



Steffen Döll, *Wozu also suchen? Zur Einführung in das Denken von Ueda Shizuteru*

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IT IS HIGH TIME for a book about the philosophy of Ueda Shizuteru, and what better place for it to come from than Germany. For more than three decades Prof. Ueda has been traveling to the German-speaking lands to deliver public lectures and present papers at academic conferences, many of which—twenty-seven by my count—have been published in their original German. Add to this a lifetime of academic work in

Japan, including the eleven volumes of his recently completed Japanese writings, the *Ueda Shizuteru Collection*, and the resources for approaching the thought of a man whose name has become synonymous at home and abroad with the best that Japanese philosophy has to offer are there in abundance. Steffen Döll has taken up the challenge to give us a concise and useful guide to Ueda's otherwise daunting corpus.

After the very briefest of biographical sketches, Döll sets up the question around which he sees Ueda's ideas to revolve like planets around the sun: *What is the Self?* If the Self functions as an absolute, "as the fullness of *Dasein*" (17), it cannot be understood in merely psychological terms but only in a wider, ontological relationship with a Reality within which the Self unfolds and which in turn reaches consciousness through the Self. Accordingly, any description of the Self must reach beyond the ordinary ego-consciousness of a subject standing among the objects of the world to retrace the emergence of consciousness, its progression through self-awareness, its discovery of its origins, and its return to encounter the world "just as it is." Both the objectivity of the world and the subjectivity of the individual fall away, and in their place we have a "self that is not a self," that is, a Self that becomes itself by letting go of its attachment to itself and the finite world of its experience to step into the "infinite openness" of Reality.

In working out his "phenomenology of the Self" Ueda draws freely on the philosophy of Heidegger, and still more on the thinking of Nishida Kitarō, to locate the project of self-understanding as a being-in-the-world in the wider, unlimited locus of a nothingness beyond being, world, and Self. These are complex questions and demand careful attention at each step, but Döll skips through the abstract explanation quickly in two short opening chapters in order to focus on the larger sweep of the philosophical vision. He chooses to do this, and rightly, I think, by tracing Ueda's analysis of the ancient Buddhist drawings and text of the "Ten Ox Pictures." Döll concludes his book with an original translation from the Chinese of a briefer version of the text and the first German translation of Ueda's important essay on "The Locus of Self-Awareness," which together make up nearly half the volume.

There is probably no single Buddhist text that has so fascinated Ueda these past twenty-five years as the "Ten Ox Pictures," and no images that have stimulated the development of his own thought as the final three pictures of the series. Döll devotes a chapter to a brief explanation of the text, mixing in general historical and Buddhological description with Ueda's own interpretation. A further chapter reflects Ueda's insistence that the movement from absolute nothingness (picture 8) to the world of nature just as it is (9) to the I-Thou encounter in the marketplace (10) is not a journey with an end but an ongoing process whose repetition marks the life of the selfless, awakened Self. (I would add that Ueda has used this same idea to develop his own reading of the various facets of Zen practice as well as his later interpretations of Meister Eckhart.)

A chapter on "Confrontations" digests Ueda's reflections on Descartes, Eckhart, Angelus Silesius, and Martin Buber. Each of these thinkers affected Ueda in a different way and lining them up this way gives the reader a good idea of the variety of

ways Ueda works with Western philosophical sources. Like his Kyoto School predecessors Nishida and Nishitani Keiji, Ueda's interest in Descartes is largely confined to exposing the idea of the modern, self-conscious subject implied in the phrase, *cogito, ergo sum*, in order to show the remnants that survive the Kantian critique and continue to block the way to the knowledge implied in the self-awareness of a selfless Self.

Things are very different with Eckhart. Here is a thinker with whose writings Ueda has wrestled line by line, word for word, for over forty years. In addition to his critical Japanese translations of the German sermons and his extensive commentaries on key concepts in Eckhart's work, Ueda has found a standpoint from which Eckhart and Zen complement and confirm one another at their most profound level of insight. Döll can do no more than give the briefest outline of this in the few pages he allots to the topic. (Angelus Silesius really only figures for one phrase that has its roots in Eckhart.)

Ueda's debate with Buber is a function of his attempt to contrast Nishida's interpretation of the I-Thou relationship as grounded on a nothingness beyond subject and object with what has become the classical reference point for I-Thou relationship in Western philosophy. He does this by comparing the very different understandings of the *Zwischen* that undergirds the apparent similarities. Döll summarizes this handily and with fairness to both sides.

A short, concluding chapter attempts to sketch, based on the foregoing and in the very boldest of strokes, Ueda's current philosophical standpoint, adding a comment on his style, citation of sources, and method of argumentation. He concludes that Ueda, like Nishida, is a phenomenologist in the strictest sense of the term: one who is concerned less with *explaining* than with *re-presenting* the reality of a self-awareness that is located in this world and in the infinite openness that grounds Self and world.

The footnotes scattered generously throughout his exposition (368 of them in less than 100 pages) seem to escape the author's control at times. In part this seems to be due to an uncertainty about the intended audience. Brief explanations of technical terms aimed at readers unfamiliar with Buddhist thought alternate with subtler questions about the use of terms or the interpretation of ideas that require more sophistication to appreciate. The use of Chinese characters is symptomatic. Those who can decipher the glyphs do not need the explanation; those who cannot, need the explanation but not the glyphs. While one appreciates the *Akribie*, one wishes for a more elegant way of isolating the technical apparatus without cluttering up the text with information that most readers do not need.

That said, much that is in the notes suggest that this little book could have been a lot longer than it is. For my part, I wish it were. Clearly Döll is aware of the web of connections to philosophies East and West, ancient and modern, that his précis of Ueda's thought opens up. There are hints at several points that he wants to ask more critical questions than the genre of the short introduction allows for.

A fuller picture would have to include an account of the development of Ueda's

thinking, a demanding task in itself. Ueda provides some help with the “Afterwords” he has appended to each of the volumes of his *Collection*. But his editing and reassembling of older essays by incorporating newer material often seems to take away with his left hand what he gives us with the right. To take one example, Ueda tells us that while he began by contrasting Eckhart’s “mysticism” with the “non-mysticism” of Zen, he later came to see Eckhart as himself a non-mystical voice in the Christian mystical tradition. This turn, as important as it is for Ueda’s later writings, is all but camouflaged by the edited versions of his earlier essays.

Given the obvious investment Döll has made in studying Ueda’s writings, as well as the linguistic and philosophical skills he brings to his reading, he is in a better position than any Western scholar I know to fill in the enticing outline he has given us. With collections of Ueda’s essays already available in Spanish and Italian translation, and a German collection in the planning, it is to be hoped he will.

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