the world of differentiation retains an opposition between the relative ("God") and absolute (Godhead), which has not completely transcended logical space.

Following Ueda, I demonstrated in Part I that Meister Eckhart established that differentiated being, including nature and the human person, is affirmed in a mediated way (Ueda 1982: 160; Ueda 1965: 159). This world of distinction, originally negated in detachment, is in fact affirmed, but it is not immediately affirmed. Rather, it is affirmed only indirectly, namely in virtue of the mediation of God's indistinct being. The stick, Eckhart informs us, appears holy "in the divine light." In *Gottesgeburt*, Ueda analyzes Angelus Silesius's poem:

The rose is without why  
It blossoms because it blossoms (Ueda 1965: 157).

Meister Eckhart affirms that the rose is without why. Nonetheless, it is without why because the rose is a differentiation of the essence of the Godhead and the Godhead is without why. As Ueda writes: "Being without why" belongs to God and God alone. This distinguishes God in an absolute way from everything that is not God." (Ueda 1965: 161). Accordingly, the Godhead serves as a middle term through which the rose acquires the predicate "being without why." Only as God is the rose without why (Ueda 1965: 158). This logical construction of predication requires a dualistic structure of subject and predicate, while the syllogistic structure requires a duality of God and nature. Just as the rose is divine in virtue of participation in the Godhead, so is the human being divine through God's mediation. In this way, despite the indistinct being of the Godhead, the dualities of God and human being, as well as God and nature, are still in play (Ueda 1965; 161–163). Whereas for Eckhart, nature and the human being are incarnations of the divine Godhead, for Ueda nature and the human being become incarnations of Absolute Nothingness.

In the Christian ritual of communion, Christ's body is eaten. One mystical reading of this ritual understands it as the process by which the human being becomes part of the larger body of God through whom one becomes a participant in the divine life. God is the divine substance in whom one has being. In radical contrast to this ritual, the Zen master teaches the student to kill the mediator with the following koans: "If you meet the Buddha, kill him!" and "move quickly beyond the Buddha, wherever he is." (Ueda 1965: 146). These teachings illustrate that in Zen the mediator ought to be eliminated from rather than invited into the human being. For Ueda, this indicates that Zen has a more radical attitude toward the unity of being and nothing than Eckhart (Ueda 1965: 152; Ueda 1982: 159). By letting go of the mediating principle, the affirmation of the absolute being of all things is immediate.

Since both Ueda and Nishitani affirm that the absolute is fully present in each element of the absolute, the absolute is identical with each and every being. There is no Godhead through whom and from whom the element acquires its being. As Ueda puts it, philosophers should think "the mountain as mountain, water as water." (Ueda 1965: 152). Rather than see the mountain as God or the water as God, I consider the mountain as the mountain, and the water as the water. In Eckhart, the Godhead is, and the Godhead is nothing. Rather than the "nothingness of God", in Zen I have a mere nothingness, pure and simple without further qualification (Ueda 1982: 159). When asked: "What is God?" the master ought to say "nothing." (Ueda 1965: 165) This does not mean that "God is nothing" as it might in Eckhart. Rather,

it means that there is no mediator, no subject called “God” of whom one can predicate nothing. The rose is enough by itself; it is a complete individual (*vollkommenes Individuum*) (Ueda 1965: 166).<sup>19</sup>

Eckhart calls for the human being to step beyond “God” who is relative to others, and step into the Godhead who is absolute, and in no relations whatsoever. Following Ueda’s analysis in which Eckhart conceives of the relation of the absolute to the relative in terms of mediation, for Eckhart “God” (the relative absolute) and Godhead, (the *absolutely* absolute) remain distinct. While Zen allows that the realization of the breakthrough entails the identity of illusion and enlightenment, Eckhart’s affirmation continues to hold the illusion “God” apart from the Godhead (the true absolute). While Eckhart conceives of the whole in terms of *substantio*, Zen conceives of the absolute in terms of the category of *relation* (Ueda 1965: 166). By reflecting more deeply on the self-referential structure of Absolute Nothingness, the philosopher can uncover the identification in Zen and Mahāyāna Buddhism more generally between illusion and enlightenment that is foreign to Eckhart’s thinking.

For Nishitani as well as Ueda, at the level of Absolute Nothingness, true nothingness is not a separate *thing*: the absence of being itself is not a being. Accordingly, true nothingness is *not* a thing that is *relative* to something else. In virtue of removing all independent being from nothingness, nothingness *corresponds with itself* as purely nothing at all—it is *true to itself*. Or what is the same: emptiness itself must become empty. Since nothingness is not anything at all, the nothingness that lies at the ground of being cannot be a being that is distinct from being (Ueda 1965: 123). Or what is the same: emptiness is truly emptiness only once it has emptied itself of the standpoint from which it is represented as *something* empty. In this way, absolute nothingness is *self-emptying* (Ueda 1965: 96–97).

Given that in nothingness *there is nothing there* which could in principle *stand apart* from all things, *absolute negation* is *absolute affirmation*, and nothingness is *indistinguishable* from all things. Having *emptied* nothingness of all representations of nothingness, there is a genuine self-identity of the self-identity of being and its absolute negation (Ueda 1965: 118). Through the self-correspondence of nothingness with itself in absolute nothingness where “nothingness is truly nothing”, nothingness is nothing other than being. As is evident, self-reference entails an *identity* of opposites. Nishitani quotes Dōgen on this score: “being born is being unborn, dying is not dying” and that “in the Buddha Dharma birth is said to be at once unbirth.” (Nishitani 1983: 189).

Although on the fields of consciousness and nihility emptiness is not yet empty, and self-reference is lacking, on the field of *śūnyāta* self-reference is realized.

---

<sup>19</sup>Ueda illuminates this difference through his comparison of the paintings by Joachim Buchaeler and Liang Kai. In the former, Jesus is painted small, whereas in the latter a man appears cutting bamboo against a background of emptiness. Zen’s radicalization of negation would be illustrated by removing Jesus from Joachim Buchaeler’s painting. Regarding the man cutting the bamboo in Liang Kai’s painting, Ueda says that it is through the emptiness that he becomes himself—it is as if he were the one and only one in the emptiness. See Ueda 1965: 148.

Emptiness becomes empty only on the field of absolute emptiness. Given that in Absolute Nothingness emptiness is empty, emptiness *applies emptiness to itself*. Hence, it is on the field of Absolute Nothingness wherein the thing (as well as the self) refers to itself, appears as it is. The “autonomy” of the thing on the field of Absolute Nothingness can be read out of the self-referential structure of Absolute Nothingness. “Emptiness is empty” signifies that emptiness is properly on its own and independent, that it is just empty. In this sense, the emptiness of emptiness expresses the *independence* of emptiness, how it is when it is “by itself” in its absolute uniqueness. Indeed, Ueda points out that “for anything ‘to be related,’ therefore, means that in itself it is a nothingness.” (Ueda 1982: 161). What is absolute is the relationality itself, which is nothing at all.

From our analysis of self-reference the identity of being and illusion becomes clearer. Given that on the field of Absolute Nothingness things *correspond* with themselves in virtue of their self-reference, they achieve *independence* and *autonomy*. Nonetheless, it is *exactly this independence which constitutes the illusion*. Hence, it is in virtue of the self-referential activity of emptiness, the emptiness of emptiness, that constitutes the truly *illusory* being of beings. Because “emptiness is empty,” *all things* are illusory, even emptiness *itself*. The insight that nothing is truly separate from its non-being, that all things fall into their negations, is the correlative insight into the true illusoriness of independence. When *nothing* achieves self-reference and corresponds with itself, its unity with being is revealed along with the illusoriness of its independence. Finally, this illusoriness of its independence is inseparable from its identity with being.

Nishitani and Ueda are clear that “the things themselves are phenomena” and “things are illusory at their elementary level.” (Ueda 1982: 129). To illustrate this identity, they both return once again to an ancient proverb: “a bird flies and is like a bird,” “a fish swims and is like a fish”. In his commentary on Angelus Silesius’ poem about the rose, Ueda writes that “the rose is like the rose.” (Ueda 1965: 168). The thing in its Samadhi-being is a likeness with nothing behind it by which its likeness could be measured. In this proverb, the being of the fish and the being of the bird are identified with their likeness (Nishitani 1983: 139).

Through the self-referential application of emptiness to itself, namely insofar as emptiness itself is empty, as well as in the self-referential application of illusion to itself in the recognition that “illusion itself is illusory,” neither emptiness nor illusion possesses any independent being that could stand apart from the other. Accordingly, *emptiness is illusory* and *illusion is emptiness*: there is not the slightest difference between the two. As Nishitani puts it: “This Life of Buddha, however, cannot exist apart from birth-and-death. It is only by “obtaining the mind” of sam-sara with [or as] nirvana that one can share in this release from birth and death.” (Nishitani 1983: 186).

As Nagarjuna demonstrates in the *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*,

There is not the slightest difference  
between cyclic existence and nirvana

There is not the slightest difference  
between nirvana and cyclic existence. (Nishitani 1983: 75).<sup>20</sup>

In Eckhart's terms, this means that the relative and false absolute, "God," must be identical to the true absolute, the Godhead. By recognizing that there is no difference between the true and the false God, the Zen practitioner ceases to reify the absolute as Godhead. The Godhead is not the independent thing; the independent thing that is constituted by the process of self-alienation and self-return.<sup>21</sup> Zen radicalizes the negation of the absolute: The absolute or the Godhead itself is just as illusory as everything relative, including "God." By drawing the absolute into the relative, the Godhead becomes "God" and is constituted by illusory being. To sum up the contrast, Zen draws the mystic into illusory being by drawing the true God into an illusory relation.

### *Ueda on the Great Compassion as Non-Differentiating Love*

In his "Contribution to a Conversation with the Kyoto School," Ueda connects two theoretical conceptions of nothingness with two different existential orientations. On the one hand, Zen conceives of nothingness as absolutely nothing, namely as "*neither* being nor nothingness," in which life and death (each corresponding to one side of the opposition) are an "inseparable pair" (Ueda 2011: 23–24, emphasis added). In this case, life and death are in a twofold inseparable relation of mutual dependency. On the other hand, the Western conception of nothingness tends to conceive of nothingness in terms of being as the negation of some being. What is more, being is raised to a conception of "absolute being" when death (a particular construal of non-being) is cancelled and preserved within absolute life such as what one finds in the perspective of Christianity. Christ achieves "victory over death" by means of death and resurrection: by dying to death, Christ overcomes death and eternal life is achieved for the one who participates in his death on the cross. Both Meister Eckhart and Hegel (among others) develop a corresponding philosophical conception of absolute life as the correlate to absolute being. Rather than a relation, in Hegel and Eckhart's case, non-being is cancelled and preserved in a specific form; either as subject (in the former) or substance (in the latter).

The identity of being and illusion, or nothingness and relation, can be further illustrated in the Zen approach to language. In both Eckhart and Zen, the only way to know the absolute is to cease to speak. But in the case of Eckhart, the quieting of human speech allows God to speak his divine word. Although Eckhart calls for us to be silent, he cannot help but preach. His words are true if his words are God's words. In the method of Zen, one also finds this unity of speech and silence. As Ueda says, one cannot grasp the truth with or without words (Ueda 1965: 151). As discussed in part 2, since the absolute only appears within human language and

---

<sup>20</sup>As Dōgen puts it: "Just understand that birth-and-death is itself nirvāna There is nothing such as birth and death to be avoided; there is nothing such as nirvāna to be sought. Only when you realize this are you free from birth and death." (Parkes 2014: 5).

<sup>21</sup>For Ueda, once I cease to reify the Godhead, God "*entwird*" or un-becomes.

reason in the form of paradox, one can only speak of the absolute by means of a paradox: “Buddha is not Buddha.” (Ueda 1965: 151).

Nevertheless, the paradox reflects that nothing can *truly* be said about the absolute, not *even* the paradox itself. Accordingly, the honorable Da-di was asked: “what is the fundamental truth of Buddhism? The teacher answered by giving him a hard kick in his foot! (Ueda 1965: 151). Rather than answer, the master teaches the student to clean one’s mouth: “Thoroughly clean your mouth whenever you have spoken the word, ‘Buddha’” (Ueda 1965: 151). Either one speaks in the form of a paradox, or one does not speak at all. Zen teaching reflects the death of the mediator by cleansing one’s mouth of all words.

Unlike in Eckhart, in Zen every speech about the absolute must be destroyed. In Eckhart’s terms, not only human speech, but also divine speech, the divine *Logos*, must be negated. Indeed, the ceaseless negation of Absolute Nothingness is reflected in the practice of constantly negating every conception of the absolute. By negating every speech about the absolute, the master illustrates the perpetual negation that is constitutive of Absolute Nothingness. Thus, the negation of every speech about the absolute is not just a failure; rather it is a profound *success*, for the practice of negation (rather than the successful correspondence of the concept with its object) illuminates the absolute as that which is constantly undergoing the negation of negation. Because any speech about the absolute cannot be true, it must be illusory. Yet, this illusory being is exactly what constitutes the absolute: the self-negation of the word constitutes the absolute as ceaseless negation. Thus, the illusory being of the word is the being and disclosure of the truth of the word.

The most telling illustration of the radicalization of Zen’s *via negativa* lies in the difference between the way the Zen master responds to questions of ultimacy. When Dschau-dschou is asked “what is the meaning of [the fact] that the Patriarch came from the West?” he says “Oak tree in front of the garden.” Such an answer, as we noted in Part II, draws the questioner out of logical space. Eckhart never answers such questions in this way. At one point, when asked “why did God become man?” Eckhart says: “God works without why and does not recognize any why.” (Ueda 1965: 155). As Ueda points out, this answer still belongs to the language of logic. The radicalization of Zen is the complete transcendence of logical space, and with it the call to become not One, but nothing —free empty and without conditions.<sup>22</sup>

Just as Meister Eckhart’s *agapeic* ethic of non-discriminatory love is grounded on an ontology of non-differentiated being, so does Ueda (and Zen more generally)

---

<sup>22</sup>Ueda’s account of the Great Compassion appears to call for the very inversion of the Kantian conception of practical reason that Nishitani called for in *Religion and Nothingness* (Nishitani 1983: 275). Kant’s practical critique of reason must be inverted just as his theoretical critique of reason was inverted. As Nishitani points out, love can only appear once the “autotelic” standpoint of the person which Kant privileges is broken through. Like Ueda, Nishitani also inverts Kant’s account. Nishitani offers a criticism of both Kant’s theoretical as well as his practical philosophy (Nishitani 1983: 272–274), wherein Nishitani attempts to radicalize and invert Kant’s practical philosophy. See Little 1989: 182. Kant identifies evil with privileging maxims of self-love over the moral law. Ueda radicalizes the rejection of self-love by advocating an Antinomian conception of love: a love beyond the law.

entail a *compassionate* ethic of non-discriminatory love based on the non-differentiated character of Absolute Nothingness. In the dissolving of the autonomous self in the absolute, the self recognizes itself to be in itself unified with the other. The self becomes the self-less self upon the second and third resurrection of the self in nature and the human community out of Absolute Nothingness. The scope of non-discriminatory love in Zen and Buddhism more generally extends to all beings, an insight which has only rarely been realized in the history of Western Christian thought.<sup>23</sup>

In Zen, with the annihilation of the self, all things come to constitute the self. When all things come to constitute the self, the self becomes indistinguishable from all things. In its identity or non-distinguishability from the other, the self becomes selfless. Rather than the incarnation of the divine agency, the self-less self incarnates Absolute Nothingness. By letting go of all preferential or discriminatory love of self (ego-attachment) in Zazen, one sees oneself as lacking self. One continues to practice because one loves oneself, otherwise one would not practice—but one does not love preferentially; one loves oneself as one without self, namely without preference or attachment. Through the practice of Zazen, one's love of self is transformed into a love of no-self. Since all things are constituted by no-self, the love of no-self is constituted by a non-preferential or non-discriminatory love of all things. Since all things are empty of self, the non-preferential love, namely the love of no-self, is nothing less than a non-preferential love for all things. This is just as much a love of self as a love of the other, since the practitioner is equally without self as is everything else.<sup>24</sup>

In the non-differentiating love of *agape* and the Great Compassion, there can no longer be any distinction between friend and enemy. Usually one loves one's friends and hates one's enemies. But where the love of self has been extended to the love of all others, there is no one excluded from the love of *agape*. To have an enemy would entail making an enemy of oneself, to deny love to oneself. Upon dissolving of the self in the Absolute, selfless love is the consequence. In this love, there cannot be a preference for the self over the other as is the case in the varieties of preferential love, such as friendship, erotic love, and love of family.

For Eckhart, by letting go of the self, the self becomes God, and through the love of God, love is thereby transmitted to all things. In this way, the love of self becomes indistinguishable from the love of the other. God loves himself by loving all things through the vehicle of the human soul. For Eckhart, in the identity of self and other,

---

<sup>23</sup> See for example St. Francis of Assisi, who called non-human sentient creatures his "brothers and sisters".

<sup>24</sup> The indifference of love in *agape* is not a lack of compassion or concern for the other, otherwise it would not be love. Following Davis, one might ask whether Zen leads beyond good and evil (Davis 2014: 242). Insofar as Zen calls for radical non-discrimination, it seems that Zen must renounce the difference between good and evil. In transcending the difference between good and evil, Zen appears radically antinomian, for laws (or even rules) of morality codify differences between good and evil. (Davis 2014: 24, 246). In this way, the ethic of non-discriminatory love is not normative, but descriptive.

the inherent capacity of sympathetic concern for others is universalized to all beings and this is achieved by means of self-love: the further I move towards the love of the self the further I move towards the love of the other. For Zen, by completely abolishing self-love, love becomes radically self-less, emptied even of the self of God. As Davis points out, the “well-spring of goodness is completing the process of what he calls ‘demysticism,’ while ceasing to complete the movement of ‘de-mysticism’ or what I have called ‘non-differentiation’ is a source of badness, and can give rise to what Ueda calls a kind of super-egoism” (Davis 2014: 245). Indeed, despite his proximity to Zen, Eckhart’s failure to radicalize the no-self actually gives rise to an inflated and divine super-ego that engulfs all things.

In Eckhart, the love of the self is of a selfless self, who relates to the other through the absolute, or what is the same, the self treats the other through God as the mediator. In Zen, this non-differentiating love is immediate. Having let go of all mediators, the self loves the other in virtue of the other alone. The love is direct, not indirect. Nishitani calls this selfless love the “non-differentiating love beyond enmity and friendship,” as it is called in Buddhism (Nishitani 1983: 58). In Eckhart’s love of *agape*, God empties himself and takes on the role of the human servant. For him, the human serves God in the other. From this position one can see the connection between the love of God and the love of one’s neighbor as oneself. In the unification with God as one’s beloved, one becomes unified with the other, and thereby loves the other as oneself. In Zen, by making oneself into nothingness, all things fill the self. Insofar as the self becomes receptive to all things, one becomes a servant to all things just as they are [without divine mediation]. Because all beings are equal, and equally absolute, in the selfless love of Zen one becomes the servant of all things without preference (Nishitani 1983: 285).

The Great Compassion is differentiated from Eckhart’s *agape* in its complete renunciation of the self. Certainly, Christian *agape* renounces the human self, but it does not renounce divine agency, for it is exactly through divine agency that it loves all things. The Great Compassion renounces human and divine agency, but does not renounce love in the process. It certainly renounces love as the one divine agency, or mega-self. The Great Compassion is the nondifferentiating love of *agape* without *God*. Just as Zen simply affirms “nothingness” rather than “God is nothingness”, Zen does not love all things through God, but one simply loves all things without further qualification. Since the totality is given in all things, whenever one loves one thing one loves all things, and loving all things is loving each thing.

In the Introduction I noted that Buri’s third critique of Ueda seemed to rely upon the assumption that in order for ethics to be possible the self cannot be selfless. In Buri’s words:

In any case, Ueda cannot show us how from a self-less self in the theoretical sense there can appear a man who conducts himself self-lessly in the ethical sense. Self-lessness in ethical conduct over against its surroundings presupposes just such a self which in its conduct is conscious that it is the subject which is responsible for its acts (Buri 1997: 270).

If the Great Compassion is constituted by extending love to all beings without discriminating among them, in order to become that love which loves without



differentiation, the self must cease to discriminate between itself and others. Indeed, by realizing the inseparability of self and other in Absolute Nothingness, one becomes the Great Compassion. As long as one discriminates between self and other ontologically, the Great Compassion is always something separate from oneself and something to acquire in addition to insight into the emptiness of all things. Rather, it appears that in order to become universal and non-discriminatory love, one must abandon every concept of the autonomous self: even the autonomous self of God. Rather than follow Buri's suggestion that the self ought to remain autonomous (and separate), in order to *realize* the ethical ideal of the Great Compassion, the self must be ontologically selfless and free itself from all distinction.

If on the plane of Absolute Nothingness the self is the other, does this imply that there is no difference between self and other? If there is no difference between self and other, then there cannot be a love-relation between self and other. Nonetheless, given that Absolute Nothingness is a true contradiction, the identity of the self and other also constitutes their *non-identity*. Thus, by encountering the other, I encounter myself, and by encountering myself I encounter the other. To heed the call to love indiscriminately means to love the other as myself, which is nothing less than to transform the Golden Rule from a rule separate from one's existence, from an "ought to be" governing one's existence, to the very being of one's existence.

As Nishitani points out, *śūnyāta* is also a field of *physis* (Nishitani 1983: 150). Each thing is a force by which all things are concentrated into one center. In this sense, *śūnyāta* is a force of attraction: all things are gathered into one by the force of Absolute Nothingness. In another sense, Absolute Nothingness is a force of repelling and dispersal. Given that each thing is in its negation, as the self has its being in the non-self, the thing in itself is repelled out of itself and dispersed into all things. Thus, on the field of Absolute Nothingness all things are concentrated into one, and dispersed into many. It is for this reason that "the emptiness of emptiness" is neither an abstract unity devoid of plurality nor a plurality that is utterly devoid of unity. Instead, it is an *absolute unity wherein multiplicity and difference are radicalized*.<sup>25</sup>

*Agape* shows itself to be *dialectical*. By dissolving oneself in the absolute, one experiences a re-birth of self. Because each person is herself the absolute, or *that subject in which everything is united*, each person is absolutely unique, for she is the absolute, and is therefore *singular*. Although *agapeic* love eliminates the I that stands apart from the Other, the I does not thereby completely disappear but is transformed into a *relation-less relation*. Because the absolute dwells in each person, the radical equality of each member in relation to the other demands *respect* for the absolute in each. Absolute Nothingness *differentiates itself* into indefinite singularities each of which is both separate and inseparable from the other.

It is of high importance to note that Ueda does not deny the existence of the plurality of subjects, for plurality is endemic to Absolute Nothingness, as is evident

---

<sup>25</sup>This is what Nishitani calls the "circuminsessional" aspect of Absolute Nothingness (Nishitani 1983: 150, 164).

from the plurality of Oxherd pictures, as well as the plurality depicted in those pictures. Ueda can acknowledge the existence of a plurality of subjects each of which exists “over against its surroundings.” Ueda takes the further step, however, to cancel and *preserve* that separate subject in the contradiction that constitutes Absolute Nothingness that is what it is only insofar as it is *separate* from itself. One can only love the other as oneself if the other is both *oneself* and *other* to oneself. Accordingly, it would be one-sided to emphasize the selflessness (enlightenment) at the expense of the self (illusion), when the authentic duality constitutive of Absolute Nothingness demands both (illusion and enlightenment). It is this unity of opposition that the law of non-contradiction cannot tolerate, for it demands the mutual exclusion of illusion and enlightenment.

As noted earlier, Buri appears to be working under the classical assumption that an ethical command is only meaningful if there is an autonomous self who can be held responsible for following it or disobeying it. It is absurd to hold someone responsible for following a command if they have no choice in whether they follow the command. If I follow the dictates of a moral law, I discover that central to the function of the moral law is to separate the just from the unjust, the righteous from the unrighteous. The act of separating the just from the unjust requires an act of judgment, which is an act of division. In a system of law (moral or legal) that is just and fair, each is given their due. The just are given their reward, and the unjust their punishment. Philosophers have often imagined that in the ideal system of justice, the law is blind, for it applies the same standards to all parties irrespective of other non-relevant features, such as wealth, power, or identity. Indeed, the ideality of the blindness of justice represents her impartiality, her indifference to every other determination except one’s status as it regards their relation to the moral law. As is evident, in a system of justice, the *Ur-teil*, the original partitioning cannot be extricated. By allotting to each what is deserved, the law imposes a rational and normative order on persons and their communities. Indeed, because each is responsible for her actions, each can be rewarded or punished for what they have done.

First, given that non-discriminating love is not normative, but describes the being of the enlightened self, non-discriminating love cannot be properly formulated as a kind of moral judgment to which one can be held accountable. Realizing the Golden Rule calls for negating its status as a *command or rule*, as an “ought to be” separated from the being of the self subject to it. Indeed, Buri himself recognizes this identity of the “is” and the “ought” in Ueda’s philosophy: “Accordingly, what is already corresponds to that which ought to be.” (Buri 1997: 284). Indeed, Buri’s critique of Ueda illuminates an important distinction. Ueda’s ethics of compassion certainly undermines a normative ethic in which the “ought” is separable from the “is.” But to critique Ueda’s account of the ethics of compassion for this reason would be misguided, for Ueda’s account of the Great Compassion means to negate the existence of any separable “ought” by realizing the ought in the very being of the selfless self. Accordingly, Ueda’s ethic of compassion is a descriptivist ethic of the

enlightened self that no longer stands in need of the normative command because the enlightened being is constituted by compassion itself.<sup>26</sup>

Second, because non-discriminatory love negates the absolute difference between self and other that is endemic to the command of a moral judgment, it refuses to posit absolutely separate persons who could be held responsible for their actions. This moral is expressed in the famous and scandalous teaching of Jesus on judgment: “Do not judge or you too will be judged. For the same way you judge others you too will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.” (Matt 7,1–2). Essential to the system of law is that by which normative divisions are legislated and enforced. But if I occupy the position of selfless love in which the self is the other, any normative judgment I make on the other also applies to me. If I judge the other, then I judge myself. Moreover, since in selfless absolute love I am the other, the measure by which I judge the other is the measure by which I judge myself. If I condemn the other, then I condemn myself. Usually when I condemn the other, I do not believe I am condemning myself, and from the position of the system of moral law it would be difficult to see how condemning the other entails condemning the self. As long as the fundamental principles of ethics are conceived in terms of judgment, I am still conceiving ethics from the standpoint of discursive thought, which undermines the possibility of nondiscriminatory love.

From the position of conceptual determination that denies the possibility of true contradictions, one cannot achieve this level of intimacy with the other. By imposing principles of judgment upon the absolute, the self can never be the other, and the other can never be the self without contradiction. Philosophical reflection also requires that one withdraw from that about which one is thinking, that one conceptualize it, and thereby relate to it at a distance. Indeed, on one dominant model of the ideal rational agent, one ought to think the object in a disinterested way. As disinterested, one cannot love, for all love requires that one take an interest. Of course, the immediate unity in the absolute cannot say in advance what the other needs in her particular case. This of course depends upon her empirical circumstance. But that one is ready to engage with her as an absolute singularity, and attend to her needs a singular being is itself constitutive of the orientation of *agape*. This does not mean that one cannot use reason or appeal to mechanical and calculative means to fulfill those needs, but it cannot be the dominant attitude by which one relates to the other. In the love of *agape*, one is no longer interested in asking *why* one loves.<sup>27</sup> Because love is beyond all reason, love is without why.

One might wonder whether *agape* as well as the Great Compassion are radically unjust. If non-discriminatory love does not give one one's due, it appears unjust. But if justice is reconceived as that which reconciles the human being with her absolute being, nondifferentiating love, exemplified in mercy, would no longer be inconsistent with justice. On Eckhart's perspective, since nothing is divorced from God, by

---

<sup>26</sup> Here the “ought” is conceived as that which *should be* but *is not*. As what should be, it is *not yet* realized. When it is realized, it is no longer that which merely should be, but that which is.

<sup>27</sup> Although this argument is my own, my deepest thanks go to Joseph P. Carter for this insight.

loving in a non-discriminatory way, one practices the reconciliation of all things with God through the mediation of the divine life. In Zen, by embodying the Great Compassion, one practices the reconciliation of human life with that of the Buddha. In the Great Compassion one practices the reconciliation of all things with their immediate Buddha nature. The awakening of the Buddha is the awakening of all things. In reconciliatory justice, mercy becomes just mercy. Depending on whether one adopts the perspective of Eckhart or Zen, it is unjust to attempt to hold all things apart from God or their awakening in the Buddha.

Because Eckhart posits a mega-agency, the Godhead can be held responsible for all things. In a way, this is also the case in Zen, for the circuminsessional aspect of the self entails that all things have their being in the self. Given that the self is the locus of all things, the self has the great responsibility to awaken all beings. On the other hand, however, the enlightened self, having ceased to cling to any absolute difference, has let go of its separate agency and has its being in the no-self. Having given up its separate agency, it becomes a servant of the ten thousand things in which its being is indefinitely distributed. Having emptied itself of itself, there is no longer any agent who can be held responsible without simultaneously implicating all beings. In this sense, responsibility becomes diffuse and shared—it cannot be atomized, as is illustrated by Jesus’ teaching on judgment.<sup>28</sup> In Zen this does not mean that everything is permissible; rather it means that the Great Compassion refuses to absolutely divide the self from the other—refuses to violate Buddha nature.

Of course, even if Zen does not posit the discursive as a principle of ethics, this does not mean that discursive reason has no role at all to play in ethical life. Buri’s second objection that ethics requires discursive and objective knowledge is closely related to these concerns. Buri writes:

Otherwise than in such objective knowledge of the self and the situation—however relative and finally absolutely limited it may be—it arrives at neither the “resurrection of the true self” nor to an attitude that can be distinguished from the outer and inner relatively and arbitrariness of the situation. (Buri 1997: 270).

If objective and discursive knowledge requires drawing distinctions, and Zen draws us into radical non-differentiation, then no discursive knowledge in Zen appears to be possible. Following Davis, I think there is a confusion here regarding the role of reflection in Zen. One can make an ethical judgment without attachment or reification (Davis 2014: 241). The enlightened practitioner can make a decision which is “performed from the empathetic position of the ecstatically engaged non-ego.” (Davis 2014: 245). One can certainly employ reflection as a means by which to respond to the needs of the other without being misled by reflection as a model for understanding reality. In short, discursive and reflective thought are necessary for ethics, and so long as Zen does not posit discursive form as the principle of the ethic, it can incorporate discursive and reflective thought into ethics. Indeed, when one raises the discursive to the status of a principle, then non-discriminatory love is rendered problematic.

---

<sup>28</sup>Also see Jesus’ famous teaching about punishment in John 8.1–11.

To summarize the defense of Ueda: without the selfless self, non-discriminatory love could not exist. Because the selfless self is a true contradiction, non-discriminatory love (constitutive of *agape* and the Great Compassion) could not exist without a true contradiction. Accordingly, in order to *realize* the ethic of the Great Compassion, not only must one transcend the autonomous self, but one must also transcend reason, since it is beholden to the principle of non-contradiction. Although Ueda's account of the possibility of non-discriminatory love requires transcending the self and reason, there is nonetheless a place for both in Ueda's account, since Absolute Nothingness is a radicalized plurality whereby agents can discursively reflect in the act of loving without attachment. Although this does in fact come with the elimination of the ethical "ought," it is only eliminated because the "ought" has been *realized*—because the self loves the separate other as one's very self.

Selfless love requires tackling the meta-ethical task of radicalizing the selflessness of the absolute. Certainly, although Eckhart advocates for detachment from the human self, on his account the absolute autonomous self of God replaces the human self as the true self. On this account, love seems to become impossible, for love is a relation, and if there is only one self no relation is possible. For this reason, Eckhart's philosophy exemplifies the Western tendency to conceive of totality in one being. Through the rejection of the autonomous and separate self, only a self in inseparable relation to its other can be capable of an ethic of love. In Ueda's words: "It must be said that the grim global reality of today is the formation of a mono-world which renders meaningless the differences between East and West, and which thus invalidates the historic undertaking of Nishida and Nishitani alike." (Ueda 2011: 30). The "mono-world" is, among other things, not only a world without love but a world where love is impossible. Accordingly, the contemporary task of philosophy is not merely to dig beneath East and West, as Nishida conceived it, but to "dig down beneath the bottom of the homogenized world." (Ueda 2011: 31).<sup>29</sup> By uprooting the conception of absolute being (of which Eckhart's account is merely one variant), the Great Compassion, here understood as non-discriminatory love, becomes possible as a way for human beings to relate to the absolute in the form of an absolute relation that resists the reduction of all things to one form. Rather than reduce things to one being, non-discriminatory love "embraces all things in their most concrete form" (Nishitani 1983: 58).

On the one hand, because the Great Compassion does not coerce all things into any monofrom, the Great Compassion is *not* a coercive love. One might worry that if love is construed as Eckhart sees it, then loving all things means construing them as the self-differentiating Godhead. By freeing love of all mediating forces, love can meet each beloved on its own ground, rather than through another. By freeing love

---

<sup>29</sup> Although Ueda is right to point out that the homogenized world is the real issue, the problem of the homogenization of the world is arguably endemic to the Western tendency to cancel and preserve the other into a large ontological framework outside of which it cannot be.

of the mediator, love meets the beloved where it is, and becomes as diverse in form as the beloved is diverse. Although all things are one in Absolute Nothingness, Absolute Nothingness is nothing at all, and cannot thereby nullify the diversity of entities. Thus, they can remain diverse despite their being one.

On the other hand, although Eckhart's *agape* is grounded on the non-differentiated being of God, Eckhart nonetheless preserves the distinction between "God" and Godhead, and love depends on the condition of an act of discrimination in which the Godhead is distinguished from all other beings. This act of discrimination is exactly what makes possible the mediated love of all things through God. If becoming non-discriminatory love requires the abandonment of all difference, one can only become non-discriminatory love by abandoning the Godhead. Love successfully staves off the mono-world only when it is freed of mediating forces, and abandons all forms of discrimination. The irony of the Great Compassion, is the fact that it can love diverse persons and sentient beings in the world face-to-face as the diverse circumstances of life require, and yet can only do so if it loves them all *without* discrimination.

Like the self-less self, the Great Compassion is an outright contradiction. Loving without difference is a love that is not in relation, for difference is required for plurality, without which there cannot be relations. Yet, love is a relation. Thus, non-discriminatory love is a contradiction: it is a relation that is not a relation. Just as the realization of enlightenment resurrects the contradiction constitutive of the selfless self, the practical comportment of that self is itself also a contradiction. Because the selfless self *is* love, the contradiction in "self-less self" is the ontological expression correlating with the contradiction in the ethical or practical identity of the self in the Great Compassion as non-relational love.

Finally, because the Great Compassion is a radicalization of non-differentiation, the Great Compassion steps out of all relations, for all relations entail difference. Yet, the Great Compassion is empty of independent being, and cannot exist except insofar as it is in relation and is inseparable from relationships. By stepping out of the stream of differentiation, the Great Compassion steps right back into it. Indeed, by ceasing to discriminate, the Great Compassion does not abandon the world, but rushes headlong back into it. Thus, that the Great Compassion is non-differentiated, by itself, and stands apart from all relations is illusory. Because there is not the slightest difference between *nirvāna* and *samsāra*, the Great Compassion, as the practical identity of *nirvāna*, cannot be separated from *samsāra*. Indeed, the great insight of Zen (and Mahāyāna Buddhism) to which Ueda gives expression in his ethic of compassion, is the transformation of *samsāra* into the Great Compassion. The philosopher sees things as they are when *samsāra* becomes compassion — when absolute love does not condescend to the world of difference and relationality by holding itself apart from it, but when it embraces it without discrimination.

## Bibliography

- Athanasius, St. 2007. On the Incarnation. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series. Volume IV. Athanasius*. pp.? ed. Philip Schaff and Rev. Henry Wallace. New York: Cosimo Classics.
- Buri, Fritz. 1997. *The Buddha-Christ as the Lord of the True Self: The Religious Philosophy of the Kyoto School and Christianity*. Translated by Harold H. Oliver. Macon: Mercer University Press.
- Carter, Robert E. 2001. *Encounter with Enlightenment: A Study of Japanese Ethics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Davis, Bret. 2014. Letting Go of God for Nothing: Ueda Shizuteru's Non-Mysticism and the Question of Ethics in Zen Buddhism. In *Neglected Themes and Hidden Variations*, ed. Victor Sogen Hori and Melissa Anne-Marie Curley, 221–250. Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture.
- Döll, Steffan. 2011. Ueda Shizuteru's Phenomenology of Self and World: Critical Dialogues with Descartes, Heidegger, and Merleau Ponty. In *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, ed. Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth, 120–137. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Eckhart, Meister. 1981. *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*. Translated by Edmund Colledge, O.S.A. and Bernard McGinn. Mahwah: Paulist Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 2008. *Being and Time*. Translated by Taylor Carman. Harper Perennial Modern Classics.
- Heisig, James W. 2005. Approaching the Ueda Collection. *The Eastern Buddhist, New Series* 37 (1/2): 254–274.
- Ives, Christopher. 1992. *Zen Awakening and Society*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Leloup, Jean-Yves, Joseph Rowe, and trans. 2005. *The Gospel of Thomas: The Gnostic Wisdom of Jesus*. Rochester: Inner Traditions.
- Little, David. 1989. The Problem of Ethics in Nishitani's Religion and Nothingness. In *The Religious Philosophy of Nishitani Keiji: Encounter with Emptiness*, ed. Taitetsu Unno, 181–187. Asian Humanities Press.
- Moss, Gregory S. 2019a. The Paradox of Representation in Nishitani's Critique of Kant. In *Kant on Intuition: Western and Asian Perspectives on Transcendental Idealism*, ed. Steve Palmquist, 275–283. New York: Routledge.
- . 2019b. Annihilating the Nothing: Hegel and Nishitani on the Self-Overcoming of Nihilism. *Frontiers of Philosophy in China (Brill)* 13 (4): 570–600.
- Nishitani, Keiji. 1983. *Religion and Nothingness*. California: University of California Press.
- Otto, Rudolf. 1971. *West-östliche Mystik*. 3rd edition. München: C.H. Beck.
- Parkes, Graham. 2014. Nishitani on Practicing Philosophy as a Matter of Life and Death. In *Oxford Handbook of Japanese Philosophy*, ed. Bret W. Davis. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199945726.013.25>.
- Pseudo-Dionysius. 1987. The Divine Names. In *The Complete Works of Pseudo-Dionysius*. Translated by Colm Luibheid, 47–132. Mahwah: Paulist Press.
- Radler, Charlotte. 2010. 'In love I am more God': The Centrality of Love in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism. *The Journal of Religion* 90.2 (April): 171–198.
- Ueda, Shizuteru. 1965. *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit: Die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen Buddhismus*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.
- . 1974. "Das Selbst im buddhistischen Denken-Zum West-östlichen Vergleich des Selbstverständnisses des Menschen." *Studia Philosophica: Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Philosophischen Gesellschaft*. Basel: Verlag für Recht und Gesellschaft.
- . 1982. 'Nothingness' in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism: With Particular Reference to the Borderlands of Philosophy and Theology. In *The Buddha Eye. An Anthology of the Kyoto School*. trans. James W. Heisig, ed. Frederick Franck, 157–168. New York: Crossroad.
- . 2011. Contributions to Dialogue with the Kyoto School. In *Japanese and Continental Philosophy: Conversations with the Kyoto School*, ed. Bret W. Davis, Brian Schroeder, and Jason M. Wirth, 19–32. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

# Correction to: Tetsugaku Companion to Ueda Shizuteru



Ralf Müller, Raquel Bouso, and Adam Loughnane

**Correction to:**

**R. Müller et al. (eds.), *Tetsugaku Companion to Ueda Shizuteru*, *Tetsugaku Companions to Japanese Philosophy* 5, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1>**

This book was inadvertently published without the Introduction to the Part titles in each of the parts. It has been corrected now and Part introductions have been added to all Part titles from Part 1 to Part 11.

---

The updated original version of the book can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92321-1>



# Appendix

Figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10: “The Ox-herding pictures”, traditionally attributed to Tenshō Shūbun (active ca. 1423–60), fifteenth century. Ink and light colours on paper handscroll (32 × 181.5 cm). Museum of Shokoku-ji Temple, Kyoto, Japan (Public Domain)



十牛圖  
(一) 尋牛

天章周文筆  
室町時代

**Fig. 1** In search of the Ox



十牛圖(二)見跡

天章周文筆  
室町時代

Fig. 2 Discovery of the footprints



十牛圖(三)見牛

天章周文筆  
室町時代

Fig. 3 Perceiving the Ox



十牛圖(四)得牛

天章周文筆  
室町時代

Fig. 4 Catching the Ox



十牛圖(五)牧牛

天章周文筆  
室町時代

Fig. 5 Taming the Ox



十牛圖(六) 騎牛歸家

天章周文筆  
室町時代

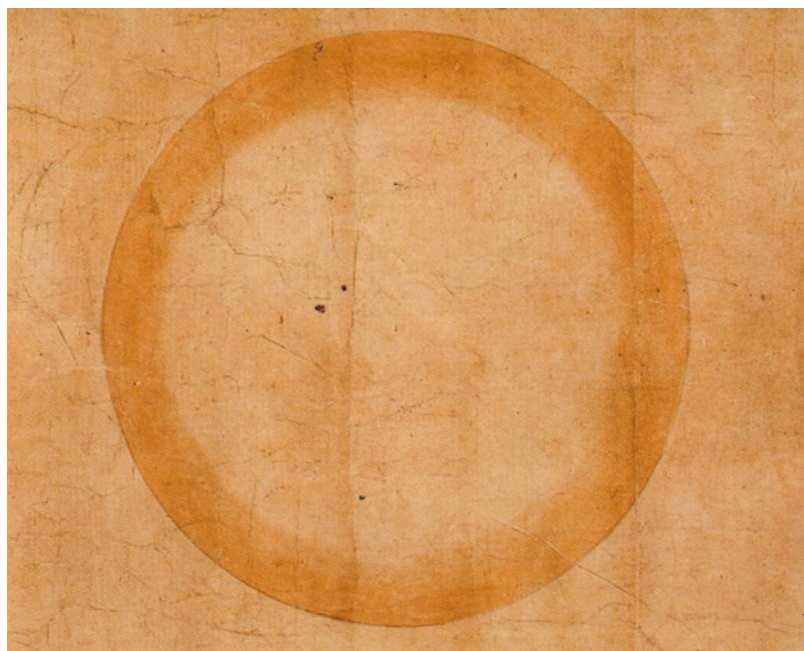
Fig. 6 Riding the Ox home



十牛圖(七) 忘牛存人

天章周文筆  
室町時代

Fig. 7 The Ox transcended



十牛圖(八) 人牛俱忘

天章周文筆 室町時代

Fig. 8 Both man and Ox forgotten



十牛圖(九) 返本還源

天章周文筆 室町時代

Fig. 9 Returning to the fundamental, back to the source



十牛圖(十) 入鄜垂手

天章周文筆 室町時代

Fig. 10 Entering the city with hands hanging down

# Biography

Ueda Shizuteru was born in Tokyo on January 16, 1926, the son of a Shingon Buddhist priest. He specialized in philosophy and religious studies at Kyoto University under the guide of Nishitani Keiji, graduating in 1949 with a dissertation on Kant. For three and a half years, from 1959 to 1963, studied at the University of Marburg under the supervision of Friedrich Heiler (1892–1967) and Ernst Benz (1907–1978). His doctoral thesis, *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit* (The birth of God in the soul and the irruption into the deity), was published in 1965 (Mohn, Gütersloh) and the next year received an award from the Japanese Society of Religious Studies.

Back after studying abroad, he taught for a year at the University of Mount Kōya and obtained a position as assistant of German language and literature at Kyoto University. Three years later, in 1967, he moved to the Department of Pedagogy, where he taught Philosophical Anthropology for 10 years and was appointed full professor in 1972. In 1976 he presented his work, *Studies on Eastern and Western Mysticism*, thanks to which he obtained his doctorate from the University of Kyoto. The following year he moved to the Humanities Department and took up the chair of Philosophy of Religion, which he held until his retirement in 1989, when he was appointed professor emeritus. For several years he taught as adjunct professor at the Hanazono Buddhist University, linked to Rinzai Zen, and Ōtani Buddhist University (linked to True Pure Land Buddhism), both in Kyoto.

He traveled often to Europe where he was a visiting professor and gave lectures at universities such as those of Marburg, Basel, Bonn, Düsseldorf, Tübingen, Munich, Vienna or Zurich. He also participated in the annual meetings of the Eranos Circle in Ascona (Switzerland). Most of the major works are included in Ueda Collected Works (11 volumes) published by Iwanami Shoten.

He was president of the Japanese Society of Religious Studies (1990–1993) and of the Japanese Society of Christian-Buddhist Studies (1999–2002), and president of the Conference on Religion in Modern Society (2002–?) and of the Nishida Philosophy Association (2003–2015). In addition to being named a member of the prestigious Academy of Japan since 1993, he received the Culture Award from the Society for the Promotion of Buddhism in Japan.

He was married to Ueda Maniko (Mayuko Ueda, born in May 25, 1930), who also graduated in Kyoto and then studied at the University of Marburg, and specialized in translating German children's literature. She died on December 17, 2017 and 1 year and a half later, Ueda passed away June 28, 2019 at a nursing facility in Uji City, Kyoto Prefecture due to pneumonia. He was 93 years old.



# Bibliography

## 1.1 Works by Ueda Shizuteru

- 1965 *Die Gottesgeburt in der Seele und der Durchbruch zur Gottheit; die mystische Anthropologie Meister Eckharts und ihre Konfrontation mit der Mystik des Zen-Buddhismus*. Gütersloh: Verlagshaus G. Mohn.
- 1965 “Der Zen-Buddhismus als ‘Nicht-Mystik’ unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Vergleichs zur Mystik Meister Eckharts.” In Günter Schulz, ed. *Transparente Welt. Festschrift für Jean Gebser*. Berna, Stuttgart: Hans Huber, 291–313.
- 1966 “Der Glaubensbuddhismus: Über den ‘Nembutsu’.” *Nachrichten der Ostasiengesellschaft*, 88: 32–44.
- 1967 “Über den Sprachgebrauch Meister Eckharts: ‘Gott muss...’. Ein Beispiel für die Gedankengänge der spekulativen Mystik.” In *Glaube, Geist, Geschichte. Festschrift für Ernst Benz*. Leiden: Brill, 266–77
- 1971 “LSD Experience and Zen.” *The Eastern Buddhist* 4.2: 149–52.
- 1971 “Maître Eckhart et le Bouddhisme-zen.” *La vie spirituelle* 124: 33–42.
- 1971 “Der Buddhismus und das Problem der Säkularisierung: Zur gegenwärtigen geistigen Situation Japans.” In O. Schatz, ed. *Hat die Religion Zukunft?* Graz, Vienna, Köln: Styria, 255–75.
- 1972 “Wilhelm Gundert 1880–1971.” *The Eastern Buddhist* 5.1: 159–62.
- 1973 “The Sayings of Rinzai: A Conversation between Daisetsu Suzuki and Shizuteru Ueda.” *The Eastern Buddhist* 6.1: 92–110.
- 1973 『禅仏教』 *Zen bukk'yō* [*Zen Buddhism*]. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō (J.)  
-reprint 『禅仏教: 根源の人間』 *Zen bukk'yō. Kongenteki ningen* [*Zen Buddhism. Fundamental human being*]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993 (J.)
- 1974 “Das Nichts und das Selbst im buddhistischen Denken – Zum west-östlichen Vergleich des Selbstverständnisses des Menschen.” *Studia Philosophica. Annual of Swiss Philosophical Society*, 34: 144–61.

- Trans. 1982 “Nothingness in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism.” In Frederick Franck, ed. *The Buddha Eye. An Anthology of the Kyoto School*. 157–168. Trans. James W. Heisig. New York: Crossroad.
- 1975 “Das wahre Selbst – Zum west-östlichen Vergleich des Personbegriffs.” In *Fernöstliche Kultur. Festschrift für Wolf Haenisch*. Marburg an der Lahn: N. G. Elwert, 1–10.
- 1975 “Das menschliche Selbst und die Lehre von Nichts: Philosophische Aspekte.” *Universitas: Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft, Kunst und Literatur* 30: 1047–52.
- 1976 “Der Tod im Zen-Buddhismus.” In Johannes Schwartländer, ed. *Der Mensch und sein Tod*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 162–72.
- 1976 “Das Denkende Nicht-Denken – ‘Zen und Philosophie’ bei Nishida unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner Frühphilosophie der reinen Erfahrung.” In *Denkender Glaube. Festschrift für Carla Heinz Ratschow*. Berlin: DeGruyter, 331–41.
- 1976 “A response to Rev. Kadowaki”, *The Eastern Buddhist* 9.1: 122–123.
- 1976 “Leere und Fülle. Shūnyatā im Mahāyāna Buddhismus.” In Adolf Portmann, ed. *Einheit und Verschiedenheit. Eranos*, vol. 45. Leiden: Brill, 135–163.
- 1977 “Das ‘Nichts’ bei Meister Eckhart und im Zen-Buddhismus unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Grenzbereiches zwischen Theologie und Philosophie.” In Dietrich Papenfuss and Jürgen Söring, eds. *Transzendenz und Immanenz: Philosophie und Theologie in der veränderten Welt*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 257–66.
- 1981 西田哲学における宗教理解について *Nishida tetsugaku ni okeru shūkyō rikai ni tsuite* [The understanding of religion in Nishida’s philosophy]. *Nanzan Institute*: 56–81 (J.)
- 1981 “Un-Grund und Interpersonalität: Zum Problem des Personengedanken im Zen Buddhismus.” In Rainer Flasche and Erich Geldbach, eds. *Religionen Geschichte Oekumene: In Memoriam Ernst Benz*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 205–15.
- 1982 with 柳田聖山 Yanagida Seizan. 十牛図。自己の現象学 *Jūgyūzu. Jiko no genshōgaku* [The ten Ox-herding pictures. A Phenomenology of Self]. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō (J.)
- 1982 “Nothingness in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism.” In Frederick Franck, ed. *The Buddha Eye. An Anthology of the Kyoto School*. New York: Crossroad, 157–168.
- 1982 “Emptiness and Fullness. Sūnyatā in Mahāyāna Buddhism.” *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 15.1: 9–37. Trans. James W. Heisig and Frederick Greiner.
- 1982 “Das Erwachen im Zen-Buddhismus als Wort-Ereignis.” In Walter Strolz, Shizuteru Ueda and Horst Burkler, eds., *Offenbarung als Heilserfahrung im Christentum, Hinduismus und Buddhismus*. Freiburg: Herder, 209–34.
- 1982 “Die Bewegung nach oben und die Bewegung nach unten: Zen-Buddhismus im Vergleich mit Meister Eckhart.” In *Konferenz in Eranos, Ascona, 19–27 August 1981*. Eranos Jahrbuch, vol. 50. Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 223–272.

- 1982 “Das Gespräch und das ‘Mon-Doh’ im Zen-Buddhismus.” In Ernesto Grassi and Hugo Schmale., eds. *Das Gespräch als Ereignis: Ein semiotisches Problem*. München: Wilhelm Fink, 45–57.
- 1982 “Materialien zu einer Theorie des Bildes und der Ritualisierung im Zen-Buddhismus.” In Ernesto Grassi and Hugo Schmale, eds. *Das Gespräch als Ereignis: Ein semiotisches Problem*. München: Wilhelm Fink, 159–70.
- 1983 『マイスター・エックハルト』 [Meister Eckhart]. 人類の知的遺産 21. Tokyo: Kōdansha (J.)  
-reprint: 『エックハルト 異端と正統の間で』 *Eckkuharuto. Itan to seitō no aida de* [Eckhart: Between heresy and orthodoxy]. Tokyo: Kōdansha gakushutsubunko, 1998 (J.)
- 1983 “Ascent and Descent. Zen Buddhism in Comparison with Meister Eckhart” I and II. *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. I, 16.1: 52–73. Trans. James W. Heisig.
- 1983 “Ascent and Descent. Zen Buddhism in Comparison with Meister Eckhart” I and II. *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. II, 16.2: 72–91. Trans. James W. Heisig.
- 1984 “Der Zen-Buddhismus und Meister Eckhart.” *Zen Buddhism Today* 2: 91–107.
- 1985 “Die Zen-Buddhistische Erfahrung des Wahr-Schönen.” In Rudolf Ritsema, ed. *Die Schönheit der Dinge. Vorträge, gehalten auf der Eranos-Tagung in Ascona vom 22. bis 30. August 1984*. Eranos vol. 53, Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 197–240.
- 1985 “Vorüberlegungen zum Problem der All-Einheit im Zen-Buddhismus.” In Dieter Henrich, ed. *All-Einheit: Weg eines Gedankens in Ost und West*. Stuttgart: Ernst Klett-Clotta, 136–50.
- 1985 “Schweigen und Sprechen im Zen-Buddhismus.” In Tilo Schabert and Rémi Brague, eds. *Die Macht des Wortes*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 91–113.
- 1985 “Sein-Nichts-Weltverantwortung im Zen-Buddhismus.” In Raimundo Panikar and Walter Strolz, eds. *Die Verantwortung des Menschen für eine bewohnbare Welt im Christentum, Hinduismus und Buddhismus*. Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder, 251–256.
- 1986 “Meister Eckharts Predigten: Ihre ‘Wahrheit’ und ihre geschichtliche Situation.” In Kurt Ruh, ed. *Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter: Symposion Kloster Engelberg 1984*. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 34–48.
- 1988 “Der Ort des Menschen im Nō-Spiel.” In *Conférence Eranos, Ascona, 19–27 August 1987*. Eranos Jahrbuch, vol. 56. Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 69–103.
- 1988 “Das Religionsverständnis in der Philosophie Nishida Kitarōs.” In Elisabeth Gössmann and Günter Zobel, eds. *Das Gold im Wachs: Festschrift für Thomas Immoos*. München: Iudicium, 513–29.
- 1989 “Eckhart und Zen am Problem ‘Freiheit und Sprache’.” In Martin Kraatz, ed. *Luther und Shinran- Eckhart und Zen. Joachim Wach- Vorlesung am 18. Oktober 1984. Phillips-Universität Marburg, III*. Beihefte der

- Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte, 31. Cologne: J. Brill: 21–92.
- 1989 “The Horizon for Presenting the Problem of Science and Religion.” *Zen Buddhism Today* 7.1: 136–142.
- 1989 “The Zen Buddhist Experience of the Truly Beautiful.” *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 22.1: 1–36. Trans. John C. Maraldo.
- 1990 “Everyday Zen.” *Chanoyu Quarterly* 62: 38–50, 63: 34–47.
- 1990 『西田哲学への問い』. *Nishida tetsugaku e no toi* [Questioning Nishida’s philosophy]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten (J.)
- 1990 “Das absolute Nichts im Zen, bei Eckhart und bei Nietzsche.” In Ryōsuke Ōhashi, ed. *Die Philosophie der Kyōto-Schule. Texte und Einführung*. Freiburg und München: Karl Alber, 471–502.
- 1990 “Freedom and Language in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism (I).” *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 23.2: 18–59. Trans. Richard F. Szuppl.
- 1991 “Freedom and Language in Meister Eckhart and Zen Buddhism (II).” *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 24.1: 52–80. Trans. Richard F. Szuppl.
- 1991 “Das Problem der Sprache in Meister Eckharts Predigten.” In Elenor Jain and Reinhard Margreiter, eds. *Probleme philosophischer Mystik*. St. Augustin: Academia, 95–108.
- 1991 “Experience and Language in the Thinking of Kitarō Nishida.” 『禅文化研究所紀要』 *Zen bunka kenkyūjokyo* [Annual Report from the Institute for Zen Studies] 17: 91–154.
- 1991 『西田幾多郎を読む』 *Nishida Kitarō o yomu* [Reading Nishida Kitarō]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten (J.)
- 1991 『生きるということ』 *Ikiru to iu koto* [That thing called Life]. Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin (J.)
- 1992 (ed.) 『情意における空。西谷啓治先生』 *Jōi ni okeru kū Nishitani Keiji Sensei* [Emptiness in feeling-will. On Nishitani Keiji]. Tokyo: Sōbunsha (J.)
- 1992 『場所—二重世界内存在』 *Basho. Nijusekaiteki sonzai* [Place. The Two-fold Being-in-the-world]. Tokyo: Kōbundō (J.)
- reprint *Jitsuzon to kyōzon. Nijusekaiteki sonzai*. 『実存と共存—二重世界内存在』 Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1999 (J.)
- 1992 “The Place of Man in the Noh Play.” *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 25.2: 59–88. Trans. Paul Shepherd.
- 1992 “My Teacher.” *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 25.1: 1–7.
- 1992 “The Place of Man in the Noh Play.” *The Eastern Buddhist* 25.2: 59–88.
- 1992–1993 “El Zen de cada día.” *Pasos* 38: 7–17; 41: 3–8; 44: 3–7; 47: 3–12.
- 1993 “Pure experience, self-awareness, bashō.” *Études Phénoménologiques* 18, Brussels: Éditions Ousia, 63–86. Trans. James Fredericks and Jan Van Bragt.
- 1993 ed. with 河合隼雄 Kawai Hayao, 『死の科学と宗教』 *Shi no kagaku to shūkyō* [The Science of Death and Religion]. Iwanami kōza, 7. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten (J.)
- 1994 “Zen and Philosophy in the Thought of Nishida Kitarō.” *Japanese Religions* 18.2: 162–193. Trans. Mark Unno.

- 1994 “The Practice of Zen.” *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 27.1: 10–29. Trans. Thomas Kirchner of 「禅への道」 *Zen e no michi* [The Way of Zen] in 『禅仏教—根源的人間』 *Zen Bukkyō: Kongenteki ningen* [*Zen Buddhism: The fundamental human being*]. Tokyo: Iwanami, 1993; 293–316.
- 1994 『経験と自覚—西田哲学の「場所」を求めて』 *Keiken to jikaku: Nishida tetsugaku no basho o motomete* [*Experience and self-awareness: Search for the ‘place’ in Nishida’s philosophy*]. Tokyo: Iwanami (J.)
- 1994 “Nishida’s Thought.” *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 28.1: 29–47. Trans. Jan Van Bragt: “Nishida Kitarō no Shisaku”, *Keiken to jikaku: Nishida tetsugaku no basho o motomete* 『経験と自覚 西田哲学の「場所」を求めて』 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1994; 1–30). Originally lecture delivered in the symposium “Beyond East and West” organized by Goethe Institute of Kyoto, September 1991.
- 1994 “The Place of Self-Awareness.” In Francis X. D’sa and Roque Mesquita, eds. *Hermeneutics of encounter. Essays in honour of Gerhard Oberhammer on the occasion of his 65th birthday*. Vienna: Publications of the Nobili Research Library, vol. XX: 203–213. Trans. T. Nobuhara, revised by Th. Kirchner.
- 1994 “Die Gelassenheit im Zen-Buddhismus.” In Ernesto Grassi and Hugo Schmade, eds. *Arbeit und Gelassenheit. Zwei Grundformen des Umgangs mit Natur*. Zürcher Gespräch III. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 207–230.
- 1995 “Nishida, Nationalism, and the War in Question.” In James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds. *Rude Awakenings. Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 77–106.
- 1995 “The Difficulty of Understanding Nishida’s Philosophy.” *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 28.2: 175–82. Trans. Thomas L. Kirchner of 「西田哲学を読む難しさ」 “Nishida tetsugaku o yomu muzukashisa”, 『経験と自覚』 *Keiken to jikaku* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1994; 231–41), originally published in the journal 現代思想 *Gendai shisō*, June 1993.
- 1995 “Hermeneutik des Weges durch den Tod.” In Gerhard Oberhammer, ed. *Im Tod gewinnt der Mensch sein Selbst. Das Phänomen des Todes in asiatischer und abendländischer Religionstradition*. Vienna: Der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 231–248.
- 1995 “Nishida’s Thought.” *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. 28.1: 29–47.
- 1995 “Silence and Words in Zen Buddhism.” *Diogenes* 170: 1–21.
- 1995 『西田幾多郎—人間の生涯ということ』 *Nishida Kitarō: ningen no shōgai to iu koto* [*Nishida Kitarō: This thing we can call a person’s life*]. Tokyo: Iwanami (J.)  
-revised edition: 改訂版『西田幾多郎とは誰か』 *Nishida Kitarō to wa dare ka*. [Who is Nishida Kitarō]. Tokyo: Iwanami, 2002 (J.)
- 1996 “Schweigen und Sprechen im Zen-Buddhismus.” In Tilo Schabert and Rémi Brague, eds. *Die Macht des Wortes. Eranos*. München: Wilhelm Fink, 91–113.
- 1996 “Phänomenologie des Selbst in der Perspektive des Zen-Buddhismus.” In Georg Stenger and Margarete Röhrig, eds. *Philosophie der Struktur: Fahrzeug der Zukunft?* Freiburg and München: Karl Alber, 19–42.

- 1996–1997 “Sōseki and Buddhism. Reflections on His Later Works.” *The Eastern Buddhist* n.s. (I) 29.2: 172–206; (II) 30.1: 32–52. Trans. Jan Van Bragt of: 『夏目漱石・道草から明暗へと仏教』 *Natsume Sōseki – Michikusa kara Meian e to Bukkyō* [Natsume Sōseki: From Michikusa to Meian and Buddhism], eds. Konno Tōru, Satake Akihiro and Ueda Shizuteru (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1995; 57–106).
- 1997 『宗教への思索』 *Shūkyō e no shisaku* [Thoughts on Religion]. Tokyo: Sōbunsha (J.)
- 1997 『ことばの実存—禅と文学』 *Kotoba no jitsuzon. Zen to bungaku* [Language and Existence. Zen and Literature]. Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō (J.)
- 1997 ed. with 堀尾孟編 Horio Tsutomu, 『禅と現代世界』 *Zen to gendai sekai* [Zen and modern world]. Kyoto: Zen Bunka Kenkyūjo (J.)
- 1997 with 岡村美穂子 Okamura Mihoko, 『思い出の小箱から鈴木大拙のこと』 *Omoide no kobako kara Suzuki Daisetsu no koto* [Small box of memories of Daisetsu Suzuki]. Kyoto: Tōeisha (J.)
- 1998 『西田哲学への導き—経験と自覚』 *Nishida tetsugaku e no michibiki. Keiken to jikaku* [A guide of Nishida's philosophy. Experience and self-awareness]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten (J.)
- 1998 『人間の生涯ということ』 *Ningen no shōgai to iu koto*. [That thing called the lifetime of human being]. Kyoto: Jinbun Shoin (J.)
- 1998 西田幾多郎—「あの戦争」と『日本文化の問題』 “Nishida Kitarō: ano sensō to *Nihon bunka no mondai*” [Nishida Kitarō: ‘That war’ and Japanese culture]. In Masakatsu Fujita, ed. 『西田哲学研究の歴史』 *Nishida tetsugaku kenkyū no rekishi* [History of the studies on Nishida philosophy. Selected works]. Vol. 2. Kyoto: Tōeisha, 462–509 (J.)
- 1999 “‘Glaube und Mystik’ am Problem ‘Erfahrung und Sprache’.” In Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde and Niklaus Largier, eds. *Homo Medietas. Aufsätze zu Religiosität, Literatur und Denkformen des Menschen vom Mittelalter bis in die Neuzeit. Festschrift für Alois Maria Haas zum 65. Geburtstag*. Berna, et al.: Peter Lang, 323–334.
- 1999 with 岡村美穂子 Okamura Mihoko, 『大拙の風景—鈴木大拙とは誰か』 *Daisetsu no fukei Suzuki Daisetsu to wa dare ka*. Kyoto: Tōeisha
- 1999 “Buddhistische Betrachtungen zum Problem ‘Wiedergeburt’.” In Walter Schweidler, ed. *Wiedergeburt und kulturelles Erbe. Reincarnation und Cultural Heritage. Ergebnisse und Beiträge des Internationalen Symposiums der Hermann und Marianne Straniak Stiftung Weingarten, 1999*. Sankt Augustin, Academia Verlag, 37–58.
- 1999 “Zen and the Modern World: D. T. Suzuki on the Eastern Way of Seeing Things.” *Journal of Japanese Trade and Industry*, March and April, 8–13.
- 2000 “Gottesbegriff, Menschenbild und Weltanfang im Buddhismus.” In Peter Koslowski, ed. *Gottesbegriff, Weltursprung und Menschenbild in den Weltreligionen*. München: Wilhelm Fink, 51–65.
- 2000 “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 World Religions*. Dordrecht, Boston: Springer, 43–56.

- 2000 『私とは何か』 *Washi to wa nani ka* [Who is “I”]. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten (J.)
- 2001–2003 『上田閑照集 (全11 巻)』 [Ueda Shizuteru. Collected Works, 11 vols.]. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten (J.)
1. 西田幾多郎 [Nishida Kitarō, 2001]
  2. 経験と自覚 [Keiken to jikaku, 2002]
  3. 場所 [Basho, 2003]
  4. 禅—根源的人間 [Zen-kongenteki ningen, 2001]
  5. 禅の風景 [Zen no fukei, 2002]
  6. 道程「十牛図」を歩む [Dōtei “Jugyuzu” o ayumu, 2003]
  7. マイスター・エックハルト [Maisuta Ekkuharuto, 2001]
  8. 非神秘主義 エックハルトと禅 [Hi shinpi shugi Ekkuharuto to Zen, 2002]
  9. 虚空. 世界 [Kokū. sekai, 2002]
  10. 自己の現象学 [Jiko no genshōgaku 2002]
  11. 宗教とは何か [Shūkyō to wa nani ka, 2002]
- 2001 “Jesus in Contemporary Zen with Special Reference to Keiji Nishitani.” In P. Schmidt-Leukel, G. Köberlin, and J. Th. Götz, eds. *Buddhist Perceptions of Jesus*. St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 42–58.
- 2002 『十牛図を歩む』 *Jūgyūzu o ayumu*. Tokyo: Daihōrin kaku (J.)
- 2003 “La fenomenologia del sé nella prospettiva del buddhismo zen.” *Studi filosofici* 25–16: 259–88.  
-Reprinted in *Zen e filosofia* (2006).
- 2004 *Zen y filosofía*, ed. Raquel Bouso. Foreword by Ueda Shizuteru. Barcelona: Herder.
- 2005 Foreword to Thomas Yūhō Kirchner, *Entangling Vines: Zen Koans of the Shūmon Kattōshū*. Kyoto: Tenryū-ji Institute for Philosophy and Religion, xx–xxi.
- 2005 “Der Ort des Selbstgewahrens.” In Steffen Döll, *Wozu also suchen? Zur Einführung in das Denken von Ueda Shizuteru*. München: Iudicium, 78–112.
- 2005 ed. with Okamura Mihoko, 『相貌と風貌—鈴木大拙写真集』 *Sōbo to fubo: Suzuki Daisetsu shashinshū* [The Faces and Infinite Presence of D.T. Suzuki]. Kyoto: Zen Bunkakenkyujo.
- 2006 *Zen e filosofia*, ed. Carlo Saviani. Preface by James Heisig. Palermo: L’Epos.  
-reprint: *Zen e filosofia*, ed. Carlo Saviani. Preface by James Heisig. Nagoya: Chisokudo, 2017.
- 2006 “Silencio y habla en el budismo zen.” In Óscar Pujol and Amador Vega, eds. *Las palabras del silencio. El lenguaje de la ausencia en las distintas tradiciones místicas*. Trans. Carlos Martín Ramírez. Madrid: Trotta, 13–38.
- 2006 “Valutazione generale della mistica di Meister Eckhart.” In Giancarlo Vianello, ed. *Messaggeri del nulla. La scuola di Kyōto in Europa*. Soveria Mannelli, Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 125–160.
- 2010 『折々の思想』 *Ori ori no shisō*. Kyoto: Tōeisha (J.)
- 2011 *Wer und was bin ich? – Zur Phaenomenologie des Selbst im Zen-Buddhismus*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Karl Alber.