

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### Approaching the *Ueda Shizuteru Collection*

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*Ueda Shizuteru shū* 上田閑照集. Ueda Shizuteru. 11 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.

Vol. 1, *Nishida Kitarō* 西田幾多郎. 2001. 381 pages. 4,800 yen. ISBN 4000924613.

Vol. 2, *Keiken to jikaku* 経験と自覚. 2002. 399 pages. 4,800 yen. ISBN 4000924621.

Vol. 3, *Basho* 場所. 2003. 332 pages. 5,000 yen. ISBN 400092463X.

Vol. 4, *Zen: Kongenteki ningen* 禅: 根源の人間. 2001. 396 pages. 4,800 yen. ISBN 4000924648.

Vol. 5, *Zen no fūkei* 禅の風景. 2002. 360 pages. 5,000 yen. ISBN 4000924656.

Vol. 6, *Dōtei "Jūgyūzu" o ayumu* 道程「十牛図」を歩む. 2003. 378 pages. 5,000 yen. ISBN 4000924664.

Vol. 7, *Maistā Ekkuharuto* マイスター・エックハルト. 2001. 386 pages. 4,400 yen. ISBN 4000924672.

Vol. 8, *Hi-shinpushugi: Ekkuharuto to zen* 非神秘主義: エックハルトと禅. 2002. 346 pages. 4,800 yen. ISBN 4000924680.

Vol. 9, *Kokū/sekai* 虚空/世界. 2002. 350 pages. 5,000 yen. ISBN 4000924699.

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Vol. 10, *Jiko no genshōgaku* 自己の現象学. 2002. 400 pages. 5,000 yen. ISBN 4000924702.

Vol. 11, *Shūkyō to wa nanika* 宗教とは何か. 2002. 397 pages. 5,000 yen. ISBN 000924710.

WITH the eleven volumes of the *Ueda Shizuteru Collection* 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 living 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 Symposium, 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 XIXth World 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 three 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 came 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.

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

<sup>1</sup> Published as a special edition of *Tōzai shūkyō kenkyū* 東西宗教研究 4, 2005, entitled "Ueda Shizuteru-shi no shisō" 上田閑照氏の思想 (The Thought of Ueda Shizuteru).

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.

### *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 five 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 and teacher—to edit and gloss nearly 3,800 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 sixty of his essays have appeared in German, English, Spanish, French, and Italian, twenty-seven of which were originally composed in German. A list of the latter is included at the end of vol. 3. I have appended a complete list to the end of the present essay. 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<sup>2</sup> 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 were not entirely the same. . . Faint traces of the different contexts lingered in the gaps, echoing off one another and even changing

<sup>2</sup> Steffen Döll, *Wozu also suchen? Zur Einführung in das Denken von Ueda Shizuteru*. München: Judicium, 2005. See my review of this work in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 33, no. 1, 2006, pp. 208–11.

places with one another” (4, pp. 386–8). 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 last year 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, and the final three 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 diverge from those of the reader.

There is more. The transitions in the *Collection* from one theme to another 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 whet the reader’s appetite for more information about the major shifts in his thinking. The best example of this appears in vol. 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.

As a living philosopher, 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 1990 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 (2, pp. 283–8)—Ueda labors to show a single “dynamic” continuity unfolding (1, p. 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” (1, p. 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 (10, pp. 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 another 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 the 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.

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.

### *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 studies in Germany that he began to read Nishida, and that principally in preparation for lectures delivered abroad. For nearly thirty 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" (1, p. 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 (*Nishida Kitarō o yomu* 何西田幾多郎を読む [Reading Nishida Kitarō], 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” (1, p. 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 a 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 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 another 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 are 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 had been my appreciation of them, including those I myself had translated.

Ueda himself mentions Suzuki Daisetz alongside Nishida as a leading light in his intellectual life (1, p. 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.

### *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 surprisingly, given his mentors, Ueda's understanding of religion revolved around the dialectic between experience and reflection. His primary data are 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?" (1, p. 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 are 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, 4, pp. 116–26). 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 *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 (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 distinc-

tion between subject and object; this is called “awakening” or *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. And (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  $B > C$  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” (5, p. 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” (5, pp. 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 his 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 interconnectedness. 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* 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 11, pp. 384–5) 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 ones visible. One is reminded of the closing lecture of James’ *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., 10, pp. 102–7). The full argument for this lies in his several commentaries on the final three of the 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* 参禅 to *samu/angya* 作務・行脚. 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, *sokuten kyoshi* 則天去私, “Follow heaven, forsake oneself” (11: p. 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 Diagram 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. Principal 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 *Zen no kenkyū* 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.

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

Diagram 1

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 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 (2, pp. 359–67). 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 weighted down by 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 the latter, Nishida is not much help.<sup>3</sup>

### *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.”<sup>4</sup> An extended version of his presentation was subsequently published in Japanese<sup>5</sup> and that in turn was abbreviated for a chapter

<sup>3</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,” in *Psyché: Invention de l'autre*, Paris, Galilée, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> Subsequently published in *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism*, University of Hawai'i Press, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> “Nishida Kitarō: Ano sensō to nihon bunka 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 857, 1995, pp. 107–33.

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 (1, pp. 217–22), 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 later writings of Nishida and makes no attempt to find anything like a "political philosophy" running through his earlier thought. Compared with Chris Jones' recently published work on the subject,<sup>6</sup> Ueda sees the 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 *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.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher S. Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, the Kyoto School, and Co-Prosperity*. London: Routledge, 2005.



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